

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Deja Vu All Over Again

*Anxious Republicans Dust Off God, Guns And Gays
Playbook In Bid To Save Statehouse Supermajority*



COVER STORY

Begins on page 6.

AFTER THE WALKOUT

The fight for public education shifts from the Capitol to the ballot box. See pages 10-20.

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Marvin Chiles

We at The Observer lost a dear friend – and Oklahoma lost an indefatigable champion of justice – with the death of Marvin Chiles.

Marvin was perhaps best known for his interfaith work, not only helping his beloved wife Mary Ellen establish the Interfaith Alliance of Oklahoma, but also serving on the national Interfaith Alliance board for many years.

He was a leader in United Methodist affairs and a faithful member of The Observer's advisory board for more than a decade, always encouraging, always thinking about ways we could help create a better, more informed Oklahoma.

Marvin was tough-minded and clear-eyed, a true son of the rural west Kansas plains. But he also was as tender-hearted and open-minded as you could ever meet – forever thinking first about others, not himself.

As our mutual friend, Oklahoma City University Professor Mark Y.A. Davies, put it, "Marvin was a beautiful, decent, and good person who truly did justice, expressed loving kindness, and walked humbly with God. It was extra difficult losing such a soul from this world especially when we see so much of the opposite in the world around us. If all the persons in the world were like Marvin, I would be much more hopeful about the future."

It was appropriate that Dylan Thomas' masterful *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night* was recited at Marvin's memorial service. He raged against the dying of the light. He never wavered nor tired of fighting for what he believed: Fairness. Justice. Goodness.

A life well lived.

What Ethics?

It is a sad fact that legislative leaders rarely forgo an opportunity to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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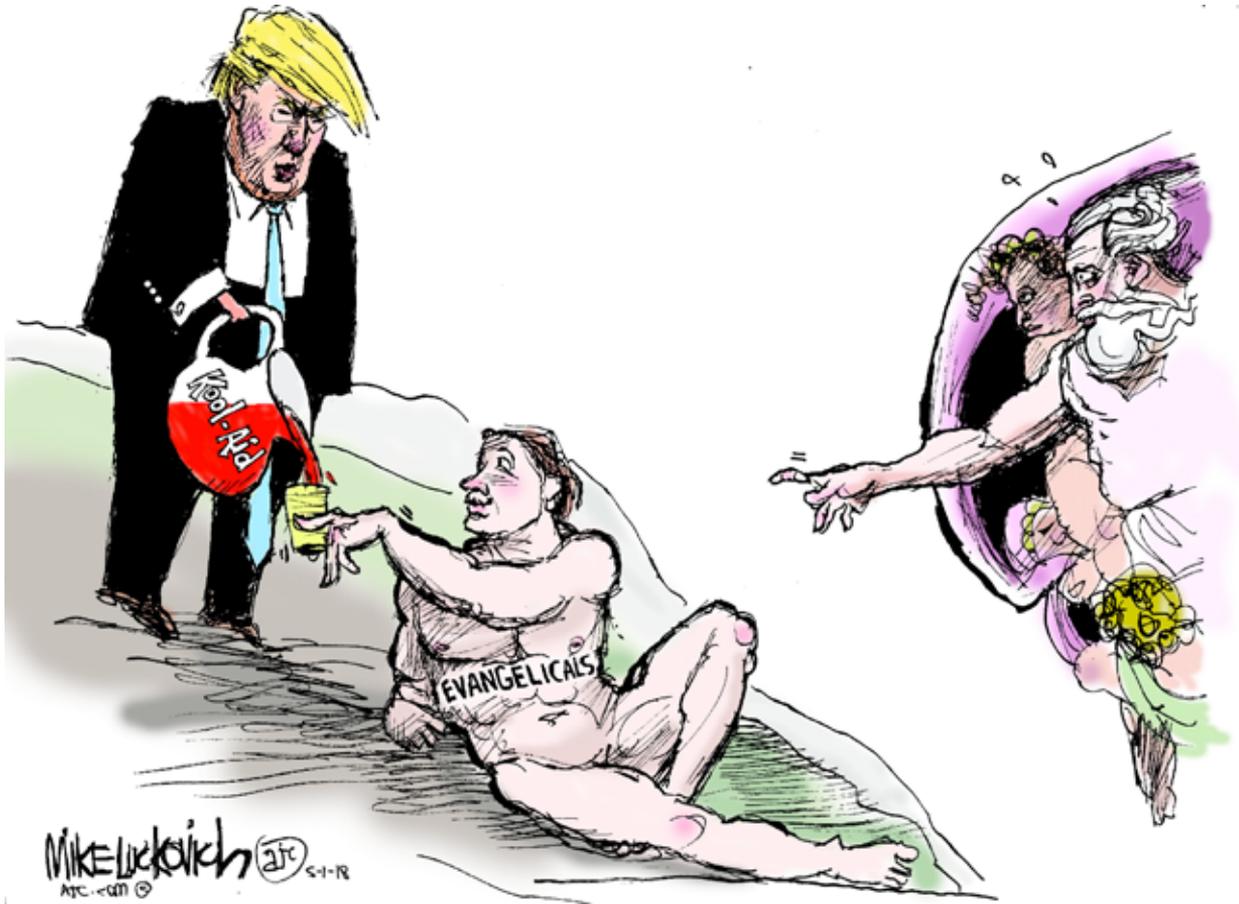
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Observerscope



Dart: To Republican candidate Gary Richardson, using sportscaster Bob Barry Jr.'s tragic death in TV ads to inflame anti-immigrant hate. He puts the goober in gubernatorial.

Ignore the sugar-coating. The GOP Legislature's so-called criminal justice reform kowtowed to prosecutors and the prison industrial complex. The will of the voters was thwarted.

Laurel: To Tulsa banker, oilman and philanthropist George Kaiser, who continues to promote higher taxes to fund vital state services. Unlike too many others in the 1%, he knows we all do better when we all do better.

The State Chamber's OK2030 blueprint is a plutocrat's wet dream. All 10 points are aimed at shifting more power from the 99% to the 1%, including privatizing public ed.

Dart: To House Speaker Charles McCall, assembling a "special" conference committee to ensure passage of anti-LGBTQ legislation. Can you spell k-n-u-c-k-l-e d-r-a-g-g-e-r?

We mourn the passing of John Raley, war hero, federal prosecutor and, for our money, the best member ever of the Oklahoma Ethics Commission. He was fearless standing up to special interest chicanery.

Laurel: To Western Heights School Board member and Observer contributor Linda James Farley, the lone vote against the superintendent's scheme to limit the teacher walkout to one day.

Apollo 10 astronaut Tom Stafford endorsed loose cannon Gary Richardson in the GOP gubernatorial primary. Nothing more painful than a state hero besmirching his legacy.

Dart: To Sen. Mark Allen, R-Spiro, authoring legislation aimed at loosening standards for hauling hazardous materials – a direct benefit to his oilfield services company. At press time, this wooly booger appeared dead.

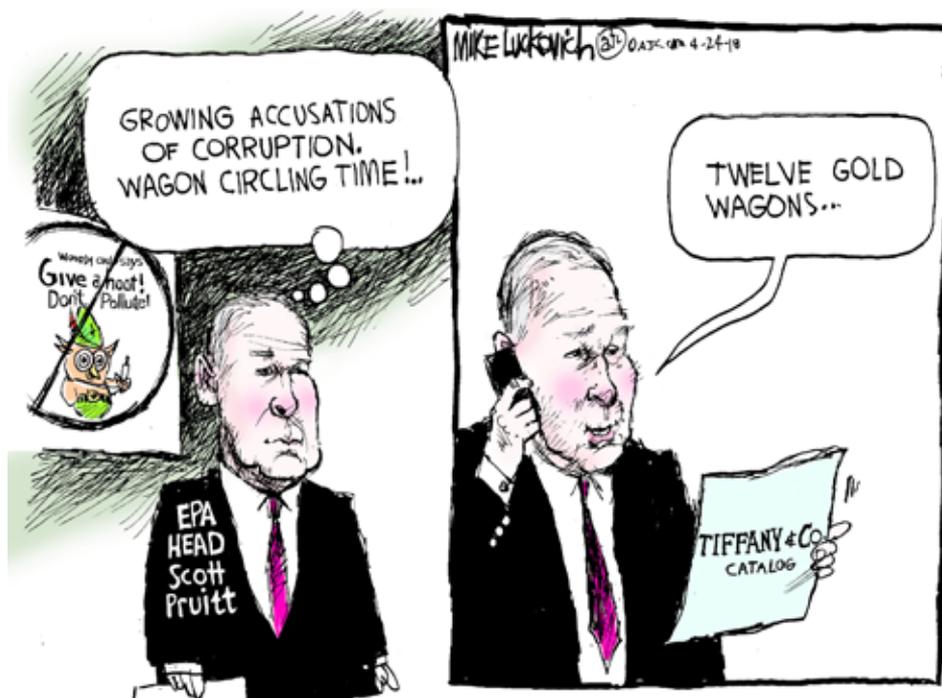
Join us May 10 for Newsmakers: Term-limited Rep. Scott Inman, longtime House Democratic leader, is special guest to discuss midterms and 2018 session. See page 13 for details.

Good news: Sen. Anastasia Pittman's reign of error is coming to a term-limited end. **Bad news:** She's seeking Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor.

Any doubt the sleeping giant hath awakened? Nearly 800 candidates filed for state office this year – far surpassing the previous high-water mark of 594 in 2000. Now it's up to voters to vet the wannabes.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:
 Expensive “Carte Blanche” travel
 must be nice
 Overwhelming security to suffice
 By raping the environment
 Pruitt enjoys the entitlement
 With no restriction on price
 Tom Birbilis
 Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:
 In the wake of Oklahoma public
 school teachers’ massive demon-
 stration for better funding, it oc-
 curs to this writer that current
 elected officials be researched to
 identify the schools attended by all
 of their progeny, most especially
 their children and grand children.
 This information would be im-
 mensely valuable to voters who’d
 like to know the “stake” each of-
 ficial might have in the realm of
 funding public education. That
 same research ought be done on
 all candidates running for office in
 2018.

Earning more than the average
 Oklahoman, state officials surely
 make certain that their progeny
 benefit from a well funded school,
 one which hires only exceptional

teachers to teach in his/her re-
 spective field. Excellent facili-
 ties, equipment and books are the
 norm as are field trips, theater and
 art. In other words, NOT a public
 school in Oklahoma.

In sum, such information would
 be very valuable to all voters who’d
 like to know whether the elected
 person or candidate actually “has
 a dog in this fight!”

Frank Silovsky
 Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:
 There is a reason that as many
 as 50,000 Oklahoma public school
 teachers left their classrooms
 each day to go to the Capitol for
 two weeks this spring. Who could
 blame them [or us] for being fed
 up?

We waited at least two years for
 our elected leaders to find the
 revenue needed to fund financial
 crises in education, health care,
 corrections and other essential
 services that led to 40% cuts in
 some state agencies. In 2017, the
 Legislature was in regular and
 special session – and we paid rural
 legislators’ daily per diem expens-

es – for the whole year without
 measurable success.

After the Step Up proposal
 failed, legislators rushed to pass
 a teacher pay raise on the eve of
 the teacher walk out, thinking that
 teachers were only advocating for
 themselves and would just stay
 home. Wrong!

The Oklahoma Education Asso-
 ciation’s budget proposal includ-
 ed state employees and proposed
 restoring the earned income tax
 credit that helps poor, working
 families, which was repealed two
 years ago by the state Legislature.
 Teachers do care about more than
 themselves.

The unions provide a way of
 standing together against financial
 exploitation and the educational
 and other crises in Oklahoma.

The teachers came united to the
 Capitol primarily to advocate for
 cost of living pay raises and res-
 toration of \$170 million or 28.2%
 in state aid funding cuts since
 2008, according to financial data
 from Oklahoma Policy Institute.
 These cuts led to larger classes,
 fewer courses, outdated textbooks
 and unqualified, uncertified “al-
 ternative” people filling in at our
 schools because real teachers are
 being forced to leave the profes-
 sion in order to provide for their
 families.

The Oklahoma Legislature did
 appropriate \$50 million in new
 funding this year, in addition to
 funding for teacher and support
 staff salary increases. However,
 these funds are less than one-
 third of the \$170 million cut from
 the education budget since 2008,
 not counting increased enrollment
 and higher cost of utility bills, in-
 surance and other expenses.

And about those pay raises ...
 Initially, the Legislature approved
 \$543.3 million in total new fund-
 ing for teacher, state employee and
 support staff pay raises, flexible
 benefits and school operations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Let The Spinning Begin

For the state's elected powers that be, this has been the session from hell, normal legislative rhythms disrupted by throngs of in-your-face constituents demanding better funding for vital state services, especially public schools.

And the citizen activists keep coming. Not in as large numbers as during the two-week teacher walk-out. But they still knock daily on Capitol doors, hoping to keep the heat on lawmakers who coughed up teacher and state employee pay raises but little else.

Thus, it's hardly surprising that legislative leaders want to get out of town ASAP – perhaps as soon as May 4, three weeks before the session's constitutionally-mandated adjournment.

There are clear incentives for an early exit.

First, lawmakers are tired. Between regular and special sessions, they've spent far more time than usual in Oklahoma City the last 15 months. Getting hourly earfuls from unhappy constituents takes the fun out of special interest-financed dinners and Thunder tickets.

Second, the Legislature itself becomes a less obvious target when its members are scattered statewide, across 149 districts, as opposed to assembled in a single locale, beneath the dome at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.

Out of sight, out of mind?

As a rule, lawmakers relish the spotlight when snipping ribbons at bridge openings, less so when potential voters come to believe they're a lower priority than the state's biggest checkbooks.

That's why this election year is especially fraught for lawmakers clinging to power.

In calling off the teacher walkout, the Oklahoma Education Association and other pro-public school forces vowed to keep the pressure on – in effect, shifting the focus from primarily knocking Capitol doors to knocking household doors behind which are potential voters whose ballots could remake the state's political landscape.

This isn't Republican vs. Democrat or conservative vs. liberal. It's about wiser deployment of Oklahoma's precious tax dollars.

Most Sooners know the state has been careening down the wrong track. They know teachers are fleeing to better-paying positions in neighboring states and classrooms are overcrowded. They know we lock up more folks than any other state and provide ever-fewer resources to deal with the root causes, including mental health and substance abuse treatment. They also know we rank near the bottom nationally in nearly every socio-economic index, too many of our neighbors without access to basic health care that could prevent expensive medical calamities and save lives.

In effect, teachers, state workers and those who view vital state services as investments in a brighter future must take civics from classrooms into homes across Oklahoma this election year.

A core lesson: there is a price to be paid for the freedoms and economic opportunities we enjoy, but that so many others across the world do not. It is the investment of our time, the requirement we educate ourselves on issues and candidates and that we hold our elected leaders accountable.

The recent walkout underscores the power of civic engagement. All it took was teachers setting a strike date for long gridlocked lawmakers to secure the first supermajority vote for a tax increase since SQ 640 was enacted more than a quarter century ago.

Moreover, the record number of candidate filings suggests educators and their allies were wise to shift their focus to the ballot box, given legislative leadership's refusal to do anything more this session to fund vital state services.

Instead, statehouse poobahs crowed about approving a budget that is \$749 million more than last year, which sounds impressive ... until you consider it did nothing meaningfully to address the 30%-plus cuts imposed this decade on many state agencies.

It is true teachers, school support personnel and state employees were given sorely needed pay raises, but that does not alter the fact this is a standstill budget. Period.

No wonder so many lawmakers wanted to get out of OKC and start their re-election spinning early.

Back To The Future

GOP Gambles 'God, Guns And Gays' Strategy Will Again Save The Day

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

When in doubt and fear, state Republicans turn to the Good Book.

No, not *that* book.

What they devour for comfort and guidance is Holy GOP scripture, a playbook with a three-point strategy for electoral success: God, guns and gays.

It's been a staple of Republican strategy for nearly four decades in Oklahoma and it's hardly surprising that is where GOP leaders turned for wisdom in the midst of this season of political discontent.

In the wake of the two-week teacher walkout, with a record number of candidate filings and with scant time left in the regular session, Republicans took steps to minimize, as much as possible, the strong head winds they face in the 2018 mid-term elections.

The threatened blowback is hardly enough, of course, to flip legislative control in arguably the nation's reddest state.

But it is enough to put the governorship in play – as well as enough statehouse seats to yield a veto-proof minority.

Enough, in other words, to break the corporatist GOP hammerlock on the legislative agenda.

So legislative leaders ramped up the God, guns and

gays agenda they had set aside when they thought teacher and state employee pay raises would dissuade the angry throngs from descending on the Capitol.

They turned to God by resurrecting a proposal to return the Ten Commandments monument to the Capitol grounds.

They attacked the LGBTQ and non-Christian communities with a measure that would allow faith-based groups to discriminate in adoption decision-making, even if the agencies received tax dollars.

And they revived a so-called constitutional carry measure that, in effect, would let anyone, anywhere, at almost any time – there are some exceptions – carry a firearm.

A trifecta of hot-button issues, designed to rev up their base and give second thoughts to loosely-affiliated Republican voters who might be weighing, in the aftermath of the walkout, whether to switch sides in the mid-terms.

Just for good measure, Attorney General Mike Hunter joined a lawsuit with 16 other state attorneys general, fighting an atheist group's challenge to a federal parsonage allowance for religious leaders.

All three legislative measures were alive at press time, just days before a planned May 4 adjournment – three weeks ahead of the constitutionally mandated deadline.

Legislative leaders resurrected these bills because history suggests it's a winning strategy. Given that winning campaign blueprints come and go – and no one is ever certain when they could mysteriously go – it's something of a gamble.

It is true that teachers, for example, have voted in the 70% range for Republicans in recent years, even though the GOP-controlled statehouse inflicted the nation's deepest cuts on public education – 28%-plus since 2007 – and refused to increase salaries until teachers threatened to walk out this year.

Many teachers with whom I've visited in recent years concede they probably voted against their self-interest. But nearly every one used similar language in explaining: "I can't be with the Democrats on the social issues."

This reflects the power of evangelical pulpits across Oklahoma and pervasiveness of Fox News, spreading



the message Christians cannot be Democrats.

Fortunately, the two-week teacher walkout opened educators' eyes to what is happening to them at the Capitol. Before the walkout, many told me their local, Republican representative "says he's for me."

Once they spent days at the Capitol, watching a GOP-dominated Legislature refuse to do anything more to help reduce class sizes and hire more teachers, their attitudes changed.

Each of the three measures listed above is odious in its own way – and, for those paying attention, reflects the moral and political bankruptcy of current Capitol leadership that will do or say almost anything to retain power.

The worst, though, is SB 1140, OKC Sen. Greg Treat's and Bartlesville Rep. Travis Dunlap's measure that would allow so-called faith-based adoption agencies to discriminate.

In recent years, the Oklahoma Legislature enacted no fewer than 25 clearly unconstitutional measures that courts ultimately tossed – costing the taxpayers millions to defend measures passed primarily to whip up the base.

SB 1140 could join the statute rogue's gallery, unless clear-eyed lawmakers had the courage in the session's waning hours to stop the shenanigans – which included House Speaker Charles McCall creating a special, one-time conference committee to get the bill off high center.

As Freedom Oklahoma's Executive Director Troy Stevenson put it, "If discrimination becomes the law of the land, we will be in court before the ink dries on the bill."

"Make no mistake: this bill is a bigoted attempt to keep Oklahoma's most vulnerable youth out of loving and committed homes. SB 1140 is unconstitutional, discriminatory, and down right cruel to children desperately in search of families. Its authors should be ashamed of their bias."

The Ten Commandments' proposal is pure demagoguery, authored by two of the Legislature's wingiest nuts: Sallisaw Rep. John Bennett and Broken Bow Sen. Joseph Silk – both of whom have a fixation on "others" among us.

But it could be costly demagoguery for the taxpayers who've already paid to have the matter resolved by the courts – they affirmed the Oklahoma Constitution's strict church-state separation plank, a provision that voters heartily re-affirmed in a statewide referendum two years ago.

Constitutional carry gives business leaders and sober thinkers statewide heartburn. But it's a sop to the



Thou Shall Not Put False Gods Before Me

single issue, 2nd Amendment crowd that has been trained to fear that jack-booted federal thugs are coming for their guns.

All three energize critical segments of a GOP base whose turnout in November may well determine whether Democrats can retake the governorship after Republican Gov. Mary Fallin's eight-year misadventure – one that leaves her disapproval rating among GOP voters at a calamitous 63%.

Will this be enough to blunt an energized coalition of public education, mental health, state employee and criminal justice reform activists – just to name a few determined to produce a ballot revolution this November?

Stay tuned. It's likely to be a fascinating – and potentially bumpy – six months ahead.



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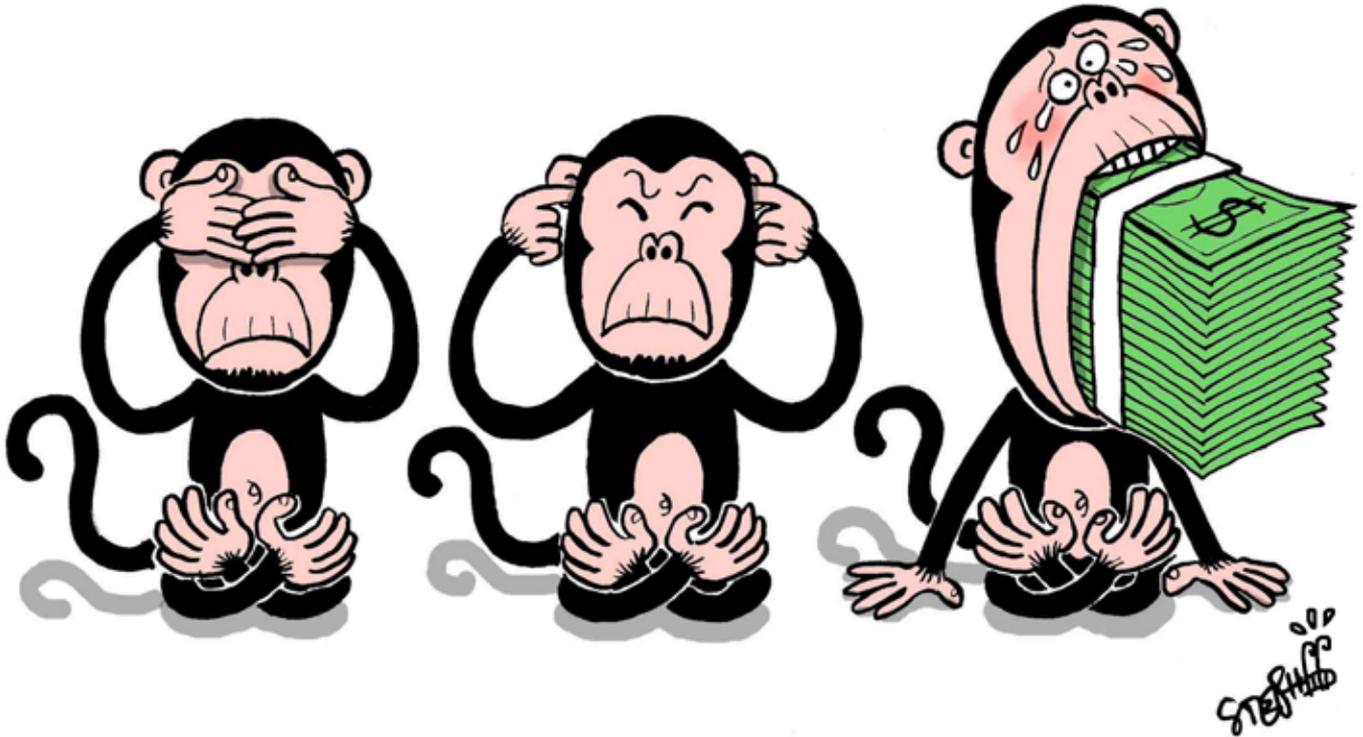
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Time + Talk - Not Trying = Not Much



Oklahoma's Lost Decade

BY CAL HOBSON

Let's just cut to the chase. Oklahoma politics of the last year, similar to the seven or so before it, has been another roller coaster of both good and bad, hope and despair, highs and lows.

Unfortunately, bad dominated good which means, as you should expect, I have to discuss and cuss our suddenly pro-education Legislature. Notwithstanding that new-found religion, it takes a lot of gall from these guys and gals to brag about a \$7.6 billion dollar budget that leaves in place most of the purposeful and painful devastation dumped by them on their constituents over the last decade.

But brag they do. Partial mea culpa funding increase for public schools, make up money for Medicaid providers, a teacher pay raise for the first in at least 10 years, a dollop to lock up more, and a bit o' green here and there primarily for law and order types like elected district attorneys. Got to keep those 27 G-Men in the black even while mental health services have been slowly starved, then strangled to death.

Additionally, lawmakers are really proud – busting their buttons actually – for potentially adjourning

three weeks before ordered to by the Constitution. But put that abbreviated schedule in context with the fact this wild and crazy bunch, over the last 16 months, has:

Struggled through two regular sessions, two special sessions, dozens of wasted night confabs, a few weekend wingdings, been admonished continually by the Supreme Court, re-elected the same spineless speaker of the House, eye-averted thousands of teacher glances because they were too busy to “see them” or, as we say in the country ...even just visit.

And worst of all YOU got to pay for all this ineptitude and callousness.

Oh, and over the same dismal year, we've also watched a parade of self-proclaimed God-fearing, family-loving do-gooders forced to resign for, let's just say, not always doing good. Girlfriends cuddled and more; slush funds funneled; campaign accounts squandered or invested at Victoria's Secret; and a little – actually a lot – molesting of the opposite sex, and in one case, the same sex.

Our Capitol gang did find time to throw together a near meaningless packet of proposals for Gov. Mary

Fall in to sign in the name of criminal justice reform. But thinking no one was watching, our solons also shot through, at the last minute and without committee consideration, other legislation that increases incarceration for years and decades.

Speaking of shooting, even more of that can now be done in Oklahoma by anyone age 21 or older, while possessing any weapon regardless of clip size, and almost anywhere, including on YOUR property, without permission or permit to carry and devoid of ANY training or background investigation. For this insanity you can thank, or not, freshman Rep. Jeff Coody, a Republican from Grandfield who authored this National Rifle Association butt-kissing nightmare. Fortunately, Wild West Jeff has drawn several opponents so hopefully after November he'll have more time down in remote Tillman County to caress his first love. No not her. His AR-15.

Simultaneously, and not to be outdone by the goofballs at the Capitol, a plethora of current or wannabe politicians proclaimed their interest in replacing Miscast Mary as the next governor. Without the slightest blush, they promise to be just as bad as the incumbent they want to replace. Among the elephant herd Very Light Gov Lamb, Business Stiff Stitt, Richie Richardson and Fraudulent Fisher [who seeks to end all abortions in Oklahoma] swore on their Bibles and filing papers they can't even spell T-A-X or S-P-E-N-

D while Mayor Mick said in a former life he could if spent mostly in downtown Oklahoma City. The only honest rube in the bunch is straight arrow Auditor Gary Jones, who has about as much chance of being governor as Custer was of being saluted at Little Big Horn instead of being scalped.

As for the Democrats, longtime senator and pot-promoter Connie Johnson as well as a gentleman with the jingled name of E-D- MOND- SON are metaphorically keeping their powder dry and hopes "high" for the fall.

Oops. I'm running out of space in The Observer for this column and I haven't even mentioned any of the good and great stuff done by the Republican Legislature or Queen Mary this past session.

Let's see. Hmm. What about? No. Let me ponder. ?????????????? &#%\$)@!!

I give up. Can't think of a thing, and I'm not the only one.

At a recent Republican governor's debate at the OKC Museum of Art, Tulsa stud Stiff Stitt, father of six and counting, opined that the best thing the Gov had done in EIGHT YEARS was to remove her daughter's trailer from the mansion grounds.

And some people think I'm mean to the Queen. *Cal Hobson, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore.*

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SHIFTING FOCUS

*The Fight For Oklahoma Schools Will Now Play Out
At Ballot Box, Where Dr. No Has Mischief In Mind*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

For most of the last two decades, former U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn was the face of an ascendant Republican Party in Oklahoma. Now he could become its worst nightmare.

Dr. No's vocal support for a veto referendum aimed at nullifying the Legislature's \$400 million funding package for teacher and state employee pay raises is feeding a prairie fire that threatens the GOP's state-house supermajority.

Republicans scrambling to protect as many seats as possible and retain the governorship hoped the two-week teacher walkout would fade in voters' minds over the six-month journey to the general election.

But Coburn's oft-blistering rhetoric, coupled with a petition drive to get the referendum on the ballot, is the gift that keeps on giving to those dreaming of a sea change at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.

If the 41,242 signatures are secured and if the first veto referendum since 1970 appears on the statewide ballot in November, there will be extra motivation for

voters to register their displeasure with the GOP's management of state affairs.

And that's not all: Legislative leaders risk throwing gasoline on the fire if they allow SJR 70 to be sent to the ballot – asking voters to loosen restrictions on how school districts deploy ad valorem tax revenue.

The referendum is sold as giving local boards flexibility to spend on operations, as well as buildings. But it's really a back-door consolidation scheme that threatens poor, often rural districts already struggling to maintain operations and update school facilities.

Coburn. Veto referendum. SJR 70. Those ingredients would seem more than enough to ensure teachers and education backers remain engaged through November. Add to that similarly engaged advocates for other vital state services, such as mental health care, and you have a recipe for higher than normal voter turnout – hardly a comforting thought for the status quo.

After The Walkout

Moreover, the discontent has festered long enough that structures are now in place to help organize and turn out those who believe Oklahoma is on the wrong path.

It's not just the Oklahoma Education Association and American Federation of Teachers. It's also groups like Pastors for Oklahoma Kids, Let's Fix This and Restore Oklahoma Now, the group launched by the Oklahoma Energy Producers Alliance.

Significantly, Restore Oklahoma Now isn't going away, despite withdrawing its petition aimed at restoring the gross production tax to seven percent. Rather, it will focus its considerable financial resources on legislative races and in opposition to any veto referendum.

As the group's executive director, Mickey Thompson, put it, "We will be at the forefront of any effort to defeat a move to renege on the school/teacher funding package."

There are troubling signs, however, for what should be an organized effort. Some OEA members, displeased the walkout was called off after two weeks, have taken aim at the organization's current leadership – particularly President Alicia Priest, Vice President Katherine Bishop and its Capitol lobbyists.

Can you spell c-o-u-n-t-e-r p-r-o-d-u-c-t-i-v-e?

There is a case to be made that continuing the walkout would have tightened the screws on lawmakers to the point they finally would take steps – ending the capital gains exemption, for example – to generate more revenue for classrooms and hire more teachers.

But taking the emotion out of it, it's also worth looking at history – specifically, how the legislative process tends to work. It's the nature of the beast – myriad personalities, opinions, and priorities negotiating – that it most often takes a series of actions, over many sessions, to fix a problem as deep-seeded as education funding.

Most problems never get resolved permanently. It's an ongoing process, forever seeking to keep pace with changing demographics, economic volatility and shifting voter priorities.

The more than quarter century assault on Oklahoma public education – from anti-government forces like the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs and Coburn's wingnut brigade – isn't over just because the Legislature coughed up money for the first teacher pay raises in a decade.

Nor is the long-term fight to restore the nation's deepest budget cuts, part of Republican leadership's scheme to starve public schools to the point they can be privatized and turned into profit centers.

The fact is, a feeble governor coupled with legislative leadership that primarily serves the state's carbon barons was dug in, more than willing to wait until public support for the teacher walkout began to erode – a casualty of inconvenience.



So now the fight moves to the ballot box – June's primaries, August's runoffs and November's general election. As journalism icon Dan Rather told attendees at The Observer's 50th year gala last month, "The ultimate revenge is at the ballot box."

Coburn and Co. remain in a parallel universe, of course, insisting that Oklahoma has a spending, not a revenue problem – that there is more than enough already available to make teacher salaries competitive nationally if only government waste is addressed.

That is pure nonsense, given that most state agency budgets were slashed at least 30% in recent years as lawmakers wrestled with massive budget holes resulting from ill-advised income tax cuts and corporate incentives.

Additionally, consider this Coburn dandy, uttered last month at the Tulsa Rotary Club: "I've been in Washington. I know how easy it is to raise taxes."

Except, of course, it's not easy in Oklahoma, where the Constitution dictates no new taxes without a 75% legislative vote or statewide voter approval. That's why the recently approved \$400 million revenue-raiser, HB 1010xx, was the first tax hike in 28 years.

The more Coburn talks, the worse it is for those peddling his unicorn-esque view of state government finances. And the better for those pursuing smart, responsible investments in Oklahoma's children and vital state services.

This Is Just The Beginning

BY KEN NEAL

Let's hope teachers and others in the Oklahoma education system do not go to sleep after their rousing performance at the state Capitol.

For the second time in recent history, teachers walked out of their classes and mobbed the Legislature, successfully getting promises to raise their pay.

I wonder if they know their work has just started if they ever hope to attain even regional averages on teacher pay, per student expenditures and other measures of education performance.

While we're hoping, let's hope the teachers and other education boosters don't repeat the performance of 1990. After a walkout, the landmark HB 1017 education reform passed. Because of Tulsa's key role

in its passage, Gov. Henry Bellmon came to Tulsa to sign the bill into law. That was April 25, 1991. But the fight wasn't over.

Republicans in the Legislature pushed a state question that called for repeal of HB 1017. It failed – 428,680 to 360,318 – in what was the largest turnout for a state question to that date. Its state question number: 639.

The big turnout? Teachers and other educators were in the ball game; they still were intense; they lobbied their friends, they voted on Election Day.

But then they rested and failed to maintain their interest and excitement when an Oklahoma City attorney crafted a state question that successfully torpedoed HB 1017. It haunts education and other vital

state services to this day.

It is SQ 640, approved by fewer than 375,000 Oklahomans.

Where were the 428,680 that voted to retain HB 1017? A good number of them probably were teachers, teachers who rested on the oars.

The fiercest, toughest tax limitation law in the nation was mandated by that vote on March 10, 1992. Only in the last session has the Oklahoma Legislature passed significant tax increases. SQ 640, as predicted, has poisoned Oklahoma government.

Legislatures dominated by Republicans have devastated education and all state government with tax cuts that mostly benefit business, primarily the oil industry. Under SQ 640, taxes can be cut with a simple majority while it takes a 75% vote to raise them.

These legislators are not Republicans at all in the historic sense. Republicans, once conservative, are now radical. What else do you call people who claim government is the enemy and to be drowned in a bathtub?

Republicans once were champions of education. Republicans once believed conservatism meant raising enough money to pay the bills.

What will Oklahoma education patrons do in the wake of a modest win in the Legislature?

Will they maintain the intensity that fi-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



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After The Walkout

Trying To Make Sense Of Legislature's Indifference

BY LINDA JAMES

Dear Legislator,

I don't understand. I truly don't understand.

Would you explain it to me?

When I was in high school, I had a favorite teacher who inspired me to become a teacher because she cared about her students. After graduating from college with a teaching certificate, I was ready to conquer the world and make it a better place for all.

A veterinarian I know once said, "Teachers are like 14-day-old puppies. At 14 days they can open their eyes." After 25 years of teaching, I have finally had my eyes opened. Too many of the "leaders" of Oklahoma don't care about the future of Oklahoma. You don't care about the citizens of Oklahoma. You don't care that the quality of education in Oklahoma has

been deteriorating.

I don't understand. I truly don't understand.

Would you explain it to me?

In April, thousands of supporters of public education gathered at the state Capitol to encourage you to responsibly fund public education by giving a raise to teachers and support personnel [bringing their income closer to a livable wage] and by funding education in general.

After nine days of talking with legislators, or at least those legislators who didn't refuse to talk with their constituents, the president of OEA declared that the walkout was over. The teachers and support personnel received raises and appropriations were approved.

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After The Walkout

Then a bill was passed that changed which fund the money from the fuel tax increase would go into. The bill creates sort of a financial shell game, moving money around to fund education with no guarantees that the fuel tax will continue to fund education as agreed upon. By moving the money, it appears you are wanting to make it hard for people to “follow the money.” The money can then be used for other expenditures, with no guarantee that education will benefit. Other appropriations that were passed were quickly repealed.

*I don't understand. I truly don't understand.
Would you explain it to me?*

Albert Einstein said, “Education is not the learning of fact, but the training of the mind.” Teachers work at least seven hours a day at school, then they spend hours preparing lessons and grading papers/tests. Yes, we get time off during the year, but we don't get paid for that time off unless we pro-rate our salary for 12 months instead of nine. Most of us have to work another job at night, just to make ends meet. This means we come to school tired and can't adequately educate our students.

*I don't understand. I truly don't understand.
Would you explain it to me?*

I consider myself an educator, not a teacher. An educator leaves a permanent impression upon the taught. It is understood that not all teachers can be called educators. Only those teachers who leave a permanent mark in the hearts of the students can be called educators. The word “educator” is used in the sense of “mentor.” On the other hand, the word “teacher” is used in the sense of “trainer” or “preceptor.” This is the main difference between the two words.

Oklahoma is constitutionally obligated to provide a quality public education to our students. Every kid – no matter where they live, their background, or social status – should have a fair shot at an equitable

education. It's the best way to reverse the growing wealth and opportunity gap in our state. Our kids have enough challenges as it is. We don't need more inequality.

*I don't understand. I truly don't understand.
Would you explain it to me?*

Support staff are a lifeline for a lot of students, translating lessons they cannot understand, occasionally filling in for teachers that have to leave school unexpectedly. They are often the essence of a school – the staff members who care for children with disabilities, who cook the food, and clean the floors.

Unlike teachers, there was no pay during the walkout if they didn't show up for work, but they supported the walkout anyway. Many support personnel earn so little that they qualify for public benefits. They struggle to survive on \$20,000 a year [or less]. Oklahoma's teacher assistants are among the worst paid in the nation; only Mississippi and Puerto Rico earn less.

*I don't understand. I truly don't understand.
Would you explain it to me?*

I want to understand. However, no matter how hard I try, I can't. Would you explain to me why the education fund has been reduced year after year after year? Don't you want Oklahoma to be a place people are proud to live in and not need to move to another state just so they can educate and provide for their families?

*I don't understand. I truly don't understand.
Would you explain it to me?*

Sincerely,

A Concerned Teacher

Oklahoma City resident Linda James Farley serves on the Western Heights School Board and operates her own printing company, L.L. James Printing. She is a certified teacher, though she does not currently teach.

Beginning

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

nally brought modest results at the Legislature and mobilize to mob the polls in the fall?

There are some signs that might happen. Filings for public office are at record levels. Perhaps the 40,000-plus teachers and their allies in higher education and support services will finally get organized politically.

Teachers and others who rightfully moan about salaries must realize that the way to remedy the problem is to organize and vote for candidates who truly believe in public education.

The only hope for a backward state is education. Educators should lead the drive to get rid of legislators who consistently refuse to fund it.

Ken Neal is former editorial page editor of the Tulsa World.

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Will Teacher Pay Raise Be Delayed By A Veto Petition?

BY DAVID BLATT

On March 28, just hours before Oklahoma senators were to vote on pay raises for teachers and other employees funded by new taxes, a group calling itself Oklahoma Taxpayers Unite held a press conference at the state Capitol. Led by former-U.S. Senator Tom Coburn, the group warned lawmakers it would lead a citizen initiative to overturn any tax increase.

Senators disregarded the warning by approving HB 1010xx with the three-quarters support needed for revenue bills, and the governor quickly signed the measure into law. But is the tax increase – the first to be approved by Oklahoma lawmakers in over 25 years – now in danger of being overturned at the ballot and dragging the pay raises down with it?

The activists' threat involves a little-known provision of the Oklahoma Constitution known as the veto referendum, which allows a petition to be filed challenging any bill passed by the Legislature. To put a veto referendum on the ballot requires signatures equal to five percent of voters in the last Gubernatorial election, which currently would require 41,242 signatures.

There have been 20 veto referendums in Oklahoma history, but none since 1970. In 1991, an initiative petition attempted to overturn HB 1017, the landmark education reform legislation of 1990, but this was not a veto referendum. To overturn HB 1017, opponents tried to amend the state Constitution; they succeeded in gathering enough signatures to get SQ 639 on the ballot in October 1991, but the measure failed with just 46% of the vote.

While there is uncertainty about the timing involved in the veto referendum process, it appears that Sen. Coburn and his followers could block enactment of HB 1010xx if they are able to gather enough signatures and clear the various other obstacles needed to get a referendum petition certified prior to the law taking effect on June 27. In that case, the bill would be stayed pending a decision by the voters, which would likely [but not necessarily] coincide with the general election on Nov. 6.

The teacher pay raise would most likely be deferred as well, as the pay raise bill is contingent on enactment of HB 1010xx. That means teachers would not see a pay increase in time for the next school year.

While opponents of the education funding package have uncovered a way to block the measure, they would be taking a major gamble by moving ahead with a veto referendum. Three-quarters of lawmakers, including over 70% of Republicans, voted for a tax increase because they understood that providing teachers a raise is both urgent and popular.

The current funding package is paid for primarily by limiting the tax break on oil and gas production and higher cigarette taxes, both of which are broadly popular and directly affect a limited number of voters, along with a small increase in motor fuel taxes [three cents per gallon on gas, six cents per gallon on diesel].

Putting the funding package on the ballot almost guarantees a huge mobilization and strong electoral turnout by teachers and other supporters of public education, which could hurt Republican candidates in the fall election. The main goal of Oklahoma Taxpayers Unite seems to be to warn Republican lawmakers about the political perils of raising taxes; the lesson they may learn instead is to stop messing with teachers.

David Blatt is Executive Director of Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

Creek County

Scholarships Awarded

Creek County Democrats recently honored two students with \$1,000 college scholarships: Garrett Crawford [Depew] of Mason High School and Morgan Jackson of Sapulpa High School.

The annual scholarship awards are named in honor of longtime Creek County Democratic Chair Willene Wright, who retired in 2013, and the memory of longtime Democratic stalwart Juanita King.

The winners, recognized at last month's Creek County Democrats meeting at Freddie's in Sapulpa, were chosen from what scholarship committee members described as a "high quality" pool of candidates.

"All the applicants show great promise," said David Nelson, a committee member. "I wish we could give every one of them a scholarship."

Visit www.facebook.com/CreekCountyDemocrats for more details.

Opening Up Building Fund Could Create Tough Choices For Schools

BY GENE PERRY

As the dust settles in the aftermath of Oklahoma's teacher walkout, advocates are still trying to understand what's been achieved and what still needs to be done to fully fund the state's education responsibilities. Now another wrinkle could emerge from a state question that could give local districts more flexibility in how they use their funding, but at the cost of creating some hard choices for schools.

SJR 70 would put a constitutional amendment on the ballot to allow property tax dollars currently reserved for school "building funds" to be merged with general operating funds. Efforts to reconcile House and Senate versions of SJR 70 were underway at press time, but it's likely that this will make it to the ballot as a state question in November.

In Oklahoma's debates on school funding, some have pointed to the apparent contradiction where schools are upgrading or building expensive new facilities even as they go to four-day school weeks or make other cuts to teachers and classroom resources. Oklahomans have wondered why that money isn't being put to day-to-day needs.

However, the changes to the building fund made by SJR 70 would still not allow most of these revenues to be used for general operations. Large capital investments like a new building or major remodeling are typically paid for with bond issues, not the building fund. It would be bad fiscal practice to allow the use of these bond issues for general operations – much like how a family might take on mortgage debt to buy a home but should avoid running up debt to pay for groceries.

Outside of bond issues, all available school property tax levies including the building fund have already been increased to their maximum level by every district statewide. That means opening up the building fund to other uses would allow for repurposing of existing school funds, but it would not create opportunities for schools to raise new money.

There are good reasons why Oklahoma has reserved building funds for repairs and maintenance. Especially in years when schools are trying to cope with chronic budget shortfalls, districts would be more likely to put off necessary maintenance if it's put in direct competition with teacher pay.

For instance, some districts allow building funds to accumulate year-to-year until they've raised enough

for a significant project like a roof repair. That would be much harder to do if these dollars are not protected from going to other important needs. In times when popular programs are facing cuts, the political pressure on administrators and school boards to spend all the money available to them would be intense, and it could result in deferred maintenance that turns into a far more expensive future problem.

The closest comparison to household finances might be combining the savings account with the checking account. A household would have more flexibility, but also greater temptation to spend all that they have.

In a world where schools were certain that plenty of funding would be available now and in the future both to pay teachers and to cover necessary maintenance, SJR 70 could give local schools more power to choose the best priorities for themselves. But in a world where Oklahoma education is still not fully funded, we should be wary of removing a fiscal safeguard.

Gene Perry is Director of Strategy and Communications for Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

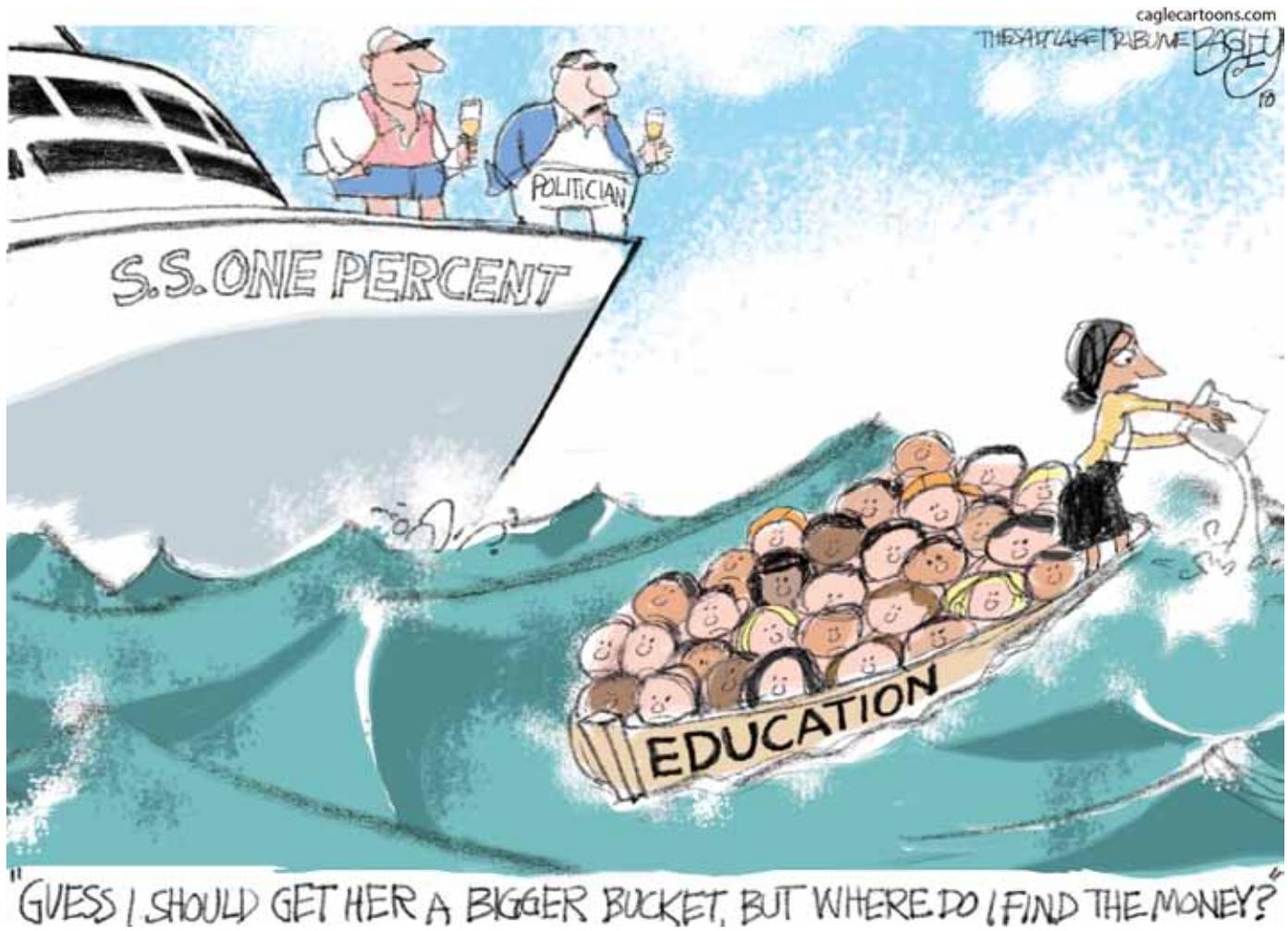


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After The Walkout



Trump's Tax Plan May Leave Legs With Few Options But To Hike GPT

BY JAN NEW

No Democrat in Congress approved the 2017 Tax Act passed in late December, and there was a good reason for it. Considered the most comprehensive changes in the U.S. tax code since Reagan-era tax reforms, the lion's share of the 2017 Tax Act benefits accrue to businesses and those in the highest income brackets. Most of the provisions applying to individuals sunset after 2025. Generally, the business tax reforms are permanent.

Various tax authorities have estimated an increase in the national deficit of \$1.4 trillion–\$1.5 trillion over the ensuing decade, discounting economic growth. Because the deficit would have doubled again if all the tax cuts had been made permanent, the eight-year sunset on our individual benefits saves approximately \$1.2 trillion – funded by you and me. But for this

article let's focus on the reduction of the corporate income tax from 35% to 21% – a significant 14% reduction.

What are U.S. corporations doing with their tax savings?

Taxpayers were assured that a significantly more competitive corporate income tax rate would 1. bring more jobs to the U.S.; 2. provide better jobs; 3. allow companies to update equipment and processes; and 4. provide training and raises for employees. A few companies did raise the minimum wage for workers; however, many more companies gave bonuses. During his State of the Union Address, Trump said approximately three million workers had already received tax cut bonuses. One survey by a well-respected stock management and research firm, Birinyi Associates,

After The Walkout

reported that shareholders, not workers, would be the biggest beneficiaries of the 2017 Tax Act.

How will Oklahoma oil and gas companies use their tax savings?

On Feb. 21, Devon announced that it would “accelerate ‘value creation’ ... not top-line production growth.” It was further reported that the company would repay up to \$1.5 million of debt, “returning excess cash flow from operations or divestitures to shareholders through both opportunistic share buybacks and dividend growth.”

The following day Continental Resources, Inc. reported a fourth quarter return “boosted by federal tax reform.” Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization [EBITDA, an approximate measure of a company’s operating cash flow based on their income statement] was reported up significantly from the fourth quarter a year-ago. The CFO further reported that Continental would “pay down debt with excess cash flow ... grow production ... and benefit from higher commodity prices.”

On Feb. 23, Chesapeake Energy Corp. released its fourth quarter financials, announcing that it had paid down debt, announced plans for capital expenditures in the range of \$1.9 billion-\$2.3 billion ... and would be positioned to create increased shareholder returns in 2018 and beyond.

Asset and debt management, growth and expansion, and increased shareholder returns are important aspects of running a sustainable and profitable business, but also important are employee training, development and opportunities for growth and advancement along with commitment to the life and vitality of the state. Many corporations support the arts, culture, and charities and they also provide, through taxes, for vital public services – education, public safety, health/mental health, and basic infrastructure that make Oklahoma a desirable place to live, work, raise a healthy family, and prosper in the future.

What is the Gross Production Tax?

The severance or gross production tax [GPT] is a tax imposed by the state on companies that generate revenues by depleting the state’s non-renewable resources. In Oklahoma, over the last 10 years, the oil and gas gross production tax has generated as much as \$825 million in FY 2008 down to its current level of \$128 million in FY 2017 – a reduction attributed to both a decline in oil prices and an incentive for horizontal drilling which dropped the effective rate of the tax from 7% to 2% on the first three years of production.

Though Oklahoma ranks fifth among all states in oil production, and third in natural gas production, it is currently reported to pay the lowest effective rate of gross production tax among nine oil and gas producing states. With the recent passage of HB 1010xx

the Gross Production Tax moves to 5%, still below the rate of seven other producing states.

Should Oklahoma’s oil and gas industry be paying a higher Gross Production Tax?

Most Oklahomans agree that the oil and gas industry is a key component of Oklahoma’s overall economy and U.S. energy independence; that it’s important to encourage sustained industry growth; and the industry is an important source of tax revenue for Oklahoma state and local government to support essential public services.

In terms of a percentage, it appears that the Oklahoma oil and gas industry is not paying adequately or commensurately with what it pays in other states – even at 5%. While the industry can argue that sustained lower prices are a mitigating factor along with worldwide market volatility, the industry also reports increased profitability due to technological advancements, innovations, and operational efficiencies achieved even in the wake of lower prices. At this point, horizontal drilling, once an innovation, is now a proven technology and like wind farms, may no longer require the degree of protection initially afforded by legislative incentives.

For example, in a 2017 presentation, Continental Resources reported increased operational efficiencies in the range of 35% in 2016 with projected increased efficiencies of 20% in 2017 through improved drilling schedules, reduced drilling costs, and “stimulation” and “optimization” of recovery. In 2017, the Oklahoma Legislature passed a bill permitting an increase in the size of a drilling unit from 640 acres to 1,280 acres, allowing the two-mile “long, laterals” needed in horizontal drilling, which now “characterizes 80% of new production in the U.S. and could potentially double Oklahoma’s production” in the foreseeable future.

As a result of a favorable federal corporate income tax rate, increasing operational efficiencies, acknowledged Oklahoma and other North American oil shale reserves now technologically accessible, and an expanding oil and gas export market, the Oklahoma oil and gas industry is in a better position to include a restored gross production tax in its business planning.

In March the Oklahoma Supreme Court rejected a challenge by the Oklahoma Oil and Gas Association and the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association to curtail efforts by Restore Oklahoma Now Inc., a nonprofit group, to place SQ 795 on the November ballot, allowing voters to decide whether to establish a flat 7% gross production tax on Oklahoma oil and gas wells. Near the end of April, Restore Oklahoma Now ended its campaign to proceed with SQ 795, instead focusing their efforts on legislative campaigns and fighting attempts by another group, Oklahoma Taxpayers Unite!, a group identified with former Sen.

A Champion Of Public Education And Equal Rights

BY KEN NEAL

We called her “Bad Penny,” and “Bright Penny,” and she could be both at the same time. Penny Williams died April 16, leaving an enviable legislative record that spanned 23 years.

She was a very serious lawmaker who was in the forefront of whatever cause or movement that she considered progressive and good for her city and Oklahoma.

One of her major accomplishments included a university consortium for Tulsa at a time when the city had no state supported higher education.

Later, she worked to create the Oklahoma School of Mathematics and Science, even though it was to be located in Oklahoma City. It was typical Penny. She wanted it for Tulsa but did not pout when it was decided otherwise.

She was best known for HB 1017, the 1990 landmark education reform. She was the driving force in the bill that Gov. Henry Bellmon pushed despite opposition from his own Republican Party.

Penny lived to see 1017’s good work destroyed by a string of backward Legislatures that refused to enforce the reform’s progressive requirements. Yet she was upbeat about the future.

The praises of Penny Williams are still coming. Virtually everybody who knew her appreciated her intellect, her determination and her desire to improve life for the people of Oklahoma.

Perhaps her most enduring and endearing quality was her sense of humor. Nobody laughed more at Penny Williams than Penny Williams.

She had the remarkable quality of being your friend even when you opposed her. Always an advocate for education, she sometimes drew opposition for specific programs. But even in opposition she was lovable, funny and persistent.

The members of the Tulsa World editorial board always enjoyed a visit from Penny. Her quick brain sometimes

outran her sentences, leading her to constantly interrupt herself with new thoughts.

Some insufferable wag at the World described her visits as “the Marx brothers interviewing Gracie Allen.” She loved it and repeated it often to entertain her wide circle of friends.

Illness slowed her final years, but it did not stop her passion and her good humored observations of Oklahoma politics.

It’s not possible, of course, but I would trade the entire Tulsa County legislative delegation for her.

It’s a cliché, but it’s true: We will miss her. *Ken Neal is former opinion editor of the Tulsa World. Williams served as a Democratic state senator from 1989-2004 and state representative from 1981-88.*



Tom Coburn, to block the revenue packages passed by legislators in late March.

The permanent, reduced corporate income tax could potentially bring meaningful change to businesses, their states and communities. Obviously, if benefits of the 2017 Tax Act are used to build Oklahoma businesses, develop workforce capabilities, and support the broader public service needs of state and community, it will in some measure be successful. The enhanced GPT revenues will certainly improve things for Oklahoma teachers and education.

If Tax Act potentials are not realized, and if the recent revenue package approved by the Legislature is somehow repealed, it would deepen our state government funding problems, increase divisiveness, and weaken our economy – at every level.

Let’s see whether corporate benefits from the 2017 Tax Act along with enhanced state revenues will benefit Oklahoma workers beyond their own short-term tax benefits – specifically in terms of business expansion, job growth, training and development, and increased wages and salaries.

Please become informed about 2018 state questions and remember to vote in upcoming primaries and the general election.

What you vote for matters. Who you vote for matters more, and what they do with your vote matters most.

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



... And We Wonder Why We're Sick?

BY JOHNSON BRIDGWATER

The state of Oklahoma has a problem – and, therefore, so do all of us who live here.

Mercury contamination has been found across our state, with a recent report placing the total number of tested and polluted lakes at 54. Many of these lakes are located around Oklahoma's remaining coal-burning power plants. [<http://www.deq.state.ok.us/CSDnew/fish/index.htm>].

And please keep in mind, this is only the start of lake testing – there are hundreds more that have not even been tested yet.

Why does any of this even matter to us? Why is this a serious issue in our state?

For starters, more than 80% of fish consumption advisories posted in the United States are wholly or partially because of mercury. In Oklahoma, these postings are all too common, and sadly it is our state's most economically challenged and most in need who pay the price of mercury contamination from fish.

Women and children are disproportionately im-

pacted in Oklahoma as well – and NOT in a good way. Sadly, these signs can be found across our state.

The U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] issued a clear warning to the United States in 2016 – mercury toxicity is common and prevalent in the United States. [https://www.usgs.gov/news/comprehensive-study-finds-widespread-mercury-contamination-across-western-north-america?qt-news_science_products=3#qt-news_science_products]

Sadly, the current head of the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] has openly stated, while under questioning at a Senate Committee, that mercury is NOT a problem. And he has allowed the EPA to try to slow down the passage of “cross border pollution” plans developed by Texas in an effort to improve air quality in Oklahoma for places like the Wichita Wildlife Refuge.

Such plans would clearly benefit all Oklahomans, but Scott Pruitt has chosen to allow corporations to have the upper hand, rather than protect the citizens

of Oklahoma. [<https://www.texasobserver.org/trump-epa-will-allow-texas-coal-plants-nearly-double-sulfur-dioxide-emissions/>]

We are approaching the second anniversary of this report, issued by an international team of scientists, led by the U.S. Geological Survey, that documented widespread mercury contamination in air, soil, sediment, plants, fish, and wildlife at various levels across western North America.

Sadly, this issue hits too close to home, with every lake so far tested by the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality [ODEQ] coming back as contami-

nated with mercury.

It is a complicated matter, but please take a few minutes to study the facts online at https://content.sierraclub.org/coal/sites/content.sierraclub.org/coal/files/docs/factsheet-mercury-coal_1.pdf

In short, the burning of coal within Oklahoma's borders is just plain hazardous.

Especially for Oklahoma fish, anglers, and pregnant moms. And of course, for the entire web of life that connects all.

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

PSO's Wind Catcher Project: Right Place, Right Time

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

No longer will fossil fuels be the main source of energy in the world. The conversion to renewable sources in progress will significantly reduce global warming largely due to using fossil fuels.

Climate change leading to severe drought recently devastated hundreds of thousands of acres in western Oklahoma. Storms this season are more intense than ever before largely due to climate change.

Oklahoma is one of several states with the potential to develop safer sources of energy like wind and solar. The time is here and PSO's Wind Catcher project will help Oklahoma become a leader in the change-over to using these renewable energy [RE] sources that are much safer than traditional fossil fuels like oil and gas.

A few years ago, with her courage and foresight, Carrie Dickerson prevailed and prevented our state from becoming dependent on costly and dangerous nuclear power. Carrie then spent her remaining years supporting the use of the wind energy, which she correctly saw as being abundant in Oklahoma. She also knew that solar energy could play a major role.

Carrie and I had numerous conversations over the years regarding the important role we saw in Oklahoma for the development of renewable energy. As president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation, I can assure Oklahomans that we will continue Aunt Carrie's legacy of strong support of RE sources. We will also encourage the fossil fuel producers to begin planning for the RE future now upon us.

In a 2018 report, Nick Akins, CEO of AEP, parent company of Public Service of Oklahoma [PSO], stated: "American Electric Power is focused on modernizing the power grid, expanding renewable energy resources and delivering cost-effective reliable energy

to our customers."

That modernizing plan began a few years ago with PSO, Sierra Club, EPA and the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality agreeing that PSO would stop using coal at its Oologah plant by replacing the two coal-fired with two gas-fired generators. One coal-fired unit has already been removed and replaced and we await the day the second one is taken offline.

With half of the coal trains gone during the day and night, we Oologahns are enjoying the decrease in noise and air pollution, traffic disruption, especially fewer accidents for our citizens.

PSO and its parent company AEP recognize the transformation in the electric industry. There will be energy efficiency with increasing RE use in the form of natural gas, wind, solar and battery integration.

PSO has decided that Oklahoma is the right place and now is the right time for the Wind Catcher project. With its unprecedented energy investment worth \$4.5 billion, this PSO project will produce a significant economic impact in the state.

Public Service Company will form a partnership with SWEPCO, its sister company. With construction begun in 2016, Wind Catcher will go online in late 2020. It will become America's largest wind farm and the second largest in the world. Consisting of 800 GE wind turbines now being installed, it will create a 2,000 MW wind facility connected with a 360-mile dedicated Extra High Voltage 765 kv power line to Tulsa and supply Tulsa metro 40% of its electricity from wind.

The benefits are considerable. Customer savings are estimated to be more than \$2 billion over the project's life. Fuel prices will be stable. There will be 4,000 construction jobs and 80-90 permanent ones. Oklahoma will see increased state and local tax rev-

enues. We are already seeing a federal wind tax credit reduction from 2.3 cents in 2016 to 0.0 cents by 2020.

The overall importance of this project cannot be stressed enough. Carrie Dickerson would not be surprised at these benefits to our state. With research on wind energy, she was very high on all RE potential for Oklahoma.

Currently PSO prices are 20% below the national average. Since 1913 PSO with over 1,500 employees has provided electricity to 1.8 million citizens and businesses in 232 cities and towns in a service area of 30,000 square miles. That's PSO impact to our state so far.

How about its Wind Catcher to the state of Oklahoma? Not only will it keep utility rates low, it will also have an economic impact on both jobs and tax revenues. It is even more important to our environment

by diversifying the energy mix, making the green option available for customers.

Clean, safe and easily RE sources are being developed here. Wind Catcher will soon save more than \$2 billion for customers. Increased property tax revenue is projected to be \$300 million. It represents \$2.9 billion in new wind generation, one of the state's largest private investments. A welcome \$60 million is estimated in new state and local tax revenue during construction.

Wind Catcher is one avenue available to Oklahoma in the 21st Century to leave behind a dirty environment for a safer and healthier one for us, mitigating the impact of climate change for the whole state.

Oologah resident Bob D. Rounsavell is president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation. His wife, Paz Maria Rounsavell, serves as his editor.

American Indian Center And Cultural Museum Will Be Boon For Oklahoma

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

The forthcoming American Indian Center and Cultural Museum in Oklahoma City will be a world-class facility and has tremendous potential for education, economic development and tourism purposes in Oklahoma. The Cherokee Nation is proud to support AICCM and pleased to see it moving closer to opening. The heart of Indian Country will be home to one of America's finest museums.

Recently, I began serving a three-year term on the American Indian Cultural Center Foundation to help move this center of collective history and culture toward completion. It will be a unique destination, designed to tell the powerful and significant story of Native Americans in Oklahoma. The AICCM's mission has always been to enhance what individual tribes, including the Cherokee Nation, do to share our heritage.

Art, history and contemporary culture will be all in one place, and if people want to dig deeper they can travel to Tahlequah or Ada or Anadarko or Lawton.

I am proud to be a part of this creative endeavor and a public-private venture with the state of Oklahoma, city of Oklahoma City, AICCM Land Development LLC and private sector. Absolutely none of this would be possible without the cooperation of the 38 federally recognized tribes in Oklahoma today.

Construction will resume this summer and take about two years to complete, while exhibits and other interior finishes will take another year to install. The museum will open in the spring of 2021. Construction was stopped six years ago on the museum, which sits at the junction of Interstates 35 and 40 in Okla-

homa City, when state funding ran out.

As Native people, perseverance is something we know well, and we would not be moving forward today without Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby and his leadership in establishing a powerful and productive partnership with Oklahoma City's leaders. He has been a champion to achieve this dream. Once completed it will be an epic indoor/outdoor adventure for the entire family with unique exhibits, hands-on educational programs, firsthand accounts and cultural demonstrations.

Tribes have tremendous heritage and history in Oklahoma, which is why state leaders wanted to build this museum in the first place. It will substantially increase opportunities to educate Oklahoma's youth on the rich history of our state, which was born from Indian Territory.

Those critical aspects of Oklahoma's history simply are not stressed enough in public classrooms. Oklahomans need to know more about their history and certainly need a better grasp of how important tribal governments are not just to our past, but also to our bright future.

Tribal governments mean so much to the state, not just its cultural identity, but also in a very real and tangible way economically. The Cherokee Nation alone has an economic impact on our state of over \$2 billion.

Oklahoma is Indian Country, and AICCM will be a tremendous asset to all of us.

Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

An Evening With ...

DAN RATHER

On April 29, The Observer family gathered at the University of Central Oklahoma Boathouse in downtown OKC to hear from journalism icon Dan Rather and to celebrate The Observer's 50 years of Comforting the Afflicted and Afflicting the Comfortable.

Mr. Rather's keen insights on national and international politics and his remarkable storytelling captivated a packed house. He also signed copies of his best-selling book *What Unites Us: Reflections on Patriotism*, a powerful and important perspective in this era when our democratic republic is imperiled.

The fundraising event honored the memory of The Observer's founders, Editor Frosty Troy and Publisher Helen Troy, and included current Editor Arnold Hamilton's take on The Observer's future and its role in helping create a better, more informed Oklahoma.

[A video of the program will be posted at <https://okobserver.org> in early May.]

As part of the event, Mr. Rather also engaged in a lively, one-hour question-and-answer session with aspiring journalists and law students from the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma City University and Oklahoma City Community College.

Photos by MaryAnn Martin, Marti Troy, Debra Proctor, David Glover

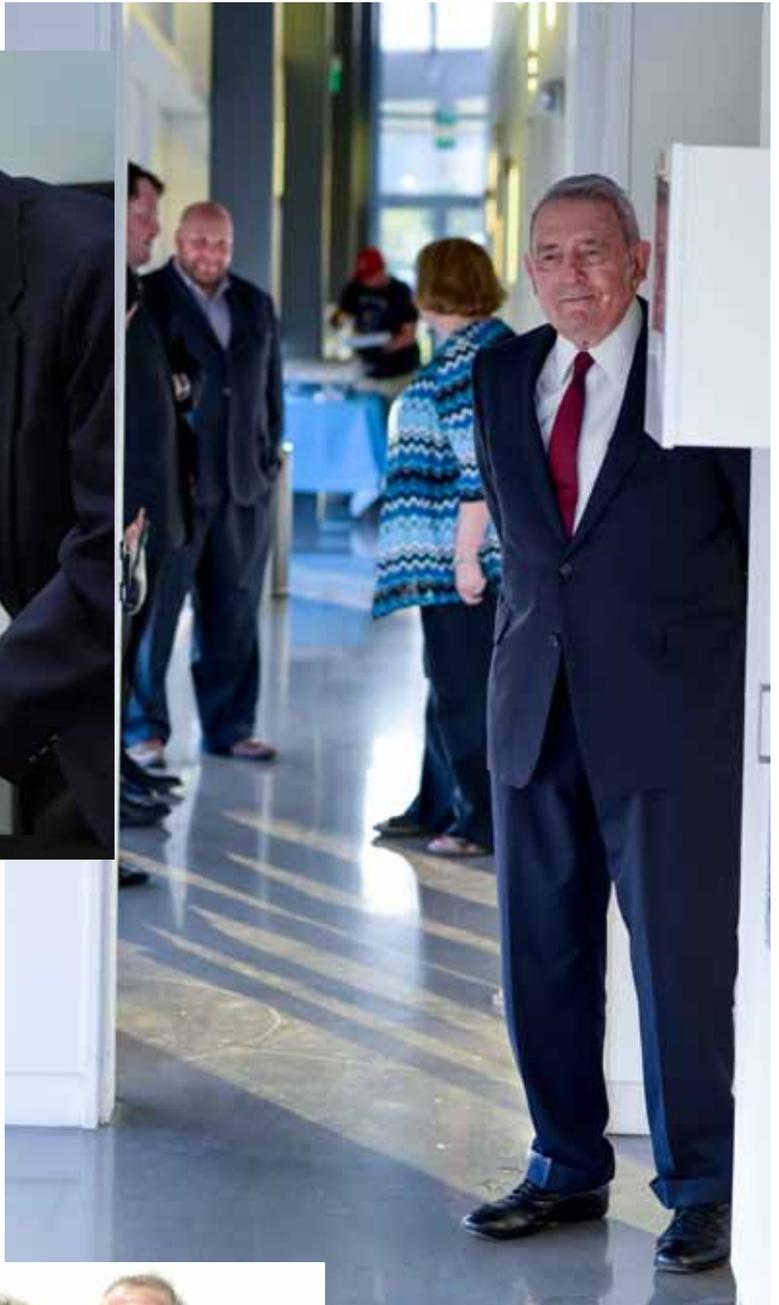


Above: Dan Rather and Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton share a laugh.

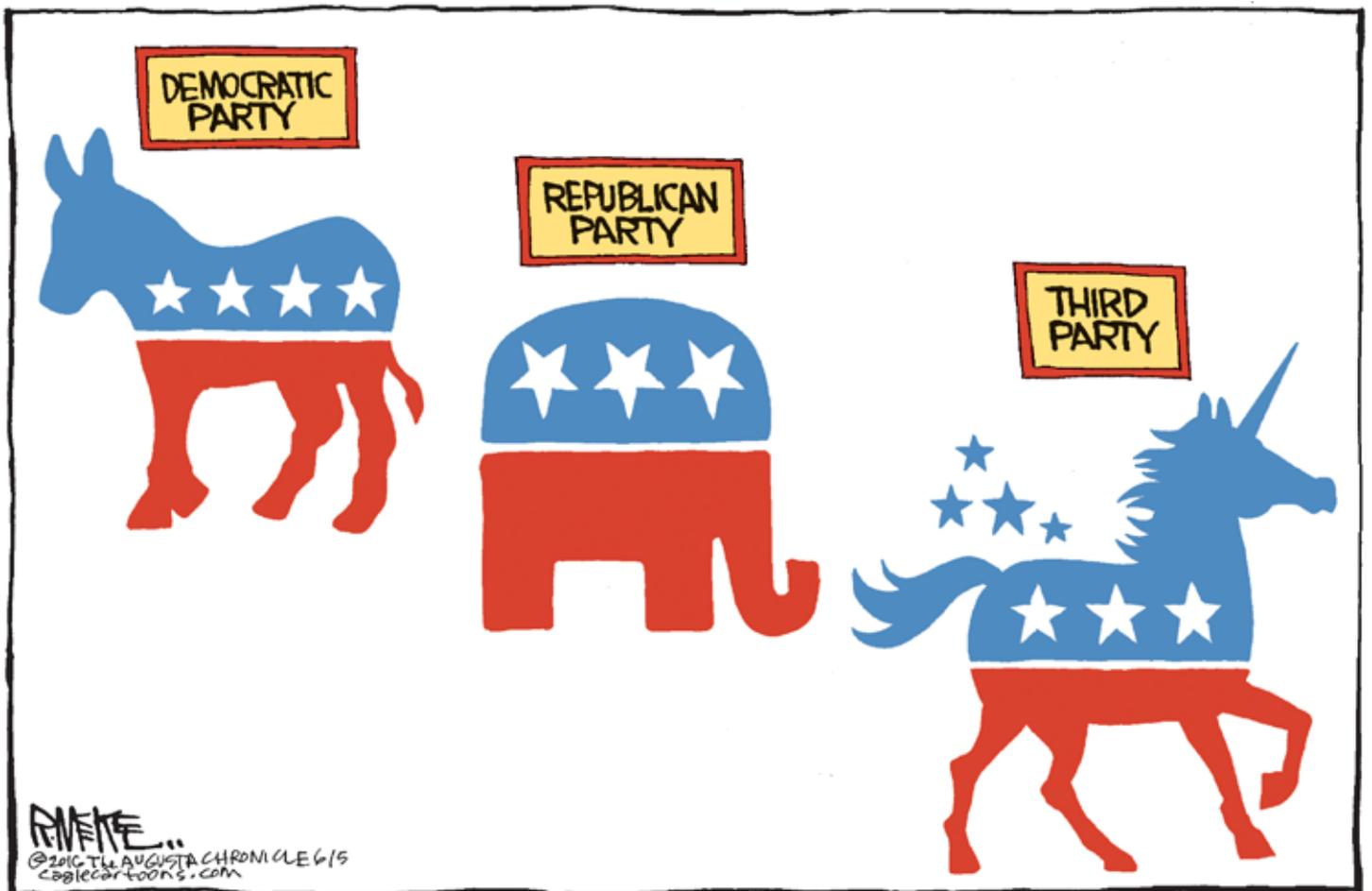
Top Right: Cherokee Chief Bill John Baker presents Mr. Rather with a traditional Cherokee blanket, welcoming him to Oklahoma.

Middle Right: Mr. Rather visits with Marti Troy, daughter of The Observer's founding publisher, Helen Troy, and founding editor, Frosty Troy.

Right: A glimpse of the Boathouse crowd from behind Arnold Hamilton and Dan Rather.



Clockwise from top left: Charter Observer subscriber Jay Carwile chats with Mr. Rather during the book signing; Mr. Rather, waiting to be introduced; Mr. Rather with Ponca City attorney Fred Boettcher, left, and his brother, veteran journalist and foreign correspondent Mike Boettcher; Robyn Lemon Sellers with Mr. Rather; George and Aldean Krumme and Eli Grayson watch as Mr. Rather signs their books.



A Third Party? How Not To Settle For Lesser Of Two Evils

BY ROBERT REICH

Are you happy with the electoral choices provided you by the two major parties? If not, should you vote for a third party candidate? Not so fast. Remember what happened in 2016, when Libertarian Gary Johnson got 3.2% of the popular vote and Green Party candidate Jill Stein got 1.06%? Enough votes that, had they gone to Hillary Clinton, she'd have won the Electoral College, and Donald Trump wouldn't be in the White House.

Oh, and anyone remember what happened in 2000, when the votes that went to Ralph Nader all but sealed the fate of Al Gore, and gave us George W. Bush?

You see the problem? In a winner-take-all system like ours, votes for third party candidates siphon away votes from the major party candidate whose views are closest to that third-party candidate. So by not voting for the lesser of two evils, if that's what you want to call them, you end up with the worse of

two evils.

But here's the good news. You've got at least two ways to avoid the lesser of two evils other than voting for a third party candidate.

First, you could build support for your favorite primary candidate inside one of the major parties – like some of you did for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic primaries.

But, you might say, look what happened to Bernie! The Democratic Party establishment rigged the game against him.

I don't want to open up this particular can of worms, but if a party establishment has a chokehold on the primaries – the answer isn't to go with a third party and end up with the worse of two evils, but to organize and mobilize inside the party to break that choke hold, as some would say the Tea Party has done in the GOP.

Never underestimate the power of grassroots activism focused like a laser on taking over a major political party that has ossified.

Another way to avoid the lesser of two evils: Get your state to institute ranked-choice voting, also known as instant-runoff voting, which allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference.

The process is simple: In the first round, only voters' first choices are counted. If a candidate gets a majority, that's the end of it: That candidate wins. If no candidate gets a majority, the candidate who received the fewest votes is eliminated, and then the second choices of voters who preferred that candidate are counted.

If that gives a majority to one candidate, that candidate wins. If there's still no one with a majority, the process continues, until one candidate gets a majority.

Ranked-choice voting isn't perfect, but it enables you to vote your conscience –even for a third-par-

ty candidate – without the worry that you're giving ground to the candidate you like least.

The idea is gaining popularity. Last year, some form of ranked-choice voting was proposed in 19 states. In 2016, citizens in Maine initiated a referendum for ranked-choice voting and won. It's already being used in statewide special elections in North Carolina, and in 10 major cities.

You don't have to settle for the lesser of two evils. But in order to get the candidates you want elected you need to get involved, now. In the primaries. And in changing your state to ranked-choice voting.

It's our democracy. Whether it works, is up to us. *Robert B. Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley; author of 15 books, including his most recent, The Common Good; and co-creator of the award-winning documentary, Inequality for All. A review of his latest book can be found on page 40 of this month's Observer.*

Why I'm A Democrat ... After 44 Years As A Republican

BY BOB SCHNEIDER

This was not an easy decision to make. Politics is like one's religion, you just don't change it unless you have a moment of clarity and realize you are on the wrong path. My family's involvement in the GOP goes all the way back to the mid-1850s and the start of the GOP in Illinois.

My Mother's family helped organize the GOP in Illinois. They were opposed to one human being owning another human being as chattel. They found slavery morally repugnant and were zealots in advocating its demise. My family has been GOP blue-blood.

That is how far back my roots run in the GOP. I have no roots in the Democratic Party. However, it is time for me to lay some down.

There are things I don't like about the Democratic Party. There are people in the Democratic Party I dislike as much as I dislike Donald Trump. So, why not remain an independent? There is a good reason for that.

In America, if you want to bring about change, if you want to be an agent of change and not a voice in the wilderness you must belong to one of one of the two political parties. I was a party faithful for the GOP. I often turned my nose up and voted for the GOP nominee no matter what. Some were good men and women, in fact, outstanding men and women. Others were as dumb as a rock and were still fighting the Civil War. I voted for them anyway.

Donald Trump and Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner are the two men who drove this decision for me. They are twins. Rauner is Trump in a more presentable form. He is careful to not give to Trump, or mention his name because he knows it is the kiss of death in Illinois to support Trump. Bruce Rauner betrayed me. I worked to help elect him in 2014 and he lied to me. He is as corrupt as any governor we have ever had.

Trump loves to attack his critics and is particularly harsh on Republicans who don't kiss his ring. Have you noticed that Trump has not skewered Rauner for his lack of *public* support for Trump? Curious, don't you think? He will criticize Chicago, he will criticize the mayor, he will beat up on everyone except two in Illinois: Fellow billionaire and ideological twin Bruce Rauner, and Illinois House Speaker Mike Madigan. Why Madigan? You might want to look at whose law firm handles tax matters for Trump Tower in Chicago.

WHY I LEFT THE GOP

Hate and paranoia have become an ideological principle in the GOP. The common view is the poor are thieves and stealing taxpayer's money. They point to social programs as having failed to end poverty. Social programs are not designed to end poverty. They are designed to keep you alive while an individual tries to find another pathway in life.

They hate education. Their steadfast crusade to

end public education, to deny it money is an attack on our future. I went to public schools, including a public university. I received a good education, from dedicated teachers and professors. That should be preserved and not torn to shreds.

They are trade protectionists and isolationists. This is the final betrayal of Ronald Reagan.

They blame the victims. In fact, they have a false victimhood that they are actually the victims of the poor. They point to a mother on food stamps with an iPhone in her hand as “evidence” of theft. Did they ever stop to think that maybe a family member in better circumstances gave her that iPhone?

With competition, which the GOP claims is a very conservative idea, the prices on smartphones have dropped dramatically along with the cost of service. Why shouldn't a poor person have access to the rest of the world? Their view that I've read a hundred times if I have read it once. The resentment of the poor only continues the poverty and despair of the poor.

The GOP hates the poor. They are only interested in self. Everything with the GOP today is “I.” There is no “we” in their dialogue. In the GOP rant about the poor, they go out of their way to admonish the poor for being poor. They treat them without dignity and try to destroy all hope for the poor.

The GOP is xenophobic. The day we lose the melting pot is the day we lose America.

The GOP is overtly racist and unapologetic for it. They can talk about how much they love Israel but that doesn't stop them from being anti-semitic. They love the Jews “over there,” but the Jews under their very noses? Not so much. This week, I have been told I am a kike which is not a term of endearment and told there is an oven with my name on it. I belong in an oven because I don't agree with conservatives. That sums up today's GOP.

Sen. Toi Hutchinson, a Democratic state senator, has been called vile names, and references to her death have been common. I was told by a member of the GOP just today that “that's just average citizens voicing an opinion.”

WHY I JOINED THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

I am opposed to racism. I abhor racism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism. It is not “just an opinion” by “average citizens.” It is a vile practice that is to be stood against whenever, and wherever it happens. The GOP is giving safe haven to the racists who flocked to the party after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. Based on a principle of human dignity, the Democratic Party said goodbye to the racists and they ran into the outstretched arms of the GOP.

The Democratic Party may not agree, but they listen. The far left is rigid and dogmatic but the average Democrat may not agree with you but they will listen to what you have to say. I am pro business, and so is the Democratic Party. It is now the home of Free Trade. The GOP is now the home of trade

protectionism.

The Democratic Party does not hate science. They recognize throwing what we throw in the air and water will kill us all eventually. Richard Nixon knew that, too, which is why he pushed for and signed into law the Clean Air Act and established the EPA. As a result, the Great Lakes are no longer in danger of catching on fire as they were in the '60s and '70s. There are no more killer smogs that took lives. For younger Republicans, Google killer smog and see what we used to contend with. It was a problem Richard Nixon fixed, and now you are trying to break it again.

The Democratic Party supports collective bargaining. I can't say I am in love with unions, I am not in love with them. However, I am in love with the Constitution of the U.S. and collective bargaining is a right under the First Amendment of the Constitution. I support that right for the same reason I support the right to own a firearm under the 2nd Amendment of the Constitution. If we find a way of end-running any amendment then we have just made the Constitution a meaningless document.

The Democratic Party believes everyone is entitled to dignity. The GOP is wrong on healthcare along with nearly all social issues. Their proposals strip the poor, the elderly, and minorities of basic human dignity.

This was not an easy step. In the '80s, I was an advocate of trickle-down economics as the solution to our economic ills. It is hard to admit *I was wrong*. The theory sounds nice, but as evidence has shown, it is a myth. Educated Republicans understand income distribution is out of whack and are seeking ways of correcting the ill. They are running up against the rank ignorance brought into the party and exploited by the party.

I spoke with a relative who is still solid GOP and he acknowledged all my concerns as being factual. He asked me to stay in the party and fight for its soul. There is nothing left to fight for. His comment about a soul was interesting. That is the problem with the GOP. It has lost its soul.

It has no compassion, it has no empathy, it is just a collection of self-centered individuals who care about nothing outside of their own lives. There is not a bigger picture, there is only self-absorption with the GOP.

I'll pass on the GOP. As far as I am concerned, write its eulogy.

Will I be welcomed into the Democratic Party with open arms? That is highly doubtful. Like the GOP, they are wary and suspicious of anyone who was not born into the party. I won't be trusted, I won't be given party responsibilities or jobs as I was with the GOP.

What I do care about is I will have a voice in the debate. As a member of the party, they can't exclude me. My voice will be heard. From what I have experienced so far, excluding people is a GOP move for

It's Time To Boycott Hannity's Advertisers

BY JUAN COLE

The problems at Fox "News" go way beyond Sean Hannity. But he is a major problem. For him to go on air and defend attorney Michael Cohen numerous times without so much as mentioning that Cohen is his legal adviser is the height of journalistic corruption.

Nor is it only Fox that hides the financial and personal interests of its celebrity commentators from the public.

In 2008, in a story that is unremembered and unheeded, the New York Times blew the whistle on a Pentagon scam to place ex-officers on CNN as Iraq War and security commentators, while never disclosing their ongoing ties to the U.S. military or their ties to companies making money off the war.

There is no reason at all to believe that CNN has cleaned up its act. Fox is guilty of the same sort of interlocking directorates strategy in "news" provision.

The information system in the United States is mostly broken. Twenty-four hour cable news is just a pretext for earning advertising dollars and therefore mostly presents infotainment or cheap panel debates [mostly by partisans or people without any obvious credentials or special knowledge].

A handful of corporations own all of the major television news outlets. Even at the level of more trusted local stations, Sinclair has been buying them up and using onerous contracts with the anchors to force them into reciting pro-Trump propaganda.

Fox News is a project of far rightwing Australian-origin billionaire Rupert Murdoch to push television news in the United States in the direction of white nationalism, white grievance, romanticism about the business class, defense of neocolonialism, and punitive attitudes toward workers and the dissident middle class. It has a firm editorial line, which is set in explicit memos to on screen

presenters. Its stars have been serial sex abusers like Roger Ailes and Bill O'Reilly. Hannity has emerged as the last Great White Hope among the bullies of cable news, and that he is corrupt and dishonest should come as no surprise.

What to do about all this? Most of the people reading this don't watch Fox anyway [and by the way there are some excellent reporters employed by this corporation and the local stations are often quite good].

The only thing that has been shown to work is a consumer boycott of advertisers. That is what got rid of the odious O'Reilly.

Note that I am not calling for a boycott of Hannity advertisers because I dislike him personally or because I disagree with his politics.

He has revealed himself to be corrupt and dishonest with his viewers on a basic level that should be unacceptable even in a generally corrupt company like Fox News.

Of course, ideally, the Democratic Party would be planning for a reform of the FCC once it takes back over Congress. The poor things don't seem to realize that the Reagan dissing of the Fairness Doctrine was one of the trucks that ran over the Democrats after 1981.

But in the short term, it is up to us. [You can find a list of Fox advertisers at <https://www.foxnewsadvertisers.com>.]

This is different, because it speaks not to political views or values, about which we can disagree, but to professional ethics. No one should be on air who speaks about subjects on which they have personal interests, and who does not disclose them.

We must boycott.

Juan Ricardo Cole, a public intellectual and essayist, is the Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His blog, Informed Comment, can be found at <https://www.juancole.com>.

control and not something the Democrats tend to do.

I am now a Democrat. As I look at the words, there is a tinge of remorse and sadness. Sad because of what the GOP that I spent a lifetime serving has become. As I look at the words, I also realize I have recaptured my soul. That is not a statement the GOP can truthfully make.

I pray they can recapture it one day, but I don't think I will see it in my lifetime. You have to have empathy to have a soul.

Bob Schneider spent more than 30 years in national politics as a federal lobbyist and political consultant, focusing primarily on foreign policy, national defense and trade. This essay was first published July 7, 2017 at ChicagoNow.com.



Why Should The Poor Pay High Drug Prices?

BY DEAN BAKER

We have seen a lot of hyperventilating in political circles over Donald Trump's recently proposed tariffs on steel and aluminum. While these do not seem like well-considered policies, and are likely to do more harm than good even from the narrow standpoint of increasing manufacturing employment, they are not by themselves the horror story being presented.

Steel prices often fluctuate by 20% or 30% over the course of a year, as they did in 2016. If tariffs raise the price in the U.S. by 10%, that would be unfortunate for downstream industries, but not exactly a catastrophe.

However, more important than the specifics of a steel tariff is the implicit assumption that the country as a whole has an interest in stronger and longer patent and copyright protection. Many pundits have

attacked Trump's focus on steel and manufacturing because they argue, we should be more concerned about protecting U.S. corporations' patents and copyrights overseas. This doesn't make sense.

At the most basic level, stronger and longer patent and copyright protection means that people in other countries have to pay more money. These government-granted monopolies often allow companies to raise the price of the protected items by a factor of 10 or even a 100. In this way, they are equivalent to tariffs of several thousand percent.

Just to be clear, this is not a point that can be honestly disputed by economists. If a government barrier raises the price of a good, it doesn't matter whether we call that barrier a "tariff" or a "patent," the impact on the market is the same.

This means if Pfizer's patent protection on a drug

allows it to raise the price it charges for a drug in China or some other developing country by a factor of 10 over the free market price, it is equivalent to imposing a tariff of 1,000% on the drug. The difference is that instead of the tariff revenue going to the government, it goes back to Pfizer as higher profits.

It's obvious that higher profits for Pfizer are good for its shareholders and top executives, but why should the rest of us be happy about people in developing countries paying more money to Pfizer for its drugs? Many of us care more about poor people being able to get drugs than Pfizer's profits.

The story gets even worse. The more money that Pfizer and other U.S. companies collect overseas for their patents and copyrights, the less these people have to spend on other goods and services. In effect, because Pfizer can charge more for its drugs, people in China and other countries have less money to spend on U.S.-made cars and planes.

How is this good for most of the people in the United States?

The pushers of stronger and longer patent and copyright protection will undoubtedly claim that higher profits will provide more incentive for research and creative work. This is true, but what are the numbers? If Pfizer gets another \$1 billion in profit will they invest one percent of it in research?

That would be an increase, but that means the world would be spending \$1 billion in higher drug prices to get an additional \$10 million in research.

That's not a very good deal. And even this research could be largely wasted on developing copycat drugs that are intended to gain a portion of a competitor's patent earnings by duplicating a successful drug.

Again, that could be good for Pfizer, but it is not especially helpful for the rest of us who want to see research focused on developing treatments for conditions where there is not already an effective drug.

To be clear, we do need a mechanism for financing research and creative work, but there is little reason to believe that patent and copyright monopolies are the most effective tool. These are relics of the medieval guild system. We can do better in the 21st Century.

It would be great if we could have a serious debate on the most efficient way to finance research and creative work. That may be asking too much from our national media. How about we set the bar a little lower.

How about if the media stop telling us that what is good for Pfizer and Microsoft is good for the country as a whole. We get that reporters and editors' friends and family members might benefit from longer and stronger patent and copyright protection, but maybe they can try thinking beyond your immediate experience. After all, this is supposed to be what they are paid to do.

Dean Baker is a macroeconomist and senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC, which he cofounded.

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Comey Did It To Himself And Us

BY JUAN COLE

In former FBI director James Comey's recent interview with ABC News, he attempted to position himself as an upholder of the rule of law, of the Constitution, and even of the truth.

Human beings are very good at forgetting their own misdeeds and building narratives that justify themselves, which may even be desirable evolutionarily. But the particular shape of Comey's amnesia is troubling because of what it means for American democracy.

Comey has been a central figure in the gutting of the 4th Amendment of the Constitution and in attempts to make sure the FBI and the rest of the U.S. government can break your encryption and spy on you illegally.

It is true that Comey did not want to go as far in that direction as former vice president Dick Cheney, but he wanted to go so far as nevertheless to make the Constitution meaningless and to make Americans vulnerable to hacking. You see, the tech companies cannot create backdoors for the FBI without creating backdoors for Russian troll farms in St. Petersburg.

Am I saying Comey did it to himself? I am saying

Comey did it to himself. And to the rest of us.

Comey condemned Edward Snowden for his revelations about illegal government collection of Americans' data from telephone calls. Even that was misdirection because Snowden's more important revelation was that the NSA has individual-level tools to monitor emails.

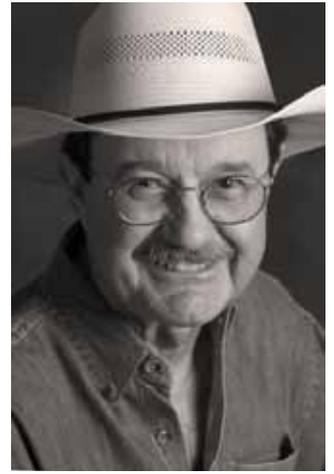
But even the telephone metadata issue is grave, since it would tell you to whom Warren Buffet is speaking, potentially allowing manipulation of the stock market; it would tell you if a politician is seeing a specialist in venereal diseases, allowing you to blackmail him.

And apparently Comey and others corrupted the entire U.S. judicial system by illegally requisitioning telephone metadata to zero in on drug sellers, then notifying local police to arrest them and lie to the judge about how the police began their evidence trail.

One-hundred thousand of the inmates in our vast penitentiary gulag are guilty of no more than selling some pot, which most of us don't even think should be illegal, and many were put there by unconstitu-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35

Jim Hightower



A Plutocratic Coup

Many Americans are reluctant to accept that coup conspiracies are part of country's history. We tend to believe that plots to overthrow the government are totally foreign to our national character. But we do do coups. In fact, the country itself was founded on an armed coup to replace the legal ruler, King George III, with a gang of revolutionary upstarts.

One coup that most of us haven't heard of is The Wall Street Putsch of 1933. The financial establishment – along with its media and political henchmen – rushed out to bury the story and protect the gentlemen of Wall Street implicated in the part. It's a heck of a story about capitalist skullduggery by a few Lords of Wealth trying to overthrow the government and enthrone a fascist regime friendly to them.

In 1933, the Great Depression was in full force, spreading mass unemployment, waves of bankruptcies and abject poverty. The people's boiling political anger was scaring the aloof denizens of Wall Street, as more and more people joined in open rebellion against all things the plutocrats considered sacrosanct: unfettered capitalism.

The year before, Franklin D. Roosevelt had scored a landslide presidential victory over Wall Street's man, then-President Herbert Hoover, by promising a New Deal for millions of Americans impoverished by the Depression. To the bankers' horror, the new president's government policies and programs to help people get back on their feet included new taxes on wealth.

Such Wall Street multimillionaires as Grayson M.P. Murphy [banker and Anaconda Copper Mining Co. head] and Robert Sterling Clark [heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune] were enraged by FDR's moves. "Class war," they wailed, claiming that their "liberty" to grab as much wealth as possible was being shackled.

Calling Roosevelt a traitor to his class, these men implemented a plan to oust him by enlisting a private military force made up of thousands of destitute World War I vets who were protesting the failure to receive promised federal bonus payments.

Gerald MacGuire, Murphy's bond salesman, was an ex-soldier and an active member of The American

Legion. MacGuire reached out to retired Marine Maj. Gen. Smedley Darlington Butler, a respected advocate for veterans. After several meetings spent discussing veterans' issues, MacGuire finally explained that the financial powers he represented wanted Butler to create a paramilitary corps of 500,000 vets and march on Washington to force FDR from the White House.

MacGuire told Butler that the Wall Street cohort plus a new group called American Liberty League [made up of the right-wing bosses of such corporate giants as DuPont, Colgate, General Foods and General Motors] were prepared to fund the cause to the tune of \$300 million [about \$5.6 billion in today's money], and that Remington Arms would supply the weapons. The conspirators thought that FDR would go down without a fight and would welcome the coup. Once in place, the financiers and militarists would install a "secretary of general affairs" to run the country. And one of their choices was Smedley Butler.

But he was the wrong general. Butler was a patriot and a lifelong soldier for democracy, and he was astounded and repulsed by the hubris and treachery of these aristocrats from Wall Street. Butler enlisted investigative reporter Paul Comly French to help gather proof of the bankers' intent.

With evidence in hand, Butler got the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities to conduct an investigation, which convinced members of the committee that Butler's story was "alarmingly true." The committee then opened public hearings with Butler giving detailed testimony.

Wall Street responded by immediately launching a coordinated counterattack assailing Butler and dismissing the idea that very idea of a coup was preposterous. They got the establishment media to pile on to discredit him.

But the House committee final report concluded that it was "able to verify all the pertinent statements made by General Butler," and that "There is no question that these attempts were discussed, were planned, and might have been placed in execution when and if the financial backers deemed it

expedient.”

Nonetheless, officials failed to punish the perpetrators of this outrageous assault on our democracy. And with the help of a Wall Street-loving media, the coup attempt was sealed off from our history books.

Fortunately, a real patriot was able to expose the traitors, nipping the coup d'etat in the bud. Their attempt reveals the threat of concentrated wealth and the ever-present danger that the imperious rich pose to majority rule. Not only should this real-life drama be highlighted in history books; it should be a blockbuster movie.

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Learning From DeMarco

Some are born with good luck, but I was 30 years old before Lady Luck smiled on me with full radiance. She arrived in the form of a petite bundle of feistiness, inherent smarts, political savviness, personal warmth, playfulness and beauty both inside and out, named Susan DeMarco.

I apologize for turning inward for a personal commentary today, but DeMarco [as she's called by all who have known her] is an admirable example of the virtue of citizen activism. She didn't dwell in the media limelight, yet she's one of our country's everyday people who consistently works to make a positive difference in all they do, accomplishing so much more good than the bulk of politicians and other sparklies who are perpetually in the public eye.

She's been a teacher, a leader of public interest groups, an investigative journalist, the author of three books, a government official, a public policy innovator and a mentor, as well as a lifelong champion of economic fairness, social justice and equal opportunity for all. In other words, as one activist put it, "she's a firecracker."

For some 45 years, it's been my good fortune to team up with this woman in assorted progressive populist battles against the big shots trying to run roughshod over the democratic values of workaday people.

Alas, on the first of April, DeMarco slipped away from me and all who loved her. I was alone with her when she drew her last breath, 18 hours after I asked the hospital to honor her previously written directive that all life-support tubes be removed from her body. Crushingly sad, of course, yet deeply rewarding, for she not only conquered the blood clot that had slammed into her brain, but also our society's high-tech medical imperative that she be held captive in her own damaged body.

And how very DeMarco that she managed to fly away on both Easter Sunday and April Fools' Day!

Tributes and heartfelt reminiscences have poured in from all over. She would have been amazed by how many people appreciated her – her work, her assistance and her example. One longtime Texas friend summed up the New Jersey native with the highest of Texan accolades: "She was mighty fine."

No need, however, to send flowers or make donations in her name. Rather, she would hope that the comfort of her pain-free passing in an Austin hospital might alert others to consider the possibility of controlling their own end times. The last message of love that DeMarco sent to all of us was this: Plan ahead.

Life comes at us fast, and this often includes its abrupt end. She was able to die on her own terms only because she had previously signed three essential legal documents stating her wishes and empowering a trusted loved one – me – to allow medical officials to switch from life sustaining to palliative care, letting her die naturally and without pain.

The documents are Durable Power of Attorney, Declaration of Guardian and Advanced Directive to Physicians. As legalistic as all of that sounds, it's not complicated to get and fill out these standard forms. Indeed, most hospitals today have and will provide free copies of some of the forms to those who ask. In addition, a recent Medicare provision pays your own doctor to spend time during your physical exams to explain, discuss and assist you with Advance Care Planning.

One more thing I learned from this experience is that it's not enough to have signed the end-of-life documents – you also need someone who knows where they are when the time comes. Hospital officials cannot take your word that the documents exist. As I frantically searched her "filing system" – i.e., unmarked piles of stuff around her bedroom – I could hear her saying, "Come on, Hightower, time to go!" Luckily, they were found, and so she was able to depart as she wished.

Above all, DeMarco was a free spirit – full of life, curiosity and imagination. She delighted in the diversity of birds that populated her big South Austin yard, from shy cardinal couples to raucous grackles, and she often had magical dreams of actually flying with them. She even imagined her final exit as a joyous, avian-like experience, as expressed in an old, uplifting gospel song she liked: "I'll Fly Away." And that's just what she did. – *Jim Hightower*

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BARBARA BUSH, 1925-2018

Thank You, Mrs. Bush

BY TOM ROSSHIRT

My brother Matt died of AIDS 26 years ago today, passing away in his bed in my parents' home in Houston.

It was a benighted time for people with AIDS. There were no antiretrovirals then. There was nothing much you could do for an AIDS patient but hold his hand. And many people still thought you could get AIDS by touching. My parents knew of individuals who'd been fired from their jobs for volunteering for AIDS organizations. That's how crazy the fear was.

As Matt was dying, we were befriended by a man named Lou Tesconi, a volunteer from the local AIDS organization. Lou came by to visit with Matt and to offer whatever service and kindness he could to my mom and dad.

Shortly after Matt died, Lou began studies to become a Catholic priest. Within the year, he was diagnosed with AIDS and kicked out of the seminary. Lou was a lawyer by training and temperament.

He appealed the judgment to a Catholic bishop, who then asked Lou to found and head a ministry for people with AIDS. It was called Damien Ministries and was established in a poor part of Washington, DC.

In early 1989, when the country was still very ignorant and fearful of AIDS, Lou got a call from the White House. First Lady Barbara Bush was planning to visit Grandma's House, a home for infants with AIDS. It was one of the very first outings in her tenure as first lady, and Lou was asked to join a team of people to brief her privately before the event.

During the briefing, Lou told me later, he said: "Mrs. Bush, it is a fantastic thing that you are holding these babies with AIDS. But the country sees them as innocent and the rest of us with AIDS as guilty. The whole suffering AIDS community needs a collective embrace from you today."

Lou thought he was speaking metaphorically. Apparently, Mrs. Bush doesn't do metaphor. She stood

up, walked over to Lou and gave him a big hug.

After the briefing, Mrs. Bush took a tour of the facility as she talked to the press. She hugged, kissed and played with three little girls and then nailed the message: "You can hug and pick up babies and people who have ... HIV. ... There is a need for compassion."

At the news conference afterward, Lou stood by his point on Mrs. Bush's visit: "I'm afraid that it may send a message that babies are innocent and can be helped," he said, "but that the rest of us aren't." He added: "I told her it would certainly help to get a collective hug from the first lady."

Then, again, this time in front of the cameras, Mrs. Bush wrapped Lou up in a big embrace.

Mrs. Bush wrote of this visit in her memoirs. She noted that "even then, people still thought that touching a person with the virus was dangerous." But she didn't give herself any credit for dealing a blow against stigma by embracing a gay man with AIDS in 1989.

Lou had a buzz from that hug that never went away.

In the fall of 1991, near Thanksgiving, I got a call from a friend that Lou had gone into the hospital again. He didn't have to tell me that it was for the last time. I called the White House and asked whether I could speak to the first lady's office. I was

a nobody press secretary on the Hill. I didn't expect anyone in the White House to talk to me. Suddenly, I was speaking with the first lady's press secretary, Anna Perez, who had accompanied Mrs. Bush to Grandma's House that day. I began to recount the events of two years before, and she saved me the time: "I remember Mr. Tesconi," she said. I explained Lou's condition and said, "It would be so comforting for him to receive a letter from Mrs. Bush."

A few days later, I went to see Lou in the hospital. As soon as he saw me, he reached beside his bed with a slow and shaky hand and pulled out a letter: "Look what I got," he said.

The letter was unflinching and full of love. She didn't duck the issue that Lou was dying. She used it as a pivot to say, "Well-done." At the bottom, in her own hand, she wrote to Lou that his life mattered, that he had made an impact.

That was a long time ago. But some things you don't forget – and shouldn't. In a time of ignorance, her wise touch eased the sting of exclusion for my friend and many others.

Thank you, Mrs. Bush.

Tom Rosshirt wrote this column in June 2012. He was a national security speechwriter for President Bill Clinton and a foreign affairs spokesman for Vice President Al Gore.

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Comey

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

tional government surveillance which then concealed itself from the judiciary.

Far from standing for the Constitution or the truth, Comey dramatically undermined both. Comey has bequeathed these unconstitutional tactics to the weasel-y and wholly unscrupulous Jeff Sessions, who is having his minions use them against DACA dreamers and Black Lives Matter.

Comey watched James Clapper lie to Congress about mass warrantless surveillance of the American people. Comey knew Clapper was lying. He did not come after Clapper. He did not resign. His insistence on truth-telling suddenly was abandoned. He was disappointed that Gen. Petraeus was not prosecuted for lying to the FBI about his affair. Clapper's assassination of the 4th Amendment and dissimulation was not an issue for him.

Comey doesn't like Trumpworld. Comey helped create Trumpworld.

Then there was his attempt to strongarm Apple into weakening [you might as well say deleting] encryption on its smartphones. Comey saw an opening to get rid of that pesky encryption by creating a legal precedent, and he lied about his true motives, maintaining that there was no other way for the FBI to investigate the San Bernardino shootings. [Let me help

him with that; a couple of mentally unstable people were allowed to buy an arsenal and went postal.]

When the FBI did hack in, they found nothing useful. They did Apple the favor of demonstrating that current encryption is too weak.

National Security elites like Comey are not our friends when it comes to privacy. The NSA used tradecraft and bribery to get an encryption company to adopt an NSA standard, which turned out to have backdoors for the NSA. And, of course, for everyone else.

American democracy was certainly hacked in 2016. You can argue about whether Putin's patriots were decisive or not, but you cannot deny the attempt. Comey has been so eager to get the bad guys that he has robbed the rest of us of our 4th Amendment rights and of our privacy, and gave Russian and UAE hackers essential tools.

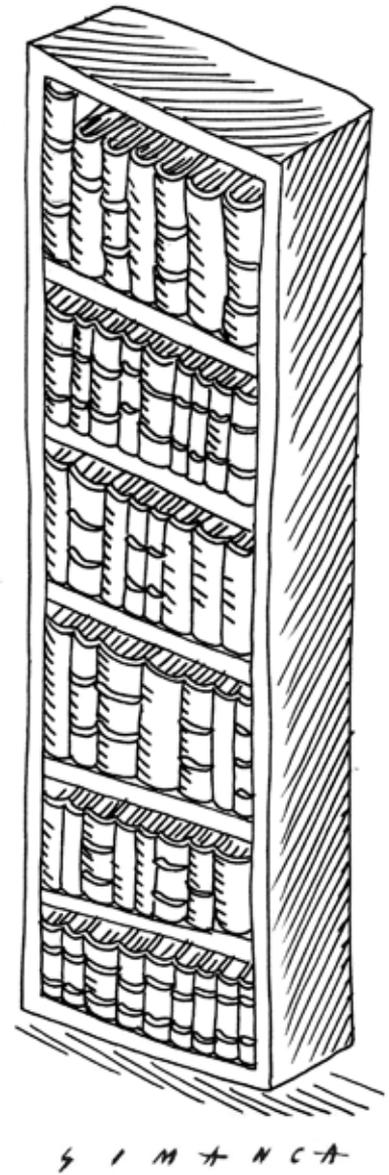
He still can't see it.

Comey doesn't like Trumpworld.

Comey helped create Trumpworld.

Juan Ricardo Cole, a public intellectual and essayist, is the Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His blog, Informed Comment, can be found at <https://www.juan-cole.com>.

Social Media Spreads Fake Bodies, As Well As Fake News



BY FROMA HARROP

Phony “news” stories aren’t the only toxic content being spread on social media these days. Bad people are pitching digitally touched-up rear ends and modified thighs as real, dismaying teens and young women unable to attain what’s being sold as perfection.

Public anger at the ills unleashed by social media currently burns hottest on Facebook – namely, its profiting off political lies posted by masked operatives.

Many also blame Facebook for stoking the modern hell of FOMO – fear of missing out. We speak of the feelings of inadequacy fanned by friends’ jolly vacation and party posts, presentations that make many think everyone is having a better time than they are.

But an interesting study out of Britain suggests that for young women especially, Facebook isn’t the most damaging social media platform out there. Instagram is.

The United Kingdom’s Royal Society for Public Health asked nearly 1,500 people ages 14 to 24 to score the five leading social networks on matters related to health and well-being. The issues included anxiety, depression, loneliness, body image and real-world relationships.

Facebook landed in the middle. YouTube was rated as most positive, followed by Twitter. Then came Facebook and Snapchat.

Instagram ranked as the most negative. The reason is easy to guess. As a photo- and video-sharing service, Instagram focuses on image. Young people have long obsessed on appearance. That makes faked visions of youthful beauty unusually cruel.

Instagram bombards young women with pictures of flawless bodies in bikinis. These physical ideals are unobtainable – even by the models posing in those doctored pictures. That’s not how they’re presented,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39

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Investing In Peace

BY HAL SPAKE

On April 13, without proof that the Assad regime launched a chemical weapon that killed 80 people, the U.S. fired 68 Cruise missiles at Syrian targets.

In 1988 Iraq unleashed 30 gas attacks that killed 50,000 to 80,000 civilians and soldiers. In that attack our government prevented UN inspectors from verifying the use of chemical agents and blocked any discussion of the topic in the UN Security Council.

In response to a question about England's use of gas, Winston Churchill said "I am strongly in favor of using poisoned gas against uncivilized tribes," and The British Manual of Military Law said civilized nations couldn't use chemical weapons on one another but those rules do not apply in wars with uncivilized states and tribes.

It appears that one person who used chemical weapons is accused of being a monster, another is embraced because he fought for our national interests and the third is hailed as a hero and recently had two fictionalized movies about him in movie theaters.

This shows that though war is wrapped in the cloak

of morality, war is about the politics of power and acquisition of wealth.

The Government Accountability Office says over the past 17 years the U.S. has spent \$2.4 trillion blowing stuff up and killing people. We could talk about how much that amount of wealth could do. Coast-to-coast high-speed rail could be built, numerous infrastructure could be completed, K-higher education funded, universal health-care provided and rural hospitals kept open.

Everyone has heard that discussion before and the arguments seem to fall on deaf ears. Instead of rehashing these lifeless topics, let's look at China's "One Belt, One Road Initiative."

China is currently building a new "Silk Road" of rail, highways and pipelines that will link Beijing to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Greece, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Belgium, France and Italy. Their Maritime Silk Road, with new and expanded port facilities built and controlled by the Chinese, will link Italy to Egypt, through the Suez Canal, around the Horn of Africa and on to Kenya, Sri Lanka, India,

Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and the two Koreas.

For half the cost of America's wars, China is building alliances while taking economic control of Eurasia. Someone in American leadership needs to question our unwavering devotion to the dogs of war.

Our military adventurism is currently alienating many of our allies as we continue to destabilize one Middle East country after another.

Even Turkey, our staunchest partner in the Cold War against the Soviet Union, is now buying non-

NATO compatible weapons systems from Russia and moving closer to China.

It's time we abandon our ideas of military domination and instead focus our national wealth on development. If we don't, a new Eurasian economic bloc will abandon the U.S., because the dividends of improving life greatly outweigh the financial and psychological costs of taking life.

Norman resident Hal Spake has worked for the National Security Agency and is a retired U.S. diplomat. He also is chairman of Common Cause Oklahoma.

Social Media

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

though. Vulnerable young women feel ugly, inferior and socially doomed.

Though these images are as bogus as the made-up political controversies sown by Russian bots, they haven't raised the public's ire nearly as high. That's understandable, given the stakes for the world, but manipulated photos directed at the young still represent a harm.

The RSPH recommends that social media platforms put what amounts to warning signs on photos of people whose images have been digitally changed. More than two-thirds of the young people surveyed liked that idea.

Setting aside the messages being beamed, the retreat into social media itself seems to be making young people sadder. The hours lost chatting online are obviously hours not spent in face-to-face friendships - or just in the sunshine.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh surveyed nearly 2,000 people ages 19 to 32 about their social media use. They found that those clicking onto these platforms more than 58 times a week were three times likelier to feel lonely than others visiting fewer than nine times.

A study published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior* found that those who use seven or more social networks seem to be three times as likely to suffer from general anxiety as those using two or fewer platforms.

It could be that people who live on social media do so because they are depressed or anxiety-ridden to being with. What shocked me most was the revelation that some of us are on more than seven social media platforms.

Of course, no one has to be on social media. Some psychologists insist that it's become an addiction for many. Despite some compelling comparisons of the way slot machines and social media platforms are designed, the jury remains out on that.

But the damage caused by fake content hits both casual and fanatical users alike. Whether in the form of words or digitally manipulated photos, doctored content has invaded social media.

In most cases, the manipulators are not doing it for the benefit of others. They're just playing with their heads.

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Consolidations To Watch For In 2018

1. Hale Business Systems, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Fuller Brush, and W. R. Grace Co. will merge and become: Hale, Mary, Fuller, Grace.
2. Polygram Records, Warner Brothers, and Zesta Crackers join forces and become: Poly, Warner Cracker.
3. 3M will merge with Goodyear and become: MMMGood.
4. Zippo Manufacturing, Audi Motors, Dofasco, and Dakota Mining will merge and become: ZipAudiDoDa.
5. FedEx is expected to join its competitor, UPS, and become: FedUP.
6. Fairchild Electronics and Honeywell Computers will become: Fairwell Honeychild.
7. Grey Poupon and Docker Pants are expected to become: PouponPants.
8. Knotts Berry Farm and the National Organization of Women will become: Knott NOW!
And finally....
9. Victoria's Secret and Smith & Wesson will merge under the new name: TittyTittyBangBang
Thanks to Billie Rodeley for sharing on Facebook

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The Rx For Saving The Republic

THE COMMON GOOD

By Robert B. Reich

Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group

208 pages, \$22.95

BY JOHN WOOD

Time magazine once named Robert Reich, the secretary of labor during Bill Clinton's administration, one of the Top 10 most effective cabinet secretaries of the 20th Century. Today, the author of 15 books is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley. He is also a co-creator of the award-winning documentary, *Inequality for All*, and of the documentary *Saving Capitalism*, which you can stream now.

His latest book, *The Common Good*, focuses on the cyclical nature the United States unfortunately finds itself in – sometimes virtuous and other times vicious cycles.

Today, Reich claims, we, not surprisingly, find ourselves in a rather vicious one that we are compelled to reverse. Reich's well written book argues that the idea of the common good has gone out of style, but "if there is no common good, there is no society."

Trump has gotten people talking, Reich says, about such things as to whether even have a "social contract" or even a public sphere. In a short book of just over 200 pages, Reich compares stakeholders vs. shareholders. Corporate America card-stacks in that they quietly dismiss the downside of ever increasing CEO compensation and the "profit at any cost" mantra backed by the idea that the executive has a fiduciary obligation to increase returns to shareholders no matter what the cost.

Reich finds such arguments "tautological." He laments that in this mentality only investors are considered. But he asks earnestly: "What about the common good?"

Those against the common good are many, from deregulated banks to slumlords. He says they dismiss society's rules of fairness – "tacit rules that can be exploited by people who view them as opportunities for selfish gain rather than as social constraints."

It's become more and more a dog-eat-dog world that prospers through distrust at the expense of our social institutions.

Reich says that inequality is such that wealth has been largely concentrated to the top. This is not natural because some of that wealth is being used to

change the rules of the game, whether regulatory or legal, to create clear advantages to those on the top, imposing disadvantages on everyone else below.

For example, the recent tax law that accrues most of its benefits the top 5% or the attack on safety nets. Banks were bailed out, but homeowners who find themselves in the untimely position of being upside down with their loans were not. Alternatively, the fact that our president can go bankrupt multiple times and be considered "smart," yet student debt is not subject to the same laws.

Just to count the "few" contradictions that keep the rich richer and the poorer poorer.

With Nixon, we got Watergate. That scandal undermined our faith in the presidency. Nixon was focused on his power, his political survival, not the institutions of democracy. This was on top of all the turmoil of Vietnam. The Boomers grew up with history, holding a new sense that maybe they couldn't count on our institutions anymore. They lived this turmoil.

Reich's new book takes us on a tour down America's moral descent. He claims the decline originated with Nixon. Likewise, he indicts the current administration for its obvious willful ignorance of the common good, undermining democracy itself.

He says that while the Boomer Generation remembers a time before this common good eroded, they barely do. Lacking experience with the idea of the common good has further corroded it through no one knowing what to expect from a functioning common good when they haven't personally experienced one.

Before the Boomers, Reich claims there was a much greater sense that society should share in the common wealth for most, if not all, its members.

This is very different than the Greatest Generation's experience before them. They lived through the Great Depression and World War II where they trusted their government. They had to in order to survive.

Today's generations – X, Millennials, and Zs – probably are at a loss as to what to do because the "common good" looks more like distant history rather than something real to them. This is especially true because the problems are all around us, not just the

presidency, but the banks, the media, corporations, etc.

How do people find firm footing? It's easy to give up.

Reich explains that Trump is not a source of the problem – instead he's a symptom. However, with the erosion of the common good, Trump is now its clear antithesis.

Reich says we need a kind of civic renewal so more people are willing to work with others “to separate facts and logic from values and beliefs.” He proclaims the answer is in civic education. It stems from the founders who wanted people educated enough to keep power inbounds – or what was called at the time “civic virtue.”

A lady once walked up to Ben Franklin and famously asked: “What sort of government have the delegates created?” Franklin responded, “A Republic if you can keep it.”

Reich asks what it takes to keep it. The answer? Education. Even Thomas Jefferson once said, “Ignorance and despotism seemed made for each other.”

Education, whether it's K-12 or higher education, has dangerously become considered an individual investment. As a result, it's up to families themselves to foot this rather expensive and ever-escalating bill.

This reminds me of a public meeting I attended a few years ago. Two elderly people asked their state representative why they should pay for school since their children were now grown. Such a question made my head spin.

I agree not only with Reich here, but also the video blogger and author John Green, who said profoundly, “Public education does not exist for the benefit of students or the benefit of their parents. It exists for the benefit of the social order.”

This is the common good Reich is talking about. We need an educated population because we benefit daily through our economy and social order.

And I also agree with Green when he says further, “It's because I don't like living in a country with

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a bunch of stupid people.”

Even after a two-week teacher walkout, it seems like a majority in the Oklahoma Legislature, the largest cutter of K-12 appropriations of any state in the union in the last 10 years, still doesn't get it.

Maybe they'll get an inkling in November?

John Wood is an associate professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma. His commentary and analysis does not necessarily reflect the views of UCO.



Young People Joining Unions Again

BY HANNAH FINNIE

At the March for Our Lives in Washington, DC, rays of sunlight break through an unseasonably cold March, through the ordered, brutalist buildings that line Pennsylvania Avenue. Hundreds of thousands of people crowd the avenue, just as they have been crowding legislators' phone lines and email inboxes in recent weeks. On a stage strategically positioned in line with the Capitol building, 17-year-old Cameron Kasky, a Parkland shooting survivor, delivers this proclamation:

To the leaders, skeptics, and cynics who told us to sit down and stay silent, wait your turn: Welcome to the revolution. It is a powerful and peaceful one because it is of, by, and for the young people of this country. Since this movement began some people have asked me, do you think any change is going to come from this? Look around, we are the change. Our voices are powerful, and our votes matter. We hereby promise to fix the broken system we've been forced into and to create a better world for the gen-

erations to come. Don't worry, we've got this.

Kasky's statement was, of course, about guns. Seventeen of his classmates and teachers had been taken from him, and from their families, friends, and their own futures, five weeks earlier by a gunman who used an automatic weapon to kill 17 people in 6 minutes and 20 seconds. But they were also taken by a system – a political system wherein a vast majority of Americans, and particularly young Americans, support policies to clamp down on gun deaths but politicians, bought off by the NRA, do not listen.

Young people are at a tipping point. They are frustrated by a system whose cracks were etched into place by preceding generations, but have only fully metastasized for theirs. They experience suffocating levels of student debt alongside declining wages and income equality while watching companies monopolize entire industries, and sometimes even nationwide elections.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

stick a knife into the state Ethics Commission and twist it.

They did it again this session when they effectively defunded the agency, opting to finance it instead through fees collected from candidates, political parties, lobbyists, and PACs.

That means only \$710,351 for the agency to serve as the public's official, constitutionally established watchdog over the intersection of money and politics.

Barely enough money to keep the doors open and lights on. Not enough to conduct serious investigations into candidate and special interest hanky-panky and malfeasance. Far from the estimated \$3.3 million it needs to fully execute its duties.

House Speaker Charles McCall, Senate President Mike Schulz and their minions should hang their heads in shame – if they had any.

They want the patina of a watchdog but without the bite. They hope rank-and-file Oklahomans will think there is a finely-tuned mechanism in place to identify and prosecute graft, corruption and payola when in fact it's been neutered.

Sadly, this is nothing new. When Democrats controlled the Legislature, they never fully funded the agency either, making it difficult, if not impossible, to review and pursue all serious allegations. Now, the Republican supermajority is working to kill it ... hoping to conceal the blood on their hands by starving it to death.

GOP Gov. Henry Bellmon was the driving force behind the agency, created in 1990 when voters by a 2-1 margin enshrined it in the state Constitution. Unfortunately, Bellmon left the watchdog's funding up to the Legislature. Fox meet henhouse.

What better time than now to secure a permanent funding source? A citizen uprising already is brewing against the mischief at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. Oklahomans must not sit idly while the Ethics Commission is drowned in the bathtub.

Who will take up the cause?

DINOs

Historically, Democrats cast themselves as the Big Tent party, a political home for liberals, moderates and conservatives alike.

Unlike lockstep Republicans, Ds often warred like cats and dogs – and failed to reunite in November, occasionally to their agonizing shame [think: Trump].

As Will Rogers quipped, "I don't belong to an organized political party. I'm a Democrat."

Today, of course, Democrats in Oklahoma are way past the time they could afford to be splintered. They paddle against strong currents in statewide races,

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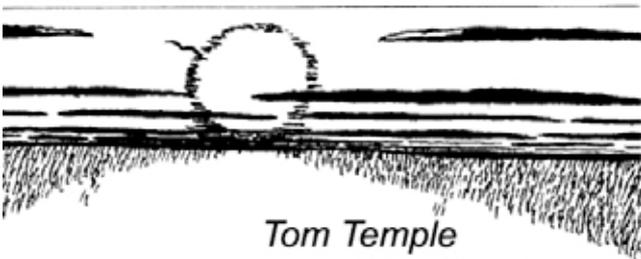
Democratic efforts are hampered when mainstream media designate what can best be described as DINOs – Democrats In Name Only – as spokespeople for a party with which they have passing connection, at best.

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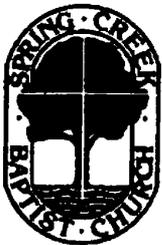


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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

A microcosm of TrumpWorld: Patrick Wyrick almost certainly wasn't qualified to hold a seat on the state Supreme Court [residency issues]. So, naturally, the uber-right justice gets a promotion from the president – to a federal judgeship. #Sad

Remember all the hate over Oklahoma's new car tags? Well, the scissortail design just finished fourth in America's Best License Plate Award competition [yes, there is such a thing]. Winner: New Mexico.

Sleep tight? An Oklahoman's life expectancy is 75.7 years – 47th worst in the nation, according to report in the Journal of the American Medical Association. In 1990, we ranked 36th with life expectancy of 75.

Don't forget Our Revolution Oklahoma's May 31 blowout featuring former Ohio Sen. Nina Turner and columnist Jim Hightower, who'll be introduced by Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton. See back cover for details.

AARP reports only 32.3% of 65-year-old-plus Oklahomans report their health is very good or excellent. Even Texans [38.2%] feel better than we do! #Pathetic

Finally, some good news: Time reports a record 309 women filed as candidates for U.S. House seats nationally as of April 5 – eclipsing the previous high of 298 in 2012. We believe a woman's place is in the dome!

How's that Trump tax cut working out for you? It's stupendous for the 1%. The AP reports the nation's six biggest Wall Street banks got a \$3.6 billion tax cut this year. Even GOP Sen. Marco Rubio acknowledges the duplicity.

Wither an educated, engaged electorate? Fed survey finds just 38.3% of Americans ages 65-plus read for pleasure or self-fulfillment on a typical day – highest of any category. Millennials? Only 12%.

Connected? Or controlled? Americans average checking their phones 47 times daily – only 19 minutes between each check. Two-in-three think periodic unplugging is important for mental health, but only one-in-four actually do it. – Time

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

However, House Bill 1012xx repealed the hotel/motel tax that was part of the initial funding package, reducing the total by \$34.9 million to \$530.7 million. So \$543.3 minus \$530.7 leaves us short by \$12.6 million for year one of these new education spending commitments. The next year, the shortfall will increase to \$116 million because funds generated by the cigarette tax increase must shift from education to funding health care services.

The legislators think they're done with budget problem and are planning to go home early from this year's session. Maybe teachers kept going back to the Capitol because they can add and subtract.

Nobody currently serving in the Legislature was in office when the majority Republican Party forced through their trickle down economic strategy by racheting down personal income taxes with a series of reductions that benefitted the wealthiest Oklahomans most.

At the same time, these no-tax-for-any-reason zealots sent a ballot measure to the people asking them to ban tax increases for any reason without a supermajority of the state House and Senate or another vote of the people. The people said yes. It sounded good.

The goal was for business and industry to flood the state with new jobs that would ultimately boost the economy.

Well, I ask you, how did that work out for Oklahoma? Where are the new businesses and the great jobs?

It is way past time for the Republican-led Legislature and governor's office to figure out how much the giveaways to special interests cost the state in the form of tax refunds, rebates and incentives that get them out of paying the taxes they already owe.

Legislators really don't know. Ask them. Guestimates suggest more than \$1 billion, but who knows? These tax give-aways were embedded in different pieces of Republican-sponsored legislation for the past 10 years. Legislative staff and attorneys will have to go back and look.

The next critical step is to make sure all special interests – not just the oil and gas industry – pay their fair share of taxes. Then we won't need to raise taxes and will be able to fully fund education and essential services again.

Jackie Gaston
Yukon



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

Unions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

Representation – actual representation – feels more like theory than reality.

People are, finally, beginning to take notice of young people’s activism to fix that system. However, many are mistaking the new wave of media coverage dedicated to young people’s political activism for young people’s newfound political activism.

It’s not that young people were ever politically dormant; it’s just that their activism has existed in places where older generations aren’t used to looking: on college campuses, like the Know Your IX movement and tuition equity campaigns for undocumented students, and inside activist movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #ByeAnita and #Occupy.

And now, increasingly, unions.

For the first time in decades, union membership is on the rise among young people. Historically, younger people have not been unionized, and their rates of union membership trail older adults by wide margins. But just like the gun laws that are already being amended, that too is beginning to change.

According to the Economic Policy Institute [EPI], in 2017, there were 262,000 new union members in the United States. Seventy-five percent of this increase came from young people [which EPI considers those aged 34 and under, but for the purposes of this article, broadly refers to the older subset of Generation Z and most Millennials, ages 16 to 35].

Young people also hold the most favorable attitudes towards labor of any generation, and their support for political parties skews heavily towards those that support pro-worker policies [like standing against “right-to-work” laws], including the Democrats and, increasingly, the Democratic Socialists of America [DSA].

But for some reason, unlike previous generations, young people’s workplace organizing isn’t seen as an integral part of their organizing, writ large. While plenty of people are documenting the rise of young people’s union membership and plenty more describing young people’s leadership in activist spaces, what’s missing is the idea that these two phenomena are actually one: Young people are turning to outside outlets that allow them to exercise their politics in the wake of a political system that, by and large, does not.

•

In a piece for Jacobin Magazine, Micah Uetrict sketches out the ebbing relationship between democracy inside and outside the workplace, and, relatedly, the relationship between economic and political democracy.

To Uetrict – a sociology graduate student who focuses on labor, member of the DSA, and associate editor at Jacobin – activism is activism, whether it

takes place at the workplace or outside of it.

“It’s a relatively recent development that we think of what happens at work as some kind of separate sphere of our lives in general,” he says. He adds: “Young people understand that and don’t like living in a dictatorship in the place where they spend 8 or 10 hours of their day.”

Uetrict experienced something similar at his first job out of college, when he worked as a cashier at an airport making minimum wage. He says he and his co-workers were treated as less than human on a daily basis, and they eventually decided to unionize, granting him a newfound sense of agency.

“I had never felt as powerless,” he says, “as I did when I was a cashier making minimum wage. Conversely, I had never felt as powerful as I did when I joined with my co-workers, confronted my boss, and won.”

That fact – that unionization campaigns often center around not simply better wages or benefits, but a sense that your voice will be heard – often goes misunderstood by those who are not connected to the labor movement. But for Uetrict, who went on to become a union organizer, the idea of worker voice, even if it’s to voice complaints about stagnant pay or subpar health benefits, is not simply one benefit of unions; it is the benefit.

“The thing that you learn immediately as an organizer,” he tells me, “is that even in low-wage workplaces, the number one issue people have with their workplaces is not their low wages but a lack of respect.”

A lack of respect is also primarily driving young people’s frustration with the political system. When Kasky, the 17-year-old Parkland survivor, spoke at the March for Our Lives, he said “our voices are powerful, and our votes matter.” He said that in contrast to the status quo, in which young people’s voices are not seen as powerful, nor their votes.

And looking at recent history, it’s not hard to understand why that might be Kasky’s understanding of the status quo.

Young people’s votes were spurned by an electoral college that favors rural, sparse areas, disproportionately discounting the large numbers of young people who lived in cities in 2016. Their ideas of stronger restrictions on guns, reigning in big banks, and support for the rights of LGBTQ people, immigrants, people of color, and people of varying religious views have been continually overpowered by older generations and special interests.

Seen through that lens, it’s no wonder young people have found working inside the U.S. political system ineffective, and, quite frankly, not worth their time. Instead, young people have redirected their activism

toward different kinds of outlets, where their efforts may actually bring about tangible results. Outlets like unions.

What does this mean for the labor movement? A workplace is, at the most fundamental level, a microcosm of the political system. There are those who hold power, the bosses, and those who don't, the workers. Over time, the balance of power ebbs and flows; when unions are strong, the balance shifts more heavily to the workers, and when unions are weak, the balance favors the bosses.

When unions are powerful, workers have something akin to a voice in the direction of their workplace. And when unions are at their most powerful, workers have something akin to a voice in the direction of their country, a counterbalance to special interest groups like ALEC or the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

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Julia Ackerly is working to build unions up to that level. Now 27, she's worked on Democratic campaigns for most of her adult life: She worked as a field organizer and regional field director for the Bernie Sanders campaign in the 2016 primary elections, and then for Larry Krasner's bid to be Philadelphia's District Attorney [DA], a race that drew national attention for how Krasner sought to use the DA position to enact a progressive vision for the criminal justice system. Ackerly has always worked on campaigns that worked closely with organized labor. But she had never been in a union herself.

That changed when the Campaign Workers' Guild [CWG] formed. The idea behind the CWG is pretty simple: It hopes to unionize campaign staffers, who experience harsh working conditions where poor pay and benefits and long hours run rampant, justified by managers as sacrifices for an important cause.

CWG is currently organizing campaigns one-by-one: Its first successful organizing campaign was that of Randy Bryce, the candidate hoping to win House Speaker Paul Ryan's Congressional seat, and it's organized 10 more campaigns since, for a total of 11 as of March 2018. But it ultimately hopes to organize entire parties' campaign staffs at once in the future.

Ackerly, who helps organize campaign staffs and is now a dues-paying member of CWG herself, says that having a collective ability to be heard and respected in the workplace is a "very motivating factor towards unionization campaigns."

She singles out creating protocol and reporting structures for sexual harassment and discrimination as one of the biggest motivations staff members have for organizing. Which, tellingly, is also the one of the biggest activist movements dominating living room and water cooler conversations across the country as the #MeToo movement continues.

Young people dominate the junior staffs on campaigns and have also made up a significant portion of the driving force behind recently organized campaign staffs, according to Ackerly.

Jake Johnston, the Vice President of Organizing for

the Non-Profit Professional Employees Union [NPEU] has similarly seen young people take the lead at the organizations that have recently organized under NPEU, and at NPEU itself.

For Johnston, collective action has implicit ties to activism, writ large.

"The reality is that our political system really has cut out a significant part of this country. I think there's clearly a rejection of the status quo, and yet there are so few avenues to try and change that," he says. "Whether it's joining the DSA, joining a union, joining an advocacy campaign, or joining an electoral campaign, people are trying to change that. Everyone needs an outlet for activism."

That's true for young people in particular. For far too long, they've been on the receiving end of an economic and political system that does not work for them, while being denied the opportunity to change that system.

Whether it's students like Cameron Kasky shouting about the NRA into a microphone that reverberates from the Capitol to the White House, young people like Julia Ackerly organizing an industry that has never been unionized before, or activists like Micah Uetrict organizing his own workplace, young people are refusing to take part in a political system that has consistently and methodically drowned out their voice.

Instead, they've taken their voices elsewhere, to outlets like unions and activist movements where – finally – their voices are being heard.

Hannah Finnie is the senior policy and communications associate for Generation Progress, the millennial engagement arm of the Center for American Progress.

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

Two prime examples: former AG Mike Turpen and former Treasurer Scott Meacham. Both formerly elected as Democrats to statewide office. Both smart and articulate. Both well-heeled.

Yet neither reflects the progressive leadership of the Democratic Party emerging in the early 21st Century.

Turpen is an especially compelling target. He does Democrats no favors with his weekly bombast on KFOR-TV's Flashpoint. Or with his op-ed columns singing the praises of corrupt, rightwing EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. Or with his open support of incumbent Republican Attorney General Mike Hunter.

This is not to suggest Democrats should explore ways to excommunicate Turpen or Meacham. Rather, it is to implore the state's mainstream media to heed the generational change underway – and to elevate the voices of emerging leaders who more accurately reflect Democratic reality.



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