

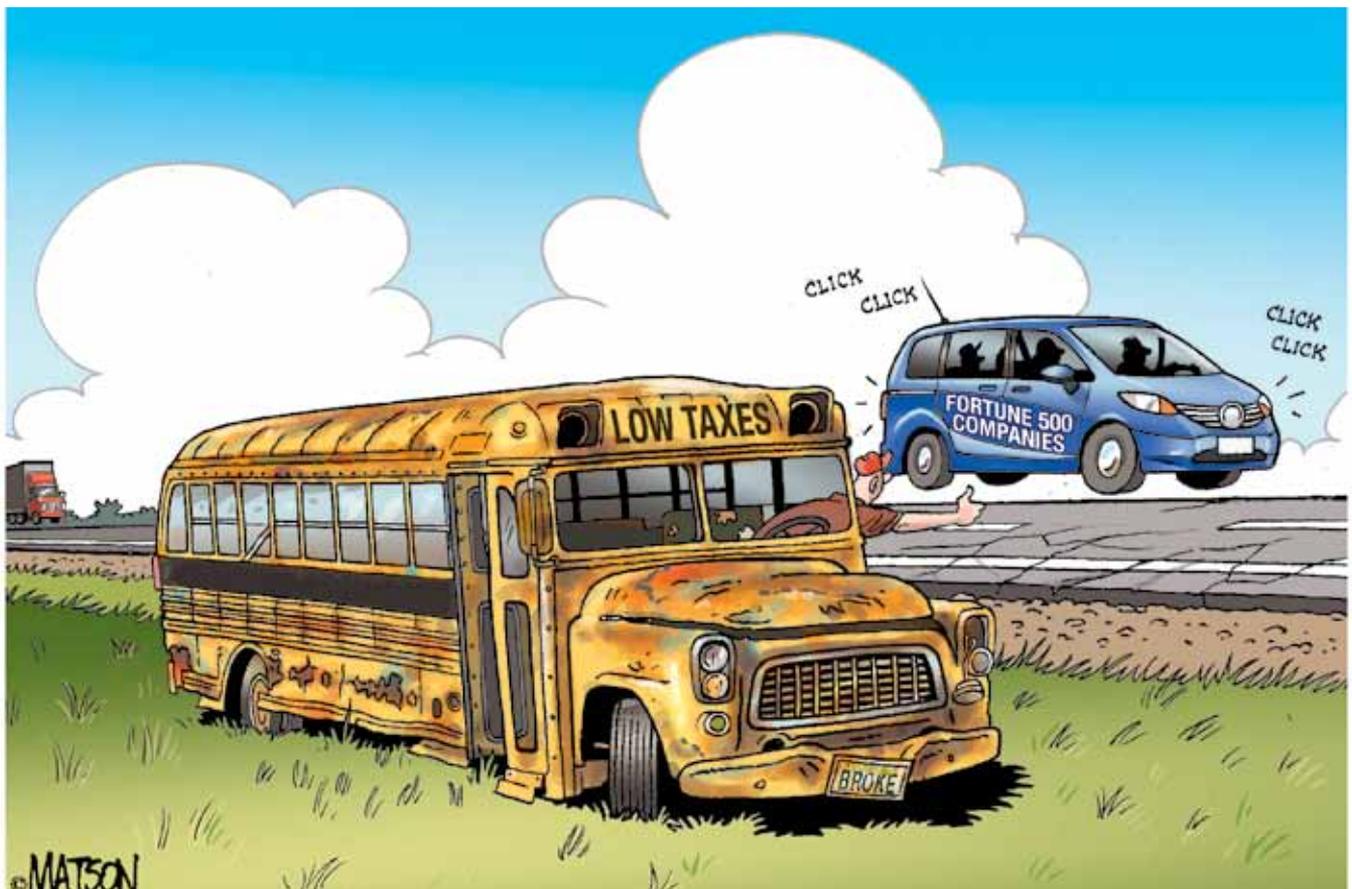
# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• ANNUAL EDUCATION ISSUE •

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## SCHOOL DAZE

*Teacher Pay Raises Alone Won't  
Solve State's Public Education Emergency*



*Back-To-School Special Report  
Pages 12-17*

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To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

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

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## Observations

### Vigilance

The aroused giant that is the Oklahoma electorate cannot be allowed to resume its long slumber that enabled a dismantling of vital state services and left us on the cusp of Third World status.

If vigilance can replace apathy long-term, June's massive primary turnout will be remembered as the rocket launch of an Oklahoma renaissance.

The Stage II booster is Aug. 28's runoff elections. Civic duty again must be exercised in larger-than-normal numbers to send a clear message to the statehouse Powers That Be that the status quo will no longer be tolerated.

By definition, The Observer family is engaged in the affairs of state. It's up to us help educate our fellow Oklahomans on the issues and candidates – and to encourage them to cast ballots. Democracy is a participation sport, after all.

### Which Direction?

The intensifying battle for the soul of Oklahoma is best illustrated by two Republican runoffs – for state superintendent and Corporation Commission.

Incumbent Superintendent Joy Hofmeister was forced into the runoff, largely because a candidate with a famous name, Will Farrell – no, not The Anchorman – garnered nearly a quarter of the June 26 primary vote.

That left Hofmeister, who received nearly 47% of the vote, in an Aug. 28 fight for her political life against a repeat, far-right candidate, Linda Murphy, a darling of the school choice, pro-voucher set.

We were not initially keen on Hofmeister, whom we feared was Janet Barresi with a smile. We were wrong.

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## THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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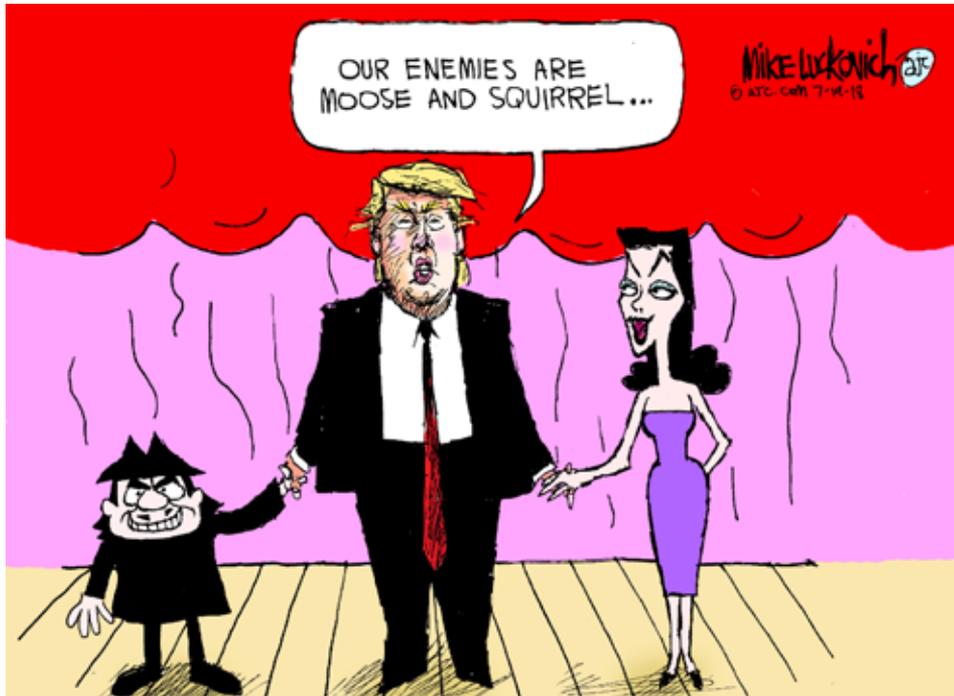
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# Observerscope



Don't look now, but University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato's "Crystal Ball" just moved the Oklahoma governor's race from "safe Republican" to "likely Republican." Momentum, Drew Edmondson.

Dart: To goober-natorial wannabes Kevin Stitt and Mick Cornett, the GOP's Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee on reproductive rights. Both would sign bans even if they conflict with *Roe v. Wade* – meaning more tax dollars wasted defending unconstitutional legislation.

The purge of retired OU President David Boren's team is getting nasty with ouster of VP Jabar Shumate, who unwisely invoked Clarence Thomas-esque imagery in portraying himself the victim of a "high-tech lynching."

Laurel: To OU's former top lawyer [and current 4th District congressional candidate] Fred Gipson, pursuing an open records lawsuit against the secretive OU Foundation. Oklahomans deserve to know how donations to public colleges and universities are spent.

Gov. Mary Fallin's fall-from-grace is surely historic: 74% gave thumbs down to her performance in latest Rasmussen Poll – least popular governor in America. It was only four years ago she won re-election with 56% of the vote.

Dart: To OKC Council, racking up more than \$100,000 in legal bills defending an indefensible anti-panhandling ordinance. That could provide a lot of services for the city's poor.

Troy Stevenson is out as Freedom Oklahoma executive director after a dust-up over GOP participation in OKC's Pride parade. He previously antagonized some Freedom allies by publicly quitting the Democratic Party and re-registering as an independent.

Laurel: To Bartlesville's Abigail Bollenbach, honored with the Horkheimer-Smith Youth Service Outreach Award from the 16,000-member Astronomical League. The homeschooled sophomore received a \$1,750 prize and all-expenses-paid trip to the group's recent national convention in Minneapolis.

We mourn the passing of state Rep. Claudia Griffith, a powerful voice for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse and a first-responder to the OKC bombing. The Norman Democrat was 67.

Good News: Higher tax revenues will enable the first Rainy Day Fund deposit since 2013 – \$370 million. Bad News: Anti-taxers already resisting its use to augment woefully underfunded state services.

Rhetoric: On Mar. 26, OK Independent Petroleum Association warns increasing the GPT "would deter future investment in our state." Reality: On July 24, Continental Resources reports oil production surged 25% in 2Q, thanks to expanded drilling in Oklahoma and South Dakota.

"It's much harder to be a liberal than a conservative. Why? Because it's easier to give someone the finger than a helping hand." – Mike Royko, late Chicago columnist

News: Texas Sen. Ted Cruz endorses Cathy Costello for OK Labor Commissioner. Comment: The captain of the Exxon Valdez wasn't available? Cruz's ship is sinking – check out Texas polls.

American Electric Power and PSO pulled the plug on the Windcatcher project after Texas regulators balked – a huge win for the carbon crowd and defeat for Oklahoma environment and economy.

Think November's gubernatorial contest will be intense? Wait until the battle over SQ 793. Big money is at stake in proposal to expand optometric services into mega-retailers like Walmart.

"Farmers are getting the full Stormy Daniels' treatment – Trump screwed them and now he's paying them off." – The Late Show's Stephen Colbert

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# Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Forecast: Evangelical Scott Pruitt's rise and fall may track similar to Jim Bakker and wife Tammy Faye. They were 1970-80 grandiose rich TV messengers of God.

Like them, Pruitt will disappear out of public sight for several years, slithering back quietly into Harold Hamm's and Bob Funk's holes and waiting to fight another day. They'll figure out a way to rehabilitate him – then try to foist him back on gullible Okies.

Then comes his grand deliverance-comeback asking God to forgive his sins and Okies to vote for him – as their humble reborn Christian.

Pruitt's ego is too big for him to not try a future comeback, unless he spends several years in prison, like Jim Bakker did for fraud!

Bob Jackman  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Scotty Pruitt's corruption has finally caught up with him, at least in part.

I continue to be shocked at the overall hypocrisy of the GOP, in

particular with government spending, which was their bell-cow issue eight years ago. I recall the GOP, led by tearful John Boehner and granny starver Paul Ryan, in virtual unison braying, "But how are we going to pay for it?", at virtually every proposal from the prior administration.

In his relatively short, but entertaining time as head of the EPA, Scotty spent taxpayer money like a drunken frat boy with daddy's credit card, and every Republican in the U.S. House and Senate, including Oklahoma's own James Lankford – supposedly Dr. No-It-All's successor at pointing out government misspending – simply turned a blind eye to it.

Seems to me that such profligate spending habits didn't just happen overnight. Maybe the state of Oklahoma should review Scotty's spending when he was on our state government's teat to see what was improper, or perhaps even criminal.

Tim Jarvis  
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

"Comics" claim that singer Mer-

le Haggard says he never heard of Muskogee! Could that "fictional [but plausible] memory lapse" be due to the town's landslide vote to legalize medical marijuana? Might this mean that "white lightning" has lost its place as "the biggest thrill of all?" If true, many social benefits are in the offing.

Now county sheriffs can refocus their attention on rooting out "backwoods stills" and the most dangerous form of society's No. 1 killer drug: alcohol. Fewer fatal car accidents, lost jobs and broken marriages. Decreasing incidents of both child and spousal abuse. Accidental and intentional gun deaths [murder] both on the wane.

What's not to like?

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

If you didn't have a reason to vote, this should definitely be one.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has now declared we are an official theocracy. I just called their comment line to ask which religion will be the top one. Will Catholic beliefs over-ride Jehovah's Witnesses? Sessions is Baptist – will his be on top? The bottom of the pile will belong to smaller religious groups and those with no religious beliefs.

Religious discrimination is the order of the day in the Justice Department. Why would there be an official Justice Department Religious Liberty Summit? Now the Department of Justice will have a "religious liberty task force" to make sure all departments respect and protect any kind of religious liberty and political speech.

Sessions: "We've seen nuns ordered to buy contraceptives." Someone forced nuns to buy contraceptives for themselves? Someone forced nuns to buy contraceptives for someone else? He is full of it. It is possible that someone thinks a nurse working in a Catho-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



## *Starving The Watchdog*

It speaks volumes about the disheartening state of Oklahoma politics that the Ethics Commission felt it had no choice but to sue Gov. Mary Fallin and lawmakers over its abysmal 2018-19 funding.

The agency – rank-and-file Oklahomans’ constitutionally created protection against venality and payola at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. – never has been properly funded during its nearly 30-year existence.

But never – until this year – was its general appropriation zero. *Zero!*

This is yet another example of the Legislature ignoring the clear will of the people.

When voters approved the 1990 constitutional amendment creating the watchdog, it included a mandate that lawmakers adequately fund its operation. They always approved an annual appropriation, of course, but it never was sufficient for the Ethics Commission to fully carry out the mission envisioned by Republican Gov. Henry Bellmon and voters.

This fiscal year, the Legislature left the agency to make-do with what it collected from candidates, special interest lobbyists, political action committees and political parties required to register with the state – \$710,351.

That means the Ethics Commission won’t have the financial resources necessary to keep up with the activity of nearly 600 lobbyists – representing 1,100 businesses and groups – or thoroughly review about 11,000 reports filed by campaign committees and special interests.

The people’s watchdog has been defanged by a Legislature that clearly doesn’t want too much independent poking around at the confluence of big money, politics and policymaking.

Can you spell r-e-d f-l-a-g?

Now, \$710,351 may sound like a lot of money to most Oklahomans. It most assuredly is. But let’s put that in context. The agency’s first budget was about \$700,000 ... nearly three decades ago.

This year’s lawsuit-inducing abomination funds a skeleton staff of seven – nowhere near enough to keep an eagle eye on possible shenanigans and hijinks.

The FY ‘19 appropriation is “insufficient to enable the commission to fulfill its constitutional duties,” according to the lawsuit filed with the state Supreme Court.

“The commission did not have sufficient personnel or funds for FY 2019 to timely investigate and prosecute significant litigation regarding conduct that may have impacted election results.”

The agency needs \$2,467,097 just to carry out basic duties.

Fallin and legislative leaders responded to the lawsuit with breathtaking hubris.

In separate but similar legal filings, Senate President Pro Tem Mike Schulz and House Speaker Charles McCall sought to portray the Ethics Commission as just another run-of-the-mill state agency that now – as Schulz put it – “wrongly considers itself a fourth branch of government.”

Further, Schulz called the agency’s request for increased funding “unprecedented” and McCall insisted there is “no evidence” to suggest lawmakers are deliberately starving the agency.

The governor, meanwhile, argued the Supreme Court has no authority to require her to call a special session to increase the agency’s budget. Separately, she told the Tulsa World the agency’s “adversarial approach will make it more difficult to find common ground with the Legislature.”

That’s rich. The Oklahoma Ethics Commission isn’t some unexpected or emergency expense. It’s part of the state’s budget. Every year. It’s crystal clear by now that legislative leadership isn’t interested in finding “common ground.”

There are several ways to permanently fix the problem, if only lawmakers and the governor had the will.

One is to set a per capita annual appropriation for the Ethics Commission. Oklahoma currently spends about 18 cents per resident – far below the 83 to 89 cents other states commit to watchdog agencies with similar duties. Even Louisiana spends 45 cents a resident.

Another option is to dedicate a percentage – say, 5% – of each year’s budgets from the five state enti-

# A 'Rogue' Agency?

BY JAN NEW

While all states now have some form of ethics oversight, Oklahomans should be proud to have voted overwhelmingly for the Ethics Commission and its mission to supervise political campaign practices and regulate the behavior of public officials.

An article in a recent edition of the Oklahoman reported claims by Oklahoma's Ethics Commission that they are being starved for funds "sufficient to enable it to perform its duties."

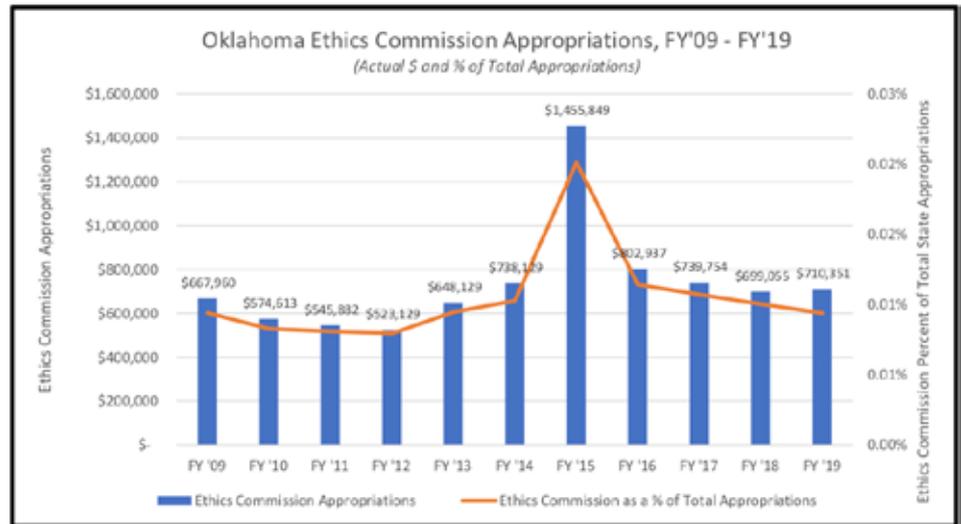
House Speaker McCall stated, "The appropriations history shows otherwise." The Ethics Commission initially sought \$4.5 million in appropriations for fiscal year 2019. That request included almost \$1.2 million to start a department in the agency to improve access to open records and open meetings [which was not funded]. The balance of the request – \$3.3 million was not addressed in the article.

The accompanying graph was developed from Ethics Commission appropriations over the last 10 years. It's obvious that Ethics Commission funding is often less than .01% of total state appropriations and appears to be trending in that direction again.

Looking at the graph, the three exceptional years when the commission's appropriation actually exceeded .01% of total state appropriations occurred in FY '14-'16. It's not difficult to see that commission appropriations are not keeping pace with earlier funding levels.

It would be helpful to understand the remainder of the commission's budget request; it may be well justified, but citizens and voters, who depend upon the information and other services of the Ethics Commission, should be concerned that this organization is adequately funded.

Oklahoma is fortunate to have one of the few constitutionally mandated ethics commissions. Added to the Oklahoma Constitution as Article XXIX in 1990 by a 2-1 vote of the people, the mission of the Ethics Commission is vital – par-



ticularly in a time when elected officials and government generally suffer a lack of credibility.

It's good the commission's authorization is constitutional rather than purely statutory or by executive order. Checks and balances throughout the system are needed; however, the Legislature's "power of the purse" can certainly limit the commission's ability to get their work done.

I've attended commission training sessions which are well organized. The compliance officers and other staff are knowledgeable and helpful. The amount and quality of data the commission is responsible for collecting and making available to the public is amazing, and the "Guardian" is the only source of its kind for campaign financial reports and resolution of campaign violations.

In 2008 the Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity stated several factors determining the effectiveness of such state oversight efforts: "strong legal foundations, broad jurisdiction, safeguards of independence, robust enforcement powers, ample resources, partnerships with complementary institutions, and political will."

Ample resources will continue to be at the center of achieving the robust oversight necessary to assure the will of Oklahoma voters is being satisfied.

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

ties that appoint Ethics Commission members: the governor, attorney general, Supreme Court, House and Senate.

The watchdog's current fiscal crisis and the law-

suit it spawned didn't develop overnight – neither party when in power provided adequate funding. Let's hope the Supreme Court will finally make it happen.



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# THEATER OF THE ABSURD

## *Dust-Ups Over Medical Marijuana Regulations Give Recreational Pot Initiative Powerful Boost*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

**M**edical marijuana is now legal – and soon to be available – in Oklahoma. How it got to be is the stuff of a Keystone Cops or Abbott and Costello script.

The synopsis:

*Voters overwhelmingly approve medical cannabis on June 26. Lawmakers refuse to craft regulations necessary for its implementation. Instead, the unelected state health board writes the rules, ignoring counsel's warnings it's exceeding its legal authority. The governor approves the rules. Lawsuits are filed.*

*The health department's lawyer resigns – seemingly in protest – only to be charged criminally with sending herself threatening emails. The state pharmacy board's executive director is fired after being accused of attempting to bribe the health department lawyer during the rules-writing.*

*The attorney general informs the health board it acted improperly. The governor blames initiative petition writers for imposing what she decried as an*

*impossibly tight deadline for implementation. The health board revises the rules.*

*Applications for dispensaries are now being accepted. A joint legislative committee – no pun intended – is formed to address medical cannabis issues.*

*You couldn't make this stuff up. Parody is reality these days at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.*

*An even stranger – or more remarkable twist – is who benefitted most from all the slapstick: proponents of legalizing recreational pot.*

*The shenanigans bolstered the narrative that state leaders routinely thumb their noses at the will of the voting public. In response, an aroused electorate lined up on the summer's hottest days – some approaching and exceeding 110 degrees – to help Green the Vote collect more than enough signatures to put SQ 797 on the ballot.*

*By the last weekend in July, 132,527 Oklahomans had signed the recreational marijuana initiative – more than the 124,000 required to be submitted to*

the Secretary of State by Aug. 8.

Green the Vote says it hopes to amass at least 150,000 before the deadline to afford wiggle room during the signature verification process.

The state health board approved the revised medical marijuana rules at a special meeting Aug. 1, reversing a ban on smokable pot and eliminating the requirement dispensaries hire a licensed pharmacist.

It also dropped limits on the amount of THC – marijuana’s psychoactive ingredient – in products and plants and provision and the requirement that female patients take a pregnancy test.

The dust-up could have been avoided had lawmakers acted in last spring’s regular session. It wasn’t a surprise that medical marijuana won landslide voter approval in June’s primary. For six months, polls showed likely voters ready to embrace it. Yet lawmakers punted, knowing full well they’d only have 30 days to implement a complicated system if voters approved SQ 788.

Worse, legislative leaders and Gov. Mary Fallin then opted to skip a special, post-primary session and leave the regulation-writing up to the health board. Once the folly of this decision became evident, Fallin reversed herself and urged the board to rescind the “two last-minute amendments” that spawned lawsuits and public outrage.

Then she blamed petition-writers for the debacle: “State Question 788 was written with a 30-day implementation deadline. It is unfortunate there was not more consideration given by proponents of SQ 788 as

to how challenging it is to place such a quick turnaround on a very complicated subject.”

Oh, the humanity! Before you reach for a tissue to dab the tears, remember this: The initiative petition, with its 30-day language, was filed with the Secretary of State’s office on April 11, 2016 – more than 26 months before the election. Proponents started gathering signatures on May 14, 2016 – more than 25 months before the election.

In September 2016 – 21 months before the election – the Secretary of State verified proponents had gathered enough valid signatures to force a vote on 788. On March 27, 2017 – 15 months before the election – the state Supreme Court rejected challenges, clearing the way for a vote. Finally, on Jan. 4, 2018 – nearly six months before the election – Fallin ordered it to the ballot.

Moreover, lawmakers convened in regular session in early February and adjourned in early May – plenty of time to enact regulations necessary were voters, as expected, to approve medical marijuana.

Instead we ended up with a five-ring circus involving the governor’s office, the attorney general, the health board, the pharmacy board and the Legislature – all scrambling to make chicken salad out of chicken scat.

What we have here is a pattern of statehouse indifference to the will of the voters is clear. The bungled implementation of SQ 788 marked the second time in as many election years that voters made abundantly

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

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# *The Trouble With Words*

**BY CAL HOBSON**

For most of us, if we mind our manners, the syllables and phrases that pass from our mouths in conversations are mostly routine, hopefully harmless, sometimes helpful but soon forgotten. However a higher standard exists for the world's most powerful person who, for better or worse, is always the president of our United States.

For example, George Herbert Walker Bush once declared, "Read my lips. No new taxes." As popular as that promise sounded in the moment it probably later cost him re-election.

Also a very verbally adept fellow, and Rhodes Scholar to boot, named William Jefferson Clinton may still best be remembered for declaring, "It depends on what the meaning of the word is is." It sure did and still does.

Now comes the current, ever confident, self assured and always self promoting occupant of the White House, Donald John Trump, who stepped on his tongue and perhaps tie, not to mention his standing in at least the Free World, by confusing the commonly understood word of "would" with its exact opposite "wouldn't."

This unforced fumble came at a most unfortunate time last month in Helsinki because a question, posited by one of those pesky press persons, couldn't have been much clearer. It was: Did the Russians mess with the American election process in 2016?

Our leader declared, "I don't know why they would," even though all 17 intelligence agencies have told him, over and over again, that they did and are continuing to do so even as he stood next to his pal, crafty former KGB lieutenant colonel and apparently President for Life of Russia Vladimir Putin.

As the above proves, playing fast and loose with words is obviously a long time symptom of Potomac Fever but based on my recent review of countless campaign brochures, TV ads, radio spots, press releases and mailers of candidates for state offices, I have found similar misstatements and disinformation ... to put it kindly.

For example, due to the pounding both Republican gubernatorial candidates are inflicting on members of the Oklahoma Board of Health for their handling of rules implementing the medical marijuana vote [SQ 788], one would think former OKC Mayor Mick Cornett and Tulsa mortgage manager Kevin Stitt were big boosters of the proposal before the primary election June 26. Well, one would think wrong. They, like third place finisher Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb, all were vehemently opposed to the people's initiative and predicted the sky would fall if the puffers prevailed which, as we all know, they did.

To me the sky still seems in place but these two

punctilious Puritans have become self-appointed parade marshals for the medical marijuana celebration. Could it be the 57%-plus "yes" vote of the folk, including even a slight majority of Republicans, is motivating their new-found interest in and guidance for the rest of us on the topic?

Short answer: Yes, indeed. Both are singing a new tune and issuing revised press pronouncements.

Not to be outdone by Cornett and Stitt, Gov. Mary Fallin, who has taken more positions on the rule-making process than Stormy Daniels allegedly did with Donald Trump in 2006, plunged into the fray. Within 24 hours of the 5-4 vote by health commissioners adopting amendments gutting the intent of voters, Malleable Mary proudly signed them. However Attorney General Mike Hunter quickly proclaimed that they were illegal. With another flip-flop, Fallin instantly concurred and ordered the nine-member board, eight of whom she appointed, to do a 180 and undo the mischief they had just done.

Commissioners saluted and responded. Message received. Message understood. Mischief then repealed. The Public, however, remained mystified, morose and felt manipulated. Here again words matter and, if misused, they can get important people in deep doo doo or even worse.

While top elected bananas played out their high stakes shenanigans, two unelected bureaucrats, specifically the legal advisor to the Health Board and the director of our Pharmacy Commission also got into the fun game of messing with the minds of voters and taxpayers.

How so you ask? Here's how. The lawyer inexplicably sent herself false and threatening emails, followed promptly by the pharmacy CEO offering her a better job if certain new regulations were inserted within the administrative rules drafted to please the pill dispensers. Outcome? Lawyer recommended otherwise. Pharmacy board members then fired their executive and now everybody is suing everybody, rules are being re-written, again, and the saga continues.

Oh, and one more minor thing: At the request of agents at the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, Oklahoma County District Attorney and well-known straight shooter David Prater is delving into allegations of possible misdemeanors, felonies and other foolishness surrounding this matter. Talk about collusion ... Oklahoma style.

I know all the above is dispiriting – maybe even makes you want to get high and/or drop out Haight-Asbury style – but, dear readers, it may get worse. Our Legislative leadership, perhaps the world's most famous non sequitur, is riding to the rescue

by appointing a very special “joint committee” [pun intended] to clear the haze in the air on this mess.

One has to hope it will produce more clarity than that other very “special” committee leaders assigned last spring to determine whether this same Health Agency did, or didn’t, have a \$30 million shortfall. In their wisdom, lawmakers decided it did. Later, it was proven it didn’t. Inspector Clouseau would have been proud.

In closing, just what does all this mean in our brave new world of instant and readily available information that is spoken, sent, printed or shared? Actually, several things.

First, spell check should be installed on Trump’s Twitter feed and, if possible, his forked tongue. Second, based on actions taken and statements made by many high-ranking elected and appointed officials in Oklahoma, perhaps more hallucinogens

than just medical marijuana have been in wide use among them. And, finally, if this duplicitous drama hadn’t been so much fun to watch it would be sad ... just sad.

Therefore, maybe it’s time to lighten up, light up and mellow out, so ... anybody got a match? Of course, it’s not for me. Just my granny with the grumps, uncle with ulcers, papa with the poops, sister with cysts, brother’s boils and mom who imagines she has morning sickness all over again. What?

For all the rest of us, whether smoked, inhaled, rubbed on, taken in pill form, crushed or cooked ... doesn’t matter. It’s doctor recommended to cure the nausea we suffer watching these Capitol capers. And the hemorrhoids, too – but use only the salve.

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

# *Sheriff Claims Immunity, Says Fighting Pot Measure Part Of His Official Duties*

**BY JOHN M. WYLIE II**

**R**ogers County Sheriff Scott Walton has made the lawsuit filed by leading medical pot advocate Chip Paul alleging Walton tossed him out of a public forum on the ballot measure, violating various laws and constitutional rights, into a federal case.

Walton’s lawyers spent \$400 in filing fees to move the case from Rogers County District Court to the U.S. District Court in Tulsa.

They also claim immunity for Walton because all allegations – including campaigning against the ballot initiative with taxpayer money and resources and using violence to intimidate citizens exercising their constitutional rights – were among his official duties.

The case stems from a June 18 fracas at the pre-election forum – videoed and widely distributed – which appears to show Walton grabbing Paul by the throat and removing him, using his head to open a closed door.

Voters approved the pot issue June 26 but overwhelmingly nixed a three-part county sales tax – most of it approved and renewed by voters since 1988 – cutting the County Commissioners’ budget by two-thirds.

Commissioners warned that failure to change voters’ minds in a January election would turn the county’s roads from asphalt to gravel. An estimated \$8.5 million lost in the interim would cause immediate service cuts.

Those began with the announcement that the popular free disposal by county residents of large items such as junk furniture at three county warehouses

## *Help End Taxpayer-Funded Abuse of Citizens*

The Oklahoma Observer wants to know about the kind of taxpayer-funded abuse of power outlined in these stories, which often is hidden from the rest of the state. We’d like to let the sunshine in, and would welcome information about such situations. Your identity will be kept in complete confidence in accordance with state law, but we will need your email address in order to follow up as we research each problem. Please send information to [ahamilton@okobserver.net](mailto:ahamilton@okobserver.net). Our readers can help us find individual cases and patterns of abuse that may span the state.

will soon end.

Paul filed his lawsuit June 20 seeking over \$75,000 in damages, over \$10,000 in punitive damages, and an injunction to stop Walton from misuse of office and violating citizens’ constitutional rights. It named Walton individually and in his official capacity.

Walton’s law firm, Best and Sharp of Tulsa, removed the case to federal court July 13 citing its allegations involving federal rights and issues.

The highly rated firm specializes in defending against lawsuits ranging from medical malpractice and nursing home neglect to violation of workers’ rights, its website says, using the slogan “At Best & Sharp – our attorneys try lawsuits.”

Brendan McHugh, a Claremore attorney known for taking on schools, public agencies and public officials, is Paul’s attorney.

Best and Sharp attorneys Thomas A. LeBlanc and Todd M. Wagner, in a five-page answer filed July 18, denied all wrongdoing by Walton, contended Paul's monetary claims exceed federal limits on damages, and added, "Defendant cannot be sued directly for any alleged negligence arising out of any claim pursued by Plaintiff in accordance with the Oklahoma Governmental Tort Claims Act ... Plaintiff's state law claims are barred or limited by the ... Act."

The law adopts the "doctrine of sovereign immunity" and says "the state, its political subdivisions and all of their employees acting within the scope of their employment ... shall be immune from liability for torts."

U.S. District Judge John E. Dowdell ordered the two sides to file a joint status report with the court Aug. 13.

The controversy and ensuing lawsuit drew nationwide media attention.

*John M. Wylie II, retired publisher of the Oologah Lake Leader, is an independent investigative reporter and author based in Oologah.*

## *Jail Exec Fired After Reporting Assaults, Suicide Attempts*

**BY JOHN M. WYLIE II**

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**T**he ex-Rogers County Jail Administrator has accused embattled Sheriff Scott Walton of firing him "in retaliation for reporting ... the stabbing of an inmate, the assault of an inmate by a jailer while the inmate was in a 'wrap' restraint" and "attempted suicides" as well as other violence requiring formal reports to regulators.

His accusations came in a complex lawsuit filed late July 27 by Nathan Sappington, who is seeking over \$300,000 in actual and punitive damages.

He is represented by Tulsa attorney Daniel Smolen, who is nationally-known for representing individuals fighting wrongdoing, inadequate training and other issues facing law enforcement and other government agencies.

He was responsible for the \$6 million settlement between Tulsa County and the family of Eric Harris, an unarmed man shot and killed by Tulsa County Reserve Deputy Robert Bates, who said he mistook his service weapon for his Taser.

Reuters, the international news service best known for government and business coverage, said based on information provided by both sides the \$6 million was the largest excessive force settlement in Oklahoma history.

Walton now has been sued at least 22 times in Oklahoma state and federal courts, although some of those are duplicate complaints that have been moved from state to federal court. Some cases have settled, others dismissed and some remain pending after up to five years. Two have been heard by the Oklahoma Supreme Court, both resulting in published opinions.

The suits involve situations such as Sappington alleges – those involving political issues along a variety of lines [see separate story], and those which involve a little of both.

Walton did not respond to a text message request for any kind of statement about his current legal situation from him or his attorney, and court records were unclear about the precise status of several cases.

In the new suit, Sappington offers this timeline of events:

He was hired by the sheriff's office July 1, 2008. By March 2017, when he took medical leave for back surgery, he was jail administrator.

When he returned to work two months later, he was on light duty and "told to stay away from the jail. One of his supervisors told Plaintiff that because of his restrictions he was a liability to the other jail employees."

However, he soon learned of the Rogers County Sheriff's Office's "failure to report incidents occurring within the jail while he was on medical leave, including but not limited to the stabbing," assault by a jailer and discovery of an inmate with a noose.

He "immediately investigated the allegations and reported his finding to his superiors and the Oklahoma State Department of Health in accordance with the duty imposed upon him" by state law.

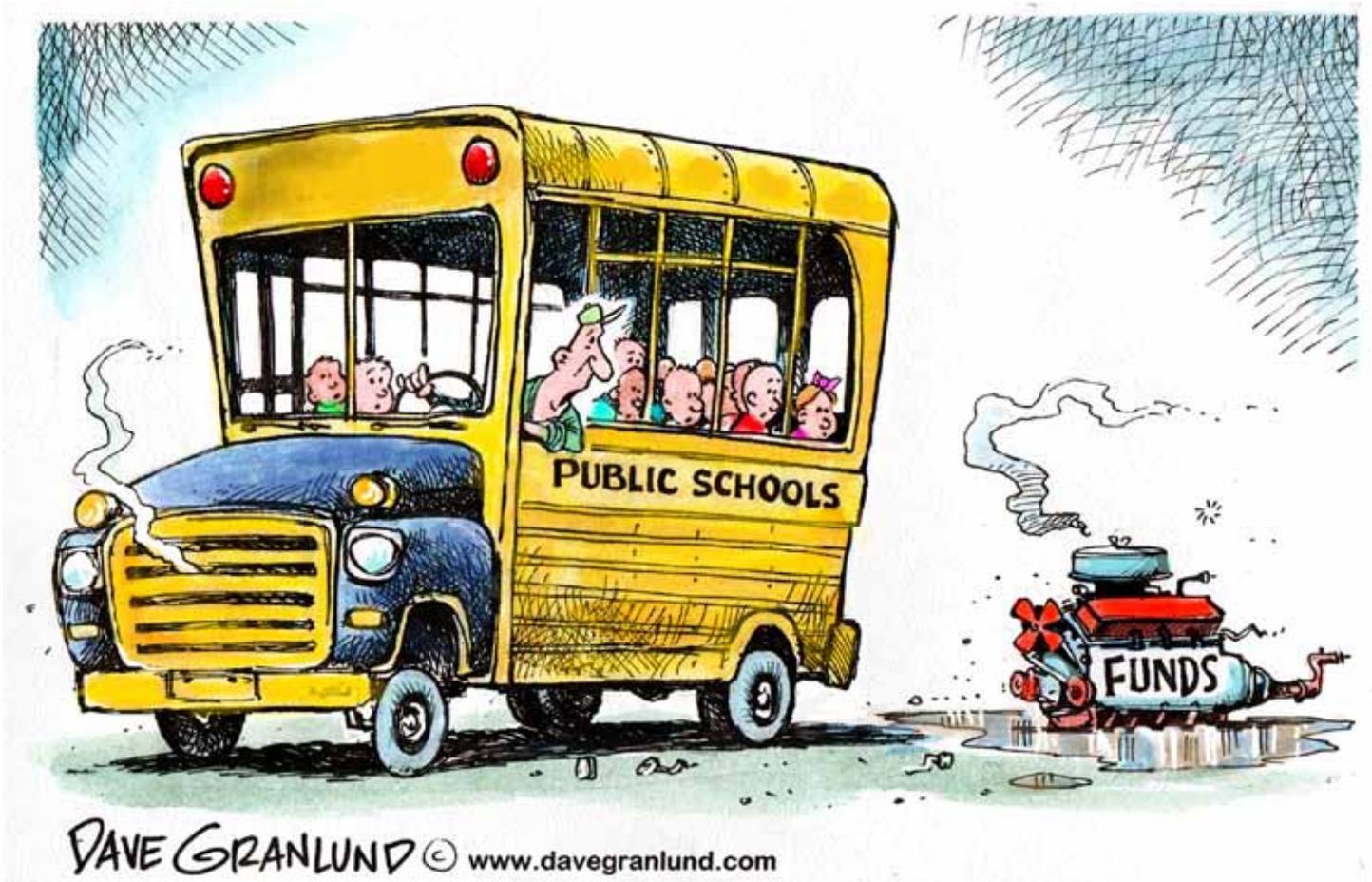
After reporting the information, including directly to Sheriff Walton, he was fired Aug. 7, 2017 "in retaliation for reporting serious problems, including assaults on inmates and attempted suicides in the jail" despite being protected from such action by a universally known court case and the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Failing to report serious assaults on inmates and suicide attempts is at direct odds with the Oklahoma Administrative Code ... violations of [which] affect the health, welfare and safety of the inmates."

He said his disability is covered by the ADA, which the sheriff knew required "reasonable accommodations ... The unlawful employment practices complained of were and are intentional."

Sappington is seeking actual and punitive damages in excess of \$150,000 plus attorney fees, costs including both back pay and benefits and forward pay and benefits until normal retirement, compensatory damages for pain and suffering, mental anguish, punitive damage for "knowing and intentional acts of discrimination" and any other damages the court finds just.

No schedule has been set for the case, which has been initially assigned to District Judge Sheila A. Condren.



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# STATE OF EMERGENCY

*Failure To Invest In Public Education*

*Threatens Oklahoma With Third World Status*

**BY ARNOLD HAMILTON**

**T**he red lights are flashing over Oklahoma's public schools.

Yes, the Legislature did enact a \$6,100 teacher pay raise last spring, hoping to quell unrest and stem the hemorrhage of top-flight educators to other higher-paying states.

Otherwise, lawmakers did precious little to reverse a decade of funding cuts – the nation's steepest – leaving Oklahoma public education in a State of Emergency, teetering on the precipice of long-term inferiority.

As the Oklahoma Education Association noted, "Over a decade of neglect by the Legislature has given our students broken chairs in classrooms, outdated textbooks that are duct-taped together, four-day school weeks, classes that have exploded in size

and teachers who have been forced to donate plasma, work multiple jobs and go to food pantries to provide for their families.

"We are saying enough. No more empty promises. The governor and Legislature need to act now to fix this."

They didn't fix it.

In fact, on the eve of the 2018-19 school year for most students, a teacher crisis persists – 1,238 emergency certifications already approved to help fill classrooms, nearly two-thirds the number issued all of last year.

What can be done? Naysayers like the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, former U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn and others insist plenty of tax money already is available to solve the problems, if only it were spent

# ANNUAL EDUCATION ISSUE

wisely.

They also believe in unicorns and flying pigs.

As educators return to their classrooms and families drop off their children and grandchildren at school, here are five steps they can take to demand

Oklahoma finally invest in public education at levels that give all – regardless of socioeconomic status – the tools to succeed in the 21st Century:

1. Vote for candidates who promise to make education the state's No. 1 priority, then hold them accountable. That means staying in frequent contact with legislators and monitoring their actual votes on the issues. No lip service.

The so-called “teacher caucus” of candidates provides an easy way to know which candidates are most likely to be devoted to public schools. Seventy-one educators running for local, state and federal offices are still alive – including 21 appearing on the Aug. 28 runoff ballot.

2. Lobby lawmakers – as a first step – to get Oklahoma education funding to the regional average: \$9,744 per student. That would put the state slightly ahead of New Mexico and just below Arkansas.

Oklahoma spent an average \$8,075 on each of its 688,511 students last year, worst in the region and \$1,006 per student less than the next lowest state, Texas.

The regional average isn't good enough in football, of course. It shouldn't be in academia, either.

3. Push for an end to four-day school weeks and restoration of class-size limits.

Gov. Henry Bellmon's marvelous HB 1017 reforms limited class sizes and made Oklahoma the envy of academia nationally. The Legislature spent the next three decades dismantling the reforms.

It doesn't require exhaustive research to know smaller classes produce better outcomes. It's common sense that 40 third-graders aren't going to get the instruction that a class of 20 would.

The jury is still out on four-day school weeks. For example, in Montana after the schedule shift,

test scores increased short term, but dropped significantly in subsequent years. Education policymakers long have wrestled with whether the school year is long enough as it is – particularly given that students

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19



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# The Truth About School Consolidation

BY KEN NEAL

Oklahoma could easily lop off about 100 small school districts and ease the constant clamor for consolidation.

But guess what? It wouldn't save a dime. Well, maybe dozens of dollars. Some of those small districts, thought to be so wasteful, are in some cases the only way, if not the best way, to educate children.

The western half of Oklahoma the state resembles Wyoming more than eastern Oklahoma. Remember, Oklahoma is made up of two dissimilar territories forced together by Congress.

By 1905 Indian Territory in the east wanted to come into the union as the state of Sequoyah with Oklahoma Territory in the west a separate state. But a Republican Congress and president, fearing the addition of four Democratic senators, refused their entry.

The Congress of that era created many of our problems by forcing Oklahoma to enter as a single state. School consolidation is one of them.

Early Oklahomans believed in education so much that they dedicated a section out of every township to education and strived to have a school within striking distance of every farm.

There were perhaps 6,000 school districts in early Oklahoma. There are 512 in 2018. Clearly, there has been a lot of consolidation. But has there been enough? That has been debated by education boosters and legislators for at least 40 years and it arises again as the 2018 election nears.

It is not likely to be settled for the very simple reason that the suggested solutions do not fit all dis-

tricts.

It is obvious, but not often recognized, that each district has its individual strengths and problems.

Consider a recent suggestion to have countywide school districts. Hey, that would mean 77 districts down from 512. That's good, right?

Consolidation advocates – usually from urban areas looking to rural areas to save money – would rebel at the thought of say, a single superintendent and board where there are now 14 districts [Tulsa] or Oklahoma [15]]. Many other counties have numerous districts.

Such would wipe out 14 or 15 districts with five to seven board members, clearly taking away local control. Who really wants that? Certainly not school board members! The same people calling for consolidation want more local control. How would the elimination of hundreds of school board members help local control?

Oklahoma once had county school superintendents, but they gradually fell by the wayside as the state urbanized. Ultimately, the HB 1017 reform eliminated county superintendents. At the time, roughly 100 “dependent” districts [K-8] were labeled “independent” districts.

Consolidation advocates usually zero in on many rural districts with few students. Some of those formerly dependent districts should be attached to larger district for efficiency.

But such bureaucratic shuffling would not save substantial money unless individual schools were closed, and the students sent to larger ones. That could improve educational offerings but bring political consequences.

Consolidation is very difficult in Oklahoma even when it is obviously needed. That's because Oklahoma law requires the approval of voters in each consolidating district.

This is rarely accomplished, given the fact that small town and rural districts oppose closing a local school because such closings often mean the demise of struggling towns.

Even with Oklahoma's disdain for education, the local school is often the most modern structure in town.

Finally, the only real reason to consolidate schools is if it improves the educational opportunity for children. Clearly, extremely small schools lack in educational opportunity for their children. On the other hand, it can be argued that large school districts like Tulsa and Oklahoma City are so difficult to administer that students are often penalized.

What is the optimum school district size? Many educators think a district of perhaps 5,000 children is optimum. It is large enough to have a high school with a range of educational offerings and small enough for teachers and administrators to know their students well.

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Consolidation? It's not as simple as it appears. A rational approach calls for a study of the needs of each district, but even then, implementation would be difficult.

The Legislature could pass a law requiring a district with less than 100 or so students to merge with the nearest larger district. That kind of a law is not likely to pass.

There is no simple consolidation method. When a political candidate starts spouting simplistic solutions and claiming immense savings, be assured that candidate doesn't understand Oklahoma's school consolidation obstacles.

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

## *Striking Teachers Beat Back War On Public Schools*

**BY HENRY A. GIROUX**

This spring, thousands of teachers and students walked out of schools, marched in the streets, and raised their hands and signs in protest against the war on education.

In the age of illiberal democracy and the growing fascism of the Trump Administration, the unimaginable has once again become imaginable as teachers inspired and energized by a dynamic willingness to fight for their rights and the rights of their students are exercising bold expressions of political power.

The power of collective resistance is being mounted in full force against a neoliberal logic that unabashedly insists that the rule of the market is more important than the needs of teachers, students, young people, the poor and those deemed disposable by those with power in our society.

Teachers are tired of being relentless victims of a casino capitalism in which they and their students are treated with little respect, dignity and value. They have had enough with corrupt politicians, hedge fund managers and civically illiterate pundits seduced by the power of the corporate and political demagogues who are waging a war on critical teaching, critical pedagogy and the creativity and autonomy of classroom teachers.

Since the 1980s, an extreme form of capitalism – or what in the current moment I want to call neoliberal fascism – has waged a war against public educa-

tion and all vestiges of the common good and social contract.

In addition, this is a war rooted in class and gender discrimination – one that deskills teachers, exploits their labor and bears down particularly hard on women, who make up a dominant segment of the teaching force.

In doing so, it not only undermines schooling as a public good, but also weaponizes and weakens the formative cultures, values and social relations that enable schools to create the conditions for students to become critical and engaged citizens.

Schools have been underfunded, increasingly privatized and turned into testing factories that deliver poor students of color to the violence of the school-to-prison pipeline. Moreover, they have also been restructured in order to weaken unions, subject teachers to horrendous working conditions and expose students to overcrowded classrooms.

In some cases, the dire working environment and dilapidated conditions of schools and classrooms appear incomprehensible in the richest nation in the world.

### **RECLAIMING EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD**

Fortunately, teachers, students, progressive social movements and others are rising up, refusing to be written out of the script of a potentially radical democracy.

Yet, what has often been lost on those who have courageously charted this growing assault on democracy is perhaps its most debilitating legacy: the long-standing and mutually reinforcing attacks on both public education and young people. Such attacks are not new; rather, they have simply intensified under the Trump Administration.

As a war culture has started organizing all aspects of society, schools have transformed into zones of economic and political abandonment. Increasingly modeled after prisons, schools have become subject to pedagogies of oppression and purged of the experiences, values and creativity necessary for students to expand and deepen their knowledge, values and imagination.

Moreover, as state and corporate violence engulfs the entire society, schools have been subject to forms of extreme violence that in the past existed exclusively outside of their doors. Under such



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circumstances, youth are increasingly viewed as suspects and are targeted both by a gun culture that places profits above student lives and by a neoliberal machinery of cruelty, misery and violence dedicated to widespread educational failure.

Instead of imbuing students with a sense of ethical and social responsibility while preparing them for a life of social and economic mobility, public schools have been converted into high-tech security spheres whose defining principles are fear, uncertainty and anxiety.

In this view, a corporate vision of the U.S. has reduced the culture of schooling to the culture of business and an armed camp, and in doing so, imposed a real and symbolic threat of violence on schools, teachers and students. As such, thinking has become the enemy of freedom, and profits have become more important than human lives.

## **TEACHERS, STUDENTS IN CRISIS**

Public schools are at the center of the manufactured breakdown of the fabric of everyday life. They are under attack not because they are failing, but because they are public – a reminder of the centrality of the role they play in making good on the claim that critically literate citizens are indispensable to a vibrant democracy.

Moreover, they symbolize the centrality of education as a right and public good whose mission is to enable young people to exercise those modes of leadership and governance in which “they can become fully free to claim their moral and political agency.”

Rejecting the idea that education is a commodity to be bought and sold, teachers and students across the country are reclaiming education as a public good and a human right, a protective space that should be free of violence, and open to critical teaching and learning.

Not only is it a place to think, engage in critical dialogue, encourage human potential and contribute to the vibrancy of a democratic polity, it is also a place in which the social flourishes, in that students and teachers learn to think and act together.

Under the current era of neoliberal fascism, education is especially dangerous when it does the bridging work between schools and the wider society, between the self and others, and allows students to translate private troubles into broader systemic considerations.

Schools are dangerous because they exemplify Richard J. Bernstein’s idea in *The Abuse of Evil* that “democracy is ‘a way of life,’ an ethical ideal that demands active and constant attention. And if we fail to work at creating and re-creating democracy, there is no guarantee that it will survive.”

## **HOW EDUCATION CRISIS EMERGED**

Insisting on the right to teach, the right to learn

and the right to view schools as a valued public good historically have been radical acts. How did we get to this present moment?

Under the regime of neoliberalism, deindustrialization, the tax revolt of the 1970s, and the increasing attack on the social contract and welfare state imposed new burdens on public education at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

Schools were increasingly underfunded as inner cities descended into poverty, class sizes increased, poor students dropped out, and schools became more segregated by class and race.

Teachers were increasingly deskilled and lost control over the conditions of their labor as lifeless accountability schemes and mind-numbing testing regimes were passed off as reform initiatives under the Bush, Clinton and Obama administrations.

Once the teachers realized that the terrible conditions under which they worked were commonplace they were ready to act regardless of whether they had the support of their unions.

These reforms, while allegedly appealing to educational ideals, especially the assumption that they would help economically underprivileged students, did just the opposite and turned schools largely into imagination-crushing citadels of boredom and conformity.

President Bush’s educational policy, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which did a great deal to leave many children behind, was followed by Obama’s policy titled *Race to the Top*. Unfortunately, Obama simply provided more of the same dead-end approaches to education that had damaged public education for decades.

What is different under the Trump Administration is that today’s teachers and students are facing not only a crisis of schooling but also a crisis of education. Trump is upfront in stating without apology that he loves both the uneducated and being uneducated. Not only does he disparage any display of critical intelligence – whether in the critical media, courts or online culture – he has made it clear with his education secretary choice, Betsy DeVos, the billionaire and utterly clueless charter school advocate, that he holds the very notion of public education as a crucial democratic public sphere in low regard.

In a meeting with 2018 teachers of the year, DeVos stuck to her anti-public school, anti-teacher script by stating that she hoped that teachers “would take their disagreements and solve them not at the expense of kids and their opportunity to go to school and learn.”

In part, this is code for a broader narrative in which conservatives and liberals for years have been blaming teachers exclusively for students who drop out of school, end up in the criminal legal system,

# ANNUAL EDUCATION ISSUE

perform poorly academically and distrust authority, among other issues.

As if such failures are entirely the fault of teachers, regardless of the defunding of schools, the rise of overcrowded classrooms, the increase in widespread poverty, the starving of the public sector, accelerated attacks on public servants, the transformation of cities into ghost towns, the smashing of teacher unions and the creation of labor conditions for teachers that are nothing short of deplorable.

No surprises here. DeVos appears to have a penchant for reaching for the low-hanging rhetorical fruit when it comes to commenting on public schools, teachers and students.

The ideological assault against public schools, teachers and students is now in full force thanks to an alliance among big corporations, billionaires such as the Koch Brothers, conservative foundations, business lobbying groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC] and the Trump Administration.

This alliance seeks to privatize public schools, increase tax breaks for the rich [depriving schools of essential revenue], substitute privately run charter schools for public schools, support voucher programs, cut public services, endorse online instruction and redefine public schools around issues of safety and security, further situating them as armed camps and extensions of the criminal legal system. The question here is why corporations, politicians, hedge fund managers and a horde of billionaires want to destroy public education and inflict irreparable harm on millions of children.

Gordon Lafer, a professor at the University of Oregon, has argued in his book, *The One Percent Solution: How Corporations Are Remaking America One State at a Time* that the U.S. is a country in decline, characterized by a rise in economic inequality, families unable to support themselves, increased hardships for workers, the decline of social provisions, the evisceration of public goods, restricted voter rights, lowered employment standards, an ongoing attack on social safety nets and a dwindling middle-class.

Lafer believes that the war on schools is rooted in a terrifying set of neoliberal policies and that big business is determined to dismantle public education. He argues that "big corporations are ... worried ... about how to protect themselves from the masses



as they engineer rising economic inequality [and] they try to avoid a populist backlash ... by lowering everybody's expectations of what we have a right to demand as citizens.... When you think about what Americans think we have a right to, just by living here, it's really pretty little. Most people don't think you have a right to healthcare or a house. You don't necessarily have a right to food and water. But people think you have a right to have your kids get a decent education."

## TEACHERS FIGHT BACK

Against the current frontal assault on public education and the rights of teachers and students, a new wave of opposition has developed around the nation's schools that has provoked the public imagination and mobilized mass numbers of students, educators and the public at large. Teachers have been walking out, striking and demonstrating in states across the country – including for two weeks last spring in Oklahoma.

While all of these strikes addressed issues specific to their states, they shared a number of issues that revealed a broader attempt to undermine public education.

In all of these states, teachers made paltry wages nearly \$13,077 below the nationwide average of \$58,353 and well below the nationwide high of New York at \$79,152. Many teachers had to work two or three extra jobs simply to be able to survive. In a number of cases, their pension plans were being weakened.

There is a direct line between spending cuts for schools and a decrease in taxes for the rich and

# RED STATE STRATEGY

## *Could Oklahoma Be Next To Deploy Initiative Petition To Expand Medicaid?*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

**W**hen it comes to health care for the poor, Oklahoma's policymakers routinely ignore the adage against cutting off your nose to spite your face.

In 2012, Gov. Mary Fallin and the Republican statehouse supermajority rejected Medicaid expansion because it was a pillar of – gasp! – Obamacare. This year, the governor and lawmakers embraced a Medicaid work requirement that seems likely to cost more to administer than it will save lopping off anyone gaming the system.

The result: a quarter-million or so of our fellow Oklahomans are left with little choice but to seek the costliest healthcare on the planet – the emergency room. Moreover, dozens of mostly rural hospitals and nursing homes are on the brink of insolvency, their possible closure a dire threat to small towns and farm life.

Political pique is a lousy governing principle.

Thankfully, there are signs that policymakers' let-them-eat-cake indifference toward the least among us is waning – nationally, if not yet in Oklahoma.

In late May, Virginia's GOP-majority Legislature approved – and Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam signed – legislation expanding Medicaid beginning in 2019. In addition, ballot initiatives in four politically conservative states – Nebraska, Montana, Utah and Idaho – seeks to ensure participation in the program, funded by the feds 93% the first year and 90% thereafter.

Weary of an all-too-often dysfunctional statehouse, rank-and-file Oklahomans increasingly have taken matters into their own hands, circulating petitions on everything from criminal justice reform to medical marijuana – in other words, doing the Legislature's job.

Why not Medicaid expansion?

First, it's smart public policy. It would cost taxpayers far less to dedicate resources on the front end

– routine wellness care for the poor – than to wait until long-ignored warning signs yield catastrophic consequences for those who can't afford regular doctor visits.

Second, the federal match is [ital]our[endital] money – money we've already sent to Washington that instead is being used to improve health outcomes in more than 30 other states that embraced Medicaid expansion.

As House Democratic Leader Steve Kouplen put it, "Our state's inaction on this issue has failed our citizens. It's time to change course and bring this money home."

In rejecting Medicaid expansion, Fallin and Co. argued that Oklahoma could not afford its share when the federal match declined to 90%. Really? Oklahoma couldn't afford the 10% that would extend healthcare to between 200,000 and 250,000 living in poverty?

The fact is, Oklahoma can't afford not to accept Medicaid expansion. Improved overall health helps create a larger, more productive workforce and more tax-payers.

Sadly, too many lawmakers and candidates still think we're better off kicking as many as possible off SoonerCare. That's nonsense. Access to healthcare gives us a fighting chance to create a healthier state and limits taxpayer exposure to the ever-climbing cost of uncompensated care.

Among the major party gubernatorial candidates, only Democratic nominee Drew Edmondson seems to get it. He vows, if elected, to begin working day one to reverse what he calls Fallin's "worst decision."

Think about it: Nearly one in five Oklahomans is uninsured – about 668,000, according to the Urban Institute. That problem is particularly acute in rural areas where, the Center for Rural Affairs' Jordan Rasmussen notes, "the limited availability of health care providers and facilities, greater travel distances, and limited financial resources make access to care challenging."

"A failure to expand Medicaid creates another barrier to care for hard-working rural people and the rural hospitals and clinics that seek to provide them with care and services."

If the next governor and Legislature can't see the wisdom of Medicaid expansion, it will be up to rank-and-file Oklahomans to act. You might want to keep your petition-signing pen handy, just in case.

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# *OK Medicaid Proposal Threatens Healthcare For Parents, Caretakers*

**BY CARLY PUTNAM**

SoonerCare, Oklahoma's Medicaid program, helps thousands of families in our state see a doctor or fill a prescription.

This spring, Oklahoma lawmakers ordered the state Medicaid agency to build a proposal to cut coverage for parents if they don't report working or volunteering enough hours. This proposal has serious consequences for Oklahoma families if it's approved by the federal government.

Most non-elderly adult Medicaid enrollees already do work, but they have low-wage jobs that generally do not offer health insurance and are often unstable, with frequent job losses and work hours that can fluctuate sharply from month to month. As a result, many working parents would be at risk of losing coverage for one or more months under this proposal.

Furthermore, the proposal shows little regard for what happens if parents work themselves into the coverage crater by earning more than 46% of the federal poverty level [about \$630 per month for a single mother with one child].

Under this proposal, parents face a Catch-22. If they manage to work the hours needed to stay on SoonerCare, they would make too much to remain covered – even though they are still earning far below the poverty level. When that happens, they may not have other options to keep the health coverage they need.

This proposal would cut health coverage for people who don't or can't follow its rules, with catastrophic effects for entire families. However, this new proposal from the state remains silent on even the basics of how this would be implemented – let alone what it would cost.

There's no detail on how work or volunteer hours would be tracked or verified or what documentation members must provide to prove their compliance.

Similarly, there's no information about how or how frequently members will need to prove they qualify for an exemption. This is particularly important for parents with chronic illnesses or disabilities who, whether working or seeking an exemption, may struggle to provide necessary documentation and lose the health care they need as a result.

There's also no information about good-cause exemptions – will a parent lose coverage if she's in the hospital when she's supposed to be uploading a pay stub?

Most crucially, the proposal provides no estimates

of how many Oklahomans would lose their health coverage, even though we know coverage loss will happen.

Oklahoma's uninsured rate is already among the highest in the U.S., and losing health coverage can be catastrophic for the working families who use SoonerCare to get a checkup, control a chronic condition, treat mental illness, and more.

The purpose of SoonerCare is to provide access to health coverage for low-income Oklahoma families. This proposal does not appear to consider the effect on those who will lose coverage under this proposal.

Before Oklahoma proceeds down this risky path, Oklahoma families deserve to know how they will be affected.

Ultimately, this proposal underestimates or leaves out the costs of administrative burdens on the Health Care Authority, doesn't account for reporting burdens on very low-income parents, and doesn't consider the statewide burden of a spike in the uninsured rate and more parents unable to see a doctor.

SoonerCare is not a jobs program. This attempt to distort it into one will only increase costs and prevent Oklahoma families in poverty from getting the care they need.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority is accepting public comments on this proposal until Sept. 3, and it's important that Oklahomans speak out against this serious threat to SoonerCare.

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

## *Emergency*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

seem to forget so much during the typical summer vacation.

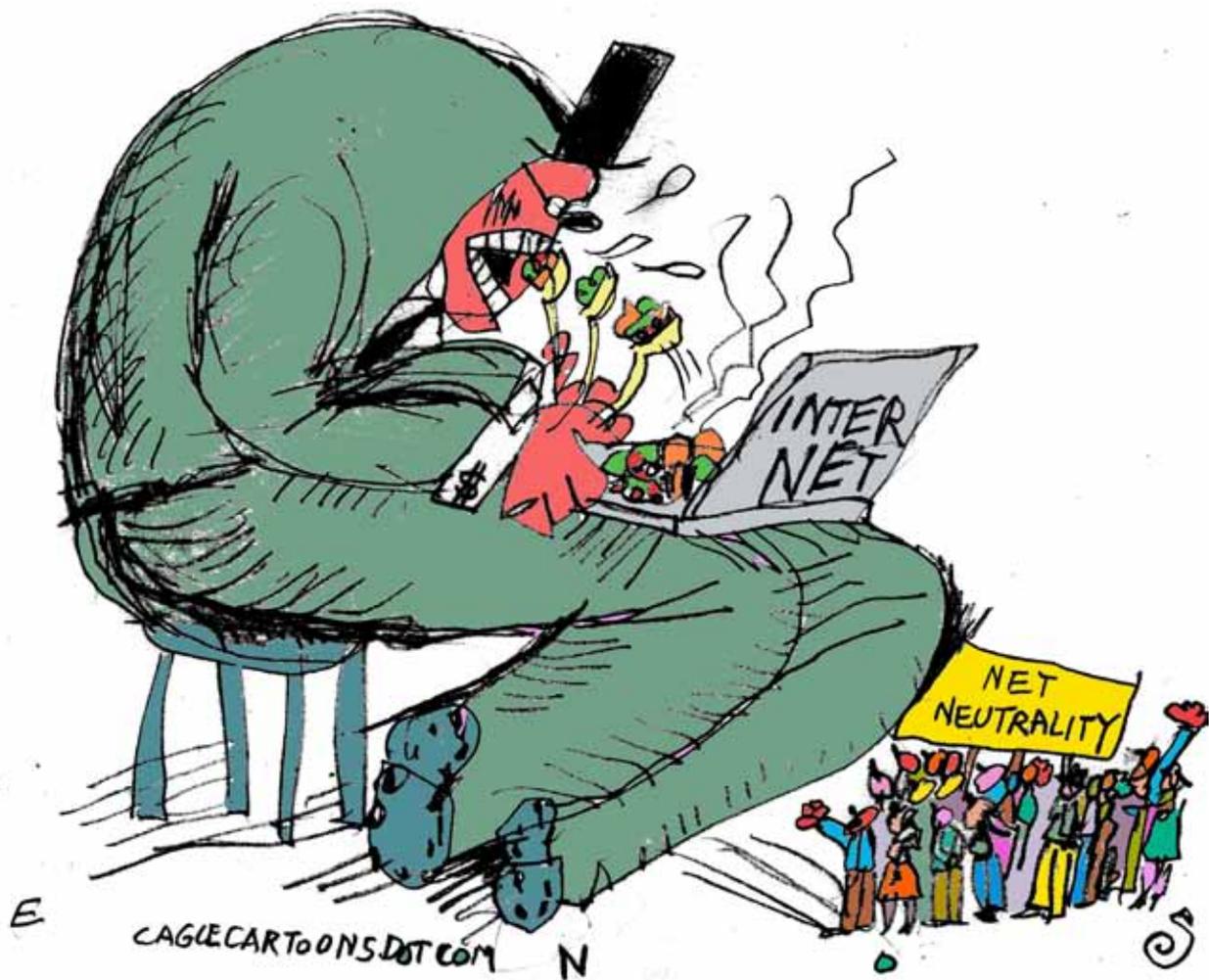
4. Remind friends and family that t-a-x is not a four-letter word. Taxes are the social contract that allow us to pay for schools, build roads, maintain public safety, help the disabled, ensure child welfare and more.

Oklahomans are in the bottom half of what they pay in state and local taxes. Moreover, the poorer you are in Oklahoma, the higher percentage of your income goes to taxes – 10.5% for those earning less than \$18,000 a year, only 4.3% for those earning more than \$418,000, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

Rolling back income tax cuts that cost the state treasury \$1 billion and disproportionately benefited the wealthiest 20% is a good starting point.

5. Never forget that teachers remain woefully underpaid and overworked. A new Education Resource Strategies study found Oklahoma educators make 16.3% less than needed to cover basic needs and taxes for a single parent of three.

The fight for Oklahoma's future begins with educational opportunity for all.



## *Will DC Reps Stand Up For Everyday Oklahomans On Net Neutrality?*

**BY MICKEY DOLLENS**

A long and storied strain of populism runs through the history of our great state. Oklahomans have always had an independent streak and since statehood we've been able to transcend partisan politics and understand some economic issues as just plain old common sense.

Today, the people of Oklahoma understand that a free and open internet is critical to our ability to connect with loved ones and to have our voices heard, not to mention our ability to thrive in a competitive 21st Century economy. National polling has consistently shown that the vast majority of voters – 82% of Republicans, 90% of Democrats and 85% of independents - oppose the FCC's recent repeal of Net Neutrality protections.

So the question is, why aren't the people's representatives in Washington, DC, doing anything about

it? And more specifically, why haven't Tom Cole, Steve Russell, and our other members of Congress followed the bipartisan lead of the Senate in advancing a Congressional Review Act [CRA] resolution that would restore Net Neutrality?

You don't have to read public polling numbers to know that Net Neutrality is a nonpartisan issue. Once again, it's common sense. Sen. John Kennedy, R-LA, said it best when he voted in May for the CRA overturning the repeal of Net Neutrality rules: "You either trust your cable company or you don't. If you trust your cable company, you won't like my vote. If you don't trust your cable company, you will like my vote."

Ask your friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers if they trust – or even like – their cable and internet providers. I think you know what you'll hear.

That's really what net neutrality boils down to – it's a question of whether we trust the companies that bring internet into our homes and businesses not to make a pretty penny by discriminating against certain types of online content.

These companies already make a solid profit by charging us for access to the web. Without net neutrality, they'll be able to monetize the other side of the web – charging businesses and organizations to access their client base. Those who can afford it will end up with faster, prioritized access. Those who can't will end up in the slow lane.

You better believe Silicon Valley companies will get priority access and Oklahoma's small businesses will be left in the dust.

When our representatives return to Washington, DC, in September they have a decision to make and it's summed up nicely in Sen. Kennedy's quote: Will they side with ridiculously rich cable and internet companies trying to lobby for a new revenue stream? Or will they side with everyday Oklahomans, small business owners, community organizations, and local media companies who want a free and open internet?

I encourage our members of Congress to reach down into that deep well of populism in our state's history and side with the people by supporting the Net Neutrality CRA.

*Mickey Dollens, an Oklahoma City Democrat, represents District 93 in the Oklahoma House.*

# *Plea Deals Leave Oklahoma's Justice System Unbalanced*

**BY ANNA ROUW**

One of the most basic rights for Americans accused of a crime is the right to a fair trial before a jury. However, the vast majority of criminal convictions – 90% to 95% – don't happen at trial. Instead, they're the result of a deal negotiated by prosecutors and defense attorneys without going to trial.

Plea deals are the norm for a number of reasons, but the justice system's dependence on them is a serious problem. When nearly all criminal cases are resolved outside of the courtroom, the dangers include racially biased sentences, convicting innocent defendants, and a criminal justice system with little transparency or accountability.

In a typical plea deal, the defendant pleads guilty to a crime in exchange for a less serious charge than

what the prosecutor would seek if the case went to trial.

For example, a defendant facing first-degree burglary charges that bring 7-20 years imprisonment could be offered a plea deal of second-degree burglary with only five years imprisonment. With years of life at stake, the pressure to take the deal can be intense, even if the defendant had a chance of full acquittal at trial.

Both prosecutors and defense attorneys often push for plea deals due to an overburdened criminal justice system.

Due to underfunding, the Oklahoma Indigent Defense System has been on the brink of a constitutional crisis for years, with caseloads that are over two and a half times higher than national standards. District Attorneys have struggled to keep their offices afloat as state revenues have dried up.

Bringing more cases to trial simply isn't feasible in this environment.

The reliance of the justice system on plea deals gives prosecutors a great deal of power in negotiating the resolution of criminal cases. Many defendants cannot afford bail or pay a bondsman to be released before their case is resolved, so many defendants see plea deals as a way to get out of jail as soon as possible.

With this leverage, prosecutors can press for incarceration or supervision with little resistance from defendants. Desperate to get back to their families, many defendants take the deal.

This power imbalance may even influence an innocent defendant to plead guilty merely because they lack the resources to undergo a lengthy trial.

Judges could put plea negotiations on more even ground by giving those who can't afford bail other options to secure their release, so they aren't under so much pressure to take the first deal they're offered.

Some Oklahoma counties have already begun to widen the use of nonmonetary release resulting in fewer people in jail. In one study, pretrial releases were found to reduce defendants' probability of pleading guilty by 12%.

There are other steps lawmakers can take to reduce the impact of plea deals. Oklahoma has already begun to reduce sentences for many crimes, such as reducing minimum sentencing for drug offenders and reclassifying simple drug possession as a misdemeanor. However, there is still a long way to go.

Scarce resources and large caseloads mean that plea deals will continue to be the norm in Oklahoma's criminal justice system for the foreseeable future. However, district judges and state legislators have options to curb the most problematic elements of plea deals. Judges and lawmakers should embrace them as steps to prioritize justice over convenience.

*Anna Rouw is an intern with Oklahoma Policy Institute; [www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org).*



## *The Irreligious Right Shows Its Hypocrisy*

BY GARY EDMONDSON

The Oklahoman opined on July 21 that many Democrats were reassessing Bill Clinton in this #MeToo era.

The paper cited an interview with the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, “calling the former president ‘entitled, rapey, gropey, grabby, disgusting.’ Bourdain, a prominent liberal, also criticized Bill and Hillary Clinton for the way they ‘efficiently dismantled, destroyed, and shamelessly discredited’ women who accused the former president of sexual harassment and [in one instance] rape.”

The paper sneers that this change in Clinton’s standing is “conveniently voiced by liberals only after Clinton is no longer politically useful [and may even be a liability].”

Somehow the conservative mouthpiece missed the obvious corollary to this observation. Republicans did not wait until Clinton was out of office to attack his character. They thumped their Bibles and took him all the way to an impeachment trial – and lost.

So, instead of worrying about Democrats re-evaluating Clinton, The Oklahoman could have called for some consistency from the self-righteous right regarding the present Slimeball-in-Chief.

Writing for The Week in late July, Bonnie Kristian wondered:

“If you’re doing something hypocritical, does it make things any better to note you’ve been a hypocrite for a long time? I would say no, but Pastor Robert Jeffress, an adviser to President Trump and one of his most rhetorically gymnastic supporters, says yes.”

She cites a July 23 Fox News interview, where the pastor of Dallas First Baptist Church said: “Back in 1980, evangelicals chose to support a twice-married Hollywood actor who was a known womanizer ... Ronald Reagan. They chose to support him over Jimmy Carter, a born-again Baptist Sunday school teacher who had been married faithfully to one woman.

“The reason we supported President Reagan was not because we supported womanizing or divorce. We supported his policies, and that’s true with Trump, too.”

There you have it. Religion and morals have nothing to do with the irreligious right, though it requires some limber reasoning to then claim morality as the cornerstone of such hypocrisy.

Clinton-bashers on the right used his immorality as a weapon. Similar actions by one of their own was inconsequential.

And they still are. Porn stars, playmates, payoffs,

## PUBLIC FORUM

infidelity, incessant lying, racism and greed are irrelevant.

In late July, Oklahoma GOP District Four Chair Steve Fair observed: “Far too many political types justify the actions of their own, but condemn everything the other side does.”

I couldn't have said it better myself.

I wait in vain for the Republicans, who were standing on the moral high ground with me while we were condemning Clinton's perfidy on “principles not partisanship” to even chide their own immoralist.

Way back in August 2016, Michael Brendan Dougherty reported for The Week that “[Calvinist theologian Wayne] Grudem admits that Trump is ‘flawed,’ and says extreme things. Grudem concludes, however, that ‘most of the policies he sup-

ports are those that will do the most good for the nation.’

“It's an interesting argument,” Dougherty notes, “but it seems to militate against the statement he signed in 1998, which said that ‘the moral character of a people is more important than the tenure of a particular politician or the protection of a particular political agenda.’”

Rev. Jeffress claims, “Nobody has sold his soul to support President Trump.”

You can agree with that assessment only if you also agree with columnist Gary Wills:

“The religious right has long been not a religion, but an ideology.”

*Duncan resident Gary Edmondson is chair of the Stephens County Democratic Party.*

# *Do You Believe in Karma?*

**BY SHARON MARTIN**

It's hard to be lighthearted  
when your president's a liar,  
when the whole dang world is threatened  
by his pants that are afire.

He shreds the Constitution  
and feeds it to the rats,  
rules by whim and fiat  
and blames the Democrats.

To think, he used to be one!  
But then the party turned.  
No longer segregationist!  
The Jim Crow laws all burned,

at least in legal rule books.  
We know Jim Crow's still here,  
and the liar's words and actions  
stir up the racists' fears.

Adored by evangelicals.  
I can't imagine why.  
This preacher's kid knows Christians,  
and this hater comes up shy.

He's stacking courts with corporatists  
undoing revolution.  
We shed the aristocracy once.  
This backward evolution

should not sit well with patriots,  
and that's us, do you hear,  
the workers and the poets,  
the brown folk and the queer,

moms and dads, day laborers,  
all those who earn a wage,  
who vote and pay their taxes,  
the ignorant and the sage.

We're all in this together  
We all must march and shout  
and call and vote and rally.  
We can't sit this one out.

Here's hoping there is justice  
and it lands his butt in jail.  
Do you believe in karma?  
Will Putin go his bail?

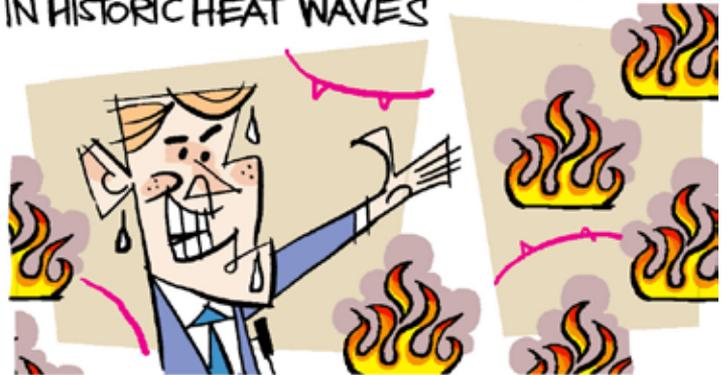
*Oilton resident and former educator Sharon Martin read this at the Woody Guthrie Poets event July 14 in Okemah. Martin's latest book, Not A Prodigal, is available through Barnes and Noble. Her recent children's book, Froggy Bottom Blues, can be purchased in hardcover or paperback from Doodle and Peck Publishing and in paperback from Amazon. More of her essays can be found at [okobserver.org](http://okobserver.org).*

# FUTURE FORECASTS

ALONG WITH THE RECORD-BREAKING HEAT EXPECT HISTORIC SANDSTORMS, MASSIVE FIRES AS A WARMING DENIAL SYSTEM FLOODS WASHINGTON, D.C. WITH COLD CASH.



AS DROUGHT CONDITIONS WORSEEN AND OUR POWER GRIDS COLLAPSE THOUSANDS DIE IN HISTORIC HEAT WAVES



CHANGE DENIERS, COASTAL FLOODING REFUGEES AND HEAT REFUGEES HEADING NORTH SHOULD EXPECT RECORD-BREAKING HEAT.



## *Climate Change Is Upon Us*

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

Leading climate scientists warn that we have only a few years left to save the planet from severe climate changes devastating for mankind. The Trump Administration has now brought our planet to the brink of destruction by denying climate change and refusing to utilize science as a valid tool for finding the answer to this significant challenge.

So where do we go from here?

Perhaps it's now time for our broadcast media to step up. Have you ever wondered why our broadcast meteorologists don't engage in the debate? Might it be related to the competition for market share, the Almighty Dollar ruling the roost or the fear that current or potential advertisers being lost due to the truth?

With climate change getting worse season by season, perhaps the time is ripe for those with the training, skill and knowledge to begin educating those of us who receive our information via the TV airwaves. Broadcast media is missing a vital opportunity to enlighten those who get up in the morning with them

and go to bed after the final weather report and the end-of-the-day sportscast.

The basic training for meteorologists is provided by the science of physics, and our radio/TV weather forecasters possess it. The nation's most preeminent weather school is on the OU campus in Norman. It has global repute; however, its graduates are not including climate change in their broadcasts, or engaging the public in a discussion of humans' biggest problem. Most TV weather forecasts simply have no mention of global warming or climate change.

Most of the world's people can contribute to the reduction of global warming once informed about the nature of the problem. In essence, the build-up of greenhouse gases is now largely due to human activity. Most scientists believe human activity is now the major contributor to the problem of global warming/climate change. Identifying such harmful activities as heating/cooling our homes with fossil fuels is a good start in modifying our behavior, improving our economy, as well as answering the dilemma of

climate change.

Today's foremost challenge is the energy we use daily to heat and cool our homes and workplaces. Fossil fuels are the major problem but we now have the means to significantly reduce and ultimately eliminate the need for these fuels, which produce the harmful greenhouse gases, including CO2 in our atmosphere.

It is imperative that the world switch over to renewable sources, which include wind, solar, hydropower, geothermal – all so abundant in Oklahoma. Natural gas, the least polluting fossil fuel may be used as needed for the transition. Renewable sources are readily available in Oklahoma.

Transportation is another activity responsible for producing abundant CO2 in the atmosphere. The world requires more hybrid vehicles and vehicles fueled by natural gas, electric and solar power. In addition mass transportation is a need, not just for those who cannot afford autos.

Oklahoma is in a unique position to bolster public transit. Denver Metro has wonderful passenger rail service. Last year both St. Louis and Kansas City added or updated streetcar service. By year's end Oklahoma City's streetcar system will be up and running downtown.

Recent months saw new activity on the Eastern Flyer, the passenger rail service to connect our two largest cities. The WATCO organization has asked for bid proposals for a six-month trial run of passenger service between Sapulpa and Del City and the communities of Sapulpa, Bristow, Stroud and Chandler. The main object is to determine the ridership potential to justify train service that ultimately will have to include the Tulsa and OKC downtown areas.

It's only a matter of time before Tulsa has to update public transit, especially in its central city with its rapid growth. Without adequate mass transit, such growth will not only slow down but also come to a screeching halt.

Oklahoma finds itself at a point where it must make decisions that not only support growth but also find measures that contribute to health, income, fewer accidents/injuries, deaths, even continued life on this planet.

Blessed with abundant supplies of clean energy, our state needs to hasten the conversion from fossil fuel dependency so as not to foul our air, increase global warming or facilitate climate change with weather aberrations like wildfires, earthquakes, floods and tornadoes. [NOAA estimates \$1 billion-plus cost for each of the 16 disasters in 2017.]

Surely that's not the future we want to create for us, our children and, most of all,

our grandchildren.

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



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# RIGHT MAOISM



## *'Reject The Evidence Of Your Ears'*

BY JUAN COLE

**D**onald Trump's success stems in large part from his hucksterism, from his disregard for facts and his ability to pull the wool over the eyes of his cultists. It also stems from a shrewd use of logical fallacies in argument.

After the catastrophic Helsinki summit, the question was, "Is he Putin's poodle?"

That is a good thing, his flacks say, since peace with a nuclear power is much better than conflict.

This way of thinking is a logical fallacy, known as

the False Dilemma. There just are other possibilities that fall between nuclear Armageddon and sucking up to Putin. For instance, you could even have a summit with him, and seek cooperation where there is overlap in interests, but just be forthright that you don't think his unilateral annexation of Crimea and attempt to usurp other Ukrainian territory is right.

Speaking to the Veterans of Foreign Wars last month, Trump cautioned his audience about the reporting on Helsinki and on the Mueller investigation:

“Just remember, what you’re seeing and what you’re reading is not what’s happening.”

Twitter knew what to do with this unhinged remark. People quoted George Orwell’s 1984: “The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command.”

As the great science fiction writer Cory Doctorow pointed out, Eric “George Orwell” Blair, the anarcho-syndicalist journalist who fought in the Spanish Civil War, did not write 1984 as a prediction of the future but as a critique of his own present:

“Orwell didn’t worry about a future dominated by the view-screens from 1984, he worried about a present in which technology was changing the balance of power, creating opportunities for the state to enforce its power over individuals at ever-more-granular levels.”

Then, when on the night the Cohen tape was leaked to CNN, the Trump team actually attempted to dictate how it was heard by releasing an obviously doctored transcript of it.

Cohen sets up a dummy corporation for buying Playboy bunny Karen McDougal’s silence about their year-long affair, to reimburse David Pecker [yes!] of the National Enquirer for offering her an op-ed contract on condition she not reveal the affair.

Here’s the transcript, according to the Washington Post:

COHEN: ... Um, I need to open up a company for the transfer of all of that info regarding our friend, David, you know, so that – I’m going to do that right away. I’ve actually come up and I’ve spoken –

TRUMP: Give it to me and get me a [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

COHEN: And I’ve spoken to Allen Weisselberg about how to set the whole thing up with ...

TRUMP: So, what do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?

COHEN: ... Funding ... Yes. Um, and it’s all the stuff.

TRUMP: Yeah, I was thinking about that.

COHEN: All the stuff. Because – here, you never know where that company – you never know what he’s –

TRUMP: Maybe he gets hit by a truck.

COHEN: Correct. So, I’m all over that. And I spoke to Allen about it, when it comes time for the financing, which will be –

TRUMP: Wait a sec, what financing?

COHEN: Well, I’ll have to pay him something.

TRUMP: [UNINTELLIGIBLE] pay with cash.

COHEN: No, no, no, no, no. I got it.

TRUMP: Check.

The Trump team, however, released their own version of the transcript, in which they maintain that Trump wasn’t suggesting that Cohen pay with cash but rather was insisting that Cohen pay by check.

Dispassionate news sources have not agreed with Giuliani’s spin.

In fact, just before the 2016 election, Trump sent Hope Hicks out to deny any knowledge at all of the

“catch and kill” contract between the National Enquirer and McDougal. “We have no knowledge of any of this,” she said.

But the tape shows that Trump knew all about it down to discussing how exactly to reimburse Mr. Pecker for the McDougal hush money.

“I’ll have to pay him something,” Cohen told Trump.

Trump wanted it all to be off the books. “Pay with cash,” he instructed.

Cohen knew he was taping himself and knew what paying with cash would make the whole thing look like. “No, no, no...” he protested.

It is not actually clear to me whether it is Cohen who then says “check” or Trump. If the latter, he is caving to Cohen’s refusal to pay Pecker cash.

In the end, the dummy corporation did not actually make a payment to Mr. Pecker. It is not clear that anything very illegal happened here.

It is not illegality that is of concern here. It is Trump’s instruction to Hope Hicks to deny it all. “We have no knowledge ... ”

The same denials have attended the numerous meetings of Trump associates with Russian contacts.

Back when Bush and Co. invaded Iraq, one of them, perhaps Karl Rove, gave an interview with Ron Suskind about criticism of the war of aggression on Iraq:

“We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study, too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

At the time, I called this way of thinking “Right Maoism,” after the Chinese leader’s insistence that he could industrialize China by sheer force of will, a fantasy that led to millions of deaths.

Likewise, of course, the Bushies were not “an empire” in Iraq but just incompetents who helped destroy the Middle East.

The response to the Suskind interview was the internet meme of the “reality-based community.”

Now Right Maoism has reemerged under Trump, even more virulently than under Bush. Just as Bush attempted to shape American perceptions of Iraq by constantly declaring the U.S. occupation a shining beacon on a hill, so Trump attempts to portray his presidency as a march from victory to victory: Why, he has denuclearized South Korea and cowed Iran, destroyed ISIL and put China in its place.

The U.S. public was invested for perhaps three years in the Iraq War before they started rethinking the calamity, as evidenced in the 2006 mid-terms. In the case of Trump, they don’t have the luxury of mulling it all over for three years or more.

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



# *The ABCs Of Trump*

**BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL**

**I**t's striking that political reflection in the age of Trump has been so often transformed into ethical reflection about moral character—virtues and vices – and the relation between the personal and the political. Pundits have been obsessed, not by policy considerations, but by head-shaking reflections on the vices of Donald Trump and expressions of bewilderment that such a man could become president.

A significant number of his supporters are willing to ignore the personal and simply say, “I don’t like the man, but I like his policies.” That’s too easy.

For Trump, the personal and the political are connected in a disturbing way, because the policies are expressions of the man, and his personal characteristics leave us nothing to admire nor to which we might aspire. He’s loathsome.

I’m happy to contribute to the attempt to understand this politician who haunts our social life like a headache that never passes. My view is that his policies are expressions of the man – and I detest the man. The inference is obvious.

Who is Mr. Trump? Why does he arouse so many contrasting emotions? How has he managed to exacerbate our divisions and disagreements?

In previous Observer essays I highlighted two features of his conduct and character, suitably related.

First, he proclaims falsehoods at an astonishing rate. A recent Washington Post story reported that he has made over 3,000 false or misleading claims since coming into office, 6½ per day, although on two extraordinary days in 2017 his total reached 53 and 49, respectively.

People typically call these falsehoods “lies” and our president a “liar.”

No, he’s not a liar – that is, a person who knows the truth and intends to deceive. Trump is unconcerned with truth. He’s concerned about advancing his own interests. He respects neither the ideal of truth nor the virtue of honesty.

Call this phenomenon what you want. Like the philosopher Harry Frankfurt, I call it bullshit and Donald Trump a bullshitter, a dangerous character indeed.

It is indifference to truth that is dangerous; the epithet merely helps us locate key facts about his speech and state of mind. His bullshit despoils our political life in an insidious way.

Second, he doesn’t merely thumb his nose at truth and honesty. He seems to act as if such ideals are ir-

relevant; they do not apply to him. His egocentricity is morally deeper.

He is a person who “systematically allows himself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes him against the complaints of other people.” Such a person believes he is special, unconstrained by norms of courtesy and civility – and truth-telling. This person acts and talks as if he is the magnetic center of a world conceived as a clash of competing interests.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you? No. Screw others if it will advance your own interests, since that is what others are out to do to you.

Think about yourself. Ignore moral norms. The philosopher Aaron James calls this type of person an asshole, an inelegant way to describe someone who denies that we are moral equals and sees himself as standing above or outside of the moral community. Once again, the phenomenon is more important than what we name it.

There are always assholes among us, those who violate norms of civility, courtesy, and compassion, whose egoism is merely annoying and leave us with the practical problem of dealing with people who cut in line, continually interrupt in conversation, or act boorishly or unfairly when we play games with them. But we are at a loss when one of them becomes President Asshole, the moral leader of our political life, whose vanity and self-absorption are unlimited.

I want to add a third component to my description of Mr. Trump’s moral character. I use the term “moral character” broadly, to refer to both vices and virtues, those traits of character that have moral significance. His bullshit is rooted in his egoism [assholeness], yet assholes are members of groups with which they identify. Assholes are individual egoists [Trump is often called a “narcissist”] yet egoists have a gender, are members of families and religions, and citizens of a nation.

It is inevitable that individual egoists, who see themselves and their own interests as decisive in deciding how to act and what kind of person to be, will, to the extent that they identify with being members of a certain group, place the interests of their own group above the interests of other groups. Individual egoism is conjoined with group egoism. [Ignore the possibility of incoherence when the egoist attempts to resolve a practical conflict between his own interests and the interests of the group with which he identifies. Mr. Trump may have faced this dilemma during the Vietnam War.]

The social world is comprised of in-groups and out-groups. It’s unsurprising that the political rhetoric of the asshole expresses a simple-minded Manichean view of the world. The egoist is also a chauvinist, one who has a special allegiance or devotion to his own group or kind.

I came of age when chauvinism was commonly attached to its male variety instead of the more original

meaning referring to a kind of exaggerated patriotism or nationalism. [Patriotism is group egoism.]

Now we’re used to the broader meaning of the term, in which chauvinism may be modified by references not only to gender but also to all sorts of groups and kinds. Mr. Trump is a chauvinist of easily identifiable kinds. It is virtually inconceivable to think that a mere asshole could have been elected president without the electoral power of chauvinist rhetoric.

It must have occurred to people of my generation that his comments about women on the infamous “Access Hollywood” tape – “You can do anything. Grab them by the p---y.” – expresses male chauvinism. [Obviously, groping women is asshole behavior and sexual assault.]

The nationalist slogan we associate with his campaign is given chauvinist teeth by rhetoric and policies that sort the world into “Us” and “Them,” our group and their group. Anti-immigrant rhetoric describes them as criminals and rapists, out to take our jobs and undermine American culture. Muslims are dangerous terrorists who want to destroy our way of life. White supremacists are victims of identity politics, political correctness, and affirmative action. [Racism is chauvinism.] Both our international friends and enemies treat us unfairly in trade agreements.

I suppose that tax policy and undermining government regulation can be interpreted as the attempt to aid business, the group in which the family brand resides. And disrespectful [mostly black] NFL players who kneel during the national anthem are not like us, for whom patriotism is defined by clearly articulated rituals rather than critical reflection on the ideals, history, and behavior of the nation.

Much has been said about Trump’s nativist inclinations, but his nationalism is just another [important] form of chauvinism. He masterfully combines this with other forms: sexual, racial, religious.

His chauvinism is where the personal meets the political, the location where his self-absorption meets flag-waving cheers, and appalling middle-school name-calling is seen merely as motivating rhetoric that assures his supporters – the “base” – that he’s on their side, fighting against Them: immigrants, people of color, the LGBTQ community, progressives, environmentalists, hostile nations, and those Americans who would destroy our way of life.

Mr. Trump seems to have little or no respect for some central moral norms that lubricate social life. He talks carelessly and self-interestedly as if he’s unconcerned with truth. In his conduct and policies he appears to lack any broader vision of the human good, beyond the interests of his tribe.

I leave you with the ABCs of Trump: asshole, bullshitter, and chauvinist. Make America Great Again!

*Randolph M. Feezell, PhD, grew up in northwestern Oklahoma and is professor emeritus of philosophy at Creighton University in Omaha, NE.*

# How Liberal Partisan Politics Strengthen The Right Wing

BY WILLIAM C. ANDERSON

*“My mind is appalled at the thought of a political party having control of all the details that go to make up the sum total of our lives.” — Lucy Parsons, 20th Century American labor organizer, radical socialist and anarchist communist*

**T**he desire to condemn evil and wrongdoing should not be a partisan matter, but the brutality of the present shows us how many people feel otherwise.

In the midst of each despicable advance the right wing makes at the expense of people’s lives, there is always shock and awe from the liberal class. There’s the shock that it’s actually happening, the shock that liberalism is failing to halt right-wing encroachments and the shock that oppression has happened under the direction of Democratic Party politicians as well Republican ones.

This says a lot, but a very important takeaway is how liberalism coalesces the very oppressive forces many of its constituents think they are actively opposing by being liberals. The travesty that is immigration policy in the U.S. gives us a very clear picture of contradiction.

A creation of the Bush Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE], was one of the sweeping reforms made after the 9/11 attacks. During a time in which war fever was being heavily stoked, the Democratic Party largely went along with virtually everything the Republicans were incentivizing in the name of nationalist fervor. Under the guise of patriotism, the Democrats enabled wars, policies and attitudes that have become some of the most atrocious events seen in our lifetimes.

The responsibility of maintaining empire and continuing violence isn’t one-sided within the U.S.’s two-party system – it’s the only side. Our votes will elect



those who enforce hegemony around the globe no matter if we cast them to the right or the relative left. This is how we ended up with ICE and foreign policy that destabilizes other nations abroad, producing unlivable conditions for many people around the globe.

The migrants, immigrants and refugees who have come or have attempted to come to the U.S. are forced to make the journey through the grate of U.S. politics. They cross the borders of an empire that has long crossed over them. In return, they are treated as if they are criminals for simply doing their best to survive.

Though the language of the two parties may differ at times, the end result is the regular extension of empire’s violence, and that has remained the same no matter who is in power.

During the Obama presidency, the Democratic Party showed unabashed support for Obama’s attachment to the policies of the Bush Administration that

came before him. Whether it was Wall Street bailouts, immigration policy or the “war on terror,” when there was an opportunity to end the unacceptable, it was squandered instead.

The Democrats excused their strengthening of Bush-era policy by wrapping atrocity in nicer language. President Obama always made sure to emphasize his record-level deportation apparatus was focusing on “criminals,” as if criminals should have less rights by default; President Trump entered the White House echoing this idea.

The responsibility of maintaining empire and continuing violence isn’t one-sided within the U.S.’s two-party system – it’s the only side.

When the Bush Administration responded to the panic of 9/11 by using the emergency to manipulate and overreach, the Democrats helped give the state bigger weapons to carry out their agenda. The Democrats aided right-wing supporters and the Republican Party at the time, as they often still do, at many of their own constituents’ expense.

While many liberal voters may have thought they were being more moral for “reaching across the aisle” to affirm at least some or part of the right’s racist, xenophobic paranoias, they were, and have been, merely assisting the destruction.

President Trump’s “zero-tolerance” stance on immigration which breaks up families is directly connected to the Republicans and Democrats who broke up families before him and enabled him with the means to do so.

President Clinton’s Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 helped pave the way for ICE as we know it. Using this terrible act, Clinton went about expanding Border Patrol, criminalizing various low-level immigration violations and enlarging the deportation machine.

In 2014, former Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton said that children who cross the border should be “sent back,” and stated that, “We have to send a clear message, just because your child gets across the border, that doesn’t mean the child gets to stay,” the former secretary of state said. “So, we don’t want to send a message that is contrary to our laws or will encourage more children to make that dangerous journey.”

It’s worth questioning if liberal voters and Democratic Party politicians would have decried another anti-immigrant Clinton Administration the way they’ve decried Trump’s.

Hypocrisy is exposed under the headlines. People react in shock to not-new abuses happening under Trump that have been occurring for the last two administrations or more. When it was announced that the Trump Administration planned to house migrant children in tents, The Washington Post noted that, “The shelter site, at the Tornillo-Marcelino Serna port of entry, is about 20 miles east of El Paso along the Mexico border. It was last used in 2016 to house migrant children and families in large, dormitory-style

canvas tents.”

We are now poised to see something much worse than Trump unless we prioritize reorganizing all that we can into a true opposition.

In 2014, the Obama Administration housed more than 7,000 children at bases in Oklahoma, Texas and California for months. NBC Nightly News pointed out just as much saying, “It will not be the first time the U.S. government has erected tent cities to house immigrants. U.S. Customs and Border Protection used tents to house an influx of immigrants in 2014 and at the end of the Obama Administration.”

This regularly gets left out when prominent liberal politicians and pundits rush to condemn Trump. To maintain its cherished role as the lesser-evil party, the Democrats willfully ignore the connectivity of their own party in creating, perpetuating and inflicting the brutality they pretend to be inherently opposed to and manipulate their base.

The contradiction maybe most embarrassingly reared its head when a number of liberals – and at least one former Obama Administration official – mistakenly shared photos they thought were exposing the Trump Administration’s treatment of immigrant children when they were, in fact, from President Obama’s term.

Surely if one’s desire to condemn wrongdoing and evil is partisan, that person doesn’t have a problem with wrongdoing or evil as much as they do with who gets to carry it out and [maybe] how it looks or sounds when they do so.

The brutal normalcy of atrocity is strengthened by a liberal class that will not admit fault and entertains the despicable in the name of tolerance. Democrats and their supporters have pushed the right so far ahead by pretending to be opposed to the violence they regularly inflict themselves.

By strengthening the right to the extent they have, we are now poised to see something much worse than Trump unless we prioritize disorganizing the liberal class from party politics and reorganizing all that we can into a true opposition.

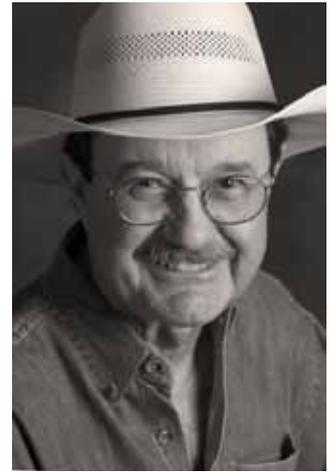
It may only be a matter of time before we see a president who has fascist desires with more competency to carry them out.

If we are to move forward, abolishing and opposing tyranny where and when we rightfully should, a radical honesty is required of us. There can be no more lies and deceptions for the sake of party politics.

Telling the truth about violence is an important part of combatting it. The question should no longer be who is better equipped to carry out state violence against us, but instead, when and how will we stop all the violence against us.

*William C. Anderson is a freelance writer whose work has been published by The Guardian, MTV and Pitchfork among others. He’s also co-author of the forthcoming book As Black as Resistance [AK Press 2018].*

# Jim Hightower



## *Cowboys For Liberty*

What's in a name? By definition, the name of a person, place or thing is its personal designation ... a distinct way of being known to others. Unless, of course, it's the opposite – a label meant to disguise who or what a person or thing really is. In other words, a fake name.

Hiding one's true identity can be done for many legitimate purposes, but it tends to be widely-used these days by scheming people or nefarious interests with... well, with something to hide, using a dishonest, Orwellian representation of themselves for villainous reasons.

Two of the most notorious practitioners are common crooks and corporate front groups, which often are one and the same. For example, Restaurant Workers of America is not made up of waiters and cooks. It's a front-group of chain-store owners who oppose raising the sub-minimum wage of their actual workers. Cloaking themselves as independent citizen advocates and adopting such patriotic-sounding names as Americans for Prosperity, these astroturf outfits run massive campaigns of deceit promoting policies and views that benefit the corporate sponsors at the expense of the public interest.

So, what should we make of a brand-spankin' new group with the incredible moniker of Cowboys for Liberty? What a positive name! Cowboys are seen as down-to-earth straight-shooters, and America is all about liberty.

But wait – is this one of those Koch-funded, far-right-wing bands of angry, anti-government ranchers? Au contraire, as the old cowhands say. In fact, Cowboys for Liberty is an audacious, fun-loving network of hell-raising, climate-change activists who are out to expose, shame and defeat the corporate-serving profiteers behind the unconscionable climate-denier industry, instigated by Jim Marston of the Environmental Defense Fund.

With many of its members from Colorado, Montana, Oklahoma, Texas and other Western states, this new conservation coalition chose the cowboy image both to symbolize the True-West commitment to defending Mother Nature – and as a spoof on the

right-wing's intentional perversion of language and honest policies.

One of their first targets? The most selfish of them all: climate-change deniers.

Yes, from time to time, a few individuals pop into the public eye who are so consumed by self-importance, self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement and all things selfish that they have no shame – even when their narcissism does gross harm to others.

These narcissists-doing-disastrous-damage are the climate-change denying clique of prominent polluters, politicians and propagandists are shamefully used their positions of power to enhance their own fame and fortune as glaciers melt, oceans rise, extreme weather expands, species perish and Earth itself spins toward being unlivable.

While these professional deniers acknowledge no shame, the feisty Cowboys have stepped forward to acknowledge it for them. They've established a Climate Deniers Hall of Shame, and it inducted its first class of infamous deniers.

Among the honorees are Charles and David Koch, who've dumped more than \$100 million into front groups spreading lies about climate change; Sen. Jim Inhofe, the dotty old dean of deniers, who has called global warming a conspiracy spawned by the Weather Channel; and the former CEO of Exxon Mobil, who secretly funded right-wing groups to issue hoked-up reports to discredit the science of climate change.

The Hall of Shame is fun, but it's not a prank. It's a real place to memorialize in perpetuity the names, faces and shameful actions of obtuse, avaricious individuals who've worked to put their petty selves above the very existence of humanity. Publicizing the nefarious efforts of these deniers reveals the importance of an informed and engaged citizenry. Otherwise, we end up ruled by a kakistocracy – government by the worst people in our society.

To get involved with the Cowboys for Liberty, and to see the Climate Deniers Hall of Shame, go to [www.whydeny.org](http://www.whydeny.org).

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# Trump's Border Policies Undermine Our Democracy

In early June, I traveled to “The Valley,” as the McAllen-Brownsville area of Texas is called, down where the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

This river, one of the longest in the U.S., forms the entire Texas-Mexico border, meandering south and east 1,250 miles from our far-west desert city of El Paso to the semi-tropical tip of my state. Its cartographic function aside, the narrow and shallow Rio Grande has historically been viewed by families in the region as more a connector than a divider, and it has long fostered a rich, cross-fertilized culture along its length, uniting generations of us Americans with our Mexicano neighbors.

Though I had gone there to talk politics at a union conference, I wasn't about to pass up the chance to wallow awhile in the rich Tex-Mex experience. So I took an extra half day to savor some fresh shrimp from the Gulf, quaff a couple or three good Mexican cervezas, let my mind drift to the lazy tempo of palm trees swaying in the sea breeze and generally absorb the area's unique spirit, character and centuries-old sense of place. It was an altogether pleasant experience.

Well, except that, just beyond the palms where I was floating in blissful reverie, a time bomb of sadistic immigration policy was ticking. Only a couple of days later, the border would explode in a media conflagration that would char Washington and burn across America as the public learned that our tempestuous, tweety-bird president had decided The Valley would be ground zero for his political mugging of border-crossing families. Suddenly [and stupidly] he and his agents mounted a full-scale terrorist attack on

thousands of migrant children – 10-year-olds, four-year-olds, toddlers and even babies!

Many of these tykes have trekked hundreds of miles with parents and other adults along the dangerous route to El Norte. Others have migrated alone in an urgent attempt to escape rampaging gang violence and life-crushing poverty stalking them in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and parts of Mexico.

Hoping for humanitarian refuge in the Land of the Free, these vulnerable people are instead being met at the Rio Grande by Trump's newly fabricated “zero tolerance” policy against Latinx asylum seekers. His Customs and Border Protection agents have been brusquely separating distraught children from their parents – mostly moms – whom they haul to a McAllen detention jail run by ICE [the ruthlessly cold Immigration and Custom Enforcement agency].

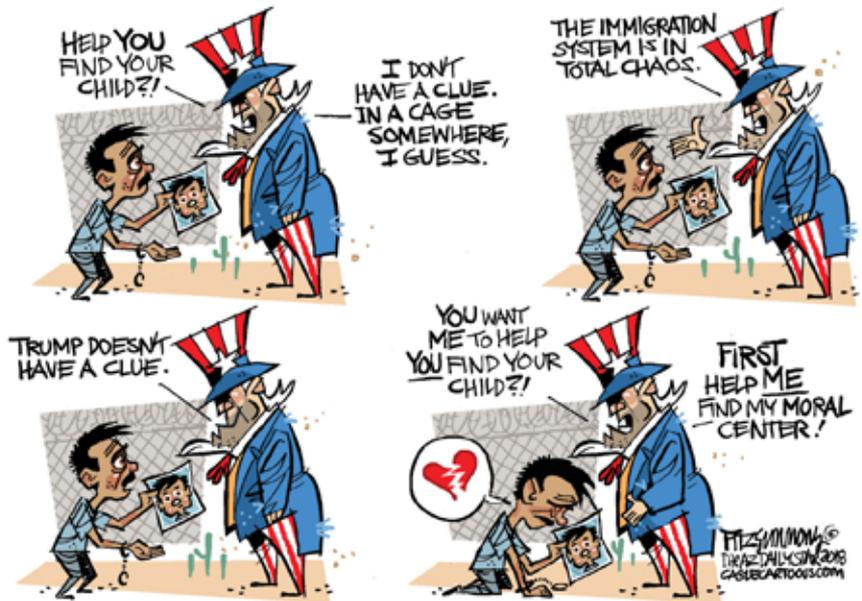
Some of the terrorized children have been taken 60 miles away to Brownsville to be incarcerated in chain-link cages inside a

windowless, 77,000-square-foot warehouse [a converted Walmart Supercenter] run by a private corporation under contract to Trump's Refugee Resettlement. Other “alien children” have ended up in facilities as far away as New York City.

There's no need for me to chronicle each step in this Trump-run-amuck saga, for nearly everyone has seen shocking videos and photos of his troops seizing and ripping apart families. Again, and again, we've heard recordings of bewildered, anguished and sobbing children and absorbed weeks of 24/7 coverage and commentary about this flagrantly immoral assertion of Trumpist autocracy. And we've heard the bizarre twists, turns and tweets of Trump, Sessions, Spence, Kelly, Huckabee-Sanders, Nielson, et al. trying to rationalize their intentionally cruel policy.

The deeper issue of what their relentless pursuit of zero tolerance says is not just about the implementers of this tortuous policy – it's also about all of us.

Although deportation injus-



# Trump Tricks Naive Democrats On Immigration

BY FROMA HARROP

If I worked for Donald Trump and designed a T-shirt that read "I don't believe in borders" in Spanish – and I got a Democratic congressman, say Minnesota's Keith Ellison, to parade in it – I'd probably get a raise. Heck, he might even give me a top agency job with his unspoken permission to abuse the taxpayers.

But Trump didn't need to pay anyone to pull off the T-shirt feat. Ellison did it for him and for free.

Trump really doesn't have strong issues other than immigration. The tax cuts have produced little joy among working people. After inflation, average wages in the sector covering construction, manufacturing, health care and fast food actually slipped in May.

The recent report of 4.5% real economic growth in the second quarter drew a "Wow!" tweet from the president. And it was impressive – almost as impressive as the 4.6% growth seen in two of Barack Obama's quarters, though nowhere near Obama's 5.2% in the third quarter of 2014.

No, all Trump's got now is immigration. His problem here is that poll after poll shows a general public that's quite moderate on the issue. Most Republicans say they want a path to citizenship for otherwise law-abiding undocumented immigrants. Most Democrats want enforcement of the immigration laws.

And Trump's cruel policy of separating children from their parents at the border nauseated people across the political spectrum. On the surface, that highly unpopular ploy would seem to work against his agenda.

But suppose there was calculation in that move. It's quite possible that the Trump camp created the painful scenes to bait some Democrats into taking radical positions against all immigration enforcement.

If so, he succeeded, witness Ellison's outrageous call for no borders at all. Actually, only a handful of activists on the fringe left have advocated abolishing U.S. Immigration and Customs

Enforcement, but they're the ones who get attention. Republicans are making sure of that.

But so are the news media. The New York Times, for one, made a big deal about a surge in social media traffic in support of the ridiculous idea. Social media "opinion" is the creation of a few people with time on their hands. And did anyone on the news desk inquire as to the possible presence of Russian bots trying to get Democrats to fight one another?

ICE enforces the immigration laws. It doesn't make policy. Demands to disband ICE for inhuman practices are like right-wing efforts to rip up the Internal Revenue Service because some people object to paying their taxes. The IRS doesn't write tax law. It enforces it. Getting rid of the IRS would lead to massive tax evasion.

Here's the problem with the Democratic leadership. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer did shoot down calls to "abolish ICE." House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi has gone all wishy-washy on this critical issue. When you hack through her complex explanations, you find a proposal to reform the agency, not simply disband it.

If that's the case, use the word "reform" and not "abolish." The latter is an emotional outburst from a far-left fringe that does more to sabotage Democrats than get them elected.

A regulated immigration program protects blue-collar workers, be they white, black, brown, native-born or documented foreigner. As for the undocumented, they won't get legal status until the public feels confident that the laws are being enforced going forward.

Responsible Democrats must make loud and clear their belief in a humane but law-respecting immigration system. Not getting in front helps Trump [and Russian bots] trap them into seeming to tolerate positions anathema to the larger public, including the workers they profess to champion. This is nothing less than political malpractice.

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tices have long been a blot on our country's "Give me your tired, your poor" pretensions, Trump has turned immigration policy into a despotic nightmare of

presumed guilt, mass incarceration and what amount to death-sentence deportations. The policy of "zero tolerance" violates the rights of immigrants, while under-

mining our own rights and, in the process, shriveling the basic value of fairness that binds democratic societies together, as well as our own. – *Jim Hightower*



SECRET  
SERVICE



NOT-SO-  
SECRET  
SERVICE

## *Will Kavanaugh Make Trump A Monarch?*

**BY JOE CONASON**

To Donald Trump, the qualifications of any individual for a seat on the nation's highest court are meaningless. He knows nothing of judicial decisions except *Roe v. Wade*, the reproductive rights precedent that his supporters want overturned. He has no idea how to assess any judge, beyond his own superficial impressions. He could scarcely care less what any potential nominee may think about the law – with one important exception.

That exception brought us Brett Kavanaugh, winner of Trump's Supreme Court sweepstakes, and an advocate of executive immunity from precisely the kind of investigations and lawsuits that now threaten this president.

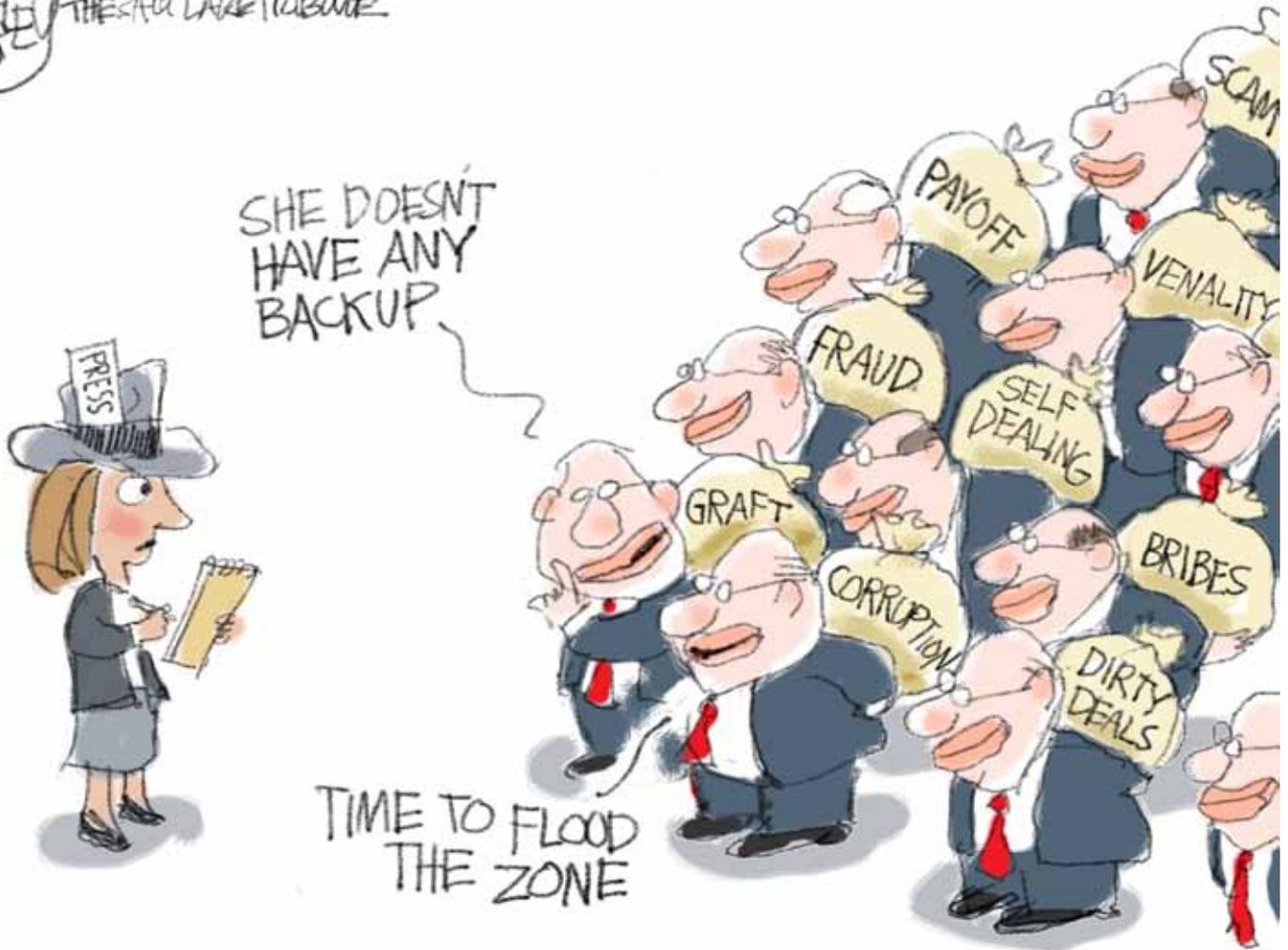
Naturally, Kavanaugh displays all the right [and far-right] credentials, including a Yale law degree, a career dedication to the Federalist Society, and a

lifetime of activism in the Republican Party, as well as a current position on the prestigious Second Circuit Court of Appeals. As Democratic senators warn, he can be expected to vote consistently to please his party's major donors on everything from health care to voting rights. He probably hasn't changed his mind on any public issue since college.

But Trump chose him over all the cookie-cutter conservatives because of the single occasion when Kavanaugh radically shifted position. In a 2009 law review article, he argued that the president, unlike any other citizen, should remain immune from criminal investigation or civil litigation while in office.

He urged Congress to pass legislation enacting such an exemption because the burdens of the presidency are too overwhelming to permit any such

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## *Trump Hates Journalists, But Not For The Reason He Claims*

**BY CONNIE SCHULTZ**

Last month, CNN Washington correspondent Ryan Nobles tweeted about a random encounter with a member of the public: “This rarely happens so I thought it was worth documenting. Gentleman stops me at the hotel where the press are staging covering POTUS – asks if I’m part of the press corps. I say yes – he replies: ‘Thank you for your service, the First Amendment is so important right now.’”

I understand why Nobles wanted to share this. It was not that he agreed with the man’s assessment. As Nobles made clear in a later tweet, he would never claim to be a public servant, and no journalist should. His original tweet offered a glimpse into how it feels whenever a member of the public is not attacking us for what we do.

This is not a woe-is-us column. Look at what we get to do for a living. Lucky us. I’m just acknowledging how our jobs have changed since the 2016 elec-

tion. I’ve been a journalist for more than 30 years, 16 of them as a columnist. I am accustomed to being unpopular with some.

What’s new is the looming shadow of this president, who regularly brays his hatred for journalists. He calls us the “enemy of the people,” potentially endangering lives. His venom is toxic. And contagious. It is nice to cross paths with those who are immune. Every time a stranger approaches me to express support for journalists – which happens with greater frequency, I’m grateful to say – the weight lifts a bit.

It is not news that our numbers are dwindling. Just recently, the New York Daily News reduced its newsroom staff by half. This is a monumental shift in local journalism. As Columbia Journalism Review Editor-in-Chief and Publisher Kyle Pope noted, “With an editorial staff of about 44 people remain-

*It's Easy To Be A ...*

# CHANGE AGENT

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ing, and a New York City population of 8.6 million people, there'll be one Daily News staffer for every 195,000 residents – a ratio much worse than most small-town papers.”

Pope goes on to describe the impact of such cuts: “What does it mean not to have local news in your town? Would it change where you live, how you raise your kids, where they go to school?”

“It would if a local coach were abusing kids, and would have kept doing so if a newspaper hadn't reported it. It would if money that was supposed to be going to city services was instead going to higher financing costs for government bonds, since no one was paying attention to the deals the city was cutting. It would if there were a spike in health viruses, because there wasn't the news infrastructure to warn people to be safe.”

If you think about it, even a bit, it's easy to imagine all that could go wrong if you couldn't count on local journalists to keep you informed. It's a complicated relationship, to be sure.

As long as local journalism exists, there will be tension between the newsroom and the community

it covers. Familiarity breeds conflict in the happiest of families. There's no avoiding one another, and never did I feel closer to readers than during my two decades at The Plain Dealer in Cleveland. I was held accountable wherever I went, from the produce section at the corner grocery store, to the fourth pew from the back at our church. There was no escaping others' viewpoints, which is how it should be for anyone trying to influence public opinion.

Late last month, The New York Times reported that President Donald Trump threw a fit on Air Force One because one of its televisions was set to CNN, rather than Fox News. Think about that. The president of the United States wants all of his news filtered through the one network willing to alter reality to his liking.

Small wonder, then, that Trump continues to cast journalists as a menace – but not for the reason he claims. In this country, journalists are constitutionally empowered to expose any and all threats to democracy.

This is the president's grievance.

Ask yourself why.

# *What's The 'True Threat' To American Journalism And Democracy?*

**BY GENE POLICINSKI**

Threats to the survival of a free press seem much in the air these days, from the near daily online insults hurled from the White House podium to the lunatic who opened fire on an innocent group of news people in Annapolis, MD, on June 28.

But the greatest danger facing our shared freedom of the press and to journalists' role in our democracy is not so much either of those factors, as important and tragic as both are.

Perhaps the greatest – and just as immediate – threat is the ongoing decline in the sheer numbers of those involved in the operating and staffing of newsrooms, for now felt most strongly in the “print” sector.

Here's the most recent example: The owner of The New York Daily News – for decades the blue collar, saucy and salty tabloid voice of one of the planet's largest cities – just cut already weakened newsroom numbers from less than 100 to a reported 45 or so.

The paper's Editor Jim Rich, and Managing Editor Kristen Lee, were bounced as part the mass layoff by an out of town entity that now owns the paper, Tronc – responsible for similarly slashing staffs in other newsrooms it controls, from Chicago to Los Angeles.

No doubt those who bark “fake news” on com-

mand will clap their hands over the news. But as Rich so eloquently wrote hours before the Tronc travesty: “If you hate democracy and think local government should operate in the dark, then today is a good day for you.”

Recently, writer Ross Barkam of The Guardian noted that the U.S. Labor Department reports that since 2001, more than one half of all jobs in the news industry have disappeared, a decline from 411,800 to 173,709.

For newspapers in particular the situation is even more grim: a 2018 industry survey showed news department staffing nationwide is about 25,000 – for the first time less than the 27,000 employed in perennially understaffed local TV news operations. In the 1990s, surveys put those newsroom numbers at around 65,000.

Yes there is hope that online news operations will outgrow in size, scope, numbers, and the trivial fascinations that grab eyeballs if not intellects. But how long will that take? Will it ever happen?

It's difficult to sustain a nation's commitment to a “free press” if there's little-to-no press around to operate freely and demonstrate its worth to an ever-skeptical public.

Do not fool yourself that our freedom of the press

– and other freedoms of the First Amendment – are invulnerable. A tumble in the once virtually guaranteed revenue and the web disruption of previously limited access to news trashed in little more than a decade the economic model and news consumption habits of a century and more.

Combine a court decision [perhaps in the area of public figures and libel] with the White House’s moves on trade [raising the cost of newsprint] and mega media mergers approved by the government and “poof” – the vibrant, multifaceted news media envisioned by the nation’s founders as a “watchdog” on government turns into a lapdog with neither bark nor bite.

Yes, The New York Daily News newsroom cuts do not automatically mean it cannot replicate a 2017 Pulitzer Prize winning investigation – with nonprofit partner ProPublica – of wrongs in the city’s eviction laws. But effectively tracking down evildoers and keeping a watchful eye in a city of 8.5 million with a staff of about 40 will be nearly impossible, even with the help of Superman – and yes, the Daily News was the model for the comic book’s “Daily Planet” where

## SCOTUS

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distractions before his term expires. That doesn’t mean a president is above the law, he hastened to add, only that any criminal prosecution or civil lawsuit be held in abeyance.

Should the chief executive do something “dastardly,” Kavanaugh notes reassuringly, there is always the remedy of impeachment.

Coming from a jurist advertised as brilliant, this is simple-minded guff. Kavanaugh doesn’t say what should happen if a top aide to the president – someone like Michael Flynn, the former national security adviser – perpetrates a felony. Should the president be exempted from testifying against an aide? What if he refuses to testify or provide evidence? What if a prosecutor learns that the president has violated the law, too? How would an impeachment proceed without a distracting investigation?

Kavanaugh’s concern for the beleaguered presidency would be more convincing if not for his own personal history. As a prosecutor in the Office of Independent Counsel, he was among the most avid and vengeful advocates of the impeachment of Bill Clinton. He insisted that Kenneth Starr humiliate Clinton in the grand jury probing his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. But his partisan zeal may have carried him even further.

During the period leading up to impeachment, Kavanaugh was closely associated with a secretive cohort of young conservative lawyers – known as “the elves” – who were determined to bring Clinton down. Veteran elves who later became famous included Ann Coulter, Laura Ingraham and George Conway III, husband of Kellyanne.

alter-ego, mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent found a home.

We need not be mild-mannered or helpless in the face of the all too real challenges facing our watchdogs. But we do have to join in the fight to sustain a strong and free press – which, to acknowledge the factual critics of the press we have now, does not mean accepting shallow or inaccurate reporting, or opinionated talk as a substitute for journalism that matters.

In fact, there’s plenty of the latter around, but it gets caught up in the bluster and brimstone of those who see political benefit in the now meaningless blurts about “fake news” and such.

Focus on finding and supporting good journalism – which no doubt will at times tell you things you don’t want to hear, regardless of your political views – and ignore the rest.

If enough of us do that, we too “can save the day” for a free press – and help preserve democracy as well.

*Gene Policinski is president and chief operating officer of the Freedom Forum Institute.*

To prolong the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit against the president, the elves made sure that she didn’t settle the case before it could be turned into a criminal prosecution. Aiming for maximum embarrassment, they leaked “fake news” to the Drudge Report, including a fabricated claim about the shape of Clinton’s penis that later made Jones look like a liar. Ultimately, they conspired with prosecutors in Starr’s office to arrange a perjury trap for Clinton.

None of the elves or their prosecutor pals ever came clean about those highly questionable actions. George Conway dodged a subpoena to avoid testifying about his behavior under oath. Kavanaugh’s law review article daintily omits any mention of his own role in impeachment or any of those dubious machinations.

Perhaps now, the senators who will consider this nomination will require Kavanaugh to explain what he and his friends did to take down Clinton. More pointedly, they can inquire how he came to believe that a president should be tantamount to a monarch. They can find out whether he believes this president is required to testify under oath in a national security investigation that may involve collusion with a hostile power, whether this president can obstruct justice without penalty, and whether this president can pardon himself.

And if they find that he would fail to uphold the Constitution and oppose Trump’s authoritarian ambitions, then they must reject Brett Kavanaugh as unfit for the Supreme Court.

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## *Americans Will Determine America's Destiny*

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### THE FOURTH TURNING

***What The Cycles Of History Tell Us  
About America's Next Rendezvous With Destiny***  
**By William Strauss and Neil Howe**  
**Crown/Archetype**  
**400 pages, \$18.99 [paperback]**

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### BY JOHN WOOD

I stumbled upon this book when I was researching Generation Z, people born around 1995 or 1996, depending on who is counting. It is a book I nearly dismissed because it was rather antiquated, first published more than 20 years ago when many Generation Z children were still in diapers. It didn't seem useful until I found it was connected to Steven Bannon, a former Trump advisor and chair of Breitbart News. Doesn't it always? Like the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon.

All the sudden this book is also being talked about. Why would anyone review a book so old? Well, the Washington Post among others revealed Bannon's admiration for a theory that reflects Twain's oft quoted [even if it wasn't really him], "History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes."

As there were other previous eras of crisis, these authors say that today we are also in crisis, book-marked by either the devastation from 9/11 or the 2008 fiscal crisis and ending in something so disruptive that it will be as memorable as World War II and the Civil War.

In *The Fourth Turning*, Strauss and Howe turn their attention to predictable historical cycles. It's a compelling read. They argue time itself is not a circle, or a straight line, but a combination of the two. Essentially, history has a pattern.

Strauss and Howe, examine the last few American centuries, with new eras every two decades or so. Four of these eras, or approximately 80 to 100 years, is a new Turning. With each Turning, individuals change how they feel about their culture, themselves, and their future.

Societies have experienced these repeated patterns and are, they argue, as natural as the seasons: from growth, to maturation, disorder, and even destruc-

tion. For these authors, destruction is always necessary to start the growth and renewal process.

Of the four Turnings, the authors explain that the first Turning is called High, which is upbeat and an era of strengthening institutions, but weakening individualism. As a new civic order arises, the culture becomes conformist and wholesome.

The next era is that of Awakening, an impassioned era of spiritual disorder, when civic order comes under attack with a new set of values.

The third Turning, or era, is called the Unraveling, a pessimistic era of reinforcing individualism and failing institutions, when the former civic order decays and the culture splinters and is corrupted.

The fourth Turning is called Crisis, a decisive era of turmoil propelling the substitution of the old civic order with a new one. Then, the cycle starts over.

For Bannon, also a rightwing filmmaker, I need to explain his connection to this book through his movies. He has written and directed nine movies with a unique vision for our future. Most of his films deal with mainstream GOP ideas: protesters get paid to protest, Bill Clinton was corrupt, Obama played too much golf. He uses these ideas to springboard to what he really believes, according to Quartz Magazine. I will briefly examine each before delving further into the book.

In the *Face of Evil: Reagan's War in the World and Deed*, the stock footage shows how Ronald Reagan stopped Communism. Bannon explains that Nazis, Japan, and Russia were just different faces of the "beast." He says that there was no Cold War; in fact it was really World War III. We didn't see it because while the Soviets started it, Western leaders ignored it. Reagan, though, was different – a hero who instead faced and conquered "the beast."

Bannon mixes World War II axis powers with Muslims near the end just to give you the illusion they are the same thing. Basically, Bannon stresses we should be ready for war at any cost against Muslims.

Another movie by Bannon focuses on the book I'm reviewing now – *The Fourth Turning*. It is called *Generation Zero* and explains how the country's liberal financial spending created the fiscal crisis. However, his movie then goes into the Fourth Turning – how the world is in a looping 80-year cycle. It begins with Crisis, a new social order emerges, but then unravels, creating a new crisis – it starts over. You have to have a crisis first, not unlike the Revolution, Civil War, and World War II.

This crisis period started with the financial crisis. Then what happens? The movie doesn't answer the question. It leaves us hanging. But winter is coming. And greatness won't return until a devastating, but necessary war.

His next movie is *Torchbearer* [2016]. It goes event by event in Western history, explained by Christianity. It is narrated by the Duck Dynasty guy David Bossie. So, of course, Rome fell through the persecution of Christians, American Revolution was great because our Founders were Christian, the French Revolution was faulty because it was based on Man, not God. Even the Holocaust is the nefarious result of Nietzsche saying "God is dead."

Today, America has turned away from God. How can we be great again? By annihilating Muslims, of course, and thereby declaring Christian war to eradicate Muslims. Essentially, America lost its greatness when it lost its faith. We need to go to war to find our faith.

Bannon, according to Quartz, wants a war to reset the whole world. The outcome would be a world in Bannon's image, with Reaganite Christian heroes who will heal what currently ails us. For Bannon, pushing for war is a natural and needed.

While Bannon finds his answer

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to the coming crisis in the Fourth Turning, this crisis, if it happens, could create a catharsis that is not necessarily dominionism, or a new theocracy as Bannon envisions. Instead, it could be a progressive catharsis, not unlike its post-World War II predecessor of High Turning

when America created much of its current infrastructure.

While Bannon creates a narrative fitting his vision, it does not have to be that way at all.

Strauss and Howe create a compelling vision of a world with historic rhyme, but make clear it does

not repeat. While historic periods happen, they are not exactly the same. They are instead created in the many orchestrated minds of the people.

I highly recommend *The Fourth Turning*, not because of Bannon necessarily, because he is not mentioned in the book itself, but because Strauss and Howe's book provides a new way to look at history.

It is a history that in some ways repeats, but leaves

clear free will. It also argues we are soon in a place of time for renewal, but not one that is dictated. The character of the next Turning, is up to us.

*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.*

# *Sombra, Rescue Dog Of My Dreams*

**BY FROMA HARROP**

Dear Sombra,

So you're the German shepherd so good at sniffing out stashes of cocaine that drug traffickers in Colombia want you dead. Your story – how your laser-guided snout helped the Colombian National Police seize at least nine tons of drugs, leading to 245 arrests – has gone global.

You are also a gentle girl. You are happy to pose with strangers for their selfies. You're good around children.

Sombra, you are the rescue dog of my dreams, and yes, you need rescuing. The anti-narcotics police say you have become "el terror" of the criminal organizations, which is why Colombia's biggest drug gang has offered a reward of about \$7,000 for your big furry head.

Alarmed by the threat, the police have moved you to Bogota's international airport. That may put you outside the traffickers' traditional territory, but it's too close to would-be assassins for my comfort. That the police have assigned several humans to protect a German shepherd is not a good sign.

You need a witness protection program. You need to be moved far away and given a new identity.

Here's where I come in. I live in a leafy neighborhood in a medium-sized U.S. city. We have lots of fire hydrants and friendly canines. I'll call you Bruce.

"Sombra" is Spanish for "shadow." Bruce turns you decidedly male in the public's eye, and also Scottish.

My offer is nothing to sniff at, though this may be a problem for you. Your powerful nose may need full

employment. I think we can accommodate that to some extent.

Some illegal drugs no doubt pass through my neighborhood. Nothing in your league, of course. We read that you found over a ton of cocaine hydrochloride hidden in a box of bananas headed for Belgium. In June, you sniffed out a shipment of 5.3 tons[!]. We don't have challenges of that magnitude.

But there's other work to do. For one thing, the squirrels are again attacking my tomatoes. I used to have a darling mutt who was afraid of her own tail but ferocious in pursuit of squirrels. I'm sure you're up to the task.

Then there's guard duty. You have sympathetic shepherd eyes and an adorable hanging tongue, but your bulk could easily scare off anyone up to no good. German shepherds are super smart, and your police training has probably sharpened your ability to distinguish friend from foe.

The reports don't specify whether you get along with cats.

If you don't, that's OK. I have nothing against cats except for the fact that left outdoors, they turn into killing machines, devastating the bird population. If you wish to mark my bird-nurturing backyard as a no-cat zone, that works for me.

As for your canine neighbors, know that you would not be the only one gearing down from a more strenuous work life. We have greyhounds, for example, who used to race at tracks. They seem to love their retirement as they happily stroll on leashes. And frankly, you're pushing seven. That's 49 in dog years. Middle age is upon you.

We have all kinds of dogs around here – everything from rescued mutts to purebreds crowned by kennel clubs. But none of them seems to put on any airs. They'd welcome you. They'd even ask for your paw-tograph, if they knew who you were.

Sadly, we can't tell them that in a previous life, you were Sombra, the drug-hunting scourge of the worst drug clan in Colombia.

So, Sombra – I mean Bruce – a forever home awaits you. You are invited to start a new life as a woman's best friend. Y hablo espanol.

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# Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Hofmeister proved to be a clear-eyed, unapologetic champion of public education. As a result, she often found herself in the politically uncomfortable position of opposing her party's anti-public ed statehouse leadership.

If Hofmeister prevails in the runoff, it would set up a general election rematch against Democratic nominee Dr. John Cox, the longtime Peggs superintendent. It's rare voters get to decide between two excellent candidates, rather than just the lesser of two evils.

You can bet the pro-voucher crowd – which often wields disproportionate influence in low-turnout Republican-only elections – will turn out for Murphy. Which direction will Oklahoma go?

In the Corporation Commission runoff, incumbent Bob Anthony faces former Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman, whose legislative career was distinguished only as a Big Oil toady.

Anthony has served the state admirably for five terms, often the only one of the three commissioners willing to stand up for consumers and taxpayers against the demands of deep-pocketed carbon barons, utilities and other special interests who regard the regulatory panel as the “Cooperation” Commission.

If Anthony prevails, he would face the winner of the Democratic runoff between Ashley Nicole McCray, who led the primary with nearly 49% of the vote, and Blake Cummings. Any of the three would be vastly superior to Bingman.

Is Oklahoma headed toward a fairer, more progressive place, one less dominated by a few special interests? We'll know more after the Aug. 28 runoffs.

## Smart On Crime

Voters in 2016 knew what they were doing when they approved two criminal justice reform measures – SQs 780 and 781 – aimed at replacing Oklahoma's punitive approach with a smart on crime strategy.

A newly released report from the Office of Management and Enterprise Services reveals the state has saved more than \$60 million in the past year largely because SQ 780 reclassified some drug and property crimes as misdemeanors rather than felonies.

Ironically, the savings occurred in the same year that Oklahoma became the nation's per capita incarceration capital – and despite the GOP's legislative supermajority working overtime to scuttle voter-approved reforms opposed by the politically-connected prison industrial complex.

The modest savings highlighted by the new report serve as an important reminder why smart-on-crime reforms are vital to Oklahoma's future.

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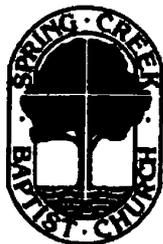
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Without full implementation, and given inmate population growth projections, the state will be left with no choice but to fund \$1 billion in new prison construction.

Voters made their preference clear: They want a truly just system that helps rebuild lives and creates more tax-payers, not more inmates siphoning tax dollars away from vital services like public education.

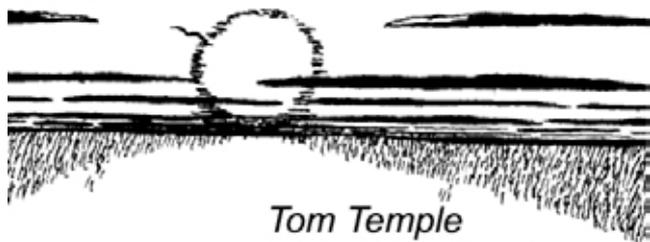
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# Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Setting the record straight: BDS Analytics' national survey of the 50-plus set found 19% use legal marijuana to relieve pain, 16% to relax and 9% to sleep better – only 6% to “get high.” – AARP

Mark your calendar: Tom Steyer's Need to Impeach is hosting a Tulsa Town Hall Aug. 8 at the OK Jazz Hall of Fame. Visit [needtoimpeach.com](http://needtoimpeach.com) for details and to register.

Medical marijuana paranoia is seeping into Oklahoma's public schools. Edmond, for one, plans to double drug testing of students involved in extracurricular activities. A worthwhile expense? Only 2% to 3% tested positive under old system – before pot became legal with a doctor's permission.

Putin must love this: 67% of American adults say they relied on social media sites for at least some of their news last year. – Pew Research Center

Next time you despair over OK's loose cannon legislators, remember Georgia Rep. Jason Spencer. He resigned office after exposing his derriere and chanting racial slurs on Sacha Baron Cohen's Showtime series “Who is America?”

Voters will decide in November whether governor and lieutenant governor appear together on future ballots – just like president and VP. Why the change? SQ 798 wouldn't save the state any money – just restrict voter choice.

The eastern district's federal bankruptcy court in Okmulgee is moving to Muskogee, effective Oct. 1, locating in the same courthouse as the U.S. District Court. Bankruptcy courts in the western [OKC] and northern [Tulsa] districts already are in same courthouses as the U.S. District Courts.

The biennial luck of the draw shines on Oklahoma's Libertarians – their candidates will appear first on general election ballots the next two years, followed by Republicans then Democrats.

Yikes! 37.9% of U.S. adults report unintentionally falling asleep during the day at least once in the past month. – Family Circle



parents because Jesus no longer gives a crap about what happens to “the least of these.” Jesus can tell the Trump Administration to take your health care or Social Security.

This is no longer the Great Society of LBJ or FDR – this is the Gilded Age and the Spanish Inquisition, all rolled into one.

We are not talking about a friggin’ cake, we are talking about the responsibilities and benefits of thousands of laws which only apply to married couples and he wants to be able to choose who you marry based on his religious beliefs and to hell with your beliefs.

Sessions is saying that the federal government, under the Trump Administration, is actively seeking to undermine the rights of citizens of this country to accommodate the religious beliefs of your boss or teacher or pharmacist or doctor or county clerk or attorney general.

Religious Americans have always been in the majority and have never been an afterthought; however, it would be nice to know which biblical interpretation we are supposed to abide by. According to the Hartford Institute and the RCMS 2010 religious congregations census, there are 314,000 Protestant variations and 24,000 Catholic and Orthodox churches.

What it is called is witnessing by intimidation and legislation. Back in the good old days we called it “legislating morality.”

Karen Webb  
Portland, OR

Editor, The Observer:

Does a president, a preacher, a teacher set the tone for those who follow his or her leadership?

Hard to answer. But an observation is just that. It seems to me that since the election of Donald Trump and his vitriolic language, acts of personal violence have been on the increase!

That observation can be tested.

Any one want to try? Or is complaining about violence and Trump too much fun?

Jeff Hamilton  
Midwest City

*Former state Rep. Jeff Hamilton also served as chair of the Oklahoma Council on Violence Prevention.*

Editor, The Observer:

In recent general elections progressives have been plucked, stuck, screwed, blued, and tattooed. America is becoming [has become?] a nation “of, for, and by the richest 1%” who care nothing for the bottom half of humanity struggling to survive, or for the condition of the world that future generations will live in. [Half of everything in the world is now owned by the world’s 17 million millionaires and 7,000 billionaires. They are just 0.2% of the world’s 7.6 billion people. The other 99.8% of people own the other half of everything.] To me, these are profound environmental and social immoralities.

It’s now *three months* and some days till the 2018 general elections.

Does voting matter? In the 2016 presidential election, 96% of black women voted for Hillary Clinton, and 53% of white women voted for Donald Trump. *Another million people* voted for Green Party candidate Jill Stein [they wouldn’t vote for that dirty Democrat Hillary] – and yes, those million Green votes would have defeated Trump.

*Voting has consequences.*

*Not voting has consequences.*

The America I want needs more black women and fewer Green voters.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

*Nathaniel Batchelder is director of the OKC Peace House.*

## Marijuana

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

clear to policymakers how they want to resolve contentious issues.

In 2016, voters gave strong approval to two criminal justice reform initiatives aimed at overhauling – and modernizing – a system that incarcerates more per capita than any other state.

In response, opponents fought implementation of the proposals, arguing voters didn’t fully understand what they approved. The result: little legislative progress has been made to fulfill the voters’ will.

June’s primary was déjà vu all over again. A landslide 57 percent embraced medical marijuana, yet opponents insisted voters didn’t understand what they were doing. The health board and governor then imposed severe, legally dubious restrictions that ignored the voters’ will.

Rank-and-file Oklahomans have noticed the trend and reacted, booting six legislative incumbents in the Republican primary and forcing 10 more into runoffs Aug. 28. This is a potentially serious problem for the Capitol’s Republican majority.

Knowing it would attract many casual or first-time voters, Fallin put medical marijuana on the primary ballot hoping to minimize the risk to GOP incumbents. Given the results, imagine what could happen if agitated voters stormed the polls in the general election to support full legalization. Privately, one election board secretary in a populous northeastern Oklahoma county predicts voter turnout could reach 75% if SQ 797 were on the November ballot.

Opponents undoubtedly will milk the clock with bureaucratic tie-ups and legal challenges in an attempt to keep it off the November general election ballot. But such gamesmanship would serve as an almost daily reminder of recalcitrant statehouse supermajority.

Could it be that hell hath no fury like voters scorned?

# War On Schools

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

big corporations. In Oklahoma, taxes had not been raised since 1990, and in 2010 the Republican governor passed “huge breaks for the oil and gas companies” and in 2015 reduced the tax rate to 2% with the cost to the state estimated at \$300 million-\$400 million per year.

Schools were shockingly underfunded and the consequences for both teachers and students have been devastating.

All of the states engaged in wildcat strikes, demonstrations and protests have been subject to similar toxic austerity measures that have come to characterize a neoliberal economy.

Once the teachers realized that the terrible conditions under which they worked were commonplace in other schools and states and that many other teachers had reached a boiling point, they were ready to act regardless of whether they had the support of their unions.

This was another important thread running through demonstrations. The strikes were not initiated by the leadership in the unions, and when they did act, they were too slow to be consequential. As working conditions for teachers deteriorated and the assault on public schools reached fever pitch, teachers bypassed their unions while using social media to speak to other teachers, communicate across national boundaries and educate a wider public.

What is particularly promising about these widespread protest movements is that they have the potential to move public consciousness toward a wide-ranging recognition in which the assaults on public schooling will be understood as part of a larger war on schools, on youth, and on the very possibility of teaching and learning, and that these struggles cannot be separated.

The use of the social media by the teachers was particularly effective in getting their message out. Individual teachers talked publicly about having to donate blood, visit food pantries and teach with textbooks that were 10 years old.

Images of broken chairs and desks, along with rodents infesting classrooms, and students complaining about books that were held together with tape offered a compelling visual archive of not only dilapidated schools, impoverished classrooms and overburdened students, but also a political system in which Republican governors and legislators were willing to implement economic policies that slashed the taxes of the rich and big corporations at the expense of public schools, teachers and students.

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

Protests against the gutting of teacher salaries, pensions and health care benefits are not simply about school budgets. They are also about a larger politics in which big corporations and the financial

elite have waged a war on democracy and instituted policies that produce a massive redistribution of wealth upward into the hands of the ruling elite. Energized young people and teachers are creating a new optics for both change and the future.

The teacher strikes and walkouts point to a grassroots movement that will no longer allow the apostles of neoliberalism, the Republican and Democratic parties, and the financial elite to ruthlessly take apart public education.

Given the public support the striking teachers have received, it is crucial that such a struggle connect the struggle over schools to a broader struggle that appeals to parents who still view public schooling as one of the few avenues their children have for economic and social mobility.

Teachers, young people and others are creating both a new and potentially radical language for politics and educational reform. Given the authoritarian times in which we live, this language is desperately needed by a society facing an impending crisis of memory, agency and democracy.

If American society is to offset the deeply anti-democratic populist revolt that has put a fascist government in power in the United States, progressives and others need a new language that connects the crisis of schooling to the crisis of democracy while at the same time rejecting the equation of capitalism and democracy.

One option is to build support for what Michael Lerner has called developing a global Marshall Plan in order to redistribute wealth, build infrastructures, expand public goods, create the conditions for environmental responsibility, and eliminate the capitalist structural and economic conditions that prevent such movements, policies and investments from taking place.

The teacher strikes hopefully will turn a moment into a movement, and in doing so, make clear that there is no contradiction between the struggle for quality public schools and fighting other injustices such as poverty, mass incarceration, unchecked inequality, massive student debt, systemic violence, escalating militarization of society and the war on the planet.

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