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MULLIGAN

*Supreme Court Gifts A Do-Over To Legislature.
Why It Must Not Ignore Need For Special Session.*



Budget Crisis: Special Report Begins Page 6

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Oklahoma Relic

Remember when three strikes and you're out was the criminal justice mantra? When tax cuts were heralded as rocket fuel for the economy and state coffers? When term limits and SQ 640 were ballyhooed as escapes from Oklahoma's public policy thicket?

Each now is in disrepute, widely viewed as experiments that didn't work out as promised.

Which brings us to Gov. Mary Fallin's creation of a task force whose charge is to analyze the Oklahoma Corporation Commission from top-to-bottom. Excellent idea – in theory.

The commission is a relic of statehood days. The notion that one agency should oversee industries as diverse and complex as telecom and oil/gas, trucking and gas/electric utilities seems quaint, if not inane in 2017.

Even more perplexing: the agency is led by three statewide elected officials whose campaign coffers typically are filled with contributions from the very industries they must regulate.

Still, as good an idea as the task force might be, it's worth pondering the timing. Why now?

Concerns the Corporation Commission is ineffective, unmanageable or corrupt aren't new. In the early 1980s, consumers infuriated by skyrocketing electric and gas rates drove the debate. Today, the agency is in the bull's eye because of earthquakes – and the fact it was slow to rein in injection wells that triggered so much of the shaking.

With Edmond's recent swarm serving as a nerve-wracking reminder the problem persists, Fallin said she created the five-member task force to review the agency's "mission and to make sure corporation commissioners have the necessary tools and resources to fulfill it."

That includes structure, functions, staffing, funding – even whether the three commissioners should be elected or appointed.

All worthy of discussion, given that other states regulate these dispa-

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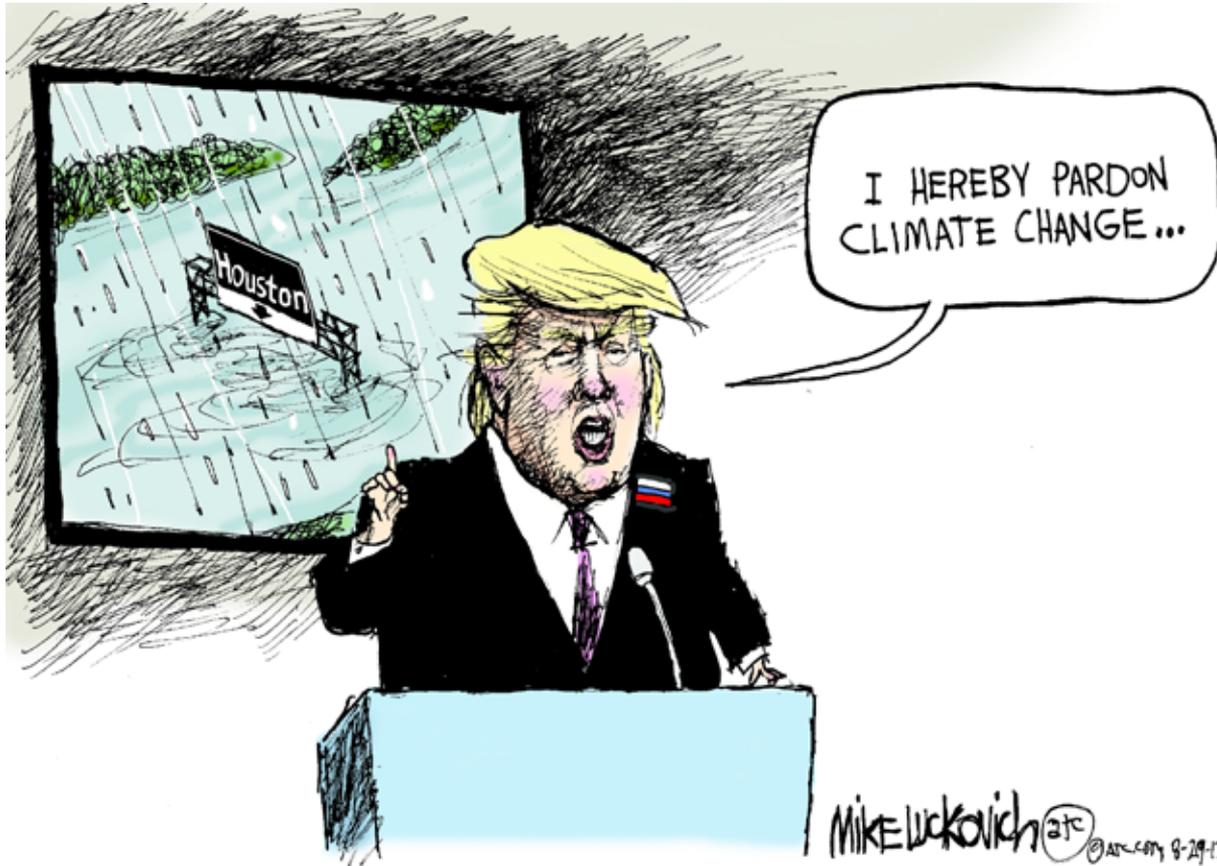
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Observerscope



Scott Pruitt is most ethically challenged Oklahoman in DC since J.C. Watts. The Inspector General is digging into Pruitt's champagne lifestyle at taxpayers' expense.

Dart: To the Koch dummies at Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, promoting a Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust raid to plug state budget holes. Clueless, defined.

It's not your imagination: Oklahoma roads and bridges rank in the bottom 10 nationally, costing state drivers \$5 billion annually. OKC drivers pay an extra \$832 and Tulsans \$859 for damages from rough roads. – TRIP research

Laurel: To Sierra Club, challenging excessive new registration fee on electric and hybrid vehicles – another legislative sop to the state's carbon barons. As matter of public policy, lawmakers should be encouraging renewables.

It's pathetic that five white guys are only announced candidates to replace outgoing 1st District Rep. Jim Bridenstine. Special elections create unique electoral opportunities ...

Dart: To the OK District Attorneys Association, recently honoring Rep. Scott Biggs for ... what exactly? Keeping Oklahoma dumb on crime? Helping bankrupt the state with a medieval lock 'em up, throw away the key mentality?

Oops! Texas Sens. Lyin' Ted Cruz and John Cornyn and 20 Lone Star House Republicans voted against Superstorm Sandy aid. Just imagine their tap-dancing when Harvey aid is up for consideration.

Laurel: To Gov. Mary Fallin, naming ex-Speaker Kris Steele to the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board. Few are better equipped – and better hearted – to decide those cases.

News: Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb appoints former state Rep. Susan Winchester as his new chief of staff. Comment: He needs a chief of staff? He's been 24/7 running for governor for seven years.

Speaking of lieutenant governor, state Auditor Gary Jones thinks it's time to eliminate the post, rolling its title/duties into the governor's office. What say you, small government Republicans?

Dart: To self-styled "Patriot Pastor" and ex-Rep. Dan Fisher, tossing his Black Robe into the race for governor. He's an unabashed theocrat who wants to wed church-state and views AP History classes as un-American.

Nearly 13% of Americans ages 12-plus admit using antidepressants in the previous month, according to a 2011-14 government study – up from 11% in 2005-08.

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Letters

Mike Luckovich 20c
art.com © 4-24-17



Editor, The Observer:

Re: Trump Merges Brand With Ultimate Symbol of Power: The White House [August/Observer]

For those who do not get to read the book *No Is Not Enough* by Naomi Klein, do read the book review by Terence McDowell.

As journalists, we find the facts and tell the people. We the people must also learn to read between the lines and understand what's under the radar. Only then can we make decisions that benefit all of us instead of just some of us.

Thank you, Mr. McDowell. Well done.

Marilyn Barton
 Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

Five years of torture and pain
 Was suffered by hero McCain
 Although terminally ill
 He succeeded to chill
 Death sentences for millions to refrain.

Tom Birbilis
 Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Reading articles about the re-

cent University of Virginia violence [I can't stand to hear his voice any longer] Caligula used the word "egregious" in regard to the actions of the now liberated white supremacists, aka Trump's base. This word is the longest I can remember him using in public, clear evidence to me his remarks were written by someone else because how would Trump recognize if an action was good or bad?

I remember being taught in my *public school* you don't know a word unless you know how to use it in a sentence. Here's my sentence:

The election of Trump as president was an egregious use of the right to vote in America.

James Nimmo
 Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Comment about police brutality as latently permissible by Mr. Trump reminds me of Orwellian "double think" – namely, "war is peace."

Jeff Hamilton
 Midwest City

Editor's Note: Jeff Hamilton

served in the Oklahoma House from 1986-1994.

Editor, The Observer:

Let's give Donald Trump and the Oklahoma congressional delegation a break.

These politicians were not elected to be harmless as a dove, wise as a serpent and urbane and tactful with all mankind.

Robert Williams, Oklahoma's third governor, is the only Okie officeholder to confess, "I could never meet those qualifications."

We expect our preachers to act like saints, not the politicians who become corrupt the first 10 minutes they have power.

I don't want or expect our politicians to be my moral authority.

My parents and Jesus Christ handle that.

So, let's leave soul saving to the preachers and get off the backs of Donald Trump, senators and Congress members.

We hire politicians for lawmaking, not to tell us how to live and get to heaven.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
 Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Never will I forget that October day in 1962 when I sat in my dorm room "frozen" by the image of President Kennedy announcing to the nation that he had ordered our navy to stop and search every Soviet vessel heading to Cuba for the possibility of finding and removing missile launchers and/or nuclear explosives. Armageddon seemed nigh! That had been my deepest sense of impending doom. Until now.

Khrushchev and Kennedy had both experienced the horror of war so their steady hands averted ultimate war.

We are presently experiencing a very different and even stronger possibility of nuclear war. To our horror, the competing nations this

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Changing Of The State Senate Guard

Ever since the legislative session ended with a thud last spring, the perpetual political parlor game has focused on the future of House Speaker Charles McCall.

Can he survive as leader of a splintered supermajority? Is he better positioned inside his caucus than it appears from the outside? What can he do, if anything, to solidify his speakership?

Interesting, yes. Important, no doubt. But all the intrigue on the Capitol's west side has obscured a fascinating development on the east: a changing of the Senate guard.

It came into clearer focus Aug. 22 when seven senators – led by Okemah Republican Roger Thompson – unveiled a plan that would require lawmakers to be more specific when appropriating tax dollars to the state's largest agencies.

It is a not-so-subtle declaration the Legislature's current budgeting approach is broken, vital state services aren't being properly funded and rank-and-file Oklahomans are getting steamed.

No, this doesn't mean the affable Senate President Pro Tem Mike Schulz, R-Altus, is in trouble. But next year will be his last because of term limits. The same is true of oft-churlish, hard-right Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Anthony Sykes, R-OKC.

In their place is emerging a block of senators who appear to recognize they better get this fixed – or risk dooming Oklahoma to a Third World-style future and returning the GOP to minority party status.

Thompson and Co.'s proposed legislation would restore line-item budgeting, eliminated in 2009 to give state agencies more "flexibility." What it actually did was provide lawmakers political cover when agencies were forced to cut vital state services.

Remember when McCall blamed the Department of Human Services for \$30 million in cuts to programs serving vulnerable children, adults and the elderly? Or when he asserted Oklahoma City Public Schools were poor stewards of their shrinking budgets – down

nearly \$40 million in the last two years?

If approved, the line-item budgeting bill would surely ramp up pressure on lawmakers. They not only would be setting spending priorities for state agencies receiving annual appropriations of \$100 million-plus, but also explaining to constituents why deteriorating textbooks aren't being replaced, class sizes are exploding and the best teachers are fleeing to other states that offer better pay.

"We're not funding an agency," said Sen. A.J. Griffin, R-Guthrie. "We're funding services for Oklahoma.

"I think a significant number of our colleagues are ready to take on the challenge."

It's worth noting, of course, that lawmakers already have the authority to specify how the money is spent. But it's easier politically to dump a lump sum on agencies – then complain if there are problems. See, McCall.

It's also worth remembering that not everything was rosy before laissez faire budgeting was enacted in 2009. Too many vital state services never have been properly, fully funded.

The fact is, line-item budgeting may not be the magic bullet Thompson and Co. hope. While it would put lawmakers squarely in the bull's eye, it also could afford opportunities for pork barrel mischief. Can you envision a lawmaker demanding a new bridge in his or her district in exchange for supporting a teacher pay raise or improved healthcare for the poor?

So, how does the line-item proposal reflect a changing of the Senate guard? Most of the senators backing it have served three years or less: Thompson and Oklahoma City Sen. Stephanie Bice were elected in 2014, and Tuttle Sen. Lonnie Paxton and Bartlesville Sen. Julie Daniels in 2016.

In addition, Thompson wants to reform the state's antiquated tax system: "If we're looking at the money coming in," he said, "we need to look at the money going out."

Stay tuned. This could get interesting.

For Lawmakers, Failure [To Act] Not An Option

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

The only surprise in the state Supreme Court's decision nullifying the \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax was how quickly it ruled.

Ever seen the justices take just 48 hours to unanimously reject something of this import?

The unconstitutional end-of-session hijinks represented – in Twitter-sphere, hashtag parlance – an #EpicFail. Not even legislative leaders seemed terribly surprised by the court's ruling.

So, what's next?

If the Republican supermajority has a lick of political sense, it will embrace the court's decision as a gift – a do-over that not only affords the opportunity to do right by everyday Oklahomans, but also is good politics.

Alas, political courage is in short supply at the state Capitol these days. Good public policy and good politics are often shackled by a GOP leadership beholden to the state's deep-pocketed carbon barons, particularly Devon's Larry Nichols and Continental's Harold Hamm.

For now, the elected powers-that-be claim to be studying things. Waiting for the high court to rule on other specious last-minute revenue raisers. Surveying state agencies on the potential damage of more budget cuts. Perhaps even praying for a miracle.

Gov. Mary Fallin says she wants a special session to plug the holes. Her plugging isn't our plugging, of course – she prefers to balance the budget through regressive taxes.

But at least she is willing to order lawmakers back to work. To put leadership on a political hot seat that weighs whose wrath is worse: the carbon barons or the electorate?

Who knew it could be this hard?

It's not.

Here's what you – and lawmakers – should know going forward:

SPECIAL SESSION POLITICS

The gift justices gave the Legislature is this: The opportunity in a *non-election* year to make the tough decisions required not only to solve the current budget crisis, but also to steer the state into a saner, more sustainable future.

Lawmakers – legislative leaders, primarily – shanked their first shot when they failed in the regular 2017

session to forge a grand bargain. Thanks to the high court, they get a mulligan.

Both Republicans and Democrats have promoted the idea of “budget-only sessions” every other year – a way to focus all 149 lawmakers on the state's short- and long-term spending priorities.

Why not treat a special session as a trial run? Everything fiscal on the table: Corporate welfare. Income taxes. Sales taxes on services. Higher motor fuel taxes. New spending priorities. No diversions into reproductive rights or religious monuments.

If the tough financial decisions aren't made this fall, they will be awaiting the Legislature in February. In an election year. When the memories of legislative malpractice will be fresher in voters' minds.

Better to solve the problems now than in a year in which all 101 House seats and half the 48 Senate seats will be on the ballot, as well as most statewide elected offices, including governor.

Do incumbent lawmakers on the eve of re-election really want teachers again standing on street corners, begging for donations to fund everyday classroom supplies? More of Oklahoma's best and brightest teachers fleeing to better paying jobs in neighboring states? Rural nursing homes and hospitals going belly-up?

A failure to act now is a risky gamble that voters' memories are short and they won't punish the party in power.

QUICK FIX

The simplest solution to replace the lost cigarette tax revenue [\$215 million] is also one of the most difficult: Return the gross production tax to 7%. Period.

Depending on oil and gas prices, that would generate between \$250 million and \$350 million for state coffers.

Ignore the carbon crowd's crocodile tears. They're not going anywhere – except to where the oil and gas is. That's here. In Oklahoma. Home of two of the nation's hottest plays, SCOOP and STACK.

An 11% gross production tax didn't prompt them to bail on North Dakota. A return to the state's previous 7% rate – essentially the same as Texas' – isn't a deal killer, either.

What it is, is a greed killer. As energy experts point out, the Anadarko Basin is the nation's third most

active – yielding a daily average 450,000 barrels of oil and 5.7 billion cubic feet of natural gas.

More importantly, most STACK wells generate at least a 10% return on low \$40s oil prices, comparable to Texas' Permian and Eagle Ford fields.

“Generally, we think the economics are pretty good and are on par with anything in the Permian and the best unconventional plays in the United States,” IHS Markit's Associate Director of Energy Research Imre Kugler told the Oklahoman.

Smaller producers took notice. “The justification for giving new drilling a 2% tax rate was based on the statement that ‘the rocks in Oklahoma are good not great’ so the oil industry needs the 2% as an incentive to drill in Oklahoma,” the Oklahoma Energy Producers Alliance opined in a Facebook post. “So perhaps now that we know our rocks are as good as any others, it's time to restore the embarrassingly low 2% tax rate to the 7% that all other wells pay; which is still the lowest rate in the major plays around the country.”

Raising the gross production tax alone could allow legislators to get in and out of special session in one day, sparing them from even more criticism that their regular session failures cost taxpayers \$30,000 for each extra session day.

But it would be nothing more than a Band-Aid – simply delaying the heavy lifting until at least next year or beyond.

A GRAND BARGAIN

Myriad lawmakers recognize the wisdom in making the hard decisions now.

As Senate Democratic Leader John Sparks put it, “We need to set clear priorities, take hard votes and make tough choices with all revenue options on the table for open, transparent discussion and debate.”

Republican Rep. Earl Sears, chair of the House Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee on Finance, told eCapitol: “We can't walk away from it. We have to deal with it.”

Saying it and doing it are two different things, of course. With Republicans driving the legislative agenda most of this century, Oklahoma lawmakers cut about \$2 billion in revenues, largely through gifting the state's elite lower personal income taxes and generous business incentives.

An increasing number of GOP representatives finally are acknowledging their Supply Side experiment failed. Cutting taxes did not magically generate more revenue. They now concede state government has a revenue, not a spending problem.

Not everyone has gotten the memo, of course – including some voters slow to accept trickle down economics turned out to be tinkle down. That is reflected in Republican brochures during recent special election campaigns, still thumping the anti-tax tub. Even the GOP's presumptive 2018 gubernatorial front-runner, Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb, can't seem to face facts.

Taking the time in a budget-only special session to roll back income tax cuts and corporate welfare

would put Oklahoma on the road to recovery.

Would it anger some voters – particularly GOP primary voters? Of course. But Oklahoma's road to fiscal recovery has to start sometime – better this fall than next. Imagine how happy most Oklahomans would be next election year to know their schools are prospering, their health care services protected and their roads and bridges under repair.

NO PUNTING ALLOWED

Failing to act this fall all but ensures calamity. That is bad news for a party that dominates both legislative houses and controls all statewide offices. It is even worse for rank-and-file Oklahomans, particularly those living in economically struggling rural areas.

First, it's not just \$215 million in cigarette tax revenues that would be lost. So would at least another \$300 million in matching federal funds, crippling the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, Department of Human Services and Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

As the governor put it, “These agencies and the people they serve cannot sustain the kind of cuts that will occur if we do not find a solution.”

If lawmakers choose to spread the pain equally across the budget, it would mean another 3.17% loss to agencies that already have endured a half a decade of even deeper cuts.

Second, waiting until February's regular session isn't a viable option, either. Some vital agencies could run out of money before then. And even if they were able to keep operating into spring, it could be fall 2018 before new revenues kick in. That would do nothing to help 2017 budgets.

If GOP leadership fails to deliver, it will have no one to blame but itself when polls open in 2018.

Deborah Astley

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GOP's Plan To Fix What Ails Oklahoma: Let's Just Wait!

BY CAL HOBSON

How exciting! Motivating! Even exhilarating!
Not.

But that was and is the primary response from many lawmakers, even Senate President Pro Tem Mike Schulz, R-Altus, and House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, to the state Supreme Court's unanimous decision that their short-lived proposal to raise the tobacco tax \$1.50 per pack was and is unconstitutional.

It took the jurists less time to issue their ruling than the reign of Anthony "The Mooch" Scaramucci, the very temporary press secretary to our slightly, perhaps completely, unhinged president, Donald J. Trump. As a matter of fact, the Supremes heard the tobacco case argument on a Tuesday and rendered their opinion on a Thursday ... of the same week!

Immediately following that rebuke, self-identified leaders Schulz and McCall opined it would be best to just "wait" until the viability of three other tax – I mean fee, assessment, judgment, levy, enhancement – schemes they also authored during the 2017 legislative session are resolved by the adults adorned with black robes in the third branch of government.

Meanwhile, lame duck-with-nothing-to-lose Gov. Mary Fallin revealed she has finally grown a spine by urging a special session to deal with the pending – and literally death defining – cuts to the health care authority, the mental health department and the human services agency. She realizes these three entities provide care to our most vulnerable citizens – the sick, elderly and children at risk. Of course, legislative big shots view them as just money sieves that

waste tax dollars and, therefore, clearly don't impact the people they worry about most: campaign contributors.

Speaking of that crowd, made up primarily of energy executives, wealthy doctors, a handful of federally-subsidized farmers and, of course, State Chamber big business types, these cash rich Okies are aggregating their max contributions of \$2,700 each behind Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb in his race to become our next governor.

He's cobbled together over \$2 million so far, much more than three notable challengers, those being well-spoken OKC Mayor Mick Cornett, Tulsa personal injury lawyer Gary Richardson, and honest, but honestly boring state Auditor and Inspector Gary Jones.

Lamb's special interest folks and their hordes of lobbyists love the light gov for multiple reasons: [1] He is viewed as most electable of the elephant candidates; [2] he bailed out on Fallin when she responsibly called for tax increases in her State of the State message last February; and [3] he can't be bought but is rentable for the next four to eight years to provide the same pro-business, anti-tax-of-any-kind policies the insiders demanded, and received, from his predecessor.

And why shouldn't they fight tooth and nail to extend the dismal status quo?

First, the oil and gas industry hit the biggest jackpot last spring by keeping in place the lowest severance tax in the nation as well as receiving a new multi-billion-dollar incentive to drill longer lateral lines through so-called "rock formations" and not just shale deposits. For confirmation of this pending bonanza, just read the article on the same subject in the Aug. 25 edition of the Oklahoman's business section.

Second, the specialty sawbones usually don't take Medicaid patients so they don't care about its expansion, or not, that could, and should, be authorized under ObamaCare.

And third, the rest of the wealthy donors covet the reductions in the personal tax cut because they benefit mightily from them.

So there you are. The rich reward their lapdogs, aka lawmakers, with long green and in turn reap the results of laws that benefit them. On cue, they all gather in the evenings, eat steaks and sip cool ones at Junior's restaurant, repeat the process for about 90 days and then, mercifully, adjourn the session and go home.

Back in the day when I was in the Air Force, we had a term for this. It was called SNAFU – which stood for Situation Normal All F#\$%&* Up. To fill in the blanks, you can either insert the word "fouled" up or if former military you remember it is "F#\$%@D" up.

Just saying.

While we all "wait" for our leaders to lead, Labor Day has arrived, a holiday in honor of working stiff. This is the blue-collar crowd with dirt under their fingernails, aches in their backs and only pennies left in

the checking account at the end of the month.

These folks mostly send their kids to public schools, although many now attend for only four days per week.

They are often church-going, frequently volunteer to help their neighbors in need, worry about their grandmas and sometimes yours ... and regularly do the dumbest thing over and over: They vote against their own best interests by returning to office legislators who, through both actions and inactions, are killing them and their futures here in Oklahoma.

Then, just to be consistent, they still blame Obama for their increasingly desperate situations. Go figure.

These sometimes former Democrats seem to have a severe case of but-itis, which basically means when someone makes a factual statement about how "deplorable" our current Legislature and its reactionary policies are, and backs up that opinion with facts, the voters most responsible for putting the know-nothings in place only response is, "But the Democrats were worse."

Not by a long shot. Under the donkey regimes, teachers, state employees and retirees could count on frequent pay increases and COLA boosts. Budgets were balanced not with unconstitutional, guaranteed-to-fail gimmicks but through conservative fiscal accountability. Important road and bridge projects were wisely funded over multiple years using double tax exempt revenue bonds.

Capital expenditures at colleges and CareerTech campuses were designed, programmed and built on time and often under budget by specific, earmarked revenue streams such as the tobacco tax increase of 2004 which, by the way, was approved through a vote of the people and, thus, has never been challenged in court. More on that in next month's column.

In 2010, when the Republicans asked for, and received, majority control status in both the governor's shop and the Legislature, they promised their constituents nothing but honey, milk and sunny skies. Their agenda was tax cuts, more corporate investment credits, job incentives, teacher and CareerTech employee salary boosts, infrastructure enhancements, a balanced budget and so much more. That plan sounded too good to be true and, of course, it was.

In closing, I realize my criticism of our elected officials is harsh and unforgiving, but no more so than their pathetic policies directed at the powerless in our state. However, on this Labor Day weekend, most of us have decided our work and worry can wait while we cook a burger, pop a top and hope for a brighter future for ourselves, our kids and grandkids. At the same time our corruption-ridden, dim-witted and clueless clowns with an "R" behind their names also enjoy the holiday and "wait" to deliver what we do not know.

Sadly, and tragically for all of us, nor do they. *Cal Hobson, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore.*

Legislature's Budget Options As Doomsday Clock Ticks

BY DAVID BLATT

Last month, the Oklahoma Supreme Court struck down a smoking cessation fee. Now without quick and decisive action, Oklahoma faces unimaginable cuts to health care and other protections for our state's most vulnerable citizens. However, if they can overcome partisan differences and ideological rigidity, our leaders have an opportunity to not only resolve this crisis, but to come out of it with even stronger investments in Oklahoma families and communities.

To recall, the Legislature approved the smoking cessation fee in the final hours of the 2017 session as part of a last-ditch effort to pass a budget that filled most of the state's nearly \$1 billion budget shortfall. After negotiations to produce a bipartisan agreement broke down, Republican leaders gambled that the smoking cessation fee, along with the partial removal of a sales tax exemption on motor vehicles, were not subject to the Constitution's supermajority requirements for "revenue bills" and could be passed with a simple majority using only Republican votes.

The smoking cessation fee, which was set to take effect Aug. 24, was expected to generate \$215 million for the FY 2018 budget. Besides \$1 million directed to the ABLE Commission for tobacco enforcement,

the revenue went to just three agencies: \$69 million to the Department of Human Services [10% of the agency's total appropriation]; \$70 million to the Oklahoma Health Care Authority [7% of the agency's total appropriation]; and \$75 million to the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services [23% of

the agency's total appropriation].

Without quick legislative action to restore the lost funding, the consequences will be catastrophic. Even with the tobacco revenue, the initial state budget was "massively underfunded," in the words of then-House Appropriations Chair Leslie Osborn.

The Department of Human Services already has been forced to enact \$30 million in cuts to senior nutrition services, in-home support for people with severe disabilities, payments to foster families, and child care subsidies for low-income working parents. The loss of another \$200 million-plus in state dollars and even more federal matching funds would devastate our health care and human services providers and the people they serve. The Oklahoma Hospital Association projects that due to the loss of federal matching funds, cuts would total close to \$520 million.

So what happens now?

Ideally, Gov. Mary Fallin will call a special legislative session, and Republican and Democratic leaders will reach a grand bargain that includes a tobacco tax increase along with more progressive revenue ideas favored by Democrats. This could provide additional revenues beyond the \$215 million from the smoking cessation fee that could be used to reverse cuts to social services or provide teachers a raise.

The Legislature could also take another try at getting supermajority support for a straight \$1.50 per-pack increase in the cigarette tax and nothing else. Republican leaders tried passing tobacco tax bills the past two sessions, but most House Democrats withheld their support in the absence of additional revenue measures, such as an increase in the gross production tax or a higher top income rate.

With the doomsday clock ticking, Democrats would be under even greater pressure to support a straight tobacco tax increase, but they would still be unlikely to approve a stand-alone increase in a tax that is seen as regressive and that ignores the state's structural budget issues.

In the absence of a bipartisan agreement, Republican leaders could again try to approve new revenues that need only a simple majority. Or they could pass a new budget that spreads the \$215 million shortfall more evenly across state agencies.

The full shortfall would equate to 3.1% cuts for all agencies, which is big enough to cause substantial hardship to Oklahomans, especially coming on top of multiple rounds of cuts in recent years.

Admittedly, doing nothing in special session and letting the three health agencies bear the full brunt of cuts is another possible outcome. It is up to all of us who care about the health and safety of our family members and communities to inform state leaders that doing nothing is unacceptable.

Lawmakers have good solutions to this crisis if they have the will to enact them.

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



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State Failing To Help Needy

BY JOE DORMAN

If you have driven the H.E. Bailey Turnpike south from Oklahoma City, you have most likely seen a billboard that reads “Government takes from the Needy and gives to the Greedy,” a statement that is famously attributed to President Ronald Reagan.

The quote is from a speech that Reagan gave before Congress, where he basically discussed how government programs often do not actually serve those truly in need. He believed far too many people abuse the system, benefiting from services they do not need or should be providing for themselves.

To this day, we regularly hear this concern from many politicians who argue for cutting spending, citing “waste, fraud and abuse” within government. While I believe the overwhelming majority of taxpayer dollars are used to support essential and necessary programs, sometimes these fiscal hawks are right. That’s why OICA was proud to support legislation this past session to improve the use of audits for agencies, helping to verify that dollars are truly going to benefit who Ronald Reagan described as “the needy,” rather than being wasted or misappropriated to “the greedy.”

With that being said, we are now facing an entirely different dilemma when it comes to state government: a massive revenue shortfall that is starving state agencies and eroding the quality of our government services. While our budgeting problems go beyond just this legislative session, the events of recent weeks have made this shortfall worse.

As I have written before, the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down a recently passed cigarette “fee” is a devastating blow [over \$200 million] to agencies tasked with health care services. Meanwhile, several other constitutionally suspect revenue bills are also being considered by the court and may end up on the chopping block as well.

The ongoing budget crisis can be addressed by the Legislature when it returns in February or, in the event that Gov. Mary Fallin calls a special session, earlier. The governor has indicated she prefers the latter route and will likely call a special session once the Supreme Court has ruled on all revenue raising measures.

OICA is supportive of this action, as we feel the Legislature cannot wait until 2018 to adequately fund state government and the services that some of our neediest citizens rely on.

At its core, this is about whether or not the Legislature can do its primary job: passing a budget that

keeps our government functioning. While it would be highly unlikely we would see a government shutdown in our state, agencies are considering furloughs and layoffs while slashing services that vulnerable children, the elderly and the sick rely on.

Some legislators argue that reductions in services should be blamed on agencies, not the Legislature. For instance, many lawmakers were upset when DHS announced it would deal with its budget shortfall by reducing payments to foster parents.

There are two ways that lawmakers can consider protecting programs like these. The first is to identify priorities and give them a line-item in the budget, rather than simply appropriating a lump sum to an agency. While it is not advisable for lawmakers to micromanage agencies, if there is something specific which they feel should not be cut, a line item can address that concern. All businesses and nonprofits do this, so policymakers should also consider that option.

Second, lawmakers need to recognize that funding for Oklahoma’s state government is not adequate to support “the needy.” To prevent a short-term crisis, we need immediate relief in the form of a special session that provides new revenue. Just as importantly, we need a long-term vision that stabilizes the state’s finances and allows us to provide adequate services for kids and vulnerable adults.

Former state Rep. Joe Dorman is CEO of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.



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Lawmakers Tread Water On Criminal Justice Reform

BY JAN NEW

Throughout the United States, state prison populations expanded rapidly in the 1970s. To keep pace, states allocated more tax dollars for prisons. From the 1980s and for the next 20 years, spending on corrections was the second-fastest growing state budget category – behind Medicaid.

According to the final report of the Governor's Criminal Justice Task Force, 31 states have reduced both imprisonment and crime rates since 2010.

Reforms in Texas and supportive public opinion have combined with increasingly challenged state budgets to create a national discussion. In 2011 Georgia passed reforms aimed at controlling prison growth through changes to drug and property offense laws, at the same time investing in drug and mental health courts and treatment, and by 2015, Georgia's

crime rate fell 10%, and the prison population declined 5.9%.

In contrast, Oklahoma's prison population has grown by 9% since 2011. Oklahoma has the second highest imprisonment rate in the country and the highest rate for incarcerated women. Even with the Oklahoma reforms initiated and signed by the governor in 2016 and the reduction of drug possession from a felony to a misdemeanor [SQ 780], the rate of incarceration is expected to grow for men and women.

While Missouri and Texas have similar crime rates to Oklahoma, Oklahoma admits non-violent offenders to prison at a significantly higher rate than other states and imposes longer sentences. Due to the use of incarceration over other less costly, effective approaches, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections "spends 86% of its budget on prison facilities and

only 6% on probation and parole.”

In July 2016 Gov. Fallin issued an executive order establishing a bi-partisan 21-member Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force charged with “developing criminal justice and corrections reform policy recommendations ... ” Over the succeeding six-month period, the task force, working in three subgroups, analyzed the state’s sentencing, corrections, and community supervision data while also reviewing current recidivism research and methods of improving public safety.

Based on task force review of “evidence-based” practices and evaluation of Oklahoma’s current position, the task force proposed 27 policies aimed at reducing growth in the prison population by 7% through 2026 – allowing Oklahoma to avoid \$1.9 billion in additional capital and operating costs – with stated outcomes contingent upon successful achievement of task force recommendations.

SQs 780 AND 781

Among the task force members were Kris Steele, former House speaker, executive director the Education and Employment Ministry [TEEM] and director of Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform; and two current state legislators, Sen. Greg Treat, who serves on the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Rep. Terry O’Donnell, who serves on the House Judiciary-Civil and Environmental Committee. Treat and O’Donnell are the authors of most of the criminal justice bills developed directly from the 27 policy recommendations contained in the task force’s final report published in February.

In November 2016, while the task force continued its work, Oklahoma voters passed SQs 780 and 781 [58% and 56%, respectively]. These ballot measures required a significant change in response to non-violent, low-level drug possession offenses. SQ 780, referred to as the “Oklahoma Smart Justice Reform Act,” makes simple drug possession a misdemeanor, while SQ 781 creates the “County Community Safety Investment Fund” where costs savings from alternatives to incarceration will be distributed to counties to fund rehabilitative programs, mental health and substance abuse treatment programs.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE LEGISLATION

Most of the criminal justice reform bills introduced in 2017 were approved by the Oklahoma Senate in March before attention was focused on the Oklahoma 2018 appropriations and budget process. Three of the bills were eventually signed by Gov. Fallin: SB 603, requirement for risk and needs assessment for every inmate; SB 604, requirement for personal safety planning for pre-trial criminal cases in the

CLEET required curriculum; and HB 2284, requirement for continuing legal education for public defenders, judiciary, and district attorneys to include domestic violence topics.

The Senate “struck the title” or the “enacting clause” [or both] on the criminal justice bills before voting to approve them – a procedure used to ensure the measures would go to a conference committee. HB 609 [voluntary certification program for victim assistance professionals] was referred to the House Judiciary – Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee March 27; no further action was taken. Four bills were sent eventually to a conference committee where conferees were unable to agree, delaying any further action [SB 649, enhancement of sentences; SB 650, expungement; SB 786, burglary categories and sentencing; and SB 793, creating a Corrections and Criminal Justice Oversight Task Force to track implementation and assess program outcomes].

The House rejected Senate amendments to HB 1338 [medical parole], and a conference was granted. While the House approved the bill, the conference committee report was read in the Senate, but no further action was taken. In the case of two other bills,



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HB 2281 [graduated penalty for crimes based upon property value] and HB 2286 [over 20 amended and new provisions to Title 57 of the Oklahoma Statutes – Prisons and Reformatories], the House rejected Senate amendments; a conference committee was named, and a conference committee report was submitted near the end of session without further action.

NEXT STEPS

Following the session, House Judiciary Committee Chair Scott Biggs was criticized by the governor's office, the Oklahoman, Chambers of Commerce and others for failing to bring these reform bills up for a vote in the committee he chairs. Speaker Charles McCall also was criticized for failing to move the bills forward. The speaker subsequently announced the remaining bills would be priority in the 2018 legislative session.

Biggs, a former prosecutor, expressed committee members' concerns over the definition of violent and non-violent crimes; the variant perspectives of defendants and victims; and cost estimates for program implementation. In early June Biggs requested several interim studies, focusing on the definition of violent and non-violent crimes as well as a review of the positive and negative impacts of justice reform programs in other states.

Interim studies can be either a source of delay or an opportunity to build understanding and support for important issues. Biggs was granted his interim studies, but they do not appear to have been scheduled yet. These presentations should be open to the public.

Another perspective on interim studies comes from former House Speaker Steve Lewis, who in a recent opinion piece for the Oklahoma Policy Institute stat-

ed:

... All legislators bring their own knowledge, experience, and temperament to a task. But the legislative process should give more legislators the incentive and opportunity to be involved and influence the outcome ... I've felt for many years that the role of district attorney ... is the most important role in the criminal justice system, if not in all of government. Having said that, we'll never have much reform in Oklahoma if the reform effort is limited by whether it negatively effects the district attorney's success in every case in obtaining a conviction and the sentencing result that individual prosecutors think is appropriate ... Reform needs to mean tilting the system toward a broader definition of justice. Otherwise our prisons will stay overcrowded with the wrong people.

Oklahoma voters should not be sidelined from this process. Who you elect matters; the decisions they make matter.

Continuing the work of criminal justice reform matters; it can positively affect so many Oklahomans; reduce impacts on families and other state services; and achieve better long-range outcomes.

Require accountability from your legislators. Write, call, schedule an appointment, and strongly encourage your senator and representative to listen to all viewpoints, build consensus, complete needed criminal justice reforms, evaluate progress, and move forward with other reforms as needed.

Let's continue investing in healthier, stronger, more resilient people who will be better able to help Oklahoma's economy thrive for the right reasons.

OKC resident Jan New is a retired public administrator of municipal, state, and federal programs.

Millions In Court Debt Swamps Oklahoma's Poorest Neighborhoods

BY RYAN GENTZLER

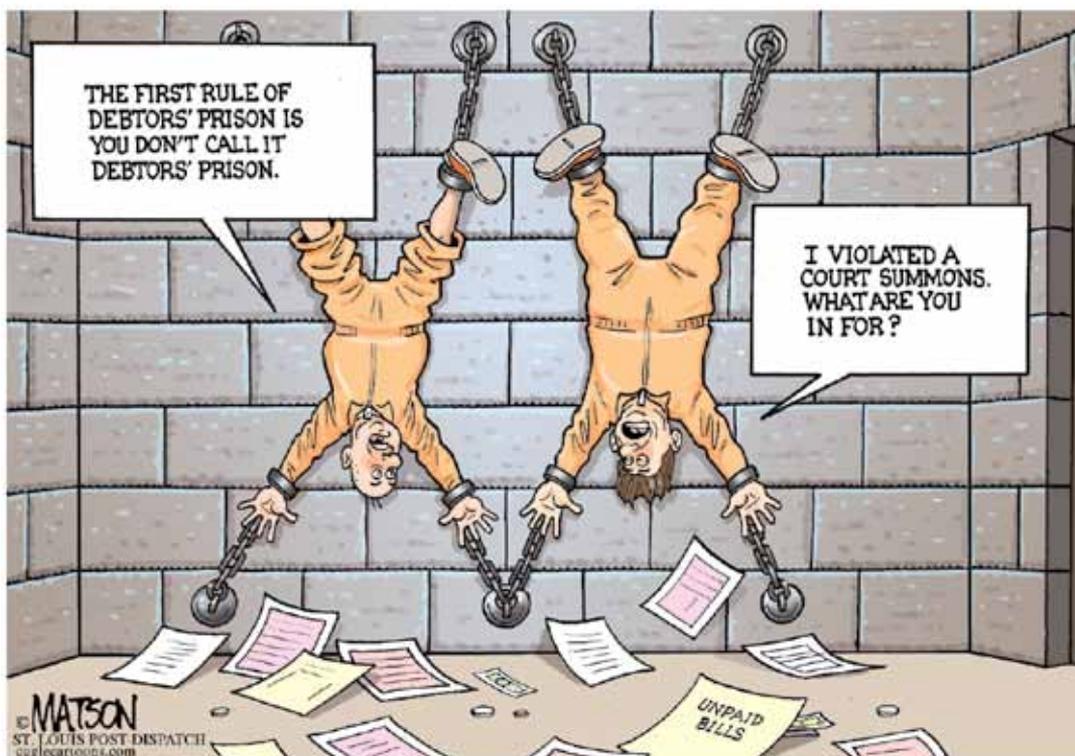
Earlier this year, Oklahoma Policy Institute released a report detailing the growth of fees attached to criminal court cases in Oklahoma. We found that as legislators attempt to prop up falling state revenues, fees have risen for every type of crime.

When low-income defendants can't keep up with payments on their enormous financial burdens to the court, a warrant may be issued for their arrest, leading to a cycle of incarceration that makes the climb out of poverty nearly impossible. Failure to pay court costs is among the most common reasons for bookings into the Tulsa County and Oklahoma County jails.

Though we've had a clear sense of the individual-

level impact of this debt through the stories of those who are affected, it's been hard to quantify the impact on communities as a whole. The agency in charge of levying and collecting court-related fines and fees, the Administrative Office of the Courts, does not collect or publish data on how much is charged to or collected from people convicted of crimes.

To get a clearer sense of the depth of the problem, we collected data on outstanding debts to the court from the state court system's online ePayments tool for misdemeanor and felony cases filed from 2011 to 2016. The data, available only for 13 counties across the state, include the age and address of the defendant, the number of charges on their case, and the amount of money they currently owe to the courts.



They do not include other amounts that defendants may owe in relation to their case, such as supervision fees due to the Department of Corrections or the district attorney's office. ZIP code data was unavailable in less than 5% of the roughly 139,000 cases for which data was collected.

The data paint a striking picture of the people and communities that are hit hardest by the rise in court fees. In many areas of north Tulsa, for example, court debt amounts to over \$300 per adult resident. It reaches as high as \$590 per resident in Turley [ZIP code 74126], an area where about 57% of residents are black and 38% of residents live below the poverty line; in Turley, there is one case of outstanding debt for every five residents.

The majority white parts of the county owe a fraction of that level of debt. [The very high \$899 in court debt per capita in the downtown Tulsa ZIP code is likely due to defendants who listed homeless shelters as their home address.]

It's a similar story in Oklahoma County: the highest debts per capita are found in south Oklahoma City ZIP codes with Hispanic/Latino majorities and in east Oklahoma City ZIP codes with black majorities.

The highest debt ZIP code in Oklahoma County, however, had a per capita debt of about \$260, less than half of its counterpart in Tulsa County. There are a number of possible explanations for this, including differences in approaches among prosecutors and judges, but it's difficult to know from this data alone what drives the enormous gap in debt between the two metro areas.

The data are a snapshot of court debt as of June of this year, so the picture will change over time. Because it was incurred recently, between 2011 and 2016, many of the people who owe fines and fees to

the courts may still be incarcerated and so are unlikely to pay off their debt quickly. Debts are commonly in the thousands of dollars, so even low-income defendants who are not incarcerated have little choice but to pay them off with small monthly payments.

Still, there is reason to believe that the picture might remain the same for a long time: one judge estimated that only around 5% to 11% of criminal costs are ever collected. In the meantime, it's clear that the communities that are struck hardest by court fees are those with the least ability to ever pay them off.

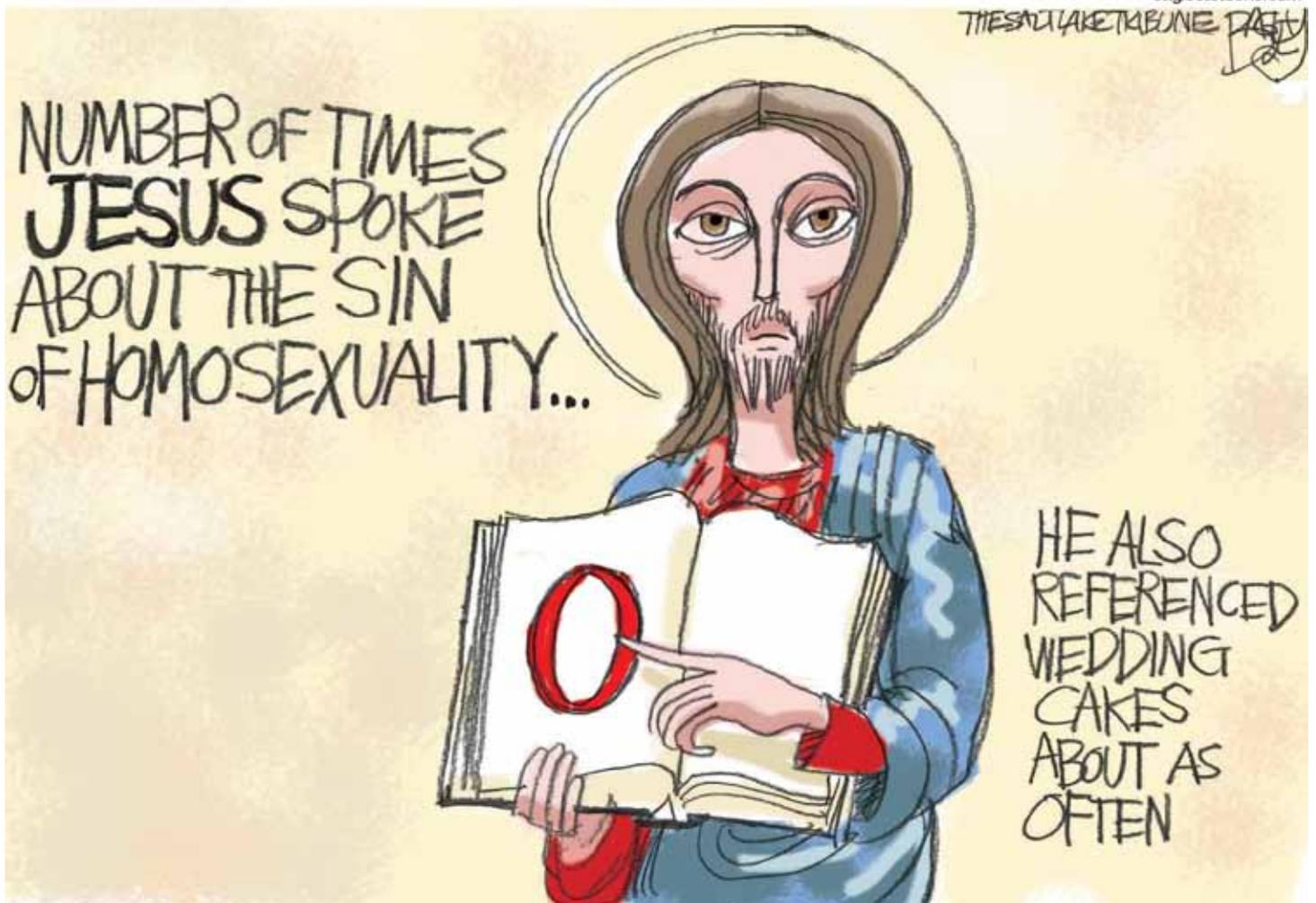
These data offer another way to look at a few common themes in our criminal justice system.

For one, racial disparities place overwhelming burdens on disadvantaged groups; this clearly extends to the debt that follows a person after their involvement with the justice system. For another, justice outcomes vary greatly due in large part to the idiosyncrasies of local prosecutors and judges; there are almost certainly some policies and practices in place — formal or informal — that lead to much higher debts in Tulsa County than in Oklahoma County.

Most of all, the data reveal why it's so inefficient to fund our courts through fines and fees: it requires the courts to squeeze as much money as possible out of the communities that can least afford it. The criminal costs collected by the courts plateaued long ago; there's little reason to expect we can collect more in the future.

Instead, it's time to look at ways to reduce debts for those who can't afford them. Doing so could let our justice system devote less time to funding itself and more time to focusing on doing justice for victims and offenders.

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



Lankford Uses Religion To Discriminate

BY KAREN WEBB

U.S. Sen. James Lankford, R-OK, defends the right of the Alliance Defending Freedom [ADF] and Attorney General Jeff Sessions to discriminate against LGBT people. I think he really likes torturing gay taxpayers and says he does it because of his freedom of religion and he doesn't care what your religion says.

"I found it odd that ABC would designate ADP as a hate group not based on any actual crime or action, but apparently based on their belief in religious liberty or traditional marriage," Lankford wrote in a letter to ABC News.

I find it odd that Lankford thinks Jesus would be in favor of abuse or torture to force a young person to repent. I mean I always taught that Jesus told the woman at the well to go and sin no more. He did not show her porn and shock her when she appeared to like it too much.

It is the Alliance for Defending James Lankford's

Freedom to discriminate based on his religion. It isn't their belief that is the problem – it is their insisting that their beliefs be the law of the land and that they can discriminate based on whatever they please.

"[ADF] is a national reputable law firm that works to advocate for the rights of people to peacefully and freely speak, live and work according to their faith conscience without threat of government punishment," Lankford wrote.

The ADF is a law firm. Whether it is reputable or not is debateable.

Again, we are talking about Sen. Lankford's right to peacefully and freely say that he believes in the abuse of LGBT people. What Lankford wants is to freely punish LGBT people for not agreeing with him and use the government as an arm of his religion.

The ADF says, "We're thankful to [Sen.] Lankford for his defense of the good, freedom-building work

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that ADF does and reminding ABC and all news organizations of their responsibility to Americans to report facts, not defamatory charges by activist groups.”

Again, they are thanking Lankford for agreeing that they are not an activist group, although they act a lot, and any group that disagrees with them is an activist group because they defend the rights of people who disagree with Lankford and the ADF.

The facts are that they and Lankford support conversion therapy and the re-criminalization of homosexuality and the ADF does it internationally. In order to support it they must believe that people choose to be homosexual and therefore homosexuality can be reversed.

Lankford is defending their right – and his – to set the clock back to the days when homosexuality was a crime and a mental illness. Lankford really needs to see *The Imitation Game*. Over 47,000 people were convicted of homosexuality in England, and there were many more over here.

Alan Turing, the man who broke the enigma machine, invented the first computer and was a big part of winning World War II, was gay. They gave him a choice, like they did a lot of people: he could undergo chemical castration or go to jail. Turing committed suicide.

The ADF, and Lankford, by association, defend bullies in school. They fight the teaching of tolerance. Do not let Lankford do this to your gay friends and family. He will say he doesn't hate gay people, but he is from all appearances OK with driving young gays to suicide. He isn't talking about gay kids voluntari-

ly going to conversion therapy, he is talking about parents or others forcing kids to go.

“In this country we have the ability and freedom to disagree,” the senator wrote. “However, disagreement ... is not the same as hate ... Labeling ADF as a ‘hate group’ feeds into a narrative that the news media frequently editorializes beyond the facts.”

The fact is they want to force their religious beliefs into the laws of the land and if it drives your gay child to suicide, it is God's will. He isn't talking about freedom to disagree, he is talking about making your freedom against the law. It is a fact: he is in favor of discrimination of taxpayers using his religion to do it.

The ADF doesn't support just the discrimination of the LGBT community, they will also say it is OK to do the same if your particular religion believes interracial marriage is a sin or divorce is a sin. They believe an employer can fire you because your religious beliefs differ from theirs, regardless of your job performance.

Lankford says he felt the need to defend a group he thought was unfairly labeled by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Who knows? He may be going after the NAACP or supporting the KKK next.

The ADF and Lankford defend the right to use their religion to discriminate against you.

Do not let Lankford get by with this. If he gets a bit of courage and actually has a Town Hall, make sure and show up.

Longtime Oklahoman-turned-Oregonian Karen Webb is a frequent contributor to The Oklahoma Observer

First Platform Plank: Fight Corruption

BY SHARON MARTIN

Dear Democrats,
How can you make it clear to voters that the Democratic platform is in voters' best interest?

Here are some suggestions:

- Fight the corrupting influence of money. This isn't a Democratic or Republican issue; it is the issue that can bring our country down.
- Keep pointing out what Democrats do best: improve the economy for working people.
- Make easy-to-read charts that show the state of the economy under the different administrations. Working people really do fare better during Democratic administrations.
- Stand on your principles even if it might cost you an election.
- I repeat: point out corruption in the campaign

system. This will be hard because members of both parties benefit from the huge amounts of money, lobbying efforts, and the ability of legislators to pay themselves.

- Don't be distracted by issues that were designed to push buttons.
- Don't ignore social justice even if it's social justice issues pushing those buttons.
- Speak in simple language. We aren't all lawyers or economists, but we can understand the law and the economy if you don't talk like specialists.
- I repeat myself. Again. We must tackle corruption. Chip away at Citizens United. Press for publicly-funded elections. Listen politely to lobbyists, but don't take their gifts. Corruption is corruption, even if it's wrapped in plain brown paper.

Until the voices of the people are heard above the din of money and corruption, the people lose. GOP leaders seem to be headed in the wrong direction –

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more privatization, more money funneled to the top, more funny money thrown into campaigns, more think tanks and lobbyists writing their own legislation. We've seen outright refusal to follow precedent and the law. This is not what patriots have fought and died for. This is what corruption has created.

We, the people, all of us, regardless of color, culture, or whatever difference the manipulators use to divide us, would like to start moving forward again.

Democrats, don't let us down.

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

A Flashpoint For Democrats

BY GARY EDMONDSON

Wandering around the living room on a recent Sunday morning, waiting for the grass to dry so I might consider mowing [I didn't], I saw the KFOR promo for Flashpoint.

I stopped, and wondered: Who is this Mike Turpen that has this cool gig of speaking on behalf of the Democratic Party? I mean, I had trudged up to OKC for two sessions of the state Democratic Convention. I hadn't seen his smiling face anywhere on either premises.

So, I looked him up and discovered that he had served as state attorney general in the 1980s and had he served a term as party chair – back before our current chair Anna Langthorn had been born.

Well, I thought, check with the party; see if I'm missing something.

Nope. Mr. Turpen holds not even a precinct position within the party. In fact, my source says that

his last active participation in party affairs was in 2008 when he was the legal rep for the Hillary Clinton campaign.

So, with the youngest state chair in the country, who has a full complement of youthful lieutenants, Channel 4 trots out the party-irrelevant Mr. Turpen as their anointed voice for Oklahoma Democrats.

He, Interchangeable Ogle and the Republican reactionary seem to have a great time talking among themselves – just some good old boys limiting the discussion to their favored few. But it is a travesty of supposed debate when the left is being represented by a guy who has been left behind by his party.

And I'm not alone with my opinion. The state party regularly fields calls on Mondays from irate party regulars complaining about Mr. Turpen – as if the choice of their supposed representative actually rested with the people supposedly being represented.

Gary Edmondson is chair of the Stephens County Democratic Party.

Rookie Legislator's Criticism Misdirected

BY MIKE W. RAY

Aug. 13's Oklahoman newspaper informed us that first-term state Rep. Tom Gann, a Republican from Inola, is "concerned about local control after an attorney general's opinion."

Seems an AG's opinion "confirms that the state Department of Education can overrule a local school board that rejects a charter school application."

"I am disappointed to see our attorney general disregard local government and duly-elected representatives on a local school board," Gann was quoted as saying. "Regardless of the pros and cons of charter schools versus public schools, this is a new, unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of the governor, who appoints every member of the SDE."

To loosely paraphrase the Bible: As the GOP sows, so shall it reap.

Rep. Gann's criticism is misplaced. In pointing a finger of blame, Gann need only look at his own

Republican colleagues.

The genesis of his complaint can be traced to SB 782, which the Republican-controlled Legislature approved 28 months ago. SB 782 permits the State Board of Education to sponsor a charter school if an application has first been denied by a local school district. Authors of the measure were then-Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, and former House Speaker Pro Tempore Lee Denney, R-Cushing.

The bill passed the Senate by an overwhelming margin, 35-7. In the House of Representatives, SB 782 was endorsed on a 64-31 vote recorded on April 14, 2015. All 64 "aye" votes were cast by Republicans; voting in opposition were 26 Democrats and 5 Republicans.

Rep. Gann receives an "F" grade for insufficient homework on this issue.

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

A Sleeping Giant Awakens

BY MARION HILL

Repealing ObamaCare is dead. For now. That doesn't mean the Republicans have given up trying to get rid of the law, or to make health care more expensive and/or less available for lots of families.

I would argue that the long period of uncertainty over what GOP legislators would do to the Affordable Care Act is largely responsible for the decision of some insurance companies to pull out of many markets around the country.

This leaves people in those counties with only one insurance provider, so there's no competition to make that one company lower its premiums and provide better coverage.

Self-fulfilling prophecy, anyone? Just predict ObamaCare will fail and then do everything you can to make it fail.

"ObamaCare has problems, so let's make them worse" seems to be the R's slogan. Thanks a lot, GOP. Weren't you sent to DC to solve problems, not create more?

Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic Research, in a recent column titled "Killing the Landmark Program Would be Wrong," notes that experts who study the healthcare issue state that – contrary to the drivel regularly spouted by Trump and his allies – the healthcare exchanges "have largely stabilized and insurers are now able to operate profitably."

The experts he's referring to include the Congressional Budget Office, the Kaiser Family Foundation and others who are anything but partisan hacks.

Let's connect the dots. Insurers are not pulling out of markets because they can't make money by insuring people in those places. They're pulling out because of uncertainty. Insurance companies hate uncertainty.

So Republican lawmakers have been making sure there was plenty of it.

Baker goes on to say that "the lack of competition in the exchanges is primarily a problem for people who live in states controlled by Republicans.

"More than 20% of the people who live in states with Republican governors only have one insurer in their exchange. Only 2% of the people who live in states with Democratic governors live in a county with a single insurer."

In case anyone should miss his point, he makes it crystal clear: "... most Republican governors did not want ObamaCare to succeed, while most Democrats did."

Expansion of Medicaid is a big part of the way ObamaCare provides coverage to more people. And Republican governors [including the Oklahoma disaster named Mary Fallin] mostly did not expand Medicaid. No, they'd rather turn down free money from the federal government to insure their neediest citizens than admit that something good, worthwhile, and decent happened on President Barack Obama's watch.

Take that, poor kids, elderly citizens, and anyone for whom a serious medical condition could cause a devastating financial burden. You had to suffer while Fallin bestowed more largesse on greedy billionaires and oil companies in the form of tax cuts and tax exemptions.

Even when Republican governors have taken Medicaid expansion money, they often have not aggressively promoted the exchanges. Therefore, fewer healthy people have signed up for insurance than would almost certainly have happened with real promotion.

And, of course, having a good proportion of healthy folk in the exchanges is what makes the system work well.

But it was never Republicans' plan to try to make the Affordable Care Act work. Their goal was to kill it. Unfortunately for their scheme, ObamaCare has proved livelier than they'd anticipated and is much more popular now than in its infancy.

Thus we've seen the fiasco of Republican lawmakers trying to ram through a bunch of unpopular bills – to either repeal and replace, or simply to repeal, ObamaCare – all concocted behind closed doors, away from the curious eyes of either their fellow Democratic lawmakers or the general public whose healthcare they were trying to destroy.

But they didn't reckon with having to face that public thronging their campaign offices, jamming their phone lines, and generally threatening their jobs if affordable health care should go away.

That's one thing that entrenched politicians tend to forget: the citizenry put them there, and it can take them out. Sometimes abruptly and painfully.

Granted, it's too bad that citizens weren't more alert much earlier. Maybe we wouldn't have had to stand on a precipice looking down into the abyss, as the R's have forced us to do lately.

But citizens are aroused now. You betcha we are. *Marion Hill lives in Durant.*

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Is America In Trouble?

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

The last few days have brought deaths, injuries and other devastating effects of Harvey to our Gulf coastal areas in Texas and Louisiana. Most of us are riveted to the TV in compassion for other Americans there; a great many have left the safety of their own homes to assist them.

How about the countless other Americans whom TV does not display but who are going through turmoil that is as terrible?

Few are racists, but most are touched by race prejudice or practice race-based discrimination. First, let's distinguish between the two. Simply defined, prejudice refers to an attitude while discrimination is the acting out of prejudice. One can be prejudiced without ever acting on the prejudice; discrimination sometimes results in acts of violence. [The paradox of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville comes to mind: a white protesting race rally of Neo Nazis is killed.]

When prejudice is based on race, e.g. skin color, racial discrimination appears. What's important is our recognition that America is a landscape of racism from its beginning.

When white Americans decided they needed ser-

vants or other workers, they were answered with shiploads of blacks, mainly from Africa. They did have indentured servants after the influx due to the Irish potato blight, along with others from Europe who owed money or were taken from jails or escaped poverty in Europe; all of them rendered service for a certain length of time but could not be bought or sold. Much money changed hands over the centuries of our existence from the buying and selling of African slaves. The relationship between African Americans and their largely white masters developed into feelings of white supremacy with black Americans undergoing much suffering.

Humans are good at denying what they do not wish to believe or accept about themselves. We Americans are especially adept at denial, especially our ambivalence about race in light of our professed reverence for the equality of all, as enshrined in our constitution. We really do not wish to view ourselves as being prejudiced or, worse, practicing racial discrimination. Most of us are certainly not guilty of racism or would never resort to violence in dealing with people

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

Dictators And Double Standards

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

On Aug. 5, Paul Kagame was re-elected with 99% of the vote, an outcome that ensures he will remain president of Rwanda until at least 2024.

The State Department expressed concerns about irregularities in the vote tabulating process. The main opposition candidate, Diane Rwigara, had naked photos of herself displayed on the internet and was barred from running. She said that Rwanda is “like a pretty girl with a lot of makeup, but inside is dark and dirty.”

For years, the country has been the darling of the western donor community. Bill Clinton called Kagame a “visionary leader” and Bill Gates said he was “among the greatest leaders of our time.”

Kagame has allegedly presided over an economic miracle in which growth has expanded by 8% per year, and poverty rates decreased by 17%.

Former economic adviser, David Himbara, however, said that state authorities manipulated statistics and that Rwanda was an “economic midget compared to its neighbors.”

Kagame also established a police state in which the government maintains control through a network of surveillance in which each village has a chief and an informer. Dissidents have been hunted down and murdered even in exile, including the former intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya who was killed in South Africa.

The New York Times in its coverage of the election acknowledged repressive features of Kagame’s rule but said he “had guided Rwanda with a steady hand” and was “hugely popular” because he had “brought stability to a traumatized country after the 1994 genocide.” [Kimiko de Freytas, “Rwandans Vote in Presidential Election, With Only One Likely Winner, Aug. 5, 2017, A4]

Much evidence reveals, however, that Kagame rules through fear and helped precipitate the orgy of violence that befell the country in 1994.

In October 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front [RPF], commanded by Kagame, invaded Rwanda from Uganda with the blessing of the United States and United Kingdom in an attempt to overthrow the Hutu-led government of Juvenal Habyarimana.

The invasion instigated the civil war that resulted in an escalation of ethnic violence.

An eight-year French investigation found that Kagame then masterminded the shooting down of Haybarimana’s plane in April 1994 as it returned from peace talks in Arusha, Tanzania, which established a power sharing arrangement.

The standard narrative blames Hutu extremists for shooting down the plane and orchestrating the geno-

cide of Tutsi. However, investigations by independent scholars and legal experts have found that basic demographic trends made clear that more Hutu were killed than Tutsi.

Kagame also blocked UN intervention because his ultimate goal was to win state power and restore Tutsi primacy, which had been destroyed during the early 1960s Hutu Power revolution.

Kagame’s RPF forces went on to invade Congo twice, helping to install current President Joseph Kabila after first supporting and then turning against his father Laurent. RPF-backed militias in turn plundered Congo’s resources, accounting for the artificial economic boom in the capital, which Kagame could then take credit for.

In 2011, President Barack Obama asked the State Department to demand that Kagame be immune from prosecution as an acting head of state after a lawsuit was filed in an Oklahoma court by the widows of President Haybarimana and Burundian leader Cyprien Ntarimana. They purported to have proof that Kagame masterminded the fatal April 1994 plane crash, which triggered the Rwanda mass killings.

In 2017, the Trump Administration is committed to providing the Rwandan government with \$500,000 in military and police aid, \$5,000 in advisory training, and over \$137 million in economic assistance.

During the height of the Congo war, as Wayne Madsen documents in *Genocide and Covert Operations in Africa, 1993-1999* [Edwin Mellen Press, 1999], the Pentagon provided the Rwandan and Ugandan invaders over \$10 million in arms through CIA conduits, installed a command and communications center in Kigali and along the shores of Lake Victoria, and shared intelligence and satellite imagery of refugee movements some of which was provided free of charge by the defense contractor Bechtel.

American Special Forces and private contractors such as Military Professional Resources Inc. [MPRI] also trained RPF and Ugandan fighters guilty of civilian atrocities.

The U.S. government, as we can see, has thus far had a strong stake in sustaining Kagame’s rule for geostrategic motives and out of desire to access Congo’s vast mineral wealth over the Chinese and other powers like the French who had supported Habyarimana.

Mr. Kagame, in turn, has been treated with relative kid gloves in the mainstream media, which may condemn some of his excesses but also rationalizes his rule.

A blatant double standard can be seen when we compare coverage of Kagame and leaders who have

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U.S. And The N. Korea Dilemma

BY HAROLD V. SARE

When I returned from Korea in 1948, a man on the street noticed my uniform and asked where I'd been. When I answered "Korea," he asked, "How did you like it over there in Europe?" Most people now seem to know that Korea is that peninsula between Japan and China.

At the end of World War II, Korea was held by Japan, but with the defeat of Japan, control of the Korean peninsula seemed to be "up for grabs." Thus Korea became an international issue between the Soviet Union and the United States. Diplomatic efforts toward a resolution were messy, at best.

The Cairo Declaration [1943], which did not include the Soviet Union, and the Yalta Conference in 1945, which did include the Soviet Union, reached an understanding on Korea but not an official agreement. The Soviet Union had entered the war against Japan after the Potsdam Conference of July 1945. The Potsdam Declaration promised Korea its independence.

The Soviet Union promised to honor the independence of Korea on Aug. 8, 1945. However, by late 1945 the Soviet Union occupied Korea north of the 38th parallel, and the United States occupied Korea south of the 38th parallel. Since that time Korea has been divided – with no possibility of union of the two Koreas. Two United States-Soviet Union meetings [May 1946 and August 1947] dealt with possible unifica-

tion of Korea, but they did not resolve the issue.

In September 1947 a UN Temporary Commission was established to help bring about the unification of Korea, but the Soviet Union would not cooperate. The South Koreans, with U.S. occupation authorities' approval held elections on May 10 for a National Assembly, which convened on May 31, 1948. It elected Syngman Rhee as speaker. Rhee was elected president on July 20; and the Republic of Korea was established August 15. U.S. military government soon came to an end.

In November 1947 the Supreme Peoples Assembly of North Korea set up a committee to draft a Constitution, which was adopted in April 1948. In August they elected members of the Supreme Peoples Assembly. Kim Il Sung became Premier. In October the USSR officially recognized this state as the only legal government of Korea. The government organization was patterned after the government of the USSR – a communist state, which became a problem for the U.S.

Thousands of refugees [400,000 or more] fled to the South and many from abroad returned to South Korea. These activities kept the South in a state of chaos.

North Koreans filtered into the South and contributed to the turmoil, instigating riots and much discontent. I witnessed this chaos up close since I spent more than a year with U.S. Military Government in

An Open Letter To The President

As community leaders in the Pacific Northwest, we express our moral outrage that the threat to unleash nuclear weapons is being brandished as if these were simply an extension of more conventional weapons. The weapons that ended World War II demonstrated their catastrophic force.

An attack using nuclear weapons against North Korea would produce an unprecedented and unimaginable humanitarian catastrophe. These warheads produce temperatures greater than the surface of the sun, blast forces that level all structures for miles, and levels of radiation that kill both quickly and slowly. We have all seen the wrenching images from Hiroshima and Nagasaki – incinerated bodies, flesh torn loose, pathetic survivors grappling at life's edge.

The threat to use these weapons as proposed constitutes a crime against humanity. The willingness to kill millions of noncombatants under the guise of national security is unconscionable for any nation-state in the modern age, given the undisputed consequences to life on our planet.

There is only one enlightened and responsible path forward to address another nation's nuclear arsenals and threats: dialogue and negotiation. As the most powerful nation in the world, we, of all nations, should be secure in our willingness to engage in mutually respectful dialogue and to

seek reductions in not only North Korea's nuclear arsenals but also our own.

If this current dilemma has taught us anything it is that the world's residents will only be free from the horrors posed by nuclear weapons when their total elimination has been achieved.

We urge you, President Trump, to extend the hand of reason and dialogue to the leadership of North Korea, and other nuclear nations, and demonstrate your confidence in our nation's ability to resolve these escalating nuclear dangers without the incalculable effects that would derive from using nuclear weapons. Millions of lives in Asia and beyond are at stake.

Former Strategic Nuclear Commander George Lee Butler concluded that nuclear retaliation "would irretrievably diminish our priceless stature as a nation, noble in aspiration and responsible in conduct, even in the face of extreme provocation."

The use of nuclear weapons against North Korea must not become America's second nuclear-age legacy.

This open letter, written by former OKC resident Bruce Amundson, MD, was signed by 20 Seattle-area community leaders and published in the Seattle Times. Amundson is president of Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility.

special investigations. The country was poor, disorganized, and underdeveloped.

Then on June 25, 1950, the North Koreans invaded South Korea with many of their troops trained by the Soviet Union. China added much fuel to the fire when it transferred 12,000 Korean troops in its military to North Korea. The South Koreans were not prepared for such a threat.

U.S. troops entered the war to help the South Koreans – thus the start of the Korean war for the U.S. The Chinese in 1952 entered the war on the side of North Korea with 1.2 million troops. However, the U.S.-led forces pushed the North Koreans and the Chinese back roughly to the 38th parallel, which is still the border that separates the two Koreas. An armistice in the Korean conflict was agreed to on July 27, 1953.

Since the armistice, North Korea has focused heavily on building a military establishment, including missiles and nuclear weapons, as well as a large army. It has amassed a large artillery and missile force near Seoul.

It is reported that North Korea has 10,000 or more heavy weapons just little more than 35 miles north of Seoul.

Seoul and its surrounding area has a population of about 25 million. About 18,000 U.S. troops and their

families and many U.S. business people also live in the area. The population of that region is about half of the total population of South Korea. North Korea has a population similar to South Korea.

The distribution of the South Korean population, with so many millions so close to the 38th Parallel complicates military action against North Korea when it threatens the U.S. North Korea's nuclear threats against the U.S. and Guam are difficult for the U.S. to cope with militarily. Negotiations seem to be a mandatory approach.

The Chinese, who control 90% of North Korea's trade, are supposedly trying to calm the situation. However, China does not want the U.S. military there and is opposed to any kind of unification of Korea that China is not in control of.

Such a state of affairs has been a historic problem between China and Japan. Russia is supposed to be putting pressure on North Korea to negotiate with the U.S.

Let us hope and pray that this problem will be resolved rationally and peacefully. I am concerned that the irresponsible, off-hand comments by our president are only complicating diplomatic efforts.

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

Interventionist Policy Blurs Line Between Neoconservatives, Neoliberals

BY NYLA ALI KHAN

President Trump's address to the nation on Aug. 21, in which he underscored his government's stance vis-a-vis South Asia, gave me a sense of déjà vu.

The line of demarcation between neoconservatives and neoliberals in the United States is thinner than some people realize. In terms of interventionist politics and foreign policy; support for the ramifications of globalization, some of which are the corporatization of agriculture and structural adjustment programs in the developing world; and being harbingers of peace through preemptive strikes, the two have much in common.

Going back to my sense of déjà vu, subsequent to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989-1990, India lost its powerful ally. India's relations with the U.S. reeked of distrust and paranoia at the time.

This worsened when senior officials in the first Clinton Administration questioned the legality of the status of Kashmir as a part of the Indian Union. The nonproliferation agenda of the U.S. in South Asia actively undermined India's proliferation strategy in the early and mid-1990s.

Washington's agenda was propelled by the fear that South Asia had burgeoning potential for a nuclear war in the future [see "Prepared Statement by John H. Kelly, assistant secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs before Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, House Foreign Affairs Committee," Nov. 2, 1990].

Pakistan's policy of abetting insurgents in Kashmir and Afghanistan led to its political insularity and seemingly legitimized India's proactive approach. The U.S. adopted the policy of persuading both India and Pakistan to actively participate in the nonproliferation regime by agreeing to comply with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty [CTBT] and to an interim cap on fissile-material production ["Interview with Strobe Talbott," *The Hindu*, Jan. 14, 2000].

Washington's political volte face became apparent when it explicitly demanded that Islamabad withdraw from occupied Indian positions and maintain the legitimacy of the Line of Control [LOC] in

Kashmir. It was implicit in this demand that it saw Pakistan as the egregious aggressor.

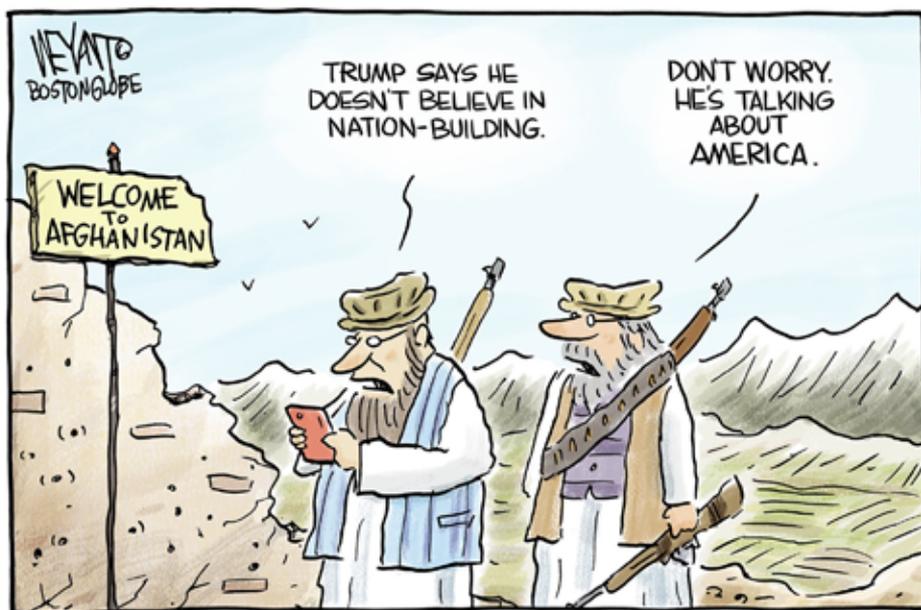
In his construction of Pakistan and Afghanistan, President Trump has reduced the two countries to safe havens for terrorists. Although President Trump would have us believe that his government has no intention of telling Afghans how to run their country, military aid – in any way, shape, or form – always comes with strings attached.

Washington's incrimination of Pakistani's stance mitigated New Delhi's fear that internationalization of the Kashmir dispute would spell unambiguous victory for Pakistan. India's strategy of coercive diplomacy increased the international pressure on Pakistan to withdraw its forces from Indian territory.

India took recourse to limited conventional war under nuclear conditions, prior to President Clinton's March 2000 visit to New Delhi. At this point in time, proliferation was relegated to the background in Indo-U.S. relations.

The Kashmir issue further receded to the background during the Bush Administration. The neo-conservatives in that administration zeroed in on India as a country in the Asia-Pacific region that would offset China's burgeoning economy, which I see as an attempt to reconstruct the cold-war paradigm ["U.S.–South Asia Relations under Bush," 2001]. President Trump's avowed support for further building ties with India in order to enhance its economic and military

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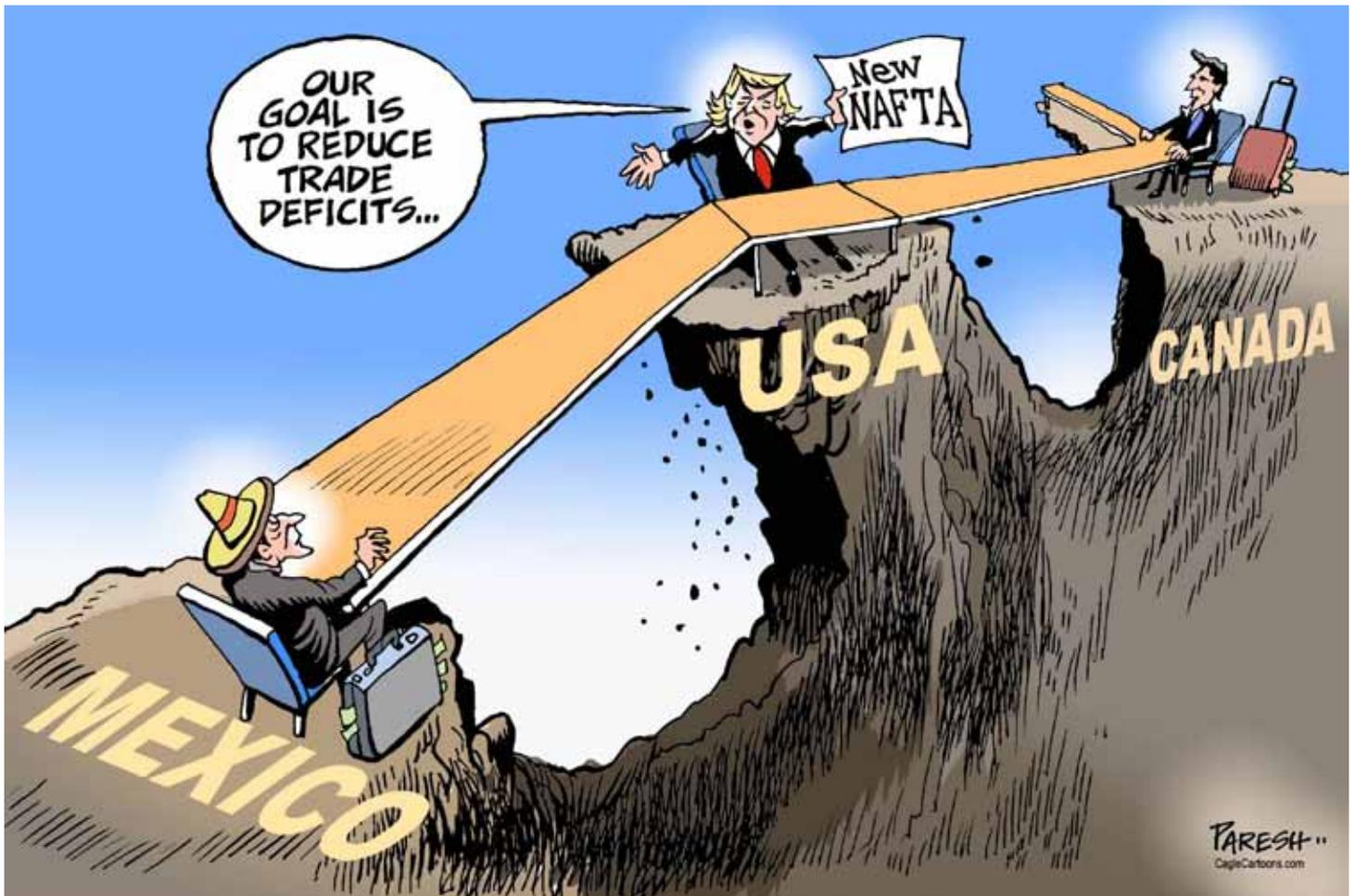
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Labor Unions To Trump: No More Trickle-Down Trade Deals

BY LEO GERARD

Free trade be damned. People don't need any more free trade. They need jobs. And not just any jobs. They need good jobs with living wages and decent benefits.

That's what negotiators from the United States, Canada and Mexico must prioritize as they rewrite the reviled and failed North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]. Negotiators must focus on improving the lives of people, not boosting the profits of corporations.

NAFTA betrayed the citizens of the United States, Canada and Mexico because it was based on the same servility to the rich that trickle-down economics was. Under trickle-down, the wealthy and corporations got the biggest, fattest tax cuts. Everyone else suppos-

How Union-Busting Bosses Propel
Right Wing To Power

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edly was to benefit somehow someday. A microscopic pinch of the immense monetary gift granted to the high and mighty was supposed to magically appear in everyone else's pockets. It never did.

And that's the problem with NAFTA. Its negotiators placed corporations on a pedestal, awarding them rights and privileges that no human, no labor organization, no environmental group got. Again, the wrong-headed idea was that if corporations made big bucks, some of the benefits would trickle down to workers. That never happened.

NAFTA was great for corporations. It provided in-

centives for them to move to the lowest-wage, lowest-environmental regulation location – that being Mexico. Profits, dividends and CEO pay all rose as corporations like United Technologies uprooted profitable American factories – like its Carrier plant in Indiana – and moved them to Mexico. There, dirt-poor wages and lack of environmental regulation provide even higher profits, dividends and CEO pay.

Workers in none of the three NAFTA signatory countries saw any benefits. Wages in the United States and Canada stagnated. In Mexico, wages are actually lower than before NAFTA. The poverty rate in Mexico is almost exactly the same as it was in the mid-1990s, before NAFTA took effect.

NAFTA ensured there was no wall between the Unit-

workers are dealt with in an addendum. They're an afterthought.

NAFTA gives corporations an extraordinary privilege. They can sue governments for what they contend are "lost profits" if they don't like regulations or legislation. They don't have to present their cases to real judges in open court, either. They get to go before a tribunal of corporate lawyers whose decision cannot be appealed by the governments ordered to pay unlimited billions of tax dollars to the corporations. Corporations can force governments to pay if lawmakers protect citizens by, for example, banning a neurotoxin or limiting sale of dangerous products.

There's no counterpart for workers. NAFTA provides no way for the Carrier workers laid off in India-

The difference in the way NAFTA treats corporations and workers is stark ... The humans in the United States, Canada and Mexico won't be tricked or trickled down on again.

ed States and Mexico for corporations to scale. Humans get stopped at the border, but not corporations. United Technologies faced no barriers this year when shipped manufacturing from Indiana to Mexico. It was the same for Rexnord, which closed its ball bearing plant in Indianapolis this year and sent it across the border to Mexico, no problem.

As the United States' trade deficit with both Canada and Mexico skyrocketed in the 20 years after NAFTA took effect in 1994, the United States lost 881,700 jobs. That figure is three years old, so it does not include United Technologies and Rexnord moving 1,600 Indiana jobs to Mexico. Since NAFTA, more than 60,000 factories closed in the United States.

Clearly part of the lure is wages. While a manufacturer may pay \$20 an hour in the United States, it'll only pay \$20 a day in Mexico, where the average manufacturing wage is \$2.49 an hour. Labor organizations there are almost always completely controlled by corporate employers, rather than by the workers. So securing raises is nearly impossible.

And while many formerly American manufacturers moved just across the border to special industrial areas, overall job growth in Mexico was not significant. That is because subsidized corn exported from the United States bankrupted huge numbers of small Mexican farmers and many corporations have moved their factories again, this time from Mexico to even lower-wage China and other south Asian countries.

That's just great for rich investors and fat cat CEOs. It's been horrible for workers in Mexico, Canada and the United States. What has trickled down has been toxic – lost jobs, stagnant wages and worry.

The difference in the way NAFTA treats corporations and workers is stark. Corporations get special perks in the main NAFTA document. The rights of

napolis by United Technologies to sue. The workers can't ask three hand-picked worker-jurists in a secret court for income lost because the corporation moved to Mexico to make even bigger profits on the backs of underpaid workers there. There's no way for Mexican workers to sue when a corporation endangers worker health with pollution or when a company-controlled labor organization pushes down wages.

In fact, NAFTA's labor addendum bows to corporations before even mentioning workers. The addendum's preamble says the NAFTA signatories resolved to expand markets for goods and services and to enhance corporate competitiveness globally. Then, after that, the preamble says a goal is to create new jobs, improve working conditions and living standards, and protect "basic" workers' rights.

Frankly, that's offensive. Workers' concerns must be primary in this renegotiation. That includes wages, working conditions and corporate pollution. Wages must rise in Mexico or the migration of U.S. and Canadian corporations to south of the border locations will never stop.

A renegotiated NAFTA that subordinates workers will meet the fate of the now-dead Trans-Pacific Partnership [TPP] free trade deal. An uprising and uproar from workers, environmentalists, faith organizations, community groups and others killed the TPP before it ever reached Congress. The humans in the United States, Canada and Mexico won't be tricked or trickled down on again.

Leo W. Gerard is president of the United Steelworkers union. President Barack Obama appointed him to the President's Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations. Follow him on Twitter @USWBlogger.

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Rebuilding The Collective Power Of World's Workers

BY RICHARD L. TRUMKA

The Economic Outlook for 2017 and the Stocktaking Paper for the Ministerial on Globalization really do grapple with the core economic problem OECD countries face – the vicious cycle of stagnant wages and low growth.

The Stocktaking Paper tells us globalization has meant rising inequality. The cause of rising inequality turns out to be the decline in workers' share of income and wages not keeping up with productivity. That turns out to be because of the decline in workers' bargaining power as a result of globalization being managed in ways that pit workers' against each other.

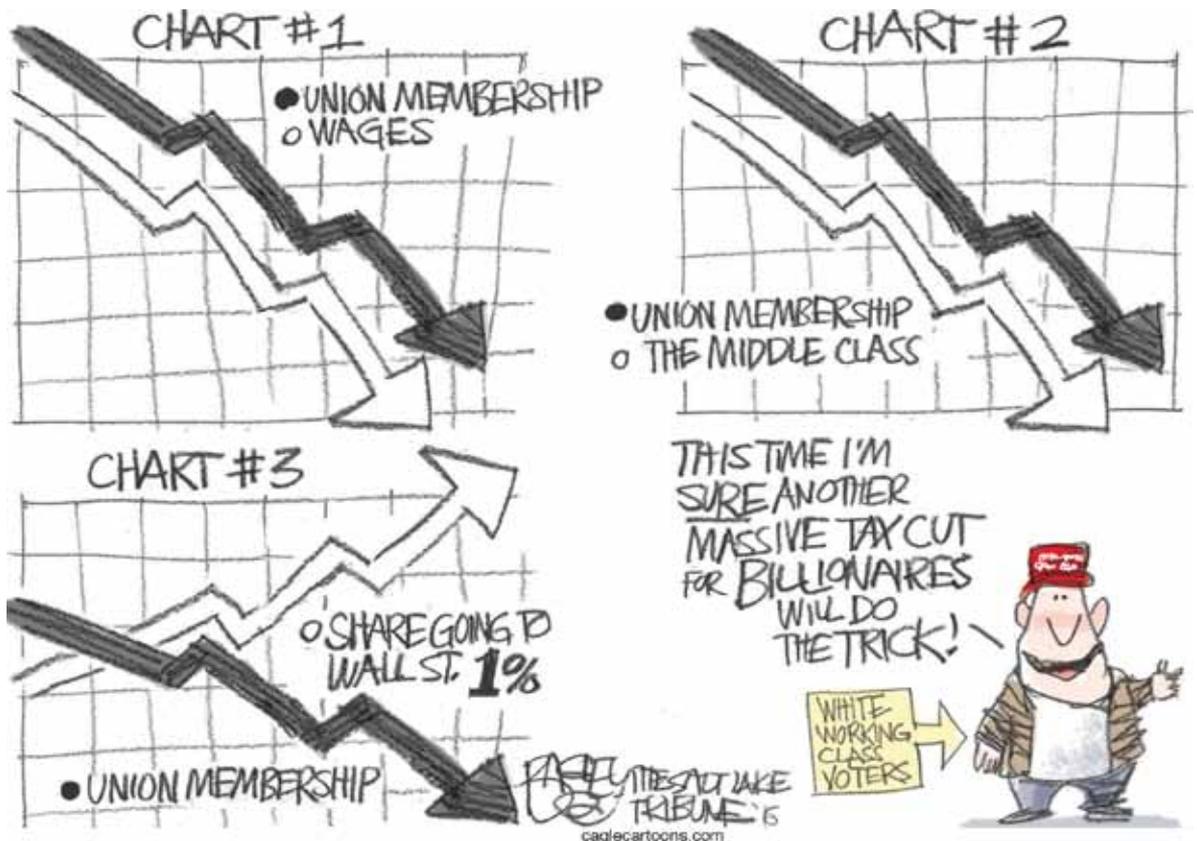
Underneath all of this is the decline of the percentage of workers belonging to unions and covered by collective bargaining. Now I want to be clear, this is not my explanation – this is what the OECD says in the Outlook and the Note.

The challenge from here is that we must on the one hand get to the root causes of this low growth trap in policy choices. We must stop trying to marginalize the crisis of low wages and stagnant growth as merely regional, or treat it as if it were somehow inevitable rather than being the product of policy choices. Then we must actually bring the OECD's policy prescriptions into line with our economic analysis.

Because as we sit here today we face a crisis not just of the project of globalization but of democracy

itself—in a way we haven't seen since the 1930's.

Anti-democratic forces are able to gain ground fundamentally because ordinary people believe democracy has come to mean inequality, poverty, and rising economic insecurity. In the United States, a recent Harvard University public opinion study found only 30% of people born since 1980 think democracy is necessary for a good society, and 24% think democracy is harmful.



This is precisely why we must not allow the policy debate to become one between neoliberals and authoritarians. We must have a humane economic vision *and* a human political vision. That requires rebuilding the collective power of working people, both in the workplace and in politics.

Because in a world of global corporations and big data, of Nissan and Uber – collective power is the only form of empowerment that actually exists for ordi-

nary people.

The first steps, though, are that we must stop making excuses and stop making policy recommendations that amount to ripping out the economic foundations of democracy.

We must stop trying to make excuses by referring to megaforges such as technology or globalization and get serious about the fact that policymakers are responsible for the way megaforges are harnessed – either to enrich a handful of people or for the broader good.

We must stop marginalizing the problem – while regional issues are important, wage stagnation is a global issue and at the very core of our crisis. It also does not help to talk about “compensating the losers” when the majority of the working population in OECD countries are the quote “losers.”

We must stop the double standard where we refer to the employer community and the investor community, but then talk about solutions for workers as if we can make it on our own as isolated individuals.

We must stop with the narrative that somehow, in a dramatically wealthier world, we cannot afford the

economic dignity and security for ordinary people that policymakers took for granted when the OECD was founded.

We must move on from policies that attack the working people of the OECD that go by code words like “structural reform” and “flexibility” and instead get serious about protecting democracy by building social solidarity.

The OECD should be in the business of helping people build democratic institutions that give them economic and political voice – guardians of equality and democracy

And please, please understand, the alternative to addressing wage stagnation and the status of working people in the global economy is not more of the same elite-dominated globalization. The alternative is an escalating crisis where the false promises of authoritarianism and racism threaten to overwhelm the democratic ideal.

Richard L. Trumka is president of the AFL-CIO. He delivered these remarks at a recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] panel in Paris on the global economic outlook.

Labor Pressures Trump To Deliver

Labor leaders, once courted by President Trump, are stepping up their campaign to turn workers against the White House if it does not deliver more on jobs and trade – and if it does not stop undoing Obama-era regulations.

The most visible effort was a two-week tour organized by the coalition Good Jobs Nation that ropes in labor-friendly politicians. The coalition, launched in 2013 to pressure Barack Obama’s White House on trade and wage issues, organized rallies throughout the Midwest through Labor Day.

“Trump ran as a working-class hero, so let’s look at the results,” said Joseph Geevarghese, Good Jobs Nation’s executive director. “We’re seven months into his administration, and wages are flat. People are still getting pink slips.”

The Aug. 21 Indianapolis kickoff rally featured Sen. Bernie Sanders and was designed to highlight the complicated aftermath of an early Trump coup for workers – a deal that delayed layoffs at a Carrier plant in nearby Huntington.

In December, Trump came to Indiana to announce that Carrier would lay off only a few hundred of its 1,400-odd workers, thanks to the state’s promise of \$700,000 per year in tax breaks to the company and a presidential promise of corporate tax reform.

“Companies are not going to leave the United States anymore without consequences,” Trump said.

Nine months later, Carrier is well into cutting 632 jobs – more cuts than the president had promised. “He made promises to working-class people,” said Chuck Jones, who represented Carrier workers as

president of United Steelworkers Local 1999. “He said that if he were president, that jobs would not be leaving this country. Guess what? They still are. He could be signing executive orders. He’s not lifting a finger.”

As the White House eagerly points out, the economy has seen steady job growth every month since Trump took office. Wages have ticked up .7% in the past year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics – in line with the increasing cost of living. Trump’s Republican base, meanwhile, has become overwhelmingly positive about the economy, with consumer confidence and the employment rate ticking up to 16-year highs.

Labor leaders, who watched their members vote Republican at historic levels last year, however, increasingly suspect that the administration will squander those gains by ignoring actions that could increase wages.

The Trump Administration has undone or walked away from a number of regulations that labor lobbied for, and won, under Obama, including one that required companies to disclose labor law violations before bidding on big government contracts and one that made 4.2 million more workers eligible for overtime pay. That rule and several others were challenged in court by business groups, and the Trump Administration has defended them less forcefully than its predecessor.

Instead, the administration has synced up with congressional Republicans in rolling back regulations on business, with the expectation that job growth will ensue. – *David Weigel, The Washington Post*



The Orifical Trump

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

For many Americans, the election of Donald Trump has occasioned ongoing attempts to understand him and our puzzling reactions to the man. Why is he so odious?

In a February 2017 *Observer* essay, I argued [with the help of Harry Frankfurt] that Donald Trump should be seen as a bullshitter rather than a liar. Trump's steady stream of falsehoods indicates an unconcern with truth rather than an intent to deceive. He doesn't seem to care whether his claims correspond with the facts, nor is he moved or reformed by critical responses.

His bullshit and the atmosphere of bullshit that pervades our politics [and our social life] are significant threats to our democratic ethos since truthful discourse is so fundamental for political attempts to improve the quality of our lives. No wonder we find his bullshit revolting.

In this second installment I want to consider whether Trump's bullshit is grounded in his character in some morally deeper way. To understand

Trump's relation [or lack of relation] to truth, we need another concept. A philosopher, Frankfurt provides an enlightening way to understand our president by offering an analysis of the concept of "bullshit" and contrasting the liar and the bullshitter. Another contemporary philosopher, Aaron James, in his bestselling book, *Assholes: A Theory* [Anchor Books, 2012], tells us that he wants to provide us with concepts that help us understand why a familiar character in our social life is so disturbing. Yes, he does this by providing a theory of assholes.

Once again I ask the reader to overlook the coarseness of the language, attend to the character that James describes, and assume that there's more going on than using an abusive epithet. [I am not engaged in mere name-calling]. James realizes that we can use the term "asshole" loosely [just as Frankfurt noted that we can use the term "bullshit" loosely], and we may mean no more than to express our annoyance or irritation with someone who acts like a "jerk," a "boor," a "schmuck" or a "bully." [Calling someone

a bully may suggest something deeper about a person and is certainly suggestive when thinking about Trump's character and actions].

James insists that the term "can be expressive and also pick out a real feature of persons." So, let's consider James's theory of assholes and see how the theory might apply to Trump.

Start with examples. The asshole "is the person who habitually cuts in line," "frequently interrupts in a conversation," "weaves in and out of lanes in traffic," or "who persistently emphasizes another person's faults." Think of Trump's name-calling in the campaign: "little Marco," "lying Ted," "crooked Hillary." He belittled John McCain's war experiences, mocked a reporter's disability, demeaned the former FBI director, called Jeff Sessions "weak," and verbally attacked the Senate majority leader. [An apt example for sports fans: he drove a golfcart across a green. What an asshole move!]

What kind of person does such things? According to James' theory: "a person counts as an asshole when, and only when, he systematically allows himself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes him against the complaints of other people."

The key to an asshole is that his self-absorption is not a brief egocentric lapse. It's habitual and morally deeper; it's part of his character. James, as a moral philosopher, says that it's a vice, a "stable trait of character."

The asshole allows himself special advantages and thumbs his nose at norms of courtesy and civility because he believes he *is* special. His entrenched sense of entitlement means that he supposedly has a *right* to special advantages because of his heightened moral status.

After Attorney General Sessions recused himself from the Russia investigation, Trump whined that it just wasn't "fair," supposedly because he couldn't choose a person he could control. The moral language was significant. He seemed to say that he was entitled to special treatment in the way that he handled the investigation.

Why do we find the asshole "deeply bothersome," disturbing, "morally reprehensible," "rightly upsetting," even "morally outrageous?"

James admits there's a puzzle here. After all, we're not talking about Hitler or Stalin and James does say that the material costs of asshole behavior are often small or slight for others. Isn't the language of the "moral asshole" overblown?

The reason we find the asshole so bothersome is that his sense of entitlement, his deep-rooted sense of his special moral status, challenges "the idea that we are each to be recognized as moral equals." Many philosophers have claimed that a central feature of morality is the kind of equality expressed in the Golden Rule, the notion of universal human rights, or Kant's insistence that we should respect persons;

we should treat them as ends and not as mere means.

In flouting conventions and even moral rules, for example, the rule to tell the truth or the virtue of honesty, we recognize in our response to the asshole a fight "for moral recognition in his eyes."

An asshole denies that everyone is due equal respect: certainly not his political opponents, his colleagues, nor those who work with or for him; certainly not immigrants nor women, construed as sexual objects; certainly not citizens of other countries nor practitioners of other religions. It's no wonder that many have connected Trump's rhetoric and behavior to those who see their own special status in racial, sexual, or religious terms. Trump's asshole rhetoric may contribute to racism, sexism, and an intolerant exceptionalism.

Note that it is a puzzle why his base includes large numbers of evangelical and socially conservative Christians, whose moral condemnation of a person may extend no further than her position on abortion and gay marriage, and whose approval of their president ignores his seeming rejection of the fundamental tenet of their moral worldview. "Do unto others?" "Love your neighbor?"

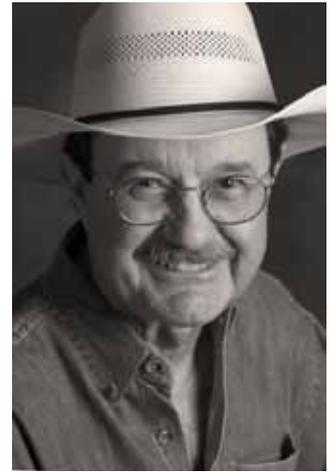
Donald Trump seems to think that he stands above or outside of the community of persons due equal moral respect. After all, he's made so much money. There's Donald, and then there is everyone else, a world largely populated by losers. The currency of moral worth is translated into the hard currency of economic success. It is the asshole's delusional sense of entitlement that makes him such a significant character for us.

To have an asshole as POTUS, the overarching representative of our shared moral and political commitment to the inherent equal value of *all* persons, is "morally repugnant," the words James uses to describe assholes.

James calls his theory of assholes a "constructive proposal" that should be evaluated on the basis of "whether it captures the importance assholes have for us." [Remember that we encounter assholes in all walks of life. Later, James identifies both exemplars and different types of assholes. In 2012 the author both mentions and then describes Trump: "Self-Aggrandizing Asshole with Thin Moral Pretext."] Let's broaden the basis of evaluation and see how the theory explains Trump's behavior as well as our responses.

First, the theory helps us understand Trump's bullying, name-calling, rudeness, and boorishness. James says the asshole "is extremely sensitive to perceived slights while being oblivious to his crassness to others." An asshole "rides people with wearing comments" and engages in "a kind of willful insensitivity." That's Donald.

Given his sense of special status in human relationships, there's no need for mutual restraint, courtesy, or civility. Nor is there reason to respect others



Tweeter-In-Chief Vs. The Wisdom Of Robert E. Lee

I hate to say this, but I'm starting to feel sorry for Donald Trump. He's only been in office for half a year, and already he's running out of Americans to attack.

Of course, he came into office having already notched his AK-47 Twitter rifle with hundreds of hits on the American citizenry, including such entire groups such as "nasty women," Mexican-Americans who have Latin-sounding names and Muslim-Americans who are, you know ... Muslims. Since then, he's repeatedly used the presidential bully-pulpit for mass-bullying assaults on every news outlet and reporter who refuses to be a Sean Hannity-suck-up to The Donald.

The trigger-happy tweeter-in-chief also relishes gunning down his own political kin: He has blasted all House Republicans who voted for a health care bill he called "mean" after he had personally pushed them to pass it; he mercilessly called for Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell to commit political hara-kiri for failing to pass his abominable Trump-Care bill, a bill which was meaner than mean; and he publicly shoots down his own top appointees, from Attorney General Jeff Sessions to his short-lived mouthpiece Anthony Scaramucci [aka "The Mooch"], and now even his chief political strategist, Stephen "The Barbarian" Bannon has been bounced.

Then came The Great Donald Debacle – his bumbling, shameful response to the racist, anti-Semitic rampage in Charlottesville by a menagerie of neo-Nazis, KKK thugs and swastika-clad white supremacists. His embrace of these marauding far-right extremists – and his attack on all who stood up to their bigotry – was so appalling that even his multimillionaire allies in Fortune 500 corporations gagged. Led by Merck CEO Kenneth Frazier, the 47 members of Trump's two big corporate advisory committees abolished their own panels in protest. The petulant president, clueless as usual to the importance of political symbolism, tweeted an angry potshot at Frazier – who happened to be one of the only two African-Americans on Trump's corporate committees.

But our foam-at-the-mouth president still has one loyal friend by his side – Ku Klux Klan poohbah David

Duke. "Thank you," the Duke of Whiteness tweeted to Trump after his defense of the supremacists' murderous frenzy in Virginia. Perfect – The Duke and The Donald deserve each other.

While the present President of the United States keeps revealing a constricted moral character that ranges from boorish to brutish, it's only fair to note that he also has a tender side.

This surprising side of Trump popped out several days after those savage attacks by raging white supremacists in Charlottesville. In a presidential tweet, he said: "Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart." Yes, very sad to see a resurfacing of raw bigotry ripping so viciously into America's historic attempts to create a culture of mutual respect and unity in a nation of extraordinary diversity – e pluribus unum, as our national maxim puts it.

Oh ... wait, that's not what Donald meant. Rather than criticizing the violence of the armed racists who were out to rip apart the Big Idea of American Egalitarianism, this was the boorish, small-minded president speaking. Trump was actually defending the bigots who were rallying around pieces of bronze and granite that celebrate America's darkest period of slavery, secession and white supremacy.

The KKK thugs invaded Charlottesville in a violent objection to the city's planned removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, who led the southern states' war against the U.S. so they could continue to enslave African-Americans. Trump's lament, then, was not about the attack on America's humanitarian ideals, but merely about "the removal of our beautiful statues." Apparently, it never occurred to him that most Americans do not consider the statues either beautiful or ours.

Ironically, Robert E. Lee himself opposed erecting Confederate statues across the south: "I think it wiser not to keep open the sores of war," he said, but instead "to obliterate the marks of civil strife."

If only we had a leader with such self-effacing wisdom today, when bigots feel newly empowered to incite civil strife in our nation.

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Wall Street Thieves Finding New Ways To Steal From Us

The self-described “Geniuses of Wall Street” are being stupid. Again.

In 2007, their stupid schemes and frauds crashed our economy, destroying middle-class jobs, wealth and opportunities. Far from getting punishment, however, these financial scowflaws were bailed out by their Washington enablers – so the moral lesson they learned was clear: Stupid pays!

Sure enough, only a decade later, here they come again! Rather than investing America’s capital in real businesses to generate grassroots jobs and shared prosperity, Wall Street is siphoning billions of investment dollars into speculative nonsense – such as high-profit securities “secured” only by rickety bundles of subprime auto loans.

Car dealers, eager to goose up sales, have been hawking new vehicles to lower-income people, offering quick credit approval. Banks – eager to hook more people on monthly car payments – have been approving these subprime car loans without verifying the buyer’s ability to pay. Then, a Wall Street bank’s investment house buys up thousands of these iffy individual loans, bundles them into multimillion-dollar “debt securities,” and sells them to wealthy global speculators. Last year alone, banks sold \$26 billion-worth of these explosive bundles of car loans.

This is just another paper-shuffling con game, a repeat of Wall Street’s subprime mortgage scam a decade ago. It generates fast, easy money at the start for superrich speculators and greedy banksters – but as more and more low-income buyers are unable to make their car payments, defaults build up and the whole financial bubble pops.

Wasting America’s much-needed investment capital on a predatory lending scheme that intentionally puts people in cars they can’t afford with loans they can’t repay is not only stupid, but immoral ... and it’s killing our real economy. Why are we letting elite Wall Street loan sharks do this to us?

These same practices of bundling and re-selling were the cause of the 2007 crash in the housing market that led to millions of American families losing their homes. But 10 years later ... where did all those houses go?

Communities across the country have recently found out that Wall Streeters themselves – from former-Goldman Sachs investment bankers to real estate investment trusts – rushed out to scoop up thousands of those foreclosed properties, usually

grabbing them at bargain basement prices when they were auctioned off on courthouse steps in Atlanta, Miami, Phoenix, Dallas, Chicago, Las Vegas and other metro areas with hard-hit working-class suburbs. The investment consortiums have deep, deep pockets and can easily outbid local buyers to take possession of the majority of the single-family homes being sold off in many of those distressed places.

Why are they buying? To turn the homes into rental properties and become the dominant suburban landlord, controlling the local market and constantly jacking up rents. For example, the Wall Street Journal found that in Nashville’s suburb of Spring Hill, just four of these predatory housing giants own 700 houses – giving this oligopoly of absentee investors ownership of three-fourths of all rental houses in town. One of these bulk buyers is an arm of Blackstone, the world’s largest private equity firm, another is an equity outfit that was spun out of the housing speculation department of Goldman Sachs, and another is a billionaire whose investors include the Alaska State oil fund.

Not only do rents jump dramatically when such outfits seize a market, but the Wall Street landlords are intent on imposing “a new way” on the U.S. housing market. They’re pushing a cultural shift in which homeownership is no longer part of the American Dream and tenants are taught to accept annual rent increases as the price of having a home.

So, the banksters crash the economy, you lose income and your home, they buy your house at auction, then they rent it to you at an ever-increasing price. The “new way” is the same old story of the rich robbing the rest of us. – *Jim Hightower*

A Deere In The Spotlight

When I was a boy, I loved spending time with my Uncle Ernest and Aunt Eula on their small northeast Texas farm. They pulled a frugal living from their 50 acres, raising a little bit of everything. Doing a lot with a little to make ends meet, Ernest and Eula operated on principle of frugality expressed in an old country rhyme: *Use it up/ Wear it out/ Make it do/ Or do without.*

This meant that when their tractor broke down, they fixed it themselves. Likewise, if their old Zenith console radio went on the fritz, they didn’t just order a new one – they brought out their tool kit and fixed it.

While the media and political powers seem blissfully ignorant of the “lifestyles” of America’s commoners, most families are struggling financially and are



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making do or doing without. For this poor-to-middle-class majority, frugality is not some old-world virtue, but a household necessity, and the “fix-it” ethic is central to their lives.

Add to them the millions of do-it-yourselfers who like to tinker or refuse to be a part of the corporate system’s throwaway economy.

Today, just about every manufactured product containing software – from an electric toothbrush to an SUV – has no-repair clauses and/or digital locks. It’s now standard industry practice for manufacturers to insert a spurious claim into their sales agreements that the company retains legal possession of key components of the products they sold to us, and only it can make repairs. To see how insidious this is, let’s go back to the farm with Ernest and Eula.

My aunt and uncle would’ve been thunderstruck that a tractor company like Deere & Co., the world’s largest, can now embed a ban on do-it-yourself repairs in the fine-print legalese gobbledygook of its sales contracts. Manufacturers call these devious clauses “End User License Agreements” – EULA!

Although buyers technically “own” the Deere tractor, the EULAs define the software that runs them as its “intellectual property” and asserts “proprietary rights” to certain parts. Therefore, if “unqualified individuals” [aka, farmers] tinker with their purchases, they can be held in violation of federal copyright laws.

Hog stuff! Which syllable in the word “own” don’t they understand? If you bought it, it’s yours. Period. Congress has passed no laws barring buyers from opening up, ripping out, adding in, fixing, rewiring, upgrading or tying bells onto stuff they’ve bought. Deere’s claim to have a controlling power over people who own its products is a ridiculous perversion of language, logic and law. Far worse, though, are the multiple harms done to farmers and others who’ve been led to believe that Deere’s repair-prevention clause is the law:

First, just hauling your multi-ton tractor to one of the few dealerships or authorized repair shops can cost beaucoup bucks and invaluable time.

Second, while Deere will sometimes dispatch a technician for an on-site fix, the key question is: When? A few days’ delay, especially during planting and harvesting, can crash a farmer’s bottom line.

Third, when Deere’s “do-not-touch” proprietary software goes haywire – leaving a farmer in the

lurch with a broken-down tractor – it’s not Deere’s fault. Ever. The corporation’s lawyers added language to its sales agreement declaring that farmers cannot sue the manufacturer for “crop loss, lost profits, loss of good will, [or] loss of the use of equipment.”

Fourth, Deere’s licensing scheme is an artificial, corporate-imposed, private “law” that will squeeze independent shops out of business and allow Deere to dominate the U.S. tractor-repair market, siphoning money and skilled jobs out of rural communities and ultimately leaving farmers at the mercy of a monopolist.

Deere’s claim of a proprietary right to control the repair of your tractor is no more grounded in law than the snake oil flimflammers of yesteryear were grounded in science. Yes, Deere owns the copyrights, patents and trade secrets involved in creating the software, but you’re not tampering with, pirating, altering or trying to sell any of those intellectual properties – you’re just repairing your tractor, and it’s none of the manufacturer’s business. It’s your absolute right to do so. – *Jim Hightower*

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Michael Moore And The Democrats' Burden



BY FROMA HARROP

Michael Moore's one-man show on Broadway is at times hilarious, at times tedious. While theater critics found *The Terms of My Surrender* greatly wanting, the liberal audiences seemed grateful for some comic resistance to the Trump era.

Problem is, Moore is their problem. Or, at risk of inflicting a narcissistic injury on the lefty provocateur's sense of centrality in great liberal causes, part of the problem. Had ticket buyers known his history of aiding and abetting the forces he purports to fight, they might have added Moore to their boycott lists.

They certainly would have choked at Moore's opening complaint: "How the f--- did this happen? The second time in the last 16 years we got the most votes!"

Ah, 16 years ago. That's when Moore and other purifiers of the rigid left openly urged liberals to throw the election to George W. Bush. The race was so close that Republicans were sending checks to the campaign of left-wing spoiler Ralph Nader. It was in all the papers.

But Moore worked the Nader rallies with his rumpled-workingman shtick. "A vote for Gore is a vote for Bush," he insanely bellowed. "If they both believe in the same thing, wouldn't you want the original than the copy?"

Democrat Al Gore won the popular vote by a half-million but lost the Electoral College, as Nader siphoned off a few progressives in Florida.

Later in the show, Moore bitterly denounced Democrats who voted for "Bush's war" and the liberal publications that endorsed it. Truth is, the claims that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction were more believable at the time than the contention that Gore was just like Bush.

The lesson of 2000 had clearly been forgotten by 2016, when Bernie Sanders and allies caricatured Hillary Clinton as a handmaiden of dark Wall Street forces. They condemned her as a toady of corporate America for having backed the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Actually, the TPP was a good deal for most American workers but an easy target for demagoguery. [Trump ditched TPP, and now most Democrats support it.]

Sanders was not a spoiler in the Ralph Nader sense. He vied for the Democratic nomination and eventually came around to supporting the Democratic candidate. But self-importance – stoked by adoring followers – so clouded his judgment that he saw little danger in letting the "witch" bleed until almost the end.

Even after Clinton amassed 3.6 million more votes than he, Sanders withheld his endorsement for weeks. At the Democratic convention, some Sanders ninnies booed Clinton's name without serious reprimand by their leader. And – shades of 2000 – a Bernie group put out a flyer reading, "Join us to hear why Hillary Clinton is more dangerous than Donald Trump."

Trump picked up the talking points where Sanders left off. Clinton admittedly ran a flawed campaign, but when Sanders said after the election that she should have been able to put Trump away, you just wanted to ...

So what should Democrats do? They should encourage states to hold primaries attracting a broad swath of voters rather than caucuses dominated by a few well-trained strategists. They should require Democratic candidates to be registered Democrats. And they should insist that candidates for president release their tax returns.

All the above Sanders opposed. He does get some grievance points for the party leaders' favoritism toward Clinton. They should desist.

Meanwhile, Democratic leaders should stop indulging heretic hunters who can't tell the difference between Gore and Bush, Clinton and Trump. Better that they leave the tent in a sulk than juggle blowtorches on the inside. As for problematic hangers-on like Moore, they are simply a burden. It's time to label them as such.

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Fossil Fuel Subsidies Lead To Massive Health Costs

BY ALEX KIRBY

Health campaigners say the energy policies of the world's richest countries are inflicting a double burden on their citizens, not only using their taxes to pay fossil fuel subsidies, but also loading huge health costs on them.

A Health and Environment Alliance [HEAL] report says that although fossil fuel combustion causes deadly air pollution and climate change, virtually all governments spend vast sums of public money – their citizens' taxes – on supporting the oil, gas and coal industry in fossil fuel energy production.

HEAL's report also says the health costs associated with fossil fuels are over six times higher than the subsidies the industry receives in the G20 group of the globe's leading industrialized countries.

The G20 agreed in 2009 to phase out the subsidies, but HEAL says that on average, in countries belonging to the bloc, the health costs associated with fossil fuels are far greater than the subsidies: \$2,758 bil-

lion against \$444 billion.

HEAL cites a 2015 report by the UK-based think tank the Overseas Development Institute [ODI], which finds that "G20 country governments' support to fossil fuel production marries bad economics with potentially disastrous consequences for climate change."

GLOBAL IMPACT

HEAL's own report says the subsidies support an industry that causes premature deaths, ill-health and huge health costs worldwide, in stark contrast to the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. It urges policymakers to end subsidies and use the public money saved to support healthy energy or health care investments instead.

Every year air pollution from mostly fossil fuel combustion cuts short the lives of an estimated 6.5 million people worldwide through respiratory tract infections, strokes, heart attacks, lung cancer and

chronic lung disease. The costs to health from the resulting air pollution, climate change and environmental degradation are not carried by the industry, HEAL says, but paid by society.

Genon K. Jensen, HEAL's executive director, said: "European and global leaders continue to pledge to tackle climate change and decarbonize our economy. However, they still give out billions of euros and dollars which lead to global warming and fuel early death and ill-health, including heart and lung disease.

"It is time to seize the opportunity to improve the health of millions of people worldwide by abandoning subsidies to the deadly fossil fuel industry. They should walk the talk and end fossil fuel subsidies now."

COUNTRY STUDIES

The report examines the costs of the health impacts arising from fossil fuel subsidies in several countries. In the UK, for example, the health costs from fossil fuel-driven air pollution are almost five times higher than the subsidies paid.

That means that citizens not only see \$6.5 billion of public money given to one of the world's wealthiest industries, but that gift costs them another \$30.7 billion in health costs alone from premature deaths from air pollution.

In China, the report says, fossil fuels impose \$1,790 billion in health costs from air pollution, more than 18 times what the nation pays to oil, gas and coal producers, helping to fuel a public health crisis that is already causing 1.6 million premature deaths every year.

HEAL recommends that policymakers should phase out fossil fuel subsidies by 2020 for developed nations, and by 2025 for low-income economies, to cut premature deaths, poor health and climate chaos and promote renewable, clean energy choices.

The report also highlights how the funds could be re-allocated to boost health.

In Germany, for example, it says the \$5.4 billion of subsidies represent taxpayer money that is sufficient to provide more than 300,000 households with a solar installation, powering their homes with clean energy, as well as to fund the transition for all of Germany's 15,000 coal power plant workers for five years.

In countries like Turkey and Poland fossil fuel subsidies represent valuable public funds that could strengthen national health systems, providing Poland with 30,000 more physicians.

Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former prime minister of Norway and later director-general of the World Health Organization, writes in a preface to HEAL's report:

"Fossil fuels cause climate change. The temperature increases and extreme weather events associated with climate change have direct impacts on the health and wellbeing of people all over the world.

"As a result, the Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the WHO all recommend the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies to protect human health ... Ultimately fossil fuel subsidies pay the polluter instead of making the polluter pay."

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Will The Federal Civil Service Defend Us?

BY RALPH NADER

As the Trump wrecking crew ramps up its destructive campaign against federal health and safety protections and social services for impoverished, disabled and vulnerable people [young and old] the latest targets of their ire are the federal civil servants who faithfully keep our government functioning here and abroad.

Mind you, the Trump wrecking crew is not going after gigantic corporate welfare programs, giveaways, bailouts and subsidies to big business. Nor are the Trumpsters going after wasteful, inflated government corporate contracts or massive billing frauds on Medicare, Medicaid or other government programs.

These egregious examples of crony capitalism, so disliked by conservatives and progressives alike, seem untouchable. While disgraceful, this is not surprising; many of Trump's nominees benefitted might-

ily from this cronyism before coming to Washington and Trump still benefits due to his refusal to divest.

Given this state of corporatist mayhem, the important question is: Will the federal civil service hold against lawless, dangerous non-enforcement of the laws and arbitrary suspensions of ongoing programs to protect the people from corporate assaults on their safety and economic wellbeing?

These are tough times for career civil servants who have given their all to do the right thing and make government serve the people [if you doubt this, just read the new book *American Amnesia* by Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson].

Consider civil servants' anguish. If they keep doing their job, they're going to be pushed to retire or be marginalized.

If they do as they are illegally or wrongfully ordered

to do, they are going against their conscience and undermining their oath of office.

The oath of office taken by federal civil servants is not to the president or to their cabinet secretary. It is to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution defines the work role for federal employees, [according to the Office of Personnel Management] “to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty.”

To further define their obligations, the Code of Ethics for U.S. Government Service has declared that civil servants must “put loyalty to the highest moral principles and to country above loyalty to persons, party or government department.”

Top civil servants are being told to freeze what they are doing or reverse course, suppressing science and take down scientifically informed websites [such as those on calamitous climate change] and suspend law enforcement – all under the direction of Trump’s cabinet lackeys who are openly bent on serving the Fortune 500 corporations, not the Constitution. Many of these public servants are quitting rather than violate their code of ethics.

In March, as the EPA wrecking crew chief, Scott Pruitt, moved to let corporations pour more poisons into your air, water, soil and food, the head of the Environmental Justice Office, Mustafa Ali, quit.

More recently, the highly-regarded Elizabeth Southland, the director of science and technology in the EPA’s Office of Water, resigned. She said that Pruitt and Trump, who are pushing a 31% cut in the agency’s already strained budget, are abandoning “the polluter pays principle that underlies all environmental statutes and regulations.”

Former Secretary of State [and Republican] Colin Powell, in an op-ed published in May for The New York Times, denounced the disabling proposed cuts that hollow out the work of diplomats and aid workers who advance peace and critical assistance to poor families in underdeveloped countries. He warned about creating “a vacuum that would make us far less

safe and prosperous.”

Almost certainly, in the coming months, scientists in the Food and Drug Administration will be told to back off and let inadequately tested drugs go to market for the drug industry’s gouging profits.

Other civil servants will have their judgments repressed when they recommend recalling defective motor vehicles, prohibiting clear cutting in our national forests, enforcing civil and voting rights, removing certain pesticides from our food, issuing ready-to-go safety standards for travelers, enforcing safeguards for nursing home residents and implementing proper nutritional school meal recipes for children.

The Trumpsters actually want to have the best and most experienced public servants to quit. They are already retaliating against civil servants who speak truthfully of the harm to innocent people being caused by the grisly policies championed by the corporate paymasters.

Fortunately, there are outside groups already challenging in federal court the lawless Trump regime under the Administrative Procedures Act, the Freedom of Information Act and other violated federal laws. They are also defending harassed civil servants who try to bring their conscience to work.

These citizen groups – Public Citizen [see citizen.org], Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility [see peer.org], The Government Accountability Project [GAP, see whistleblower.org], and numerous other organizations, including civil service retirees, are working daily to remind Trump’s tyrants that our country remains one under the “rule of law” on behalf of, by and for the people.

Those ideals need the cutting edge of organized citizens and the larger backing of focused public outrage putting heat on members of Congress. Both between and during elections, an organized and motivated public can put a stop to this vast takeover of our government by the avaricious corporate supremacists.

Remember, we vastly outnumber them. It’s easier than we are led to think when “we the people” decide to show up.

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When Insults Had Class

A member of Parliament to Disraeli: “Sir, you will either die on the gallows or of some unspeakable disease.”

“That depends, sir,” said Disraeli, “whether I embrace your policies or your mistress.”

•
“He had delusions of adequacy.” – Walter Kerr

•
“He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire.” – Winston Churchill

•
“I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure.” – Clarence Darrow

“He [Ernest Hemingway] has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary.” – William Faulkner

•
“Thank you for sending me a copy of your book; I’ll waste no time reading it.” – Moses Hadas

•
“I didn’t attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it.” – Mark Twain

•
“He has no enemies, but is intensely disliked by his friends.” – Oscar Wilde

– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing

Orificial

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

by telling them the truth. Trump's bullshit is related to his assholiness. Since he's special, he may say anything to anyone in order to advance his interests. A little creative looseness with the truth can help get the deal done.

One of the most powerful elements of James's theory [in relation to Trump] is the claim that an asshole's sense of special status and entitlement will inevitably leave him "impervious to reform." Why should an asshole listen to others, be open to criticism, appreciate ambiguities in human relationships, or feel the need to change? We have seen this over and over in Trump's behavior.

He doesn't change! The asshole's entrenched sense of entitlement "immunizes him against the complaints of other people." Whereas the cooperative person listens to complaints and criticisms, the asshole is "accustomed to calling others out."

We have been dumbfounded that criticisms of Trump's bullshit have had no effect on the man. Instead, he responds with accusations about "fake news" and the dishonest motives of his critics.

Deja Vu

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

dominance in the Indo-Pacific region gives the Modi government and its ultra right-wing Hindutva agenda a pat on the back.

U.S. strategic ties with New Delhi were further consolidated in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001, when the links between militant/insurgent groups and Pakistan's military and militia forces were underscored. As one of the consequences of the decision of the Bush Administration to eliminate Al-Qaeda and its supporters in Afghanistan, Pakistan's General Pervez Musharaff found himself with no option but to sever ties with the Taliban.

Following this drastically changed policy decision to withdraw political and military support from the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Islamabad found itself unable to draw a clear line of distinction between "terrorists" in Afghanistan and "freedom fighters" in Kashmir. Islamabad's quandary proved New Delhi's trump card.

New Delhi's strategy was validated by U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, and the deployment of U.S. forces in and around Pakistan to restrain Pakistani aggression. India was assured by the U.S. that it would stall any attempt by Pakistan to extend the Kashmir dispute beyond local borders, which might disrupt its operations against the Al-Qaeda and the

Evidently, in his mind he doesn't deserve such criticism – or any criticism. The inaugural crowd was the largest in history. He won the popular vote – somehow. The asshole is fully immunized from inconvenient facts and those who point them out.

Finally, James's theory nicely explains why we find the asshole – and especially one we must confront every day in the media – so bothersome, even repugnant. If James is correct, our reactions are essentially related to our moral convictions. It was Kant who beautifully characterized the moral community as a "kingdom of ends," in which all autonomous, rational beings have equal intrinsic value and thus a right to equal moral consideration.

An asshole, our president, "fails to recognize others in a fundamental, morally important way." In a list of vices we should reserve a special place for assholiness. And if Trump is an asshole, which he certainly seems to be, he deserves our contempt.

Randolph M. Feezell, PhD, grew up in northwestern Oklahoma and is professor emeritus of philosophy at Creighton University in Omaha, NE.

Taliban.

Also, deployment of the U.S. military in Pakistani air bases strengthened New Delhi's confidence that Islamabad would hesitate to initiate nuclear weapons use. The result of India's policy of coercive diplomacy was that the Musharraf regime was pressured by the U.S. to take strict military action against the mercenary and militant groups bolstering the insurgency in Kashmir [PBS interview with U.S. Undersecretary of State Richard Armitage, Aug. 30, 2002].

Regardless of the possibility of nuclear restraint in South Asia, a resolution of the Kashmir dispute and insistence on accountability for human rights violations through transitional justice mechanisms would put a monkey wrench in the drive in both countries to beef up their nuclear arsenals. It would also dampen the belligerence of an interventionist American foreign policy, hence my sense of *déjà vu*.

Nyla Ali Khan is a member of the Scholars Strategy Network and the author of Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Transnationalism; Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir; The Life of a Kashmiri Woman, and the editor of The Parchment of Kashmir. She is editor of the Oxford Islamic Studies' Online's special issue on Jammu and Kashmir. She can be reached at nylakhan@aol.com.

Franken Subdues Political ‘Dehumorizer’

AL FRANKEN

Giant Of The Senate

By Al Franken

Grand Central Publishing

416 pages, \$28

BY JOHN WOOD

Al Franken’s new book has come just at the right time for our democracy, it seems. His book is a quick read, even for 416 pages. It artfully places some rhetorical balance back in our often rough-and-tumble, even crazy politics these days.

Similar to the research backed by McClennen and Maisel’s *Satire Saving Our Nation?*, Franken is not unlike John Oliver and John Stewart. He is a great example of comedy used as a positive manifestation of a direct way to revitalize our democracy.

The book itself is initially disorienting as the fourth wall drops in this narration with jokes and wisecracks. Throughout the book, he talks directly to the reader and makes fun of the situation. At the same time you get used to the pace and it is quite an enjoyable read.

Franken is often very serious with stories on issues and his senate colleagues. He then punctuates his interesting stories about his life experience. He honed his comedic timing on Saturday Night Live where the show’s brand of comedy rewarded “viewers for knowing stuff about politics without punishing them for not.”

Franken has transformed himself. We follow his life from comedian and contrarian through his current travails as politician and statesman. His transformation is from “show horse” to “work horse.”

Franken heaped mountains of ridicule on conservative officeholders in both of his previous books, 1996’s *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations* and 2003’s *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the*

Right.

And yet, his Senate experience was much different. He transformed from Left antagonist into a senator who developed a solid working relationship across the aisle – finding some kind of common ground for the common good in order to actually get anything done.

Franken has had some quality success in turning his legislation into law through bipartisanship, while in the minority. He focused on legislation from education to mental health, workers to veterans.

He connects with senators across the aisle through his sense of humor. For example, he connects with Kansas Republican Sen. Pat Roberts because both are “big Jack Benny fans.”

In addition, Franken says, “my favorite Republican colleagues aren’t the ones whose politics are the least objectionable, but rather the ones with the best senses of humor no matter how objectionable their policies may be.”

He even talks about his relationship with former Oklahoma Sen. Tom Coburn, who admitted he didn’t have much of a sense of humor, so the two didn’t quite get along as Franken hoped. “So I went to Tom and I said, ‘Tom, can I take you to lunch?’ And he said, “tell you what, you can take me to breakfast.” At breakfast he asked: “To be a doctor in Oklahoma, do you have to have any formal education?’ He retorted, ‘Yes! You’ve got to go to medical school!’ I said, ‘OK, Tom, that was a joke.’” Later that day, Coburn wrote him a nice note saying he actually had a lot of fun.

Franken didn’t get along with everyone; for example, he describes Texas Sen. Ted Cruz as a “world-class

butthole.” He explains further, “I like Ted Cruz more than most of my other colleagues like Ted Cruz. And I hate Ted Cruz.” He explains that Cruz breaks protocol by criticizing his own party’s leadership.

Since taking office eight-plus years ago, Franken learned quickly that he had to filter and subdue his comedic side because of what he calls the “dehumorizer.” In the book he describes “the story of how, after spending a lifetime learning to be funny, I learned how not to be funny.”

A dehumorizer is most often used by his political opponents – typically Republicans – who take the life out of his jokes, stripping them of their context then using them to smear him.

Franken spent 15 years honing his comedic style. The SNL veteran surprisingly flipped a seat in the 2008 election. His story has become less and less unusual whether its Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, even Donald Trump, as actors seem to be able to successfully launch into politics.

His story is one of resiliency. He was elected only by recount that took nearly a year to resolve before he could take his seat. He initially lost. He successfully challenged it because provisional ballots were not counted, which helped him win by a razor thin 312 votes out of eight million or so cast.

Franken also talks about how Trump at least has united progressives: “I think it’s bringing us together.” He told the story of how “a colleague of mine, a Republican, was asked at an event, ‘Are Democrats angry?’” Franken answered “yes,” but nothing will happen unless the Democrats take over in 2018. He argues that Republicans in Congress are afraid to ruffle feathers among their own base, even though they know Trump is out of control. They are strangely “sticking with him. They don’t want to be primaried, so they have a very odd row to hoe.”

Franken warns if people don’t start caring about telling the truth then we can’t have real discourse.

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“If you can say something that is provably false, and no one cares, then you can’t have a real debate about anything.”

While Franken struggles with the current situation in which we find ourselves today, he hopes that his story “is a small part of a bigger

story – the story of how progressives picked themselves up off the mat and made an epic comeback” eight years ago. “And now we have to do it again.”

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

How Union-Busting Bosses Propel Right Wing To Power

AGAINST LABOR

How U.S. Employers Organized To Defeat Union Activism
Edited By Rosemary Feurer and Chad Pearson
University of Illinois Press
288 pages, \$28 [paperback]

BY SHAUN RICHMAN

U.S. bosses fight unions with a ferocity that is unmatched in the so-called free world.

In the early days of the republic, master craftsmen prosecuted fledgling unions as criminal conspiracies that aimed to block their consolidation of wealth and property. During modern times, corporations threaten the jobs of pro-union workers in over half of all union elections – and follow through on the threat one-third of the time. In between, bosses have resorted to spies and frame-ups, physical violence, court injunctions, private armies of strikebreakers, racist appeals and immigrant exploitation.

The labor question has never been a genteel debate about power and fairness in America.

A new book from the University of Illinois Press' *The Working Class History in American History* series offers a broad survey of how bosses have historically engaged in union-busting. *Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism* is a collection of scholarly essays edited by Rosemary Feurer and Chad Pearson.

The essays that comprise *Against Labor* cover a period that stretches from the late 1880s to the Clinton era. Elizabeth Esch and David Roediger explore the racist assumptions that were built into so-called "scientific management." The men with the stopwatches who broke production down into ever smaller tasks had ethnic preferences for each: Lithu-

anians for grinding steel, "American Poles" for forging, never Mexicans for the night shift and so on. A happy [for management] side effect of this speed up was the simmering resentment between different nationalities that hindered workplace solidarity.

Chad Pearson shines a light on Progressive-era worker organizations that were created and propped up by employers to help workers resist "union monopolies." In other words, they created unions for scabs to break strikes and open up closed union shops.

Robert H. Woodrum looks at the use of the Ku Klux Klan and employer-sponsored vigilantism to run union organizers out of the Alabama docks and reverse the modest gains southern workers made during World War I. Michael Dennis updates the southern picture by documenting the UFCW's sustained, large-scale organizing drive in non-union Virginia supermarkets in the early 1990s. Already facing enormous competitive pressure from Walmart, the supermarkets dug in for a years-long fight with little concern for the law. The story is a perfectly concise example of just how broken the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was as a venue for protecting workers by the time Bill Clinton took office.

None of these stories are particularly earth-shattering revelations to people who study unions and union-busting. What's most notable is how employer tactics get recycled and adapted from era to era, and

that no era was free from union-busting. That's a key point of *Against Labor*. Editors Feurer and Pearson place their collection squarely within the new body of scholarship on the "rise of the right."

Contrary to a popular narrative that has an activist right wing resurging in the years between Nixon's 1968 election and Reagan's firing of the air traffic con-

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

*Friends believe there is
that of God in everyone.
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but when they act as if
it were true, their trust
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- Author unknown

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

rate entities so differently. In Texas and California, for example, separate agencies – some with elected, others appointed leadership – are responsible for oil/gas, utilities and transportation.

But here's the potential rub with Fallin's task force: Its composition seems designed to ensure a particular outcome ... which in this case could well be what's in the best interest of the state's carbon barons, not rank-and-file Oklahomans.

Membership includes the attorney general [recently appointed by the governor], a senator to be named by the president pro tem, a representative to be selected by the House speaker, a corporation commissioner designated by fellow commissioners and the governor's Secretary of Energy and Environment, who will serve as chair.

Fallin's executive order requires the task force to "consult and engage with stakeholders, including but not limited to entities regulated by the commission and consumer groups." The problem, of course, is not all voices carry the same weight when a political group sets public policy. Recall whose voices ruled in budget negotiations last session? Hint: It wasn't rank-and-file Oklahomans who wanted the gross production tax returned to 7%.

Indeed, the timing of this task force can hardly be coincidental, politically. Earthquakes and the damages they yield – not only to homes, but also to highways and bridges – aren't likely to be going away, because neither are the use of injection wells.

With earthquake damage suits already in the works, what better time to appear to be modernizing the agency that regulates oil and gas? The question: Will it result in real reform or prioritize the interests of regulated industries over rank-and-file taxpayers? The devil, as usual, will be in the details.

Joy-ous Reprieve

The ethics cloud that enveloped state Superintendent Joy Hofmeister for nearly nine months lifted in August. Sort of.

On the eve of a preliminary hearing, the Oklahoma County district attorney dropped four felony campaign finance charges against Hofmeister – but made clear charges could be re-filed "pending further investigation."

From a political standpoint, the absence of absolutism leaves a Yogi Berra-esque "déjà vu all over again" feel. Can you say, "Hillary, 2016?"

Clinton's presidential bid was dogged by questions about her use of a private email server when she was secretary of state – a will-she/won't-she face charges distraction that proved pivotal on Election Day.

The same sort of whipsaw could happen to Hofmeister, whose re-election bid was stuck in neutral before

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charges were dropped – having raised only \$18,210 through June 30, far below what an incumbent eyeing re-election typically would want.

Before being charged Nov. 3, Hofmeister was arguably the state's most popular statewide elected official – especially revered by teachers who gave her a 67% approval rating in an August 2016 Sooner Poll.

Now? It seems likely many Oklahomans will give her the benefit of the doubt – especially if months pass without charges being re-filed.

First, she has an otherwise squeaky-clean record. Second, her persona is the antithesis of corner-cutting or game-playing.

Further, it's notable that Hofmeister was greeted with applause when introduced at last month's Observer Newsmakers event on public education.

Politically, Hofmeister must hope Prater will signal the all-clear as soon as possible. Professionally, she needs any lingering suspicions about her 2014 campaign to be resolved if she is to be as effective a public education advocate as Oklahoma's 700,000-plus students need.

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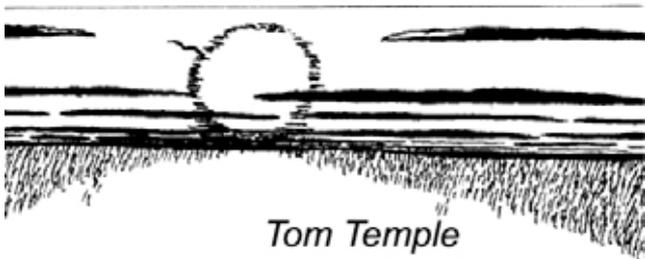
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

ICYMI: Gov. Mary Fallin is the nation's fourth least popular governor, according to recent Morning Consult poll – trailing only New Jersey's Chris Christie, Kansas' Sam Brownback and Connecticut's Dannel Malloy.

What's a small gummint GOPer to do? Term-limited OKC Rep. Kevin Calvey wants another taxpayer-funded job, of course – as an OK County commissioner. State government's gain would be county government's loss.

Laurel: To new Rep. Karen Gaddis, D-Tulsa, challenging all lawmakers to deliver a case of paper to at least one public school in their district. A nice gesture, sure – but more importantly, it could get her colleagues to actually set foot in schools they are starving financially.

Good News: U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe's cruel pigeon shoot fundraiser is no more after the U.S. Office of Special Counsel ruled it violated the Hatch Act for the event to be staged on federally owned and managed land in Jackson County.

Bad News: Pigeon shoot honcho Tom Buchanan, OK Farm Bureau prez and OK Water Resources Board member, got off with a mere slap on the wrist even though he unlocked the gate to the off-limits property for the 2014 event. Inadvertent? Nope, impunity.

Ex-Rep-turned-Norman Chamber boss Scott Martin is promoting a how-to-run-for-office forum Sept. 28. Here's the secret: Cash the carbon barons' checks and do what they tell you. Cynical, yes – but true.

Wow! Eighty percent of the \$1 billion "Indian-made" jewelry sold annually could be counterfeit, violating federal law. However, only 22 of 1,700 complaints since 1996 have been prosecuted. – High Country News

Time reports the Secret Service has spent \$60,000 on golf cart rentals so far this year, while protecting President Trump at his two resorts. Wouldn't it be cheaper to just buy a fleet? We've seen them for under \$500 each on the internet.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

time are led by two absolutely uninformed, bombastic, immature heads of state with no concept of war playing “chicken” with nuclear weapons!

North Koreans are helpless under their mad dictator. However, we have our illustrious Constitution providing ways to prevent “mad leadership” from dooming us. The 25th Amendment could eliminate our half of the madness. Is there time? Is there the courage? “We the people” can determine our fate.

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Houses of worship are meant to be spaces that provide sanctuary to their congregations. In these hotly contested times, that also means safe spaces from the secular politics that are splitting so many communities of faith.

That’s why I’m so concerned about efforts by President Trump to repeal the Johnson Amendment – the law that protects tax-exempt churches from having to endorse political candidates. I’m not the only one who believes in keeping political endorsements out of our churches. In fact, I have added signature to a petition of more than 3,500 faith leaders from around the country urging Congressional leaders to protect the Johnson Amendment.

The law, which has been in effect for as long as any of us can remember, also grants churches and other community organizations – also known as 501(c)3s – a tax break because they are committed to the common good.

We all know how divisive political races can be. Some preachers proudly flout the law by inviting local news reporters and TV cameras to worship services where they endorse political candidates from their pulpits. Other houses of worship are being divided by the same kind of political polarization paralyzing the legislatures in both Oklahoma City and in Washington, DC. Congregations and families are being rent asunder.

That’s why it’s important that houses of worship are protected from pressure to endorse and oppose candidates. That’s not to say that we don’t have a role in talking with our members and each other openly about issues. That’s important. As people of faith, we need to be able to connect with one another about the moral and social issues of our times. That’s our



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*Only a fool would try to deprive working
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role, and we are happy to fill it. But there's a difference between discussing issues, and getting into the business of picking candidates.

Houses of worship are natural places for the kind of activism that encourages all citizens to thoughtfully examine issues of public policy and to vote their conscience. People of faith have a moral responsibility to speak to others respectfully and to speak truth to power in a civil manner. We have free speech, and we exercise that right. Our focus should be on issues, not politicians.

Getting congregations in the business of supporting and opposing candidates seeking political office is something entirely different. That removes houses of worship from being sacred spaces that work to connect communities and makes them one more place where political candidates divide us. That's not

Labor

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

trollers in 1981, the modern right wing began rising in reaction to the New Deal. Many employers simply never accepted the legitimacy of state intervention on behalf of union rights that was enshrined in the original National Labor Relations Act. These employers – mostly small and mid-sized firms – acted as an advance guard against union rights.

They pressed against the edges of the law, testing their ability to fire union activists for cause, replace strikers, lockout recalcitrant unions and restrict organizers' access to the job site. They learned to love making the NLRB go to court to enforce orders against bosses' union busting, for in the courts they found far more sympathetic arbiters of management's rights. The biggest holes in labor law's protections of workers rights, exploited in the anti-union drives of the 1980s, mostly come from bad, postwar court decisions that some people like to kid themselves were a golden age of labor-management cooperation.

Sure, there were employers who talked a good game about their [junior] "partners" in labor, kept their pensions and healthcare plans funded and mostly avoided knock-down, drag-out contract fights. But, clearly in retrospect, they were ready to beat down and bust their own unions just as soon as the advance guard of reactionaries created a political environment where it was possible.

The most fascinating story in the collection, "The Strange Career of A.A. Ahner: Reconsidering Blackjacks and Briefcases," comes from Feurer. It tells of a hired gun whose career bridged two very different eras of labor-management relations in the Kansas City area. Scholars have referred to the advent of the NLRB as a kind of transition from blackjacks to briefcases for anti-union employers. It's commonly assumed that the Pinkertons, thugs and company "unions," employers' first line of defense against unions in the 1920s, were muscled out of the way by a new generation of lawyers who promised to "work

good for anyone.

As our leaders in Congress, including Jim Inhofe, James Lankford, Tom Cole, Jim Bridenstine, Mark Mullin, Steve Russell, and Frank Lucas do the hard work of leading during these turbulent times, I hope they will not weaken or repeal the Johnson Amendment.

The Johnson Amendment protects all of us, as people of faith, from having politicians pressuring our congregations for endorsements. Keeping houses of worship separate and apart from political races is good for both congregations and communities.

Bruce Prescott
Norman

Editor's Note: Dr. Bruce Prescott is a member of the Oklahoma Observer Advisory Board and a retired Baptist minister.

the system" to represent their clients' interests at the NLRB. But in Ahner we find a direct, lineal connection between the two approaches.

Ahner ran his own detective agency beginning during World War I. For the right price, he would spy on workers, plant bombs and frame union activists [he had lots of friends in law enforcement at a time when there weren't terribly rigid boundaries between local business and police]. This work continued into the 1930s, when he was investigated by a Senate committee probing how employers were violating the new labor act.

Recognizing that times had changed, Ahner improved his image, if not his underlying philosophy. Working with a local priest, he became co-chair of the St. Louis Labor-Management Committee, which counseled conciliation and arbitration. Through this "volunteer" work, he lined up consulting gigs with unionized employers. Mostly this was for bargaining and grievances, where union representatives who knew his history would be aghast to find him sitting across the table with an air of respectability. But occasionally – even in the 1950s – he was called on for union avoidance work, where he pressed the limits of employers' rights to their own free speech and to squelch their workers'.

Ahner's story enriches our understanding of the real roots of today's anti-unionism. One wishes Rosemary Feurer had expanded her research on Ahner and others like him and made that the subject of her book.

It also serves as a warning that today's union-buster will claim to have "always" had a "productive working relationship" with unions when we begin to win again. But the only "always" that applies to American capitalists is that they are always against labor.

Shaun Richman is a former organizing director for the American Federation of Teachers.

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Racism

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

of other races. Unfortunately, however, some of us do.

It is those few for whom the rest of us must assume responsibility. If we do not, then they will provide models of behavior for our children and even some adults in their irrational moments. So how do we answer the behavior of racial violence or verbal threats based on racial prejudice?

Racism ultimately leads to violence in both verbal and physical manifestations. Violence produced by racial hatred is now occurring in our increasingly volatile nation. We see extremist acts all across our once peaceful country. White supremacist gangs are growing in numbers while our policemen are being killed by both white and black extremists.

Meantime, the voice of reason that should be coming from the president's office remains silent. That silence allows for misunderstanding and helps to create an alarming increase in violence. America needs leadership that will help its citizens differentiate between right and wrong. Unfortunately our president's voice is only heard when he uses it to berate those who would disagree with him. It is not so much what he says but what he does not say when we need to hear from him.

More than anything else, it is his spineless failure to state the truth that hurts our society more than what he might say in the heat of political disagreement.

America's dissident groups have been around for some time. Even before the rise of Trump accompanied by the Alt-Right, conspiracy theories have helped create concerns of "white genocide." They have been the backbone of the anger feeding the violent radical right that has been working its way into our country's mainstream.

America is indeed fortunate to have organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC] working to keep track of the groups that poison America from the inside. As it pointed out in its most recent Intelligence Report, our country is radically different under the Trump presidency. The real news is fake news while left is right and the top is bottom. There couldn't be stranger politics. In fact, the country now exists in the "upside down."

Is America in trouble? Without a doubt in my mind, we are in serious trouble. We are bogged down in a war of words politically with a president unable to provide the moral authority needed to lead the country. White supremacists, black nationalists, and neo-Nazis are back in America's 21st century.

For America to be a world leader in affairs, we must correct our own problems first. We have far too many injustices left unattended to foist ourselves on other countries. Before we try to help others, we must help ourselves overcome the woes keeping our neighbors from enjoying the freedoms to which many Ameri-

cans have access.

Look around and you will see the homeless, the hungry and all the dispossessed. Where will they fulfill their daily food needs? Where is their shelter at night other than streets, bridges and vacant buildings? Where are the hungry, especially the children going to find, much less afford, their daily bread? How will the unemployed find work to support their families? How will the sick afford medical care when the government can't even help provide it? What about we old ones? Where can all of us find a supporting community in which we can seek a meaningful life?

It's really time America address its most serious problems and realize the vision of our Founding Fathers. Those who have achieved what so many others only desire but never realize must come to their rescue because isn't that what America is all about: people helping one another achieve their dreams?

Bob Rounsavell is the president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation. He and his wife Maria are freelance writers living in Oologah.

Dictators

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

been defiant of the West such as the late Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Nicholas Maduro and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Putin has been consistently referred to as an ex-KGB thug and accused of killing opponents, arming the Taliban, financing right wing parties in Europe and engaging in a Nazi-type blitzkrieg in Crimea, when Crimeans voted in a referendum to rejoin Russia and Putin had been provoked by the U.S. sponsorship of a coup d'état in Ukraine.

The Times ends its piece on Rwanda by quoting from journalist Stephen Kinzer, author of the pro-Kagame book *A Thousand Hills*, who stated that "the only year when there was some measure of free discourse in Rwanda, was the year that led up to the genocide."

As if Rwandans or Africans by implication cannot handle real democracy and require the iron hand of a dictator like Kagame, who conveniently serves the regional interests of the United States and United Kingdom.

Jeremy Kuzmarov teaches at the University of Tulsa and is author of Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century [Massachusetts, 2012] and a forthcoming book, The Russians are Coming Again: What We Did Not Learn From the First Cold War [Monthly Review Press, 2018].

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