

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

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STITT'S SCRIPT

*Well-Heeled Political Novice Wants To Revamp
Spending, Create Top 10 Education State*



*Stitt Era Dawns, Fallin's Long Career Ends.
Special coverage begins on Page 8.*



THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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VOLUME 51, NO. 1

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To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

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FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Howdy!

With this issue, The Observer begins its 51st year as Oklahoma's premier journal of political and social commentary.

This is no small achievement, especially given a tumultuous 21st century media landscape littered with once respected and prosperous publications that now are but fading memories.

We could not have endured, of course, without the faithful support of our family of subscribers, some of whom – *remarkably!* – have been with us from the outset.

Thanks to your generous response to this year's holiday gift appeal, we welcome hundreds of new readers to a publication unlike any other in Oklahoma.

By way of introduction, we aspire to be a rollicking journal of free voices, fearlessly speaking truth to power, shining a spotlight on hypocrisy and corruption, and standing up for the least among us.

We are forever a work in progress. Sometimes we miss the mark. You likely won't agree with everything we publish. Neither do we. But we believe few things contribute to a healthy democracy quite like a raucous public square, full of diverse ideas and respectful debate.

We believe Oklahoma's brightest days are ahead – if good-hearted, fair-minded folk are given the facts necessary to demand good-hearted, fair-minded public policy from our elected leaders.

Please let us know what you think. We welcome other points of view, minus name-calling, innuendo or slander.

If you like what you see, we'd be forever grateful if you'd introduce others to The Observer. Our annual holiday gift campaign – with bargain-rate subscriptions – continues through January. [See page 47 for details.]

Welcome aboard!

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Observerscope

MIKE LUKOVICH @MIKE_LUKOVICH 12-29-18

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW



The year's first Observer Newsmakers is Jan. 10, with House Democratic Leader Emily Virgin and Senate Caucus Chair George Young previewing the 2019 session. See back cover for details.

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Markwayne Mullin, only Okie in DC delegation to oppose criminal justice reform. The ex-MMA fighter clearly took one too many kicks to the head.

OU Regents ought to hang their heads in shame for hiring James Gallogly as president. Gallogly's threat to "destroy" his predecessor David Boren reeks of middle school bullying – the antithesis of an academic leader.

Laurel: To outgoing Gov. Mary Fallin, signing 30 commutations last month for nonviolent offenders unnecessarily warehoused in OK prisons. Baby steps, but progress nonetheless.

For the record: Oklahoma's population grew about 10,000 – or .3% – in the 12 months ending July 1, mostly because of foreign immigrants and fewer deaths than births. – Census Bureau

Dart: To Sen. Paul Scott, R-Duncan, demonstrating world-class buffoonery by proposing measure that would end Soon-to-be-Sooners prenatal care program because it helps undocumented immigrants. It defines the phrase "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

Good News: U.S. Senate dysfunction torpedoed two lousy Oklahoma candidates for the federal bench: state SC Justice Patrick Wyrick and Tulsa attorney John O'Connor. **Bad News:** Donald Trump likely will re-nominate both.

Laurel: To U.S. District Judge Vickie Miles-LaGrange, retiring after 24 exceptional years on the bench. Her career was replete with firsts – first black federal judge in Oklahoma, first black woman elected to the state Senate and first black U.S. attorney.

Someone who can speak slowly enough needs to explain to Republicans that ObamaCare is p-o-p-u-l-a-r. Latest evidence: a record 150,000 Okies signed up for 2019 – 7% more than last year.

Dart: To the House Speaker's press secretary, Jason Sutton, sharing a Fox News contributors' tweet that media should be treated like a "vipers nest." Dale Carnegie, where art thou?

Former Burns Flat Rep. Ryan McMullen is Simmons Bank's new community affairs officer for Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, South Texas, St. Louis and Kansas City. He also served as state director for USDA Rural Development.

Laurel: To our dear friend David Williams, wrapping up a stellar 25-year career with the Oklahoma Education Association. It'll sure be quiet around there without him.

Speaking of OEA, Del City High graduate James Keith is the organization's new executive director, succeeding the retiring David DuVall. Keith was administrative director at the Univ of Minnesota Medical School's Duluth campus.

Dart: To Idabel Rep. Johnny Tadlock, switching to the GOP even though he was re-elected without opposition as a Democrat. Yes, he's now a member of the Republican supermajority, but he'll remain a back-bencher.

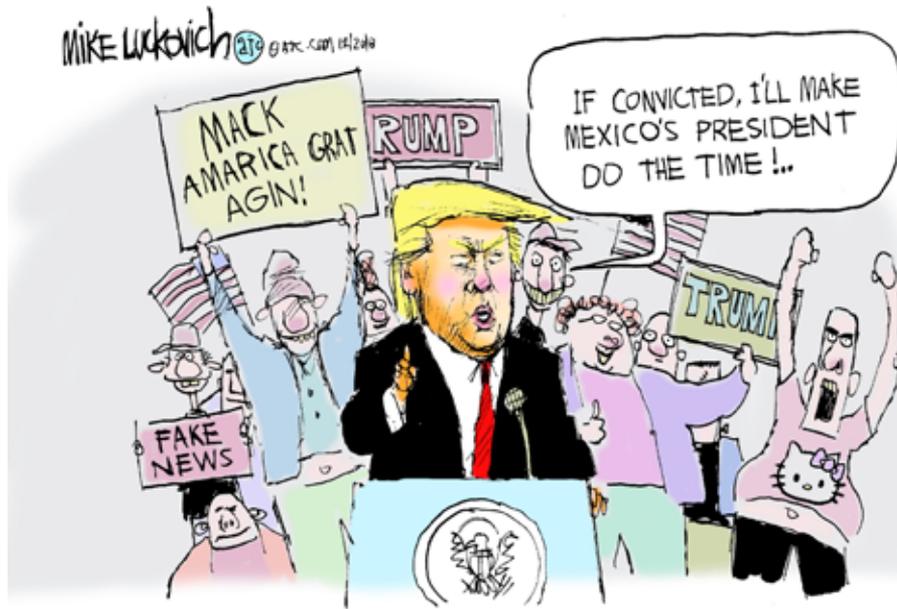
Dethroned EPA Grifter-in-Chief and former Oklahoma AG Scott Pruitt accepted \$50,000 – apparently in cash – from a Wisconsin billionaire for his legal defense fund. Did he keep the briefcase, too?

Laurel: To retiring Oklahoma County commissioners Willa Johnson and Ray Vaughn, whose careers reflected the finest in public service. They will be sorely missed.

Charity begins at ... 65? AARP reports older households donate about 50% more than those headed by younger folk.

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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Arnold Hamilton in the December issue of *The Observer* attributes Peggy DeFrangé's loss to misogyny. He also stated that she faced strong resistance within her own party and that, in my opinion, seems to imply that House District 17 Democrats in Pittsburg, Latimer and LeFlore counties are misogynists.

I, for one, take umbrage with that because, if it were true, how did she manage to win the nomination for the seat in the Democrat primary against a man?

I think there were other factors at play here. One of them was straight party voting. That, in my opinion, not only led to her defeat but also to the defeat of Rep. Donnie Condit. We need to do away with straight party voting, largely because many voters don't understand it. Another factor was the surge in Trump voters going to the polls.

I don't think Mr. Hamilton meant to call District 17 Democrats misogynists, but, if he did, he needs to look deeper into the factors that led to defeat of not only Mrs. DeFrangé but also to Rep. Condit.

Clare Thomas
McAlester

Editor's Note: Clare Thomas is

vice chair of the Pittsburg County Democrats.

Arnold Hamilton responds: I was not attempting to blame Peggy DeFrangé's defeat solely on misogyny or to in any way suggest all District 17 Democrats are misogynistic. I try to never paint any group with such a broad brush.

The point I was making is that some Democrats were debating/discussing that issue during the primaries. When I attended the Pittsburg County Democrats' Christmas party last December, I was asked flat out whether I thought a woman could win the HD 17 seat. I said I had no doubt a woman could win – and pointed, as an example, to Kalyn Free's election as Pittsburg County DA some years ago. But the mere fact I was asked the question indicates it was on the minds of some voters – perhaps even being used against DeFrangé.

As pointed out elsewhere in the December Observer, the Republican tsunami swamped rural Democratic candidates across the state – knocking out incumbents like Condit and those like DeFrangé who were attempting to hold Democratic seats. The reasons for that will require some serious, long-term research – espe-

cially since so many rural voters clearly are voting against their self-interest [see Opportunity Missed, December Observer].

And yes, straight party voting is something this state must address – we are among a dwindling minority that allows it.

Editor, *The Observer*:

Why do Oklahomans continue to vote Republican?

Since they have controlled the state Senate and House of Representatives, they have driven public education to the bottom of the barrel; allowed our infrastructure to deteriorate; pushed the tuition in our state universities to record highs; over-crowded our penal institutions while understaffing them; gutted the Department of Mental Health, Department of Human Services, and Oklahoma State Department of Health; and turned down Medicaid funding, thereby increasing the closing rates for our rural hospitals.

I could go on and on but you get the picture. I am almost 80 years of age. It looks as if I won't live long enough to see it change.

Robert S. Kennedy Jr.
Harrah

Editor, *The Observer*:

Just say no. Republican leaders and Gov.-Elect Kevin Stitt want him to appoint and control unelected state agency heads. That is a terrible idea for taxpaying citizens.

It was stopped in Oklahoma decades ago to avoid firing and replacing competent, knowledgeable administrators with the latest governor's political campaign cronies and jobless, but unqualified family members from the top to bottom of agencies.

Trust me. We don't want those folks trying to run state government. Incompetence in these roles would lead to more, not less wasted state dollars and poorer service for Oklahoma citizens.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Saving The Watchdogs

I often refer to myself as “an ink-stained wretch.”

It’s not some lame attempt at self-deprecation. It’s truth.

I’ve loved newspapers since ... well ... since I can remember. As a first grader, I pored every morning over the Oklahoman, my father’s paper of choice. I was thrilled when the Tumelsons next door finished reading, and gave me their copy of, the Oklahoma Journal. By second grade, I was writing my own paper, which I then delivered to neighbors on my block in Midwest City. I carried the hand-printed copies in a white canvas shoulder bag my mother made – it looked just like one the real carriers wore.

When dad was transferred to Edwards Air Force Base in California, I thrilled to the daily arrival of the Los Angeles Times. I often walked what seemed like a mile round-trip to the base’s commercial center to buy the afternoon Los Angeles Herald Examiner.

When we returned to Oklahoma, I rode my bike three blocks to Crest Foods to buy the afternoon Oklahoma City Times. I was especially delighted with the “blue streak,” the day’s final edition. Weird, I know.

I don’t know why I was born with ink coursing through my veins – I just was. There’s no family newspaper lineage, so far as I know.

I reminisce about my lifelong love affair with newspapers because of the state of print journalism today. #Sad.

It is especially dire in our state capital, where the Oklahoman is now owned by a New York-based newspaper chain that is best known for gutting staffs and shrinking the number of pages. Its focus is profit, not quality journalism.

Our founding editor, the late Frosty Troy, and I often cussed and discussed the Oklahoman’s penchant for editorializing in its news columns and serving up far-right propaganda on its opinion pages. But we always urged the Observer family to read it, because we viewed it as an important asset to our public square.

Sadly, GateHouse Media’s acquisition of the Oklahoman seems more like the final stage of a death

spiral. GateHouse promptly fired 37 employees and cut the number of sections. More recently, it announced the paper is shrinking its delivery area – lopping off about 7,000 subscribers – and no longer will be available in coin-operated vending machines.

As you can see from reading Jim Hightower’s column on the next page, slash and burn is GateHouse’s standard operating procedure.

Interestingly, the Oklahoman recently hosted a state-of-the-paper luncheon for about 100 readers, not only to discuss the financial challenges it faces but also to solicit news coverage ideas.

The bottom line seemed to be this: The newspaper will not survive unless OKC embraces it through subscriptions and advertising.

As an ink-stained wretch, let me be clear: I don’t want the Oklahoman to go away, either. At the same time, I also must point out that newspaper readers are savvy – they may recognize the importance of a watchdog press, but they also know when they’re paying more and getting less.

I kept a log Dec. 17-27 of the Oklahoman’s number of sections and pages. Eight of the 11 days, the paper was squeezed into two sections – it typically printed at least four before GateHouse’s Oct. 1 purchase.

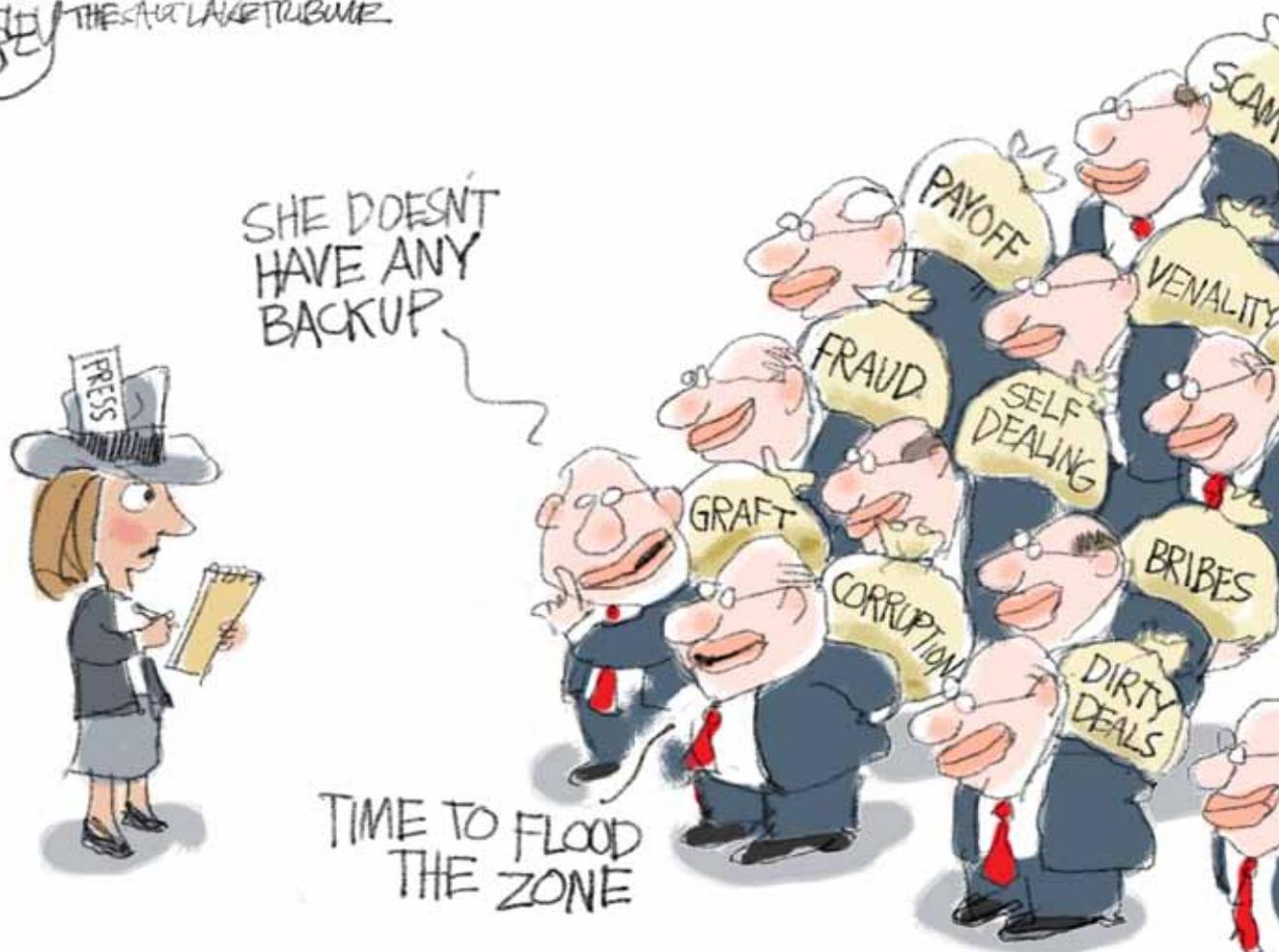
On three of the 11 days, it contained a mere 20 pages; on two others, it was 26 pages. The largest paper was Sunday, Dec. 23 – five sections, 46 pages, not including the advertising circulars.

An Observer reader told me the Oklahoman is so thin, her carrier can’t throw it from his car and reach her porch. He instead gets out and walks up to leave it on her porch. Excellent customer service, but pitiful when considering this is the state capital’s lone daily.

I can’t help but wonder whether more readers would be inclined to stick with the Oklahoman if they saw serious investment from GateHouse in the product – a signal we’re all in this together.

There are no easy answers in the fast-changing media world, but it seems clear newspapers that invest in their product are reaping rewards. Just look

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



Free The Free Press From Wall Street Plunderers

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Editor's Note: This column by our friend and syndicated columnist Jim Hightower calls out the "hedge-fund scavengers" and "ruthless Wall Street profiteers" gobbling up and looting America's newspapers. It is of particular significance to Oklahoma, because one of the companies cited, GateHouse, is the new owner of the Oklahoman. Since taking over Oct. 1, GateHouse has fired 37 – about a third of the Oklahoman's employees – and consolidated sections, most days printing about half the pages it did previously.

Unfortunately, Creators Syndicate declined to distribute Hightower's column to The Oklahoma Observer and other publications because it feared blowback from the two media chains named in it. We are pleased to publish Hightower's column here, not only because we fight tirelessly against censor-

ship, but also because we believe our readers have a right to know who is guardian of the state's largest daily.

A two-panel cartoon I recently saw showed a character with a sign saying: "First they came for the reporters." In the next panel, his sign says: "We don't know what happened after that."

It was, of course, a retort to Donald Trump's ignorant campaign to demonize the news media as "the enemy of the people." But when it comes to America's once-proud newspapers, their worst enemy is not Trump – nor is it the rising cost of newsprint or the "free" digital news on websites.

Rather, the demise of the real news reporting by our city and regional papers is a product of their profiteering owners. Not the families and companies that built and nurtured true journalism, but the new

breed of fast-buck hucksters who've scooped up hundreds of America's newspapers from the bargain bins of media sell-offs.

The buyers are hedge-fund scavengers with names like Digital First and GateHouse. They know nothing about journalism and care less, for they're ruthless Wall Street profiteers out to grab big bucks fast by slashing the journalistic and production staffs of each paper, voiding all employee benefits [from pensions to free coffee in the breakroom], shriveling the paper's size and news content, selling the presses and other assets, tripling the price of their inferior product – then declaring bankruptcy, shutting down the paper, and auctioning off the bones before moving on to plunder another town's paper.

By 2014, America's two largest media chains were not venerable publishers who believe that a newspaper's mission includes a commitment to truth and a civic responsibility, but GateHouse and Digital First, whose managers believe that good journalism is measured by the personal profit they can squeeze from it.

As revealed last year in an American Prospect article, GateHouse executives had demanded that its papers cut \$27 million from their operating expenses. Thousands of newspaper employees suffered that \$27 million cut in large part because one employee – the hedge fund's CEO – had extracted \$54 million in personal pay from the conglomerate, including an \$11 million bonus.

To these absentee owners and operators, our newspapers are just mines, entitling them to extract enormous financial wealth and social well-being from our communities.

The core idea of the "civic commons" is that we are a self-governing people, capable of creating and sustaining a society based on common good.

A noble aspiration!

But achieving it requires a basic level of community-wide communication – a reliable resource that digs out and shares truths so people know enough about what's going on to be self-governing. This is the role Americans have long expected their local and regional newspapers to play – papers that are not merely in our communities, but of, by, and for them.

Of course, being profit-seeking entities, that are usually enmeshed in the local moneyed establishment, papers have commonly [and often infamously] fallen far short of their noble democratic purpose. Overall, though, a town's daily [or, better yet, two or more dailies] makes for a more robust civic life by devoting journalistic resources to truth telling.

But local ownership matters, as some 1,500 of our towns have learned after Wall Street's corporate demigods of greed have swept in without warning to seize their paper, gut its journalistic mission, and devour its assets. For example, Digital Media, a huge private-equity profiteer, snatched the St. Paul Pioneer Press and, demanding a ridiculous 25% profit

margin from its purchase, stripped the newsroom staff from a high of 225 journalists to 25!

As Robert Kuttner reported, these tyrannical private equity firms are paper constructs that produce nothing but profits for faraway speculators. He notes that the blandly-named entities only exist "thanks to three loopholes in the law" – the first lets them operate in the dark, the second provides an unlimited tax deduction for the massive amounts of money they borrow to buy up newspapers, and the third allows them to profit by intentionally bankrupting the paper they take over.

Our right to a free press is meaningless if Wall Street thieves destroy our communities' presses. The good news is that many enterprising people are devising ways to rescue their newspapers. For more information, go to dfmworkers.org.

Watchdogs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

at the New York Times, which now has more paying subscribers than ever – about 3.6 million, three-quarters of whom are digital readers.

We at The Observer know well the challenges of a rapidly changing media landscape. Our economic model once relied almost exclusively on paid subscriptions. Now, we must monetize special events, including monthly community forums; major fundraisers like last spring's An Evening With Dan Rather; and connect with readers at okobserver.org and via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to help keep the lights on and presses running.

As a loyal reader, you can help by sending gift subscriptions to friends and family you think would benefit from The Observer's hard-hitting, insightful analysis, commentary and reporting. Our special holiday rates remain in effect through January. See page 47 for details.

It's not clear what the future holds for a watchdog press in Oklahoma. But this we do know: a free press isn't really free. It's expensive to keep top-notch, well-trained journalism professionals on the beat. But it would be far more costly to our democratic republic to lose those independent eyes and ears.

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RHETORIC vs. REALITY

*Stitt Wants To Run Government Like A Business.
He Also Wants Oklahoma To Be A Top 10 Education State.
Is Either Goal Realistic Or Attainable?*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

For an outsider, Gov.-elect Kevin Stitt sure is acting like an insider.

As he prepares to assume office Jan. 14, the Tulsa mortgage lender and political newcomer not only is tapping political veterans for key inaugural and administration posts, but also is spouting traditional Republican themes, including applying business principles to government.

The same political vision that drove state government off the fiscal cliff?

It's too early to know, of course, but Stitt's pre-inaugural rhetoric suggests he, like so many statehouse GOP leaders past, believes state government remains bloated and inefficient despite repeated evidence to the contrary.

He specifically warned lawmakers and state agencies that the State Board of Equalization's certification of \$612 million more to appropriate next year is "not a blank check."

"This is not something that you can just come in and say, 'Hey, how can we fund our pet projects.'"

Sounds reasonable, until you consider vital state services mostly faced starvation budgets in the eight years since Republicans seized virtual supermajorities in both legislative houses and control of all state-wide offices.

The Legislature made modest first strides last session toward reversing the nation's steepest education cuts, for example – giving teachers their first across-

the-board raise in a decade and adding \$50 million to classroom funding.

But it was only a first step. And other key services – from corrections to transportation, law enforcement to health care – are standing in line hoping to recoup appropriations lost when GOP lawmakers pursued income tax cuts and corporate welfare that cost the state treasury about \$2 billion a year.

The notion that state government should be run like a business long has been a Republican applause line but it is largely meaningless. In the last decade, GOP statehouse leaders themselves ordered up independent analyses they were convinced would prove once and for all that state agencies squander huge chunks of tax dollars.

They aren't. In fact, they're remarkably efficient, for the most part.

For evidence, look no further than the \$844,000 then Speaker Lance Cargill and co-Senate President Glenn Coffee insisted the state spend on hiring an independent firm, MGT of America, to audit the state Department of Corrections in 2007-08.

It found no significant inefficiencies or places to cut, but instead recommended changes to reduce prison growth and spending more tax dollars to add 4,000 prison beds and repair aging facilities.

Yet, one of Stitt's early cabinet appointees was former Tulsa Sen. Mike Mazzei as secretary of the budget who, the governor-elect said, "will continue to ensure that our fiscal house is in order and that accountability and transparency measures are implemented with the state's use of Oklahomans' hard-earned tax dollars."

Mazzei is perhaps best known as an outspoken critic of corporate welfare, tax incentives lavished on businesses often without regard for their effectiveness. This should be a good sign ... except that Mazzei's post-Senate rhetoric also seems to mirror Stitt's on government spending habits.

"Which candidate will help get Oklahoma's financial house in order?" Mazzei wrote in a pre-election newsletter distributed by The Oklahoma Opportunity Project, a group he helped create and for which he

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served as honorary chairman.

“We can’t afford the same shotty [sic] financial practices of the past such as spending too much money in good times and handing out far too many special tax deals to the politically well-connected. We must have more transparency and accountability.”

That can be interpreted myriad ways. But Stitt has made clear he wants to reform the state’s budget process, with special emphasis on performance metrics. The Legislature, which controls the purse, would have a lot to say, of course, on any such changes.

But both Stitt and lawmakers would be wise to consider the counsel of former state Treasurer Scott Meacham, now president and CEO of i2E, which describes itself as a non-profit corporation that mentors technology-based start-up companies in Oklahoma.

In a recent newspaper column, Meacham said he quickly learned when transitioning from private business to government [he served in Democratic Gov. Brad Henry’s administration, then also as treasurer] that “state government can benefit from the implementation of principles from business, but it is something fundamentally different.”

“When I first came to state government, I believed the state was made up of one guy digging the ditch while four watched. I found the opposite to be true. State employees at all levels take what are oftentimes much lowering paying jobs than they can get in the private sector because they are passionate about the people they serve ...

“Over the past five-plus years, these dedicated professionals have worked to serve the needs of their constituencies while their budgets have been eviscerated with cuts of up to 35% or more, which has left them unable to meet the needs they are tasked with serving.”

As one who rarely voted and has never served in public office, Stitt seems inclined toward the GOP’s cut-your-way-to-prosperity rhetoric. That trickle-down philosophy has proven itself a failure time and again – from Reaganomics to Kansas’ Gov. Sam Brownback to the Republican-dominated Oklahoma Legislature.

If Stitt wholeheartedly pursues an end to corporate welfare – remember Mazzei’s line: “far too many special tax deals to the politically well-connected”? – he might be able to ensure Oklahoma can fully fund vital state services without a general tax increase.

Alas, it won’t be easy for the governor – whose primary tools are the veto pen and a bully pulpit – to convince lawmakers to turn against deep-pocketed special interests whose campaign contributions are vital to re-election.

The primary laboratory for Stitt’s vision – as he’s articulated so far – will be public education.

The governor-elect insists he wants Oklahoma to be a Top 10 education state. The legislative leadership swears school funding remains a top priority, too. With a projected \$612 million more to spend next year ... who knows?

Stitt and lawmakers will have the money to build on last spring’s long overdue investment in public ed.

The Oklahoma Education Association made clear where it thinks the money should go – seeking a \$150 million increase in classroom funding, raises for teachers and support personnel, and an 8% cost-of-living hike for retirees.

“We’re going to take them [Stitt and legislative leaders] at their word and work with them to make this happen,” OEA President Alicia Priest said. “All of this is necessary to fix our education system.”

Indeed, it is. But it’s also true that other vital state services are in dire shape, something Priest acknowledges: “We know education doesn’t [operate] in a bubble.” But she added, “We have to get education right” because Oklahoma’s economic future depends on it.

Everyone seems to agree on that – from Stitt, House Speaker Charles McCall and Senate President Pro-Tem-designate Greg Treat to teachers and public ed advocates. As usual, the devil will be in the details.

There are more than a few members of the GOP’s legislative supermajority, for example, that think investments in Oklahoma’s public education system must be coupled with “reform” – fewer school districts and superintendents, more accountability for student and teacher performance, and more competition [read: privatization].

They need to get a grip on reality.

First, school consolidation already is occurring, naturally – about 100 fewer districts now than four decades ago, even though student enrollment is up more than 100,000 since 1992-93.

Second, a preoccupation with bubble testing conspired with starvation budgets to undermine student achievement and drive thousands of the state’s best and brightest teachers from the classroom.

And finally, research indicates students in charter and private schools, on average, perform no better – and in many cases, worse – on standardized tests.

This is what we know works: Spending the money necessary to reduce class sizes and to hire [and retain] the best teachers.

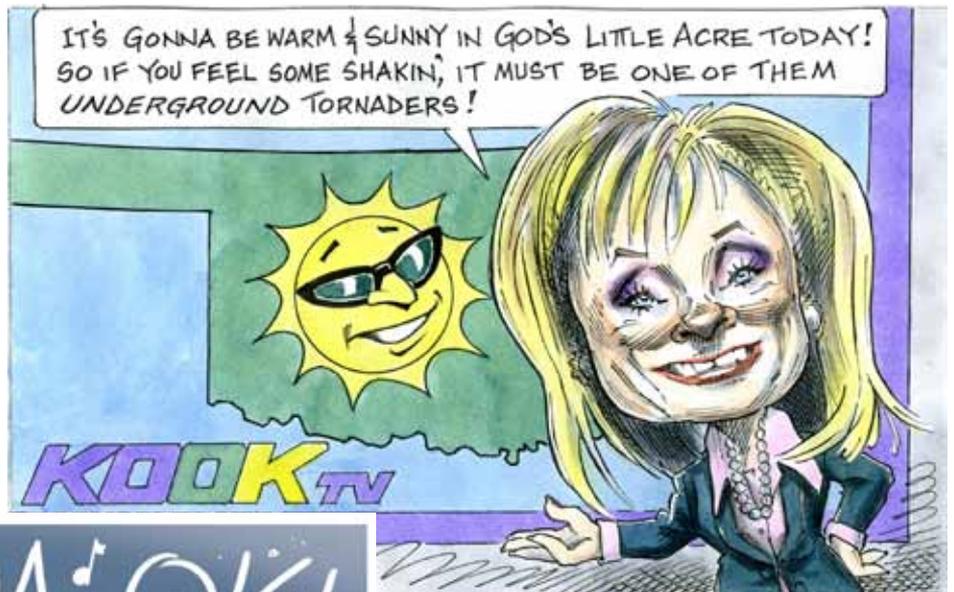
Oklahoma was on its way to becoming a national model with Gov. Henry Bellmon’s landmark 1990 reforms, HB 1017. Unfortunately, anti-public ed forces – driven by hatred of teacher unions and a quest to monetize public education – worked around-the-clock to derail the blueprint.

That all-out assault on public schools led to starvation budgets, mushrooming class sizes and – finally – last spring’s walkout.

It would be wise – dare we say, visionary? – for the Legislature to build on the financial investments made last spring by sticking with what we know works.

To actually become a Top 10 state in education will require significant, long-term financial investment, the likes of which Oklahoma has seen only once before. You get what you pay for, Mr. Stitt.

THE DEPARTING GOVERNOR



FALLIN'S FREE-FALL

*Once Widely Popular, Oklahoma's Governor
Leaves Office As The Nation's Least Liked.
How Will She Be Remembered?*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

With just over a month left in her second and final term, Gov. Mary Fallin publicly signed 21 commutations for non-violent offenders incarcerated before voters approved criminal justice reforms that would have kept them out of prison in the first place.

It was an emotional scene, the once hard-nosed, lock-'em-up governor offering grace to the inmates, as many of their family and friends cheered, wiped tears and exchanged hugs.

"As we prepare for the Christmas holiday season," Fallin said, her voice breaking, "let's not forget there

is a God of second chances.”

Ironically, the ceremony served as something of a metaphor for Fallin’s eight years as governor. She was bestowing do-overs on the 21 inmates – she would commute nine more sentences later in the month – when it was she who may well be left wishing for second chances.

Fallin staked her claim to Oklahoma history in 2010, capturing 60%-plus of the vote in becoming the state’s first female governor. Four years later, she rolled to re-election, the choice of nearly 56% of voters.

As she leaves office this month, though, Fallin owns an ignominious distinction as the nation’s least popular governor – 75% of Oklahomans giving her performance thumbs down in a recent Morning Consult survey.

Considered in its totality, it’s almost unimaginable Fallin’s long, mostly charmed political career could end like this. From state representative to lieutenant governor, Congress to governor, she never lost a campaign. Most weren’t even close.

But it’s worth noting that until elected governor, Fallin wasn’t in a front-and-center, make-it-happen political post. As a state representative from the then-minority party, she had little power – only one of 149 lawmakers. As lieutenant governor, she had even less stroke. As a member of Congress from a small state? You get the picture.

Oklahoma’s governorship, of course, is short on power, too. But it does have important tools that enable governors to influence, even define public policymaking – two prime examples: the veto pen and the bully pulpit.

Fallin’s fall from grace is littered with examples in which she misplayed or underplayed her hand, convincing more and more Oklahomans she wasn’t up to the challenge. Three moments, though, stand out as illustrative of the woulda, coulda, shouldas that defined her eight years as governor:

1. Early in her first term, Fallin announced Oklahoma would not accept federal funding to set up an Affordable Care Act health insurance exchange or to expand Medicaid.

She initially accepted a \$54 million federal grant to create an online marketplace for Oklahomans to shop for health insurance, but later bowed to pressure from GOP Senate ideologues who wanted nothing to do with ObamaCare.

This turned out to be a huge mistake. First, the ACA now is so popular that Republicans across the country actually campaigned to protect its provisions. Second, it made Fallin look weak and ineffective to be stampeded into reversing course. Finally, the failure to expand Medicaid pushed rural hospitals, in particular, to the brink of insolvency and proved to be especially harmful to Native Americans.

Just last month, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a report specifically citing adverse effects of Oklahoma’s failure to expand Medicaid –

not only on Native Americans, who have lower rates of health coverage, but also to Indian Health Services and tribal care programs that “fail to receive payment for the services provided to lower income patients.”

The governor long insisted the state couldn’t afford its tiny contribution to the expanded system, but that’s baloney. The reality is, hundreds of millions of Oklahoma tax dollars sent to Washington are now being spent on health care in other states ... while Oklahoma’s health outcomes worsen.

2. Oklahoma’s capital punishment protocol came under worldwide scrutiny after the botched April 2014 execution of Clayton Lockett, who writhed on a gurney for 43 minutes before dying. It intensified in January 2015 when it was learned the state used the wrong chemical to execute Charles Warner.

The spotlight shined directly on Fallin not only as the state’s top elected leader, but also because the governor has the final say on executions.

A grand jury investigating the flawed executions issued a scathing report that led to the resignations of Fallin’s chief counsel and the state’s corrections director, further tarnishing the governor’s image.

3. Last spring’s two-week teacher walkout – and the build-up to it – clearly damaged Fallin’s public persona.

Why? First, her proposals to generate more revenue to fund vital state services, including education, would have shifted more of the tax burden to the state’s working class. Second, the budget battles highlighted her coziness with the state’s carbon barons, who opposed a gross production tax hike to pay for a teacher pay raise.

Fallin’s tenure was far more complex than these examples – we haven’t discussed her tepid response to drilling-induced earthquakes or her office’s lack of transparency when it came to open records requests – but they serve as snapshots of how a political career could fall so far, so fast.

Not surprisingly, the governor has tried in her final months to put a bow on a lump of coal, arguing she’s helped leave the state in better shape than when she took over.

It is true that state revenues are in a better place, but it was less because of Fallin’s leadership than happenstance: recovery from a national recession finally was fueled in Oklahoma by higher oil and gas prices.

Governors alone have no power to affect such market outcomes, but like presidents claim credit when times are good and shrug like everyone else when they’re not.

At least for the immediate future, Fallin may best be remembered for two things: Her abysmal approval rating and her compassion and sense of fairness in commuting 30 sentences for inmates who never should have been behind bars in the first place.

It’s not hard to imagine the governor wishing she, too, could have second, third and fourth chances to rewrite the history of her administration.



*‘People, I just want to say,
 you know, can we all get along?’*

BY CAL HOBSON

On May 1, 1992 armed robber, jailed felon, suspected drunk driver, less-than-model citizen and target of Los Angeles police brutality Rodney Glen King uttered those famous words following six days of rioting in the City of Angels.

The violent and deadly carnage, which resulted in 63 deaths and \$2 billion of widespread destruction, erupted immediately after the acquittal in state court of four officers who were seen on video tape striking him with batons at least 33 times, breaking bones and putting him the hospital.

Eventually, however, a federal jury imposed prison time for two of the men in blue and awarded the soon to be the famous and previously infamous King \$3.8 million in damages. By the way, the newly minted millionaire soon married one of the jurors who found in his favor.

In a somewhat similar vein of thought, biblical scholars say an earlier and more articulate version

of Rodney’s request for civility came from Jesus himself when He preached “love thy neighbor as yourself.”

Though these pleas are separated by 2,000 years, and were uttered by two very different and contrasting figures, both admonitions are simple, sincere, compelling and yet often ignored. Why?

Because wisdom alone, of course, does not seem to shield us from violating the urgings of Jesus and King nor does station in life, perceived power, accumulated wealth, inherited beauty or even a lucky last name such as Roosevelt, Clinton or Bush.

Or put another way ... DNA may determine the color of one’s eyes but not the looseness of a tattling tongue or thoughtless transgression – to which this tattler/transgressor admits guilt.

But Rejoice and Celebrate! Every New Year’s Day offers the opportunity for each of us to make *resolutions* whereby we promise improved behavior rang-

ing from, let's say, contributing to a kinder, gentler world; or more likely to displaying a lower number on our bathroom scales; or even, just for luck, eating black eyes peas on Jan. 1.

However, due to my proven track record of rarely keeping any resolutions longer than the time it takes me to type them, I have chosen an easier path for 2019 which is: *I hereby resolve* to make no resolutions at all for myself but five for and about others!

So in the arcane, irrelevant and outdated language preferred by us politicians ...

1. BE IT RESOLVED THAT: For The Doubting Thomas', Nancy Pelosi's and Chuck Schumer's, please don't just presume that whatever President Donald Trump says is *always* a lie. In the spirit of bipartisanship, version 2.0, show some patience and wait until he confirms the fib in his very next tweet. Then you can lob your "liar, liar, pants on fire" press release or, if you prefer, award him multiple Pinocchio's.

2. BE IT RESOLVED THAT: For the legions of Hillbilly Hillary Haters, and you know who you are, resolve to admit your disdain directed at the "Lock Her Up Lady from Little Rock" has more to do with her smarts, self confidence and accomplishments and less to do with her missing emails, wayward husband and worldly airs.

3. BE IT RESOLVED THAT: New University of Oklahoma President James Gallogly proved his *resolve* when allegedly declaring that he is the "meanest SOB" his predecessor would ever meet. Strong words for sure but confirmed recently when he fired dozens of longtime, loyal and mostly blue-collar workers in Norman just before the holidays. Was it really Grinch Gallogly that stole Christmas Just Past from so many or a spendthrift previous president? Depends on who you ask ... and probably one's political party registration.

4. BE IT RESOLVED THAT: During his recent successful campaign, Gov.-elect Kevin Stitt, R-Tulsa, may have stepped in a bit of bulls**t by promising, lickety-split, to make Oklahoma a Top 10 state in everything great! HOWEVER AND THEREFORE, as challenging as that may prove to be, an easy place to start, *right here, right now*, would be for him, in the name of participatory democracy, to vote at least as often as the once a decade federal census is conducted.

Come on, Kev. Take a break from reading pages of fine print in the 30-year mortgages you issue or even the time-consuming hiring process as you place on the state payroll all those Sen. Jim Inhofe staffers who will help you run government like a business. But beware. Based on the size of the federal deficit, none of them may know very much about balancing a budget nor does, sadly, the lady you are about to replace. Speaking of her ...

5. BE IT RESOLVED THAT MAYBE: Declaring Mary Fallin the worst governor in Oklahoma history is

premature, especially since she is still the incumbent and THEREFORE has a few days left for redemption; and FURTHER, such designation ignores the fact that a former governor, Jack C. Walton, was actually impeached and removed from office! Walton, a wild-eyed, *cigar-smoking, liberal Democrat*, drew the wrath, rebuke and ire of the 1923 Legislature due to his ardent, impassioned disgust and disdain for murderous members of the Ku Klux Klan during his brief 313 days of service.

Really. I'm not making that up.

By contrast Fallin, a clear eyed, *non-smoking, fiscally conservative Republican*, has managed to: Frequently and knowingly bankrupt our state; gleefully turn down billions of our own health care dollars earmarked for thousands of sick and suffering Okies; purposely allow a trailer, sans the required skirting, *and* a foreign-made car allegedly owned by a foreign-looking person to be placed/parked on the mansion grounds; undoubtedly, commit a few other high crimes and misdemeanors.

However, according to many respected historians, including Rush Limbaugh, Sarah Palin, Sally Kern, Beetle Bailey and Donald John Trump, Fallin's short-sighted, unthinking, unconstitutional [but in my opinion courageous] veto of a bill written to allow insane people, illegal illegals, a few far right thinking Democrats and even former but always nutty Veep Dick Chaney to carry multiple AR-15s most anywhere in Oklahoma is what sealed our lame duck lady's listing as *the worst ever in state history*.

But, hey, fellow sufferers, look on the bright side. Her well-earned historical asterisk makes Fallin a lock for appointment to any number of important vacancies in the Trump Administration. After all, he could do worse and already has ... many times ... which raises a question. Anyone seen Scott Pruitt lately?

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



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Ignoring Reality

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

When I was about four years old, a family in town had agreed to purchase a full-blood Boxer pup from friends of theirs who had a beautiful female Boxer. However, somewhere along the line the mama Boxer had been visited by a bird dog and the pup looked more like Petey, from the old Little Rascal show than an AKC registered Boxer.

By chance, we were without a dog and the rejected pup came to live with us. We named him Bozo and what we got was truly a faithful friend and companion. He had the heart of Lassie, the adventure of RinTinTin, and the valor of Rex the Wonder Dog. No amount of money could have purchased a better companion for my brother and me as we experienced special times and special places exploring the countryside from one end to the other.

The bond that I had with that mongrel named Bozo helped instill my deeply held conviction that true friends are not normally those from wealth and privilege, but instead are those who may simply need a fair shake, a kind word or a helping hand to boost their confidence and give them a sense of self-worth.

Several years later, Mom and Dad purchased a nicer

home with additional land for our cow-calf operation. Cross country, the new place was about four miles from the old one and Bozo who was by then an old dog had a hard time with the move. Every few days, he would disappear. We would drive out to check cattle and there he would be laying on the front porch of the old house coping with his inability to face the reality of our move. Each time we would load him up and take him back to the new place he seemed feebler. Then one day, Bozo just didn't show up. We searched but could not find him.

In retrospect, it is difficult to imagine the emotional torment that Bozo faced. He could not overcome his rhetorical logic that returning to the familiarity of the old house would bring normalcy. He was unable to face the reality of our move and his new surroundings.

Rhetoric is like that. It causes us to ignore reality.

Oklahoma's state government is in crisis. Responses based on dogmatic rhetoric present themselves as failed leadership and an inability to address the reality of the issues we face. Instead of properly funding state agencies, our leaders are chronically unable to overcome the rhetoric of the day.

When I was first elected to the Legislature, the buzz word was Zero Based Budgeting, defined as the theory that the state would save money and eliminate waste if the budget of every state agency were stripped to zero and each agency were required to justify every dollar requested. When legislative leaders realized that budget requests were justified and state government was woefully underfunded, the call for Zero Based Budgeting quietly dissipated pending renewal by some unwitting future legislator.

The current rhetoric at the Capitol supports granting private entities contracts for expensive audits on state agencies. In reality, the evidence shows that the costs of the audits exceed any minimal waste that may be eliminated. The irony is that the budget of

the State Auditor and Inspector who has the constitutional responsibility to perform audits has been repeatedly cut.

As a state this type of rhetoric has moved us away from adequately funding education and roads and mental health and child welfare and veterans' benefits and host of other agencies.

There is currently a dog that wanders up and down the road near my home, a couple of miles in each direction. He reminds me of Bozo from my childhood. Like the state's leaders, they both seem to react based purely on raw emotion rather than the reality of the situation.

Chickasha Democrat David Perryman serves District 56 in the Oklahoma House

Beyond Teacher Pay: Class Size Matters

BY REBECCA FINE

Last April, the Oklahoma Legislature finally passed revenue bills that restored \$480 million of education funding. The majority of the new revenue is being used to fund a long-awaited pay raise for teachers. They also increased funding for school operations by \$50 million, but that is far less than the \$200 million teachers demanded and makes up less than one-third of the amount that has been cut from schools since 2008.

Now, as we near the midpoint of the 2018-19 school year, public school administrators must again struggle with how to allocate insufficient resources.

One commonly cited challenge that educators and students talked about during the walkout was growing classroom sizes, and that concern is well founded. One of the most consistent findings in education research is that class size impacts student outcomes.

It is also a factor that state legislatures can directly control through legislative action. Funding class size limits would build on the progress made last spring and improve education outcomes in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma did successfully reduce class sizes in 1990 but has since backtracked on that progress. HB 1017, the Education Reform Act of 1990, was another landmark reform package brought about by a teacher strike. In addition to generating more funding for public schools and initiating other changes, HB 1017 required class sizes no larger than 20 students per teacher in grades one through five, and a limit of 140 students a day for middle and secondary teachers.

In the initial years following HB 1017, teachers saw a significant drop in classroom size. However, that progress did not last.

By 2002, common education funds were \$158 million below projections, and by Dec. 1 of that year, 189 of the 541 school districts in the state had been exempted from the class-size mandates. Today, all school districts in Oklahoma have been exempted

from HB 1017 class size limits, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Research makes clear why Oklahoma should renew its efforts to reduce classroom sizes. Smaller class sizes are particularly beneficial for students in kindergarten through third grade.

In a prominent study, researchers randomly assigned kindergartners to classrooms varying in class size from 13-15 students to 22-28 students. By third grade, those students in the smaller classes showed achievement gains equivalent to about three months of schooling compared to those in the larger classes. Significantly, these gains lasted throughout their schooling.

Reducing class size may be a particularly good approach for low-income students and students of color. Many of these students face an opportunity gap that makes it more difficult to reach academic proficiency, and schools must determine the best way to address these needs. Some researchers expect the positive effect of class size reduction could narrow the racial opportunity gap by about one-third.

While reducing classroom size requires increased investment, the long-term benefits for schools with a high proportion of low-income students could exceed the costs by 2-1.

As Oklahoma looks towards our next legislative session, there will be many debates about how to spend growing revenue collections. Making strategic decisions about how to spend these dollars begins with taking a closer look at key factors known to directly impact student learning.

Now that we've provided a sorely needed teacher raise, reducing class sizes back to early '90s levels should be the next step to undo the damage caused by years of education cuts.

Rebecca Fine is an education policy analyst with Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.



Sooner Senators On Wrong Side Of History With Yemen Vote

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

On Dec. 14, Oklahoma's Republican senators, James Inhofe and James Lankford, voted in opposition to a Senate amendment which passed by a 54-41 margin to end U.S. support for the civil war in Yemen.

This vote places these two alleged Christian moralists on the wrong side of history – and humanity.

Since the Saudi led invasion of 2015, Yemen has been thrust into a biblical type humanitarian disaster.

Over 50,000 children are estimated to have died from a cholera outbreak, and eight million are on the

brink of famine.

Hundreds of civilians had also been killed in air strikes, some using U.S.-supplied ordinance.

In recent months, public opinion has shifted against Saudi Arabia because of the exposure of Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman's role in the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi who was reporting on the war on Yemen.

Major American newspapers have displayed images of sickly Yemeni children affected by the famine and war.

In a speech on the Senate floor, Inhofe claimed that

the anti-war Senate resolution was flawed because the United States was not engaged in military action in Yemen. This is simply untrue.

In May 2018, the New York Times reported on the presence of American Green Berets on the Saudi-Yemen border.

They had been training Saudi ground forces and pilots, provided intelligence for bomb targeting, and helped locate and destroy caches of ballistic missiles at a launch site that Houthi rebels were using to attack Riyadh.

Private American contractors also trained the Saudi Navy and commanded Yemeni army units.

The United States sold over \$100 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia over three years and \$27 billion in arms to the United Arab Emirates whose ruling al-Nahyan dynasty trained, paid and equipped more than 25,000 Yemeni soldiers.

Lankford claimed that American disengagement would not protect Yemeni civilians.

This is untrue since many civilians have been killed by American-made weapons and cutting off American support would place pressure on the Saudis to accept

a peace agreement.

The faulty logic behind Lankford's position only makes sense if we consider the source of his campaign donations.

According to Open Secrets.com, from 2013 to 2018, he took \$885,385 from the oil and gas industry which has deep ties to Saudi Arabia. Inhofe took \$377,000 during that time, and nearly \$2 million since 1989.

Inhofe also has received \$758,859 from defense companies that do business with the Saudis, including BAE Systems and General Dynamics. He is reported to have purchased tens of thousands of dollars of stock in Raytheon, whose missiles killed 23 civilians in Northern Yemen in April after striking a wedding party.

Inhofe is thus a war profiteer growing rich off the immiseration of Yemen's children. He and Lankford are both on the wrong side of history and bring shame to the state through their vote.

Jeremy Kuzmarov teaches at Tulsa Community College as an adjunct lecturer in American history and is author of three books on U.S. foreign policy. He is active in the Tulsa Peace Fellowship.

Sins Of Religion

BY FRANK SILOVSKY

The Oklahoman reported in October that the Catholic Archdiocese of Oklahoma City was severing ties with the 17 other Christian denominations making up the Oklahoma Conference of Churches.

A letter from the Archbishop apparently said he was troubled by his perception that OCC leadership reflected a drift from "ecumenical collaboration to secular politics."

This news saddened me because I have many Catholic friends and much admiration for OCC, which demonstrates visible commitment to religious tolerance and serving people in need.

It should be said that the Catholic Church has a political agenda of its own.

By opposing contraception and birth control, Catholic teaching insures more abortions, which are also opposed. When the National Conference of Bishops lobbies Congress every year opposing birth control services for women, they cite America's 70 million Catholics as allies.

World population growth today exceeds 80 million annually [births over deaths], while millions of woman lack access to contraception and birth control services they desire.

Catholic teaching that LGBT love is sinful causes psychological damage to individuals,

families and loved ones of LGBT people everywhere.

For longer than 20 years, sexual orientation, whether gay or straight, has been deemed a natural human characteristic by the American Medical Association, Psychiatric Association, Psychological Association, and National Association of Social Workers – no more a sickness or sin than skin color.

The Catholic Church's male-only priesthood and power hierarchy are anachronistic and misogynistic, and the celibacy requirement for priests apparently attracts some with sexual pathology.

By shielding their own from prosecution for crimes against children, for decades, the Catholic Church has behaved like a crime syndicate.

The greatest threats facing the world include challenges related to population, the danger of nuclear war, and climate change caused by emissions of greenhouse gases.

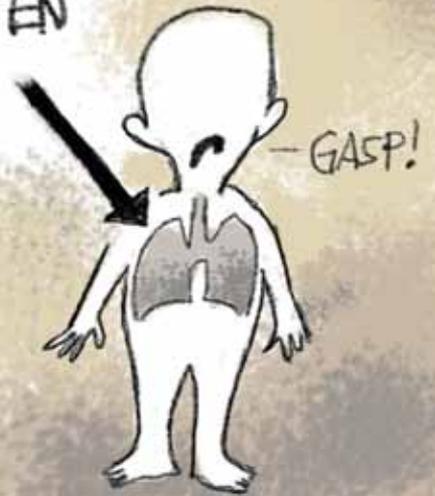
Before it is too late, humanity must embrace religious and secular leadership responsible and accountable to nature and future generations, who must inherit whatever planet we leave them.

Frank Silovsky lives in Oklahoma City.

DETAILS ABOUT THE ROLLBACKS TO CLEAN AIR REGULATIONS...



ARE BEING WRITTEN HERE



Coal-Fired Plants, Oil-Gas Companies In Legal Cross-Hairs Over Toxic Waste

BY JAN NEW

A recent edition of The Hill's Overnight Energy Newsletter reported the U.S. had 1,470 coal-fired power generating plants in 2007, decreasing to under 1,000 in 2017 due to increased use of natural gas and renewables and the cost of building new plants, which trade associations agree would require subsidies – tax incentives and loan guarantees.

There is also more than 40 years of public debate about the health and environmental consequences of mining coal, burning it, and the impacts of disposing of its wastes – reportedly more than 70 million tons annually in landfills and ponds, including filling active and abandoned mines, and recycling it in concrete, cement, soil stabilization, and many house-

hold applications.

What is coal ash? Why is it a threat to public health and the environment? How is Oklahoma impacted? How is it currently regulated? What is the significance of two petitions currently before the Supreme Court?

The process of burning coal results in production of coal combustion residuals – primarily coal ash, consisting of fly ash or fine particles of burned fuel, and bottom ash. Fly ash, by volume is the largest constituent and can be composed of up to 60% silicon dioxide. It also includes crystalline silica, a human carcinogen [U.S. National Toxicology Program]. There are other life-altering constituents of coal ash including varying trace concentrations of heavy metals.

Managing coal ash isn't simple – not the health and environmental consequences; the current regulations – existing and proposed; or pending litigation and related Supreme Court petitions. These issues are rendered more difficult by a worldwide demand for affordable, safe, and sustainable energy beginning in your home when you turn on the lights.

Why is coal ash disposal a threat to public health and the environment?

Silica dust from crushed rocks in coal mines and pervasive dust from disposal of coal ash pose health risks. If inhaled continuously over time, it can cause silicosis and other serious and fatal respiratory diseases. A progressive form of Black Lung has recently been reported by NPR and Frontline; their documentary film entitled “Coal’s Deadly Dust” will air Jan. 22 on PBS.

There are an estimated 1,400 coal ash sites nationwide with recycling representing a reported \$10 billion industry. In 2008 a large coal ash spill at a Tennessee Valley Authority power plant in Kingston, TN flooded more than 300 acres of land, releasing coal ash into two local rivers at an estimated cleanup of \$1.2 billion.

In 2014 EPA developed rules to regulate coal fly ash as a “non-hazardous” waste under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act [RCRA]. Defined as a “nonpoint source” [diffuse rather than single identifiable source], coal ash is now regulated by the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality through management programs not established under the Clean Water Act [CWA] – concepts being tested by two certiorari petitions before the Supreme Court.

How is Oklahoma impacted?

Bokoshe, OK, population 450, is an historic coal-mining town in LeFlore County – one of six or more sites across the state where coal ash is stored and disposed of in mines, landfills, and ponds. In Bokoshe, coal ash has been recycled for “mine-filling,” a “beneficial use” distinguished from “disposal” where the loose material is deposited in active and abandoned coal mines – a practice not regulated by EPA. Bokoshe also has surface pits used for coal ash disposal and regulated by ODEQ.

In 2006, the National Academy of Sciences cataloged the ways that coal ash with its concentration of heavy metals can pollute ground and surface water. In the interim, environmental organizations examined mine-filling operations in Pennsylvania, finding water quality at risk in 10 locations.

By 2009 an Oklahoma hydrogeologist analyzed one of the disposal pits in Bokoshe and found wastewater from oil and gas wells mixed with coal ash – with resultant pollution of well water and nearby creeks. EPA forced discontinuance of oil and gas wastewater disposal but not the coal ash or the mine-filling.

In June 2018, coal ash contaminants were found at unsafe levels in groundwater at four other coal ash sites in Oklahoma.

How is coal ash currently regulated?

In June 2018 just before Scott Pruitt resigned as EPA administrator, Oklahoma became the first state to be given authority over its coal ash program. Environmental groups resisted the decision, realizing that the state permitting program would mean ODEQ could allow coal ash disposal sites to operate indefinitely with virtually no mandatory public disclosure or oversight.

What is the significance of the two petitions before the U.S. Supreme Court?

After Oklahoma was given authority over its coal ash program, two U.S. Courts of Appeals have partially supported and one has rejected Clean Water Act [CWA] citizen suits seeking to hold power companies liable for discharges of pollutants from coal ash disposal facilities.

In *Upstate Forever v. Kinder Morgan Energy Partners*, the Fourth Circuit held that a discharge of pollutants through groundwater to waters of the U.S. could violate CWA if there was a “direct hydrologic connection.” In *Hawaii Wildlife Fund v. County of Maui*, the Ninth Circuit held that a discharge through groundwater was actionable if traced to an identifiable point source; however, the Sixth Circuit held in two cases that lawsuits based on contaminants discharged through groundwater were precluded by law.

Upstate and *Maui* have petitioned the Supreme Court for certiorari; if granted, the U.S. Supremes will hear and rule on the issue. Recently, the Supreme Court invited the Solicitor General to file briefs for both petitioners on behalf of the U.S. by Jan. 4.

If the Supremes hear the cases and coal ash groundwater contamination is found actionable under the Clean Water Act, coal-fired plants and industries like oil and gas, manufacturing, and mining companies would be liable for costly changes in standard practices and cleanups. Stay tuned.

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

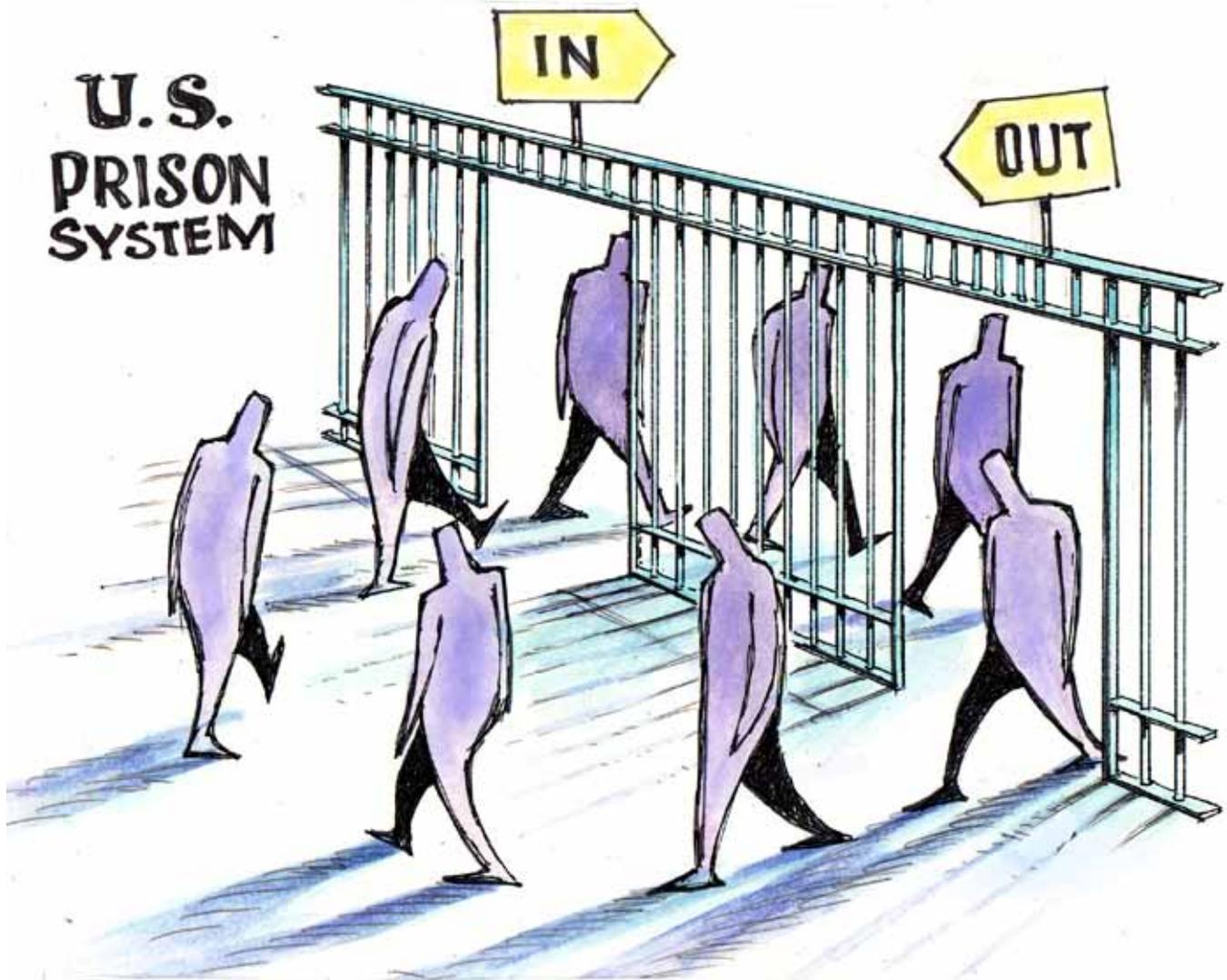
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U.S. PRISON SYSTEM



DAVE GRANLUND © www.davegranlund.com

Funding Inmate Higher Education: Small Investment, Big Payoff

BY ANNA ROUW

Oklahoma has made encouraging progress on justice reform in recent years. Reforms passed in 2016 and 2018 will slow prison population growth and spur investments in rehabilitation. While these are important steps in the right direction, criminal justice reform should also look to bring more rehabilitative programs to those still in prison.

Nearly 27,000 individuals are in Department of Corrections [DOC] custody, and approximately 90% will eventually be released. For justice reform to be suc-

cessful in the long-term, we must prepare those currently incarcerated for meaningful re-entry back into our communities.

One crucial component to successful re-entry is access to post-secondary education.

Incarcerated individuals are under-educated. Among the general public, about one in three adults have a college degree; for formerly incarcerated, fewer than one in 20 do. On average, men entering Oklahoma prisons have a sixth-grade education, and women have an-eighth grade education, according to

DOC staff.

DOC has been proactive in providing high school education to incarcerated individuals at no cost to the individual. Going further to expand access to post-secondary education for Oklahoma's incarcerated individuals would yield benefits not only to incarcerated individuals, but also to the state's safety and budget as a whole.

Investing in post-secondary education in prisons brings multiple benefits. Post-secondary education lowers recidivism primarily by helping formerly incarcerated people get a job after they're released.

According to one study, providing incarcerated individuals with post-secondary education reduces recidivism by 46%. The reason is because those who receive some post-secondary education while incarcerated experience higher rates of post-release employment than those who do not.

As more jobs require higher education, it is important that incarcerated individuals pursue post-secondary education in order to improve their employment options.

Investing in post-secondary for incarcerated individuals is also cost-effective for states.

In 2003, Texas helped 66 incarcerated individuals achieve associate's degrees at a cost of less than \$2.6 million. By the end of three years, the savings from avoiding re-incarceration for this cohort exceeded the cost of educating them.

One study calculated that for every dollar spent on prison post-secondary education, the state receives a four- to five-dollar return on investment by decreasing

the number those of returning to prison.

Prison post-secondary education programs also have a positive effect on prison safety by providing a sense of agency and opportunity. This improves the social climate and overall safety for both inmates and staff.

Oklahoma DOC does provide 27 degree programs and post-secondary courses at 22 of its 27 facilities. However, they are out of reach for many. Individuals are responsible for paying for the costs associated with taking college courses, but most are from low-income backgrounds and often cannot afford classes.

In 2014, the median income for people prior to incarceration was less than \$20,000. While some individuals earn some money while incarcerated, this income is often far below the minimum wage and must be partially allocated to other obligations, like restitution and toiletries.

Without financial assistance, post-secondary education is an impossibility for the vast majority of incarcerated individuals. If legislators want to reduce recidivism and save money through post-secondary education, they have options: increasing DOC appropriations to allow for post-secondary financial assistance or creating a specialized scholarship program through the State Regents for Higher Education, to name a few possibilities.

Expanding access to prison post-secondary education would take relatively small investments and pay big dividends.

Anna Rouw was a criminal justice intern with Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

Tackling The Challenges Of Our Global World

BY JOHN THOMPSON

Here are a retired teacher's suggestions for New Year's Resolutions for educators, school patrons, and students, as well as anyone else seeking a better Oklahoma. I'll start with the easy ones.

First, ask yourself when you last heard anyone who has been in our schools who said anything nice about standardized testing. Then, please notice how even true believers in high stakes testing are rejecting bubble-in accountability.

To take just one example, Shael Polakow-Suransky was a deputy schools chancellor in New York City when corporate reformer Joel Klein used test scores to reward and punish schools. Polakow-Suransky recently tweeted, "The biggest barrier to student learning and closing the achievement gap is the current system of standardized tests."

Thanks in large part to state Superintendent Joy Hofmeister, Oklahoma only has one test with stakes for students, the 3rd grade reading test, and there are ways to mitigate its harm. So, every educator who believes that they have been forced to practice teach-to-the-test education malpractice should ask a question:

What would have happened if we had failed to resist testing mandates that we see as unprofessional and damaging to kids and then we were clobbered by the education budget cuts of recent years?

Then we should ask the tougher questions:

What will I do to drive a stake into the heart of the testing vampire? How will we counter the Oklahoman's call for doubling down on the test-and-punish legislation passed in 2010 that threatened to turn

schooling into a sped up Model T assembly line?

Second, whenever the New York Times, Newsweek, or other online sources publish a database which reveals how your community is doing, put your address in and see how your neighbors are faring. For instance, one database shows how the economic outcomes of poor children in Oklahoma County are in the nation's bottom 17th percentile. Another reveals the collapse of life expectancies of poor, undereducated, mostly white middle aged Oklahomans. A third allowed me to see the life expectancy in my neighborhood [almost 80 years] and that of my former students' neighborhood, the North Highland. Just over three miles to the north, my kids are expected to live almost a decade less.

The latest database shows that Oklahoma City's neighborhoods' segregation declined by 12% from 1990 to 2015 as school segregation increased by 9%. And that helps explain other data on what happened to the 59 poor black boys who grew up in my neighborhood in the 1990s. I knew most of them and one-fifth were incarcerated. It is equally shocking that those kids who are now in their 30's make an average annual income of \$13,000.

Of course, taking the next step and battling against this racial and economic resegregation is much tougher, as are my next proposals.

One reason for increased segregation is the over-expansion of charter schools. Charters, as well as suburban sprawl and magnet schools, and irrational fears have increased separation by choice, but it is more complicated than that.

It was also the culture of competition – using test scores to keep score – that undermined teaching and learning, and further accelerated flight away from neighborhood schools, thus spurring more segregation in school.

Even as most school reformers have joined most school patrons in rejecting stakes being attached to standardized tests, too many choice advocates perpetuate drill and kill by demanding that test scores provide the metric for determining who is winning and losing the fight for students.

Until educators in high-poverty schools win the battle against worksheet-driven malpractice that sucks the joy out of classes, parents will continue to put their own kids in low-poverty charters that don't have to teach-to-the-test.

Third, educators must resist “depersonalized” online learning, whether it occurs in state subsidized online charter systems like EPIC, or so-called “personalized” instruction in traditional public schools. When students criticize programs like Summit Learning, even walking out in protest, educators must stand by our kids.

Above all, parents must condemn online Pre-K-K. In the words of Dipesh Navsaria, our youngest kids need “laps, not apps,” and conversations, not developmentally inappropriate digital academics.

Summit learning is apparently the best of the

inherently dangerous online learning programs. I've seen great and good Summit classes, but I've also witnessed online “instruction” so awful that made me physically ill.

That leads to perhaps the greatest and most complicated challenge to our democracy: We adults should first apologize for failing to teach our kids digital ethics along with digital literacy.

We've completely failed in helping children learn to use and not be used by their cell phones. We are starting far behind as threats to our younger generation and our democracy explode.

In *Like War*, P.W. Singer and Emerson Brookings explain the already-arrived threat: The Weaponization of Social Media.

“Information literacy is no longer merely an education issue but a national security imperative.”

My generation listened but didn't hear the wisdom of the late Steve Goodman:

*The 20th century is almost over,
almost over, almost over,*

The 20th century is almost over – all over this world

The 21st century is almost one-fifth over, and parents and teachers must belatedly help prepare our kids for their new environment. After we welcome the New Year, let's commit, generation to generation, to tackling the challenges of our global world.

John Thompson is an award-winning historian who became an inner-Oklahoma City teacher after the “Hoova” set of the Crips took over his neighborhood and he became attached to the kids in the drug houses. Now retired, he is the author of A Teacher's Tale: Learning, Loving, and Listening to Our Kids.

Re-Imagining 'Oklahoma!'

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

In its fifth revival since 1943, the “re-imagined” award-winning musical *Oklahoma!* returns to Broadway in 2019 with Ado Anne renamed Ado Andy.

For fundamentalist folks in Oklahoma who deplore modern trends about sexuality, the show may be offensive. And even as Oklahoma takes on a renewed right-wing government led by another ultra-religious governor, the image of the state is being recast nationally and internationally in a decidedly different tone.

It happened 75 years ago when *Oklahoma!* delivered a new love-struck cowboy version of musical theater to Broadway. And in 2018 – the same show

slants those Oklahoma cowboys as cowgirls, instead.

The Daniel Fish-directed treatment, sanctioned by the manager of the Rodgers and Hammerstein book, premiered at Oregon's Shakespeare festival last summer to sold-out audiences.

Again sold out at Ann's Warehouse, it next played Sept. 27-Nov. 11 in Brooklyn.

Broadway's preview starts March 19 at Circle on the Square Theatre, 1633 Broadway. Public ticket sales opened Jan. 5.

In essence, this all indicates that the new rendition of the play that gave Oklahoma its state song is plainly "hot" in socially-politically liberal New York where homosexual marriages are reported in the Times in the same vein as those that are heterosexual.

President Trump has not yet commented on such matters, to this pundit's knowledge.

On Dec. 23, New York Times reviewer Laura Collins-Hughes wrote the new "Oklahoma!" with same-sex lovers might seem to have 'gimmick' written all over it. But in Bill Rauch's transformative and important production at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, such worries melt away the instant that Curly [Tatianna Wechsler] made her exuberant entrance, as much fun to root for in romance as Ado Andy [Jonathan Luke Stevens] would turn out to be."

Another reviewer wrote: "In 1943, *Oklahoma!* reinvented the musical and captured the spirit of Amer-

ica." Then he added: "Over 75 years later, this spirit has evolved in ways we never could have hoped, feared or imagined."

That means that some stars of the show are depicted as homosexuals in love and conflict – instead of heterosexual hayseeds in love and conflict.

Another critic wrote that the "reorchestrated and reimagined" show has "always been a very American story, but never like so much of one until now."

Oklahoma! is based on Claremore's Lynn Riggs 1931 classic *Green Grow the Lilacs*, a play that depicts Rogers County at statehood time and in pioneer settings.

Rogers County is where both author, screen writer and playwright Riggs [1899-1954] and cowboy-comedian-actor-pundit Will Rogers [1879-1935] were born and reared in rural settings two decades and 20 miles apart. They were never known to have met. *Joseph H. Carter Sr. is author of President or Precedent: Carl Albert's History Changing Choice [Amazon], Never Met A Man I Didn't Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers [HarperCollins] and The Quotable Will Rogers [Gibbs Smith Publishers]. He was credited in Playbill magazine for his efforts in launching the 1991 Broadway musical The Will Rogers Follies: A Life in Revue. It played 982 performances at the Palace Theater then made multiple national tours in which Carter sometimes played famed aviator Wiley Post.*

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'TAKE A KNEE?'



'JERK A KNEE?'



JOHN COLE
SOMETIMES TRIBUNE
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The Simple Patriot

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

It is a commonplace to say that the Vietnam War changed my generation; however, the specifics of that change are left unexplained. For me, it occasioned a new, more critical approach to the history and actions of my country. [It took some time to bring other historical wounds and scars into relation with criticisms of the war.]

I needed a more critical perspective before I went to college. My high school social studies teachers were Eisenhower Republicans who voted for Bud Wilkinson in 1964 [and against my all-time favorite Oklahoma Democrat, Fred Harris]. They undoubtedly influenced my adolescent love of country and my support for our national mission of fighting communism.

My brother had joined the Marines. I became vaguely aware of what was going on in the world, because I knew he might end up in Southeast Asia, helping to prevent dominoes from falling. Yet there were voices

of dissent.

I recall writing a letter to an editor during high school, advocating a novel solution to social conflict in American: more patriotism!

I stepped on campus at the University of Oklahoma in 1968 as a scholarship athlete, hardly a situation that might naturally produce radical thoughts and actions. My ignorance and naivete were challenged by the learned atmosphere of the university, not the athletic department. I began to ask questions that were at once both new and necessary if I were to understand a world that seemed to be falling apart. Dien Bien Phu. The Tet offensive. Kent State. The Pentagon Papers. Then Watergate.

I learned that our leaders had lied to us and that very many people had died and continued to die because of those lies. I learned that it was possible to question a theory of international relations prevalent

among our leaders. I learned to distinguish political power and moral authority.

My simple high school patriotism had been undermined by education and teachers who wanted me to think. One day in 1971 I stood at third base for the playing of the national anthem before a Big Eight baseball game. I didn't think about my father's participation in World War II nor my Uncle John's role in the Korean War. I thought about questions concerning just wars, political honesty, and violence against dissenting citizens. [Like Colin Kaepernick, I could have thought about racial injustices.]

I had changed. My simple patriotism had morphed into something else: more complex, less extreme, infused with a more cosmopolitan awareness that respect for humanity might be less partial; concern might extend beyond national borders.

Questions surrounding patriotism are among the most fundamental for a citizen. What is patriotism? [What does it mean to be patriotic?] How is patriotism properly expressed? What are its moral credentials? Is patriotism a virtue? Or is love of one's country "in many cases no more than the love of an ass for its stall," as J.B. Zimmerman wonders.

Let's assume that Igor Primoratz is right. Patriotism is "defined as love of one's country, identification with it, and special concern for its well-being and that of compatriots."

For some people, patriotism is unambiguous and straightforward. It's love of one's country. It is expressed in public displays and respect for the symbols and songs that represent the country: the national anthem, "God Bless America," the flag, lapel pins, military parades. Negatively, simple patriotism prohibits behavior that could be interpreted as anything less than whole-hearted support of whatever national goals have been set by the nation's political and military leaders.

In the late '60s simple patriotism was nicely expressed by Merle Haggard's anthem to redneck America, which associated patriotism with flag waving and rejection of the counterculture. Simple patriots don't smoke marijuana or take LSD, burn draft cards, grow long hair, or wear sandals. [It may have escaped Merle's notice that some members of the counterculture, including some I knew well, were veterans.]

The simple patriot's vehicles were adorned with a central directive: "America, Love It or Leave It!" The bumper sticker expressed a view called extreme patriotism in the current philosophical literature. "My country right or wrong!" Whatever my country does is right, because ... it's my country, don't you know. No questions.

Simple patriotism naturally aligns with extreme patriotism [to be distinguished from a more moderate version], because anything less than wholehearted support for one's country would allow criticism and dissent to sneak through the door.

According to extreme patriotism, criticism would

be incompatible with unconditional love of country, a meaningful national identity, and special concern for one's country and compatriots. Love of country means absolute acquiescence to national leaders and goals.

Some may think I have created a straw man, since patriotism need be neither simple nor extreme. But that is precisely the point. Simple and extreme patriotism are nonstarters.

Patriotism consists, first of all, of inner phenomena: love, construed as a special affection for one's country; deep identification with a national story; special concern for the interests of the country and its citizens. The simple patriot insists that these sentiments and attitudes must be expressed in unambiguous displays of patriotic piety.

However, as soon as we realize the primacy of inner phenomena constituting patriotism [sentiments, affection, attitudes, concern, identification] it is an open question how the inner gets expressed in observable behavior. There is no necessary connection between the sentiments that define a special allegiance to a country and actions that supposedly define the behavioral expressions of those sentiments. [Analogously, imagine how love between members of a family might require criticism and behavioral conflict.]

Our president responded to NFL players kneeling during the national anthem, protesting police brutality, with threats, encouraging owners to fire them. Trump is a simple patriot [one might say a simple-minded patriot] who could not conceive of their behavior as anything but disrespect for the anthem, flag, and the military.

Beto O'Rourke's notion of patriotism is more complex. When asked about NFL players' protests, he said, "I can think of nothing more American."

To speak metaphorically, no one knows what is in the heart of a person who rejects the conspicuous



displays of patriotism required by the simple patriot. Why is the simple patriot allowed to define patriotic behavior and the meaning of symbols that are traditional expressions of the country?

If simple patriotism is aligned with extreme patriotism, the position is in even worse shape, morally speaking, because “my country right or wrong” rules out moral judgments made by autonomous individuals about the goals and actions of their country. If we are not allowed to criticize our country, then a citizen would not be allowed to criticize racial injustice, various forms of inequality and denial of liberty, genocide, and imperialist wars.

Extreme patriotism entails that citizens in Nazi Germany would have been wrong to reject the moral horrors of the Final Solution. In fact, the Nazis used the sentiments of patriotic Germans, extreme patriots, to advance their vile ends.

James Baldwin, the great African-American writer, is reported to have said, “I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.” If Baldwin is correct, the only acceptable form of patriotism must be moderate [as opposed to extreme], because a concern for one’s country and compatriots requires a moral perspective that allows a critical response.

Simple and extreme patriotism should be replaced by something more nuanced, but if the replacement is still a form of patriotism, it may be challenged by a position that rejects its partial concerns and recommends a more universal, cosmopolitan outlook.

A citizen of the world may point to a number of problems for any form of patriotism. According to

one scholar, “patriotism tends to exaggerate the goods of the country and hide its flaws.” Also, “it too easily swings toward militarism and attacks on an outgroup.” [For the latter, think of Trump’s rhetoric associated with immigration.] But tendencies aren’t necessities; they are dangers. In light of these dangers, a moderate form of patriotism needs to remain vigilant and critically acute.

The deeper issue for any version of patriotism [argues the cosmopolitan] is what I call the problem of arbitrariness.

Why should we restrict our concern for others’ interests and our judgments about right and wrong in the way the patriot does? Why should an accident of birth be the basis of concern for others and moral judgments? Special concern for the interests of one’s country and compatriots is arbitrary. Human rights are not limited by virtue of geography.

The 1960’s divide has returned – or perhaps it’s been simmering below the surface for 50 years. Trump’s version of nationalism and patriotism has made the conflict between two forms of patriotism more overt. One is simple and extreme; the other is more complex and moderate.

Of course, Trump has helped exacerbate the conflict as Divider-in-Chief. At his flag-waving rallies we get Lee Greenwood’s song as a stand-in for Merle’s anthem, in order to stir the passions and vilify the enemy: other Americans who dare to question and criticize and kneel.

Would that a Beto O’Rourke could bring all of us together, cosmopolitans as well as patriots.

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

A Tale Of Two Foundations

BY JOE CONASON

Nobody ought to be surprised to hear of the belated demise of the Donald J. Trump Foundation, a racketeering enterprise under investigation by the state authorities in New York for the past two years.

Barbara Underwood, the state attorney general, announced that the foundation will dissolve and its assets distributed to bona fide charitable groups. She seeks to prohibit its overseers, President Trump and his adult children, from serving on the board of any nonprofit in New York for the foreseeable future.

Raking through the foundation’s records since 2016, Underwood found what she described as “a shocking pattern of illegality,” which included not only various self-serving schemes to bolster Trump businesses and stroke Trump’s ego but also multiple [and unlawful] expenditures to advance his presidential campaign. The largest donation went to restore

a fountain outside the Plaza Hotel in New York when Trump owned it. The smallest went to the Boy Scouts and appeared to be Donald Trump Jr.’s enrollment fee.

Trump misused the assets of one scam, the Trump Foundation, to protect another, Trump University. He sent a \$25,000 foundation check to Florida Attorney General Pamela Bondi – an illegal donation – around the time she was considering whether to open a fraud probe into his fake educational institution. He raised millions for a veterans charity and then let Corey Lewandowski direct the distribution of those funds in Iowa on the eve of the 2016 Republican caucuses. That violated the law, too.

Meanwhile, a different foundation continues to operate in New York City, with the highest possible ratings from nonprofit watchdog agencies like Guidestar, Charity Navigator and Charity Watch. Over the past



decade or so, that foundation is estimated by public health authorities to have saved the lives of millions of people around the world threatened by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other diseases. And it has estimable programs that help farmers, workers, women and schoolchildren around the world, including the United States.

That foundation bears the names of Bill, Hillary and Chelsea Clinton – none of whom have ever been sanctioned for a misuse of foundation funds.

Yet the sorry fact is that despite The Clinton Foundation's extensive good works, many, perhaps most, Americans probably believe that it is no better than Trump's fountain of sleaze. That negative image is owed to a carefully crafted and heavily funded plan to defame the Clinton Foundation, run by none other than Steve Bannon.

Using funds supplied by the right-wing billionaire Mercer family, Bannon oversaw the production of a highly inaccurate book, *Clinton Cash*, which he then used to manipulate mainstream news outlets. The book author even made a deal with *The New York Times* to feature the book's "research" in a front-page story that suggested Hillary Clinton had engineered approval of a uranium sale to Russia for the benefit of foundation donors.

That false and cynical story ran in 2015, around the time that Clinton declared her presidential candidacy – and it molded a damaging narrative that influenced all ensuing coverage, just as Bannon and Mercer had plotted. From that moment until November 2016, news coverage of the Clinton Foundation mainly con-

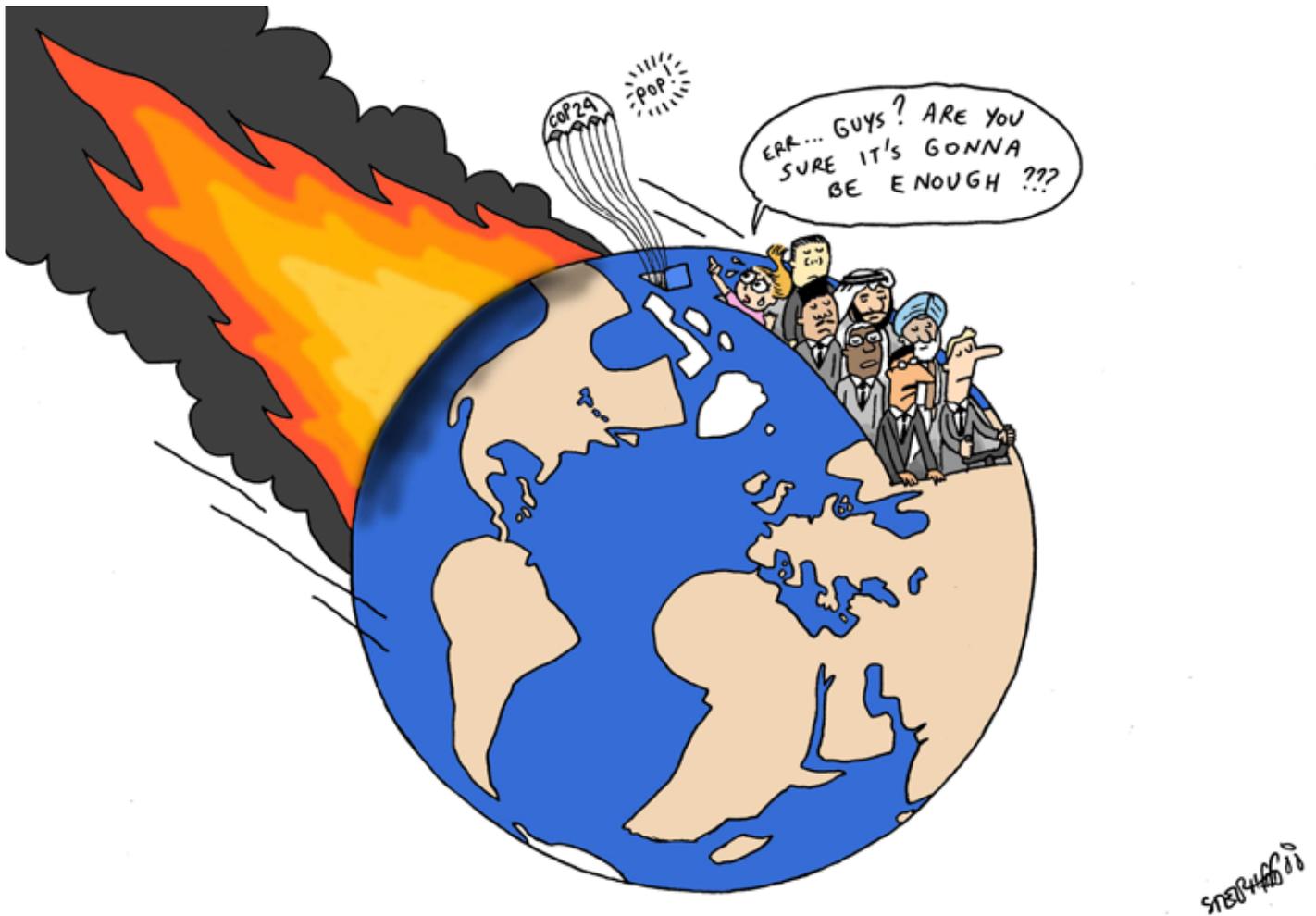
sisted of snuffling around for gossip, stolen emails and any other stray nonsense that advanced the negative story. Coverage of the Clinton Foundation's actual achievements was pushed aside.

The Trump Foundation escaped any such harsh scrutiny until just six weeks before Election Day 2016, when the *Washington Post* published the most devastating articles in a series by David Fahrenthold. His outstanding investigations eventually set the stage for the Trump Foundation's exposure and dissolution by New York authorities. But most of Fahrenthold's toughest stories came far too late for any political impact – and received far too little coverage in mainstream outlets.

By then, Brad Parscale, the Trump aide who is already managing Trump's reelection campaign, had bamboozled voters with a wildly bogus comparison, as summarized in this June 2016 tweet: "Data doesn't lie: Clinton Foundation was 'slush fund' while Hillary was a Senator/Secretary/Pres candidate. Trump Foundation helped people in need with 100 percent to charities, but @realDonaldTrump voluntarily shut his down. Yet who is the sleazy NY AG suing?!"

Parscale earned four Pinocchios from the *Post* fact-checker for this crude deception. But he got the last laugh.

Voters can depend on Parscale and Trump to slander their opponent in 2020, just as they lied viciously and incessantly about the Clintons. The question is whether mainstream news outlets will again amplify such lies in the name of "balance" or defend truth against its enemies.



Propaganda Can't Disguise That Climate Crisis Has Arrived

BY GARY EDMONDSON

After joining blood-stained fossil fuel tyrants from Saudi Arabia and Russia to weaken the scientific report at the COP 24 climate meetings in Poland, U.S. representatives, for the second straight year, used the gathering to promote the very industries that threaten Earth with degraded living conditions.

Profits over pollution – and the people who suffer from it.

DeSmogBlog reports that Drilled “investigates the crime of the century – the creation of climate denial.”

According to DeSmog, “It tells the story of the special interests that launched campaigns against evolving climate science and the momentum created by this science, starting in the late 1980s and sustained through the 2000s ...

“Drilled exposes the campaign of climate denial as a successful public relations endeavor undertaken by

the fossil fuel industry and allies.”

And remember, these are companies whose own research identified the perils of global warming as early as the 1970’s – research they kept under lock and key.

Josh Gabbatiss of the Independent cites the obvious, “The overwhelming majority of qualified experts agree that coal, oil and gas must be rapidly and completely phased out if the world is to stand a chance of meeting its ambitious climate targets and avoid catastrophic environmental consequences.”

Those consequences have arrived.

The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis contributed to The Lancet/Countdown: Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change.

Evidence, IIASA notes, “shows that rising temperatures as a result of climate change are already exposing us to an unacceptably high health risk ...

“... The report also states that ambient air pollution resulted in several million premature deaths from ambient fine particulate matter globally in 2015.”

Among the report findings are:

- 157 million more vulnerable people were subjected to a heat wave in 2017 than in 2000, and 18 million more than in 2016.

- 153 billion hours of work were lost in 2017 due to extreme heat as a result of climate change.

- Heat greatly exacerbates urban air pollution, with 97% of cities in low- and middle- income countries not meeting [World Health Organization] air quality guidelines.

Hugh Montgomery, co-chair of The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change and director of the Institute for Human Health and Performance, University College London, says: “Heat stress is hitting hard – particularly amongst the urban elderly, and those with underlying health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes or chronic kidney disease.

“In high temperatures, outdoor work, especially

in agriculture, is hazardous. Areas from Northern England and California, to Australia are seeing savage fires with direct deaths, displacement and loss of housing as well as respiratory impacts from smoke inhalation.”

Note the present tense “is hazardous.” The dangers are here right now and conditions will only worsen under dirty, greed-first policies being pushed by Donald Trump and the Republicans.

Rachel Cleetus, from the Union of Concerned Scientists, according to Gabbatiss, said considering the urgent warnings to cut emissions, the Trump Administration’s ongoing promotion of coal “stands in stark contrast with this climate reality.”

Matt McGrath of the BBC caught climate think-tanker Camilla Born, observing, “Climate science is not a political football.”

As Aldous Huxley observed, “Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.”

Duncan resident Gary Edmondson is chair of the Stephens County Democratic Party. More of his essays can be read at <https://okobserver.org>.

Bringing The Future Back Into American Politics

BY FROMA HARROP

An ad on ABC’s Live with Kelly and Ryan shows a little girl dragging a teddy bear to her mom at an elegant dinner table. The mother hugs her again and again. Then up pop the words: “You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation.”

A Patek Philippe is a very fancy Swiss watch. If only the leaders in Washington would take a comparable interest in preserving the environment for the generation to come.

They do not. Until the Trump years, there was bipartisan support for bequeathing to future Americans a country resembling the beautiful one the politicians inherited. Sure, there were differences, but there was a basic understanding that the interests of those not old enough to vote – or not yet born – should be considered.

The Trump Administration’s lust for opening pristine public lands and even natural monuments to industrial ravage is unprecedented. It’s become a religion to Donald Trump that no moneyed interest should ever have to pass up a buck. But history will judge his refusal to do anything about climate change other than make it worse as governing of a depraved nature.

So numb has Trump made the public on this issue that his decision to bury the devastating National Climate Assessment by issuing it the Friday after

Thanksgiving drew little shock. The administration didn’t even care enough to change the findings.

The report predicts that higher temperatures will help spread deadly tropical diseases across the heartland. It foresees torrential rainfall drowning water and sewer systems, ironically threatening the supply of drinkable water. Food production will be threatened.

Infrastructure will collapse. Drought will intensify. And the West will suffer more fires. Many thousands of Americans will die simply from the heat.

The report was put together by 13 federal agencies. An official in Trump’s Environmental Protection Agency predictably dismissed the report as a product of the “deep state” – that is, bureaucrats conspiring against the president. “We don’t care,” Steven J. Milloy said.

For those who care only about money, the report comes with pretty dismal economic predictions. For example, the damage from warming weather could chop 10% off the U.S. economy by the end of the century.

There are more and more Americans who will still be around by then. Many young people and their children can expect to welcome the 22nd century – assuming they survive the 21st.

Small wonder the younger slice of the electorate has started to amplify its voice at the polls. Some

31% of eligible voters ages 18 to 29 cast ballots in the recent midterms – the highest level of youth participation in a midterm in the past 25 years. Democrats got 67% of their vote, versus only 32% for Republicans.

Voters of all ages are already experiencing the alarming effects of climate-driven weather events. As fires consume big chunks of the West, floods inundate parts of the East Coast.

The new freshman class of House members, meanwhile, won't be judging the world by how much its members can retire on in four years. Having been whacked by the Great Recession, millennials, for

one, find themselves worrying about both house prices and house elevation – the higher the property, the less worry about flooding and oven temperatures.

For younger people, climate change will bring political crises, in addition to weather-related ones. They will be confronted with global chaos unleashed when millions around the world must flee from their no-longer-inhabitable villages and cities.

The most expensive watch can be replaced. But as it's been said, there's no Planet B. Planet A must be looked after for the next generation.

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The Resilience Of Nadia Murad

BY NYLA ALI KHAN

One of the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize 2018 is Nadia Murad, an Iraqi Yazidi activist, for her effort “to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.”

The Norwegian Nobel Committee underscored, “This year marks a decade since the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1820 [2008], which determined that the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict constitutes both a war crime and a threat to international peace and security. This is also set out in the Rome Statute of 1998, which governs the work of the International Criminal Court. ... A more peaceful world can only be achieved if women and their fundamental rights and security are recognized and protected in war.”

Ever since ISIL laid siege to a large portion of Iraq in 2014, Yazidi women have borne the brunt of the violence in that country. Hapless women have been negotiating with members of ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant], both materially and sexually. Unfortunately, the innate conservatism of Arab and South Asian societies prevents them from overtly describing and condemning sexual exploitation. Yazidi women are further dehumanized because of the self-denigration that accompanies physical defilement. The law of the jungle which prevails in those areas leaves no scope for rehabilitation of the victims of violence. The brutalization of the culture has been rendered more lethal by the socialization of boys and men into the militarized ISIS culture. Within such a masculinist discourse, the rigidly entrenched hierarchical relationship between men and women is inextricably linked with sexualized violence.

Little did Nadia Murad's family know that their precious daughter, whom they had sheltered from the turbulent waves of life, would be driven to insanity by unbearable suffering and humiliation. She along with other Yazidi girls, several of whom were under the age of puberty, was horrendously violated by a

bestial group of ISIL militants. Nadia was defiled and her beautiful innocence ended. Had God forsaken her? Would she be saved by a messiah or would she be left at the mercy of these satanic creatures? Was this a nightmare that would vanish at the break of dawn? Despite the indelible scar on her psyche and her humiliation, Nadia had the resilience to cope with the buffets that fate had dealt her.

Subsequent to the Peace Prize announcement, Nadia Murad observed, “Persecution of minorities must end. Sexual violence against women must never be tolerated. We must remain committed to rebuilding communities ravaged by genocide. ... We must work together with determination – so that genocidal campaigns will not only fail, but lead to accountability for the perpetrators.” She added, “Survivors deserve justice. And a safe and secure pathway home.”

Will the grievances of such aggrieved and powerless people ever be redressed? Will violated Yazidi women ever have the satisfaction of knowing that those who wronged them did not go unpunished?

It is heart wrenching to see despondent women with hopelessness entrenched in their atrophied looks and minds. Physically bruised, psychologically broken, improvident; socially marginalized and left to their own devices; unsought by those with the means to help; each sigh bespeaks a grief that knows no bounds and has no hope of respite.

Some conservative Yazidis disapprove of attempts to welcome survivors back into the faith and would rather ostracize them. These repositories of communal values and cultural traditions are not always able to find a support system in a community that had experienced the trauma of state-formation at its expense.

Several “dishonored” women in conflict zones retain their status as familial and cultural chattels lacking control over their own bodies.

Although the international community made a commitment to incorporate gender perspectives in

Trump's End

BY ROBERT REICH

I recently phoned my friend, the former Republican member of Congress.

ME: So, what are you hearing?

HE: Trump is in deep sh*t.

ME: Tell me more.

HE: When it looked like he was backing down on the wall, Rush and the crazies on Fox went ballistic. So he has to do the shutdown to keep the base happy. They're his insurance policy. They stand between him and impeachment.

ME: Impeachment? No chance. Senate Republicans would never go along.

HE [laughing]: Don't be so sure. Corporate and Wall Street are up in arms. Trade war was bad enough. Now, you've got Mattis resigning in protest. Trump pulling out of Syria, giving Putin a huge win. This dumbass shutdown. The stock market in free-fall. The economy heading for recession.

ME: But the base loves him.

HE: Yeah, but the base doesn't pay the bills.

ME: You mean ...

HE: Follow the money, friend.

ME: The GOP's backers have had enough?

HE: They wanted Pence all along.

ME: So ...

HE: So they'll wait until Mueller's report, which will skewer Trump. Pelosi will wait, too. Then after the Mueller bombshell, she'll get 20, 30, maybe even 40 Republicans to join in an impeachment resolution.

ME: And then?

HE: Senate Republicans hope that'll be enough

- that Trump will pull a Nixon.

ME: So you think he'll resign?

HE [laughing]: No chance. He's fu*king out of his mind. He'll rile up his base into a fever. Rallies around the country. Tweet storms. Hannity. Oh, it's gonna be ugly. He'll convince himself he'll survive.

ME: And then?

HE: That's when Senate Republicans pull the trigger.

ME: Really? Two-thirds of the Senate?

HE: Do the math. 47 Dems will be on board, so you need 19 Republicans. I can name almost that many who are already there. Won't be hard to find the votes.

ME: But it will take months. And the country will be put through a ringer.

HE: I know. That's the worst part.

ME: I mean, we could have civil war.

HE: Hell, no. That's what he wants, but no chance. His approvals will be in the cellar. America will be glad to get rid of him.

ME: I hope you're right.

HE: He's a dangerous menace. He'll be gone. And then he'll be indicted, and Pence will pardon him. But the state investigations may put him in the clinker. Good riddance.

Robert B. Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. He has written 14 books, including the best sellers Aftershock, The Work of Nations, and, his most recent, Saving Capitalism.

peace efforts and underscored gender mainstreaming as a global strategy for the growth of gender equality in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action in 1995 [Mazurana et al. 2005: 12], I observe a lot more could be done toward prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict zones and increasing women's participation in peacekeeping and post-conflict peace building and nation-building in Iraq.

As Dyan Mazura, Angela Raven-Roberts, Jane Parpart, and Sue Lautze [2005] observe, "inattention to, and subsequent miscalculations about, women's and girl's roles and experiences during particular conflicts and in early post-conflict periods systematically undermines the efforts of peacekeeping and peace-building operations, civil society, and women's organizations to establish conditions necessary for national and regional peace, justice, and secu-

urity."

It is heartening that the Norwegian Nobel Committee has recognized the worth of the peace-building work that survivors of sexual violence and women's organizations can contribute at the local and regional levels. The aspirations for accountability of terror groups' use of sexual violence, healing, and peace must be translated into a powerful force that would determine the substance of conflict resolution.

Nyla Ali Khan is the author of Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Transnationalism; Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir; The Life of a Kashmiri Woman, and the editor of The Parchment of Kashmir. She has also served as a guest editor working on articles from the Jammu and Kashmir region for Oxford University Press [New York], helping to identify, commission, and review articles. She can be reached at nylakhan@aol.com.

Jim Hightower



DIY Democracy

What do the workaday majority of Americans want their lawmakers working on? Check any legitimate poll – or just listen to most any barstool conversation down at the Bottoms Up pub – and you’ll hear them saying clearly and consistently that they want such basics as middle-class jobs, health care for all, a fixed-up infrastructure, a government uncorrupted by corporate cash, a little less greed ... and, you know, the Common Good.

And what have they been getting from their national and [most] state governments? Tax giveaways for the superrich, a relentless shredding of the social safety net, union busting, privatization, a 2,000-mile border wall, racial and gender repression, dark-money politics, paranoia and xenophobia, voter suppression and ... well, the building blocks of an American plutocracy.

In short, our elected “representatives” have been bluntly ignoring what we want and routinely delivering precisely what we *don’t* want.

How can we get lawmakers to reverse that perverse agenda and produce public policies that serve the people? Not by pleading with entrenched incumbents. That’s as hopeless as trying to teach table manners to a hog: It annoys the hog and wastes your time.

The tried-and-true way of “influencing” them is to target, expose, challenge, and un-elect the bastards. That’s not easy, and it takes several election cycles, but it has been done periodically throughout our history by organizing and mobilizing big grassroots movements, including in the New Deal years, the 1950s and ‘60s civil rights struggle, and the anti-war movement of the 1970s.

Don’t look now, but we’re in the midst of another progressive political uprising that’s been coalescing since about 2010. And ever since Bernie Sanders showed the way with his barrier-busting run in 2016, this movement has been steadily expanding, maturing and gaining electoral strength.

Indeed, in November’s congressional, state and local elections, hundreds of the plutocracy’s servile officeholders were defenestrated by progressive forces – and some promising new voices for the

people were added.

Recruiting, training and electing good reliable candidates, however, is not our only route – nor the surest route – to getting the policies and laws we want. Here’s another way: Have the *people themselves* be the lawmakers.

Why should congress critters, lobbyists and other political elites have monopoly control of the public agenda – control that allows them to refuse to introduce, debate and vote on – much less pass – measures that are crucially important to the larger public?

A way around them is the dual democratic process of “initiative and referendum.” When a state or local legislative body obstinately ignores the people’s will, the initiative process allows grassroots citizens to step in and put a law up for a direct vote by the people. On the other hand, when a legislature passes a special interest law the people oppose, the referendum process lets citizens put it on the ballot, giving voters a chance to veto it.

Both processes require a prescribed number of registered voters in a particular jurisdiction to sign petitions to put any of their wants and needs on the ballot, and bingo! Their measures will be there for a popular vote at the next election. It lets rank-and-file citizens bypass the middlemen, mitigating the power of increasingly autocratic and plutocratic elites.

Twenty-six states and over 80% of our cities have various forms of these direct democracy tools, and they’re becoming a major means for grassroots activists to produce progressive change, as 1] Washington remains locked down by corporate money, Trump pandemonium and right-wing intransigence; 2] too many state governments are essentially controlled by cliques of corporate lobbyists, tea party nutballs and Koch-funded anti-government ideologues; 3] the electoral system is so tightly gerrymandered, money-clogged and repressive; and 4] there is such deep public distrust and disgust at the boneheads and greedheads running our country. No wonder people are turning to do-it-yourself government.

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Power Harassment Indifference

Anti-feminist politicians and talk show yakkers try to ridicule the reality that women in our rich and advanced society might endure any “oppression.”

America isn’t Afghanistan, they snort. Women here get to vote. Girls play all kinds of sports and can grow up to be astronauts or CEOs or anything. Why, we even had one nominated for president two years ago!

Well, women certainly have made strides from the colonial chauvinism of 1789, and they’ve escaped much of the suffocating paternalism of the “Father Knows Best” years. But is that our highest standard? It’s ridiculous, dishonest and socially destructive to pretend that the 51% majority of us are getting anywhere near the fair share of power and respect they’re due.

In corporations, universities, government offices and elsewhere, there is usually an oppressive male culture and a repressive power structure that routinely shortchange women on pay [generally a third less than men doing comparable work, with black and Latina women making even less] and on promotions.

That’s bad enough, but adding insult to injury, prevailing conventional wisdom blames women for this! They’re not “career-oriented,” or they’re too thin-skinned, or they’re not aggressive enough, or they’re too moody, and they need to “lean in” more. Delve just a smidgeon deeper, however, and voila! The core cause of this deep and pervasive discrimination is the glaring inequality of power that men hold over women.

Amazingly, the impact on workingwomen of blunt-force sexual crudity by superiors has only recently been deemed a major cause of workplace problems. Spurred by the explosion of hundreds of thousands of #MeToo revelations, harassment has finally climbed to the top-of-the-charts ranking of things holding back women in practically every line of employment:

1. In recent surveys, 81% of women say they’ve experienced some form of sexual harassment.
2. About half of girls say they’ve encountered harassment in their schools.
3. Employers and officials usually discount the veracity of women/girls who complain, and accept the denials of men who’re accused.

4. Male hierarchies, meekly supported by some women, tend to ostracize and retaliate against victims who report abuse.

5. Some 80% of young women who’ve been harassed on the job tell surveyors that rather than file a complaint that higher-ups won’t take seriously, they just leave the jobs. Some places just don’t think it’s a big deal that their organizational hierarchy tolerates a grab-ass mentality and allows abuse. Their attitude is, “Hey, no one’s making you work here.” More commonly, though, harassment and discrimination persist because leadership only addresses it bureaucratically, incrementally and ever so cautiously. While those in charge of these companies and groups loudly condemn all such actions as “unacceptable,” they quietly accept the actions by doing nothing more than setting up a “diversity committee” or providing some “sensitivity training.”

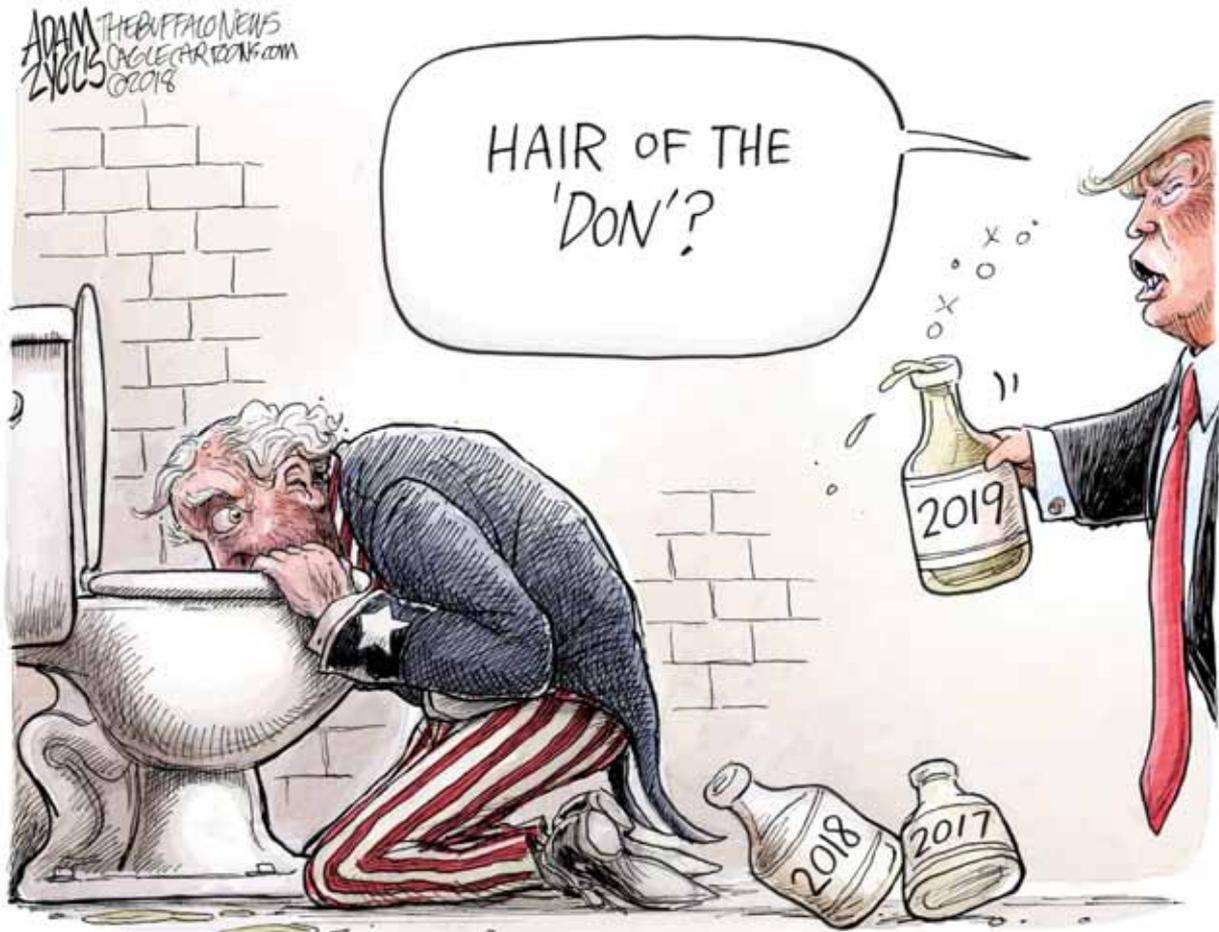
A couple of abuser factors are in play here: One is that the offenders lawyer up, so the response to the abuse ends up focused primarily on limiting the institution’s liability, rather than concentrating on cleansing the toxic culture. Second is what I call “The Willie,” borrowed from Willie Nelson’s humorous idea that he wants his tombstone to read, “He meant well.” In a nefarious twist of Nelson’s droll humor, honchos of many high-profile brand-name outfits these days proclaim that they are committed to leading the charge for justice and respect for women in the workplace, but whoa! Let’s not push too hard, too fast.

Jamie Dimon is a prime example of those who cry for progress but then throttle back to a putt-putt pace. As CEO of JPMorgan Chase, Dimon has cultivated an image of an enlightened Wall Streeter who touts the merits of having female decision-makers throughout the bank’s corporate structure.

“It is the right thing to do, plain and simple,” he told New York Times interviewer Rebecca Blumentstein in September. Yet, when she gently noted that JPMorgan’s 11-member governing board includes only two women [18%], Dimon’s enlightenment dimmed. He says he can only go so far in trying to do the right thing: “It’s hard for me to do a board search and say I’m only going to look at women.” Really? Why?

Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund, a partnership with the National Women’s Law Center, helps workers who are experiencing harassment – in any industry – with free legal help. See nwlc.org/legal-assistance and donate here: timesupnow.com. – *Jim Hightower*

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The Hopes And Fears Of All The Years

BY ANN DAPICE

The words from a Christmas carol written by a Philadelphia Episcopal priest in 1868 were sung and heard by many once again this recent holiday season. “The hopes and fears of all the years,” describe our world conditions well.

As 2019 begins many of us have written, or thought about writing, or thought they should be writing, resolutions or goals for the coming year. But these usual habits seem a little out of touch with the chaos we experience at home and in the world.

It is an earth with fires, floods, tornados, and earthquakes often in unexpected places. In the news we see pictures of starving and dying children along with mass migrations. School, church and synagogue shootings have become all too common. Law enforcement often results in body camera recorded lethal responses, killing people of color because, in their own words, they were afraid. Americans are encouraged to new levels of racism, misogyny and religious intolerance. From our country’s leaders we receive “alternative facts” – documented misrepresentations that change by the hour and day.

In a country that has long viewed itself as a world

leader, we are now seen by some as a global embarrassment and worse, without resolve.

Fears abound. Hope is less certain. The philosopher Benedict de Spinoza [1632-1677] is quoted as saying, “There is no hope unmingled with fear, and no fear unmingled with hope.”

In the political arena the use of the two words to attract voters has a long history. Promises are made to the citizenry. Some are kept. Some are well intentioned but ineffective. Too many were never meant to be anything but empty commitments.

Richard Nixon was reported to say, “People react to fear, not love. They don’t teach that in Sunday school. But it’s true.”

In recent years we heard about the man from Hope, AR who would become president. Later the word hope would be seen beneath President Obama’s photo. Former presidential candidate John McCain’s running mate Sarah Palin would make fun of what she called Obama’s “hopey, changey thing.”

That notion agreed with the reality that hope for many is to continue what they have – or have had. It is a zero-sum view where one person’s gain is another’s

loss.

For minorities to have better access to society's goods is perceived as loss for those who have had these resources. This perspective is further explained in Trump's "Make America Great Again" where he expertly plays people's wishes and also their phobias. He promises that he, and only he, can fix what he says is wrong.

In the 2016 election Hillary Clinton was seen as the candidate of hope continuing Barack Obama's theme of progress and optimism. It's important to note that progress or change can serve as hope or as fear depending on the nature of the change and who it will affect.

The science of fear continues to grow in its many dimensions – physiological, psychological, sociological, and political. The amygdala is the part of the brain responsible for detecting fear and preparing to respond to perceived threats. Fear is a necessary response to imminent danger. It has been a critical adaptation for human survival. When faced with predators our bodies react physically through hormones to cause us to use the three mechanisms known as fight, flight, or freeze.

Scientists have long been able to test our responses to fear in numerous ways. It is a concrete, known reality. People feel fear. It can cause symptoms such as cold hands, rapid breathing, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, sweating, dry mouth, and tightening of muscles in the arms and legs. All of these can aid in fighting or running from the predator. The symptoms can even be observed by others.

However there needs not be a specific predator if food, water, housing, safety, family, and group survival needs are at stake. Research now demonstrates that specific fears can cross generations and affect descendants who never experienced the fear inducing event that their ancestors suffered. This is thought to be an adaptive mechanism developed to prepare future generations to respond appropriately to threats.

We now know that oxytocin, the "bonding" hormone, works well to provide care and protection for the young, but distrust of people in other groups can become a side effect of this need for protection. In this sense President Trump's "wall" serves as a symbol for his supporters that they and their families will be protected from the "others" arriving south of the U.S. border.

The science of hope is not as clear as that of fear. Researchers describe hope with related terms such as aspiration, motivation, optimism, and extroversion. In some discussions hope is said to be related to faith and religion. Hope has goals and paths, it is problem-solving in nature.

Happiness, related to but not the same as hope, utilizes pleasure pathways in the brain. Similarly, optimism, while distinguished as related but also different from hope, is also located in neural networks.

More specifically, hope is described as a motivating factor to encourage people to continue what are seen

to be positive actions such as completing schooling, participating in treatment of disease and engaging in psychotherapy.

It is a goal setting behavior not unrelated to making New Year's Resolutions mentioned above. If the resolutions are not continued through the year it could show a lack of aspiration or motivation.

These descriptions appear to house hope in the individual and not the external factors that are beyond an individual's control. By that reasoning, others, despite rhetoric and promises, cannot provide hope. It resides in the person.

It is not whether health care, or education, or housing are available but whether the individual will make use of them. It is not that more jobs will be provided but whether the individual will engage in behaviors that make for successful employment.

The understanding of hope commonly used seems quite different from what has been studied and reported in academic research. Yet as it happens, a reading in science journals will comment that the reported research gives hope for future uses, technology and even cures.

Cancer patients will say that they are hopeful again when offered new therapy. People say things like "I hope it doesn't rain because we're having an outdoor event tomorrow."

An internet search for the term shows that many non-profit charitable and religious organizations will have the word hope in their mission statements and even in their organizational titles. These groups often seek to address problems such as addiction, domestic violence, homelessness, and therapy for incurable diseases – problems which continue to confound society.

The assistance provided may be incomplete or insufficient to the problem. The patient or client may be blamed, told they are not working the program, responding to the advice given, or following their physician's orders.

Once again, hope is viewed as the responsibility of the individual, not that of available resources or solutions. In this way hope can be manipulated and whether or not such organizations offer new solutions, they attract people who may be desperately seeking help. Analysis and assessment of some services provided have been found invalid and sometimes dangerous, yet they continue to be promoted.

All of this happens in a time of unimagined mass communication. Technology provides us with information, both true and false, available through the internet, delivered to our handheld devices. Hopes and fears, along with facts and truth, are offered along with commodities in a worldwide marketplace of choices.

For political leaders, email, Twitter and Facebook allow direct communications so that we may receive multiple messages daily from elected officials. Our hopes and fears can screen what we want to be true

EVERY OTHER
ADVANCED
NATION HAS
UNIVERSAL
HEALTH CARE
WHY NOT US?

THEY ALL HATE
THEIR HEALTH CARE!

IT'S MORE
EXPENSIVE!

YOU DIE
WAITING
FOR CARE!



THE QUALITY
IS WORSE!

IT'S LESS
EFFICIENT!

THEY HAVE NO
FREEDOM!

MY RICH WALL ST.
DONORS WILL STOP
MAKING A KILLING
OFF SICK PEOPLE!!!



caglecartoons.com

25 Ways The Canadian Health System Is Better Than The Affordable Care Act

BY RALPH NADER

Dear America:

Costly complexity is baked into ObamaCare. No health insurance system is without problems but Canadian-style single-payer – full Medicare for all – is simple, affordable, comprehensive and universal.

In the early 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson enrolled 20 million elderly Americans into Medicare in six months. There were no websites. They did it with index cards!

Below please find 25 ways the Canadian health care system is better than the chaotic U.S. system.

Replace it with the much more efficient Medicare-for-all: everybody in, nobody out, free choice of doctor and hospital. It will produce far less anxiety, dread, and fear.

Love, Canada

25. In Canada, everyone is covered automatically at

birth – everybody in, nobody out.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, 28 million Americans [9%] are still uninsured and 85 million Americans [26%] are underinsured.

24. In Canada, the health system is designed to put people, not profits, first.

In the United States, ObamaCare has done little to curb insurance industry profits and in fact has increased the concentrated insurance industry's massive profits.

23. In Canada, coverage is not tied to a job or dependent on your income – rich and poor are in the same system, the best guaranty of quality.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, much still depends on your job or income. Lose your job or lose your income, and you might lose your existing health insurance or have to settle for lesser coverage.

22. In Canada, health care coverage stays with you for your entire life.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, for tens of millions of Americans, health care coverage stays with you for as long as you can afford your insurance.

21. In Canada, you can freely choose your doctors and hospitals and keep them. There are no lists of “in-network” vendors and no extra hidden charges for going “out of network.”

In the United States, under ObamaCare, the in-network list of places where you can get treated is shrinking – thus restricting freedom of choice – and if you want to go out of network, you pay dearly for it.

20. In Canada, the health care system is funded by income, sales and corporate taxes that, combined, are much lower than what Americans pay in insurance premiums directly and indirectly per employer.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, for thousands of Americans, it's pay or die – if you can't pay, you die. That's why many thousands will still die every year under ObamaCare from lack of health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time.

19. In Canada, there are no complex hospital or doctor bills. In fact, usually you don't even see a bill.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, hospital and doctor bills are terribly complex, making it very difficult to discover the many costly overcharges or massive billing fraud.

18. In Canada, costs are controlled. Canada pays 10% of its GDP for its health care system, covering everyone.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, costs continue to skyrocket. The U.S. currently pays 17.9% of its GDP and still doesn't cover tens of millions of people.

17. In Canada, it is unheard of for anyone to go bankrupt due to health care costs.

In the United States, health-care-driven bankruptcy will continue to plague Americans.

16. In Canada, simplicity leads to major savings in administrative costs and overhead.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, often staggering complexity leads to ratcheting up huge administrative costs and overhead.

15. In Canada, when you go to a doctor or hospital the first thing they ask you is: “What's wrong?”

In the United States, the first thing they ask you is: “What kind of insurance do you have?”

14. In Canada, the government negotiates drug prices so they are more affordable.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, Congress made it specifically illegal for the government to negotiate drug prices for volume purchases, so they remain unaffordable and skyrocketing.

13. In Canada, the government health care funds are not profitably diverted to the top one percent.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, health care funds will continue to flow to the top. In 2017, the CEO of Aetna alone made a whopping \$59 million.

12. In Canada, there are no required co-pays or de-

ductibles in inscrutable contracts.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, the deductibles and co-pays will continue to be unaffordable for many millions of Americans.

11. In Canada, the health care system contributes to social solidarity and national pride.

In the United States, ObamaCare is divisive, with rich and poor in different systems and tens of millions left out or with sorely limited benefits.

10. In Canada, delays in health care are not due to the cost of insurance.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, patients without health insurance or who are underinsured will continue to delay or forgo care and put their lives at risk.

9. In Canada, nobody dies due to lack of health insurance.

In the United States, tens of thousands of Americans will continue to die every year due to lack of health insurance and much higher prices for drugs, medical devices, and health care itself.

8. In Canada, health care on average costs half as much, per person, as in the United States. And in Canada, everyone is covered.

In the United States, a majority support Medicare-for-all.

7. In Canada, the tax payments to fund the health care system are modestly progressive – the lowest 20% pays 6% of income into the system while the highest 20% pays 8%.

In the United States, under ObamaCare, the poor pay a larger share of their income for health care than the affluent.

6. In Canada, people use GoFundMe to start new businesses.

In the United States, fully one in three GoFundMe fundraisers are now to raise money to pay medical bills. Recently, one American was rejected for a heart transplant because she couldn't afford the follow-up care. Her insurance company suggested she raise the money through GoFundMe.

5. In Canada, people avoid prison at all costs.

In the United States, some Americans commit minor crimes so that they can get to prison and get free health care.

4. In Canada, people look forward to the benefits of early retirement.

In the United States, people delay retirement to 65 to avoid being uninsured.

3. In Canada, Nobel Prize winners hold on to their medal and pass it down to their children and grandchildren.

In the United States, Nobel Prize winners sell their medals to pay for their medical bills.

Leon Lederman won a Nobel Prize in 1988 for his pioneering physics research. But in 2015, the physicist, who passed away in November 2018, sold his Nobel Prize medal for \$765,000 to pay his mounting medical bills. According to a report in Vox, the University of Chicago professor began to suffer from

memory loss in 2011, and died in an Idaho nursing home.

2. In Canada, the system is simple. You get a health care card when you are born. And you swipe it when you go to a doctor or hospital. End of story.

In the United States, ObamaCare's 2,500 pages plus regulations [the Canadian Medicare Bill was 13 pages] is so complex that then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said before passage "we have to pass the bill so that you can find out what is in it, away from the fog of the controversy."

1. In Canada, the majority of citizens love their health care system.

In the United States, a growing majority of citizens, physicians, and nurses prefer the Canadian type system – Medicare-for-all, free choice of doctor and hospital, everybody in, nobody out and far less expensive.

For more information, visit singlepayeraction.org.

Nader.org

Is American Democracy In Trouble?

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

We humans are in a bit of a funk. Although there's excitement generating innovations in the world of technology, two basic problems could spoil the future.

The basic problem that threatens our planet is global warming/climate change. Close behind is America's forsaking its obligation to lead the world in saving our mother earth from its ravages – in fact abandoning the rest in working for solutions.

Have we Americans truly lost our way? Are we no longer able to summon up the desire to talk with one another and create laws in partnership between our two political parties?

The essence of our democracy is threatened by the lack of strong leadership. Our president continues to lead by shooting from the hip and his aim is awful. Our two political parties offer very little encouragement when it comes to creating an environment that supports solutions brought about through negotiations. On most days, Democrats and Republicans seem content only on passing their partisan version of legislation rather than producing a strongly debated and negotiated document expressing the highest ideals of our diverse population.

Let's think about that. Our system has worked over the years with our two political parties work-

ing together in order to create legislation that is in the best interests of both sides and the nation. A democracy only works when there is the will to provide a solution. Once the decision is made to craft a workable plan, only then will politicians solve problems that will serve the needs of most of us.

The first 10 amendments to our Constitution were ratified on Dec. 15, 1791. Fondly known as the Bill of Rights, the first two are most important in understanding how the Constitution has worked over our history to make America the world's greatest country, one where millions of people come to fulfill the human aspiration for freedom: Freedom of religion, free speech, a free press and the right to petition government for redress of grievances.

On our TV screens these last few weeks we witness the latest group from Central America that are following those from Germany, China, Scandinavia, Ireland, Italy, Russia, France, Spain, the Middle East, the Philippines, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. The Native Americans, including Mexicans, were here before all of them.

When one takes a look at the Bill of Rights, it's easy to understand why so many people from all over the world want to live here. America is admired for its ability to continually offer immigrants sanctuary from oppression of their rulers and provide citizens fundamental rights to pursue their dreams.

America is at a crossroads concerning basic human rights. Our fearless but confused leader, President Trump, is creating doubt in millions of us as he bans some groups, fearing they may endanger society.

On a Saturday, Oct. 27, 11 people in their place of worship were killed and several more wounded when a known Jew hater walked in and committed America's largest mass murder of Jewish people. Rushing in to stop the shooting and help people, two policemen were among those wounded.

Religion is one of society's most important and sacred institutions, granted the right to exist, protected by the First Amendment. This is only one of several church shooting events in recent times. Our worship hours may no longer be any safer than any other hour.

When people are prevented from worshipping, from speaking freely, or freedom of the press is no longer allowed and deemed a threat, then we all should realize that we are in trouble. When people no longer have the right to peaceably assemble or to petition our government for a redress of grievances, then bet your almighty dollar we are neck deep in mud. Democracy is in trouble.

Last Nov. 6, America cracked open the door of opportunity when Democrats regained the majority in the House of Representatives. The question now before us: Can the majority Democrats enlist the aid of enough Republicans to restore a working democracy?

With climate change now threatening us on a

daily basis, there is precious little time remaining to restore our environment to a healthy condition capable of supporting human life, in fact all life.

In 2020 let's replace The Donald, and demand that Democrats and Republicans resume a healthy working relationship and restore a working democracy. A democracy that will regain the world's confidence and ensure humankind its continued existence.

The task ahead will be difficult and will require input from all and from each of us. We must learn to trust each other again, maybe even talk across the circles we've isolated ourselves in.

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

'Progressive' Just Another Word For 'Human Kindness'

BY JOE LITTLEJOHN

The Rev. Franklin Graham's recent declaration that "'progressive' is just another word for 'godless'" is certainly an insult, and I ask readers and the Rev. Graham to consider whether it is also an absurdity. Whereas calling it an insult needs no explanation, use of the word absurdity may be unclear to some readers.

It strikes me as absurd in the most direct way in that almost all the people I know in Oklahoma who I consider to be progressive are professed Christians and active members of one of the state's hundreds of churches. They accept Jesus Christ as their savior, attend services on Sunday, and take part in other church activities. They certainly are not "godless," as the Rev. Graham claims.

Part of the problem may derive from a misunderstanding or lack of understanding of what a progressive is. To be a progressive is to be active in reforming aspects of our society that harm human beings and their world. It is about as far from being godless as you can get.

It is, in fact, a straightforward way of putting into practice God's will as it is found in the basic teachings of Jesus Christ. The question of belief in God will be addressed further along. Here, the focus is on the social side of Christianity.

The overriding social principle of New Testament Christianity is to do unto others as we would want others to do to us. The two specific implications of this principle are that we should not judge others

and that we should help them when they need help.

Although there are numerous specific applications of these two goals – helping and not judging – I'll take up only a couple of the most controversial positions that political progressives take: their positions on abortion and homosexuality. Personally approving abortion or LGBTQ rights is not in and of itself a progressive requirement. People can, in fact, personally disapprove of both and still be whole and healthy progressives. The requirement for people to be progressive is that they do not judge and disrespect other people on these issues, and progressives do not refuse to interact with them based on such differences.

In the context of the preceding explanation, the issue of belief in the Christian God is easier to understand. Both in the nation as a whole and here at home in Oklahoma, most progressives are professed Christians.

At the same time, there are progressives who are non-believers or Buddhists or Muslims. In this instance, the overriding factor is that other progressives do not judge them. That judgment is left to God. If they fight the progressive fight, they are still behaving in a Christian way on social issues.

Being a progressive is a political matter, not a religious matter.

Progressives are people who want to change the parts of our society that leave millions of their fellow human beings without decent lives. Progressivism is not socialism, as some opponents like to claim. It does not advocate equal distribution of wealth. It's fine for people to get rich through smart, honest, hard work.

At the same time, progressives believe all human beings should have decent places to live, health-care, enough to eat, and transportation to work and school.

That's all progressives want. And it is not godless. *Joe Littlejohn is editor of the Bryan County Democratic Party newsletter.*



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The Gift Of Long-Term Perspective

THE SOUL OF AMERICA

The Battle For Our Better Angels

By Jon Meacham

Random House Publishing Group

416 pages, \$30

BY JOHN WOOD

Out of tragedy, Jon Meacham writes about hope.

No, not Barack Obama's "Hope and Change" campaign rhetoric. And certainly not the overly cynical "Hokey Changey Stuff" overreaction ala former Alaska governor and one-time losing vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin.

Meacham provides a more realistic hope, taking up residence between our twin natures. We are our "better angels," but in constant tension with our "worst instincts" or our "dark side."

As Pulitzer Prize-writer Meacham explains it in an interview on NPR, "At heart, the American identity is a perennial conflict between our worst instincts and our best ones. OK. It's a soul, an ethos that has room for Martin Luther King, but it also has room – from generation to generation – for the Ku Klux Klan and for hate and for fear."

And from tragedy – Meacham's impetus for his latest book.

He says its writing was ignited by the tragic events in Charlottesville more than a year ago when a Neo-Nazi bulldozed his car through a peaceful "anti-fascist" counter protest, killing one and injuring 19. And yet President Trump blamed both sides. Some justice came of this, though, as last month the killer was sentenced to life in prison.

From this tension, Meacham sees both sides play out.

In Meacham's well-written book, he starts by explaining the context of this "dark side" of America's "soul." It is as anti-egalitarian as it is demagogic, and usually racist. He launches his exploration of this negative instinct through the Confederate States of America with its unmasked permeation of white supremacy at its Southern core.

Not long after President Lincoln's famous words, calling for "the better angels of our nature" in hopes that the states would "swell the chorus of the Union"

and not divide our country, the Civil War broke out.

After America's bloodiest war of all time, this dark side was never destroyed – as Meacham points out, it actually seemed to prevail with its undermining of Reconstruction, paving the way for Ol' Jim Crow, morphing into fighting for the "holy cause" of "states rights."

While Meacham seems to largely stop with Johnson's Vietnam after ruminations about the two KKK waves, as well as Japanese Internment among other events, he quickly skips to Trump.

However, I know we can see other instances of this dark side – not necessarily in his book, but instances that take me closer to home.

Did you know Jim Crow was not enshrined in Oklahoma's Constitution due to fears that President Teddy Roosevelt would veto statehood? And yet, just a little more than 100 years ago, the Oklahoma Legislature, in its temporary home of Guthrie, penned Senate Bill No. 1 defining all its citizens with any degree of African ancestry as black – maintaining segregation anyway.

Further evidence can be found a decade later in Tulsa's Greenwood District where whites massacred hundreds of black residents and razed the neighborhood within hours. At about the same time, David Grann's recent book *Killers of the Flower Moon* documents the Osage murders, where whites acted as their insidious "wards."

More recently is the much harder to forget bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building and the 2015 University of Oklahoma Sigma Alpha Epsilon racism incident. Oklahomans have always known the dark side of our nature.

And yet, there is optimism in Meacham's voice.

"In the main, the America of the 21st century is, for all its shortcomings, freer and more accepting than it has ever been. If that weren't the case, right-wing populist attacks on immigrants and the widening main-

stream wouldn't be so ferocious," he writes. "A tragic element of history is that every advance must contend with the forces of reaction."

Steven Pinker similarly voices Meacham's optimism in his earlier book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Pinker uses this "Better Angels" metaphor for human motivations that can "orient us away from violence and towards cooperation and altruism." Pinker's book covers a treasure trove of data documenting declining violence across time and geography.

Pinker, though, sees this decline in our dark nature as some sort of inevitability. Not so for Meacham. Through his covering of history, wars and all, Meacham finds that progressive change needed its shining lights.

Meacham points to leaders, such as Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson. Each in their own way helped surpass fear and replaced it with aspirations of change. And our better angles are exhibited in programs that were championed by these leaders – i.e., the Square Deal, the New Deal and the Great Society.

Meacham says hope is wrapped up not just in these heroes, but also in average people. He finds hope in early suffragettes like Carrie Chapman Catt and Alice Paul, and with John Lewis and Rose Parks in their successful fight for civil rights, as well as the all-consuming fight against Joseph McCarthy's Red Scare tactics that attempted to undermine our freedoms.

In the last two years, I have read so many books critical of where we are today – from Jamieson's *Cyberwar*, MacLean's *Democracy in Chains*, Woodward's *Fear*, and Nance's *The Plot to Destroy Democracy*, etc. – it's easy to forget those books that will give you a sense that tomorrow can be better than today, even when we feel so imperiled by America's presently unfolding of events.

The Soul of America does just

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that.

Meacham gives us a gift – his long-term perspective that today's time of crisis is not unique. Our history runs in cycles, often alternating between peace and misery, but "America's Soul" is in a slow progression toward an emphatic

civilization.

While Pinker and MLK see inevitability, Meacham reminds that our Better Angel's do not have to prevail – they require persistence, even sweat, blood and tears.

Meacham's words are a soothing

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

The Wall Is Trump's Folly

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

Unless he was asleep from ages 15 to 43 years old, Donald Trump was part of a generation that reviled the horror of the crude and ugly Berlin Wall.

Hoping to halt democracy, evil forces erected the wall in 1961; East Berliners wielding crude hammers, crumbled the wall Nov. 9, 1989.

Yet, at age 72, Trump gambles heavily on an equally ugly wall between Mexico and the United States. History shows that the "wall" concept is an expensive, crude idea doomed for failure.

From the walled cities of medieval Europe to the Great Wall of China and the Berlin wall, politically inspired walls as weapons of defense own a singular heritage. They failed.

This pundit has scaled China's architecturally tasteful wall; explored the handsome walled cities of 14th Century Italy; stood at Gate Charley in Germany; and lived on both side of the U.S.-Mexico border that, even with a wall, works poorly.

Biblically, there is a thought: Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down.

In all times, the folly of politically inspired borders and the even more useless physical walls are haunting reminders that keeping folks apart is a mistake

Hopes, Fears

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

in a time when facts that reach us are shaded, incomplete, spun, or false.

There have always been purveyors of falsehoods – typically found in sensational publications. Rumors and untruths now come directly to us continuously to be screened either by our own experiences or "hopefully" by fact checking providers.

For survival we still need to know who and what to fear. Our predators are no longer likely to be wild animals. Most of the time we cannot fight or flee. We also need to know what to hope so that we are not manipulated by false promises. It is time to educate our hopes and fears.

Tulsa resident Ann Dapice, PhD, has taught and/or served as administrator at a number of universities including the University of Pennsylvania, Widener University, Penn State University, Northeastern Oklahoma A & M College, Tulsa Community College, Rogers State University, and Goddard College, teaching courses in the social sciences, philosophy and Native American Studies. She is Director of Education and Research for T.K. Wolf, Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization and Founder/Executive Director, Institute of Values Inquiry.

and against human nature.

This pundit forecasts that Donald Trump will be haunted throughout history for senselessly championing the physical wall under construction along the southern border of the United States.

As 2019 unfolds, a diminutive lady wearing spiked heels – U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi – defies Trump's folly most dramatically and effectively.

Without a mention of walls' historic failures, Pelosi simply challenges the senselessness waste of Trump's venture.

Only the most simple-minded pundits and politicians seem to adore and support the wall. Most live far from the border or never studied history.

When the Dang Dynasty discovered gunpowder in 850 A.D., they used it to repel invading Mongols who feared arrows flaming with gunpowder. Invaders were only slightly stymied by the long China wall.

Used in innovative 13th Century cannons, gun power easily toppled the high walls of medieval cities in Europe.

More abstractly, the power of truth and the cry for freedom toppled the Berlin Wall three decades ago.

Living in a small Mexican city, this pundit and his adventuresome wife discovered most Mexicans are simply family-oriented, hard-working folks. Some who lacked jobs or economic opportunity said they saw the United States as a temporary work place.

Most Mexicans we met who had migrated to the U.S. said they were only seeking work but planning to return home with money to start their own business. Of course, some never left the U.S. and became patriotic, civic-minded Norteamericanos.

Unfortunately, in recent times, the demand for recreational or addictive drugs by United States citizens opened a new path for Mexicans to earn. Smuggling became a flourishing industry for a few Mexicans who found "border security" to be easily skirted.

When walls rose, ladders rose and tunnels sprouted.

Much like the Italian immigrants used national prohibition of liquor in the 1920s to launch careers in bootlegging that led to other illicit crimes and the Mafia, smuggling drugs to the U.S. created a small criminal class among Mexicans.

Current efforts to legalize and tax marijuana are dramatically denting the smugglers' trade. Economics 101 teaches that lack of demand curtails supply. Artificial barriers never worked so well.

Joseph H. Carter Sr. is author of President or Precedent: Carl Albert's History Changing Choice [Amazon], Never Met A Man I Didn't Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers [HarperCollins] and The Quotable Will Rogers [Gibbs Smith Publishers].

Sharing The Burden

Oklahoma lawmakers received welcome news last month when the State Board of Equalization certified that \$612 million more would be available to spend in 2019-20 than in the current fiscal year.

The rosier state revenue picture is the result of a strong year for the Oklahoma economy and Legislature-approved increases in gross production, gasoline and cigarette taxes.

Still ... it's way too early to pop the champagne corks and celebrate our state's escape from a decade of economic recession and foolhardy trickle-down economic policies at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.

What appeared so promising in December may not be reality as 2019 unfolds.

Oklahoma's over-dependence on oil and gas threatens to torpedo a strong recovery that generated a 12-month record \$12.8 billion in gross receipts for the state treasury.

The recent plunge in oil prices is bad news for a state that sorely needs more revenue if it is to build on last spring's legislative momentum that helped stem the budgetary hemorrhaging and gave teachers their first across-the-board raise in a decade.

Here's where you can see dark clouds on the horizon. The record revenues reflected oilfield activity through October. In September, for example, West Texas intermediate crude averaged \$70.23 per barrel. November's prices – about \$55 a barrel – won't impact state revenues until January.

That is especially worrisome when considering general revenue in the first five months – July to November – of the current 2018-19 fiscal year was only 4% above projections.

If oil prices remain sluggish for an extended period – and there's little reason to think they won't – it won't necessarily impact the current fiscal year's budget, built on \$53.08 per barrel oil. But it could create major headaches for policymakers who've promised to expand on last year's investments, especially in public education.

For those of us who lived through the 1980s oil bust, it's unfathomable that we've made so little progress in reducing our reliance on carbon-related taxes – about one-fourth of state revenues.

The mantra in that era was: We must diversify the Oklahoma economy to insulate it from the vicissitudes of oil and gas prices. The fact it remains the mantra today reflects a failure not only of political, but also of corporate leadership.

There is a sure-fire way to permanently fix this: Tax reform.

Legislative tax policy for two-plus decades worked

TOM GOODWIN

Cheyenne, OK

*Reader and supporter of The Observer
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to shift as much of the tax burden from the state's wealthiest to its working class. The blueprint produced lower income taxes – down from 7% to 5% – and higher sales taxes and fees.

Who benefits most from this approach? The state's deepest pockets. It matters little to those making \$250,000-plus a year to pay an extra penny on a gallon of milk, but it can be a back-breaker for Oklahomans struggling to make ends meet.

The income tax is the fairest tax of all because it is based on the ability to pay. Restoring it to 7% could generate as much as \$2 billion annually for investment in vital state services that help build a brighter future.

It may not set well with lawmakers' biggest campaign donors, but it beats enraging rank-and-file voters by tinkering with their property or sales taxes, ideas broached by Republican-dominated statehouse leadership.

If oil prices remain low, last year's rancorous two-week teacher walkout and fierce budget battle royal may have been but a glimpse of Oklahoma's policy-making future.



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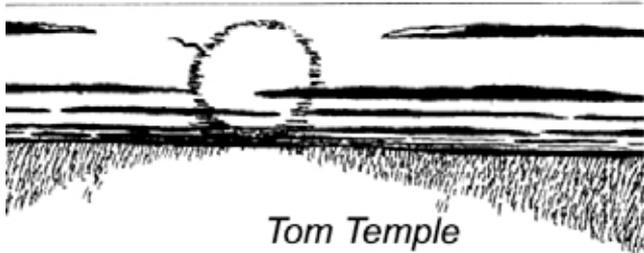
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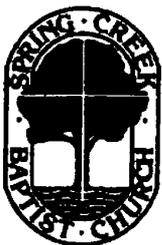
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Democratic control of Congress is curtailing Oklahoma DC power. GOP Rep. Tom Cole hoped to become House Appropriations chair, but post-election wasn't even chosen by colleagues as his party's ranking member.

Insanity! One in four Americans age 60-plus won't get a flu shot this year – 43% think it could make them sick, 35% don't believe it's effective, 25% don't expect to get the flu and 22% don't like shots. – AARP

Cheered on by the Oklahoman, lawmakers took away local power to regulate oil and gas drilling and establish a minimum wage. Now the newspaper crusades for the Legislature to give power to cities to regulate marijuana.

Isn't it way past time for the Legislature to regulate homeschooling? No one wants to take away parents' rights to educate their children as they see fit. But the state has an obligation to ensure minors are in fact being educated – and are safe.

Let's hope Gov.-elect Stitt's budget secretary, former Sen. Mike Mazzei, is better with numbers than words. His recent Oklahoma Opportunity Project newsletter decried the state's "shotty" financial practices.

The times are a-changin': Black Friday online sales set a record – including \$2 billion spent via smartphones. – Adobe Analytics

Don't pop the champagne corks just yet. Lawmakers should have \$612 million more to spend in FY '20, but sagging oil prices threaten to wreak havoc. Will Oklahoma ever wean itself from boom-bust fossil fuels?

Did you know? Vinita received a \$25,000 AARP Community Challenge grant to improve pedestrian safety and walkability along the town's historic Route 66 Main Street.

We urge our readers to switch channels when Sinclair affiliates [KOKH in OKC and KTUL in Tulsa] broadcast the parent company's oft-disgusting editorials. Recent example: defending the use of tear gas against migrants at the border.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

The governor already appoints cabinet heads that manage agency administrators. Administrators need time to work their way up so they can learn complex state budget, hiring, purchasing, legislative and rule-making processes.

Gov. Stitt, find out how state government works before you ruin it.

Jackie Gaston
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

I'm always puzzled by the cowardice of people who promote and revel in causing racial mischief in the least and deadly misery at the most based on people's skin color. The election of King Rump did not make them racists--they already were, it doesn't happen overnight. However, the election of one man has given these people the braggadocio to crawl out from under the large stone of their ignorance and pretend they're responsible people and now can have a turn at running the country as if right and wrong were just oscillations of a pendulum. It's never right to do wrong regardless of who they claim as their leader or role model. Their actions beggar my mind to think about their poverty both in material wealth and in character of soul that they cleave to a rabid animal like Trump while their own lives become more and more unbearable. Clinging to Trump is like clinging to a lead weight.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

First, it was privatization of our public lands and parks and now the privatization of our postal service is on the block in the U.S. Congress. Everyone should call his/her Congress members and ask them to co-sponsor HR 993 and SR 633 which opposes privatizing the postal service. Our U.S. Constitution, Article 1; section 8, gives the U.S. Congress, not private enterprises, the power to establish post offices.

What is behind this scheme? The postal service seems to be just fine. We receive our mail in a timely fashion. Postal workers are well paid, have job security and a promise of a good retirement.

A private enterprise could change all that in order to make a profit on their investment. Would they cut services, drop services for rural citizens? How many



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employees would have to go? Would your post office be closed? And after they did these money-saving tricks, would they go bankrupt from lack of business and have to close all postal services?

Tell your Congress person privatizing the postal service is not acceptable.

Nadine Jewell
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

On behalf of Amnesty International No. 238 of Oklahoma City, I am writing to thank you for your excellent article in the November Oklahoma Observer about our annual Write-A-Thon for human rights at Full Circle Bookstore.

We also thank you for being a beacon of hope for Oklahoma, and wish The Observer family happy holidays and a wonderful, joyous, successful 2019.

Victor Gorin
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

FDR said it best: "You have nothing to fear but fear itself." Trump added hate, racism, blasphemy, lies, and anti-Semitism.

How sad for our country. Washington must be rolling over in his grave.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

According to Pew Research, 20% of American adults get their news from print newspapers. An article in a recent edition of The Oklahoman stated they would be discontinuing home delivery service to about 7,000 subscribers and reduce retail sales in the state by another 3,500 – as well as removing all of its vending machines.

In Oklahoma, there are 2,957,250 adults over the age of 18. The Oklahoman reaches 92,073 either by broadsheet or digital on a daily basis. The Tulsa World reaches about the same percent. So 6% of the Oklahoma adult population reads, presumably, some portion of The Oklahoman or The Tulsa World each

day. The remainder may read some combination of their daily, weekly or other papers available by subscription or off the newsstand; this may include Dallas Morning News, Wall Street Journal, USA Today and others.

Pew Research says approximately 60% of Americans get their news from cable, local or network TV news, and social media. Carl Bernstein, in a presentation earlier this year in OKC, said we've actually expanded the amount of high quality investigative reporting and commentary across all delivery platforms. I agree, but would question the inherent problems of what feels like "media fragmentation."

What percentage of American adult readers will take the time to examine more than one news platform or dive below the bullet points to commentary? 10%? 20%?

Is it enough to build consensus or forge compromise across a broad range of policy issues? Can public opinion become too fragmented to sustain a democratic form of government? How do we teach consensus-building competencies? Is public school curricula developed using Bloom's Taxonomy – Affective Domain?

Jan New
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Before Republicans elevate George Herbert Walker Bush to sainthood, he should be remembered for appointing two dummies, Vice President Dan Quayle and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, as well as trying to bury us Okies.

As President Ronald Reagan's vice president, Bush permitted bureaucrats to close Oklahoma's Penn Square Bank, a maverick oil patch lender, on July 5, 1982.

This only liquidation of an energy bank caused 400 to 500 Okie business bankruptcies, 170 bank failures and gave our state a "woo you and screw you" reputation.

Our scandal could have been avoided by taking out the bad loans, funding the deposits and selling the bank like the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. did with Texas banks.

But Bush was tied to "Big Oil" and "Big Banks" who wanted to buy Okie leases on the cheap and to pass branch banking and multi-bank holding companies in the Legislature, which happened with Penn Square's bloody shirt.

Bush had made his fortune as a Texas oilman and his buddy, James A. Baker III, a Houston lawyer with extensive oil stock interests, was Reagan's chief of White House staff.

The day after Penn Square's failure Bush spoke at a Republican fundraising lunch in Oklahoma City and never mentioned Penn Square. The bank's blood was on his hands.

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reminder of America's resilience. "The good news is that we have come through such darkness before — as, time and again, Lincoln's better angels have found a way to prevail."

All these events Meacham brings up harken back for me to Martin Luther King's famous words: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

With this long-term view, Meacham shows us that our "Better Angels" are not abstract. We have to be the "few caring people" to make our world a better place, as Margaret Mead says: "For, indeed, that's all who ever have."

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.

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