

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

DECEMBER 2017 • VOLUME 49 NUMBER 12 • \$5.00

PIQUE POLITICS

*Knee-Jerk, Off-With-Their-Heads Approach
To Governance Sets State Back A Generation*



- Cover story begins on page 6



ADVISORY BOARD

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

OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

FOUNDING PUBLISHER

Helen B. Troy [1932-2007]

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

[ISSN 0030-1795]

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

POSTMASTER

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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

UPDATE ADDRESSES

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

LETTERS TO EDITOR

E-mail to letters@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

Observations

Thinning Patience

Even though Gov. Mary Fallin vows to give lawmakers a second extra-session chance to fix the state budget's structural woes, there is little reason to think they will seize the opportunity.

In fact, given the carbon baron's stranglehold on statehouse leadership, it seems increasingly likely the best hope for reversing the nation's deepest education cuts, bolstering vital healthcare services and rebuilding transportation infrastructure is with a statewide ballot initiative.

A newly formed coalition, Restore Oklahoma Now Inc., wants to give voters a chance next year to return the gross production tax on all oil and gas wells to its historic 7% rate and create a permanent funding source to bolster teacher salaries.

Oklahomans already are on board – even if legislative leadership isn't.

According to a Global Strategy Group poll of 400 registered voters Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 67% wanted lawmakers in special session to enact a comprehensive revenue plan “that avoids further budget cuts and allows for a teacher pay raise and other investments in critical state services.”

The survey, commissioned by the Oklahoma Policy Institute, also found 55% of respondents supported restoring the gross production tax to 7%.

Taking matters into our own hands is part of our state's DNA. When we joined the union in 1907, the Progressive movement was strong and suspicions of deep-pocketed special interests high. As a result, Oklahoma became the nation's first state to include initiative and referendum in its original constitution.

The tool, of course, has produced both good and bad, depending on your perspective. Voters endorsed liquor by the drink and pari-mutuel gambling on horse races despite religious opposition. They also imposed term limits on legislators and a supermajority requirement in order to raise taxes – both major contributors to the quagmire at NE 23rd

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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

Name: _____

Address: _____

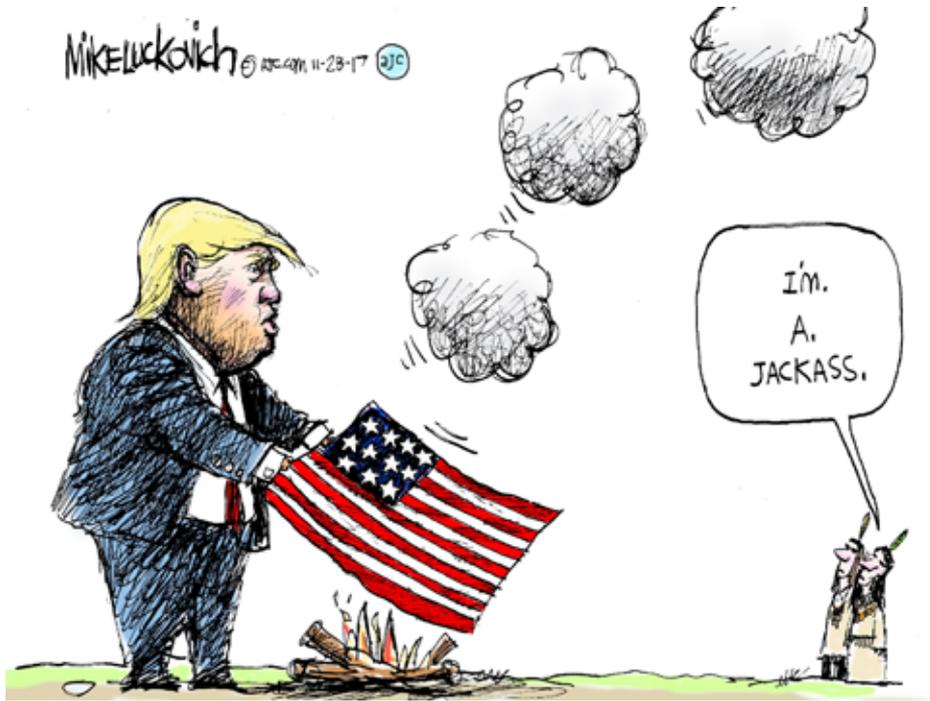
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Please make checks payable to: "The Oklahoma Observer"

Clip and mail to: The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. If you prefer to pay using a credit card, visit us online at www.okobserver.net.



Observerscope



Need last-minute stocking stuffers? Nothing beats a one-year Observer subscription [see back cover] or a classic Observer t-shirt [page 7].

The uber Right is yucking it up over gubernatorial wannabe Gary Richardson's derision of Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb as "Mary's Little Lamb." Clever.

Dart: To OK Sen. James Lankford, voting for GOP tax package that not only would enrich the wealthy and explode the deficit, but also destroy separation of church and state. Jesus wept.

Gov. Mary Fallin promises to announce early next year the date for statewide vote on medical marijuana [SQ 788] – either June primary or November general election.

Laurel: To University of Central Oklahoma, No. 10 on the Military Times' 2018 list of best four-year colleges and universities for veteran and active-duty students – up 11 spots from a year ago.

Democrats lost two of three special elections last month, but the win was huge: Allison Ikley-Freeman flipping a GOP Senate seat in uber conservative west Tulsa to become the county's first openly LGBTQ legislator.

Dart: To the nation's Bigot-in-Chief, spoiling a ceremony honoring Navajo code talkers by again besmirching Sen. Elizabeth Warren as "Pocahontas." Even GOP Rep. Tom Cole is imploring Trump to knock it off.

Oklahoma lost another jewel with recent passing of Duncan's Bill Buxton, former prosecutor and judge who established Stephens County Drug Court. He also was a supporter of Legal Aid and a longtime Observer reader.

Laurel: To Gov. Mary Fallin, dropping the veto hammer on the Legislature's venal budget rewrite – great news for rank-and-file Oklahomans sold out by House leadership. Now we await word on date for a second special session.

Our friend Tamya Cox reports OK GOP Rep. Steve Russell "refused to take a picture of us" last month in DC "because we were Planned Parenthood and he was afraid the opposition would use it against him."

Dart: To Speaker Charles McCall and his Mini-Me, Rep. Josh Cockroft, subpoenaing three Fallin Administration insiders over the state Health Department scandal – a juvenile shot-across-the-bow for her budget veto. They later withdrew the subpoenas.

Speaking of Health Department chaos, the attorney general, state auditor and a grand jury are investigating the alleged fiscal malfeasance that led to longtime Director Terry Cline's resignation.

We mourn the passing of Dorothy Messenger, a devoted Observer reader since 1979. Our condolences to daughter Myrna Ranney and family.

Next time we grieve over a mass shooting, remember this: Americans are 4.4% of the world's population but own 42% of its guns. Moreover, 31% of gunmen in mass shootings from 1966-2012 were American. – Professor Adam Lankford, University of Alabama

More evidence of Oklahoma carbon barons' sway with the president: New state Justice Patrick Wyrick added to Trump's shortlist for future SCOTUS vacancy. Wyrick served as solicitor general under state AG-turned-EPA Chief Scott Pruitt – Harold Hamm's leading sycophant.

Nearly a year into Trump's Reign of Error, we are reminded of Voltaire's words of warning: "Any one who has the power to make you believe absurdities has the power to make you commit injustices."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Trump placed Al [Franken] under attack

Now who's calling the kettle black?

Between the goose and the gander

There's variance of candor

The results are mostly abstract.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

When I was at November's Oklahoma Observer Newsmakers event, I heard former Gov. David Walters relate a remark made to him by the late House Speaker Carl Albert: "Voters don't for a candidate, they vote against a candidate."

My take-away from this is that Alabama would prefer a child molester like Roy Moore in elected office rather than have a Democrat. In their minds Democrats are associated with the queers and lesbians who now have marriage equality.

In retaliation, our enemies have increased their polemics and advanced their ideas that "deeply held religious beliefs" can now be used to uphold the ages-old dis-

crimination used against all manner of minorities, be it sexual orientation, gender, or skin color.

Their use of religion as an offensive weapon not only defames their founder's intentions, it also becomes a political sledgehammer to break down common decency and morals in order to impose a repugnant societal order to advance a personal ignorance that blocks rational thinking and retards scientific progress that has made all our lives better.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

It's sad to see the way President Trump is betraying the very people who put him into office. Many of them believed, according to interviews with Trump supporters before and after the 2016 election, that, "He's for me - he'll stand up for the little guy."

Unfortunately, Donald Trump is, and has always been, for one person only: Donald Trump.

Look at the current tax-bill debate in the Republican-dominated Congress. Either bill, House or Senate, will enrich Donald Trump,

his heirs, and his billionaire buddies. And in order to pay for the economic favors granted to them, money will be taken from Medicaid, Medicare, and tax exemptions depended on by the middle class.

A headline in the Nov. 19 Dallas Morning News says it all: "Rich get richer under both GOP overhaul plans."

As one small example of the tax-exemptions losses that are proposed, look what would happen to public school teachers. Because some public-school students cannot afford to buy school supplies, their teachers often buy these from their own pockets. Presently, teachers can deduct up to \$250 a year for school supplies they purchase for their students. That deduction would be totally eliminated under the Senate plan.

Do we really believe public-school teachers have too much money, so we have to take that deduction away from them in order to let billionaires like Trump keep more of their money?

Fair is fair, but fairness is no part of the Republicans' tax "reform" plans. Instead, we see the same old "trickle down" approach: giving tax breaks to the wealthy and promising that that money will somehow trickle down to the non-wealthy who really need tax breaks.

"Trickle down" has never worked, and never will. We tried it in the 1980s, and the deficit exploded. The same thing will happen if this Republican-backed tax "reform" plan passes.

Tax breaks should go to the non-wealthy, because these folks will spend the money and thus help the economy. Rich folks will sock it away in offshore accounts.

Let's all contact our legislators and tell them to pass real tax reform, with tax breaks going to those who need them and will spend the money they save in taxes to help our economy. No more

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Dismantling The Patriarchy

President Trump finally has a signature achievement.

No, it isn't the border wall [nor is Mexico paying for it]. It isn't the repeal of ObamaCare or a ban on *all* Muslims entering the United States.

It isn't even tax cuts for the wealthy – though versions have gained traction in both houses of Congress, threatening to do for America what trickle down acolytes have done for Oklahoma and Kansas.

What Trump has managed to do is force a national reckoning on sexual harassment.

Trump's playboy past – especially his “grab them by the p--y” braggadocio, captured on the *Access Hollywood* video – didn't prevent him from becoming president. But it did yield a powerful, important consequence: a turning point in which victims no longer would remain silent and powerful men would be forced to account for despicable behavior.

Oklahoma, as you recall, was at the vanguard of this national transition – Tulsa Rep. Dan Kirby accused of sexually harassing two of his former legislative assistants and Woodward Sen. Bryce Marlatt charged with sexual battery after allegedly groping an Uber driver.

Both resigned – Kirby in February after a House committee recommended he be expelled and Marlatt in September after his arraignment.

Meanwhile, House leaders imposed new requirements that representatives annually complete training on the issue and sign an anti-fraternization agreement every term.

The Congress has taken similar steps since Minnesota Sen. Al Franken and Michigan Rep. John Conyers were accused of sexual misconduct.

Boorish, piggish, even criminal behavior is not new to the halls of political power, of course. I've spent much of my professional career covering three legislatures – Oklahoma, Texas and California. Each included its share of *Animal House* characters and pursuits.

Nor is such misconduct the exclusive purview of one party. Or even of elected officials. A few lobby-

ists were known to deploy every weapon in their arsenals – from food and entertainment to travel and, yes, sex – to influence legislators.

Enough is enough. The days of boys-will-be-boys must end, once and for all, whether it be public or private life. How can we help achieve that?

One way is to elect more women to public office. Oklahoma's record on this is terrible – second lowest percentage in the nation, behind only West Virginia, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

Just consider the raw numbers: Women fill only 20 of 149 seats in the Oklahoma Legislature – 14 of 101 in the House and six of 48 in the Senate [two seats are vacant, one in each chamber].

That is a mere 13.4% of all seats. Yet women comprise 50.5% of the state's nearly four million residents, according to Census Bureau figures.

Common sense suggests more women in elective office would help reduce the towel-snapping sexism all too often tolerated in male-dominated clubs.

As *The Nation's* Editor and Publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel recently put it, “Sexual harassment is grounded in an imbalance of power, the heady sense that one can commit wrongful acts with impunity.”

Recall that Trump attempted to dismiss his *Access Hollywood* comments as “locker room talk.” More accurately, they reflected generational garbage, a patriarchal past that no longer will be tolerated.

There was some social media musing during the gridlocked special session about what would happen if female legislators gathered in a room and hammered out a deal on taxes and spending.

I have no doubt. If you put the likes of Sens. Stephanie Bice, Kay Floyd and A.J. Griffin and Reps. Leslie Osborn, Emily Virgin and Regina Goodwin around the negotiating table, Oklahoma would be en route to a much better future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arnold". The signature is stylized and cursive.



Our Tantrum-Driven Public Policy

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Admit it. That felt good, didn't it? The Oklahoma Legislative Compensation Board's vote last month to cut lawmakers' pay 8.8% was a monumental middle finger to what is arguably the state's most reviled public institution.

So, so satisfying – especially since it came during a heated special session that ended with Gov. Mary Fallin vetoing much of a venal budget that benefited wealthy carbon barons at the expense of the 99%.

As the immediate gratification fades and the reality of the board's action sets in, Oklahomans must look themselves in the mirror and answer these questions: Was it smart? Was it in the state's best long-term interests?

The truth is, Oklahoma is in a mess because it all-too-often engages in Pique Politics – knee-jerk, off-with-their heads, throw-the-baby-out-with-the-bath-water tantrums born of frustration with the Powers

That Be.

Irate that Sen. Gene Stipe's constituents refused to vote him out? Enact term limits to force his removal.

Riled by tax hikes? Impose SQ 640, making it all but impossible to generate new revenue – no matter how dire the circumstances.

Stewing over the current Legislature's repeated inability to solve the state budget's long-term structural problems? Slash their salaries.

Libraries are filled with volumes warning people against rash, emotional decision-making. Don't spank in anger. Don't panic on a bad stock market day. Don't buy the first vehicle you test drive. Sleep on it overnight.

Sober, clear-eyed, reflective invariably works best.

Yet Oklahoma finds itself in a fiscal morass that threatens its future prosperity because too many residents react rather than engage in the public square – or worse, leave their civic duty to others.

To a majority of voters in 1990, term limits seemed a reasonable idea. No more career politicians. New blood and new ideas would be baked into the system.

Except it didn't work. It simply transferred more power from elected representatives to special interests. Lawmakers come and go but lobbyists remain, serving as the statehouse's de facto institutional memory.

Worse, legislators arrive in Oklahoma City knowing the 12-year clock is ticking. It's no longer a potential career, but rather a professional stepping-stone – an audition with corporate lobbying interests for lucrative future employment.

In 1992, voters were sold another red herring – that low-tax Oklahoma was actually over-taxed. The uber Right dictum resulted in passage of SQ 640, a constitutional amendment requiring either a legislative supermajority or statewide voter approval to raise taxes.

Term limits ended a century of Democratic dominance at the Capitol and ushered in an era of Republican control ... which produced at least \$2 billion in income tax cuts and corporate welfare that primarily rewarded their political sugar daddies: the state's 1%.

When oil and gas prices inevitably declined, Oklahoma found itself in a fiscal straight-jacket with vir-

tually no way out – SQ 640's restrictions making it all but impossible to raise taxes to reverse the nation's deepest education cuts, near-worst health outcomes and crumbling infrastructure.

So rather than do the heavy lifting and fix two giant mistakes born of collective fury, Oklahomans simply cheer when the Legislative Compensation Board whacks legislative salaries.

That'll show 'em!

It is true that Oklahoma lawmakers' base pay [\$38,400] is second highest in the region – and more than five times Texas'. Teachers, can you feel the love?

But it's also true that you get what you pay for. The pioneer era notion of a citizen legislator no longer applies. Most years the Legislature may only be in session four months, but it's a 24/7, 365-day-a-year job.

It's a little like being a minister. You're never not on call. When you want your legislator, you want them. Period. Doesn't matter if they're out selling insurance. Or practicing law. Or tilling the fields. Many constituents seem to regard their lawmakers as hired hands. Jump first, ask how high later.

There's no reason to feel sorry for lawmakers, of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Just in time for the holidays ...

THE OKLAHOMA Observer Shop



Vintage Logo T-Shirt

Show your love for The Observer and your solidarity with the 99% with a classic "T" featuring our iconic logo on the front and our motto on the back. Available in black or Oklahoma flag blue. M-XL \$18, XXL \$20 plus \$3 postage/handling.

To order with credit card, call 405.478.8700.
Or mail payment to PO Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113



HOBSON'S CHOICE(S)

*Cal's 3rd Annual Christmas Gifts
For Heartland's Heartless And Clueless*

BY CAL HOBSON

Thank you Arnold Hamilton and the entire Observer staff for allowing me to present my third annual Christmas gift recipients. The competition this year was especially intense with performances ranging from inept to inane.

With those traits guiding us, it was only natural that we began our search for the worst abusers of the public trust in the most logical place: Washington, DC, otherwise known as Swampville, USA.

Even in a town cluttered with Trump toadies, our congressional delegation set new lows for honesty and transparency while at the same time babbling about their fealty to the United States Constitution

and love for us, their constituents.

It's hard to know where to start with our Seven Soldiers of Misfortune, but let's begin with 1st Congressional District **Rep. Jim Bridenstine**, who may soon have the opportunity to destroy whatever credibility the space agency still has with taxpayers.

No. 1: This truly competent Navy flyer [as were those involved in the Tail Hook Scandal] is on the verge of becoming top dog at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA]. Yes, that NASA.

For this critical and technology-driven assignment, Bridenstine received an overwhelming vote of confidence – 14 to 13 – from the Senate Committee on

Commerce, Space and Transportation with the opposition expressing worries that his selection had more to do with politics than personal qualifications.

However, I must admit this flyboy has some experience in the field [he was briefly director of the Tulsa Air and Space Museum]; is a climate denier, which probably doesn't matter since there is little to none in space; and boasts as one of his best friends fellow pilot **Sen. Jim "Crash" Inhofe**.

Of course, future astronauts may fret some about that close vote in the germane Senate committee, but still should take comfort in knowing such banality is routine in Washington. Think **Jeff Sessions** as attorney general, for example.

No. 2: Returning now to earth, this year's *Hypocrisy Award* recognizes our entire very conservative Republican congressional delegation of self-proclaimed deficit hawks.

They all voted yes on the purported tax reform legislation, which also added at least \$1.5 trillion to the already \$18 trillion national debt.

Most egregious of the phones, former Falls Creek church camp leader and now **U.S. Sen. James Lankford** – declared he was against the bill the night before he voted for it because it would indeed do exactly what he opposed ... add to our cumulative debt.

No. 3: *The Group Chicken Little Lifetime Award*. For context, see No. 2 above.

Because of very strong competition, rarely do we find politicians so inept, awful and deceitful that they deserve recognition in two of my coveted categories. However, **Inhofe, Lankford, Cole, Lucas, Russell, Bridenstine** and **Mullen** win this one hands down and have even provided yours truly a little Christmas ditty, taking note of their accomplishment of screwing future generations out of ... well, their fortunes:

*Of course a balanced budget we must find
Just not now, not at this time
We'd rather spend and spend out of our minds
While showing you our big, really big behinds!*

*A spending we will go, a spending we will go,
A balanced budget? Like our butts that's just for show
And so, to our voters, who we find just lovable
We also thank God you are so damn gullible!*

No. 4: "Gimme Shelter" Estate Tax Abolition plaque. The inscription reads: Never have so few received so much for doing so little ... except arriving in this world via the golden vagina.

No. 5: "I Can't Hear You Now But Pretended I Did When Campaigning" award.

Special recognition for lawmakers who many times promised a teacher pay increase but voted no on HB 1054X that would have provided one.

Session grades received by this bunch: An F in honesty, an F in listening skills, an F for taking money on false pretenses, and an F for setting a terrible ex-

ample for children everywhere ... including their own.

No. 6: The *Inspector Clouseau Clueless Certificate of Silliness*. Earned by **Speaker Charles McCall**, R-Atoka, for appointing a special committee to find waste, fraud and abuse at the state Health Department.

This special committee is the textbook definition of waste, fraud, abuse and goofiness.

Chairman **Josh Cockroft**, R-Wizard of Wanette, withdrew three subpoenas the day after he issued them. Reason? None of the three served with these potentially life-changing documents ever worked at the Health Department ... but who knew?

Certainly not Josh the Joker of Pott County.

No. 7: For *Intellectual Dishonesty*, a copy of the Merriam Webster dictionary goes to House Republican Flood Leader **Jon Echols**, R-OKC.

In debate, lawyer Jon said Democrats were lying ... but were not liars. ?????? This man needs not only a dictionary, but also a psychiatrist.

As **President Trump** would say: sad. Just sad. BTW, if lying were a felony, Echols would get a life sentence with no chance of parole.

No. 8: The *First Annual Bob Funk Express Personnel Employment Award* goes to ... drumroll ... the **Oklahoma Legislature**.

With term limits, new members begin their future job searches before they are sworn into office to supposedly do the people's business, which means they never get around to doing the people's business ... like passing a balanced budget.

No. 9: The *Phony Crocodile Tears Cryoff Contest* winner is **Rep. Bobby Cleveland**, R-Slaughterville.

The competition was close, but my very own legislator wins it for the heart-wrenching stories he tells about the plight of correctional officers at our Lexington prisons who mostly collect food stamps from the government and injuries from inmates.

Workers there, or anywhere else, certainly won't receive a pay raise thanks to blasphemous Bobby, who promised them one as he made a speech against legislation that would have paid for it.

His head is as empty as the Gobi desert, but as devious as Donald Trump's, minus the IQ.

No. 10: The *Government Is Awful But I Am Addicted To It* award.

A clear winner here is **Rep. Kevin "Stop Me Before I Kill Myself During A Publicity Stunt On The Steps Of The Supreme Court Building" Calvey**, R-OKC, who has run for several public offices since he was five when he competed for Kindergarten King For A Day. Sad.

Anyway, having come and gone in the Legislature for over a decade, while also campaigning often and futile for Congress, our favorite fiscal watchdog, hang dog, hound dog and ding dog now wants to serve the citizens of Oklahoma County as one of their three commissioners.

This could be a perfect fit. If Kevin wins next year he mostly can thank residents living in an area known

as Fridayland. These folks generally hate taxes and government services ... until they want them. And, by God, want them right now!

These small government devotees will then be represented by a self-serving blowhard who pretends to hate what he really loves – a government paycheck – and could find a news camera while blindfolded in a North Dakota blizzard.

No. 11: The *Missing In Action Wall of Shame* memento goes to **Senate President Pro Tem Mike Schulz** of Altus, who was indeed very active in OKC this past winter, spring, summer and fall ... but it was job-searching for the after-life – meaning life after he leaves the Legislature next year.

Looks like he'll lobby in the Capitol City on behalf of farmers who already have more tax credits, incentives, write-offs and exemptions than any other group found in Title 68, the voluminous Oklahoma tax code.

No. 12: The *Lifetime "Own 'Em, Don't Just Rent 'Em"* award goes to my high school buddy **Harold Hamm**, 13th child of Lexington sharecroppers and now Oklahoma's richest man.

Since sharecroppers never own the property they work on and must divide the fruits of their labor with oft-absentee landowners, HH is not about to just rent the time and attention of lowly lawmakers when it is so cheap to just buy them.

A few thousands here, a few more well-placed thousands there of campaign contributions and – *Bingo!* – keeping the severance tax the lowest in the nation guarantees teacher salaries will be as well.

Well, my Santa sack of goodies for goofballs in government is full, including some clean coal for stuffing in their stockings. My sleigh will be powered not by Rudolph but taxpayer-subsidized wind power, its sleds greased with lobbyist largesse.

But Hark! I hear the angels calling, warning me I have not a minute to lose because our public servants are scattered throughout the world ... to four-star resorts, where joy, mirth, incense, champagne and Jack Daniels will be shared by all, courtesy of those they keep on call.

Bah, humbug!

But for the rest of you out there in the real world, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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

BadVoter.org

Check any Oklahoma voting record
Sign up for "Vote by Mail" reminder
See your current registration info or register

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

Spending Or Revenue Problem?

BY AL LINDLEY

The old adage “when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging” is attributed to several sources, including Oklahoma’s own Will Rogers. It shouldn’t take a rocket scientist to recognize that if one misses the exit and continues down the turnpike, one will soon be really lost.

State legislators can learn a valuable lesson from the maxim if they are willing. After 12 years of massive tax cuts and sharp reductions in state services Oklahomans are left with chaos.

Thanks to a smarter-than-the-voters Legislature, prisons are overflowing, mental health services are severely curtailed. Roads and bridges rival Third World nations. Rural hospitals and health clinics are forced to shutter their doors. Classrooms are overcrowded; grossly underpaid teachers are fleeing the state for better pay.

Perhaps the Legislature can discover an answer in writing a budget by reviewing how my family changed a huge household debt into a balanced budget. However, the remedy requires a brain to evaluate problems, a heart to consider the effects on everyone – especially the least of these – and the courage to stand up to the lobbyists.

In 1978, shortly after changing jobs, a specialist who long monitored my daughter Wendy’s medical condition referred her to a specialist in Galveston, TX. After meeting with the medical team we agreed to surgery.

During the operation the seventh nerve of the sympathetic chain was severed. Readers with some degree of medical knowledge understand the problems that created.

Wendy remained in Galveston for six weeks before returning to Oklahoma. My wife, June, lost her job because she elected to remain in Galveston while I returned to OKC, making frequent flights to and from Galveston. Returning to Oklahoma Wendy’s health concerns required her to stay more than two years in the former long-term care facility at Children’s Medical Center before we brought her home.

Although my wife was not working, my salary was sufficient to cover the household budget. A few days before we made the transition bringing Wendy home I was called to the office. I was informed that my services were no longer required since Wendy’s health was a distraction for me. During that short time Wendy’s medical cost exceeded lifetime caps.

Fortunately, while applying for a position at another company, the head of the Data Processing unit saw my resume and application. As a member of a

sister church he recognized my name and offered me a job. After Wendy's COBRA ran out I began to receive letters from the insurance carrier claiming that the durable medical equipment requested was not medically required or that the medical services were related to a preexisting condition, i.e. a severe disability. After each letter, Wendy's attorney asked for clarification. I lost that job, too.

I qualified for maximum unemployment compensation benefit of \$195 per week, which didn't come close to covering household budget items such as mortgage and car payment, utilities, auto insurance, food, clothing, Wendy's pharmacy bill, and other necessary items.

I began applying for jobs with a salary that would support my family, but never received an offer. After a while I turned my attention to state employment. After six months I was offered a 4 p.m. to midnight position with a state agency.

Later, after returning to work, a church friend gave me an interest-free loan to bring all my unpaid debts up to date. After taxes and deductions the take-home pay was slightly more than the unemployment compensation. A neighbor aware of the situation offered me a job substitute teaching at his school. A few days each month allowed me to pay back the loan ahead of schedule and save extra cash for the speed bumps every household meets.

A few years later, on Mar. 15, 1985, while preparing to take Wendy to a doctor's appointment, she stopped breathing. Within minutes, firefighters from Station 25 and ambulance personnel were on site. She would spend the next 10 days in South Community Hospital [now Integris Southwest Medical Center]. Ten days later, she had another breathing episode at school and firefighters at Station 19 and ambulance personnel rushed her to Children's in OKC. After 10 days she returned home to die in her mother's arms on April 15, 1985.

As medical bills arrived, it was apparent that even with my wife's newly acquired allied health degree the expenses for Wendy's care could not be paid. After reviewing the few options available only one stood out as the best choice. I accepted a part-time job at Crossroads Mall unloading trucks from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. and ending the day at a state job from 4 am to midnight. The extra revenue from Crossroads Mall provided the needed funds to pay the debt. Although it was difficult surviving on six hours of sleep the effort was worth the outcome.

What passes for leadership at the Capitol – Senate President Mike Schultz, House Speaker Charles McCall and Floor Leader Jon Echols – is a cruel prank on Oklahomans. They constantly search under seat cushions and take metal detectors along hiking trails hoping to find enough money to plug huge gaps in the state budget.

Instead of using one-time funds, borrowing Rainy Day funds and demanding agencies cut services to stop the bleeding, a permanent answer ought to be

implemented.

According to the Oklahoma Tax Commission web site, an Oklahoman earning \$140 per week is in the same tax bracket as a multi-billionaire. Those earning \$140 per week wonder what happened to their tax cut, while the multi-billionaires know who received it.

Evaluating the billions in business tax credits that are no longer valid and restructuring the income tax would require courage. Sadly the Wizard of Oz is not welcome at the state Capitol.

Democrat Al Lindley served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 1996 to 2008.

Tantrum

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

course. They knew what they were signing up for. But on the cusp of 2018, it's a fact that \$38,400 a year for what is often an around-the-clock job isn't going to attract the state's best and brightest, much less the new lower base salary of \$35,021.

Instead, Oklahoma could end up with even more legislative knuckleheads than it has now – those who are less interested in public service than in the title and perks or whether it eventually could yield a cushy long-term job.

The compensation board was sharply divided – 4-3 – over the legislative salary cut. One of the yes voters even wanted to lob a “hand grenade” and slash salaries in half.

But House Speaker Charles McCall, whose inept leadership helps fuel the anti-Legislature fervor, was correct when he pointed out the possible repercussions: “Cutting compensation ensures that in the future many lower-income but capable citizens won't be able to run for the Legislature. Only those with financial means will have the opportunity to represent citizens at the Capitol.”

It's time for Oklahomans to do the heavily lifting. To fix this mess and get the state on a viable long-term course, term limits and tax-raising restrictions must be reversed.

Let the voters in each district decide who serves – and for how long. Abide by the truly American principle of majority rules when it comes to taxes.

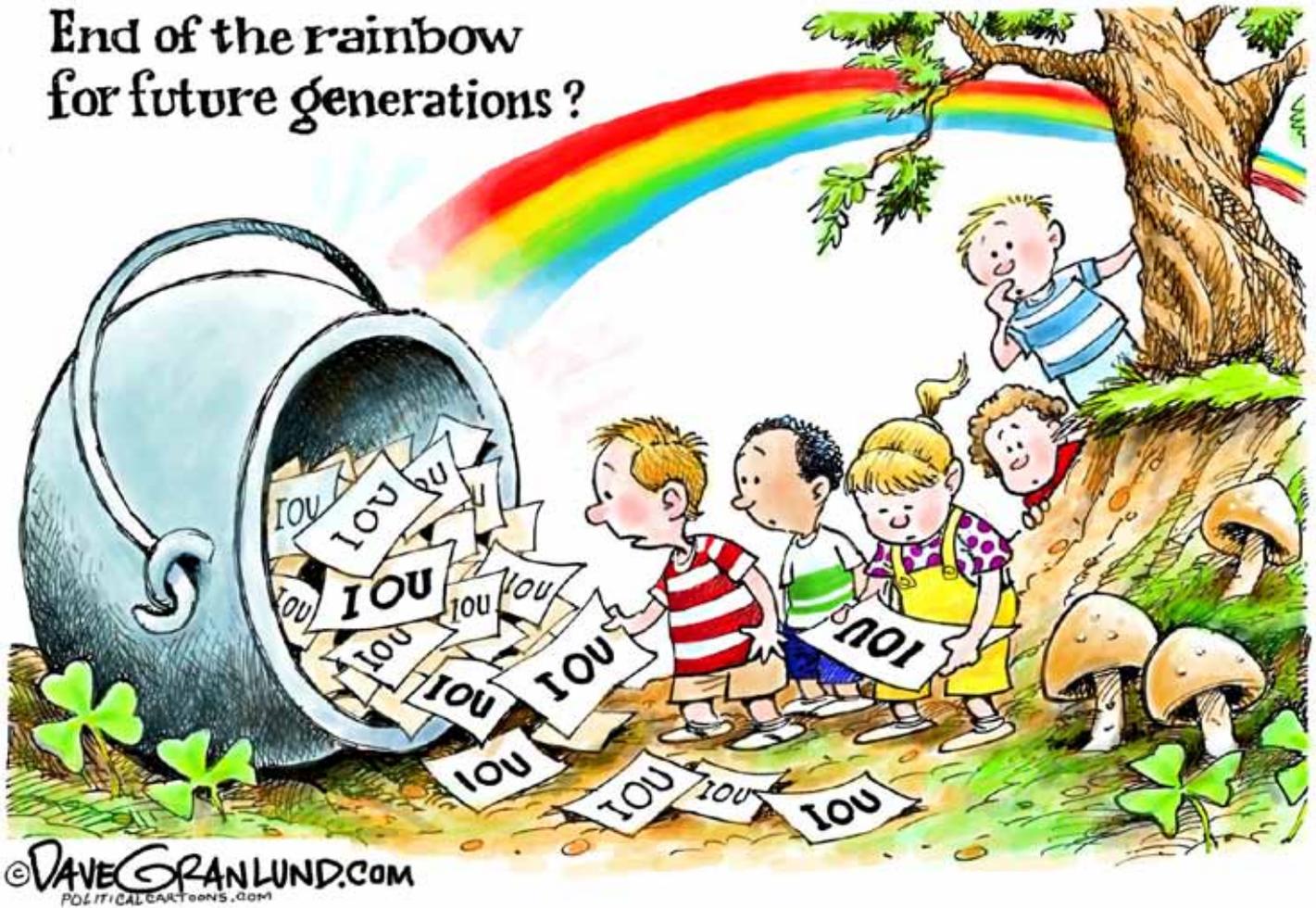
And set legislative compensation at a level intended to attract the best and brightest among us.

Three simple steps, not easily achieved.



The American
Dream Starts
@ your library

End of the rainbow for future generations ?



A Children's Agenda For The New Year

BY JOE DORMAN

For those who are involved in politics and policy at the Oklahoma Capitol, 2017 feels like the year that will never end. Special legislative sessions, elusive budget deals, and an early start to political campaigning have given this year an endless “Ground Hog Day” vibe that makes it seem like 2018 exists only in the distant future.

Nevertheless, the New Year is practically here, and it may surprise the public to learn that the bill-filing deadline for the 2018 legislative session is Dec. 8. Bills filed before the deadline do not necessarily need to be in their detailed, final form; most are “shell bills” that simply identify a topic.

In that spirit, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy has identified five priority areas we hope our lawmakers make the focal point of their legislation, including:

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Oklahoma needs to reduce its very high poverty rate. Restoring the Earned Income Tax Credit will

provide immediate relief to low-income families.

Protecting access to health care, especially for children, by fully funding SoonerCare should be a budgeting priority as well. This is especially important on the state level given ongoing fears of federal cuts to the Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP]. Bolstering public education [starting with a teacher pay raise] will also help shore up services that low-income families rely upon.

FOSTER CARE, ADOPTION, CHILD WELFARE

Oklahoma's “Pinnacle Plan” – the reform agenda designed to correct longstanding problems within the Department of Human Services' child welfare division – has been successful at reducing caseloads for social workers, contributing to a safer and more stable environment for children.

Severe and chronic underfunding at DHS, however, means the agency is constantly a threat to regress. To prevent that from happening, legislators must give DHS the resources it needs to hire, train and retain

quality social workers.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Oklahoma has the highest female incarceration rate in the developed world and the No. 2 male incarceration rate in the nation.

Our outdated criminal justice policies are breaking up families, creating cyclical poverty and costing taxpayers a fortune. Fines and fees have created virtual "debtors prisons," over-stuffed and dangerous facilities that warehouse Oklahomans for non-violent crimes and separate them from their families and their jobs.

We need common sense reforms that keep families together and redirect non-violent criminals away from long stints in prison.

RACE EQUITY

Like most places in the country, children of color face disadvantages and challenges that their white peers do not.

While almost two-thirds of white children come from families making more than 200% of the federal poverty level, for instance, the same is true for just 37% of African American children, 36% of Native American children and 33% of Hispanic children.

Legislators should examine ways of closing that race gap, focusing on improving outcomes [and funding levels] at public schools.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Research continues to support the notion that Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACE] – which include things like exposure to poverty, domestic violence or substance abuse at a young age – can be debilitating events that need specific, trauma-informed care.

OICA supports providing education and health care professionals with greater training and resources regarding ACEs and Trauma Informed Care.

Many of the concepts listed above were topics of conversation at the 2017 KIDS COUNT Conference, hosted by OICA and attended by hundreds of child advocates.

Another theme at the conference was the need to brand 2018 as "The Year of the Child," a 365-day reminder that we should all be working towards solutions that help our youngest residents.

That idea is being embraced by a growing list of organizations working to re-focus our politics and public policy in a way that benefits children.

If you have ideas of your own regarding problems facing our state, please contact your state legislators as soon as possible. You can find their contact information at OICA.org under our legislative link.

Also, we would appreciate it if you would post on the OICA Facebook page at

<https://www.facebook.com/OICAKidsCount/> and our Twitter account @OklaChildAdv with your solutions.

If we start the positive dialogue now, we can help ensure 2018 is a productive legislative session that improves child well-being for years to come. Former state Rep. Joe Dorman is CEO of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.



CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
COMMUNITY
ACUPUNCTURE
An Affordable Good Health Practice

Karen Wilson, M.Ac.

2525 Northwest Expressway
Suite 201
Oklahoma City, OK 73112
405.255-3193



Ofi House Family Lodging and Rental

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

FEATURES

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

FOR RATES & AVAILABILITY

www.theofihouse.com
918.457.5886
kalyn@theofihouse.com

Find us on





Prison Facilities, Equipment Reflect Years Of Neglect

BY MIKE W. RAY

Oklahoma's prison system is outdated, underfunded and overextended, as demonstrated by the second consecutive request by Corrections Department Director Joe Allbaugh for a budget of \$1 billion-plus.

Oklahoma consistently has one of the highest incarceration rates in the nation.

The total convict population numbered 62,601 on Nov. 27. That included 26,658 incarcerated inmates [16,896 locked in state facilities, which were at 112% of rated capacity; 2,044 inmates in community corrections; 585 inmates at the Lexington Assessment and Reception Center; 5,879 inmates in private prisons; 1,239 in halfway houses; and 15 in county jails under contract between the DOC and the county]; 349 prisoners who were hospitalized or "outside the walls" for some other reason; 1,282 convicts confined in county jails while awaiting transfer to the state prison system; and 34,312 convicts in "community supervision" programs such as wearing GPS tracking

devices or on probation or parole.

The Nov. 27 head count showed an increase of 411 inmates from 4½ months earlier, on July 10. In fact, the convict population reached a record 63,000 on Aug. 31 but gradually declined over the next three months. Oklahoma's prison system count was 55,244 two years ago today – indicating an increase of 7,357 convicts in the last 24 months.

The Legislature has mandated stiffer penalties for numerous offenses, and adds to the list of crimes every year. The 2017 regular legislative session was no exception; at least three measures created new offenses for which a violator can be sent to jail.

Even with a GOP supermajority in both houses of the 149-member Oklahoma Legislature, Republican Gov. Mary Fallin got merely a fraction of her criminal justice reform measures enacted this year – because of the obstructionist tactics of one Republican state Representative who had the tacit approval of the Republican Speaker of the House.

Meanwhile, the appropriation from the Legislature to the Department of Corrections [DOC] is actually less today than it was 10 years ago.

According to the House of Representatives' Fiscal Division, the DOC received an appropriation of \$482.6 million in FY '08. The appropriation for FY '17 [which ended June 30] was originally \$484.9 million; however, ledgers reflect, legislators siphoned off more than \$4 million of that to help plug another gaping hole in the state budget, leaving the DOC with a net appropriation of \$480 million.

Largely because of staffing shortages and comparatively low pay, the turnover rate last year among all corrections department staff was 21%; among correctional officers the turnover rate was 25%. Records indicate that more than two-thirds of the agency's correctional officers have less than five years of service with the department.

The agency's health-care costs are rising as the prison population ages because of lengthier sentences.

In a related matter, six months ago an estimated 14,461 prison inmates were deemed to be in need of mental health services. That was an increase of 3,402 [or 30%] over the number of Oklahoma prisoners who were considered in need of mental health services at the end of FY '11, records reflect.

In addition, the DOC's capital requirements continue to grow. Maintenance, repairs and replacement of infrastructure and equipment have been deferred or ignored for several years to support operations.

"The days of baling wire and pliers are over," Allbaugh said.

The Board of Corrections voted Tuesday to request \$1.53 billion – an increase of more than \$1 billion over the current appropriation – for FY '19 [July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019].

The extra revenue would include funds to build two medium-security prisons, each with a capacity of 2,000 beds, one institution for men and the other for women; \$10 million to finance a 5% across-the-board pay raise for agency employees; \$3 million for education, substance-abuse treatment and re-entry programs for convicts; \$6.7 million to boost compensation rates for the agency's medical, mental health and dental care providers; and \$5 million to expand the agency's fleet of vehicles and to replace vehicles whose odometers average more than 200,000 miles.

The department has 24 institutions, but only eight of them were designed to house inmates, the agency reports. Furthermore, several of the institutions are aged, and capital improvements needed at existing facilities are estimated at more than \$141 million.

- The biggest single item is \$22 million for an electronic, computerized offender management system.

The Corrections Department still relies on paperwork for much of what it does daily – which explains in part why a 1½ years the agency had an estimated 400,000 paper files, some dating back to the 1920s, that it was wading through, converting into digital

files.

One private-sector company advertises computer software "to manage the offender lifecycle from intake to release." It tracks functions such as amounts spent on inmate health care, measuring capacity, calculating staffing ratios, and maintaining up-to-date records on all inmates.

A performance audit of the Corrections Department that was conducted by the office of State Auditor and Inspector Gary Jones for the period July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2013 concluded that the agency's Offender Management System [OMS] "suffers from numerous inadequacies."

Among the myriad shortcomings identified by the audit: the OMS "cannot project accurate" inmate release dates, will not prompt case managers when inmate assessments are due or when an offender becomes eligible for lower security placement, does not automatically update a convict's age on his/her birthday, is not "user friendly," freezes and regularly "kicks users out" of the system, experiences "functional inconsistency" because its "usability" depends on the time of day or number of users who are logged on at any given time, the list of an offender's crimes does not include recent incidents, data files can be easily overwritten inadvertently, and the system is prone to input errors.

- The state penitentiary at McAlester, the oldest Corrections Department facility, is a prime example of neglect. The maximum-security institution was built in 1908.

"Big Mac" needs more than \$14 million worth of improvements, Allbaugh said. Those include \$5.5 million for lock, door and frame replacement throughout the prison; new water, sewer and gas lines; \$275,000 worth of electrical repairs; a new air conditioning system; and road repairs.

- The Jackie Brannon Correctional Center, a minimum-security institution also located at McAlester that houses more than 700 male inmates, needs \$17 million in improvements, DOC reports.

That includes a new water treatment plant; \$4 million for electrical and HVAC [heating, ventilation and air conditioning] systems; \$555,000 for roofing replacement; \$715,000 for laundry repairs; \$4.4 million for a restricted housing unit; and \$385,000 for emergency power generators.

- The Mack Alford Correctional Center at Stringtown, which opened in 1973, needs at least \$7 million worth of improvements: \$3.3 million for lock and panel replacement in its housing unit, \$2.75 million for a water treatment plant, \$676,000 for "stun" fencing, \$220,000 for land application of its wastewater, and \$59,700 for roof replacement. Warden Kameron Harvanek told the Board of Corrections that the water storage tank at Mack Alford has holes that are plugged with a mop handle and a toothbrush.

- The Lexington Assessment & Reception Center is in need of various improvements costing approximately \$24.8 million. Those include: \$17.35 million

for a restricted housing unit; \$3.7 million to repair/replace valves, piping and ventilation in the mechanical room; water lines costing more than \$900,000, plus \$110,000 for a water softener on one of the institution's wells and \$171,600 to recondition the water tower; \$462,000 for new roofing; \$330,000 in electrical repairs; \$550,000 for a new phone system; \$1 million for a "stun" fence, plus \$55,000 for a perimeter fence; and \$165,000 to replace emergency generators.

- Joseph Harp Correctional Center at Lexington, a medium-security facility that opened in 1978 and houses 1,400 inmates, is in need of more than \$11 million in capital improvements, Allbaugh said. Those include \$3.74 million to replace the locks, doors and frames of inmate cells; \$3.7 million to replace valves, pipes and ventilation in the mechanical room; \$715,000 for a heating/cooling water and domestic hot water system; \$748,000 for new roofing; \$330,000 for electrical system repairs; \$550,000 for a new telephone system; \$176,000 for a sewage lagoon and a wastewater land application system; \$132,000 to recondition the institution's water tower; and \$1.23 million for a "stun" fence.

- The 108-year-old State Reformatory at Granite needs at least \$2.1 million in improvements: \$1.1 million to replace the water tower, \$429,000 to install new roofing, \$187,660 to replace gas lines, \$220,000 to update an access control system, and \$198,000 to replace Weatherbee panels.

- William S. Key Correctional Center at Fort Supply needs more than \$18 million worth of improvements, corrections officials report. Those include \$6.6 million for transformer and electrical service, \$4.4 million for a boiler and chiller, \$4.4 million for a restricted housing unit, \$2.2 million for roof repairs, \$550,000 for a telephone system, and \$208,000 for a fire alarm system.

- Jim Hamilton Correctional Center at Hodgen, a facility that opened in 1969, needs \$4.4 million for a restricted housing unit, a new phone system priced at \$440,000, and \$440,000 to replace the roof over the gymnasium.

- Mabel Bassett, a female medium/minimum security facility at McLoud, needs \$2.17 million in roof repairs, \$1.2 million to update an access control system, \$198,000 for an intercom system and \$198,000 to replace Weatherbee panels.

- Dick Connor Correctional Center, a medium-security institution housing about 1,200 men, requires at least \$6.9 million in repairs, officials contend. Those include \$3.7 million to replace valves, pipes and ventilation in the mechanical room; \$1.1 million to install new roofs; \$715,000 for a heating/cooling water system and for domestic hot water; \$550,000 for a new telephone system; \$550,000 to improve the plumbing and wastewater collection/disposal system; \$139,150 to renovate an access control system; and \$165,000 to repair or replace the main power generator. The Hominy institution opened 38 years ago, in 1979.

- The Dr. Eddie Warrior minimum security facility for women, at Taft, needs \$1.65 million to buy some emergency power generators, \$633,500 in roof repairs, \$550,000 for a new telephone system, \$33,000 to remove a water tower, \$715,000 to replace the auditorium roof and a wall, and \$46,200 to replace soffits and the roof at the administration building.

- James Crabtree Correctional Center at Helena, which opened in 1982, needs \$677,000 for roof repairs, \$550,000 for a telephone system, \$165,000 for a heating/ventilation/air conditioning system, \$582,000 for a "stun" fence, \$278,000 to update two access control systems, \$330,000 to replace two emergency power generators, and \$198,000 to replace Weatherbee panels.

- The Kate Barnard Center in Oklahoma City, which opened 40 years ago, needs \$247,500 to repair the roof and \$220,000 in electrical repairs, the Corrections Department reports.

- Jess Dunn Correctional Center at Taft needs to update its access control system, at a cost of \$139,150; repair and paint its water tower, at an estimated cost of \$247,500; and replace Weatherbee panels, at a cost of \$198,000.

- Howard McLeod center in Atoka needs \$99,000 to recondition its water storage tower, \$165,000 to install emergency power generators, \$139,000 to update an access control system, and \$198,000 to replace Weatherbee panels.

- John H. Lilley Correctional Center at Boley needs \$4.4 million to develop a restricted housing unit, \$1.8 million worth of new roofing, and \$99,000 to recondition its water storage tank.

- The Oklahoma City Community Corrections Center, near the I-235 and I-44 interchange, needs \$385,000 for some power generators and \$41,580 for soffit and roof repairs to the administration building.

- The Northeast Oklahoma Correctional Center at Vinita needs \$638,000 worth of roof repairs, and Bill Johnson Correctional Center at Alva needs electrical upgrades costing an estimated \$132,000.

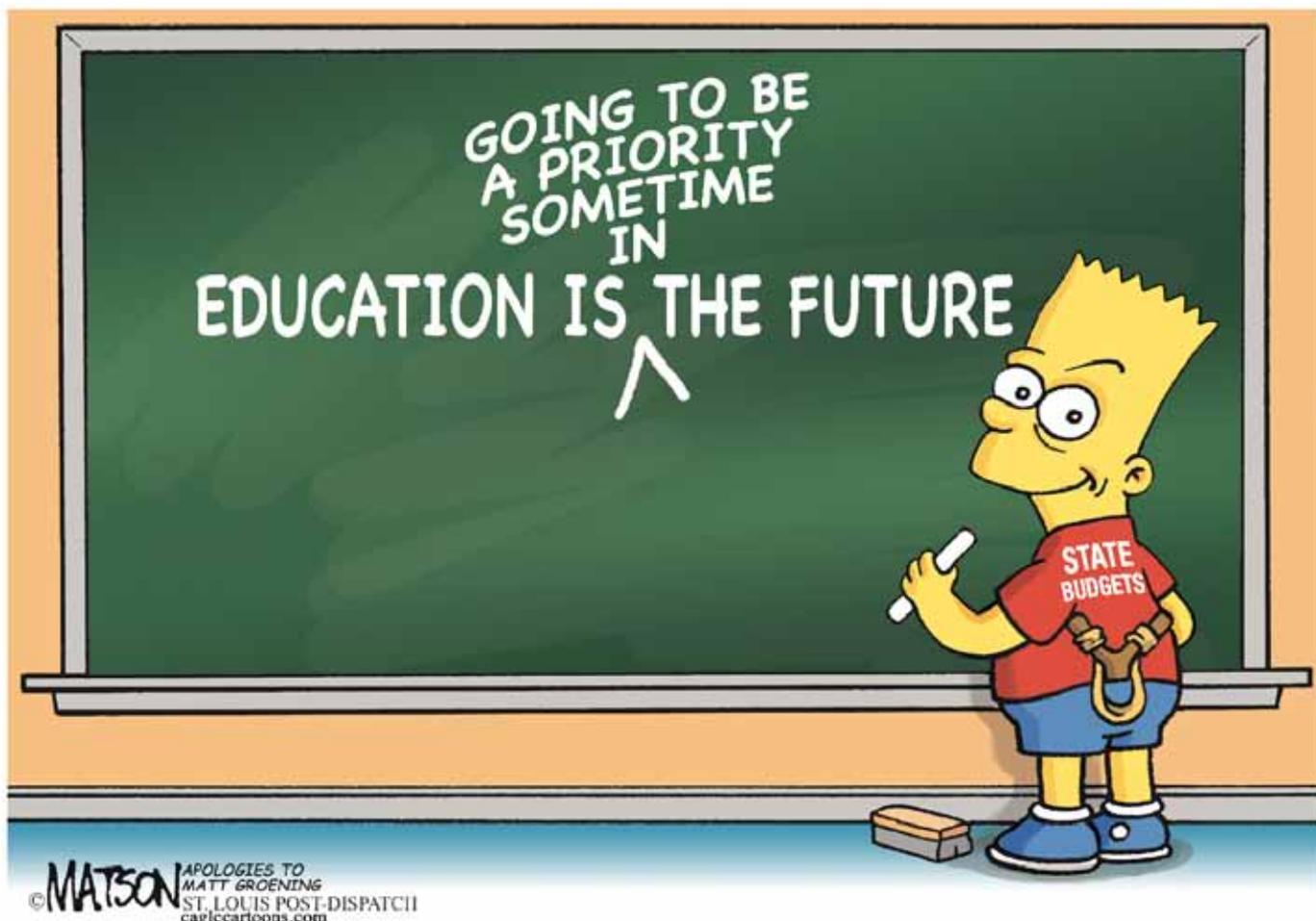
Mike W. Ray retired earlier this year after a 45-year career as a journalist on newspapers in Oklahoma and Texas, two years in public relations with Southwestern Bell Telephone, plus 19 years as a media director at the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

Deborah Astley

Summersgaze
Cdstley@aol.com

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

Visit my shop on line at:
www.spoonflower.com/profiles/anniedeb



All Generalizations Are False

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

Mark Twain often quipped that “if you don’t read the newspaper you are uninformed, and if you do you are misinformed.” Along these same lines, he remarked that, “All generalizations are false, including this one.”

Americans are a better people because of Mark Twain and the slightly cynical, but always spirited insight that he relayed to us. His observations make us engage in critical thinking and realize the danger of closing the book on any subject.

A favorite quote often attributed to Mark Twain is, “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you in trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.” Well, Oklahoma is in trouble and Twain the philosopher hit the nail on the head.

Last month Gov. Mary Fallin perpetuated the false narrative that Oklahoma’s public schools are somehow to blame for the state’s budget crisis. Her executive order directing annexation or consolidation of public school districts and district administration is the classic example of repeating an untrue statement long enough that people start to believe it.

The constant battering of Oklahoma’s schools is a favorite pastime of those groups who have longed sought to undermine public education in favor of private schools, charter schools and voucher programs that direct public tax dollars to corporate interests.

Those anti-public education forces continue to allege that Oklahoma has too many school districts; or too much of Oklahoma’s education budget goes toward the costs of administration; or school administration consolidation and school district annexation is the solution to increasing teacher pay.

There is no factual basis for those statements. In fact, those statements are unequivocally false.

We need not go further than the Red River to discover the truth. Time and again, Texas is held up as an example of educational efficiency. While Texas does have 5.1 million students and only 1,233 school districts, that has little to do with efficiency. More than half [2.6 million] Texas students are in only 49 school districts while the other 2.5 million students are in 1,178 districts and 35% of all Texas school districts have an enrollment of less than 500 students.

A February 2006 post-consolidation study by the Texas Public Policy Foundation regarding the relationship between school district consolidation and public school efficiency was weak at best and anti-theoretical at worst. Research furnished little evidence that consolidation controls costs or improves academic achievement.

The most enlightening part of the study concluded that small schools provide greater educational benefit than their large school counterparts and that researchers found large schools and districts have more bureaucratic and administrative costs while experiencing lower attendance, lower grade point averages, lower standardized test scores, higher dropout rates, and more problems with violence, security, and drug abuse.

The study cited a 2005 Deloitte Research and Reason Foundation paper that found that nationwide as the number of school districts declined more than 60% from 1960 to 1984, the need for school administration grew 500%. The need for additional principals grew 79% while the number of classroom teachers only grew 57%.

One can easily conclude that Oklahoma's public school models and the costs of administration for our 681,848 students attending 517 schools tend to

be much preferable to the Texas plan and we don't even have to cross state lines to find our efficiencies.

Oklahoma's rural schools [the ones targeted by the false narrative that our state has too many school districts] educate students much more economically, in some cases 35% to 40 % less in per pupil expenditures than metropolitan large school districts.

Finally, Oklahoma's public schools graduate 85% of their students, nearly 5% greater than the national average, while education spending remains at 48th among all states and the District of Columbia.

Educating children is expensive. In fact, about the only thing more expensive than educating children is not educating them. This is not a new concept.

Mark Twain famously said, "Every time you stop a school, you will have to build a jail. What you gain at one end you lose at the other. It's like feeding a dog on his own tail. It won't fatten the dog."

If Oklahoma wants to improve the efficiencies and performance of its schools, then it needs to elect legislators who are willing to fund them at levels that will return qualified teachers to the classroom and provide textbooks that are not obsolete and ragged.

David Perryman, a Chickasha Democrat, represents District 56 in the Oklahoma House. More of his essays can be found at okobserver.org.

An Unfortunate Victim Of Oklahoma's Budget Gridlock

BY GENE PERRY

In 2016, Oklahoma lawmakers were struggling to pass a state budget amid a massive revenue shortfall. Sound familiar?

One of the measures taken by lawmakers in that year to fill their shortfall was making Oklahoma's Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC] non-refundable. The EITC is a tax credit designed to incentivize work and keep low-income working families out of poverty. It grows along with wage income up to a maximum level and then phases out gradually, so it never becomes a disincentive to earning more wage income.

Making the EITC non-refundable in 2016 saved about \$25 million for the state budget, but only by undercutting a key poverty-fighting tool with a long history of bipartisan support and proven, long-lasting benefits for entire families.

Refundability is critical to the success of the EITC because it allows the credit to reward work even if families have small state income tax bills – yet these families are all paying sales taxes, payroll taxes, and, directly or indirectly, property taxes as well.

Without refundability, the EITC does far less to reduce poverty for those workers earning the least.

For example, a single mother with two kids working full-time at \$10 an hour [\$20,800 annually] lost \$231 when the state EITC was made non-refundable. A married couple with three children making \$20,800 lost \$313.

When lawmakers were debating their cut to the EITC, dozens of clergy, non-profits, and foundation leaders spoke out to defend it. Since the cut went through, the Legislature has faced backlash in Oklahoma and nationally.

In a scathing editorial, the New York Times wrote that the measure "cruelly targeted some of the state's most vulnerable citizens – the working poor – by cutting an average \$147 a year from the income of 200,000 households."

Several members of the Legislature expressed regret over their vote, and many members promised to fight for restoring the EITC in coming years.

Bipartisan consensus behind the EITC helped make sure that restoring the credit was included in House and Senate budget plans in the last few weeks of special session. It has been perhaps the only uncontroversial element of a package that also included in-

creasing the cigarette tax, fuel tax, and most recently, the gross production tax on oil and gas drilling.

Unfortunately, the narrow failure of the overall package appears to have taken the EITC down with it.

Unless a deal can be resurrected, working families will go another year without the full benefit of the state EITC. They will have less incentive to work – and may actually find it impossible to work when the low wages offered aren't enough to make up for added child care costs.

Those parents who are still working will have less to pay down debts or save for the future, which means their long-term ability to rise and stay out of poverty will be compromised.

It will make all of the problems facing poor and working-class Oklahomans just that much harder.

That's a shame, because lawmakers from both parties clearly want to undo this damage and restore the EITC. Instead of what the majority wants, the EITC has become another victim of Oklahoma's extreme super-majority requirements and a few holdout legislators who are blocking the popular will.

Restoring the EITC is another reason why lawmakers should keep the pressure on to change the last few votes needed for the comprehensive solution that Oklahomans want.

Gene Perry is policy director of Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

Eastern Flyer's Time Is Now

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

An Amtrak train left OKC's Santa Fe station and headed for Kansas City one Friday morning last June. On this train were officials from BNSF Railway, Amtrak, and Oklahoma. Called an inspection tour, it made various stops on the way through Oklahoma, Kansas and into Missouri.

There was much hoopla for this train trip. Hope was riding on it for an expanded route connecting Ft. Worth through OKC and Wichita to Kansas City. Concern was expressed, however, that Tulsa would be cut out of a regional commuter train network.

Let's look at some significant facts. The daily Heartland Flyer service route from OKC to Ft. Worth was continued last year, but Amtrak asked for the Heartland Flyer to grow for it to survive; ridership has not increased significantly in the last few years.

On the other hand, both the Oklahoma and Texas Departments of Transportation [ODOT and TxDOT, respectively] continue to urge Amtrak to provide more investment incentives in return for their annual contributions.

So do we grow our patronage of the Heartland Flyer or wait for Amtrak to incentivize Oklahoma ridership in the face of its own declining federal subsidy?

Maybe we need to request aid from the Oklahoma cities and even our Indian nations to help us all in growing the ridership.

The recent inspection trip was a wake-up call for many in our state, a magnificent opportunity to create a regional passenger rail service going from Ft. Worth to OKC to Wichita, stopping at key Oklahoma communities along the way. The train would then go north 20 miles to Newton, KS, where the Southwest Chief heads north to Chicago or southwest to L.A.

For Green Country, the Eastern Flyer could connect Tulsa to OKC where the Heartland Flyer could be taken to Kansas City or to Ft. Worth. Two-thirds of Oklahomans reside in the two largest metro areas.

There was some concern when the inspection train made its June 9 run: Could Tulsa be excluded from a

possible regional commuter rail service? Of course it could, but I hope Tulsa decides to become a vital part of any regional passenger rail service. Such a system can accommodate a Tulsa connection, but not unless the city negotiates with BNSF and the state to utilize the 99-year Buyers' Passenger Rights Agreement that includes four daily trains through the Cherokee rail yard in Sapulpa.

For the Eastern Flyer to operate, however, stops in the downtown Tulsa area must be identified and developed and, most important, a loading platform/station location identified and, if necessary, constructed.

Good crowds reportedly turned out at the stops on the inspection tour. Hopefully they made a positive impact on Amtrak, BNSF and state officials. That should indicate that people strongly support train service.

Now is the time for Tulsa to get involved. If Green Country wants passenger train service again, we have to contact the new Tulsa mayor, G.T. Bynum, and the Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce.

In these times of budget shortfalls, Gov. Mary Fallin is the most important elected official for state budget allocation. Since a federal funding source is critical for a regional passenger railway, our U.S. senators, Jim Inhofe and James Lankford, can play as strong a role as U.S. Reps. Jim Bridenstine and Markwayne Mullin.

For those with a passion for public transit, I highly recommend reading *Straphanger* by Taras Grescoe, who makes an elegant and impassioned case for the end of the car culture and the emerging transportation revolution.

We in Oklahoma and the U.S. need to play catch-up. What are we waiting for? Let's restart passenger rail service and ride to a brighter and safer future. *Oologah resident Bob D. Rounsavell is president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation. His wife, Paz Maria Rounsavell, serves as his editor.*

PUBLIC FORUM



My '#MeToo' Story

BY DONNA COMPTON

The #MeToo movement has prompted many people to tell a bit of their stories. I have answered a number of those posts and, unfortunately, I have kept track of how many I have done and I have not referred to the same incident twice.

When I was first divorced and moved back to OKC from Arkansas, the state trooper who had lived next door before the move called me and wanted me to get a friend so that we could go out with his buddy. His wife was a friend and my marriage had ended because of my husband's infidelities. No chance I was going to do that to another woman. I was repulsed by the idea.

When I sold advertising, there were a couple of clients who were always trying to coerce a tryst of some sort. In politics, there was one organizational rep who would come across a crowded room to pinch my backside. No matter how big the crowd, I always had to have one eye on him so I could deftly move out of his way.

Occasionally, though, it was possible to deliver a bit of poetic justice.

When I ran for Congress in 1986, I made a required trip to gain the blessing of the 5th District chairman, D.R. [initials, not to protect the guilty, but for

expediency], who lived in a tiny town north of the city. He owned the only bank in town and threw a barbeque for the whole town every year.

Prior experience had already alerted me to this man's racist and disrespectful behavior. During the 1984 5th District convention, he had sent the gathering into an uproar by saying, "Now you Hart supporters move to this side and you blacks move to that side [the Rainbow Coalition supporters of Jesse Jackson were every color, in spite of his prejudiced perception]."

He was a thoroughly disgusting man and his face looked like nine miles of bad road, etched by too much alcohol and too many cigars and cigarettes for too many years.

Doug, my young assistant, and my daughter, Sara, then eight, dutifully went to the barbeque. Shortly after we arrived, D.R. invited us into his bank. Behind his huge desk were pictures of him shaking hands with an array of luminaries – all white and all male.

We sat in front of his desk for a few minutes before he asked Sara and Doug to stay there and said that he had something he wanted to show me. He hurried off down a hallway close by and, as I rounded the corner, he was standing there blocking my way,

PUBLIC FORUM

grabbed me, and crammed his tongue down my throat in seconds.

There was no opportunity to rebuff this advance – it was over before I could adjust to it happening.

I turned on my heels and, inwardly shaking with revulsion, went back to where Doug and Sara were sitting. Giant question marks on Doug and Sara's faces clued me in to the fact that I needed to put my game face back on, which I did.

We went to the barbecue, which was just outside the bank. D.R.'s wife and grown children, and their children, were all there. D.R., with proprietary pleasure, introduced me to a number of people, none of whom I remembered for more than the two seconds it took to go to the next one.

As soon as good manners permitted, we returned to OKC.

Although there was no lower-body contact in this encounter, it felt like a rape with the accompanying flashbacks and shudders of revulsion [all of which I had, unfortunately, experienced before]. I concluded that the attack was his way of showing his power over me – I was not a well-heeled white man he could shake hands with and exert his influence over. The one way he knew to have power over a woman was through forcefully, physically overpowering her.

Throughout the campaign, he would call me and tell me he was coming to the city for one thing or another and would like to meet me for dinner. I deftly defused these requests by telling him I wasn't sure whether Doug or David [another supporter] would be available to meet with us, but I would check.

He would hem and haw and either say “never mind” or, if we actually set a time and place, he would call and cancel when he knew that others would be with me.

Fast forward to the next election cycle, which starts almost immediately after the previous one is over. Precinct meetings, district meetings, and state meetings began in the spring and concluded a few months later.

I was determined this man would not be able to exert power in this way again – I would unseat him. However, running against him was almost certain to fail.

Instead of that, I started calling women in the party who had also worked closely with him. I simply asked them what they thought of D.R. and how he had behaved toward them and the stories spilled out, one after another.

After about half a dozen of these calls, I called them back and told them of my plan, asking for their help. Some were reluctant; he was a power broker, after all. But when I told them this would not require them to confront him directly, they all agreed to help.

I asked about possible candidates who could actually defeat him. One of them suggested Alan Synar, the brother of well-respected U.S. Rep. Mike Synar. I called Alan, told him the situation, and asked him if he would consider running. After some thought [and I imagine a consult with his brother] he agreed. I told him that he and I would have very little contact in person so that D.R. would never make the connection between us and be alerted to what was coming. He agreed.

The half dozen or so women I had identified picked up the battle from there, all willing to call friends, some of whom also had negative experiences with D.R. I asked that they not make their support of Alan known in large groups – just calling and speaking with individual people behind the scene. Turns out D.R. actually had a lot of people, male and female, who were more than ready to see him ousted.

The 5th District convention was held in a motel banquet room north of the city. When I arrived, I went in and spoke to several people, nodding to D.R. but keeping my distance. By this time D.R. knew that Alan was running against him.

Full of bluster, he was telling anyone who would listen that he was bemused by this, in a very patronizing way, but was glad to see “that fine young man” get involved – test his wings for the first time. He seemed very confident that he would prevail but was tolerant of the opposition, probably because of Alan's connection to a sitting congressman.

I was moving among a group of the women who had helped and a variety of other people, all covert allies. We were doing the standard friendly schmoozing required for such a gathering.

Then Alan walked into the room. Everything got quiet as he walked directly across the room to me. We shook hands and then a friendly hug. The look on D.R.'s face was worth every minute of effort so many had put into that moment. He knew he was “had.”

Alan continued moving around the group, shaking hands and visiting. The time to convene the meeting came and, after a perfunctory opening, we divided into caucuses.

As the caucus supporting Alan grew and grew, D.R.'s face reddened, and reddened, and reddened. I was concerned for his health – not much but a little.

When we reconvened for what promised to be an interesting floor fight, he declared to the group that he was going to bow out and let the “fine young man” take the office without contest.

One down. Ah, sweet justice.
Donna Compton, who earned a Master of Divinity from Phillips Seminary, retired in 2016 after 14 years as a hospital chaplain. DR died in 2014. Synar was presiding municipal judge in Edmond when he died in 2011.

A Republic ... If You Can Keep It

BY HAL SPAKE

There are three esoteric threats facing our country.

The first, according to U.S. military strategists, is climate change.

Although the affects of increased carbon in the atmosphere was first proposed in 1824 by Joseph Fourier, some in our country have turned their backs on strategic military assessments and scientific findings that affirm man-made climate change. Their continued denial endangers not only our republic but also the survival of our species.

The second is national debt.

"If you want to see the future look behind you." – Margaret Atwood

While National Security Advisor under President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that military support of the Mujahideen would over-stretch the Soviet Union's army and bankrupt its economy. It did.

Our leaders seem unable to look at the collapse of previous empires or even remember recent events like the implosion of the Soviet Union and continue to promote and fund wars fought on credit.

The U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the subsequent "W" Bush tax cuts, increased the national debt by \$1.5 trillion between 2002-11 and set us on the same path the Soviets walked before their empire disintegrated and Russia emerged as a kleptocratic oligarchy.

By the end of this year the tax cuts under President "W" Bush have increased the debt by \$3 trillion and we are still fighting two unpaid wars. Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs estimates the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost \$5 trillion and that excludes the \$1 billion a year it cost to care for veterans.

Eight trillion dollars of our \$13.6 trillion national debt is due to unfunded wars and military spending adds \$600 billion, six tenths of a trillion a year to that debt.

Their actions continue to chip away at our republic's existence as new wars, against North Korea, Iran and Venezuela, are marketed, and new tax cuts are proposed. Meanwhile politicians and pundits say the debt is caused by entitlement programs such as health care, social security, public schools, highways and civil servant retirement benefits and ignore the true cause: war spending, and tax cuts.

The third threat is wealth inequality, which leads to justice, housing, opportunity and educational inequality.

Thomas Jefferson said wealth inequality produced

so much misery that legislators could not invent the many devices needed for subdividing property to prevent the accumulation of excessive wealth.

Tax cuts, beginning with Ronald Reagan, have resulted in massive increases in the national debt and a devastating upward redistribution of wealth from workers into the hands of the privileged few, who now own many lawmakers. This trend continues today as politicians continue to espouse the principles of Supply Side [trickle-down] economics, a thoroughly debunked school of thought.

Politicians are now parroting the idea that certain entities [corporations – defined as people by the Citizens United ruling] should enjoy a special tax rate lower than actual people with overseas incomes.

Money is power and corporations with their vast accumulated wealth pose a special threat to our Republic. Unlike living people they don't die and their wealth can't be broken up. Billionaires, with their accumulated wealth, are also a threat, but at least they die and thanks to the estate tax some dismantling of wealth and power does occur.

Our country faces other threats too, but for the most part those are nuisances, rather than existential threats.

If climate change, debt/war and wealth inequality are not addressed, our republic is doomed.

Hal Spake has worked for the National Security Agency and is a retired U.S. diplomat. He is chairman of Common Cause Oklahoma and a board member of Americans Against the Next War.

Rejecting Racism, Bigotry And Hate

BY BOB BEARDEN

All the political pundits say we probably shouldn't read too much of a trend as a takeaway from the recent elections in Virginia and across the nation. At least, they are saying we shouldn't look upon this as a groundswell for the Democrats. And they are probably correct somewhat in that assessment but nevertheless there was a definite trend from the east coast to the west coast.

Washington State turned the west coast of our nation blue from Monterey to Vancouver and that

is a good sign that people are rejecting Trumpism. The election one year ago gave the GOP total control of our government but because they tied their fortunes to a misogynistic serial groper who has no real policy other than me-first they have proven once again that they don't know how to govern with any degree of clarity or purpose.

But they are, let's face it, the party of no. They have become so practiced at saying no that they don't know how to say yes, we can, because they can't even mouth that word effectively. And tying themselves to a candidate that they hated has mired them in the quagmire he has created for them and they can't get focused on what needs to be done because their mantra is and has been for a long time destroy, destroy, destroy.

You can't govern a nation by destroying everything it stands for and they have for the last eight years stood foursquare against every attempt at progress. They have worked hard at undoing every bit of social progress that this nation has enacted over the past 80-plus years. You must govern from a position that makes things work and show that you have a sense of what real progress should be about. They have no sense of progress because they have only wanted to destroy progress, not enable it. And now they have embraced a man who wants us to go back to the good old days that were never good, to an era in which hate, fear and bigotry reigned. He seeks to destroy every single facet of social progress this nation has been able to produce over the past 80 years.

The Republican Party is fast becoming a party that embraces fear, hate and bigotry and ideology, and policies that embolden those on the fringes of our society who wish to see us return to the days when fear, racism, hate and bigotry were used by politicians to keep minorities, women and those on the lower ends of the economic scales from realizing the American Dream.

They embrace junk science and deny that climate change is real. They continue to pay homage to a failed ideology that embraced the enslavement of millions of Americans. They seek to cut off a path to citizenship for millions of hardworking productive members of our society. They want to enact tax reform that will benefit only the wealthiest among us.

If recent elections said anything, they said people are tired of them good ol' days and want no part of a mantra that embraces racism, hate, bigotry and fear. They want real progress that offers paths for all the people of this nation, not just a privileged few.

These recent elections rejected Trumpism and his divisive politics that embrace racism, hatred, bigotry and fear, on a large scale.

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

Where We Are

BY SHARON MARTIN

On the day after Thanksgiving, Americans eat leftovers and buy stuff. It is the leftovers that make the day different from any other, because someone, somewhere, is looking for a way to part you with your money every day of the year.

We worship wealth. Our president has no other qualification for office. Not one. He's mean spirited, and like a lot of manipulators, he's easily manipulated.

He is what pure capitalism looks like.

If you don't install brakes on a car, the car will kill you. If we don't install brakes on capitalism, it will kill our country.

We call universal healthcare socialism, and we let people die. They die from lack of preventive care. They die from lack of mental health services. They die because they can't afford to go to the doctor when the sickness is still treatable.

Those who have been conditioned by the word socialism keep on voting for the most expensive, most rationed healthcare in the industrialized world.

We call public education a liberal plot. When only rich people's kids are educated, we will have a Third World country, the dark ages, nobles and serfs.

When only those who can afford their own lawyers have access to justice, there is no justice. Repeat after me: Justice for some is not justice at all.

Only those who already believe this are still reading. Too many have bought into the lies that allow plutocrats to squeeze out every last dime from the citizens and destroy the dream that the founders had for this country.

Dishonest politicians parrot what people want to hear and they believe them, regardless of how the politicians act. How many sociopaths get votes from the people they hurt just by calling themselves Christians?

"We will know they are Christians by their love," the song goes.

I'm hearing the words, but I'm not seeing the love.

When people lose what they have left, who will they blame? I'm betting they won't blame themselves for not listening to actual journalists, economists, or reason.

Sharon Martin lives in Oilton, and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. Her children's book, Froggy Bottom Blues, can be purchased in hardcover or paperback from Doodle and Peck Publishing. It also is available in paperback from Amazon.



The War On Christmas

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

As those of us who are Christians enter into the Christmas season, I respectfully request that fundamentalist Christians cease with their “war on Christmas” rhetoric. I also really don’t want to hear their “let’s put Christ back into Christmas” mantra, either.

To declare that there is a “war on Christmas” or that we need to “put Christ back into Christmas” requires that we have some sense of who Jesus was and what the core values were that he stood for in his life and through his death.

This understanding seems to be of little concern to the fundamentalist Christians who have declared such a “war on Christmas” exists and who proclaim that “Christ needs to be put back into Christmas.”

For there to be a war on Christmas means that there is something happening in our society that is at war with the way of Jesus. In this sense, I actually agree with fundamentalist Christians in America that there is war on Christmas and that we need to put Christ back into Christmas; but the war on Christmas is

being waged primarily by fundamentalist Christians themselves rather than the non-Christian others whom fundamentalists so readily condemn.

There is a war on Christmas when fundamentalist Christians use the Christmas story to justify child molestation. Christ needs to be put back into Christmas when fundamentalist Christians reject the migrant and refugee.

There is a war on Christmas when fundamentalist Christians embrace Herod-like authoritarianism rather than the way of love and justice that so often comes to us through a child. Christ needs to be put back into Christmas when fundamentalist Christians reject people of other cultural backgrounds and faiths instead of accepting the gifts of those who come from afar.

There is a war on Christmas when fundamentalist Christians want to build walls of separation rather than bridges of community. Christ needs to be put back into Christmas when fundamentalist Christians celebrate corrupt wealth and power instead of look-

ing out for the poor, the sick, the naked, the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, and the lost.

There is a war on Christmas when fundamentalist Christians put their faith in the instruments of war rather than the ways of peace. Christ needs to be put back into Christmas when fundamentalist Christians support torture and execution.

There is a war on Christmas when fundamentalist Christians support policies and practices that harm the Beloved Community of all creation and threaten the future of human civilization.

Christ needs to be put back in Christmas when fundamentalist Christians refuse to support the civil rights of all persons. Yes, there is a war on Christmas, and yes, we need to put Christ back into Christmas.

This Christmas season, as we reflect on the very real war that fundamentalist Christians are waging on Christmas and on the way of Jesus in this world, may we all remember that Jesus was a Middle East-

ern person whose family spent his early years as a refugee, a person who called on his followers to work for justice and to be peacemakers, who lifted up people of other faiths as examples of God's love and justice in the world [the Samaritan], who called on us all to care for the most vulnerable, who taught us to love our neighbors and our enemies, and who was tortured and executed by the governing authorities.

If we are to end the war on Christmas, we must follow this way of love and justice, this way of peace and sacrifice.

If we are to put Christ back into Christmas we must once again open our hearts to the Middle Eastern refugee.

Mark Y.A. Davies is the Wimberly Professor of Social and Ecological Ethics and director of the World House Institute for Social and Ecological Responsibility at Oklahoma City University. To read more of his essays visit okobserver.org.

Hold The Urchin Tongues. Let's Cook Like Grandma

BY FROMA HARROP

Tis the season to do cooking. And the holidays are when folks yearn for the old classics, just like ones we used to know. Even some hardcore “foodies” put away the experimental cuisine and make predictable dishes with recognizable ingredients.

One can understand why food writers persist in advocating “makeovers” of traditional dishes. If they didn't put a new spin on standards, they'd have nothing to write about. They'd just reference a cookbook or provide links to the chicken potpie recipe on Epicurious [though I doubt the pioneers had access to dried chanterelle mushrooms].

Food writers continue to spread the belief that a 28-year-old celebrity chef can improve on centuries of culinary trial and error. There may be a genius or two among them, and it's a free country. But familiar foods feed a hunger for physical links to past experiences.

Consider an American classic, the s'more. Marshmallows and chocolate melted between two graham crackers, the s'more evokes Scout nights around the campfire. Sure, you can replace the crackers with brioche and Hershey's with imported Belgian chocolate. Point is, when you want a s'more, you want Hershey's.

Similarly, when you ask for Southern fried chicken, you generally expect a repeat of the classic dish. Some cooks do it better than others, but the diner is generally not seeking a culinary revolution.

Italians have already spent a millennium getting linguine with clam sauce right. Why one would in-

corporate Asian spices into the dish, other than for their novelty value, remains a mystery. Non-European culinary traditions also demand respect. There's a quesadilla made according to Mexican custom, and there's a Peking duck perfected in China.

The restaurants promoting the most extreme tear-downs of established dishes – food writers call them “resets” – congregate in centers of tech and finance. They have a clientele that can afford truffles on their cheese omelets – and that believes there's not a wheel that doesn't need reinventing. We're reporting

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42





Why Science Says You Should Be Reading Small Independent Media

BY JO ELLEN GREEN KAISER

Google, Facebook, and Twitter were hauled in front of Congress last month to explain how Russian bots were able to spread fake news on their platforms. The concern – and a very real one – is that these bots and fake news sites had a significant impact on the 2016 election.

Fighting fake news, however, is not the only or best way to ensure that our content ecosystem prioritizes real news.

A recent groundbreaking article in *Science* proved that a better way to secure a media system that works for democracy is to strengthen independent news outlets.

The five-year-long study, directed by Harvard professor Gary King and supported in part by Voqal, shows that even small independent news outlets can have a dramatic effect on the content of national con-

versation. King, along with his now former graduate students Ben Schneer and Ariel White, found that if just three outlets write about a particular major national policy topic – such as jobs, the environment, or immigration – discussion of that topic across social media rose by as much as 62.7% of a day's volume, distributed over the week.

Over 60% of the participating outlets were members of the Media Consortium, the organization I direct. The Media Consortium outlets that had the highest participation rates in the *Science* study, in order: Truthout, In These Times, Bitch Media, The Progressive, Earth Island Journal, Feministing, Generation Progress, Ms. Magazine, and YES! Magazine. The median outlet size was The Progressive, with about 50,000 subscribers.

Individually, none of them is a New York Times or

The Kochs Just Got Their Hands On Time Magazine. Who's Next?

BY MATT GERTZ

Charles and David Koch, the billionaire brothers who are major funders of Republican candidates and conservative organizations, now own a stake in Time Inc. On Nov. 26, the Meredith Corporation announced that it is purchasing the company with the help of \$650 million from a Koch equity fund.

A Koch spokesman suggested this is purely a business decision, and Meredith has claimed the right-wing billionaires will not have a seat on its board or influence over the editorial decisions of the newly acquired magazines, which include Time and Fortune.

But journalists are rightfully skeptical that the Kochs would enter the embattled magazine publishing business if they didn't view the investment

as a way to advance their conservative principles.

If the Kochs do begin to play a role in the workings of Time, they will join a handful of major conservative donors who have decided in recent years to purchase, fund, or launch media outlets as a way to expand their political influence. The new owners often bring in new leaders who push the newsroom to support their boss' political interests.

With print, digital, and broadcast journalism business models all faltering, right-wing billionaires will have more opportunities to pull off these sorts of takeovers in the future.

Rupert Murdoch, head of the media goliaths 21st Century Fox and News Corp., has been do-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

CNN. In fact, too often, philanthropic foundations refuse to support these outlets because they are "too small" and "don't have enough impact." What this Science study proves is that when independent news outlets work together to co-publish stories on the same topic in the same week, they can have a mighty effect.

We expected independents would have a big impact on national conversations for several reasons. First, independents have strong and loyal followers who are eager to talk about the content they read and view at their favorite outlets. When Bitch, Feministing, and Truthout together publish stories on reproductive health, they have a social reach of over one million followers.

But independent media followers are not just thumbs-up people. They not only comment and repost on social, but they also donate to these organizations and attend events in real life. These are people who want to participate in national conversations about topics they care about, from immigration to climate change to school reform. So it makes sense that they would push those conversations on social.

Second, studies coming out over the past five years have demonstrated that collective efforts make a bigger impact than stand-alone efforts. When even small outlets join together, they can have an effect larger than any of them would individually. We've seen that recently with the publication of the Panama Papers and other large-scale collaborations.

Our outlets implicitly understood those effects:

The Media Consortium was founded in order to build a collaborative network. In fact, when the researchers started working with us to figure out what they could randomize, it was we who suggested the experiment be built upon randomized timing of collaborative publication.

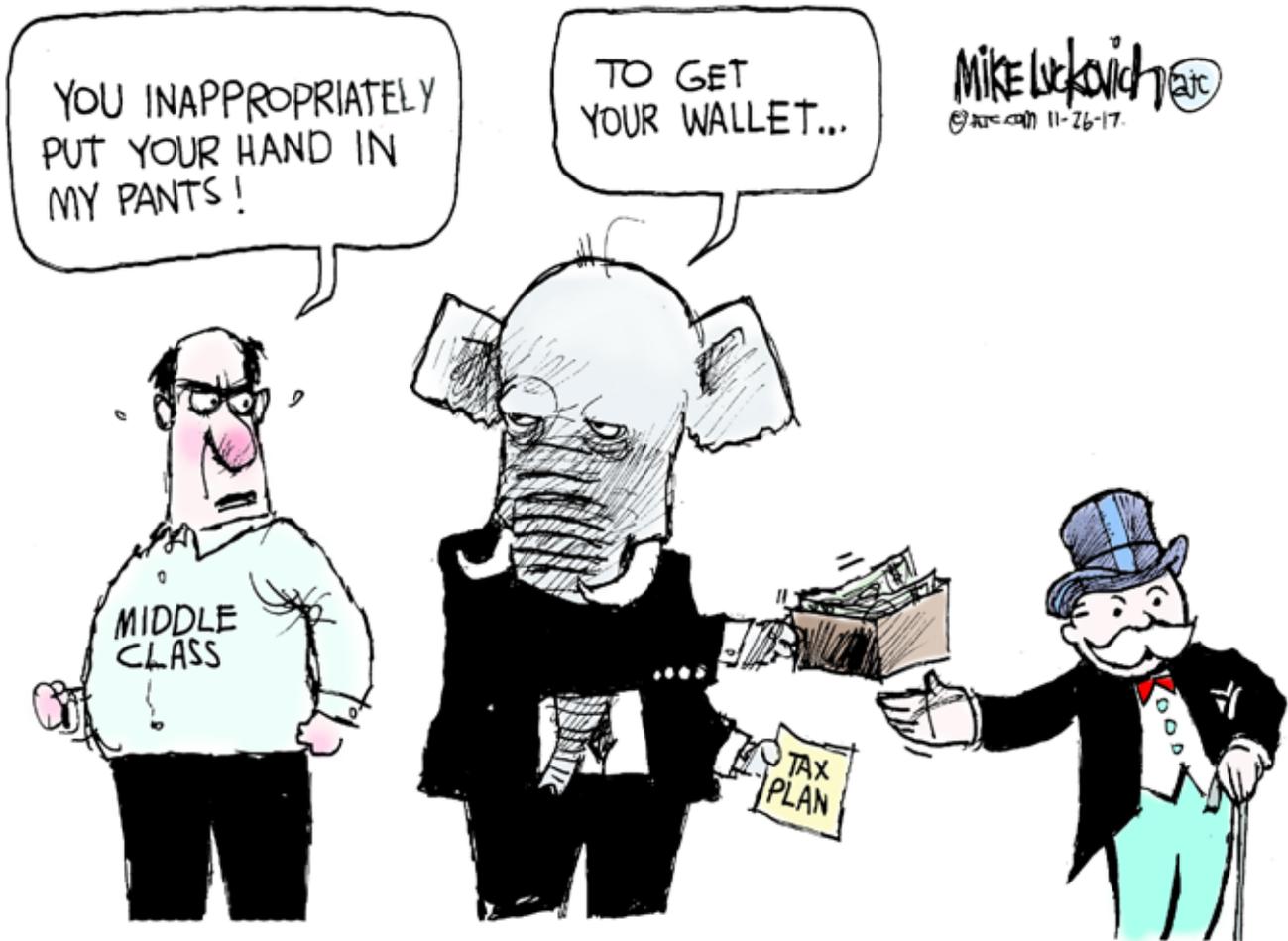
Finally, we have faith in the American people. Yes, everyone likes a cute cat photo or a bit of salacious gossip. But people care at a very fundamental level about the schools their kids attend, about their own reproductive choices, about their communities, neighbors, and friends.

They hunger for stories that impact their everyday lives. And those are the stories they will talk about and share. In fact, they will increase their sharing of stories like these by 62.7% when the stories originate on outlets they trust.

Trust matters on platforms that too often provide space for fake news. Increasingly, people will look at what outlet is providing them with that news. While trust in corporate news has gone down over the past few years, trust in independent news is strong.

The implication of the Science study is simple: If we want to foster robust conversations about national policy, we need to continue to support independent news outlets.

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser is the executive director of The Media Consortium. She is the co-editor of Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Response to Justice [Jewish Lights] and co-led the Righteous Indignation Project. Alternet



Lankford Ignoring Own State's Example On Income Tax Triggers?

BY DAVID BLATT

A major tax overhaul bill is rushing through Congress at unprecedented speed. Although tax reform is the highest priority of Congressional Republicans and the White House, crafting legislation capable of securing a 51-vote majority in the narrowly-divided Senate has been a huge challenge for Republican leaders.

For several Republican Senators, including Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford, the main concern with the tax bill is the huge amount it would add to the federal deficit.

According to the official estimate from the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, the Senate bill would increase the deficit by \$1.4 trillion from 2018-27.

Other respected estimates show an even larger deficit increase resulting from this plan.

Some Republicans have disputed the deficit projections from the CBO and other non-partisan experts,

claiming that the tax cut would generate enough economic growth to fully or largely offset the loss revenue [note that no serious economist believes this].

Sen. Lankford, however, is urging caution. His wariness is due in part due to recent experiences in Oklahoma and Kansas, where tax cuts have failed to spark economic growth and have instead led to large budget shortfalls and the need for deep cuts to services.

In a recent press conference, Sen. Lankford laid out his concerns, saying, "We can't ignore the debt and deficit issues. As conservatives, we've said for a long time that to get ahead of the deficit we have to control our spending and have a growing, healthy economy. Well, if we use all of the tax reductions to just offset, we'll never get on top of it. Those of us in Oklahoma and Kansas and the middle of the country have seen some of this in our own state legislatures. It's important to learn from what we've seen."

To address concern that the tax bill will blow up the

budget, Sen. Lankford, along with Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee and other deficit hawks have been working with Republican leaders and the White House on a “backstop” or “trigger” mechanism for when revenue gains fail to materialize.

Although no specific details about the “trigger” have been shared with the public, Corker says that it would raise taxes “if the plan does not boost the U.S. economy enough,” according to CNBC.

While coupling large tax cuts to a formula that would provide for automatic tax increases may be intended to promote fiscal responsibility, the reality is that triggers are an inherently flawed policy tool. Oklahoma’s recent experience provides an especially stark example of the problem with triggers.

In 2014, Oklahoma lawmakers passed a two-phase cut to the state’s top personal income tax rate that was tied to future revenue growth. The tax cut lowering the top rate from 5.25% to 5% was triggered in late 2014 based on revenue projections for 15 months out that were soon proven too optimistic.

Yet once tax policy was set on auto-pilot, lawmakers couldn’t or wouldn’t take the corrective action needed to change course. The tax cut took effect in January 2016 just as the state was announcing the first of two mid-year revenue failures totaling 7% and was facing a \$1 billion budget shortfall for the next fiscal year.

It’s notable that Oklahoma lawmakers this past session repealed the second triggered tax cut baked into the 2014 law that could have automatically lowered the income tax next year.

A federal tax trigger would differ in the details, but it would involve similar risks of bad timing. This is especially true if an automatic tax increase was triggered by declining tax revenues in the midst of a recession.

As Matthew Yglesias writes, “Trigger proponents want a mechanism that will cancel tax cuts if the fanciful growth forecasts of ardent supply siders turn out to be wrong, but it’s difficult to design a mechanism that accomplishes that without also introducing an ‘automatic destabilizer’ that delivers a hefty dose of anti-stimulus to the economy if it falls into recession.”

As noted by the chief economist for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in a blog post titled “A Fiscal Trigger is Impractical, Unreasonable, and Unnecessary,” a recession at some point in the next decade is a virtual certainty; having one hit while a trigger was in place “would create enormous problems.”

There is simply no way for Congress in 2017 to anticipate what the fiscal and economic circumstances will be over the next decade and to design a trigger that will work as intended at some point off in the future. Sen. Lankford should hold firm to his insistence that the tax bill not increase the deficit and not settle for a defective substitute.

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

A Shameless Lie

**BY NANCY ALTMAN
and LINDA BENESCH**

Do you trust Paul Ryan to protect your Medicare benefits? How about White House Budget Director Mick Mulvaney, a former member of the House Freedom Caucus, and like Ryan, a longstanding foe of Medicare?

If the House tax bill, its Senate counterpart or some compromise of the two is signed into law, the enactment will put Medicare’s future in the hands of Ryan and Mulvaney.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the GOP tax bill will instantly trigger \$400 billion in automatic cuts to Medicare in the next 10 years, including \$25 billion in the first year after enactment alone.

These cuts are the result of a law known as Statutory PAYGO. That law requires an automatic cut in spending when Congress increases the deficit. The tax bill is, in Donald Trump’s words, “a big, beautiful Christmas present” – for Trump’s family and other billionaires. If the Republicans are successful in passing a tax bill that increases the deficit by \$1.5 trillion, as they intend, the provisions of PAYGO will be activated.

To be clear: If the tax bill passes the Senate and is signed into law by Trump, nothing more needs to be done to cut Medicare. If the House and Senate do nothing, the cuts take effect immediately after the end of the congressional session and get bigger every passing year. A vote for this tax bill is a vote to cut Medicare.

These Medicare cuts could be waived if a majority of the House and 60 senators vote to do so. But given the Republican hostility to Medicare, together with Social Security and Medicaid, not acting and then blaming an Obama-era law is much more likely. Paul Ryan readily admits that he has been dreaming of cutting Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security since he was a college student “drinking out of kegs.” There’s no way he would pass up such a golden opportunity.

The law gives the White House Office of Management and Budget the exclusive power to determine how to implement the Medicare cuts. The head of that office is Mulvaney, a self-described “right-wing nutjob” and anti-government zealot who shares Ryan’s desire to cut and destroy Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security [along with just about every other non-defense government program]. Passing this tax bill gives him the power to decide how to cut Medicare. Given his desire to destroy Medicare, he is likely to implement the most destructive cuts possible.

Statutory PAYGO is a law that never should have been passed. It makes it much easier for Congress to force cuts to vital programs like Medicare by passing unrelated bills which then need to be offset. But that

said, just like the similarly misguided debt limit that Republicans regularly use for hostage taking, it is the law of the land.

That means every House member who voted for the tax bill – including the entire Oklahoma delegation, all Republicans – voted for a massive cut to Medicare. Every senator who votes for the Senate counterpart will be responsible as well. The American people must hold them accountable for it.

Now is the time to hold huge protests outside the offices of Republican lawmakers, demanding that they vote no on a bill that would gut Medicare to pay for an unconscionable tax giveaway to the wealthy.

The tax bill is one enormous attack on our health. It takes away the ability of those with large health care costs to deduct those costs from their taxes. It repeals the part of the Affordable Care Act that seeks to make health insurance affordable. The consequence of that is \$185 billion less in health insurance subsidies and \$179 billion in Medicaid cuts.

All so Republicans can shower huge tax giveaways on their wealthy donors. And those tax giveaways trigger automatic cuts to Medicare.

The Republicans are trying to enact this assault on our health care as rapidly as possible while the

American people are distracted by the holiday season. When health care premiums go up, when Medicare gets cut, and when Medicaid gets cut, they will blame ObamaCare – even though that is a shameless lie.

We cannot let them get away with this. Defeating this anti-health monster is essential. Since last January, Trump and his congressional allies have engaged in a nonstop war – a war on seniors, on people with disabilities, on children with pre-existing conditions, on everyone but the plutocrats.

The plutocrats have the money. But we have the numbers. If we stand together and continue to resist, we will win.

Nancy Altman is the president of Social Security Works and chair of the Strengthen Social Security Coalition. She is co-author, with Eric R. Kingson, of Social Security Works! Why Social Security Isn't Going Broke and How Expanding It Will Help Us All [The New Press, 2015]. Linda Benesch is communications director at Social Security Works, a national organization fighting to address our nation's retirement income crisis by protecting and expanding Social Security.

© Alternet

Patriotism, Taxes And Trump

BY ROBERT REICH

Selling the Trump-Republican tax plan should be awkward for an administration that has made patriotism its central theme.

That's because patriotism isn't mostly about saluting the flag and standing during the national anthem.

It's about taking a fair share of the burden of keeping America going.

But the tax plan gives American corporations a \$2 trillion tax break, at a time when they're enjoying record profits and stashing unprecedented amounts of cash in offshore tax shelters.

And it gives America's wealthiest citizens trillions more, when the richest 1% now hold a record 38.6% of the nation's total wealth, up from 33.7% a decade ago.

The reason Republicans give for enacting the plan is "supply-side" trickle-down nonsense. The real reason is payback to the GOP's mega-donors.

A few Republicans are starting to admit this. Last month, Gary Cohn, Trump's lead economic advisor, conceded in an interview that "the most excited group out there are big CEOs, about our tax plan."

Republican Rep. Chris Collins admitted that "my donors are basically saying, 'Get it done or don't ever call me again.'"

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham warned that if Republicans failed to pass tax reform, "the financial

contributions will stop."

Republican mega-donors view the tax payback as they do any other investment. When they bankrolled Trump and the GOP, they expected a good return.

The biggest likely beneficiaries are busily investing an additional \$43 million to pressure specific members of Congress to pass it, according to The Wall Street Journal.

They include the 45Committee, founded by billionaire casino oligarch Sheldon Adelson and Joe Ricketts, owner of the Chicago Cubs; and the Koch Brothers' groups, Americans for Prosperity and Freedom Partners.

They're not doing this out of love of America. They're doing it out of love of money.

How do you think they got so wealthy in the first place?

As more of the nation's wealth has shifted to the top over the past three decades, major recipients have poured some of it into politics – buying themselves tax cuts, special subsidies, bailouts, lenient antitrust enforcement, favorable bankruptcy rules, extended intellectual property protection, and other laws that add to their wealth.

All of which have given them more clout to get additional legal changes that enlarge their wealth even more.

Forty years ago, the estate tax was paid by 139,000

estates, according to the non-partisan Tax Policy Center. By 2000, it was paid by 52,000. This year it will be paid by just 5,500 estates. Under the House tax plan, it will be eliminated altogether.

Why do Americans pay more for pharmaceuticals than the citizens of every other advanced economy? Because Big Pharma has altered the laws in its favor. Why do we pay more for internet service than most other nations? Big cable's political clout. Why can payday lenders get away with payday robbery? The political heft of big banks.

Multiply these examples across the economy and you get a huge hidden upward redistribution from the paychecks of average working people and the poor to top executives and investors.

All this is terrible for the American economy.

More and better jobs depend on increasing demand for goods and services. This must come from the middle class and poor because the rich spend a far smaller share of their after-tax income.

Yet the middle class and poor have steadily lost purchasing power. Partly as a result, a relatively low share of the nation's working-age population is employed today and the wages of the typical worker have been stuck in the mud.

The Republican tax plan will make all this worse by burdening the middle class and the poor even more.

A slew of analyses, including Congress's own Joint Committee on Taxation, show that the GOP plan will raise taxes on many middle-class families.

It will also require cuts in government programs that middle and lower-income Americans depend on, such as Medicare and Medicaid.

And the plan will almost certainly explode the national debt, eventually causing many middle class and poor families to pay higher interest on their auto loans, mortgages, and credit cards.

I don't care whether the top executives of big corporations, Wall Street moguls, and heirs to vast fortunes salute the flag and stand for the national anthem.

But they enjoy all the advantages of being American. Most couldn't have got to where they are in any other country.

They have a patriotic duty to take on a fair share of the burden of keeping America going. And Trump and his enablers in Congress have a patriotic responsibility to make them.

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*.



Jim Hightower



Why So Many Americans Hate Trump's Tax Reform

Sam Rayburn of Texas, who was a legendary speaker of the U.S. House in the 1940s and '50s, offered this piece of ethical advice for lawmakers who were conflicted over whether to vote for the People over the lobbyists: "Every now and then, a politician ought to do something just because it's right."

Wow, ethics – how quaint! Today's House speaker, Paul Ryan, has put his own perverted twist to Rayburn's ethics, advising his Republican majority to vote for anything just because it's rightwing. Along with Donald Trump and Senate leader Mitch McConnell, Ryan is now pushing for a rewrite of America's tax law that's so far to the right that it's horribly wrong.

Tax proposals are written in dense legalese and gobbledegook, but core purpose of this 429-page monster is shockingly easy to understand: The Trump-Ryan-McConnell triumvirate intends to take money from millions of working families and give it to the world's wealthiest people and richest multinational corporations.

Of course, when they talk publicly about their proposal, they claim it's all about "helping" you working stiffs. It's "real tax reform for everyday hardworking Americans," trumpeted our president.

In private, though, they reveal to their biggest campaign donors that the plan lets them "help themselves" to the people's money, giving these corporate elites a huge windfall – "the biggest ever," bragged Trump. In fact, the 400 richest families in America would average \$5.5 million in new tax breaks.

Meanwhile, if your income is under \$75,000 a year, you'll end up worse off.

The Trump tax plan – better known as the Billionaires' Bonanza – is not selling well among the great unwashed. Indeed, a two-to-one majority of the public opposes it, and only 16% believe it would reduce their tax bill.

But the people don't seem to realize that Donald and his band of Trumpeters in Congress really want to help us commoners. How? By killing that dreaded

"death tax," meaning that when you and I die we can give our estates to our heirs without that inheritance being taxed.

As the president so eloquently put it: "To protect millions of small businesses and the American farmer, we are finally ending the crushing, the horrible, the unfair estate tax."

All praise The Donald for saving us!

But wait – the great majority of us don't own farms, businesses or big estates of any kind, so the estate tax doesn't apply to us at all. Also, 99% of people who do have farms and businesses are already exempt from the tax, for it only applies to individuals with estates worth \$5.5 million or more.

I realize that Trump prefers grandiose claims over actual facts, but here are a few reality checks showing that his statement is false, a lie ... a whopper: Only two-tenths of 1% of American estates are big enough to be taxed this year. How many is that? Not "millions" of families, as Trump so dramatically asserted, but just over 11,000. Moreover, the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center calculates that, this year, the estates of only about 80 family farmers and small business owners will be subject to the tax.

So who, exactly, are Trump and the GOP Congress "saving" from having to pay some taxes on their multimillion-dollar estates? The richest 0.2% of American families – including one named Trump. It's a giveaway that lets the richest of the richest escape paying more than \$20 million which they owe to support the country that has enriched them.

Forget trickle-down economics, the GOP is practicing tinkle-down economics! Why would they push such an evil, shameful policy? Because it's not you common voters they care about, it's the moneyed elites they love and the special interests that fund their re-election campaigns.

As one Republican pusher of this tax giveaway to the rich put it: "My donors are basically saying: 'Get it done or don't ever call me again.'" And that's what the Trump plan is all about.

© *Creators.com*

Why Reward Bad Corporate Behavior With More Tax Breaks?

As anyone who has ever been to any of the many cities that are graced with a Trump hotel, casino, golf resort, etc. likely knows, Donald Trump insists that his name be gaudily displayed in giant letters across every structure he owns – preferably in gold.

Now, he's taken ownership of a massive new structure that'll reach across all of America, and he might not want his name slapped all over this one. It's Trump's towering redo of our country's tax law – and, no surprise, his plan is truly golden. For the super-rich, that is, revealing in hard numbers whom his presidency really serves: Not just the 1%, but especially the 1%-of-the-1% who are multimillionaires and billionaires ... like – guess who? – him.

First and foremost, the Trump tax plan slashes the payments that giant corporations make to support our nation. He claims that this will let corporate elites raise the wages of workers and create jobs, winking at the fact that, of course, the elites will pocket every dime of Trump's tax giveaways. And he doesn't mention a little secret gotcha: A third of his corporate benefits would go to foreign owners of American corporations.

Meanwhile, Trump's luxurious new tax structure eliminates many benefits for middle class families, such as tax deductions for medical expenses, college tuition and interest paid on student loans. He wants modest-income families to pay more, so he can eliminate current taxes on his own uber-rich family, including killing the alternative income tax paid by the rich and the estate tax.

Did I mention that the gilded tax structure proposed by this self-described business genius would hang an additional \$1.5 trillion debt around our children's necks? No surprise, for Trump's grandiose luxury projects were often built with other people's money, advancing himself before he slipped away, leaving others to grapple with the bankruptcy.

Here's a question you might want to ask our Trumpestuous President and his mousey Trumpeeters in Congress: "Why are you even considering giving more tax breaks to corporate giants?"

First, the self-serving corporate class is wallowing in warehouses of wealth, greedily hoarding it in offshore tax shelters and stock-buyback schemes, refusing to invest their unconscionable profits to benefit the vast majority of people they've been knocking down and holding down.

Second, you shouldn't give away our public treasury when our nation has a budget deficit and faces a frightening backlog of crying needs for public

investment – from our deteriorating infrastructure to our disappearing middle class.

Third, our people's sense of equality and social unity has been severely fractured by 30 years of gross wealth inequality, so intentionally widening the wealth gap is criminally stupid and dangerous.

Fourth, why would you think over-paid, over-pampered CEOs deserve more pampering? They've become imperious potentates who feel entitled to gouge, cheat, defraud, lie and otherwise run over us commoners.

Consider Jeff Immelt, who resigned as the imperial CEO of General Electric this year. Not only did he have a fleet of corporate jets to fly him around, but we now learn that when this royal chief jetted here or there, he had a second jet, called a "chase plane," follow right behind him. Jet Number Two carried no passengers or equipment; it was just a spare in case his highness needed it for ... well for what? GE offers no reasonable answer, because there isn't one. Immelt says he never used the spare, but there it was, zipping along behind him costing GE shareholders thousands of dollars an hour.

This pompous waste cost you and me, too, for GE got a tax deduction for every flight Jeff's chase plane made. Why would Trump & Co. reward such common corporate rip-offs with more tax breaks? – *Jim Hightower*



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

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

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



The Death Of Christianity In U.S.

BY MIGUEL DE LA TORRE

Christianity has died in the hands of Evangelicals. Evangelicalism ceased being a religious faith tradition following Jesus' teachings concerning justice for the betterment of humanity when it made a Faustian bargain for the sake of political influence.

The beauty of the gospel message – of love, of peace and of fraternity – has been murdered by the ambitions of Trumpish flimflammers who have sold their souls for expediency.

No greater proof is needed of the death of Christianity than the rush to defend a child molester in order to maintain a majority in the U.S. Senate.

Evangelicals have constructed an exclusive interpretation which fuses and confuses white supremacy with salvation. Only those from the dominant culture, along with their supposed inferiors who with colonized minds embrace assimilation, can be saved. But their salvation damns Jesus. To save Jesus from those claiming to be his heirs, we must wrench him from the hands of those who use him as a façade from

which to hide their phobias – their fear of blacks, their fear of the undocumented, their fear of Muslims, their fear of everything queer.

Evangelicalism has ceased to be a faith perspective rooted on Jesus the Christ and has become a political movement whose beliefs repudiate all Jesus advocated. A message of hate permeates their pronouncements, evident in sulphurous proclamations like the Nashville Statement, which elevates centuries of sexual dysfunctions since the days of Augustine by imposing them upon Holy Writ. They condemn as sin those who express love outside the evangelical antibody straight jacket.

Evangelicalism's unholy marriage to the Prosperity Gospel justifies multi-millionaire bilkers wearing holy vestments made of sheep's clothing who discovered being profiteers rather than prophets delivers an earthly security never promised by the One in whose name they slaughter those who are hungry, thirsty and naked, and the alien among them. Christianity at a profit is an abomination before all that is Holy.

From their gilded pedestals erected in white centers of wealth and power, they gaslight all to believe they are the ones being persecuted because of their faith.

Evangelicalism's embrace of a new age of ignorance blames homosexuality for Harvey's rage rather than considering the scientific consequences climate change has on the number of increasing storms of greater and greater ferocity. To ignore the damage caused to God's creation so the few can profit in raping Mother Earth causes celebrations in the fiery pits of Gehenna.

Evangelicalism forsakes holding a sexual predator, an adulterer, a liar and a racist accountable, instead serving as a shield against those who question POTUS' immorality because of some warped reincarnation of Cyrus. Laying holy hands upon the incarnation of the very vices Jesus condemned to advance a political agenda – instead of rebuking and chastising in loving prayer – has prostituted the gospel in exchange for the victory of a Supreme Court pick.

Evangelicalism either remained silent or actually supported Charlottesville goose steppers because they protect their white privilege with the double-speak of preserving heritage, leading them to equate opponents of fascist movements with the purveyors of hatred. Jesus has yet recovered from the vomiting induced by the Christian defenders of torch-wielding white nationalists calling for “blood-and-soil.”

The Evangelicals' Jesus is satanic, and those who hustle this demon are “false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” [2 Cor. 11:13-15, NIV].

You might wonder if my condemnation is too harsh. It is not, for the Spirit of the Lord has convicted me to shout from the mountaintop how God's precious children are being devoured by the hatred and bigotry of those who have positioned themselves as the voice of God in America.

As a young man, I walked down the sawdust aisle at a Southern Baptist church and gave my heart to Jesus. Besides offering my broken heart, I also gave my mind to understanding God, and my arm to procuring God's call for justice. I have always considered myself to be an evangelical, but I can no longer allow my name to be tarnished by that political party masquerading as Christian.

Like many women and men of good will who still struggle to believe, but not in the evangelical political agenda, I too no longer want or wish to be associated with an ideology responsible for tearing humanity apart. But if you, dear reader, still cling to a hate-mongering ideology, may I humbly suggest you get saved.

Miguel De La Torre is professor of social ethics and Latino/a studies at Iliff School of Theology in Denver.

© Baptist News Global

Half Of U.S. College Students Are Food Insecure

BY SARA GOLDRICK-RAB

The first time I met an undergraduate who hadn't eaten in two days, I was stunned. The first time I spent the afternoon with a homeless college junior, I cried for most of the night. Now, after a decade of research on food and housing insecurity among college students, I'm just numb.

I teach at an urban public university – a “Research 1,” top-of-the-Carnegie-rankings institution. I'm not one of Philadelphia's school teachers; I'm a professor with just one class to teach each term and a big research budget. But those trappings of prestige no longer shield me from the realities of poverty in our city, and more importantly, they don't help my students.

Since 2008, my team's research on how students finance college has revealed that the main barrier to degree completion isn't tuition; it's having a place to sleep and enough food to eat. The best estimates suggest that food insecurity affects as many as one in two college students – much higher than the rate in the general population. Just as many struggle with housing insecurity, and a significant number [14% at community colleges] are homeless.

This is a largely invisible problem. Stereotypes of Ramen-noodle diets and couch-surfing partiers prevent us from seeing it. They trick us into thinking that food insecurity is a rite of passage, that hunger and even homelessness among our students is normal. But it is time to admit that we have a serious problem in higher education.

Some campuses have begun implementing small reforms to address food insecurity. The College and University Food Bank Alliance has more than 525 members from coast to coast, with food pantries housed at community colleges and universities, public and private. This is a stunning increase, since in 2012 there were just over 10. That provides emergency assistance to the students who are lucky enough to know about them, though what they actually stock varies. Sometimes there are fresh fruits and vegetables, but usually there are cans and bags, some bread, and the occasional bottle of shampoo or body wash.

In some cases, colleges are moving beyond food pantries. Just over two dozen schools operate a program known as Swipe Out Hunger, which reallocates

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



What Uncle Sam Really Wants In Yemen

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

Yemen is currently facing a “biblical type” humanitarian catastrophe.

Fifty thousand children are believed to have died this year alone including from a cholera outbreak and thousands have been displaced.

A Saudi-led coalition is seeking to install Abdrabbah Mansour Hadi as president against a Shia-dominated Houthi rebellion backed by former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. To accomplish this end, the Saudis have mercilessly bombed civilian infrastructure with the goal of starving the population into submission.

Their crime has been aided and abetted by the United States, which has provided intelligence for bomb targeting, pilot training and refueling assistance for Saudi planes as well as ordinance which has been used to kill and maim civilians.

The Obama Administration provided over \$100 billion in arms sales to the Saudis and blamed the Houthis for the violence, saying they “had a way of putting civilians into danger.”

Trump expanded funding in a trip to the kingdom and Jared Kushner has had a series of private meetings with Prince Salman with whom he has got along with famously well.

A consortium of Congressmen led by Sen. Chris Murphy, D-CT, have spoken out against U.S. complicity in the atrocities in Yemen and sponsored a bill calling for a ban in arms sales.

Murphy said the public had become transfixed with the politicized investigation of Russiagate while Ye-

men was being starved by the Saudi onslaught and blockade. In a speech before the Senate last month, Murphy outlined the ways in which the U.S. was deeply complicit in war crimes and showed harrowing photos of Yemeni children who were dying.

Murphy’s crusading efforts, along with those of colleagues like Rep. Marc Pocan, D-WI, and Sen. Rand Paul, R-KY, are admirable, though unfortunately insufficient at this time.

One thing missing in their rhetoric is an attempt to explain the motives underlying the American Executive Branch’s policies towards Saudi Arabia and Yemen, which lie at the root of double standards on human rights.

The U.S. is deeply committed to the House of Saud because it has provided the U.S. with access to cheap oil over the years and served as a U.S. surrogate in the Middle East almost as much as Israel.

Another hidden, unstated motive is the coveting of the island of Socotra, a wildlife preserve with 50,000 inhabitants located 380 kilometers off the coast of Yemen and 80 kilometers off the Horn of Africa.

Alfred Thayer Mahan in his 1890 book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* pointed out that “whoever attains maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean would be a prominent player in the international scene.”

Socotra’s strategic waterway links the Mediterranean to South-Asia and the Far East through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. It serves as

a major strategic transit point for the shipment of oil as well as China's exports to Western Europe.

The pristine island is located just 3,000 kilometers from the U.S. naval base at Diego Garcia; one of America's largest overseas military facilities which was acquired during the Cold War by expelling the local Chagossian population.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had access to Socotra as a base and Russia still allegedly covets access to the island today. The United States has had its eye on it since the end of the Cold War, choosing it in 1999 as the site to build a signals intelligence system.

In 2010, David Petraeus, head of the U.S. Central Command, held a meeting with then Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh in which Saleh allegedly allowed the U.S. to set up a military base on Socotra from which to launch seaborne missiles and possibly drone strikes to counter "pirates and Al Qaeda." The U.S. in turn agreed to double security assistance to over \$150 million.

This agreement helped weaken Russian overtures to the Yemeni government. Since that time, a new civilian airport has been built on Socotra in accordance with U.S. military specifications. Then in February 2016, Press TV reported that acting Yemeni presi-

dent Hadi leased Socotra to the United Arab Emirates [UAE] for 99 years.

The UAE has since begun to use the island for military training. Its increasing military presence is thought to represent a foothold for the United States on an island located at a crossroads of world trade.

The unfolding situation may bear some parallels to American plans in Panama in the early 19th Century when the U.S. supported Panama's secession from Colombia and then pushed through an agreement that prompted Panama to cede its sovereignty. This is how many Yemenis view it.

The New York Times claimed that the Obama Administration supported the war in Yemen because it needed Saudi support for nuclear deal negotiations with Iran, though also reported that the U.S. has kept warships in the region to guard a sea lane through which four million barrels of oil pass each day. While never mentioning Socotra directly, in effect they acknowledged a hidden underlying motive for U.S. engagement in a conflict which has begun to arouse the world's moral indignation.

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.

Why The Confusion About Iran?

BY HAROLD V. SARE

President Trump has not been willing to confirm that Iran is abiding by the Geneva Treaty. In that treaty Iran gave up its nuclear program for a 10-year period, but this agreement did not include ballistic missile development.

The United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, China and other nations signed the Geneva-negotiated treaty under the Obama Administration. Ergo, President Trump has been extremely critical of the treaty.

However, the main purpose of the treaty is to take a step toward limiting the number of nations possessing nuclear weapons. In addition to the U.S., Great Britain, Russia, Pakistan, India, Israel, China, North Korea, and others, it is widely believed that too many nations are armed with these deadly weapons. The North Korean problem dramatically reflects the danger of nuclear weapons to the entire planet.

Let's take a look at Iran, with which the U.S. has not had good relations for decades. Iran is a country with a sizeable population [81,824,270], which is largely literate [86.9%], and with about 73.4% living in urban areas. It is reported that the people as a community have a favorable orientation toward the U.S.

However, the government is a theocratic republic – really a dictatorship – that seems to radically embrace the Shi'a Islamic religion [90% to 95%]. Sunni

Muslims are only about 5% to 19% of their population.

Iran was historically known as Persia, and the official language is Persian. Their culture has been influential in central Asia and beyond. Ethnic groups include Persian, Azeri, Kurds, Lurs, Batoch, Arabs, Turkmen, and Turkic tribes living in 32 provinces. The people speak Iranian languages, including Persian, Kurdish, and Gilaki. Turkish languages such as Azerbaijani are the second-most spoken, and Turkmen and Qashqai make up a substantial minority.

We can understand from these differences why there are pressures to divide the country. The Kurds want to break away and create their own state. This issue is one of many Middle Eastern problems.

The Sunnis, the majority of Muslims in the world, and the Shi'as have been in conflict with each other for hundreds of years. Today their conflict is due largely to the mixtures of populations in the Middle East. It would be more peaceful in the region if some new boundaries of states were drawn to separate these religious groups.

The Kurds, who have major populations in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran, create serious political conflict, given their efforts to create a separate state. Interestingly, they are concentrated in a geographic area covering the several states they are located in.

Iran, Turkey, and Iraq all resist their movement to separate.

Iran is involved in the Middle East religious-based wars against the Sunnis in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and other countries.

From its religious perspective and its economic development, we can see that Iran is different from many other Middle Eastern states.

The U.S. and Russia have gotten involved in this region under very difficult circumstances, and at times are in conflict with each other. Russia supports the Syrian leadership, which is Shia; and the U.S. military often supports conflicting elements in Syria. Also, the U.S. has been involved with both aid and advisers in the Iraqi war against ISIS [which is Sunni].

Religious extremism makes it difficult to generate peace in the region.

The Middle East is a complex area for any major power that seeks peace and hopes to promote constitutional democracy. A major problem is that Middle East has been a large supplier of oil to the world. Another problem is the growing threat of terrorism in the region. Europe, and to some extent the U.S., are faced with thousands of refugees from the region. The refugee problem for Europe is the dominant characteristic of change in its total population.

It has been argued by some foreign policy figures that the U.S. should change its policies in the Middle East by creating an alliance with Turkey and Iran.

These states have better developed economies and more modern societies than other states in the region.

However, significant change would be difficult, given the fact that Turkey has just experienced an unwelcomed change in its government, and Iran is governed by a theocratic dictatorship that seems to have a firm grip over its population. It is argued by foreign policy figures that if such an alliance could be worked out, it would give the U.S. more strength to work more effectively in the region.

The U.S. has not had good relations with Iran since 1953, when a CIA-based coup overthrew Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh and put the Shah back in power. In 1979 Iranians overthrew the Shah and declared the U.S. to be the "Great Satan." My wife and I were in Tehran in late 1979, and we did not feel safe.

The U.S. was both fortunate and very diligent working with other political powers to negotiate the Geneva Nuclear Agreement with Iran. And now, President Trump's position seems unrealistic and lacking in full comprehension of purpose and scope of the Agreement.

The diplomacy recommended by the present foreign policy "experts" would take a long time to work out – if at all.

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

Since 9/11, U.S. Has Spent Staggering \$4.3 Trillion On Wars

A new Costs of War report published by Brown University's Watson Institute shows the actual costs incurred by the U.S. as part of its global "war on terror" that widely contradicts the cost of war figures put together by the Pentagon in its report.

The report points out some of the Pentagon report's most staggering shortcomings and inadequacies in measuring the war costs incurred.

The Pentagon's report, titled "Estimated Cost to Each Taxpayer for the Wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria," stated the total authorized spending for wars in these conflict regions, was \$1.46 trillion, the figure accounts for only the Defense Department's spending.

Whereas the U.S. university report that included several other costs put the figure at \$4.3 trillion for the time spanning September 2001-17.

"The U.S. wars in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the increased spending on homeland security and the departments of defense, state and veterans affairs since the 9/11 attacks have cost more

than \$4.3 trillion in current dollars through fiscal year 2017," the report reveals.

"Adding likely costs for fiscal year 2018 and estimated future obligations for veterans' care, the costs of war total more than \$5.6 trillion."

The \$5.6 trillion figure does not even include the amount U.S. spends in operations in the Horn of Africa, Uganda, Trans-Sahara, the Caribbean and Central America as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The report which is part of the Costs of War project, accounts for not just the Defense Department's spending but also some of the departments that are often neglected in the Pentagon's war cost accounting reports, like the spending of state departments, homeland security, veterans and the interest U.S. has paid so far on the money it has borrowed to wage wars.

The average taxpayer has spent \$23,386 on the wars since 2001 compared to the \$7,740 figure purported by the Pentagon in its report.

"The American public should know what the true costs of these choices are and what lost opportuni-

ties they represent,” Catherine Lutz, project co-director and a professor of international studies and anthropology at Brown University, said.

“Given that the current administration has announced more years of war in Afghanistan and elsewhere, this total will only grow,” Lutz said.

The Cost of Wars report admitted that despite including many costs, there are still some expenses incurred that haven’t been included in the budget estimates.

“Although this report’s accounting is comprehensive, there are still billions of dollars not included in its estimate,” Neta Crawford, Costs of War co-director and a professor of political science at Boston University, told Brown University.

“For example, the report’s total does not include

the substantial costs of war to state and local governments – most significantly, the costs of caring for veterans – or the millions of dollars in excess military equipment the U.S. donates to countries in and near the war zones,” she added.

The report stressed the opaqueness and lack of accountability in the Pentagon’s reports.

“The Pentagon’s areas of global war on terror operations have enlarged significantly but are not always clearly enumerated in its public summaries of their activities,” Crawford said.

“Future interest costs for overseas contingency operations spending alone are projected to add more than \$1 trillion to the national debt by 2023,” she added.

© Reader Supported News

Museum Honors Conscientious Objectors

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

Many museums throughout the world celebrate the men who fought wars but how many support those who opposed them?

The World War I museum in Kansas City recently unveiled a plaque honoring two Hutterite conscientious objectors, Joseph and Michael Hofer, who died in late 1918 in Ft. Leavenworth military prison after having undergone weeks of torture in a dungeon at Alcatraz prison in San Francisco. The ceremony was part of a conference held at the museum on conscientious objectors, dissent and resistance to World War I sponsored by the peace history society and local community area churches.

The Hutterites are a Christian religious group who live communally and promote pacifism, believing that humans were not put on this earth to kill one another.

Many migrated from Russia after refusing conscription in the Czar’s army.

Based in South Dakota, Michael and Joseph were called to war on May 25, 1918 after Woodrow Wilson’s administration had decided to send U.S. forces into the maelstrom in Europe.

In 1916, Wilson had campaigned on a platform of “he kept us out of war.” His about-face has been explained by historians as a product of Wilson’s grandiose plan to assert American power on the world stage and promote liberal principles. Others attribute the decision to economic interests led by J.P. Morgan, who had bankrolled the allied war effort and wanted a return on his investment.

Tens of thousands of Americans were killed or wounded and many came to regard the U.S. participation in the Great War as futile. The U.S. Senate failed to ratify membership in the League of Nations and the post-war settlement punished Germany and paved the way for the rise of Adolph Hitler.

As Duane Stoltzfus recounts in his book *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of the Hutterites During the Great War* [John Hopkins University Press, 2013], when they arrived at Ft. Lewis for basic training, Michael and Joseph and others from the Hutterite community were heckled because they were known as German speakers and pacifists.

After their beards and hair were shaved in violation of their religious coda, the men refused to fill out their enlistment cards and were immediately charged with disobeying orders. At trial, they said their goal in life was not to fight in any war but to work on their farm for the poor and needy ones of the United States.

The Hofer brothers were among 504 conscientious objectors who were court-martialed during the Great War, resulting in 503 convictions and a single acquittal. One hundred, forty two of the men were believed to be Mennonite, Amish or Hutterite. Six of the Mennonites died at Ft. Leavenworth including four native sons of Oklahoma, at least one of whom was Amish.

At Alcatraz, the Hofer brothers found themselves with hardened and infamous criminals representing the “worst of the worst.” The facility was heralded as a progressive prison in promoting vocational training and housing a good library, though this progressivism did not apply to the conscientious objectors who were considered to be “slackers.”

The Hofers soon found themselves in solitary confinement in the “hole” where they received only a half glass of water each day and no food. Living day and night in darkness, they were chained to the bars in their respective doors, one hand crossed over the other. The chains were drawn up so only their toes touched the floor, a technique long familiar in the history of torture known as “high cuffing.” A guard would come by periodically to beat them on their

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

It's Up To Democrats To Make Case To Save Democracy

HACKS

***The Inside Story of the Break-Ins and Breakdowns
That Put Donald Trump in the White House***

By Donna Brazile

Hachette Books

288 pages, \$28

BY JOHN WOOD

It seems that former Democratic National Convention [DNC] Chair Donna Brazile's well-written book has Democrats downright mad.

Not only does Brazile claim that the DNC had a prior, behind-scenes deal with Hillary Clinton to shore up their debt, but it also was in exchange for party favoritism – a quid-pro-quo that is not atypical in party politics after the candidate shores up the nomination in either party.

But in this deal, Clinton was to gain favor even while she was in a battle against Bernie Sanders. This revelation exacerbated the already huge cleavage forming during the primary.

Brazile says: “The Bernie people were saying how no one trusted Hillary.” And the “Hillary people were complaining that the Bernie people never did come on board, even after the convention.”

“I had tried to search out any other evidence of internal corruption that would show that the DNC was rigging the system to throw the primary to Hillary, but I could not find any in party affairs or among the staff. I had gone department by department, investigating individual conduct for evidence of skewed decisions, and I was happy to see that I had found none. Then I found this agreement.

“The funding arrangement with HFA and the victory fund agreement was not illegal, but it sure looked unethical. If the fight had been fair, one campaign would not have control of the party before the voters had decided which one they wanted to lead. This was not a criminal act, but as I saw it, it compromised the party's integrity.”

Bernie, Wikileaks, and, of course, Trump already remarked that the election really was “rigged” for Hillary. What's remarkable here is that now a party insider, the top insider no less, likewise charges the primary was just short of being “rigged.”

What's worse, when the book released, Trump naturally had to Tweet about it. “Donna Brazile just stated the DNC RIGGED the system to illegally steal the Primary from Bernie Sanders. Bought and paid for by Crooked H...” – tweeted on Nov. 2, 2017.

As is common these days, Brazile tweets back: “Today's lesson: Being quoted by Donald Trump means being MIS-quoted by Donald Trump. Stop trolling me.” #NeverSaidHillaryRiggedElection – tweeted on Nov. 3, 2017.

On top of these assertions, Democrats are likewise furious that, after Hillary's fainting spell during a 9/11 memorial service, Brazile considered replacing her from the top of the ticket with either Vice President Joe Biden or New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker. She says she was under tremendous pressure to have a “Plan B,” especially with the fundraising agreement MOU in that her spending was under the thumb of Hillary's campaign shoring up the DNC's campaign coffers. She had to go through a Clinton lackey named Brooklyn to make any purchases.

All the time Hillary was campaigning, Brazile, who wasn't paid herself, couldn't even fund down-ticket candidates, which undermined not only those Democratic seats, but also Hillary in the end, as people were largely ignored and lacked organizing and funding at the grass roots level.

Not only was she feeling attacked by Trump and her own party, but also by the Russians. The Russian hacks, she wrote, were “dirty cybertricks that were still just coming to light has left everyone scarred and scared. We were all unable to reach out to the people we normally counted on.”

Not surprisingly after all this, she felt isolated. “I had nothing left to return to. This campaign has tarnished my reputation, forced me to step down from CNN, and strained my relationships with colleagues and friends.”

She said further in exasperation: “The hacking of the DNC by the Russians shook my world, depleted my energy, creating in me a fear so deep that now I had surveillance cameras on every door and window at my house.”

Instead of quitting, Brazille rolled up her sleeves and got to work. She negotiated ways to infuse party money, created some much-needed space from the Clinton campaign and even contracted with Hacker House, cyber consultants who were determined to diagnose the DNC hacking problem and to defend from other ongoing hacks.

I think it is easy to attack Brazille. It’s easier to kill the messenger than to digest and deal with the message. As a party workhorse for more than 30 years, she hauled plenty of water for Democrats and says she’s still loyal.

As the Democratic Party moves forward, certainly chomping at the bit to get back a seat at the table with a possible 2018 wave election, I see them doing so thanks to a mid-30% popularity of a scandal-ridden, delusional president, not because the divided Democrats are somehow ready to take the reins in such a challenged environment.

The party is broke, divided, and was hacked. For example, the Democratic Party is overdrawn in Oklahoma and nationwide as noted in Politico’s “The Democratic Party’s Looming Fundraising Crisis.”

In addition, it’s divided between Clintonites and Bernieites. And those in the Sander’s camp have

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

FIND TODAY'S HOTTEST CURRENT AFFAIRS TITLES AT

Full Circle

1900 NW EXPRESSWAY
OKC OK 73118
405/842.2900

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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

WHY WAIT?

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

IMPORTANT RESTRICTIONS

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

some reason to be upset, and yet not surprised by Brazile’s revelations. Sanders beat Clinton in “honesty and trustworthiness,” according to polls, and Brazile’s book didn’t help her deficit in that area. On top of all this, you get the sense Brazile’s willingness to crit-

icize Hillary Clinton indicates her time is past and the Democrats need to look to new blood.

After reading this book, I am reminded that both parties have dropped in popularity, though for the time being Democrats lead Republicans by 10 percentage points

in generic ballots – the difference between the high 20s and 30s. Democrats will likely find themselves in a national wave election next year – and in Oklahoma may pick up some more seats, maybe even a governorship. But until the party figures out what it's "for" more than just what it's "against" – Trump – the Republicans will likely have their way again. What's crazy is that Sanders was a Democrat for just over a year – now he's an independent again – and yet he won Oklahoma's Democratic primary by more than 10 percentage points and 23 contests nationwide.

What does that say?

Democrats do need to find their way again and a special election here or there will unfortunately not overturn supermajorities. But, rolling up their sleeves may make a huge dent in this reality and reflect their actual numbers over time.

At the same time, of course, Russians are again

Grandma

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

from planet disruption.

Former restaurant critic Daniel Duane has written on the bizarre temples to culinary grandiosity now patronized by the filthy-rich venture capital and post-IPO crowd in Silicon Valley. At Manresa, for example, he was served a creation called "Tidal Pool" – "a clear littoral broth of seaweed dashi pooling around sea-urchin tongues, pickled kelp and foie gras." When he returned in a party of four, the chef created a special tasting menu. The bill for the table after tax and tip came to \$1,200.

Down in America's merely affluent neighborhoods, restaurants lure the hipster class by strewing dishes with less expensive exotica. Greens, of course, have to be micro, the cheese "artisan." The servers often do too much explaining and deliver too little food.

About the tapas craze. All dining traditions have an order of eating – what you start with, what comes next, how you end. But the "little plates" phenom-

Objectors

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

arms and back, causing heavy swelling.

After arrival at Ft. Leavenworth, Michael and Joseph complained of sharp pains in the chest and soon their conditions deteriorated. The Office of the Surgeon General listed pneumonia as the cause of death for both men, though the Hutterite Church concluded they had died in prison "as a result of cruel mistreatment by the United States military."

To add insult to injury, when Joseph's wife, Maria, was taken to see her husband's body, he had been dressed up in a military uniform.

The Hofer's saga is of relevance today as a story of principled and courageous dissent and government oppression in a time of war.

hacking our elections with too little fanfare. Brazile said she tried desperately to persuade her Republican counterparts to agree to a joint statement condemning Russian interference but that they cynically ignored her as they won.

In her rather interesting and well-written book, Brazile is going back to work, now a fellow at the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard University. There, she will explore how to stop a foreign power from influencing our elections yet again with an eye toward 2018.

With Republicans savoring their current dominance, they can't be bothered with anything that questions their legitimacy.

I think that means it's up to Democrats to make their case to save democracy.

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

enon has injected chaos into the restaurant experience.

Tapas happen to be a venerable Spanish bar tradition. They are small dishes of nibbles set on the counter to keep one going until the late Spanish dinner hour. In Spain, that's snacking, not dining.

But aspiring entrepreneurs in this country have turned small plates into the whole thing. That means that four people might have to order 10 or 11 dishes. The plates fly to the table like loaded Frisbees, forcing diners to fight with sharp cutlery for their share.

This is a generalization, I know, but the hotter the restaurant the colder the service. The owners don't particularly care if you feel unwelcome, because at that very moment, your replacements are reading erotic accounts of their grilled lamb hearts.

Bring me some fish stew, waiter, and hold the urchin tongues.

© Creators.com

In the aftermath of their case, conscientious objectors gained more rights, though many were continuously imprisoned right up through the Vietnam War era.

Their stories should be widely commemorated and told to provide a role model to younger generations and as an antidote to our militaristic culture that has led us into a state of permanent war.

Jeremy Kuzmarov teaches at the University of Tulsa and is author of several books on U.S. foreign policy and essays from a newly developed peace history website that apply just-war theory in assessing American wars. See his essay on the Korean War at <http://peacehistory-usfp.org/korean-war/>

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

and Lincoln Blvd. these days.

Of course, statewide voting on specific issues doesn't necessarily reflect the will of the people any more than the Legislature does. It's just the will of who bothered to vote on a given day.

Moreover, the same special interests with a vice grip on Republican legislative leaders, especially in the House, could easily redirect their checkbooks to oppose Restore Oklahoma Now's initiative.

Still, what's particularly notable about Restore Oklahoma Now is its coalition. You would expect educators to be on board – weary of the nation's deepest budget cuts and region's lowest salaries. What might surprise you is the group's driving force: small independent oil producers who believe a seven percent GPT is vital if Oklahoma is to become all it can be.

"We think it's a matter of fairness to Oklahomans," said Ada oilman Mike Cantrell, "that all oil and natural gas production be taxed at a flat and competitive – with other states – rate that helps sustain essential state services, especially addressing our teacher crisis and teacher pay."

Amid all the extra session gamesmanship, Restore Oklahoma Now hasn't gotten the attention it deserves. But be advised: this isn't windmill tilting. The group hopes to raise \$3 million to help get the issues on next year's general election ballot. It already has \$700,000 in commitments.

Legislature leaders ignore the fact a 7% GPT on all wells would still be the nation's lowest. Maybe voters will force them to accept reality.

Gridlock, Explained

Oklahoma desperately needs – and voters desperately want – the Legislature to set the state on a sound, long-term fiscal course that appropriately funds vital state services and positions the state for future economic prosperity.

Instead, the tail is wagging the dog at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. House leadership has chosen the Tea Party, Grover Norquist, trickle-down approach to governing – which has failed spectacularly, over and over [see Reagan, Ronald and Brownback, Sam].

Speaker Charles McCall and Co. are hard-core anti-government ideologues whose power is magnified by big money special interests that have gamed the system to maximize profits and minimize losses.

Their special session answer to the state's budget crisis would have left lawmakers with at least a half-billion-dollar budget hole when they return for regular session in February.

Far-right ideologues don't care – this is what they always dreamed of: shrinking government to the point the rest can be drowned in a bathtub.

Better Information, Better Policy

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

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

OKPOLICY.ORG

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

Johnston & Associates

Landowner Environmental and Pollution Law

Free Consultation

Ken Johnston - Wes Johnston

405-224-4000

118 North Fourth St

Chickasha, Oklahoma 73018

Johnstonlawfirm@SBCGlobal.net

TOM GOODWIN

Cheyenne, OK

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



Thankfully, Gov. Mary Fallin vetoed much of the so-called "cash-and-cuts" budget blueprint.

Most House Republicans know education, highways, and health care are assets worth investing in – not mere cost centers. But they are afraid. Afraid of drawing a far-right primary challenge. Afraid of losing their legislative seats. Afraid of losing a damn title.

Can we issue an Amber Alert for missing backbones?

Spring Creek Baptist Church

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



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

[405] 721-3252
springcreekbc.com



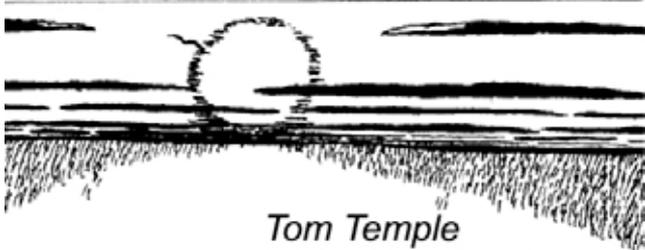
For a VOICE
and RESPECT
at work
ORGANIZE!

Call Brad at
(405)947-2333
Teamsterslocal886.com

REX FRIEND *Attorney at Law*

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

(405) 557-1277
Reasonable Fees — Terms Available



405.478.4936
www.TTemple.com

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER

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

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

Call 405.478.8700 for details.

Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Good News: Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust votes to spare mental health and senior nutrition programs from \$3 million in cuts. **Bad News:** That just encourages lawmakers scheming to raid the fund.

“The money was all appropriated for the top in the hopes that it would trickle down to the needy. Mr. Hoover didn’t know that money trickled up. Give it to the people at the bottom and the people at the top will have it before night, anyhow. But it will at least have passed through the poor fellow’s hands.” – Will Rogers, Nov. 26, 1932

Kicking the nicotine habit is tough as ever. Thirteen percent of Oklahomans age 65-plus are still smoking, despite all the health risks. – AARP

We note the passing of former state Rep. Larry Roberts, a classroom teacher and former Ottawa County treasurer who represented Miami in the Oklahoma House for 21 years. He was 70.

Perhaps we’re falling victim to CTPC [Creeping Trump Conspiracy Paranoia], but it sure seems fishy so many signatures on OKC income tax-for-schools ballot initiative were declared invalid. Stay tuned.

Puppy Power! A Swedish study suggests owning a dog is linked to reduced cardiovascular disease and death. – Scientific Reports

More Americans required hospitalization from injuries linked to walking with a mobile device [69.5%] than from distracted driving [9.1% texting], according to 2013 study. – Time

Making a difference in personal health and climate change: If every American skipped meat and cheese just one day a week, it would be annual equivalent of driving 91 billion fewer miles or taking 7.6 million cars off the road. – veganoutreach.org

Alabama’s GOP National Committeeman Paul Reynolds is suspicious about the source/timing of sex allegations against Senate nominee Roy Moore: “My gosh, it’s the Washington Post. If I’ve got a choice of putting my welfare into the hands of Putin or the Washington Post, Putin wins every time.”

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

tax breaks for Donald Trump and his buddies.

Elbert and Marion Hill
Durant

Editor, The Observer:

Please, everyone who is on Social Security or is getting it taken out of their check, join me in spreading the word that Social Security is not tax money. They take that money not for taxes but for the separate Social Security fund to be used when people retire and only then.

My Social Security card says "not to be used for identification. Only for Social Security." Now they are spreading propoganda to workers that it's making us safe to put our Social Security number of everything. It's done the exact opposite.

Not one dime of tax money has been put into Social Security. They do not subsidize Social Security. It is and always has been solvent and always will be if they stop taking the money and putting in IOUs.

We the people fought them and won until the '70s or first of the '80s on letting them use it for identification. Now it is on your bank account, mortgage, healthcare and everything you buy. They follow your money with it and are about to bust half of the country. People who depend on it.

This tax cut is only for people making \$75,000 and up. The people making under that will get a 2% raise. All of our congressmen voted for it. After 10 years all but the millionaires-and-up taxes will go back down. How did they sell the American people such a plan? And why will they all be voted back in? Because of illegal gerrymandering; abortion being in politics; hate [toward Mexicans, Muslims, Jews, etc.]; fear-mongering; teaching to hate and fear everyone, including unions, non-Christians, etc.

Please just help to stop the lies. We are all human beings. Wanting to live, love and be happy. Having a different belief is OK. Believing your belief is the only right one is dangerous.

Stop the hate and fear! Let them know that you know Social Security is not a part of the budget. I've heard Congress say when the tax cuts are taken away in three to 10 years they will start getting into Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

I hear Trump say everyday how great this country is doing, and he's given us full employment and higher

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



okea.org

BEN F. SANDERS

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

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

BFSCPA@HOTMAIL.COM

PHONE 405.843.0037 / FAX 405.947.0209

Oklahoma Retired Educators Association



The only organization
that works for
Retired Educators

405.525.2230

800.310.2230

www.orea.org



PLUMBING
HEAT & AIR

RESIDENTIAL • COMMERCIAL

FOR ALL YOUR PLUMBING, GAS & AIR WORK

WE WORK BY THE JOB... NOT BY THE HOUR

BEST FLAT RATE PRICE

www.jeans-plumbing.com
OKC & Surrounding Areas **844-1951**

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



WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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

Kochs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

ing this for decades, growing the small Australian newspaper business he inherited from his father into a string of major news outlets in that country, the UK, and the U.S. Murdoch uses those media assets to shape the public debate and maximize his political impact.

Any Time Inc. staffers breathing sighs of relief over reports that the Kochs will play no direct editorial role should read up on Murdoch's takeover of *The Wall Street Journal* in 2007. Early signs that Murdoch would be hands-off with the *Journal* were dashed the next year when the paper's top editor was pushed out. The resulting rightward shift in editorial content led to an exodus of reporters.

The paper is now helmed by Gerard Baker, once a conservative columnist at *The Times*, a daily newspaper Murdoch owns in the U.K. While the paper's journalists still do some great reporting, many have left the paper in part over concerns about its treatment of President Donald Trump, now a Murdoch favorite.

The same phenomenon came to Nevada, albeit on a smaller scale, when Republican megadonor and billionaire casino magnate Sheldon Adelson purchased the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* in late 2015.

As with the Kochs' purchase of a stake in Time Inc., critics pointed out that there would be little reason for Adelson's involvement if he did not plan to use the paper for his own benefit. Adelson installed new newsroom leaders and cracked down on negative reporting about his business dealings.

Many reporters and editors left the newspaper in the following months, citing a reduction of editorial freedom. In October 2016, after Adelson had spent tens of millions of dollars in support of Trump's presidential campaign, the *Review-Journal* became the first major newspaper to endorse him.

In the realm of digital media, two leading Republican donors who made billions in the finance industry have backed different factions of the conservative movement – along with ideologically sympathetic conservative websites.

The Trump-supporting Mercers bought a stake in the extremist garbage factory *Breitbart.com*, while Paul Singer, who backed Sen. Marco Rubio, R-FL, in the 2016 primary, is reportedly the main funder of the more moderate *Washington Free Beacon*.

On broadcast television, Sinclair Broadcasting Company is an ever-expanding behemoth owned

by the Smith family, which donates heavily to Republican candidates and causes. Journalists at stations taken over by Sinclair complain that they are forced to slant the news to the benefit of conservatives. More may soon have the same complaint if the company's purchase of Tribune Media goes through – which would add OKC stations KFOR [NBC affiliate] and KAUT to KOKH [Fox], giving it control over half the capital's news TV news operations.

Philip Anschutz, a Denver billionaire oil and railroad magnate and major Republican donor, has amassed a portfolio of media companies over the past 12 years, launching the conservative publication *The Washington Examiner*, and purchasing *The Weekly Standard*, a leading conservative magazine, as well as the daily newspapers *The Oklahoman* and the *Colorado Springs Gazette*.

Journalism needs to be paid for, and any media magnate with interests outside that industry creates potential conflicts of interest. But there's a difference between this set of media funders, who have donated in some cases tens of millions of dollars to Republican and conservative causes, and the likes of Jeff Bezos, the Amazon billionaire who purchased *The Washington Post*, where my wife now works, in 2013.

As Bezos largely eschews political giving, there's far less evidence to suggest he bought the paper to bolster a particular party or ideology. His ownership does, of course, require that the paper's reporting on Amazon be scrutinized for evidence of potential corporate influence. [Per the paper's top editor, Marty Baron, Bezos has no editorial role and does not comment on the *Post*'s coverage of his company, and the paper has produced critical coverage of Amazon.]

While there have been a rush of new examples in recent years, conservative moguls have used their media companies to push for political aims for decades. Indeed, Time Inc. is one of the most famous precedents.

Henry Luce, the company's legendary founder, who first conceived and launched magazines like *Time* and *Fortune*, was a prominent Republican known for deploying his publications to support his favored candidates and causes.

But the precarious financial position of many in the journalism business raises the concern that Republican megadonors may start snapping up shaky media outlets and using them to dramatically shift the debate. Time Inc. may be only the beginning.

© *Media Matters*

Hunger

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

unused dollars on meal plans to students who need them. Homegrown efforts such as Single Stop are helping students apply for SNAP, and some institutions are beginning to accept EBT on campus. In Houston, the local food bank is offering “food scholarships” to community college students, proactively providing groceries rather than waiting for emergencies to occur. There are food recovery networks, nutrition programs, and educational activities like Chalah for Hunger, where students gather to break bread and learn about poverty.

These efforts are entry points to systemic change, and they make it possible to envision a time in which the National School Lunch Program operates on all campuses, providing breakfast and lunch to every student who needs it.

But when it comes to housing, things don't look so good. When colleges and universities think about housing, they see dollar signs to be gained from residence halls catering to wealthy and international students, rather than opportunities to facilitate affordable living. Given massive state disinvestment throughout the country, it is hard to blame the public institutions. But it means that a growing number of students are being left out in the cold.

Students who struggle to pay rent are at risk of eviction, like so many other low-income adults around the country. Those who seek out shelters find the same overcrowded and sometimes dangerous conditions that have long plagued those temporary accommodations, and students often miss out on beds because the lines form while they are still in class. Even young people who grew up in public housing can lose their housing when they enroll in college if their local housing authority deprioritizes full-time undergraduates.

The financial aid system contributes to these problems. Consider a 23-year-old adult living on the streets, estranged from two middle-class parents because he is queer. Under federal law, his parents' income is used to determine his financial aid, even though he lacks access to those resources. His only hope of disregarding their income and qualifying for more support is to endure a “special circumstances” process that requires documentation verifying that he is homeless, which can be challenging if he was not homeless in high school and is not in the shelter system.

The oversight of the very real housing and food needs of undergraduates is hypocritical given the intense pressure we place on people today to complete college degrees. It is very difficult to complete anything – whether it is a vocational training program for a welding certificate, an associate's degree in nursing, or an engineering program – without first having your basic needs met.

Every college and university must help its students connect to every public benefits program for which they are eligible. That support, coupled with emergency cash assistance, can help shield students from hunger and help them keep a roof over their heads. Colleges should also pursue external partnerships with local food banks, housing authorities, and homeless shelters. And most of all, higher education has a responsibility to tackle poverty among its students in a data-driven way that acknowledges that students without resources do not lack talent, drive, or intellect. They simply need access to the same sorts of supports that students from families with money enjoy every day.

Talk about social mobility is all the rage in higher education right now. But let's get real: College is a great route out of poverty, but for that path to work students must escape the conditions of poverty long enough to complete their degrees.

Sara Goldrick-Rab is a professor of educational policy studies and sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Letters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

wages and way more jobs than President Obama and on and on. Then why do we need a tax bill?

When President Eisenhower was president, the wealthy paid 91% tax. And the economy was great. Ever since they keep dropping the percentage, saying we'll have more jobs and better wages, and now it's down to 35% and they are making trillions and we have the lowest pay ever [when compared to prices] and no good paying jobs.

They say if we cut it to 20% then they will bring our jobs back. Only, the wealthy have said no such thing. Just the Congress talking. Also if you make \$50,000 a year, it would take you 2,600 years to make a billion dollars. I can't even do the math on it but they said average wage, which is supposed to be \$50,000, so you do the math.

Just please stop voting these people in when they do nothing but hurt us. Don't believe them. Watch what is happening.

Let's stop hating Democrats or Republicans and come together on the things we agree on. We have been in an almost 20-year war. What have we won? What do we have to win? We've lost our freedom. I want it back. I hope others do, too.

P.S. All of Trump's businesses are in another country. His ties, champagne ... sorry I can't think of them all ... but none, none, none are made here. Yet he is going to bring our jobs back. What's topping him?

Barbara Goodman
Midwest City

500 For The 50th



Next year is The Observer's 50th as Oklahoma's voice for the voiceless. To mark the occasion, we've launched a special challenge we're calling *500 For The 50th*.

We're asking you, our loyal Observer family, to help us add 500 new subscribers during our annual holiday appeal – vital if we're to ensure The Observer keeps Comforting the Afflicted and Afflicting the Comfortable for another half-century.

Gift subscriptions are the gifts that keep on giving, year around. And they're a real bargain – only \$40 a year, nearly 35% off the newsstand price. We'll even send a card announcing your gift!

These are perilous times for our state and nation – and for The Observer. Corporate behemoths dominate public policy and publishing. The powerful do not give up power easily. We're counting on you to help ensure The Observer remains a voice of reason amid the rightwing vitriol. Won't you join us in the fight?

Happy Holidays from The Hamiltons!

**Send your check to The Observer, P.O. Box 14275, OKC 73113.
We also accept all major credit cards:**

Card No. _____ Expiration: _____ Security Code: _____

Send gift subscriptions to:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please sign gift card from:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please sign gift card from:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please sign gift card from:

Your info:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE (_____) _____