

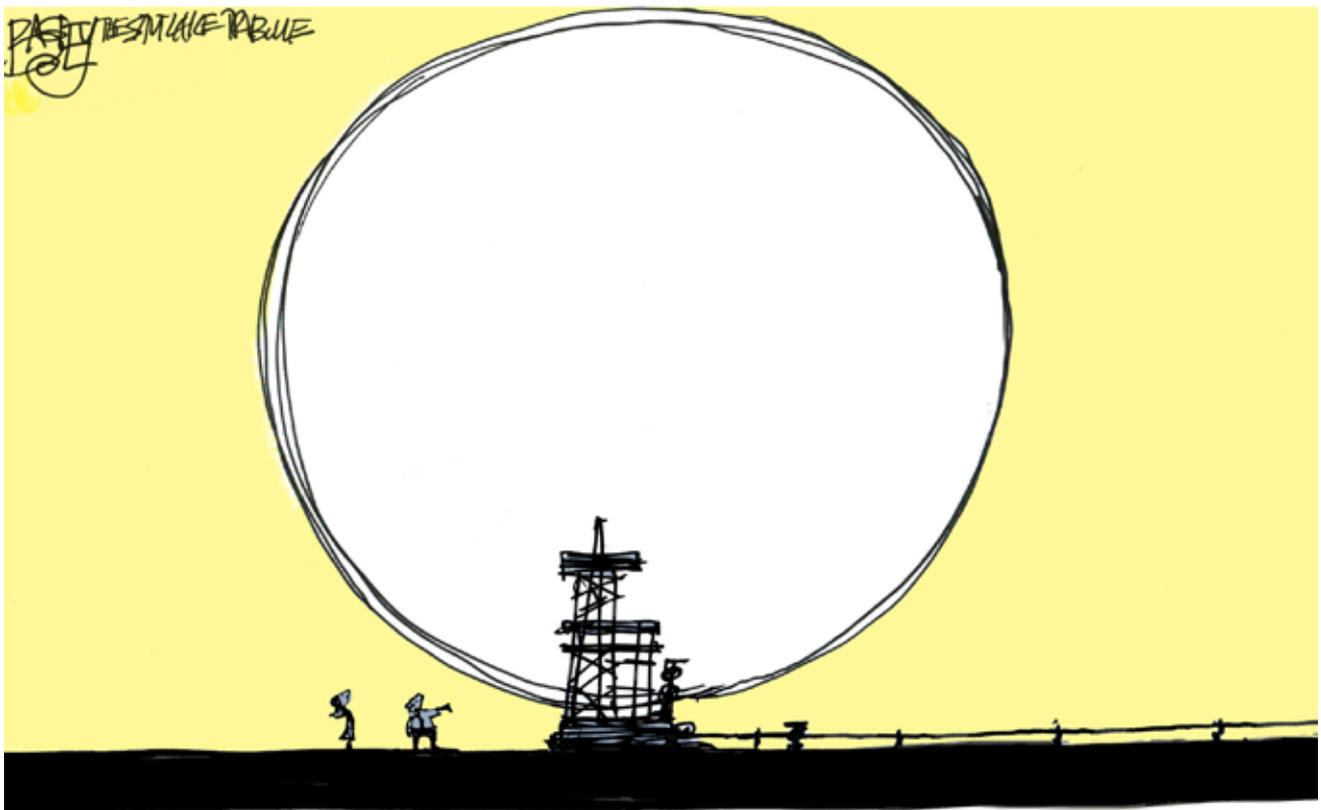
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

OCTOBER 2017 • VOLUME 49 NUMBER 10 • \$5.00

Almost Heaven

*Is Oklahoma Headed Down West Virginia's Path,
Too Reliant On A Carbon Industry Destined For Decline?*



"SURE, FRACKING MAY CAUSE EARTHQUAKES AND POLLUTE GROUND WATER, BUT YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SOURCE OF UNTAPPED ENERGY!"

*The Environment And Oklahoma's Economic
Future: Special Report Pages 12-17*

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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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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FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

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Observations

Not-So-Special Session

By the time you read this, the Oklahoma Legislature possibly – though not probably – will have done the right thing and fixed the state budget's long-term structural problems.

The special session that commenced Sept. 25 and recessed three days later was a tense, unhappy sequel to this year's regular session.

While most lawmakers clearly felt the heat to act, House leadership, in particular, snuggled ever more tightly with deep-pocketed carbon barons who won't give up their gross production tax exemptions unless pried from their cold dead fingers.

If you look up the word "toady" in the dictionary, you'll find photos of House Speaker Charles McCall and his chief sidekick, Rep. Jon Echols. Their servitude to the likes of Harold Hamm, Larry Nichols and Co. should make them Public Enemy No. 1 and 1-A for anyone who cares about the common good and the state's future.

Big money always has wielded outsize influence at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd., of course, but it's breathtaking how publicly venal it is now – fat cats speed-dialing into budget negotiations to declare what they will and won't accept, the people's elected representatives be damned.

The best news from the special session – tentatively set to resume Oct. 9 – is that Gov. Mary Fallin finally found a backbone, Senate Republicans found they could accept higher taxes without being smote, and Democrats found their unity begat political strength far exceeding their legislative numbers.

Fallin was one of the Capitol's few GOP leaders in recent years willing to publicly acknowledge that Oklahoma has a revenue, not a spending problem. But until she rolled up her sleeves in late summer and demanded dialogue with competing legislative interests, she was mostly ignored.

Even more impressive, she tightened the screws on legislative leaders by not limiting the special session agenda to addressing the \$215 million budget hole created when the state Supreme Court ruled the \$1.50

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Observerscope



You won't want to miss our Oct. 12 Newsmakers at OKC's Full Circle Books, featuring former Corporation Commissioner Jim Roth and Sierra Club Director Johnson Bridgwater. See back cover for details.

Laurel: To Corrections Director Joe Allbaugh, persistently speaking truth to legislative power about abysmal prison funding and overcrowding. This is a dangerous situation, unworthy of civilized society.

No doubt David Boren did great things in his 23 years as OU president. But his legacy is stained by his efforts to silence scientists who determined injection wells were responsible for state's earthquake swarms.

Dart: To Rep. Michael Rogers, R-Broken Arrow, calling reports of draconian education cuts "fake news." If his IQ were any lower, we'd have to take him out twice daily to water him.

Justice Joseph Watt's year-end retirement affords Gov. Mary Fallin another appointment to the state Supreme Court. Will she actually choose someone this time that meets all the requirements?

Laurel: To legislative Democrats, proving that by remaining united, they can wield outside influence [only 35 of 149 seats] against big money interests starving vital state services. Would Will Rogers recognize a party organized?

The Trump Administration failed to rule in time on Oklahoma's plan to use \$350 million in federal funds to help lower healthcare premiums in the individual market. A not-so-cleverly disguised undermining of ObamaCare.

Dart: To Rep. Scott Biggs, R-Chickasha, still torpedoing voter-approved criminal justice reform. A real speaker would strip the arrogant Biggs of his judiciary chairmanship and move his seat to the back row.

Speaking of Biggs, the hard-ass, by-the-book ex-prosecutor did not disclose \$9,450 in donations to his 2014 House campaign until filing an amended report this spring. How would he punish himself?

Dart: To ex-Sen. Tom Coburn and ex-Gov. Frank Keating, opposing tax increases to solve the state budget's structural deficit. The most dangerous place in the world is between these publicity whores and a TV camera.

We mourn the passing of our friend Lydia Polley, 86, former chair of the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. She was a dynamo!

American Bar Association has concluded U.S. Magistrate Charles Goodwin is unqualified to serve as a new federal judge in OKC. So, naturally, Oklahoma's two senators, Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, support the Trump nomination.

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

It is said that this is a “Christian” nation. This Christian nation elected a Trump who violates all moral values of that faith: walls, lies, deportation of the stranger in the land, threats of war and violence, devaluation of the economically oppressed, etc.

We are witnessing the bankruptcy of Christian leadership and the Christian tradition in the most blatant form possible.

Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

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

Editor, The Observer:

Think about it: We are advanced enough to send a satellite to Saturn through a bunch of millions of miles of empty space, maintain communication with it and receive countless pictures back through those bunch of millions of miles of space and we can see it flame out going into Saturn's atmosphere.

But we can't rid ourselves of two dangerous psychos posing as leaders of their respective countries, Kim-Chee Un and Dotard Cheeto, and we let them terrorize the en-

tire world as the two of them see who can make the biggest arc with their souped-up nuclear missiles posing as penis proxies for their egos.

What a sorry place the world has become. Technology but no sense. Brains but no heart.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Trump promised to empty the swamp

Removing miscreants from bottom slop

He is filling positions

Regardless of omissions

Since lites always float to the top.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Déjà vu, all over the place. From someone I have known over 50 years, a lovely meme suggesting that if North Korea bombs us then we send the NFL players to fight them.

This was from a person with perfectly healthy sons who voted for Trump and who has no problem sending other people's kids to be

pieces in Trump's game of reality RISK.

Even though this person's sons could have joined up during peace time or fought in the first Gulf War, they did not. One of them has a child of age now, but that child will be in college, paid for by parents and grandparents.

How about this? Send that idiot in the Oval Office to do his duty he didn't do during Vietnam. You know, the guy with the bone spurs who says he was a brave soldier and that his Tet Offensive was avoiding VD while having sex with anyone with a vagina and bragging about it for decades.

Send his sons, send the children and grandchildren of all of his enablers. Make sure all the neo-Nazis and white supremacists and their children and grandchildren are sent first.

As far as I am concerned, anyone still supporting Trump after all the crap he has done should be in uniform along with all of their children and grandchildren.

Karen Webb
Portland, OR

Editor, The Observer:

Newsflash from the New York Times, 9.11.17:

“Scott Pruitt, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, says it is insensitive to discuss climate change in the midst of deadly storms.”

Let's see: 1] Hurricanes derive their power from warm water – the warmer, the more powerful; 2] Ocean temperatures are higher this year by three to seven degrees Fahrenheit – *world wide!*; 3] “Harvey” drifted back into the Gulf at least three times, feasting on the extra warm water; 4] Global warming seems to have formed both a new “Great Lake” in southeastern Texas and a veritable “war zone” along the entire Florida peninsula.

There are none so blind as those who choose not to see!

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City



Apathy Is Not An Option

What we're seeing in the halls of Congress, in the Oklahoma Legislature's not-so-special session, in the streets and on college campuses is hardly unprecedented.

Representative democracy is often messy. Sometimes, sadly, even violent.

So why is it so unnerving now?

Is it because we have a president who delights in roiling, rather than calming the political waters? Is it because race remains a festering sore? Is it because the American dream now is beyond reach of so many?

The reasons are many, of course, but they point, collectively, to danger for our glorious experiment in self-governance – while also serving as an unambiguous reminder that civic apathy is not an option.

My dear friend and The Observer's founding editor, the late Frosty Troy, used to say, "People don't think we can lose this country, but we can." Evidence mounts he was correct.

Consider the last last few weeks. As the nation chose sides over NFL player protests and President Trump's tweetstorm of nationalism, it also debated a pillar of our polity: free speech.

There are those who would like to restrict that right, forcing all to stand for – and maybe even sing along with – the national anthem. That's not patriotism. That's fascism.

Even Attorney General Jeff Sessions – believe it or not – struck the right chord, saying, "There are those who will say that certain speech isn't deserving of protection. They will say that some speech is hurtful – even hateful.

"But the right of free speech does not exist only to protect the ideas upon which most of us agree."

Living in an open society means taking the good with the bad. Allowing all to utter whatever inane thought comes into their heads, unless it's threatening to an individual or public safety.

I'm routinely appalled and sometimes enraged by what I hear in the public square – whether it's bigoted, theocratic or corporate-funded demagoguery.

What I'm more concerned about at this moment, however, is that so many college students seem so

willing to curtail disquieting speech.

According to a new Brookings Institution study, nearly one in five students at four-year colleges and universities think it's OK to resort to violence to silence a speaker with whom they disagree – and more than half endorse shouting down and drowning out speakers they consider offensive.

Further, more than half the 1,500 students surveyed think it's important for colleges to "create a positive learning environment for all students by prohibiting certain speech or expression of viewpoints that are offensive or biased against certain groups of people."

Let that sink in. These are our future leaders. Will they come to understand the genius of a First Amendment that gives wide latitude to objectionable speech in order to ensure all have the right to self-expression?

This is an ever-present tension in our politics. But it feels more acute these days when some are glued to Fox, others to MSNBC; neighbors and friends tip-toe around politics and public policy; and Facebook's "unfriend" button is oft-deployed as a weapon.

The problem is, as we retreat to our silos, we seek more to affirm our worldview and less to understand the other side. As comedian Bill Maher put it, "One reason our politics is so screwed up is that it's gotten so tribal."

Silver lining? There is growing evidence rank-and-file Americans understand we must engage to protect our precious freedoms.

You see it in the larger crowds in the statehouse hallways and galleries. And you see it in the marches against racism and inequality.

As the student survey suggests, the most difficult part may be this: Listening to those with whom we disagree. Seeking to understand. Pursuing common ground.

Are we up to the challenge?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arnold Hamilton".



The Real Sooner Scandal Is Not What You Think

BY CAL HOBSON

No, it's not the endless line of Republican lawmakers who, like this Democrat, will always carry the unwanted moniker of lawbreaker. That's bad enough, but there is a group of unelected Oklahomans who should also be ashamed of their selfish, short-sighted and self-centered behavior. Their misrepresentation of the facts and win-at-all-costs attitude has and continues to play a central role in this state's long-running financial woes.

Druggies, you say? Bank robbers? Those who text and drive? Folks who don't adequately tip their hard-working servers in restaurants? Nope. This crowd includes some of my best friends – or were until this column is published.

They are the wealthy leaders of our domestic en-

ergy industry organized within the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association [OIPA]. Identified by company name, I'm referring to Devon, Chesapeake, Continental, Newfield and scores of lesser known outfits who claim, among other things, that if the Legislature raises this nation's lowest gross production tax – ours – by even a smidgen, they will pull out of the very prolific plays known as the STACK and SCOOP, both embedded within the massive Arbuckle structure, and promptly move their rigs, workers and investment dollars to greener pastures in Texas and North Dakota.

Let me express in four words what knowledgeable Observer readers already know: That is a crock.

Energy domos won't high-tail it out of here for

many reasons and allow me to list just a few: First, those other states have much higher extraction rates [over 7% and 11%, respectively, while ours is only 2%]; second, after fracking many Okie wells are more prolific and thereby provide greater profit; third, our road and pipeline systems are extensive and mature, thus cheaper and very convenient to use; fourth, the weather is generally better here, at least compared to North Dakota; fifth, no property tax is assessed on our minerals, unlike those underneath the Texas plains; sixth, drilling costs are dropping everywhere but are falling even faster in the Sooner state after passage last spring of the long laterals legislation; seventh, energy prices are recovering and stabilizing above \$50 a barrel and \$3 per mcf; eighth, very ex-

Now is the time for friends Harold, Larry and others of similar stature in the carbon cabal to step up and lead. If they do, and that of course is a big if, an overall tax increase package including the heretofore sacrosanct severance assessment, would pass when the special session reconvenes, perhaps this month.

Properly structured, it must at a minimum provide a significant teacher pay raise; save rural hospitals so both underprivileged children and our seniors have access to at least bare bones health care; earmark additional gasoline taxes to repair and maintain dilapidated roads potholed by 80,000-pound load-carrying trucks; reverse the stupid trend to four-day school weeks; put a college education back within reach of thousands of our young people; staff adequately

Energy barons, this is where you come in ... Your industry is doing fine ... while the rest of Oklahoma ... is dying before your very eyes, so open them now and do something about it – before it is too late.

perienced, well-trained oil path workers are readily available in all of our counties.

Do I need to add more?

Obviously not, but please understand this: prominent producers I know and admire like Larry Nichols of Devon and Harold Hamm, a Lexington High School friend of mine who later became founder of Continental Resources, are indeed generous donors to many good causes.

They and their employees sponsor schools, provide scholarships, support the arts and cultural endeavors but they are also tenacious in their opposition to any effort to raise Oklahoma's absurdly low severance rate.

Through massive campaign donations issued to obedient lawmakers and the hiring of dozens of lobbyists to represent their views at the Capitol, these wealthy scions of our most important industry enjoy inordinate influence over a handful of key decision-makers occupying the Capitol's corner offices.

How else to explain the utter intransigence of House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, and Senate Pro Tempore Mike Schulz, R-Altus, to any and every call for modernization of oil patch taxation? After all, the districts these two represent in the Legislature have relatively little energy production within them.

Let's face facts even if McCall and Schulz won't. Our public schools, higher education institutions, health and mental care systems, prisons, roads, bridges and other infrastructures are in desperate and worsening conditions. While additional dollars are not the only solution, they damn sure are part of it and, contrary to the claim, the energy industry is not carrying its share of the funding burden.

the dangerous and explosive prisons; and finally get mentally impaired people out from underneath bridges and into treatment programs before winter starts.

In closing, let me admit I'm not an expert on the energy industry, but the following is what I have experienced. My grandfathers and father were in the business – one a geologist who helped bring in the Healdton Field in 1915, one that got rich but later went broke in the Seminole play of the 1920s, and then followed by my wildcatter Dad who drilled shallow wells mostly in Stephens and Carter counties until a welder's torch caught his only rig on fire outside the town of Loco in 1954. I vividly remember the scene because I was sitting in a truck onsite and watched as the derrick burned down. Dad had mortgaged our home and five acres to drill the proposal and soon the bank owned those small assets as well as the pile of melted steel.

Later, as a legislator, I served for decades on both the House and Senate energy committees, voted for and proudly co-authored the 1% severance tax plan for deep horizontal drilling in 1994, but later opposed further incentives when the oilies no longer needed them to survive and thrive. I do receive a small monthly royalty check, own a few minerals in several counties, including one in Texas, lived and legislated through the Penn Square debacle of the 1980s, authored unpopular but broad-based tax increases in 1985 and 1990 to fund core services, and fervently still believe Oklahoma's best days are ahead of it.

But that is really up to what has always been our biggest and best economic sector, the employer of first choice, the dominant voice heard by lawmakers, and that, of course, is the oil and gas industry.

Harold, Can You Spare A Dime?

No. 3 on the Forbes' list of the 10 people who gained the most money *worldwide* in 2016: Harold Hamm and family.

"The collapse of oil in 2014 crushed Hamm's fortune more than any other individual, but he has gained the most from its recovery," writes Forbes reporter Dan Alexander. "The bust wiped out more than \$13 billion from the net worth of America's fracking king. In 2016, he made most of it back."

Wait. Let's get this straight. Continental Resources and its CEO Harold Hamm are telling the Oklahoma Legislature they are desperate to maintain the massive tax subsidy provided by the state of Oklahoma.

Continental and Hamm, the founder and principal stockholder, "struggled" so desperately in

2016 that Hamm's net worth increased by more than \$9 billion! That's right, Hamm ranked third in the world in increase of his net worth.

Taking full advantage of Oklahoma's special 2% tax, Hamm increased his net worth by 150% to more than \$15 billion. We're all for Mr. Hamm and his ability to amass a world-class fortune, but does it have to be acquired on the backs of Oklahoma's public schools, its teachers, the sick, elderly and those needing health services, and a million hard-working Oklahomans who need good schools, good roads and a myriad of other state services?

To some of us, this is a world-class embarrassment. Due in some large part to the unconscionable special tax benefits available only to Hamm and other rich oilmen ... **ONLY IN OKLAHOMA!**

Through the generosity of Mother Nature, creative leadership and beneficial tax policies, it has been dealt a straight flush within our borders. Producers should stop spreading falsehoods about the precariousness of the business and gratefully, not grudgingly, share its bounty with current and future generations, educate others on the complexities of new and incredible extraction processes but, most of all, lead – and lead right now!

Deborah Astley

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Cdastley@aol.com

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Oklahoma is in trouble and few can do anything about it. Legislators, for the most part, are inexperienced and, to make things worse, incompetent. Their attention spans are less than most third graders while many apparently focus on pleasures of the flesh rather than the tedium of an outdated tax code creating nothing but oceans of red ink.

Gov. Mary Fallin is term-limited, owner of a losing legacy of her own making, but is suddenly and seriously trying to cobble together a coalition of progressive Democrats and reform-minded Republicans working feverishly to right the ship before it sinks.

Energy barons, this is where you come in. Take off your hard hats, store your golf clubs for the winter, rub away the phony crocodile tears intended to convey your industry's shaky future, cancel the fall vacations to exotic and beckoning spas, put on your best Armani suits, climb into black beemers or whatever, convene a press conference at the Capitol and commit to helping not inhibiting the handful of elected leaders – including Fallin, minority House honcho Scott Inman and farsighted Republicans – desperately awaiting and begging, literally, for your support.

These courageous politicians are sending you an SOS – Save Our State. Your industry is doing fine – and you know it – while the rest of Oklahoma is becoming a wasteland of opioid abusers; fleeing educators; unaffordable colleges for middle class kids; counties devoid of doctors and hospitals; prisons bulging with drug addicts and the mentally ill; silent, abandoned rural main streets, etc.

Oklahoma is dying before your very eyes, so open them now and do something about it – before it is too late.

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

State, Federal Gridlock Jeopardizes Children's Health Services

BY JOE DORMAN

At the time of writing this column, our state elected officials were still at an impasse regarding a budget agreement and a resolution to the ongoing Special Session called by Gov. Mary Fallin. The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy [OICA] has been active in calling for Republicans and Democrats to work together to address the \$215 million budget hole created after the courts struck down an unconstitutional cigarette fee.

The \$215 million reduction – which balloons to over \$500 million when federal matching funds are included – will either be spread across state government or, if no legislative action is taken, be shouldered exclusively by three agencies that oversee health care and social service programs.

Neither scenario should be acceptable to voters or to our lawmakers.

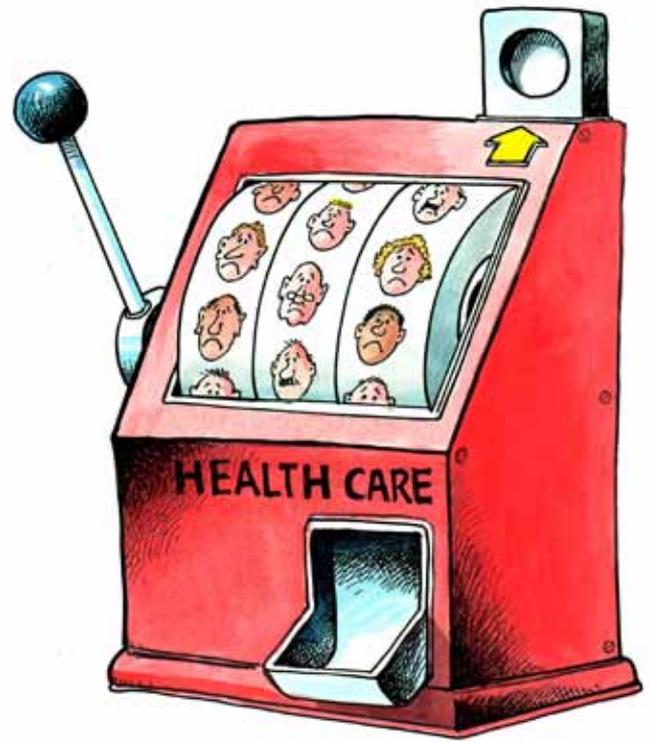
Several options for closing the budget hole have been discussed, including a [constitutional] \$1.50 per pack cigarette tax hike, an increase in income taxes for high earners, and an increase in the gasoline tax. Other ideas presented have dealt with taxing “luxury” services, like tattooing and lawn care.

The increase in the gross production tax has been something discussed by the public, but has gained little traction inside the Capitol among the Republican supermajority.

Meanwhile, OICA has called upon our elected officials to reinstate at least a portion of the Earned Income Tax Credit which assists families struggling to make ends meet as a form of tax relief.

While informal and behind-the-scenes negotiations continue, the rank-and-file membership of the Legislature has been sent back home at the call of the presiding officer. Essentially, the leaders of the House and Senate called a “timeout” rather than spend roughly \$30,000 per day to keep the rest of the Legislature at the Capitol.

Unfortunately, a compromise does not look imminent. While there are some other ideas that have been



DAVE GRANLUND © www.davegranlund.com

thrown out for resolving budget issues going forward, nothing has been advanced or publicly endorsed by both parties.

Sadly, funding issues that directly and negatively impact Oklahoma health care are not limited to the state Capitol. The failure of the federal government to reinstate the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, threatens to cut off health insurance for sick kids.

The program, created under a 1997 law and passed with bipartisan support at the time, provided coverage for children in families with low and moderate incomes as well as to pregnant women. It was instrumental in lowering the percentage of children who were uninsured, reported at nearly 14% when it started. Current numbers through KIDS COUNT Data list the uninsured rate for children at 7% for Oklahoma and 5% nationally for 2015, the last year of collected data.

CHIP was last reauthorized in 2015 and was due to be renewed by Sept. 30, 2017. It expired, but efforts are being made to encourage Congress to act quickly before states run out of funding.

Oklahoma has seen success with CHIP, utilizing \$49 million annually to assist in covering 122,000 Oklahoma children. Should our federal elected officials not act, that financial burden will fall on the state at the worst possible time.

Please use your voice as a child advocate and contact your senators and representatives and ask them to act soon to address budget issues that will impact the children of our state and nation.

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

Bought And Paid For

BY SHARON MARTIN

Fifty kids in a sixth-grade classroom! Legislators, this is what your tax cuts have done.

You cannot cut your way to economic prosperity.

A generation from now, citizens you've starved, some literally, will be raising families in a Third World state unless you quit catering to a few rich donors and do what's right.

We've seen almost no good legislation in this state for several years. Even when the people speak with their votes, when they try to make a positive change, self-servers at the capital block the progress. At whose bidding? You certainly aren't serving the citizens of Oklahoma.

Do I sound a little angry?

I've seen the map. We are the only major oil producer that's asking almost nothing of oil and gas companies except for campaign contributions and a box of education supplies to teach the next generation about the glories of oil and gas production. Not that I didn't use that box of goodies to teach science. We teachers take what we can get when our schools are hungry.

What I say here probably won't matter. People will continue to believe the lie that returning the gross

production tax to previous levels will cost them their job. They will vote for you out of fear or misguided loyalty.

When these school kids you've cheated are raising families of their own, will they realize what you've done to them?

Will companies be able to find workers with adequate education and training?

Will Oklahoma roads still tear up our tires?

Will one child in four still be going to bed hungry?

Will there still be people who believe that the next tax cut is the one that is going to save them?

Enough with the corruption!

This is our state. We pay taxes. We want services that the state can't afford because the working stiff is the only one paying his or her fair share.

Why are you always trying to give tax breaks to the people who don't need them?

We know why, and some of us are tired of bought-and-paid-for legislation.

Raise the gross production tax or get out of office. We want legislators who understand that education is an investment. Infrastructure is an investment. A give-away to donors is just a crime.

Sharon Martin lives in Oilton.

How Does SQ 788 Compare To Other States' Medical Marijuana Laws?

BY RYAN GENTZLER

Next year, Oklahomans will vote on SQ 788, a ballot initiative to legalize medical marijuana. As of 2017, 29 states have approved measures legalizing the drug for medical purposes.

We often think of legalization in binary terms – either medical marijuana is allowed, or it isn't – but in practice, the systems put in place by those 29 states to regulate the drug vary greatly. Each state has many choices to make about how patients can be prescribed marijuana, how much they can have, and where they get it from.

The language of SQ 788 is specific on many of these details. It would put in place laws that decide how a person applies for and receives a license to use medical marijuana; the quantities that a license holder can possess; the qualifications and licensing process for retailers, growers, processors, and transporters; and

the tax rate and distribution of revenue from sales.

When compared to other systems, SQ 788 would put in place a system that is on the permissive side, but well within the current spectrum of laws.

Under SQ 788, Oklahoma residents can apply to the Department of Health for a medical marijuana user license. Applications would have to be approved by a doctor "according to the accepted standards a reasonable and prudent physician would follow when recommending or approving any medication." SQ 788 would not require a diagnosis of a specific condition to prescribe medical marijuana.

Among the states that permit medical marijuana already, only California does not specify conditions that qualify a person for access to the drug. The rest limit access to people with conditions like cancer, glaucoma, HIV/AIDS, and severe and chronic pain. Applicants in those states need to have their diagno-



sis certified by a doctor to get a license.

All states that allow medical marijuana limit how much a person can possess at one time and in what form. The quantities allowed by state regulations range from one to 24 ounces. In addition, many states allow license holders to grow marijuana at home, limiting the number of plants from as few as six in Colorado, Alaska, and Maine to as many as 24 in Oregon.

SQ 788 would allow license holders to possess up to eight ounces of marijuana, six mature marijuana plants, and six seedling plants, as well as one ounce of concentrated marijuana and 72 ounces of edible marijuana. These amounts are toward the high end of the range but considerably less than what's allowed in places like Washington state.

Although some states initially allowed only home-grown marijuana, most now allow retail dispensaries to sell the drug to license holders. In some states, the number of licenses for such businesses is strictly limited – Maine and Minnesota, for example, each allow only eight dispensaries throughout their entire state, New Hampshire only four. Other states, like California, leave most regulations to local governments. Some states prohibit dispensaries from operating within a certain distance from a school.

In this area as well, the proposal before Oklahomans next year will be on the permissive side, though not out of step with other states. Although SQ 788 restricts dispensaries from opening within 1,000 feet of any school entrance, it also prohibits local gov-

ernments from changing zoning laws “to prevent the opening of a retail marijuana establishment” and places no limit on how many establishments can operate.

SQ 788 is on the permissive side of the medical marijuana regulation spectrum, but that shouldn't be surprising given that the proposal was drafted by activists. Since it was approved as a statutory rather than constitutional measure, the Legislature would be able to amend the law with a simple majority vote. Lawmakers will hold an interim study this month to clarify details of the proposal and hear from states that have already implemented medical marijuana.

While many Oklahoma legislators are likely skeptical of the idea of marijuana as medicine, they're right to prepare for the possibility of SQ 788 passing. In a 2013 poll, over 70% of Oklahomans supported “allowing seriously ill patients to possess marijuana for medical purposes with a physician's recommendation.”

Recent national polls show 88% of all Americans in favor of medical marijuana and 60% in favor of legalizing recreational marijuana, a trend of support that has been increasing over time.

States have experimented with loosening marijuana laws for over two decades, and the pace of liberalization has quickened in recent years. We'll know next year if Oklahomans are ready to try it for ourselves. *Ryan Gentzler is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.*

Avoiding Post-Oil Apocalypse

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

There is no doubt Big Oil and Gas is seeking to stifle competition with its ongoing legislative efforts to undermine the state's fledgling wind industry.

It's all about the money, right?

Yes ... but it's also about the future.

The fact is, the carbon barons know history is not on their side. Fossil fuels are finite. Renewables are proliferating. Climate change is steering governments and individuals away from fossil fuels. They want to cash in ... while they can.

All of which means what, *exactly*, for Oklahoma, a state in which roughly one in four jobs is tied directly or indirectly to the energy industry?

If oil and gas is headed toward a slow, but steady decline, does Oklahoma risk becoming the next West Virginia, a state that failed to hedge against its over-reliance on coal?



This is a conversation worth having.

Remember the 1980s oil bust, when the state's policymakers vowed to broaden the economy so that a single sector no longer could bring the state to its knees?

Efforts were made, with modest success [think biotech, for example], but once oil and gas rebounded, it again became the field of choice for many workers – they already were trained and the money sure beat retail or fast food.

Oklahoma remains exposed, heavily dependent on carbon extraction. Check out these numbers from a September 2016 State Chamber study:

- Average wages in the oil and gas sector were \$104,000 – more than double the state average of \$44,178.
- Nearly 150,000 Oklahomans worked in oil and gas, earning \$15.6 billion – or 13.2% of total state earnings.

As renewable energy becomes a less expensive, more available alternative, however, the demand for oil, especially, is likely to begin a permanent decline, much like coal, because of environmental implications.

What did that look like in Appalachia? The region lost 33,500 coal mining jobs in the five years ending in 2016 – more than 67% of them in eastern Kentucky



and West Virginia.

This year, West Virginia plunged to the bottom of CNBC's state-by-state economic rankings, one of seven state economies that actually shrank in 2016.

"Sadly," notes former Oklahoma Corporation Commissioner Jim Roth, "Appalachia has few economic options and has suffered from poverty and isolation for decades/centuries."

It's true that West Virginia and Oklahoma are not wholly comparable. But it's important Soonier policymakers recognize that over-reliance on one sector can wreak havoc on an entire economy.

As a result, they must immediately seize upon and nurture the advantages the state has – preparing for a future, perhaps generations from now, when oil and gas are but a small percentage of the state economy.

What does that look like?

Oklahoma must do more to encourage wind and solar – two natural resources it has in abundance. Of course, for legislators, this likely means biting the hand [carbon barons] that feeds their political ambitions [campaign contributions].

Will they be willing to put Oklahoma's future – the future of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren – ahead of political expedience? So far, the answer is no, given the roll back in wind incentives.

The trend to renewables is obvious, however. Oklahoma, despite an oft-ambivalent Legislature, ranks No. 3 nationally in wind power – a position that no doubt can be improved with only modest encouragement and investment.

But the state ranks 49th in solar power, according to SolarPowerRocks.com's annual state-by-state comparison – in large part because the Oklahoma scored an F in incentives.

Why would state policymakers be so reluctant to support solar? Especially when Oklahoma City, for one, averages 139 clear days a year, the equivalent of 3,089 hours of sunshine? Probably because the business status quo is so powerful.

As former U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz noted on a recent trip to OKC, "Business models will be challenged. Business will have to react, and those that are good at it will react well and will do well even as we go through these transformations."

Roth, an OKC lawyer who chairs Phillips Murrah's Clean Energy Practice group, believes Oklahoma will embrace the inevitable: renewables are the future.

"Perhaps the greatest source for optimism for an Oklahoma in a post-carbon constrained economy," he says, "is that our huge potential in wind and yet untapped solar energy are going to allow us to transcend towards the new economy in

the coming decades.

"But to be sure, we need leadership and vision to help us move towards our full energy potential as a state."

After all, Oklahoma doesn't want to end up as the economic Appalachia of the Plains.



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Big Oil Oligarchy And Earthquake Madness

BY BOB JACKMAN

It's simple fact: Shutting down the 700 salt-water villain, earthquake-causing disposal wells – identified by the Corporation Commission – in Oklahoma's Earthquake Red Zone would end our seemingly never ending earthquake madness!

Yet the press following the mandates from Oklahoma's Big Oil bullies continually reframe or omit reality – we do know how to stop induced earthquakes. But for years we continually read or heard that induced earthquakes are complex inter-disciplinary seismicity problems with very difficult uncertain problematic issues. The subtext: the general public is incapable of understanding [supposedly] unsolvable and unstoppable quake issues!

Plus we are told Oklahoma's induced earthquakes have never been experienced before in the earth's history!

Liars, liars – hope your private office toilet's damaged doors won't shut due to earthquakes!

We split atoms, discover lifesaving antibiotics and do far-out robotic surgeries, make amazing cell phones beyond a 65-year-old's comprehension, and can fire missiles on a gnat's ass 3,000 miles away. Yet

Oklahoma officials can't/won't control certain disposal wells causing damaging earthquakes.

Are we living in a Third World State?

World War II's global conflict ended after six years [1939-45] and President Kennedy's 1963 funding took six years for a manned U.S. mission to land on the Moon in 1969. Yet Oklahoma has been unsuccessful for 8½ years and counting to stop oil men-induced earthquakes first identified in 2009.

The U.S. Geological Survey's 2017 forecast – seen on their "Natural and Induced Earthquakes Map" of Oklahoma's 16-plus Red Zone counties – projects a 5% to 12% chance of damages from more induced earthquakes this year. Another recently published study predicts an 80% probability of twice that figure.

If certain peanut or ice cream plants received warnings from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that, due to unacceptable conditions, chances are 5% to 12% of serious food poisoning from those plants, state and federal officials would immediately close the targeted plants until man-made conditions were eliminated.

Why is earthquake-making exempt from such strict

safety regulations? Ask the Environmental Protection Agency director, Oklahoma's Scott Pruitt.

Intertwined, the Oklahoma Geological Survey, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission and Big Oil continually mislead thousands of earthquake damaged homeowner victims and concerned citizens with years of similar news releases.

For example, how many times you have read, "We have newly released seismicity-science reports thanks to 100 or more state-of-the-art seismic monitoring stations located across Oklahoma. They will yield more [allegedly] important data needed to understand how to solve Oklahoma's earthquake characteristics and pinpoint exactly what fault triggered the latest ground shaking record earthquake."

Notice they never talk about proven proactive measures like shutting down hundreds, not several, key earthquake-making disposal wells.

Voters are angry and tired of hearing Big Oil puppets – full of mendacity mush. Déjà vu all over unmapped faults zones and OCC injection reductions again and again and again since 2009.

The fact is, oil field-made earthquakes are not simply an economic byproduct we must endure in order to protect the health and welfare of Oklahoma's petroleum industry. Oklahoma's Big Oil Oligarchy not only refuses to stop them, but also adds insult to injury by blocking official earthquake damage surveys that give victims a clearer picture of what's happening to them and their property.

It's enough to make you buy solar panels and electric cars, watch Al Gore's latest "Inconvenient Truth" movie, pray for tornado- and earthquake-free days and move far, far away.

Bob Jackman is a petroleum geologist living in Tulsa.

Nearly Half Of All Sooners Live Within Mile Of Active Oil, Gas Wells

BY BRIAN BIENKOWSKI

More than 17 million people in the U.S. live within a mile of an active oil or natural gas well, including nearly half of Oklahoma's population, according to a new study.

The study is the first peer-reviewed, nationwide estimate of how many Americans live close to active wells and raises health concerns, as such proximity has been linked to heart, lung and brain problems, some cancers, and certain birth defects such as lower birth weights, pre-term births and heart defects.

"The closer you are to a well, the more likely you are to have health impacts," said Eliza Czolowski, lead author of the new study and an associate in the energy and environment program at PSE Health Energy, a nonprofit research institute in Oakland, CA.

Using state-level information on oil and gas drilling and the U.S. Census, Czolowski and colleagues had data for 30 states and estimated that 17.6 million Americans, or about 6% of the population of the contiguous 48 states, lives within a mile of an active oil or gas well.

Perhaps most concerning for public health, about 1.4 million children under the age of five live within a mile of active wells.

"This study hammers home why we need federal and state safeguards against oil and gas air pollution like methane," said Bruce Baizel, energy program director at Earthworks, which was not involved in the study.

"Americans across the country are forced to live with oil and gas operations in their communities, lit-

erally right next door to their homes, their schools, their playgrounds," he added.

Oil and gas wells release pollutants – including particulate matter, benzene, nitrogen oxides, ozone, volatile organic carbons, carbon monoxide – to nearby air and water and have been linked to a host of health problems in people living nearby.

The study, published in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, compared states and found Texas, Ohio, California, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania all have more than one million of their residents living within a mile of wells.

West Virginia and Oklahoma had, by far, the highest percentages of their populations near wells. In West Virginia, about half of the state's roughly 1.8 million people live within a mile of an active well. Oklahoma was second with about 47%. The next highest state was Ohio with 24%.

Texas had the highest number of people living within a mile of an active well at 4.5 million people.

There are no federal regulations for buffer distances between active wells and people's homes, Czolowski said.

Many states have their own setback requirements, she said. A 2013 study found that among 31 states with current shale gas production, 20 required the wells be sited certain distances from nearby homes. The setbacks range from 100 feet to 1,000 feet.

Brian Bienkowski is senior editor and staff writer at Environmental Health News and The Daily Climate.

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Trump Could Confuse Our Way Back Into Climate Deal

BY FROMA HARROP

Will President Trump bring the country back into the Paris climate agreement? The bets are on, and this bet says he will. The past few days have produced clashing reports that he may or may not come around. Confusion is how Trump gets turnarounds past the base.

What happened right after he spoke of helping the “dreamers,” immigrants brought to this country illegally as children? He defended his earlier controversial remarks equating the Charlottesville racists to the protesters. And he retweeted anti-Muslim sentiments.

After his call to ban transgender troops from serving in the armed forces, our military leaders pushed back, and Trump pulled back. Defense Secretary James Mattis is now tasked with devising a new policy months hence. Meanwhile, transgender people are re-enlisting.

What makes one think that Trump will follow a

similar trajectory on the Paris climate deal? Several things.

One, and I hate putting this first because it should be the least consequential: his approval ratings. They inched up from the depths for much of September. Trump’s moves toward moderation, which includes working with Democratic leaders, surely played a part. A rising applause meter lowers a reality TV star’s blood pressure.

Two, and it’s a shame this has to go second, is Emmanuel Macron. The French president excels in courting Trump’s grandiosity. As other European leaders gave Trump a wide berth, Macron gallantly invited him to Paris for the Bastille Day parade.

At the Elysee Palace, Macron had Trump sitting on gilded chairs that the gilded chairs in Trump Tower wish they could be. Trump was so impressed by the Bastille Day spectacle that he’s proposing a Fourth of July parade in Washington that would “top it.”

This relationship has led Macron to opine that

Trump may reverse the decision to leave the Paris deal. Shortly thereafter, economic adviser Gary Cohn said Trump still plans to withdraw. But no matter.

Macron said there will be no renegotiation – “we won’t go back” – but added the “door will always remain open.” The dance is a minuet, controlled and ceremonious.

Three is Cohn’s participation in the climate issue. Cohn had been an advocate of staying in the Paris agreement. During the United Nations General Assembly, he met with the climate ministers from big-economy countries.

Note Cohn’s words. He said the withdrawal will happen “unless we can re-engage on terms more favorable to the United States.”

However, the Paris agreement lets countries set their own targets for cutting greenhouse gases. That includes lowering them. Also, every country can meet the targets in its own way.

So Trump can change some numbers under the Paris rules and call it a renegotiation. He’s good at that sort of thing.

Next, there is an economic downside to standing outside this international treaty. Not being part hurts America’s ability to profit from the booming clean energy economy. Some countries have already been threatening to slap tariffs on American products made under lax environmental standards. And our pullout has opened a leadership chair that China is now filling.

Lastly, and this should really be first, climate change is feeding America’s devastating natural disasters. Scientists widely agree that warming waters are making hurricanes more vicious. Witness the monster storms ripping up parts of Texas, Florida and the Caribbean. Higher temperatures are also seen playing a role in the intense wildfires threatening much of the West.

Trump so far has shown little interest in addressing climate change, but more and more of the American people do. Rejoining the Paris agreement would probably do wonders for his approval ratings. And this brings the argument full circle.

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Now Is Time To Solve Climate Change For 2050

BY PAULA CABALLERO

The reality of daily life is that we try to fix the problems that are staring us in the face. In many ways, the desire for short-term results defines the rhythm of both public and private life. So the idea that decisions today will define where we end up in a couple of decades is difficult to grasp, and may even appear outlandish.

Yet the unprecedented, deadly tropical cyclones in the Caribbean today and around the world foreshadow a perilous tomorrow if we don’t tackle climate change now. We are at an historic crossroads that requires us to factor in the future. Because in a very real sense, 2050 is now.

Our decisions today will define where we end up tomorrow. The idea that unabated, incremental growth is the formula to eradicate poverty will leave us all ultimately poorer and make the pockets of desperate poverty more entrenched. Business as usual will lead to a world that is depleted, more unforgiving, more unequal.

What we do now will determine whether we are able to keep global temperature to 1.5 degrees C or well below 2 degrees C [2.7 degrees or 3.6 degrees F] above preindustrial levels; that’s the point beyond which the most severe consequences of climate change kick in. Short-sighted investments could lock in 20th Century ways of doing business and policy that will make achieving this target more expensive and tech-

nologically challenging.

In addition to taking paths that emit fewer greenhouse gases, a “2050 is now” mindset is also about protecting the natural resources and systems that will enable the people in tomorrow’s communities – especially rural ones – to make a decent living. Ill-advised decisions on how we use land and manage water could undermine food, water and energy security in the decades to come.

Within the next two decades, the world will spend \$90 trillion on infrastructure, transforming cities, energy systems and landscapes. We get to decide now whether we spend that \$90 trillion on damaging, backward-looking more-of-the-same or shift our energy, transport, agriculture and consumption to radically new pathways that can be sustained. This is the only way we can ensure that our midcentury world gives all people a shot at a dignified life while safeguarding the planet’s natural wealth.

We need to reframe how we understand development and its challenges. The global community has rightly prioritized the eradication of poverty. But unless we make the right decisions today, we may lock out development opportunities and end up perpetuating poverty, or making it worse.

By 2050, 2.5 billion people are expected to move to the world’s cities. The growing global middle class

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Doak Undermines Experts Working To Insure Oklahomans

BY CARLY PUTNAM

In September, Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner John Doak testified before a U.S. Congressional committee that he wants Congress to eliminate Navigators, the community workers who help enroll people in health care under the Affordable Care Act. Doak told Congress that he opposes these Navigators because they compete with private insurance agents and brokers.

Now, Commissioner Doak is ordering Oklahoma Navigators to turn over their enrollment data to his agency. Doak's rhetoric when making the request implies that he plans to use the data to argue that these workers are a waste of federal dollars. But in both the letter to Navigators and his testimony to Congress, Commissioner Doak is not telling the whole story.

Health insurance is complicated and expensive, and enrolling in insurance as an individual can be very difficult, even for people used to dealing with it. That's why the Affordable Care Act authorized trained community workers known as Navigators to help enrollees understand their options [Medicare has a similar program].

Unlike insurance brokers, Navigators can't be paid more for steering enrollees to particular plans, and they are trained to help enrollees apply for Medicaid if they are eligible. There are more than 200 Navigators and similar workers registered in Oklahoma.

The Trump Administration recently slashed Navigator funding, using out-of-context data to argue that the program is ineffective, and Doak has parroted this talking point. But in reality, navigators are a crucial part of helping people enroll in health coverage, especially those who face challenges enrolling on their own.

One in three of the clients who Navigators assist don't have internet at home, limiting their ability to research on their own. One in 10 people assisted speak a language other than English, while individuals with disabilities or complex medical needs need time to closely review their options, so helping a single enrollee can take a lot of time.

Compared to private insurance brokers, Navigators help more individuals who are low-income and uninsured, and their clients are more likely to be Latino or require translation services.

Navigators are required to provide unbiased information to anyone who asks for assistance, but their biggest value comes with helping those who are least likely to be able to evaluate their options and enroll

on their own.

Doak's insistence that Navigators are unnecessary is an attack on one of the only programs helping the most marginalized people in Oklahoma to get insured.

Attacking Navigators threatens an already fragile health insurance marketplace in Oklahoma. While ACA isn't broken or failing in Oklahoma, it is delicate – and more confusion will only make the problem worse.

Oklahoma's uninsured rate has dropped by 22% since 2013 – a real accomplishment, but still much less of a drop than the U.S. average, let alone similar states like Arkansas that have been bringing all of the ACA's benefits home for their people.

Oklahoma's comparative lag in covering the uninsured is due to both national and local factors. Last January, the Trump Administration cut off advertising in the final weeks of Open Enrollment, driving enrollment down.

In Oklahoma, headlines trumpeting record premium spikes [which generally didn't mention that most enrollees saw no increase in costs due to premium subsidies] almost certainly depressed enrollment, especially since only about half of uninsured adults are aware that premium subsidies and other financial help are available.

News of insurers leaving the state's Healthcare.gov marketplace may also have suppressed enrollment. However, the remaining insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield, has from the beginning covered the majority of people in Oklahoma and continues to offer plans in all 77 counties.

Enrollment in Oklahoma is also lower because many uninsured Oklahomans remain stuck in a coverage crater while the state refuses federal money to expand Medicaid. This gap in eligibility for Medicaid and eligibility for tax credits to buy insurance on Healthcare.gov makes it harder for Oklahomans to know if they qualify for the tax credits – and about a fourth of Oklahoma's current uninsured population would actually qualify.

A long record of Oklahoma officials attacking the ACA and spreading misinformation about the law likely hasn't helped.

Commissioner Doak in particular has a long record of disingenuous claims about the health care law. Before enrollment on the ACA's individual marketplace

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How About Naming Schools After Woody?

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

Following the Charlottesville protests, a group of Tulsa residents set up a petition on change.org calling for the removal of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's name from a mid-town Tulsa elementary school.

The petition which was delivered to Tulsa Public Schools and Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum states: "No one wants to see Tulsa be the next Charlottesville. There's not much we can do to fight against White Supremacists in America, but this is something we can do. We have control over whom we glorify. The solution? Hold a contest and have the Tulsa community vote for a new name, honoring a more respectable American hero."

In the spirit of the petition, I propose that Robert E. Lee elementary be re-named after Woody Guthrie, the legendary folk singer who hails from Okemah, not far from Tulsa.

Other Oklahoma schools should consider doing the same.

Woody is a great American hero whose ballad *This Land* has been adopted far and wide and was sung by Woody's protégé Pete Seeger at the inaugural ceremony of America's first African-American president in 2009.

Woody Guthrie was a brilliant creative artist whose ideals are ones we should want all of our kids to strive for. He was an independent critical thinker and visionary.

Woody was also a great patriot who fought for the United States in the Great War against Fascism. He stood up for human rights and sang against injustice throughout his career.

Following his stint in the Pacific War, Woody expressed concern about the victims of the U.S. atomic attack in Hiroshima and potential for nuclear war bred by the Cold War arms race and spoke out against questionable U.S. foreign policies such as the Truman administration's support for pro-Nazi collaborators in the Greek civil war and dictatorial governments in China [Jiang Jieshi] and South Korea [Syngman Rhee].

Woody also foreshadowed the critique of the Occupy Wall Street movement in expressing outrage at the excesses of Wall Street and the Big Banks in a view shared by a huge number of Americans. He wanted a fair economy in which laborers were adequately rewarded for their work.

The goal of education should be to foster the creative spirit and critical thinking capacity of our young



people and to instill in them a social conscience so that one day they may too speak out against injustices and work for greater equality and fairness and a better society.

I can think of no greater role model to inspire our young people than Woody Guthrie and thus propose that Robert E. Lee School and other area schools considering name changes be named in his honor.

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) among other works.

2050

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will strain natural resources. Entrenched poverty will be increasingly concentrated in areas already experiencing conflict, fragility and resource degradation. Just eight years from now in 2025, 1.8 billion people will live in regions that lack sufficient water. Recognizing that 2050 is now means taking responsibility for avoiding conditions that will yield tomorrow's poverty and exacerbate inequality within nations and across regions.

The drumbeat of "2050 is now" must shape our thinking. We need to learn to frame our problems and solutions in terms of how they will define our world over the coming decades, not whether there will be results for a couple of years. Every cost-benefit analysis should consider long-term consequences.

Change is within reach. The investments, policies and actions we take today can ensure that the natural and built environments will provide decent lives for the world's people—especially the poorest and most marginalized—between now and 2050, while protecting the planet's awesome biodiversity.

Sustained, sustainable and inclusive development is only possible if we tackle climate change by making today's decisions looking to 2050, looking to create the conditions that will safeguard and increase natural and human capital. That is how to get the growth we need.



Plaything Of The Wind Of Public Opinion

BY GARY EDMONDSON

While searching for a lost reference, I struck pay dirt – a description of a least favorite politician offered by one of my unmet mentors.

“[He] was an amoral man. Deceit, simulations, telling lies marked the character of the man. He was bright, able and wholly unethical. The end, in his view, justified the means.

“No man is perfect, but deeply ingrained in our character has been the conviction that man has moral standards that are not subservient to expediency. [He] had a compulsion to put expediency first. The appetite of his ego was devastating. Nothing could stand in his way.”

My hero continued, “[He] lived not for his ‘friends,’ but for his enemies. Everyone who crossed his path, everyone who was a competitor, had to be destroyed

... The regime of the politics of destruction, which [he] headed, thrived on ‘enemies.’ If he did not have one, he was forced to create one.”

Since an outdated reference in the next part of the quotation might tip my hand, I’ll point out here that my hero is Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and the person he is describing is Richard Nixon.

So, there is nothing new under the sun.

In the second volume of his autobiography, *The Court Years*, Douglas continues with more descriptions of Nixon that seem sadly applicable today. Substitute “Russian” for “Soviet” and you’ll catch my drift.

“He was actually envious of Soviet ruthlessness and helped design the American counterpart. He was interested not in the clash of ideas, but in the clash of power.

PUBLIC FORUM

“Telling lies was so customary a technique, so much a proverb of his life, that he was unaware when he did lie. His compulsion was to never admit an error or a weakness. If he ever does make such an admission, it is solely for tactical reasons ...

“Respect for ideological differences and for the sense of moral obligation that once made up our political ethic became obsolete as he fashioned the monolith of sheer power. He sponsored a new value system in which truth played no part of what he called ‘operable realities.’

“He became the embodiment of the blatant secularism which emerged through our business practices and our commercial advertising and which took the place of our old morality. He represented no culture or belief except the necessity to win by destroying people.”

“Operable realities,” is it? How much does that sound like “alternative facts?”

As with many of us last year, Justice Douglas found himself lamenting:

“I had grossly underestimated the decline in American morality to the point that the White House could become a huge public relations forum, operating with Madison Avenue techniques.”

Yes, we’ve seen this kind of demagoguery before. It put the country through its worst domestic crisis since the Civil War.

But the great Justice Douglas offers hope that also carries a warning.

He says that the three forces that stopped Nixon were “[1] a free press that dared shake its fist at its incipient censor; [2] a public opinion that rated moral values high and that began to puke at chicanery in high places; and [3] a stoutly independent judiciary.”

So, we can see why our president spends so much time attacking the press that points out his outrageous lies on a daily basis and the judiciary that won’t let him have his spoiled-brat way.

Protecting American values depends upon the press and the courts. There appears to be a shortage of Congressional representatives and public religionists who rate “moral values high.”

One reason for this acquiescence seems to be a monumental shift among white evangelical Christians regarding the moral stature of politicians.

In 2011, the Public Religion Research Institute asked, “if elected public officials could fulfill their public duties if immoral in their private lives.” At that time, 61% of the white evangelical Christians said, “No.”

Asked the same question in October of last year – with candidate Trump bragging about grabbing women by their genitals and inciting racism while promising a pro-birth Supreme Court justice – 70% of those same Christian soldiers said private morality would not be a factor in public life.

During his life as a public figure, Donald Trump – who also bragged about barging into the dressing room at his Miss Universe contest – has been documented on all sides of most political issues. And when his inconsistencies have been pointed out, he screams at the messengers and ignores those pesky facts.

One school of thought was that Mr. Trump’s outrageous misogyny, bigotry and bullying were merely campaign tactics to energize his base.

They adopted this notion because they believed that no sane person could espouse such nonsense in the 21st Century. The loyalty of his core supporters proves them wrong.

And now, President Trump’s reliance on racist campaign rallies to bolster his ego demonstrates how dependent he is upon someone’s – anyone’s – adulation.

Mr. Trump projected an image of defiant independence throughout the campaign, but how independent is someone who must keep courting favor from supporters?

A poll of historians would probably consider Andrew Jackson a strong executive, certainly in the Top 10 as far as power – if not virtue.

So, I was surprised last summer while slogging through Alexis De Toqueville’s *Democracy in America* to find the exact opposite opinion expressed by an astute observer who was on the scene during Jackson’s presidency.

The Frenchman’s famous critique of our young republic notes:

“One hears it said that Gen. Jackson was a man who had won battles, that he is an energetic man, prone by nature and habit to the use of force, covetous of power and a despot by inclination.”

Except for the part about military service, this description has a most familiar ring to it. [Of course, our commander-in-chief considers property development and stiffing creditors equivalent to risking one’s life for our country.]

Explaining Jackson’s anti-federal and de-centralization leanings, De Tocqueville concludes, “... Gen. Jackson is the spokesman of provincial jealousies; it was decentralizing passions [if I may put it so] that brought him to sovereign power. He keeps his position and his popularity by daily flattery of those passions. Gen. Jackson is the majority’s slave; he yields to its intentions, desires and half-revealed instincts, or rather he anticipates and forestalls them.”

Again, we are confronted with a very similar personality type. In fact, De Tocqueville even mentions Jackson’s penchant for pursuing and punishing his enemies.

And while Mr. Trump vilifies Muslims and people of color, Jackson, a slaveholder, turned his evil intentions against Native Americans, including those who had contributed to his military successes and subse-

quent fame.

I'm guessing these similarities will suffice for Trump & Co. to keep Old Hickory's visage on the \$20 bill.

Between Donald Trump's election and his inauguration in front of that itty-bitty little crowd, I observed the above similarities in deportment between him and Andrew Jackson, as described by De Tocqueville, and I wondered about the tone of Mr. Trump's presidency – “whether we will see a free-wheeling, bold Trump presidency or one that is all hot air. We really don't know what he stands for besides personal greed and self-aggrandizement.”

Events of the past few weeks tend to tip the scales toward the self-aggrandizing hot air category.

Unable to accomplish much in Washington, our president makes frequent campaign sorties into friendly territory to hear the applause from the 30% of Americans who support his racist, pro-rich agenda. [And most of these supporters are not rich.]

Running out to Arizona to pardon Sheriff Joe Arpaio before the legal process had been finalized gave him a chance to assure his racist base that racial profiling and discrimination are dear to his heart – “the daily flattery of those passions” – and he received their cheers as his reward.

But then Mr. Trump crossed up his base and surprised Congressional Republicans by striking a deal with Democrats to fund hurricane relief and increase the debt ceiling.

[Our Sen. James Lankford offered hurricane victims his prayers – which were answered when responsible senators voted for the relief package. He didn't.]

It was telling of that the president's primary reaction to the deal was to revel in the good publicity that doing the right thing brought him.

This susceptibility to flattery and applause raised the possibility of flattering Mr. Trump toward other sensible actions.

Then, after putting 800,000 Dreamers at risk by voiding DACA – to the cheers of the racists – the president evidently found more common ground with Democrats to come up with an outline to preserve their residency in the only country they have ever known.

But the approval from sensible people was drowned out by outraged cries of “Amnesty Don” from his racist base. So, wafting on the wind of public opinion, he denied any DACA deal.

At the same time, he again tried to divert attention from the murderous Nazis, Klansmen and free-lance white supremacists – some of whom, remember, are “fine people” – that invaded Charlottesville under banners of the Third Reich.

This, while attacking a new “enemy,” ESPN sportscaster Jemelle Hill who looked at the long years of evidence right up to today and came to the logical

conclusion that anyone with such a record was a “white supremacist.”

While De Tocqueville called Jackson “the majority's slave,” it is apparent that Trump is beholden to that racist minority which he led into the mainstream – and which he threatens to unleash in primaries upon any Republicans who oppose him.

He uses these happy haters to keep others in line. Looks like they're keeping him line as well.

Gary Edmondson is Stephens County Democratic Party chair.

Our Biggest Mistake: The Electoral College

BY VERN TURNER

The turmoil created by the current political situations in the United States has most thinking people trying to fathom what went wrong.

What mistakes or accumulation of mistakes has brought us to this place of national and social rancor that conjures up headlines from the 1850s? The voices of discontent no longer have anything to do with improving our social situation, creating jobs for working classes or even agreeing on how to honor those who defend us against tyranny.

Today's voices – at least those broadcast by the media – seem to be all about which group is being unfairly treated, chest-thumping rallies and demonstrations about why certain groups are so much better than others or exhibiting hateful symbolism and verbiage just for the sake of displaying their own stupidity.

As is my wont, I try to look into history for the “string of pearls” that leads to the last pearl on the string. Today, I am trying to decide from what well-spring of misery did today's current social malaise evolve. My basic answer is the founding fathers allowing slavery to be part of our original Constitution. That cave-in to the economic pressures of the soon-to-be slave states was our original sin and our first display of moral cowardice against the gods of money and economics.

Additionally, I've previously written about how the specific language of the Second Amendment was tailored to encourage the Southern states to sign that Constitution, thus making them states. We've all seen how those “compromises” have turned out as they haunt us still.

It must be clear to anyone breathing in this country

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that the latent race identity and violent gun culture has been with us all along. The election of Barack Obama peeled off the scabs of racist passivity and brought forth the screaming demons of hate and prejudice the likes of which we haven't seen in decades.

Now, with the most egregious enabler of hate, prejudice, fear and ignorance this nation has ever produced in politics, filling every news outlet, the institutionalized haters have a hero they can cling to. The current U.S. president lives off of these people. They are the ones who voted for him; 62 million of these uninformed, unsophisticated and single-issue voters who thought that nothing bad could happen by embracing incivility, bullying, sexism, racism and demagoguery. So, where is the mistake?

Maybe it's the Electoral College which our founding fathers also included in the original Constitution. Slavery amendments "fixed" the original sin, but the Electoral College still exists. That said, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by more than three million votes. But the electoral college awarded the office of president to her minority opponent.

This happened in 2000, too, when votes were not counted and the Supreme Court awarded George W. Bush Florida's electoral votes even though he lost the popular vote by at least 500,000 votes. Bush not only became one of the most unpopular presidents in our history, but also nearly cratered the international economy.

The Electoral College's intent was to prevent the election of a tyrant or a madman by "accident." The electors were supposed to vote their conscience. No longer.

It's a rubber stamp, and two of the last three presidential elections have given the country two minority presidents, two illegal wars, a massive economic disaster where \$35 trillion of global wealth vanished almost overnight, tax giveaways to billionaires ... and now a loudmouthed hate monger who is trying to bully his way across the globe including an equally deranged national leader who has nuclear weapons and no seeming compunction not to use them.

Add in the Russian connection between the current president and the hacking of voting centers across the country by the Russians and you have an international incident that would bring tears to the eyes of the great spy authors. I think the intent of the Electoral College has failed badly in the 21st Century.

Our biggest mistakes may be categorized as long- and short-term, with the former creating the latter. Allowing slavery, with all its social implications for the sake of money and wealth of a very few, is the epitome of capitalism devoid of regulation.

This eco-social mindset became institutionalized to the point where the justification and rationalization of the fundamentally immoral institution of slavery created the ingrained dismissal of black people,

by white people, as inferior beings. This mindset became the accepted cultural norm of the slave states.

That cultural imperative is still with us today as we've seen from incidents across the country, and from the verbiage from officers of the current executive administration. The outrageous hate against black people by so many white people today has been passed down through the generations from the beginning of slave-driven economics on this continent.

Clearly, the Electoral College has failed to safeguard the country against the election of very poor candidates for the office of president. The 2016 election was perhaps the lowest point in our electoral history, allowing a spectacularly unqualified man to become our chief representative to the world.

The Electoral College, in concert with profound voter apathy and ignorance, allowed an unapologetic misogynist, liar, bully and fraudulent businessman to become president.

This current, short-term mistake [obvious to all but the true believers] may be our undoing as a democracy. This administration is voicing over- and undertones of fascism, race-baiting and ethnic bias in shameful and childish forms that the world has never seen from the United States.

Perhaps the conclusion of this essay can offer that both the allowance of slavery and the invention of the peculiar Electoral College [our founders were still terrified of allowing a monarchy form of government in 1789] are our biggest mistakes as a country. We've tried hard to fix the race part, but we have ignored the Electoral College's vulnerability to political change over time.

Are we failing to heal racial divides, or is this time of Trump just an aberration? Is it just the publicity the 30% of us in a rage is receiving overwhelming what passes for normal life?

One thing is clear. We cannot afford to stay home from the voting booth for any election at any level. By not informing ourselves of the candidates and the issues, we allow our mistakes to multiply and become a distortion of our national existence.

The emergence of Donald Trump as our president should be lesson enough for rational, caring, patriotic Americans to do the right thing while working to fix our mistakes and make the country a better place for everyone.

If you don't vote, you are guilty of abetting the perpetuation of our mistakes. Is that the legacy you want to leave your children?

Vern Turner lives in Denver. His latest book, Racing to the Brink: The End Game for Race and Capitalism, is available through Amazon.com.

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Taxing Dollars Already Taxed By States Will Not Happen

BY FROMA HARROP

Nice try, Republicans. You'd like to end the federal deduction for state and local taxes. That would stick the expensive-to-live-in blue states with more of the nation's bills. It would amount to taxing income that has already gone to taxes. Not gonna happen.

This is not the sort of thing your Republican voters would shrug off. They tend to be middle- and upper-middle-class. Many supported Trump in the hope he would ease their tax burdens. Erasing the federal deduction for state and local taxes would, for many, do the opposite.



Not gonna happen because of politics. But let's not ignore your honking hypocrisy. You talk a big game on federalism – the belief that power should flow from Washington to the states – and then propose making it harder for state and local governments to raise revenues for schools, roads, police, health care and myriad other services they provide.

And spare us the lectures about blue state taxes being too high. That may or may not be true, but how much or how little a state taxes its people should be no business of meddlers in Washington.

As for the politics part, that's easy. States hit hardest by killing this deduction would be the high-income ones, such as California and New York. Though considered generally liberal, these big population centers are hardly Democratic monopolies.

California sends 14 Republicans to the House, as many as Alabama, Idaho, Kentucky and Wyoming put together. New York contributes nine Republicans, matching the combined total from Mississippi, West Virginia, Alaska and both Dakotas.

Nine plus 14 equals 23. Democrats need to win 24 Republican-held seats to take back the House. And don't forget the 13 Republicans representing districts in the high-income blue states of New Jersey, Illinois and Maryland.

"It is clear people on Long Island would definitely lose under this tax reform," Rep. Peter King, a New York Republican, noted with accuracy.

Fans of ending the deduction have called it a "blue state subsidy." That conveniently ignores the reality that the income tax as it now stands is a red state subsidy. King's voters are already paying higher taxes because of higher incomes reflecting higher costs of living. It is not unusual for a teacher-cop couple on Long Island to be earning \$150,000 a year.

A couple living in Babylon, Long Island, would have to make \$111,000 a year to live as well as a couple making \$90,000 in Wheeling, WV. But all else being equal, the Babylon couple would pay higher taxes as

"richer" people.

Want to end the subsidies? Start by indexing the tax rates to the cost of living.

Anyhow, voters living well but decidedly less than large would not be amused at being asked to pay higher taxes to offset a windfall for the superrich. Zillionaires tend to regard their property tax deductions as small change.

Under the Republicans' tax reform plan, those making over \$730,000 a year would enjoy an average tax cut of about \$129,000. About 50 percent of the tax savings would go to them.

In a flash of honesty, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin was on the Sunday talk shows Oct. 1 explaining that he can't guarantee tax cuts for everyone in the middle class. [Suck it in, will ya?]

White House budget director Mick Mulvaney was on television, too, saying that for the president, "this really is about the middle class and the corporate tax rate." If you wish to argue that President Trump has not factored in the potential for vastly enriching himself, knock yourselves out.

Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps Trump will persuade people to believe him and not their tax returns. They elected him, didn't they?

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The Church Of America First

BY GARY PELUSO-VERDEND

In the mid-20th Century, theologians in Europe and North America sought to make theological sense of two world wars, the first of which was supposed to have been “the war that ends all wars.” They reflected on the causes of the wars and feared new wars, both the reality of the Cold War and the possibility of nuclear annihilation.

These theologians frequently equated nationalism with idolatry. Over 20 nations, led by the Western Allies, created the United Nations, 1942-45. Protestant church leaders mirrored their secular counterparts and began to work through 500 years of differences to form the World Council of Churches [1947]. Fear of nationalism and the threat of nuclear war strengthened the centripetal forces.

Seventy years later, centrifugal power outpulls the centripetal. Can you imagine creating either the UN or the WCC today? Unthinkable. Ludicrous. And national, ethnic, and religious supremacy are once again surging.

Here in the U.S., one expression of nationalistic

surging is America First.

I’ve not heard of religious leaders, other than a version of Christian, who have given their blessing to America First. So, let’s imagine an extreme version of America First in which Christianity is subsumed in nationalism, which in fact turns the nation into God. How far-fetched is the “extreme”?

Attributes of the Church of America First:

- Its creed: America is God, the President is His Prophet, and the military is God’s right hand.
- The house of the Church looks like either a federal building or a consumer mecca; both are symbols of power and wealth. Or, the church building IS a federal building or a mall.
- Churches are decorated with American flag-draped crosses [federal law mandates that crosses must be made from two crossed swords, because this cross represents battle and not execution as the cross of Jesus was]. There is no greater sacrifice for any higher cause than to die for the nation in war.
- Each president, other than misguided UN-loving

“America is one nation among the nations of the earth” heretics, has their own saint days.

- Righteous prayers are raised for the protection of America and Americans and the destruction of America’s enemies, foreign and domestic.

- Theologians debate who is a true American – which ethnicities, cultures, skin colors, political viewpoints.

- Every church building is surrounded by a big, beautiful wall and guarded by two armed citizens in uniform, symbolic of the need for constant vigilance against endemic threats at the nation’s borders.

- Only people who love the president may attend church.

- There is no First Amendment. The Constitution of America First starts with today’s Second Amendment.

- There is a holiday to commemorate each victory in war, and historians must report that America, which is God, has never lost a war. With each holiday, there are sales on appliances and bedding [because spending money, rather than cleanliness or thrift, is next to godliness].

- Since “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” [Psalm 24], all the resources of the world belong to America.

- Cults such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism are tolerated to the extent they display the American flag in the position of prominence in their holy spaces, sing patriotic hymns at least twice a year, don’t hold services that compete with national pastimes such as youth soccer, and support the president unreservedly when the country is at war. Which, these days, is always.

- Federal law requires that guns, the ultimate symbol of freedom, must adorn the entrance to every sanctuary. Open carry is both welcome and encouraged in worship.

- The Church’s leadership skews hard toward white straight males, but as long as patriarchy is maintained [and patriarchy is an essential attribute of America First], persons of other races, genders, and sexual orientations can become leaders, too.

- The Church reads from a Jefferson-inspired cut-and-paste Bible. But rather than a Bible that deletes references to miracles and “priestcraft” as Jefferson did, this one substitutes America for every reference to God, portrays Jesus as the paradigmatic American, and deletes passages and verses that could not be properly understood within the framework of America First. There are other changes. For example, Genesis begins with a Manifest Destiny story of how America, personified by one man and one woman, woke up one day in a beautiful garden and felt entitled to “till the grounds, conquer any peoples you find in the land, and exploit every resource for your monetary benefit.” It is America, not Israel, that God liberated from Egypt, which somehow was a bastion of liberal values.

Extreme? As I read what is going on in the U.S. to-

day, there is too little of what I wrote above that is completely fiction.

The mid-20th Century theologians were onto something. Nationalism easily and powerfully pulls toward making a god of the nation. Religious leaders need to be vigilant for the undertow and resist the pull.

Never, never should we champion or undergird the idolatry of America First.

Gary Peluso-Verdend is president of Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa.

Growing Danger Of Dynastic Wealth

BY ROBERT REICH

White House National Economic Council director Gary Cohn, former president of Goldman Sachs, said recently that “only morons pay the estate tax.”

I’m reminded of Donald Trump’s comment that he didn’t pay federal income taxes because he was “smart.” And billionaire Leona Helmsley’s “only the little people pay taxes.”

What Cohn was getting at is how easy it is nowadays for the wealthy to pass their fortunes to their children, tax-free.

The estate tax applies only to estates over \$11 million per couple. And wealthy families stash away dollars above this into “dynastic” trust funds that escape additional taxes.

No wonder revenues from the estate tax have been dropping for years even as wealth has become concentrated in fewer hands. The tax now generates about \$20 billion a year, which is less than 1% of federal revenues. And it applies to only about two out of every 1,000 people who die.

Now, Trump and Republican leaders are planning to cut or eliminate it altogether.

There’s another part of the tax code that Cohn might also have been referring to – capital gains taxes paid on the soaring values of the wealthy people’s stocks, bonds, mansions and works of art, when they sell them.

If the wealthy hold on to these assets until they die, the tax code allows their heirs to inherit them without paying any of these capital gains taxes. According to the Congressional Budget Office, this loophole saves heirs \$50 billion a year.

The estate and capital gains taxes were originally designed to prevent the growth of large dynasties in the U.S. and to reduce inequality.

They’ve been failing to do that. The richest one-tenth of 1% of Americans now owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90%.

Many of today's super-rich never did a day's work in their lives. Six out of the ten wealthiest Americans alive today are heirs to prominent fortunes. The Walmart heirs alone have more wealth than the bottom 42% of Americans combined.

Rich millennials will soon acquire even more of the nation's wealth.

America is now on the cusp of the largest inter-generational transfer of wealth in history. As wealthy boomers expire, an estimated \$30 trillion will go to their children over the next three decades.

Those children will be able to live off of the income these assets generate, and then leave the bulk of them – which in the intervening years will have grown far more valuable – to their own heirs, tax-free.

After a few generations of this, almost all of the nation's wealth will be in the hands of a few thousand families.

Dynastic wealth runs counter to the ideal of America as a meritocracy. It makes a mockery of the notions that people earn what they're worth in the market, and that economic gains should go to those who deserve them.

It puts economic power into the hands of a relatively small number of people who have never worked, but whose investment decisions will have a significant effect on the nation's future.

And it creates a self-perpetuating aristocracy that is antithetical to democracy.

The last time America faced anything comparable to the concentration of wealth we face now, occurred at the turn of the last century.

Then, President Teddy Roosevelt warned that “a small class of enormously wealthy and economically powerful men, whose chief object is to hold and increase their power,” could destroy American democracy.

Roosevelt's answer was to tax wealth. The estate tax was enacted in 1916 and the capital gains tax in 1922.

But since then, both have been eroded. As the rich have accumulated greater wealth, they have also amassed more political power, and they've used that political power to reduce their taxes.

Teddy Roosevelt, a Republican, helped create a movement against dynastic wealth. Trump and today's congressional Republicans will not follow in his footsteps. I doubt even today's Democrats would do so if they had a chance. Big money has become too powerful on both sides of the aisle.

But taxing big wealth is necessary if we're ever to get our democracy back, and make our economy work for everyone rather than a privileged few.

Maybe Gary Cohn is correct that only morons pay the estate tax. But if he and his boss were smart and they cared about America's future, they'd raise taxes on great wealth. Roosevelt's fear of an American dynasty is more applicable today than ever before.

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

GOP Governors Deploy Fake News

Never underestimate Republicans' willingness to pull out a shovel when it seems they've hit rock bottom. For proof one need look no further than the Free Telegraph, a website purposely constructed to look like a news publication that's actually a hyper-partisan bit of propaganda launched by the Republican Governors Association.

The AP reports the website “blares headlines about the virtues of GOP governors, while framing Democrats negatively,” and instructs readers on how to receive “breaking news alerts.” The apparent motive is to fool voters into thinking they are reading a bonafide news outlet, and the site offers “no acknowledgement” it is a product of an official party committee” dedicated to electing Republicans.

Since the AP outed the site as partisan propaganda, MSNBC reports that a note in tiny, hard-to-read type has been added at the very bottom of the page, indicating that the publication is “Paid for by Republican Governors Association.”

The fake news site – to borrow a description Republicans use for authentic news organizations reporting actual truth – is still online. Phony articles include hit pieces on Democratic gubernatorial candidates in Maryland and Virginia, a glowing tribute to Texas GOP governor Greg Abbott, and even a satirical “quiz” targeting New Jersey Democratic politician Phil Murphy. One piece even takes a shot at liberal filmmaker Michael Moore.

The subterfuge doesn't end there. There's also a Facebook page and Twitter account, both of which claim to bring subscribers “all the political news that matters outside of Washington.” Neither admits its connection to the RGA. Again, the motive is obviously to boost GOP candidates and causes under the guise of being a nonpartisan news entity.

The AP points out that “the website was registered July 7 through Domains by Proxy, a company that allows the originators of a website to shield their identities.”

Even some Republicans admit this latest dirty trick goes beyond merely pushing the envelope on decency.

“It's propaganda for sure,” GOP communications strategist Rick Tyler, who worked on Ted Cruz's presidential campaign, told the AP, “even if they have objective standards and all the reporting is 100% accurate.”

Jon Thompson, RGA spokesperson, dismissed the AP's questions about the integrity of the site, saying it's “just another outlet to share those positive results” being produced by GOP governors. – *Kali Holmoway/Alternet*

How Integration Benefits All Students

BY ELI HOROWITZ

A recent episode of the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC quickly got at everything that's wrong with the debate over affirmative action and the larger issue of race and education. The show featured Marvin Krislov, former general counsel at the University of Michigan when the Supreme Court upheld race-based admissions there, discussing the news the Trump Administration plans to challenge university admissions policies "deemed to discriminate against white applicants." And then a Michigan grad called in to rant.

When I hear stuff about affirmative action my blood absolutely boils. It's gotten to the point where if I meet an African American and they're getting an MBA I go, 'oh don't tell me you're going to the University Michigan.'

At the core of the caller's frankly racist comment was the assumption that a person of color doesn't merit acceptance to a university, whereas a white person does. Krislov pushed back, making it clear that universities have an academic threshold that any student admitted must meet regardless of background. As he explained, affirmative action doesn't allow unqualified people of color in, but strives to create a more diverse group amongst an already qualified field. Krislov also cited data that suggests white women have been the largest recipients of affirmative action, not people of color. And yet, the caller's belief that people of color are getting special favors at the expense of white people is widely shared.

Opponents of affirmative action misinterpret the idea of merit, but they're also missing the academic and social value of integrated school communities. I graduated from a diverse high school before attending Vanderbilt, which in 2008 was still overwhelmingly white. A few months into college, someone who attended New Trier High School, a majority white high school in the town next to my hometown of Evanston, IL, joked that Vanderbilt was "New Trier South." He wasn't far off. At that point, just 6.7% of students at Vanderbilt were black; 6.2% were Latino.

Vanderbilt has since made great strides in making its student body more diverse, but when I was there, you could feel the lack of diversity both in the classroom and in campus life. I sat in classrooms where almost everyone was white. This inherently limited the depth of perspective that could go into a discussion and might've actually lowered the rigor.

Additionally, social life was largely segregated. My classmates who'd only attended segregated schools were likely unaware of what they'd missed out on. My own experience at Evanston Township High School [ETHS], one of the most diverse high schools in the U.S., enabled me to build relationships and learn from people from other backgrounds.

I began to wonder how many white students at institutions like Vanderbilt would get in if they didn't have elite high school educations, access to tutoring and economic security. I thought about how many students of color would get into top colleges if they were afforded the same advantages of their white peers.

Of course, demographic data alone doesn't guarantee that a school is a bastion of inclusion. In my time at ETHS, classes were divided by academic tracks: remedial, regular, honors and advanced placement. While more diverse than Vanderbilt, my honors and advanced placement classes were largely white.

Not long after I graduated, ETHS decided to get rid of honors humanities in order to increase diversity in the classroom. The new policy put any student reading at or above grade level in the same class, and gave extra support to students who were reading below grade level.

As Evanston Superintendent Eric Witherspoon explained at the time, using standardized tests to track students before they got to high school was effectively excluding them from advanced classes. Said Witherspoon: "The majority of these excluded students are non-white."

This measure received mixed support amongst parents, but showed a commitment to an integrated learning environment. And better yet, it worked.

Between 2011-14, three school years after the measurement went into effect, Advanced Placement participation rates went up 19% for white students, 35% for black students and 78% for Latino students. On top of that, the number of students scoring a three or higher went up as well; 31% for white students, 98% for black students and 118% for Latino students.

All three student groups benefited academically despite initial concerns from white parents that the humanities classes wouldn't be as rigorous, another racist assumption that diverse classrooms wouldn't be as academically intense.

Quantitatively, there's no question that integrating classrooms worked at ETHS. But beyond data, creating an environment where students from all backgrounds interact regularly has social benefits, albeit ones that are challenging to categorize.

Unfortunately, the integrated class setting ETHS actively created is something I didn't get at the undergraduate level and that many privileged white students never experience. The Justice Department should be doing everything in its power to increase diversity and inclusion, not play the misguided reverse racism card.

Eli Horowitz is an assistant men's basketball coach at Cal Tech and a reporter at Excelle Sports.

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ALEC Board Leads In Fed Violations

The federal government has slapped eight of the American Legislative Exchange Council's [ALEC] known corporate board leaders with more than \$6.2 billion in federal fines and penalties for misconduct or corporate crimes since 2000.

The leading ALEC scofflaws include pharmaceutical giant Pfizer [\$4.350 billion]; Exxon Mobil [\$715 million]; Koch Industries [\$657 million]; AT&T [\$421 million]; United Parcel Service [\$35 million]; alcohol multinational Diageo [\$17 million]; Peabody Energy [\$16 million]; and Altria, owner of Phillip Morris, the largest U.S. cigarette manufacturer [\$7 million].

The companies pay thousands of dollars each year to sit on the "Private Enterprise Advisory Council" of ALEC, a pay-to-play organization that lets its corporate members rub elbows with lawmakers and draft bills promoting their interests for legislators to take back home to their states.

ALEC re-branded its corporate board as an "advisory council" in 2013 after Common Cause and the Center for Media and Democracy [CMD] filed a complaint against the group with the IRS for being a corporate lobby masquerading as a charity.

The extensive violations data is accessible for the first time thanks to "Violations Tracker," an expanded database of federal regulatory actions created by Good Jobs First. The tally of fines and penalties does not include state enforcement actions, such as the

billions that Altria and three other major tobacco companies are required to pay for illnesses caused by smoking under a master settlement with 46 states.

Good Jobs First's database shows that the eight ALEC companies had over 2,000 separate instances of federal fines and penalties for health and safety, environmental and consumer protection violations, employment discrimination, and other categories of misconduct over the past 18 years.

Given that only a small percentage of corporate misconduct triggers federal action resulting in fines and penalties, the actual number of violations is most likely much larger.

Four of ALEC's corporate board companies – Pfizer, Exxon-Mobil, Koch Industries, and AT&T – are among Violations Trackers' top 100 non-financial-industry bad actors. Banks and financial firms account for the largest federal fines and penalties.

Exxon provides a prime example of why repeat violators ally themselves with groups like ALEC in order to weaken regulations and influence public policy. Exxon pumped more than \$1.7 million into ALEC over a 17-year period as part of a written industry plan to use ALEC to sow uncertainty about climate science and undermine international climate treaties, and to promote Exxon's legislative goals around cap-and-trade policies, fracking, the Keystone Pipeline, and opposition to the Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan. – *PR Watch*

President Trump Is Killing Me

BY DANA MILBANK

President Trump is killing me.

No, really. He's killing me.

I went for my annual physical last month, and, for the first time in my 49 years, I had to report that I've not been feeling well: fatigue, headaches, poor sleep, even some occasional chest pain. My doctor checked my blood pressure, which had always been normal before: alarmingly high!

What could this mean? I don't smoke, I'm not obese and I swim most days. The doctor hooked me up to electrodes and ran an EKG; it was normal. He suggested I try an ultra-low-sodium diet, and I spent a few weeks living on unsalted rice cakes, undressed salads and unappealing entrees; the pressure dropped a few points, but not enough. We could pretty much rule out sleep apnea and other things that can cause a spike in blood pressure. My doctor had me take a calcium CT scan of my heart, which filled me with enough radiation to melt s'mores but turned up nothing terrible.

At this point, I arrived at a self-diagnosis: I was suffering from Trump Hypertensive Unexplained Disorder, or THUD. For almost five decades, I had been the picture of health, but eight months into Trump's presidency, I was suddenly ailing. Trump is the only variable, I told my doctor. "He sure is variable," my doc replied, endorsing the diagnosis.

I know THUD is a real condition because I have a scientifically valid sample to prove it. I told my editor about my new medical state, and he reported that he, too, has been newly warned by his doctor that his blood pressure has become borderline, and things could go either way. Sort of like with the "dreamers" [although in my editor's case, dealing with me may be the primary cause of illness].

I also know THUD is real because I performed a longitudinal study to test my hypothesis. I bought a blood-pressure monitor and strapped it around my bicep at various points during the news cycle:

I am spending the evening with friends. Blood pressure: 116/67.

Trump says he is going to respond to North Korea with "fire and fury." Blood pressure: 150/95.

I'm at home with the kids. Blood pressure: 117/69.

Jeff Sessions says they're scrapping the DACA program: 137/92.

Trump agrees with "Chuck and Nancy" to avoid a debt-limit fight. Blood pressure: 122/81.

I remember that Trump's term lasts another 40 months. Blood pressure: 159/97.

I have a strong suspicion THUD is a widespread phenomenon. A dentist tells me orders have surged in the Washington area for night guards because more people are clenching and grinding their teeth

in the Trump era. Psychotherapists tell me that they are unusually busy and that most clients are talking about Trump, who is exacerbating whatever neurosis, depression or other conditions they had. This is probably quantifiable, but I am too fatigued to do this work. My heart can only take so much.

It stands to reason that THUD is less pervasive in parts of the country that supported Trump: rural areas, the South, the industrial Midwest. Americans here are probably suffering no deleterious effects on their health as a result of Trump's election. Indeed, they may be feeling much better, collectively, as a recent epidemic of Obama Derangement Syndrome subsides.

Trump may be making blue America sick, but he is not causing health conditions to deteriorate in red America. Barack Obama famously spoke of spreading the wealth. Trump is spreading the health.

This, then, may be the essence of Trumpcare. He isn't improving health for anybody. But by making health worse for those who live in parts of the country that opposed him, he is equalizing the health of all Americans. He is uniting us in infirmity.

An article published this week in the American Journal of Public Health finds that life expectancy in the United States closely follows voting patterns in the 2016 election, with Trump winning the most support in counties with the lowest gains in lifespans.

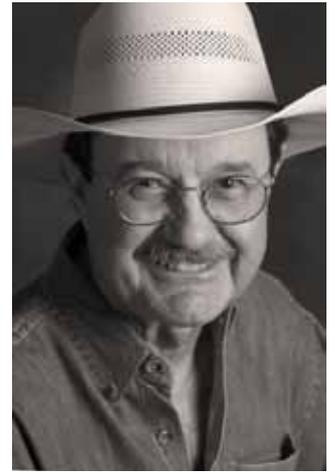
Jacob Bor, an assistant professor at Boston University, found that in counties where life expectancy rose by less than three years since 1980, there was a 9.1 percentage point increase for the Republican share of the vote between 2008 and 2016. In counties where life expectancy rose by more than seven years since 1980, there was a 3.5 point increase in the Democratic share.

Call it the health gap – and Trump is closing it, by making those in blue America ill.

Happily, I have addressed my case of Trump Hypertensive Unexplained Disorder in its early stages, and my doctor has started me on blood-pressure medication. My prescription is renewable until January 2021, at which point I expect it will no longer be medically necessary.

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Populist Victories Won In This Conservative Colorado Town

What's been happening politically and culturally this year in Colorado's second largest city is inspiring. Progressive/populist organizing to build grassroots movements to counter plutocratic rule and govern in the people's interest now have a model of success in one of the least likely places.

Since the 1990s, Colorado Springs has been shaped by an inordinate number of right-wing institutions. Yet, the Springs also is home to a hardy band of progressives, including environmentalists, unionists, women's champions, scrappy entrepreneurs, LGBTQ activists, students and teachers, a sizeable immigrant population, social justice church groups and some sensible libertarians.

With Bernie Sanders bringing new, highly energized voters into play, young people who had previously evinced zero interest in the old Democratic-Republican duopoly were rallying behind Bernie's grassroots populism. His revolutionary call to rein in America's corporate oligarchs also sparked a fire in older, working-class people, including Repubs and none-of-the-above folks who'd given up on the idea that either party gave a damn about people like them. A shift was occurring in Colorado Springs' political zeitgeist – one that might open a path for new alignments and a progressive-populist movement.

But movements don't just happen – until people literally make a move, inspiring others to join in and take action. In the midst of 2016's national Trumpian tumult, a core group of community allies started exploring strategies for a fresh political organizing effort in Colorado Springs. They pinpointed two decisive shortcomings in past efforts: One: progressive campaigns tended to be defensive, reacting to the extreme right's framing of issues and then spending much of their time and money countering disinformation and dirty tricks. Two: while local developers and the hard-right maintained permanent staff and campaigns, progressives started every battle from scratch, scrambling to create new organizations, which were handicapped by lack of institutional memory.

So this band of populist allies decided to make a big move. They called on progressive forces through-

out the region – including Democrats, Berniecrats, Greens and non-partisan issue advocates – to come together and build a permanent social change organization.

Moreover, they reached out to fair-minded, commonsense moderates and sensible libertarians who were embarrassed both by religious crazies [whose intolerance sparked the town's moniker: "Hate City"] and by the political toadies of the area's corporate kingdom. These business-friendly cronies used city government to further enrich the elites while ignoring pressing needs for funding parks, mass transit, street lights, public bathrooms, and for saving drought-stricken trees.

Through the spring and summer of 2016, the allies met with more than 100 local organizations and activists and formulated a straightforward goal: to mobilize a broad coalition around progressive values and common-interest proposals and then to assemble the full-time staff, tools, and resources needed to initiate and win candidate and issue campaigns.

Then, in October, seven local activists formed Together for Colorado Springs with a can-do slogan: "Together We Can Move Mountains." Working committees were formed to handle the nitty-gritty chores of turning the ideas into effective action.

After Trump's surprise victory last November, Colorado Springs moderates and progressives were eager to mobilize in response. These newly activated citizens were able to plug into T4CS, which announced itself in exactly the right fashion: by throwing a wang-dang-doodle of a party. After all, sustaining a grassroots, democracy-building movement requires more than non-stop political action. It also needs social and cultural events to round out its appeal, unite its members and express its democratic spirit.

So T4CS's public launch put the party back in politics, with a joyous crowd of more than 600 coalition supporters for a night of funky music, tub-thumping speeches and a renewal of hope – plus, of course, plentiful libations to lubricate the new movement. The very next day, though, it was down to business, for city council elections were less than two months away.

Unfazed by public opinion, the Colorado Springs' corporate political network, and their hard-right Christian allies headed into the April council elections with a business dream team and mountains of money, fully expecting to increase their control by winning all six of the seats up for a vote. Sure, the T4CS group had popped into view, but it was seen as just another collection of liberal losers.

But the progressive upstarts pulled off a stunning upset. Even though T4CS was outspent by at least 10-to-1, the people's efforts prevailed. All three T4CS endorsees were elected by substantial margins, as were the two candidates it recommended. These five joined a progressive holdover, thus, a progressive coalition now holds a solid majority at City Hall.

By working together, the citizen uprising in the Springs has, indeed, moved mountains, shifting power from backrooms out to the grassroots.

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Health Care For People, Not Profit

Believe it or not, we can get Congress to enact a new program providing good quality, lower-cost health care for your family and [what the hell, let's think big here] for every man, woman and [especially] every child in our society.

Step One: eliminate every dime of the multimillion-dollar government subsidy that now covers platinum-level health insurance for all 535 members of Congress and their families. Let those laissez-faire ideologues who have saddled us with an exorbitantly-expensive, dysfunctional and [let's admit it] sick system of medical profiteering experience what they've wrought, without any government pampering. This includes shutting down their "Office of the Attending Physician," a little-known spot of pure, 100% socialized medicine conveniently located in our U.S. Capitol to provide a full range of government-paid doctors, nurses, pharmacists and others who give immediate, on-the-spot attention to these special ones.

A seriously sick child, a car wreck, a cancer diagnosis – and suddenly the civilized idea of Medicare for All will start making sense even to anti-government, you're-on-your-own Republican ideologues.

Well, you might say, they still won't feel the pain, because they're one-percenters, pulling down \$174,000 a year each from us taxpayers, meaning they can afford to buy decent health insurance. Ah, but here comes Step Two: put all of our congressional goof-offs on piece-rate, pay-for-performance salaries.

Why pay them a flat rate whether they produce or not? For example, American babies are more likely to die in their first year of life than babies in Poland,

which provides universal health insurance for all of its people. So, every year that the U.S. Congress fails to provide health coverage for every American family, the members should get their pay docked by a third. Pay them only when they deliver for the people, not for their ideological purity.

When Congress finally assures good health care for all of us, then its members would get the same coverage. But until they deliver for the whole public, the public owes them nothing.

It's true that America is No. 1 in health care, but before erupting in chants of "USA! USA!" – note that we're only No. 1 in health care spending. Ouch.

Our country lays out more per person for health insurance and out-of-pocket payments than any other advanced nation on the planet – nearly \$10,000 a year for each of us. Germany, Canada, Australia, England, Japan, Poland and all other advanced democracies pay only a fraction of that – yet their people get far better care, are healthier and live longer than our people.

That's because they have nationwide, public health insurance systems providing comprehensive coverage for everyone while eliminating 25% to 30% of every health care dollar that profiteering insurance corporations take for their administrative and advertising costs, exorbitant profits and executive pay, paperwork and waste.

Why don't we Americans have such an efficient and effective system? We do: Medicare! It's a proven no-hassle, quality care for each of America's senior citizens. It works!

But what about children, young people and the middle-aged ... the majority of our people? Glad you asked.

Sen. Bernie Sanders [along with Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris and 14 others] have just introduced the "Medicare for All" act, extending this successful commonsense program to everyone.

Sanders' proposal [like Rep. John Conyers' bill in the U.S. House] will cut the health care costs paid by typical working families from some \$6,200 a year to \$466. It'll also cut out the complexity and stress of getting the care you need – just go to any private doctor you choose, show your public insurance card and – Bingo – you're in! No more co-pays, deductibles or fighting with corporate insurance bureaucrats trying to keep you out.

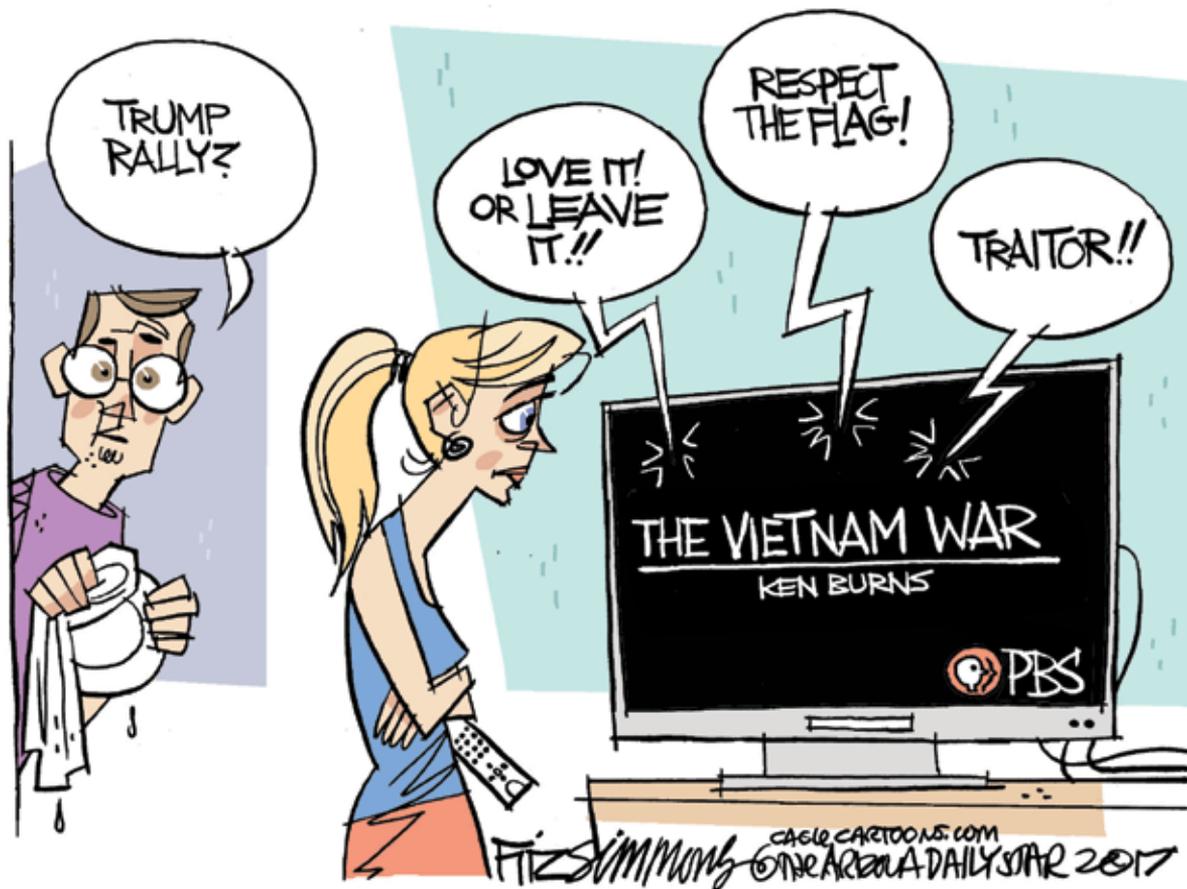
Learn more about Bernie's Medicare for All plan to create a people's health care system! – *Jim Hightower*

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Vietnam Documentary Sophisticated Exercise In Empire Denial

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's documentary on the Vietnam War was aired the last two weeks of September on PBS, rekindling public debates about that ignoble affair.

The film follows previous Burns works in providing poignant footage mixed with compelling interviews and a backdrop of good music, starting in this case with Bob Dylan's *A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall*.

Despite the counter-cultural veneer, however, and admirable efforts to provide a Vietnamese perspective, Burns and Novick's film provides conventional analysis about the war's outbreak and can be understood as a sophisticated exercise in empire denial.

The film is misleading at the outset in quoting an American soldier who recounts the pain of his homecoming, insinuating that veterans were maltreated in the United States – a trope often used to blame anti-war activists for creating this allegedly anti-veteran and divisive climate.

A voice-over by Peter Coyote subsequently claims that the Vietnam War was “started in good faith by decent men.”

However, the film goes on to recount a history in which the United States failed to allow for elections in the South after Vietnam had been divided following the French defeat at Dienbienphu. Everybody knew North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh would win the election, and so the United States set about building a client regime in the South that rigged a referendum and then massacred thousands of suspected communists.

These facts point to the United States violating the sovereignty of Vietnam and betraying the American mission of supporting democracy around the world.

After World War I, the Wilson Administration refused to look at a petition by Ho Chi Minh advocating for Vietnam's independence. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations subsequently provided extensive support in the first Indochina War [1946-54] to the French who had presided over an oppressive colonial regime that exploited Vietnam's economy and brutalized nationalist opponents.

This support was not made in good faith, but rather out of self-interested geopolitical calculation and

prejudice.

Burns and Novick mislead viewers further by showing footage of North Vietnamese migrating to the South, fleeing communist terror, and interviewing a woman whose family fled while leaving out the fact that the CIA worked to sabotage North Vietnam's economy, created a fake resistance movement and coerced many Catholics and others to flee by spreading false rumors about Vietminh atrocities and promising them 40 acres and a mule.

Burns and Novick depict the southern guerrilla movement as being controlled by the Hanoi Politburo when the National Liberation Front [NLF] was founded in direct response to the 10/59 law passed by South Vietnamese premier Ngo Dinh Diem that allowed for the execution of regime opponents after a military trial.

Burns and Novick also leave out some of the sinister aspects of nation building in the late 1950s, such as the police training program led by CIA advisers working under the cover of Michigan State University [MSU] who imported surveillance equipment and built up Diem's secret police.

The film suggests that the U.S. was deceived by Diem who promoted undemocratic methods against Americans' advice.

However, MSU police adviser Arthur Brandstatter wrote to his colleague Ralph Turner that he supported Diem's position regarding the role of the Civil Guard in "neutralizing VC activity" and "never agreed with the position that the Americans should try to help develop a democratic police force under conditions of instability and insurgency." [See Jeremy Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2012, chapter 7].

These comments directly fly in the face of the film's presentation.

According to Burns and Novick, the tragedy of the Vietnam War was a product of the political climate of the Cold War. The film makes a point of showing a map of the Soviet Union overrunning Eastern Europe and then attempting to do the same with Iran, Turkey and the Mediterranean, particularly in Greece.

This history is flawed, however, because in Greece it was the U.S. and UK that intervened militarily on behalf of royalist forces who had collaborated with the Nazis, while the Soviet Union maintained its pledge under the Yalta agreements not to back the left-wing rebels.

The USSR also only consolidated pro-communist regimes in Eastern Europe after the U.S. had implemented the Marshall Plan, interfered in election in Italy and infiltrated secret teams, led by ex-Nazi collaborators, to foment revolutions in Eastern Europe.

Burns and Novick quote Richard Nixon, Lyndon B. Johnson and other proponents of the domino theory who feared that if Indochina fell, all of Southeast Asia would follow.

Left out, however, is how anticommunist fears were

used to advance a larger imperialistic policy designed to consolidate a chain of military bases from Okinawa through the Ryukyu Islands, which were threatened by the communist revolutions.

Political analyst Noam Chomsky has explained that Vietnam was never going to invade any of its neighbors. The real fear of policymakers was that successful independent socialist development in Vietnam would serve as a model to other countries, including those with key strategic value such as Indonesia and Japan.

None of this is discussed in Burns and Novick's documentary which relies on clips from policymakers and commentary from old Cold Warriors mixed with a balance of Vietnamese voices who do not address the war's imperialist underpinnings on the American side.

The implications are considerable in light of the fact that the United States has been constantly at war since the Vietnam War ended and continues to be deceptive about the motives underlying these wars.

The film is further flawed in its later episodes in that it does not interview many Vietnamese civilians who bore the primary brunt of the U.S. military onslaught, and barely acknowledges how the massive U.S. bombing of the South contributed to an unprecedented migration of refugees into the cities.

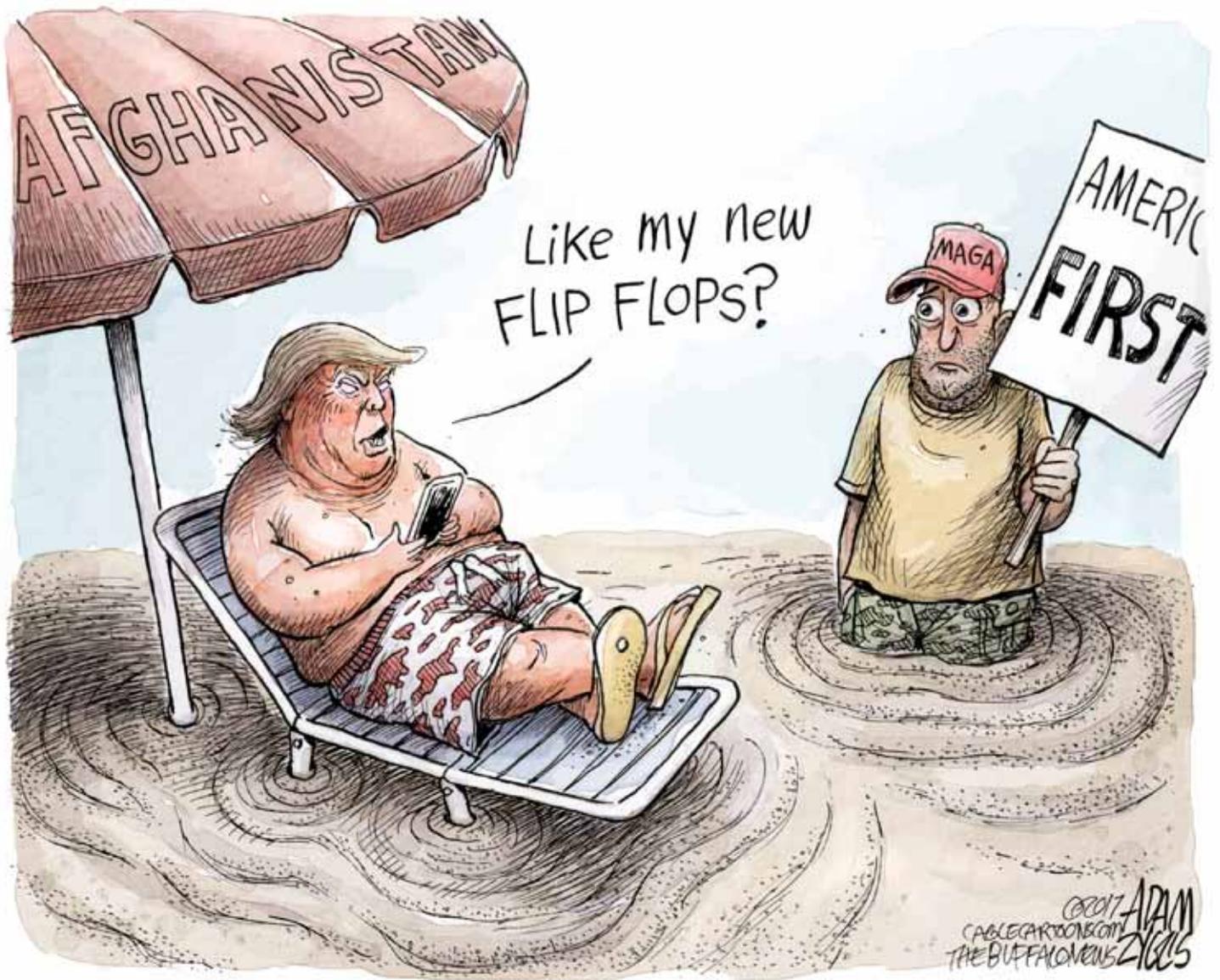
Dissenters on the U.S. side are painted negatively as being prone to violence and hostile to returning veterans. The movie's footage, however, shows antiwar activists targeting Reserve Officers' Training Corps [ROTC] branches on college campuses, not veterans, and displays active duty soldiers protesting the war.

Burns and Novick's film promotes further myths about the war, like that 40,000 U.S. GIs were addicted to heroin, when the total was far less. The film glosses over the effects of Agent Orange when thousands of Vietnamese and Americans got cancer from its spraying and Vietnam has experienced huge levels of birth deformities and ecological damage from its use. The secret wars in Laos and Cambodia and their horrors are completely left out.

The last episode makes a point of underscoring the hardship faced by Vietnamese after the war without attributing proper blame to the United States, and fails to acknowledge that the Vietnamese were able to celebrate the consummation of their revolution like the United States in 1776.

Overall, the film is stunning in some of its visuals and includes some revealing interviews. However, it provides misleading history that sanitizes to a considerable extent a horrific war whose costs for the Vietnamese were incalculable and which continues to poison our own political culture.

Jeremy Kuzmarov teaches at the University of Tulsa and is author of The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs [Massachusetts, 2009] and Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century [Massachusetts, 2012].



QUAGMIRE

How Is Afghanstian Worth More Lives And Treasure?

BY HAROLD V. SARE

President Trump has authorized additional U.S. troops to augment the 8,400 who are already in Afghanistan. It seems that the top U.S. generals convinced him that our security is at stake in that region. Pakistan, a neighboring nuclear state, supports terrorists affiliated with world-wide terrorism. Further, as we recall, terrorists who perpetrated the 9/11 disaster in the United

States were trained in Afghanistan.

While there are knowledgeable persons who have recommended that the U.S. withdraw from Afghanistan, the whole area is volatile, and the U.S. wants to maintain relationships with the nuclear powers in the region.

India, nearby, is another nuclear power. Our relationships with Pakistan are tenuous, and Pakistan

has citizens and others who relate to peoples in Afghanistan.

President Obama planned to withdraw, and President Trump argued for withdrawal, but his military advisors convinced him we needed to stay and to send additional troops. That seems to be the current policy. The U.S has been involved for 17 years and has spent billions of dollars and many lives there.

It seems that we are caught in a quagmire that is difficult to deal with and to get out of.

Afghanistan is an unusually complicated state that has experienced much chaos and considerable strife and internal conflict during its entire history. At times it was part of larger kingdoms or empires, and at times it was an individual entity. The population is made up of many tribes and powerful warlords. Warlords have dominated local areas and complicate any kind of central government.

In spite of its diversity, the ancient Silk Road, connecting trade routes between China and the western world for centuries, went through Afghanistan. Alexander the Great dominated the area in 330 B.C., and in 1219 C.E. Genghis Khan and the Mongol masses took control. However, Mahmud Ghazni, who established an empire from Iran to India, in the 11th Century, has the reputation of being the "greatest of Afghanistan's conquerors." Later, the British Empire took control. Currently, it is an "independent" state.

The state is completely landlocked with many neighboring states including Pakistan, India, China, Russia, and Iran. Pakistan has the longest border with Afghanistan and probably has the most influence in the country. The largest ethnic group is the Pashtuns. There are about 14 different ethnic groups. The population of the country is estimated at 32,564,342. The Sunni Muslims make up about 80% of the population, and the Shia Muslims are about 19%. Literacy is about 38.2%.

Afghanistan seems perennially to be a troubled state. A unified kingdom was established in 1973, but a military coup replaced the kingdom and a republic was established. Then a pro-Russian coup took place in 1978. The Soviets took over the whole country in 1979, set up a pro-Soviet government, and engaged in a massive guerrilla war with Muslim resistance. Reportedly, the Russians lost up to 15,000 troops. An agreement led by the United Nations with Russia in 1988 provided that Russia would leave Afghanistan. They left in February 1989, withdrawing 100,000 troops. This withdrawal of Russian troops was based on a peace agreement signed in Geneva by the U.S., Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

A guerrilla group, the Mujahadeen, formed to battle the Russians in 1978 continued to fight the Russian established government. It had been receiving aid from the United States, Great Britain and China by way of Pakistan.

In 1995 the Islamic militia, the Taliban [a Sunni Muslim organization] was established, stating it would ensure peace. It held power over 75% of Afghanistan

from 1996 to 2001. They enforced a strict interpretation of Sharia law or Islamic law on the areas they controlled. The United States refused to recognize the Taliban because of its authoritarian orientation.

The Taliban was supported by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern states. The Al-Qaeda, created in 1988 by Osama bin Laden and 15 other Islamists against the Russians, was very much involved in the conflict on the side of the Taliban. Of course Americans know about the Al-Qaeda and the tragic events on Sept. 11, 2001.

As a resistance to the Taliban, Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, former enemies, created the United Front referred to as the Northern Alliance. Between September 1996 and November 2001 the Northern Alliance, brought a number of ethnic groups together and controlled around 30% of the Afghan population in the northern part of the country.

Massoud sought assistance from the U.S. and other western countries, and they were able to oust the Taliban from Kabul with U.S. air support.

The U.S. became involved as President George W. Bush noted that the "leadership of Al-Qaeda had great influence" in Afghanistan and that it supported the Taliban regime in controlling most of the country. He condemned the Taliban regime. He then made a list of strong demands from the Taliban such as "deliver to the U.S. all of the leaders of the Al-Qaeda and close immediately every terrorist camp, and hand over every terrorist and their supporters to appropriate authorities."

Soon thereafter NATO approved a campaign against Afghanistan revolutionaries.

So where do we stand now? Military operations are underway in defense of Afghanistan in an effort to bring about peace and stabilization. We have been there seventeen years, spent billions of dollars, lost a number of troops, and many others have been wounded. Still we actually cannot envision an end. In addition to the troops there now, it appears that 4,000 more are on their way.

We have had as many as 100,000 troops there.

I think that our objective has to be long range. Are the costs to the U.S. worth it? Is staying there going to be worth it in the cost of lives and treasure? I am concerned about risking more lives, and the impact on our national debt. Iraq and Afghanistan already have seriously burdened our national debt.

On the other hand, we do have to defend our country against terrorism. Americans must give a great deal of thought to our international involvements in terms of our national power and interests. We must ensure our leadership in world affairs and the international economy.

Unfortunately, President Trump has not demonstrated great professional leadership in world political and economic affairs. Our leadership in world affairs seems to be in decline.

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

PILLORY HILLARY

Three Columnists Assess Clinton, Her Defeat In Wake Of Her New Book



Why Media Want Hillary To Shut Up

BY JOE CONASON

There is something slightly strange about the reproachful media response to *What Happened*, Hillary Clinton's new book on the 2016 campaign.

Now everyone knows that the Washington press corps dislikes and distrusts the former Democratic nominee. After all, several of its most eminent members have admitted their herd's prejudice against her. But the nearly unanimous demand for her to be silent – often presented in the form of blind quotes from

her alleged “friends”—cuts against normal journalistic curiosity, let alone the usual lust for fresh gossip.

And it doesn't matter how many times she accepts responsibility for her unexpected defeat by Donald Trump in the Electoral College. Pundits and reporters insist she hasn't acknowledged her guilt sufficiently, with the requisite sincerity. So the best choice, according to the press, would have been for her to say and write nothing.

Nobody in the media is eager to hear Clinton's perspective on that catastrophic election cycle – especially not the part about them and their performance. They would rather not reflect on why her “damned emails” were so ridiculously overemphasized. Or why Trump enjoyed constant and groveling promotion as a television spectacle. Or why journalists produced so many misleading “investigations” of the Clinton

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

Hillary Blames Everybody But Herself For Loss

BY THOMAS FRANK

How do you lose the presidency to a man like Donald Trump? He was the most unpopular presidential candidate of all time, compounding blunder with blunder and heaping gaffe upon gaffe. Keeping him from the Oval Office should have been the single-minded mission of the Democratic Party. And it should have been easy for them.

Instead they lost, and now their 2016 candidate Hillary Clinton comes before us to account for this monumental failure, to tell us *What Happened*. Unfortunately, her new book is less an effort to explain than it is to explain away.

No real blame ever settles anywhere near Clinton's person. And while she wrestles gamely with the larger historical question of why the party of the people has withered as inequality grows, she never offers a satisfying answer. Instead, most of the blame is directed outward, at familiar suspects like James Comey, the Russians and the media.

Still, by exercising a little discernment, readers can find clues to the mystery of 2016 here and there among the clouds of blame-evasion and positive thinking.

Start at the beginning: why did Hillary Clinton run for president? “[B]ecause I thought I’d be good at the job,” she writes. Then, 13 pages later: “It was a chance to do the most good I would ever be able to do.”

A would-be do-gooder needs problems to solve, of course, and so Clinton says she turned next to the people who knew what was wrong. “I started calling policy experts,” she writes, “reading thick binders of memos, and making lists of problems that needed more thought.” Lists of problems and solutions are everywhere; reeling them off one after another is one of her favorite rhetorical devices, her way of checking the boxes and letting everyone know that she cares.

Proceeding in this rational, expert-sanctioned way, Hillary Clinton set out resolutely on the road to oblivion.

She seems to have been almost totally unprepared for the outburst of populist anger that characterized 2016, an outburst that came under half a dozen different guises: trade, outsourcing, immigration, opiates, deindustrialization, and the recent spectacle of Wall Street criminals getting bailed out. It wasn't the issues that mattered so much as the outrage, and Donald Trump put himself in front of it. Clinton couldn't.

To her credit, and unlike many of her most fervent supporters, Hillary Clinton doesn't deny that this web of class-related problems had some role in her down-

Hate On Hillary, But She's Right About Trump

BY JOAN VENNOCHI

Someday, Hillary Clinton will be remembered with respect as a smart, driven, and remarkably resilient woman who made history – but not as much as she wanted to make.

That time hasn't come. She's still a polarizing loser, who can't get any more love in defeat than she did as the winner of the popular vote in the 2016 presidential election.

So don't love her. But don't settle for a less than full reckoning of what happened to her either. Like all candidates, she made mistakes. But she also lost because of Russian interference; because of how James Comey handled the FBI investigation into her use of a private e-mail server; and because a dishonest and unscrupulous opponent, bolstered by a click-hungry media, painted a picture of “Crooked Hillary” that played on the fears and biases of an angry electorate.

Clinton's “Sunday Morning” interview with anchor Jane Pauley reinforces her dilemma. No matter what she says about her own responsibility for the devastating loss to Donald Trump, nuggets like this get all the attention: She was so confident of victory, she and Bill Clinton bought a second home in Chappaqua, NY, in September 2016, to accommodate a White House staff during presidential retreats. Instead, it's where she retreated to write her memoir, *What Happened*.

Clinton, of course, gets no credit for candor for disclosing this painful testament to presumption and hubris, just scorn for counting her Electoral College chickens before they were hatched. Meanwhile, unchained bluster, among other unsavory characteristics, propelled Trump to the White House. And narcissism rooted in disturbing ignorance continues to define his presidency. But pointing out that double standard when it comes to judging them isn't going to change anyone's mind about Clinton.

Her book was mocked before its official release, naturally by Trump. Just hours after returning to Washington from Hurricane Harvey-ravaged Texas, the president retweeted a meme showing the cover of Clinton's book and, next to it, a book with the same design, with the words “I Happened” over his picture.

Democrats want her to disappear. That's not uncommon for the alleged party of empathy for the people. When Michael Dukakis lost to George H.W. Bush, in 1988, he was also pilloried. Then, he was ignored, as if that would erase the story of his candidacy.

Actually, the seeds of Trump's cruel and relentless attack on Clinton were nurtured in that 1988 race, when the elder Bush went along with a plan to smear Dukakis as the squishy, liberal “Willie Horton” candidate. From the start, Dukakis took the blame for

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The Power Behind The Alt-Right Throne

DEVIL'S BARGAIN

*Steve Bannon, Donald Trump,
and the Storming of the Presidency*

By Joshua Green

Penguin Publishing Co.

288 pages, \$27

BY JOHN WOOD

At first blush, Steve Bannon's appearance and background bear little evidence to a man that he would become – for a time, that is, as influential a man as he was behind the scenes of the Trump Administration.

Often disheveled, unshaven, with triple-layered shirts untucked – not your typical politician, more like your older never married uncle.

Devil's Bargain's author Joshua Green even stated regarding Bannon's "style" in a Slate interview: "I've never been able to figure it out. I don't have any idea. It's the weirdest sartorial style I have ever encountered."

His style, or lack thereof, reflects Breitbart's adopted mascot the Honey Badger, from the six-year-old viral video "Crazy Nastyass Honey Badger." The video gleaned more than 80 million YouTube views by last year. And the video's irreverent personification and sassy commentary resonated with Bannon and says a lot about his dress and demeanor.

Bannon has a rather odd assortment of experiences, too, that brought him great wealth and to an unlikely position in this unlikely White House. He was a Navy man, Goldman Sachs investment banker, and strangely a video game investor in – of all games – World of Warcraft, as well as a hard-right maker of nearly 20 films, and a media mogul at Breitbart.

Stranger than fiction, Bannon's 2005 fundraising of nearly \$60 million from Goldman Sachs, which was invested in a Hong Kong-based corporation that required low-wage Chinese workers to play World of Warcraft. They attempted to earn as much virtual in-game gold as possible that could be traded for real currency, according to Green.

Bannon's idea fizzled because players realized they were being set up and quickly rebelled. But his short-term failure helped him realize that, "These guys,

those rootless white males, have monster power."

He later decided that these gamers would be a foundation of the alt-right. "You can activate that army. They come in through Gamergate or whatever and then get turned onto politics and Trump."

Strangely enough, Hillary Clinton famously alluded to a "vast right-wing conspiracy" trying to bring her and Bill down in 1995. In the late '90s, it became a rather small but loud cottage industry.

Bannon was able to turn up the heat and make this industry thrive through Breitbart.

For example, Bannon masterminded a key book about Hillary Clinton in 2015 to connect her with crony capitalism. *Clinton Cash*, written by Peter Schweizer, was a very successful attempt by Bannon to mainstream such media coverage.

"We've got the 15 best investigative reporters at the 15 best newspapers in the country all chasing after Hillary Clinton," Bannon said.

The book specifically focused on Clinton Foundation donations by foreigners, over-paid speeches to corporations, as well as income made after leaving the White House in 2001. A film adaptation of the book was out in time for campaign season, Green said.

What's interesting is that Time Magazine later reported that the presumed audience for this *Clinton Cash* book-turned-film was not really conservatives at all.

This is because Green found that Bannon was critical of the Right for essentially navel gazing in the past. His new strategy was to mainstream stories in the "liberal" media.

During the Lewinsky scandal around 1998, Green said, Bannon felt that the Right had been limiting stories to the audiences on the Right only. His new strategy was to mainstream his news.

Through this effort, Bannon established the 501(c)3 Government Accountability Institute [GAI] in Florida where he served as the executive chair and co-founder. There he would help coordinate Breitbart as senior editor-at-large.

Breitbart is known for its hard-hitting animosity toward immigrants, Muslims, and Black-Lives-Matter – essentially a Liberal’s nightmare. However, it was a hit with the alt-right, certainly a discontented and raucous alliance receptive to hate.

GAI, a 501(c)3 was supposed to give an air of legitimacy to Clinton Cash and other stories because it seemed neutral. It would more likely land in places like the New York Times with liberal audiences than from an unabashed Right-Wing news site.

Bannon, Trump’s former White House Strategist, helped bring Trump from the brink of self-destruction after the convention due to campaign disorganization. Bannon had left his media empire two months before Trump was elected president. He was successful in framing Clinton as the foil and corrupt status quo, as opposed to Trump, the agent of change. It worked.

Bannon was able to help Trump hammer his audience with three framings to not only his base, but also to mainstream audiences: First, his strident views on halting illegal immigration and slowing down legal immigration. Second, bringing back blue-collar jobs to America and getting out of foreign wars. Third, he also brought in people like Kellyanne Conway, Stephen Miller, and Sean Spicer who could double-speak the Trump gospel.

Undergirding all this is a Jacksonian populism mixed with Hamiltonian economic nationalism. Green finds that Bannon frames the enemy as crony capitalism by a permanent corrupt political class that Bannon equates to “draining the swamp.”

Bannon left an indelible stain on the Trump presidency through an economic nationalist policy

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that Republicans have largely embraced so far. While Bannon left in August, because of his head-butting with Ivana, or because Trump himself felt threatened that Bannon was sometimes portrayed as really running things. Whichever.

I especially liked the SNL skit

that famously portrayed Bannon in a Halloween skeleton costume sitting in Trump’s oval office seat. Taking the hilarious juxtaposition further, Trump sits to his side playing with tinker toys like a child.

Bannon is not too far away. CNN recently reported that while he

is back at Breitbart, he and Trump talk nearly every day over the phone. Bannon is now working toward punishing Republicans who do not live up to Trump expectations by primarying them with alt-right candidates and scathing online news.

Green was able to interview both Trump and Bannon for several hours for this interesting world that he opens up to you on the precarious alt-right and the man behind Trump's ascension. Green reveals a scary reality, where the "rightwing conspiracy" is not a conspiracy at all, but reality.

Green produced a well-written book that will keep you reading, especially as it reveals the dark underbelly of the alt-right and its mastermind who is

wrapped up with all his bravado, alt-right utopian vision.

This includes never-ending "leaks" and infighting that yields a number of investigations, controversies, and wall-to-wall coverage, not to mention the constant distraction of Trump tweets.

It is all this, Green says, that will likely unravel the Trump Administration.

Green ends with, "It's hard to imagine that Bannon and the legions he spoke for will wind up as anything other than the latest partners disappointed when their deal with Trump turns sour."

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

Conason On Hillary

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

Foundation, yet so very few examinations of Trump's longstanding connections to organized crime. Or why vital policy differences between the two candidates received a tiny fraction of media attention.

The press may not top the list of those who earned blame for the election's outcome, notably including former FBI Director James Comey, Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook, various unnamed Russian malefactors and Clinton herself. But she has legitimate grievances over how she and her opponent were treated by the American media, particularly several of its most illustrious outlets.

The statistical and analytical brief for her case is already publicly available, in a path-breaking report released in August by a team of scholars from Harvard and MIT.

Titled "Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign," their study used an enormous collection of data from online sources to map the impact of a wide variety of news sources. What they found was a sharp asymmetry between left and right outlets that benefited Trump and damaged Clinton. And while most mainstream coverage treated both candidates negatively, it "largely followed Trump's agenda." That meant reporting about Clinton focused on "scandals" involving the Clinton Foundation and emails, while reporting about Trump focused on his issues, such as immigration.

The report delivers a fascinating, highly detailed and fairly discouraging portrait of the media constellation and its role in our democracy. But its election findings went deeper, revealing how the extremely partisan and inaccurate right-wing outlets, led by Steve Bannon's Breitbart News, set the agenda for the more "objective" mainstream media.

Featuring a "case study" of the Clinton Foundation, the report shows how a slanted front-page article in The New York Times influenced widespread coverage that continued to unfairly damage Clinton up un-

til Election Day 2016. In late April 2015, the Times published an extensive piece based on Clinton Cash, a book financed by Bannon's dark money donors, headlined "Cash Flowed to Clinton Foundation Amid Russian Uranium Deal."

As the report's authors note acidly, "Buried in the tenth paragraph of the story was this admission: 'Whether the donations played any role in the approval of the uranium deal is unknown. But the episode underscores the special ethical challenges presented by the Clinton Foundation, headed by a former president who relied heavily on foreign cash to accumulate \$250 million in assets even as his wife helped steer American foreign policy as secretary of state, presiding over decisions with the potential to benefit the foundation's donors.' Needless to say, it was the clear insinuation of corruption in the headline, not the buried admission that no evidence of corruption was in fact uncovered, that made the April 2015 story one of the Times' most tweeted stories during the summer [of 2016]."

The report goes on to dismantle equally spurious exposes in leading outlets such as the Associated Press and The Washington Post, which insinuated corruption when the actual evidence proved there was none. And there are plenty of other examples. The effect was to disinform readers and voters, precisely the opposite of what journalists supposedly aspire to do.

Naturally, mainstream media outlets have ignored the prestigious, heavily documented Harvard study. They can suppress this kind of criticism far more easily than Donald Trump can silence any negative voices.

But if Hillary Clinton starts talking about this disgrace, then audiences and readers might start listening. And that's why the media has gently suggested that she should just shut up and go away. Nevertheless, she persists.

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

per pack cigarette tax unconstitutional. Instead, she expanded it to include both a “long-term solution to continuing budget shortfalls” and “a needed pay increase for K-12 public school teachers.”

A narrowly-crafted, cigarette-tax-only agenda would have given political cover to top lawmakers, who could’ve shrugged and said, “Teacher raises? Sorry, our hands are tied. The agenda limits what we can do.” With an expansive agenda, it’s their fault – period – if they fail to tackle these issues.

Senate Republicans seem to have gotten the message. They’re open to cutting a revenue-generating deal that dispatches this political tar baby, once and for all – or at least gives the impression they’ve done so.

Democrats, meanwhile, proved that standing firm, with the masses, on behalf of the common good, is a winning strategy. They discovered they can exert outside influence over Capitol decision-making despite controlling only 28 of 101 House and seven of 48 Senate seats.

McCall and Co. remain remarkably tone deaf, however – still squealing that all this could be resolved in a nanosecond if only those meanie Democrats would vote to hike the cigarette tax.

Fallin and Senate Republicans clearly understand this specious blathering is a loser with rank-and-file voters that can do basic math – the Daily Disappointment’s editorial board being an obvious exception. It’s a fact: The GOP owns a virtual supermajority in both houses. It doesn’t need but a few Democratic votes, if any, to do pretty much whatever it wants.

At best, the special session gridlock reflects a failure of leadership. At worst, it is very public proof that leadership is a shameless subsidiary of Big Oil and Gas.

Maybe House leaders will surprise us. Maybe they’ll do right by the least among us. Maybe even Hamm, Nichols and Co. will experience an epiphany.

If not, it will be up to an aroused electorate to re-seize control of state government and demand all – no matter how big their checkbooks – pay their fair share to help build a better, more prosperous future.

Drip, Drip, Drip

Sex scandals. Resignations. Seats flipped. What has been a very bad year for the powers-that-be at the state Capitol got even worse last month.

Woodward Sen. Bryce Marlatt resigned after being charged with sexual battery. Former gubernatorial aide Travis Brauer faced charges stemming from allegations he shot up-skirt photos of a woman during a legislative meeting last spring. And Republicans

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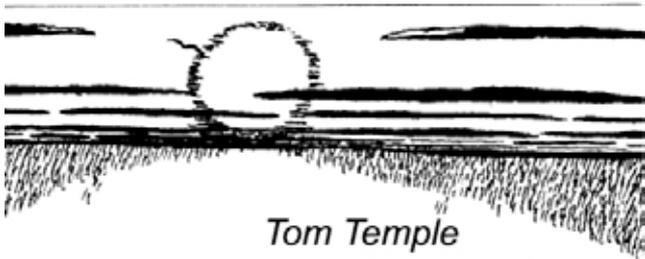
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It's time for Columbus
Day ... and then comes
the Ghosts and Goblins
of Halloween!

failed in a third straight special election to hold an open legislative seat.

Hardly the momentum the state’s dominant political party wants heading into an election year when almost every statewide office, including governor, as well as every House and half the Senate seats will be on the ballot.



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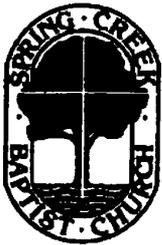
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The drip, drip, drip of bad news is clearly affecting the Oklahoma electorate: A SoonerPoll in late spring found nearly two out of every three respondents viewed the GOP-dominated Legislature unfavorably.

Legislatures, as institutions, rarely score high in public opinion surveys, of course. And it must be said that voters pondering how the state ended up in this mess should first look in the nearest mirror, for elections indeed have consequences.

Thankfully, there are signs an oft-apathetic electorate is rousing from its long slumber. Though voter turnout remains abysmally, shamefully low, it is clear those who do cast ballots are paying closer attention to the candidates beyond whether they have an “R” or a “D” behind their names.

The three Democrats who flipped GOP seats this year – Rep. Jacob Rosecrants of Norman, Sen. Michael Brooks Jimenez of Oklahoma City and Rep. Karen Gaddis of Tulsa – all defeated Republicans with the usual mixture of party establishment and business support that has delivered GOP supermajorities in recent years to the state Capitol.

Some try to explain away recent Democratic pickups as isolated incidents that are not unusual in low-turnout special elections. That might be so if it were one or two special elections, but Democrats have won five of six over the last two years.

The only loss – Republican Zach Taylor narrowly won the open HD 28 in Seminole and Pottawatomie Counties – was in a non-urban district, consistent with the GOP’s recent takeover of much of rural Oklahoma.

The Democratic victories reflect a trend – voters frustrated not only with the Legislature’s repeated failure to set the state on a sound fiscal course, but also with aberrant behavior ranging from sexual misconduct to malfeasance.

Significantly, three more special legislative elections on the ballot Nov. 14 – two in Tulsa and one in Oklahoma City – will provide a clearer picture of voter discontent. [The general election for the Senate seat Marlatt held isn’t scheduled until Feb. 13.]

The two Tulsa seats [SD 37 and HD 76] are in traditional Republican strongholds. If Democrats flip one or both, it would be a seismic political event. The Oklahoma City seat [SD 45] has been in GOP hands – former Sen. Kyle Loveless resigned because of campaign law violations – but it includes neighborhoods that recently elected Democrats.

The special session could be a huge factor in the special elections. If the GOP-dominated Legislature doesn’t produce, Democratic prospects improve in all three.

Will Republicans stem the hemorrhaging with a combination of visionary public policy and smart electioneering?

Or will Democrats capitalize on special election pickups and engineer a renaissance in the 2018 mid-term elections?

The next few months will tell us much.

Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Dart: To state Insurance Commissioner John Doak, undermining the experts that help Oklahomans navigate the Affordable Care Act exchange. See Carly Putnam's excellent analysis of Doak's venality on page 18.

Our hearts go out to former state Superintendent Sandy Garrett and family in the loss of her life partner, former state Rep. Jerry Hefner. He was 68.

Ethically-challenged EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's senior adviser, Albert "Kell" Kelly, hammered by federal regulators because of misdeeds at Tulsa-based SpiritBank when was chairman/CEO: \$125,000 penalty and lifetime banking ban.

No surprise: As the number of ACT test-takers in Oklahoma soared this year, scores dropped to 19.4 – 1.6 points below the national average. This gives experts a more complete picture of state's education challenges.

Remember when the Wall Street Journal's rightwing politics were kept to the opinion pages? Not anymore. Look at Editor Gerard Baker's recent emails to staff, effectively neutering unflattering reporting on Donald Trump.

The Oklahoman devoted nearly a half page of dwindling Sunday space to a "review" of owner Philip Anschutz's new book, *Out Where The West Begins*. The paper's book editor described Anschutz's writing as "exceptional." Of course he did.

Need a reminder about the goodness of our neighbors? AARP reports that 24% of Oklahomans, ages 65 and up, donated their time in the past year.

At The Observer, the coffee pot never rests. Good thing, because a study in Spain found adults drinking four or more cups daily had 64% lower risk of dying during the 10-year follow-up than those who rarely or never drink coffee. – European Society of Cardiology

Yikes! Eighty-three percent of 159 tap water samples worldwide contained plastic pollutants. The health implications are unclear, but this can't be good, right? – ORB Media

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Frank On Hillary

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

fall. When she isn't repeating self-help bromides or calumniating the Russians she can be found wondering why so many working-class people have deserted the Democratic Party.

This is an important question, and in dealing with it Clinton writes a few really memorable passages, like her description of a grotesque campaign stop in West Virginia where she was protested by a crowd that included the former CEO of the company that owned the Upper Big Branch mine, where 29 coal miners died in 2010.

But by and large, Clinton's efforts to understand populism always get short-circuited, probably because taking it seriously might lead one to conclude that working people have a legitimate beef with her and the Democratic Party.

Countless inconvenient items get deleted from her history. She only writes about trade, for example, in the most general terms; NAFTA and the TPP never. Her husband's program of bank deregulation is photoshopped out. The names Goldman Sachs and Walmart never come up.

Besides, to take populism seriously might also mean that Bernie Sanders, who was "outraged about everything," might have had a point, and much of *What Happened* is dedicated to blasting Sanders for challenging Clinton in the Democratic primaries. Given that he later endorsed her and even campaigned for her, this can only be described as churlish, if not downright dishonest.

Vennochi On Hillary

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

his decision not to fire back.

Even so, it has taken nearly three decades for him to get the recognition he deserves as a smart, decent, and committed man who traveled, as the *Boston Globe's* Thomas Farragher describes it, from the brink of the presidency "to a quiet life of significance." On election day, Dukakis lost to Bush by seven million votes. How did he feel? "Bad. Bad," he told Farragher, noting how "you've disappointed literally thousands of people who worked for you."

Clinton has also acknowledged the pain of losing and the empty feeling that comes with letting supporters down. And she lost to a candidate who was written off as unelectable.

Imagine being the Democrat – and the woman – who helped elect Trump. There's a lot of angst attached to that epitaph. Clinton told Pauley, "I am done with being a candidate. But I am not done with politics,

That Clinton might have done well to temper her technocratic style with some populist outrage of her own only dawns on her towards the end of the book, by which point it is too late.

Not to mention impossible. Hillary Clinton simply cannot escape her satisfied white-collar worldview – compulsively listing people's academic credentials, hobnobbing with officers from Facebook and Google, and telling readers how she went to Davos in 1998 to announce her philosophy.

And then, in her concluding chapter, returning to her beloved alma mater Wellesley College and informing graduates of that prestigious institution that, with their "ca@ pacity for critical thinking" [among other things] they were "precisely what we needed in America in 2017."

I wish it were so. I wish that another crop of elite college grads were what we needed. I wish Hillary's experts and her enlightened capitalist friends could step in and fix this shabby America we inhabit today, where racists march in the streets and the Midwest falls apart and cops shoot motorists for no reason and a blustering groper inhabits the White House.

I wish it were all a matter of having a checklist of think-tank approved policy solutions. But I know for sure it isn't. And voters knew that, too.

Political analyst and historian Thomas Frank is author of What's The Matter With Kansas and Listen, Liberal.

Alternet

because I literally believe that our country's future is at stake." She's right about the country's future.

So go ahead, mock her for years of pragmatic politics and episodes of disingenuousness. Refuse to like her, let alone love her. But understand that forces larger and darker than Hillary Clinton conspired to elect the despicable and deceitful rival who now occupies the Oval Office.

Someday, she will get her due. Given these harsh and unforgiving times, perhaps not while she's still a part of living history.

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first opened in 2013, Commissioner Doak forecasted “skyrocketing premiums,” a claim that was not based on real data and that did not turn out to be true.

A few months later, after enrollment concluded, Doak blasted the cost of the Healthcare.gov website per enrollee, neglecting to recognize that the cost would be spread out over successive enrollments periods.

Commissioner Doak warned this spring that Oklahoma’s remaining insurer was in danger of leaving the state without presenting any evidence to support his claim. In June, an Insurance Department press release vaguely referenced “many insurers ... resorting to double digit premium increases,” while failing to mention that Oklahoma’s marketplace insurer had requested one of the smallest premium increases in the U.S. this year — just 8.7%.

And testifying before Congress with a panel of state commissioners, Doak argued against the bipartisan fixes that are favored by a large majority of Democratic and Republican insurance commissioners across

the country.

Speaking before Congress in early September, Commissioner Doak reiterated his opposition to the ACA and to Navigators in particular. Now his agency is ordering Oklahoma’s Navigators to turn over their enrollment data by the end of the month.

Given past experience, we can expect that the data will be used out of context to try to sabotage enrollment — just before this year’s Open Enrollment period starts on November 1.

Let’s hope this doesn’t happen. After all, with Navigators’ federal funding still uncertain, with a shortened enrollment period and almost no advertising planned, with the state trying out a new and ambitious reinsurance plan, and with the third-highest uninsured rate in the country, it would be highly irresponsible for the state Insurance Commissioner to destabilize Oklahoma’s health insurance marketplace further.

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

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