

# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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## Pruitt's Pathology

*AG-Turned-EPA Chief And Wannabe U.S. Senator's  
Record Infected With Venality And Arrogance*



### **COVER STORY**

*Begins on page 24.*

### **2018 OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE**

*From a potential teacher walkout to an early peek at the mid-terms, our coverage begins on page 5.*

# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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## LETTERS TO EDITOR

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# Observations

## *Saving Democracy*

None of the recent plans aimed at getting Oklahoma on firmer long-term footing included an obvious, sorely needed fix: redistricting reform.

The current map – classic partisan gerrymandering – created a Republican statehouse supermajority that not only is failing to solve the state's thorniest problems, but also is effectively killing representative democracy.

Hyperbole? Nope – it's reality.

Consider this: Voter turnout in Oklahoma is now routinely among the lowest in the nation, disincentives galore built into the current system.

Many seats go unchallenged or are decided in one party's primary. Even if there is a general election contest, one party's nominee is a virtual shoe-in – district boundaries crafted to create safe Republican or Democratic seats.

Gerrymandering's insidious impact was obvious in 2016 when 20 legislative incumbents won re-election without challenge. Worse, Democrats didn't even bother to field a candidate in 33 solidly Republican districts races.

The deck is so stacked that most eligible Oklahomans either don't bother to register or stay home on Election Day – nation's sixth worst-turnout in 2016, at just over 50%.

Oklahoma's current districts were crafted early this decade by Republicans to create Republican legislative supermajorities – then to protect Republican incumbents. Mission accomplished.

Unfortunately, it also created a state Legislature that has failed spectacularly to solve the state's ongoing fiscal crisis.

Intuitively, one party control would unleash legislative bodies to get big things done. Practically, it has yielded unprecedented gridlock because of an intra-party war over what conservatism means in the early 21st Century.

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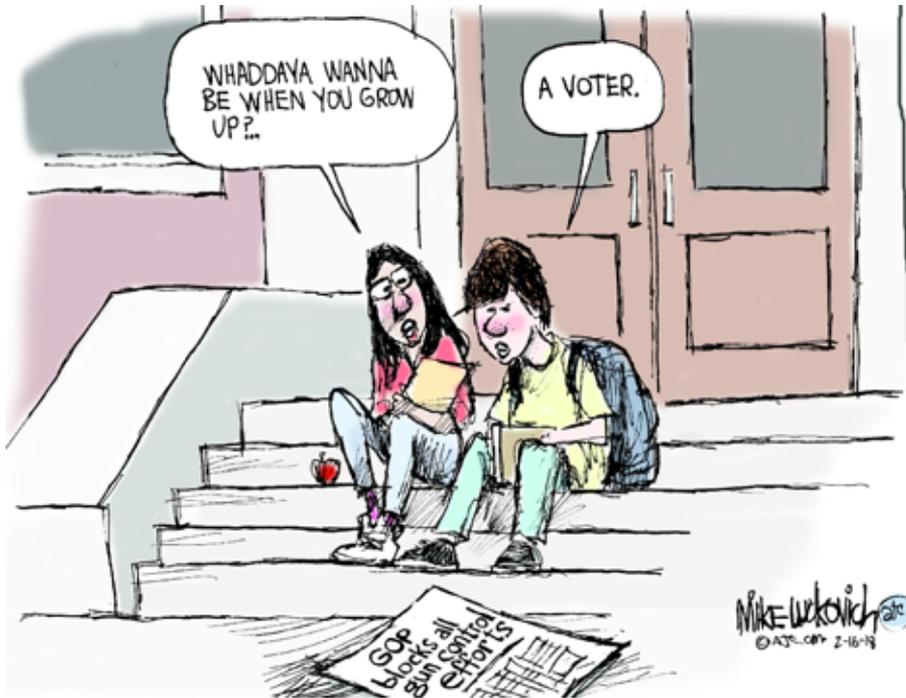
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# Observerscope



If you haven't secured tickets for March 22's Observer fundraiser – An Evening With Dan Rather – better hurry. VIP tickets already sold out. See back cover for details about an event you won't want to miss!

**Dart:** To gubernatorial wannabe Mick Cornett, pitching voters on re-creating OKC's "magic" at state level. There was nothing magic about it, of course. It was fueled by – gasp! – higher taxes.

Oklahoma Academy recommends the state embrace California's nonpartisan, blanket primary – all candidates on one ballot, with top two vote-getters facing off in general, regardless of party. Worst idea since term limits.

**Laurel:** To Sen. Kevin Matthews, D-Tulsa, for yeoman's work creating school curriculum that finally educates OK students on Tulsa's 1921 race riot. A frightening example of racism and hate, swept under rug for far too long.

We warned months ago ex-OK AG Scott Pruitt's tenure as EPA chief would end badly. Will Tar Creek cover-up be his undoing? Or that he lives a champagne diet on taxpayers' budget?

**Dart:** To Sen. Jim Inhofe, responding to constituents' pleas for common sense gun control with form letters touting his A-plus NRA rating. A new low for OK congressional delegation's goober-in-chief.

Most dangerous place in world is between "retired" U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn and a TV camera [or any journalist, really]. If he's hell-bent on starving state government, he needs to get off sidelines and into GOP race for governor.

**Laurel:** To Oklahoma Ethics Commission, ordering two-year cooling off period before elected reps or agency heads can become lobbyists. Excellent first step toward breaking special interest dominance.

An open legislative seat that should be high on Democrats' 2018 flip list: Bryan County's HD 21. Rep. Dustin Roberts, R-Durant, isn't seeking a fifth term.

**Dart:** To Rep. Mike Ritze, authoring House resolution aimed at ousting the judge presiding over Falls Creek rape case. Yes, plea deal was a travesty, but judicial or prosecutorial misdeeds are better remedied at ballot box.

**Breathtakingly Brazen:** Melania Trump's pal-turned-First Lady assistant Stephanie Winston Wolkoff's firm gets paid \$26 million for inaugural work. It didn't even exist two months before The Donald was sworn in.

**Laurel:** To Auditor Gary Jones, wisely supporting new revenues while every other GOP gubernatorial candidate tucks tail at mention of higher taxes. Most voters know OK has a revenue, not spending problem.

The influential Club for Growth is targeting Rep. Markwayne Mullin for defeat in Second Congressional District GOP primary, depicting him as a big spender and decrying his broken promise to quit after three terms.

**Dart:** To rookie Heavener Rep. Rick West, proposing chemical castration for sex offenders [HB 2543]. To paraphrase our friend Molly Ivins, if ignorance ever climbs to \$100 a barrel, we want drilling rights on West's head.

March 8's Observer Newsmakers at OKC's Full Circle Books features Rep. Collin Walke and the Rev. Lori Walke, discussing Oklahoma Values Package aimed at helping the state's beleaguered working class. See page 13 for more details.

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# Letters



Editor, The Observer:

I fully and unequivocally support these young adults who have involved themselves in the political process through continued and organized pressure on adults and elected officials to address gun violence. Not only are the students from Parkland, FL, exercising their freedom of speech and assembly rights, but we're witnessing a movement across the country of young people who are fed up with excuses and inaction.

I value democracy and the process that empowers even school children to bring about change when they feel their rights are not being protected. And I do believe these young people have every right to demand safety. They also have the right to demand their schools be adequately funded – a challenge not unique to Oklahoma, but especially severe.

Never again should a child be afraid at school. Never again should elected officials bury their heads in the sand while they sit in a Capitol building equipped with metal detectors and armed guards at every entrance and guards in the parking lots.

Leaders need to lead. We need

massive increases in school funding for school security, teacher pay raises, and better learning materials. Oklahoma leads the nation in cuts to our schools, while at the same time increasing tax giveaways to movie stars and corporations that aren't even headquartered in our state.

I can't emphasize this enough: I fully support teachers and students who demand safety and better funding. The democratic process is not only for a privileged few. It's everyone's privilege as well as responsibility to act when they believe their rights are being threatened or neglected.

We adults have many duties to our children, but the most basic are to keep them safe and ensure they're educated and prepared for the future.

James Lockhart  
Heavener

*Editor's Note: Democrat James Lockhart served in the Oklahoma House from 2010-16 and has children enrolled in public schools.*

Editor, The Observer:

The DACA children are under God's protection. Blessed are those who help them and cursed

are those who harm them.

Al Engel  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I protest the prayer policy of the House of Representatives and ask that it be rescinded immediately.

First, the policy restricts the religious freedom of the representative. Second, the policy assumes that we are a theocracy, which we are not.

On those two grounds I ask for repeal.

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

*Editor's Note: Democrat Jeff Hamilton served in the Oklahoma House from 1986-94.*

Editor, The Observer:

1. Odds are good that Trump will resign once his rotten business and political dealings clearly surface [think: income tax returns].

2. Even the Republican House of Representatives and Senate will not be able to ignore Mueller's near certain proof that there was/is collusion by Trump with Putin and/or multiple obstruction of justice by Trump. Impeachment, removal or the 25th Amendment are in the offing if either one or the other is proved.

3. Even if both No. 1 and No. 2 should fail, the 2018 and 2020 elections definitely offer;

a) a wave of angry, highly motivated [#metoo] women candidates;

b) brand new 18-, 19- and 20-year-old voters enraged by recurring lack of action on guns;

c) thousands of "Greens" and other non-Dem voters from 2016 now clearly seeing their tragically consequential votes/non-votes;

d) angry "Dreamers" and their friends and families who are highly motivated to oppose Trump and the Republicans by voting, helping to get out the vote, or both;

e) "Black Lives Matter" helps to get the African-American votes

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## *The West Virginia Model*

**I**t's time for educators and public school supporters to dust off their torches and sharpen up their pitchforks.

Only a state Capitol show-of-force seems likely to persuade venal legislative leadership to prioritize Oklahoma children over deep-pocketed oil and gas interests in the longstanding fiscal stare-down.

A teacher strike is not to be undertaken lightly, of course. First, it would be illegal, though unlikely to result in mass arrest. Second, it would create hardship for thousands of working parents whose work-life schedules revolve around school calendars.

Sadly, it's one of the few options left to pressure an obstinate Legislature to act.

Almost 30 years ago, similarly desperate times for Oklahoma public education led to similarly desperate measures. More than half the state's teachers walked out of their classrooms and into the Capitol. A quarter of the state's school districts were forced to close their doors.

The four-day walkout yielded HB 1017 that not only increased teacher pay, but also bolstered school funding and mandated smaller class sizes.

Alas, the nationally acclaimed reforms didn't survive long. A Republican-led income tax cutting-corporate welfare spree produced the nation's deepest education cuts.

Moreover, despite years of assurances that public education was their No. 1 priority, Gov. Mary Fallin and the Legislature failed to deliver on promises to end a decade-long teacher pay raise drought and steer more money into classrooms.

Good things come to those who wait? Not when it comes to current leadership at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. The only way to get the attention of this wholly-owned subsidiary of big oil and gas is to put the squeeze on them.

Walk out. Not a one-day Capitol rally. Not on a holiday when parents already were scheduled to be off work and could care for their kids. Walk out ... for as long as it takes ... no matter who it inconveniences.

Think the voting public is irritated now? [Nearly 60% gave thumbs down to the governor and Legislature in a recent Sooner Poll.] Imagine their fury

when schools close because classrooms are teacherless, day after day.

They know who's responsible for this mess – including \$16 million more in mid-year education cuts imposed this week in the aftermath of Step Up Oklahoma's defeat.

As retired University of Central Oklahoma journalism professor Terry Clark put it on social media: "Legislators should forfeit their pay and be locked up for child neglect."

You may recall the governor had promised to veto any proposal that inflicted more cuts. She caved instead, signing them into law. All because she and legislative leaders refuse to buck the carbon barons and restore the gross production tax to its historic 7% rate – which would still be the nation's lowest.

For the record, a recent state of Idaho-funded study determined Oklahoma's effective oil and gas tax rate actually was 3.2% in fiscal year 2016. That's chump change compared to our neighbors: Louisiana 13.3%, Arkansas 12%, Texas 8.3%.

Aren't our kids and teachers as valuable as theirs? Most Oklahomans undoubtedly would yell, "Hell, yes!" Further, if forced to choose between teachers and lawmakers, they'd overwhelmingly back their teachers.

That is no small matter. As OEA President Alicia Priest recently noted in a Facebook post, "The goal is not a walkout – *the goal is getting funding for education and our core services.*" To achieve that, she wrote, "We must have community backing."

An estimated 33,000 West Virginia teachers and school workers provided a template in late February, mounting a four-day strike that left more than a quarter-million students out of class in 55 counties across the state. The result: A 5% raise for the nation's 48th lowest paid teachers, a 3% raise for all other state workers – and the governor's promise he would establish a task force to deal with skyrocketing insurance costs.

If Oklahoma lawmakers don't act now to raise more revenue, they face a \$167 million budget hole next fiscal year. That would leave teachers – and public school devotees – with no choice but to march on the Capitol.

# A Swing And A Miss!



*First Week Whiff On ‘Step Up’ Plan Won’t Be Session’s Last Word On State’s Fiscal Crisis. The GOP Desperately Needs A Solution If It Wants To Avoid An Angry Electorate In Fall.*

**BY ARNOLD HAMILTON**

**T**he Legislature’s spectacular failure to resolve the state’s entrenched fiscal crisis can be explained in one word: Greed.

No, it’s not that beleaguered teachers are asking for too big a salary bump. Or that state agency chiefs are inveterate empire builders. Or that rural healthcare providers are crying wolf when it comes to reimbursement rates.

The greed that torpedoed Step Up Oklahoma [and every other serious effort to get Oklahoma on firmer fiscal footing] can be traced to the swanky suites occupied by the state’s carbon barons, especially Harold Hamm.

They demanded a poisonous provision that guaranteed no consensus was possible – an unfair, double tax on their fast-growing competitors: wind.

The Big Oil and Gas Protection Act was never going to corral the three-fourths legislative supermajority needed to increase taxes for teacher pay raises and health services.

Too many school districts now rely on ad valorem checks written by wind farm operators. Too many campaign accounts benefit from wind checks – think nearly \$80,000 in contributions to newly elected Sen. Casey Murdock, R-Felt.

Absent the attack on renewables, the path to 75% was clearer, though hardly guaranteed.

The reality is, some Tea Party Republicans won’t support a tax hike for any reason and other lawmakers – including many Democrats – won’t accept anything less than restoring the gross production tax to its historic 7% rate.

It was brutal that teachers – going on a decade without an across-the-board raise – were left, once again, at the altar. And that rural hospitals and nursing homes were left teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

It was made worse by the fact the carbon barons' hammerlock on the Republican-led Legislature created a toxic showdown pitting long-time allies against each other.

In years past, before social media dominated the public policy give-and-take, allies disagreed face-to-face, helping keep vitriol in check. Step Up Oklahoma's demise quickly degenerated into an online you're-with-us-or-against-us fight to the finish.

Of course, pro-public education activists and their legislative supporters – both Democrats and Republicans – will need each other before this session is over on myriad issues, not just teacher pay raises.

So, what's next?

There is a plain-as-the-nose-on-your-face fix, if only lawmakers and Gov. Mary Fallin had the backbone to push back against Hamm and Co.: roll back more than \$1 billion in income tax cuts enacted this millennium and return the GPT to 7%.

*Voila!* Long overdue raises for teachers and state employees. No more four-day school weeks or hopelessly overcrowded classrooms. Rural hospitals and nursing homes off life support. Under-staffed, bursting-at-the-seams prisons in less danger of federal court takeover.

As dispiriting as the session's first month was – especially with \$40 million more in FY '18 budget cuts approved by the governor – it's important to remember that legislative sausage-making is neither appetizing nor for the faint of heart.

Nor is the "best, final" offer the "best, final offer."

Somehow the "best, final" A-plus plan last fall morphed into the "best, final" Step Up plan in early February ... which then morphed again with the late-night addition of state employee pay raises in a last-ditch effort to sway "no" voters.

Then, within days, state Auditor Gary Jones, a GOP gubernatorial candidate, joined with all 28 House Democrats in support of a package that would increase the GPT to 5% – a percentage point higher than Step Up.

It also would cut proposed cigarette and motor fuel tax increases in half – to 75 cents a pack and three cents a gallon, respectively – and kept proposed diesel tax hike at six cents a gallon.

Cricket.

For the moment, GOP leadership seems content to live with the cuts – and with a nearly \$168 million estimated budget hole for next fiscal year.

But as the session continues, the pressure will build for Republicans to act.

Why? Without it, their statehouse domination is at risk. It's easy math for even the most casual Oklahoma voter: The GOP controls the governor's office plus 72 of 101 House and 40 of 48 Senate seats. And it can't govern?

Moreover, neither Republican statehouse leadership nor the state's carbon barons wants voters to solve this mess via SQ 795, the fledgling initiative petition aimed at increasing the GPT to 7% and backed by the state's truly small independent oil and gas producers.

Hamm and Co. grudgingly agreed to increase the oil and gas severance tax from 2% to 4% in the Step Up plan, but 7% is clearly three steps too far – even though it would remain the nation's lowest such tax, by far.

Still, they are politically savvy enough to know the Restore Oklahoma Now initiative is attractive to voters tired of the Legislature's dilly-dallying – it would generate enough money to fund a \$4,000 teacher pay raise plus about \$2,000 in benefits, and provide money to school districts for teacher recruitment and early childhood education.

What's more, if oil prices and production trend higher, keeping their recent pace, the 7% tax could generate double the initial estimates of about \$280 million annually for public schools.

Big oil and gas is challenging SQ 795 in court. A hearing is set for March 1. If the Supreme Court allows the petition to proceed, it will intensify pressure on the Legislature to act.

Lawmakers could do the right thing – the easy thing – and roll back income and gross production tax cuts, restoring the funding necessary for vital state services and pulling Oklahoma back from the fiscal cliff.

Don't hold your breath. We're in an era in which voters must make the tough decisions the Legislature's corporate lapdogs won't.

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Deborah Astley

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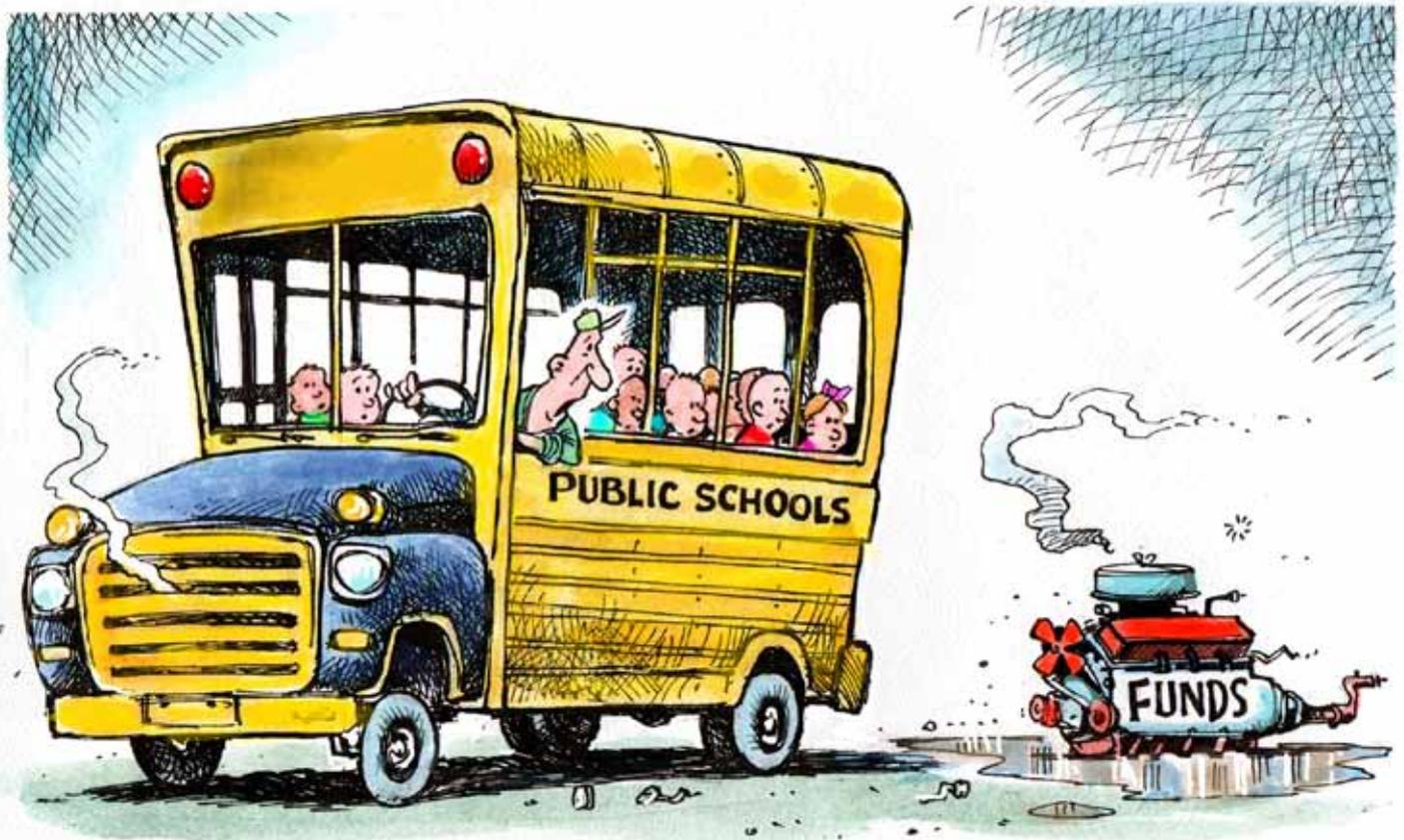
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# ‘This Is Not OK’

## *Cuts Hitting All Aspects Of Public Ed*

BY DAVID BLATT

**M**iami Public Schools in Ottawa County serves about 2,500 K-12 students in seven schools. This year, four school librarian positions were eliminated, leaving the district without a single librarian.

In Newkirk, there is no librarian and no speech or drama classes. In Edmond, elementary school students no longer learn Spanish. In Agra, the band program has been eliminated and there are 45 students in a choir class.

In Tulsa, the PTA and school foundations are covering teacher salaries with private funds at several schools. There are no security officers employed in any of Oklahoma City’s elementary schools.

These are just a few of dozens of stories I heard recently when I asked members of a Facebook education group to share examples of how their schools or their children’s schools have been affected by budget cuts in recent years.

We know that over the past decade, cuts in education funding have been severe. State general funding is nearly \$180 million less than 10 years ago, while K-12 enrollment has grown by over 50,000 students. Adjusted for inflation, Oklahoma’s state general funding of schools is down 28% per student compared to a decade ago, far and away the largest cuts in the nation.

Oklahoma now spends almost \$1,700 per pupil less than our neighboring states and would need to boost spending by over \$1.1 billion to reach the national average, based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Some of the most visible consequences of budget cuts are widely known. After 10 years without an increase in the salary schedule, Oklahoma teachers are now close to the lowest paid in the nation, and teachers are leaving the state or quitting the profession in droves. The worsening teacher shortage has forced

the state to issue over 1,800 emergency certifications already this year.

Norman Public Schools alone has issued more emergency certifications this year [35] than were issued across the whole state five years ago [31]. Over 90 school districts have moved to four-day school weeks as a way to save money and retain underpaid teachers, who can use the extra day to work another job.

Bartlesville Superintendent Chris McCauley recently told the Tulsa World, “In addition to the five teachers we lost to Kansas last year, we have 12 teachers who are emergency certified. We are hiring people we wouldn’t have even interviewed just a few years ago because there aren’t more qualified applicants.”

Beyond these well-publicized problems, the impact

A fourth of high schools have eliminated world language classes over a decade and the number of high schools without a single world language class has nearly quadrupled, according to Oklahoma Watch. This year there are about 525 fewer world language classes being offered across the state compared to four years ago.

There are 300 fewer arts classes, 500 fewer classes in family and consumer sciences, and some 815 fewer music classes in elementary schools alone.

“Each Oklahoma City public school at the elementary level was forced to choose to no longer have music or art,” one teacher wrote. “At my school none of the students receive any art instruction.”

In addition to classroom teachers, many schools have cut librarians and library assistants, counsel-

**A Bartlesville school “has to limit basic supplies ... At the end of the school year, janitors are re-using trash bags and the paper towel dispensers are empty.”**

of budget cuts can be seen in just about every district, school, and classroom in the state. Based on personal testimonies, media coverage, and data on teachers, classes and students from the State Department of Education, here are a few ways in which budget cuts are being felt:

One parent of a Tulsa middle-school student wrote that her daughter’s school just hired a teacher to open up a new section of English/Geography after having 54 in a class all first semester. “They are now down to 40 in each of the three sections, which is better but still sucks,” she wrote.

My own son was one of 45 students in a high school drama class last year with an over-matched first-year teacher. Kindergarten classes have grown to over 25 children per classroom in many schools, while upper elementary school classes now commonly have over 30 children.

Overall, there are more than 700 fewer teachers in Oklahoma public schools in the 2017-18 school year than there were in 2013-14, while student enrollment has grown by about 15,000. This has led to growing class sizes for both core courses and electives.

Statewide, there are some 4,500 more students taking Algebra I than four years ago, but 2,000 fewer classes being offered, according to numbers from the Department of Education. There are the same number of students taking high school art as four years ago, but there are 150 fewer art classes and 93 fewer art teachers.

Along with larger classes, a growing number of schools have eliminated classes and programs, especially in the arts, technology, and foreign languages, the subjects that enrich the learning experience and help prepare students for higher education and employment.

ors, psychologists, speech pathologists, and para-professionals. “In Enid, my elementary school has a half-time librarian and a half-time counselor. Each of them are maintaining a full load at both schools,” one parent writes.

Statewide, the number of librarians and media consultants is 140 less than four year ago, a 13% drop.

Although the number of special needs students is increasing, the number of school-based health professionals is flat or declining. Tulsa Public Schools lost 12 of their 40 speech pathologists this year; those who remain must manage caseloads of close to 100 kids. A Putnam City parent wrote that her son’s special education teacher is responsible for serving 54 kids.

Schools are also struggling with less support staff and scarce supplies. A Mill Creek parent writes that their school no longer has a full-time janitor, just someone who works twice a week for 10 hours and only does bathrooms. An Oklahoma City teacher says that there are no longer maintenance workers; “principals have to fix things themselves.”

A parent of a Bartlesville elementary school students says that their school “has to limit basic supplies like copy paper, paper towels, and trash bags. At the end of the school year, janitors are re-using trash bags and the paper towel dispensers are empty. This is not OK.”

It’s encouraging to see a continued effort among lawmakers to provide teachers a substantial raise. This is essential but it won’t be enough. To address the crisis in our schools we will need more teachers, more staff, more resources, and a more genuine commitment to public education.

*David Blatt is executive director of Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).*

# Saving Oklahomans From Themselves

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

**N**earing the end of the 19th Century, millions of Americans suffered from economic and social disenfranchisement. The era known as the Gilded Age had produced an industrialized United States in which a few had accumulated massive amounts of wealth. However, income inequality had relegated most to subsistence wages working for someone else in the factory or on the farm. Wealth influenced and co-opted the government at all levels through a variety of machinations, not least of which was unregulated campaign contributions.

Out of these dire circumstances and suppressed agricultural prices arose Grange organizations and then, as the plight of urban workers worsened, farmers were joined by laborers and a myriad other Americans who were experiencing first-hand the havoc wreaked upon them by bankers and corporate monopolies and trusts, including railroads and other industrialists.

As a result, in the 1880s and 1890s, the People's Party, commonly referred to as the Populist Party, symbolized hope for an alternative America in which economic opportunity was more broadly available to common people.

It was in this setting, in 1907, that Oklahomans were preparing for statehood and the 46th state's constitution was carefully crafted to preserve and protect the rights of Oklahomans against infringement by those whose wealth and influence could undermine our fierce individualism. The motto chosen by Oklahoma's founding fathers, Labor Omnia Vincen, or Labor Conquers All Things, communicated their mindset.

A basic and primary right reserved to the people by the framers of Oklahoma's Constitution was the right of Initiative and Referendum. In plain and simple

terms, the framers, wary of the likelihood that wealthy campaign contributors and corporate interests would corrupt legislators, reserved unto the people of our state the right to "Initiate" legislation and constitutional amendments and the right to "Refer" legislation to a vote of the people when bad legislation had been enacted by

overly influenced legislators.

Both processes involve the right of petition followed by a vote of the people. These fundamental rights have remained virtually unchanged since the Oklahoma Constitution was approved by the voters on Sept. 17, 1907.

This year, however, an Enid legislator filed HB 1603 proposing two major changes to the Initiative and Referendum process, both of which would drastically impede the ability of citizens to file a valid petition.

First, HB 1603 would require that the signatures on a petition be obtained in equal percentages in each of the 77 counties across Oklahoma. Consequently, the failure to obtain a sufficient number of signatures in a single county would invalidate the petition and prevent the people of Oklahoma from voting on the issue.

Second, HB 1603 would eliminate the requirement that the required signature count be based on a percentage of the total votes cast in the last gubernatorial election. With that language removed, the percentage of signatures required would be based upon the total number of registered voters in Oklahoma. Consequently, HB 1603 would increase the number of required signatures on a petition by 244%.

It is difficult to understand why the author of HB 1603 and the six legislators who on Feb. 20, 2018, voted to advance the measure from the Rules Committee to the House floor and why they would want to infringe upon this fundamental right of the people.

Perhaps they were focused on how utterly unreasonable and dangerous the citizens of Oklahoma can be. After all, the people of the state had gone crazy in 1914 when they made habitual drunkenness of legislators an impeachable offense and again in 1935 when they had successfully used an initiative petition at the height of the depression to appropriate \$2.5 million to the State Board of Public Welfare.

Perhaps the most egregious usurping of legislative authority occurred in 1942, when the people of the state of Oklahoma, through initiative petition, established the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System!

It could be that acting at the direction of their campaign contributors, their urgency was to change the rule as soon as possible to thwart any attempt by Oklahomans to petition to return the Gross Production Tax on oil and gas to 7% or restore the top Oklahoma income tax rate on high earners to the rate that it was before those irresponsible cuts took \$1.5 billion per year out of the state budget or any number of citizen initiatives designed to solve this state's budget crisis in the absence of the legislature and the governor to do so.

Otherwise, what were they thinking? David Perryman, a Chickasha Democrat, represents District 56 in the Oklahoma House.



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An Affordable Good Health Practice

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# Bills Threaten Health Care For Poor

BY CARLY PUTNAM

**A** greater share of Oklahomans is uninsured than almost any other state, and our comparatively poor health has serious economic consequences.

One might hope that Oklahoma's legislators would be working this session to make sure more Oklahomans, not fewer, have access to health care. Unfortunately, some lawmakers have instead filed bills that would yank health coverage from low-income parents.

Oklahoma's health insurance system for low-income families overwhelmingly serves people who have no other options – children, elderly adults, and people with disabilities.

Just one in 10 SoonerCare members are working-age adults without an official determination of disability. To qualify for SoonerCare, they must be parents or caretakers of dependent children and make very, very low-incomes – a single mother with one child is too wealthy to get coverage through SoonerCare if she earns more than \$600 per month.

Families living on incomes this meager are doing everything they can just to get by, but several bills filed this session would seriously jeopardize parents' access to health care. These bills would allow the state to terminate these parents' health coverage if they don't work a required number of hours or participate in a state-approved work or volunteer program.

But most SoonerCare patients who can work already do – and those that don't have serious barriers to employment that are not fixed by these bills, such as caregiving responsibilities for a child or aging parent.

Furthermore, dropping coverage for an inhaler or ADHD medication will only make people less employable. Oklahoma lawmakers shouldn't be making it harder to be healthy, and legislators should reject these bills.

The efforts to take health coverage from low-income parents don't stop there.

Parents already have to be extraordinarily poor to qualify for SoonerCare, but SB 1030 would push the income eligibility cutoff even lower: a single mother with one child would be too wealthy to qualify if she made just \$300 per month. This would make SoonerCare one of the most restrictive Medicaid programs in the country, and it would take health coverage away from thousands of parents.

Another bill would go further: HB 3344 would end coverage for these parents entirely, something no state has ever done.

SoonerCare is an effective, efficient health program, with low administrative costs and lower cost growth than private coverage. So it's odd that legislators would seek to upend this success.

After years of budget shortfalls, lawmakers may be tempted to blame to programs like SoonerCare and the families who need it as the cause of the state's financial woes. It's true that Oklahoma's spending on health care has been growing, but that has been in response to need in a state that still has one of the highest uninsured rates in the nation.

In the long run, we know that a healthier state is a more productive, economically prosperous state. If lawmakers really want to reduce the cost of covering Oklahoma's poorest families, they should be focused on policies to make the economy work better for all and using all available federal dollars to expand health coverage.

If they instead focus on taking away health care from struggling parents, they will only make our state's economic future worse.

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

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## Medical Marijuana 'Bernstorm' Set March 6

Our Revolution Oklahoma will revive the Bernie Sanders organizing model in OKC on March 6, focusing this time on passing SQ 788, the medical marijuana initiative set to appear on the June 26 statewide primary ballot.

The "Bernstorm" event will feature speakers from Patients and Activists for 788 and Oklahomans for Cannabis, then break attendees into neighborhood-based teams to organize get-out-the vote events.

There is no charge to attend the event, which begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Teamsters Union Hall, 3528 W. Reno Ave.

For more information on "Bernstorm" and Our Revolution Oklahoma's efforts to promote progressive policies and candidates, visit [ourrevolutionok.com](http://ourrevolutionok.com).

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## Khan Headlines Events

First Congregational Church of Norman, UCC is hosting a series of free events next month featuring Dr. Nyla Khan, scholar and author most recently of *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's Reflections on Kashmir*. She will deliver a lecture entitled "Unity, Diversity, and Pluralism" at 7 p.m. April 13 at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, 2401 Chautauqua Ave., then lead a workshop from 9 a.m.-noon April 14 at 1017 Elm Ave., both in Norman. For more information, visit [www.facebook.com/normanucc](http://www.facebook.com/normanucc) or [www.normanucc.org](http://www.normanucc.org) or call 405.928.9192.

# Guns, God And Gays

## *Oklahoma's Provincial, Puritanical And Political Pathway To Nowhere*

BY CAL HOBSON

In barely a month, hundreds of well-meaning citizens will file for political office in Oklahoma with the majority running for one of the 149 seats in the Legislature. Many incumbents in both parties will ask for an additional term of public service and most will receive one. On the Republican side of the ledger a handful of challengers may squeak into office by promising to be even more conservative than the already very conservative in-

cumbents they hope to defeat.

Because majority party members are always well funded by lobbyists and political action committees, voters will receive expensive four-color personalized mailers, fancy flyers at their doors and on windshields, hear thousands of radio spots and blearily watch endless TV ads. Then during the dinner hour both robo and live calls will reinforce the laudatory messages already showered upon the great

unwashed. All are designed and packaged to convince you, the often distracted, disengaged and disinterested citizen that everything is just fine here in Sooner country. As so many already know, nothing could be further from the truth. A decade of dominance on 23rd Street by the Republicans has driven us into a ditch – no, actually, a canyon – of debt, despair and disgust.

Now, as for the Democrats, it doesn't much matter what incumbents or their challengers have to say to you or about each other. Their current caucuses are so small – 28 of 101 in the House and eight of 48 in the Senate – that even if the party of Roosevelt, Kennedy, Clinton and Obama could agree upon policies and proposals, which never happens, they will be stiffed by the current party in power next session anyway.

Therefore, facing this political landscape, I'll ignore the donkeys for now and focus on the pachyderms' plan for victory in the fall of 2018. It's a lead pipe cinch they'll stay with what brought them to the dance in the reddest of red states.

And just what might that be? Read on.

For them, it goes like this. Don't talk about public education, except to lie and say you are embarrassed – no, shocked, just *shocked* – by our worst in the nation teacher salaries. Don't discuss our horrendous health care indicators except to say it is Obama's fault. Be sure and blame the overcrowded and deadly gulags we



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**Thursday, March 8, 2018**

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call prisons exclusively on violent, repeat offenders when, in fact, they make up fewer than 30% of those warehoused within the stone walls. And never forget to excoriate state employees for screw ups in their agencies when actually budget writers have directly caused the yawning deficits through underfunding – and thus strangling – of programs mandated by lawmakers themselves.

Next, while continuing to play the distraction game, our rulers will boo-hoo the status of roads, bridges and other collapsing infrastructures while making sure their digs are world class. I'm talking, of course, about the \$500 million price tag to remodel our state Capitol building, where penny-pinching solons occupy plush chairs in luxurious suites while utilizing the most modern technology available anywhere in the state.

Throw in armed security second to none, abundant and free parking, immediate access to scores of outstanding staff members far smarter than themselves, per diem of \$156 per day, mileage at a profitable rate unless one drives a tank and a legislator salary for four months work that ranks among the Top 15 in the nation.

Finally, and not unimportantly, there are legions of lobbyists hanging around the rotunda with campaign checks in their hot hands ... available if their bidding has, is and will be done.

So who wouldn't want to keep or get this gig?

Fast forward now to June 1. The session is over, not much was accomplished, the natives are restless and elections approach. For many Republicans, that means it's time to trot out the big three wedgies guaranteed to incite, inflame and energize their debased base. These are, of course, the oldies but goodies: guns, God and gays. Works every time.

They'll fire away first with their most effective weapon: guns. Any size, any number, any velocity, any clip capacity, semi or almost fully automatic, any make or model. Anytime. Anywhere.

To begin, and a reminder of how not to win friends and influence Okies concerning their love affair with the Second Amendment, let's focus on former U.S. Rep. Dave McCurdy, D-Norman, who lost big time to the world record holder of surviving self-inflicted plane crashes, Sen. Jim Mountain Inhofe, R-Tulsa.

Poor old blue dog Demo Dave saw fit to vote for the Brady Bill in 1992 after President Reagan's press secretary, Jim Brady, as well as the president himself plus others were nearly killed by lover boy John Hinckley who had fallen hard for movie star Jodie Foster.

That's similar to the same excuse expressed recently by 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz after mowing down 17 of his former classmates and teachers on Valentine's Day in supposedly one of Florida's safest high schools. Because of current law in the sunshine state, Cruz couldn't buy a handgun like Hinckley used because he isn't 21 and he would have also had to endure but probably flunk a back-

ground check.

However, to legally purchase the AR-15 semi-automatic he did wield execution-style on kids and their teachers no background check is required and he only needed to be 18. Following his carnage, had he wanted a Budweiser from the local 7-11 instead of the Dr Pepper he did buy at a nearby Walmart, Cruz would have been denied because he also is too young to purchase a cold one.

Remember, these nutty laws were not written and approved by a junior high school student council. Just the opposite. They are introduced by adults, who were elected by other adults, and signed into law by one or more Florida governors.

Now, back to our upcoming elections, if being a zealot for the sacrosanct right to carry, concealed or otherwise, won't get candidates to 51%, then they often trot out God to serve as the tiebreaker. Remember when running for office as a Republican, especially in a contentious primary, always, in a trembling voice, reveal God told you to file and at the same time hint the Lord obviously didn't send the same message to your opponent[s].

To seal your deal with the evangelical vote, promise that, when elected, you personally will put both God and guns back in all classrooms. Your pitch is simple and reassuring: the kids will then be prayerfully safe, teachers will be armed and, should some liberal federal judge overturn as unconstitutional your proposals ... so what? You're not paying for the high-dollar lawyers from Liberty University that will litigate and eventually lose the case. Your constituents are.

And speaking of an unconstitutional waste of time, here's a new doozy just implemented in the House of Representatives at the behest of a lawmaker, and Oral Roberts University graduate, Rep. Chuck Strom, R-Tulsa. His rule change dictates that if you want to have the honor of bringing the preacher of the day to watch over the wayward flock at the Capitol, that man or woman of God must be from the same church the lawmaker attends.

Makes perfect sense to me except for the fact that there are no Muslims or Jews in the Legislature, so no rabbis or clerics will be heard from ... just mostly middle-aged white guys from evangelical and/or mainline churches. This one's a no-brainer for the ACLU and another hit to the taxpayers' wallets when struck down.

And finally, if your cookie-cutter campaign platform is still sputtering, conservative candidates can't go wrong by demagoguing gays, especially when running outside of inner city OKC, Tulsa and a few Norman precincts surrounding the University of Oklahoma.

Your nationally-known role model to emulate is former and longtime Republican state Rep. Sally Kern, apparently the pride of northwest OKC who became famous for stating a gay is more likely to kill you than, say, a crazed, bomb-toting Muslim

# Voter Fraud Reality Doesn't Warrant Fingerprint Bill

BY DENNIS HANSEN

In Oklahoma, voter fraud is a felony that incurs a punishment of up to five years in prison and/or a \$50,000 fine. With an existing law in place, with such severe punishment, one has to wonder why Rep. David Perryman, a Democrat serving HD 56, would introduce HB 1332.

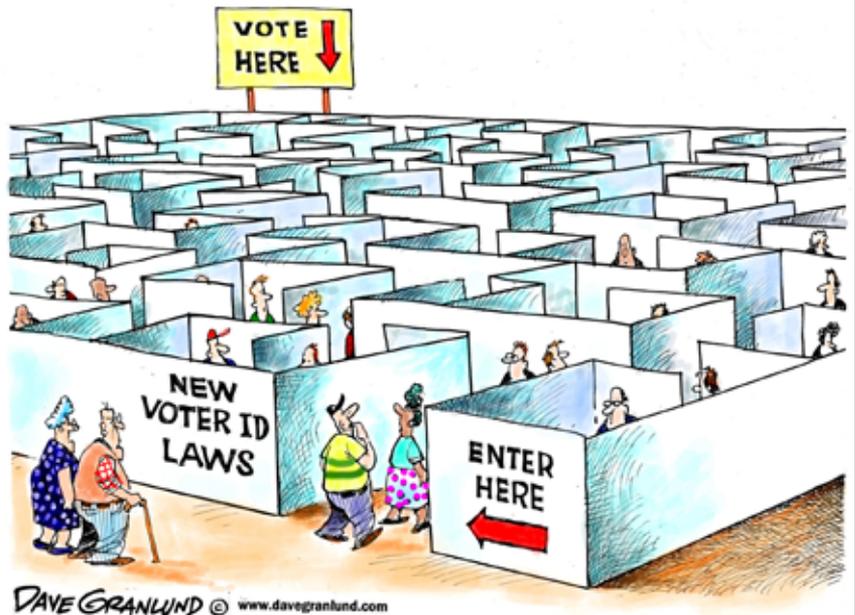
This bill states: *"The State Election Board shall develop and implement a procedure for computerized finger imaging by means of an inkless finger image scanning device and shall require every applicant for voter registration or change in registration to submit to finger imaging for the purposes of proof of identity and to ensure the security of the voter registration card issued to the applicant*

*and to enable registered voters who have no written documentation of identity to vote."*

In other words, registration will be more difficult, intimidating and time consuming, especially for elderly and lower income applicants. Not to mention more costly to the state!

To what end? What problem does this bill solve that isn't already addressed by existing statute? The Oklahoma State Election Board has already stated that there is very little evidence of voter fraud in the state that would require more odious registration and voting laws.

State Election Board Secretary Paul Ziriaux told OKC's News 9 in 2017 that "out of the more than 1.4 million votes cast in the last two years, only 10-20 cases of voter fraud have been reported" in the state. Most of those cases, he explained, turn out to be an elderly person forgetting about voting absentee, and showing up at their polling place.



Perryman's bill does not indicate where funding for this unnecessary "finger printing" of voters might be found. Do you expect the election board has any spare money left over after all our special elections recently?

Legislation like HB 1332 is nearly always presented as a way to combat in-person voter fraud, a crime that is virtually non-existent, and already adequately covered in our law. But the real-world impact of these laws is to disenfranchise eligible citizens from voting at all. And that's not something a legislator, much less a Democratic one, should be backing.

Withdraw your bill, Rep. Perryman!  
*Oklahoma City resident Dennis Hansen wrote this essay on behalf of Our Revolution Oklahoma, the state chapter of the national organization that grew out of Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign and works to reclaim democracy for working people.*

madman. Actually, neither is remotely as dangerous as a jilted wife when she finds out her God-fearing, gun-toting, gay-bashing beau has been fooling around with a Capitol secretary. Now that behavior is really guaranteed to shorten not only your service in the Legislature, but also your less than blissful marriage back in the boonies.

However, all is not lost ... only your employment, family and reputation. But due to connections made and favors done while in office, you probably can

still have a title starting with an "L" but it will stand for "lobbyist" rather than "legislator."

And it really is a better deal at the Capitol, anyway. The jobs are interchangeable, the pay is much better as a hired gun and term limits don't apply, either.

For you, it's win, win, win. For voters and taxpayers, it's just more of the same.

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

# Suffering In Silence

BY PAUL CATLEDGE

**C**ivil discourse when discussing politics is a good idea. It's a goal I aspire to, but have yet to achieve. I get so worked up my wife has made me pledge not to talk politics at all around family and friends. Most of the people we know and are related to tend to be typical Oklahoma conservatives.

We recently hosted a social gathering at my house to celebrate two birthdays – mine and a woman with whom my wife worked before both retired. The birthdays fell within the same week.

I, of course, swore I would not talk politics. The gathering consisted of my wife and me, three other women and the husband of the retired friend of my wife.

After dinner and during the dominoes game, one of the women who is not a conservative, made some sarcastic remark regarding Donald Trump. The other husband came back with: “We just need to leave him alone and see what he can do. Give him a chance.”

I swallowed my tongue but, true to my word, I remained silent. My mind was racing. Look at what he has done. He just handed the oligarchs a trillion-dollar tax cut; he has appointed stooges to head up federal regulatory agencies with the stated goal of destroying government regulation that protects our air and our water; he boisterously denies climate change while pledging full steam ahead with coal, gas and oil drilling and production – to the great peril of our planet; he spouts racist and bigoted remarks and actively sews division among American working people; he praises ruthless dictators of other countries and refuses to speak ill of Vladimir Putin.

I could go on ad nauseam, but you get my point. We have seen what he can and will do.

The gentleman who wants to give Trump a chance recently retired from a career in trucking. He has some land and runs a small herd of cattle. If he watches news at all, he watches Fox.

He and his wife are both going into retirement with significant health issues and a limited, fixed income. They are eligible for and applying for Medicare.

They are entering this phase of their lives blissfully ignorant of the fact that Trump and the Republican Congress are in the process of dismantling Medicare and Medicaid, and are forging ahead with plans to turn Social Security over to the riverboat gamblers

on Wall Street.

Where would you even start to discuss politics with these people? How do you engage in civil discourse with people who are entirely clueless? How do you explain to them that the democratic principles America was founded on are in great peril?

It's really not a question of civil discourse. The challenge we face is in trying to educate people who have no desire to learn. They have formed opinions that have no basis in fact.

I'm not dismissing the notion that we have to try and educate people, because when they repeatedly vote against their own interests, they are enabling those who are working against all of our interests.

We somehow have to try, but it is a herculean task we face.

*Durant resident Paul Cartledge is chair of the Bryan County Democratic Party.*

# The Need For Critical Thinkers

BY SHARON MARTIN

**F**or the same reason that some legislators refuse to do what is necessary to adequately fund public education, it was once illegal to teach a slave to read.

Those who seek power and their own interests fear educated citizens. They want pawns, not critical thinkers. Critical literacy is necessary for a free society.

Without an education system that includes everyone, justice is impossible.

Justice for some is not justice.

Economic security for some is not economic security.

A healthcare system that leaves people out is neither just nor economically viable.

Incarceration as a means to shape society is a travesty. So are for-profit prisons.

Critical thinkers understand these things. They question legislators and administrations that seek to curtail our right to question them. They demand the right to speak out against corruption. They insist on every citizen's right to vote.

Facts are essential. Good research skills are absolutely essential. So is the ability to tell truths from lies.

This makes the push to arm teachers even more troubling.

Parents with critical thinking skills don't want

weapons in the classroom. If teachers are armed, thinking parents who can afford to do so will take their kids out of public schools. Those who aren't homeschooled will be enrolled in private schools where weapons are not allowed. This will be another blow to public education funding.

It's time to think, folks. Don't let gun manufacturers think for you. A good shotgun will keep the varmints away. A hunting rifle, most as lethal as any military weapon, will keep your family fed.

A pistol by your bedside may or may not keep your family safe. It's a fact that more gun deaths occur in homes that have guns. Duh!

Let's change laws to protect people from shoot-first law enforcement. Let's change laws to stop manufacturers from selling military weapons to the general public.

Arming teachers is not the solution. Militarizing the police force is not the solution.

Arming students with critical thinking skills is.

Let's make sure public schools stay open. Let's improve access to mental health treatment. Tell your legislators to pass sensible regulations.

Your Second Amendment rights are safe. We must make sure the rest of our Constitution and our children are, too.

*Oilton resident Sharon Martin's latest book, Not A Prodigal, is available through Barnes and Noble. Her recent children's book, Froggy Bottom Blues, can be purchased in hardcover or paperback from Doodle and Peck Publishing and in paperback from Amazon.*

# Boorish Or Criminal?

BY MARION HILL

I'm glad women who accuse powerful, clueless men of sexual assault are now, finally, being believed. The fact that men have gotten away with mistreating women for centuries isn't news to anyone who has been awake. The Me, Too movement – and the courage of those who have come forward to blow the whistle on “old boy” practices of raping, groping, and otherwise demeaning women over whom men have power – have done a long-overdue service to the victims and society in general.

That said, however, I worry that we're in danger of losing proportion and considering every bit of male misbehavior toward women the same. Former Sen. Al Franken came out of the comedy culture, in which being a bit “edgy” was considered a good

thing. But as a senator, he was very serious, trying hard to leave his comedy roots behind.

Of course, our history follows us. That photo of him pretending to grope an actress, and the several accusations of his having kissed or grabbed women without their consent, are cringe-worthy. Franken was right to apologize and ask for an ethics investigation into his conduct.

But I don't agree that he should have been made to resign from the U.S. Senate before any investigation even began. I usually applaud Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand's speaking out on behalf of women in the military and for the rights of women generally. But I think she was unfair in demanding Franken resign immediately.

In my view, his conduct should have been investigated and, if warranted, he should have been censured by the Senate. There's precedent for such censure, and it would have been a powerful statement of disapproval by his colleagues.

Full disclosure: I like Al Franken. I thought some – not all, but some – of the comedy he did on Saturday Night Live was funny, and occasionally thought-provoking. But I've admired his work as a senator more.

He did his homework, represented Minnesotans well, and distinguished himself in Senate committee hearings by his informed, incisive questioning of witnesses. He often spoke out, too, on behalf of women's issues, as well as issues that affected other vulnerable people.

Is he perfect? No. It was right that women who felt violated by his actions spoke out. He should have paid a price for his less-than-stellar behavior. But I don't believe everything good that Al accomplished for his state and for the country should have been negated by those instances of failure.

When men like Franken get lumped together with Judge Roy Moore, President Donald Trump, or movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, all of whom have been credibly accused of much worse behavior than he was alleged to have done, it's not only possibly unjust to him but also unfair to the victims of these other powerful men. Putting them all in the same basket seems to trivialize the awful behavior of Moore, Trump, and Weinstein.

I've never been in the position that's far too familiar to many women: having to choose between submitting to unwanted advances from an employer and losing a badly needed job. I have been made to feel uncomfortable in a workplace, though.

When I was 19 or 20 years old, I took a job as secretary in an asphalt laboratory at an oil refinery, the only female among a dozen older men. I heard lots of off-color jokes apparently designed to embarrass me. I didn't dare object, I thought. If I had done so, the response would surely have been, “Aw, can't you

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42



## *A Solution To The Carnage?*

BY JUAN COLE

**C**an anything be done about the phenomenon of “mass shootings?” These killings have plagued the U.S. for decades.

The problem is getting substantially worse over time. The first time I published a version of this column, in 2012, only 88 people were killed in mass shootings that year. In 2017, some 590 persons were killed in mass shootings, according to one crowd-sourced site.

Moreover, Trump keeps droning on about gang violence, but most of their killings are also carried out with semi-automatic rifles.

We polish off some 15,000 Americans a year with murders [around 11,000 of them via firearms], and 30,000 a year in auto accidents. There are also something like 18,000 suicides a year by firearm in the U.S., about half of the total; perhaps large numbers

of those people would still be alive if it hadn't been so technically easy to take their on lives. Mass shootings as a proportion of murders committed by firearms rose to an astonishing nearly 4% last year.

I'd say that is a national emergency.

One problem is that mass shootings produce a national trauma, and probably are designed to do so. Isolated murders of adults, however tragic, don't upset us the way a madman shooting down children does. The mass shootings, which grew last year to some almost 4% of murders, deeply disturb us.

It is also the case that mass shootings are arbitrarily defined as those in which four or more people are killed. For those affected, three is pretty “mass.”

Public policy is often made on the grounds of what we find unpalatable. You will note that we are also upset by airplane crashes, and we insist that they are

always completely unacceptable. We don't feel the same way about whacking 30,000 people a year [and injuring like 300,000] in auto collisions.

In addition some 2,000 of the 9,000 firearms murders a year are committed by drug gangs and other criminal gangs, and these are primarily using semi-automatic weapons to commit these murders.

So there is a problem, of increased numbers of mass shootings and increased numbers of victims over time. And there is a problem with the roughly one million gang members having military-style weapons and committing 14% of the murders every year in the U.S.

Is there a solution of the problem?

Even someone who really loves semi-automatic guns – Paul Barret, author of *Glock: The Rise of America's Gun* – admits of the 1994 ban on semi-automatic rifles:

“The one potentially sensible provision in the Assault Weapons Ban was the imposition of a ten-round magazine capacity, which affected both semi-automatic rifles and semi-automatic pistols, including the Glock. You can begin to understand that at least this [limitation] might inhibit the mass shooter because, under that regime, he would at least have to think ahead enough to carry multiple 10-round magazines.”

Personally, I don't understand why civilians need semi-automatic pistols and rifles at all. And the evidence we have from the mass shootings that have been happening is that yes, the shooter will bring extra rounds. Lots of extra rounds.

But I'll tell you what, some sort of limitation is better than none, and at least such legislation might es-

tablish the principle that guns can be regulated by law.

So how about we propose a law specifying that no civilian may buy a semi-automatic weapon that has greater than a 10-round magazine, and that such weapons for the civilian market be constructed so that extra magazine drums cannot be attached?

And we ban semi-automatic rifles altogether.

What about all the semi-automatic weapons already in people's possession? There are like 280 million guns in the US, nearly one per person. [Though in fact, a small minority, about 3% of the population, owns most of these guns, and the proportion of gun owners in the population has been shrinking; fewer and fewer people have more and more guns]. Since the 1980s, sales of semi-automatic weapons have been in the tens of thousands annually.

Well, you could have a buy-back program, and could offer people trade-ins. Changing things would not have to be coercive. People would have a choice between having an illegal pistol and a legal one with a smaller magazine.

Contrary to what is often alleged, in any case, used guns are seldom the problem. Most used guns are in people's safes. The new ones are the problem. Most people who commit mass shootings seem to go on a buying spree first, and gang members likewise most often like to purchase new weaponry.

So there you have it, a step toward a solution. Ten-round magazines for the pistols, no semi-automatic rifles for civilians.

*Juan Cole is a professor of history at the University of Michigan.*

## *Guns, Guns And More Guns*

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

**N**umber 17 just occurred.

Just six weeks into 2018 and America the-not-so beautiful has had 17 school shootings. When are we going to stop maiming and killing our children and their teachers? What does it take to recognize that our country has a serious problem and no one wants to be responsible for solving it – once and for all.

Americans own 48% of the civilian weapons in the world. That's incredible. It's nearly one half of all the civilian weapons that exist on planet earth. These are not weapons like the shotgun I own which was made for hunting. We're talking about weapons made for killing our fellow humans.

Yes, what a good job we're doing to reduce the human population.

Who's courageous enough to take on the job of halting the slaughter supported by the NRA and the manufacturers of assault weapons and ammunition that can tear apart the human body on impact?

Death by gun violence is at epidemic proportions

and no one in America seems able or willing to stop it. We can blame the Trump Administration all we want but those other elected leaders in Congress have not proposed any viable plan that deals with this epidemic we are enduring.

The NRA and its allies are prone to cite the Constitution's Second Amendment, which is one of the most misinterpreted documents in the world. Let's take a look at what it says:

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

A simple statement yet horribly misinterpreted by those who would reap benefits from the manufacture and distribution of military-style weapons and ammunition. They seem to have bought off America's leadership at every level of government. And those not bought off seem convinced their positions are only secure if they remain silent on the issue of gun control unless authorized to speak by the NRA and its allies. Thus this sad state of affairs in today's America

is where we find ourselves today.

Look closely at the Second Amendment. Who has the right to keep and bear arms? "A well regulated Militia." Even that, as well as other forces, have to be carefully regulated and trained despite their dedication "to the security" of our country. The Amendment does indeed state that the people have a right to keep and bear arms.

*But* it does not specify what type of arms we citizens can have and which of us cannot have weapons.

Today's conditions are far different from those that existed when the Second Amendment was written. There were no assault weapons back then. They did not exist when it was written. Today's world of complex technology requires an updated Second Amendment, or better yet, a clear definition by the court of the type of weapons that can be purchased and kept for self-protection – at home, in our schools, on the road, in our place of worship, or even our places of fun.

Today's gun laws require tighter restrictions on who is eligible and who's not to purchase a weapon and need to specify the types of guns suitable for the average American to own and keep at home.

One of the saddest memories I have is our 11-year-old neighbor who killed his 8-year-old sister while playing at home with his father's handgun. The more tragic happening was our good friend's receiving the news about his best friend. Decades afterwards and hundreds of miles away I still could not talk about it with Christian, aware of how raw the memory still remained.

Today with the greater advance in weapon technology our laws have not kept pace with change but more significant with the proliferation of deadlier versions of weapons of mass destruction.

The average citizen under no circumstances can own any type of assault weapon capable of mass killings. The Florida school perpetrator was able to fire

his weapon approximately 150 times in just a few minutes, killing 17 teens and injuring 14 more.

America's leadership, at the very least, is guilty of letting this situation continue to exist, putting millions of our school students, their teachers and other staff at risk on a daily basis. It has happened far too many times to deny its threat is not a risk to our democracy's continued existence.

Is the end of America's democratic republic at hand? Is the American Dream about to draw its last breath disappearing into the history books as a dream unable to sustain itself because not enough of us want to share that dream of justice and equality for all men. Let's not forget our history lest we become lost in its shadow by failing to make it available for all of us.

Currently approximately 80% of the American public support better gun control regulation. Elections are just ahead in this midterm season. It's time to use the ballot box and elect people with strength of character and the will to survive life's challenges, if not surmount them.

The continued denial of our problems such as climate change, to name another, will only lead to disaster. Guns are only one of many facing us as a nation. In order to continue existing, we must face the challenges life presents us.

Character is one of the tools of survival we need to quickly rediscover so we might continue our own path forward instead of backward into the shadows of history.

I believe we are better than that. In fact, as I finish writing this column, I am seeing plans for a nationwide protest March 14. School students, our children and grandchildren are preparing to show the rest of us how America works.

It looks to me like our future might still be intact. *Oologah resident Bob D. Rounsavell is president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation. His wife, Paz Maria Rounsavell, serves as his editor.*

## *Trumputin's 2nd Amendment Idiocy*

**BY HARVEY WASSERMAN**

**M**y beloved childhood friend, someone I've known since before elementary school, lost his grandson in the latest Florida shooting.

He was a freshman in high school, a beautiful innocent, full of joy and promise. My sister cannot stop crying. Writing this article, on the day after, is the only way I can deal with it. I cannot yet bring myself to call.

Make no mistake about this: Sooner or later, these mass murders will strike you personally in your home and in your heart and in your soul.

You may see them as abstract ghosts, fleeting hor-

ror shows off in the distance. But there are so goddam many of them, it is absolutely inevitable you will lose someone you love very soon. Close your eyes and ask who it will be, and what that will do to you and yours for the rest of your lives.

It will be a stone in your core that will never go away.

America's gun holocaust has become a ghastly game of Russian Roulette and all of us are losing to the House, which is to say the gun industry.

The Manchurian Mafioso in the White House says it's a mental health issue, and for once he's absolutely right.

Trumputin and those like him are criminally insane when it comes to [among so many other things] guns. That the slumlord-in-chief has issued a statement blaming the victims, and without mentioning gun control, is par for his course.

The first thing to remember about gun violence is that it is *a business*. There is an entire corporate infrastructure that makes *big money* on these murders. Whoever makes and sells the automatic weapons and the bullets that do these slaughters makes a profit on them.

Yesterday's shooting, like tomorrow's, puts money in their bank account. They will be enriched by the next mass slaughter and the one after that and the one after that.

They can haul out all the fake Constitutional rhetoric they want. But the National Rifle Association is out there promoting an industry that is *in business* to threaten your health, safety, legal rights, and long-term security.

By law, nothing beyond their own corporate bottom line has the least impact on them.

Every limitation on gun ownership *costs them cash*. And it's no accident Trumputin's Russian backers chose the NRA [among so many others] to launder money into his campaign.

That they have warped the Bill of Rights comes with the territory.

Here's what the Second Amendment actually says:

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

No other of the first Ten Amendments has an explanatory introduction. The right to keep and bear arms is assumed as a basic right, but *only* in light of service to the security of a free state, and under the auspices of a well-regulated militia.

In other words:

*Nobody has a legal right to own a gun in this country unless they can show that their ownership of such a weapon serves the security of our free state and, such ownership must be integrated into a well-regulated official organization.*

So if you are a demonstrably sane person, and can show that your gun ownership will help protect our security, and you are a member of a sanctioned, well-regulated official organization with real social accountability, then the Second Amendment does indicate you have a legal right to own a gun.

Otherwise, *forget it*. There is *no constitutional reason* to believe you have the right to keep and bear arms.

There are historic roots to this Amendment. The Founders were foisting a Constitution that imposed a strong central government on a nation that didn't want one.

In an agrarian society, farmers who'd just fought a guerrilla war to defeat an imperial power wanted assurances their local militias would remain intact, and that their ownership of single-shot, hard-to-load

muskets would be protected.

These were groups of neighbors who knew and trusted each other and wanted mutual protection for their communities.

Slaveowners like James Madison, who crafted the Bill of Rights, also wanted to protect the military units they relied on to track down runaways and stop a slave rebellion.

But the idea that a general populace, full of unbalanced crazy people, would be left at random to own huge arsenals with the killing power we've seen in Florida, Las Vegas, Connecticut and so many other places would have absolutely horrified every one of those who wrote the Constitution and then demanded a Bill of Rights.

This is not what they meant. They'd've never stood for it.

The government they were establishing, for all its class, gender, racial biases, and other faults, was meant to secure "the general welfare."

The Second Amendment is now being deliberately misinterpreted by a predatory industry, a corrupt corporate elite, and an uncaring, would-be dictator. They are protecting the bottom line of a for-profit industry with not a shred of conscience or concern for the security of a free state or the law.

So next time some gun lover throws the Second Amendment at you, throw it right back.

And when you read the horrible news about the inevitable next mass slaughter, remember that sooner or later it will be you or someone you love and it will forever ruin your life.

This does not happen in other industrial nations.

It's long past time to remove the gun industry's unlawful control over our government.

We have overcome before, and we will again, even on this. Our lives depend on it.

*Harvey Wasserman's America at the Brink of Rebirth: The Life & Death Spiral of U.S. History will be published in the fall at Solartopia.org.*

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John Cole  
 OFTEN TIMES TRIPS IN  
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# SHOOTING CLASS

BY F.L. WYLIE

Sonny stroked the cold metal pistol. The guys with Glockes made fun of his heavy old Smith & Wesson, but the teen could drill a bullet through the heart of the target better than most of them. A natural, his instructor said.

He stuffed size 14 gym shoes, Algebra homework and a faded paperback into his backpack. He started to slide in the handgun, then paused.

Did he need a gun to feel safe, to feel like a man?

He squared his shoulders and tried to stand taller, then grabbed his pants to keep them from sliding off his thin hips. He had a few whiskers on his chin, but the gangly sophomore would not strike fear in anyone.

He threw the pack over his shoulder and ran to catch the bus.

“Hey, wuss,” a classmate yelled.

The teen joined the band nerds in the front. Most of the jocks and cheerleaders had their own cars, but a few bullies ruled the back of the bus. Skinny dudes did best up front.

The bus dumped the students at the school door. He lined up at the security checkpoint, tossed his backpack on the x-ray belt and walked through the metal detector.

“Stop!” the guard ordered. “Step over there, to the side.”

The other students gawked as he waited in the foyer.

“The principal’s office. Now!” the guard barked.

He tried to walk cool and cocky; he felt sweat spreading under his arms.

He slumped in the row of seats reserved for troublemakers outside the principal's door. He cracked his knuckles as he waited for an ass-chewing.

Finally, his name was barked from the office. He slunk in.

"Sonny, do you want me to call your mother?" the principal asked.

"Nah, I can talk by myself."

"Young man, I think your forgetful behavior is deliberate. You're suspended for three days."

The teen winced.

"You've been warned. Bring your gun to school every day. It's state law. How can we keep the students safe if you aren't armed?"

The sophomore looked the principal in the eye. "Aren't 500 armed students enough? Surely you don't need me."

"Your rebellious attitude will get you in trouble." The principal pulled the dog-eared copy of "Catch 22" out of the backpack. "Bring your pistol and leave this crap at home when you come back in three days."

As the teen retreated down the hall, he paused. The word "Library" had been painted over, but a ghost of the letters still remained. The space was now the gun instruction classroom and indoor shooting range.

A new slogan had been painted on the wall:

"The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."

## Editor's Note

"Shooting Class" won 1st Place in Flash Fiction in 2013 at the annual statewide Rose State College writing contest and conference produced by well-known novelist William Bernhardt. However, author F.L. Wylie had been diagnosed with cancer just hours before the announcement. She now is in total remission, and this is the work's first publication. Not a word has been changed in the five years since it was written. F.L. [Faith] Wylie is known statewide as retired owner and co-publisher with her husband John M. Wylie II of the Oologah Lake Leader, which during their 33-year tenure became known as the state's most honored community newspaper. Her first novel, *The Revelation Key*, was formally unveiled Feb. 23 at a Greek/Western themed reception in Oologah and she will speak about and sign the book as part of the 2nd Annual Author Fest, 1-5 p.m. Saturday, March 3 at the Public Library of Enid and Garfield County.

He missed the books.

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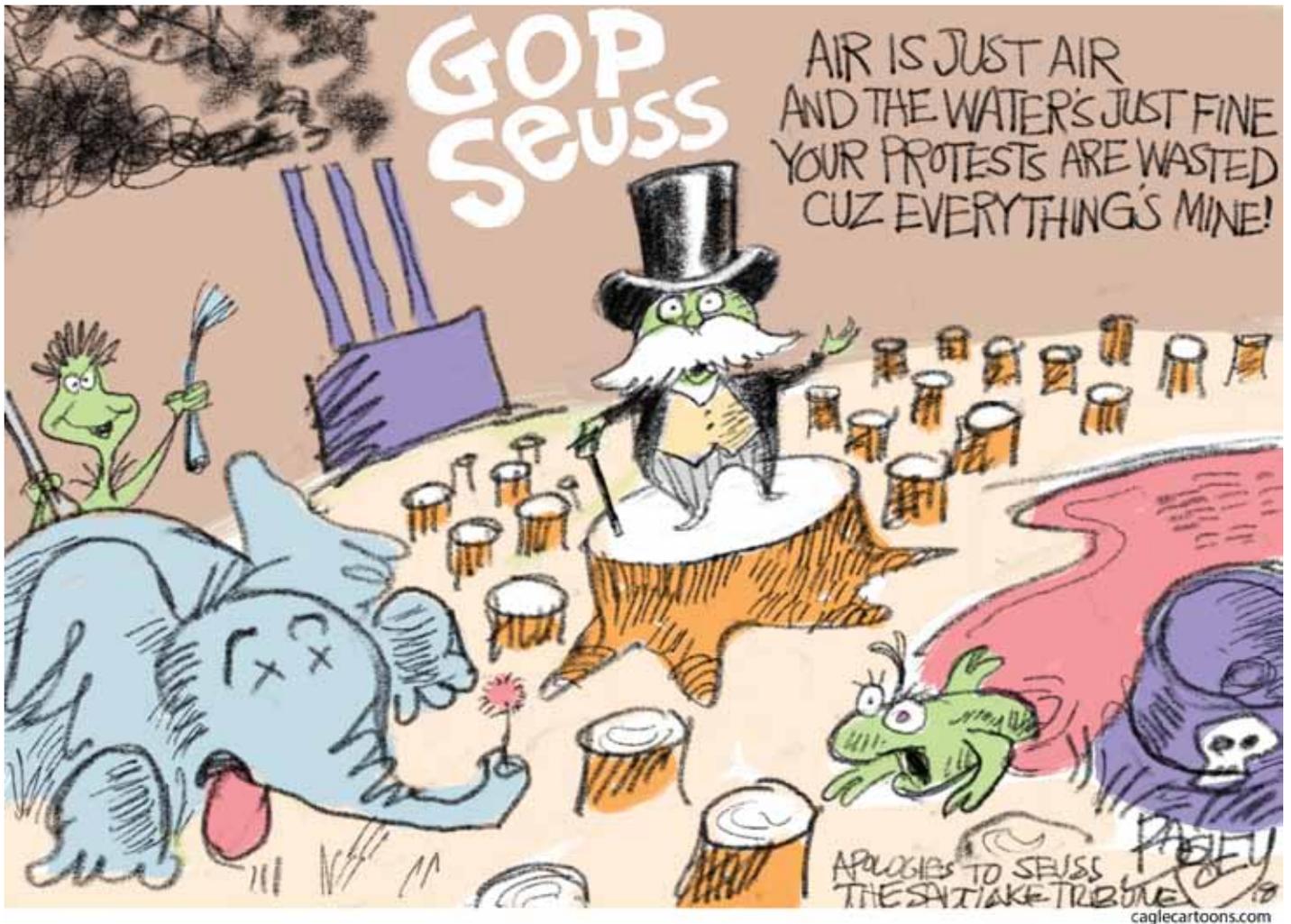
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# Everything You Need To Know About Scott Pruitt But Were Afraid To Ask\*

*\* The Answers Are A Thinking Taxpayers' Worst Nightmare*

BY JOHNSON BRIDGWATER

**M**any Oklahomans know Scott Pruitt. He did, after all, serve as the state's attorney general.

What most people do *not* know is that Pruitt actually spent half of his life in Kentucky, where he was born, raised and completed his college education, before moving to Oklahoma to complete a law degree at Tulsa University and begin his political career in our state.

Perhaps this lack of "growing up an Okie" explains his lack of willingness to take the steps to legally protect Oklahoma from known harms such as earth-

quakes, river contamination, and fiscal wrongdoing related to one of Oklahoma's Superfund sites.

His inaction to protect the residents of Oklahoma went so far that he is currently being sued due to his complete lack of action on an audit related to the Tar Creek Superfund site. Not only did he refuse to take legal steps once a formal audit revealed criminal-doing, he also took the unusual action of actively refusing to let the Oklahoma state auditor read the audit.

Pruitt often boasts of his Oklahoma ties, but they are riddled with corporate polluter influence.

As Oklahoma attorney general, Pruitt dismantled

Oklahoma's Environmental Protection Unit, zeroing out its budget and removing its title from the Oklahoma AG structure, and he refused to prosecute corporations that polluted our air and water. He even tried to block a rule against dumping mercury pollution in our waterways by claiming mercury wasn't dangerous.

For anyone familiar with Pruitt's "modus operandi," none of this is surprising. The ACLU and others had to sue him to get routine FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] requests honored, and the judge overseeing the trial admonished his attorney for their complete lack of legal tact. In addition, public campaign finance records routinely reveal the majority of his funding came from fossil fuel and industrial corporations.

So why does this matter? Is this not "just the way it is now" in modern politics?

Well, no – not when one of Pruitt's first actions as EPA administrator was to authorize the use and remove health restrictions from chlorpyrifos, a chemical known to cause child brain damage and other serious adverse health impacts following a meeting with Dow Chemical. His form of "pay to play" is a direct threat to the well-being of America's children, as well as the overall environmental health and public well-being of Oklahoma citizens.

He also actively worked to undo the Clean Power Plan, as well as to allow industrial coal plants in the state of Texas to continue burning coal and allowing the predominant south wind to continue to dump toxic airborne pollutants across Oklahoma.

For example, the Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge is now visibly impacted by cross-border air pollution as a result of the EPA's decision to give corporate polluters in Texas more time to develop yet *more* plans aimed at improving air quality.

Bottom line, time after time after time, Pruitt favors corporations over children, chemicals over clean water. Oklahoma now sits with 54 mercury-contaminated lakes, and the list is growing annually.

Texas coal plants currently emit the highest amounts of sulfur dioxide pollution in the nation and send dangerous streams of pollution throughout Texas and across the border into Oklahoma which contributes to hazy skies and extensive health issues for Oklahomans.

Pollution from Texas coal plants costs Oklahomans more than \$771 million annually – the result of more than 2,100 asthma attacks, 78 deaths, and 9,400 missed workdays. But in October, Pruitt abandoned his fellow Oklahomans to placate Texas polluters who don't give a second thought about Oklahoma families or its natural places.

Under Pruitt, the EPA's Texas Regional Haze plan allows more pollution from these plants than they produced in 2016. Pruitt abandoned stronger clean air protections against Texas coal pollution. These protections, which are already a decade overdue, would have given Oklahoma billions of dollars in public

health-related benefits.

What is also concerning is Pruitt is *not* fulfilling his job in any manner previously filled by *any* former EPA administrator. Nor does he have *any* scientific training in environmental issues.

He couples this lack of proper job background with a complete lack of taxpayer responsibility. The Washington Post reported that even after he was discovered and publicly admonished for taking private plane travel, Pruitt continued the practice – repeatedly flying first class at the taxpayers' expense. At this point, the grand total for his first-class flights is in the neighborhood of \$100,000 [yes, \$100,000 of *your* federal tax money].

One of the most heartbreaking trends of Pruitt's time as EPA administrator is the litany of actions that directly, negatively impact children's health. Most recently, it was announced the Environmental Protection Agency is closing the National Center for Environmental Research [NCER]. This research center oversees the administration of programs providing millions of dollars in grants and fellowships each year that lead to studies documenting the effects of chemicals on children's health.

Sadly, this closure is not the first time Trump's EPA has stood by the chemical industry.

Last year, Pruitt rejected a ban on chlorpyrifos, a pesticide linked to reduced IQ, developmental delay and increased risk of learning disabilities in children. The EPA recently reversed restrictions on the use of this pesticide shortly after meeting with officials from Dow Chemical.

If this alone is not a cause to reconsider allowing this individual to continue leading the EPA, then simply run through the laundry list of EPA actions that are currently triggering legal attempts to block their taking affect.

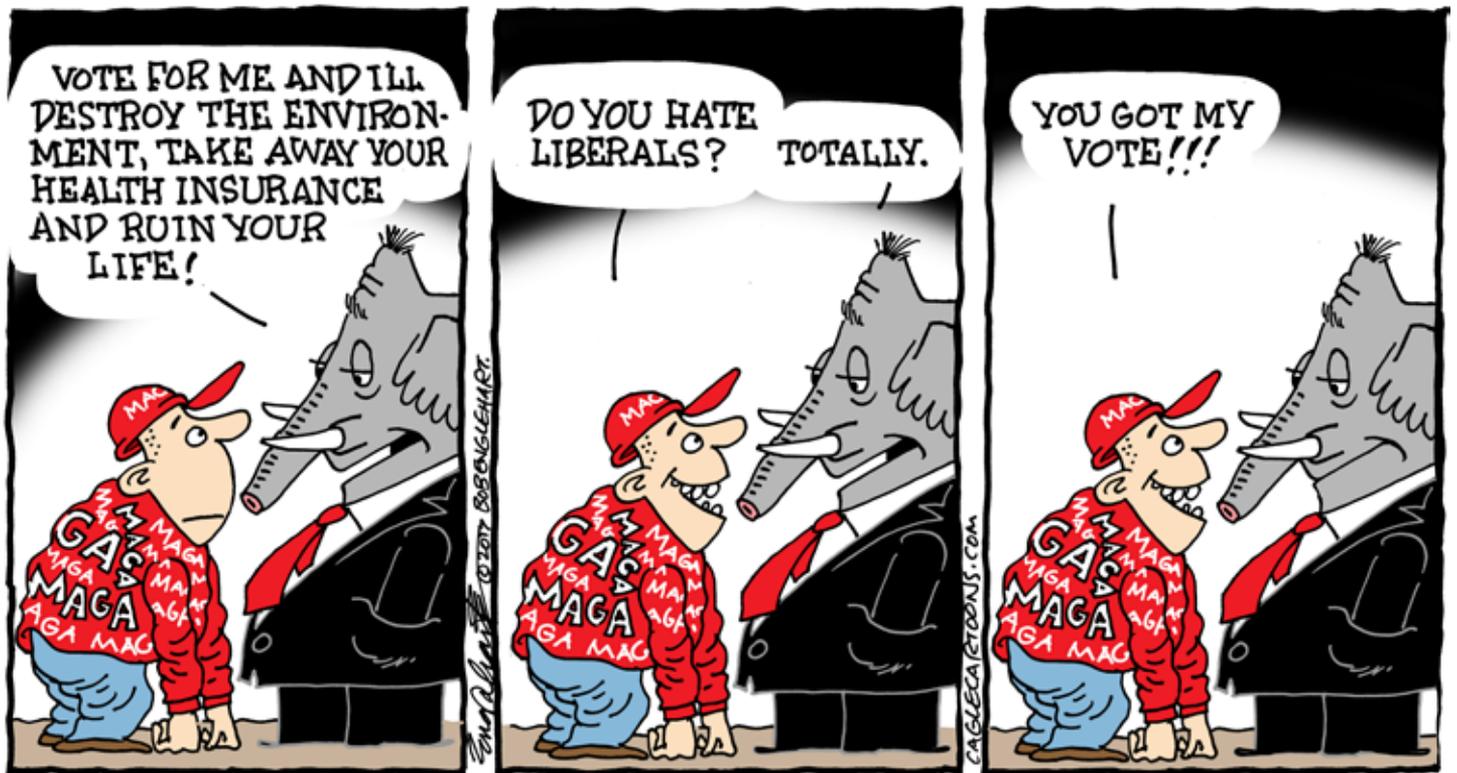
The Harvard Environmental Law Program maintains an online database to track all of the Trump Ad-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42



# What The Hell's The Matter With These People?

*A One-Time Republican Explains.*



**BY ROGER B. RENSVOLD**

**I**t seems incomprehensible that over 650,000 supposedly sane, decent citizens of Alabama – 98% of the Republicans who voted in the 2017 special election – would choose an accused child molester, a man who asserted that women should not run for office, Muslims should not be allowed to serve in Congress, and homosexuality should be illegal. What's the matter with these people?

To understand, you need to be a doctrinaire conservative. I used to be one.

I was raised on a diet of Adam Smith, Ludwig von Mises, Bill Buckley and Barry Goldwater. At one time, I was a member of the John Birch Society, and the Oklahoma state chairman of Young Americans for Freedom which was, in its day, the fascist answer to the socialist Students for a Democratic Society.

It took many years of living abroad, in Europe and China, to teach me that the way we Americans see America is not the way the rest of the world sees it. It took a PhD in Organizational Behavior, which required large doses of social psychology, to convince

me that conservative theories of human behavior are specious. My Road to Damascus moment came late in life, and it was painful – but that's another story.

Here's the conservative worldview. In outline, it seems barking mad, but most conservatives would agree with it.

The fundamental conflict, throughout history, has been between individuals, with "God-given rights," and the State. The State, which consists of a self-perpetuating, ever-growing cadre of special interests, seeks to use legislation and police powers to concentrate wealth and power in their own hands, for their own benefit. The end-point is a Soviet-style socialist monolith, controlled by a small elite.

The high-water mark in American history, characterized by the explosive growth of invention, industry and wealth, was the Gilded Age, between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the Great Depression. The "industrial statesmen" of the era – Rockefeller, Mellon, Carnegie and others – built a colossus on the foundations of discipline, ingenuity and

calculated risk. The Depression was a storm. It would have passed on its own, but the socialist authoritarians, always lurking in the shadows, seized upon it to advance their agenda.

Since Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Federal State has grown, at the expense of state and local governments, private associations, and personal freedoms. The American people have become dependent upon federal welfare programs, and habituated to federal taxation and control. The handcuffs are comfortable! People now prefer wearing them to facing, unfettered, the opportunities and dangers of true freedom.

The tide began to turn with Barry Goldwater. Although he was defeated, his principles found an audience. The beginning of the counter-revolution, a return to true Americanism, began with Ronald Rea-

keeping him in office is preferable to what would happen if he lost power.

Further: The Republican Party must, at whatever cost, maintain control of the Senate. If the House published Articles of Impeachment, a Democratic Senate would surely convict. A Democratic Senate would also be able to block conservative appointments to the Supreme Court, and hold them open for the next Democratic president. Enormities such as *Roe v. Wade* would continue to be the law of the land, and the slaughter of innocent unborn babies would continue. Protecting the Senate requires all true conservatives to do whatever is necessary, including holding their noses, and voting for candidates such as Judge Roy Moore.

So that, in a large nutshell, is what conservatives

Modern 'conservatism' is a cult, with its own complete, consistent world view. Conservatives cannot be converted. They must be defeated and contained.

gan. It suffered a setback under Clinton, and made little progress under George W. Bush, because of the demands of the Global War on Terror. It seemed to be in danger of faltering during the administration of the avowedly socialistic mulatto freak, Barack Obama [who was also probably a foreign-born usurper]. But the Republican Senate held the line, and at least prevented Obama from naming a socialist to the Supreme Court.

The election of Donald Trump, along with a Republican House and Senate, represented a unique opportunity to start cutting away the socialist tumors that have been growing on the country ever since 1928. Tragically, Trump has not been up to the job. So far, he's shown no evidence that he understands his office, and how to use it. But he's only had one year. There's plenty of time to turn things around, if – and only if – his presidency, and the Republican Congressional majorities, both survive.

Which brings us to the present crisis. Trump cannot – *cannot* – be impeached. If he is, and his sworn enemies are free to parade his various follies before the public, then two things will happen. First, the Republican Party will lose control of the Senate in 2018, and the House and White House in 2020. Second, the party will split. The so-called moderates [who are, in fact, doctrinaire conservatives] will be left in control of an empty shell. The hardcore activists, the so-called "alt right," will either drop out of politics in despair, or form their own party.

Protecting Trump, and America's future, justifies measures that would otherwise be unacceptable, such as compromising the independence of the judiciary. Trump may, technically, be a criminal – but

believe. It really is. Ask them.

It's all a delusion. To refute it, we could begin with first principles, such as the origin of "rights," but that's not the point of this short essay. The point is to argue that modern "conservatism" is a cult, with its own myths, its own interpretations of history, and its own sources of "facts."

Conservatives will not be converted. Those few who do change will do so in response to philosophical crises arising from the collision between the theories they've espoused, and the realities they've observed. Being lectured by non-conservatives will not – *repeat not* – work. Scientific studies have consistently demonstrated that attempting to change opinions by argumentation doesn't weaken opinions; rather, it makes them stronger.

Fortunately, the way back doesn't require us to convert any of them. The graphic on the next page tells the story. The Right lost the popular vote by over three million, and only won the electoral college because of 40,000 votes in two hotly contested swing states.

But the most significant sectors are the ones shown in gray; the people who were eligible to vote, but didn't. A slight change there would have changed everything. And this is the way forward: registration and mobilization of non-voters. Nothing else is required.

Of course, some new voters will be on the Right, but most will be on the Left. Their political orientation is precisely the reason that so many have not been voting; their disgust and despair at the current situation are so extreme, they've retreated into postures of avoidance and denial. [Although some have told me,

“If I’d known there was a chance of that fool (Trump) being elected, I would have voted.”]

The only way to defeat the Right is the same way that the Soviet Union was ultimately defeated – by containment. We must recruit allies, coordinate strategies, outnumber, isolate, marginalize, and wait for the movement to run its course.

After repeated defeats and disappointments, some on the Right will lose interest and withdraw from politics. They won’t be converted; they’ll simply be worn out. Others will fight to the end, but demographics assure us that the end is in sight.

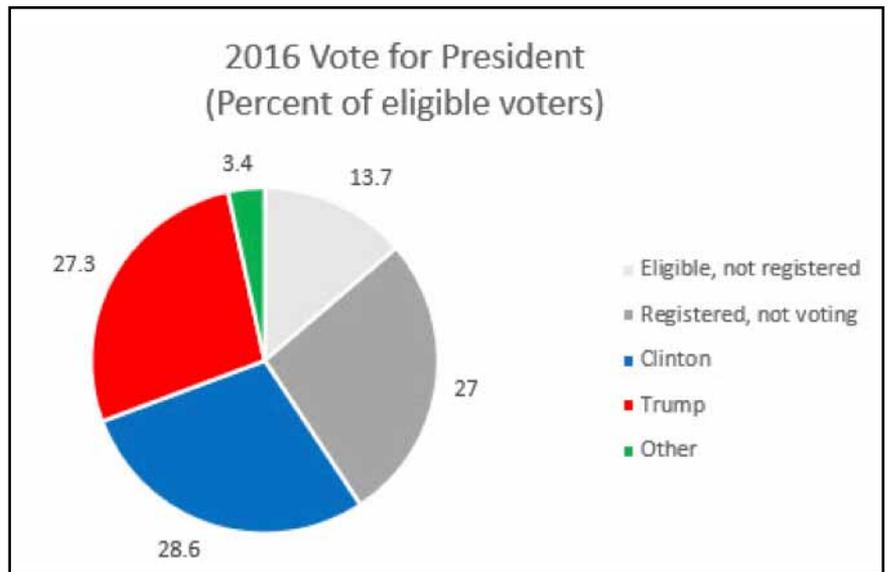
Most conservatives are middle-aged, and many of them [to judge from the beer bellies on display at “alt right” rallies] have unhealthy lifestyles.

In summary:

Modern “conservatism” is a cult, with its own complete, consistent world view.

Conservatives cannot be converted. They must be defeated and contained.

GOTV is the only strategy the Left needs. It is quite enough for the task ahead.



*Midwest City resident Roger B. Rensvold has had a varied career. After 20 years in the military, which included 18 months in Vietnam, six years in Cold War Europe, and flying as an experimental test pilot, he earned a PhD from Georgia Tech and taught for almost 10 years at City University of Hong Kong. Raised a right-wing Republican, he experienced his Road To Damascus moment during the 2008 campaign, and has been a progressive activist ever since.*

## *Alt-Right Behind More Deaths Than Many Americans Realize*

**BY KALI HOLLOWAY**

Last June, the Trump Administration rescinded funds previously earmarked to counter right-wing extremism and white supremacist violence.

Just two months later, 19 people were injured and protester Heather Heyer was killed by a neo-Nazi demonstrator in the streets of Charlottesville, VA. Though Charlottesville has become the most cited example of contemporary right-wing terror, it hardly offers a full picture of the threat posed by those Trump described as “very fine people.”

A new study from the Southern Poverty Law Center finds there have been more than “100 people killed or injured by alleged perpetrators influenced by the so-called “alt-right” – a movement that continues to access the mainstream and reach young recruits.”

The SPLC report tracks the rise in alt-right related violence beginning in 2014, when 22-year-old Elliot Rodger murdered six people and injured 14 others in Isla Vista, CA.

Like many alt-right adherents, Rodger’s radicalization began in men’s rights forums, which helped

stoke his racism, misogyny and self-loathing.

The study identifies 13 killers who have collectively killed 43 people and injured 67 others.

[Initially, Parkland, FL school shooter Nikolas Cruz was linked to white nationalists, but subsequent investigations found nothing to substantiate the reports. Now, it appears the claims were part of a disinformation campaign spread by internet trolls and white nationalists.]

“While some certainly displayed signs of mental illness,” the media tendency to depict these violent right-wing extremists as troubled loners is conveniently misguided.

The SPLC notes that the most conspicuous unifying background trait among these individuals is a “history of consuming and/or participating in the type of far-right ecosystem that defines the alt-right.”

A healthy number of those identified in the report are outspoken fans of Donald Trump, the report notes.

Nicholas Giampa, who in December murdered his ex-girlfriend’s parents before killing himself, was an

“enthusiastic supporter of then-candidate Donald Trump [who] often used racist slurs to attack Trump’s critics.”

Charlottesville killer James Alex Fields’ social media pages were reportedly filled with Trump and Pepe memes.

A Daily Beast report found Sean Urbanski, the alleged killer of U.S. Army Lieutenant Richard Collins III, “apparently liked memes about Donald Trump, white supremacy, and the alt-right.”

Alexandre Bissonnette, the Quebec mosque murderer and the lone Canadian in the group, was reportedly an avid supporter of both Trump and Marine Le Pen.

In July 2017, former Breitbart intern Lane Davis stabbed his father to death; a little over a year before, he wrote a rap ode to Trump he posted on YouTube. [Choice lyrics: “Finger on the trigger/Trump might use a nuke, boy/But he’d rather use a tariff/And that’s superb.”]

The alt-right’s visibility has grown alongside Trump’s political career, and the two appear inextricably linked. Nine of the attacks cataloged by the SPLC occurred in the shadow of the Trump presidency, leading the organization to cite 2017 as the most violent year of the alt-right’s existence thus far. Overall, the mean age of far-right killers is 26, with the youngest just 17.

Members of the alt-right have been open about their efforts to appeal to young, impressionable minds. An Anti-Defamation League report released in late January noted that there has been a drastic increase in

the amount of “white supremacist propaganda – flyers, stickers, banners, and posters – appearing on college and university campuses.”

Racism and misogyny have also been allowed to grow unchecked online in spaces such as 4chan and Reddit, and more recently, “alt-tech” sites such as Gab and WASP.love [a racist dating site].

Back in 2009, the Department of Homeland Security published a report on right-wing extremism that warned of increasing violence from militias, hate groups and other right-wing terrorists. Following pushback from GOP lawmakers who leaked the report, as well as their conservative reporters, the document was officially retracted by DHS and “the Extremism and Radicalization Branch was quietly dismantled,” according to the New York Times. Yet

multiple recent studies have shown that white nationalists now pose a far greater terrorist threat to the U.S. than ISIL.

The Trump Administration’s sympathy for the alt-right and other white supremacists and its refusal to counter their terror, means these fanatics will likely only grow more dangerous.

Daryl Johnson, the counterintelligence analyst pushed out of the DHS for his prescient report, wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post just after the Charlottesville tragedy, again attempting to offer a warning.

“Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan members, militia extremists, and other radical right-wing zealots march side-by-side at pro-Trump rallies across the country,” Johnson wrote. “Trump’s endorsement of the border wall, the travel ban, mass deportations of illegal immigrants – these ideas were touted on white su-

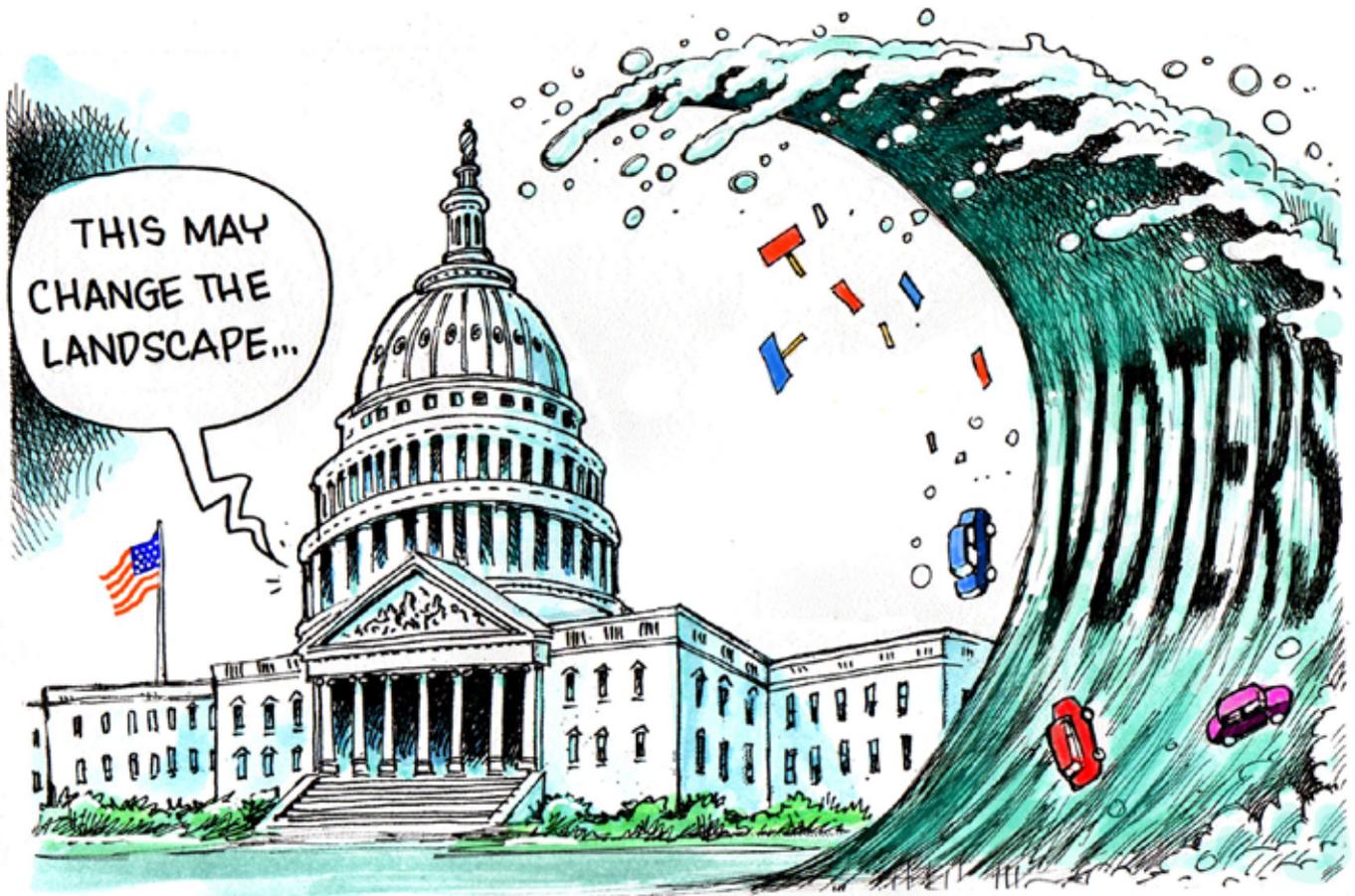


premacist message boards merely 10 years ago. Now they’re being put forth as official U.S. policy ...

“Extremists no longer hide anymore. They number in the hundreds of thousands and are extremely well-armed. The political apparatus and the news media appears confused in their reporting of the scope of the domestic terrorist threat – some ignoring it completely.

“When 9/11 happened, the government made an effort to connect the dots beforehand, but failed because of a lack of communication among agencies. In this case, the government isn’t even trying – and worse, it appears to be enabling the threat to flourish.”

*Kali Holloway is a senior writer and the associate editor of media and culture at Alternet.*



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## *In November, Democrats Need To Be The Third Party*

BY FROMA HARROP

**W**idespread displeasure with Donald Trump and his party bodes well for Democrats in November. They have a good chance of retaking the House and a decent one of winning a Senate majority. But to get there, they must be smart. And being smart includes attracting Republicans repelled by Trump.

There's not going to be a third party any time soon, as much as many centrists crave one. But Democrats can serve as a haven for independents and appalled Republicans wanting options other than the moral wreckage that's become the GOP. At least in 2018.

For patriotic conservatives [and others], defending American institutions and norms now takes precedence over winning on this or that policy initiative. This is a time of crisis. In a stroke of good luck or hard work, Democrats have enlisted six former federal prosecutors, candidates schooled in the rule of

law, to run for House seats.

The crude populism practiced by Trump is all over the ideological map, though in his case, it's mainly words. Trump hollers sweet nothings to the working class while in practice shoveling the nation's wealth to the wealthiest few. The working people's losses will continue to mount, starting with the health care security that Trump promised to preserve but is now helping kill. This was bait and switch, big-time.

Tax cuts and spending that explode deficits are not conservative, and real conservatives know it. Trump world's piggish conduct, meanwhile, repels traditionalists. The resistance from right-of-what-used-to-be-center makes never-Trump Republicans the most interesting and principled voices in today's politics.

Trump does seem to be retaining high approval among party members in general, but there are fewer behind them. Republican-leaning independents are

up for grabs. Many who used to call themselves Republican leaners have dropped the “Republican” altogether and now simply identify as independents.

Some Democratic politicians err in thinking that moving decisively left to win over the so-called base is the way to go. It's not. Democrats are better off appealing to growing masses of independent-minded voters – certainly if they want the party to win outside its regional strongholds.

In any case, they should be mindful that the Bernie-Hillary divide was largely manufactured. Candidate Bernie Sanders certainly sounded more radical than Hillary Clinton, but on the issues, they weren't far apart at all.

Trump loudly pushed that myth. And now we learn that Russians were also secretly sowing discord among liberals. They bought pro-Bernie, anti-Hillary ads on Facebook even after the Sanders campaign ended.

Then they ran ads promoting Green Party candidate Jill Stein – she who praised Trump's pro-Russia platform. “Trust me,” one Russian-sponsored ad for Stein read. “It's not a wasted vote. ... The only way to

take our country back is to stop voting for the corporations and banks that own us.”

It's hard to imagine any lefty not understanding the necessity of defeating Trump, but undoubtedly some were sucked into the con. [Or they weren't worried about their health care.]

Voters of all persuasions can agree on the evils of rampant corruption, chaotic foreign policy, environmental degradation and cultural debasement. But Democrats have to develop a coherent stance on immigration that says, “Our determination to protect the ‘dreamers’ does not mean we don't want immigration laws enforced going forward.” Sanders, by the way, is quite moderate on this issue, understanding that lower-skilled American workers need protection from unfair competition.

The country desperately needs a massive rejection of what Trump and his Republican enablers have wrought. Whether voting for Democrats in November is a one-time deal for disaffected Republicans remains to be seen. But they should do it for all of us, and Democrats must help them.

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# *Embracing Bold Platforms, Progressives Work To Unseat Corporate Democrats*

**BY JAKE JOHNSON**

**D**riven by the conviction that the Democratic Party must undergo a fundamental transformation if it is to vanquish both the immediate threats posed by President Donald Trump and deep-seated societal ills that were present long before Trump arrived on the scene, progressive insurgents throughout the country are working to unseat Democratic incumbents in the 2018 midterms and push the party left.

“What this is about is that if we re-elect the same Democratic Party that we had going into this mess, then we're going to have the same exact result,” Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a former organizer for Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign who is taking on Rep. Joe Crowley, D-NY, said in an interview with Politico. “In order for the country to move forward, the Democratic Party has to transform.”

Ocasio-Cortez is just one of many progressives running against the status quo enforced by their state's Democratic machine, which – as The Intercept detailed in a recent report – often works to constrict policy boundaries and tilt the balance of power toward the donor class.

Fueled by small-dollar contributions – which in some cases have been enough to outraise incumbents who rely on corporate cash – grassroots candidates across the nation are working to break through

these boundaries by running on ambitious progressive platforms in 2018 that include Medicare for All, tuition-free college, criminal justice reform, and a \$15 federal minimum wage.

By Politico's count, “six veteran incumbents already face energetic primary challenges from younger candidates in New York and Massachusetts. In Illinois, two Chicago-based members are being targeted from the left.”

Marie Newman, who is taking on right-wing Democratic Rep. Dan Lipinski in Illinois' 3rd Congressional District, highlighted shifting public opinion in progressives' favor as one of the reasons insurgents are sparking such enthusiasm in blue states and throughout the U.S.

“About 75% are for healthcare for all or Medicare for All,” Newman said of the 3rd District, highlighting a number that coincides with the massive growth in support of Medicare for All nationwide. As Common Dreams reported last July, 62% of the American public now believes it is “the federal government's responsibility to make sure that all Americans have healthcare coverage.”

Jan Rodolfo, midwest director of National Nurses United [NNU], praised Newman in an interview with *In These Times*, noting that “it's important to send

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

# Jim Hightower



## *The South Is Rising Again*

**I**n the past year, we've seen a burst of audacious political assertiveness coming out of Old Dixie, and I'm not talking about those Trumpeteering, tiki-torch-brandishing, tinhorn KKKers the media focuses on. The real story is that a fresh, "Reclaim the South" movement of young African-American populists is emerging, kindling long-suppressed hope in the racially scarred Deep South and offering the possibility of real economic and cultural progress.

Guess who's mayor of Jackson, MS, the state's capitol city? Chokwe Antar Lumumba – a black, 34-year-old lawyer who was raised in Jackson in a family and community of longtime Black Power activists. Last June, backed by Our Revolution and Working Families Party, Lumumba was elected with 93% [!] of the vote, and he promptly pledged to make Jackson "the most radical city on the planet." By radical, he means aggressively innovative in developing policies and programs focused directly on lifting up Jackson's middle-class and poor residents, rather than adopting the failed trickle-down model of nearly every other city. For example, instead of giving away government subsidies to lure rich corporations, Lumumba is trying to make the city a national showcase of home-grown cooperative enterprises owned by the people themselves.

In August, the incumbent mayor of Birmingham, AL – an old-style, don't-rock-the-boat politico favored by the city's power brokers – thought he was cruising to an easy re-election. Then wham! – an underdog populist challenge by 36-year-old African-American attorney Randall Woodfin stunned the city powers with a first-place showing that forced the mayor into an October runoff. Woodfin, a city prosecutor and school board member, went on to defeat Birmingham's corporate and political establishment by winning the mayorship with 58% of the vote. He did it by proposing an all-out populist agenda, building a broad coalition of local progressive activists and running a dogged ground game with the full support of Our Revolution, Working Families Party, and other national groups. Our Revolution, for instance, deployed some 70 volunteers to help in the runoff and sent more than 11,000 text messages to voters

urging support for Woodfin.

Likewise, other full-bore, African-American populists won big in races for local offices across the South, including:

- Khalid Kamau, a Black Lives Matter activist and national Democratic convention delegate for Sanders, won a South Fulton, GA, council seat with 67% of the vote.
- Braxton Winston, a young community activist and battler against rampant inequalities in the enforcement of justice in Charlotte, NC, won a City Council seat.
- And La'Shadiion Shemwell, a 30-year-old barber and Black Lives Matter proponent, pulled 57% of the vote in his extraordinary run for a City Council seat in McKinney, TX. The suburban city on Dallas's north side had long been considered a safe Republican bastion.

The nationwide progressive offensive in 2017 produced other ground shifting results such as many victories by millennials [five elected to the state House in Virginia alone]; victories by immigrant candidates, including in Somerville [MA], Helena [MT], and Minneapolis; a rebellion in previously red suburbs; and several wins by openly transgender men and women including House of Delegate [VA], several City Council seats and even a few seats on local school boards. Victories like these are proliferating because immigrant populations are growing, the LGBTQ community has become more readily accepted, Trumpism and GOP extremism are turning voters off, a rapid and relentless downsizing of the middle class is altering attitudes, and serious grassroots political organizing by Our Revolution, Democratic Socialists of America, Working Families Party, and other progressive groups is making a difference.

We can draw two big lessons from these wins in the "red" South and victories by others previously counted out by the status quo: progressives with a full-throated populist message [Medicare for All, a \$15 minimum wage, corporate money out of politics, etc.] can win nearly anywhere; and the assertion by establishment Dems [echoed by corporate media] that progressive populism is not a winner is – in two words – bovine excrement.

# Who Will Trump Mob Kill Next?

**B**reaking news: Trump & Company are a murderous mob! From the start of his White House tenure, the Trumpsters have plotted, stalked and serially killed vibrant members of the English Language.

The word “Fact” was the first to go. Robust and universally respected, Fact was assassinated last year when one of Trump’s hired killers poisoned it with an unknown substance nicknamed: “Alternative Fact.”

Their latest victim was a much-honored word that has produced a whole family of world literature: “Satire.” This powerful noun embodied the use of sarcasm and ridicule to expose the vanity and vice of public figures, but Trump himself killed satire by starving it of any meaning.

How can anyone satirize a presidency that is, in reality, nothing but a fully-staged satire of vanity and vice?

Satire involves exaggerating the flaws, mannerisms, oddities, etc. of various characters to convey how corrupt and contemptible they are – but it’s impossible to exaggerate the awfulness of an administration that gleefully flaunts its awfulness every day.

Take Trump’s proposed budget ... please! Delivered just in time for Valentine’s Day, it’s a nasty piece of work. For example, it would intentionally increase poverty and hunger across our country. It would slash programs providing essential food, housing, and even heating assistance for about 50 million Americans – mostly children, old folks, poverty-wage worker, and disabled people.

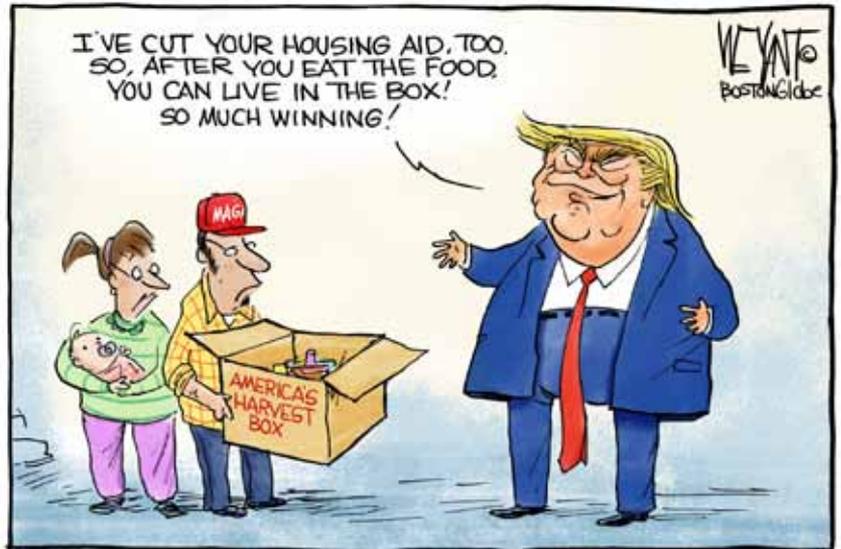
Then there are the vital Medicare and Medicaid programs that most working class Americans count on.

Candidate Trump promised us that “there will be no cuts” in funding for these programs. But now he has sent his Valentine budget to us, featuring – guess what? – hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid.

Not only has his cynicism killed satire, but his cynical health care cuts could kill you.

Presidential budgets aren’t just numbers, they’re statements of a president’s moral principles. No work of satire could ridicule Trump’s morality as effectively as his own budget does.

Even Charles Dickens, the masterful satirist of Victorian English elites, couldn’t have imagined using a box of food to take a gratuitous, heavy-handed slap at poor people. But Donald Trump and two of his slap-happy cabinet officials did imagine it – and then did it.



They slipped a malicious, punish-the-poor provision into the food stamp budget Trump sent to Congress. Instead of getting a small monthly allowance to spend on foods of their choice, the Trump provision would take away half of the poor people’s allowance and substitute a monthly box of peanut butter, canned goods, and other packaged food items chosen for them by their friendly federal government.

It’s bureaucratic, patronizing, demeaning ... and stupid, but Trump ag secretary, Sunny Perdue, hailed the Big Brother’s Dinner Box as a “bold, innovative” idea.

Besides, Sonny disdainfully said of food stamp recipients, they are hooked on a culture of dependency – so maybe a diet of peanut butter will cure them of that.

Then came Trump budget director, Mick Mulvaney, a Tea Party extremist who demonizes impoverished Americans as moochers, bizarrely putting a luxury spin on the “Harvest Box,” as the Trumpeters have dubbed their miserly scheme. Mulvaney compares the government issued box of grub to Blue Apron, an upscale grocery delivery system. But, Mick – get a clue – Blue Apron patrons get to choose what’s in their box – and it ain’t peanut butter!

As the leading Democrat opposing the Trump mob’s food stamp gut job says in dismay, “My god, these people are awful ... really just not nice people.”

Less nice is their real intention to kill the food stamp program entirely. Trump’s budget calls for slashing 30% of the funding this year. As watchdogs at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities put it, “That’s the real battle.” The food-box silliness is a distraction to let them pull off the big theft.

To help stop them go to [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org). – Jim Hightower



# *GOP's Ruthless Court Packing Scheme*

**BY STEVEN ROSENFELD**

**S**enate Judiciary Committee Republicans ended a century-old tradition Thursday that will accelerate the appointment of right-wing federal judges in purple and blue states, where they will preside over thousands of cases that will never reach the Supreme Court.

The move, led by Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Charles Grassley of Iowa, was the most egregious partisan intervention in the judiciary since Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell blocked 2016 hearings on President Obama's final Supreme Court nominee, Merrick Garland, which would have given the court a center-left majority. [After the 2016 election, conservative Neil Gorsuch was appointed and confirmed.]

"Michael Brennan gets voted out of Senate Judiciary Committee along party lines despite fact that he refused to acknowledge implicit racial bias in the justice system," tweeted Vanita Gupta, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and former head of the Justice Depart-

ment's Civil Rights Division under President Obama. "Grassley kills the blue slip tradition with this vote. Brennan voted out over objection of a home-state senator."

"Chuck Grassley's blue slip policy blocked three of Obama's African American circuit noms. But now he's changed his policy to ram through two of Trump's white circuit noms, inc Michael Brennan," tweeted Christopher Kang, who served in the Obama White House Counsel's Office for more than four years and was in charge of its judicial nomination process.

These comments underscored that Republicans under President Trump are packing the federal courts with right-wing nominees, many of whom are not qualified to hold these lifetime posts. The public often underestimates the power of federal judges, especially at the appellate level. While the Supreme Court gets about 7,000 appeals annually and hears between 100-150 cases, federal appeals courts receive upwards of 60,000 appeals annually and are often the final arbiter of justice in America.

What transpired Thursday was both procedural and political. On procedure, the Republican Judiciary Committee chairman overrode an objection by Michael Brennan's home-state senator, Democrat Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, who didn't return a so-called blue slip, in effect, putting Brennan's nomination on hold.

"This is a 100-year-old tradition. It's not an official policy. It's not a rule, but it has been a tradition," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-CA, protesting Grassley's decision to override Baldwin and vote on Brennan's nomination, which moved to the Senate on a party-line vote. "Since its inception, no Democratic chair of the Judiciary Committee has ever held a hearing for a judicial nominee over the objection of a Republican senator. That's fact and it's history."

But Grassley's decision is also extremely political. Not only does it show that Republicans will dispense with any rule or tradition that stands between them and exerting political power, it also shows that the GOP is eager to foist extremist judges on purple and blue states.

"Today's vote ... shows just how far Chuck Grassley is willing to go to cripple the system of checks and balances designed to protect our federal courts and our liberty," said Marge Baker, People for the American Way executive vice president. "His decision to move forward on the Brennan nomination over the objection of a home state senator sends a clear signal that the Trump administration can run roughshod over individual senators when it comes to judicial nominations. Donald Trump and [White House Counsel] Don McGahn have repeatedly nominated unqualified political cronies and narrow-minded elitists to critical seats on the federal bench."

Baker is referring to several Trump nominees whose controversial pasts forced them to withdraw from the process. But Feinstein, in remarks last December, also noted Republicans were ramming nominees through the process to pack the federal courts with unqualified right-wingers.

"The speed at which these judges are being rammed through the process is stunning," she said. "We're already seeing the ramifications. Just yesterday the White House announced that two of its nominees would not be moving forward. One nominee, Brett Talley, had already been voted out of the Judiciary Committee, but we learned of troubling undisclosed information while he was pending on the floor ..."

"Republicans refused to advance seven circuit court nominees last year, but now we're speeding through the process to fill those seats with conservative judges," Feinstein said. "Fairness aside, we should all be concerned that we're giving lifetime appointments to potentially unqualified nominees."

How unqualified is Brennan? Consider this exchange between Brennan and Democratic New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, in which Brennan dodged Booker's questions about racial bias in the federal justice system.

Sen. Booker: You're aware that African Americans are stopped more than whites for drug searches, that there's no difference between blacks and whites who are using drugs or dealing drugs, but they're 3.7 times more likely to be arrested for it. You're aware of the data, I imagine, that says African Americans are more likely to get mandatory minimum sentences for the same crimes. You're probably aware that African Americans are more likely to serve more time for similar crimes. Do you think explicit racial just exists in the Justice system as you know it?

Michael Brennan: One of the things I can say, senator, is I want to put my pro bono [volunteer] efforts into—

Sen. Booker: I'm not asking about you specifically, sir. I'm asking do you think racial bias exists in the criminal justice system?

Michael Brennan: I can't be in a position, senator, under the Canons of Ethics, of taking positions until I would—

Sen. Booker: Sir, sir. I'm sorry. The data, the evidence, is profound. I've had Republican nominees, Democratic nominees, FBI leaders in hearings I've had, simply point to the fact that in the United States of America, implicit racial bias impacts the criminal justice system. And you have no opinion, whether, on the facts, or no assessment, on whether racial bias exists in the American criminal justice system?

Michael Brennan: I try to put my time and effort into those areas where it's most, where I think it would have an impact. For example, for the Federal Defenders Office in Wisconsin.

Sen. Booker: That's not the question I'm asking, sir. I'm asking, yes or no, do you think racial bias, implicit racial bias, exists in the criminal justice system. Yes or no?

Michael Brennan: I would indicate senator, absolutely, if I could take a look at all those statistics and studies that you looked at, that I would be able, be in a position to offer an opinion.

Sen. Booker: And you haven't? You're a judge in the United States of America and you have not looked at issues of race or sentencing in the criminal justice system?

Grassley cut off Booker from asking further questions.

As the Leadership Conference tweeted a short while later, "The Senate Judiciary Committee, on a party-line vote, just advanced the nomination of Michael Brennan to the 7th Circuit. This marks a dangerous surrender to Trump and represents Chuck Grassley's breathtaking hypocrisy on blue slips."

But more is at stake than Grassley's hypocrisy. The Republicans are engaged in a massive right-wing court-packing scheme that will last for decades — long after the Senate's current Republican majority is gone.

This is one of the Trump administration's most potentially damaging legacies.

© *Alternet*



## *Dreamers, Immigration And The Art Of The Deal*

BY JAN NEW

**L**et me start by saying that the authorization of legislation addressing continuance of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program is all about the art of the deal – and every aspect of immigration reform that sticks in anyone’s craw.

Unfortunately, approximately 780,000 “Dreamers” in America are caught up in this much larger maelstrom of immigration reform issues that divide the nation and our Congress. Additionally, a willful chief executive who ostensibly wants only four major concessions, seems to actually want a full and comprehensive solution to unaddressed immigration issues that currently divide us.

While theoretically laudable, it seems all but impossible with the current political climate. Why?

### **FACTIONS AND ACTIONS**

What is a faction? Does it differ from a caucus? One definition of a faction is a group within a larger group

that has its own ideas about an issue, and in the process of maintaining those viewpoints, divides the unity of the larger group. Usually, the term caucus is used when talking about a group belonging to a political party who get together to confer about party policy.

Today a related term is “identity politics,” which refers to groups of people who form political alliances but not necessarily within traditional parties. Factions and identity politics are not the same concept, but they can both bring about excessive divisiveness or “extreme partisanship,” one of the four dangers George Washington warned Americans to guard against to preserve unity and a democratic republic.

We were similarly warned of the inherent problems with factions and divisiveness by James Madison in his Federalist Paper No. 10 “The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection.” Madison believed a tendency toward faction exists in ev-

everyone, and relief can only be sought in “controlling its effects” – something the U.S. Senate and office of the president did a poor job of as they set about to consider immigration reform bills during the week of Feb. 12, 2018.

### **WHY THE DELAY?**

By Feb. 12, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had cleared the Senate calendar to fully debate DACA, border security, and other immigration issues. He stated the president had “spelled out a fair and generous framework” for reform.

Several weeks earlier, the president had released his four principal requirements: inclusion of 1.8 million dreamers [counting those who are eligible but have not yet applied]; a \$25 billion trust fund for border security and a border wall; an end to “chain migration” [family reunification]; and an end to the Diversity Immigrant Visa program, also known as the green card lottery, a program that makes 50,000 immigrant visas available annually to diversify the immigrant population.

These major immigration tenets and more were discussed in the Republican Platform 2016, crafted in part by Gov. Mary Fallin.

As McConnell’s address to the Senate continued it was obvious the president’s requirements included more than four reforms. McConnell also indicated the Senate would proceed not with a consideration of the individual bills like S.1852 [Succeed Act] or S.2192 [Secure Act, also later referred to as the Grassley Bill] but would instead vote to proceed with an unrelated neutral House-passed bill that would serve as the vehicle for any immigration legislation the Senate might pass – H.R. 2579.

Remember, while a 51% simple majority or 51 votes is required to pass immigration legislation in the Senate, that assumes that debate has “closed.” In the Senate it takes a three-fifths vote or 60 votes to close Senate debate [“cloture”]. With debate left open, no vote on the issue takes place.

Also on Feb. 12, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, with five decades in elective politics, criticized support for Trump’s Plan, the Grassley Bill, as a “partisan plan with no input from Democrats,” but insisted:

“Democrats are fully committed to protecting ‘Dreamers,’ and we have long supported effective border security. Many Republicans are in the same boat. The only enemy here is overreach. Now is not the time to reform the entire legal immigration system. Rather, this is the moment for a narrow bill, and every ounce of our energy going into one that can pass.”

Schumer also invoked the words of George Washington in challenging the Senate to make the painful compromises that come with democratic government – “to be the cooling saucer for our politics.”

What ensued in the Senate from Jan. 12-15 was a series of nonstop amendments to H.R. 2579 by various Senate factions.

One amendment struck the original language of the

resolution, replacing the measure in its entirety with the Succeed Act and the Secure Act, referred to as Sen. Grassley’s bill by Majority Leader McConnell, who said it “drew on the framework which the president officially endorsed.”

By far the most conservative and comprehensive bill, the Grassley bill includes not only Trump’s four primary requirements but also addresses at length numerous other equally or more controversial provisions. Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford characterized the bill as a “middle ground” proposal insofar as the president temporarily backed away from addressing sanctuary jurisdictions, asylum, and interior enforcement – narrowing only somewhat an incredible list of controversial policy decisions.

Among its many provisions, the Grassley Bill directs the Department of Homeland Security [DHS] to gain operational control of the U.S. southern border and to deter illegal activity. It authorizes the National Guard and the Department of Defense to support this effort.

DHS would be directed to establish a National Border Security Advisory Committee; various enforcement teams and task forces; and a biometric exit data system. It includes authorization for additional border control and immigration personnel; a means of reimbursing state and local prosecutors for federally initiated criminal immigration cases; and increases in immigration capacity detention.

It reinstates the Secure Communities program, a federal information-sharing partnership between DHS and the FBI, and it revises: apprehension and detention of aliens; non-immigrant admission; parole authority; unaccompanied alien children; human smuggling and trafficking; drug trafficking and crimes of violence by illegal aliens; visa and passport security; background checks; naturalization; expedited removal; immigration crimes and penalties and others. On Feb. 15 the Grassley bill failed the cloture vote.

The same day, a group of 25 senators, so-called “centrists” and referred to as the Common Sense Coalition, reached a bipartisan agreement on a bill that would provide a 10-12 year route to citizenship for “Dreamers;” a 10-year, \$25-billion set-aside for a wall and other security measures; a ban on “Dreamers” sponsoring parents for citizenship; and no alteration on the diversity lottery [which distributes 50,000-plus immigrant visas to persons from diverse countries].

### **STILL SIX VOTES SHY**

Twenty-five centrists plus 29 additional votes were still six votes shy of the promised land; the cloture vote on the Common Sense Amendment failed, 54-45. Other immigration amendments also failed to gain cloture on Feb. 15 – measures by Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, and Sen. Chris Coons, D-CT, and by Sen. Pat Toomey, R-PA. [You can see all the actions at [Congress.gov](http://Congress.gov).]

With the sheer number of controversial issues, there are individual senators and coalitions of sena-

tors who cannot agree on one let alone all the terms. Sen. Schumer with five decades in elective office understands that separate bills of sufficiently narrowed scope to address the most pressing problems are required to garner needed votes. The president, as CEO of his own businesses, has been able to establish and enforce his own policies at will; now, the art of the deal is a more complex negotiation – a deliberative process in a republic or representative democracy. It's called the real deal, and it requires advanced leadership skills. We'll see.

As various amendments were being debated in the Senate on Feb. 15, the Associated Press frequent tweets by President Trump – all day long. In the end Schumer reported Trump had not only “threatened to veto legislation that didn't match his demands,” but that he “seemed to be against every solution that might pass because it was not 100% of what he wanted.” Schumer said he believed that the DACA proposal and border security were the only two issues that could pass the Senate.

Even should a more limited bipartisan bill pass the Senate after recess, the divisions in the House Judiciary Committee and the House are possibly more challenging than the Senate. H.R. 4760 by Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-VA, and Rep. Michael McCaul, R-TX, reportedly has White House support, but virtually all Democrats and some Republicans would not favor some aspects of the bill; House Republicans have said they could consider amending the bill after the Congressional recess.

For a 51% vote in the House, 218 Representatives would need to reach consensus. In terms of numbers, the 238 Republicans in the House could pass it, but it's unlikely. The Freedom Caucus alone with 32 identified members consisting of conservative and libertarian Republicans, many of whom would disagree with one or more provisions. House Democrats likely to consider a bipartisan measure [party democrats and progressives – 182 out of 193 Democrats], would need an additional 36 Republican votes to pass it.

A coalition of mainstream Republicans and Democrats could theoretically pass it [156+113=269], but most seem to believe the House Speaker Paul Ryan,

R-WI, would not bring any bill to the floor that didn't have the requisite votes.

Some say the best alternative might be a one-year extension of Dreamer's protections and money for border security – in line with Schumer's thoughts.

Many “Dreamers” in Oklahoma, approximately 6,100, spoke publicly of their fears and concerns in advance of the president's March 5 deadline – especially after the Justice Department asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals order keeping the program in place. But the high court on Feb. 26 declined to take up the case – for now – leaving the DACA program in place, perhaps for months, while the case works its way through the courts.

### A FINAL THOUGHT

As a means of controlling factions, James Madison believed the number of citizens served by a larger republic would exert a public voice “more consonant to the public good ... being more favorable to the election of proper guardians of the public weal.”

Some of Madison's thoughts about this were posed as questions – perhaps because he could not fully foresee the future of elective politics nor the excesses of current campaign finance.

Whatever the legislative [and judicial] outcomes following the Congressional recess, “Dreamers” and the rest of the world are watching to see how we will treat 780,000 young people who have invested much in America and who need our continued protection and a legitimate path to citizenship.

Our need for reasonable border security and a reformed immigration program will require tough but fair policy decisions – tempering intention with desired outcomes – keeping us from becoming a nation of isolationists and xenophobes while still making America a place for those who want to work with us toward a better life.

Who you vote for matters. What they do with your vote matters more.

*Oklahoma City resident Jan New is a retired public administrator for municipal, state, and federal programs, private industry, and national trade association program development.*

## *Trump's Cuba Hostility Serves Kremlin*

BY JOE CONASON

**H**AVANA – The presidency of Donald Trump is teaching millions of Cubans – along with people around the world – to see the United States as a symbol of disappointment rather than hope. Within a few months, his abusive attitude toward Cuba has nearly reversed the diplomatic, cultural and humanitarian opening initiated by his predecessor.

Trump's angry and unthinking policy represents

in microcosm his generally malignant impact on American interests abroad. And it is yet another occasion when his actions have clearly advanced the fortunes of a hostile foreign power.

Yes, that means Russia.

Today the U.S. Embassy on Havana's shoreline boulevard, the Malecon, is virtually silent, its staff reduced from a barely adequate 54 to a pitiful 14 [not counting the Marine guards who provide secu-

riety]. Five are State Department officials and nine are support staff. Our current ambassador, Philip Goldberg, is a seasoned diplomat, but he arrived only a week ago to serve in acting status for an indeterminate tour.

With almost no consular staff on hand, the embassy can do nothing for the Cuban people, who yearn for the thousands of visas our government agreed to provide. For despite decades of ideological hostility, the United States and American people remain extraordinarily popular here.

Not far away from the crippled American outpost, however, stands the Russian embassy – a looming, hideous edifice that resembles an upraised middle finger in an otherwise charming neighborhood.

Never much liked by Cubans even during the Soviet period, when they provided enormous aid and trade benefits as a political ally, the Russians fell out of favor altogether when the Communist empire imploded. Yet over the past year or so, Russia has become very active again here, making lots of deals with the Cuban government. Where Venezuela was once the ally that sent discounted oil to Havana, the Russian Federation has stepped up, perhaps because its energy sector intends to exploit Cuba's undersea petroleum deposits.

And since Trump's election, Russian agencies and companies have negotiated technology, defense, and commercial agreements with the Cubans, including an ambitious scheme to rebuild the island's decrepit railroad system. In short, the Russians are emphatically back, only 90 miles from Key West, where the withering

of American influence will encourage whatever mischief they mean to create not only in Cuba itself but in the United States and throughout Latin America.

The timing is perfect, too. President Raul Castro is scheduled to cede power within months to a successor from a new generation, a wrenching change for a country ruled by Castros since 1959.

What enhanced this opportunity for the Kremlin, of course, was the American reaction to an apparent assault on our personnel in Havana last year, which inflicted pain, panic, and medical injuries via means that remains mysterious. A lengthy investigation by American law enforcement and intelligence agencies has yet to determine what caused the illnesses that afflicted Americans and Canadians at several locations, including hotels and residences. And the exhaustive, highly technical investigation has also failed to find a culprit.

Naturally Trump has blamed the Cubans, although they offered unprecedented cooperation in the probe and there is no substantive evidence of their guilt.

The lack of proof hasn't dissuaded either the president or Secretary of State Rex Tillerson from retaliating with a travel warning that discourages American tourism and the expulsion of more than a dozen Cuban diplomats.

Those actions have badly undermined the nascent detente with Havana. Which may well have been Trump's aim from the beginning, since he aims to undo all of Obama's achievements regardless of merit and constantly stokes the prejudices of every Republican voting bloc. Meanwhile, he is harming ordinary Cubans in every way.

No doubt the strange assault on U.S. personnel in Cuba is genuinely disturbing to Tillerson, who has convened an Accountability Review Board to assess the department's response. While the former Exx-



onMobil executive has decimated and mismanaged the diplomatic corps in ways that must also please his old friends in Moscow, his safety concerns are understandable.

But it is important to observe – as Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-VT, did during a visit to Cuba this week – that Canada has maintained a fully functioning embassy in Havana, although Canadian personnel were also affected by the mystery ailment. At a press conference on Wednesday, Leahy rightly urged the State Department to restore full staffing at the U.S. embassy, where plenty of our dedicated foreign service officers are still eager to serve.

We don't know who is behind the troubling incidents in Havana, but the perpetrators' agenda is all too obvious, whether they are acted on behalf of a foreign power or a renegade element in the Cuban state or both. They aim to drive the United States and Cuba apart at a crucial moment. Our government should stop acting as their hapless pawn.

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## *Behind The Curtain Of Trump's Reality TV Palace*

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### **FIRE AND FURY**

***Inside The Trump White House***

**By Michael Wolff**

**Henry Holt & Co.**

**336 pages, \$30**

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**N**ot surprisingly, Donald Trump's lawyers tried to stop publication of an expose inside Trump's reality TV palace intrigue.

And likewise trying to block likely one of the most unfortunate and yet fascinating media soap opera spectacles in history would, of course, create a spectacular Streisand Effect.

Not unlike when the term was named after Barbra Streisand, who failed to quash photos of her Malibu residence in 2003, media attention pulled further public attention to it.

When Michael Wolff was asked about Trump lawyers' efforts to stop his book, he gleefully answered, "Where do I send the box of chocolates?"

People flocked to not only buy his book but also to preorder it. I did as well and was excited to receive it a few days early on my Kindle. I found that this was because the publisher preemptively reacted to Trump lawyers by moving the publication date up four days.

Astonishingly, in the first week alone, more than 250,000 e-books and 100,000 audiobooks were sold. Remarkably, more than 1.4 million physical books were sold and people waited in line at bookstores to buy their own copy.

Unheard of these days outside of Black Fridays! *Fire and Fury* remains on the New York Times Best-seller list for Combined Print and E-Book Nonfiction as well as Hardback Nonfiction.

Even before I read the book, television news was abuzz with what were the juicy bits to scoop out of this book. So, while knowing the ending doesn't bother me much, it might bother other readers. If it does bother you and you are attuned to politics at all, you probably have heard some of rumblings in this well-written and timely book.

That's OK because there is more to it than the brief flashes of fast facts. Wolff captures the chaotic tempo

of the stormy meltdown of this administration. It's a mesmerizing, mysterious, and yet very public story.

Wolff's book was to cover just the first 100 days of the Trump presidency, but he says, "events barreled on without natural pause for more than two hundred days" until John Kelly became chief of staff and Trump's Chief Strategist Steve Bannon departed, ousted because Trump felt threatened by media portrayals that Bannon was really running things.

Wolff claims that the Russian collusion coverup might be the 21st Century version of Watergate. To illustrate, Trump's once close advisor Bannon called meetings by the president's son and staff with the Russians "treasonous."

This administration that was once just head-spinning confusion and scandal now has turned to a dizzying display of delusional GOP talking heads, such as Sanders, Conway, Spicer and others who somehow perform daring jujutsu-like linguistic alt-facts to keep their administration from utter implosion.

What's amazing is that this spectacle is not only common knowledge, but daily life of staff under Trump.

Beyond the Russian connection, Trump has an insatiable Twitter habit, his many affairs percolating, his utter fascination with dictators, top jobs without security clearances for his family, his business affairs worldwide, his taxes unreported. It never ends!

What's most surprising to me is that Trump and his campaign never expected to have a realistic prospect to capture the White House. Writes Wolff, "The unspoken agreement among them: not only would Donald Trump not be president, he should probably not be. Conveniently, the former conviction meant nobody had to deal with the latter issue."

Fox News Executive Roger Ailes once told Trump that if you wanted a career in TV, run for president.

Trump wanted more than just a career in television; he also wanted his own network and a more powerful brand. One week before the election, he was surely ready to fail: "I don't think about losing because it isn't losing. We've totally won." And he had a ready-made excuse anyway. If he loses, well, "it was rigged."

This all makes utter sense! He was not prepared because didn't care. And yet, now he finds himself where he swears he was supposed to be the whole time.

Wolff, for example, notes that former campaign advisor Sam Nunberg tried to school Trump early in the campaign about the Constitution. "I got as far as the Fourth Amendment before his finger is pulling down on his lip and his eyes are rolling back in his head."

Furthermore, Wolff says Trump has no interest in conducting foreign policy or even devising legislation. Instead his time is spent watching himself on the ever-present television. Likewise, Wolff claims, journalists and news anchors exhibited an unhealthy reciprocal obsession.

I was rather concerned when reviewers pointed out that Wolff's narrative was rather academically under-resourced; however, with some rather small errors, Wolff with his West Wing access gives readers riveting detail as if you were actually there.

As Joe Scarborough describes the book: "The spirit of it is completely true."

In response, Trump tweeted: "Michael Wolff is a total loser who made up stories in order to sell this really boring and untruthful book. He used Sloppy Steve Bannon, who cried when he got fired and begged for his job. Now Sloppy Steve has been dumped like a dog by almost everyone. Too bad!"

Interestingly enough, Newsweek ran a story headlined "Bannon and Trump Had a Love Story for the Ages Before Breakup." So, Trump was either lying about his once trusted adviser before *Fire and Fury* came out or thereafter.

Trump, who ranges from "Half-

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truth" to "Pants on Fire" 88% of the time according to politifact.com, makes me think Wolf's account has even more veracity.

I recommend Wolff's book, which is a combination of the late-night comedian exaggeration and news reporter accuracy and restraint.

Wolff at least gives us space to speculate in public about what is "truth" about our current reality, because it is certainly stranger than fiction in this White House. *John Wood is an associate professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma.*

# Boorish Or Criminal?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

take a joke?” and “Women have no sense of humor.”

The fact that I was a greenhorn in the job undoubtedly partly explained the behavior of my fellow employees—it’s traditional at many workplaces to “give the new guy or gal a hard time,” part of the process of “welcoming” newbies. I’m not a fan of that practice for either men or women, since beginning a new job is fraught with plenty of anxiety without being teased by one’s new cohorts, too. But having to be the only female in a basically male world adds even more discomfort and tension.

## Pruitt

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

ministration rollback attempts being enacted by the EPA under Pruitt. You may view this database here: <http://environment.law.harvard.edu/policy-initiative/regulatory-rollback-tracker/>

Lastly, we must consider morals and ethics, given the power invested in the person who leads the Environmental Protection Agency.

Sadly, once again, Pruitt chose the path of corruption rather than the path to a higher ground. He hired a personal friend, Albert Kelly, who had just been

It’s too early to tell whether the new openness about powerful-male behavior will have lasting results in workplaces and other interactions between the sexes. Even if changes do happen in offices and film studios, I doubt they’ll filter down any time soon to help waitresses and cleaning women. But it’s a start.

Now we just need to recognize differences between bad-boy antics and the truly reprehensible, and to deal with each appropriately.

*Marion Hill lives in Durant.*

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banned from the banking industry for life due to unethical and illegal actions, to oversee one of the largest single pots of federal money in the U.S. government.

Pruitt supported Trump’s budget proposal to cut spending on cleaning up Superfund sites by \$330 million.

Cuts to the Superfund program will impede EPA work, grants and partnerships to clean up contamination in areas like the Tar Creek Superfund site in Ottawa County. Prior to EPA’s cleanup of the former lead and zinc mining area, it found that 35% of children in the area had elevated levels of lead in their bloodstream.

While Pruitt was state attorney general, the Lead-Impacted Communities Relocation Assistance Trust was established to help residents in the Tar Creek Superfund site relocate away from the contaminated towns of Picher and Cardin.

As a part of the trust, a contract was made with CWF Enterprises to demolish homes within the Superfund site and remove debris from the area. When investigated by Oklahoma auditors, Pruitt declined to file charges and took the unusual step in 2015 of prohibiting the auditor’s office from releasing it to the public.

The state auditor has said publicly that wrongdoing related to the contract cost taxpayers \$3 million.

Scott Pruitt isn’t looking out for Oklahoma’s best interests, and he never has. He is a stereotypical politician putting the health of our children and families at risk because he only cares about himself and his special interest donors.

Apparently, Pruitt failed to study Immanuel Kant during those college years in Kentucky. I would urge him to spend some time getting to know the concept of the “Categorical Imperative,” in hopes that he may come to redeem himself as a human fit for duty.

*Johnson Bridgwater is director of the Oklahoma Chapter of the Sierra Club.*

# Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

A more effective Legislature – one less fractured, prone to hunkering down in ideological silos – isn't going to be created without a more engaged voting public. And that isn't likely unless the once-a-decade redistricting process – historically controlled by the party in power – is de-politicized as much as possible.

A possible solution is to create an independent commission to draw legislative boundaries after each Census – something 13 states already have done, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

A new group, Represent Oklahoma, wants to do the same thing here, via an initiative petition drive that will ask voters to replace legislative control of redistricting with a non-partisan independent commission. It originally hoped to secure enough signatures to get it on the ballot this year, but time is short.

Even if it can't get on the ballot until 2020, an independent commission, if approved by voters, could be in place by 2021 when legislative boundaries are updated after the next Census.

As former U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn once put it, voters need to choose their politicians, not politicians choose their voters.

## Progressives

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

a message to incumbents that if they fail to act as progressives, there's consequences for them electorally."

The wave of progressive primary challenges by candidates like Newman and Ocasio-Cortez come as Democratic voters are increasingly dissatisfied with the party's leadership.

According to a Harvard-Harris poll conducted last October, 52% of Democrats think "movements within the Democratic Party to take it even further to the left and oppose the current Democratic leaders."

Suraj Patel, who is challenging Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-NY, told Politico that the progressive wave now taking shape is largely a result the Democratic leadership's failure to respond to the needs of the party's constituents.

"This is a remarkably aware, awakened, active new generation looking at politics as not an option anymore but an obligation. I looked around and I saw a Democratic Party not doing much at all to welcome that group to the fold," Patel said. "I refuse to wait my turn in an establishment that doesn't make sure that people are competing. That's one of the things the Democrats need to grapple with."

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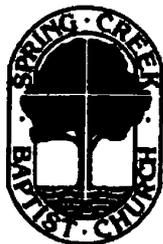
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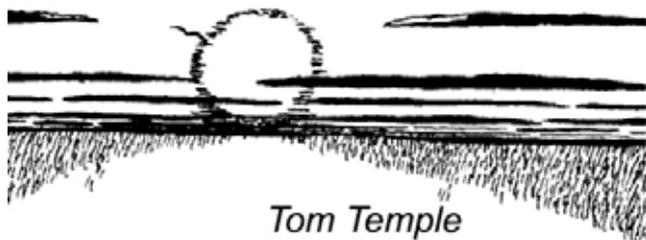


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# Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

**Laurel:** To veteran Tulsa World state Capitol bureau chief Barbara Hoberock, selected for induction this spring into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. A terrific reporter and even better person.

Gov. Mary Fallin's longtime fiscal guru, Preston Doerflinger, resigns as interim state Health Department director after 2012 allegations of domestic violence become public. Doerflinger and GOP legislative leaders clashed repeatedly.

**Dart:** To Rep. Chuck Strohm, R-Jenks, crafting new rule that effectively blocks non-Christian clergy from serving as House chaplains. He mostly ducked interfaith leaders on OK Conference of Churches day at the Capitol.

Keep an eye on carbon-controlled legislative leaders. They thwart efforts to repeal GPT and income tax cuts, but continue to covet Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust and Land Office golden eggs.

Our friend Dean Painter shares a storefront message board's alert: "Viagra shipment stolen. Cops looking for gang of hardened criminals."

**Dart:** To U.S. District Judge Stephen Friot, offering to reduce a drug-abusing, counterfeit check-writing woman's sentence if she agreed to be sterilized. It's not "voluntary" if your liberty depends on it.

Whatever happened to notion of good stewardship? An estimated 11.1 billion plastic items litter coral reefs across the Asia-Pacific region. – Time

Legislative efforts to neuter impact of June's medical marijuana vote are fueled by turf-protecting special interests – law enforcement, prosecutors and Big Pharma, each fearing lost revenue if it is legalized.

Wow! 20.8 million Rx painkillers were shipped from out-of-state drug companies to two pharmacies in a West Virginia town of about 3,000 between 2006-16. Prescribed pot is far better alternative to opioids.

For the record: The typical American now gets 18 more minutes of weeknight shut-eye than in 2003 – a nightly average of eight hours. – Time

# Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

back to the 2008 and 2012 “Obama Era” level;

f] the full onerous effect of both the “so-called” middle class tax cut and the paucity of affordable health care are clearly laid at the perpetrators doorstep;

g] steadily changing demographics elevating “people of color” to majority status;

h] the Puerto Rico hurricane debacle motivating Puerto Ricans all over the U.S. to get organized against this racist president and his minions;

i] descendants of all voters from “shithole countries” mobilized similarly to Puerto Ricans;

j] never mind the NRA, Koch Brothers, etc. “Highly Motivated Voters” can, and will, overrule “Big Money.”

Color me hopeful!

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

All of this talk about “legal/illegal,” “but it is the law!” and “respect our laws!” reminds me of an exercise I did with my speech students when I was trying to create a climate of tolerance in the classroom.

I had the students grab a sheet of paper and make a big paperwad and then create a circle around me with their eyes shut, their hands, with the paperwads, in the air. Their backs were to the center of the circle and I, in the center of the circle, also had my eyes closed.

I said, “If you have ever driven a car under the influence of any substance, drop your hand.” I would hear lots of giggles because they were college students, after all.

I continued through the litany: if you have ever driven over the speed limit, drop your hand; if you have ever smoked pot or taken a friend’s pain pill for a bad headache; if you have ever stolen anything, even change out of your mom’s purse; if you have ever bought cigarettes under the age of 18; if you have ever told a lie to escape punishment; if you have ever copied your friend’s homework; if you have ever had sex with anyone to whom you are not legally married ... drop your hand! The questions could go on and on, of course.

Finally, I would say, “now turn around and let me have it with those paperwads!” and, of course, I never, not once, got pelted with paperwads because no one – no one – lives by the rules all the time.

So, when people who steal and call it “a good busi-



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of their choice. —Dwight D. Eisenhower*

ness decision" ... or run me off the road when I am driving the speed limit but justify it because they are in a hurry ... or sexually harass the pretty young thing at the office and call it "flirting" ... or cheat on a test cause they just didn't have time to study ... complain about people coming to America "illegally," I just want to ask if some laws are more legal than others?

Is there a hierarchy in the law books? Is it OK to allow a foreign power to influence an election, but not OK to try to ensure a better life for my family? Is your "bad" worse than my "bad"?

As Jesus said, "he/she who is without sin, cast the first stone [paperwad]."

Ruth Askew Brelsford  
Red Oak

Editor, The Observer:

Elon Musk and NASA persist in efforts toward sending people to Mars. Instead, precedence must be given to prospects for sustainability on earth.

Until nations agree that our survival demands harmony with nature and cooperation instead of competition, toying with interplanetary space travel is madness.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

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

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahoma makes the big time!

We are not longer just a national disgrace; we rose, or sank, to the international level!

On page 27 of the "Economist" weekly news magazine [Feb. 3-9 issue] is an article titled "Five into four," and subtitled "What happens when a state cannot afford to educate its pupils."

Read it and weep. Our embarrassment should know no bounds.

Charles Wende  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Given just one question to ask a person running for office, what should it be?

Not what qualifies you for the job?

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Not what makes you worthy of admission to Heaven's holy gates?

Asked for this question, Oklahoma's longest serving state legislator [52 years], the late Sen. Gene Stipe, said, "Can you treat the rich and poor just the same? That is awfully hard to do because the poor have so little to commend them?"

On the Social Security tax, Donald Trump and Oklahoma's congressional delegation chickened out answering Stipe's question.

The po folks pay Social Security tax on all of their income.

But not Donald Trump.

The maximum earnings of the rich subject to the Social Security tax is \$128,700.

They are cheating us, grandmas, on our Social Security.

If the rich paid this tax on all of their income, it would give us a well-deserved \$200 a month raise. We have a very weak alumni association. Most of the members are six feet under.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

As quickly as things are happening now it is nearly impossible to write a letter about Trump and have it be contemporary by the time it is published - but here goes.

Taking a card from Trump's deck of monikers to hang on people who he doesn't particularly care for, here's the best I can come up with: Dead Beat Donnie Boy. Anyone with an improvement please have at it. My thought has been that the only way to fix our government would be to dismantle it and start all over again. But that would only cause more problems. Enter D-B-D.

He is "destroying" the government, the good along with the bad and ugly [come to think of it is mostly the good]. It is encouraging to hear more people using the words Trump and dictator in the same sentence. Hopefully the people with the horsepower to prevent him from completing his goals along those lines will do so before it's too late.

Now he has come up with a real doozy: a military parade down Constitution Ave. in his honor. All this under the guise of love and respect for the military. He wants the military to pay homage to HIM, the military he was able to avoid. If he is successful in this endeavor that will put the US of A about a step shy of officially becoming a Third World country and a place for a dictator [guess who?] to take over.

This guy is dangerous. That parade will put us in the same classification as North Korea, China and Russia. [Any common ground there?]

All of us gun nuts will have to prepare to have our guns confiscated at that point.

Tom Ellis  
Okeene

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