

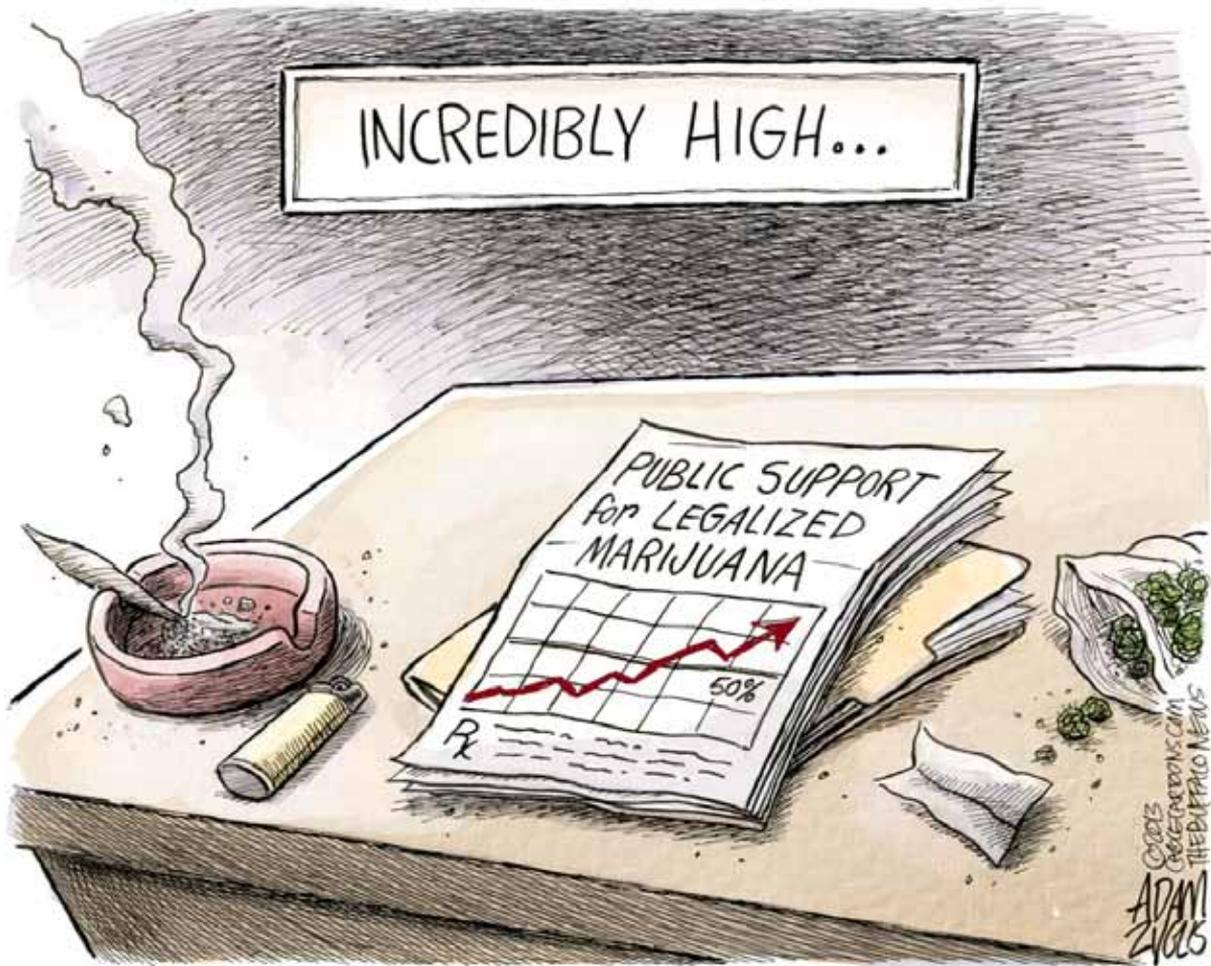
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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POT PROTOCOL

Likely Voters Strongly Favor SQ 788 And Legalizing Medical Marijuana, But What Would Legislature Do?



COVER STORY Begins on page 6.

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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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Observations

Sanctimony On Steroids

Franklin Graham simply cannot heed the wisdom it's better to remain silent and have people think you're a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

The evangelistic hate-monger long had LGBTQ Americans in his sights, decreeing, for example, their "immorality" will expose them to the "flames of hell."

Now, he's unleashing his hyper-sanctimony on the political left.

Addressing preachers, fellow evangelists and his leading Los Angeles donors just before the California primary, Graham said: "Progressive? That's just another word for godless."

According to the New York Times, he urged the group gathered in a Rose Bowl locker room to stand against their state's "blue wall," adding this is the moment for churches to "suck it up" and vote.

Somewhere Billy Graham weeps.

The late "pastor to the presidents" had his bigotry, too. He demonized homosexuality as a "sinister form of perversion." But he also spent much of his career counseling presidents of both parties, bridging the political and ideological divide.

His son, Franklin, clearly hasn't learned from either example. He instead clings to Donald Trump's Make America Hate Again strategy. Of course, the president and Graham are on the wrong side of history. Racism and bigotry are destined to slither back beneath the rocks.

Their hate speech actually is reinforcing a more progressive, pluralistic spirit among younger Americans – and driving more of them away from Graham's Pharisee-like brand of evangelical Christianity.

No matter how hard Trump and Graham try to roll back the calendar, their white-men-in-charge worldview is now a minority opinion – and will be for generations to come.

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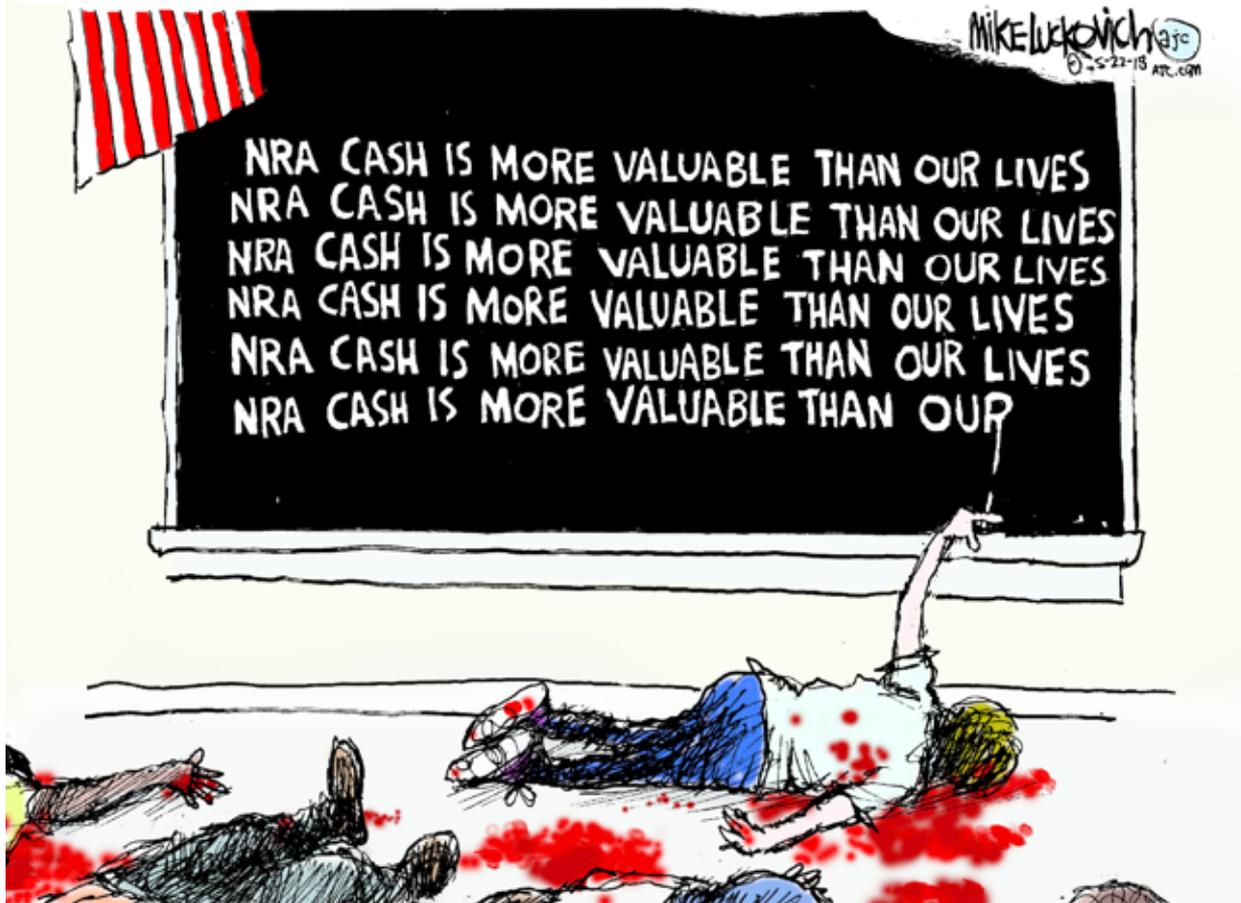
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Observerscope



Laurel: To Gov. Mary Fallin, vetoing the cleverly [but misleadingly] named “constitutional carry” measure. HB 1212 would have poured gasoline on a wildfire of gun violence plaguing the nation.

OK Supreme Court will hear challenges June 11 to SQ 799, the proposed veto referendum that could torpedo teacher and state employee pay raises. Stay tuned.

Dart: To Gov. Mary Fallin, signing bigoted, unconstitutional SB 1140 that authorizes private adoption agencies to receive tax funding yet discriminate based on sexual orientation or religion. A sop to evangelical extremists who wield outsize influence in GOP base.

Someone who can read slowly enough needs to tell our snowball senator, Jim Inhofe, that the warmest May ever in Oklahoma followed the second coldest April. Wild swings define climate change.

Dart: To evangelist [?] Franklin Graham, declaring “progressive” is “just another word for godless.” Pride goeth before a fall.

Not only did GOP Legislature ignore voters’ demands for real criminal justice reform, it also voted to return Ten Commandments to the Capitol – despite voters clear preference for church-state separation. Worse, Gov. Mary Fallin signed HB 2177 into law.

Laurel: To three of state’s largest school districts – OKC, Tulsa and Yukon – giving teachers, staff general election day off. If only they vote their economic self interest ...

Congratulations to Rep. Mickey Dollens and wife Taylor on birth of their first child – a son, Dean. Dad will be a featured guest at Observer’s June 14 Newsmakers [see back cover for details]. No word on whether Dean will make an appearance.

Next time you hear trickle-downers like Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb, goober-natorial wannabe Kevin Stitt and ex-Sen. Tom Coburn carp about government spending, remember their cabal yielded Oklahoma AG-turned-EPA Chief Scott Pruitt, who just spent \$1,560 of your tax dollars on 12 customized fountain pens.

Oklahoma Democrats were smart to open their primaries to independents – the choice of so many younger voters. Of 45,000-plus new registrants this year, nearly one-third declined to commit as Republicans, Democrats or Libertarians.

Laurel: To California, banning state-funded travel to Oklahoma in response to state’s anti-LGBTQ, pro-evangelical adoption law. What will knuckle-draggers do if it torpedoed Sept. 8 OU-UCLA football game?

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Gotta wonder: How would La-peerr react if some nut broke into the NRA offices and began shooting up the building and people?

To be redundant, he will have a whole lot to atone for on his Judgment Day.

Tom Ellis
Okeene
and
Mary Ann Hawkins
Salem, OR

Editor, The Observer:

In this writer's opinion, had Trump's lawyer not paid "hush money" to Stormy Daniels on Oct. 15, 2016, and had FBI Chief James Comey not reopened the so-called "problem with Hillary Clinton's e-mail" 11 days prior to the election, voters would surely have elected Clinton.

Comey has since admitted that reopening the "Clinton Case" was a serious mistake on his part. Comey explains that at the time he was quite certain of a Clinton victory. Consequently, Comey wished to avoid Clinton's very likely victory to be "unnecessarily sullied" by any e-mail controversy that might

subsequently arise.

Rudy Giuliani, President Trump's newest lawyer, recently [effectively] exclaimed on FOX news: "Can you imagine the effect the Daniel's incident would have had on the election?" Of course it would most certainly have been an "electoral bombshell."

Lastly, another seeming ignored political irony is President Trump's positing that among his many reasons for firing Comey was the FBI chief's "mishandling the Clinton e-mail scandal!" [Exclamation point added.]

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

"Tricky" Dick Nixon must surely take a far second to Donald Trump in terms of presidential falsehoods. I even developed some sympathy for the pathetic Nixon. But I have nothing but contempt for the self deceptive Trump. He lost his soul years ago.

Jeff Hamilton
Midwest City

Jeff Hamilton represented District 101 in the Oklahoma House from 1986-94.

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to God:

Well, God, I hate to tell you, but politicians think you really screwed up. Regardless, some obnoxious politicians are bringing you back into the public eye again. They are reviving the God, Gays and Guns talk, working their way to the next election.

First, God, they can't make up their minds about you. They think you did a bad thing by making all those other people a different color than they are. Second, they get upset because they don't think your gay family deserves equal rights and privileges that they enjoy. Third, the sounds of gunfire and the killing and wounding of your people must make you very sad. Sorry, but politicians like the money and they aren't going to give up NRA funding to curtail guns.

And then, God, if that weren't enough, we have a president with questionable morals that this crowd elected. Now he wants to use his power to make policy to subordinate women in the U.S. He evidently wants "Good Women" added to the God, Gays and Guns policy. Seems as if he is an expert in taking choices from women.

Apparently, he previously didn't believe in abstinence only for himself as his background shows, but now that is to be his policy for women. He wants all birth control and choice taken off all women's and their physician's agenda.

Where did America go wrong?
Nadine Jewell
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to our allies ... and enemies:

Trump is:

"A Demagogue" – Sen. John McCain

"An Idiot" – Chief of Staff-Gen. John Kelly

"A Moron" – Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson

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The Legislature That Will Not [Sine] Die

The most contentious Oklahoma Legislature in recent memory simply will not go gentle into that good night.

It tried, of course – wrapping up this year’s conclave three weeks early, undoubtedly hoping 16 dysfunctional months of sessions and special sessions would be distant memories by the time voters cast ballots in November.

Instead, the 56th Legislature is threatening to become the Legislature that would not die.

Before many could even settle into their off-session routines, some lawmakers announced they want to return to Oklahoma City – this time for a special session aimed at overriding Gov. Mary Fallin’s veto of SB 1212.

The governor wisely vetoed the so-called “constitutional carry” proposal that would allow just about anyone, anywhere, anytime to pack heat – no permit or training required.

Business leaders were opposed, fretting it could create a wild west, OK Corral image for the state, chilling economic development. Law enforcement worried it could complicate split-second life-death decisions over who is the good guy – or bad – with a gun.

If you listen, however, to the bill’s sponsors, Sen. Nathan Dahm, R-Broken Arrow, and Rep. Sean Roberts, R-Hominy, you’d think Oklahomans suffer under some of the nation’s most onerous gun laws.

That’s preposterous, of course, but reality could not prevent SB 1212 from sailing through both legislative houses. Why? Because it afforded lawmakers an election-year opportunity to burnish their Second Amendment street cred.

Now, Dahm, Roberts and Co. want the Legislature to call itself into special session in an attempt to subvert Fallin’s veto.

It is hard to imagine they could secure the support of 68 representatives and 32 senators necessary to force a third special session – at a cost of about \$30,000 per day. Cha-ching!

But you never know ... especially in an election year.

Meanwhile, the proposed veto referendum aimed at overturning tax increases to fund teacher pay raises and other state services seems destined to keep the spotlight on the 56th Legislature – at least for the next month or so.

One reason: the state Supreme Court has set oral arguments for June 11 on two legal challenges that could keep SQ 799 off the statewide ballot, even if proponents secure the necessary 41,242 signatures.

Additionally, veto referendum opponents are working overtime to educate eligible petition signees what could happen to public education, in particular, if the tax hikes are reversed.

“Decline to Sign” morphed into formal coalition whose messages now pervade social media, especially if you’re connected to a teacher or pro-public ed supporter.

There also are exhortations to boycott businesses where SQ 799 petitions are available to sign.

The effort to thwart the veto referendum is clearly having an impact. How do we know?

First, some businesses identified as petition-signing sites on the Oklahoma Taxpayers Unite website have disavowed their involvement. Second, the veto referendum’s highest-profile supporter, former Sen. Tom Coburn, felt compelled to push back in op-ed columns and an Oklahoma Taxpayers Unite blog post.

“Contrary to what you have heard,” he wrote, “we at Oklahoma Taxpayers Unite do not hate children. We appreciate and support teachers.

“Like 70% of Oklahomans, we want pay raises to be enacted ... But the parlor tricks of the Legislature and misinformation campaigns of the Edu-crats need to stop.”

As an institution, the Legislature rarely draws high marks in statewide public opinion surveys. But recent polls suggest voter discontent exceeds normal levels of dismay.

For legislative leadership scrambling to maintain power, nothing could be worse than for rank-and-file Oklahomans to be reminded all summer long of the recent misadventures at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.



SQ 788 Vote Is But First Hurdle For Medical Marijuana

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Here we go again.

In 1982, it was pari-mutuel gambling on horse races. In 1984, it was liquor by the drink. In 2004, it was the lottery.

Now, the state's self-proclaimed arbiters of morality are railing against what they view as another "sin" referendum – in this case, the June 26 statewide vote on medical marijuana, aka SQ 788.

Ordained Baptist minister and U.S. Sen. James Lankford insists it would be "harmful to the social fabric of Oklahoma."

Rev. Paul Abner, leader of OK Faith Leaders, warns against placing "ourselves under the controlling influence of something other than [God's] spirit."

The state's largest daily, the Oklahoman, repeatedly plants the seed [pun, intended] in editorials and news

columns that SQ 788 could result in recreational use of demon weed.

The sky didn't fall after pari-mutuel gambling was approved in 1982, despite opposition from similar voices. Or after liquor by the drink was enacted in 1984. Or after the lottery was authorized in 2004.

Nor will the state crumble if voters – as polls suggest – embrace modernity and give doctors and patients the right to be treated with a plant species that has been used for medical purposes for 30,000 years.

The fact is, marijuana already is widely grown and available in Oklahoma – it's just not regulated and taxed.

Legalization could generate millions for vital state services, starved for much of the last decade because of the Republican Legislature's devotion to Supply

Side economics. The long-discredited theory that tax cuts generate more revenue was discredited again as income tax cuts and corporate welfare blew giant holes in the state budget, forcing lawmakers this year to approve the first tax increase in 28 years.

Though not an apples-to-apples comparison, it's worth noting that in 2017 Colorado [population 5.6 million vs. Oklahoma's 3.9 million] generated \$1.5 billion in marijuana sales, including \$416.5 million from medical marijuana.

In a replay of the liquor-by-the-wink era, marijuana is ignored or tolerated in some areas while aggressively pursued in others by law enforcement agencies that rely on pot-related fines to fund their operations.

It is undeniable that attitudes toward marijuana have softened since the tumultuous Vietnam War era, even in states like Oklahoma that regard themselves as buckles on the Bible belt.

The question is, why?

Most likely because nearly everyone knows someone who's risked breaking the law to get pot for a loved one suffering the effects of chemotherapy, arthritis or other crippling maladies.

I saw the benefits nearly 40 years ago when my aunt was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. The chemotherapy was debilitating. She could scarcely keep down the food necessary to keep up her strength.

Her normally law-abiding family chose to break the law in a last-ditch effort to ease her agony, illegally obtaining marijuana. They mixed it with butter and spread it on crackers. She didn't survive the cancer, but her quality of life improved dramatically.

Today, Oklahomans flock to Colorado to take advantage of full marijuana legalization. Some purchase creams to rub on arthritic hands. Others choose edibles to help with anxiety or headaches.

TIMES ARE A-CHANGIN'

Half of Oklahoma's neighboring states – Colorado, Arkansas and New Mexico – have legalized medical marijuana, perhaps giving important context to last month's KWTW-KOTV SoonerPoll which found 57.5% of likely voters supported SQ 788, while only 29.6% opposed.

What's particularly noteworthy is opposition has not increased since previous statewide polling in January – despite concerted, organized efforts to sow doubt and confuse voters about the measure.

The proposal not only enjoys strong support across party lines, but also among self-described evangelicals.

Nearly half [48.5%] of surveyed Republicans joined 67% of Democrats and 80.9% of independents in favoring the initiative. While about half [50.7%] of self-identified “very conservatives” opposed SQ 788, 32.2% supported it – as did 63.3% of “somewhat conservatives.”

“Support is high for SQ 788 among liberals, moderates and Democrats,” notes Bill Shapard, the SoonerPoll.com CEO. “But anytime you can get a third or more of the majority – like Republicans and conserva-

tives – to vote with you, you can get any state question passed in Oklahoma, and that is what we are seeing in these results.”

EVANGELICAL SUPPORT

Despite opposition to SQ 788 from organized groups and OKC Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, evangelical voters are almost evenly divided over expanding medical marijuana – 53.7% in favor.

More intriguing: 49% who attend church multiple times a week endorsed the proposal.

Supporters of SQ 788 responded to the Lankford-Coakley-Abner opposition by citing the Bible itself – specifically, Genesis 1:29's “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.”

“The word of God is clear on this issue,” argues Jed Green, Yes on 788 state director. “So our question is, given that the ministry of Jesus Christ centered on healing the sick, without precondition, how would Jesus vote?”

“Our prayer is that as leaders in some denominations of the faith community express themselves on this issue, they will resist the temptation to deceive Oklahomans with half-truths and things left unsaid.”

MEDICAL ESTABLISHMENT'S OPPOSITION

The Oklahoma State Medical Association and the Oklahoma Pharmacists Association both joined with the group SQ 788 Is Not Medical to fight passage.

Opponents, for example, frequently warn that medical marijuana could exacerbate the state's opioid plague, adding yet another vehicle for addiction and misuse.

Indeed, the former state medical association president, Dr. Kevin Taubman, told a December forum he worries the proposal's lack of specifics could lead to “temptations to use it for anything.”

Of course, SQ 788 is a statutory – not constitutional – measure that would leave to the Oklahoma Legislature the responsibility of crafting standards for prescribing and using medical marijuana.

It's likely doctors and pharmacists would wield considerable influence over any legislation coming out of a special session that would be necessary since lawmakers waited for the statewide vote, rather than act

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Deborah Astley

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Sad, But True: *This* Is Oklahoma

BY CAL HOBSON

"As one mouth closes, another always opens." – Brian Spellman, author, humorist and eccentric

For example, dear readers, consider the following, unforced foible: "If I was willing to take a bullet for Bill Clinton just imagine how hard I will work for you."

How uplifting and heart warming!

That careless comment was recently made by devout Christian and adamant "Don't Blame Me" Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb, R-Edmond, a former Secret Service agent, former Friend of Mary and current candidate for Oklahoma governor.

Todd's turgidity was uttered as humor during a foolishness-filled forum in Guthrie on March 10. The response from the audience to that belly buster was a muted combination of giggles, guffaws and gasps.

For me I'm just left pondering WWJS or D?

Apparently determined not to be outdone by that less than inspiring utterance, another Goober Wannabe, polarizing Preacher Dan Fisher, R-Yukon, de-

clared he is an "absolute abolitionist" when it comes to guns, abortion and a bunch of other stuff and thereby is guided only by God's Law not man's ... or woman's, especially.

On the bright side, if Fire and Fury Fisher gets to the governor's mansion we won't have to fret that some of those goofy ideas cooked up in the Legislature might be implemented because, last I checked, they are written by humans, not chiseled in stone by God's previous messenger Moses and thus wouldn't be signed into law by Dan The Current Tablet Man.

Following flame-thrower Fisher came super wealthy lawyer Gary Richardson who opined that "Oklahoma is not a poor state; it is just poorly led" and urged the mostly Tea Party loyalists in attendance to study his "kitchen table plan" for details ... so I did just that.

Not surprisingly I discovered it was written by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, with input from that ancient Washington swamp swimmer Grover Norquist.

Goofy Gary then served up the warmed-over pablum of smaller government, lower taxes, a balanced budget and less intrusion from Uncle Sam. As he did, a healthy round of applause rang out from the mostly old, mostly white attendees who happen to also be recipients of government's most expensive bennies known as Social Security, Medicare, SSI, Medicaid and, where appropriate, military retirement with gold-plated health insurance.

Other notable Republican candidates were also on the dais that day, including OKC MAPS loving Mayor Mick, math maven Auditor Gary Jones and mortgage manipulator Kevin Stitt. However, their comments were more restrained – you know, even grown-up-like – and therefore the red meat crowd gathered in Oklahoma's former first capital responded tepidly.

For example, father of six Stiff Stitt reminded everyone he has been to all 77 counties, enjoyed meeting “real folks out there” and now even gets to exchange text messages with ... hold it ... wait for it ... music legend Toby Keith!

Wow. Me, too ... when I buy an album. Cowboy Keith, whose real name is Covell, was born in Clinton, not Moore as the water tower along I-35 touts; lives in ranch-style luxury east of the socialist commune of Norman; was a derrick hand and semi-pro football player before turning to his current and less physically demanding profession – writing, singing and playing music.

Keith makes a very good living in the entertainment business and has generously shared his largesse for many years with the less fortunate, especially children facing grave health challenges.

All that red, white and blue from Toby is likely worth a few votes come the primary on June 26 but remember current leader in the recent Sooner Poll is still Boy Scout Lamb who probably checkmated Kevin's crooner with personal pal Donald Trump Jr. during a big buck bonanza at the four-star Waterford Hotel in OKC.

The obvious conclusion? Singers many bring Sooners to the dance but dollars direct the Two Step.

Now let me be clear. I'm not saying all these fellers are without *anything* to offer voters in the way of substantial proposals, meaningful reforms or even motivating musings, but what I am saying is ... *it's not very damn much*.

For example, the absolute hottest topic on the spit-and-whittle circuit now is: The Second – and greatest – Amendment, that being the Right to Carry a gun, concealed or otherwise, licensed or not, trained or not, about anytime, anywhere, of almost any caliber, clip size, barrel length, semi-automatic or not.

And, yes, like you, I am aware of the shootout at Louie's Restaurant on Lake Hefner in OKC on May 24. The gunman, who wounded three before being shot to death by two bystanders, both of whom were licensed and extensively trained to carry handguns, was mentally ill, demonic, and had even posted flyers and videos admitting such. His plea for help couldn't

have been more urgent and public ... or less ignored by the public with the notable exception of The Gayly newspaper. Coincidentally May was National Mental Health Month.

So what about education, health care, infrastructure, meaningful criminal justice reform, tax structure, quality jobs?

You've got to be kidding. This is Oklahoma.

For proof, just listen to our version of El Rushbo, that being one Pat Campbell, morning talk show host at KFAQ, 1170 on your dial and originating from Tulsa, America.

All his palaver recently has been to demand a THIRD special session of our not so special Legislature to address the most compelling, overwhelming and immediate crisis facing this state – Gov. Mary Fallin's veto of HB 1212, the above described gun bill.

Not opioids, four-day schools, declining college graduate rates, high school dropouts, obesity, early and avoidable deaths, teen pregnancy, smoking, dipping, chewing or even the heartbreak of pimples in the ninth grade. On these sticklers we note only Silence from the Lamb and the rest of the flock, but they do remind us regularly of both their closeness to the NRA and distance from the incumbent they want to replace.

In other words they can all read the polls.

And as Messieurs Lamb, Cornett, Stitt, Richardson, Jones, Fisher and other pachyderms compete to be top toady for the gun-toters, they compliantly drag themselves out of the sack before dawn to proselytize with Pat in pummeling Gov. Fallin.

Apparently a rightwing talking head from T-Town shivers the timbers of these campaigners more than law enforcement officials and Chamber of Commerce big-wigs who strongly urged her wise veto.

Makes me wonder. Just where is First Lt. Henry Bellmon, tank commander on Iwo Jima Beach, winner of both the Legion of Merit and Silver Star, competent and courageous United States senator, visionary Oklahoma governor, hands-on conservator of our soil, water and air, common sense gun owner AND Republican Party chairman when we – all of us – need him the most?

Answer: In a Higher Place watching with disgust the political party he almost single-handedly created, being plundered and polluted by panderers and profiteers. The current conflagration is probably enough to make even Buttermilk Bellmon reach for a shot of Chivas, garnished by a slice of bitter lemon and more than a dash of disappointment.

And come election night, things could be so bad Henry may need a double ... meaning Milk Maid Shirley will knock one back, too!

Don't forget to vote on June 26. It's not that your life depends upon it, but a happier future in Oklahoma probably does.

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

Why Edmondson Is State's Best Hope

BY KEN NEAL

Oklahoma has a \$1.2 billion savings fund because of the foresight of one man and now that man wants to be governor. Voters should hasten to the polls to elect him.

He's Drew Edmondson, who fought to save the tobacco money that legislators and the governor wanted to use in the general budget. The interest earned from the growing fund is used for tobacco cessation programs and health related issues.

That \$1.2 billion fund will continue to grow, fed by tobacco companies that continue to profit from an addictive drug that causes death. How big will it get? Tobacco use is declining. Some think smoking will be eliminated by 2050. The fund could reach more than \$2 billion, judging from past contributions.

Someday, the battle against smoking will be won. Then, some of the income off the tobacco fund could be pledged to pass a revenue bond issue that bond experts say could reach \$1 billion. Oklahoma would have that billion to spend on needs without touching the fund or even all of the income from it.

Edmondson's work in, first, winning a lawsuit he and other attorneys general filed against Big Tobacco and, then, devising a program to save Oklahoma's

income from that settlement are landmark achievements.

Oklahoma's Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust Fund is a sparkling accomplishment in an otherwise financially destitute picture.

It is arguably the single most significant budget accomplishment in state history and the man who brought it about has not been sufficiently recognized.

Frankly, it is a wonderment that Drew Edmondson wants to be governor. Even harder to understand, voters rejected his candidacy eight years ago, ultimately electing the hapless Mary Fallin, who has hastened the decline of an already struggling state.

Edmondson is a Democrat, the legatee of a historically important Oklahoma family. He is the son of a premier congressman, the nephew of a reform-minded governor, and the brother of a Supreme Court justice.

The Edmondson family is dedicated to public service like no other in Oklahoma. Drew Edmondson is a star in the Edmondson galaxy.

In 16 years as attorney general, Edmondson performed with honor. But for the spitefulness of a federal judge, he would have succeeded in a lawsuit to

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save the Illinois River from polluters. Once again, he was looking to the future welfare of his home state.

Obviously, public service flows in the veins of Drew Edmondson and the Edmondson family.

At a robust 70, Drew Edmondson is set to cap a stellar career with eight years as Oklahoma's governor, precisely at the time when the state needs a leader with vision. Edmondson has more governmental experience than all the other pretenders in the race.

While the other candidates are racing to pledge fealty to the National Rifle Association and end all controls on guns, Edmondson proposes rational proposals to halt Oklahoma's financial death spiral.

One doesn't have to spend time analyzing his plans. His past performance is such that voters should know a Governor Edmondson will perform in the best interests of the state.

He will be a voice of rationality. He will oppose the basest impulses of Legislators while trying to pass legislation to bring Oklahoma out of the morass into which the state has sunk under 12 years of Republican rule.

A politician looks to the next election. A statesman looks to the next generation. Edmondson got the tobacco fund established 20 years ago. Does that make him a statesman? We think so.

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

Voting Unites Us

June 26's primary not only will help determine the state's next governor and the Legislature's makeup, but also whether Oklahoma will legalize medical marijuana.

Sadly, too many Sooners in recent years have failed to take their civic duty seriously. In 2014, for example, only 32% of eligible voters turned out for an election that gave Gov. Mary Fallin a second term and strengthened lopsided Republican statehouse majorities.

Ask your GOP friends how that's working out for them? If polls are any indication, not well – more than half of likely voters give thumbs down to the governor's and the Legislature's performances.

Widespread unrest coupled with the marijuana measure seems to be getting Oklahomans off their derrieres and back into civic affairs – more than 45,000 new voters registering since January.

Still, the failure of so many to engage in the political system isn't merely an academic concern. It's a genuine threat to our democratic republic.

Irritated by the Legislature's inability to solve the state's long-term education funding crisis? Dismayed when lawmakers all but thumbed their noses at voters' demands for serious criminal justice reform? Unnerved by the elected representatives' repeated failure to properly fund mental health services in an era

when mass shootings are all too common?

The buck stops with each of us.

Not only to do the homework necessary to decide whom to support at the ballot box, but also to hold them accountable if they tell us one thing at the local coffee shop and vote differently on the House or Senate floor.

That's why it's heartening to see school districts lead the way in encouraging Oklahomans not to forsake their civic duty.

Since last spring's statewide teacher walkout, Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Yukon schools announced they would not hold classes on general election day – Nov. 6 – giving overworked and underpaid teachers more time to vote.

Hopefully, the holiday also will serve as an important reminder to parents, grandparents and public school supporters that every vote counts. No-showing not only abdicates your voice in civic affairs, but also effectively enables a small, voting minority to set public policy.

That's why teachers and state employees only now are scheduled to receive their first pay raises in a decade [assuming the noisy, anti-tax minority's proposed veto referendum fails]. That's why Oklahoma's overcapacity, understaffed prisons are on the brink of conflagration. That's why a wealthy few can dictate who pays their fair share of taxes and who doesn't.

The school day off sends a wonderful, patriotic signal about the importance of suffrage. But why stop with schools? Why isn't Election Day a national holiday?

Voting unites us, even as we cast our ballots for competing candidates.

It also distinguishes us from much of the world in which oppressed, steam-rolled majorities would give anything for the right to participate in free and fair elections.

Unsurprisingly, grousing already has commenced about Oklahoma schools being closed on Nov. 6.

Some critics, of course, are convinced educators already are fairly paid, working only about 35 hours weekly [seven-hour school days] and nine months yearly.

Others don't like the idea of an Election Day off because they fear the political power of an aroused sleeping giant – teachers, administrators and public school supporters uniting to demand a Legislature that reverses the nation's steepest education cuts and makes long-term, serious investments in our children's futures.

The Election Day holiday is a good start to a brighter future. Next, we should seriously consider online voting [see Oregon] and same day registration. The more voices in the public square, the better. – *Arnold Hamilton*

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Cornbread And Beans – And Frosty

BY WALLACE COLLINS

I had subscribed to The Oklahoma Observer for many years, reading the commentary of Frosty Troy and others truly “telling it like it is,” but I had not become acquainted with the man until I decided to run for House District 45. During my campaign in 1996, I talked with Frosty on occasion about issues concerning my race and the Oklahoma Legislature. His advice was very valuable. After winning the race for that seat, I had occasion to see Frosty at the Capitol as he was always there covering the antics of the Legislature and the governor, Frank Keating.

When I ran for re-election in 1998, I asked Frosty to speak at one of my fundraiser events, which he did. Frosty not only would speak on behalf of people he supported, but he would also bring a check, putting his money where his mouth was. I was always proud to have his support and endorsement each time I ran for office, but that did not mean that Frosty would hold back criticism if he thought you were wrong on an issue.

I won two races for HD 45 in 1996 and 1998, but was defeated for a third term in 2000 as “W” swept the nation, especially here in Oklahoma. Surviving the sting of losing that race, but not finished with politics, I decided to run for the open seat for Cleveland County chair in early 2001. Upon winning that race, I set about raising money to make Cleveland County one of the strongest county parties in the state. After four years as Cleveland County chair, and with the country tired of many years of war and George W, I successfully ran and served another four years in the Oklahoma House from 2006 until 2010. Again, Frosty was always there to help and support, both with words and a check.

I continued to build our Democratic persona utilizing a program I had started back in 1998, the Cleveland County Cornbread and Beans weekly luncheon. Along with help from others, and a lot of support from my wife, the weekly luncheon was kicked off at the Love Light Bakery on OU’s campus corner. Dr. Gene Tynner and wife Dottie had agreed to look for a location to hold the meetings and get things started. Our first gathering was in May of 1998, and local Democrat, Ben Odom was our first speaker. The place was packed, and a tradition was started.

It had been my idea and contention for several months that Democrats needed a way to gather and realize that there was a large number of Democrats in Oklahoma. This had been driven home to me during my earlier campaign for HD 45, my wife and I



From left: Syndicated columnist Jim Hightower, Wallace Collins and Frosty Troy at 2011 Cleveland County Democratic Party fundraising dinner.

knocked every door in that district. We always identified ourselves as proud Democrats, and were continually told “I thought I was the last Democrat in Oklahoma” – to which I always answered, “No, there are plenty of Democrats still here, we just need to be organized.”

I felt that Democrats needed a way to commune with each other and realize that we were still the majority [at that time].

Frosty Troy played a big part in the success of the Cornbread and Beans luncheon as he was a willing and dependable speaker for our growing group. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate with our fledgling group. As you may remember, 1998 was a year of very hot weather, with many days of 115-degree temperatures. The air conditioning at the Love Light failed in August and it only took one luncheon with no a/c to cause us problems.

Unfortunately, an absentee landlord was not interested in repairing the a/c and the Love Light was forced to close. The Cleveland County CB&B wandered around from one place to another before finally settling in at Furr’s Cafeteria on West Main in Norman. It had a much larger capacity and plenty of parking for all of the Democrats that attended on a weekly basis. Frosty Troy was invited to speak on an annual basis, as he was a large draw and very informative for our audience. We always passed the hat among the crowd for donations to support the county party, and as I said before, Frosty not only lent his impressive credentials to our group, he would also bring a nice check to fatten our coffers!

After suffering another defeat in 2010, I decided

to run for the vacant state party chair job, and won. One of the very first things on our agenda was to get the state party out of debt. My team decided to hold a fundraiser at the Harn Homestead near the Capitol to “Turn Burnout into Turnout” in preparation for the presidential campaign. The event was a huge success, and as would be expected, Frosty Troy was our keynote speaker.

One of the many items we had up for auction was a painting donated by a veteran friend of mine, Mike Simmons a resident at the Norman Veterans Center. As the bidding started several bids were taken, but Frosty was the high bidder. As things slowed, Frosty, in typical Frosty fashion decided to bid against himself because he thought the painting was worth more!

Of course he also knew that the proceeds from the auction was going to help the state Democratic Party. That was a terrific example of the selflessness of Frosty Troy! Always willing to help.

I remember attending the funeral of the late Sen. Gene Stipe in Frosty’s hometown of McAlester. Frosty gave a eulogy for the senator. Stipe was either loved or hated, but he had a question that he would ask political candidates, “Can you treat a poor man the same as a millionaire?” Frosty Troy could answer “yes” to that question – he would treat the high and mighty the same as someone humble and powerless. Not everyone can say the same.

As we approach the 20-year anniversary of the Cleveland County Cornbread and Beans luncheon, it makes me very proud to have started the institution, and for the many Democrats that have kept it going uninterrupted for 20 years! I don’t know of any other county that can make such a claim, but I do know that our success spurred others to start similar groups.

Having such a dynamic speaker like nationally known and recognized Frosty Troy certainly made it easier to attract an audience and keep them coming back on a regular basis. I held the office of Cleveland County Chair for four years and during that time at Furr’s we would average 75 to 80 people every week. But as you would expect, it was Frosty Troy that set our all-time record for attendance – 180 in a standing room only crowd to hear his latest views at Furr’s Cafeteria. That record would later be tied by then Sen. Cal Hobson, who was also a large contributor to the success of our group.

I am sure that today many would love to see 180 strong, motivated Democrats at one time in one place.

During one of our many early organizational meetings, we were told by the then county chair that the idea would not

work, but thanks to our hard heads and determination, we didn’t listen. We decided that Cornbread and Beans was a traditional Democratic meal, and therefore that was our new name.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



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Oklahoma Democratic Party Staff First In Nation To Unionize

BY BRETT DICKERSON

Non-managerial staff members of the Oklahoma Democratic Party are the first in the nation among state Democratic Party headquarters to officially unionize with a signed contract.

And they did it with the full support of management and party leadership.

It is a significant move for those who toil in the engine rooms of party politics where the next fund-raising event and 24/7 campaign pressures can create an always-on-everywhere work environment.

“We already enjoy a positive work culture, but by unionizing, we have brought another level of professionalism to the office for a more productive workforce moving forward,” Angela Almond said in an email response to our questions.

She’s the communications director for ODP and joined with staffer Andrew Rickle to represent their office staff in negotiations.

“Newly established procedures outlined in our contract will provide continued and uninterrupted support to candidates, leaders, and party members during administrative changes as the party elects new leaders every two years.”

LEADING THE WAY

March 11, 2017, Oklahoma Democratic Party leadership voted unanimously to change the non-management staff’s employment status from “at-will” to “just-cause.”

At-will employees can be fired for any reason. Just-cause employment requires the employer to state clearly the reasons why employment is terminated.

In that vote, leadership also expressed that they welcomed the staff to start organizing with a labor union of their choice.

The bargaining process then started October 16, 2017, and concluded May 23, 2018.

‘BETTER MANAGER’

“It’s making me a better manager already,” ODP Chair Anna Langthorn told Free Press when she gave us a few minutes out of her busy schedule Thursday [May 26].

The state party chair is also the executive director and runs the day-to-day operations of the party.

“I’m very excited. I think that staff is excited. It’s been a long process. In the end, we got a document that we are all going to be happy with.”

She said paid family leave, vacation, sick leave and other work benefits are now clearly defined in their



Anna Langthorn

contract.

But especially working for an organization that elects new leadership every two years and has many volunteers who serve on the party’s board of directors, the consistency and uniformity of treatment will create consistency the party has not had, said Langthorn.

MORE EFFECTIVE

Langthorn believes that the party itself will become more effective over time with consistency.

“Over the course of time I would say that some of the lack of success in the state has come from inconsistency within the state party office,” she said.

In past years, all staff could be sent out the door upon the election of a new state party chair.

She said she has not made a decision about running for state party chair again in 2019.

“If I run again, I may or may not get re-elected. In that instance, if there’s a new chair, all of these staff will still be here protected by this union agreement in their roles.”

“And if they are dismissed, it will have to be for cause and not just because there is a new administration.”

REFLECTING VALUES

Langthorn told us it is very significant that the Democratic Party in Oklahoma is living its values of standing up for workers to have the right of union representation and collective bargaining.

“We’re on the leading edge of how modern labor and industry is going to work,” Langthorn said.

“As the U.S. moves to a more service-based economy, a more office-based economy, we’re going to need a reconciliation and a conversation about that office employees can be just as abused as industry employees can.”

The issues are the same across all workplaces she said.

“Just because you’re working in an office environment and not in a factory environment doesn’t mean

you don't have those same rights, too."

THE UNION

The labor union the six employees chose to be a part of was the Office and Professional Employees International Union [OPEIU], Local No. 381.

She said typically, that union represents office workers who work for organizations where leaders are elected by members such as labor unions.

But the union also represents many office and clerical workers across a broad range of businesses.

According to information on the union's website, they have 104,000 members representing 110,000 workers in all fifty states, Puerto Rico and Canada.

Brett Dickerson is editor of Oklahoma City Free Press, an independent, online news site; <https://free-pressokc.com>. Reprinted by permission.

Dem Dems

BY PAUL CARTLEDGE

Democrats are experiencing a growing divide as we progress toward the 2018 mid-term elections. The fact of a divide is nothing new for Democrats. There have always been divisions in the party of the people, but this one is a little more profound. This divide is derived of a struggle for the heart and soul of the American political system.

The Republican Party is firmly entrenched as the champions of the 1%; the economic upper crust. Trickle-down economics has proved to be a bust in every instance where it has been tried. But Republicans persisted in rewarding wealth at the expense of the general population.

Democrats, on the other hand, retrenched, starting with the Clinton Administration. The focus of Democrats shifted to placing more emphasis on representation of those in the top 10% of the economy. In doing so, Democrats all but abandoned reliance on labor unions for campaign funds and shifted their focus more to Wall Street, banks, and corporate interests for campaign financing. This Democratic strategy and its followers have become known as neo-liberalism.

Barack Obama, a neo-liberal, was able to ignite a groundswell of Democrats to elect him to the presidency by promising "change you can believe in." No doubt, some of Obama's support came from voters who felt disenfranchised by the Washington crowd.

While Obama won handily, his coattails were not long enough to maintain majority control of the House or Senate for Democrats. Obama's policies were not radical left by any stretch, but Democrat after Democrat, sensing a strong racist backlash against the first black president, chose to base their campaigns on championing conservative issues. The result was a failure to enthruse more progressive voters, enabling rightwing voters to elect ultra-right

candidates, from statehouses to Washington.

This paradigm shift has proven disastrous for Democrats, as they have lost state after state to Republican control. Thanks to gerrymandering and other underhanded tactics, Republicans win big at election time, while a majority of Americans consider themselves Democrats or independents.

Simple math leads to the conclusion that roughly 90% of the American population is greatly under-represented in our political system.

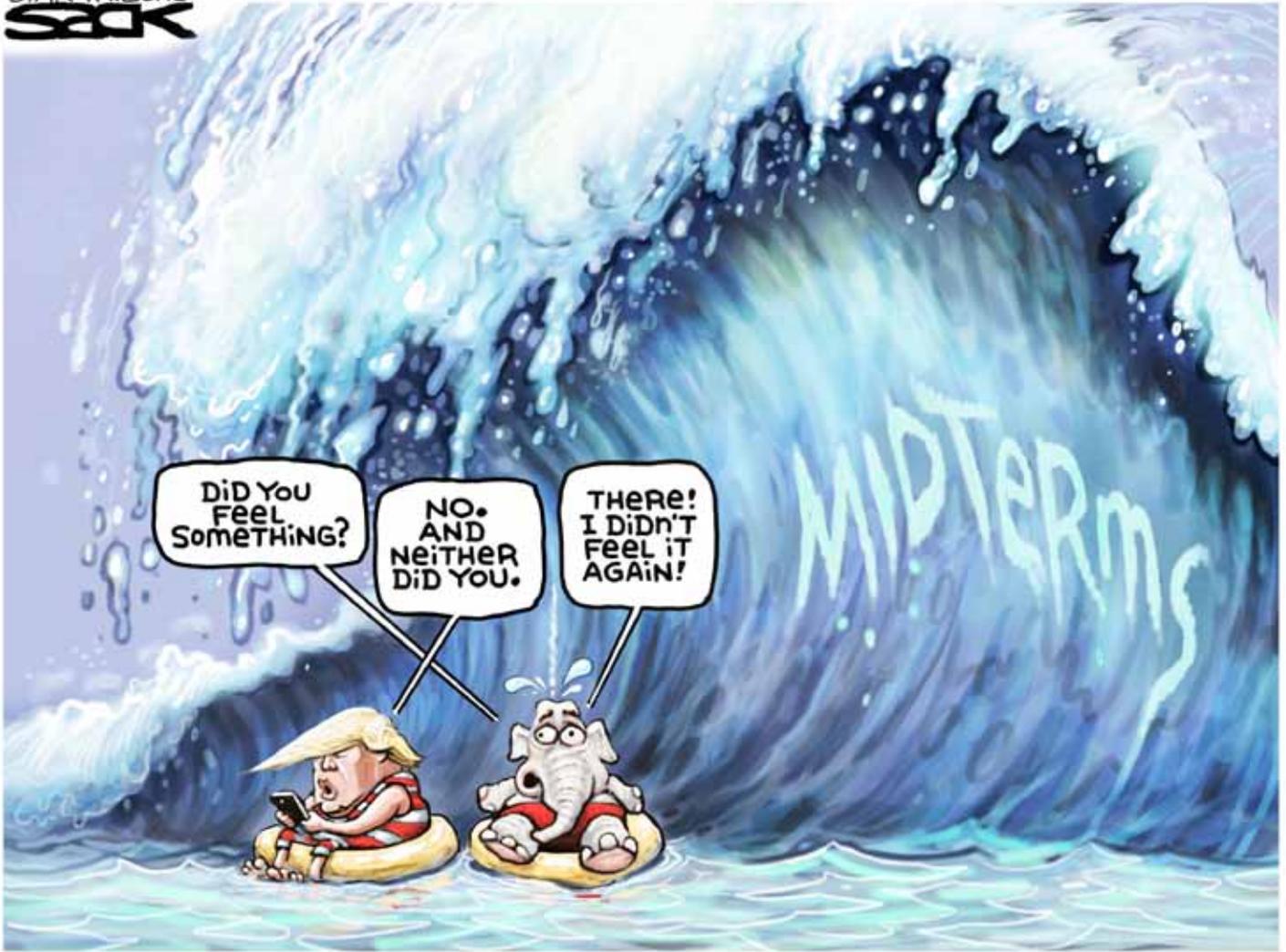
The 2016 presidential campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump tapped wellsprings of discontent among Americans. Sanders offered solid solutions that in many ways represented a revival of elements of President Roosevelt's New Deal. Trump, meanwhile, offered platitudes tinged with hate and racism. He spewed promises of jobs and prosperity for all and attracted enough votes in key states to tip the scales.

The just completed round of Democratic primary elections in several states saw wins by progressives. Those wins happened in spite of the work of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee [DCCC] pouring money and support behind more traditional Democrats while discouraging progressive candidates in races the DCCC considered winnable by Democrats. The Democrat National Committee [DNC] has maintained its traditional hands off in the primaries. But the fact that several key representatives of the DCCC are prominent Democratic congressmen has raised the question of the degree of separation there is between the DCCC and the official party establishment. Neo-liberals in the Democratic Party are threatened by progressives who rail against big money in politics. Bernie Sanders thumbed his nose at corporate donors and raised almost as much money as Hillary Clinton in the 2016 primary.

Recent high school shootings have ignited a groundswell of political activism among millennials. They vow they will register and vote in large numbers in an attempt to break the grip the National Rifle Association and other monied interests hold over elected officials. Millennials are by default much more focused on environmental issues than are their predecessors.

As we progress toward 2018-20, there is that group of frustrated Sanders progressives, bolstered by disappointed Trump supporters, and now the millennials. A uniting of these three groups would form a robust political alliance. This group could take over and change the Democratic Party, working from the precinct level on up through party ranks. But if the Democratic Party establishment continues to buck the tide and fails to widen its stance in such a way as to not only include, but also to embrace these elements, that strategy could spell the beginning of a movement toward formation of a solid third party platform.

Paul Cartledge lives in Durant.



Dems Unified On Key '18 Themes

BY RUY TEIXEIRA

Dare I say it? The Democrats may actually be doing something right!

I get asked a lot by the press to comment on the Democratic civil war. It is always my sad duty to inform them that the rumors of war are greatly exaggerated. Folks are actually getting along pretty well and seem to have a solid idea of what they need to do to inflict a defeat on the merry band of lunatics running our country.

One guy who does get it is David Leonhardt. He has a terrific column in the Times on the actually-existing Democratic midterm campaign rather than the caricature of infighting factions favored by many reporters.

Leonhardt has this to say:

“Stacey Abrams and Conor Lamb are supposed to represent opposite poles of the Trump-era Democratic Party. She is the new progressive heroine – the

first black woman to win a major-party nomination for governor, who will need a surge of liberal turnout to win Georgia. He is the new centrist hero – the white former Marine who flipped a Western Pennsylvania congressional district with support from gun-loving, abortion-opposing Trump voters.

But when you spend a little time listening to both Abrams and Lamb, you notice something that doesn't fit the storyline: They sound a lot alike.

They emphasize the same issues, and talk about them in similar ways. They don't come across as avatars of some Bernie vs. Hillary battle for the party's soul. They come across as ideological soul mates, both upbeat populists who focus on health care, education, upward mobility and the dignity of work.

Yes, there are some tensions on the political left. But these tensions – over Obama-style incrementalism vs. Bernie-style purism, over the wisdom of

talking about impeachment, over whether to woo or write off the white working class – are most intense among people who write and tweet about politics.

Among Democrats running for office, the tensions are somewhere between mild and nonexistent.

Democratic candidates aren't obsessed with President Trump, and they aren't giving up on the white working class as irredeemably racist. They are running pocketbook campaigns that blast Republicans for trying to take health insurance from the middle class while bestowing tax cuts on the rich [charges that have the benefit of being true].

The political scientist Theda Skocpol is among the sharpest observers of modern American politics, having studied the Obama presidency, the Tea Party reaction and now the Trump resistance. Skocpol and her colleagues are tracking Trump-leaning areas in four swing states, and she too has been struck by the Democrats' relative unity.

"Media pundits and even social scientists want to look for some kind of ideological divide," she told me. "I just don't see a huge set of divisions in the Democratic Party. They're all talking about economic issues.

Doing so is smart, because it helps Democrats

send the most powerful message in politics: I'm on your side – and my opponent isn't. Americans really are divided on abortion, guns, race and other cultural issues, but they're remarkably progressive on economics. When Democrats talk about health care, education and jobs, they can focus the white working class on the working-class part of its identity rather than the white part. And Democrats can fire up their base at the same time.

Abrams is a particularly good case study. In the primary, she argued that Democrats should stop chasing conservatives who were lost to the party and instead work to lift progressive turnout. But Abrams's universal, populist message shows that she hasn't given up on swing voters. Her message resembles the one that helped Barack Obama win over enough white voters in his 2012 re-election campaign."

All correct. Now if he could just get his colleagues in the rest of the press to report this rather than the chimera of a Democratic civil war.

Ruy Teixeira is senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and author of The Optimistic Leftist: Why the 21st Century Will Be Better Than You Think.

Reality Check: Why Elections Likeliest Way To Remove Trump

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

Why elections will likely be the only way to remove our current president from office:

The House of Representatives will never impeach the president before 2018. No matter what Mueller brings forward, the vast majority of the president's base, which is the House of Representatives' base, will stand by the president; and members of the House of Representatives have proven themselves time and time again to be unwilling to go against their base.

Even if the House becomes controlled in 2018 by Democrats, it takes two-thirds of the Senate to convict the president. The Senate will likely never get to the 67 votes needed to convict. This is primarily owing to the fact McConnell and others see this administration as the opportunity of a generation to stack the courts in their favor.

An impeachment and conviction of their president would so weaken the support of their base that winning the presidency in 2020 would be almost impossible.

The president's base, fundamentalist white Christians, will never turn on the president for at least the following reasons – [1] abortion, [2] Israel, [3]

immigration, [4] Islamophobia, [5] guns, [6] resistance to LGBTQ+ rights, [7] many of them think this president is part of God's plan to bring the end times [yes, they really do believe this], and [8] turning on the president would be an admission on the part of fundamentalists and their leaders that they were wrong about God's plan [don't count on that ever happening].

The most realistic, yet still hopeful, scenario I see would be the following: If the Democrats can take over at least the House of Representatives, then they can check the president's legislative agenda.

Better yet, if Democrats can take the Senate in addition to the House, they can check the president's judicial agenda and not allow him one more SCOTUS appointment and keep radical right wing judges off of the lower courts. Then the Democrats must unite around whomever they choose to be their presidential candidate in 2020 and bring this current presidency to an end.

Any Democrat or progressive independent who starts down the "I will never vote for the lesser of two evils" path must be reminded that even if one grants that both candidates are evil, allowing the

greater of two evils to win, is allowing more evil to come into being. Given the choice between lesser and greater evil, choosing the lesser is the only truly responsible choice. Hopefully, the example of the current administration has taught us this lesson clearly.

Does the current president deserve to be impeached and convicted?

I believe the full body of the evidence that Mueller will be bring forward, if he is allowed to bring it forward, will lead to a resounding yes in response to this question.

The reality, however, is that the chances of either happening are extremely slim, and our hopes for

impeachment and conviction, as valid as they may be, cannot take the place of organization, strategy, and enthusiasm for 2018 and 2020. The well being of our republic, the world's people, and the planet depend on staying focused on 2018 and 2020 like never before.

Mueller's findings will not likely lead to impeachment and conviction, but they very well could be motivation needed for progressives to vote in record numbers to bring this presidency to an end.

Mark Y.A. Davies is the Wimberly Professor of Social and Ecological Ethics and director of the World House Institute for Social and Ecological Responsibility at Oklahoma City University.

SNAP Proposal Won't Put More People To Work But Will Leave More Hungry

BY COURTNEY CULLISON

More than 800,000 Oklahomans need help putting food on the table every year, and they get that help through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP, formerly known as food stamps].

In Oklahoma, SNAP provides help purchasing groceries for children, seniors, people with disabilities, and the working poor. SNAP also boosts the Oklahoma economy, bringing back \$890 million to our grocers in 2017. But now these important benefits are under attack.

Recently the U.S. House voted down a proposed Farm Bill that would have made significant changes to SNAP, including radical changes to the program's work requirements. Renewal of the U.S. Farm Bill is essential for Oklahoma families and for our state's agricultural economy.

Unfortunately, passage of this law has been derailed because Congress pursued a deeply flawed and partisan approach that would have taken away food assistance from two million struggling Americans, including children, seniors, and veterans.

SNAP is not a jobs program. It's a nutrition program – and it's a really good one. Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP helps put food on the tables of families who are struggling to afford a nutritious diet. Put simply, SNAP works. It helps to reduce hunger and alleviate malnutrition. It works to reduce poverty [especially extreme poverty] and improves health outcomes for recipients. SNAP is an important program for a lot of Oklahomans.

Last year, over 850,000 of us used SNAP at some point in the year. With an average monthly benefit of just \$121 per person in 2017, it's not a lot. But for families that often run short of money each month

that small benefit means not having to choose between paying the utility bill and buying groceries. SNAP benefits are an essential boost for many working families in Oklahoma.

And many Oklahoma workers really do need that boost. In 2016, 28.7% of Oklahoma jobs were low-wage – meaning that they paid less than the poverty threshold for a family of four. In addition to low pay, these jobs are likely to come with a fluctuating work schedule and no paid sick leave.

It is deeply disappointing that 198 members of the U.S. House, including all the members of the Oklahoma delegation, voted in favor of this harsh and partisan Farm Bill that would put an estimated 97,000 Oklahomans and their families at risk of going hungry.

his bill would have cut SNAP dollars by nearly \$19 billion and diverted much of that money to a risky new scheme of ineffective work programs and unforgiving penalties. This plan would have resulted in Oklahomans losing food assistance without new income to cover the loss.

The food assistance provided by SNAP is crucial for many Oklahoma families and for the Oklahoma economy. SNAP brings nearly \$1 billion per year to our state and keeps many communities from becoming food deserts.

To pass a responsible Farm Bill, Congress must return to a bipartisan commitment to improve SNAP and reduce hunger and malnutrition in America. It's time for Congress to embrace that bipartisan spirit again and work on a Farm Bill that protects and strengthens SNAP.

Courtney Cullison is a policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

Changing Of The Guard At NE 23rd And Lincoln?

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

It's no secret oil and gas has dominated Oklahoma politics the last half century – routinely exerting more sway at the Capitol than agriculture, highway contractors or trial lawyers.

Booms opened the state's spending spigot and spurred tax-cutting frenzies. Busts yielded massive budget holes and tax increases.

Either way, in good times or bad, the carbon crowd almost always got what it wanted from the legislative sausage making.

Not this year. In fact, two things happened that suggest Oklahoma could be on the cusp of a changing of the political guard.

First, despite a full-court press, the state's deepest pockets failed to defend against a hike in the gross production tax – from 2% to 5%. Continental's Harold Hamm even sat in the House gallery, as if to signal don't-you-dare.

They did, anyway.

Later, Hamm and Co.'s efforts to kill a lucrative wind industry incentive failed in the Senate, suggesting lawmakers weren't thrilled at the prospect of explaining to voters why they kept the GPT at the nation's lowest level while ending incentives for wind – a chief oil and gas competitor.

This is not to suggest, of course, that oil and gas producers – especially the likes of Hamm and Devon Energy's Larry Nichols – were somehow knocked permanently off their pedestals of political power.

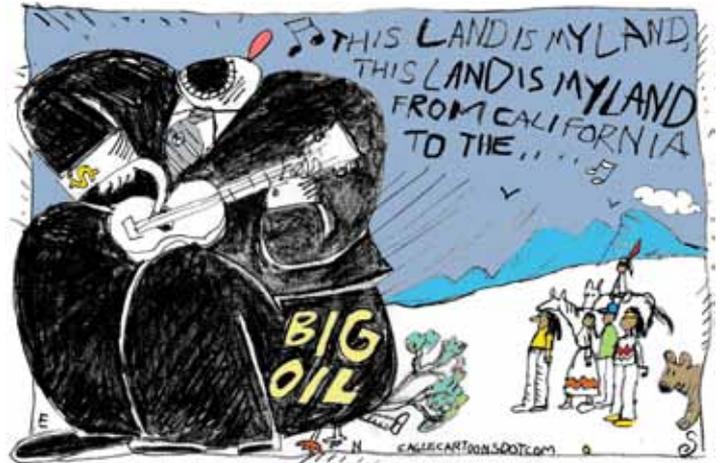
Rather, it is to point out the wind industry's growing political clout – not just with environmentalists and other clean energy allies, but also among rural counties and schools now cashing sizeable wind energy-related ad valorem tax checks.

It wasn't hard to understand why some lawmakers were open to ending the zero-emission tax credits. Some of their biggest campaign donors wanted it. Plus, it was dearly costing an already cash-strapped state treasury – an estimated \$75 million this year alone.

What made less sense was why carbon bigwigs wanted so badly to deliver a gut-punch to wind energy producers – other than greed.

It doesn't require an advanced geology degree to know oil and gas are finite natural resources. Moreover, we're harvesting more, faster than ever before, thanks to hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling.

Are we in the final, great oil and gas production boom?



It undoubtedly will outlast Hamm's and Nichols' generation, but where do their companies – so important to Oklahoma's economy and treasury – go from there?

Renewables seem the obvious choice, especially given the ever-present wind that comes sweepin' down the plain and the high frequency of sunny days – an average 231 annually in Oklahoma City.

Thanks in no small part to public policy, Oklahoma already is the nation's No. 2 wind producer. The Wind Catcher project in the Panhandle is poised to become America's largest wind farm and supply an estimated 40 percent of metro Tulsa's electricity.

Solar hasn't gained the same traction, in part because lawmakers haven't given it the same priority when it comes to incentives. But it seems only a matter of time before it, too, is a vital part of our energy mix.

The trick for Oklahoma policymakers is to maximize renewables' potential while also ensuring legacy producers – oil and gas – remain strong and profitable, protecting thousands of jobs and millions in tax dollars.

Raising the gross production tax to 5% and protecting wind incentives were excellent first steps.

Next, the Legislature should return the GPT to its historic 7% rate – it still would be the nation's lowest – in order to fund vital state services necessary for Oklahoma's economic future.

And it should find ways to encourage more investment in renewables – which not only would help cushion the state budget from oil's and gas's historic boom-bust cycle, but also smooth the transition into the post carbon world.

With New Medicaid Requirement, Too Many Devils In The Details

BY CARLY PUTNAM

During the recent legislative session, Gov. Fallin signed HB 2932, directing the state to apply for federal permission to remove low-income parents from SoonerCare if they fail to report working enough hours in a given week. With Oklahoma now committed to developing such a proposal, it is vitally important that policymakers proceed with caution.

Oklahoma's proposed Medicaid work requirement is aimed directly at low-income families. Gov. Fallin's statement, released after she signed HB 2932, said in part that it would affect "able-bodied adults without dependents."

However, in Oklahoma's Medicaid program, adults with dependents – that is, parents and caretakers raising children – are the only people a proposed work requirement could possibly apply to. All 73,000 parents on SoonerCare will need to either report their hours to the Health Care Authority or seek and be granted an exemption.

Any situation where the price of failing to comply is loss of health coverage is high-stakes, but for parents, the consequences of failure are even more serious. A parent who can't fill a prescription because they aren't working enough will likely find herself less able to find work and parent effectively. For kids, having a caretaker who is not healthy enough to parent them or who has untreated mental illness is one of the most serious adverse childhood experiences, which can cause serious harm to a child's health and well-being over their whole lifetime.

Oklahomans already report these childhood traumas at higher rates than most other states.

People without health coverage are more likely to delay treatment for medical issues, further risking their health and threatening to overwhelm their family in medical debt. Furthermore, when parents lose health coverage, their children are more likely to become uninsured.

In short, tying basic health coverage to work isn't a threat just to parents' health, but to the health and finances of entire families.

For these reasons, Oklahoma must do all that we can to ensure that SoonerCare members are able to meet and report their working hours reasonably. People with disabilities and chronic diseases must be able to continue their medical care.

Similarly, exemptions must be broad enough to accommodate the realities of everyday life – from individuals unable to work because they're caring for ag-

ing parents to those who simply don't live in where the jobs are, or don't have transportation to where the jobs are – and such exemptions must be obtainable to those who need them.

Without expanding coverage, a Medicaid work requirement could also become a cruel Catch-22 for low-income parents.

In Oklahoma, the income eligibility cutoff for working-age adults on SoonerCare without disabilities is 46% of the federal poverty level. That's what sociologists refer to as "deep poverty," and works out to less than \$800 per month in income for a single mother with two children.

If that mother works more hours or gets a raise that boosts her earnings to \$850 per month, she'll still fall well below the federal poverty level, but she will no longer have health coverage. She will have fallen into the coverage gap between where SoonerCare eligibility for parents ends [46% of the federal poverty level], and eligibility for subsidies on Healthcare.gov begins [100% of the federal poverty level, or \$1,732 per month for that mother with two children].

If she lived in one of the 33 states that have accepted federal funds to expand coverage up to where Healthcare.gov's subsidies begin, whether through Medicaid or by using federal dollars to subsidize private coverage, her situation would be different.

But because Oklahoma has so far refused to expand coverage, a work requirement stands to create a Catch-22: If members don't comply with the work requirement, they'll lose their coverage. But if they do comply, they could still lose coverage, because their incomes could easily exceed Oklahoma's income eligibility cutoff.

The federal government is aware of this issue: the federal administrator who leads the regulatory agency overseeing Medicaid has suggested that non-expansion states will need to structure their work requirement to ensure that those who lose their Medicaid eligibility as a result of a work requirement have other options.

Oklahoma could easily fix the dilemma by simply expanding coverage, thereby eliminating the work requirement's cliff and finally providing a path to basic health care for thousands of uninsured Oklahomans.

Tying Medicaid coverage to employment is entirely new territory, with enormous potential for harm. Unfortunately, Oklahoma Medicaid administrators are also operating in a very tight timeline.

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Real Corruption: The Scott Pruitt Story

BY RICHARD ESKOW

Question: Which of these scandals should result in EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's removal from office?

A) His cushy, poorly documented, below-market rental deal on a lobbyist friend's Capitol Hill townhouse;

B) His extensive use of first-class air travel [to Europe, among other places], purportedly to avoid "vulgar" interactions with the lowly citizenry;

C) His extravagant \$43,000 soundproof phone booth, seemingly inspired by the "Cone of Silence" in television's "Get Smart" series;

D) His overspending on personal security, and then lying about it;

E) His dinner at a five-star restaurant with a Roman Catholic cardinal who doesn't believe in climate change and was under investigation for child abuse; or,

F) His misuse of the Safe Drinking Water to give two aides massive raises, bypassing White oversight.

Answer: None of the above.

Yes, Pruitt seems to be a terrible, self-centered person, who spares no expense on himself as long as someone else foots the bill. But the real reason Scott Pruitt should be removed from office is because he is causing lasting harm to current and future generations.

Scott Pruitt abuses the public trust by using his position to serve the Koch brothers and other fossil-fuel magnates, and he is killing us and our kids in the bargain.

THE REAL CORRUPTION

While many White House officials are personally deplorable, and some may prove to be personally corrupt, the real corruption isn't who they are. It's what they do.

The policies they carry out are more cynical – and far more destructive – than any of their self-serving deeds and depravities.

Pruitt is an excellent case in point. The energy industry lavishly funded his campaigns for Attorney

General of Oklahoma, even when he ran unopposed. The Koch brothers have been especially generous to Pruitt, and invested heavily in lobbying for Pruitt's confirmation as EPA head.

They invested well, if not ethically. Pruitt was the ideal Attorney General in his state for the fossil-fuel industry, suing the EPA 14 times for doing its job.

Pruitt's emails, which were revealed after a suit from the Center for Media and Democracy, expose his coziness and collusion with the fossil-fuel industry. He has insisted that climate change is a "hoax," despite the overwhelming scientific consensus in its favor. And he has been an enormously destructive EPA administrator, gutting rules, budgets, and staff alike.

'NORMS' AREN'T NORMAL

That's why efforts to target his personal lapses, like a recent one from Democratic senators on the Environment and Public Works Committee, will fail to move the needle politically.

For most Americans, this kind of talk about ethics is little more than static in the background of their noisy lives. If anything, it reinforces their cynicism about government, and won't change many votes.

Even if efforts to force Pruitt to step down succeed, he is likely to be replaced by an equally destructive

administrator, whose defects of character are only less conspicuous.

THEN WHAT?

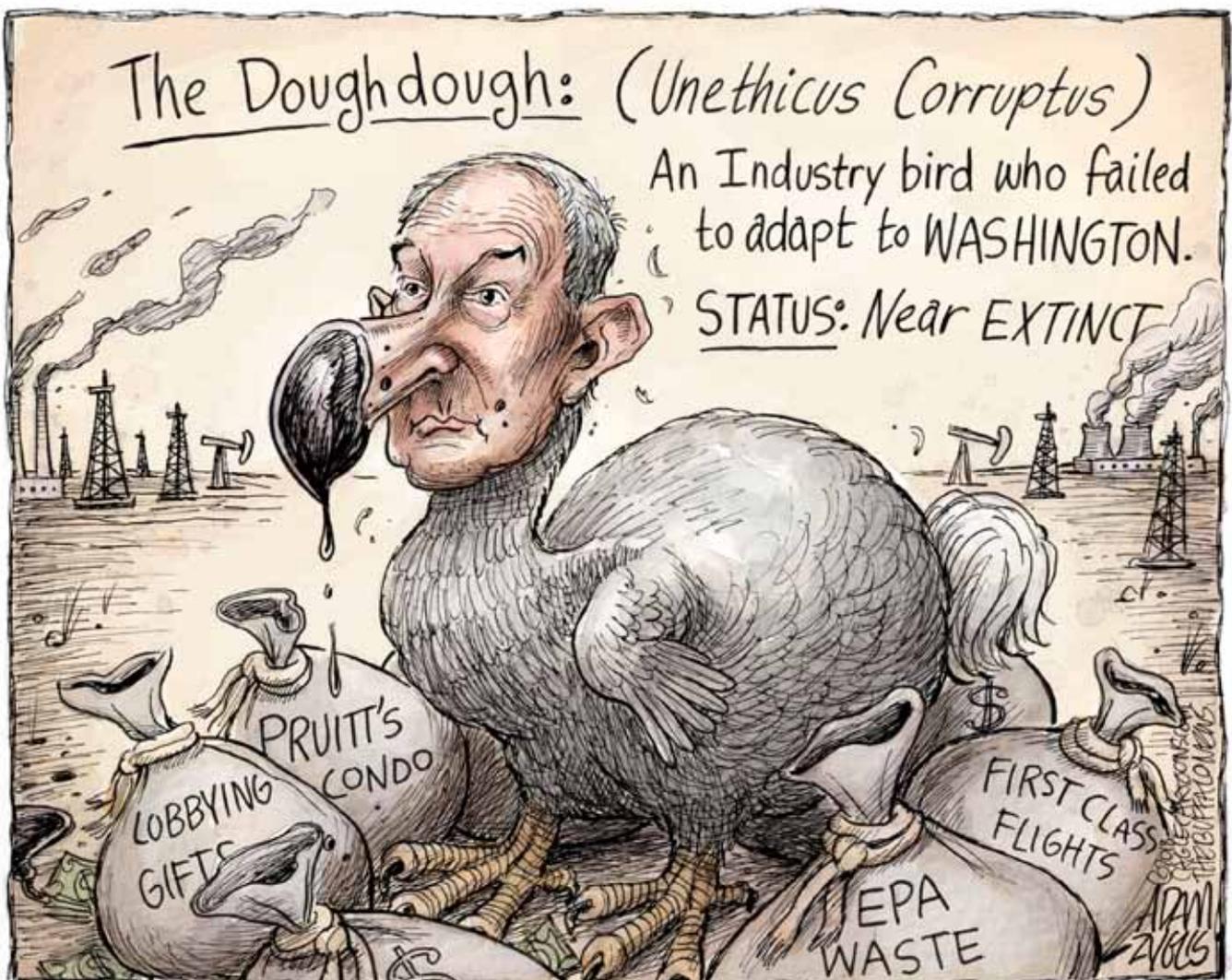
For too many politicians, the goal is a return to "norms" of bipartisan civility. "It's not just concerning to Democrats, it's also [troubling] to a lot of Republicans," said Sen. Tom Carper, D-DE. "And maybe sooner rather than later they'll find their voices."

But those are the norms that have made it acceptable to act against the public interest, selling our lives and our planet to the highest bidder, as long as insiders don't talk rudely or stick their fingers too deeply into the public till. Republicans aren't likely to "find their voices" against any Trump nominee. They certainly won't "find their voices" against the Koch brothers and the exploitation of the environment, because those are policies they support.

And that's where the real corruption lies.

Robert Redford got it right in a recent op-ed. Redford lists Pruitt's many misdeeds, from his attacks on climate science to his delaying or easing of standards on everything from auto fuel standards to the discharging of mercury, lead, and arsenic into our air, land, and water.

Groups like "Boot Pruitt" get it right, too, by listing



Pruitt's administrative misdeeds along with his personal corruption.

TELL 'EM RONNIE SENT YOU

It was inevitable that Trump's promise to "drain the swamp" of moneyed interests from politics would turn out to be a lie. He has put virtually every branch of government in the hands of the industries that want to exploit them. But that's not a Trump invention; it's a Republican habit.

Ronald Reagan appointed Anne Gorsuch to run the EPA, and her tenure there was arguably as bad as Pruitt's. Like Pruitt, she slashed the budget, clashed with career employees, cut regulations, and appointed industry insiders to oversee their friends and colleagues. [Gorsuch was the mother of Neil Gorsuch, Trump's first Supreme Court appointee.]

That's why Pruitt's opponents – a group that should include everyone who loves the earth, or future generations – should focus more on what he's doing, and what his party is doing.

KILLING US, NOT SO SOFTLY

Here's the latest, real-life Pruitt scandal: Working with White House officials, Pruitt's aides suppressed a study showing that certain chemicals in the water supply were harmful at much lower levels than had previously been believed. These chemicals are used to make Teflon, firefighting foam, and other products.

The harms caused by the presence of these chemicals in drinking water, according to the study, are increased incidence of pregnancy problems, thyroid disease, and cancers.

An unnamed White House official said the study would be "a public relations nightmare" for the administration, a statement that is only true if the administration plans to ignore the problem. It's clear that "nothing" is exactly what this administration's environmental team, led by Scott Pruitt, intends to do.

Environmental pollution kills. It increases the frequency and severity of chronic disease, which causes four out of five American deaths each year. Air pollution alone kills between 155,000 and 200,000 Americans per year. Even at the lower estimate, that's more than five times as many people who died on 9/11.

This may just be a semantic difference, but if Robert Redford gets anything wrong, it's when he describes Pruitt as a "one-man public-health risk to the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat."

Pruitt isn't acting alone. He's not a "one-man" anything. Pruitt is working hand-in-hand with the president, his party, and the industry tycoons who have subsidized his career. Scott Pruitt may or may not stay in his current position. But the real corruption – a corruption that is literally killing us – will be around for a long time to come, unless the American people demand that it stop.

Richard Eskow is a writer, a former Wall Street executive and a radio journalist.

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Frosty

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After we decided to make a go of it, it fell to Gene and Dottie to find a place to meet. They generously donated much time and effort to locating meeting places for many years. After their deaths, I proposed the name be changed to the Tyner Cornbread and Beans to honor their years of contributions to our party and our cause.

Our cause was made easier by having wealth of speakers available to us. Academics from OU were called on and many state office holders anxiously awaited an invite to speak to our large group. Candidates for nearly any office in Oklahoma wanted to speak, but the bar was set very high by Frosty Troy and Sen. Hobson.

Frosty Troy never turned me down for a speaking engagement, and one of my highlights was having him name me to his "Five Best" Oklahoma House performances in 2000. Frosty always put out his rating of the Ten Best and Ten Worst in the House and Senate. He was bipartisan in that he could always find at least one Republican that made his top group in both the House and Senate, but he had little trouble finding plenty of Republicans for his worst group.

I know that everyone that knew him, whether in person or not, still misses Frosty Troy and his beloved wife Helen! They were truly "Democrats' Democrats."

I don't know of any higher honor to give than that! Norman resident Wallace Collins is former state representative and former chair of the Oklahoma Democratic Party. June 13 would have been Frosty's 85th birthday.

Medicaid

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

Gov. Fallin's Executive Order directs the Health Care Authority to be prepared to submit their plan to the federal government by early fall, which likely means that a waiver draft will be available for public comment by July.

At that time, Oklahoma advocates must be prepared to carefully scrutinize the state's work requirement proposal and speak out if it does not account for these potential harms to Oklahoma families.

Carly Putnam is Policy Director of Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

Read The Observer On-Line
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They Call It What?

BY ANN DAPICE

You awake to your alarm. You look at your “to do” list for the day. You check the weather, your calendar and map for highway construction. You are not exactly sure where your meeting is but you will use GPS map directions and listen to the voice that gives instructions along the way.

News from television, radio, newspaper, and the internet tells you about the latest local, national and international happenings. You scan the many emails deleting most that are of no interest to you. Then you skim Facebook messages and respond to some.

Just as you are ready to leave for your meeting, you hear a storm warning. Weather, child abduction and other messages alert us to danger at all times.

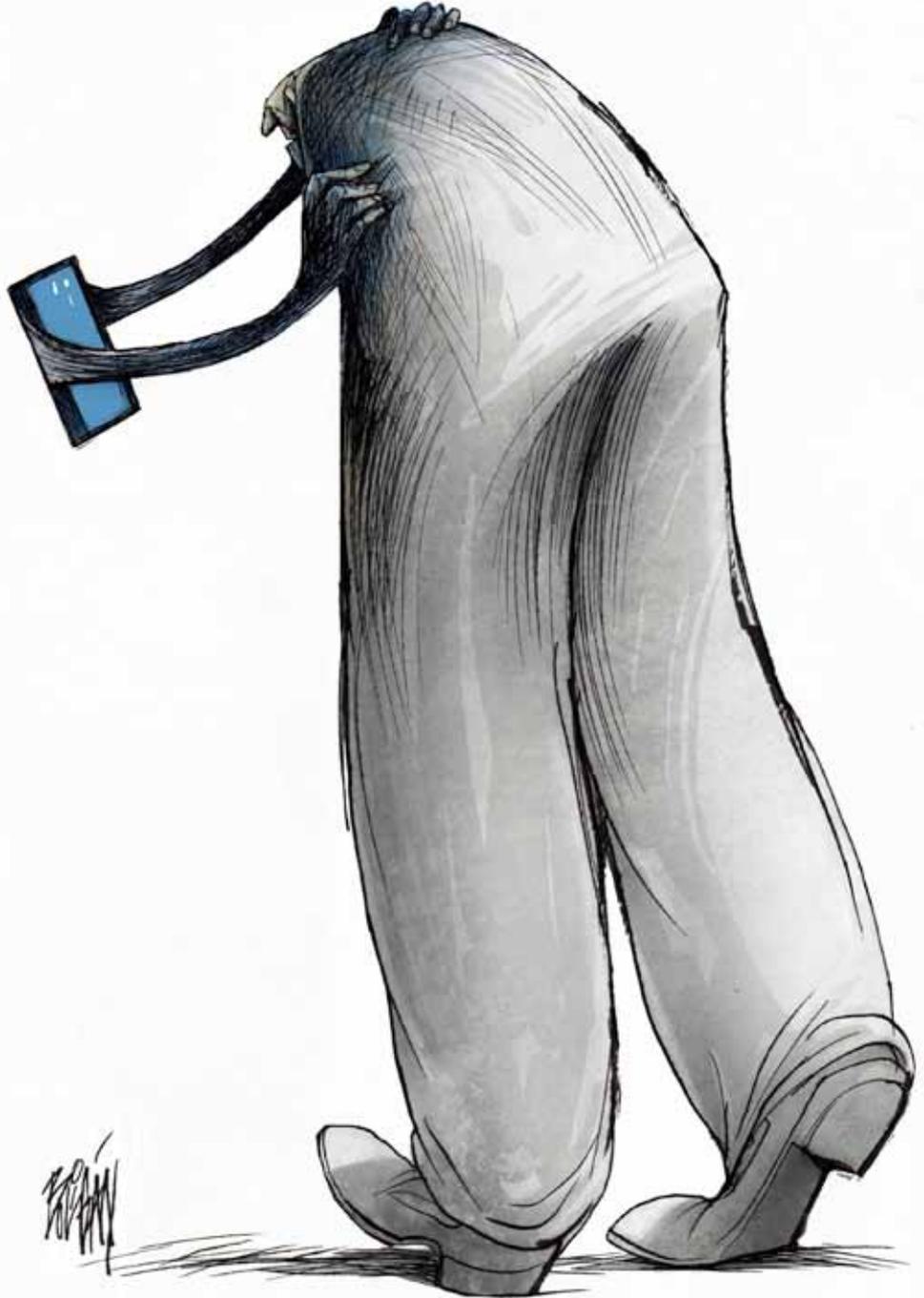
You double check to be sure you have your phone before you leave. You’ve been asked why your “smart” phone is so important. Are you addicted to it? It’s a question often asked.

To survive and continue the species, humans have always required food, work, necessary risk taking, effective communication, and knowledge of potential dangers like weather, violence, war.

It has also been important that these behaviors feel good or relieve discomfort in some way so that people will engage in them – thus the involvement of the reward pathway in the brain.

From these survival needs a variety of addictions can arise.

The phone rings while you drive to your meeting. The old brain tells you to answer it – that it may be a child or friend in trouble. There may also be an emergency text or email. You think of different possibilities.



But safety for you and others around you requires that you pull over to the side of the road to check. The possibility that it is an emergency will nag at you until you learn the nature of the communication.

Your old brain wants confirmation that everything is all right. For the same reasons you will see smart phones visible and scanned frequently at your meeting.

Addiction is related to behaviors that were once adaptive for survival that have now gone awry. Science demonstrates that addiction is the excess intake of external chemicals and/or excess engagement in behaviors that stimulate chemicals in the brain's dopamine reward pathway. Addiction is any behavior that people do not, or feel they cannot, stop – even when potentially destructive to themselves and others.

With rapid changing technology, new challenges arise. Humans once used a wide variety of tools to accomplish necessary tasks. What once were separate tools are now combined into one small “smart phone” – a clock, camera, flashlight, radio and television reception, calculator, weather report, calendar, maps, video and voice recording, and immediate access to what were once books and encyclopedias on a shelf.

With its own directory for phone numbers, email and physical addresses, the smart phone allows communication through voice and text messages, conference calls for groups, and the ability to utilize video and voice for face to face interaction [e.g., Skype].

So, are you addicted to your phone? Addiction thrives on greater access. Smart phones provide seemingly endless information and access to a wide variety of experiences – and they do it quickly.

One way to measure our use of smart phones is to think of the time spent in the past watching television, calling friends, writing letters, reading newspapers and articles, going to a library, scheduling events, taking and sending photos, checking the weather, and using maps and calendars.

How does that compare to the present time that you spend on your smart phone? Have smart phones just expedited activities that would have been done in the past?

Despite possible consequences, people can be seen talking on the phone while driving and normally careful people are seen texting obliviously while crossing a busy street.

There are other serious problems related to smart phones use – bullying, stalking and suicide for example. There are arguments pro and con regarding use of smart phones by children, and if they do, what rules are appropriate.

The benefits of smart phones are many. In one small portable unit is a phone that is so much more than a phone. From it we can obtain knowledge of all kinds, a recipe needed for dinner, today's stock

market report, photos taken and sent, we can watch television and listen to the radio, read a variety of newspapers and publications, find forgotten lyrics, and talk to each other from a distance in face to face communication. It offers more than most of us could have imagined.

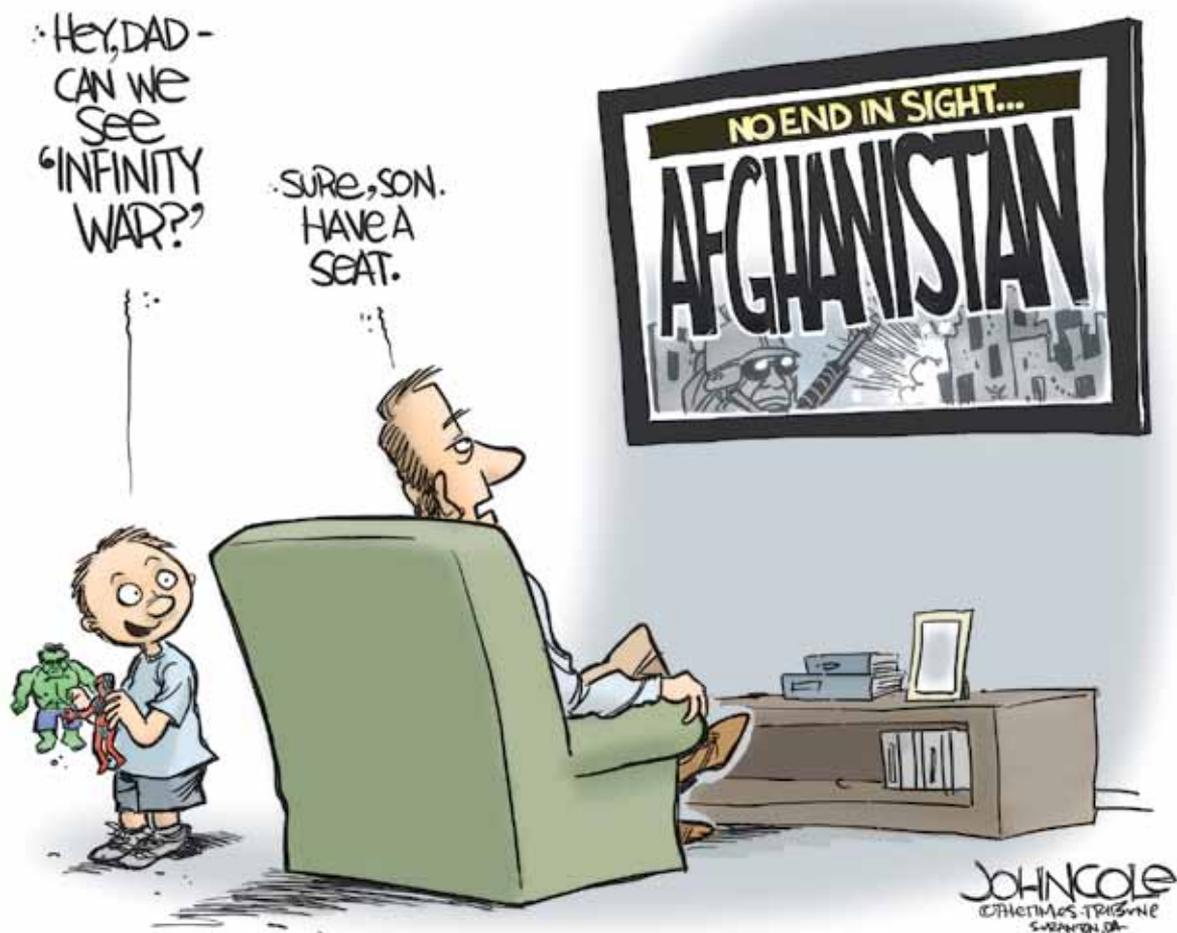
As we use it, whether driving, posting messages on Facebook, or playing games, we must ask ourselves the addiction question: Is our behavior something that we do not, or feel we cannot stop – even when potentially destructive to ourselves and others. *Tulsa resident Ann Dapice received a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and has taught and/or served as administrator at a number of universities. She is director of research and education for T.K. Wolf, Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization where she and staff have treated addicted clients and researched addiction, publishing the results in book chapters and academic presentations regionally, nationally and internationally.*



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Rejecting The Mindset Of The Forever War

BY WILLIAM RIVERS PITT

My daughter was born in the 22nd year of the Forever War, which stands today upon its 27th year and counting. People who should know better may tell you the war started only 17 years ago, after Sept. 11, but those people are likely trying to sell you something, and it's probably more war.

The Forever War began as Desert Storm and wended its way through different iterations such as Operation Desert Fox, before morphing into the current multi-theater murder machine we know today. It has no Pentagon jargon name any more, not really. It's just forever.

They came for me just before it all began. I was a newly minted high school graduate, green as new grass, when the man in the uniform paid his call.

Saddam Hussein is as dangerous as Adolph Hitler, the Army recruiter told me in my living room, with a huge army that threatens the world. War is coming. If I join the Reserve Officer Training Corps in September, however, I wouldn't see that war for another four years, and I would be an officer when I did.

"Probably," he said, "it will all be over by then."

My father heard a similar argument some 25 years before my conversation with the recruiter, and heeded it by joining ROTC before volunteering for Vietnam. A good FDR liberal from the Deep South, where they still remembered the Tennessee Valley Authority [a wildly successful New Deal jobs program] with deep fondness, my father wanted to run for office someday, and you didn't run for office without time in uniform back then.

So he went, and he came home, but he never came back, not all of him. In many ways, I lost my father to that war before I ever met him. Even then, so long ago, I knew this about him, about war. Remembering, I thanked the recruiter for his time and sent him on his way.

My father passed away three years ago with pieces of his heart, mind and soul still lost thousands of miles away. I still have his dog tags. His war lasted 25 years. My war, the one I chose not to fight, will be turning 30 soon with no end in sight. I have never fought in it, but it is my war nonetheless, and now my daughter's. The Forever War is a generational affair.

"Probably," the recruiter said, "it will all be over by then."

I think about him now and again, and wonder how many kids like me he fed to the Forever War. I wonder if he even knows. I wonder if he remembers saying that to me. I wonder how many times he said it to others, and if he is still saying it today, out there in living rooms with other green kids. Someone like him is saying something like that somewhere, right now, because the machine is always hungry.

Here is a slice of our cruel, blood-rusted Forever War in its current state: Bombings and killings continue unabated in Afghanistan. Bombings and killing continue unabated in Iraq, where weapons of mass destruction have still not been found. Syria is a killing field, as is Yemen. Lebanon still bleeds. Iran, which has entirely fulfilled its end of the bargain, watched in rage as a nuclear deal struck with the U.S. and Europe was shredded in yet another dangerous move by Donald Trump, who sought to placate the John Bolton wing of his rudderless party. Libya, Egypt and much of North Africa are in violent turmoil.

Millions upon millions of war refugees suffer the cruel indignities of displacement and want.

With Gina Haspel's nomination to run the Central Intelligence Agency, we saw a day in the life of the Forever War in miniature. A debate broke out regarding the efficacy of torture. See, our government tortured some folks during the Forever War, as President Obama blithely admitted back in 2014. Our government tortured people in Iraq, Afghanistan, in so-called "black sites" around the world, on a base 90 miles from Florida and, in at least one instance, right here on U.S. soil.

Haspel ran one of these black sites as a CIA operative, oversaw the practice of torture, and later destroyed the evidence of those vicious crimes. Now, Donald Trump has put her in charge of the CIA, because torturing other human beings is no impediment to promotion these days. When questioned by Congress, Haspel pledged not to re-start a torture program but stopped short of condemning the practice outright.

For John McCain, Republican senator from Arizona, Haspel's answers fell far short of the mark. "Ms. Haspel's role in overseeing the use of torture by

Americans is disturbing," McCain said in a statement after her testimony was concluded. "Her refusal to acknowledge torture's immorality is disqualifying. I believe the Senate should exercise its duty of advice and consent and reject this nomination." Alas, the Senate confirmed her nomination on May 17.

For the record, I generally do not like John McCain much at all. Notwithstanding his glorious ability to get under Trump's skin like an Alabama tick, I consider the Senator from Arizona to be a cruel bannerman for the hard right. On this specific issue, however, McCain's opinion is above reproach, as well it should be given his personal experience.

In 1967, McCain's A-4E Skyhawk was shot down over Hanoi by a missile. The crash left him with two broken arms and a broken leg. His captors crushed his shoulder with a rifle butt and stabbed him with a bayonet. He was given scant medical treatment, beaten at two-hour intervals for extended periods, and placed in solitary confinement for two years. Then it got worse. An attempt at suicide was thwarted by the guards. This was his life for more than five years. When he finally came home, his hair had turned white.

In a just world, the opinion of a man like John McCain on the topic of torture would be respected. At minimum, it would not be insulted. Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney and Kelly Sadler of the White House communications office reminded us, sadly, that we do not live in a just world.

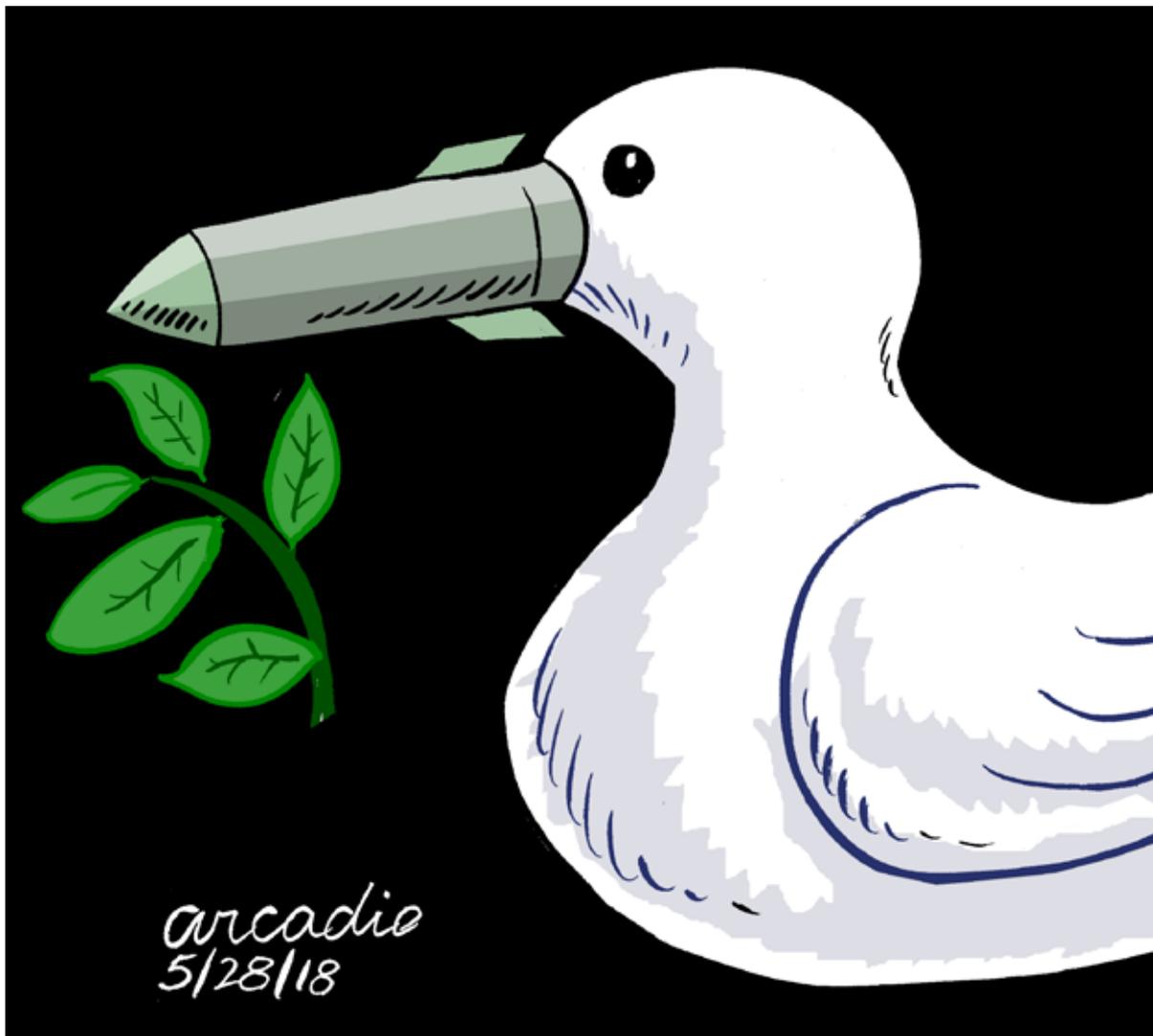
Lt. Gen. McInerney went on Fox Business Thursday to argue in favor of torture, and by proxy the nomination of Haspel, claiming that torture is effective because it worked on John McCain. "That's why they call him 'Songbird John,'" said McInerney, coughing up the old canard about McCain giving intelligence to his captors in exchange for better treatment. In essence, McInerney said torture works because it turned John McCain into a traitor.

Sadler's job at the White House is to manage talking points for administration allies to deploy during media appearances. On the same day that an Air Force general accused a sitting U.S. senator and torture survivor of treason on live TV, Sadler found herself in a communications office staff meeting about the Haspel nomination. When the subject of McCain's statement came up, Sadler said, "It doesn't matter, he's dying anyway."

In other words, for the crimes of detesting torture and disliking the president, spokespeople for the party McCain has served throughout his career have now labeled him traitor and buried him before he is dead. "I like people that weren't captured," Trump said of McCain during the campaign. The fish rots from the head down.

That's where we are today, but that's not all of it, not by half. Donald Trump and his henchmen are a symptom, not a cause.

To nick a line I once used about George W. Bush, blaming Trump for all this is like blaming Mick-



ey Mouse when Disney screws up. We have been in an active shooting war in one form or another for almost 30 years now, and have been on a wartime economic footing since President Truman signed the National Security Act more than 60 years ago. Within that context, Trump just came down with the last drop of rain.

The Forever War is not just in the Middle East. It is in Korea, where U.S. troops still stand to post along the DMZ. It is in Vietnam, where hundreds of thousands of children have been born with spina bifida, neural tube problems, missing limbs, missing vertebrae, autoimmune disorders and more, four decades after the U.S. finished hosing that nation down with Agent Orange. And yes, the Forever War is also in Iraq, which practically glows at night from all the depleted uranium the U.S. has detonated there since 1991.

This is why we find ourselves today talking about torture the way other people talk about their sandwich order, and why powerful voices see fit to accuse torture survivors of treason. We have been thoroughly debased by all this war, all this violence, all this death for so many years. The most popular video games come with body counts. Neighbors with massive arsenals are the norm, and massacres flicker by like dandelion seeds.

We are a crumbling nation not just in a moral sense,

but also in a literal one. The trillions of dollars spent on the Forever War have turned our economy into a shaky shell game, and deprived us of the opportunity to make education, infrastructure, genuine health care and artistic achievement the cornerstones of our culture. When capitalism sits at the table with democracy, sooner or later all the plates are empty save for a golden few. The United States did not invent the concept of using war to plunder the treasury. It simply perfected the practice.

Donald Trump did not do this. He and his friends are merely taking mighty advantage of it. They know we are all smothered by the sense that it is this way because it has always been this way, and so it will always be this way. No greater lie could be told, yet we tell it to ourselves in word and deed every day, because we are very well trained after all these years.

This is the only world my daughter has known, the world I have known since I was a boy, the world that counts my father among its countless casualties.

By accepting this unendurable reality as the new normal, we are doing the war machine's work for it, oftentimes with earnest diligence. This must end. We cannot let the Forever War into our heads any more. I'm ready when you are.

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America's Megalomaniac

There's No Longer American Foreign Policy, Only Trump's Ego

BY ROBERT REICH

I spent late May at a conference in South Korea, during which time Trump went from seeking a meeting with Kim Jong Un to cancelling it, then suggesting it might be back on.

"What does Trump want?" South Korean officials at the conference kept asking me. Notably, no one asked what the United States wants. They knew it was all about Trump.

Trump's goal has nothing to do with peace on the Korean peninsula, or even with making America great again. It's all about making Trump feel great.

"They are respecting us again," Trump exulted to graduating cadets at the Naval Academy last Friday. "Winning is such a great feeling, isn't it? Nothing like winning. You got to win."

In truth, the United States hasn't won anything, in Korea or anywhere else. After 15 months of Trump at the helm, America is far less respected around the world than it was before.

The only thing that's happened is Trump is now making foreign policy on his own – without America's allies, without Congress, even without the State Department. Trump may consider this a personal win but it hardly makes America safer.

Some earnest foreign policy experts are seeking to discover some bargaining strategy behind Trump's moves on North Korea. Hint: There's no strategy. Only a thin-skinned narcissist needing flattery and fearing ridicule.

Trump got excited about a summit with Kim when he thought it might win him praise, even possibly a Nobel Peace Prize. He got cold feet when he feared Kim might be setting Trump up for humiliating failure. Now he's back to dreaming about the prize.

The delicate balance in Trump's brain between glorification and mortification can tip either way at any moment, depending on his hunches. All international relations become contests of personal dominance.

He rejected the 2015 Iran treaty for no apparent reason other than Obama had entered into it. Trump couldn't care less that by doing so he has harmed relations with our traditional allies, who pleaded with him to stay in. And he's undermined America's future credibility. Why would any nation [including North Korea] enter into a treaty with the United States if it can break it on the whim of a president who wants to one-up his predecessor?

Ditto with the Paris climate accord. Obama got

credit for it, so Trump wants credit for unilaterally sinking it.

Trump has demanded that America's nuclear arsenal be upgraded. Why? Since 1970, the United States has been committed to nuclear nonproliferation. What changed? Trump. A more powerful arsenal makes him feel more powerful – "respected again."

It's not about American interests in the world. It's about Trump's interests.

Wonder why Trump promised to lift trade sanctions on ZTE, China's giant telecom company? ZTE has been trading with North Korea and Iran, in violation of American policy. Everyone around Trump advised against lifting the sanctions.

Look no further than Trump's personal needs. ZTE is important to China, and China recently pledged a half-billion-dollar loan to a project connected with Trump's family business.

While we're on the subject of high tech, why has Trump pushed the Postal Service to double the shipping rate it charges Amazon? I mean, isn't Amazon important to America's high-tech race with the rest of the world?

The most likely explanation is that the CEO of Amazon is Jeff Bezos, who's also far richer than Trump. Bezos also owns The Washington Post, and the Post has been critical of Trump.

As you may have noticed, the man doesn't like to be criticized. As Trump explained to Leslie Stahl of 60 Minutes during his campaign, his aim is "to discredit you all and demean you all so when you write negative stories about me no one will believe you."

Any halfway responsible president of the United States would be worried about Russian meddling in U.S. elections. Protecting American democracy is just about the most important thing a president does.

But Trump has turned the inquiry about the Russians into a "dark state" conspiracy against him. And he's demanded that the Justice Department investigate the people who are investigating him.

With Trump, there's no longer American foreign policy. There's only Trump's ego.

If peace is truly advanced on the Korean peninsula, the Prize shouldn't go to Trump. It should go to South Korean president Moon Jae-in, who has tirelessly courted the world's two most dangerous megalomaniacs.



"STOP THEM FOR SPEEDING!!!"

Trump's Big Lies About The FBI

BY JOE CONASON

Arguing with Donald Trump and the president's most fervent supporters is usually a wasted effort. If they truly believe his paranoid whining about "the deep state conspiracy" to oust him, they're not much interested in facts or logic.

Trump's increasing efforts to promote confusion over the origins and conduct of the Russia investigation nevertheless deserve to be refuted. So do his repeated complaints that he is the victim of a political scandal even worse than Watergate.

He can continuously bamboozle his Fox-befuddled followers because the Russia saga is complex and convoluted – and because they all live in his world of "alternative truths." It is not the real world that the rest of us inhabit.

In Trump's world, the Russia investigation is a "witch hunt," the biggest ever, of course, conceived years ago at the instigation of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton by unnamed yet nefarious intelligence officials – those denizens of the "deep state."

In the real world, U.S. intelligence officials open an

investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election during July of that year – after hearing from Australian and other friendly intelligence agencies about the Kremlin's hacking into Democratic emails.

In Trump's world, the Obama Justice Department cruelly violated the privacy of his former campaign adviser Carter Page in order to advance the conspiracy against him, while hiding behind the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

In the real world, Page's contacts with Kremlin agents both in the United States and Russia had attracted the attention of the FBI counterintelligence division long before Trump announced his campaign for president. In fact, Page became a person of interest in a 2013 investigation that eventually led to the imprisonment of one Russian spy and the expulsion of two confederates who had diplomatic cover. To obtain the FISA warrant, prosecutors had to persuade a federal judge that there was "probable cause" to treat Page as a witting clandestine operative for the Russian government.

In Trump's world, the FBI sent Stefan Halper, a long-time Republican source, to "spy" on his presidential campaign in 2016. Halper's mundane conversations about Russia with three campaign operatives were, according to Trump, part of the bureau's gigantic conspiracy to undermine him.

In the real world, Halper did nothing that harmed Trump's campaign, while the FBI used every means to conceal its investigation into the campaign's Kremlin connections during the weeks before Election Day. The bureau's highly effective effort to protect Trump resulted in a front-page New York Times article on Oct. 31 with a wholly misleading and premature headline: "Investigating Donald Trump, FBI Sees No Clear Link To Russia."

In Trump's world, the FBI allowed Hillary Clinton to escape prosecution for using a private email server [as Colin Powell did before her] and top FBI officials schemed to help her win the presidency.

In the real world, as everyone knows, then-FBI director James Comey twice violated Justice Department rules to harm Clinton's campaign by publicly criticizing her and by revealing, just days before the election, that his agents were examining emails on her aide Huma Abedin's laptop. [Trump should remember what Comey did because it helped him win the election – and because he later cited it as an ex-

cuse for firing Comey.]

To this day, in Trump's world, the FBI and the Justice Department are controlled by "deep state" forces hostile to him and determined to remove him from his duly elected position as president. And the special counsel investigation is merely the instrument of these hostile bureaucrats, who are probably Democrats.

In the real world, Trump himself appointed the career law enforcement officials who now run the FBI and the Justice Department – notably including Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and FBI Director Christopher Wray, both of whom happen to be lifelong Republicans [as is special counsel Robert Mueller].

There is no evidence whatsoever to support the fantastic falsehoods of Trump's world – a construction of presidential lies on a scale that would thrill Josef Goebbels.

Concerned only with preserving himself, he slanders federal law enforcement officers and undermines the nation's bulwarks against terrorism, espionage and crime almost every day. In the end, he won't escape the judgment of the American people and of history. But meanwhile he is inflicting terrible damage on the systems that protect us all.

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Japan's 'Scientific Whaling' Kills 333 Minke, Fueling Outrage

After publication of a new whaling report, many conservation groups are questioning Japan's controversial "scientific whaling" program's motive. The study conducted by the International Whaling Commission [IWC] concluded that Japanese whaling vessels take in 333 Antarctic minke whales – 181 of which are females and 67 percent of which are pregnant – during its annual hunt.

Besides the high percentage of pregnant female minke whales killed, ICW's report also determined that Japanese whalers killed 61 immature males and 53 immature females.

"The continued killing of any whale is abhorrent to modern society, but these new figures make it even more shocking," Alexia Wellbelove, senior program manager at Human Society International, said.

Even with "significant conservation efforts underway worldwide to address the issues," the Japanese government launched the controversial program in 1987 in which they claim that the mammals are killed for research purpose. The government plans to hunt upwards of 4,000 whales spread across the next 10 years, EcoWatch reported. And while they insist the killings aren't done to endangered whales, the Japanese government claims that eating whale is also part

of their culture.

"There is nothing scientific about harpooning a pregnant whale, chopping it up and putting it on a plate," Tony Burke, Australia's Labor Party environment spokesman, said. "Japan's position on this is absurd and the Australian government must not be silent."

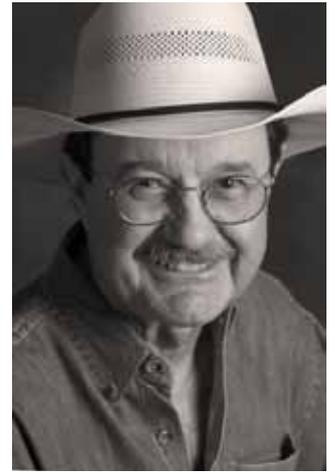
The inhuman practice is fueling outrage and the Australian chapter of Human Society International is looking to the Australian government to intervene.

Sea Shepard, a conservation organization featured for several years in Animal Planet's Whale Wars, has sent ships yearly since 2005 to try and intercept the whale hunts in the Antarctic Ocean, but this year the organization didn't send any ships because Japan is using "military technology."

"They have real-time satellite coverage of where we are, Paul Watson, founder and captain, said. "We cannot close in on them. It's a waste of time and money to go down there and not be able to achieve anything."

Wellbelove and other conservationists hope more countries, along with Australia, will be able to send "the strongest possible message to Japan that it should stop its lethal whaling program." – Ashley Curtin, *Nation of Change*

Jim Hightower



A Wall Street Sin Tax

The moneyed populace is adroit at getting Congress to shift America's tax burden to workers, consumers, small businesses – anyone but them. Sen. Russell Long, the former chair of the finance committee, used to quote a little back-country ditty on this point: "Don't tax me, don't tax thee, tax that fellow behind the tree."

Some extremely rich fellows who've been hiding behind the tree to avoid taxation for years are the global financial speculators engaged in the high-rolling, computer-driven, fast-buck, multi-trillion dollar, casino gambles that now define Wall Street. Unbeknownst to most people, the dominant investment banks today have been converted into casinos. Rather than amalgamating capital to finance the real economy, the bulk of Wall Street transactions are purely speculative – such as gaming foreign currency exchanges, collateralized debt obligations, credit default swaps, crude oil and farm commodity futures and more.

These transactions create nothing but quick profits for those few big traders who can afford to play, with most of them using automated tracking systems and superfast computers to invest millions of dollars at a time into these exotic financial instruments. They buy into a scheme one day and sell it the next – or even turn the transaction around in a matter of minutes. And we're talking about huge sums of money every year – a mindboggling \$700 trillion according to the Wall Street Journal.

As we saw in the 2007 crash in the housing bubble, such gamesmanship for the few wrecks havoc on the many. And Wall Street's continuing refusal to invest in productive enterprises has created America's new normal of a stagnant economy.

One way to restore some sanity is to erect a disincentive for Wall Streeters Gone Wild. A "financial speculation tax" would achieve that ... and more.

First, the FST would be a very modest assessment of, say, one quarter of 1% per transaction. Every time anyone buys or sells a stock or bond, as well as any derivative, option, future, credit default swap or other financial exotica, a tiny tax of 0.25% or less would be applied to the transaction.

Regular folks who have some of their money in the

stock market would feel no pinch from this tax, for they make relatively stable, small, long-term investments in stocks and bonds, so the FST would be a trivial charge.

However, the tax would sting the global speculators and profiteers who surge in and out of the market, buying and selling huge volumes of assets at lightning speed. Each of them betting on hundreds of these ultra-short-term transactions every day, grabbing millions of dollars a year by finding a small profit margin on each one. Because of those small margins, an FST add-on of 0.25% to buy each asset and another quarter percent to sell it would be a real restraint on their frenzied and dangerous gambling on financial nonsense, helping to stabilize our present flash-crash economy.

FST amounts to a progressive "sin tax" on Wall Street's casino culture, possibly compelling more capital to move into America's crying need for job-creating investments in Main Street enterprises.

While the tax on speculators is tiny, it would pay off big for our country. Two economists calculate that it would generate \$100 billion-\$150 billion a year for the public treasury, virtually all of it from speculators. This money is needed to reduce the deficit, while also providing funds to rebuild our infrastructure, create a green-jobs economy, and get America moving forward.

Crazy? From 1914 to 1966, the U.S. had a 0.20% tax on the buying and selling of stocks. And in 1932, Congress more than doubled it to help finance job creation and national recovery during the Depression. It worked, helping America prosper. As for being too wild, after the 1987 Wall Street crash, none other than President George Bush the Elder endorsed the idea, as did GOP Senate leader Bob Dole.

It's time to put the Wall Street tax back on the table. Rather than just cutting back on the middle class and on America's future – as the no-can-do leaders in Washington propose – let's invest in the grassroots people to build America up. The money to do that is now being frittered away by speculators on Wall Street. Let's reclaim a chunk of it for the common good of all the people – 0.25% at a time.

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Goons In Gucci

In the fierce labor wars of the last century, industrial barons employed Pinkertons and other goons to bloody the heads of laborers or simply gun down those struggling for a share of economic and political power. It was brutal, but organized workers persevered and eventually gained a share of economic and political power.

From their sweat and blood, America's middle class flowered.

Today, the bands of nouveau corporate royalists [with coats of arms bearing such names as Mercer, DeVos and Koch] are determined to take back those middle-class gains of yesteryear. They are working to achieve this through a coordinated, long-term campaign to crush the ability of working people to unionize, bust America's middle-class wage structure, eliminate job security and emasculate government as a force capable of controlling corporate avarice and arrogance.

These latter-day royalists are employing a more sophisticated thuggery than brute force [though don't think they wouldn't resort to it]. Instead, their goons are more likely to be in Gucci than brogans, using dollars and computers rather than clubs and guns. They have been recruiting, financing, training, deploying and coordinating thousands of political operatives to work through hundreds of front groups, law firms, think tanks, PACs, lobbying offices, media and PR consortiums, faux academic centers, astroturf campaigns and, of course, compliant politicians.

Among the compliant is our covey of hyperactive governors, all carrying basically the same anti-worker, anti-democratic policy ideas. Their unified agenda wasn't produced by telepathy or freakish happenstance, but by the AFC, ALEC, IFL, SPN and other obscure organizational acronyms unknown to 99% of Americans.

Behind the non-descript acronyms are aggressive and insidious right-wing wonk shops that have been set up and richly financed by the corporatists to prepare and hand-deliver pro-corporate programs to compliant governors and key legislators. Once delivered, the organizations work [usually clandestinely] to get the programs enacted. Let's peek inside one of those acronyms.

American legislative exchange council. "ALEC is the nation's largest nonpartisan, individual membership association of state legislators," explains a brochure of this secretive organization. Maybe your very own local lawmaker is one of them – but you won't get that information from ALEC, which hides its list of legislators from public view.

The "exchange" in ALEC's name is not between lawmakers, but between lawmakers and such behind-the-scenes powers as Alcoa, Altria, Amway, AT&T, Bayer Corp, Caterpillar, ExxonMobil, Koch

Industries, Kraft Foods, Peabody Energy, Pfizer, Reynolds American, State Farm Insurance and UPS. These giants form ALEC's "private enterprise board," and they are among the self-interested corporations that put up its money and shape its agenda.

What do corporations get for their tax-deductible donations? A greased skid for sliding their wish list into the laws of multiple states.

ALEC is something of a speed dating service. It holds three national conferences a year, plus convening issue-specific policy sessions in 20 to 30 state capitols annually. These are cozy sessions that conveniently gather groups of legislators to meet in private with corporate executives.

The two groups schmooze together and develop bills to help extend corporate power over workers, consumers, environmentalists, and others – then the lawmakers go back home to pass the corporations' bills.

ALEC is the ultimate back room for corporate-legislative collusion. Its promotional brochure describes it as a dynamic partnership "that will define the American political landscape of the 21st century."

That's no empty threat. ALEC's tete-a-tetes result in about 1,000 bills being introduced across America every legislative session, and an ALEC official proudly adds, "We usually pass about 200 bills a year."

Something unconscionable is at work here, something that is shameful, unworthy of our people, and directly contradictory to our country's founding ideals.

The richest, most powerful, most privileged people in our land – in cahoots with a horde of the least principled, most venal political opportunists in civic life – are intentionally savaging the well-being of America's majority and aggressively suppressing the democratic rights that make America America.

And for what? Solely for themselves, for the aggrandizement of their own wealth and power. – *Jim Hightower*

Name The States

An old pastor made it a practice to visit the parish school one day a week. He walked into the 4th grade class, where the children were studying the states, and asked them how many states they could name. They could only come up with about 40 names.

He jokingly told them that in his day students knew the names of all the states.

One lad snickered, "Yes, but in those days there were only 13."

– *Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing*

BLESSED
ARE THE
HYPOCRITES...

...FOR THEY
ARE THE
GIVERS OF
MULLIGANS

WATCH THE HAIR



What You Need To Know About New White House Faith-Based Initiative

BY ROBIN MARTY

On May 3, religious leaders in the United States celebrated the National Day of Prayer. As a political event, the day has grown in influence – and this year was no exception.

President Donald Trump enthusiastically embraced his new role as a gatekeeper of “religious liberty” for Christian evangelicals and Catholics throughout the nation.

And this year he offered even more opportunities to the religious right than ever before, with the establishment of the “White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative.”

So what exactly does this initiative declare? Here’s everything you need to know about the push for even more – Christian – religious power in the U.S. government.

1. Religious organizations can no longer be excluded from grants because they discriminate based on gender, sexual orientation or religious

grounds.

The executive order reads:

The executive branch wants faith-based and community organizations, to the fullest opportunity permitted by law, to compete on a level playing field for grants, contracts, programs, and other Federal funding opportunities. The efforts of faith-based and community organizations are essential to revitalizing communities, and the Federal Government welcomes opportunities to partner with such organizations through innovative, measurable, and outcome-driven initiatives.

2. Faith-based organizations will be working in more areas of public policy than ever before.

According to the executive order, a liaison from the Faith-Based Initiatives program will seek out “experts” for potential opportunities in “poverty alleviation, religious liberty, strengthening marriage and family, education, solutions for substance abuse and

addiction, crime prevention and reduction, prisoner reentry, and health and humanitarian services.”

3. There will no longer be any opt-out if beneficiaries don't want to be proselytized at.

USA Today reports:

The executive order repeals Obama administration rules limiting the ability of groups getting federal funds to preach to those they serve. Under the Trump order, faith-based groups will no longer have to refer beneficiaries to alternative programs if they object to the religious teachings.

4. Investigation into “religious discrimination” will intensify.

NY Magazine explains:

In line with Trump's loud-and-proud advocacy of the political views of conservative Christians, his new faith-based office will apparently focus on policing agencies to make sure there is no interference with participation by church-sponsored organizations, and no transgressions against the ‘liberty of conscience’ of believers. This is a term, of course, that both political and religious conservatives these days construe very broadly to sanction all sorts of exclusive and exclusionary demands, even in the use of federal funds.

According to Adelle Banks, who first reported the initiative, the office will “serve as a watchdog for government overreach on religious liberty issues.” It will be interesting to see if the watchdog growls, and if so, at whom.

5. LGBT groups fear direct and increased discrimination.

Samantha Allen of the Daily Beast reports:

“We're very concerned because this administration has a pattern of inviting discrimination in the name of religion,” Camilla Taylor, director of Constitutional Litigation for the LGBT legal advocacy group Lambda Legal, told The Daily Beast shortly before the Rose Garden event.

Based on its reported description, Taylor said that the new faith initiative; seems to be “actively seeking out opportunities to facilitate discrimination.” [As details of the order were officially announced minutes later, Lambda Legal tweeted, ‘Yikes, y'all.’]

6. Religious liberty for Christians will likely lead to a loss of freedom for non-Christians.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State writes:

[O]ne thing is for certain – Trump is committed to allowing religion to be used to discriminate throughout the federal government and today's order is just another way to implement this agenda. Religious freedom should be a shield to protect religion, not a sword to harm others. Trump and his Evangelical Advisory Board have this all wrong; they're harming religious freedom, not protecting it.

Robin Marty is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer and editor who formerly worked as director of special projects for the Center for Independent Media.

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Freeing Predators To Bilk Little People Hurts All

BY FROMA HARROP

The most vivid takeaway from the financial meltdown of 10 years ago was that nearly everyone got hurt. Stock investors took a beating. People who had carefully set aside money for retirement saw a third of their savings vanish. Consumer spending collapsed, pushing two of the Big Three U.S. car companies to the edge of bankruptcy. Unemployment soared to 10%.

Taxpayers had to bail out both the banks and the automakers. And no, they didn't have a choice. It was that or turn the Great Recession into another Great Depression.

The losers were everywhere, but the saddest had to be the ordinary folks who lost their homes. It started with a housing bubble feeding the fantasy that real estate values could only rise. That provided financial predators the perfect setup to peddle indecent mortgage schemes.

The mortgages looked like easy money but were actually booby-trapped contracts loaded with high fees and exploding interest charges. They often transformed what could have been manageable setbacks into foreclosures.

Out of the rubble rose a government agency tasked with reining in some of the abusive lending practices that fueled the debacle. It is the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The CFPB set rules on mortgages, payday loans and other financial prod-

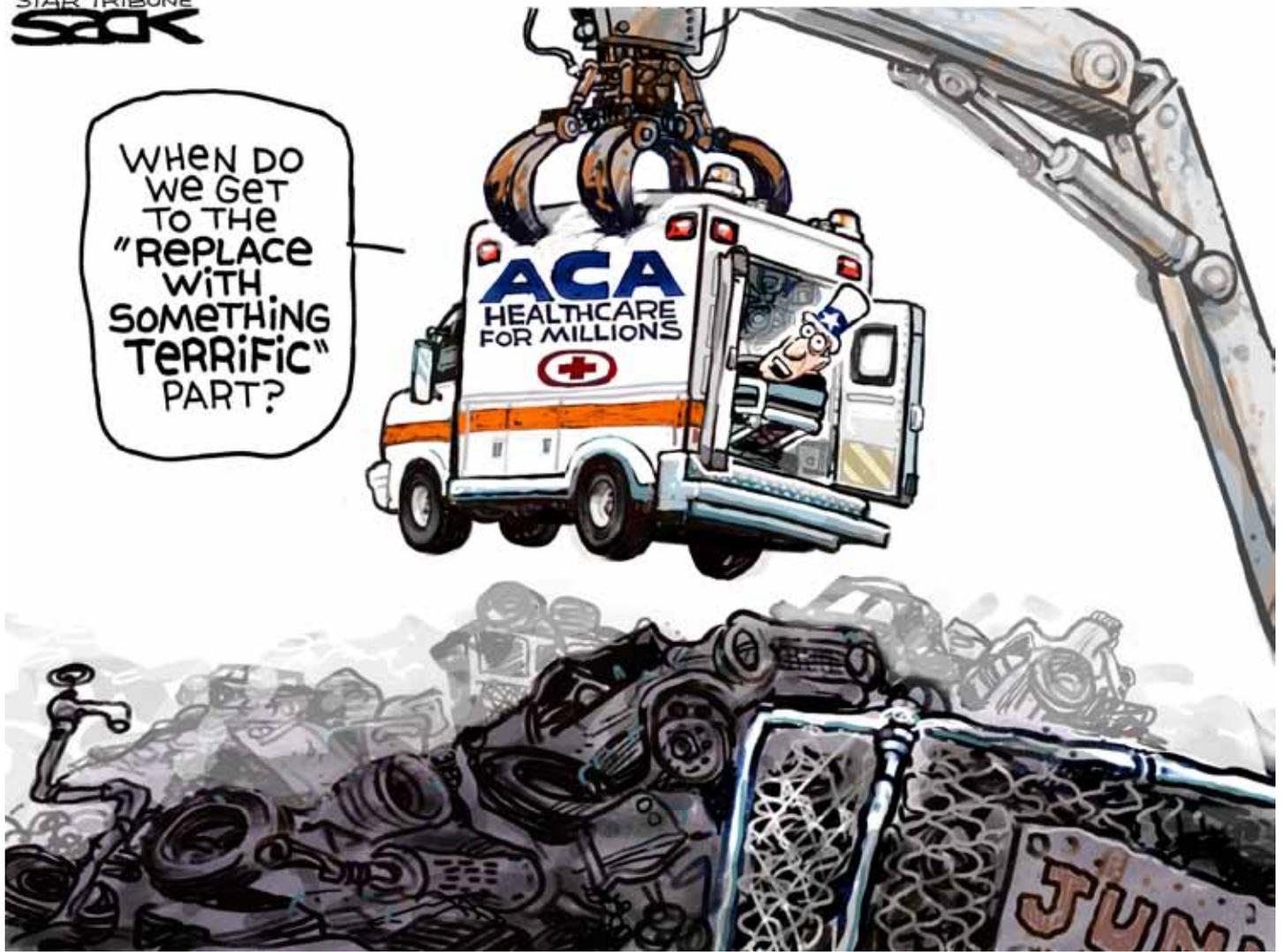
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Why Not Medicare For All?

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

My answer is, why not? Today we have profit-driven health care run primarily by the insurance industry and Big Pharma, fed by a circle of related for-profit businesses.

Whatever happened to health care because it's the right thing to do? The moral calamity that drives our so-called health care system needs an ethical set of rules that not only cures illnesses but also prevents them. The goal is clear and the objectives are much clearer.

No longer can America sit idly by when more than 30,000 citizens die yearly. Although we know how to cure the sick, they are needlessly dying, locked out of our profit-driven health care industry. That's unacceptable, a "moral atrocity" unworthy of us and our democracy.

Every day 100 Americans die avoidable deaths. Not

dying from a medical condition but from lack of treatment; they are killed by a system geared to ration health care based on ability to pay.

Help, however, may be on the way. More and more of us are realizing that everyone is entitled to health care as a human right, and pursuit of universal health coverage ought to be a national goal. Latest stats show 60% of Americans support this, with 75% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans. Increasingly we believe every single one of us deserves health care, regardless of status. And yes, only one reform will cover everyone and control costs: a single-payer, Medicare-for-all system.

According to Public Citizen, a new political reality on health care has arisen, powerfully demonstrated by the Republicans' inability to repeal the Affordable Care Act, or ObamaCare. That failure has pushed single-payer health care from the fringes to the center of

the policy debate in Congress. Americans have risen up to support a universal system of health care that is *worthy of all and fair to all at an affordable price.*

A mantra is slowly emerging in Congress: "Health care is a right." This past year the American public rose up to declare loudly and clearly that all have access to health care, even those who can't afford it. Single-payer, Medicare-for-all is the reform that will cover everyone and control costs at the same time. This new political reality was amply demonstrated by Republican House inability to repeal ACA. Here comes instead S.11, Medicare-for-all sponsored by 16 senators with Bernie Sanders as principal author.

Gone soon are the days of people needlessly dying because they can't afford the high charges of profit-hungry insurance businesses and Big Pharma. Time soon to place the right goals for health care in America. Sprouting is a medical system designed to not only cure illnesses that cripple and kill but also prevent illnesses arising despite healthy lifestyles of eating and exercise. Then we will stop paying *far more for far less* than citizens of other nations in the industrialized world.

For example, the U.S. infant mortality rates are almost three times higher than in the best performing countries. Our life expectancy rate is lower than in 30 other developed countries. We have, by far, the worst problem of access to health care: one in three Americans had a cost-related lack of access in the past

year. Outrageous!

Let's look at what Public Citizen is quietly doing to usher in America's universal health care system. Knowledge is power is the aphorism we all remember. Information is powerfully correcting misinformation spread by opponents of health care for all. We must know the central argument for the single-payer model and against the current system: we pay far more for far less. As long as Big Pharma and the insurance industry remain in charge of America's health care, tens of thousands of Americans will die needlessly. Our government and we, the people, must ensure that no American is without basic health care any longer.

The current "Medicare for All Act of 2017" is not perfect, but a significant improvement over the present system. Its basic statement justifies its very existence: "Every individual who is a resident of the United States is entitled to benefits for health care services under this Act."

Exposing the abuses of the current system is an absolute need. The problem is the following: the high salaries and perks of insurance executives, coupled with undue political influence of the insurance, drug and hospital corporations due to the astronomical cost of running for public office and politicians' dependence on corporate donors and lobbyists. Maybe worthy of mention is public apathy. Yes, the present state of health care is due to us all: the guilty is US.

An abundance of information on health care is

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available but some are simply myths or outright lies.

Myth 1: Single-payer is government-run health care.

Wrong. Hospitals remain in private hands.

Consider the Veterans Administration or the British health care system. In both, the government pays the doctors and hospitals. Doctors are not employees of the government; hospitals remain in private groups. One needing health treatment can go to any doctor or hospital in the country.

Myth 2: Single-payer will lead to rationing, as in Canada.

Wrong. Right now in the U.S., private health insurance companies do the rationing. No health insurance, no health care in most cases. More than 30 million Americans have none, thus 100 deaths daily.

There are some problems in the Canadian system but all you hear about is the long lines – and that's health insurance industry propaganda, or fear mongering.

Zero people die every day in Canada from lack of health insurance or the mythical long lines.

Myth 3: Costs will skyrocket under Medicare for all.

Wrong. Single-payer is the only health care reform that will save enough to insure everyone.

With the health insurance industry weakened in power, we save at least \$500 billion a year in administrative costs and profits. The savings can then go for those lacking insurance and fully cover those underinsured.

Yes, more people will seek health care because of their universal health care but they seek medical treatment early, thus obviating more costly treatment. Remember that the most expensive health care is ER and the last days of health care.

Myth 4: Drugs will be more difficult to obtain under the single-payer system.

Wrong. The drug industry would have you believe that there will be less research and development [R&D] under the single-payer model.

Today most medical research is funded by the National Institutes of Health. Under single-payer, this research would grow. Also, drugs will be cheaper under it.

When all patients are under one system, the payer wields higher leverage. For example, the VA gets 40% discount on drugs because of its buying power, this being the main reason why other countries have lower-priced prescriptions. Thus, the drug industry's opposition to single-payer.

Myth 5: Single-payer will cover less than my insurance.

Wrong. For the majority of Americans, single-payer will be a vast improvement.

Funded through the single-payer system will be all medically necessary care, whether inpatient or outpatient, including doctor visits, hospital stays, drugs, mental health counseling, nursing home care, rehab, home care, eye care, oral and dental care.

No more bills. No more deductibles. No more co-pays.

Finally,

Myth 6: Single-payer will cost me more than my current payment for private health insurance.

Wrong. The vast majority of Americans will pay about the same or less than their payment now. Instead of premiums to a private health insurance company, most of us will pay a similar or lower amount in taxes. So, right now, if you're paying \$8,000 in premiums for a family of four with a \$4,000 deductible, your yearly liability is at least \$12,000. You will probably pay less in taxes to fund a universal single-payer health care system and there will be no deductible.

Ain't America great, my friends? It certainly would be under a single-payer, Medicare-for-all system.

For more info on this system, go to www.publiccitizen.com.

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

Improving Women's Health

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

Who is kidding whom?

President Donald Trump claims he is trying to "improve women's health" by depriving them of medical advice, forcing their doctors to lie and increasing the cost of routine women's health care all at once.

He's back at it. If the Chinese won't listen to him, then why not beat up on women? Forget about picking on North Korea; he wants to pick on the people who take care of the poorest and neediest women amongst us.

I'm talking, of course, about the war on Planned Parenthood: that terrible place where, for low or no

fees, women can get gynecological services they desperately need; prenatal care to help them have healthy babies; and treatments for diseases and infections and a whole host of potentially life-threatening illnesses.

Shut the doors. Build new facilities next door if you want to perform an abortion. No money for that? Too bad. To heck with the Constitution. Who cares if poor women die?

Not Donald Trump. Mired in messes of his own making, Trump – the man who [according to his lovers] doesn't even bother to use protection when



sleeping around while his own wife is pregnant – thinks poor women should be denied the right to choose whether to have a child. They should even be denied basic health information that would allow them to protect themselves, to make safe choices, to save their lives.

The annual war on Planned Parenthood has absolutely nothing to do with improving women’s health. It’s all about improving the molester in chief’s poll ratings. How hypocritical can you get? What if Stormy Daniels had gotten pregnant? Dare we even ask?

Denying Planned Parenthood Title X family-planning money has absolutely nothing to do with defunding abortions. Planned Parenthood, along with other health care organizations, is barred from using Title X funds for abortion, even if the woman [who is supposed to be the decision-maker here] has the right to choose abortion. No, this is about politics. And money.

Organizations such as Planned Parenthood must either build new and separate facilities to perform abortions [How? With what money?] or stop performing abortions altogether – not just stop performing them but stop even talking about them or referring women to the health care providers they need.

According to Hal Lawrence, the chief executive officer of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the rules the president announced

last week represent “an egregious intrusion in the patient-provider relationship and may force physicians to omit essential, medically accurate information.”

Just for poor women, of course.

Because make no mistake: If you live in a big city and have a private doctor, you can walk into his or her office and get all the information that the Constitution gives you the right to have and make an informed decision, one that is protected by the Constitution.

But if you are poor and sick and lack a private physician, if you live in one of the many parts of America where there are virtually no clinics that provide abortion services, your costs just went through the roof and your access to health care is on its way down the toilet.

When can we stop with these stupid games that cost lives?

You would think that a man who takes so little responsibility for whether he brings children into the world would at least have the decency not to foreclose the choices of women who make the mistake of getting involved with a selfish pig like him.

You would think ... but Donald Trump doesn’t care what you think. He’s still fretting about Hillary Clinton’s emails and all those nasty women who almost cost him the election. Maybe next time, they will.

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America's Shared Values Can Trump Partisan Divide

WHAT UNITES US

Reflections On Patriotism

By Dan Rather and Elliot Kirschner

Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill

288 pages, \$22.95

BY JOHN WOOD

In the relatively surreal era of Trump tribalism and growing disorientation of our shared reality, Dan Rather and Elliot Kirschner point out that we are likewise experiencing a potential sea change in opposition. But it won't likely happen until America remembers what unites us.

This hopeful book, written in Rather's voice, is an easy read. I studied it all on the plane to Central America a few weeks ago.

Rather, the CBS anchor who was fired more than a decade ago, still stands by his report on how G.W. Bush was able to skirt the immensely long line to join the National Guard during the height of Vietnam. Joining the guard, at the time, meant you wouldn't go to war, which is a 180-degree change when I served in Desert Storm.

G.W. was protected from serving in the jungle precisely because of his father's looming influence, according to Rather's report. Not only did the well-connected G.W. slip ahead of thousands of other young men keeping out of the draft, he disappeared from his guard drills for at least a year.

G.W. never really paid a political price for this news, as it was conveniently swept under the rug after Rather was fired. And yet, the facts were never denied by the Bush family, but Rather was roundly critiqued for how he received the documents anyway.

Rather defended himself a couple years ago, saying, "We made some mistakes of getting to the truth. But that didn't change the truth of what we reported."

After more than a quarter century as a journalist, Rather finds that America needs to get back to a place where we can all largely agree again that we all should enjoy the ideal of "one person, one vote." At the same

time, inclusion, while imperfect, is another idea that we aspire to as a nation. There also has been from the beginning in America the shared sentiment that we want to continue to strive and improve on ourselves.

Today, he says, we are too focused on a nationalism based on conceit and arrogance. Instead, we need to redefine patriotism, which is a constructive and active form of patriotism. We need to roll up our sleeves a bit because this form of patriotism takes work.

His acknowledgement is not unlike Timothy Snider's *On Tyranny*, which cautions that protecting our public institutions is what we need to do because institutions won't do it themselves. This requires a lot of effort.

"It takes coming together for good causes," Rather writes. "This is one of the things I cherish more about the United States: We are a nation not only of dreamers, but also of fixers." Repeatedly, Americans tell ourselves upon reflection, "This is not good enough; we can do better."

Beyond patriotism, Rather says we need to get more knowledgeable about the world around us, engage with those unlike us, as well as ensure fairness, due process, and equal opportunity. These ideas need our protection.

Rather says he doesn't have all the answers, but the point is to at least have the conversation and weight the options in a deliberate way.

This reminds me when, while growing up, I once asked my Dad, "What is a weed anyway?" after he pointed to a yellow flower to remove in our yard. He answered: "It's anything you don't want because it's either invasive, or you don't like the way it looks like."

It seems to me that Rather is saying a conversation is a marketplace of ideas, weeds and all. This is far superior to dismissing news you don't like as "fake news." Instead, it helps ensure you don't miss out on facts necessary to make fully-informed decisions and solve society's problems.

We need all the information we can get to solve today's problems. You don't know what you are missing if you simply demonize the messenger bearing disquieting information.

Actually, dismissing the news you don't like as fake is a rather old propaganda technique – dangerous name-calling. As an example, Rather points to the women's movement in the 1950s, often dismissed as either Communism, Socialism, or Unamerican. And yet these women were on the right side of history.

Whether it's kneeling at football games or not wearing a lapel pin, this is a way to dismiss arguments rather than have the honest conversation. Dissent, historically, is who we are as Americans, he writes, especially when times are tough. We need, he insists, to cherish dissent.

It seemed to me, as I read Rather's book, he finds us in an Orwellian moment. For the first time, we have a president who never apologizes or explains; instead he relentlessly attacks anyone he doesn't like, beyond even the media.

These attacks are often read in a torrent of Twitter rants, frequently laden in propaganda. Such tenacity takes skill, something ironically the Russians have specialized in for more than a century. Rather's observation: Trump is pretty much a propaganda artist.

What's more, I just read Trump has a team that often tweets for him, yet purposefully preserves his many misspellings and errant capitalization errors. So very populist. Trump is just an Average Joe, right?

I also found this interesting after reading Rather's book: Trump and the GOP deploy a propaganda

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technique called "Whataboutism." It is a logical fallacy, perfected by the Russians, discrediting an opposing position by charging hypocrisy without even refuting the argument at hand.

Interestingly, Garry Kasparov once commented on Trump's use

of whataboutisms: "Moral relativism – 'whataboutism' – has always been a favorite weapon of illiberal regimes. For a U.S. president to employ it against his own country is tragic."

Here is an example from one of Trump's more than 2,500 tweets in

his first year in office:

“So many people are asking why isn’t the A.G. or Special Council looking at the many Hillary Clinton or Comey crimes. 33,000 e-mails deleted? 6:44 AM - Jul 22, 2017”

And, you wonder why he can’t stop talking about Hillary, right?

As Rather points out, propaganda like what-aboutism deflects from the conversations we should have, ideally weighing all available public policy arguments, free of manipulation.

Whataboutism gets traction because it is a commentary on ourselves and our human defects. The logic: if nobody is perfect, there’s license to do all sorts of imperfect things. It can justify anything without explanation or justification. This illogic undermines honest dialogue and can justify behavior that is above the law. And that’s scary!

We need, Rather says, to once again find what unites us. He quotes, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s description of the direction of the civil rights era: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

They say our best days are still ahead, if people act as informed, involved, active and organized citizens and go to the polls. But, Rather notes, “Compromise cannot be confused with capitulation.”

Further, he suggests “we all reach down deep into the soul of this nation and hold on to the central principles that have made us great. Do not let go. Do not

apologize or explain away your brand of patriotism. Do not sacrifice your ideals.”

Rather has neither retired nor retreated. Instead he dusted off his suit, rolled up his sleeves and started “News and Guts” <https://www.newsandguts.com/>, combining 20th Century journalism and 21st Century digital distribution and social media to help provide a deeper understanding of news.

Rather’s take on current affairs no doubt would find favor among Oklahoma teachers who spent two weeks this spring marching at the state Capitol, demanding better funding for public education.

“Few professions,” he opines, are “more important than teaching.”

With the mid-term elections fast approaching and with the future of public education still a defining topic in Oklahoma, it is worth recalling this line from Rather’s recent appearance on CNN: “Revenge is best served at the ballot box.”

I recommend this well-written and hopeful book for you during these bizarre, unsteady times.

We need hope to get back to our nation’s core tenets, Rather concludes. “I believe in a wide and expansive vision of our national destiny. And I believe in all of you to help make it a reality. Courage.”

John Wood is an associate professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma. The views he expresses are his and not necessarily the university’s.

Predators

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

ucts.

Payday loans typically involve small sums extended at high rates of interest and paid back when the borrower receives the next paycheck. To the payday loan industry, the ideal customer is a working person with a dependable trickle of income to siphon and little understanding of consumer finance.

Mick Mulvaney is a former congressman and best friend forever of Wall Street. He once called the CFPB a “sick, sad” joke. He recently told the American Bankers Association, “If you’re a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn’t talk to you.”

Mulvaney is now temporarily running the CFPB. His apparent mission is to remove the obstacles between the predators and their little-guy prey. Under him, there has been no new investigating, hiring or data collection. Gone is the online system of consumer complaints that you or I could see. Most cases against payday lenders have been quashed.

Mulvaney’s champion to “lead” the bureau was Gary Cohn, the former Goldman Sachs chief whom President Trump named to head his National Economic Council. Once the tax bill lovingly tailored for the Wall Street oligarchy became law, Cohn left the administration.

Some argue that those who don’t carefully read

their contracts, borrow too much or are otherwise ignorant, gullible or greedy deserve what they get. I say that a humane society protects the unsophisticated from the financial snakes, some of whom slither behind the biggest names in U.S. banking.

Is it fair to deny credit to people who can’t get traditional loans? The answer is yes. Those with decent credit can borrow at decent terms. Those without such credit shouldn’t borrow.

Even good regulations can’t stop a determined fool from being parted with his money. But was it unreasonable for the CFPB to go after lenders charging what amounted to an annual rate of nearly 400% on a \$350 loan? That’s what some payday lenders were draining from threadbare workers.

As for the rest of us, what happens when these drowning Americans go ill with stress or turn violent? They end up costing the public in disorder and social needs. And when the growth of these financial swindles turns into a big tumor on the economy, an expensive and painful readjustment will inevitably follow.

Ten years after the most recent financial meltdown and the old bad policies are back. Wall Street is getting richer, and the public is on the hook.

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Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Mainstream Media

Those still hoping Donald Trump will throw up his hands and walk away from the presidency are kidding themselves.

Trump's White House reality is a narcissist's fondest fantasy.

He commands the world stage every day. Not just America's. *The world's*.

Which increases pressure on us, as smart, savvy, civic-minded Americans, to be smarter about how we consume all things Trump.

Comedian Michelle Wolf faded heat for some of her White House Correspondents Dinner remarks. But she astutely noted that mainstream media are hooked on Trump's every tweet and pronouncement, no matter how ignorant, hateful or untrue.

Why? Because cable ratings have rarely been higher. Circulation for some newspapers and magazines is up. So are book sales. Which means someone is watching and reading. Many someones, in fact.

"You guys are obsessed with Trump," Wolf told the journalists. "Did you used to date him? Because you pretend like you hate him, but I think you love him."

"I think what no one in this room wants to admit is that Trump has helped all of you. He couldn't sell steaks or vodka or water or college or ties or Eric, but he has helped you. He's helped you sell your papers and your books and your TV.

"You helped create this monster, and now you're profiting off of him. If you're going to profit off of Trump, you should at least give him some of the money, because he doesn't have any."

She is correct that Trump probably isn't the billionaire he claims to be. But he doesn't deserve a royalty check from media [we get it – it was a joke] given that he's already profiting obscenely off his presidency [see hotels and resorts].

There is a larger point to consider here: Media are in business. They must make money to operate. So they naturally gravitate to what attracts viewership and readership. The Observer courts readers, too.

But we, as news consumers, bear responsibility, too. If we value investigative reporting and smart commentary that takes us beyond inane tweets and truly informs on the Trump Administration's misdeeds, we must demand more of it. Turn off the nightly cable shout-fests and read – especially long form journalism that digs deeply into important, complex subjects.

It takes more effort. It requires more thought. It's *harder*. But it's necessary if we are to perform our civic duty. Otherwise, we live risk living in a perpetual state of outrage and anxiety – and losing this grand experiment in representative democracy.

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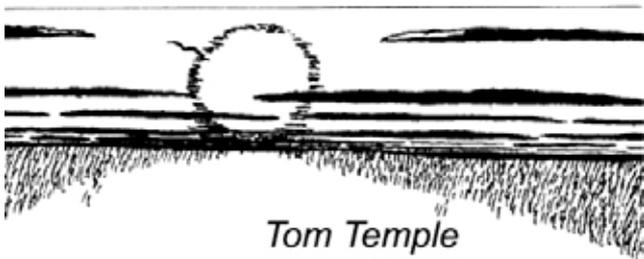
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Laurel: To former Gov. George Nigh, delivering a commencement address for 69th straight year – this time at his alma mater McAlester High. The 90-year-old Nigh is an Oklahoma treasure!

News: GOP-controlled Virginia Legislature approves Medicaid expansion, extending health coverage to 400,000 low-income residents. **Comment:** Elections have consequences. Democrats gained 15 seats in House of Delegates last fall.

Meanwhile, Gov. Mary Fallin signs HB 2932 which could cost some Oklahoma Medicaid recipients their coverage. This burnishes her legacy as a modern day Marie Antoinette – indifferent to the working poor.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Democratic Party, first in nation to unionize its staff – affiliating with Office and Professional Employees International Local 381. This defines walking the walk.

When is the Corporation Commission going to do the right thing and pass along savings due Oklahoma gas and electric ratepayers from 2017 federal tax bill?

The Oklahoman's anti-SQ 788 bias pervades its news columns. Recent front-page headline/story wails "troubled agency," "inept at managing its own finances" would "regulate legal pot." Actual news [already widely reported]: state Health Department will regulate medical marijuana, if approved.

News: World Health Organization urges governments to eliminate trans fats from global food supply by 2023. **Comment:** It won't happen until Hamburglar-in-Chief's tiny fingers are pried off his Big Mac.

Millennials hoping to upend the political status quo must mobilize and turn out in the mid-terms. The nation's electorate is aging – 45 and up increasing from 30.9% in 1980 to 41.3% in 2016. – AARP

News: The state's colleges and universities survived this year's session without further budget cuts. **Comment:** A visionary Legislature not only would invest more in higher ed, but also find ways to fund it tuition-free.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

All smart men, adults. And these are his friends! Could it be all of the above? ... And more? Egotist, narcissist, sociopath, gasbag, blowhard, fraudulent, corrupt, lecherous, racist, sexual batterer, dirty old man? But then I digress.

To America's Allies: So we messed up! All of you guys have made electoral mistakes and you didn't have Vlad Putin to help. Give us some time, we'll sort this out. In the long line of American presidents, some great, some not so much, let's just consider this "comic relief." Remember the same country elected Barack Obama. Talk about going from the sublime to the ridiculous! Thanks to our archaic Electoral College, James Comey and Vlad we have our second minority republican "President."

Those of you in Europe and elsewhere must shake your heads in amazement when you see our "Democracy" install an incompetent buffoon who came in second place to a brilliant accomplished woman. You must be astonished by our new government by capricious whim and Twitter; crazy edicts and the assaults on the rule of law. You must be stunned when you see Republican officeholders value their position over their country.

Take heart, for our Tweeter-in-Chief's approval rating hovers around 39%. That means 61% of us haven't gone bat-poop crazy. Many who took leave of their senses have recovered and become repentant. Rome recovered after Caligula's four-year reign.

America has abdicated our leadership of the world for four years, but it falls into the talented hands of the three M's: Macron, Merkel and May. We are very lucky to have accomplished allies, skillful world leaders, in our time of madness.

Please keep stability in our world until 2020 brings the vision of the American electorate into clear focus and – to borrow a phrase I heard somewhere – "makes America great again!"

Rick Ewing
Lexington

Editor, The Observer:

First, I want to say that was awesome to see Dan Rather. He is my hero, because he always spoke truth to power! He represents a lost "free press." He gave you "the news" not his opinions of the news. Witnesses and victims were interviewed, not talking



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of their choice. —Dwight D. Eisenhower*

heads. Thank you to all who were responsible for that night. I truly miss Dan Rather being in our homes each night and on 60 Minutes.

I keep hearing that what's wrong with our schools is not teacher pay, tax funding or higher wages, so parents don't need to work three jobs just to make it. [Then they have no time that's needed to be involved in their children's lives and development.]

It's that we took God out of schools. Ummm! Do you people think you can pick God up and put him here or there? I think God goes wherever God wants to go. Not where "you" demand.

No one can put God in or out of schools. Your belief about God was taken out, because we all have our own belief in God and don't want others telling our kids that yours is the right one. We gave respect to all beliefs and I think it's what's right with schools.

Shame on Oklahoma for what's happening to our public schools.

I also hear that "guns don't kill people, people do." What an ignorant saying. Guess what? If there are no guns, no one gets shot. People don't shoot, the gun

does.

We had a gun in the home growing up. We sometimes ate a rabbit or squirrel that my Dad had shot. But we were never taught to carry a gun around like it made us tougher or better than others. No one needed to put it on their person like the Old West.

We do have a gun problem. We need to come together and fix the problem. I don't pretend to know all the answers or any maybe. But we have to ask the questions and try to find the answers to a terrible problem.

Barbara Goodman
Midwest City

Editor, The Observer:
Bridenstine in charge of NASA – oh, my!
Who will teach him to fly?
Airplanes have wing's to traverse
Rockets have boosters for the universe
He may learn how to identify.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

SQ 788

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

in the recently-completed regular session.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT CHAOS

SQ 788's broad outlines give the state Health Department authority to regulate whatever the Legislature devises. Recent allegations of financial mismanagement in the agency have given SQ 788 opponents another beachhead to attack the proposal.

In fact, the headline on the Oklahoman's lead story Sunday, May 27 howled: "Troubled agency would regulate legal pot." The opening paragraph warned that approving SQ 788 would leave regulation for "regulating and auditing marijuana growers" to "the state

agency that has proved inept at managing its own finances."

This isn't new. Anyone paying attention to SQ 788 knew the Health Department was designated as the supervising agency. Were the headline and story – and timing, one month before the primary – designed to create doubt among undecided voters or those whose support for medical marijuana was thin?

There's no telling what opponents might roll out in a last-ditch effort to torpedo the proposal. But barring something extraordinary, it seems quite likely Oklahoma on June 26 will become the 31st state to embrace medical marijuana.

As comedian Bill Maher put it, marijuana is "the one thing that unites hippies and hillbillies."

Actually, the biggest roadblock to dispensaries popping up around the state sooner rather than later may be the Legislature itself.

When SQ 788 was written, the consensus was that lawmakers wouldn't dare seek to nullify the will of voters if they approve medical marijuana.

But the Legislature has done exactly that in response to two 2016 ballot proposals that won broad voter approval – one, on comprehensive criminal justice reform, the other reaffirming the state's strong church-state separation.

Lawmakers failed to deliver on criminal justice reform in either 2017 or 2018. Worse, they actually approved – and Gov. Mary Fallin signed into law – a measure aimed at returning the Ten Commandments monument to the state Capitol grounds.

The voters may approve SQ 788. But that doesn't necessarily mean the fight for medical marijuana will be over.



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