

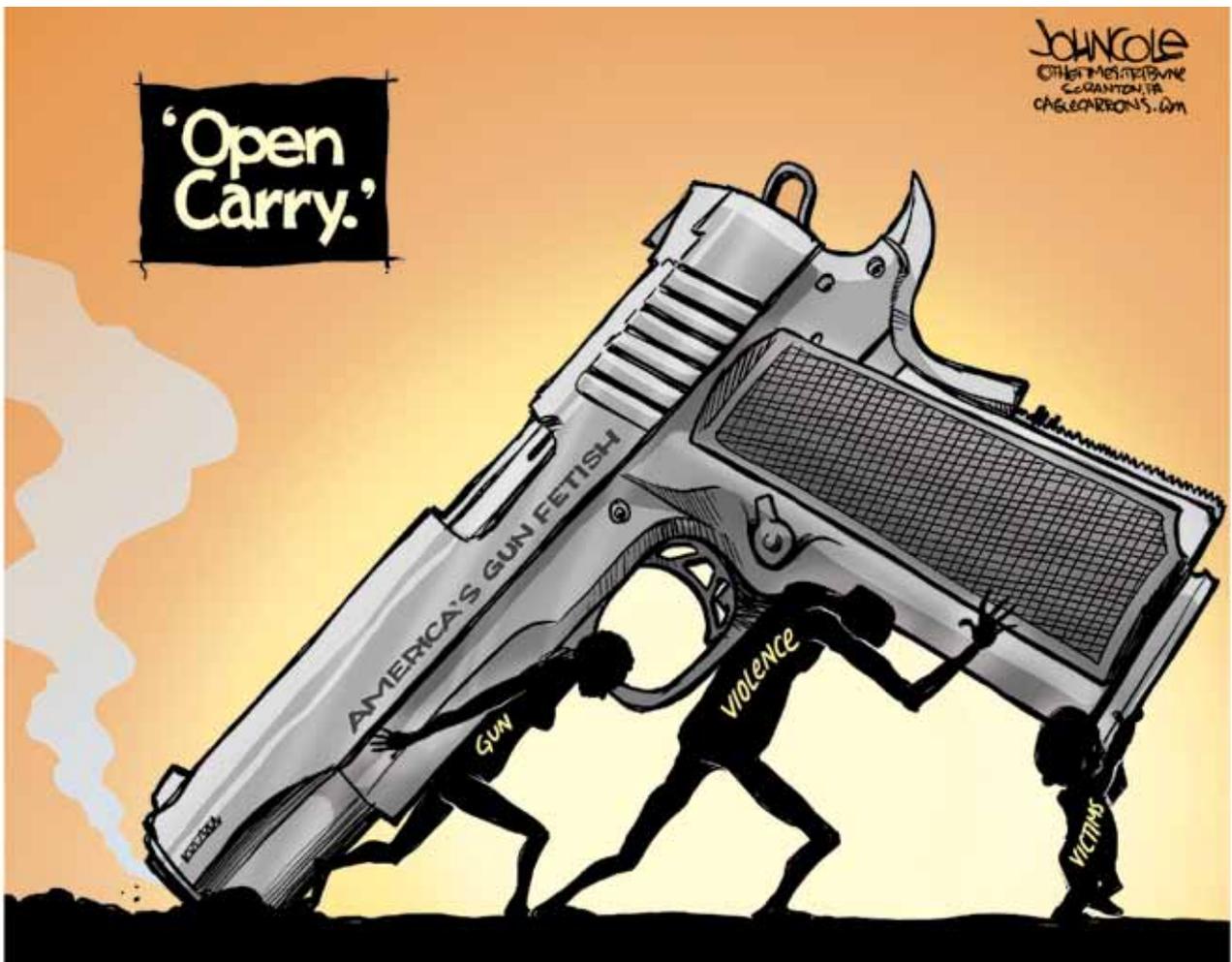
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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MARCH 2019 • VOLUME 51 NUMBER 3 • \$5.00

Red State Roulette

The Dangers Of Permitless Carry



Special Report begins on page 6

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

E-mail to letters@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

Observations

Smear?

The long-simmering bad blood between University of Oklahoma regents and former President David Boren is embarrassing, a self-inflicted – and costly – black eye.

We are not in position, of course, to judge the validity of sexual harassment allegations against Boren. But it doesn't take a renowned barrister to make a compelling case regents bungled their response.

If regents or other university officials possessed credible evidence a crime was committed, law enforcement should have been alerted forthwith. If the allegations were determined to be a civil matter, why weren't they investigated sooner?

Perhaps they didn't come to the board's attention until after Boren's departure last June? Perhaps. But if so, that begs a question: why did the investigation suddenly become public seven months after Boren retired and after he and new President James Gallogly clashed over the state of university finances?

The timing smacks of a coordinated smear.

Boren's relationship with a rightwing-dominated board – all but one appointed initially by Gov. Mary Fallin – began souring after he championed a 2016 statewide initiative aimed at increasing sales taxes to fund public education, from early childhood to university.

When Gallogly took the helm last July and declared OU's finances a mess – leading to layoffs and belt-tightening – Boren defended his stewardship. The back-and-forth took a nasty turn when Gallogly allegedly threatened to “destroy” Boren if “he ever crosses me again.”

Gallogly denied making the threat, but the debate clearly estranged Boren from his successor and some regents.

This soap opera-esque airing of dirty laundry is beneath the dignity of a flagship public university. It also besmirches the reputation of an institution of higher learning that aspires to be listed among the nation's

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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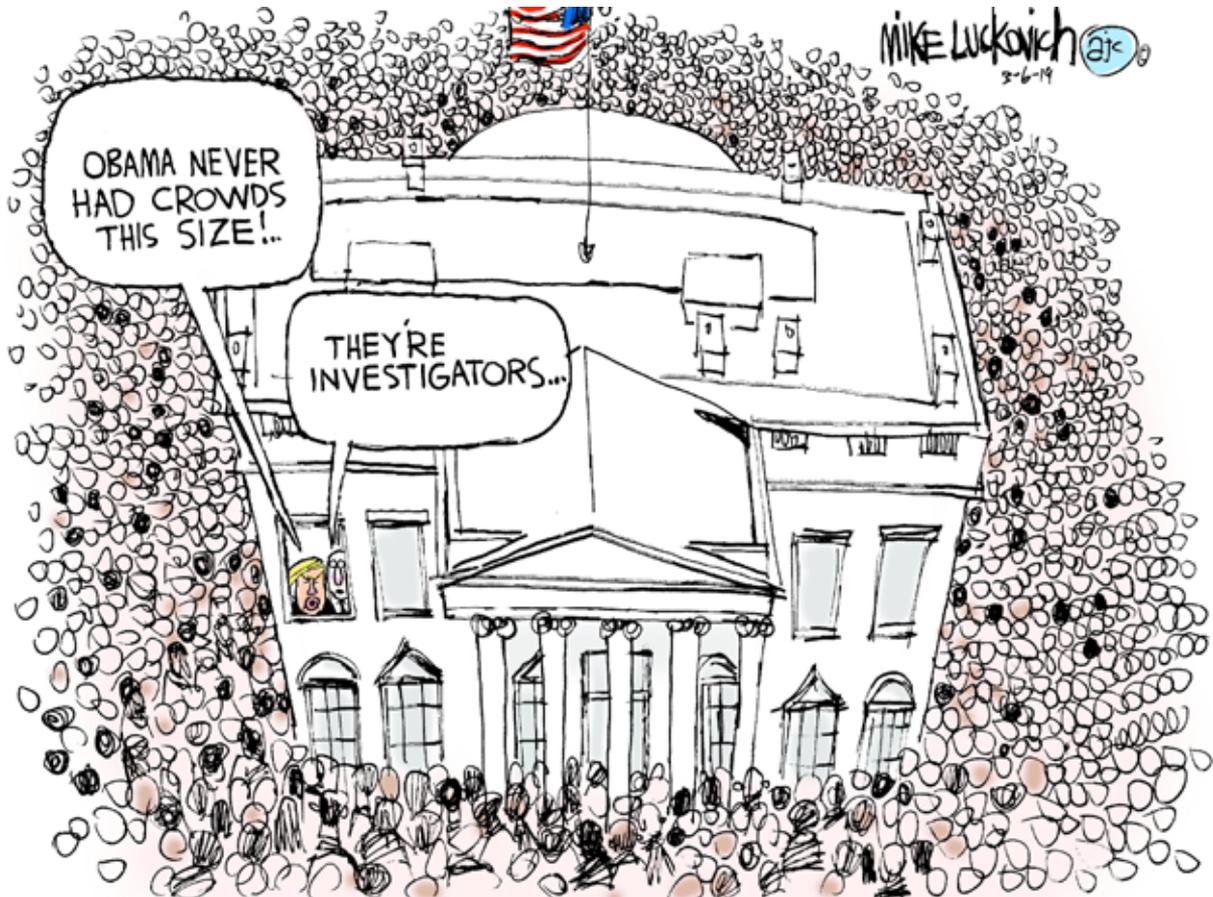
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Observerscope



Laurel: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, first governor to personally welcome Muslims to the state Capitol for their annual advocacy day – signaling in deed and word that he represents all four million Oklahomans.

Bad News: The incredible shrinking Oklahoman cut its opinion pages to four days a week. **Good News:** Only four days of mindless rightwing drivel to endure.

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, shedding crocodile tears that Republicans weren't given more time to study the resolution rejecting President Trump's emergency declaration. It was one page, for goodness sake!

Freedom Oklahoma hit a game-winning grand slam by naming Allie Shinn as its new executive director. The former ACLU deputy director also serves on the Sally's List board.

Laurel: To activist extraordinaire Mary Francis, honored with the Sierra Club's equivalent of an Oscar – the Ed Kessler Bulldog Award. She is an Oklahoma treasure – indefatigable in her quest to help create a better state!

Wow! At his first meeting as Democratic National Committeeman, former Gov. David Walters was elected to the DNC's executive committee.

Dart: To the GOP's statehouse supermajority, ramming through the dangerous permitless carry bill – but refusing to allow open carry in the Capitol. Hypocrites.

It hasn't gotten near the attention it deserves, but Tulsa Rep. Regina Goodwin's HB 2253 – making it clear that voting rights are restored once a felony sentence is fully served – sailed through House and awaits Senate action.

Dart: To Bartlesville Sen. Julie Daniels, practicing medicine without a license. Her SB 614 would require doctors to mislead patients on whether medication abortion [Mifepristone] can be reversed. It can't.

What's wrong with this picture? Oklahoma is No. 6 nationally in average peak sunlight hours, but No. 45 in solar energy production. If only lawmakers could give up carbon barons' campaign checks ...

Laurel: To Tulsa attorney Jim Frazier, retiring after more than two decades of tireless service as Oklahoma's Democratic National Committeeman.

Congratulations to our friends Tulsa City Councilor Kara Joy McKee and OKPolicy's Gene Perry on the arrival of their first – a baby girl named Tsula Lew.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Thank you so much for “GOP’s Vacuous Attacks on Kendra Horn” [February Observer]. This has been the mantra not only for the Republicans, but also The Oklahoman. Nary a day goes by without the insertion in their articles that she not only voted “against Oklahoma values,” but there is also a seminal phrase consistently inserted that states that the Republicans are determined to take back her seat in the next election.

Everyone seems so shocked that she does not vote on the same side of issues as a Republican would. She was elected as a Democrat and one would assume that her constituents expect her to represent Democratic values. There were comments about her voting propensity as soon as she arrived in Washington and before she had voted on anything. She was chastised for voting for Nancy Pelosi for speaker of the House. Did people expect her to vote for a Republican?

Republicans seem to be in such a state of incredulity over the fact that she unseated Steve Russell

causing their inability to accept such utter disregard for tradition on the part of the young and progressive voters in her district who selected her. I am not one of her constituents and thus did not even vote for her, but I have been observing her execution of duties, and while she is less progressive and more centrist than my tastes, I believe she is fair and adds long-needed and overdue balanced representation for our state.

Thank you for speaking up for her!

Sandy Adams
Guthrie

Editor, The Observer:

Y-Y-E-E-S-S!!! *Finally* someone with a bigger soapbox and spotlight than I or anyone I know has said in public all the thoughts and examples of monstrous behavior that have been boiling in my mind since I first read about the Orange Criminal years ago.

No respectable man or woman in America can honestly still support Trump after this devastating closing speech by Michael Cohen – be they ordinary working stiffs like

me or elected members of local, state, or federal governments.

In his closing remarks at a Congressional hearing, Mr. Cohen laid out clearly all the Trump crimes against American law and crimes against humanity for all to see and for his supporters to futilely attempt to rebuke.

The Pied Piper magic of Trump is broken once and for all.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The other day, U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar, R-AZ, berated Michael Cohen with an adage his mother taught him; to wit, “Liar, liar, pants on fire!”

Another adage from my childhood comes to mind: “It takes one to know one!”

Charles Wende
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Building a fraction of a wall is akin to be a “little bit pregnant.” It is or it ain’t. A rose ...

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

According to the Oklahoma Constitution Article 2, Section 26 [Article II § 26]:

“The right of a citizen to keep and bear arms in defense of his home, person, or property, or in aid of the civil power, when thereunto legally summoned, shall never be prohibited; but nothing herein contained shall prevent the Legislature from regulating the carrying of weapons.”

That is, we all have a right to keep and bear arms, but that right is not unlimited, and our lawmaking-body, the Legislature, can regulate the carrying of weapons [firearms]. As it is right now, we have licensing and training in place to be able to carry, concealed or openly, in order to comply with public safety.

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Sacrosanct, No More

Not so long ago, in a statehouse not so far away, the then-minority political party pledged its devotion to the principle of local control.

No one knows local problems better than locals, they declared. Government closest to the people is the best. Nothing's worse than one-size-fits-all decrees from NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.

But a not-so-funny thing happened when Republicans, after a century of Democratic dominance, finally seized control of all levers of state government in 2010: Local control was no longer inviolate.

OKC residents wanted a citywide vote on establishing a higher minimum wage and improving worker benefits. The Legislature blocked them.

Towns enduring earthquake swarms took steps to protect neighborhoods from oil and gas drilling and their drinking water from contamination. The Legislature blocked them, too.

Local school boards exercised their authority to reject proposed charter schools. The Legislature blocked again, giving the state board the power to overrule the locals.

The erosion of local control and consolidation of statehouse power persists, mostly unabated.

Just last month, for example, the Senate Education Committee approved a measure, Claremore Sen. Marty Quinn's SB 441, that would mandate five-day school weeks.

A no-brainer, right? A traditional five-day week means shorter, more focused periods of classroom instruction for students and relieves working families of the mad-scramble to secure extra child care.

Plus, some education experts contend Oklahoma's minimum class schedule – 180 days or 1,080 school hours – actually needs to be increased in order to prepare students for the challenges of a 21st century global economy.

The problem? The Legislature too often is terrific at issuing mandates and lousy at funding them.

Many of the 92 school districts operating on four-day weeks made the switch because they were withering financially – the result of state lawmakers imposing the nation's deepest education budget cuts.

Forcing districts to return to five-day weeks without seriously increasing funding is legislative malpractice at its worst – and a flashing neon sign declaring statehouse indifference to local control.

Yes, SB 441 would provide exceptions to the five-day mandate. But guess who would get to decide whether a district can operate a four-day schedule? It's not the duly elected local school board. Rather, it would be the unelected State Board of Education, appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state Senate.

To be clear: The issue is less about the superiority of five-day school weeks – they are optimum, in most cases – than it is about whether the GOP-dominated Legislature will earmark enough of this year's nearly \$575 million in additional revenue to fully fund a five-day mandate.

This isn't the only legislative assault on local control that bears scrutiny.

Orlando Rep. John Pfeiffer's HB 2150 would tighten restrictions lawmakers imposed four years ago on municipalities that seek to regulate oil and gas operations within their jurisdictions.

Billed as a "mineral owners rights" measure, it essentially would block anything that limits "the use and development of minerals" or increases "the costs of oil and gas operations."

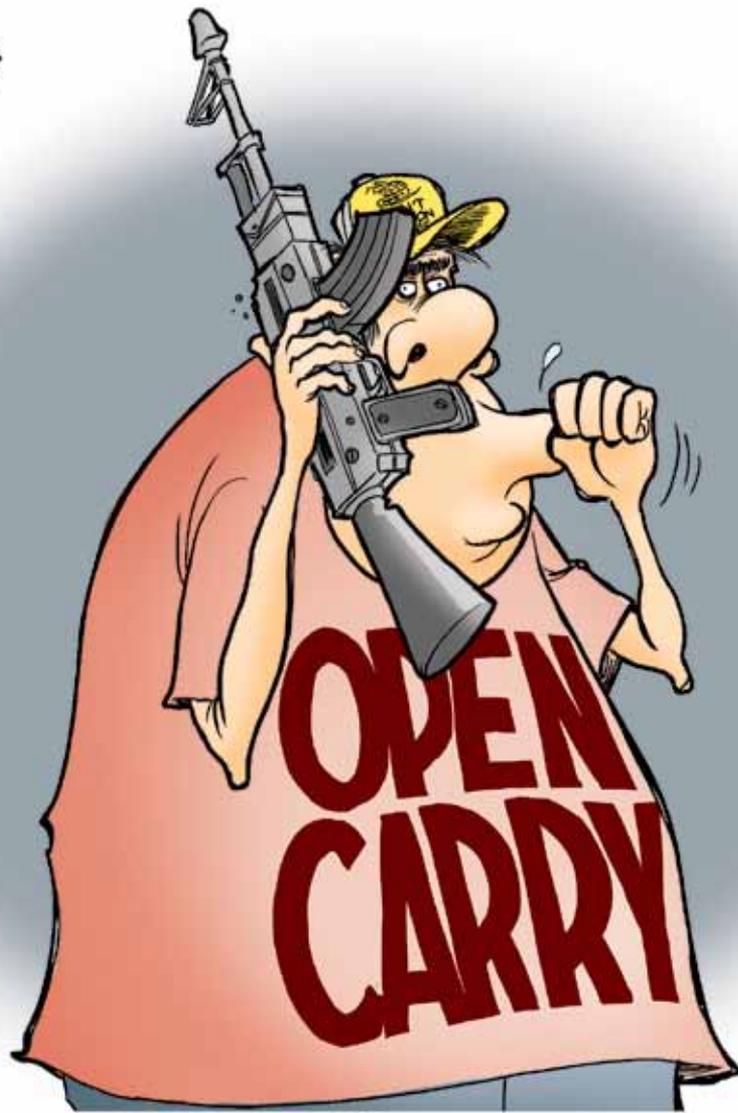
Who stands to benefit most? Oil and gas companies, of course.

First, the measure would sharply diminish the likelihood they could be stopped from operating wherever and whenever they please – even if it adversely affects property rights and taxpayer investments in public infrastructure like roads and bridges.

Second, as Chickasha Rep. David Perryman, who opposes HB 2150, points out, it's oil and gas operators that "own a growing percentage of Oklahoma's minerals."

Don't be surprised if the legislative assault on local control ignites a ballot backlash – not just the defeat of some incumbents, but also passage of initiatives to restore the local-state balance of power balance. Stay tuned.

JOHN COLE
OF THE TIMES-TRIBUNE
SCRANTON, PA.
CARLETONS.COM



THE NEW OK CORRAL

Parroting The NRA Line, New Governor's First Bill Signing Is The 'Dangerous' Permitless Carry

BY BRETT DICKERSON

The first bill signed by Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt was the so-called "Constitutional Carry" law allowing the open carry of a firearm without a background check, training, or permit.

Sailing through both Republican-dominated chambers in days, HB 2597 landed on the Republican governor's desk in the morning of Feb. 27 and was signed by the end of the day in an upbeat public ceremony. The law takes effect Nov. 1.

Nearly all Republican candidates and the new Republican governor had pledged in the last election to get permitless carry passed.

In his signing remarks to the media, Stitt closely mirrored a statement first coined by the National Rifle Association's Wayne LaPierre after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings where one gunman shot and killed 20 children with an assault weapon.

“I think the best defense for a bad guy with a gun,” Stitt said, “is a good guy with a gun.”

Most of the media seem to have missed the significance of the broader term “firearm” which replaced “handgun” used in the existing concealed carry law. With the new language, any kind of long gun – such as assault weapons, rifles, or shotguns as well as handguns – can be openly carried in public after Nov. 1 when the law takes effect.

The law is based on the current concealed carry law that protects property owners’ rights to restrict carrying a weapon on their property or place of business. The biggest changes have been to eliminate the requirement for a background check and to include all firearms.

The law contains language that prohibits carrying by persons who have committed certain types of crimes. But it is only enforceable once law enforcement catches those persons carrying illegally.

Carrying firearms is also prohibited in government buildings and courthouses, schools, sports arenas, gambling establishments [unless specifically allowed]. In a trailing bill negotiated by Oklahoma City and Tulsa leaders, open carry is not allowed in public parks, although concealed carry is.

In sharp contrast, the U.S. House of Representatives with its Democratic majority passed HR 8 that would extend background checks for gun purchases to private sales as well as dealer sales that are currently regulated. However, there are doubts that the bill can pass the hurdle of the Senate with its Republican majority or get the signature of President Donald Trump.

U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn, a Democrat representing central Oklahoma’s 5th Congressional District, voted for the bill.

In response to passage of HB 2597, Horn raised concerns about the new law in comments to The Frontier, an online news site based in Tulsa, saying the new law “doesn’t make us safer.”

STRONG REACTIONS

Along with the expected celebration from gun-rights proponents, a number of people on the Left spoke out about the bill and the law once it was signed.

House Minority Leader Emily Virgin was blunt with The Observer when we asked about the bill as it moved to the Senate.

“It’s just extreme, unnecessary and dangerous,” she said.

“Every member of the House Democratic caucus, urban and rural, voted against the bill. And, we’ve received a lot of support because of our no votes.”

Virgin said the feedback they have heard was that “people see it as going too far.”

“They see a no vote as the common sense policy, even if many of them are gun owners and they’re Second Amendment supporters.”

Once the bill had been signed into law, Virgin released a sharp rebuke of the apparent values of the Republican majority and Stitt.

“It is disappointing that this issue is clearly the top priority for the Republicans at 23rd & Lincoln given that it’s the first and only bill that has been fast-tracked through the legislative process and signed by the governor,” Virgin said. “We’re facing many issues as a state, but access to firearms isn’t one of them.”

Oklahoma County Commissioner Carrie Blumert leveled direct criticism of the law in response to our request for comment.

“Thousands of families grieve the loss of loved ones every year in our country because of gun violence, domestic violence, suicide, gang violence, and mass shootings,” she said.

“Rather than increasing public safety by ensuring all gun owners go through the proper training, background checks, and permitting processes, we have done just the opposite.”

She vowed to “... always work to increase public safety and enact common sense gun legislation, no matter what position I hold.”

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has been active with comments across the political spectrum from the introduction of the bill. After its signing, traffic increased, especially on Twitter.

“While liberals in Congress keep trying to take away our constitutional rights, Governor Stitt is standing up for what is right in Oklahoma. I want to thank him for leading and protecting our rights.” – U.S. Rep. Kevin Hern, [@krhern]

“Weeks where my uterus and guns take the center stage in our state govt absolutely make me want to move. I won’t and will continue to fight, but it would sure be nice if we could focus on things like education, health care, etc. But again, not as sexy for those mail pieces.” – political consultant Cassie Peters [@cassibob], Feb. 28

“How is passing [swiftly] and signing permitless carry into law making #OKTopTen? How do we keep our communities safe and desirable when we will have folks who are untrained carrying firearms they have no idea how to use? Are we just begging for more negative statistics?” – State Rep. Cyndi Munson, [@CyndiMunson85], Feb. 27

On Facebook we saw some comments by Edmond resident Ed Ibarra, who identified himself as a person of color. We asked what he thought the reaction of whites would be if they saw openly armed people of color in public.

He said that in the metro areas he thought there would be some neighborhoods where it would be accepted. But in the rest of the state, he believed there would be a different response.

“Having traveled Oklahoma’s rural counties extensively for several years for work, I can say that in most of Oklahoma, Constitutional Carry will be a whites-only privilege,” said the medical company representative.

“I can say that having experienced open racism in those areas.”

PERMITLESS CARRY

Sheer Lunacy

BY STEVE JARMAN

I am enraged. The Republican majority in the House of Representatives passed HB 2597, the permit-less gun bill.

Here in Pauls Valley and the Garvin County area, my family's name has been synonymous for three things: hunting, fishing and law enforcement. There are three generations of us, now, that grew up on the Washita River. To us, guns were no different than rod and reels and trotlines. In most cases we ate what we shot just like we ate what we caught.

My Dad was a police officer for years. My cousin Jimmy was the chief of police here in Pauls Valley for years. Jimmy's Dad, Charlie, was at one time a police officer. Jimmy's son, Jeff, was a police officer and had not I had a chance to go to college and get a teaching certificate I, too, probably would have become a police officer.

I recall four times when my Dad told me of situations where he had to draw his pistol on men. Twice he fired it and both times he deliberately missed and he was a crack shot. Why? He didn't want it on his conscience that he either shot or killed someone.

He had a childhood friend who also went into law enforcement. His name was S.J. Orr. S.J. spent

most of his adult life working as a police officer in a small town in New Mexico. S.J. was not so fortunate. Toward the end of his career he and another officer were forced to kill a man. It was a horrific and gruesome situation. S.J. retired not long after that.

Several years later he stopped by our house to visit with my Dad. He told Dad the details and then told him, "Dawson, I haven't slept in five years."

I didn't get to meet S.J. I was teaching at that time. Teaching is a very confining job.

I taught for 31 years. To the best of my recollection, during those years the two most violent incidents to occur in Pauls Valley Public Schools blew up in my face.

One took place while I was doing my student teaching. A student went berserk and started throwing desks at another student across the classroom from him. Several years later a student walked up to another student who was standing in front of me and stabbed him. To make a long story short I pinned the boy with the knife up against the lockers and had to talk him out of the knife to keep other students from getting hurt.

Afterwards, the school board sent me a thank you letter for preventing a bad situation from getting worse. In that letter they called me a "hero." It was kind of them, but I don't think so.

Why do I tell you about all of this back story? Yes, I know a few things about guns and about violent situations. Enough so that I say this with conviction: You do not throw gasoline on a fire to put it out. Instead, snuff out the fuel source.

Every teacher I have visited with agrees with me on this matter. There is not place for guns in schools.

I mean, seriously, do people think that because they can carry a gun it makes them bulletproof? What if they get an eye shot out? Boy! It's hard to draw a bead when you can't see.

People who think that the 2nd Amendment gives them the right to bare arms need to finish reading it. They remind me of a man who said he started reading the Bible and quit when it got to the part where God told Noah, "Go forth and multiply." That guy wound up having 15 kids.

Over the past few years we here in Pauls Valley have had to deal with a lot of totally unnecessary deaths. At least 20 helpless people died when Gov. Mary Fallin closed the State School. Then there was the lady who died the day our hospital was closed. Her daughter got her to the emergency room just after they had locked the doors. Her daughter took her to the hospital at Purcell and she died in the parking lot.

When will this insanity end?

Again, you do not throw gasoline on a fire to put it out.

Steve Jarman lives in Pauls Valley.

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What If People Of Color Open-Carry?

People of color in Oklahoma are beginning to ask what the response might be to a group of blacks or Latinos openly carrying firearms when they will be allowed by law to do so on Nov. 1.

"If we were in a group, even gathered casually, just two or three people of color, I do not think that we would be safe from Caucasians or police ... who felt threatened or just entitled to intervene," said Edmond resident Ed Ibarra, who identified himself as a "person of color."

In late February, the first bill signed by first-year Gov. Kevin Stitt was the so-called "Constitutional Carry" bill that made its way through the Republican-controlled Oklahoma House and Senate in mere days.

The law takes effect Nov. 1 and will allow most people to openly carry handguns, assault weapons, rifles, and shotguns in public with restrictions for some typically crowded venues.

Republican legislators dominated by white men as well as the white, male Republican governor spiked the ball, jubilant that they had made good on their near-universal campaign promises to enact a permitless carry law in the 2019 session.

From a large number of heavy social media comments the clear assumption is that white men are going to be the ones most interested in openly carrying firearms.

But what if a group of black men are seen carrying firearms? In America's recent past there has been such a time where conservative whites responded in opposite fashion to what we would expect today.

In 1967 the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was formed centering in Oakland, CA. Its purpose was to defend black people in the U.S. against abuse and murder by whites and the police.

An important part of their effort was their "cop-watch" program that involved founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale along with a growing membership patrolling the streets of Oakland with loaded firearms ready to defend blacks against an openly hostile police force.

It became commonplace in Oakland to see a car load of Black Panther members pull up across the street from a police stop and stoically observe while holding rifles and shotguns.

White Oakland citizens were shocked and police taken aback.

In response, Donald Mulford, a Republican assem-

OKC Chief: Law Increases Threats To Police Officers

Veteran Oklahoma City Police Chief Bill City offered this blunt assessment of permitless carry:

- "This is the wrong direction. We should be going the other direction."

- "The more guns you have, the more easy it is to get guns, the more deaths you're going to have. You'll have homicides, accidental shootings, suicides. It's bound to increase."

- "There's so many people out there out there that haven't been convicted. They're committing crimes and will be able to have guns with them and if we catch them and we know they're gang members and we know they're running with violent groups, we still can't do anything about it. We can't even take their gun. Got to give it back to them, and they'll go on their way. What laws like this does, it increases the threat for officers."

- "They [officers] don't know who they're approaching, especially depending on the area and the time of day. They have the right to ask, 'do you have a firearm?' he said. "They're probably going to be asking the citizens a lot more times if they have a gun than they used to."

- "Saying that it makes communities safer, that's [a] pretty tired and old statement ... That's not the case. We should be going the other direction and be more responsible about who we have carrying guns in this country."

blyman representing Oakland in the California Legislature, introduced a bill that would reverse the liberal gun-carrying laws, a vestige of California's vigilante past.

He had wide support from fellow Republicans to restrict anyone from carrying a loaded firearm in public unless they had direct need to gain a permit to carry one.

Republicans strongly supported the bill as did the National Rifle Association. That organization publicly urged then Gov. Ronald Reagan to sign it, which he did. It became the Mulford Act.

For more information, research these informative articles about that time:

"Here's how the nation responded when a black militia group occupied a government building," by Nick Wing, *The Huffington Post*, January 2016.

"The Secret History of Guns," by Adam Winkler, *The Atlantic*, September 2011. – *Brett Dickerson*

SOONER SCANDAL OR BOOMER BUST?

The Sexual Harassment Investigation Of David Lyle Boren

BY CAL HOBSON

Last spring I led a non-credit seminar at the University of Oklahoma examining the 50-year public service career of then soon-to-retire President David Boren. In a very small way it was an effort to educate myself and other senior learners about his life – nothing more, nothing less.

Guest speakers who had known Mr. Boren even longer than I were invited to present unvarnished, unedited remarks – pro or con – then answer questions or listen to comments from about 100 seminar members, some of whom had known him since childhood.

Within a day of our course completion, David retired, ending a splendid 24-year run at the helm in Norman.

Observer subscribers know he also served almost a decade in the Oklahoma House of Representatives, followed by one term as governor, then 16 years in the United States Senate. In the opinion of many, David is our state's most accomplished statesman.

However, for some, he was – and is – just another career political operative, one who endeavored to please all while rewarding close friends with large salaries and inflated titles based more on personal loyalty to him rather than clear and convincing qualifications for their employment.

Fair or unfair? I just report and you decide. A half century in the spotlight is bound to create a myriad of opinions about any human being and clearly this man is no exception.

When he exited from the glaring lights as the long-time lead of our state's most prominent political stage, bouquets of praise, glowing editorials, honorary titles, expressions of thanks, heartfelt handshakes and hugs all were showered upon him from friend and even foe alike.

Just in case you don't know, David is a son of teachers, a husband, father and grandfather; writer, Rhodes Scholar, Army officer, learned lawyer, author of critically important statutes both at the state and federal level, and a much sought-after speaker,

thinker and visionary. He is also a lifelong Democrat – a conservative one, according to some; big spending liberal, in the opinion of others.

And now, not even a year after voluntarily departing his perch on the pinnacle of power, he is the target of a sexual harassment investigation requested by his former bosses, the university regents. An inquisition – query, if you prefer – is being conducted by perhaps the largest and most expensive law firm in America, Jones Day, by name – headquartered in Washington and employer of 2,700 lawyers who do their assigned work on five continents, as well as in scores of states. None other than a former U.S. Attorney from Georgia, the Peach State, is the hourly billing sleuth-in-charge.

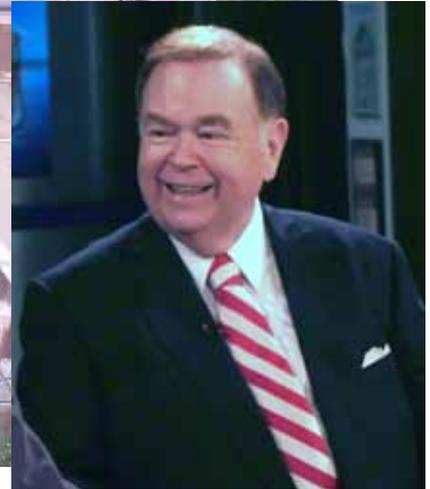
We Okies are footing his bill, and that of some helpers as well, and will continue to do so for weeks – more likely months and perhaps even years – to determine the existence, or absence, of proof relevant to Boren's alleged sexual harassment of former male aides.

Wary and cautious university press releases have been generated but damaging and damning leaks to the Oklahoman newspaper, and specifically longtime reporter Nolan Clay, form the basis of the public hunt for facts – just the facts, ma'am – of conduct unbecoming by Boren.

It's a who-done-it, high-stakes, high-profile set of articles, penned by investigative reporter Clay, a pro in this kind of journalist output at the paper for decades.

Unfortunately, I got to know Nolan rather well more than 20 years ago when he and several of his colleagues were assigned by then-publisher Edward L. Gaylord to poke around in the life and times of a different politician I knew and know very well.

That would be me! As a result of their dogged digging, I got to meet a lot of new people back then with very important sounding titles – prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation agents, grand jurors, witnesses, agen-



cy directors and security consultants, just to name a few. The list goes on, so maybe I should write a book sometime, but it would be a boring read. No wrongdoing on my part, or anyone else's, was found.

So what gives now concerning Boren? Who is the accuser – or accusers – and why?

At this moment, are longtime rumors and speculation worthy of spending so much of your money to examine? What are the specific allegations? When and from who did this matter come to the attention of regents, new President James Gallogly, legal authorities, whistle-blowers or some combination thereof?

What is the legal definition of harassment? Is it unwelcome advances, inappropriate touching or glances, provocative words or suggestions, reprimands, admonitions or something else ... more or less? And when did any of this occur, if at all, not to mention where, why and under what circumstances?

Some say the only eventual winners in this mess, if any can be found, will be multiple sets of lawyers, hired to do what they are hired to do: investigate, evaluate, litigate and, often in a case such as this, settle for money. Whose money? Most likely yours. Most likely a lot.

The losers? Just about everybody else. If the allegations are based in fact, those making them have already lost in a very personal sense. The Boren family, regardless of the truthfulness yet to be determined, can never be viewed in the same light as before this process began. The broader university family cannot possibly come out a winner and our flagship center of learning will be besmirched, in some way, perhaps forever.

Oops ... In my haste to identify losers, I forgot an additional possible winner – that being, of course, the Oklahoman newspaper. By publishing such provocative pieces, long on allegations but devoid

of identifiable sources providing hard, verifiable information, subscriptions and readership may have ticked up – but at what cost to others? What had been simply gossip and water cooler comments in decades past suddenly became worthy of front-page, above-the-fold reporting that reads more like speculation.

Yes, readers have the right to know much about former and current prominent public figures, just as Orson Welles had the right to air a story about aliens that set off national panic. The difference is Welles soon revealed it was all a joke, just in good fun, no permanent harm done or intended.

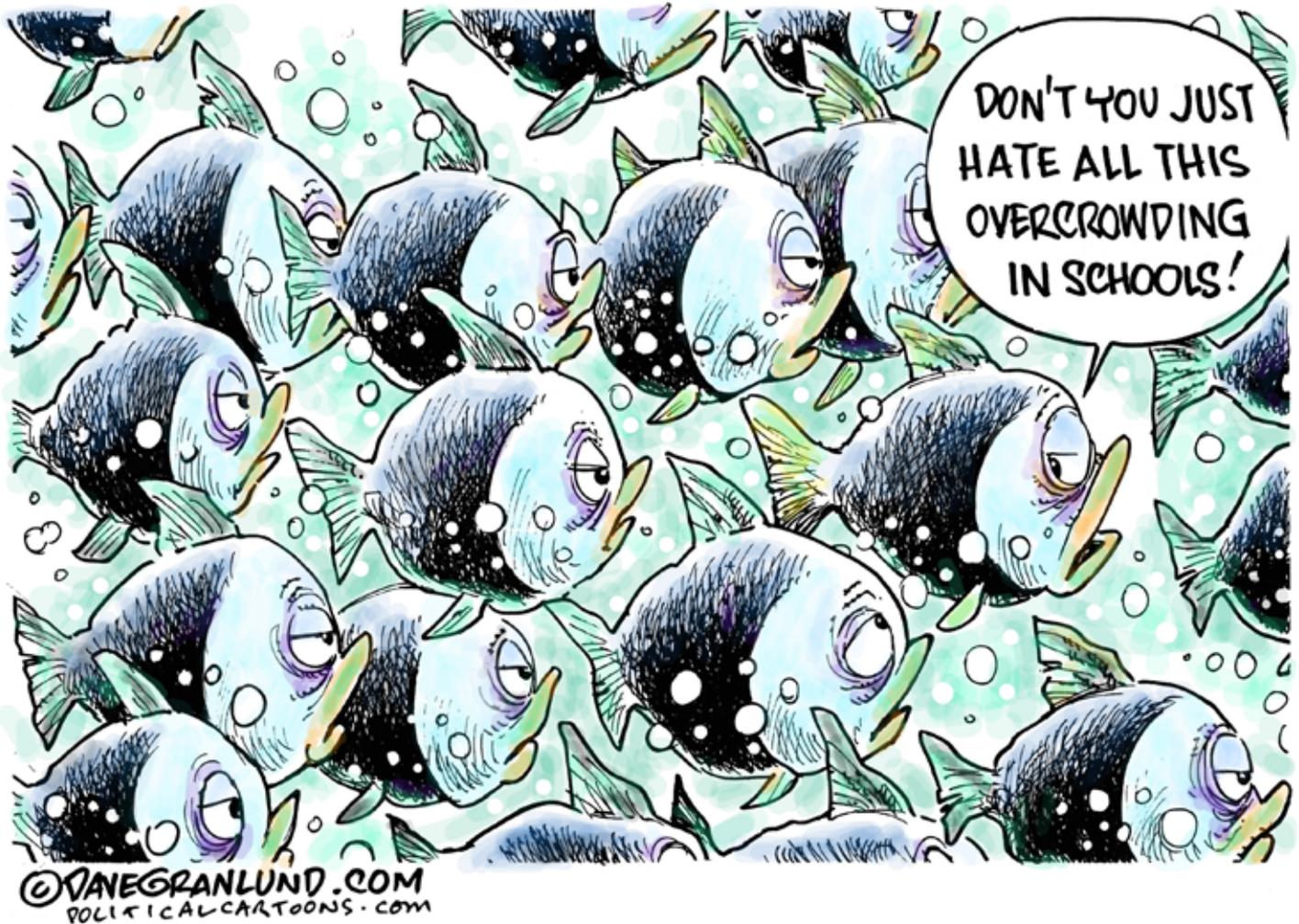
None of those caveats apply here, not now, nor can they in the future. As is often said, the genie is out of the bottle or you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube. And David Boren's remarkable career, regardless of the final outcome of this "investigation," will always be besmirched with, at a minimum, an asterisk, an aside, an explanation, a caveat, a clarification.

But should the allegations prove to be without merit, one thing that will never appear, in print or otherwise, will be an apology from those who approved the story for publication in the first place.

Better to be first out of the gate with breaking news than to have to explain to the new, out-of-state chain newspaper ownership why not.

Anyway, apologies are only uttered by dummies and weak people and if you don't believe me just ask our strongest, smartest and best president in history, a New York developer named Donald J. Trump. He'll tell you he has never apologized for anything in his life, and he's the one that will bed down in the White House tonight.

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



Oklahoma's 'Staggering' Teacher Exodus

BY JOHN THOMPSON

The Tulsa World's headline nailed the big picture, Staggering: 30,000 Oklahoma Teachers Have Left Profession in the Past Six Years, Report Shows. The World's Michael Dekker cites state Superintendent Joy Hofmeister who explained, "The loss of 30,000 educators over the past six years is staggering – and proof that our schools must have the resources to support a growing number of students with an increasing number of needs."

These huge losses occurred in a state that employed only 50,598 teachers in 2017-18.

Hofmeister addressed the immediate problem: "Steep budget cuts over the last decade have made the teaching profession in Oklahoma less attractive, resulting in a severe teacher shortage crisis and negative consequences for our schoolchildren."

The analysis – *2018 Oklahoma Educator Supply and Demand Report* – by Naneida Lazarte Alcala, also touched on the ways that the lack of respect and the decline of teachers' professional autonomy contributed to the massive exodus from the classroom.

The report showed that Oklahoma's annual attrition rate has been 10% during the last six years, which was 30% more than the national average. This prompted an increase from 32 emergency certifications in 2012 to 2,915 in 2018-19. As a result, the median experience of state teachers declined by one-fifth in this short period.

Given the challenges faced by the Oklahoma City Public School System, it is noteworthy that the highest turnover rate in 2017-18 [almost 25%] occurred in central Oklahoma. Over 11% of teachers in the central region are new hires.

It should also be noted that charter schools have the highest turnover rate [almost 42%], even higher than that of middle schools.

I kid my colleagues in middle school. But there is a serious point.

Choice advocates have had success in their political campaign to defeat traditional public schools, but their turnover rate is another sign that the oversupply of charters shows that privatization isn't a viable,

educational alternative to neighborhood schools.

But the financial cutbacks were not the only cause of the crisis.

Alcala cites a survey of teachers who have left Oklahoma schools; two-thirds said that increased compensation would not be enough to bring them back to the classroom.

Citing reasons that were beyond the scope of the report, 78% said that the quality of the work environment had declined, and nearly half said it had deteriorated a great deal.

On the other hand, the report suggested aspects of teaching conditions that merit further examination. It cited research on the negative effects of teacher turnover on student achievement, especially for low-income students.

This stands in contrast with research cited by accountability-driven, competition-driven school reformers who argue that turnover isn't necessarily bad. After all, they invested heavily in trying to identify and dismiss low-performing teachers.

The SDE study cited the value of low student-teacher ratios in terms of raising student achievement, especially for low-income students.

It also noted the national pattern where education degrees have "notoriously" declined, as well as the drop in graduates in Oklahoma teacher preparation programs.

And that brings us to the unintended results of features, as opposed to bugs, in the corporate school reform movement that peaked during this era.

Reformers who lacked knowledge of realities in schools misinterpreted research on California schools which supposedly said that class size reductions don't work, and then ignored the preponderance of evidence on why class size matters. Reformers often blamed university education departments for poor student test scores, and experimented with teacher preparation shortcuts.

Some reformers even said what many others felt about wanting to undermine the institution of career teaching.

To understand the decline of working conditions for teachers, the teacher strike in Denver, as well as those in Oklahoma and other states, must be considered.

Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet, the former superintendent of the Denver schools, called for incentives in urban schools by 20-somethings who would work for seven to nine years. His hugely expensive and complicated incentive system provoked the recent strike.

It should have been obvious that teacher churn is bad for students, who need trusting relationships with educators who love them.

A decade ago, however, edu-philanthropists and the federal government essentially imposed a rushed and risky experiment on schools in Oklahoma and across the nation. These non-educators praised the gambles as "disruptive innovation."

But they incentivized primitive teach-to-the-test

malpractice and drove much of the joy of teaching and learning out of schools.

Evidence that excellent teachers were being "exit-ed" by a flawed statistical model used in these teacher evaluation systems was ignored. Since these policies incentivized the removal of highly paid veteran teachers during the budget crisis prompted by the Great Recession, Baby Boomers were often targeted.

This resulted in schools such as Upper Greystone, an elementary school with 24 certified staff, which had 21 teacher vacancies at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year.

During the 1990s, education experts frequently warned that Baby Boomers would soon be retiring, and sought ways for veteran teachers to pass on their wisdom.

During the last decade, however, corporate reform made the staggeringly serious mistake of undermining teachers' autonomy in order to force educators to comply with their technocratic mandates. Veteran teachers were rightly seen as opponents to their teach-to-the-test regimes, and often they were pushed out of the profession so they wouldn't undercut the socializing of young teachers into opposing bubble-in accountability.

Even if we had not made another unforced error and dramatically cut education spending, failed reforms would have wasted educators' time and energy, damaged teachers' professionalism, and sucked much of the joy of teaching and learning out of classrooms.

When the retirement and the pushing out of Baby Boomers, funding cuts, and drill-and-kill pedagogy came together during and after the Great Recession, this staggering exodus of teachers was triggered.

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.



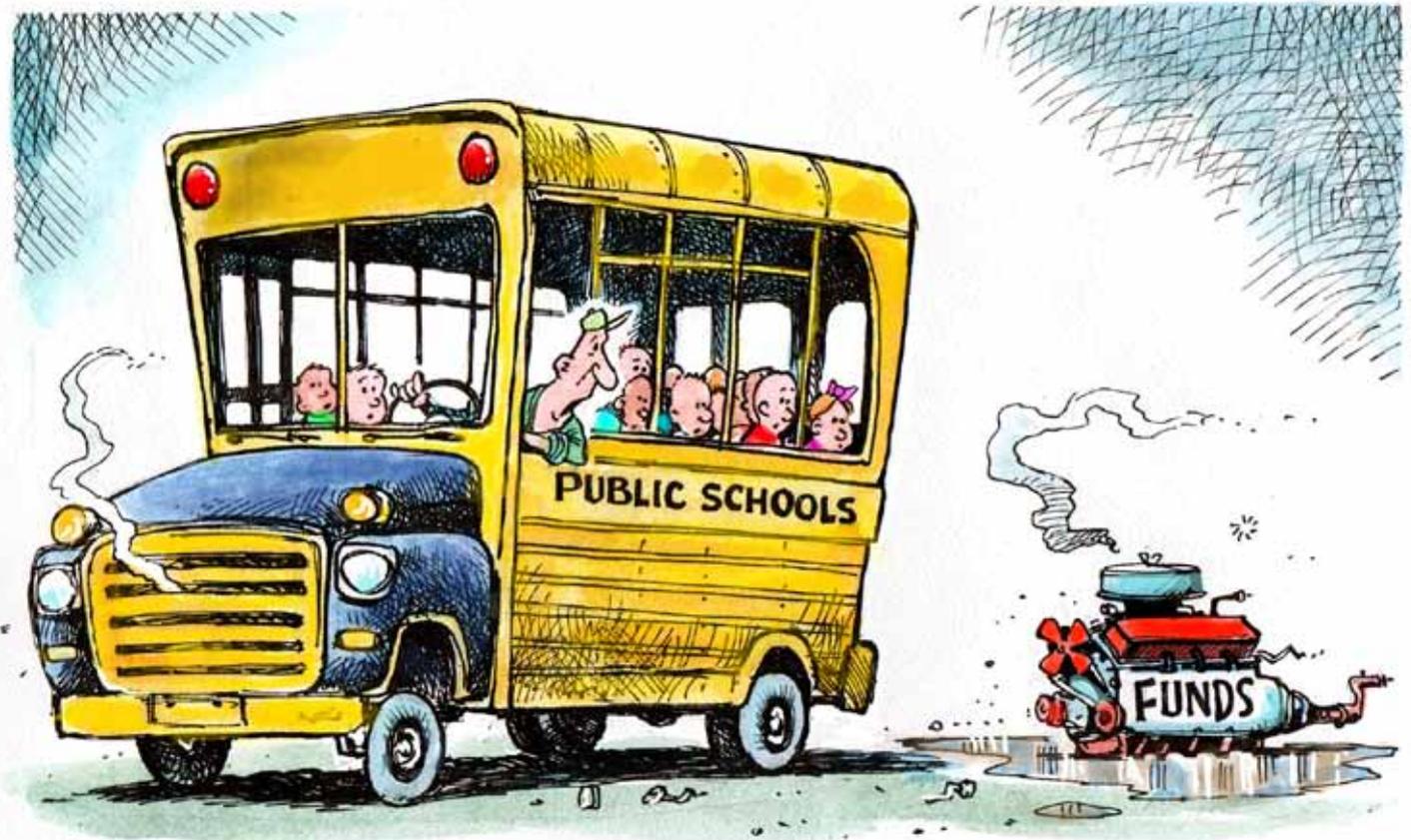
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More, Better Paid Support Staff Key To Improving Oklahoma Schools

BY REBECCA FINE

Walk through any school in Oklahoma, and you will likely find the proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” hanging over a teacher’s desk or printed on a principal’s mug. Decades of research about the importance of school climate confirm this saying. Education support staff – like bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, mechanics, plumbers, security guards, teacher aides, paraprofessionals, secretaries, and others – are a critical component of schools as villages.

This is why it was particularly worrisome that Gov. Kevin Stitt’s budget proposal for education spending this session only included increased funding for a \$1,200 teacher pay raise and a teacher recruitment bonus. Teachers do need better pay, but a small raise will do little to address the conditions teachers have

endured over the past decade.

Teachers are leaving Oklahoma schools because their pay is low, but also because the pressure to produce results without sufficient human resources – especially support staff – has become untenable.

In short, budget cuts have depleted the school village, and we need funding to restore it.

This session, education support professionals must be a bigger part of our conversations about how to better serve Oklahoma’s schools. This 2018-19 school year has almost 54,000 more students – more than double the total undergraduate enrollment of the University of Oklahoma – than a decade earlier, but 391 fewer support employees.

School support staff has a unique and important relationship with the children in their schools. Ap-

proximately three in four education support professionals live, vote, and worship in the districts where they work. Support staff often bring knowledge and relationships from the community into the school, which can help build vital relationships for students who might have difficulty connecting with educators.

Despite their importance to student success, support staff earn poverty-level wages. Last year, support staff received a \$1,250 pay increase, which nudged the average support staff salary to \$21,583 – just barely over the federal poverty line for a single parent with two children. Low salaries mean that many live paycheck to paycheck, and Ed McIntosh, president of American Federation of Teachers Tulsa, says that the vast majority of support employees in his organization take on second jobs.

Budget cuts also mean many support employees are doing more work for the same low pay. Carmon Williams, an elementary school secretary in Oklahoma City who supports herself and four children on a \$19,000 a year salary, also fills in [unpaid] as the school nurse, handing out medication during the four days a week her school does not have a dedi-

cated nurse. She often stands in for other staff when the school is short-handed.

Administrators at one school district explained that staff turnover is a problem in many of their schools. Low wages can force staff to look for jobs outside public education or find positions that more easily accommodate working two jobs.

Just as high teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement, high support staff turnover challenges a school's ability to create sustained collaboration with staff that is necessary for vibrant school climates.

Education support professionals are central to the success of every school and child, but are too often overlooked by policymakers. Improving Oklahoma's schools means increasing education support professional pay and funding state aid so that schools can hire enough staff.

This session lawmakers have the capacity to fulfill these goals, and Oklahomans should remind them that this is a top priority for our schools.

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

More Than Just A Car Tag

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

Every time a tribal citizen registers a vehicle with the Cherokee Nation, they make an investment in public education and our young people.

You see, our vehicle tags are more than just a pretty tag. By Cherokee Nation law, 38% of the revenues from our tag sales are earmarked specifically for public education.

This year, thanks to our flourishing Motor Vehicle Tax program, Cherokee Nation is awarding a record-breaking \$5.7 million to more than 100 school districts in northeast Oklahoma.

Since 2002, Cherokee Nation has contributed more than \$56 million to public education. Today, that investment in public education is more important than ever for the Cherokee Nation and the state of Oklahoma.

More tribal car tag revenue means we are able to serve more students. When we expanded the sale of Cherokee Nation tags statewide to all 77 Oklahoma counties in 2013, we knew the school systems in northeastern Oklahoma would reap the benefits. Indeed, it has proven to be an essential component of their annual budgets for many schools here.

Supporting local school districts is important to the Cherokee Nation's long-term success. These partnerships with schools represent our investment for the future of our great state and our tribal government.

Our tribal funding comes with no strings attached

and is not earmarked for specific budget items, so every pupil benefits. This means we are helping area students in our local schools, regardless of whether they are Cherokee.

For Cherokee people, embracing education has always been a community value. It creates hope for a better future for our children and the generations to come.

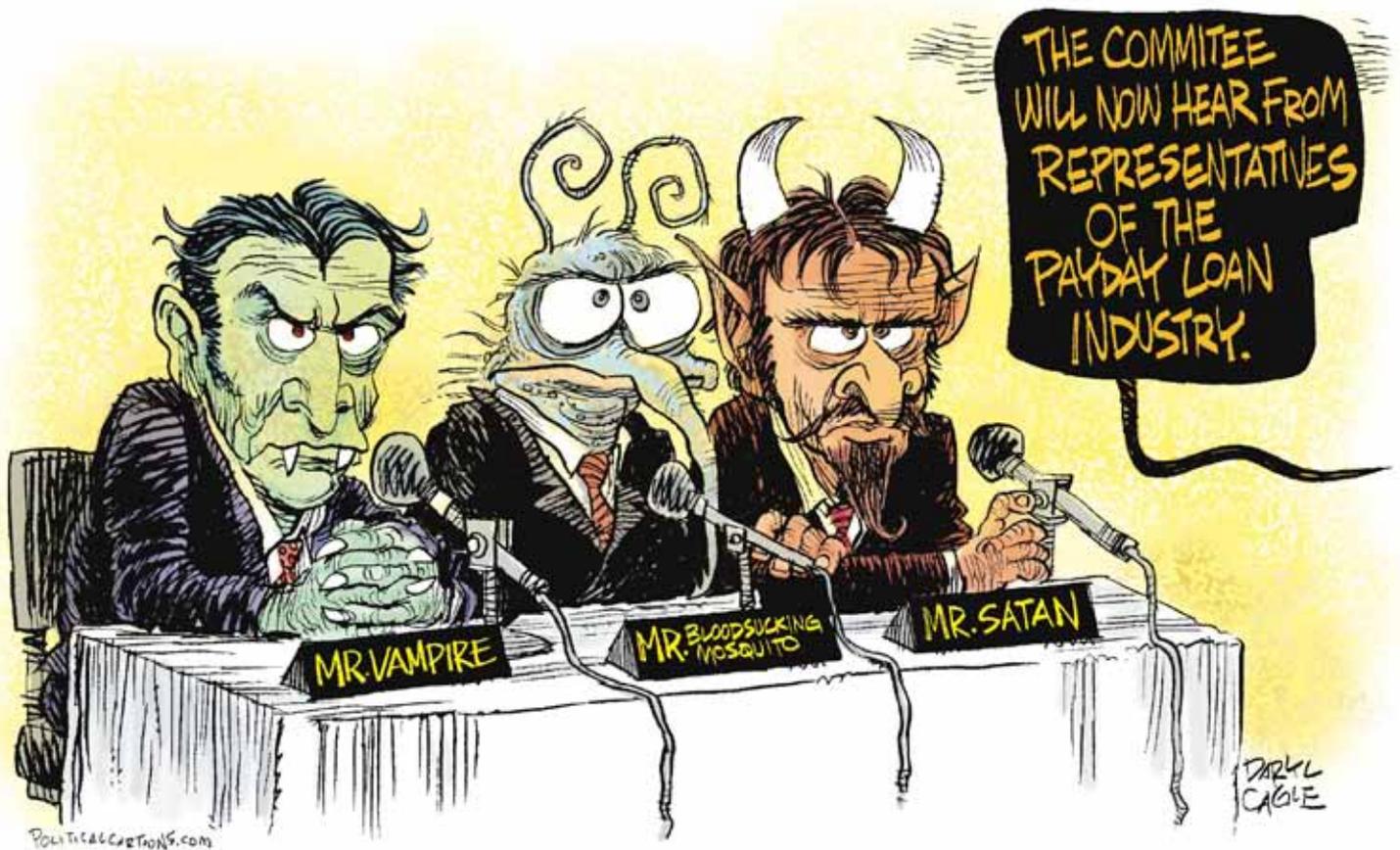
I come from a long line of teachers and administrators devoted to learning. My family's background helped build a foundation and reinforced an ideal that I have embraced as a public servant: Supporting access to educational programs is the best investment we can ever make as a sovereign tribal government.

Over the last several years, public education in Oklahoma has taken numerous financial hits and the proceeds from Cherokee car tags allow us to help fill in the gaps in school budgets.

I am extremely proud of the many ways our region benefits from these revenues. The Cherokee Nation Motor Vehicle Tax program not only saves our people money on their car tags and instills Cherokee pride, it also has a positive and lasting impact in our communities and schools.

With every vehicle registered, we are investing in our children, in our families, and in our future as Cherokees and Oklahomans.

Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.



Oklahoma Falling Further Behind In Economic Rankings

BY COURTNEY CULLISON

There are quite a few reasons to be optimistic about Oklahoma this year. Unemployment is low and the state expects to have a budget surplus this year, the first in quite some time. But despite this good news, too many Oklahomans are still struggling to make ends meet and build a better future for themselves and their families.

For the third straight year, Oklahoma has dropped in the Prosperity Now Scorecard rankings. This year, we rank 43rd in the financial health and overall well-being of our residents – that’s down from 34th in 2016.

The Scorecard shows too many Oklahomans are struggling with financial security. On businesses and jobs, we have a mixed record. Our unemployment rate is lower than the national rate, and nearly half of private employers in the state offer health insurance.

But the percentage of jobs in Oklahoma classified as “low-wage” – more than one in four – outpaces the national rate, indicating that many Oklahomans are working hard for paychecks that are too small to

meet their basic needs.

Many Oklahomans are just one minor emergency away from financial disaster. More than one-third of Oklahoma households do not have a savings account, and only three in five Oklahomans have access to revolving credit they could use to cope with an unexpected expense.

As a state, we rank in the Bottom 10 in nine of the 15 measurements of financial health.

Oklahoma struggles most for health care, with a rank in the Bottom 10 states on all six measures in the Scorecard. Our uninsured rate [16.6%] is the second-highest in the nation, and nearly one in 10 Oklahoma children do not have health insurance. In turn, one in six of us report forgoing a visit to the doctor because of the cost.

This year, the Scorecard added a new measure – racial disparity – which measures the gaps in outcomes between white residents and residents of color. As a state, Oklahoma ranks eighth in this new category. This means that we have comparatively small gaps in

the wellbeing of white Oklahomans and Oklahomans of color.

But that doesn't mean that we're all doing equally well. In Oklahoma's case, it means that a lot of white Oklahomans [especially in rural Oklahoma] are struggling just as much as Oklahomans of color – we're all finding it difficult to make ends meet.

These rankings tell us that Oklahoma does face significant challenges. But the good news is that we have good policy solutions that could address these issues.

The Earned Income Tax Credit has a proven history of helping to lift working families out of poverty. But for families to receive the full benefits of this credit, it must be refundable – families must be able to claim the credit even if the amount exceeds their income tax liability. That's why it's important that legislators

restore the refundability of our state EITC.

Oklahomans use payday loans at a higher rate than residents of any other state, and these predatory loans trap working families in a cycle of debt that can be nearly impossible to escape. Oklahoma needs stronger policies to protect our people from predatory lenders.

For too many Oklahomans, a lack of access to health care puts them at risk of debilitating illness and massive debt. We could ensure all Oklahomans have access to affordable, quality health care by accepting federal funds to expand Medicaid.

With these solutions, we can set Oklahoma on a path to a more prosperous future.

Courtney Cullison is an economic opportunity policy analyst for Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

A Danger To Ourselves

BY GARY EDMONDSON

The Republic of Kiribati, 226 square miles of Pacific islands, is buying land on Fiji to settle its 100,000 residents once rising ocean water overwhelms the homeland.

But Fiji is threatened, too, as are Maldives, Palau and other island nations facing the consequences of our warming planet.

In Miami, flooding has become a tidal event.

Oklahomans don't have to worry about rising sea levels, but our alleged leaders' continued denial of climate change threatens us nonetheless.

November's National Climate Assessment contained these assessments for the Southern Great Plains:

- "Temperatures in the region are projected to increase by up to 5.1F by 2050 and up to 8.4F by late 21st century."

- "Warming will bring an additional month or two of stifling, hot summer temperatures: we can expect an additional 30-60 days a year above 100F."

- "People and ecosystems will be hurt by extreme drought, unprecedented floods and wildfires, with future conditions potentially drier than anything the region has ever experienced over the last 1,000 years."

- "Each 1.8F of warming increases the death rate of elders with chronic conditions 2.8% to 4%."

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science recently reinforced these findings.

Using data for Lawton, the projections for 60 years from now for my part of the state will average 7.4F warmer and 33.2% drier in the summer and 12.7F warmer and 55.7% drier in the winter.

Under a high heat and drought bull's-eye, our future is jeopardized by Greed's Own Politicians such as the Apostles of Ignorance representing us in the U.S. Senate.

Sen. Jim Inhofe authored the *The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future.*

He's the genius who thinks a snowball refutes well-documented increases in global temperatures.

Our other Apostle of Ignorance, James Lankford observes, "This whole global warming myth will be exposed as what it really is – a way of control more than anything else."

No, he doesn't want any restrictions on the petro-polluters who poison us and pay him off.

Not to be out-dumbed, Rep. Tom Cole once co-sponsored legislation to exempt greenhouse gases from the Clean Air Act.

In December, the Oklahoman [RIP for Stephens County] editorialized: "When people are asked to choose between expensive electricity and expensive fuel and continued global warming, or affordable and plentiful fuel supplies along with the same global warming, most are going to favor the latter."

Did you catch the lie? It's not "the same global warming." Reduced carbon emissions reduce the warming. Still, Oklahoma Republicans say, "Gotta smoke?"

The petro-propagandists concluded "there's no reason to embrace government policies that would reduce quality of life far more than what might occur because of climate change."

Those in sinking islands and flooding coastal cities might disagree with that last claim.

We would be better served with leaders who stepped up and encouraged us to make a few tough choices in order to assure a sustainable quality of life for ourselves, our heirs and our cousins throughout the world.

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



In Racist Tweet, Trump Treats Genocidal Trail Of Tears As A Laughing Matter

BY MICHAEL HILTZIK

Among President Trump’s indisputable accomplishments in his mere two years in office is that he has made overt racism acceptable once again in political discourse for Republicans and conservatives.

The latest example came from Trump himself within hours of Sen. Elizabeth Warren’s announcement of her presidential candidacy.

Everyone expected Trump to engage soberly and frankly with the Massachusetts senator’s core message of income inequality and the rigging of the American economy in favor of the rich.

Just kidding! Everyone expected Trump to respond with the utmost crudeness and crassness. He didn’t disappoint.

Trump tweeted: “Today Elizabeth Warren, sometimes referred to by me as Pocahontas, joined the race for President. Will she run as our first Native American presidential candidate, or has she decided that after 32 years, this is not playing so well any-

more? See you on the campaign TRAIL, Liz!”

A number of points need to be made here. One is that Trump appears actually to be proud of his infantile “Pocahontas” taunt, which he’s been wielding against Warren for a couple of years. The insult refers to family lore of Native American heritage that Warren has cited.

Second, the voices of Republican officeholders, who should be shouting condemnations of this racist tirade from the rooftops, are silent. Why is that?

Mitt Romney, the former GOP candidate for president and a newly minted U.S. senator from Utah, has tried to position himself as the grown-up under the Republican tent, notably with a Jan. 1 Washington Post op-ed in which he promised to “speak out against significant statements or actions that are divisive, racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, dishonest or destructive to democratic institutions.”

As far as I can tell, he hasn’t spoken out about the Pocahontas slur since his swearing-in, and thus far

he seems to have said nothing about Trump's latest tweet.

Third, Trump's reference to the "TRAIL" in all-capital letters looks like a reference to the Trail of Tears, the genocidal removal of Indian tribes from their Eastern homelands during the presidencies of Andrew Jackson and Martin van Buren in the 1830s. As many as 4,000 tribal members died during the forced removal, undertaken so that their lands could be turned over to white farmers and gold prospectors. More on that in a moment.

Remarkably, one defense being raised to Trump's allusion to the Trail of Tears is that he's too ignorant to be aware of the Trail of Tears. That's the tack taken by Brit Hume of Fox News, responding to a tweet from Rolling Stone's Jamil Smith slamming Trump for having "used the murders of Indigenous people as a punchline."

Hume replied, also by tweet: "Yes, because Trump is noted for his knowledge of 19th century American history vis a vis the native population. Jeez."

Perhaps Hume believes that Trump is much more cognizant of American history vis a vis the native population in the 16th and 17th century, the era when the real Pocahontas lived. Or maybe he's implying that Trump was thinking of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans singing *Happy Trails to You*. Jeez, indeed.

If Hume is right, by the way, shouldn't we expect Trump to issue an apology for a statement he now knows could be misinterpreted? We should expect that, but no one is holding their breath.

Does Hume's defense of Trump's racist references to Native Americans extend to the Republican Party as a whole and to its sedulous followers?

Here's how the Republican National Committee headlined its response to Warren's candidacy: "Fauxcahontas' Failure To Launch." GOP Chair Ronna Romney McDaniel, Mitt Romney's niece, thought this gibe was sufficiently hilarious to tweet out the article under her name.

Jacob Wohl, a right-wing pro-Trump blogger, tweeted a photograph of Warren altered to give her a quiver of arrows and an Indian headband, over the text: "If you're like me, you CAN'T WAIT to see Trump turn the campaign trail into the 'Trail of Tears' in 2020." Obviously, the Republican leadership's indulgence of racist mockery gives people like Wohl the green light to run with it.

Does Brit Hume not understand that Trump's and the RNC's association of Warren's ethnicity with "Pocahontas" or "Fauxcahontas" is a racist insult to all Native Americans by its reduction of all Native American women to a Disneyfied stereotype?

[According to historians, Pocahontas was the daughter of an Algonquian chief; the story of her rescue of the English colonialist John Smith in 1607, now part of our cultural legacy, is often treated by historians as at least partly mythical.]

The scariest aspect of all this is that it places the intellectual bankruptcy of American campaign re-

porting on display once again.

The campaign press' fixation on Warren's ethnicity is, as Matthew Yglesias of Vox puts it succinctly, not an error but a choice. The issue has been dressed up by newspapers and cable chatterers as an argument not over whether Warren does or doesn't have Cherokee blood, but whether she used her purported Native American heritage to win appointment and promotion at a series of law schools, ultimately Harvard.

That's an effort to make the attention paid to this fake issue look serious and profound, but it's a transparent dodge. In September, the Boston Globe, Warren's hometown newspaper, published a thorough examination of this claim of preferential treatment. Here's its conclusion:

"The Globe found clear evidence, in documents and interviews, that her claim to Native American ethnicity was never considered by the Harvard Law faculty, which voted resoundingly to hire her, or by those who hired her to four prior positions at other law schools. At every step of her remarkable rise in the legal profession, the people responsible for hiring her saw her as a white woman."

Perhaps crestfallen by this conclusive debunking of the original justification for masticating the ethnicity issue into a slurry, the campaign press has now reformulated the issue. Now it's supposedly about how maladroitly Warren has "handled" the issue and what that says about her ability to govern as president.

This will encourage roundtables on CNN and the other cable channels to continue gnawing on the bone – and avoiding the issue of economic fairness that really matter to Americans that Warren has placed at the center of her campaign. Whatever Warren has said about being part-Native American, Trump's overtly racist jeer is immeasurably worse, and hasn't been receiving a nanogram's worth of the attention it deserves.

If you're concerned that coverage of the presidential race in 2020 will be as inane as the coverage in 2016, or worse, here's proof that you should be terrified.

Let's return to the question of the exploitation of the Trail of Tears by Trump and his minions. There's some disagreement among historians whether the term should apply to the general policy of forced migration imposed on Southeastern tribes after enactment of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, or only to the relocation of an estimated 17,000 members of the Cherokee Nation in 1838, as well as Choctaws and three other Southeastern tribes.

As the Appalachian writer John Ehle related in his 1988 book *Trail of Tears*, the uprooting of the five tribes disrupted their social and family cohesion. "Deaths were numerous, suffering was intense, and ... the government of the Cherokees, once promising, was destroyed."

The Indians had been confined in prison camps before they were transported. Fed an unfamiliar diet of meal and pork, the misery and sickness started there. "The diet, the filth of the camps, the flies feeding at

the slit trenches and visiting the food and hands of the people” were deadly. They marched in freezing weather, often barefooted. There was malaria in the summer; smallpox “struck the Choctaws and became an epidemic among them,” Ehle wrote.

“Many of the deaths were of infants whose nursing mothers were ill with intestinal diseases. The sick infants bawled until too weak to cry. One mother carried the corpse of her infant for two days, keeping it company.”

The ultimate toll is uncertain, but is generally placed at 4,000, including 2,000 thought to have died in the camps.

This act of genocide is the moment of American history that Trump and his followers choose to turn into a joke.

No reporter interviewing a Republican leader or officeholder should let the interview end without getting that politician’s reaction to this level of racism on the record. No journalist should overlook the rank racism of the Republican campaign theme.

Racism, whether wielded against black, Hispanic or Native American individuals or groups is the American sickness, and to avoid calling it out is shameful.

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‘Is It An Insult To Proclaim Indian Blood, Even If Only A Bit?’

BY KEN NEAL

I thought I understood when Sen. Elizabeth Warren said she was part Indian, but I guess I didn’t.

President Trump, as he does nearly everyone, quickly slurred her and all Indians by calling her “Pocahontas.”

The senator threw gasoline on the fire by trying to prove she is part Indian with a DNA test that showed she has very little Indian blood, if any.

The test brought a rebuke from the Cherokee tribe that is hard to understand. Is it an insult to proclaim Indian blood, even if only a bit?

If so, I and my other Oklahomans, I suspect, are in trouble with the Cherokees.

When the poor senator got gob smacked for her claim, my first reaction was, “Hey, many of us in Oklahoma claim to be part Indian. After all, it’s

Indian Territory, something that President Trump wouldn’t know since he is pretty unlearned about all U.S. history.

No big deal, I thought.

As often happens, I am wrong. The senator is apologizing to every Indian she can find, including Cherokee Chief Bill John Baker.

Apparently, the Indians believe Warren getting a DNA test showed a “lack of understanding about what constitutes Native American identity.”

That’s quite a leap. She only said she was part Indian and the DNA was in response to Trump, the real jerk in this kerfuffle.

You’d think the Indian outrage would have been reserved for Trump instead of a woman innocently claiming a bit of Cherokee blood.

But never mind. I have a personal gripe. I have always claimed to have a bit of Cherokee blood, so I am in the boat with the senator.

Here’s my story: I have always wanted to share it with Cherokee officials to see if they can cast light on my heritage.

My great grandmother was a Cherokee Indian. She died giving birth to my grandfather Sept. 18, 1880, on Magazine Mountain, AR.

Her name was Melissa E. Ussery. My father said his father claimed to be Scot-Irish and Cherokee Indian and that he didn’t know if his mother was a full blood Cherokee.

I have tried to find her in the usual records but can’t learn more about her beyond the 1880 U. S. Census.

So I am part Indian but like Sen. Warren I don’t know how much.

But in saying I am part Cherokee, I didn’t know I was offending anyone. I must say Cherokee officials who would be offended by that bit of boast on my part will have to wait a while for an apology.

My reading suggests my great grandmother or her forebears were among the Cherokees called the early settlers who came west even before the bulk of Cherokees on the Trail of Tears.

As I understand it, some of the early settlers dropped off in Arkansas while others continued moving west into Oklahoma.

I have visited Magazine Mountain looking in graveyards for grandma, only to find hundreds of unmarked sandstone head stones.

Like Elizabeth Warren, I am not a “person of color; I am not a citizen of a tribe.”

For the record, I would like to be, but neither great grandma nor grandpa made it onto the infamous Dawes Commission early in the 20th century.

From tales I have heard growing up in Oklahoma, I suspect there are a lot of “part Indians” like Sen. Warren and me.

I can’t wait to hear the nickname Trump has for me: “Hiawatha?”

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

POWER PLAY

*Stitt And Legislative
Leaders Want To Fix
What Isn't Broken
In Order To Create
A 'CEO Governor'*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Gov. Kevin Stitt wants more power. The Republican dominated Legislature seems inclined to give it to him lickety-split.

Isn't this a conversation – and decision – that should extend beyond the powers that be at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.?

What Stitt and Co. want to do isn't some run-of-the-mill corporate restructuring that's buried in the back of a business journal. It's the equivalent of a few insiders overhauling an iconic 112-year-old brand without first sitting down with the owners.

Given that the “business” in this scenario is an oft-vilified government, many Oklahomans might be tempted to shrug. Couldn't be worse than it is now, right? Maybe it is time for a change?

Don't be so sure.

The plan – as hammered out earlier this month by Stitt and legislative leaders – would give the governor authority to hire and fire the leaders of five of the state's most consequential agencies.

It also would claw back some agency board appointment power from the governor, giving the House Speaker and Senate President Pro Tem two appointments each to the boards governing Transportation, Health Care Authority, Corrections, Juvenile Affairs, and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Stitt has been clear from the outset he favors a CEO-style governor, pointing out in his State of the State address, “By granting the governor hiring au-



thority, you will know exactly where the buck stops – at my desk.”

Except ... the current system mostly seems to be working just fine. Like any massive operation, there will be malfeasance, misfeasance, miscalculations and screw-ups. Yes, the state Health Department's woes remain fresh.

But it's important to remember there are already protections that keep the nonsense to a minimum – from the legal [think: attorney general, grand juries and courts] to the legislative [oversight] to the gubernatorial [agency board appointments and, not to be underestimated, the bully pulpit].

This push for gubernatorial power is hardly new. Former Gov. Frank Keating, for one, was a vocal advocate. But Oklahomans never took the bait. Why?

From statehood, Sooner DNA has included a healthy suspicion – often justifiably so – of power residing in too few hands. Read the history of the state Constitution – what was included and why. The state's founders purposely diffused power.

Given human nature, it's not difficult or unreasonable to imagine the possible shenanigans if the current legislative proposals become law. Nepotism, anyone? A good ol' boy system, writ large?

In the Republican rush to change the current system, Democrat leaders are serving as the Legislature's town criers, warning of the potential pitfalls.

“The Senate Democrats are concerned about the

latest Republican proposal to increase the executive power of the governor,” said Senate Democratic Leader Kay Floyd. “We believe agency directors should be experienced professionals, not political appointees accountable only to the governor.

“Currently, agency boards make decisions, which impact millions of Oklahomans in an open meeting with input from the public. Under this proposal, agency directors would be able to make decisions behind closed doors with no public accountability. Oklahomans expect transparency from their state government; unfortunately, this proposal is a move in the wrong direction.”

Not surprisingly, Stitt, Speaker Charles McCall and Senate President Greg Treat each insisted the new plan enhances transparency, as did the usual rightwing, anti-government suspects like the Koch Brothers-funded Americans For Prosperity.

“Oklahomans deserve a say in how government regulations, which impact their everyday activities, are made,” said John Tidwell, AFP’s Oklahoma director. “The agreement reached today provides increased transparency and reforms how their hard-earned tax-dollars are spent. Today, we are one step closer to becoming a customer-focused state government.”

Hardly. As House Minority Leader Emily Virgin put it, “We have reached a point where the term ‘government accountability’ has lost all meaning. By taking away the decision-making power of our boards, we are moving decisions from a venue that falls under

the Open Meetings Act and is in view of the public to a venue that is literally behind closed doors and lacking transparency.

“Additionally, we have had many agency heads that have pushed our state in the right direction in spite of Capitol politics. By removing the oversight ability of the boards, we are creating an environment that will not only allow political patronage but will demand it. This plan isn’t about providing transparency. It is about acquiring power.”

Change is rarely easy. Particularly entrenched, institutional change. The status quo is powerful. The proposal to expand gubernatorial power may well be something that most Oklahomans come to believe is worth trying.

But it is not something that should be quickly foisted upon them by the state’s elected elite. After all, state government belongs to all of the nearly four million Oklahomans who are its rightful owners – not merely “customers,” as Stitt calls them.

Rather than ramming through this blueprint, as quickly as possible, elected leadership should take the time to systematically make its case for change. How about public meetings around the state, not just in the Capitol’s marbled halls?

Whenever statehouse powers-that-be seek make major changes – at warp speed – it’s important to pay close attention. It often means rank-and-file Oklahomans are in danger of being cut out of important decision-making. The results can be disastrous.

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What Lankford's Sleuthing Missed

BY TIM JARVIS

When Sen. Tom Coburn decided that he was through with Washington, Sen. James Lankford proudly picked up the mantle of being the Congress critter who would point out all of the silly things our hard-earned tax dollars were spent on. The 2017 version can be found at: https://www.lankford.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Federal_Fumbles_2017.pdf.

While perusing this document, it occurred to me that the good senator's list was rather selective and oddly incomplete, even though in his introductory letter he indicated his findings were intended to be helpful to Democrats and Republicans. So I figured I would help him by pointing out several other things our tax dollars were spent on. Keep in mind this is only a partial list:

- As of April 4, 2018, a whopping \$77 million had been spent for President Trump's trips to play golf. [Nearly \$30 million of this was to Mara Lago.] Recall that candidate Trump said if he was president he would stay in DC and work, unlike President Obama, whom he referred to as "vacationer-in-chief." He also said that he wouldn't play golf at all if he was president. Ouch. The irony ... it hurts.*

- \$165,000 for "lounge furniture" at HUD, even though there is no lounge. It is unclear exactly where this furniture was placed. [An additional \$31,000 for Ben Carson's dining set (?) at HUD was cancelled due to an uproar. Pictures showed there was nothing wrong with the table that was going to be replaced.]

- Over \$75 million for protection for Melania and Barron while they are in New York City.**

- \$139,000 for three sets of double doors for Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. [Dude – ever been to Home Depot or Lowes?]

- \$12,000 for Scotty Pruitt at EPA and Zinke at Interior for chartering flights instead of flying commercial. [A repeating theme for this administration.]

- An unknown amount spent by Tom Price, Health and Human Services, to take a private jet from Philly to DC. The Inspector General said: "Our rigorous review of former HHS Secretary Price's use of chartered, military, and commercial aircraft found that 20 out of 21 trips did not comply with applicable federal regulations and HHS policies and procedures, resulting in waste of at least \$341,000 in federal funds." We recommend the Office of the Secretary review the lack of compliance with federal requirements and determine appropriate actions to recoup the travel costs." No word if any was recouped.

- \$43,000 for Scotty Pruitt at EPA for a sound-

proof booth, plus \$3,700,000 in additional security because ... he's afraid ...of something? [P.S.: As of Apr. 10, 2018, there had been no threats on his life. Someone had called him an "ignorant f--," but since when does pointing out an obvious fact qualify as a threat on someone's life?] AND \$70,000 [!] for a bulletproof desk. The limit to redecorate an office, as set by Congress, is \$5,000. Also, he ordered bulletproof seat covers and other perks for a new SUV which raised the lease cost to over \$14,000 per year.

- \$3,000 by the EPA on tactical pants and polos. And, for some reason, gear to break down locked doors. [Think about that ... why does the EPA need to break down a door ... ?]

- \$138,000 by DOD paid at Trump hotels during the first eight months of 2017. [Emoluments, anyone?]

- Over \$1 million for Steve Mnuchin [Treasury] to use military aircraft instead of flying commercial. [From that "left wing rag" Politico.] [For those who are unaware, Politico is not left wing.]

- Over \$120,000 for Scotty Pruitt [yet again] and/or David Shulkin [former VA Secretary] for personal trips to Italy, Morocco and/or London [to watch the Wimbledon tennis tournament.]

- \$73,000 for Trump's sons' trip to Dubai in March 2018 for personal purposes.

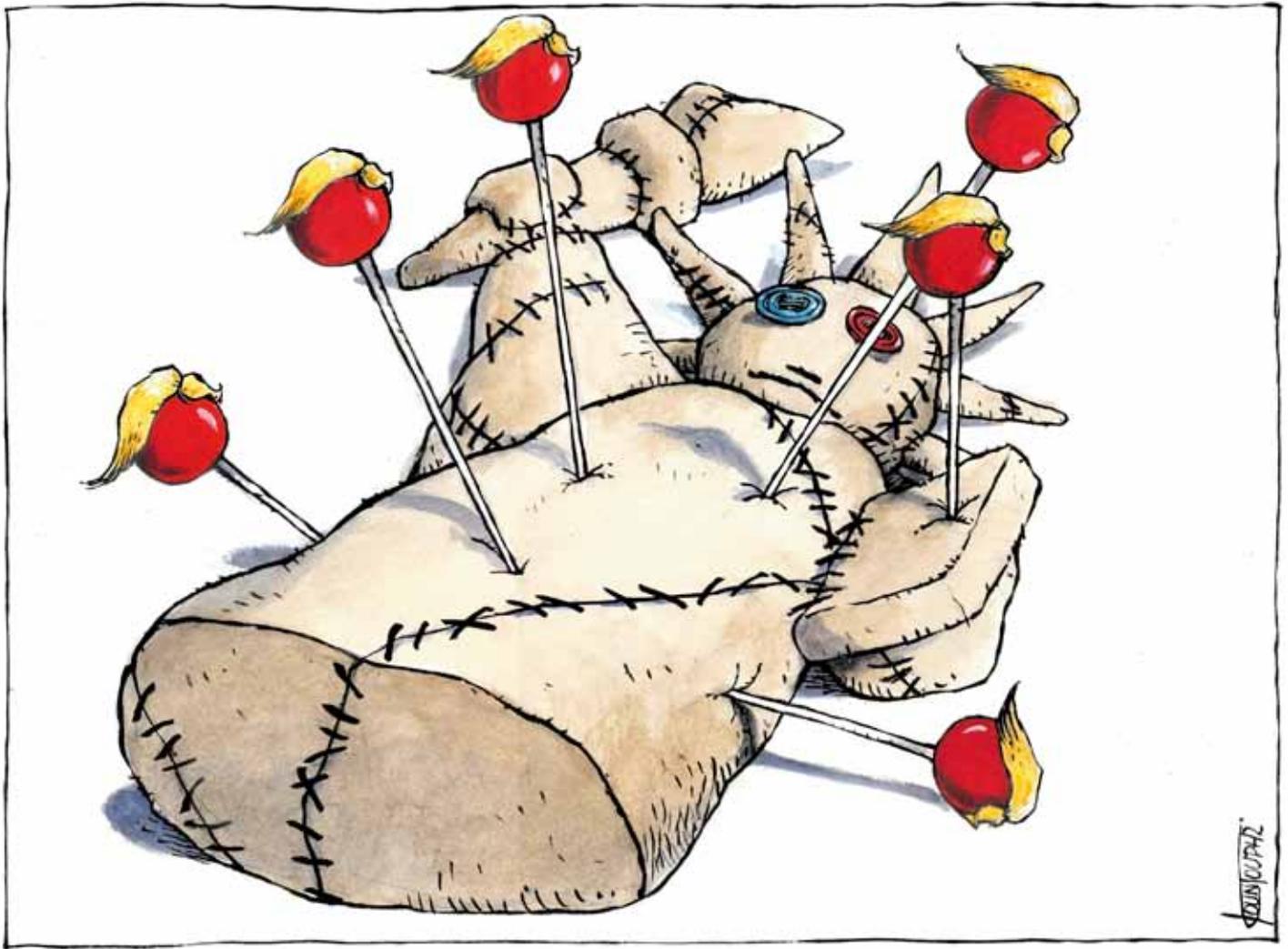
- \$1 million per month for Betsy DeVos [Secretary of Education] for a 24/7 security detail of U.S Marshalls – which has never done before. No word on why this was needed. She requested a whopping \$20 million for FY 2019 for additional security. Again – why are these people so fearful?

- \$52,701 for curtains in former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley's taxpayer-funded New York City apartment.

- Over \$150,000 by Brock Long [FEMA] for improperly using government resources at least 40 times. ["If I've told you once I've told you at least 40 times ... "]

- Nearly \$100,000 for Donald Trump Jr.'s lavish trip to India in 2018 to sell his family's luxury condominium projects, according to The Washington Post.

The Department of Homeland Security released 47 pages of documents showing Trump Jr.'s February trip cost more than \$97,805 for hotel rooms, airfare, car rental and overtime for Secret Service agents for the trip. Full-page glossy newspaper ads offered those who put down a \$38,000 deposit on a new



People, We Have A Problem

BY VERN TURNER

One of my favorite comics is Bill Maher. No surprise there for those of you who read my stuff. On his latest show, he mentioned that our president possesses a malignant narcissistic personality disorder. I looked it up. There is an interesting list of characteristics and traits that define this particular personality disorder.

- Self-centered; egotistic: It's always about themselves
- Fantasies about success, brilliance, accomplishments, power
- Believe in their own superiority over everyone
- Require constant praise
- Sense of Entitlement: Everybody owes them or should be thankful for him/her
- Exploits, denigrates others who were once friends
- Envy of just about everyone
- Must be center of attention
- Lacks empathy

There are a few more traits, but you get the idea. Coincidentally, I've been reading David Cullen's chilling narrative about the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, CO, not 10 miles from where I now reside.

For many years, the motive for this massacre by two teenaged students remained a mystery. Then an FBI agent named Dr. Fuselier started referring to psychological research and showing the writings and videos of Eric Harris to professional psychologists.

What emerged was an acute version of some of the major aspects of narcissism that was classified as psychopathy.

It was noted that Harris was not insane, he was psychopathic. Why?

Because insane people exhibit confusion while a psychopath is rational and coldly calculating. They are also callous, manipulative, comically grandiose, egocentric and totally lacking in empathy.

Moreover, psychopathic brains don't function like normal brains. These people enjoy being bad. They exhibit a ruthless disregard for others. They will defraud, maim or kill for trivial gains. These people also have a gift for disguising their ruthlessness.

Their total life is a con job. They live to seduce others into their web so they can be denigrated later. The con job for a psychopath is total immersion into fabrication [lies] so that the "inferiors" can be suckered into whatever the psychopath intends. This research and its conclusions appeared in a 1941 book, *The Mask of Sanity*, by Dr. Hervey Clickly.

There's more. Psychopaths lie for amusement. In some, lying is so profound it becomes their signature characteristic.

In 1970, Robert Hare wrote *Without Conscience*. In it he published the 20 characteristics of psychopathy.

In addition, he surmised that the condition was mostly inherited and that 80% of psychopaths were males. Using EEG [Electro-encephalogram] technology, he discovered that the brain of a psychopath exhibits completely abnormal outputs from "normal" brains.

One of Dr. Hare's colleagues, Dr. Kent Kiehl used a different technique to examine the response of the amygdala, or emotional center of the brain, to different stimuli that should exhibit emotional responses. In normal brains, compelling, horrible and disturbing stimuli elicited the expected results; these brains were indeed emotionally impacted.

But in a psychopath's brain, these emotional stimuli elicited no response from the amygdala. Psychopaths simply rationalize shocking and disturbing words or displays.

So much for the Psychology lesson ... The point to this piece, ultimately, is to increase awareness as to the open behaviors of the man that 62 million people and an antiquated Electoral College put into office as the president of the United States.

Moreover, I also mean to take an axe handle to the consciousness of the 92 million voters who stayed home and didn't vote at all.

That said, it stuns me still that so many people in the "red" states lacked even the remotest sense to not see through the con job that the psychopath named Trump was perpetrating upon their souls, their livelihoods, their children and their futures. The ugliness of excessive bragging alone should have been enough to cause pause among those not underground.

Why didn't it? Why didn't the disgusting and disgraceful recordings of Trump's bragging about fondling/abusing women drive all women away from this monster?

Now, we see women from everywhere claiming of being abused wrongfully by men almost daily in the news. So, how could over 50% of white women vote for Donald Trump? Are they that easy to fool?

The parallels with Eric Harris in our current president are not necessarily Hitlerian in their creepiness, but rather more frightening to the very preservation

of our democratic republic.

Forget the Republican Party as a check on the psychopathy of Donald Trump. Their politics are so corrupt that they'll buy any con job he's selling. And like a good psychopath, he doesn't care.

What is most frightening is that Donald Trump, put in an extremely vulnerable position by his legal woes and crises, might just lash out against all of us "inferior beings" and destroy us all along with himself. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the other killer at Columbine, formed a suicide pact while committing to killing as many other humans as they could – indiscriminately.

Will Trump's pathology cause his mind to snap and make a similar decision? Or will he just suspend the Constitution and all elections so he can retain his power, again like a good psychopath? That is our problem today.

Just as Harris and Klebold supplemented each others' pathologies, are Trump and Putin doing the same thing? Probably not.

Putin wants to live. He may be a thug, a murderer and a monster, but his self-service is based on power and his own peculiar, criminal view of nationalism. Trump's condition is all about himself, and we have all seen what a pathetic, insecure, irrational and sick creature he truly is.

Ironically, Trump is the person being conned around the world. But our intellectually lazy 35% still think Trump is our savior. I can't figure that out. I guess we'll have to see how bad it gets before the great awakening reaches the rural farms and towns that put Trump in office. Meanwhile, the Democrats are going after this madman at full speed.

I'm no psychologist, but I learned enough the last week of February to be frightened for our nation.

Denver resident Vern Turner is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. His latest book, Why Angels Weep: America and Donald Trump, is available through Amazon.





North American Expats Contribute To Inequality In Latin America

BY MATTHEW HAYES

When Ana Jane* turned 60, she decided she wanted “a complete life change.” Approaching retirement, she was suddenly laid off from her job as an interior decorator in early 2009, during the peak of the financial crisis. Having endured cancer, job loss and an addiction problem, she was hoping to turn her life around. But the opportunities to do so in her home city of Houston, TX, were limited.

“I don’t think I can live in Houston for what I had as far as monthly income,” she said. “I wanted out of the states.” So she left.

Over the last decade, thousands of Americans, most of them white, have left the United States to settle in communities in Latin America, where the cost of living is lower. International “lifestyle marketers,” such as International Living, with ties to real estate inves-

tors and developers in select destinations, often promote these communities online.

Ana Jane chose to live in Cuenca, Ecuador, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] World Heritage city of 330,000 people located high up in the Ecuadorian Andes, and where the average monthly household income is about \$700, well below what most retirees say they live on in the U.S.

About a third of Cuenca’s population work in the informal sector, where even the basic salary of \$394 per month is not guaranteed. Though there are no official statistics keeping tab on how many Americans have relocated there, municipal officials estimate as many as 10,000 since the 2008 crisis.

Many of these expats have fled diminishing returns in the U.S., but often, that’s not the sole reason for

relocation.

Elise, 66, moved to Ecuador with her husband in 2011. “We knew that we were getting up in age, [and] that if we wanted to do something adventurous, we had to do it then.”

Cuenca is not the only community in Latin America to receive “lifestyle” and retirement migrants from Canada and the United States. In recent years, international lifestyle marketers have drawn attention to low-income communities in Mexico, Costa Rica and Panama as well.

In some places, tens of thousands of North Americans – far more in numbers than the Central Americans in the “migrant caravans” coming to the United States – are relocating for a mix of lifestyle ideals, climate and lower cost-of-living.

Since 2011, I have documented the lives of people moving to Cuenca from Canada and the United States. I have spoken with them about their reasons for moving, their impressions of Ecuador and their aspirations for the future. I have also documented their impact on receiving communities in Ecuador.

LIFESTYLE MIGRATION AND GLOBAL INEQUALITY

Americans said they hoped their impact on Cuenca was a good one, and they participated in charities and provided extra help to their domestic employees – which they could afford because of the lower cost of living. But they also participated in gentrification processes, raising prices of rent and real estate.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the historic El Centro neighborhood, where the city government is renovating plazas and streetscapes with the aim of increasing real estate values and attracting higher-income tourists and lifestyle migrants. The active social lives and shopping habits of American and Canadian retirees has helped support new boutique business and craft producers, replacing “mom-and-pop” shops in central neighborhoods.

Cuenca’s UNESCO-designated downtown increasingly caters to transnationally mobile, global middle classes.

Jorge is a clothing vendor who worked 29 years at Plaza San Francisco, located in the heart of Cuenca’s historic center. But the city removed his stall, along with those of 133 other vendors, to make way for renovations that would reduce vending space, and open the plaza for cultural events and craft fairs.

For him, El Centro was his community, the place that he worked. Since being moved to a temporary stall off the square, he said he was lucky if he could sell one or two \$10 items per day.

Like many other lower-income workers, he hoped to give his children a better life, and measured success by what his labor was about to bring home. “We have to maintain our families,” he said.

To make ends meet, he and many of his colleagues had to work longer, find other jobs and reduce their expenses.

“The whole city is changing, and we have to change,

too,” he said. “I am not young. I am used to this work.”

Vendors’ livelihoods have been affected by the growth of middle-class malls and the decline of lower-income workers in El Centro as it becomes a leisure space for global middle classes.

Another clothing vendor, Dolores, was fighting for her right to work and to remain in place. She said that the mayor now wanted the plaza so North American retirees could stroll on it. Dolores, however, does not have a retirement to look forward to.

“I have no pension,” she said. “I will continue to work until God decides I will work no more.”

Jorge, too, knows that the changes he faces are partly due to the arrival of wealthier North Americans. Everything is getting expensive now, he said, but he doesn’t harbor any great resentment against the retirees.

“If there were a job in the United States, I would move there,” he said.

Jorge said before he dies, he would also like to see things he had never seen before. He mentioned Vilcabamba, a vacation town four hours south, which he had heard a lot about but had never been to.

While Jorge’s colleagues try to work their way back into the heart of the city they have fostered for generations, lifestyle migrants like Ana Jane and Elise are “discovering” Vilcabamba and other rural areas near Cuenca – with help from internet search engines and international lifestyle marketers.

North Americans have bought land and built luxury retirement houses for what, to them, are affordable prices. They have transformed rural landscapes. There, as in Cuenca, they have increasingly pushed people off the land, and into lives where they must work more, longer and often at lower pay to make ends meet.

Lifestyle migration to Cuenca provides a window into the type of global society that is taking shape after a generation of economic globalization. It is tempting to blame lifestyle migrants for being greedy or rapacious. But the truth is more complex, and reveals global inequalities inherited from a colonial past. These shape all our lives no matter where we live.

At this moment in history, however, failure to address them in any systematic way produces localized forms of global inequality, gentrification and dispossession, as transnationally mobile global middle classes rub shoulders with street vendors in the tourism cities of Latin America.

*All participants in my research agreed to share their stories on condition of maintaining their anonymity. Names are, therefore, pseudonyms.

Matthew Hayes is associate professor of sociology at St. Thomas University, Fredericton, Canada, and Canada Research Chair in Global and International Studies. He is the author of Gringolandia: Lifestyle Migration Under Late Capitalism published by University of Minnesota Press

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TYRANNOSAURUS RX



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The Key To Cheap Drugs? Pay Research Costs Upfront

BY DEAN BAKER

We face a bizarre situation where policy experts, advocacy groups, and politicians struggle to find ways to bring down drug prices. The situation is bizarre because drug prices would be low in a free market; it is only government policy that makes them expensive.

It is the government-granted patent monopolies that create the problem of high drug prices, not the market. The government gives drug companies patent monopolies that make it illegal for competitors to sell the same drug. These patent monopolies allow companies to charge prices that are 100 or even 1,000 times the free market price.

Drugs are almost invariably cheap to manufacture. But if a drug company has a monopoly on a drug that can save a person from cancer or some other deadly or debilitating disease, it will be able to charge a very

high price for it. Patients or their families will pay hundreds of thousands of dollars, or more typically, get an insurance company or the government to pick up most of the bill. While there are instances where companies producing generic drugs can gain monopoly power and jack up their prices, this is a relatively small part of the story of high drug prices.

Drugs produced by the brand drug sector account for roughly 75% of drug costs, even though they are just 11% of sales. This means that generic drugs account for only one-quarter of drug spending despite being almost 90% of sales. Even these numbers understate the role of patent and related protections. Some generic drugs also benefit from government-imposed protections, such as a six-month period of exclusivity for the first generic to enter a market.

We are on a path to spend more than \$450 billion

Opioids And Me

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

I know.

I know the heartache of mothers who lose their sons, children who lose themselves.

I'm as enraged as anyone by the pain peddlers who hand out pills that get sold on the street, popped with abandon, shared among friends.

It seems to me that if you sell guns, you have an obligation to make sure that they are used safely. Ditto for cars, machines of great destruction. Ditto for drugs that could kill people – or save them.

I live on opioids. I'm one of millions. You'd never know it unless you were to run into me once a month, trying to get some work done while I sit in the waiting room for my turn to get a duplicate sheet of paper.

This is how we are going to stop opioid abuse? This is Enemy Number One – me and other people holding on in pain in the office of a doctor whose subspecialty is addiction.

I go to him because I don't want to be addicted. And I'm not. Great. I could stop tomorrow. And sometimes I've had to – when I've forgotten to pack them or run out on a weekend – and faced not a single symptom of withdrawal. I can go days without withdrawal.

Intractable pain, yes, but not withdrawal. I am very rational and controlled when I am screaming bloody murder.

My pain is the result of botched surgery at a Mayo clinic in Phoenix by a doctor named Dr. T. [Got that, Google?] After unnecessary surgery, she ruptured my colon and nicked my spleen and left me in the ICU with peritonitis and sepsis while she went to Maui.

I didn't die, but I went home with enough opioids to get rich on the street. And that was Mayo, not Dr. Feelgood.

If you know what you're doing, you get what

you want. It's as easy as that. You can buy it or steal it or waste your time on shysters. You can figure out who they are – maybe it'll take you a day; go to the beach where the police can't hassle the residents/dealers; find a corner or an office or a shipment; or sit around town for an hour here and there. A hundred bucks a script. Oh, the pain ...

The poor slobs are the ones who don't know what they're doing, the jerks like me who just end up in pain, who start out with doctors who'd rather let us suffer than take the "risk" – what risk? – of prescribing us the medicine we need.

When I ran out of my Mayo supply, I was literally begging for Norco. I had RNs 24/7 who doled it out.

"Let's take a break," the hapless internist who sent me to Mayo twice said. We did. The pain was horrible. I found a new doctor. He understands what addiction is. And what it isn't. The best he could say of my former internist was that he was hopelessly wrong.

But mine isn't the only such story. In smaller cities, internists won't prescribe opioids for chronic pain. When in pain, people drive hours. I have heard horror stories about veterans in pain, having served our country, having literally lost limbs, left to beg for medicine that might make life tolerable.

I'm all for declaring a war, establishing a trust fund, insisting that those who profit from illegal drug use contribute those profits to prevention and treatment.

But don't punish the doctors who truly care for those with chronic pain. Don't stigmatize us with pictures of addicts or terrify our children with tales of certain death. Don't take away the medicine that allows us to live a normal life.

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[2.2% of GDP] on prescription drugs this year. We would likely be spending less than \$80 billion, a savings of \$370 billion annually, if all drugs were sold in a free market without patents or related protections.

The justification for patent monopolies is that it gives drug companies the incentive to research and develop new drugs. While the drug companies hugely exaggerate the cost of developing drugs, there is no doubt that it is expensive and they would not be able to recover their research costs if their newly developed drugs were sold in a free market without protection.

But we don't have to rely on patent monopolies to

pay for drug research. We could, for example, pay for the research costs upfront. In fact, the government already does this to a substantial extent. It spends close to \$40 billion a year financing biomedical research through the National Institutes of Health and other government agencies. There is bipartisan agreement that this is money that is very well spent.

However, as it stands, most of this funding is for basic research. It is essentially a gift to the pharmaceutical industry, which does the additional research needed to develop and test drugs and bring them through the Food and Drug Administration's approval process.

There is no reason that federal funding has to be restricted to more basic research, rather than supporting the development and testing of new drugs. If the federal government were to pay for the later stages of drug development and testing, and bring drugs through the FDA approval process, then newly developed drugs could all be sold as generics. This could mean that the next big cancer drug might sell for a few hundred dollars a year rather than a few hundred thousand.

This doesn't mean we would have the government directly taking responsibility for developing new drugs. It could have long-term contracts with private companies, much as the Defense Department does. While there are abuses in defense contracting, these companies do develop state of the art military systems. [That is not an endorsement of how they are used.] Contracts can be renewed and expanded, or terminated, depending on a company's effectiveness with the money it received.

One big advantage of contracting biomedical research over military research is that there is no reason for secrecy. We really don't want the blueprints for weapon systems posted on the web where any terrorist group can download them, but there is no reason not to post developments in the treatment of cancer or heart disease.

In fact, web posting of all results in a timely manner should be an absolute requirement for any company doing publicly funded research. This was the practice in the mapping of the human genome, where the Bermuda Principles required that results be posted nightly. This should allow other scientists to both learn from advances made elsewhere and to correct mistakes where they see them.

We also don't have to look to replace patent financed research all at once. The government could focus its support on two or three major health areas, like cancer and diabetes. The industry does a bit less than \$70 billion a year in research. If we added another \$15 billion to \$20 billion to what the NIH now spends, federal-financed research should be able to replace a substantial portion of the research now done by the industry.

Even in the areas chosen for funding by the government, the industry would still be free to compete, doing patent-supported research. However, in addition to the risk of not developing an effective drug, the companies relying on patent monopolies could face competition from a publicly funded drug that is as good or better, and selling at generic prices.

Our current system of financing drug research is like paying firefighters when they show up at our burning house with a family inside and then asking what it is worth to save them. It makes zero sense to have a patient suffering from a serious illness, or their family, to cough up the money to pay for research that has already been done.

Patent monopolies also give huge incentives for all sorts of corrupt behavior by drug companies, including pushing their drugs in contexts where they are not appropriate. The marketing of OxyContin is a recent example of this sort of abuse.

Conservative economists have a point when they tout the virtues of a free market. It would be great to have a free market for prescription drugs.

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

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On Being Offended In Trump's America

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

When thinking about the ethics of speech it doesn't take long to arrive at issues associated with offensiveness. And, more generally, appeals to being offended seem – at least to me – more common than they once were.

"I'm offended." "I just find that so offensive." Symbols. Speech. Conduct. Attitudes. Viewpoints. Language. Clothes.

Is it just me, or has something changed? An appeal to offensiveness is now a first line of defense – or offense – when offering arguments about what ought or ought not to be done, or said, or written about. We now live in what one pundit calls "America's Outrage Culture," or as I would say, America's Culture of the Offended.

The use of so-called dirty words raises a number of interesting questions: moral, legal, and social [in a broad sense relating to civility, manners, politeness,

and so forth]. Issues associated with swearing intersect with larger questions about appeals to offensiveness.

We arrive at appeals to offensiveness fairly quickly when considering reasons not to cuss because other popular arguments appear to be relatively weak and offending someone seems to raise a relevant concern. Consider the weaker popular arguments.

Some claim that swearing is immature and uneducated. It's obvious there's no necessary connection between swearing and lack of education or immaturity. Counterexamples are everywhere, from my profane PhD-laden friends to those in political power, well-documented by Bob Woodward in his recent book about chaos in the White House.

Trump and all the president's men are masters of the intensifying use of the F-bomb. At points Trump's colleagues refer to him not simply as a "moron" and

a “liar.” He’s a “f**king” moron and liar! Much more expressive!

Others condemn swearing because, “It’s lazy.” “It isn’t necessary.” If these are supposed to be reasons not to cuss they are question-begging, assuming what they are trying to prove.

To say that cussing expresses the vice of laziness assumes we ought to control our bad linguistic habits. The appeal to laziness doesn’t give an independent reason not to cuss; it assumes we should curb our vile tongues.

The meaning of “necessary” in “it is not necessary” is this: one may choose to cuss; however, given the taboos in play, one should have good reasons to cuss – and there are none. Therefore, the appeal to “not necessary” is simply the claim that the taboos are sufficient to inhibit such speech. Why are they sufficient? Because they are sufficient.

Other arguments against swearing may raise relevant issues but are not decisive. Appeals to one’s religion or holy book are unpersuasive for those outside of the religion and constitute non-rational appeals to authority if they are couched in terms of faith.

Swearing is certainly ill-advised in a job interview or in the annual review with a censorious, straight-laced supervisor. However, appeals to self-interest are context-specific. Is it against one’s self-interest to use dirty words? It depends on the situation. As reported by Woodward, it didn’t appear to be against Trump’s self-interest when he used the F-bomb and “mother***er” in conversations with members of his administration.

Nor does swearing always express a lack of virtue. A person might be just, compassionate, and trustworthy, despite the fact that she cusses like the proverbial sailor.

Some think that cursing contributes to the decline of civility and manners in society, but it’s not clear which way the causation runs. And to say that dirty language is ugly and unattractive substitutes aesthetic for ethical considerations by merely reminding us of the taboos associated with the words.

The most serious objection to swearing claims that it may harm someone, but whether it does harm will depend on the way the words are used. If we have a duty not to harm, then foul language may violate this moral requirement in certain contexts. Abusive cussing is typically directed toward other persons and may involve insults or ridicule, so persons may be directly hurt by language [unlike your dog, who may ignore your insults but not your stick].

But this is not a wholesale indictment of swearing because dirty language has many other uses: cathartic, intensifying, expressive, disparaging, commending, lubricating, comedic, subversive, self-definitional, and probably others.

Another version of the moral argument against swearing [and the more common accusation] rests on the premise that it is offensive. Our cussing may not

directly insult or ridicule another, or damage someone’s self-esteem, but it may offend. This should count from the moral point of view.

Why should it count? How much should offensiveness count, more broadly, in our ethical deliberations? [What I say here will be anecdotal and incomplete – much more could be said.]

One of the larger questions involves the distinction between harm and offense. An appeal to harm is morally deeper since evident examples of harm involve a violation of a person’s rights [according to philosopher Joel Feinberg], a negation of a person’s interests in some important sense. To murder, steal, rape, or enslave is to harm another person in conspicuous ways.

To offend someone is to cause or occasion some unpleasant or discomforting mental state. To be offended involves one’s feelings and emotions [conflating the two for the moment] and may or may not harm in some deeper sense. It makes sense to say that many offenses do not harm.

It seems to me that many [most?] uses of dirty language that may in fact offend some people are harmless. How much should it matter, morally speaking, that the way we talk, write, dress, act, display symbols, and interact with others may offend someone?

It is noteworthy to consider the vast array of happenings that might offend. We have unlimited opportunities to be offensive. From rooting for teams with questionable mascots to the bumper stickers that proclaim our values to the world – we need not kneel for the national anthem nor wear a provocative T-shirt to offend someone.

I have been struck by two things when thinking about these issues. First, appeals to offensiveness are vague. Offensiveness is related to a large number of more determinate mental states. I understand when someone says she is resentful, ashamed, embarrassed, annoyed, insulted, disgusted, or uncomfortable [although discomfort is less determinate than these other emotions]. But when you tell me you are offended, I’m not sure what you mean. Do we really know what we mean by the reference to offensiveness, despite the fact that it is a common knee-jerk reaction to events?

If you say you are offended by Colin Kaepernick kneeling for the National Anthem, what kind of psychological state are you experiencing? Are you angry? Annoyed? Resentful? Then say so. If you are angry, then tell me why. What are your reasons? I need not act in a way that makes you less angry, or resentful, or outraged unless your reasons for your emotional response are good ones. This leads to another important issue.

Offensiveness is realized in a complex mental state involving both something felt, an affective content, and something judged, some cognitive content. It is an emotion that either includes judgments or just is a certain kind of judgment. This has been called the

Jim Hightower



Push, Push, Push: How Movements Succeed

There's a sports cliché, often applied to political races, that devalues strong-but-losing contenders: "Close only counts in horseshoes," they snort.

For building a progressive movement, however, candidates, staffers and volunteers who lose a vote but run good campaigns – especially in tough political terrain – are, in fact, winners.

Their campaigns attract new activists; develop the skills, talents and knowledge of all participants; increase support for particular issues and values; build political organizations and networks; and plant the seeds of change for the next campaign, either for the same candidates or for others who think, "Hey, with a few twists, maybe I could win."

In movement building, success requires constantly expanding the group.

Bernie Sanders, for example, ran for office [and lost] four times before being elected mayor of Burlington, VT, in 1981 [by only 10 votes!]. But he didn't get there by himself.

Over the years, a steadily growing coalition organized around the wild-haired maverick and grew in numbers and governing abilities. When Bernie became mayor, the coalition was able to implement a range of landmark progressive policies. More voters equals more progress, which equals more trust, which equals more voters. Repeat.

Big populist issues matter in movement building. Let's take health care. If you have good insurance – as all corporate political and professional elites do – the quality of the U.S. health system is merely an intellectual issue. But if, like millions, your coverage is iffy to nonexistent, health care costs fall between a constant worry and a full-blown crisis. This glaring disparity cuts across all racial, ethnic, gender, religious and even partisan lines, so the demand for major reform unites a majority of voters.

The candidates who did well last year did not offer vague proposals to "expand" Medicaid or "protect" ObamaCare, but instead hammered a clarion call of "Medicare-for-All."

This kind of bold, plain-talk populism cuts across many of the same political lines to help candidates

who advocate equal pay for women, access to higher education, prison reform and affordable day care as well as banishing corporate money from politics and ending voter suppression.

So, while national media mostly attributed November's increased vote for Democrats to Trump's negatives, the voter excitement that propelled many boldly progressive candidates was generated by their own positives. Their No. 1 appeal was advocating unabashedly for fundamental changes to address widening inequality and legalized oppression of workaday families.

Comfortable elites don't always see that, but regular people feel it every day and seek candidates without corporate blinders – candidates who see, understand and stand unequivocally with them.

Democratic movement building is not for wimps or those seeking instant gratification. Even in a good election year [as democratic populists certainly had in 2018], the movement must turn right around and do it again. It's physically straining and emotionally draining, with almost chaotic ups and downs, external ambushes and internal ego eruptions. This bumpy path is why movements must take root and mature over time.

Activists must learn cooperation and earn group trust, setting aside picayune matters and self-importance to work together for the Common Good. In any given year, even a successful, growing movement will lose more elections than it will win, but the key is to persist, gaining ground incrementally toward the big goals of fairness, justice and opportunity for all.

There's good reason why these efforts are called "struggles." For starters, trying to hold together a naturally rebellious, widely dispersed and wildly diverse people's movement is like trying to load frogs in a wheelbarrow. And then, even with your team working well together, the struggle gets harder, for you're directly confronting the concentrated wealth and power of entrenched elites who abhor our egalitarian ideals and will go all-out to crush our efforts to democratize.

So, yes, it can be exhausting, and it can be tempting to just give up – especially where the political climate is harsh, the rules are rigged and wins are scarce. Still, push on we must, for it's the only way We the People have ever made progress toward the democratic society we seek.

Indeed, experience shows that steady grassroots pushing pays off. It took decades of organizing, but Bernie went from a fringe, “dark horse” mayor to America’s most popular senator, while people aligned with him ran local campaigns that outmaneuvered the old guard’s corporate-run political system to take top elected posts.

You know your community and state. You know the people’s issues. You know your group’s talents. And you can see how progressive issues, candidates and movements are advancing. Our task is to keep doing what brought us this far: organizing, harmonizing and mobilizing.

Together, step by step, we can do this.

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Just Say ‘No’ To The Corporate Bribe Racket

The richest man in the world, who heads one of the world’s largest and richest corporations, is also filthy rich in arrogance and pomposity.

Jeff Bezos of Amazon has demanded that a city’s officials kowtow to him by taking billions of dollars from their taxpayers and handing the bundle to his retail behemoth. In essence, he was demanding a bribe to locate an Amazon headquarters in this particular city. But – lo and behold – the city mustered its collective integrity and pride to say “no” to his devil’s bargain!

The city I’m bragging on is not New York, which made national news recently by shoving away Amazon’s attempt to fleece \$3 billion from its taxpayers. Rather, I’m saluting San Antonio, TX, which in 2017 simply refused to play Bezos’ con game when he first rolled it out.

While 238 cities and states groveled in front of the diminutive potentate, staging dog and pony shows in the perverse hope that he might choose their taxpayers to rip off, San Antonio’s mayor and top county official sent a “Dear Jeff” letter kissing him off. The proud 300-year-old city has much to offer, they said, but any development deal “has to be the right fit; not just for the company but for the entire community,” adding that “blindly giving away the farm isn’t our

style.”

They wrote that a key criterion for awarding any incentives was whether a company was “a good corporate citizen.” They then gently chided Amazon, noting that its so-called search for a new home was a money-grubbing scam. Surely, they said, such a data-driven corporation had “already selected its preferred location,” and thus, “this public process is, intentionally or not, creating a bidding war amongst states and cities.”

That is the core issue here, which the media has mostly missed, instead slamming the Big Apple with snide headlines like “New York Hates Amazon.” No, the activists who spooked Bezos hate throwing billions of scarce public dollars at a pompous corporate prince who neither needs nor deserves such tribute.

City and state officials everywhere need to follow the examples of New York and San Antonio and agree to stop bidding against each other in the corporate bribe racket.

However, Amazon’s attempt to squeeze subsidies from New York taxpayers had two very positive results: One, it shoved these immoral bribery schemes into the glare of the national spotlight. And two, it showed that outraged commoners can push back and push out a corporate bully that considered itself untouchable royalty.

These sweetheart deals between corporate and government officials are almost always consummated in the dark. But New Yorkers pulled the curtain on the sordid affair between CEO Jeff Bezos and Gov. Andrew Cuomo and – whoa! – even jaded New Yorkers were aghast at the buck-naked ugliness they saw.

In a city with a housing crisis, a broken subway system and other crying needs for public investment, taxpayer funds were to be doled out to an \$11 billion, monopolistic, tax-dodging, anti-union global colossus.

Bezos, who has squirreled away a personal fortune of \$137 billion, was even to be given his own helipad, rather than have to be chauffeured in his limousine through New York traffic or, God forbid, take the subway.

Yet, almighty Amazon turned out to be a fraidy cat, hissing furiously and scampering when ordinary people and grassroots leaders dared to denounce the hubris, greed and deceit behind this raw deal. Facing protest rallies and, worst of all, public questioning, Bezos & Co. chose to flee rather than engage the community and find a way to become a good neighbor – starting by rejecting the money and apologizing for thinking that the people should pay for the company to move there.

Amazon’s arrogance and abrupt retreat from New York opens the door to a national discussion about how to end these corporate shakedowns, which are now rampant across our country. It won’t stop until We the People stop it. Indeed, half a dozen states

went running to Bezos the moment he fled New York, begging him to take their tax dollars.

This sick civic cycle diverts public funds from infrastructure, education and other needs that actually create real economic growth for all. Let's join people in Arizona, Florida, Illinois and elsewhere who are pushing an interstate compact – the End Corporate Welfare Act – to stop trying to one-up each other in corporate giveaways. For more information, go to GoodJobsFirst.org. – *Jim Hightower*

Do We Really Need So Many Foreign Tech Workers?

BY FROMA HARROP

Americans don't usually think of technical professionals as "guest workers," yet at any one time, there are more than a half-million foreigners holding tech jobs in the U.S. They are here thanks to the H-1B visa program. H-1B, so the official spiel goes, addresses an alleged shortage of "highly skilled" Americans to fill jobs "requiring specialized knowledge."

Growing evidence, however, points to companies' using the program to replace perfectly qualified American workers with cheaper ones from elsewhere.

A new report published by the Atlantic Council documents the abuses. The authors are Ron Hira, a political scientist at Howard University, and Bharath Gopalswamy, director of the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center.

Among their criticisms:

- Virtually any white-collar job can be taken by an H-1B visa holder. About 70% of them are held not by what we consider tech workers but by teachers, accountants and salespeople, among others.

[Denver Public Schools employs teachers on H-1B visas. During a strike, the district actually threatened to report participating foreigners to immigration authorities. It later apologized.]

"By every objective measure," Hira and Gopals-

wamy write, "most H-1B workers have no more than ordinary skills, skills that are abundantly available in the U.S. labor market."

U.S. colleges graduate 50% more students in engineering and in computer and information science than are hired in those fields every year, according to a study by the Economic Policy Institute.

- Employers don't have to show they have a labor shortage to apply. They don't even have to try recruiting an American to fill the job.

Cutting labor costs is clearly the paramount "need." In Silicon Valley, computer systems analysts make on average just over \$116,000 a year. But companies can hire H-1B workers at a lower skill level, paying them only about \$77,000 a year to do the same work, the report says.

And it's not unheard-of for companies to ask American workers to train the H-1B workers taking their jobs.

60 Minutes featured Robert Harrison, a senior telecom engineer at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center. Asked whether training his replacement felt like digging his own grave, Harrison responded:

"It feels worse than that. It feels like not only am I digging the grave but I'm getting ready to stab myself in the gut and fall into the grave."

Why does this program continue without serious reform? Mainly because its big boosters include such marquee tech names as Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Michael Bloomberg and Eric Schmidt. Big Tech has showered think tanks with funding to brainwash Americans into believing that their country is starving for tech expertise.

Are there rare tech skills that justify companies' looking abroad? There are, but that's the purpose of the O-1 visa. About 10,000 are granted each year to individuals with "extraordinary ability or achievement."

I asked Hira whether we need H-1B at all.

"I think there's a place for the H-1B program," he responded. "The O-1 is a cumbersome process that requires a lot of paperwork, both in preparation and review. But we need to raise the standards of the H-1B program so that the quality and skills of the workers are much higher."

Also, we should substantially raise the wages paid to H-1B workers and make employers show that they tried to recruit Americans and offered them positions. Other guest-worker and green-card programs have that requirement.

Finally, put in force an effective means of enforcement. Right now, compliance is driven by whistleblowing. A random auditing system would far more efficiently find abuses.

Apparently, the argument that "tech jobs need filling" has, in many cases, oozed to "we want cheaper foreigners." The H-1B program demands a major overhaul.

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Offended

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Cognitive Theory of the Emotions.

The popular theory is that emotions are involuntary, passive, dumb, and irrational. They merely happen to us and prevent us from being fully in rational control of our lives. This has been called the Myth of the Emotions. It's difficult to underestimate how widespread is this myth and how misleading [or wrongheaded] it is.

Suppose I'm angry at my roommate because I believe he stole my shoes. My anger is a function of certain facts: my shoes are missing, my roommate likes those shoes and wears my size, he went out tonight, and I really want to wear just those shoes. I make an inference.

My anger is a function of my judgments, and when I find out I was wrong I cease to be angry at him. My emotion was a cognitive [but incorrect] response to the world. If my emotion was involuntary, passive, dumb, and irrational, the later facts that negate my anger would be irrelevant. I chose to be angry based on my mistaken view of what I took to be the case.

The point? The fact that a person may experience some unpleasant or uncomfortable mental state should matter to me, but it need not be decisive for my moral deliberations if it is essentially related to judgments I need not respect. This point is exemplified by the racist who is offended by an interracial couple holding hands, the homophobe offended by a same-sex couple walking arm in arm, grandma offended by a woman nursing her baby in public, the philistine who slashes a painting of a nude in the art museum, or any kind of zealot [religious, nationalist, ethnic, political] offended by a perceived slight to his worldview.

An appeal to offensiveness is the beginning of a moral argument that seeks reasons for being offended, not the terminus. When the appeal is made that we ought to be sensitive to others' feelings, it may omit the notion that the feelings are part of an emotion that includes a judgment that may be incorrect, implausible, culturally narrow, religiously bigoted, prejudiced, chauvinistic, shallow, or the result of irrational taboos.

Furthermore, my willingness to offend may be the result of a judgment that more important values [political, moral, aesthetic, educational, or even personal] may override the fact that some may be offended by what I say or do. Appeals to a principle of offensiveness do not resolve the moral messiness of our lives; they accentuate it.

Whether we might offend someone should matter to us if we are sensitive, yet that hardly calls for a puritan rejection of all swearing. Cuss words have varying degrees of taboo-loading and an enormous variety of uses. We shouldn't swear in front of grandma nor

be so promiscuous about the use of dirty language that our speech becomes uninteresting and boring. I defend the moderate vulgarian whose swearing is artful, effective, and sensitive.

As for the broader notion of appeals to offensiveness, I have always been impressed by a simple response to the easily offended. I am offended by those who are easily offended. As a matter of consistency shouldn't those who are easily offended respect my feelings and resist the temptation to offend me? Shouldn't they remain silent and seethe elsewhere?

Everyone can play this game. An appeal to offensiveness is a blank moral cartridge. A problem of self-reference undermines the strength of the appeal. There's no way to resolve conflicting appeals to offensiveness, unless we consider the reasons for the offense, which makes the mere appeal to offensiveness irrelevant. You're offended. Big deal. Tell me why.

In the end, I must say I'm rarely, if ever offended, perhaps because I'm not sure what it means to be offended. I come closest to engaging the concept when I consider our president, a person I find loathsome because of his narcissism, dishonesty, ignorance, and shallowness. To say that I'm offended by the man doesn't do justice to the depth of my emotional response.

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

About That Eye ...

A pirate walked into a bar, and the bartender said, "Hey, I haven't seen you in a while. What happened? You look terrible."

"What do you mean?" said the pirate, "I feel fine."

"What about the wooden leg? You didn't have that before."

"Well," said the pirate, "We were in a battle, and I got hit with a cannon ball, but I'm fine now."

The bartender replied, "Well, OK, but what about that hook? What happened to your hand?"

The pirate explained, "We were in another battle. I boarded a ship and got into a sword fight. My hand was cut off. I got fitted with a hook but I'm fine, really."

"What about that eye patch?"

"Oh," said the pirate, "One day we were at sea, and a flock of birds flew over. I looked up, and one of them crapped in my eye."

"You're kidding," said the bartender. "Can you lose an eye just from bird sh--?"

"It was my first day with the hook."

-Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing



A Green New Deal For U.S. Labor?

BY SAURAV SARKAR

The simple yellow protest signs were stenciled “Green Jobs for All.” Speaker after speaker stepped into the middle of the office floor, marked with a U.S. House of Representatives seal. Rep.-Elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, fresh off her election win, gave the protesters high fives.

That was the scene in November when the youth climate justice organization Sunrise Movement held a sit-in at the office of Rep. Nancy Pelosi, who was soon to be speaker of the House.

Most Americans had never heard of the “Green New Deal” at the time.

Now, it’s on the mainstream radar.

The New York Times and the Washington Post ran multiple stories when Ocasio-Cortez introduced a resolution on Feb. 7 to reduce carbon emissions through a massive good jobs program. The resolution has 67 House co-sponsors, while the Senate version has 12.

Just like the original New Deal in the 1930s, her

version of a Green New Deal would include a federal guarantee of living-wage employment – that is, anyone who wanted a job could get one at a salary that could support a family, with an emphasis on union jobs and protecting the right to organize.

The plan would also include public investments in clean energy infrastructure. But “there are millions of good, high-wage jobs that will be available through the Green New Deal, and they’re not just jobs that are in the manufacture of clean energy,” said security officer Judith Howell, a Service Employees 32BJ shop steward. For instance, she said, it will take work to clean up the environment where it’s already been damaged.

Howell has been an environmental activist since hearing Ray Charles sing “America the Beautiful” on Earth Day. Last year she helped push through a carbon tax in her hometown of Washington, DC.

Activists like her are responding to the acute necessity to deal with climate change before the earth

is drastically damaged.

It's not too soon. Scientists now estimate that humanity has 12 years to cut carbon pollution by 45% to avert dramatic increases in droughts, flooding, heat, and poverty. Among the costs will be exposure to deadly heat illnesses for 350 million more people around the world by 2050 and \$500 billion lost annually to the U.S. economy by 2100.

IT HASN'T BEEN EASY

Not everyone is on board, though. In fact, significant forces in the labor movement are actively opposed to a Green New Deal.

"It is difficult to take this unrealistic manifesto seriously, but the economic and social devastation it would cause if it moves forward is serious and real," said Terry O'Sullivan, president of the Laborers union, in a statement about the Green New Deal resolution.

The Laborers are worried that members will lose their jobs in fossil fuel industries, which they say are paid much more than current jobs in the renewable energy sector.

The American labor movement has a long history of mistrusting environmental groups as job-killers. Frequently the Building Trades are at odds with environmental groups over projects like the Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines.

Most often, the AFL-CIO backs the Building Trades, though some unions, like National Nurses United, Steelworkers, and Service Employees, have forged ties with environmental groups.

"A small group of unions with close ties to the fossil fuel industry appear to be setting the definition of what the millions and millions of union members in America want and need," said historian Jeremy Brecher, a staff member at the Labor Network for Sustainability.

It's not hard to see that a huge gap exists between current labor-environment collaboration and what it will take to win a massive, federally mandated good jobs program to combat climate change.

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

One union that finds itself in a unique position is the Electrical Workers [IBEW], which benefits from solar energy construction but has traditionally allied with the other Building Trades and still supports coal and nuclear energy production, anathema to environmentalists.

The IBEW has offered career training for electricians in the solar energy industry in New York, Los Angeles, Alameda County in California, and Washington state.

Kevin Norton is a member and former assistant business manager of IBEW Local 11 in Los Angeles. He strongly supports his local's environmentally friendly work. But his first reaction to the Green New Deal is that it's "a lot of well-meaning people who don't necessarily know what they're talking about.

"There's always a group of people," Norton said, "that want to do those kinds of projects, but they

want to do them at \$15 an hour, or \$13 an hour." In contrast, he said, wages and benefits for a union journeyman can total up to \$74 an hour.

He believes what's necessary for an environmentally friendly jobs program is to "do it in a way that's responsible, so we don't kill every job in the state."

California is a good example, he said – the state has created a "whole wave" of green jobs, and good ones at that. Local 11 has had as many as 1,000 electricians working on a solar project at a given time. Why not do the same in Appalachia and Detroit?

In New York state, a coalition called Climate Jobs NY has used pre-hire collective bargaining agreements, called project labor agreements, to win guarantees that workers will be paid prevailing wages in \$1.5 billion in renewable energy projects. These are in wind energy construction, solar, and the retrofitting of schools and other public buildings to make them more energy-efficient.

The Worker Institute at Cornell University spearheaded the project alongside IBEW Local 3, the New York State Nurses, 32BJ, and other unions, aiming to create unionized jobs while investing in sustainable energy. Importantly, the project has the support of the local Building Trades council.

Lina Lopez is a journeywoman electrician in New York. She has taken two classes at Local 3, one to install solar panels and the other to learn how to work with electric car charging stations. She likes doing the work.

"It's to help a little bit," she said, "to help keep this climate clean for the next generation."

These local and state projects are examples that a federal Green New Deal might draw upon – and they offer a glimpse at how the slogan "Green Jobs for All" could be made real.

© *Truthout*

A Super-Market

A new supermarket opened near my house.

It has an automatic water mister to keep the produce fresh. Just before it goes on you hear the sound of distant thunder and experience the smell of rain.

When you approach the milk case you hear cows mooing and experience the scent of fresh cut hay.

When you approach the eggs case you hear hens clucking and the air filled with the pleasing aroma of bacon and eggs frying.

The canned vegetable section features the aroma of fresh buttered corn on the cob.

I don't buy toilet paper there anymore.

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

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SCIENTISTS: BEES CAN DO BASIC MATH...



Bees Can't Bayer It – Neither Can We

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

The question of the day is why are bees dying at such an alarming rate? And the answer is that they are struggling to survive the obscene amounts of toxic pesticides being released into our environment by multinational chemical companies. They are also having to face the “I don’t care” Trump Administration and to battle Bayer, the world’s No. 1 manufacturer of bee-killing pesticides.

Fortunately, the Natural Resources Defense Council [NRDC] is taking on Trump’s EPA in court to restrict the use of dozens of these bee-killing pesticides. NRDC is demanding Bayer’s CEO pull his company’s bee-killing pesticides immediately from the American marketplace. Why? Because last year a shocking 40% of America’s honeybee colonies collapsed.

Now that the science is in, it leaves no more room for doubt or delay in dealing with this tragedy. We know that the world’s most widely used class of insecticides are “neonics” – they are the main reason for the devastating loss of bee colonies in our coun-

try.

There is a full-blown crisis here. According to the government, the number of managed honeybee colonies has plummeted from four million in 1970 to only 2.5 million today.

Here’s the reason that happening is so scary: Bees in this country pollinate 70 out of 100 major crops – from apples and blueberries to watermelon and zucchini. Not to mention the abundance of flowers and vegetables that bees pollinate in millions of backyard gardens across our beautiful and bountiful countryside, including Michelle Obama’s White House legacy of gardens of the kids who now love to be with nature and to eat their own homegrown veggies.

NRDC has taken on the fight for bee survival directly to the German chemical giant Bayer. Bayer is not just the trusted maker of aspirin, Aleve, One A Day and Alka-Seltzer. Bayer is also the world’s leading manufacturer of bee-toxic neonics. Its leading neonic products, imidacloprid and clothianidin, have

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Dark Money Group Formed To Promote Trump's Energy Agenda

BY ANNA MASSOGLIA

Environmental and energy policy is poised to be a hotly contested issue in the lead-up to the 2020 election.

One new group that stands to play a key part in that conversation is Energy 45 Fund, a 501[c] [4] nonprofit organization founded by ex-senior Trump administration adviser Mandy Gunasekara “to promote the Trump energy agenda” following her resignation from the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA].

The source of money fueling the group may remain a mystery. Gunasekara told the Center for Responsive Politics that the group's funders will be allowed to remain anonymous.

“I will respect their preferences,” Gunasekara said.

Moreover, the “dark money” group's website was purchased weeks before Gunasekara left the Trump Administration, while she was seemingly still on EPA payroll.

In a resignation letter to the White House dated and effective Feb. 7 – the same day House and Senate Democrats floated their “Green New Deal” – Gunasekara formally resigned from her position as principal deputy assistant administrator at the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation then announced plans to launch the group.

Incorporation records confirm that the group was incorporated as a 501[c][4] nonprofit organization the day after Gunasekara's resignation with the stated purpose being “to inform the public about the environmental and economic gains made under the Trump Administration” by “educating policy makers and the general public regarding legislation and other matters of importance to the people and economy of the United States.”

Domain registration records reviewed by CRP reveal that the group's website was quietly registered to Surya Gunasekara – Mandy Gunasekara's lobbyist husband, who started lobbying the EPA shortly after his wife joined the agency – on Jan. 20, weeks before his wife's resignation.

Mandy Gunasekara told CRP that her husband has no official role in the organization and that his name is listed due to their use of a shared GoDaddy account.

Surya Gunasekara joined Capitol Hill Consulting Group in November 2017 and began lobbying for an energy company called Ameresco during the final quarter of the year.

During the first quarter of 2018 and the final quar-

ter of 2017, he and two other lobbyists at the firm are listed as lobbying the EPA. Issues listed on the firm's Lobbying Disclosure Act [LDA] filings include “Energy Savings Performance Contracting; FY19 Appropriations for federal energy programs; Renewable Fuels.”

An initial Q2 lobbying disclosure for 2018 also lists the EPA but an amended Q2 filing for 2018 does not mention the agency.

Mandy Gunasekara has been the Trump Administration's top air and climate adviser at the EPA for the past two years but has her own history in the revolving door, working as Senior Director Legislative Affairs at the National Association of Chemical Distributors before she was hired by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in 2015.

Under then-Chairman James Inhofe, R-OK, she became the committee's Clean Air Act and Climate Change counsel. Gunasekara is perhaps best known in DC circles for her connection to Inhofe's highly publicized snowball stunt on the floor of the Senate.

“Continued environmental progress will be borne out of innovation, not oppressive regulations, government take-overs or green new deals,” a page touting “America First Environmentalism” on the website reads, in an apparent jab at House Democrats' Green New Deal spearheaded by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-NY, and released the same day Mandy Gunasekara resigned from the EPA.

On another page titled “Exposing Liberal Energy Fantasies,” the Energy 45 website continues pushing back on the Democrats' new environmental proposals.

“Led by self-avowed socialists, the Democrats have made a leftward lurch so dramatic that it would make Stalin blush. Their policies to combat climate change are nothing but a proxy for draconian government control that prohibits car ownership, kills domestic energy production, and harms low-income communities the most,” the website reads.

Building on her resignation letter's condemnation that the Paris Climate Accord is one of “many bad deals,” the group's website touts Gunasekara as the “chief architect” of the Trump Administration's withdrawal from the agreement who “worked to repeal the disastrous Clean Power Plan” and create “opportunities for beautiful clean American coal.”

Anna Massoglia is the Center for Responsive Politics's political nonprofits researcher.

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How Russian Interference Helped Tip 2016 Election

CYBERWAR

How Russian Hackers And Trolls Helped Elect a President

By Kathleen Hall Jamieson

Oxford University Press

336 pages, \$24.95

BY JOHN WOOD

I remember the day after the 2016 election. That morning my wife and I barely talked. We drank our coffee in stunned silence. As I drove to work in what seemed to be a foggy bottom, I kept asking myself, “What in the heck just happened?”

Two years later, the nation witnessed a blue tsunami that flipped the U.S. House, taking up our state’s 5th District up in its wake – certainly a reaction to the topsy-turvy events in recent years.

A CNN poll found that 57% of Americans acknowledge that Russians “meddled” in the election, including 77% of Democrats. In early 2018, the U.S. Intelligence Community reported the Russians were already trying to influence the midterms by focusing on sowing discord among the population through social media.

Yet, the president still fails to accept our own intelligence assessments of this Russian effort. Furthermore, he hints that he places at least as much, if not, more faith in Russian President Vladimir Putin’s version of events.

Who is he working for again?

Of course, lest we forget, this is all in the context of Robert Mueller’s indictments or guilty pleas from 34 individuals, including Roger Stone, Trump’s Trickster. Something is not right.

And while we are many steps down the road of this historically traumatic saga, many others have yet to be made. Professor Kathleen Hall Jamieson, professor of communication and the director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, makes evidentiary case in her *Cyberwar* to presume that the 2016 outcome was at the very least influenced, maybe even tipped toward Trump.

“Did Russia turn the outcome of the last presidential race?” a PBS Newshour anchor pointedly asked Jamieson. She responded, “I believe it’s highly probable that they did – not certain, but highly probable.”

In her book, she adds, that she is not arguing at all that Russians voted, or even influenced the voting machinery and, therefore, the vote count. Instead Jamieson is making the case that Russian trolls persuaded enough people to vote in a specific way, or just skip the vote itself. Jamieson says the change in outcome toward Trump’s favor was not just plausible, but likely.

She finds one of the biggest issues is that citizens are allowing their ideology to cloud their faculties, from unwittingly “liking,” supporting, and attending rallies around the nation set up by St. Petersburg operatives to even retweeting fake troll content. Jamieson gives examples of the viral fake headline: “Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for President.” In another, “FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide.”

Jamieson calls such examples “Viral Deception” or VD, like a venereal disease and shouldn’t be shared at all.

And yet, she reports, a fourth of Americans visited a fake website between Oct. 7 and Nov. 14, 2016. What’s more, fake news stories were so popular that they were more widely shared on Facebook than the most mainstream factual stories.

After Russians created the fake content, Americans unwittingly shared it over and over.

This media manipulation fed by bias in the context of a highly partisan charged election could have been

just enough to sway 80,000 votes among three purple battle-ground states – Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. To place this in context, I find Trump won those states by 0.2%, 0.7% and 0.8%, respectively. And yet he lost by three million votes nationally.

Polarization has been fed, she says, in the past 60-plus years. For example, Democrats nearly doubled and Republicans nearly tripled the number of parents who were adamant that their child marry someone of their own party. People do not want their kid to marry the “enemy.”

The chasm across the partisan aisle has deepened and widened to dangerous levels, she says. Motivated bias can explain that while Obama could have denounced Russian hacks on the eve of the election, Obama instead decided it better to keep silent to prevent being perceived as tampering with the election.

In such an environment, the president thought – and rightfully so – that he would have been attacked no matter his Noblesse oblige. At the same time, Trump stoked the Russians by asking for them to find the 30,000 missing emails. They either took the challenge, or were already knew the play. Time will tell.

She says that Clinton didn’t do herself any favors as she fueled distrust by not releasing her Wall Street speeches when challenged to do so by her Democratic rival Bernie Sanders. From then on, Russian trolls focused on her lying with discrepancies about her private vs. public persona. This narrative caused her popularity to nosedive more than almost anything in her failed campaign. While Russians didn’t create Hillary’s persona, they amplified it with leaks.

Jamieson argues that had polarization not been so high, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell might have joined Democrats in condemning the Russians, but with each side swallowing a rather bitter pill, neither wanted to help each other. She said there has

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been such a stark contrast to nearly 20 years ago in what she calls a “phase change” in electoral politics. For example, she notes that this in contrast to when a low level Bush advisor transmitted debate prep to the opposition; instead of being rewarded, he was reported

for mail fraud by the Gore campaign themselves.

Jamieson points out that to be “forewarned is to be forearmed,” meaning to be armed with truthful information is what will get us through another election. She says that the outcome would be

just as “problematic if they targeted a Republican, or third party.” And it might be next time.

I think Jamieson might be right, based on what I’ve read elsewhere. Putin is not a Republican – he only seeks to create chaos in American elections. It’s why there is evidence that anti-establishment candidates Bernie Sanders and Jill Stein may have also had help from Russian memes and hackings in the name of undermining Democratic legitimacy – ultimately helping Putin justify his own regime.

The good news is that the social media landscapes is changing in the aftermath of the Russian hacking. For example, Twitter notified 1.4 million of its customers that Russians hacked accounts. Facebook uses factcheck.org, co-founded by the author herself. YouTube even notes who posted a video, so RT videos reveal they are paid for by the Russian government.

However, these fixes are short-sighted, she argues in that these technical solutions fall short, as trolls focused on issue framing and priming to get their

message out. Nothing has prevented this sort of viral messaging, which is incredibly effective as most people are fairly uncritical about their media consumption.

One way Jamieson’s book is important is that she uses social science research to back up her main point: while interference by Russian hackers and other operatives did not determine the outcome, it influenced enough voters to tip the election to Trump – especially since he faced an uncharismatic and flawed candidate who had been targeted by Russians.

Jamieson makes a strong case. Louis Brandeis asserts “sunlight to be the best disinfectant.” In exposing these likely influences, Jamieson says we need to finally acknowledge the very real “Cyber War of 2016.”

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.

For Statehouse’s Inexperienced Leadership, Essential Reading

WORDS OF DESTINY

Writing That Shaped Oklahoma

Editor: Bob Burke

Oklahoma Heritage Association

181 pages, \$19.95

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

Oklahoma’s Capitol wallows in inexperience. From Gov. Kevin Stitt to the dozens of new legislators and legions of fresh political appointees, Bob Burke’s incredible book offers a shortcut course on tracing the footprints of the state’s legal foundation.

If nothing else transpires under this inexperienced new leadership, Oklahoma government must be guided by the “rule of law.” Burke, both a practicing attorney and prolific author about history, offers basic legal documents in a readable, palatable and concise single book.

Burke’s collection of documents crisply outline the basic laws and writings that are the backbone of the state and fundamental in civilized behavior in Oklahoma. These are the precedents and foundation of state laws.

If more space had been available, Burke’s book would have merited copies of the 1887 U.S. Constitution and the 1215 Magna Carta as earlier building blocks of Oklahoma government. The author under-

stands those precedents.

But for brevity, Burke skips ahead a logical starting place: the 1803 Louisiana Purchase Treaty that allowed the U.S. to buy from France the vast real estate that included the future Oklahoma except for its Panhandle.

Vital recorded next is the Indian Removal Act of 1830 that allowed swapping of tribal acreage in eastern U.S. for land in largely vacant “Indian Territory.” Hard-to-find treaties between the U.S. and various Native American people are republished here.

To humanize and freshen this scholarly tome, adventuresome Burke selected other key writings, songs and even artwork that were invaluable in shaping the tone of Oklahoma. These sidebars give the book some levity and life. Burke’s vivid rendering tells how then-state Rep. George Nigh got the song “Oklahoma!” adopted as the state’s anthem.

Down to tough business, Oklahoma’s fundamental document, the 1907 Constitution, is reprinted along

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

academic elite.

Further, there is no small amount of irony that a “financially troubled” university’s regents would hire a pricey, global law firm, Jones Day, to investigate allegations against Boren. So far, OU has acknowledged paying Jones Day \$84,802.50 for the probe. You can bet the meter will keep ticking for months, if not longer.

No matter the outcome, this is a sad, sordid episode for OU and its leadership, present and past. If regents are elevating enmity for Boren over what’s best for the university, they are serving themselves, not OU or state taxpayers.

Obsessed

Senate leadership wisely blocked Sen. Joseph Silk’s SB 13 that would have made abortion murder. It’s not only unconstitutional, but also a sure-fire way to squander precious tax dollars in an all-but-certain-to-lose court fight.

Of course, smart and courageous legislative decisions aren’t always rewarded politically. So Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat came up with a plan to mollify aroused anti-abortion forces.

Treat punched the legislative accelerator for his SB 195 that would automatically outlaw the procedure in Oklahoma should the U.S. Supreme Court someday overturn Roe v. Wade.

It quickly won Senate Health and Human Services Committee approval – but not Silk’s or his ilk. Silk argued the measure “does absolutely nothing to save the lives of unborn children in Oklahoma today ... in the meantime, more than 5,000 children die each year in Oklahoma – that’s between 15 and 20 unborn children killed every day ... it’s time to put the lives of the unborn first.”

There’s a reason “God, guns and gays” – a mantra U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe made famous a quarter-century ago – remains a GOP staple: It helps turn out vital segments of a winning Republican voting coalition.

But for statehouse leadership, it’s increasingly difficult to pacify the most rabid anti-abortionists who can’t grasp why a GOP legislative supermajority and a pro-life governor won’t take matters into their own hands and defy the U.S. Supreme Court.

Actually, the reason is simple: Most Oklahomans – check the polls – support safe, legal abortions. So do most Americans. A reconfigured U.S. Supreme Court could overturn Roe v. Wade, of course, but Chief Justice John Roberts’ seems disinclined to reverse long-established law. Why? It could damage the court’s legitimacy.

TOM GOODWIN

Cheyenne, OK

Reader and supporter of *The Observer*
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Thus, Republican leadership navigates a political tightrope: The very voters it needs to win elections are the very zealots creating migraines session after session.

That is not likely to change any time soon, even if SB 195 is approved.



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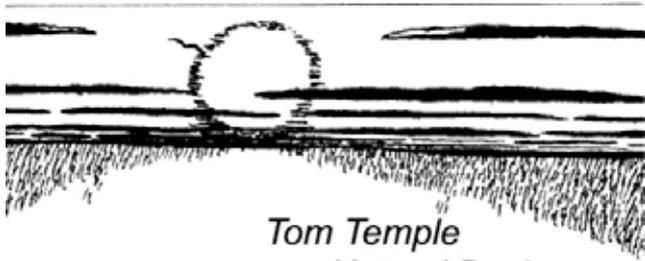
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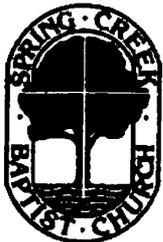


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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

It's past time to end the revolving door – lawmakers leaving office one day, lobbying their former colleagues the next. Ex-Reps. Josh Cockroft, Bobby Cleveland and Pat Ownbey are latest to cash in on their “public service.” The legislative fix? Adopt the Ethic Commission’s proposed waiting period. Now.

Our friend Don Sherry nailed it: “How fitting: Oklahoma gets open, unlicensed, and untrained carry on the same day the nation gets a smoking gun” – courtesy of Trump fixer Michael Cohen.

Uh-oh. Oklahoma Watch reports Gov. Kevin Stitt’s pick as secretary of veterans affairs/military, Brian Brurud, faces New Orleans federal court lawsuit over claims he and his Tulsa-based Check-6 violated federal labor laws by underpaying veterans.

Medical marijuana boom: The state already has approved 54,000-plus patient and 1,000-plus dispensary licenses, generating more than \$12 million in licensing fees and \$375,000 in excise tax.

A \$1,200 teacher pay raise. A 2% cost-of-living hike for state retirees. A \$2 per hour salary bump for correctional officers. All sorely needed. How are lawmakers going to pay for it?

Don’t look now, but Oklahoma’s largest virtual charter school, Epic, is in the crosshairs of state and federal investigators – at least in part because some students may be dually enrolled in private schools. Epic received \$112.9 million in state funding this year.

Here’s another reason to end daylight savings time: The number of traffic fatalities typically jumps 6% the first week after we spring forward. – AARP

Democratic presidential wannabes will be courting an increasingly left-leaning base: About half of Democrats now identify as liberal or progressive. – Time

Attention, young parents: The Tooth Fairy now leaves kids an average \$3.70 per tooth, according to Delta Dental. The figure comes from parent interviews, by the way, not an open records request to the Tooth Fairy.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

However, Oklahoma HB 2597 “Permitless Carry” seeks for more unfettered access to firearms by allowing people over age 21 [or age 18 if military personnel] to carry firearms, loaded or unloaded, without the training requirement for carrying a firearm as well as an extensive background check process that includes mental health and court records.

Nearly 81% of Oklahomans oppose this proposed law which includes Oklahoma businesses, colleges and universities, and law enforcement.

Without a required permit, an officer’s ability to ask for proof of eligibility to publicly carry will be greatly diminished.

The cost of an initial license is \$100 for five years or \$200 for 10 years and combined with other associated costs such as fingerprinting it is approximately \$195/5 years [\$39/year] or \$295/10 years [\$29.50/year]. The cost to renew is even less. This amount is not so unreasonable as has been suggested.

Further, supporters can’t answer how this will impact public safety for the better or explain the fallout of the nearly \$4 million loss to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

Jasha Lyons Echo-Hawk
Pawnee

Editor, The Observer:

Mitch McConnell, after the State of the Union speech: “I’ve said time and again: Mindless obstruction is unacceptable. The only way Congress will be able to deliver is – as President Trump put it – “by focusing on cooperation, compromise, and the common good.”

During Obama’s final year, Mitch McConnell said: “One of my proudest moments was when I looked Barack Obama in the eye and said, ‘Mr. President, you will not fill the Supreme Court vacancy.’”

True to his word, McConnell refused to give Merrick Garland a hearing till the end of Obama’s presidency – 10 months of obstruction.

From NPR: A nomination was needed to fill the 2016 vacancy on the Supreme Court created by the death in February of Justice Antonin Scalia, an icon of conservative jurisprudence.

President Barack Obama quickly named Merrick Garland, 63, to fill the seat. Garland had long been considered a prime prospect for the high court, serving as chief judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the

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District of Columbia Circuit – a frequent source of justices that is sometimes called the “little Supreme Court.”

Widely regarded as a moderate, Garland had been praised in the past by many Republicans, including influential senators such as Orrin Hatch of Utah.

But even before Obama had named Garland, and in fact only hours after Scalia’s death was announced, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declared any appointment by the sitting president to be null and void.

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Towns in Oklahoma and other states that add fluoride to the public drinking water are becoming fewer. Those that are declining or ending fluoridation should consider themselves very fortunate to be eliminating that very toxic, arsenic-laced industrial waste fluorosilicic acid chemical from their water supply.

I expect there will be a slew of dentists who will begin to shout out that tooth decay rates will now double or triple as a result.

Rest assured that scenario will never happen as these misinformed dentists aren’t aware that there

has never been a controlled study that scientifically documents that water fluoridation reduces or prevents tooth decay.

The American Dental Associations [ADA] “classical” water fluoridation/tooth decay “studies” the ADA and the U.S. Public Health Service [USPHS] used back in the 1940’s and 50’s to justify their endorsement of water fluoridation were nothing more than unscientific scripted publications that were intentionally sculptured to create the illusion that fluoride had something to do with tooth decay rates.

H. Trendley Dean, DDS, the chief dental officer at the USPHS who was in charge of creating those “classical studies,” admitted, under oath, in 1955 that those “studies” were not valid studies. The ADA just forgot to tell the dentists.

None of those studies, nor any since then, followed the same children from year to year, the water sources were not analytically consistent, and there was absolutely no consideration for nutrition, oral hygiene care or dental care. A valid scientific controlled study cannot have numerous variables, especially ones not taken into consideration. Truth decay causes water fluoridation.

Jim Maxey, DDS
Tulsa

Sleuthing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

Trump luxury project outside Delhi a chance to dine with the president’s son, prompting charges of conflict of interest. [Duh.] His team boasted to reporters they had sold \$100 million worth of the pricey flats, including \$15 million in a single day.

The government spent a similar amount – about \$97,830 — for hotel stays for Secret Service and embassy staffers for Eric’s trip last year to Uruguay. Citizens for Ethics and Responsibility in Washington released a report in July that shows the Secret Service spent \$200,000 on airfare, hotel rooms and

other expenses when Trump Jr. and Eric went to the United Arab Emirates to open a golf resort in 2017. And WE picked up the tab for security while they were on these business trips!

Again, this is just a partial list at some of the outrageous ways the current administration is spending our tax dollars.

*I do not expect any president to live every moment of his/her life in the White House, in spite of what Trump said he would do. I mean, it’s not like that was his first fib. Vacations are necessary, even if it’s a “stay-cation,” which he’s allegedly doing plenty of lately, based on his log of Executive Time. However, they should also be balanced with reasonableness, especially when it’s being paid for with taxpayer money. What is reasonable is up for debate.

**Similarly, I have no qualms with protecting any president’s family. But when family members decide to live elsewhere or travel extensively for personal purposes, I think the reasonableness needs to be balanced. What the limits are for family living arrangements or travel is, again, up for debate. Maybe the correct answer really is “whatever it takes.” Or may not.

Finally, I have one simple question for Sen. Lankford: what would you have done if President Obama and his administration had spent money like this?
Tim Jarvis lives in Edmond.



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Bees

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

now topped \$1.5 billion in annual sales. By the way, other purveyors of neonics include both Monsanto and Syngenta.

Now that the European Union has restricted the use of these toxic chemicals, Bayer is having problems selling neonics in its own backyard. Their solution has become our problem because Bayer is now selling increasing amounts of neonics in the United States and our bees will keep on dying in droves.

It could get even worse for us. According to the NRDC, "The Justice Department has tentatively approved a merger of Bayer and Monsanto. These two goliaths are poised to become one global colossus with even more power over farmers."

This could very easily result in our chemical-soaked food supply becoming even deadlier for our bees.

NRDC is fighting in court currently to restrict neonics use. Unfortunately the EPA has approved their sale of neonics, disregarding their impact on endangered bees, butterflies and birds. Isn't that a clear violation of the Endangered Species Act it is mandated to enforce?

The latest data indicate we need to deal with the negative impact of using neonics now. A recent annual survey of American beekeepers shows that honeybee colonies aren't only dying during winter. Last summer bee colonies collapsed at a rate of 17%!

Here's what makes that news so significant. In summer bees need to flourish and thrive. When they start dying off at that rate during the warm, bountiful months of summer, we can be certain that something is wreaking havoc with Mother Nature.

By no means is this an unsolved mystery. For a long time scientists have warned about a tidal wave of neonics being one key factor in the nationwide collapse of bee colonies. Bees also suffer from the loss of wildflower habitat, rapidly spreading diseases, and climate change.

These factors have left our vital pollinators stressed out, thus even more susceptible to pesticide poison-

ing.

The increasing use of neonics in our farms couldn't happen at a worse time. Why? Because neonics are now the most heavily used class of insecticides in the United States, applied to an estimated 150 million acres of crops each year.

We find also that more than 90% of our corn crops begin with seeds treated with neonics. These neonics also are creeping into our own backyards by way of garden plants treated with them and sold at the top garden retailers and hardware stores countrywide.

With this widespread usage it won't be much longer before most of America's bee colonies get wiped out. Acute exposure will kill our bees directly. Chronic exposure to lower doses will make it more difficult for bees to fight off disease, survive winter, forage for food or even find their way back to their hive.

These neonics are truly insidious because they are so systemic that once absorbed into a plant's tissue, they turn the plant into a tiny poison factory that emits toxins all the way from the roots to the nectar on which the bees feed.

It can truly be said that Big Ag is conducting a giant uncontrolled experiment with Mother Nature and our food supply. However, EPA refuses to end this chemical free-for-all; its leisurely timetable reviewing neonics stretches to 2022. And that was before President Donald Trump put his amigos at Big Ag in charge of EPA.

This crisis is only one of many Trump accelerated. Until we recognize that our democracy is being turned into a capitalistic machine focused only on profit margins, expect only the worst. Time is limited before opportunity to take meaningful action runs out. So get to it folks, or suffer the consequences of doing nothing. Our concerns must be turned into action.

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

Leadership

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

with fine collections of surrounding events. The string of critical amendments is added bringing the original document into its present form.

From these scattered legal actions Oklahoma's function of being a "democracy in a Republic" are the foundation upon which thousands of statutes enacted by legislatures since 1907 and signed by the more than two dozen governors are hinged. New bills enacted this year face the same tests.

For quick study, these far-reaching documents

are presented by Burke, sparing long hunts in dusty tomes, libraries or on-line searches. Beyond the fresh political faces at Oklahoma's Capitol, this meritorious book even deserves a slot on shelves in Oklahoma homes or as bedside reading for voters who care. 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].

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