

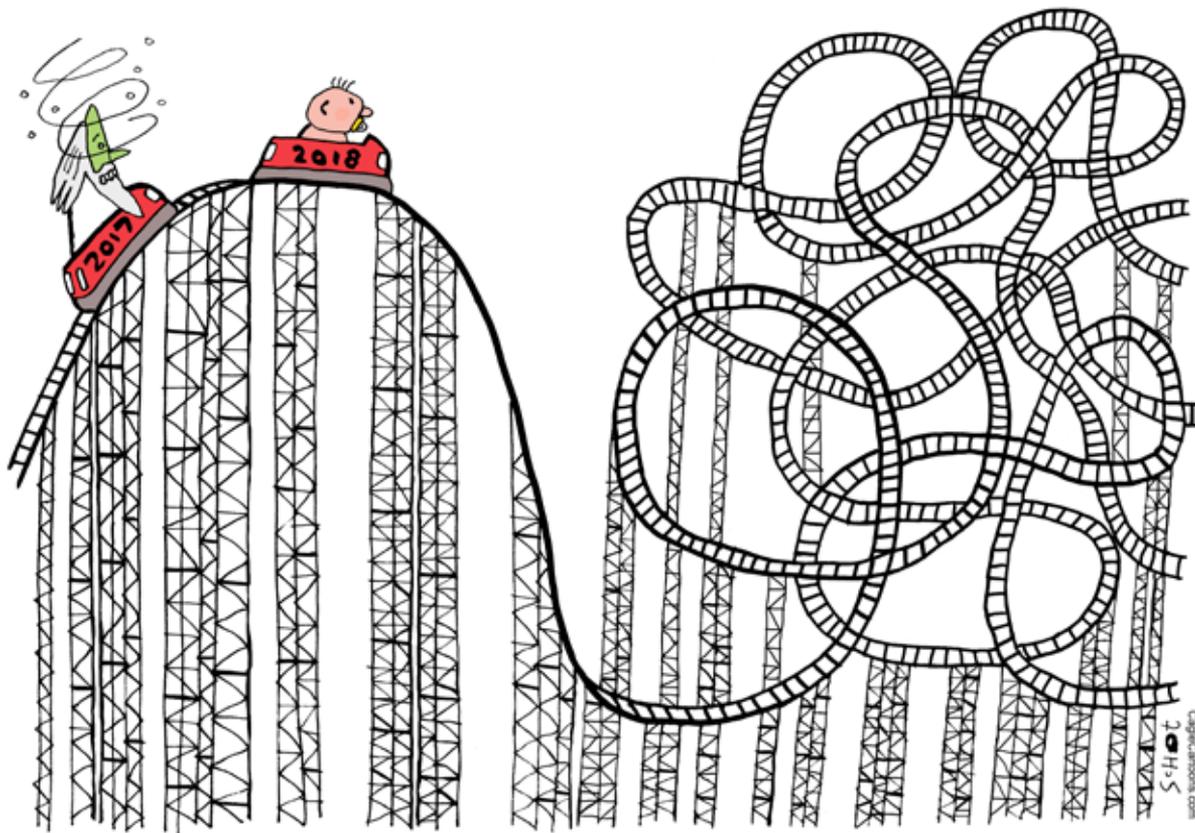
# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

JANUARY 2018 • VOLUME 50 NUMBER 1 • \$5.00

## 18 Fixes For '18

*How Oklahoma Can Be Steered Onto  
A Saner, More Progressive Political Path*



- Cover story begins on page 6



# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

www.okobserver.org

VOLUME 50, NO. 1

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To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

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

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## [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](http://www.okobserver.net) to use a credit card.

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# Observations

## Greetings!

With this, the first issue of The Observer's 50th year, we welcome hundreds of new subscribers – many joining us through the generosity of loyal subscribers who responded to our annual holiday gift campaign.

It won't take long to discover why The Observer is Oklahoma's premier independent journal of commentary. While the state's lockstep, conservative mainstream media shamelessly trumpet the interests of the wealthiest 1%, we champion equality and fairness for all – regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual preference or socio-economic status.

We are unabashed liberals, staunch supporters of public education, separation of church and state, and civil liberties. We believe that together we have a moral obligation to take care of children in the dawn of their lives and seniors in the twilight of theirs – everyone else is on their own, unless they need a hand-up, not a handout.

We don't agree with every viewpoint we publish, but we believe few things contribute to a healthy democracy quite like a robust public square, full of diverse ideas and respectful debate.

These are perilous times for our state and our nation, thanks to the Republican supermajority's fiscal mismanagement at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. and Donald Trump's incoherent presidency. Even so, we remain optimistic that Oklahoma's and America's best days are ahead – if good-hearted, fair-minded folk are given the facts necessary to demand good-hearted, fair-minded public policy from our elected leaders.

As you dig into each issue, please let us know what you think. We welcome other points of view – minus name-calling, innuendo or slander.

If you like what you see, we'd be forever grateful if you'd introduce others to The Observer. Our holiday gift drive – 500 For The 50th – is seeking 500 new subscribers to help give us a jump-start on Comforting the Afflicted and Afflicting the Comfortable for another half-century.

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# THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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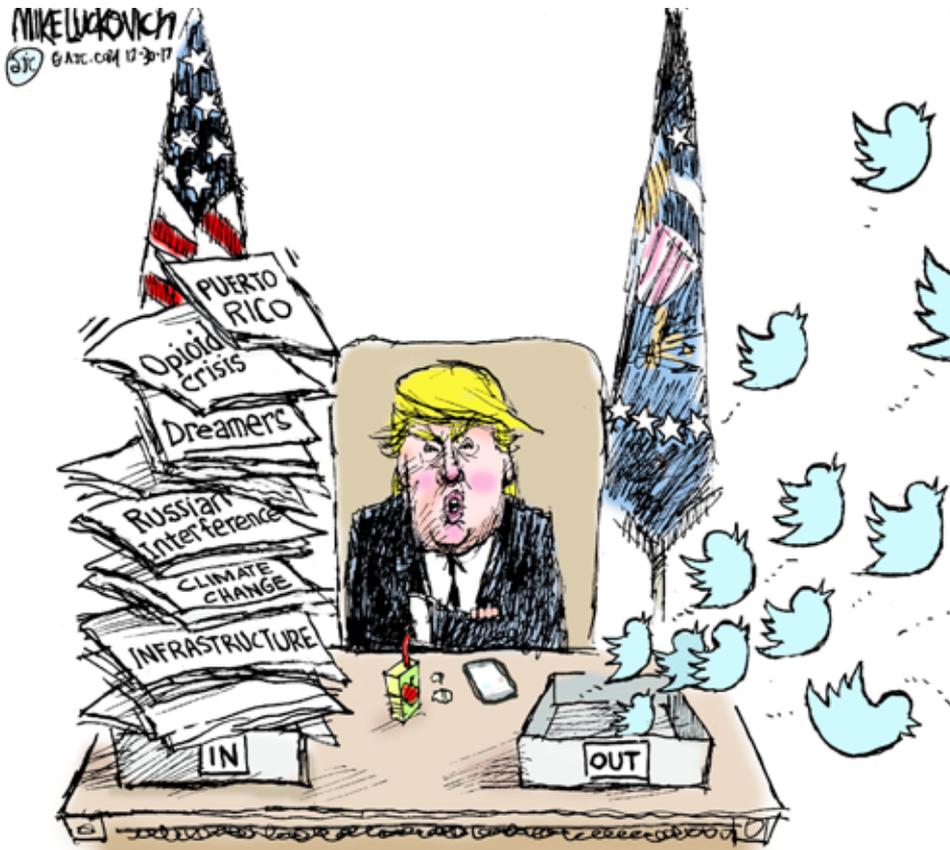
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# Observerscope



You won't want to miss our Jan. 11 Newsmakers on fixing Oklahoma's broken state government, featuring Tulsa Rep. Monroe Nichols and former Gov. David Walters. See back cover for details.

Dart: To KFOR, keeping the Flashpoint trio intact despite Kirk Humphreys' homophobic ranting. Could there be a better time to revamp a program in need of an Extreme Makeover?

Beware the new state House special investigative committee, looking into health department misdeeds. It could become vehicle for all sorts of partisan mischief. See Congress, Benghazi.

Sad, but true: The state Constitution requires a balanced budget, but there is no mechanism to hold the Legislature accountable if it fails to do so. It's up to voters to jettison those who willfully ignore the mandate.

Laurel: To Rep. Scott Inman, opting to finish his sixth and final term rather than resign early for personal reasons. He won't be Democratic leader, but the public square will benefit from his strong voice and strategic thinking.

A new world record category for Guinness? Donald Trump uttered 24 false or misleading statements in a 30-minute interview with the New York Times, according to Washington Post fact-checkers.

Congratulations to our friends John and Marsha Greiner on their golden anniversary. We miss John's daily presence at the Capitol – and his superb reporting.

Let this sink in: In the first 11 months of last year, the U.S. endured 54,858 wildfires that scorched 9,152,458 acres. That's the equivalent of about one-fifth of Oklahoma up in flames. – High Country News

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Jim Bridenstine, leaving his Tulsa area constituents in limbo for months while he hoped for better gig as NASA administrator. If he wasn't going to vote because of potential conflicts of interest, he should have resigned and accelerated the process for his replacement.

Speaking of Bridenstine, his NASA nomination expired at year's end – mired in controversy because it was yet another miserable Trump choice for a vital science-centric post. Hopefully it won't be revived.

Laurel: To Speaker Charles McCall, assuring the State Chamber he would permit the full House to consider proposals, if introduced, to alter anti-tax SQ 640. Great news since Rep. Monroe Nichols' HJR 1003 has waited a year for just such a hearing.

We enthusiastically endorse former Senate President Cal Hobson's brilliant suggestion that Corporation Commission-ex Jim Roth succeed disgraced Kirk Humphreys on OU Board of Regents.

One of the few positives in the abysmal reverse-Robin Hood federal tax package is the Johnson Amendment survived. If preachers want to politic from the pulpit, their churches shouldn't be tax exempt.

We mourn the passing of longtime Observer supporter and former Weatherford Mayor Gary Rader, whose back-cover ad urging folks to visit his hometown graced these pages for years.

Aspen residents living next door to Vice President Mike Pence's vacation get-away hung rainbow banners declaring, "Make America Gay Again." #Resist

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# Letters



Editor, The Observer:

An observation: With public pressure calling for him to resign from the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, the subsequent defeat of Kirk Humphreys – former mayor of Oklahoma City and unsuccessful U.S. Senate candidate – was an unquestioned example of a man who has outlived the principles he was taught as a child that minorities can be excluded from legal protections.

However, it's only a small flaw in the big picture of the homo-haters. With arguments heard in December 2017, should the Supreme Court rule in favor of the Colorado baker who claimed deeply held religious principles forbade him from supplying his public services to a same-gender couple – not to be confused with the Oregon state court case that found against a baker – it will be similar to the *Hardwick v. Bowers* [1986] ruling that said private consenting adult sexual activity was not protected by privacy concerns. It was later overturned by *Lawrence v. Texas* [2003] that outlawed all such laws nationwide, regardless of gender.

I've lived long enough to see that

the USA rarely in a timely manner lives up to its rose-colored glasses ideals of equality, the rule of law, and certainly not justice. We older people don't have 17 years to wait for another reversal of a case that should have been open-and-shut from the beginning.

We citizens are required to live by the "rule of law" but the elected elite members of Congress and life-term federal judges operate with their own interpretation of the Constitution.

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Pleased as I was with the Alabama outcome, it was not a landslide. It was a squeaker, probably a fluke.

Yes, high numbers of African-Americans, lots of women, and LGBTQ voters strongly opposed pedophile Roy Moore. But the 20,000 voters who wrote in a name so as not to vote for either candidate were probably all Republicans. The margin of victory was less than 7,000 votes, so, clearly, in a normal election, the Republican would have won.

To conclude from this Alabama curiosity a national mood shift is dangerous fantasy. There are just 10 months before the 2018 elections. Serious effort will be required to make the changes real.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

*Editor's Note: Nathaniel Batchelder is director of the Peace House in OKC.*

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Barbara Goodman's letter in December Observer:

If one makes \$50,000 a year, it would take that person 20,000 years to make one billion [1,000,000,000] dollars. Not 2,600 years as is stated in the letter.

When we use numbers to support our opinions, we need to double check our math or do better proof reading. If not, we lose some credibility.

Dana Dorr  
Oklahoma City

*Editor's Note: We failed Editing 101, which requires double-checking the math. Thank you for keeping us on our toes!*

Editor, The Observer:

Beware of the TV fruitcakes who use words like dossier. They do so since they heard someone else use it and believed it sounded intellectual.

Beware, too, of a critic of the new tax bill who criticizes lowering the corporate tax rate. Even if they were smart enough to know, they wouldn't want you to realize that we taxpayers pay – yes, pay – the corporate taxes of the great American corporations. The corporate tax is not taking any tax burden off of you.

If the new tax bill does no more than void the alternative minimum tax and the ObamaCare mandate, along with a reduction in the corporate rate, it will be rewarding to this old CPA of 56 years. But, it

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## *Making Sense Of 2017's Nonsense*

**W**hen it comes to state politics, 2017 will be remembered as an epic fail. One regular legislative session. Two special sessions. No grand bargain to fix the state's long-term fiscal crisis.

From the ashes, three takeaways:

- Current leadership at NE 23rd and Lincoln Boulevard doesn't really care about public education.

They pay endless lip service to it, of course, swearing it's their No. 1 priority. But when push comes to shove, they pledge allegiance instead to the state's deepest pockets.

Corporate welfare in the form of the nation's lowest gross production taxes trumps the desperate need to reverse the nation's deepest education cuts. Income tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the state's richest are prioritized over long-promised teacher pay raises.

It is one of the enduring mysteries that two-thirds or more of Oklahoma educators voted to help create a statehouse Republican supermajority that's taken a meat ax to school funding and ignored the exodus of teachers to neighboring states that offer better pay.

Until teachers prioritize their economic self-interest over spurious social issues deployed by the Powers That Be as a divide-and-conquer strategy, public education will founder – and future generations will suffer.

My New Year's advice to educators: Bone up on one of the state's finest hours – approval in 1990 of HB 1017's education reform package. It was enacted only after teachers and public school supporters turned up the political heat, marching around the Capitol for days in nasty weather.

Teachers forget how much political power they can wield. They need to band together and hold all-hat, no-cattle legislators accountable for their double-talk. The 2018 elections provide the perfect opportunity to do so.

- Given big money's hammerlock on the statehouse, rank-and-file Oklahomans are left with little choice but to take matters into their own hands.

Already, the group Restore Oklahoma Now Inc. has

filed a statewide ballot initiative – SQ 795 – seeking to restore the gross production tax to its historic 7% rate in order to provide a \$4,000 pay raise for public school teachers.

Another group, Represent Oklahoma, is pursuing a similar petition strategy aimed at ending partisan gerrymandering that prioritizes political power over communities of interest when legislative boundaries are redrawn every decade.

In addition, Tulsa Rep. Monroe Nichols' HJR 1003 could give Oklahoma voters the opportunity to repeal SQ 640 that requires a legislative supermajority or statewide voter approval to raise taxes.

House leadership bottled up Nichols' proposal in last spring's regular session, but it could be revived in 2018 – especially since it is emerging as a hot topic among grass roots activists across the state.

[Indeed, efforts to roll back SQ 640 and create an independent redistricting commission will be topics at Jan. 11's Observer Newmakers event in OKC, featuring Nichols and former Gov. David Walters. See back cover for details.]

Don't be surprised if November's general election ballot is state question heavy yet again. This is what happens when elected leadership fails to govern.

- The Democratic Party, reeling much of this century, is showing signs of life, no doubt thanks to the statehouse morass.

Democrats captured four of six legislative special elections in 2017 – all previously held by Republicans. The most remarkable upset came in an uber conservative west and south Tulsa Senate district where political newcomer Allison Ikley-Freeman knocked off Republican operative and former Jenks City Councilor Brian O'Hara.

The seat-flips sent an unmistakable message that voters are displeased with the GOP-dominated Legislature's failure to set Oklahoma on a sound, long-term fiscal course that protects vital state services.

Do these takeaways portend massive electoral upheaval in Oklahoma next year? Much will depend on whether Republican leaders can summon the courage to cross their deep-pocketed donors and side with rank-and-file Oklahomans. Don't bet on it.

**A VISITOR FROM ANOTHER PLANET TRIES TO MAKE SENSE OF LIFE ON PLANET EARTH.**



*To 2018 ... And Beyond!*

**BY ARNOLD HAMILTON**

**T**his is the season of resolutions and predictions. Of hope, not pessimism. It would be easy to predict what the 2018 Legislature will not do. History is a powerful predictor, particularly when an election year is involved.

Rather than give in to the glass-half-empty syndrome, we prefer to be aspirational at the dawn of 2018.

If we were to be project managers for a dry dock overhaul of the listing Good Ship Oklahoma, we'd offer these 18 fixes in pursuit of a fairer, more just and prosperous state:

1. Abolish the death penalty.

Rather than waste energy pursuing ever more ingenious ways to kill convicts, we should make the current moratorium permanent. It is almost certain we have executed innocents. No one wants that. Plus, it's less costly to lock up someone for life than to kill them.

2. Legalize pot.

Oklahoma's prisons exceed capacity primarily because of punitive drug laws – a massive drain on the state's finite financial resources. Other states – California is the latest – demonstrate the wisdom of legalizing and taxing marijuana. Less crime, more revenue for vital services – a no-brainer.

Oklahoma voters will get the chance this year to decide the fate of medical marijuana, already legal in 29 states. Nearly everyone knows someone who's risked breaking the law to get pot for a loved one suffering the effects of chemotherapy, crippling arthritis or other maladies. Legalize it medically and it no longer is criminal to do what's best medically for you or your loved one.

3. Eliminate or modify SQ 640.

The 25-year-old constitutional amendment is slowly but surely killing Oklahoma. It requires a legislative supermajority [75%] – or a vote of the people – to raise taxes, no matter how severe the crisis. It's often too difficult to persuade three-fourths of the Legislature or a majority of Oklahomans the sky is blue. Imagine how hard it would be to convince them on taxes – primary reason taxes have gone down [no supermajority required] but not up since 1990.

4. Eliminate term limits.

Twelve-year restrictions on serving in the Legislature gave special interests even more power. Lawmakers come and go, forced out – whether competent or incompetent – by an arbitrary date. Lobbyists are not term-limited. They have become the Legislature's de facto institutional memory and bill-writing authority – which hardly benefits rank-and-file Oklahomans. For proof, look at state government since Republi-

cans seized control in 2010.

5. Elect more women.

Women represent more than half Oklahoma's population but fill only 20 of 149 legislative seats – 13.4%. Though women served recently as appropriations chairs in the House and Senate, neither was invited into final budget negotiations, a sure sign of the patriarchy's grip on power. The men have screwed it up long enough; let's give women a chance.

6. Elect a Democratic governor.

The two leading contenders, former Attorney General Drew Edmondson and former Sen. Connie Johnson, are vastly more progressive than any of the Republican candidates. Either would help bring balance to a Ship of State that's tilting so far right it's about to capsize. What's even more important, though, is a Democratic governor would be at the table for re-districting – the redrawing of legislative boundaries after each Census. The current lines ensure GOP supermajorities. A fairer drawing would create more competitive legislative races and give rank-and-file voters a larger voice in public policymaking.

7. End gerrymandering.

A new group calling itself Represent Oklahoma is pursuing an initiative petition that would give voters the opportunity to create an independent, non-partisan redistricting commission. It would prioritize communities of interest over political power when legislative boundaries are drawn. This would be a wonderful addition to the general election ballot.

8. End the revolving door.

The state Ethics Commission this month will decide the fate of a proposal that would block state employees and lawmakers from lobbying for two years once they leave their current office. The cooling off period would stop the behind-the-scenes, possible future employment dance that undoubtedly affects decision-making from the legislative halls to the agency offices. This would provide one more layer of protection for rank-and-file citizens often victimized by this seamy insider game.

9. Fully enact criminal justice reform.

Now that Rep. Scott Biggs is out the way, the Legislature should embrace what 2016 voters clearly said they want: to get smart on crime. Take the money saved by ending punitive [and unproductive] punishment and invest it in addiction and mental health services, as well as job retraining and education – all with the goal of creating healthy, more productive and taxpaying citizens.

10. Reverse income and gross production tax cuts.

Oklahoma's never-ending budget calamity is proof yet again that trickle down economics does not work. Driven primarily, though not exclusively, by GOP officials, the state stuffed about \$2 billion annually into the pockets of the state's wealthiest – all with the promise it would unleash unparalleled prosperity. What it actually did is starve vital state services.

11. Teacher pay raise.

Oklahoma's teachers are the lowest paid in the re-

gion. Many haven't had a raise this decade. Indeed, teachers would need a \$10,000 boost just to restore spending power they had in 1993.

Already, the group Restore Oklahoma Now Inc. has filed a statewide ballot initiative – SQ 795 – seeking to restore the gross production tax to its historic 7% percent rate in order to provide a \$4,000 pay raise for public school teachers. It's not enough, but it would be a good start.

12. State employee pay raise.

Like teachers, state workers have gotten the shaft – no across-the-board hike in a decade, fewer doing more work, positions unfilled, demands increasing from a growing population ... in short, no respect. These hard-working folks deserve much better, especially from a population that considers itself the buckle on the Bible belt.

13. Expanded health care for the working poor.

Oklahoma blew a golden opportunity when anti-Obama tea partiers refused to even consider Medicaid expansion – which would have pumped hundreds of millions into an underfunded system and helped keep rural hospitals and nursing homes afloat. It's never too late to do the right thing and fix the system – leveraging as many federal dollars as possible.

14. Find spots for Ken Miller and Gary Jones to continue to serve.

Miller, the state treasurer, and Jones, the state auditor, are term-limited. Both are the kind of straight-shooting, excellent public servants in short supply, especially on the Republican side. Jones hopes to become governor [an uphill battle in a crowded field], but Miller hasn't announced any future political plans. Oklahoma would be wise to find ways to continue to plug them into public service.

15. End the war on wind power.

The carbon barons, especially Harold Hamm, are waging an all-out assault on wind power, viewing it as a threat to the control they wield over state energy resources. The problem is, legislators and regulators tend to cave to the biggest checks, meaning wind is excelling despite incredible obstacles. It's time for the state to embrace renewables – Oklahoma can be a world leader because of wide-open spaces, abundant solar and ever-present wind.

16. End the GOP stranglehold on the congressional

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Deborah Astley

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# *Saving Oklahoma Public Education*

BY JIM WILSON

**S**tarting today it will take a generation to restore public education to levels achieved in 1990 with the passage of HB 1017. Unfortunately, there is no such effort. The easiest solution for young adults who have or expect to have children is to move to another state. Hopefully those who choose to stay in Oklahoma will help with solutions.

Structurally, common education is in a position where it cannot survive as a useful social tool. Young people are not pursuing careers in education. Half the new teachers are leaving the profession within five years. Experienced teachers are leaving to teach elsewhere. Often there are no applicants for open teaching positions. Hiring a teacher requires an applicant and hiring a really good teacher may require multiple applicants. Hiring and funding enough teachers to keep class size reasonably small is paramount.

Unfortunately, Oklahomans refuse to respect teachers as professionals. Disparaging arguments such as “they only work six hours a day and have three

months off every year” are not thoughtful. A quick intuitive analysis suggests the absence of qualified applicants infers the job is less than desirable.

Teachers are attacked as incompetent without basis by the Legislature, business community, churches and citizens at large. Every year there is a volume of new policies proposed, many of which become law, with intentions of improving results. Overlooked is the obvious solution – a master teacher with a small class.

Proponents of testing think measuring and comparing student ability is a way to hold teachers accountable. School administrators can identify underperforming teachers without testing. Regardless of the method, there is no pool of qualified applicants from which to choose replacements.

In conjunction with the inability to hire teachers or replace bad teachers, there is an erroneous assumption among legislators and the general public that all kids have the same ability. The thought that continued negative reinforcement will force schools and

teachers to achieve similar results among kids with varying ability is unfounded.

### **THE PROBLEM**

Teachers need to be accepted as college educated and professionals. Historically teachers have primarily been women. Women have been relegated to nurturing – which is perceived as less valuable than *real* work. There is resistance to spending money on kids from birth through high school since rearing children is women's work. We assume women in our communities will be glad to nurture our children without decent compensation – *because they love*

## *Oklahoma has plenty of money and a vested interest in the public education system.*

*what they do.*

Teachers need to demand respect. Demand it from peers, administrators, legislators, community and family. Teachers need to demand compensation commensurate with the value of their social contribution.

The Associated Press recently reported income for a typical U.S. household, adjusted for inflation, finally regained its 1999 peak last year. As a point of reference, by the end of this fiscal year an Oklahoma teacher will need an additional \$10,000 to achieve inflation adjusted parity with the peak year 1993. The current rate of \$31,600 established in FY 2008 has lost approximately \$6,000 in real value through FY 2018.

Legislators will struggle with a small increase in the minimum salary schedule for teachers. They will complain about the expense and the absence of revenue. And they will mislead by suggesting significant raises are unaffordable.

Oklahoma has plenty of money and a vested interest in the public education system.

For some fun with semantics, can an increase in pay be called a raise when it does not exceed the real value lost to inflation?

### **THE SOLUTION**

Adopt a proposal to achieve parity with the 1993 pay scale by increasing each level of the minimum salary schedule by \$10,000 along with a statutory requirement for an annual inflation adjustment plus 2%. With this adjustment, teachers will have received parity, will maintain parity and accumulate small raises.

Give the legislators until April 1 to statutorily create a minimum salary schedule reflecting the above changes. Legislators may claim support but blame leadership for stifling legislation. That claim would be untrue because any member can initiate a discharge petition to bring a measure directly to the floor where everyone will know how every member voted.

If they fail, tell them teachers are too sick and tired to work. Filing to retain their seats begins April 11. As parents scramble to find day care with their medi-

an \$18 per month income tax savings, they may very well decide to support and elect representatives who will address the ongoing neglect of public education.

### **IGNORE THE EXCUSES**

Excuse 1: "If we have to raise revenue it will hurt economic activity."

Legislators would have us believe that economic activity is limited by government spending. The obvious contradiction is the known value of consumer spending. A teacher with an extra dollar is more likely to spend it in Oklahoma than a royalty owner chasing the next gas well in North Dakota or the CEO buying

bonds in a Tennessee utility company. A royalty owner threatening to leave the state to avoid contributing to education will not be missed.

Excuse 2: "Other agencies will have less money."

If so, it is only because of poor management by the Legislature. Concern for other agencies, especially higher education, is the reason SQ 744 failed [initiative to pay teachers the regional average]. Undisputed is the structural funding needs for common education. It is not the responsibility of teachers, who have taken a 25% cut in real income, to continue funding the remainder of government by forgoing their pay.

Excuse 3: "Teachers are greedy."

If anything, teachers are not demanding enough respect as professionals. Some teachers think they are being charitable by donating services, only to find out they are being used and then demeaned for doing so. Some buy supplies for their classrooms – only to be disparaged when test results show some of the kids have challenges. Charity is fine – but giving away work and money to sustain a broken system is damaging the entire system by postponing remedies.

Excuse 4: "Teachers don't work full-time and aren't worth what we pay them."

In every community there is an assortment of the *smartest* people on earth who bloviate about the worth of someone else. Invariably, the clown with the mouth perceives a self-serving benefit when defining the worth of another. Why are people not seeking such a great job that pays too much?

Excuse 5: "Teachers don't understand how the economy works."

Legislators espouse their simplified understanding of markets. With a diminishing supply of teachers and increased demand to educate more children while keeping class size reasonably small, the teachers are in the enviable position of teaching legislators about leverage. Leverage is the impossible task of firing and replacing 50,000 sick teachers.

*Jim Wilson, a Tahlequah Democrat, represented District 3 in the Oklahoma Senate from 2004-12 and served in the Oklahoma House from 2000-04.*



"WELL, YA SEE, THESE POOR WIDOWS GOTTA HAVE SKIN IN THE GAME OR THEY MIGHT NOT APPRECIATE THE FREE STUFF WE GOTTA GIVE 'EM..."

## SQ 640 Makes State Ungovernable

BY GENE PERRY

In March 1992, Oklahoma voters approved SQ 640, which requires a 75% supermajority for the Legislature to increase taxes. It passed with the support of 56% of those voting that day, but turnout was very low.

For example, President Bill Clinton received just 34% of the vote in Oklahoma later that year, but still had nearly 100,000 more votes than SQ 640.

Nevertheless, the minority of Oklahoma voters who supported SQ 640 on that day has had a dramatic and long-lasting impact on our state.

The history of SQ 640 is deeply intertwined with Oklahoma's debates over education funding. In 1990, Oklahoma passed historic education reforms that paired tax increases with new requirements to reduce class sizes, increase teacher pay, strengthen teacher accreditation, and make other improvements to schools. Soon a political action committee called the "Oklahoma Taxpayers Union" organized a ballot initiative [SQ 639] to repeal it. SQ 639 was voted down in October 1991, but the Oklahoma Taxpayers

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*Efforts to repeal anti-tax SQ 640 will be a prime topic at Jan. 11's Observer Newsmakers event at OKC's Full Circle Books, featuring Rep. Monroe Nichols and former Gov. David Walters. See back cover for details.*

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Union regrouped to put SQ 640 on the ballot just five months later.

The largest financial supporter of the campaign for SQ 640 was the Oklahoma Publishing Company [the parent company of The Oklahoman newspaper] and its executives Edward L. Gaylord and Clay Bennett [now chairman of the OKC Thunder]. On the other side, the biggest financial contributors against SQ 640 were the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce and the state Chamber of Commerce, alongside groups representing teachers and public employees.

Oklahoma's 75% supermajority restriction for any tax increase is the most stringent in the U.S. Four-

teen other states require a supermajority, but in most of those states, it is 60% or two-thirds. Oklahoma is the only place in the country to require three-fourths supermajority approval of all tax increases.

And since SQ 640 passed, lawmakers have not once cleared that hurdle. In most cases, the idea of raising taxes was not even brought up, because lawmakers knew that it would be nearly impossible.

Of course, that hasn't prevented lawmakers from cutting taxes multiple times with a simple majority. As a result, Oklahomans are paying a historically low percentage of income in state and local taxes. The 7.9% of personal income that Oklahomans contributed to state and local taxes in 2014 was lower than all but two states and significantly below all our surrounding states.

The costs of this disinvestment in our state have been well-documented, including the largest cuts to school funding in the nation, serious threats to

the care of Oklahoma's most vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities, tens of thousands of Oklahomans losing needed mental health care, and a prison system at the brink of collapse.

Now, majorities of Republicans and Democrats alike have realized the mistakes of the past and acknowledged that Oklahoma has a revenue problem. But SQ 640 allows a minority of anti-tax legislators to block revenue solutions that Oklahomans want.

Even though a revenue plan won strong, bipartisan support in special session, it fell just short in the House of Representatives with "only" 70% approval.

As the Tulsa World recently wrote, the Oklahoma Legislature "has become an example of the tyranny of the extremes." To get out of this mess and make Oklahoma governable again, it's clear that we need to undo SQ 640.

*Gene Perry is policy director of Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).*

## *Cooking At The Capitol*

**BY DAVID PERRYMAN**

**I**n my family, holiday traditions have always been as much about food as they are about the gathering of extended family. Some of my best memories of Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year are the smells and tastes of foods that are often reserved for special occasions.

With absolute predictability, we not only knew what each aunt would be bringing, we also knew what bowl or dish it would arrive in. Many of the dishes containing the food had been in our family for decades, if not generations, and were as much of our family tradition as what they contained.

Sometimes, an elderly aunt would "pass the baton" by presenting a recipe and the bowl that it was served in to a younger family member.

While there might be upwards of eight to 12 "cooks in the kitchen" making final preparations for a specific holiday meal, each knew the boundaries of their bailiwick and never crossed the line in such a manner as would spoil someone else's culinary offering.

Perhaps state legislators and other partisan politicians in Oklahoma government would best serve their state by tending to their own "bailiwick." In a classic case of "too many cooks spoiling the broth," a Republican-led committee that claims to be "investigatory" has joined a Republican-led audit and a Republican-led grand jury in trampling around a state agency that has been intentionally underfunded and set up to fail.

This new committee is reminiscent of the Republican-led "secret" investigatory committee that was formed in January 2017 to investigate sexual harassment claims against a Republican legislator. There is

little reason to believe anything will be "discovered" if it would serve the party best for it to "not be discovered."

It came as no surprise that the sexual harassment investigation did not "discover" that the \$28,414.20 in state funds paid to the person who claimed that she was harassed or the \$16,085.80 in state funds paid to her attorneys was paid by House leadership in violation of 58 O.S. Section 158(A). Instead, the legislator was allowed to set his own resignation date and the committee rode into the sunset.

Now another politically motivated Republican-led "investigatory committee" is trampling the evidence while a Republican state auditor who has allegedly been aware of the facts for months rushed in the past several days to start an "audit" only to announce a day or two later that he personally shouldn't be involved but that people who work for him would be. Not to be outdone, the Republican attorney general who was appointed by the governor just a few months ago has initiated a grand jury to "investigate" those involved, including a number of other Fallin appointees.

In a breath of fresh air, the United States Department of Justice and the FBI announced they will investigate. In light of that announcement, Oklahoma would best be served if the partisans and those who might have a motive to prevent an embarrassment to a specific political party would "get out of the kitchen" and not spoil evidence.

Most observers agree that there are no missing funds and instead believe that the agency likely used

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# The Many Ups, And Several Downs, Of A Soon-To-Be Ex-OU Regent

BY CAL HOBSON

Since the 2018 legislative session will not officially begin until next month, it is far too early for any criticism, praise, guesses or conjectures from me about what may or may not be accomplished when it convenes in February. Here's hoping against all odds that Gov. Mary Fallin and lawmakers will display cooperation and consensus in addressing the plethora of problems besetting and besotting our state.

The question that really matters is actually very simple: If not them, who, and if not now, when?

So, while we wait for either the current day version of the Ringling Brothers Circus or less likely the ancient Greek Senate of wise thinkers to arrive at the Capitol, I've chosen this month to discuss the life and times, foibles and foolishness, accomplishments and accolades of former OKC mayor, still prominent and productive real estate developer but soon-to-be ex-University of Oklahoma regent Kirk Humphreys.

Additionally, and for nearly a decade, Kirk has been the conservative commentator on Flashpoint, a TV political talkie. His liberal foil, of course, is former Okie from Muskogee Attorney General Mike "The Mumbler" Turpen and the popular show's moderator is one of the Ogle boys. Forgive me for not remembering his first name but they all look alike to me. And it is in this generally entertaining, sometimes informational environment where Mr. Humphreys met his, so to speak, word-induced Waterloo.

For brief background, Kirk stepped on his tongue by saying if homosexuality is "OK" then a man "sleeping with a boy is, too." Rep. Emily Virgin, D-Norman, sitting in for Turpen, gave the obviously adled Humphreys several opportunities to correct, clarify or withdraw his remarks but, no, the construction magnate, former school board member and big city mayor dug deeper, dredging up the gay ghost of a retired Democrat, Massachusetts Congressman

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Barney Frank. Reliably moderate moderator Ogle declared Kirk's comments would probably generate some emails.

You think so, Kevin?

The response was more like a tsunami, a torrent, a tirade of talk and tears that eventually led to his tortured resignation as a regent to be effective before the spring semester begins at OU but after the national championship college football playoff series.

Now that makes sense to me. Who wouldn't want to attend all the parties in Pasadena, then be placed in prime Rose Bowl positions and thereby enjoy an opportunity to socialize with the prominent and prosperous boosters of our beloved flagship university? After all, that's just part of what busy regents must do!

However, on the downside and before the much anticipated fun and sun in California, the other six supervisors of all things related to the Sooners had to be Grinches at Christmas time and demand their fellow Poo Bah resign from probably the most coveted of all non-elected positions in Oklahoma – being an OU regent.

And take note: I don't use the word "demand" lightly because, for nearly a month of twisting and turning in the messy maelstrom he alone created, Kirk, a man of many talents and accomplishments, had declared the word "resignation" was not in his vocabulary.

And frankly such a position of affront to political correctness seemed less of an issue when, for example, Kirk opined that perceived challenges at Putnam City High School – where he long ago was a board member – were related to the "changing gene pool."

Hmmm. That's interesting. It makes me wonder what his take is currently concerning the overwhelming dominance in both numbers and talent on his, and our, OU football team, measured in contributions by black athletes notwithstanding a couple of white guys named Mayfield and Andrews.

In the very unlikely event that soon-to-depart regent Humphreys feels the urge to respond to my query, a brief Google search of a fellow named Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder could be informative. He, too, lost his job by turning a complicated, scientific question of athletic prowess, not to mention academic acumen, into – and forgive me – an issue of black and white.

Most recently, when parents at the new John Rex Elementary Charter School also demanded Humphreys resign as one of their board members, cash-rich Kirk explained the innovative facility probably would not exist without his previous financial support.

While there is a grain of truth in such braggadocio, such a claim by me would be similarly questionable if I declared, as principal author of legislative authorizing expanded casino gambling in Bible Belt Oklahoma, that no such reality could or would exist without little old me.

I do regularly get credit, or blame, for such a fact, but on matters of major import, cooperation and consensus of many generally is the rule rather than just a dictatorial proclamation by one, regardless of the real or perceived power of that individual.

Look, I've known Kirk Humphreys for decades and like him personally. He is smart, often charming but occasionally arrogant and I can declare, without fear of contradiction, that I, too, have at least one of those three traits.

Additionally, as a member of the Senate Education Committee for 16 years, I voted for scores of regents nominated by five different governors, from both political parties, to serve in such a capacity.

Had I still been in the Legislature during 2012, when Mr. Humphreys' name came forth from Gov. Fallin to serve on OU's governing board, I would have cast, without question, a "yes" vote guided by what I



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knew at that time.

Today, based on what I know right now, my vote would be, for obvious reasons, not just “no” but ... “hell, no.”

Words and actions matter and have consequences both good and bad, especially for public officials or prominent people. For evidence, just ask Heisman Trophy winner Baker Mayfield about the Kansas game or, better yet and personally more painful, me – a former somebody.

In closing, and as usual, I do have a bit of advice for Gov. Fallin who alone can submit for confirmation by our honorable Senate a replacement for the deposed Humphreys. How about nominating well-respected attorney, former Corporation Commissioner and twice-elected Oklahoma County Commissioner Jim Roth for the vacancy?

Oh, you’re right, governor. To your great credit you tried that once before when you offered Mr. Roth’s name to serve on the less visible but, as required by law, bipartisan state election board as its only Democrat. Without comment he was turned down by the Republican-dominated Senate committee. And it ain’t because he was a Democrat or wasn’t qualified then, or sadly, now. It was simply because he is gay.

So governor, better find another rich, white, straight, male Republican maximum contributor just like five of the six other current OU deciders. After all, we don’t want any controversy with this nomination. We’ve already had enough generated by the fellow he replaces.

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

# *Arrests For Marijuana Possession Spiked In 2016. What happened?*

**BY RYAN GENTZLER**

**L**ast May, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation [OSBI] released official crime statistics for 2016. While most attention on crime rates is rightly devoted to serious crimes, OSBI noted an eye-catching development in a supplemental report: arrests for drug crimes increased by over 20% from 2015. Part of this may be the result of changes in reporting methods, as agencies switch from reporting totals to incident-based reporting.

However, when viewed in light of other trends in the report, it suggests that some law enforcement agencies were devoting more resources to low-level drug crimes – possibly at the expense of investigating more serious crimes – in the run up to the November 2016 election.

The surge happened as Oklahomans prepared to vote on whether to reclassify simple drug possession as a misdemeanor, which they ultimately did in November 2016. This apparent shift to focus on minor drug crimes reflects a bad case of misaligned priorities.

OSBI includes statistics both for crimes that are reported to law enforcement and for arrests made by agencies. Reports of most “index crimes” – serious offenses like murder, aggravated assault, and burglary – increased in number from 2015, while the number of murders ticked down. Overall, the number of index crimes [not the crime rate, which takes into account population changes] rose by 5.1% following three consecutive years of decreases.

Despite the rise in reported index crimes, the num-

ber of arrests for those offenses by county and city agencies fell by over 10% [our analysis does not include state agencies or juvenile arrests, which causes slight variations from the numbers cited here].

Similarly, arrests for alcohol-related crimes fell by over 10%, continuing a long decline. But the number of drug arrests by local agencies increased by about 16%, by far the largest single-year increase in recent years. This is enough to at least raise an eyebrow – with more serious crimes being reported, why are there fewer arrests for those crimes but more for drug crimes?

OSBI also provides numbers of drug arrests broken down by possession or sales/manufacturing, as well as the category of the substance: marijuana; opium, cocaine and their derivatives; synthetic narcotics; and other. Possession accounted for about nine in 10 drug arrests in 2016.

While all categories of drugs saw increases in arrests, the increases were far higher for marijuana and other drugs; together, these categories accounted for 80% of the increase in the number of arrests.

Since the arresting officer decides which category the drug falls under, and it’s not always clear what the substance is at the time of an arrest, the “other” category likely includes most arrests for illegal possession of prescription pills.

Because of this, it’s likely that the sharp increase in arrests can be at least partly explained by law enforcement focusing on opioids, a growing concern in Oklahoma. Our state has struggled with prescription



abuse for years, and Attorney General Mike Hunter has led an effort to bring together substance abuse services, law enforcement, and others to combat the problem.

The increase in marijuana arrests is more puzzling. Numbers had been following a clear downward trend, seeing an increase in only one of the previous seven years. The increase of 20% in marijuana arrests from 2015 to 2016 is a drastic deviation from that trend, alone accounting for 43% of the overall increase in drug arrests. As Oklahoma prepares to vote on legalizing marijuana for medical purposes in 2018, the trend seems to be far out of step with the current moment.

It's no secret that many law enforcement leaders were among the loudest opponents of SQ 780, the ballot question passed by voters in 2016 that reclassified simple drug possession and minor property crimes as misdemeanors rather than felonies.

In the run-up to the election, for example, Rogers County Sheriff Scott Walton darkly predicted that people with addictions would create havoc: "They can steal more, and use drugs freely and openly. If you're caught with heroin on a school playground, you're guilty of a misdemeanor ... I think it sends a message that these things aren't as bad."

Oklahoma voters didn't see it that way, passing the question and its companion measure, SQ 781, by healthy margins.

It's possible that some law enforcement agencies,

believing SQ 780 would send a message that drugs "aren't as bad," would use their discretion to reinforce their own message that drugs are indeed dangerous by arresting more people.

The trends in drug arrests across counties differed widely: agencies in 25 counties – about one in three – made fewer drug arrests in 2016 than in 2015. But the counties with the largest populations saw marked increases: 11.6% in Oklahoma County, 13.6% in Tulsa County, and 24.8% in Cleveland County.

The increase of 639 drug arrests in Oklahoma County – home of outspoken SQ 780 opponent District Attorney David Prater – alone accounts for almost a quarter of the total state increase.

Local law enforcement leaders must make critical decisions about where to focus their limited resources. The best research shows that the most effective ways to prevent crime are to address issues like substance abuse through treatment rather than punishment, and to make people who would break the law feel that they're likely to be caught.

Last year's crime statistics show that, on average, our law enforcement agencies moved in the opposite direction in 2016: focusing less on investigating and making arrests for serious crimes, and spending more time arresting people for drug crimes.

This is the wrong approach if we hope to make Oklahoma communities safer and stronger.

*Ryan Gentzler is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).*

# *Inter-Tribal Task Force Tackles Child Policy Issues*

**BY JOE DORMAN**

**O**n Dec. 14, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy [OICA] hosted its first Indian Child Welfare Task Force meeting. This gathering brought together inter-tribal and state agencies with a focus on respecting the government-to-government relationship the State of Oklahoma has with each of the 39 federally recognized tribal nations headquartered in our state.

The primary aspects the task force focused on were: [1] discussing matters affecting Indian Child Welfare, [2] increasing technical awareness for tribes to adopt and maintain statistics and data with a goal towards accurately tracking information about Native populations and [3] identifying needs around administrative issues that negatively impact the placement of Native

American youth throughout Oklahoma.

After five hours of discussion and collaboration, the task force produced several recommendations and major policy areas that need improvement within the categories of education, social justice and health care.

Some of those recommendations and policy areas are:

1. Creating Tribal Courts for kids, overseen by tribal membership, that divert children away from the juvenile justice system and towards rehabilitation resources available through either the Oklahoma Department of Human Services or tribal resources;
2. Nation to Nation agreements, along with further

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# *Chief Reflects On Successful 2017*

**BY BILL JOHN BAKER**

**A**s we begin 2018, we can reflect on our multitude of achievements in the past year and look forward to the coming year's opportunities. We can see where we have been in the past 12 months and what possibilities the future holds.

This reflective time of year reminds me to think about what truly matters to all of us. When the holidays come around, our lives take on a larger meaning than simply living for ourselves. We think of our loved ones, our extended families, our long-lost friends and our neighbors.

As Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, I think of our almost 360,000 citizens around the world and want the best for every single one of them.

A good government makes life better for its people, and for future generations. That is what we are striving for at the Cherokee Nation. In 2017, we reached significant heights and accomplished historic achievements.

First, we broke ground on the hospital expansion project at the WW Hastings Health Campus in Tahlequah. It will be a historic day for the tribe when we open our Indian Health Service joint venture facility. The 470,000-square-foot facility, which will be the largest Native health care facility in the country, is on target to open in 2019. The four-story facility will fea-

ture 180 exam rooms and an ambulatory surgery center. About 350 construction jobs and more than 850 new health jobs will eventually be fulfilled over time.

In the past year, we also released the results of our latest economic impact study on the Oklahoma economy. The tribe strengthens the state's economy through investments and jobs. Our fiscal footprint exceeds \$2 billion, and we will strive to ensure that continues. Our newest entertainment facility in Grove, the 10th in the Cherokee Nation Businesses gaming portfolio, was opened on Grand Lake, and it created about 175 good jobs in Delaware County.

We filed a lawsuit against opioid distributors and large chain drugstores that have flooded our communities with dangerous pills. Over the past two years these companies have flooded Cherokee Nation with enough prescription opioid painkillers to provide every man, woman and child 153 doses each.

In 2017, Cherokee Nation also filed a lawsuit against the federal government on claims the United States mismanaged the tribe's trust fund. The suit asks the U.S. government to provide an accurate accounting of the Cherokee Trust Fund, which includes property, land, funds and other resources the federal government may have mismanaged over decades.

One of the most pressing things we focused on in

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# Task Force

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cooperative agreements between the state of Oklahoma and specific nations to improve data [especially electronic data] and information sharing regarding child social services;

3. Tribal Languages taught in schools as curriculum to ensure preservation of tribal knowledge and culture;

4. Funding mental health services at an earlier age and in partnership with tribal nations so as to maximize opportunities for better health care outcomes;

5. Exploring the possibility of transferring individuals within the state corrections system to tribal jurisdiction should there be a program in place which meets suitable criteria under criminal justice reform measures. Transfer to tribal jurisdictions could reduce the burden on the state corrections system and allow the tribes to work with their own membership for treatment and counseling;

6. Oklahoma state employees, agents of the court and law enforcement need to be trained on agreements, policies, sovereignty issues and compact details for a better understanding of how to deal with Oklahomans who have tribal membership;

7. Tribes need state Medicaid reform and enhanced partnerships through agreements to better improve federal reimbursement for coverage and assist the

state government with these costs;

8. SNAP, medical records, and other information should be shared through binding confidentiality agreements to allow both state and tribal governments to better serve their constituents;

9. Foster parent payment should be restored to assist with the cost of helping these families who take in children to provide better opportunities;

10. Excused absence for tribal events should be allowed from schools to help preserve heritage of student-aged members, as well as accurate information regarding statehood day events and how this impacted tribal members during those times;

11. Continuing Legal Educations classes for members of the legal community to better understand sovereignty issues within Oklahoma's judicial system;

12. UNITY and other youth programs should receive greater recognition and work with schools to better provide opportunities for tribal youth to gain leadership experiences; and

13. Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting [AFCAR] statistics should break down to tribes individually, when possible.

OICA looks forward to working with our legislators, state agencies and tribal departments to find ways to improve services for all the children of our state, including those with tribal membership. We will continue to keep our readers updated on solutions we are able to achieve through this and other initiatives. *Former state Rep. Joe Dorman is CEO of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.*

# Chief

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the past year is the conservation of our air, land and water. Cherokee Nation worked with the state to get an emergency order to halt the disposal of radioactive waste near the Arkansas and Illinois rivers, and we vowed to reduce the tribe's carbon footprint at our complex and all buildings.

It is our responsibility to preserve our natural resources by executing policies with long-term sustainability in mind. That's why I am committed to making Cherokee Nation's complex more friendly to renewable energy sources. We constructed a solar energy charge station and purchased electric cars to add to our fleet.

In cultural preservation, our Cherokee Language Master Apprentice Program graduated its first adult students. This new language program is designed to create a new generation of adult speakers and teachers for the Cherokee Language Immersion School.

We also officially reopened Sequoyah's Cabin Museum after the tribe acquired the historic property from the Oklahoma Historical Society. We will now manage the homestead of the legendary statesman and inventor of the Cherokee syllabary.

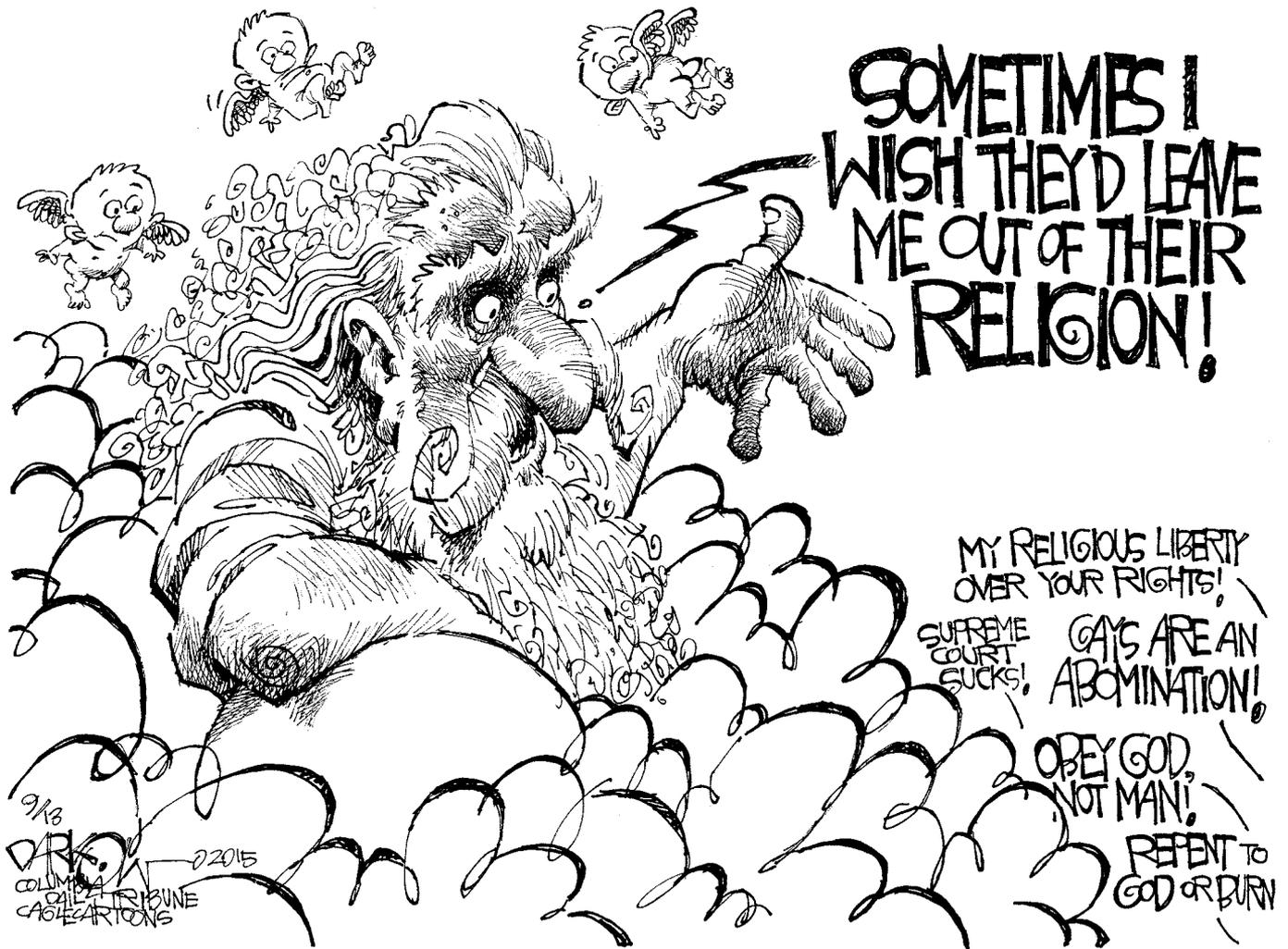
We announced a new foster care paid leave policy that is the first of its kind in Indian Country, and one of the first in the state of Oklahoma. Employees who foster can receive five days paid leave for fostering Cherokee children. That is time that families can set aside for appointments like doctors and daycare and for the bonding that is needed.

Finally, a decision came down in the longstanding Cherokee Freedmen case from the federal court. As I said during my State of the Nation address during Cherokee National Holiday, Cherokee Nation will not appeal the decision. We have started processing the citizenship applications, and now we are beginning the healing for all parties.

I hope 2018 offers us just as many opportunities to fulfill the needs of the Cherokee people and to deliver and execute ideas that will improve lives. In the coming months, we plan to break ground on the new Cherokee Casino Tahlequah and we will open a new 4,000-square-foot, open-air pavilion near the historic Cherokee National Capitol building.

We are proud of what we have done and enthusiastic about what can be accomplished in the upcoming year. We will continue to focus on the things that make real and lasting impacts in the lives of our Cherokee citizens.

*Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.*



## *God Does Not Elect Presidents*

**BY GARY PELUSO-VERDEND**

**E**very so often, a reader of my blog attacks me, or counter-attacks may be the way they view their retort. I take issue with something the current president has done, and my critic counters with: "You think the former president was the Messiah."

No, I don't.

God does not elect presidents. Or mayors. Or candidates for any other elected office in the U.S. "We, the People" elect, or at least our designated representatives do, such as the electors in the Electoral College.

Theologically, I have two huge objections to anyone's claim that so-and-so is "God's candidate."

The first theological objection is that the United States of America is not ancient Israel. In the He-

brew Bible, one finds numerous claims of God choosing or rejecting one leader or another. Fine. But applying the same claim to elected office in the U.S. is not appropriate, despite how often some pastor or elected leader has made the claim.

The U.S. is not the successor to or the extension of God's Chosen People. This nation is not the New Israel, the Promised Land, a Light to the Nations, or collectively the City Set on a Hill.

While there is aspirational value in all of these analogies, any claim that the U.S. is different or special in God's eyes is theologically suspect. American civil religionists, those who reflect on the theological meaning of America's national life, would do well to excise the comparison of the U.S. and Israel.

The only exception I'd make to this blanket state-

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ment is, to quote that theologically deep phrase from Spider Man's Uncle Ben, "With great power comes great responsibility." I do believe God holds each nation, corporation, and person accountable for what is done with one's power, and the U.S. is currently the world's most powerful nation.

America is not Israel, and no president is the messiah.

The second theological objection is due to human freedom. I believe we are free to do what is right, we are free to mess up, and we are free to experience genuine irony: the opposite of what we intend.

When I was in college participating in a seminar, we were discussing the topic of nuclear war. A pastor in the seminar remarked, "God has assured the church that the church shall exist until the end of time, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I don't think God will let us blow up the planet. God would intervene before that happened."

I was shocked, the same way I am when someone says, "Everything happens for a reason," as if that means there is a hidden, intending actor orchestrating everything that happens. Well, I believe in hidden intents, and I believe in a God who acts with an entirely different grasp of time, of cause and effect,

than my or our puny minds can comprehend.

But I do not believe everything happens according to God's plan. Elections are stolen. People are hurt. Accidents happen. Good women and men lose. Random events coincide. In life, we can get more than we earn or less than we deserve.

God loves us toward doing right but does not compel us to do right. God can use evil intentions and make something good come from them. But human beings can act in ways that frustrate God's intent, that damage God's work—not ultimately, but even a temporary derailment can negatively affect us mortals, as anyone who has suffered at the hand of another can attest.

We, the people, elect. We may believe one candidate's values more closely align with God's values than the other. We may believe God could work better with one candidate than the other [which makes God sound a lot like a career bureaucrat, foreign service employee, or judge!].

God does not elect persons for offices in the U.S. Voters do. I stand by that statement regardless of whether my chosen candidate wins.

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

# How Democracy Fails

BY SHARON MARTIN

**M**itch McConnell and Paul Ryan take from the poor and give to the rich without flinching. It's not that they don't like little people; we just don't matter.

Republicans know they have the power, and they plan to do everything they can while they can to cement it for the next generation. Only one party matters, and we can't just blame Putin.

Did Russia interfere with the election? U.S. intelligence agencies say so, but this coup didn't happen in just one election cycle.

On Dec. 9, 2000, the Supreme Court halted the recount in Florida and on Dec. 12 declared George W. Bush winner of the election. The real prize was redistricting. The GOP redrew voting districts and gave election security to party members all the way down into state and local jurisdictions.

Two war fronts when one might have been winnable, tax cuts in wartime, banks too big to fail, and home loans for which lenders had no responsibility crashed the economy in 2008. Young people voted for hope, but the party that lost declared they weren't going to have it.

In 2010, the Supreme Court called money free speech. Now elections were easier to buy. And in

2013, SCOTUS undid a key section of the Voting Rights Act. Now states were free to demand special IDs, shorten voting hours, and otherwise keep "undesirables" from the polls.

For eight years, there was constant effort to undermine President Obama. Why? His policies brought us out of the worst recession since the Great Depression. We weren't afraid of nuclear annihilation, either.

Sore losers refused to vote on judges nominated to fill vacant seats. Legislators demanded concessions then refused to vote for the Affordable Care Act. They cared more for their donors – insurance companies, banks, and billionaires – than they did for the health and wellbeing of the people they swore to serve.

They undermined the president with lies and innuendos despite the esteem in which he was held by the rest of the world. And in 2016, even when McConnell and others knew of Russian interference and hacking, they stood in the way of letting the American people know.

This is treason in my book. And the resulting damage will likely be catastrophic.

Remember the Dow losing over half its value? This

hit retirees especially hard. Pre-existing conditions made you uninsurable. Now, even children are in danger of losing coverage that once had bipartisan support.

Dreamers are looking over their shoulders while Vice President Pence has his own dreams of a nation as cleansed of non-Christians as Myanmar is of Rohingya Muslims.

With the constant attack on the press, intelligence agencies, and truth, we can become just another dictatorship by committee. Or party.

This isn't patriotism; it's a coup. The framers of our Constitution must be spinning in their graves. *Oilton resident Sharon Martin is author of the new children's book, Froggy Bottom Blues. More of her essays can be found at [okobserver.org](http://okobserver.org).*

# *Strong Suggestions For Dems, Progressive Independents In 2018*

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

**A**s the political hell of 2017 closes, I have a few suggestions for Democrats and progressive Independents in 2018:

1. In 2018, our republic hangs in the balance. We must keep our focus on this fact. Anything that takes away from an awareness of and unified response to this existential threat is a waste of time politically speaking in the year 2018.

2. The chances that this Republican Congress will impeach and convict Trump are extremely low, so don't waste too much time focusing on impeachment in 2018. Any great hope about this Republican Congress having the courage to impeach and convict Trump should have been dashed after witnessing the Republican love fest on the White House steps after the tax cuts bill was passed. Yes, we can hope for impeachment, wish for it, even sign a petition or two calling for it; but don't spend too much energy on it, unless Mueller is fired, then when we are in new territory. If Mueller is fired, we must be on the streets in the millions – seriously. Until that time, as long as Mueller is allowed to keep investigating, don't let impeachment be our primary focus in 2018.

3. The primary focus of 2018 must be on the Nov. 6 elections. It is imperative that Democrats take either the Senate or the House of Representatives. It would be best to take over both. Much of the worst that a Trump Administration could do between 2018 and 2020 could be blocked by a Democratic-controlled Congress, and as the Mueller investigation proceeds, a Democratic Congress could take appropriate measures related to impeachment and conviction of the president if the evidence warrants such action.

4. 2018 is not about changing Trump supporters' minds. Let's stay away from fantasy. 2018 is about staying focused, united, and intentional about getting every person not supporting Trumpism to be registered and voting on Nov. 6. We have to help

each other register, we have to educate each other about what is on the ballot, we have to help each other get to the polls [or learn how to use absentee ballots], and if we live in a state that has voter ID laws, then we need to help each other get those IDs. Focus on what we can do. We can overwhelm Trumpism at the ballot box. We cannot change the minds of those who are still supporting Trump. If Trump's words and actions in 2017 did not convince to stop supporting trump, there is very little that rational arguments from a liberal friend or relative is going to do to change their minds.

5. 2018 is about staying united. No matter whom you supported in 2016, do not let your hard feelings about that election get in the way of staying on task in 2018. As much as you may hate the two-party stranglehold on state and national politics, 2018 is not the year to once again fall on your ideological sword. The Supreme Court, the entire judicial system, the EPA, a livable climate, racial justice, economic justice, justice for women, and our identity as a pluralistic society are all at stake in 2018. If you were a Sanders supporter, suppress your desires to criticize Clinton, and if you are a Clinton supporter, suppress your desires to criticize Sanders. Yes, we have our differences, but wake up and smell the Trump coffee that is currently brewing and boiling over in Washington and get over it. We have to forgive each other, reconcile with one another, and fight like hell together in 2018 and 2020 to save our republic. No buts about this one. Just stop it!

6. Do not vote for non-incumbent third-party candidates in 2018 or in any other year unless your state has a ranked choice voting system that allows you to vote for a third party candidate without harming your favorite or perhaps least disliked major party candidate. I hope that someday the whole country will have ranked choice voting so that we can all

vote for our first choice every time and create a robust multi-party system, but until that time comes, voting for a third-party candidate simply strengthens the major party that you would least like to see strengthened. Really it does. It's just math.

7. Don't let any seat go unchallenged in 2018 or 2020. Yes, running for office is difficult and expensive, and it may seem like a waste of time to run Democrats in the districts heavily controlled by Republicans; but in 2018 and 2020 [and in every election for matter] every vote counts, and the more Democrats there are on the ballot for all offices, the more likely Democrats and progressive Independents will come to the polls in record numbers.

8. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Demo-

crats must not simply be the anti-Trump Party. Be the party of fairness, the party of justice, the party of compassion, the party for equal opportunity, the party for sustainability and environmental justice, the party of vision, the party for education, the party for community, the party of true religious freedom, the party for human flourishing. Be the Democratic Party – a party that cares for people, fights poverty, and protects the planet.

We can do this! We must do this! Happy New Year. *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. More of his essays can be found at [okobserver.org](http://okobserver.org).*

# On Taxes, It's Deja Vu All Over Again

BY PAUL CARTLEDGE

It's like deja vu all over again.

I awoke the other morning with a sense of foreboding, reminiscent of the awakening Nov. 9, 2016, when I tried to come to grips with the realization that Donald Trump had been elected – gag! choke! – p-p-p president of the United States of America. The latest downward spiral derived from the popup notification on my computer as I worked late the night before – Senate Republicans had passed the tax bill.

It wasn't a complete shock. Everybody predicted it would pass, but still, I held out hope that in the end a few holdouts might find the decency to put the American people and the American economy ahead of the interests of big money. But in the end, every man and woman calling themselves Republican caved to the Koch Brothers and their ilk.

This tax package is a huge leg up for the Oligarchy, and the foot on the end of that leg, on it's way up, delivers a kick in the teeth to American Democracy.

All the Republican ballyhoo about helping the "middle class" is pure demagoguery. If they actually gave a fiddlers f\*#k about the middle class, they would try to undo some of the damage inflicted by Reaganomics. They would, in fact, raise taxes substantially on the 1% and impose a value added tax on all goods entering the United States produced by cheap foreign labor.

Lightening should strike every Republican liar who asserts publicly that by lowering the corporate tax rate they are laying groundwork for manufacturers to bring jobs back to America and increase wages for American workers.

Capitalist manufacturers didn't rip the hearts out of American cities and towns and throw tens of

millions of American workers out of work because of the corporate tax rate, which they had become expert at skirting. The signing of NAFTA was the green light for them to offshore hundreds of thousands of manufacturing plants and displace all those workers, in pursuit of cheap labor.

This tax package is an obscene reward for capitalists who place the bottom line over any concern for country and their fellow Americans. I agree with all the economic analysts who assert that this tax package is a repeat of Republican ideology that fostered the era known as the "Roaring 20s" – aka the run-up to the Great Depression.

It would take a major surge of displacing Republicans in the U.S. House and Senate with Democrats and right-minded Independents, along with the election of a Democratic president to try and mitigate this disaster.

Fasten your seat belts. We are in for a rough ride. *Durant resident Paul Cartledge is chair of the Bryan County Democrats.*

## Coming In February

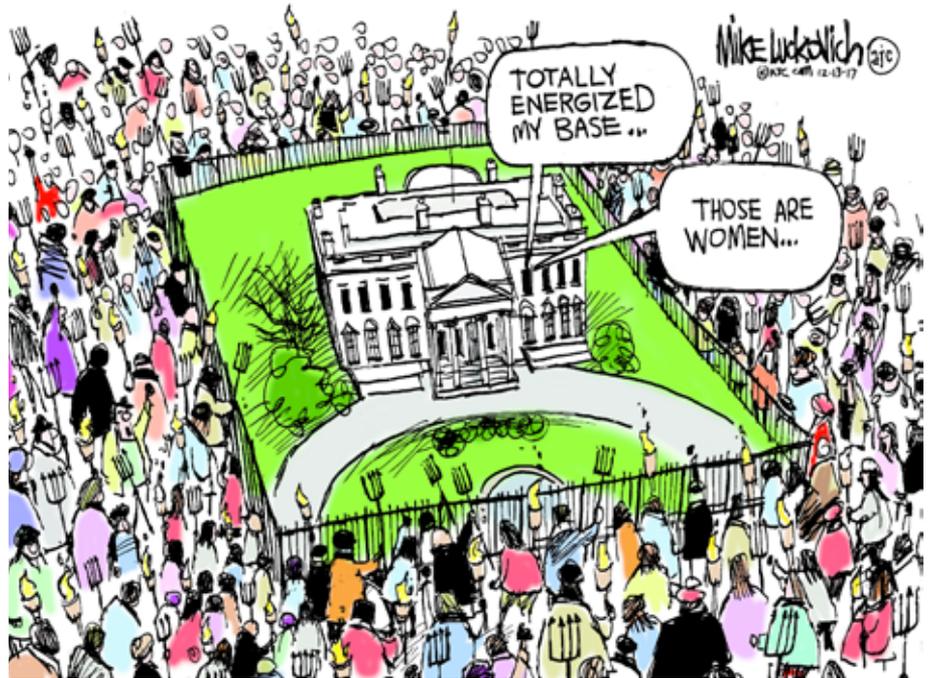
Will Republicans and Democrats be able to strike a grand budget bargain? Will GOP House leaders ever have the courage to tell Harold Hamm & Co. "no"? The February Observer answers those questions and many more in our annual legislative session preview.

The second issue of our golden anniversary year also includes a special report on Oklahoma's passenger rail future. You won't want to miss it!

*The View From*

80

BY MARION HILL



**T**urning 80, which I recently did, revises one’s perspective on life. Though I confidently expect to live many more years – healthy, vigorous ones, I hope – I must recognize that my future doesn’t include as much time to accomplish important tasks as I could look forward to at 30, or even 60. I want to make my remaining time count.

In the Age of Trumpism, that must involve speaking up, speaking out, and refusing to be silenced when I see wrongs being committed in my name.

I came to activism slowly. Reared in a conservative Southern Baptist home, I went – courtesy of scholarships – to Oklahoma Baptist University for a B.A. in journalism, then to Stanford University for an M.A. in communications.

Culture shock on going from OBU to Stanford? Oh, yeah. It happened that I was at Stanford in 1961-62, before the Free Speech Movement erupted in 1964 at UC Berkeley, just across the Bay from Palo Alto. But the winds of change were blowing even then at both campuses.

I recall a “protest site” set up on the Stanford campus at a location I had to walk past every day on my way to and from classes. Some of the protesters’ signs referred to the Berlin Wall, which had been built in August just before I arrived at Stanford in September, but – in my memory, at least – the protest was against all attempts worldwide to suppress the rights of peoples to determine their own destinies.

One sign said something like, “I’m here battling for free speech – why are you out there?”

Good question, I thought. My heart was definitely on the side of the protesters, but my body was not. I

didn’t feel I could physically join them because: [A] I was too busy trying to keep my head above water in a challenging class schedule; [B] my parents would be greatly disappointed if I should get involved in something that might lead to my arrest; and [C], mostly, I was scared. Scared to speak up, because I feared criticism and/or ridicule from others.

The latter reason/excuse is what keeps people silent in the face of wrongdoings everywhere. Humans want the approval of fellow humans, and it’s hard to go against the tide of public opinion.

But brave individuals have done just that over the centuries, and their courage has brought about much of the progress we’ve seen both here and around the world. Yes, the Holocaust happened, as did slavery and, many times, the slaughter of indigenous peoples. But sanity and compassion tend to win out, eventually.

The Holocaust did end, finally, because brave individuals stood up. They risked their own lives to save Jews and others targeted by the evil Hitler regime, and to tell the truth about Nazi Germany to the rest of the world.

Over the years since my Stanford days, I’ve participated in a few protests, including ones against the Vietnam War and the invasion of Iraq.

On Jan. 21, 2017, the day after the Orange One’s inauguration, I was one of about a million people [women, men, kids] who traveled to Washington, DC to protest the new administration’s stated views against the rights of immigrants, women, LGBTQ folk, the free press, etc. Similar marches took place that day across this country and around the world.

My own journey to DC involved a bus trip with 50 others from Oklahoma – a grueling ride in which the

bus stopped only for gas, driver changes, and fast food for passengers. But the moment I heard the Women's March was being planned, I said to myself, "This is a moment in history, and I must be part of it."

Since then, many other marches have protested actions by Trump lackeys, such as the ending of Net Neutrality. Undoubtedly more will happen during his term, which I hope will be mercifully brief.

Obviously, no one can go to all the protests. But a friend and I recently went to a Tax Bill Blowback Rally in Oklahoma City, which attracted 600-plus people and protested the awful tax-cut bill that

Trump's craven supporters in Congress would pass shortly thereafter. It was exhilarating to be with like-minded folk, although we knew we wouldn't prevent the bill's passage. We just had to speak up against it.

So as long as I can physically do it, I will spend a part of whatever time I have left in speaking out against wrongs I see happening. Regrettably, the Age of Trumpism provides plenty of opportunities.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Maybe I'm living my life in reverse?  
*Marion Hill lives in Durant.*

## *OK's First Progressive Millennial Fellows Named*

**N**ew Leaders Council Oklahoma, the state chapter of the nation's leading organization for progressive Millennial thought leadership and skills-based training, has named 16 Fellows to its inaugural NLC Institute.

The 2018 Fellows will attend skills-based trainings throughout the winter and spring, be provided with a mentor and develop a Capstone Project in Oklahoma to prepare them to be the change-makers of the future.

"New Leaders Council Oklahoma is very excited to begin training our next generation of leaders in Oklahoma," said Bailey Perkins, NLC OK's co-director. "We have a top-notch inaugural class and expect great things over the next six months."

The 2018 NLC Oklahoma fellows are James Connaughton; Courier Wizard LLC, owner/operator; Anna Facci, Council on American-Islamic Relations Oklahoma, government affairs director; Chaunte' Gilmore, Valir PACE, physical therapy assistant-staff therapist; Lani Habrock, Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, program director; and Chantel Hartman, Oklahoma State Department of Health, Center for the Advancement of Wellness, Tobacco Use Prevention program coordinator.

Also, Cicely Johnson, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, child welfare assistant III; Samantha Johnson, Youth Services of Tulsa, health education specialist; Candace Liger, physical fitness consultant; Nicole McAfee, ACLU of Oklahoma, Smart Justice campaign manager; and Bansari Mehta, Retina Vitreous Center, medical practice administrator

Also, Rylee Sivertsen, Pearson Public Affairs, project coordinator; Mary Smith, Pratt & Whitney, HR specialist; Jonathan Still, Last Frontier Council, district executive; Charise Walker, Helping Women Win Inc., CEO/founder; Bradley Ward, University of Central Oklahoma, VetHERO Coordinator; and Aaron Wilder, Planned Parenthood Great Plains, Media Officer.

These fellows join the national class of nearly 900 in 50 NLC chapters across the country. Nationally, the new fellows class self identified as is the most

diverse in the organization's history with 63% non-white, 61% female, and 17% LGBTQ+.

"NLC is proud to announce its largest and most diverse cohort yet. In 50 cities and states, our fellows will be driving change in their communities and their workplaces," said Mark Riddle, New Leaders Council president.

"These nearly 900 individuals are the future of our country, ensuring a more progressive and prosperous future."

The NLC Institute is a six-month training program focused on skills transfer for each cohort on issues such as entrepreneurial goal setting, strategic communications and digital outreach, economics, finance and fundraising, management and coalition building, progressive policy, and diversity and inclusion.

For more information, visit [newleaderscouncil.org](http://newleaderscouncil.org).

## *Capitol*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

federal funds to pay for state or non-eligible expenses with the intention to have other funds available to use for eligible expenses. Such a method of money management is not foreign to the state Legislature which has made a practice of sweeping revolving funds from state agencies to plug budget gaps for the past seven or eight years.

Likewise, the director of State Finance used the same money management method last year when he failed to follow the Oklahoma Constitution and swept millions from the Rainy Day Fund. The only difference is that the director of State Finance, a Fallin appointee, had access to the attorney general, another Fallin appointee and was able to secure an attorney general's "opinion" that the executive branch of state government didn't have to follow the Oklahoma Constitution.

*David Perryman, a Chickasha Democrat, represents District 56 in the Oklahoma House.*

# DERELICTION OF DUTY

## *State's Failure To Resolve Bribery Case Has Consequences*

BY RICHARD A. BURPEE

**T**he concept of “duty” is exceptionally important in the military. Officers take an oath to “well and faithfully discharge the duties” of their office, “So help me God.”

Broadly, “duty” means accomplishing the assigned mission to the absolute best of one’s ability, despite difficulty or danger; doing what should be done when it must be done, selflessly and courageously. Duty is more than just responsibility; it is obligation – and not to be undertaken lightly.

Public officials in the civilian world take a similar oath. In this state, they swear not only to “support, obey, and defend the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma” but also to “faithfully discharge my duties” as a judge or officeholder “to the best of my ability.”

On Dec. 19, eight justices of the Oklahoma Supreme Court joined a long list of Corporation Commissioners and Attorneys General who have not just neglected their sworn duties as state officeholders, they have willfully failed to perform them. In the military, they would be court-martialed.

In 1989 AT&T [then Southwestern Bell] defrauded its ratepayers in Oklahoma – including the United States Department of Defense and all Federal Executive Agencies – by bribing a Corporation Commissioner in a rate case. Two people went to prison, but the



bribed order was never overturned, allowing AT&T to keep hundreds of millions of dollars that should rightfully have been refunded to ratepayers.

The unlawfulness and injustice of this situation is perfectly clear. And so should have been the duty of our state officials to correct it. Yet time after time, at-

torneys general have chosen not to bring legal action, Corporation Commissioners have chosen not to declare the bribed decision void and properly re-decide it, and now the Oklahoma Supreme Court has chosen not to find bribery unconstitutional and allow an application seeking to refund billions to ratepayers even to receive a proper hearing.

The dereliction of duty in this state is not only disgraceful – it is lethal.

Misappropriating funds is serious, but public officials who either ignore or find excuses not to do their duty are fundamentally fatal to a democratic form of government.

Young people who believe their government is full of corrupt officials acting in their own self-interest rather than the public interest will refuse to serve and defend it when their country comes under attack.

Similarly, those in the United States military who take their sworn duty seriously will refuse to do business in a state whose public officials cannot be re-

lied upon to protect our armed services from obvious fraud.

Everyone agrees the bribery in this case is wrong, but most of our public officials want someone else to fix it. They know what should be done, but citing “jurisdiction” or “preclusion,” declare themselves impotent. These officials should be relieved of their duties.

The DOD and FEA were parties to this case from the outset, and their filing citing “compelling evidence of intrinsic fraud” and “criminal activity” indicates they may be willing to seek justice at the federal level if Oklahoma officials won’t do what’s right.

But know this, the United States military does not take kindly to being defrauded. The ongoing dereliction of duty by officials in this state will have consequences.

*Lt. Gen. Richard A. Burpee [ret.] is the former commanding general of Tinker Air Force Base and an applicant in the AT&T bribery refund case.*

## 2018

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

delegation.

Oklahoma has not been well-served by one-party dominance of its five congressional and two U.S. Senate seats. It would be far better for the state to have a more balanced delegation that affords entrée on both sides of the political aisle, especially given our over-dependence on federal dollars. Best immediate chance for a Democratic breakthrough is the OKC area’s 5th District, currently held Rep. Steve Russell.

### 17. Tackle food insecurity.

Oklahoma’s hunger problem is getting worse. Just ask food banks, pantries, churches and other civic organizations. One in four children often goes to bed hungry. This creates a near-impossible learning environment in school, a serious threat to the prosperity of the next generation. Good, nutritious food must be more readily available in the state’s poverty pockets – something good public policy can make happen.

### 18. Abolish the Electoral College.

No, this isn’t something Oklahoma can do alone. But it officially can join the fight to end this anachronism. In 2016 Hillary Clinton received three million more votes than Donald Trump – and she lost. Too many Oklahomans of various political stripes don’t bother to vote any more because they figure the state is so Republican red. But the bigger impact is on the state level. The voting disincentive all but ensures an engaged, rabid minority sets the political agenda for the entire state – often electing the most extreme candidates to the Legislature, for example. The current state of affairs shows the danger of low voter participation.

Will any of these 18 ideas take root in 2018? We shall see. This much is certain: It won’t happen without good-hearted people getting back in the trenches to reclaim their state for the betterment of all.



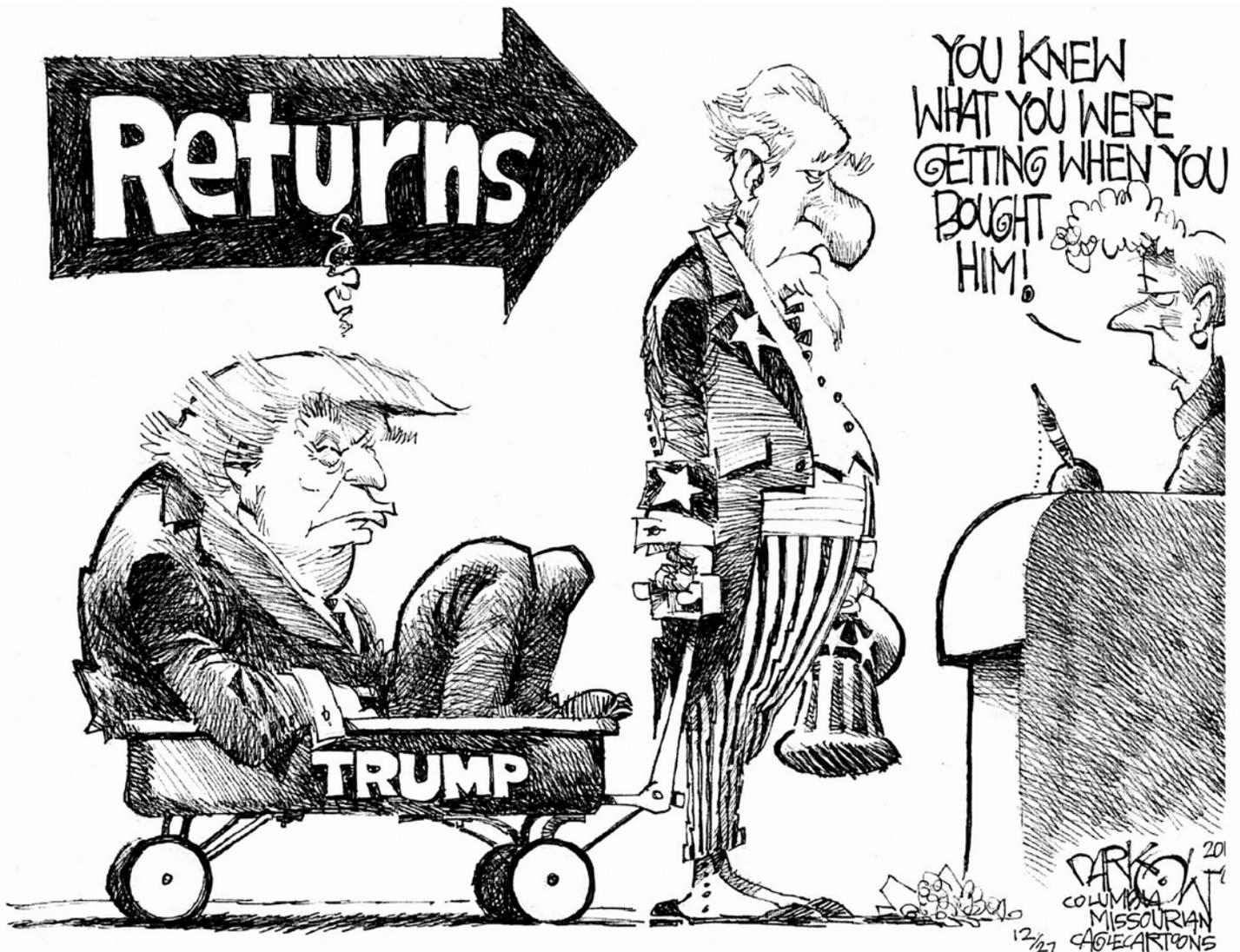
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## One-Year Scorecard For Trump Voters

BY ROBERT REICH

**A**lmost one year in, it's time for another update for Trump voters on his election promises:

1. He told you he'd cut your taxes, and that the super-rich like him would pay more. You bought it. But his new tax law does the opposite. By 2027, according to the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, the richest 1% will have got 83% of the tax cut and the richest 0.1%, 60% of it. But more than half of all Americans – 53% – will pay more in taxes. As Trump told his wealthy friends at Mar-a-Lago just days after the tax bill became law, “You all just got a lot richer.”

2. He promised to close “special interest loopholes that have been so good for Wall Street investors but unfair to American workers,” especially the notorious “carried interest” loophole for private-equity, hedge fund, and real estate partners. You bought it.

But the new tax law keeps the “carried interest” loophole.

3. He told you he'd repeal ObamaCare and replace it with something “beautiful.” You bought it. But he didn't repeal and he didn't replace. [Just as well: His plan would have knocked at least 23 million off health insurance, including many of you.] Instead, he's doing what he can to cut it back and replace it with nothing. The new tax law will result in 13 million people losing health coverage, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

4. He told you he'd invest \$1 trillion in our nation's crumbling infrastructure. You bought it. But after his giant tax cut for corporations and millionaires, there's no money left for infrastructure.

5. He said he'd clean the Washington swamp. You bought it. But he's brought into his administration

more billionaires, CEOs, and Wall Street moguls than in any administration in history, to make laws that will enrich their businesses, and he's filled departments and agencies with former lobbyists, lawyers and consultants who are crafting new policies for the same industries they recently worked for.

6. He said he'd use his business experience to whip the White House into shape. You bought it. But he

has created the most dysfunctional, back-stabbing White House in modern history, and has already fired and replaced so many assistants [one of them hired and fired in a little more than a week] that people there barely know who's in charge of what.

7. He told you he'd "bring down drug prices" by making deals with drug companies. You bought it.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39

# 7 Habits Of Highly Effective Resisters

BY FROMA HARROP

**C**leaning up the cultural and civic debris left by Donald Trump and his right-wing helpers will require concerted effort. The "resistance" is determined to do that, but to succeed, its members must develop some effective strategies and drop counterproductive ones. Here are seven suggestions:

One. Stop retweeting him. Trump's inflammatory tweets are designed to bait you, to draw you into his game. Angrily retweeting his inanities only amplifies the message. Despite his waning popularity, Trump retains the ability to entertain. He does this not only through the tweets themselves but through the passionate responses he provokes from critics. Without your reaction, the tweets would shoot out into space and quickly lose altitude.

When Trump tweets an obvious lie on a subject of national importance, an answer may be warranted. Keep the correction simple and clean of emotion. And please, don't include his Twitter handle.

Two. Pick and choose what gets you angry. You really don't have to care what he says about CNN or Rosie O'Donnell or the NFL. Trump's babbling brook of bluster keeps him at the top of everyone's attention all the time, which seems to be the point of it. Do you want to bring more audience to the show?

Many Trump tweets support positions with little public support. [The perfect example would be the Republican campaign to dismantle the Affordable Care Act.] Do not dignify them with your outrage. The persuadables are already persuaded.

Three. Question everything you read on social media. The Russian trolls helped elect Trump by creating an alternative reality built on a swamp of falsehoods. Trolls have also been found to impersonate progressives with the intention of a] making them look bad and b] fomenting fights among them.

A simple rule of thumb is to accept as fact information directly found on the websites of reputable sources. Information from elsewhere, even

if it quotes a good source, should be verified, its context understood.

Four. Don't get suckered into Clinton distraction. Hillary and Bill Clinton are now private citizens in Chappaqua, NY. Trump's attacks on them are of little consequence, serving only to rile up Clinton defenders. Continued nonsense about Uranium One, Benghazi or whatever would die out if progressives ignored it. Countering the baseless charges implies that something needs defending.

Five. Do not condemn Trump voters. They supported him for a variety of reasons, not all related to racist, sexist and otherwise unattractive sentiments. Trump's crashing poll numbers mean a good number of his voters are up for grabs. Give them space. Drop the finger-wagging and the "I told you so."

Never forget that the American people cast nearly three million more votes for Clinton than for Trump. Despite Russia, despite Comey and despite weaknesses in her campaign, Clinton received the most votes of any presidential candidate in history except for Barack Obama. Have faith in the people.

Six. Liberal resisters should make common cause with conservative resisters. You are on the same team now, defending the democracy and civic norms. The never-Trump Republicans are truly courageous in defending their principles while sustaining attacks by former allies. Don't go ballistic over small differences.

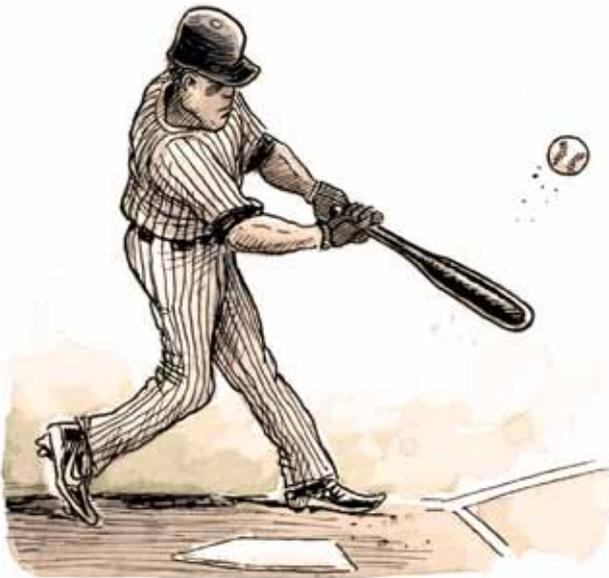
Seven. Get out the vote. Fixing habits one through six should free up time to do what really matters, and this is it. The resistance has already scored major victories in Virginia and Alabama through improved turnout. Imagine the sweep in Virginia had Republican state lawmakers not gerrymandered the map.

The resistance must push its supporters to vote in down-ballot races as the conservative base does. Taking control of statehouses is key to drawing fair districts. So drum into heads the habit of voting. That's how this all ends.

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# America's NATIONAL PASTIME...

Then



Now



## *NBA, Not NFL, Is League Of America's Future*

BY KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

**A**lthough football has long been America's favorite child among professional sports, there are clear indicators that the ol' pigskin is starting to deflate in fans' eyes.

Football fanatics need not panic: polls show it's still far ahead of both baseball and basketball in popularity. The 2017 NBA finals averaged 20.4 million viewers [a 20-year record], which is roughly the same as the NFL's regular Sunday night audience of 20.3 million, and nowhere near the 2016 Super Bowl uber-audience of 111 million.

Based on just those numbers, football is still kicking professional basketball, baseball and hockey through the goal posts. But America can be fickle. And the Magic 8-Ball of our cultural zeitgeist says, "All signs point to the NBA replacing the NFL as the

league of America's future."

This prediction has nothing to do with the athletes themselves, their level of skill, their heart, or their commitment to their sport. Professional athletes are generally the highest expression of what the human body is capable of doing and therefore inspiring to the fans to reach higher and strive harder. In that way, no sport is superior to any other sport.

But when it comes to professional sports, some are more inspirational, more exciting and more entertaining to the general public than others and those sports take on a symbolic meaning for Americans. They come to represent our core values. They represent not just who we are, but who we want to be.

Baseball once ruled all other sports as America's pastime because it reflected the laid-back, less con-

frontational mood of America in the 1920s and 1930s. It was highly strategic, required precision teamwork, but moved at a pace reflective of hot summers in rural towns across the country.

Football's popularity rose with the increasing aggression of the America at home and abroad. Football embodied an America who faced all challenges head on, forcing its will on opponents through skill, guile and brute force. We were a country taking bold risks in order to succeed and football was the riskiest of team sports.

But America has changed and with that change we are seeing a shifting away from hoisting football on our collective shoulders. Although football remains our most popular professional sport, that popularity has been declining over the past five years, from 67% saying they were fans in 2012, to 57% in 2017. Professional baseball has also fallen 2% during that time. However, professional basketball has risen 3%. Before anyone starts blaming Colin Kaepernick, let's remember that he first took a knee in 2016 and that the fan base erosion had already been strong several years before that.

One major reason Americans are stepping back from football is the danger. Physical risk has always been one of the attractions of the sport – a rite of manhood. But recent studies showing just how severe the brain damage is to the players shocked us. A 2017 study published in the Journal of American Medical Association discovered chronic traumatic encephalopathy [CTE] in 110 out of 111 brains of former NFL players. A broken arm or cracked rib is one thing, the scars that prompt bragging rights, but widespread permanent brain damage that affects players for the rest of their lives is beyond entertainment. There is nothing sexy about depression and dementia.

What makes it worse is that studies are finding the same problems with high school and college players. The same study found CTE in the brains of three of 14 high school players [21%] and 48 of 53 college players [91%]. Dr. Bennet Omalu, who is credited with discovering CTE [and who Will Smith portrayed in the 2015 movie Concussion], said that allowing kids to play football was equal to child abuse: "It is the definition of child abuse. If you play football, and if your child plays football, there is a 100% risk exposure."

This harsh reality prompted several former NFL players – including Brett Favre, Terry Bradshaw and Troy Aikman – to admit that they would not want their sons to play football. LeBron James and then-President Obama agreed.

Knowing all that, Americans can't help but feel a little complicit in cheering for a sport that is so destructive to its players, especially kids. According to a Washington Post-University of Massachusetts Lowell poll, 90% of sports fans agree that head injuries represent a problem in the sport.

Another loose thread being pulled to unravel football's dominant status is the fact that it's less popular among children, who are the future fan base. Accord-

ing to ESPN, basketball is the most popular sport among American youth, both boys and girls, while football has dropped to third place. Yet, football is responsible for more injuries than any of the other sports. Football accounts for 28% of injuries among athletes five to 14, while basketball is responsible for only 15%.

Those are just numbers and we know that numbers can fluctuate based on a lot of factors. More important to the future of football than the injuries and declining popularity among youth is the symbolic nature of the sport as it relates to representing America.

America's sport isn't about who we were in the past but about who we want to be going forward. We no longer see ourselves as Friday Night Lights warriors who send our best and brightest into combat on the field, needlessly risking their brains and futures for the sake of 11 minutes of actual play [out of the average three hours and 12 minutes of an NFL game], which is the same as baseball.

In contrast, basketball is a perpetual motion machine in which players face muscular opposition, yet don't conquer with brute force but rather with graceful maneuvers and intense teamwork. Each game is an example of athletic alchemy, producing astounding physical displays of leaping, spinning, passing and shooting. And it does this every few minutes.

America's sport also has to represent America's spirit, and right now that spirit is not one of complacency or complicity. Many athletes are no longer satisfied with taking the money and running home to hide out in their mansions. They want to fully embrace their responsibility as role models to children and representatives of their communities to speak out whenever America veers off the road paved by the U.S. Constitution. With the Trump Administration's overt racism, misogyny, xenophobia and anti-LGBTQ policies, we haven't just veered off the road, we're hanging over the cliff.

NFL players have been pioneers in expressing their patriotism through silent protest at a time when there is so much to protest. Colin Kaepernick has been a leader in this movement and he has paid a personal and professional price for not caving into pressure. Dozens of other players, coaches and even owners have joined the protest, though most of them have since backed off once there was fear that the NFL's slipping ticket sales and TV ratings might be related to such demonstrations.

Sadly, there is a racial component to this policy. It is the players of color who are being denied their freedom to protest because they are the ones who are part of the oppressed social group. White owners and white fans don't experience this same oppression, so speaking out about racial disparity in the U.S. is not a priority to them.

However, when owners honor military groups at games, or even play the national anthem, they are expressing their political opinions. This means that



# Why Oklahomans Should Oppose Arming Ukraine

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

Oklahoma's Congressional delegation is adamantly opposed to Big Government – except when it comes to subsidizing Big Oil and expanding U.S. military operations.

Their latest cause is championing the arming of Ukraine.

This past month, 250 soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Brigade Combat team arrived back in Broken Arrow after a stint training two battalions of the Ukrainian army. Sen. James Inhofe subsequently drafted a letter to President Donald Trump urging him to send “defensive” military weaponry including surplus guns and ground vehicles to Ukraine.

Inhofe acknowledged that the term “defensive” was “insincere because anything you send over can be a defensive weapon.” In his view, however, “Russia’s continued aggression and repeated refusal to respect Ukraine’s territorial integrity warrants a strong response from those of us who respect the rules-based international order.”

Inhofe’s moralizing is undercut by the very fact that Oklahoma’s troops were training battalions in Ukraine which is as much a violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity as Russia’s.

Inhofe’s outrage about Russia’s alleged disrespect for “a rules based international order” is furthermore laughable if we consider his support for preemptive

war and interrogation methods that violate the Geneva Conventions and his contempt for international treaties.

Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford's office has also issued a statement supporting sending body armor, radios and other weapons to Ukraine to help it "defend itself from Russian occupation." According to Lankford, U.S. "efforts in Ukraine" are vital to the "defense of Eastern Europe" and "security of the entire region."

Many Ukrainians, however, do not view the current Poroshenko government in Ukraine as legitimate nor the Russians as occupiers. Poroshenko came to power in what he acknowledged was a coup d'état in February 2014, heavily supported by the United States and West. His government forged alliance with neo-Nazi groups who supported the overthrow of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich.

These groups have been implicated with the Ukrainian army in human rights abuses, fighting separatists in the Eastern Donbass including the shelling of villages, extra-judicial killing and torture in secret prisons.

The western media almost uniformly branded Russia as an aggressor in the Ukrainian war. However, from the Russian point of view, the existence of a neo-Nazi backed government on its border backed by the West, and which came to power illegitimately, is alarming.

Russia's troop presence has been relatively limited, furthermore, and the separatist rebels in Eastern Donbass are a popular force – locals welcome Russian intervention.

Ukraine has long been divided between East and West, with different segments of the population seeing benefit in allying either with Russia or the West.

The question Americans should be asking is whether it is our duty to pick sides in a complex civil conflict and what underlying agendas have been driving U.S. interference in Ukraine.

Since the late 1990s, the United States has been expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] into countries bordering Russia in violation of a promise made by former Secretary of State James Baker to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that the U.S. would not expand NATO to the East if Russia agreed to a unified Germany.

After the fall of communism, American financial interests benefited from rapid privatization policies initiated by Russian President Boris Yeltsin at the behest of his Harvard University advisers.

Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, has asserted national control over Russia's Central Bank and economy and improved conditions from Yeltsin's time.

The U.S. and EU intervention in Ukraine can be seen in perspective as part of a policy designed to weaken, discredit and potentially destabilize a newly assertive Russia.

Since 2007, Putin has advanced a vision of a multipolar world order and taken steps to consolidate a

Eurasian power bloc he hopes one day might rival the United States.

Putin has also aggressively pursued the building of pipelines in Central Asia and oil exploration. These measures threaten American control over the Eurasian heartland, which foreign policy strategists like the late Zbigniew Brzezinski have long considered crucial to American global dominance.

The hysteria surrounding Russiagate so far has revealed very little information about alleged collusion between Trump Administration officials and the Russians or concrete evidence of Russia's election hacking.

However, it has helped to fuel anti-Russian sentiment and hysteria in the United States, which the foreign policy establishment is using to garner support for confrontationist policies.

Oklahomans should be attuned to the politicized implications of Russiagate, educate themselves about the facts and oppose Inhofe and Lankford's efforts to arm Ukraine with lethal "defensive" weaponry, particularly at a time the state is facing a major fiscal crisis.

The arming of Ukraine is part and parcel of a strategy that will contribute to more human rights violations by Ukraine's army and inevitably deepen the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and Russia, fueling a dangerous new arms race and Cold War.

*Jeremy Kuzmarov is J.P. Walker assistant professor of history at the University of Tulsa and author of Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century [Massachusetts, 2012] along with the forthcoming book The Russians are Coming Again: The First Cold War as Tragedy, the Second as Farce [New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018].*

## You Learn Something New Every Day

Las Vegas Churches accept gambling chips. There are more churches in Las Vegas than casinos.

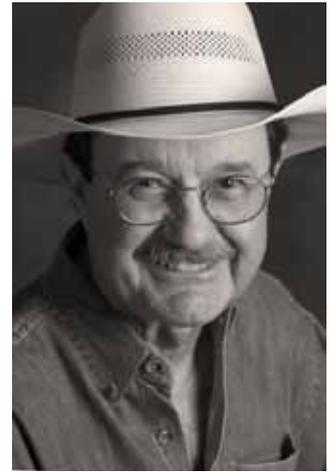
Not surprisingly, some worshipers at Sunday services will give casino chips rather than cash when the basket is passed.

Since they get chips from many different casinos, the churches have devised a method to collect the offerings.

The churches send all their collected chips to a nearby Franciscan monastery for sorting and then the chips are taken to the casinos of origin and cashed in.

This is done by Chip Monks.

- Thanks to Frank Silovsky for sharing



## *The Great Scamazon*

**W**hile big brand names travel hither, thither and yon to play Milk the Taxpayer, Amazon is totally rewriting the rules of the taxpayer subsidies game, super-sizing their piles of public money without even having to go door to door.

In September, the \$136-billion-a-year, multi-tentacled monopolist sparked a prairie fire of excitement among state and local economic development officials when it coyly announced its intention to build a second corporate headquarters in Someplace, North America.

CEO Jeff Bezos baited his location-subsidy trap with red meat, announcing that Amazon “expect[ed] to invest over \$5 billion in construction and grow this second headquarters to include as many as 50,000 high-paying jobs.”

Then Bezos & Co. made a bold move: They sat still and waited. Stretching corporate overreach to new lengths, the Amazonian royals bid public officials to approach the Seattle throne with all the jewels, bars of gold, frankincense, myrrh and any other tribute they could muster to show their worthiness for HQ2 [Amazon’s name for the proposed co-headquarters]. In one stroke, Amazon switched its corporate role from asker to askee and instantly pitted taxpayers, like you and me, across Mexico, Canada and the U.S. against each other in a no-limit bidding war.

Amazon then issued a seven-page directive listing some specific “incentives” that each supplicant should offer. First was a “business-friendly environment.” Then, urging hopefuls to “think big” when offering freebies, the directive listed specific incentives that would be “Decision Drivers,” including contributions of “land, site preparation, tax credits/exemptions, relocation grants, workforce grants, utility incentives/grants, and fee reductions.”

Oh, and also a highly-educated labor pool; an international airport with direct daily flights to key cities; quality of life where “our employees will enjoy living”; and, most important, “elected officials eager and willing to work with the company.”

Surely no self-respecting civic official would willingly play the sucker in such a demeaning, sell-out-

the-public scam.

Ha! Officials from 238 cities, regions, and states have so far rushed to Bezos’ corporate castle to grovel, dance, beg, and stage dog-and-pony spectacles in the perverse hope that Amazon might choose their taxpayers to rip off.

- Tucson showed its love by shipping Amazon’s prickly CEO a 21-foot Saguaro cactus.
- New York City lit up the Empire State Building and other iconic landmarks in Amazon Orange.
- Seattle, already a company town, pleaded with His Majesty Bezos to locate HQ2 adjacent to HQ1.
- Stonecrest, GA, voted to annex 35 acres to create a new city to be named – yes – Amazon.

All this for a tacky PR stunt with one purpose: To get the handful of actual contenders to jack up their offers. Amazon’s data-driven, hard-nosed “economic development department,” set up five years ago, will decide among the few locations it has already deemed most profitable.

Not every city jumped at the chance to dance with Jeff Bezos. The mayor and top county official of San Antonio, TX, for example, sent a “Dear Jeff” letter in October, politely-but-firmly rejecting his offer to let them stuff his pockets with their community’s wealth. They rightly questioned the integrity of the bidding war process he initiated for choosing a second headquarters city: “It’s hard to imagine that a forward-thinking company like Amazon hasn’t already selected its preferred location,” they wrote. Their missive then explained that while San Antonio can compete on its merits with any city, “giving away the farm isn’t our style.”

San Jose, CA’s Mayor Sam Liccardo went a step farther. His city, he wrote in a Wall Street Journal op-ed, wouldn’t offer special incentives to Amazon or any giant corporation. Why? “Because they are a bad deal for taxpayers.”

And Little Rock, AR had the most creative “no” of all. Like a love affair breakup letter, it began with “Hey Amazon, we need to talk.” The city’s human scale and non-hectic quality of urban life, it explained, “would be totally wrecked” by Amazon’s demands and, “we can’t sacrifice that for you. ... Am-

azon, you've got so much going for you, and you'll find what you're looking for. But it's just not us."

Instead of giving your hard-earned dollars to Amazon this year, consider staying local. Check out Institute for Local Self Reliance and see how you can help stop taxpayer giveaways.

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# Ag Outsiders Tackle Powerful Agribiz Insiders

**I**n the 1980s, when I was Texas Ag commissioner, my staff and I proposed a comprehensive set of state rules to protect farmworkers, public health, our water supplies and farmers themselves from the life-threatening consequences of toxic pesticides.

But trying to enact these policies in Texas meant taking on the enormous money and power of the chemical lobby, as well as a hostile Republican governor, and a legislature largely made up of corporate lapdogs.

All of the above were howling furiously at us, snarling that they were going to shred the new protections we'd laid out. When I told my legislative director that it seemed like the political odds were against us, his response was not a confidence booster: "Some of the evens are against us, too," he said.

Yet, by rallying a big coalition of family farmers, consumers, environmentalists, labor groups, church leaders, and others, and then bringing these "outsiders" inside the usually closed legislative lair to confront the cozy club of lawmakers and lobbyists – we won!

Fast forward a few decades and I find we continue to fight these very same battles even today.

As his first official act as Trump's EPA chief, industry lapdog Scott Pruitt rejected a petition to ban Dow Chemical's insecticide, chlorpyrifos. The neurotoxin's well-documented and persistent dangers include stunting children's brain development. But never mind: Dow contributed to The Donald's inauguration festivities.

Meanwhile, after Monsanto's RoundUp herbicide and its "RoundUp Ready" GMO seeds sparked a global plague of new superweeds, the company responded by apologizing. [Just kidding.] In fact, Monsanto is now rolling out yet another patented and pricey line of genetically engineered, herbicide-resistant crop seeds that the top weed scientists say

will evolve even harder weeds.

And both scientists and farmers have also flagged a more urgent problem: The herbicide the company is pushing – dicamba – is volatile and drift-prone. Last summer, Midwestern farmers reported huge losses related to clouds of neighbors' dicamba drifting over and killing their unpatented crops.

"You're going to have to buy their [GMO seeds] because their chemical is drifting around," one Missouri farmer told the New York Times. That's quite a business model.

But there's encouraging news, too: farmers, scientists and consumers are fighting back, and global health agencies are responding to the threats. Thailand, Brazil and Canada recently banned a range of toxic agrochemicals, and the European Parliament recently reviewed RoundUp's key ingredient, glyphosate, now found in 45% of Europe's topsoil, and extended the licensing for the chemical's use for only another five years.

Today's Good Food forces [consisting of the grassroots people and groups worldwide striving to build a sustainable, equitable agriCultural system] are under constant attack by the moneyed forces of agri-Business, which view food as nothing but another assembly line product to be fabricated by any means that fatten the corporate bottom line.

We're in an ongoing, momentous struggle [cultural, economic, political and moral] over the very nature and future of food, and our best path to victory is to do as we did in Texas three decades ago: to forge coalitions of outsiders to confront and expose the self-enriching cabal of insiders.

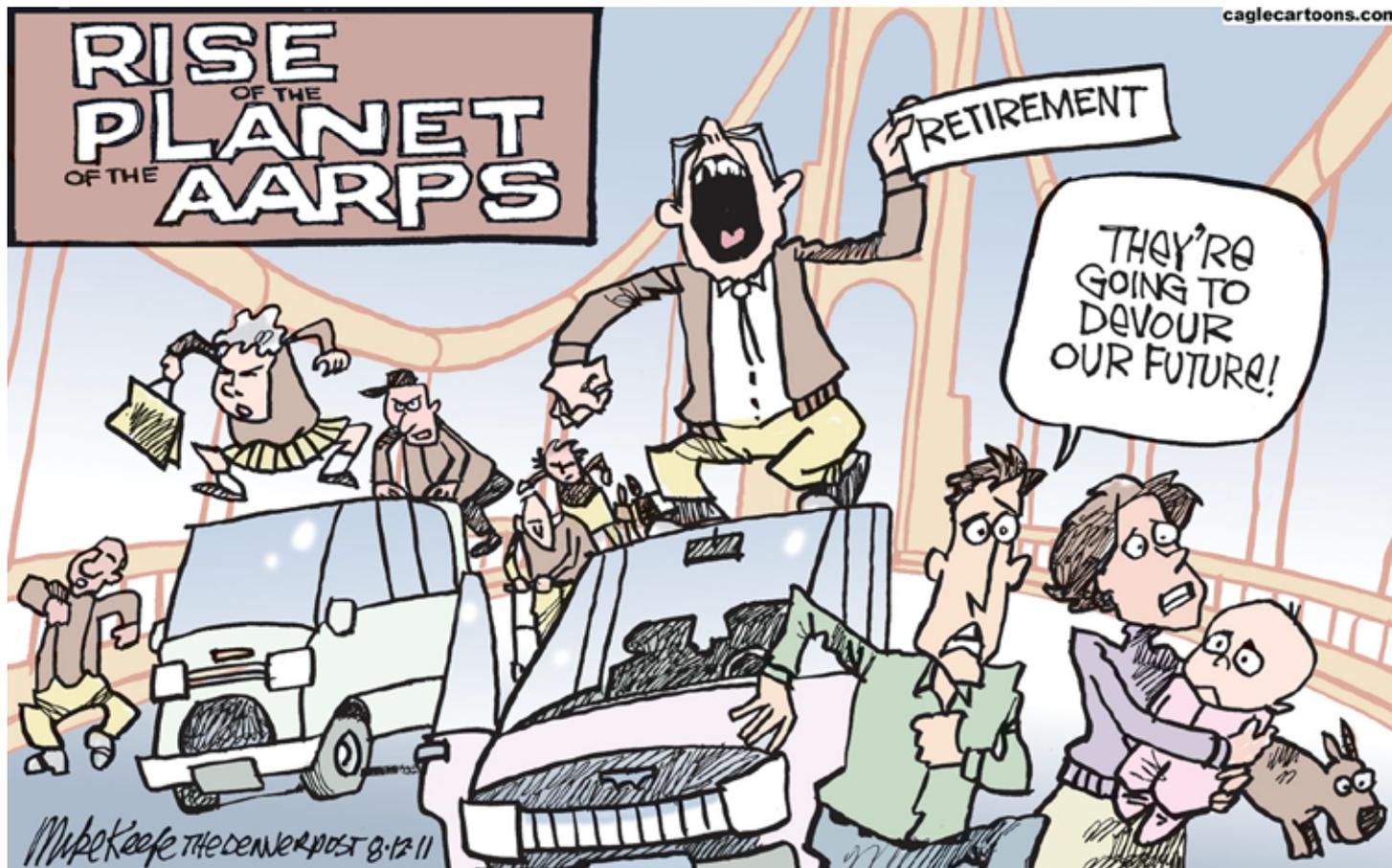
The Pesticide Action Network is a tremendous worldwide resource for farmers and consumers alike looking for ways to fight for safe, sustainable alternatives. – *Jim Hightower*



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## *Let's Skip The War On 'Boomers'*

BY FROMA HARROP

**W**hen things get dull, enterprising rousers of rabble promote a war against something or other to gain attention. The war against the baby boom generation is already in full swing.

One book about the Americans born between 1946 and 1964 has “Generation of Sociopaths” in the title. And a recent piece in *The Atlantic* goes for their throats as “grandparents stealing from the grandchildren.” [Ouch, that serpent’s tooth.]

There’s good reason for concern about the costs of supporting large numbers of retirees living longer, but please hold the red-faced fury. Let’s stay on the rails and stop getting so much stuff wrong.

A sloppy mistake [that many who know better commit on purpose] is to throw Social Security and Medicare into the same basket. Writing for *The Atlantic*, Eric Schnurer, a self-described “rethinker of government,” asserts that both programs were sold on a “fiction” – the belief that all the enrollees are receiving benefits they paid for through taxes. That’s only partly true about Medicare and seriously misunderstands Social Security.

Social Security is not a savings plan. It is a kind of

insurance. Payments go to the disabled and children who lose a wage-earning parent, as well as to retirees. The contributions by workers who die before they collect their own benefits mostly stay in the pot.

Social Security is a self-contained program. Very little of its funding comes from general revenues. Should the money cushion run out, payments would be automatically cut. But there are easy fixes to cancel the run-out date, currently 2034. An obvious one is to raise the maximum income level subject to Social Security taxes.

Gains in productivity could also ease the pressure. Rising productivity helps explain why 42 workers supported each retiree in 1945 and only three workers did by 2009 – but the checks kept flowing.

One of the Schnurer’s more elusive condemnations goes like this: The boomers elected Ronald Reagan. America stopped looking at the future, he explains, “when the baby boom generation, enthusiastic Reagan backers, became the largest cohort in the electorate.”

There are two problems with this statement. One is it’s not true, at least not for the 1980 election, when 54% of boomers voted for someone other than Rea-

gan.

There's another problem with wherever this argument is going. The boomers' Social Security benefits were actually cut in the Reagan years.

Until then, Social Security was strictly pay-as-you-go. Recognizing that the baby boomers would put extra pressure on the system years hence, Democrats and Republicans agreed to build up a trust fund – to in effect save for the day when the crush of retiring boomers would stress the program.

They hiked Social Security payroll taxes. Money not then going to beneficiaries went into the fund. They also raised the ages at which boomers could start collecting full benefits. Then 65, it will reach 67 for those born in 1960 or later.

These changes were necessary and proper. They were responsible. But they did represent a cutback in

benefits that previous generations enjoyed.

Medicare is another story. Despite all those taxes workers put into the program and the charges paid by beneficiaries, Medicare makes heavy demands on the treasury. Medicare costs need curbing, but do note that it is already darn more efficient than private insurance.

Rather than beat up people for turning 65, let's bring all Americans into Medicare. That would be wise health care reform – and nice, too.

Everyone, meanwhile, be on guard as wagers of intergenerational conflict stoke anger with half-truths and selective facts. They are making common cause with those who would cut the daylights out of beloved government programs.

You don't want to go there.

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## *Wanting What You Have*

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

**N**ew Years is when we make resolutions aimed at change: a new body [the diet resolution], a new partner [or any], a new job [or any] ... the familiar list. It's familiar because for most of us, we've been making the same resolutions for years. And the reason we've been making them every year is because we never get there.

Want what you have, my happier friends tell me, especially as you get older, and the opportunities for change become more limited. Want the life you live, as opposed to wanting what you can never have – to relive the past, correct your mistakes, know what you know now. Forgive yourself.

For years, my resolution list used to begin with losing weight. If only I could reach the number I put on my license when I was 16 [and wasn't true then], happiness would be mine. Wrong. Thanks to the gross misconduct of doctors at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona [Mayo is in Minnesota; I should have known that], I weigh 10 pounds less than that now, and believe me, I would trade in a minute. Give me back my old body, imperfect as it was. Let me enjoy food again. Stupid. Stupid.

Of course it is important to your health to lose excess weight, to exercise, to eat right. But to hate the body you have? Why? The strong legs that took me where I needed to go, the stomach that put up with abuse, the one and only body I would ever have. I hate myself, I used to say, as I examined myself in the mirror. Now I look at the pictures and shake my head: I was pretty. I looked fine, if only I had known that. If only I had wanted what I had.

In retrospect, losing weight looks easy. Stick to protein, vegetables and fruit. Ride the exercise bike. Just keep doing it, and whatever works for you will keep working. Or don't. But don't hate yourself. So

much energy wasted. So much harm done. Should it surprise us that studies find that being kind to yourself – self-compassion – may be more important than self-confidence?

The problem with most New Year's resolutions is that they depend on things beyond our control. The only thing we can hope to control is how we react. Easier said than done. Don't take it personally. How do you not take criticism personally? It is personal. Rejection hurts. If one more person who is surrounded by family tells me how much they like being alone ...

Attitude can only take you so far. It's going on eight years since I lost my dear friend Kath, who handled her juvenile diabetes brilliantly, and died six weeks after she was hospitalized for a rare and aggressive cancer that could not be handled. Sometimes, it just is what it is.

Accepting what you cannot change is, I have learned, far more difficult than trying to change what you cannot accept.

When I was younger, I found the unpredictability of life to be exciting, a challenge, an opportunity. Now, it mostly terrifies me, which is obviously not the "right" response. Can I help how I react? Is there any choice but to try?

A new body is not on my list anymore. Nor is a new job. And a new partner, after 17 years alone, seems hopelessly unrealistic. But if I can want what I have, I could be as happy as anyone.

Play the hand you are dealt, I have been telling my students for years. How well you play it counts for as much or more than the cards in your hand, studies show. I am talking to myself.

Happy New Year.

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## 'Old Way' Values Still Abound

BY FRAN MORRIS

**A**s a child development person and, yes, a Yellow Dog Democrat, recent events have made me want to share some thoughts about sexual misdeeds and politics. My long life's experiences in two very sexy industries – media and medical education – have left me with a perspective I consider worth sharing.

We live in a time and a place where most male children have been raised to be macho, masculine, and aggressively virile. This puts a lot of pressure on male children accounting for the excessive number of boys with behavioral and learning problems.

This is not to say that female children don't also experience pressure in today's world. But generally, girls are given a little more space for developing at a more reasonable pace.

Part of living and growing up is an interest in bodies and sexuality. Again, male children tend to receive a different message about what is OK and what is not. Often the most popular boys have learned to flirt, make out and have sex earlier than some of the

less macho nerds. While girls are still expected to be or at least pretend to be more virtuous, they have also usually learned that they are expected to be attracted to the more macho dudes.

An additional thing that many of today's leaders learned along the way is that to be really successful with the girls [and thus, in life], you should be white and rich. This is the only explanation for the last presidential election. Well, except, of course, for all those people who could never believe that a mixed-race interloper had somehow moved into the White House and understood that "Make America Great Again" really meant "Make America White Again."

Those of us who were surprised by the election simply lost count of how many people reared in the old way are still around. We see and hear more young people with a broader worldview and didn't realize who votes and who doesn't.

Fast forward to today's headlines about powerful people and sexual misdeeds. Please understand that I am a feminist and a child advocate. Rapists and child

molesters are the worst. And I'm aware that some awful characters bully others into sexual encounters in the workplace. Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein must be held accountable.

Both of my work environments tended to tolerate some pretty iffy behavior – affairs, unacknowledged children, drugs and alcohol abuse. Women who were trying to learn how the world works, were willing, often eager, participants. I'm unaware of any sexual harassment. Harassment, yes. Powerful men psychologically abusing women, yes. But most of the erring men I knew wanted to be loved, not feared. And I return to my original premise that men of this older generation were brought up with more pressure than nurturing.

I'm also aware that men in powerful positions attract women and that some, probably because of the way they were raised, take advantage of that. Traditionally, this country has accepted a lot of bad behavior from leaders – both Democrats and Republicans – who often seem to be accomplishing a lot for our country.

I find it troubling, however, that some people want to equate Al Franken's silliness with Roy Moore's pre-

dilection for under-age girls – or Garrison Keillor's attempt at chivalry with Donald Trump's vagina-grabbing. Of course, politics is politics and we're expected to accept such nonsense – for the good of the party.

As a Sen. Franken fan, I consider it a compliment to him that everyone went after him so fast. It proves he was developing into a real threat to powerful people. But what a loss!

I support the #MeToo Movement. I am happy that so many women who have suffered in silence for so long are speaking out and receiving help. I also still believe that "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" is a pretty good idea.

As a woman, I agree that most men are pigs [translation: think with the wrong body part]. As a child development professional, I understand that parents and society bear some responsibility for raising a generation that could elect a Donald Trump president of this great nation.

*Oklahoma City resident Fran Morris is a former child development instructor at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and longtime host of the children's television program Miss Fran From Storyland.*

## *Why I Wrote Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's Reflections on Kashmir*

BY NYLA ALI KHAN

**G**etting to know one's ideology is a work in progress. Ironically, it was in the United States – a country that prides itself on the power of its military-industrial complex – that I cultivated the drive to study the South Asian politico-cultural matrix, particularly the intractable Kashmir conflict.

My commitment to pedagogy and scholarship has been unflinching, and my faith in the critical focus that education can provide has been unrelenting.

Whether people see eye-to-eye with my stated positions or question them, anyone would be hard-pressed to deny that I have a firm political ideology and conviction.

I have spent a lot of time and energy delving into the erosion of indigenous politics in the state in my earlier work. And I have had the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture and polity of my native land, Kashmir, without which an understanding of the rich complexity of the sociopolitical fabric of the Kashmir Valley wouldn't have been possible.

To enable a general reader to fathom the complicated current political status of J&K, a large part of the state is administered by India and a portion by Pakistan. China annexed a section of the land in 1962,

through which it has built a road that links Tibet to Xiajiang.

As I underline on my monograph on Kashmir, Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan, the strategic location of Indian-administered J&K underscores its importance for both India and Pakistan. The state of J&K borders on China and Afghanistan.

The Kashmir conflict is driven by nationalistic and religious fervor, each side pointing to the violence and injustice of the other, each side pointing to its own suffering and sorrow.

The distrust, paranoia, and neurosis permeating the relationship between a large number of people of J&K and the Indian Union has intensified the conflict. The guerilla war in the state has gone through a series of phases since 1990 but repressive military and political force remains the brutal reality in the state, which cannot be superseded by seemingly abstract democratic aspirations.

This conscious policy of the Indian state to erode autonomy, populist measures, and democratic institutions in J&K has further alienated the people of the state from the Indian union. The systemic erosion of political opposition in J&K has delegitimized the

voice of dissent and radicalized antagonism toward state institutions and organizations. The exposure of some democratic institutions as a brutal facade has instigated unmitigated disgruntlement and antipathy toward democratic procedures and institutions in the state.

Our peace and prosperity are inextricably bound with the peace and prosperity of the millions in India and Pakistan. In spite of the physical delineation of the boundaries, we all live in one zone. Our hopes, aspirations, fears, and dangers are the same.

We want a lasting and peaceful settlement of the Kashmir conflict, reflecting the wishes of our people. Therein lies honor, peace, and progress for all concerned. The restoration of the autonomous status of J&K would be a viable beginning and would resuscitate rule of law and political self-determination.

Nation-states have their own interests to protect; our shared interest should be the protection of the people of Kashmir, particularly the young whose lives haven't even begun yet.

Let's place ourselves in the shoes of those who have suffered irreparable losses and will never know any closure. Time will not heal the wounds of such people. We need an indigenous constituency for conflict resolution.

In politics, the only viable way is forward, not a constant looking back. And policies and methods must be revisited, revised, and readjusted not just by mainstream politicians, but by separatist politicians as well in order to meet today's needs.

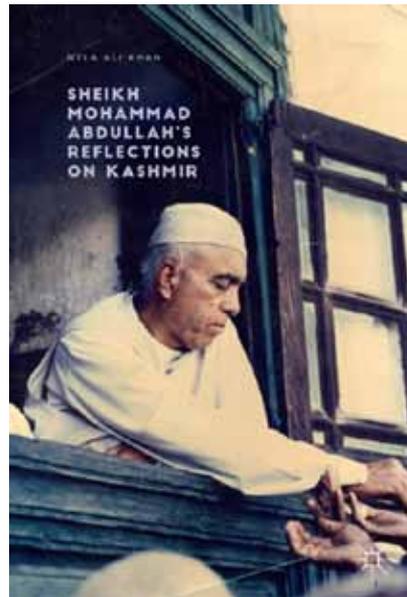
Poring over the speeches of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, arguably the only Kashmiri leader who enjoyed mass support in his lifetime, has enabled me to realize that instead of allowing polarizing elements to disrupt nation-building, we need to cull advanced and reformist ideologies in order to build common ground.

His speeches were recorded and translated by his close associates, those who fought with him in the trenches. At the time, he and his colleagues were considered persona non grata by the government of India, preventing them from gaining access to reputable publishing houses.

So, I had to retrieve and dust the cobwebs off the documents reproduced in my book, which provide tremendous insight into peace-building, democratization, and the processes of negotiation, dialogue, and accommodation required to reach some kind of fruition.

I was further motivated to complete this project by the young Kashmiris, college and university students, who came to see me last summer on my annual visit to my homeland. They observed that no one person and no one organization had copyright over Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and that a revival of the discourse of Kashmiri nationalism, which he symbolized, would repair the damaging divides and fill in the cracks in that polity.

As I underscored in *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman*



[New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014], to my mind, there is a historical value in revisiting and challenging the historical narratives about the political personages of pre-and post-1947 Jammu and Kashmir and the movement for an independent Kashmir.

My attempt to highlight the history of a region in a particular era, as I've done in *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman*

as well, is not to localize it. As I've said before, I think it is important to reshape historical memory so that it includes the humanitarian and pluralistic endeavors of leaders of the movement at that critical juncture post-1948.

I have been working on *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's Reflection on Kashmir* for a while, because I am of the firm opinion that a consciousness cannot be built without a mechanism of political training, ideological education, and progressive action, which a close study of his speeches and interviews would enable. Unless a popular politics of mass mobilization is merged with ideological guidance, not dogma, as well a grassroots social movement, it only leads to self-destruction.

A serious student of South Asian politics and the politics of Kashmir in particular could analyze the ways in which experiences have been constructed historically and have changed overtime.

In the past few years, every article that I've written, every radio and television appearance, as well as every face book and tweet of mine have been instantiations of, as one of my reviewers puts it, "the high stakes debate on the right of the Kashmiri people to determine their own political future as an independent state." In complementing *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman*, which was published in 2014, *Sheikh's Mohammad Abdullah's Reflections on Kashmir* allows me to interweave my several publications in various forums, including face book and twitter, into this compendium, bringing my work and perspective full circle.

Working on these books has enabled me to critically appraise political, cultural, and social discourses which my locations of privilege hadn't allowed me to question previously. I have been conscious of the limited representations in some other works on Kashmir which reflect the power relations between those who represent and those who are represented.

I am fully cognizant of the collision of the ideas of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

# Promises

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

But now the White House says that promise is “inoperative.”

8. He promised “a complete ban on foreign lobbyists raising money for American elections.” You bought it. But foreign lobbyists are still raising money for American elections.

9. He told you “I’m not going to cut Social Security like every other Republican and I’m not going to cut Medicare or Medicaid.” You bought it. But he and House Speaker Paul Ryan are already planning such cuts in order to deal with the ballooning deficit created, in part, by the new tax law for corporations and the rich.

10. He promised “six weeks of paid maternity leave to any mother with a newborn child whose employer does not provide the benefit.” You bought it. But the giant tax cut for corporations and the rich doesn’t leave any money for this.

11. He said that on Day One he’d label China a “currency manipulator.” You bought it. But then he met with China’s president Xi Jinping and declared “China is not a currency manipulator.” Ever since then, Trump has been cozying up to Xi.

12. He said he wouldn’t bomb Syria. You bought it. But then he bombed Syria.

13. He said he’d build a “wall” across the southern border. You believed him. But there’s no money for that, either. Chief of Staff John Kelly says it is “unlikely that we will build a wall, a physical barrier, from sea to shining sea.”

14. He promised that the many women who accused him of sexual misconduct “will be sued after the election is over.” You bought it. He hasn’t sued them, presumably because he doesn’t want the truth to come out.

15. He said he would not be a president who took vacations. “I would not be a president that takes time off,” he promised, and he called Barack Obama “the vacationer-in-chief.” You bought it. But since becoming President he has spent nearly 25% of his days at one of his golf properties for some portion of the day, according to Golf News Network, at a cost to taxpayers of over \$77 million. That’s already more taxpayer money on vacations than Obama cost in the first three years of his presidency. Not to mention all the money taxpayers are spending protecting his family, including his two sons who travel all over the world on Trump business.

16. He said he’d force companies to keep jobs in America, and that there would be “consequences” for companies that shipped jobs abroad. You believed him. But despite their promises, Carrier, Ford, GM, and the rest have continued to ship jobs to Mexico and China. Carrier, a division of United Technologies, has moved ahead with plans to send 1,000 jobs

at its Indiana plant to Mexico. Notwithstanding, the federal government has rewarded United Technologies with 15 new contracts since Trump’s inauguration. Last year, Microsoft opened a new factory in Wilsonville, OR, that was supposed to herald a new era in domestic tech manufacturing. But in July, the company announced it was closing the plant. More than 100 workers and contractors will lose their jobs when production shifts to China. GE is sending jobs to Canada. IBM is sending them to Costa Rica, Egypt, Argentina, and Brazil. There have been no “consequences” for sending all these jobs overseas.

17. He promised to revive the struggling coal industry and “bring back thousands” of lost mining jobs. You bought it. But coal jobs continue to disappear. Since Trump’s victory, at least six plants that relied on coal have closed or announced they will close. Another 40 are projected to close during the president’s four-year term. Utilities continue to switch to natural gas instead of coal.

18. He promised to protect steel workers. But according to the American Iron and Steel Institute, which tracks shipments, steel imports were 19.4% higher in the first 10 months of 2017 than in the same period last year. That import surge has hurt American steel workers, who were already struggling against a glut of cheap Chinese steel. For example, ArcelorMittal just announced it will soon lay off 150 of its 207 steel workers at its plant in Conshohocken, PA.

19. He said he’d make America safer. You believed him. But according to Mass Shooting Tracker, there have been 377 mass shootings so far this year, including 58 people killed and hundreds injured at a concert in Las Vegas, and 26 churchgoers killed and 20 injured at a church in Texas. Trump refuses to consider any gun controls.

20. He said he’d release his taxes. “I’m under a routine audit and it’ll be released, and as soon as the audit is finished it will be released,” he promised during the campaign. He hasn’t released his taxes.

*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.*

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## *Nausea Alert*

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### **UNBELIEVABLE**

***My Front-Row Seat To The Craziest Campaign In American History***

**By Katy Tur**

**Harper Collins Publishers**

**291 pages, \$26.99**

---

### **BY JOHN WOOD**

**I**'m about to throw up," Katy Tur reveals in the opening line of her new book. She felt queasy at the prospect that Trump would likely win on Election Day and she would have to continue covering him at his already planned "victory rallies" – an understandably dizzyingly, surreal moment for her.

The reporter on the winning campaign historically ends up as a White House Correspondent. Not surprisingly, she declined this honor.

She relentlessly followed the rather volatile Trump campaign for 1½ years, with more than 3,800 live TV reports, annoyed at having to hear "Tiny Dancer" on an endless loop at Trump rallies.

Trump seemed all-too-often to play a love-hate game with Tur. On the campaign trail, for example, Tur would call out Trump on his many inconsistencies and fact-checked his falsities. In return, he would call her "disgraceful," "third-rate," and "not nice." And yet he later kisses her on the way to the Morning Joe set before bragging about it on air.

On top of this, one time, he appeared with his entourage, exuberantly waving her over, introducing her to some business men: "This is Katy Tur," he said. "She's a great reporter."

She immediately thought to herself: Come again?

Tur's book gives the reader an inside look at how reporters were demeaned, spat on, and even discredited by Trump supporters on the campaign trail. She describes how, one time, Trump called on her at a Trump rally, exclaiming: "You are not reporting it, Katy." Thousands in the crowd collectively booed her and her colleagues in response. A frightening experience.

I remember what Lyndon Johnson once explained about how you had to have the "hide of a rhinoceros"

to be in politics, not a reporter.

While Tur might possess a hide not unlike a rhinoceros, by campaign's end, she even found herself her colleagues requiring private security at all of Trump's rallies.

This is certainly something new.

Really, I think it's a schtick he does to rile up his base – it's the art of distraction. As a seasoned reality TV star, he knows the production value, he knows he's being covered, he knows hating on the media plays well, not only with his base. He must be exploiting the fact that nearly two-thirds of Americans say the mainstream press is full of fake news, a sentiment that is held by a majority of voters across the ideological spectrum.

For her efforts, Tur won the 2017: Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Journalism as the first woman to lead a political team for MSNBC or any other network during a presidential year.

She deserved it!

What a crazy 500 days it was with this candidate. She laments that nothing is sacred with Trump.

"I've heard him insult a war hero, brag about grabbing women by the pussy," she says, "denigrate the judicial system, demonize immigrants, fight with the pope, doubt the democratic process, advocate torture and war crimes, tout the size of his junk in a presidential debate, trash the media, and indirectly endanger my life."

For Trump, he admits it's all just a useful game. Tur quotes a passage from Trump's *The Art of Deal* in which he says: "I play to people's fantasies ... People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration – and a

very effective form of promotion.”

Trump’s reality TV presidency is full of propaganda, but she exclaims, at least we have a free press. Even a woman in America can lead a news team to follow Trump. But it was not easy. She admits, “Being a woman is a pain in the ass.” She explains further: you have to look “good,” from her hair, face and clothes, despite living out of suitcase.

She says that as a reporter, you can’t wear the same thing twice – at least not in the same week. “A guy can throw on the same suit every single day and no one would notice.” Furthermore, “[T]he form-fitting bodysuits might as well be the official sponsor of the female press corps and perhaps a few members of the male press corps, too,” she says.

Tur not only focuses on her attire, but how Trump supporters look as well. She finds “Cowboy America,” “Biker America,” “Angry Conservative Uncle America” and “Mom America,” etc.

Inside rallies, she finds Trump supporters are often “unchained. They can drop their everyday niceties. They can yell and scream and say things they’d never say out loud on the outside.” They seem to model on Trump himself, who is rather “crude, and in his halo of crudeness other people get to be crude as well.” This often turns into violence of some sort. “He seemed to encourage it,” she says, “like an indulgent father who would never ground his son because of a justified fight.”

Tur writes an often funny, insightful, sometimes darkly comedic look at how a former reality show host essentially stole the White House in full view. I recommend this book on how a reporter has to make a major commitment to tenaciously work nearly 500 long, often dull days, following an eccentric candidate around the country.

Her subtitle – *My Front-Row Seat to the Craziest Campaign in American History* – is fitting in that she had to follow a man who admits that he subscribes to

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“truthful hyperbole.” A man who demeans reporters and calls out news organizations and stories he doesn’t like as merely “fake news.” A man who she got to know fairly well was on the verge of winning and immediately felt a queasy feeling in her belly.

I think Trump is a brilliant master of rhetoric and he is right about the rhetorical value of hyperbole as it can have considerable psychological force. However, it lacks logical force in that it provides no logical reason to accept a claim.

Hyperbole is loosely linked to

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truth. But it has “truthiness,” ala Colbert, enough to make his base love him, as they don’t need logic, just trust.

However, everyone else outside the “Trump Train” needs logic. His poll numbers are dropping to historic lows for a first-year presidency, so most have obviously learned rather quickly that whatever he says is merely irrational, irresponsible, and reprehensible.

PolitFact estimates that Trump makes false public statements around four times a day, more than any president in history. Sad!

If you want to learn more about the chaotic nature of Trump’s candidacy, take a front-row seat, but be warned: you too might feel a bit nauseated, if you are not already, at the state of affairs today.

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

## *Khan*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

self-determination, identity, and unity propounded by the young members of the Reading Room Party and the Plebiscite Front with the brutal force and suppression wielded by the Indian and Pakistani nation-states.

I have appraised not just the history of the Kashmiri nationalism dominated by the elite but I have carefully looked at the politics of the people and the political mobilization engendered by such politics in my work. Popular mobilization in J&K during the 1930s and 1940s took the form of uprisings, which was a primary locus of political action.

The primary question for me is, “Who is speaking and who is being silenced?” – enabling me to recognize the legitimacy of knowledge produced from the point of view of the local subject, the conviction of the workers of political parties who maintain the vibrancy of conviction and ideology; the collision of the idea of self-determination with military oppression on the contentious site of nationalism.

Hard core political analysis aside, I will never lose faith in the people of Kashmir. With every breath I pray that the younger generation of Kashmiris channels their anger, sense of alienation, and takes the political process forward without playing into anyone’s hands.

The centrist politics of both nation-states, India and Pakistan, have worked on depoliticizing our society.

We cannot let that happen!

*Nyla Ali Khan is a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma and a member of the Scholars Strategy Network. She also is the author of Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Transnationalism [Routledge 2005]; Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan [Palgrave Macmillan, 2010]; and Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity [Palgrave Macmillan, 2012].*

# Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

– nearly 35% off the newsstand price and less than the cost of one latte a month. We'll even send a card announcing your gift. See page 47 for details and a subscription coupon.

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## Camel's Nose

The state's ongoing budget fiasco is leading to some well-intentioned, but disconcerting decision-making that could haunt Oklahoma for generations.

Take, for example, the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, the fund born of the 1998 agreement between cigarette manufacturers and 46 states seeking to recover tobacco-related healthcare costs.

Oklahoma voters in 2000 wisely approved a constitutional amendment that put the lion's share of settlement proceeds in a lockbox, ensuring only interest earnings could be spent and only on health-related projects – many focusing on tobacco cessation.

In the years since, the state's smoking rate among adults has dropped significantly – from 26.1% in 2012 to 19.6% in 2017 – helping lift Oklahoma three spots to 43rd in the latest United Health Foundation national rankings.

It's working exactly as its conceptualizers – including former Attorney General Drew Edmondson and former state Treasurer Robert Butkin – envisioned.

Except ... it may be working too well.

As the endowment grew to \$1 billion and as the state's long-term budget crisis persisted, legislators began to covet TSET's golden egg-laying goose.

In 2017, for example, lawmakers introduced two measures aimed at siphoning off tobacco settlement dollars in order to plug budget holes created by years of ill-advised income tax cuts and corporate welfare.

Fortunately, the proposals died quickly. But you can bet there will be similar efforts this year, especially since it would be far easier politically to tap TSET than eliminate business incentives or roll back income tax cuts – both of which would disproportionately affect the elected elite's top financial backers.

Public policy-wise, however, it would be disastrous. Oklahoma scrapes the bottom of most public health indices nationally. It makes sense to devote tobacco settlement dollars to programs that not only help Oklahomans live better, healthier lives, but also support important medical research.

The problem is, TSET itself may have cracked open the door to legislators coveting the endowment's riches when it approved one-time spending of \$3.08 million to ensure the continued operations this fiscal year of 189 senior nutrition meal sites statewide and

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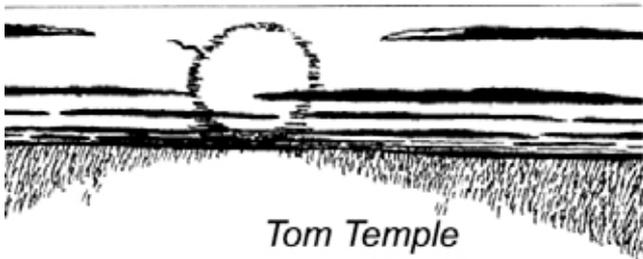
These are vital state services, to be sure. But vital state services that should be protected in the normal course of legislative business – funded with general revenue, through the regular appropriation process.

Oklahomans need to send lawmakers a clear message: Properly fund vital state services – and leave TSET alone.



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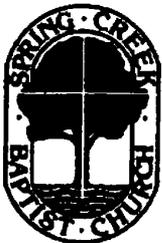
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# Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Trump's narcissism is breathtaking. He replaced the national motto – *E pluribus unum* [“out of many, one] – on presidential challenge coins with his campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again.” The coins are awarded to service members for special achievements and milestones.

Longtime Observer contributor Sharon Martin has authored a magnificent children's book, *Froggy Bottom Blues*. It's available through Doodle and Peck Publishing or from Amazon.

At least 81 journalists were killed on assignment last year, the fewest in a decade and down from 93 in 2016. But violence against media – including “killings, harassment, attacks and threats” – soared to “epidemic levels.” – Int'l Federation of Journalists

“The first time President Obama met with US Attorneys, he told us, ‘I appointed you but you don't serve me. You serve the American people. And I expect you to act with independence & integrity.’ None of us ever forgot that.” – Alabama law professor and 25-year federal prosecutor Joyce White Vance, on Twitter

New research reveals younger brains are better conditioned for fast-paced information-processing than previous generations. But older adults are superior in ability to focus and learn thanks to longer attention spans. – AARP

In a nation beset by gun violence, consider this: A new single-day record was recently set for background check requests for gun purchases – 203,086. The previous record of 185,713 was set in 2016. – National Instant Criminal Background Check System

The annual budget of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs is \$10 million – less than the amount spent on nuclear weapons every hour. Sleep tight.

OKC attorney Kent Frates has crafted a second volume of *Oklahoma's Most Notorious Cases* – this time including a section on the state's lethal injection bungling, as well as the daring daylight “hit” on Roger Wheeler in a Tulsa country club parking lot and the grisly murders of three employees and a customer at a Geronimo bank. A terrific read!

# Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

does lower the rates for all; the rich too, sure, but why not? They pay most of it.

I'd suggest not listening to those who ask how the tax cut will be paid for or made up. It should not be or it's not a real savings to you.

"Revenue Neutral" is a BS term.

Homer H. Hulme  
Chickasha

Editor, The Observer:

In their final year of office, presidents and governors are obsessed with one thing: their legacy.

They search for something of value to leave to their successors.

Gov. Fallin needs a "Hey, Mabel, get a load of this!"  
Not cutting taxes.

Not tort reform.

Not workers comp reform.

Not killing more folks than "Pretty Boy" Floyd.

Not botching the execution of Clayton Lockett.

Fallin can be remembered as a great governor by commuting the sentences of 49 condemned men and one condemned woman to life in prison without parole.

Saving souls. Now that is a history-making legacy.

And she can quote Psalm 102: "For the Lord looked down from His holy place on high; from the Heavens He beheld the earth; that He might hear the groan of the captive and set free those condemned to die."

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Growing up in Chicago during the 1940s and 1950s we referred to the dominant races as Negro and White. Persons who were a mixture of the two were referred to as Mulattoes; nothing demeaning or insulting intended.

These days we refer to Negroes as "African-Americans" by their choice. This is salutary for a multitude of very honorable reasons, not the least to avoid emphasizing a name which evolved into the slanderous "N word," a usage today thankfully considered "off limits" by all but the most racist in our society.

However, the "downside" of using "African-American" to describe all persons with any discernible African heritage is to possibly miss an important part of their personhood. Barack Obama would be described

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as “Mulatto” if he lived during my youth.

Why would it be important to describe our 44th president as Mulatto? Might it have called attention to his mother’s remarkable family heritage dating back to our Revolutionary War. Many of her forebearers fought for our nation’s independence! This qualified her as a “Daughter of the American Revolution” [DAR] and Barack as an [SAR]. You can look it up!

So, is there any doubt that both the knowledge and the emphasis of President Obama’s complete heritage would have given his election and his presidency a discernibly different exposure?

The hate-mongers who hobbled this honorable man could very well have been stripped of their “ammunition.”

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Trump selected his staff from the Washington swill

## Future

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

they aren’t against expressing political opinions, just dissenting ones, even though the country was founded on celebrating dissent.

It’s disheartening to see some owners cowering in fear rather than further embracing this just expression. In the long run, pandering to their conservative fan base rather than acting out of conscience does more harm than good – to the sport and to the country.

The NBA has been more tolerant of its players’ freedom of speech. Players and coaches from many teams have silently protested and spoken out to the press. LeBron James, Kyrie Irving, Jarrett Jack, Alan Anderson, Deron Williams, Kevin Garnett and others wore “I Can’t Breathe” T-shirts during warm-ups in 2014 to protest the death of unarmed Eric Garner by police. Steph Curry and Kevin Durant continue to speak out.

## Random Thoughts As We Age ...

The biggest lie I tell myself is, “I don’t need to write that down, I’ll remember it.”

Wouldn’t it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for 10 minutes and come out wrinkle-free and three sizes smaller!

Last year I joined a support group for procrastinators. We haven’t met yet!

I don’t trip over things – I do random gravity checks!

I don’t need anger management. I need people to

Requiring total obedience to his ill will  
He required lying and cheating  
As a basis for each meeting  
Requiring staff members to act as a skill.

Tom Birbilis  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

There is a home for sale in the Los Angeles area for \$500 million. Lavish to say the least.

But what kind of home is it that has a room you can use to escape the rest of the house?

Would make it a homeless shelter, right? But no self-respecting homeless person would be seen in such ostentation!

Happy New Year!

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

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

Detroit Pistons coach Stan Van Gundy has said that protesting athletes are “models of American patriotism.” Spurs coach Gregg Popovich echoed that sentiment when he said that his players have “the organization’s full support to speak their minds.”

Has speaking out affected ratings? This year the NBA, despite its protests, has increased its TV ratings by 32%, while the NFL’s viewership dropped from 16.5 million viewers last year to 15 million this year.

Things aren’t perfect. There is still pressure to silence players. But the NBA has a chance to seize this moment and boldly lead by promoting the values and freedoms of the U.S. Constitution. To be not just sports heroes, but also social heroes who reflect the kind of engaged Americans who won’t tolerate anyone stepping on our values, just for the price of a ticket, a hot dog and a beer.

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stop making me mad!

My people skills are just fine. It’s my tolerance of idiots that needs work.

If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would’ve put them on my knees.

The kids text me “plz” which is shorter than please. I text back “no” which is shorter than “yes.”

I’m going to retire and live off of my savings. Not sure what I’ll do that second week.

– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing

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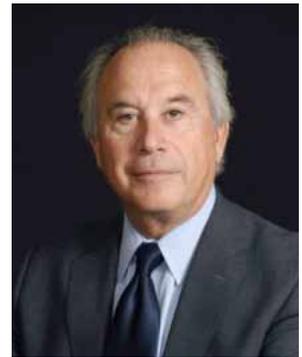
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