

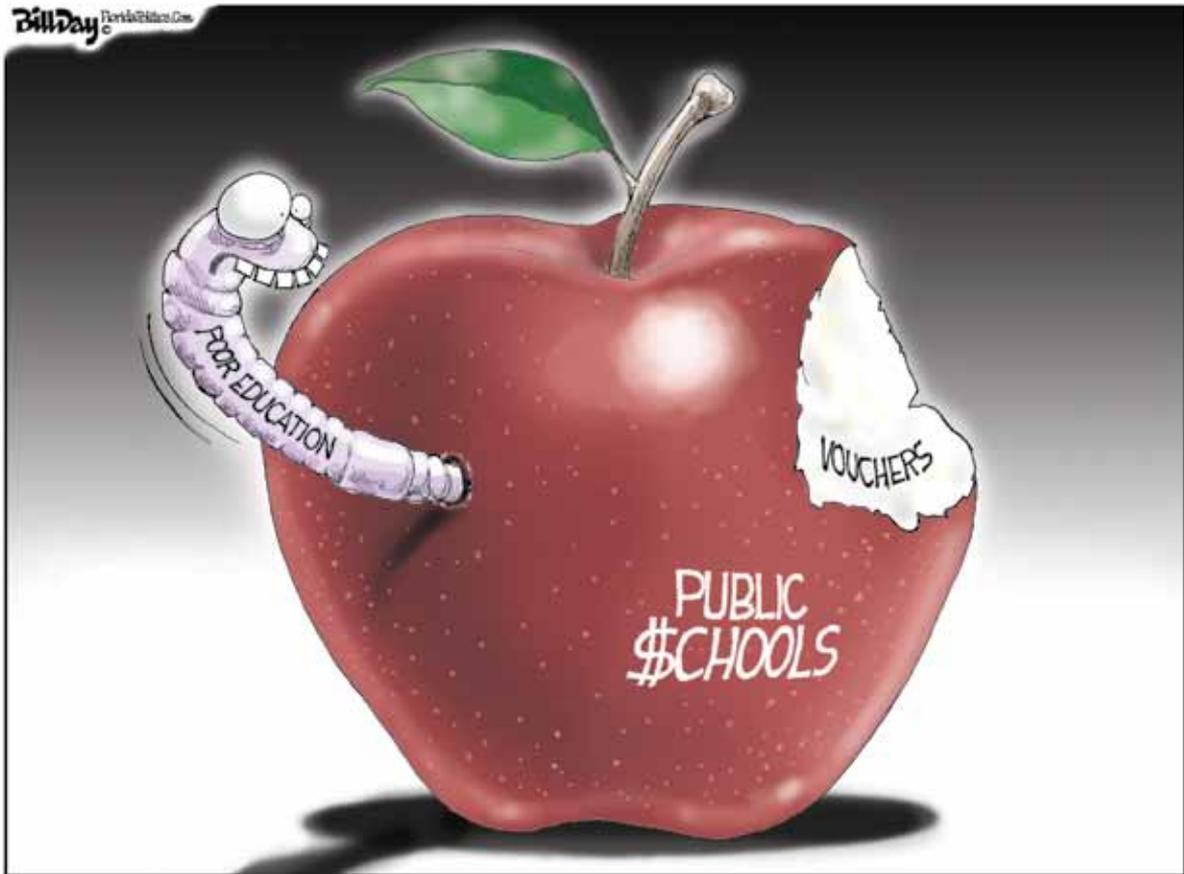
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• ANNUAL EDUCATION ISSUE •

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PROFIT CENTERS

*Koch Network Joins Efforts To Obliterate
Traditional Public Ed And Cash In On Its Remake*



Special Report begins on page 12

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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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FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

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Observations

A Big, Beautiful Plan?

Statehouse leadership is taking one last stab at crafting an alternative to full Medicaid expansion as proposed under SQ 802.

House Speaker Charles McCall and Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat in late July announced formation of a healthcare working group that includes 18 lawmakers and two members of Gov. Kevin Stitt's staff.

"Healthcare is a very complex issue, and there is no cookie-cutter approach that is going to drive down costs, improve care and increase access," McCall said. "It is going to take a comprehensive, multifaceted approach that considers not just what is wrong with the system but also what is working, and also what has worked and not worked in other states.

"That means we need to bring everyone together – patients, providers, policy experts, insurance carriers, facilities and state agencies – and find a way forward. That discussion must include everything, not just Medicaid expansion, and it will need to continue until we have a solution that works for our citizens unique needs."

Of course, the Legislature's Republican supermajority has tap-danced around healthcare since anti-ObamaCare ideologues stamped leadership and then-Gov. Mary Fallin into rejecting Medicaid expansion nearly a decade ago. While the cut-off-your-nose-to-spite-your-face cabal reigned supreme, 36 states and the District of Columbia wisely leveraged their federal tax dollars to extend healthcare to the working poor.

As he assumed the levers of power earlier this year, Gov. Kevin Stitt indicated he was gung-ho to accept the 9-1 return on Oklahoma tax dollars already sent to Washington. But he reversed himself just days later, knuckling under to hard-right extremists that despise any government program that doesn't benefit the corporate elite [think: Koch Brothers' yappy dogs at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs].

Despite nearly a decade of inaction, statehouse leadership continues

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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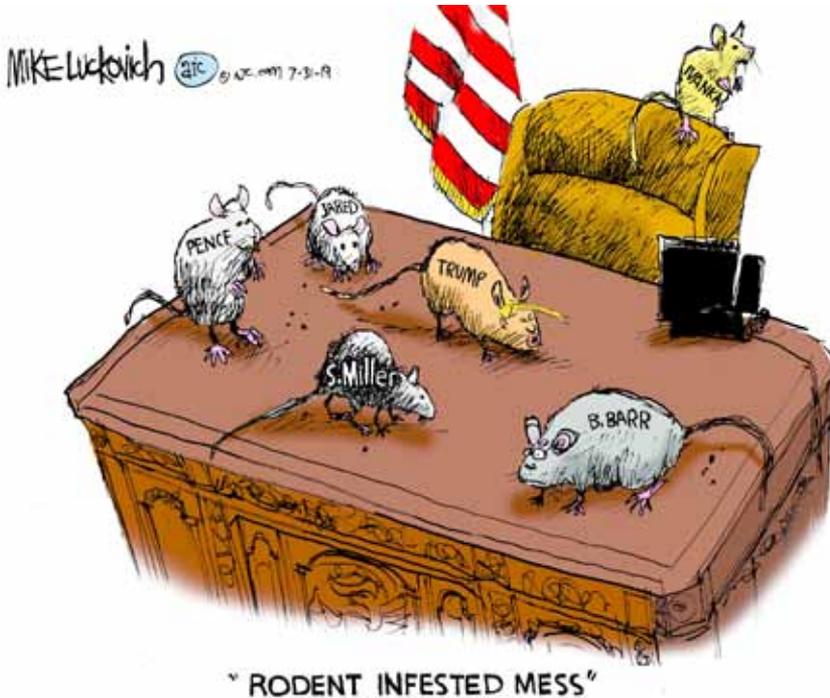
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Observerscope



You won't want to miss our annual Back-to-School Newsmakers Aug. 8 at Full Circle Books OKC, featuring Shawnee Sen. Ron Sharp and Norman Sen. Mary Boren discussing all things public ed. See back cover for more details.

Laurel: To Rep. Harold Wright, not giving up his fight to make all workplaces smoke-free. Too many Oklahomans are still exposed to the dangers of second-hand smoke. Hopefully Wright's interim study will lead to a legislative fix.

Oklahoma recently lost two giants – longtime DNC member and Girls State Director Betty McEldery and former state Rep/Corporation Commissioner Jim Townsend. They worked tirelessly to create a better Oklahoma.

Dart: To OK County District Judge Cindy Truong, upholding a 2015 state law banning standard second-trimester abortions [dilation and evacuation]. Similar crackpot laws were declared unconstitutional in Arkansas and Texas.

The Observer is pleased to join more than 60 media outlets worldwide pledging to focus on climate coverage from Sept. 16-23, leading up to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' international Climate Action Summit. Visit okobserver.org for our coverage.

Laurel: To OKC Mayor David Holt, rejecting Trump's racism and bigotry by declaring Oklahoma's capital "is a diverse community where 60% of our children are non-white," "many of our residents are immigrants," and "almost all of us are descendants of immigrants." "We welcome all," he tweeted.

Follow The Money: Gov. Kevin Stitt raised \$356,130 for re-election during the second quarter, a vivid reminder of how big money warps the political process. He's still nearly 3½ years from re-election.

Dart: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, publicly announcing his quest to renegotiate gaming contracts before alerting the tribes. Yet another rookie political mistake.

The Trump-Barr Justice Department just added to its legacy of shame, reviving federal use of the death penalty at a time public sentiment turns sharply against it. A cruel reminder that elections have consequences.

Laurel: To House Speaker Charles McCall, approving OKC Rep. Mickey Dollens' requested interim study into epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women. See July's Observer for more on the invisible crisis.

There's less shakin', rattlin' and rollin' than at the peak of earthquake swarms in 2017-18, but seismologists think state is ripe for a damaging temblor in near future based on recent seismicity.

Laurel: To our friend, union printer and school board member Linda James, honored when Western Heights School District named its new employee day care center for her and teacher Jana Weaver Pennock.

Four-term Chickasha Rep. David Perryman becomes second House Democrat to opt against a 2020 re-election bid – following OKC's Shane Stone. Perryman is the only rural Democrat west of I-35.

Congratulations to Amanda Ewing, OK Education Association associate executive director, and Sean Wallace, OK Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services government relations director, on birth of their daughter Adelaide – on Amanda's birthday!

Heartbreaking: Former Norman Sen. Jonathan Nichols' June 5 death is ruled a suicide. Nichols, 53, served a dozen years in the Legislature, beginning in 2000. He later became senior policy adviser to Speaker Charles McCall.

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

We are less than a year away from the 2020 election cycle. Instead of raging at the other side on immigration, impeachment, investigations and a hundred other divisive issues, could we not *all* insist that Trump and Congress focus full-bore on stopping Putin and the damn Russians from meddling in our elections?

We need a well-funded cyber defense against this nonsense. We need to cure this cancer before it spreads. There needs to be a serious cost extracted from those who would tear at our democratic system.

Mickey Thompson
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I appreciated the Mueller Report, and I have a comment to add, based on having read every word of it, including informative footnotes. There is ample evidence that Paul Manafort provided Russian operatives with polling data and targeting analysis, although there is no clear evidence that the candidate was informed.

I am forced to agree that there is

no clear evidence of conspiracy – *but* it was not for want of trying. Operatives from both Russia and Trumpworld were running around like chickens with their heads cut off trying to set up meetings between Mr. Trump and assorted high-power Russians. The fact that they never managed to pull it off was the result of total ineptitude rather than intent. They reminded me of the Keystone Kops.

Part two of the report provides clear evidence of multiple attempts to obstruct justice.

Dortha Dunlap
Springdale, AR

Editor, The Observer:

Feminist efforts in this country have led to some of our most profound cultural changes such as voting rights, increase in wages and other labor laws that affected the quality of life of women, children and all workers. So why do the vestiges of the historical bondage of women still hang on today? Maybe it is because of these changes and successes!

The primary focus of this message is the relationship between the feminist movement and the

current battle over reproductive freedom. Could it be that bans, and restrictions, on abortion may have less to do with the rights of the unborn child than with the threat to the social order represented by allowing women to be in control of their reproductive lives.

I'm not aware that there have been in any legislative body, federal or state, studies conducted to determine the economic, social, mental or physical impact of these restrictive laws on women, their families or society in general. Why? Why would governments propose laws and restrictions that have known negative affects [including loss of life, health and liberty] on their citizens without first pursuing the facts associated with such actions? I know what you are thinking: "How naive can this woman be?" It's of course done in this manner to strengthen a patriarchal structure and to weaken those most affected by such coercion.

I can acknowledge that beliefs about when life begins can vary. I support and would fight for any women's right to decide to have a child and not to have an abortion. I wouldn't impose that choice on anyone. No one should have the right to impose such a personal decision on another woman.

Because the Irish author Sally Rooney has expressed so accurately and eloquently the reasoning for ensuring that such life changing decisions remain with the person most affected, I leave you with her powerful words:

"Pregnancy, entered into willingly, is an act of generosity, a commitment to share the resources of life with another incipient being. Such generosity is in no other circumstances required by law. No matter how much you need a kidney donation, the law will not force another person to give you one. Consent, in the form of a donor card, is required even to remove

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Rebranding Won't Fix What Ails Oklahoma

“Oklahoma is OK” wasn’t OK. Neither was “Native America.” Or “Explore Oklahoma.”

Let the rebranding begin.

Again.

First-year Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell is leading the latest effort to recast Oklahoma in the national, if not the world, consciousness, beyond the Dust Bowl, beyond twisters, beyond the Murrah bombing, beyond ... what?

“If we don’t define who we are, every other state will,” Pinnell told the Oklahoman. “That’s politics 101. You have to define who you are before your opponent does and there’s 49 other states that are competing for the same jobs and same tourism dollars.”

Yes, but history suggests a Madison Avenue package of slick slogans and over-the-top hype won’t be nearly enough to elevate a state to rock-star status.

Remember the lessons learned in long, mostly futile attempts to get Oklahoma City off high center in the 20th century’s last quarter?

With strong voter support, city leaders offered over-the-moon incentives for a United Airlines maintenance facility. It wasn’t enough. Worse, it became painfully obvious Oklahoma City was a pawn to cut a better deal with the airline’s preferred choice: Indianapolis.

Why was Indianapolis deemed more attractive? Better overall quality of life. It wasn’t just that Indy already was major league – home to the NFL’s Colts and NBA’s Pacers. As corporate decision-makers saw it, the Indiana capital offered executives’ families more – better schools, better housing options, better leisure activities.

That’s when then-Mayor Ron Norick helped shift Oklahoma City’s focus to MAPS [Metropolitan Area Projects], a game-changer that turned an extreme makeover into a vibrant urban core that, yes, includes the NBA’s Thunder, but so much more.

Convincing folks to slap an “I Love OKC” sticker on their car windows or bumpers alone wouldn’t have transformed Oklahoma City. Nor will a 21st century rebranding solve what long has plagued the

state: Oklahoma’s image problem is it doesn’t have one.

“I jokingly say it’s not a re-brand,” Pinnell told Oklahoma City’s KFOR-TV, “because I don’t know currently what Oklahoma’s brand is and that’s a problem.”

Reality check: Virginia isn’t better positioned in the national consciousness because of its iconic “Virginia Is For Lovers” brand nor is New York because of its “I Love New York” campaign. They enjoy higher standing – at least in part – because they do not routinely rank at the bottom of social indexes like health and education.

Other than football, which rankings list Oklahoma at or near the top? Or even in the upper half? Well, we imprison more per capita than any other state. We’re No. 2 in percentage of citizens experiencing substance abuse disorders. And we’re No. 3 in the percentage suffering mental illness.

Overall, Oklahoma ranked 43rd in U.S. News & World Report’s 2019 Best States rankings, including 39th in education and infrastructure and 47th in health care. CNBC’s recent rankings also put Oklahoma at 43rd overall – but 50th in education and 46th in quality of life.

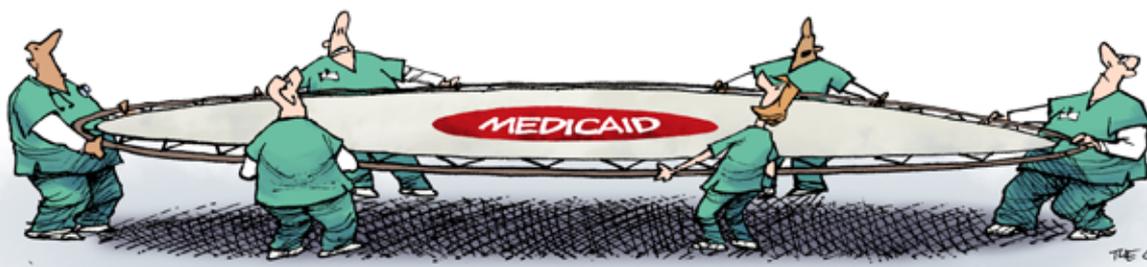
State leaders routinely trumpet that Oklahoma’s “open for business,” but CNBC gives the state a B-minus in “business friendliness” along with F’s in workforce, quality of life, education, and technology and innovation.

Such rankings vary widely, of course, depending on what’s included and how data are crunched. But there’s no escaping this fact: Oklahoma all too often finds itself near the bottom.

No doubt rebranding can be a productive – even fun – exercise. But don’t confuse an updated slogan and logo with the heavy lifting necessary to really improve Oklahoma’s image.

That will require serious, long-term financial investment in education, health care, and infrastructure, just to name three.

The fact is, other states don’t define us – we define ourselves.



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Want Affordable Health Insurance Before You Die? Sign The Damn Petition

BY CAL HOBSON

We don't always have to be last in doing the right thing ... but we sure try.

For example, our political leadership has, for nearly a decade, refused to accept billions of dollars of your own tax money to expand Medicaid. Now, thanks to the hard work of many citizens, petitions will be circulated to put just such a proposal on your 2020 ballot.

178,000 signatures must be gathered by Oct. 28 to authorize the vote. Supporters are confident that threshold can be met – and I agree.

Former Gov. Mary Fallin's wrong-headed refusal to provide health care for over 200,000 citizens bordered on criminality because, according to multiple and respected national studies, over 7,000 Okla-

A Big, Beautiful Plan?

– See editorial, page 2

homans have unnecessarily died *each year* due to the lack of prompt, affordable health care services, especially in rural Oklahoma.

And why was she and her Republican enablers in the Legislature so obstinate in turning away our tax money?

Simply because the program was and is known as ObamaCare.

Last month, the new elephant talking head on KFOR-TV's Flashpoint program – former Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb – trotted out the same old scare tactic that the feds might, in the future, reduce their share of the health program's cost. Since 36 states have

now expanded Medicaid, the chances of that happening are near zero while it's 100% sure Okies are dyin' while Todd is opinin'.

For a self-identified Christian who professes deep concern for his fellow man [and I presume woman and child], Todd reflects little sympathy for those less fortunate than himself. He clearly is a conservative. Compassionate? Well, you decide. I already have.

In another arena I certainly admit that our part-time, easily-distracted Legislature faces its share of complex challenges every session but understanding the benefits of Medicaid expansion isn't one of them – and hasn't been going on nine years.

However, just in case lawmakers are still hung up on the 10% match Oklahoma has to provide to drag back from Washington our other 90%, may I suggest a solution? Presuming Attorney General Mike Hunter prevails in his opioid abuse case against drug company Johnson & Johnson, from whom he is seeking an award of \$17.5 billion, I recommend our Medicaid match for federal dollars come from that source.

And why not?

Opioid overdose victims are often Medicaid eligible citizens and their disease costs other taxpayers untold billions to treat, cure or, sadly in some cases, incarcerate them. 6,137 of our friends, neighbors and relatives have succumbed to these powerful, addictive pain medicines over the last dozen years and many more languish now in the nightmarish darkness of continuing addiction.

I know first-hand of what I speak, having been given care within residential treatment facilities to help me beat my personal demon of alcoholism. As difficult as that task was, it paled compared to the life and death struggle faced by others around me who, before admittance, we simultaneously using marijuana, meth, cocaine, Oxy, K-2, bath salts, or some combination thereof.

The greater the diversity of abuse, the less likely clients could break the cycle of addiction. It was and is that simple.

Let's look at the facts. Oklahoma has been, is and will continue to be one of the two or three unhealthiest states in the entire union. Whether it is obesity, cancer, diabetes, drug and alcohol abuse, prescription pill excesses, heart and lung disease or even life expectancy, we are literally in terrible shape and getting worse in most categories.

And yet, against this irrefutable evidence, new Gov. Kevin Stitt allowed the Legislature to adjourn without taking any action to curb the premature suffering and death while promising another study this fall to make us not a Top 10 state in health outcomes, but maybe just in the Top 30.

With that as his new, more practical and achievable goal, it may be that private businessman-turned-government executive Stitt has begun to understand the magnitude and scope of this life-

and-death crisis faced by hundreds of thousands of families every day in our state.

Not next week, next month or next year. But now. Right now.

And by the time his October Plan is revealed, discussed and cussed, introduced as a bill next session, debated, amended, rewritten, reintroduced, then hopefully passed and signed into law, another 7,000-plus of his constituents will have died needlessly because they couldn't get health care – especially where support for Stitt is strongest, politically speaking: rural Oklahoma.

In metropolitan areas, folks fret about being within the “golden hour” for treatment in an emergency room. In too many of our counties, there is *no emergency room at all* and Medicaid expansion is precisely the antidote to alleviate that fact.

So please sign the Medicaid expansion petition. Who knows? You may save your own life by doing so instead of waiting another year for politicians to decide your life is worth saving.

So far, after a decade of pleading, begging and cajoling by citizens, our well insured political class hasn't shown much interest in the subject of health care for all in our state.

They've been too busy placing unconstitutional religious monuments on government property; or telling women what to do with their bodies; or being sent to prison for molesting children; or resigning in disgrace for campaign violations; or offering unwanted smooches to Uber drivers; or authorizing just about anybody anywhere to pack a pistol without a license or training; and therefore they haven't had much time left to focus on your health care needs and services.

After all, and as we have been painfully reminded following nine straight annual sessions of inaction on this topic, lawmakers' time is limited and priorities have to be set.

Obviously expanding Medicaid services to tens of thousands of their constituents hasn't made the cut.

Want affordable health insurance before you die? Sign the damn petition and ask your neighbor to do so as well.

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

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STITT'S GAMBLE

Governor Plays Losing Hand

When He Blindsides Tribes On Compacts

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Gov. Kevin Stitt recently announced he wants to renegotiate the state's tribal gaming compacts.

At first glance, this wouldn't seem a big deal. After all, the current 15-year agreements are nearing a period in which either side can seek changes. And it's well known state leaders are permanently on the lookout for ways to bolster the state treasury without raising taxes.

What got the first-year governor into trouble was that he unveiled his plans in a Tulsa World op-ed – before key tribal leaders got wind of it. Surprise!

Was it simply a rookie mistake? Hardly fatal, but clearly not the way to start negotiations?

Or was it further evidence Stitt still hasn't grasped that serving as governor – with limited powers – is far different than the fiat-wielding power of a corporate CEO?

It's clear Stitt covets CEO-like authority.

This spring, for example, he persuaded lawmakers to give him the power to hire and fire directors of some of the state's most consequential agencies.

And just last month, he first requested an OSBI briefing then an audit into alleged financial irregularities by Epic, the state's largest virtual charter school.

Wouldn't that normally be the purview of a duly elected attorney general, district attorney, state superintendent or state auditor – not the governor?

Well, at least the superintendent joined him in the audit request ...

There is no question Stitt's office plays point on state-tribal compacts. But it's an epic misstep to effectively treat the state's 39 sovereign tribes as if they were on par with a state agency.

Stitt could have saved himself a lot of grief if he'd spoken privately with tribal leaders before publicly unveiling his plans. A letter sent on the Friday of an extended Independence holiday almost certainly didn't reach its recipients before the Tulsa World op-ed was published on Monday. Chickasaw Gov. Bill Anoatubby, for one, expressed surprise at both the letter and editorial.

Subsequently, Stitt said he was “transparent and clear” during his campaign that he would seek a “fair-market deal” when the current contracts expire Jan. 1.

“This 15-year-old compact established some of the lowest gaming fees in the nation, and the tribes have been fantastic, successful business leaders in our state, turning their gaming industry in Oklahoma into the third largest in the nation today,” he said.

“I am committed to open discussions with all tribal partners and to achieving an outcome that spurs more funding for public education, grows opportunity for the tribes, and is a successful partnership for the state and future generations of Oklahomans.”

Ultimately, Stitt may be tilting at windmills. While some grumble about the proliferation of casinos, it's undeniable that tribes have invested far more in Oklahoma than the \$1.5 billion in exclusivity fees required by the current compacts to be paid directly to the state.

Just ask smaller communities that benefitted from tribal gifts of new fire trucks or upgraded roads. Or financially strapped public schools that were provided new technology and equipment by tribes. Or colleges whose enrollment was stabilized by tribal-supported students who otherwise might not have been able to afford higher education.

Plus, consider the jobs created: 75,885 that generated \$4.3 billion in wages, mostly in rural areas, according to the Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association.

Tribes recognize the political game being played here. As Kiowa Chairman Matthew Komalty recently told the Lawton Constitution, “The Oklahoma Legislature has by legislation cost the state billions of dollars in revenue by reducing taxes on the wealthy and the oil companies that do business in the state.”

Kiowa leaders, he said, will “not allow the state to use” his tribe to “make up for the tax losses” caused by the “state Legislature's actions.”

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Tribal Governments Ensure State's Success

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

In a recent op-ed, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt called for a renegotiation of the highly successful tribal gaming compacts, government-to-government agreements that have fueled our home state, public education and job creation for more than 15 years. He argued that new compacts should reflect “market conditions for the gaming industry,” which he implied would set tribes’ payments to the state at a much higher percentage of revenues.

Unfortunately, Gov. Stitt’s approach ignores the history of tribes in Oklahoma and the many contributions made by tribes, including the Cherokee Nation, to our state. The ability of tribes in Oklahoma to thrive as sovereign nations is one of the state’s greatest competitive advantages. It would be a serious mistake for our state government to engage with tribes like we were just any another industry, ignoring our unique economic, cultural and governmental contributions.

Decades before statehood, tribes built Oklahoma’s first modern infrastructure and institutions, establishing settlements that grew into thriving cities and towns and founding the territory’s first public schools and institutions of higher education. The Cherokee Nation’s original Supreme Court building still stands as Oklahoma’s oldest public building, now serving as a history museum.

In later decades, the federal government and non-Indian settlers tried to dismantle tribal governments, shut down tribal institutions and divide the land, but tribes in Oklahoma did not vanish. We maintained our tribal culture and identity in the face of this existential threat. Through activism and lawsuits, Oklahoma and the United States eventually recognized tribal rights to sovereignty and self-governance.

Through self-determination, tribes have prospered in business and rebuilt government institutions. As of 2017, tribes had a nearly \$13 billion economic impact on the state, according to a new study commissioned by the Oklahoma Tribal Finance Consortium. In that year, tribes directly employed more than 50,000 Oklahomans and indirectly supported over 96,000 jobs.

The contribution of tribes is not only as successful businesses, but also as effective governments. Profits from tribal businesses are invested back into the community through the development of affordable housing, health care facilities, education, infrastructure and job creation.

The contribution of tribes goes far beyond the

exclusivity fees for tribal gaming. Tribes in Oklahoma contributed \$198 million for Oklahoma education in 2017, including exclusivity payments to the state, donations to schools, scholarships and tribal education programs. Tribes contributed more than \$42 million for road construction and maintenance in their jurisdictions. Tribes operated health clinics and hospitals and provided or reimbursed care for thousands of Oklahomans, especially filling gaps in under-served, rural parts of the state.

Cherokee Nation, the largest tribal government in the state, is currently constructing a 469,000-square-foot outpatient health facility through a joint venture project with the Indian Health Service. When it opens later this year, it will be the largest tribal health facility in the country.

Additionally, Cherokee Nation Career Services provides vocational and on-the-job training for Cherokees and collaborates with the state, cities and chambers of commerce to attract businesses to Oklahoma. Recent successes of these recruiting efforts include Amazon and Macy’s fulfillment centers, which are respectively bringing thousands of jobs to Tulsa and Owasso.

Tribal governments provide assistance with housing, food and nutrition, child care and development, child support and elder assistance – all areas with huge unmet needs in Oklahoma. Tribal courts handle many child welfare and adoption cases, as well as prosecuting offenders who abuse women and children.

Though it was not always of our own free will, tribes have made a permanent home here in Oklahoma. Tribes have outlasted all attempts to terminate our governments and disperse our people. We have built prosperous communities, nearly lost it all, and rebuilt again. Native culture and institutions are one of Oklahoma’s greatest renewable resources, and all Oklahomans are better off when our state government recognizes that fact.

Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

Parroting Donald

During a dull White House dinner, Melania Trump leaned over to chat with then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

“I bought Donald a parrot for his birthday. That bird is so smart, Donald has already taught him to say over two hundred words!”

“Very impressive,” said Tillerson, “but you do realize he just speaks the words. He doesn’t really understand what they all mean.”

“Oh, I know,” replied Melania, “but neither does the parrot.”

– Thanks to Frank Silovsky for sharing

Good News, Bad News For Smaller Agencies' Budgets

BY PAUL SHINN

Large state agencies and the big problems they address, including education, health care, and mental illness, naturally get most of the attention – and the money – at budget time.

Smaller agencies, too, provide services that are equally important to our state's people and future. They investigate crimes and operate courts; they care for the environment; they collect taxes and administer government. If they are not adequately funded, all of government and our society suffer.

Over the past decade, all agencies faced repeated and serious

budget cuts, but small agencies were hit hardest. The 2019 Legislature started restoring funds for some of these agencies. Most small agencies, though, still receive less funding than they did in FY 2009. The state must increase funding for these agencies and their programs.

The share of appropriations for the 10 largest agencies in FY '20 is the smallest in over a decade, at 87.9%. Thirty-five of Oklahoma's smallest agencies will receive less funding than they did 11 years ago, even without accounting for inflation or population growth. Twenty-two [20%] have been cut by 20% or more. For example, since FY 2009, we have seen:

- a 56% reduction in the Office of Emergency Management and a 64% decline in the Governor's Emergency Fund, both with responsibilities to help recover from wildfires in 2018 and flooding in recent months;
- a 19% decline in the budget of the Health Department, the agency whose responsibilities include responding to West Nile and measles outbreaks;
- a reduction of 56% in the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in the face of an opioid crisis;
- a decline of 23% in the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training, while the number of officers and public expectations upon them are growing;
- a 31% decrease in funding for the Department of Tourism at a time when high employment and low gas prices will have record numbers of families on the road looking for new adventures; and
- a 38% reduction in the Department of Libraries,



which serves the lowest income and least connected Oklahomans with Internet access and literacy and General Education Development [GED] courses.

Economic growth and revenue increases adopted in 2018 provided the opportunity to begin restoring smaller agencies' budgets by \$140 million. This will make Oklahoma safer, invest in our future, promote innovation, and hold government more accountable.

The FY '20 budget promotes public safety in additional funding for firefighting efforts for the Department of Agriculture; increasing staffing and materials for the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation; water quality and laboratory improvements at the Department of Environmental Quality; and flood control in the Conservation Commission.

It invests in Oklahoma workers and their families through the Physicians Manpower Training Commission; increases economic development funding for the Department of Commerce; and allows the Commission for Children and Youth to better coordinate their work.

The state can further increase smaller agencies' budgets with little budget impact. An additional \$110 million in funding – 1.4% of overall state appropriations – will restore smaller agency budgets to the FY '09 level.

This small investment will pay off many times over in a healthier environment, safer communities, a better quality of life, and a stronger economy.

Paul Shinn is the Budget and Tax Senior Policy Analyst at Oklahoma Policy Institute; www.okpolicy.org.

Oklahoma's Senior Tax Breaks Costly, Poorly Targeted

BY DAVID BLATT

Tax breaks for seniors cost Oklahoma an estimated \$310 million annually and do little to help the seniors most in need, according to a new report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

These tax breaks caused Oklahoma to forego an estimated 9% of income tax revenue in 2017, a percentage share that was more than all but 10 other states. The \$310 million dedicated to senior tax breaks exceeds legislative appropriations for all but six state agencies.

Senior tax breaks are poorly targeted because most states, including Oklahoma, provide them regardless of the recipient's income or savings.

In particular, higher-income seniors with pensions, annuities, or other retirement savings benefit the most from state tax breaks for retirement account income.

In Oklahoma, seniors can deduct \$10,000 per individual or \$20,000 per couple of retirement account income, whether private or public accounts [for military veterans, the exemption is the greater of \$10,000 or 75% of income]. These deductions were worth \$116.3 million in FY '18, according to the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

In addition, Social Security income is 100% deductible regardless of a retiree's total income, as are certain federal civil service benefits received in lieu of Social Security. Together these deductions reduced seniors' tax liability by \$161.4 million.

As a result of these preferences, the report estimates that Oklahoma's seniors' tax liability is less than two-thirds that of otherwise comparable non-elderly taxpayers.

Offering tax breaks to all seniors, regardless of the recipients' income or savings, may have made sense decades ago when poverty among seniors was widespread.

But today, the poverty rate among seniors is much lower: just one in 10 seniors live in poverty today, compared to one out of four in 1970.

At the same time, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities notes that "inequality among seniors is higher in the United States than in any Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development country other than Chile and Mexico and is growing with each

generation."

These trends should weigh in favor of tax preferences that provide greater benefits to low-income seniors, unlike current policies.

Senior tax preferences, as currently constituted, also serve to reinforce racial inequality. People of color are considerably less likely to be covered by a defined benefit pension plan or to have retirement savings.

As a result, they benefit less from Oklahoma's aged-based tax exemptions on retirement income.

The cost of senior tax breaks will continue to rise with state's growing senior population, which is expected to grow from 15% of the state's population in 2017 to 18% in 2030.

Nationally, the cost of senior tax breaks are expected to more than double between now and 2030, when the number of Americans over 65 will increase to one in five.

The growing cost of senior tax breaks will add to pressures on the state budget in the years ahead.

According to a recent report by Kent Olson, Oklahoma State University economics professor emeritus, Oklahoma faces a structural budget deficit that will grow to \$1.1 billion annually by FY '30.

The gap will be large enough to exact a significant toll on government-provided services – which could include larger class sizes and continued teacher unrest, higher college tuition and greater college debt, and reductions in essential medical care for physical and mental illness – in the absence of new tax increases.

As we look ahead to a growing senior population at a time of scarce resource, Oklahoma lawmakers should be giving greater scrutiny to senior tax preferences with the aim of targeting them to low-income seniors who need help the most.

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



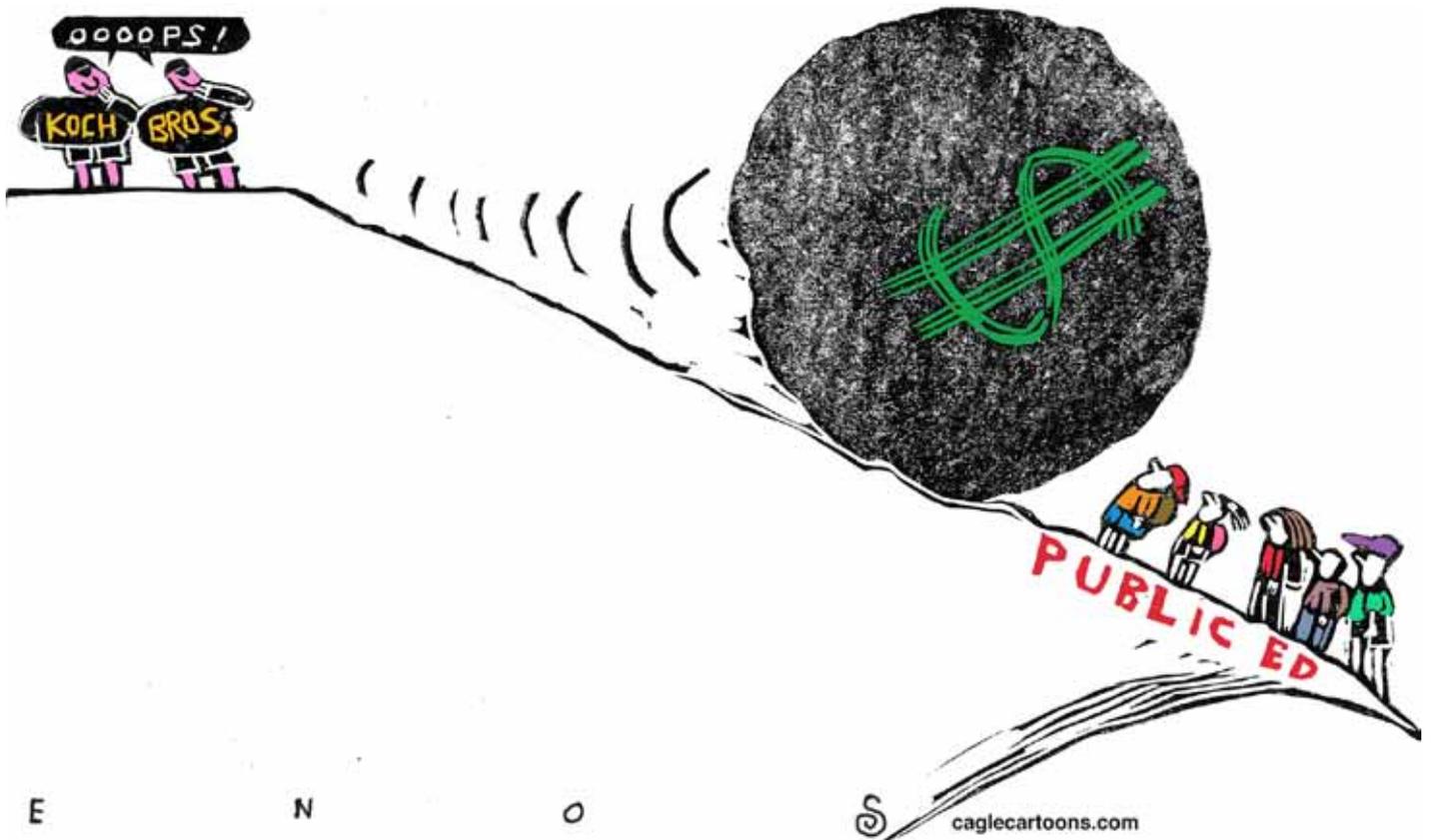
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Drive To Corporatize Schools Shifting Into Higher Gear

BY JOHN THOMPSON

When I finally dared to read some of the Wikileaks documents that transformed the 2016 election, it was shocking to learn that Hillary, not Trump, colluded with Robert Mueller’s FBI and “the Deep State.”

Just kidding! But the leaked emails offer some surprising insights into the Clinton campaign’s debate over education policy, as well as the predictable power of billionaire donors.

The notes of Clinton aide Ann O’Leary indicate that some in the Clinton team understood why the test and punish, charter-driven corporate reform agenda – generously funded by the Obama Administration – was an educational and political failure. On the other hand, Clinton was intimidated by corporate reformers like Eli Broad; John Petry, a founder of both Democrats for Education Reform [DFER] and Success Academy; Laurene Powell Jobs; Netflix CEO Reed Hastings; and the Walton Foundation, who wanted to

double down on the Billionaires Boys Club’s privatization campaign.

It was good to learn that O’Leary argued “more tests will not improve the quality of a child’s education. We can all agree that our teachers should be supported, not scapegoated.” Rejecting the previously bipartisan effort to blame “bad teachers” for the achievement gap, she noted the need for 1.5 million new teachers in the next decade, so it made no sense to continue the corporate reformers’ attacks on the profession.

O’Leary advised, “Let’s stop the bleeding that is happening – with half of all new teachers in America quitting within the first five years of starting their teaching career.”

Best of all, O’Leary sought an education policy that could “make America whole.” She recommended:

Focus on the whole child – and acknowledge that toxic stress created by poverty does impact learning and that teachers cannot do this work alone. We

need to support parents through two-generation approaches to learning. We need to provide schools the resources to hire guidance counselors and mental health providers, and make sure that children from low-income communities once again have music and art education and opportunities to participate in gymnastics and ballet.

Alternet reports, however, that “Clinton’s advisors warned her that wealthy donors like Petry, Whitney Tilson, or Eli Broad could walk if she didn’t support charter schools.” They “knew their donors were behind a lawsuit seeking to end teacher tenure.”

Petry’s DFER insisted that it would shift donations to pro-reform candidates unless Clinton affirmed the “‘more businesslike approach’ to education, and tying teacher tenure to standardized test scores.” Broad would “threaten to withhold funding from Clinton” for criticizing charter schools.

Today, the most relevant insights revealed by Alternet and Wikileaks are not the privatizers’ steadfast defense of high-stakes testing, union-bashing and driving veteran teachers out of the profession, but their continuing demand for top-down, reward and punish mandates.

Koch Network Takes Aim At Public Schools

Don’t look now but the movement to turn public schools into profit centers has gained some powerful allies: industrialist Charles Koch and his billionaires’ political network.

According to the Associated Press, the Koch Kabal is targeting education issues like school choice in response to “a new wave of hostility from Democrats who oppose charter schools and private school vouchers that use taxpayer money.”

Koch’s Yes Every Kid initiative is the latest pursuit of his sprawling network of wealthy donors, political groups and tax-exempt advocacy organizations best known for pushing anti-regulation, small-government policies. Its political arm, Americans for Prosperity [AFP], is perhaps best known for underwriting the Tea Party and opposing ObamaCare.

According to the AP’s Sally Ho:

The Yes Every Kid group is tasked with monitoring statehouses where it can be influential on school choice, said Stacy Hock, a Texas philanthropist who is among hundreds of donors each contributing at least \$100,000 annually to the Koch network’s wide-ranging agenda.

Hock and officials with the Koch network said it’s too early to provide specifics about what policies the group is pushing.

“The priority is to go where there is a political appetite to be open to policy change and lean in there,” said Hock, who also leads the Texans for Education Opportunity advocacy group that supports charters and other education alternatives.

She cited Texas, West Virginia, Tennessee and Florida as priority states where school choice proposals have flourished.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers union, called Koch’s new effort a public relations stunt.

“To date, the Koch strategy has been to profit from and compete with public schools, while trying to ‘defund and defang’ anyone who got in their way,” Weingarten said in a statement.

Koch’s new education reform lobbying group comes as the conservative icon recalibrates his priorities, both by downplaying the politics synonymous with his family’s name and emphasizing work with unlikely allies, such as partnering with liberal CNN commentator Van Jones on prison reform.

Koch previously dabbled in education issues – supporting publicly subsidized vouchers for private schools – but the new initiative represents a deeper dive into K-12 education and school choice.

This is especially significant in Oklahoma where the Koch network’s AFP and Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs seem to have the ear of a neophyte governor whose political principles are evolving on the job. OCPA’s devotion to vouchers and for-profit schools and Gov. Kevin Stitt’s evangelical worldview are a match made in hell for public ed advocates.

The AP reports:

Yes Every Kid officials won’t say how much money they will pour into the new initiative and have yet to formally identify its agenda beyond saying it would take an “open-minded approach” to state-level education issues such as school choice, school finance reform and teacher autonomy.

The Koch network is turning to community leaders to help support local priorities, rather than prescribing its own goals, said Derrell Bradford, a Yes Every Kid board member and executive vice president of 50CAN, a school choice advocacy group.

“This group is not bound by working on any one specific issue,” Bradford said. “We’re also taking a very humbling approach to the kind of policy vision we want to see.”

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According to O’Leary’s notes, these “‘experts’ were calling for new federal controls, more for-profit companies and more technology in public schools – but first on the menu was a bold remake of the teaching ‘profession.’”

Tulsa patrons should be particularly worried because Tulsa Public Schools is led by Deborah Gist and a dozen other Broad-trained administrators who are investing in so-called “personalized” online learning and its uncertified Teacher Corps, which “is one of many recent strategies for finding bodies to put in classrooms. This is necessary because about 30% of the district’s teaching force started working there in the past two years.”

The otherwise outstanding George Kaiser Family Foundation even joined with the Bloomberg and Walton foundations in funding Tulsa’s “portfolio management” directors to “absorb the duties of the director of partnership and charter schools,” and “in the future, implement ‘new school models resulting from incubation efforts of the district.’”

The so-called portfolio model is a kinder, gentler name for union-busting, turning traditional public schools into the alternative schools for charter schools, and the perpetual battle to raise test scores in a Social Darwinian fight for survival.

And that is a lead-in to rightwingers’ plans for advancing a very similar agenda.

Recent coverage of the Charles Koch network’s rebranding of their corporate reforms are equally bankrupt in terms of education policy, but politically they seem to be more attractive – and thus more threatening – than the neoliberal agenda which was pushed on Democrats.

A similar set of tactics has been announced by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs [OCPA].

A three-day donor seminar in 2018 outside Palm Springs, the Washington Post reported, brought together “about 700 people who each contribute a minimum of \$100,000 per year to the constellation of organizations that comprise the Koch network.”

The Post explained that Koch supporters:

Dreamed of disrupting the status quo, customizing learning and breaking the teacher unions. One initial priority is expanding educational saving accounts and developing technologies that would let parents pick and choose private classes or tutors for their kids the same way people shop on Amazon.

This year, according to the Washington Post, new concerns have helped prompt the rebranding. Moreover, it seems that the Koch’s reformers are more sensitive to the anger prompted by failed corporate reforms, and are seeking new battlegrounds.

In contrast to neoliberal edu-philanthropists, who promote civil rights but without acknowledging that charters have proven themselves incapable of serving the highest-poverty students, extreme conservatives

are free to explicitly shift their focus to expanding rural and suburban charters.

Moreover, some want “personalized learning” to counter the “recent polling [which] shows younger people have a more favorable impression of socialism than capitalism.”

Koch reformers are just as committed as Democratic reformers to “disruptive” change to spark dramatic “transformations.” Stacy Hock claims that “families are getting more and more comfortable with experimenting and taking risks. ... Education should be getting way, way better and way, way cheaper, but the opposite is happening.”

She said, “*What we’re seeing all across the country are little flames. ... What I don’t yet know is how to throw gasoline on all those flames.*” [Emphasis is in the original.]

I doubt that is a winning tactic; how many parents want their children used as lab rats in these reckless experiments? But it is tied to the big issue that many Democrat donors don’t seem to understand.

Democratic-leaning elites must be aware that test-driven accountability has sucked the joy of learning out of way too many classrooms, but they don’t see an alternative to top-down, data-driven governance [at least for schools serving the poorest children.]

But conservatives can adopt the winning strategy of rejecting the “‘soul-crushing’ conformity” which reform has imposed, especially in urban districts. They promise something that would be terrifying to many education leaders, even if parents would love it.

Koch embraces “the goal of letting children pursue what interests them the most and not follow a strict curriculum.”

It’s not surprising the OCPA’s agenda his very similar to Koch’s. Once you get past the inaccuracies about education in Greg Forster’s A Next Generation School Agenda for Oklahoma, an insight into its politics emerges.

The OCPA is basically gambling everything on school choice, which can be a smart wager if the goal is disruption as opposed to advancing equity. It can thus reject the doomed-to-fail campaign to expand charters in order to advance civil rights, and appeal to a huge market – patrons who are tired of top-down mandates by accountability-driven reformers.

Even if he doesn’t understand what it would take to close the achievement gap, Forster can say what Democrats [who are also beholden to the Billionaires Boys Club that imposed Common Core and other rigorous standards of learning on all schools] have been afraid to utter:

The other big problem in the standards movement has been technocracy. National standards are meaningless in practice if they’re not tied to a national system of quantitative metrics that test whether students are living up to the standards. This

forces schools to divert attention from educational priorities that aren't being measured quantitatively [and which in many cases can't be measured quantitatively] to the ones that are. Education would be whittled down more and more ruthlessly to serve narrower and narrower goals – goals defined not by parents, but by a technocratic class of “experts” and the politicians who control them.

So, we may be facing the worst of both worlds. The billionaires who backed Hillary may have adopted a less antagonistic spin, but their punitive policies re-

main very similar to those of the rightwing's billionaires. On the other hand, the Koch Brothers and OCPA have heard the protests by teachers and parents, and now pretend that they are listening and would offer more meaningful and holistic instruction.

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.

‘Teaching Is A Political Act’

BY JOHN WALDRON

This is the story of the way forward.

There's a saying I read in an education manual that has stuck with me: The other side of the coin has another side.

Last November, I was elected to the Oklahoma Legislature as one of those angry teachers demanding better school funding. I was one of 24 Democrats working alongside 77 Republicans in my deep-red state's House of Representatives. Some things didn't go so well for me in this first session, as you may have read in the essays I've been writing for Education Week.

I authored several bills. They all died. I debated against some pretty awful examples of cut-and-paste legislation from the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC], a national organization that promotes conservative legislation at the state level. One such bill, for example, required doctors to notify patients of a scientifically unproven method of reversing the effects of “day after” drugs used in abortions. They all passed.

We ended the session with an improved budget for next year, but the legislative leadership chose to deposit \$200 million dollars of unallocated revenue into a state savings account – revenue that could have been used to fully fund smaller classroom sizes.

It felt lonely to be in such a small minority, kept out of the discussions that matter. In the minority role, your primary purpose is to call into question the wisdom of the majority. That's an important function. History provides an example of American government under single-party rule: the Confederacy. Lacking a competitive party structure, it failed to build consensus and govern effectively. Individual party barons and interests obstructed the Confederate government at every turn, resisting policies to control inflation, enforce conscription, or finance

the government.

A similar dysfunction manifests itself today in the kind of interest-group politics we see in deep-red or deep-blue states. It's all too easy for powerful interests to push the policies they want with the ruling party leadership, because they know the opposition is too weak to stop them.

It's not that the other side of the coin is evil. Our system is just out of balance.

I learned that “the other guys” are for the most part good, honorable people. They just have a different point of view. But there are some who are in government chasing power and money, and it's harder to constrain those individuals when a single-party power structure prevails. In states with de facto one-party rule, there's no check on individual ambition, other than from within the ruling party itself.

However, the party wants to remain united for the sake of holding on to power, leaving the minority party in the role of Cassandra – the Trojan priestess whose warnings about trouble ahead went unheeded.

In this environment, education becomes a battleground issue. Lobbyists for private interest groups can promote school privatization through voucher bills, call for tax cuts at the expense of public services, and suppress collective bargaining for teachers. All they have to do is leverage one party, whose lopsided majority allows leaders to favor narrow interests without worrying that their power might slip. They profit from the polarization of contemporary politics.

So, how do we as educators change the narrative? As teachers, we need to realize that teaching is a political act. It affects everyone, and therefore we need to advocate for good policies that invest public resources wisely in the common good.

We can no longer shut up and teach. We have to

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speak out. We should do so politely, resolutely, and with the facts on our side. And we need to build bridges to communities that feel alienated by modern school bureaucracy.

For example, we need effective strategies that combat bullying with restorative justice and by modeling civil society. And we need to provide effective resources for addressing this generation's challenges in mental health.

Public schools need to reassert their role as a public square of American discourse – a place where citizens learn from each other and appreciate different points of view. By teaching good, old-fashioned critical thinking, we can prepare another generation to do better in the digital age.

One of the reasons we have so many states run by one party is that we have learned to vilify the other side rather than listen to it.

This fall, for the first time in 20 years, I won't be teaching in a public school. As a legislator, I cannot be on another state payroll, so I'll look for jobs in private schools. It's ironic that I had to give up the

job I loved to try to save the public school system I love.

But I don't regret the choice. I believe public service is honorable, and I look forward to coming to the next session of the Legislature with more experience and a better sense of how to get things done. I believe that the fight for better policies, for public education, and a host of other issues, is a good fight.

And I believe it's not too late to fix American politics. Most people in both parties recognize the need for a healthy public school system. And I need to assure colleagues on the other side of the aisle that I am not the enemy.

I'm part of the solution – the other side of the coin. *John Waldron taught for 20 years at Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, where he was named a finalist for state teacher of the year. He won election to the state legislature as a Democrat in November 2018. This is the final essay in a series he has wrote for Education Week. Reprinted with permission.*

Summer Nutrition Programs Key To Fighting Hunger

BY JOE DORMAN

It should go without saying, but every Oklahoma child should have access to nutritious meals. No child should go hungry, nor should they have to eat unhealthy foods – which can stunt their physi-

cal and mental development – simply because those foods are cheap and readily available.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what is happening for roughly one-in-five Oklahoma kids, who are classified as “food insecure.”

The high prevalence of food insecurity is why school free and reduced-price lunch programs are so important; the school cafeteria is literally the only reliable source of healthy food for many low-income children. Of course, that also means that many children are cut off from those nutritious meals during the summer months when school is closed.

To fill that void, the Oklahoma State Department of Education administers some Summer Nutrition Programs, which provide healthy meals during the summer months and, at some feeding sites, offer educational and enrichment programming. These programs are a great way to fight hunger while also reducing summer “learning loss,” a backwards academic slide that many students experience over their summer breaks.

A new report by the Food Research and Action Center evaluates the availability and access to Sum-

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mer Nutrition Programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and paints a very mixed picture for Oklahoma. The report, entitled “Hunger Doesn’t Take a Break” is available in its entirety at frac.org.

Putting the bad news first: Oklahoma is dead last in the country, and has been for the past four years, when it comes to the percentage of children participating in Summer Nutrition Programs who also benefit from the National School Lunch Program. In the District of Columbia, which leads the nation, 34.5% of students receiving free school lunches also benefit from Summer Nutrition Programs. In Oklahoma, that falls to just 5.5%.

Simply put, a huge number of Oklahoma students who rely on school lunches for healthy meals are falling through the cracks during the summer months.

Obviously, a ranking of 51 out of 51 is bad news, but there is a silver lining to this cloud.

The same report found that Oklahoma had the nation’s third-highest increase in summer meal participation from 2017 to 2018. In July 2018, approximately 570 summer meal sites served over 16,000 Oklahoma kids with free meals daily.

We are starting at the bottom of the pile, but we are getting better quickly and there is reason to be optimistic that trend will continue.

One of the ways the state can improve its ranking is simply by spreading awareness of this program and its availability, which is where readers of this column can lend a hand. Make sure your friends and family with school-age children know about Summer Nutrition Programs and that ALL children and teens under 18 can benefit from them.

Another way to expand access to summer nutrition sites is for the state to seek out willing partners who can help manage them.

For instance, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is working to jumpstart a collaborative effort between willing senior nutrition sites to expand their meal-offerings to children. Intergenerational feeding programs have been suggested by federal entities and healthcare professionals as a way to increase healthy interaction between senior citizens and young people.

The partnerships could also lead to new sources of federal revenue for the sites. Rep. Toni Hasenbeck, R-Elgin, requested an interim study to be conducted by the Oklahoma House of Representatives regarding this topic, but it was not approved.

There are 425,000 Oklahoma kids who eat free and reduced-price school meals. All of us can do our part to ensure they are getting the healthy food they need during the summer months.

Former state Rep. Joe Dorman is chief executive officer of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.

Lead-Based Paint Abounds In Schools

BY MARILYNNE WOOD

With all the emphasis that has been placed on making sure children are safe from the hazards of lead-based paint at home, similar efforts would seem just as important for America’s schools.

After all, outside of the home, young children spend the majority of their day – 6.8 hours a day – at school.

Yet a new federal report found that an estimated 15.2 million children in the U.S. go to schools in school districts that found lead-based paint.

This is happening more than 40 years after the United States’ 1978 ban on the use of lead-based paint in housing.

For years, as a nursing professor and parent educator who specializes in treating children with elevated lead levels, I have worked to identify children with lead poisoning and to help parents make their homes lead-safe. Lead, breathed in or ingested, can affect children’s brain development resulting in reduced IQ.

The report, released June 24 by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, highlighted how many school districts – 72% – are not even inspecting their buildings for lead-based paint hazards. The GAO restricted its analysis to school districts that had at least one school built before 1978, and those that obtained drinking water from a public water system.

Among the 12% that do inspect for lead hazards, more than half found them. That raises questions about what amount could be found in the remaining 88% of schools that aren’t looking.

Lead was more frequently found in large school districts – 51% of the time versus 8% for other districts, according to the report. These larger districts may have older school buildings, or they may be in larger cities that lack the money to keep schools in a good state of repair.

The report also reveals that 58% of school districts did not notify parents of their findings and 46% did not tell school board members. Fifty-nine percent didn’t tell the media, either.

As one who has worked directly with lead-poisoned children, I find it interesting how often there is an emphasis on making sure students have things like technology to make sure children learn. The same emphasis needs to be placed on making sure schools are free from hazards, such as those posed by lead-based paint, that threaten children’s ability to learn.

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Death With Dignity? Not In Oklahoma

BY CHADWICK COX

“Rational death” is the concept that individuals might decide to end their life based on satisfying some compelling reason, such as relief from a continuing painful life. Such individuals consider that they have a right to end their suffering.

Too often, they do kill themselves in painful, undignified and lonely acts due to current laws written by lawmakers in disagreement with self-determination under these circumstances as being a right. That disagreement results from a religious bias.

Although there are probably many reasons that serve as the bases for a rational death, the following example is likely to be the most common one.

Brittany Maynard received a prognosis of a brain tumor that would kill her in a matter of months. She decided that she would rather die under her own terms than go through an extended loss of her cognitive self and functioning skills before her inevitable and near death.

She sought physician-assisted death but found in California at that time such assistance was illegal. She wanted

a dignified death so refused to resort to the many ways one can end their life in a more lurid manner that many people are forced to do in other states with punitive laws related to rational death.

Brittany’s solution is what many others might want but for them is not workable given their circumstances. She moved to Oregon where this state had passed a Death with Dignity Act [DWDA] that allows physician-assisted death for a resident. She satisfied all the requirements, including establishing residency, and planned a gathering of family and friends to be with her for her final goodbye.

Her husband has written of her passing: “Brittany’s passing was truly peaceful. She fell asleep five minutes after taking the life-ending medication. She passed away 30 minutes later exactly as she hoped: in my arms, in her bed, surrounded by the family, friends and pets she cherished. She died on her own



terms. There was no anxiety, no fear – only love and appreciation as she fell asleep.”

That is the kind of passing many would want. I know I do but I live in Oklahoma where physician-assisted death is prevented by the threatened prosecution of any physician who might help. So far, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont and Washington have DWDA statutes, except that in Montana, physician-assisted dying has been legalized by state Supreme Court ruling in 2009.

Several other states are likely to pass similar DWDAs in the near future. In Oklahoma former Rep. Steve Kouplun introduced such bills in 2015 and 2016 but those were never heard in committee.

This session, Sen. Gary Stanislawski introduced [later co-authored by Sean Roberts] SB 108, creating the Death Certificate Accuracy Act. The bill requires

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that the death certificate show suicide even if the death was meant to prevent the eminent cancer caused death. It was signed into law by Gov. Kevin Stitt on May 6.

Here's Stanislawski's explanation for the need of this listing:

"Causing the sick and vulnerable to feel that their lives are not worthy, or that they are a burden, sends the not-so-subtle message that – as former Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm once infamously put it – they have a 'duty to die and get out of the way.' A prerequisite for preventing the lethal practice of assisted suicide from gaining a foothold in Oklahoma is honest reporting of the actual cause of death so the perpetrators cannot hide what they have done."

That is such an uninformed, paranoid and mean-spirited comment about DWDAs. Does Stanislawski really think he is doing God's work? For that matter, do all 33 Senate Republicans voting for the bill and Gov. Stitt for signing it into law feel they are doing God's work when in actual fact they are making the life of the survivor's family and friends miserable.

The rationale for thinking that suicide should be prevented is sound when considering that youth can be overwhelmed with emotions when they do not know how to properly respond. Several disorders in adults, such as severe depression and PTSD, are treatable and can relieve suicidal tendencies. However, being faced with certain death in a relatively short time is another matter.

Even that short time may be filled with real discomfort. Suicide prevention in those people with a death prognosis actually sounds irrational. Even then, some states have laws that can make the surviving family uncomfortable as it does now in Oklahoma.

The states that have DWDAs are patterned after the 22-year-old Oregon law. One particular public concern was the death procedure should be preceded by a rational and verified request from the individual wanting the death procedure. The law requires that two physicians must interview and approve the applicant before being able to request a prescription.

In those states that have DWDAs, no physician is commanded to provide the sought-for agent to end life. In fact, the doctor must have the compassion and belief that his patient must want and need relief that death would bring. In fact, all persons involved in the procedure, including the pharmacist, must willingly participate. The individual must physically take the prescribed medicine unassisted.

Unlike Stanislawski's assertion, these deaths are not considered suicide since they are inserted shortly before the less pleasant eminent death. No one involved in the procedure should be referred to

as a perpetrator.

The agents used in assisted deaths are unavailable without a doctor's prescription. The agents are chosen because they put the individual to sleep before ending life. No painful death as with many poisons. No messes left like with guns, knives, nooses or after leaps from high places for those deaths where the better agents are unavailable.

Oregon began their program in 1997, so has a large statistical base. The acceptance for the law has increased with time both in Oregon as well as in many other states. Some of those states have adopted their own version of the procedure and others are trying to get their versions enacted. The number of people that chose the procedure compared to the total deaths has been near .4% since the beginning and similar results have been attained in the other states with DWDA-like programs.

The most frequent reports of end of life concerns were loss of autonomy [nine out of 10], decreasing ability to do those things that make life enjoyable [nine out of 10] and loss of dignity [six out of 10]. Of those receiving a prescription, about six in 10 consume the prescription and all die. Many of the rest were pleased to have that option but never felt compelled to take it.

About 90% that die do so at home, about 90% were with hospice, and about 60% had cancer. This procedure is not right for many, but for others the assisted death is a less anxious and very sure ending compared to all the other alternatives.

Will Oklahoma ever pass a DWDA? That is unlikely for the foreseeable future. The fact that all three votes for SB 108 were passed by only Republicans and the negative votes were all Democrats with a few Republicans is telling.

The Republicans will not change the way they think and the Democrats have a long way to go. This brings no hope for those of us in need.

Chadwick Cox lives in Norman.

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America's Health Care Crisis

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

President Trump's new budget is a grim message for senior citizens. Next year's 2020 budget would leave seniors out in the cold by drastically cutting the programs that benefit the oldest and most vulnerable people in our society. Simply put, many would need to get by with less next year.

No one serious about protecting Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid would propose a budget so harmful to our older citizens. Not only would it cut billions of dollars to the aforementioned programs, it also would repeal the Affordable Care Act and eliminate programs for lower-income persons such as Meals on Wheels.

The candidate who once promised to take care of people in need now as president submits to Congress a budget that would gut Medicaid, weakens Medicare and deeply cuts Social Security Disability Insurance [SSDI].

According to the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, "In combination with 2017's tax cuts for the very wealthy and the administration's failure to allow Medicare to negotiate with Big Pharma for lower drug prices, the latest Trump budget shows that this administration is not plugged in to the realities of being elderly in America today."

The historic budget deficits caused largely by the Trump-GOP tax cuts of 2017 are being used as an



excuse to push unfair and harmful cuts to essential social safety net programs. It makes no sense that the well-being and financial security of millions of workers as well as retirees should be sacrificed in order to solve our nation's debt crisis, pay for tax breaks for the rich, or fund completely unrelated programs.

Unfortunately it looks like the battle to protect and strengthen earned benefits will be both ongoing and relentless.

That's mainly because opponents of Social Securi-

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ty and Medicare are fixated on scaling back the very programs that millions of retirees, workers and the nation's most vulnerable citizens rely on for daily living.

One example is reflected in the national discussion over controlling prescription drug prices. Here we are, the richest country in the world, yet according to one recent poll, while most people taking prescription drugs say they can afford their treatments about one in four have difficulty affording their drugs.

I'm one of those. For me, two to three months of every year I find myself trapped in that deep doughnut hole having to pay more for some of my prescription drugs.

Believe it or not, no regulations or laws prevent drug companies from charging people outrageous prices on their drugs. So we Americans pay the highest prices for doctors' prescriptions in the world.

Currently at least 20 outpatient drugs carry a list price of more than \$25,000 for a one-month supply, according to a March analysis by AARP's GoodRx.

Recently the new House passed legislation that would allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices directly with pharmaceutical manufacturers, permit drug re-importation from Canada, and stop Pay-for-Delay agreements that delay generics entering the market, thereby forcing people like me into that ugly doughnut hole every year.

And the good news is that a recent House panel has negotiated a deal on several bills primarily geared to ensure access to generic drugs. Let's keep the pressure on our elected officials, especially the whole Congress, to ensure that those become laws.

For years, make that decades, lots of us from patients to presidents have complained about spiraling

of prescription drug prices. Little changed until May 2017 when the AARP Bulletin ran an extended report on the phenomenon.

As it turned out, the explanation is pretty simple. It seems that although America's health care system is quite complex, in a world of strong patent laws and limited regulation of pricing, Big Pharma has extraordinary power to charge whatever it desires for its drugs.

Although we live in a fast changing world, apparently we must still pay corporate America obscene prices for items that are either highly desirable or indispensable for our health, maybe even survival. Thus the good 'ol USofA is a very expensive environment where medical drug prices rise faster than the rate of inflation.

Are you ready for this? The average annual cost of a brand-name drug has more than tripled in the past decade, jumping from \$1,868 in 2006 to \$6,798 in 2017, according to the AARP Public Policy Institute.

Older adults now take an average of 4.5 medications each month, which can rise to a total retail cost of more than \$30,000 a year for brand-name drugs.

There is hope ahead, however, if we all do our part. If we continue to keep informed and work with our elected political representatives at all levels, perhaps the most important gift from Donald Trump is making our democracy work again. That simply means that we utilize both our brain and the technology at our disposal.

There are certainly a lot more of us than he and his cohorts.

Bob Rounsavell currently serves as chair of the Eastern Flyer Coalition of communities between Tulsa and Oklahoma City. His wife Maria serves as his editor.

The Minimum Wage Debates

BY BOB BEARDEN

All conservatives believe [at least all I've heard from] that we shouldn't ever raise the minimum wage. They believe in the false mantra that people get rich by bootstrapping themselves up the ladder of success. Which is a totally false narrative. Sen. Elizabeth Warren has squelched that falsehood quite dramatically.

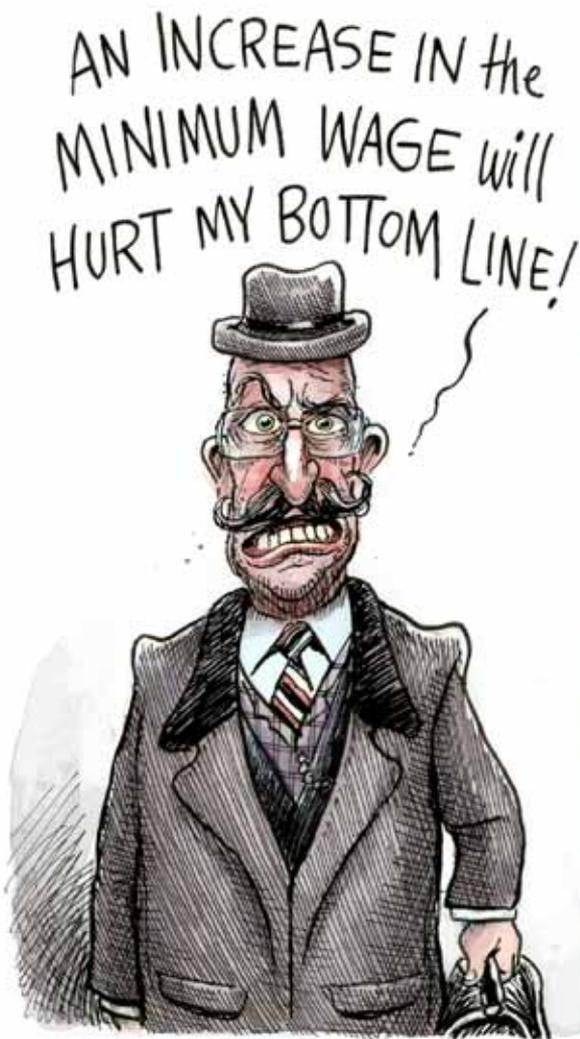
Every person of wealth has either inherited their money or got it on the backs of others, taking advantage of others, by hook or by crook. If you see a self-made individual, look into their background – they weren't self-made by any shape, way or form. Someone had to give them a hand up. Most of those

people will never acknowledge the people who helped them along their way, because they don't want to stir the pot of anger that would erupt from those people.

Millions of our fellow citizens are steeped in the idea that if they work hard and live conservatively, they will someone be rich, too. That is what is known as the American Pipe Dream. It ain't gonna happen for pretty much all of them.

But thanks to those who want to keep them believing that lie, they are spoon fed the idea that they too like the people who continually perpetuate that false dichotomy can someday be a part of the filthy rich.

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And so they always are sucked into that narrative and go through their lives living a false dream.

There is, of course, the American Dream. That, too, is predicated on a very similar narrative. Work hard, save your money and even if you don't make a lot of moola someday you will have a mansion just like J. Paul Getty. But what we aren't told is what lies behind men and women like J. Paul Getty and how they got where they are – or in his case were.

Since so many people in our nation buy into that idea they too can someday be rich, we end up with a tamp down of great expectations and a minimum wage that keeps millions of our fellow citizens mired in abject poverty. Any talk or thought of raising the minimum wage to a level that would actually allow those receiving it to have a decent slice of life gets yelled and screamed down as socialism.

When I was going to college in the early '60s the minimum wage was \$1 per hour. I first started work-

ing as a teenager at Luby's Cafeteria in Wichita Falls, TX, for 50 cents an hour on the dishwashing line. For a guy or a girl my age that was not a bad salary. In fact, while I was at Luby's I led a strike when they decided we needed to speed up the line in order to wash more dishes, faster, and as a settlement of the strike by all of the dishwashers we got a raise to 55 cents an hour.

I then switched over to the new guys in town – Uncle John's Pancake House over on Seymour Highway – starting as a busboy for 75 cents, only a quarter below the minimum wage. Within a few months I was washing dishes again for minimum wage at a \$1 per hour and later became a cook making \$1.75 an hour at almost double the minimum wage and was later offered full-time employment with health benefits [almost unheard of at the time] – a monthly salary that translated into over \$3 per hour plus stock options with the company and overseas pay

if I would sign onto the opening crew for new Uncle John's Pancake Houses in other countries.

It was a very lucrative offer for a 19-year-old kid.

But the thing is, I was attending college and making more than the minimum wage at a part time job. And it was a good living for a single person. The point is the minimum wage offered by most states can't come close to what I had when I was going to college and working part time. And most minimum wage jobs these days are dead-end jobs with no future and very few offers of advancement or raises in wages.

Oklahoma's minimum has been stagnant for at least a dozen years or even longer. Yet prices for goods and services most people need to live on have not. Our minimum wage makes it impossible for a family of four to live on. And today most families are seeing at least the adults – and often one or more of the children – working at jobs just to be able to have a place to live and food on the table.

Thousands of Oklahomans have to depend on aid from food pantries and food banks just to make sure they are able to feed their families. And employers like Wal Mart and others continue to make insane profits while they do not share that bounty with their employees. Many employees working for the minimum wage are barely more than indentured servants.

And yet, every time there is an effort to raise the minimum wage to a level that would help lift people out of poverty, the cry is it will cause prices to rise and small businesses to go under. That, too, is a false narrative pushed by companies and a lot of small businesses.

Raising the minimum wage helps business because when people on minimum wage jobs get a raise they immediately put it back into the economy by buying things they need and if the raise is high enough they spend it on whatever luxury items they have longed to own and which they now can afford to purchase one or more of.

A \$12 minimum wage will not break small businesses unless the owners are living beyond their means. And raising the minimum wage to a livable wage helps the economy and makes it likely that fewer people will need social services that they needed before. Which makes them less a burden on the local, state and federal governments that otherwise need to help them.

It is a totally false narrative cooked up by the filthy rich that raising the minimum wage to a living wage would hurt the economy and cause prices to skyrocket. If anything changes at all it would be that maybe, just maybe, income inequality would narrow! *Bob Bearden is chair of the Central Oklahoma Labor Federation Board of Trustees and a member of OKC's Mayflower Congregational Church, UCC.*

I Can't Hear You!

BY SHARON MARTIN

There's a lot of disinformation available if you want to fool yourself into believing that everything is OK. Given my anxiety level these days, I'm tempted to turn off social media and the news and fantasize about the world I want, a world in which the president and his administration care about humanity and believe in the Constitution.

Turning off is not an option, though. We can't surrender. We can't be quiet.

Apathy is our enemy. So is silence. If I may revise an old saying: action and truth will set us free.

When the president is the Liar-in-Chief, you must be especially vigilant. When he lies, make sure you have your own facts straight, and speak up. As my friend, Claudia, says, do it again and again.

Will everyone listen? No. Will someone listen? Maybe, and that's why we have to keep setting the record straight.

Let's start with a few facts about immigration:

- It was Jeff Sessions who initiated President Trump's Family Separation Policy.
- It is legal to ask for asylum.
- When you ask for asylum, it is the duty of our government to have immigration judges in place to hear your case.
- Children who experience trauma in their lives are permanently affected. – Humane people don't inflict such trauma.
- U.S. foreign policy, official and unofficial, legal and illegal, contributes to the mess that compels citizens in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to flee their homes.
- President Obama deported many undocumented visitors.
- President Obama signed the Dream Act because Congress refused to act.
- One more time, President Trump must take full responsibility for Family Separation as a policy to deter immigration.
- Family separation, as a deterrent, did *not* work.

It's an act of patriotism to counter lies with truth. Speak up while we still can.

Oilton resident Sharon Martin's latest book, Not A Prodigal, is available through Barnes and Noble. Her recent children's book, Froggy Bottom Blues, can be purchased in hardcover or paperback from Doodle and Peck Publishing and in paperback from Amazon.



Four More Years 'Too Horrible To Contemplate'

BY KEN NEAL

Should the House Democrats indict President Trump when they know the U.S. Senate will not impeach him?

More than 100 House members are on record as wanting to proceed with impeachment.

They have a solid argument: The U.S. Constitution clearly calls for impeachment of a president so clearly unfit for the office because of numerous crimes and misdeeds.

Special Counsel Robert Mueller laid out the case for impeachment, making it clear the president would have been charged if not for a questionable Department of Justice policy saying a sitting president could not be charged.

A halting, sometimes fumbling Mueller nevertheless made it clear the proper course to be rid of Trump is impeachment.

Mueller was indeed the reluctant dragon. He had warned House leaders that his testimony would not go beyond his lengthy report, in which his lawyerly and sometimes dull, language catalogued perhaps 10 instances of Trump obstruction of justice. Perhaps he knew he was not up to the assault by Republicans and the grilling from Democrats.

In fact, obstruction has been committed in public by Trump himself, such as his admission that he fired FBI Director James Comey because he was investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election.

And what did Mueller find? The Russians made widespread intrusions into the election to help Trump and hurt Democrat Hillary Clinton. He did not find that Trump conspired with the Russians, but that he readily accepted their help. In fact, Trump has boldly announced he would welcome their help in 2020.

So: The case for impeachment is very strong.

But. Few, if any, political observers believe the Trump-dominated U.S. Senate, where he is blindly defended at every misstep, will convict him because it takes two-thirds of the Senate to do that.

Those reluctant to impeach suggest that Trump would claim exoneration [as he does now at every turn] and reap benefits at the polls.

It is tempting for Democrats to impeach no matter the cost because the Constitution and justice demand it, but the fact is that Trump must be defeated at the polls and defeated badly.

It looks as if the Democratic leadership is headed toward a middle ground. House Judiciary Committee chairman Jerry Adler has asked the courts to authorize release of grand jury information that he says will in effect be an impeachment inquiry.

Facing certain defeat in the Senate, the Democrats should proceed with investigation upon investigation, perhaps passing a House censure of Trump that

would not have any legal effect but perhaps help politically.

While some House members argue persuasively to ignore more investigations and pass legislation on immigration, infrastructure, health and other important matters, the fact is that nothing is going to pass the Trump Senate, where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is blocking efforts to thwart Russian interference in 2020.

McConnell says elections should be left to the states, ignoring the fact that election of the president is very clearly a federal matter that should be regulated by the federal government.

Perhaps the saddest and worst development in the whole Trump saga is the transformation of the Republican Party into a Trump Cult.

There comes a time when reasonable people can only repeat the obvious.

Impeachment or not, Democrats should do that by any means at hand.

Trump has done incalculable damage at home and abroad that will take years to repair. Image what a triumphant Trump would do during a second term.

It is too horrible to contemplate.

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

Democrats, Get Out Of Your Own Way

BY JOE CONASON

Robert Mueller's testimony disappointed anyone seeking drama, but his performance isn't the problem. What keeps congressional Democrats from fulfilling their constitutional duty to confront a lawless president is their own political inertia.

In his own careful and stolid way, Mueller laid out the facts and arguments provided in his 448-page report [although he evidently hasn't yet memorized each page, to the satisfaction of his detractors].

Within the opening minutes of the hearing, Mueller's answers to House Judiciary Committee Chair Jerrold Nadler established that his report did not "exculpate" President Trump in any way; that in at least 10 instances, Trump attempted to stop the investigation by ordering Mueller's dismissal and discouraging witnesses from testifying; and that Trump refused to sit for an interview with Mueller or even answer questions about those many instances of alleged obstruction.

Those complaining that Mueller didn't make any "news" might look again at this exchange between him and Nadler, when he verbally rebutted Trump for the first time in public:

NADLER: Director Mueller, the president has repeatedly claimed that your report found there was no obstruction and that it completely and totally exonerated him, but that is not what your report

said, is it?

MUELLER: Correct. That is not what the report said.

NADLER: Now, reading from page 2 of Volume 2 of your report that's on the screen, you wrote, quote, "If we had confidence after a thorough investigation of the facts that the president clearly did not



commit obstruction of justice, we would so state. Based on the facts and the applicable legal standards, however, we are unable to reach that judgment,” close quote.

Now does that say there was no obstruction?

MUELLER: *No.*

NADLER: *In fact, you were actually unable to conclude the president did not commit obstruction of justice, is that correct?*

MUELLER: *Well, we at the outset determined that we – when it came to the president’s culpability, we needed to – we needed – we needed to go forward only after taking into account the OLC opinion that indicated that a president – sitting president cannot be indicted.*

NADLER: *So the report did not conclude that he did not commit obstruction of justice, is that correct?*

MUELLER: *That is correct.*

NADLER: *And what about total exoneration? Did you actually totally exonerate the president?*

MUELLER: *No.*

Under further questioning, Nadler said that the president “could be prosecuted for obstruction of justice crimes after he leaves office.” That statement, Mueller affirmed, is “true.”

During his hours before the Judiciary and Intelligence Committees, Mueller reiterated repeatedly the basic outline of the grave crimes against democracy that this president is alleged to have perpetrated.

Mueller confirmed that the Trump campaign welcomed and encouraged the Russians, who sought

his victory, to interfere in the 2016 presidential campaign. He confirmed that the president lied incessantly about that interference by claiming that the Kremlin conspiracy was “a hoax.”

And he confirmed that when the government opened an investigation into that Russian interference – perhaps the most significant criminal and counterintelligence matter of our lifetimes – Trump attempted to stop it, over and over again, by command and by threat.

In his sometimes-halting testimony, Mueller attempted to protect his nonpartisan credentials and to emphasize the fairness and impartiality of his work. That was an understandable impulse but also a choice that Republicans exploited to attack him. Worse yet, those same Republican members minimized the Russian assault on our system, in the style of Fox News conspiracy theorists who sound as if they are programmed by the Kremlin.

But the story of the 2016 campaign and the effort to kill the Mueller investigation came through despite all the verbal chaff from the far right. There can be no adequate response to that story except an impeachment inquiry – which is what the House Democrats are now conducting, without organizing or naming it correctly.

Speaker Pelosi may not relish that idea, but she knows that Trump cannot be permitted to get away with these high crimes and misdemeanors. She and her colleagues need to recognize what they are doing – and get out of their own way.

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Defeat Then Indict

BY GARY EDMONDSON

Candidate Donald Trump colluded with Russian operatives during the campaign – even encouraging them to dig up dirt on his opponent after the weekend collusion meeting at Trump Tower.

President Donald Trump has been in constant violation of the emoluments clause prohibiting officeholders from personally profiting from their positions.

The foaming-at-the-mouth bigotry, sexual predation, embarrassing ignorance and his love affairs with blood-stained dictators are not in play.

That said, it would profit no one except Trump for House Democrats to impeach him.

Mike Lillis of The Hill reported that Texas Rep. Al Green, whose impeachment motion was recently tabled, might try to reintroduce the measure and that Rep. Steve Cohen, D-TN, who introduced similar articles last year plans to do so again.

Cohen “introduced five articles of impeachment in 2017, which charged Trump with obstructing justice in firing former FBI Director James Comey; violating

the foreign emoluments clause, which bars public officials from receiving gifts from foreign governments without Congress’s consent, and the domestic emoluments clause, which bars the president from profiting from his office; and undermining two of the country’s central institutions – the courts and the press – in ways that threaten the health of the nation’s democracy.”

Lillis said that reaction to Trump’s racist hatred and lies directed at four duly-elected congresswomen “brought the tally of Democratic impeachment supporters to 87. And that list is likely to grow after [Robert] Mueller testifies before the House Judiciary and Intelligence committees.”

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-NY, told Fox News Sunday that Mueller Report “presents very substantial evidence” that President Donald Trump “is guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors.”

Mueller’s report laid out the evidence. But our Justice Department employs the self-serving rule of not

indicting a sitting president. So, since Mueller was barred from filing an indictment, Trump proclaimed himself guilt free.

Similarly, two suits charging Trump with violating the emoluments clause were tossed by courts due to a “lack of standing” by those pursuing justice. There was no ruling on the merits of the cases.

But impeachable as he is, Trump has his partner in Russian collusion, Mitch McConnell, controlling the GOP majority in the Senate. A guilty verdict there would be as likely as Sen. James Inhofe recognizing scientific facts.

Trump would be acquitted by a complicit Senate. He would claim innocence. He and his perpetually resentful privileged supporters would cry “persecu-

tion.”

An impeachment trial would become a massive diversion at a time when House Democrats should be promoting sensible solutions to the country’s problems.

The House has real work to do. Give Americans an alternative to corporate socialism, crony capitalism and vicious, divisive bigotry. Give Americans some hope for our future. Point out the president’s illegalities and despicable behavior, but leave the former to federal prosecutors once we get him out of office.

But, above all, don’t give an orange-haired clown an impeachment circus.

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

Going Slow Turkey From Donald Trump

BY FROMA HARROP

This summer, I’m taking a tip from the Chantix turkey. You may have seen the ads for Chantix, a drug claiming to help people stop smoking gradually. The turkey character is seen trying to quit cigarettes in a calm, slow manner rather than going “cold turkey.” The mellow Galliforme calmly adjusts the A/C, reads a book poolside and relaxes at home in his retro argyle vest.

I’ve used these hot months to greatly slow Donald Trump’s assaults on my psyche. That doesn’t mean totally ignoring his destructive policies. It does mean ignoring his provocations.

It started around the Fourth of July. Trump turned this normally nonpartisan celebration into a tribute to himself. Did you hear a peep from me? You did not. While others railed, as Trump wanted them to, I attended to other matters.

Not only did I not watch the taxpayer-funded Trump commercial but I also skipped days of advanced wailing by his critics. I wish the protesters had found something else to do and kept the Trump-baby balloon in the garage. They only added to his coverage.

An entirely enjoyable Fourth centered on my town’s fireworks. The high point of national pride that week was provided by the U.S. women’s soccer team.

My feathers were a bit ruffled by Trump’s racist attacks on the “squad,” four radical Democratic congresswomen of color, last week. The tweet was disgusting, of course. And few Republican officials condemned it. Right, and the sun rose in the east.

Trump knows the quartet’s defense had been somewhat compromised by its members’ tossing around careless accusations of racism against other Democrats – as well as a vulgar anti-Semitic reference by one, Ilhan Omar. Perhaps concerned that

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has begun to rein them in, he seemed intent on keeping them front and center as the faces of the Democratic Party by whatever means.

It would not shock me to learn that Trump’s cruelty at the border was partly intended to goad some Democrats into advocating policies that would weaken immigration enforcement. Do they have any idea how unpopular these ideas are, even to many who they think they’re pandering to?

But Trump’s psychological warfare won’t prevail if the opposition’s obsession with him is replaced by an equal determination to vote him out in 2020. That’s hard when the media, commercial and social, have so much time on their hands and a tendency to focus on the inflammatory over the important.

I checked my news stations, CNN and MSNBC. From dawn till midnight, panels were discussing what Trump says, what he believes, whether he believes what he says, why he’s saying it and what he thinks he’ll get out of it. The conversations loop around the same tedious circles.

And along with that repetition comes the listing of Trump’s contradictions, lies and ugly conspiracy theories. Look at all the America bashing he’s done! Remember his bizarre “American carnage” inaugural speech – given at a time of falling crime rates and a 40-year low in border-crossing arrests? Who needs reminding?

Trump is hypocritical, shameless and an international embarrassment? You don’t say.

Helping keep me cool are polls showing Joe Biden comfortably ahead in most primary races. Biden is the candidate not threatening private health insurance coverage for about 250 million Americans. And he doesn’t want to decriminalize illegal border crossings. Nevertheless, as president he would be

worlds more humane toward immigrants than the current White House occupant.

Biden is the one standing strongest between Trump and a second term.

The turkey has the right idea in turning down the noise and opening a paper book. Me? It's time to fill the birdbath and fertilize the tomatoes.

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Mueller Testimony Points to New Cold War As A Farce

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

In *The Eighteenth Brumière of Louis Napoleon* [1852], the great philosopher Karl Marx famously stated that history repeated itself, first as tragedy, second as farce.

This prophecy is evident today with Russiagate and the New Cold War.

The first cold war was a genuine tragedy that resulted in the deaths of millions of civilians in proxy wars and waste in human resources in the waging of a nuclear arms race between the United States and Soviet Union. There was at least some semblance of legitimacy in that the Soviet Union lived up to its moniker as an evil empire in some aspects, as with the Gulag system and political repression.

The second Cold War, however, has no moral purpose at all, and was triggered by American leaders' breaking a promise with Russia not to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] towards Russia's borders.

The farcical aspect of the new Cold War was firmly on display on Wednesday [July 24], when Special Counsel Robert Mueller testified before the House Intelligence and Judiciary Committee.

In April, Mueller released a 448-page report purporting to detail alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election, though which failed to find any evi-

dence that the Trump Administration had colluded with Russia to win the election.

For weeks, the media had been hyping up Mueller's testimony, raising anticipation that he might reveal new smoking gun evidence.

Many on the left had displayed great reverence for him, believing that he would help cleanse the country of President Donald J. Trump.

However, the actual testimony, like with the report, was a great letdown. Mueller revealed no new information and was evasive, declining to answer 198 questions, according to a count by NBC News.

Muller at times showed a lack of knowledge of what was in his report and revealed that he had not even been present to interview many of the witnesses.

Appearing to be feigning, or actually suffering early signs of senility, Mueller was alert enough, though, to make a few politicized points, such a condemnation of Wikileaks for allegedly illegally obtaining emails.

The central allegation of the Mueller Report that Russia interfered in the 2016 election on behalf Trump has never actually been proven, though most media outlets would lead us to believe that it has.

A study by the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity [VIPS] determined, based on the speed of communications, that the alleged hack of Democratic National Committee emails, which damaged the Hillary Clinton campaign, were actually a leak that was sent through a thumb drive from the East Coast of the United States.

The VIPs report was never engaged with by Mueller and his team, which also failed to examine the DNC's computer servers.

Despite spending at least \$30 million in taxpayer dollars, Mueller's team also never bothered to interview Julian Assange, the Wikileaks founder who has denied that he received the stolen emails from Russia.

The supposed social media disinformation campaign that helped sway American voters was carried out by a private company based in St. Petersburg, Internet Research Agency [IRA], whose connection to the Russian government has never been established and probably never will.

Half of the IRA ads on Facebook were enacted after the 2016 election, and many were non-political while others actually supported Trump. One theory is that they were part of a bait-and-click commercial operation designed to advertise various products.

The Russiagate affair has been damaging to American public discourse, highly divisive and a waste of taxpayer money.

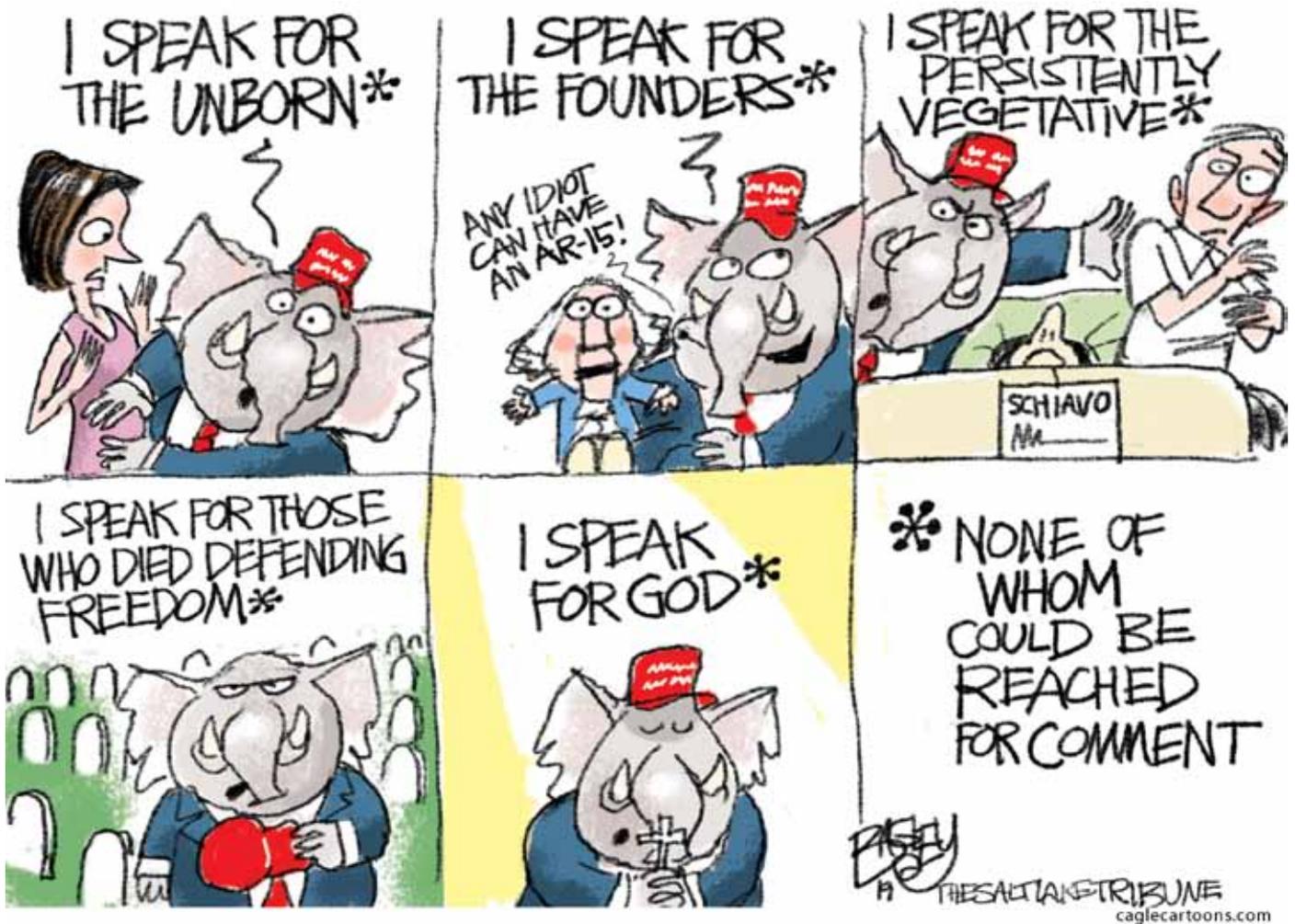
If the first Cold War was indeed a tragedy, the second is playing out as a farce with no rational basis. Tulsa resident Jeremy Kuzmarov is author of *The First Cold War as Tragedy, the Second as Farce*, with John Marciano [New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018] and *Obama's Endless Wars: Fronting the Foreign Policy of the Permanent Warfare State* [Clarity Press, 2019].

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Godism In American Life

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

Donald Trump's tweets about "the Squad" – four members of Congress, women of color, and outspoken critics of the policies and character of the Divider-in-Chief – were widely denounced as racist. Respected news organizations [for example, NPR] referred to them unapologetically as "racist tweets." The meaning of the adjective was clear, its application appropriate, and the moral criticism was straightforward.

Racism is one among a variety of isms that pick out prejudicial attitudes and actions directed toward members of a group who share what are, in fact, morally irrelevant properties, in the sense that these properties should not be the basis for discriminating against individuals. Race. Sex. Jewishness. Sexual life style. Class. Abilities. Age. Bernie Sanders denied that his age is relevant when we evaluate his fitness for the presidency. He accused his critics of ageism.

None of these properties are relevant when we think of the grounds for moral worth and moral respect, equal opportunity, and equal protection of the laws. Each of these isms identifies patterns of at-

titudes that express the superiority of members of a group and the inferiority of individuals who lack the supposed [but not actual] morally relevant characteristic.

In our politics and shared moral life these isms are powerful instruments used by members of groups who have faced and continue to experience various forms of prejudice and discrimination. These isms identify injustice and express a call for moral change. In the spirit of a desire for a more just social and political life, I would like to coin a new term that might help to call attention to a group that faces substantial discrimination in American society, based on another morally irrelevant characteristic: lack of belief in God.

A recent informative and powerful book, *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic: Atheists in American Life*, by R. Lawrence Moore and Isaac Kramnick, documents, in the story of our country, the sorry treatment of religious skeptics and government imposition of belief in God in civic rituals. My proposal is to call this form of prejudice "Godism" and I hope that

it would be added to the list of isms that are used for moral and rhetorical purposes to attempt to improve our individual interactions and common social life.

Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, classism, ableism, ageism, and heterosexism are insidious forms of prejudice that are prevalent yet live beneath the surface of polite society since a person typically doesn't explicitly endorse socially and morally unacceptable attitudes. On the other hand, Godism is more socially and politically acceptable, and endorsed by any number of institutions.

[An internet search for "Godism" will locate a minor religious perspective originating in 1985 from a Nigerian journalist. My alternative definition is reasonable – analogous to other forms of prejudice.]

Racists have prejudicial attitudes based on preferences for their own race. Sexists direct discriminatory attitudes toward members of the opposite sex. Analogously, a Godist discriminates on the basis of persons' lack of belief in God. Godism directs antagonistic attitudes toward persons whose worldview does not include an affirmative belief in a Supreme Being, however that notion is understood by persons with these prejudices.

The term "Godism" sounds peculiar, yet it is no more peculiar than the influential term "speciesism," used by Australian philosopher Peter Singer in the 1970s to fuel "Animal Liberation," an attempt to show that eating, wearing, and experimenting on non-human animals expresses a morally illegitimate preference for one's own species and a prejudice against other species.

In the case of those who discriminate on the basis of someone's lack of belief in God an alternative might be to call it "religionism." The evidence shows, however, that Godists define religion in terms of belief in God and are less bothered [perhaps because of their ignorance] by religions that are nontheistic or agnostic about the existence of God – Buddhism, for example.

As a matter of terminology, how should we refer to a person who is the object of a Godist's prejudicial attitudes? Some terms that have been used are: atheist, agnostic, nontheist, nonbeliever, unbeliever, free-thinker, secularist, humanist. All of these types share a lack of affirmative belief in "God," typically defined in a theistic sense: an infinite person, unsurpassable with respect to knowledge, power, and goodness, creator and sustainer of the universe.

Unbelievers also reject the beliefs of particular theistic religions like Christianity, for example, belief in the divinity of Jesus, miracle stories in the Bible, and the doctrine of eternal damnation.

The rejection of belief in theism may take a variety of forms. Nontheists might make an affirmative claim that there's good reason to believe that theism is false [atheism]; they may claim there's not enough evidence to affirm or deny the existence of the theistic god [agnosticism]; or they may believe there is an alternative nontheistic conception of the Divine that

is more reasonable [for example, pantheism].

One of the ironies here is that agnosticism and atheism are equally worthy of Godists' negative attitudes, yet an agnostic's claim that she doesn't know or have good reason to believe that God exists is also affirmed by the theist whose belief is an expression of "faith." One doesn't need faith if one knows. Faith seems to be the affirmation of not-knowing, yet believing.

If a person knows something is the case she need not resort to claims made by faith. I don't have faith that Donald Trump is president; I know it. It's common to hear a believer talk about the importance of faith, which is an endorsement of lack of knowledge, while simultaneously speaking as if she knows the claims of faith are true, which is unwarranted. Faith and claims to knowledge make poor bedfellows; agnosticism and faith are epistemic friends.

Why should the Godist have prejudicial attitudes toward the agnostic, whose claim that we don't know whether God exists is usually an expression of reason?

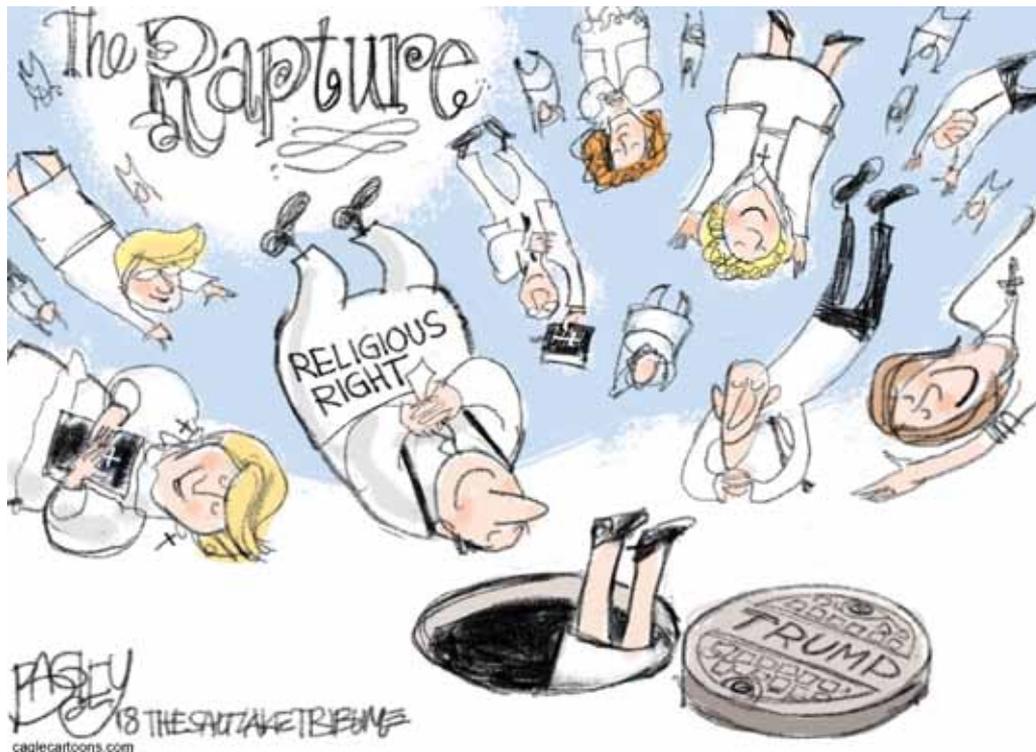
Does Godism exist? Is it a problem? Have nonbelievers faced prejudice? Do they continue to be stigmatized in America? I recommend *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic*, for the history and ongoing reality of Godism. According to the authors, "Atheists remain the most disliked religious minority in America." A Pew Research Poll found that almost half of respondents had unfavorable attitudes toward atheists, far worse than "Muslims, 32%; Mormons, 26%; Hindus, 21%; Buddhists, 20%; Evangelical Christians, 17%; Jews, 11%; Catholics, 11%."

A Gallup poll asked, "If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be an atheist would you vote for that person?" Less than half of Americans said yes. The prejudice is more shocking when comparisons are made to other groups who have been [and continue to be] discriminated against: black, 94%; women, 93%; Catholic, 92%; Jewish, 89%; and Mormon, 76%.

Parents list atheists as first among groups they least want their children to marry. Another study asked people to identify "the group that does not at all agree with my vision of American Society." The clear winner was atheists [40%], "followed by Muslims, 26%; homosexuals, 22%; conservative Christians, 13%; recent immigrants, 12%; Jews, 7%; African Americans, 5%."

Moore and Kramnick document the ways that nonbelievers have been discriminated against. "A long list of overt officially sanctioned historical discrimination against atheists and nonbelievers has resulted from their being so unliked and mistrusted." Their nonbelief has negatively affected them in pursuing jobs, joining organizations, running for political office, getting custody of their children, serving in the military, and living honestly. The list could be extended.

One columnist pointed out that among the diverse



list of Democratic candidates for president [African American, female, gay, Chinese American, Hispanic, Okie!] there was one group that was unrepresented, and being a member of which would virtually disqualify the person from the possibility of being elected: atheist. Being a religious skeptic and announcing this fact about one's belief system is political cancer.

Former Massachusetts U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, elected in 1980, came out as gay in 1987 and became the only member of Congress in a same-sex marriage. He retired in 2012. Yet he did not come out as a nontheist [his preferred term] until after retirement. In a 2014 interview he was asked why he didn't reveal his nontheism until after he left office. He said, "It was never relevant."

As much as I respect his political career, Frank's explanation for why he didn't come out as an unbeliever seems disingenuous. When he took the oath of office, en masse, he said, "I never swore and said, 'So help me God.'" A safe path because no one noticed. It would have been relevant to know that one of the most influential, smartest, and funniest members of Congress was a nontheist – especially in light of the history of discrimination toward skeptics and the typical reasons for prejudicial attitudes toward atheists, agnostics, unbelievers.

[To be fair to Frank, he also said that a public airing of his nontheism might have been misunderstood. It might have been taken as a disavowal of his Jewish ethnic identity, which he affirms – despite his skepticism about specific theological claims of Judaism.]

There are three reasons for many peoples' profound distrust of unbelievers. Each requires a more extended discussion than space allows. [Perhaps another installment.] We probably don't need the book by Moore and Kram-

nick to arrive at the first reason for these prejudices. The second and third reasons have more historical resonance so the scholars' analysis of these is helpful. "We suggest that undergirding this dislike and distrust of nonbelievers are three foundational features of American sociocultural belief."

To put these beliefs in a pithy form: atheists are immoral, un-American, and egghead intellectuals. You can't be good without belief in God; you can't be a good American without being a theist; and you're a snooty cultural elitist if you're a nonbeliever.

A pithy response to each: the first two reasons for Godist prejudices are simply false and the third is an expression of an unreasonable prejudice toward those who are highly educated: scientists, philosophers, and intellectuals [although many nonbelievers are none of these.]

Data indicate that the tide of history is working against Godism. A significant number of millennials [35%] identify as unbelievers or are "nones" who identify with no religion. And there may be almost as many "nones" in America as evangelical protestants, and more "nones" than Catholics. [Of course, some "nones" may still believe in God, despite identifying with no religion.]

Demographic change may kill both Godism and Trumpism – we can only hope. But we may need to push more aggressively against our American tradition of prejudice against nonbelievers. The death of Godism might be hastened by courageous political candidates who declare their unbelief and make Godism a campaign issue – or nonissue, since it shouldn't matter.

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

Jim Hightower



Punishing Trade Pirates? It's Complicated

There's a hierarchy of larceny in our world, from pickpockets to the Wall Street syndicates running sophisticated mass swindles. But atop the heap are "bandit nations" – countries whose industrial and political elites conspire in economic espionage aimed at stalking and stealing the ideas, technologies and innovations of other economies. Their global robbery, "intellectual property theft," plunders billions of dollars a year.

Recently, U.S. corporate leaders have been in a sputtering rage over these state-sanctioned criminal enterprises. "Pirates!" they shriek, accusing China, Russia, some European competitors and even developing nations of spying, hacking and otherwise filching U.S. patents and such.

Pirates? Well, what else to call a country that makes such robbery core to its economic development strategy? [*Warning: Inconvenient historical truth dead ahead.*] You could call it the United States of America.

In the 1790s and early 1800s, America's basically agrarian economy was dependent on cotton, tobacco and other raw farm commodities. For value-added finished goods, we were a captive market of England and other manufacturing nations. To survive, much less advance, our new nation desperately needed its own processing and manufacturing industries. But how, without the technology or skills? Our founders' answer: Steal them.

No less an eminence than Alexander Hamilton led America's elite ring of state-run thieves. As America's first treasury secretary, Hamilton declared that the U.S. must "procure all such machines as are known in any part of Europe." His Treasury Department dispatched an agent abroad to "procure" machine drawings, and it initiated bounties to lure England's textile designers and skilled operators to pass automation techniques to our government and industrialists-on-the-make.

Of course, the outraged Brits rushed to protect both their secrets and their iron grip on the U.S. market, assessing severe fines [up to 500 pounds per violation – \$99,000 today] on anyone trying to take industrial designs out of country. Nonetheless,

determined Americans kept stealing and soon built their own competitive textile industry.

Two centuries later, we are like old England, and China is the bad-boy disrupter of the global corporate order. Its leaders – like Hamilton – have little respect for other countries' intellectual property laws. A big difference, though, is that China is not a backwater; it's a global industrial power.

Still, industrial property protectionism is a tricky topic: No one has sympathy for Big Pharma when it uses brute political force to extend product monopolies that let drug companies charge outrageous prices. But if, say, America Corp. creates a new wing design, shouldn't it be able to sell its made-in-America plane to China without transferring its wing technology, too? While Chinese officials deny such theft, they [among other countries] are widely known to run a sustained, sophisticated operation to "extract" and duplicate our technology. They can then set prices below U.S. production costs – thus sucking global manufacturing and jobs to China.

But where is our moral authority to condemn and punish them? Donald Trump can fulminate all he wants and even launch an ill-considered, mad-dog tariff war, but China's leaders see the "procurement" of American industrial secrets as – Helloooo, Donald – their China First policy!

Indeed, since 2015, China has been investing billions in an ambitious 10-year "Made in China 2025" crash program to dominate the global market in 15 "industries of the future" [including alternative energy equipment, high-speed rail, robotics and electric cars]. Yes, this massive offensive includes sending moles and other agents into the inner sanctums of such giants as Boeing and GM to purloin their latest designs and materials. But the Chinese program has been abetted by some surprising partners: the very U.S. corporations complaining so loudly about Beijing's thievery.

Drooling at short-term profits from access to China's billion-person market, Western CEOs have been selling their corporations' futures by handing over their patented jewels in exchange for import licenses and access to China's low-wage non-union

workers. In addition, Chinese companies have obtained keys to industrial secrets simply by investing in U.S. firms – \$135 billion between 2005 and 2016 in partnerships and joint ventures.

Follow the bouncing ball: [1] To punish the Chinese for taking the technology that our CEOs hand to them, [2] Trump [backed by some congressional Dems] has imposed a mountain of tariffs on goods China exports to the U.S., which [3] will raise the prices for U.S. consumers and [4] has prompted Beijing to impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. grain and other products, thus hurting our farmers, other producers and consumers.

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The Mad Corruptions Of Trump Inc.

Where's Shakespeare when we need him? Only the Bard of Avon could do literary justice to the tortured madness of Donald Trump, who fluctuates between petulant self-pity and weird self-praise.

His brags are especially weird because they usually involve achievements he hasn't made. It's as though his saying something makes it true – even though everyone except his most naive devotees can clearly see that he's either hallucinating or lying.

In June, for example, at a rally launching his reelection campaign, he re trumpeted an old campaign promise to “drain the swamp,” assuring the adoring crowd that “that's exactly what we're doing right now.”

Trump gilded the lie with this beauty: “We stared down the unholy alliance of lobbyists and donors and special interests.”

In fact, he brought that entire unholy alliance directly into the White House, the cabinet and every agency to create a corrupt government of, by and for corporate plunderers. At least 230 corporate lobbyists have come inside the Trump Inc. administration.

He also opened a luxury hotel right in the center of the swamp, just four blocks from the White House, so he and his family can extract high-dollar hotel payments from special-interest lobbyists wanting favors from the Trump regime of swamp critters.

But wait ... didn't The Donald make his political hires sign an ethics pledge agreeing not to lobby the agencies where they work until five years after they leave?

Yes, but remember, Trump is a master at the Art of the Loophole, and his “pledge” provides ample room

for an invasion of weasels, including an exception allowing former officials to lobby on agency rule-making.

Do they think we have sucker wrappers around our heads? Rule-making is what agencies do! So, this gaping loophole frees Trump officials to sell their insider influence to corporate interests wanting to rig the rules against you and me.

At Trump's vainglorious campaign rally, he also declared that “nobody has done what we have done in 2½ years.” Sadly, that's the truest thing he's said.

News Alert! News Alert! This just in: Donald Trump has discovered homelessness in America.

News Update! News Update! Donald Trump says he has the solution to homelessness in America, points out that he's already ended homelessness in Washington, DC.

Once again, we can thank Fox News for its in-depth reporting, going deep into the furrows of Trump's mind to dig out this startling presidential insight and achievement.

In a June interview by Fox TV sparkie Tucker Carlson, the president of the United States articulated his concern about so many Americans' now living on the streets.

Homelessness is “a phenomenon that started two years ago,” Trump explained to the clueless Carlson, calling the problem “sad.” Our billionaire president showed his usual grasp of history and social awareness by adding, “We never had this in our lives before in this country.”

Oddly, the Fox Man let this go without questioning it. Maybe he was dazzled by Trump's next observation, analyzing why people live in the street: “Perhaps they like living that way,” posited our presidential son of privilege.

Whatever. The Donald proceeded to declare that it's intolerable to have such homelessness in our rich country – not because so many poor people are suffering, but because businesspeople and shoppers face the indignity of having to walk past the homeless to get to their offices, banks, cafes, etc.

As Tucker beamed credulously, Trump proceeded to offer his solution: simply outlaw *those people* from cluttering our sidewalks and streets. Then, The Donald royally declared that he “may intercede ... to get that whole thing cleaned up.”

Indeed, he claims he's tidied up homelessness before: “I had a situation when I first became president. We had certain areas of Washington, DC, where [homelessness] was starting to happen. I ended it very quickly. I said, ‘You can't do that.’”

After all, Trump explained to the obtuse Fox interviewer, “When you have leaders of the world coming to see the president ... they can't be looking at that.”

It's one thing to have a president who thinks “Out of sight; out of mind” should be an actual public policy.

It's another thing to have a president who's clearly out of his mind. – *Jim Hightower*



Institutional Violence And Abuse

BY ANN DAPICE

Following last month's excellent Observer article, "Epidemic," about missing and murdered Native girls and women, the darkness of trafficking continues to be in the news.

Child sex trafficking charges have been brought against wealthy businessman Jeffrey Epstein. He is accused of sexually exploiting and abusing dozens of girls between 2002 and 2005 in New York and Florida. Epstein pleaded guilty in 2008 to procuring a person under 18 for prostitution and felony solicitation of prostitution in Florida and was sentenced to 13 months incarceration. But most of that time was spent on work release or in the private wing of a jail. He is registered as a sex offender in Florida. The Miami Herald has reported a deal was made that Epstein would only face a state charge.

Power, sex and money are central in human trafficking.

We learn more about the suffering of students at major universities where they and professional Olympic figures have endured sexual abuse as their superiors ignored their complaints. Ohio State University is the most recent example where the sexual abuse of 177 students occurred over nearly 20 years.

At the K-12 level, we hear of teachers and even

school bus drivers found to be guilty of sexual assault despite supposed background checks.

We have heard of the molestation of young boys and girls by priests in the Roman Catholic Church for decades. Now the Southern Baptist churches and other congregations are in the news related to sexual violence and the same kind of coverup.

We continue to see political figures who proclaim strong religious standards caught in sexual acts that contradict their messages. New York magazine reported that a younger President Trump compared Epstein to himself. Flight records obtained by NBC News show that former President Clinton flew on one of Epstein's private planes several times.

In what has been called the #MeToo Movement, sexual assaults by Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, and other well-known persons like Charlie Rose and Al Franken have come to light as prominent women have come forward as victims of past violence. It has become a dominant theme as people remember, or can now acknowledge, what was done to them in the past.

While others have been forced out of office and jobs, the U.S. president is not yet being held accountable for even his own admissions of sexual misconduct.

The news that isn't the news is that women have been forced to sell their bodies and souls for jobs they needed for a very long time.

An increase in public misogyny sees reproductive rights of women removed as powerful politicians lessen the ability of women to have access to birth control or abortion – unless they have resources to obtain such services elsewhere. Women are even told by one elected official that if they can't stop the rape to “lie back and enjoy it” and told by another that rape can be a “blessing.”

Public rhetoric reduces women in status as only “hosts” to house babies until birth.

As the knowledge of abuses has become known, it's wondered how it is that the young Olympic athletes had no protection from the physician Larry Nassar. USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University employed him for decades. He is said to have molested at least a 150 young women. His former patients said that when they complained of his treatment they were ignored.

In the most recent university case made public, the 232-page report of first-hand accounts were from 177 Ohio State students. It is likely that Dr. Richard Strauss abused others between 1979 and 1998 when he worked as a team doctor and a physician in the student health clinic. Investigators said that Ohio State administrators failed to take action despite repeated complaints about Strauss' misconduct. The U.S. Department of Education's office of civil rights is conducting an inquiry. The university is already facing multiple lawsuits.

As the result of the report, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine called on lawmakers to extend the statute of limitations on sex crimes.

“We should all be disgusted. Every Ohioan should be disgusted and should be angered about what's happened,” DeWine said. “Not only by the vile acts perpetrated by Richard Strauss, but also they should be angered that complaints and reports about this sexual abuse were not reported to higher authorities by the [OSU] athletic department or Ohio State University health center until 1996 – more than 15 years after the first reports were in fact received.” Strauss died by suicide in 2005.

In the latest sexual assault lawsuit against Michigan State University it took three years for an alleged victim to go public. The victim says that she was raped by three basketball players. She went to counseling and is said to have been told that counselors had seen a lot of cases with “guys with big names” and the best thing to do was to get better and ignore it.

In 2011 an earlier college football scandal hit as nationally regarded football coach hero Joe Paterno's assistant coach for the Penn State Nittany Lions team was accused of 52 counts of child molestation from incidents between 1994 and 2009. [I should disclose that I taught at a Penn State campus in suburban Philadelphia between 1984 and 1990. While I was

no longer at the university at the time of the alleged events, I had good colleagues who remained and had to deal with the fallout.]

There was and still is much discussion regarding Coach Paterno's knowledge of the events. After his distinguished time at Penn State he retired and died shortly afterwards. Nevertheless, the question of who knew, and who covered up what was known, is central to this writing.

In the later 1980s I had a female student who told the class about the painful events of her molestation by a Roman Catholic priest. Although most of the young people molested by priests were young boys, young girls were molested as well. As was common practice, the molestation was denied and the priest was moved to another diocese. Her father, a successful surgeon, became so up-set that he had a heart attack and died. So already in the '80s people were not surprised to learn of priest molestation. It was common knowledge. Yet the coverups have continued to the present.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Al Mohler [2018] writes in Christianity Today that the avalanche of sexual misconduct that has come to light is “almost too much to bear.” He says that this was seen to be a Roman Catholic problem with the requirement of priestly celibacy and the “organized conspiracy of silence” within the hierarchy. He discusses the Southern Baptist problem as an unorganized conspiracy of silence.

Sadly, he notes, the unorganized nature of our problem may make recovery and correction even more difficult and the silence even more dangerous.

Most of the actions of predators discussed above would be diagnosed as compulsive sexual behaviors, whether the assaults are against the young or adults. The treatment for such conditions is uncertain.

It is important to say however, that in violence there are two pathologies: that of the perpetrators from a variety of causes, and the denial, rationalization, and pretense of all the others that the violence isn't happening.

In reality, it is not the perpetrators who are the greatest causes of violence, but those who turn a blind eye to violence in its many forms.

When society's institutions – families, schools, religious organizations, universities, hospitals, nursing homes, courts, and law enforcement – obligated to stop the violence and respond to its victims do not act, there is systematic failure and abuse.

Ann Dapice received a PhD in psychology, sociology and philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania. She is Director of Education and Research for T.K. Wolf, Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization and Founder/Executive Director, Institute of Values Inquiry. She consults with the University of Pennsylvania on development of Native American Programs where she is Founder of the Association of Native Alumni and has served on a number of University Committees.



The Case For A New Third Party

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

In the late 1850s, the United States experienced a political realignment when the Whig Party disbanded and many of its members, including Abraham Lincoln, joined the nascent Republican Party because of the betrayal of the Whig leadership over the issue of slavery and its extension.

American politics may be poised for a similar realignment today as popular disaffection with the two major parties and their domination by corporate money and interests increases. Polls show that 57% of Americans want a major new party, including 71% of millennials.

The reasons for these figures are not hard to discern: from climate change to rising cost of education, a lack of a universal health care system to a policy of endless war, the Washington ruling elite has failed its citizenry.

A Princeton and Northwestern University study found that there is no correlation between public preferences, expressed in opinion polls, and the de-

isions made in Congress let alone by the executive branch. The study concluded that the “preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy.”

The Movement for a People’s Party [MPP] was founded in 2017 and has begun to attract a considerable following in an attempt to reverse the trend towards oligarchy.

Party founder Nick Brana, who in 2016 served as national outreach director for Bernie Sanders, stated in an interview that “we are now at a historic moment just like in 1852 when the Whig elites went against their base when they adopted a pro-slavery position that led to the formation of the Republican Party. Similarly today, the Democratic Party has abandoned its working class base, creating a fissure between the party and the people, that necessitates the foundation of a new party.”

Brana points to the rapid formation of new political

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parties in Mexico and Europe in the midst of wide-scale disaffection with neoliberal policies as a model for the United States.

He sees the Green Party as equivalent to the Free-Soilers and other 19th century parties that set the groundwork for more successful parties like the Socialists and Populists at the turn of the 20th century.

These latter parties amassed large followings not only in urban centers like New York but also in the Southwest among farmers by promoting the regulation or break up of Wall Street banks that had plunged them into debt by selling them usurious loans.

According to Brana, the Green Party today is too wedded to an electoral strategy and runs candidates who do not have a strong local connection to the communities in which they are running.

The MPP's strategy is different in that it is focused on grassroots organizing.

Its members have rallied for climate justice with Zero Hour, demonstrated for peace at the women's march on the Pentagon, boycotted Driscoll's batteries on behalf of exploited farmworkers, picketed with striking teachers and hotel employees, promoted the public banking movement, participated in civil disobedience with the poor people's campaign, and helped institute ranked choice voting in Maine.

MPP political director Carol Ehrle, a former journalist and media relations specialist, stated that the MPP was focused on establishing coalitions with progressive and non-profit organizations and labor unions like the AFL-CIO whose executive council endorsed MPP.

In 2017, the AFL-CIO passed a resolution stating that "whether candidates are elected from the Republican or Democratic Party, the interests of Wall Street [over working people and labor] have been protected" and that "the time has passed when we can passively settle for the lesser of two evils politics."

In his 2016 book *Bernie and the Sandernistas*, Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of Counterpunch website, criticized Bernie Sanders, the left-wing Democratic Party stalwart, for being a fake revolutionary who failed to speak out enough against U.S. foreign policy and directed his followers into the counter-revolutionary fold of the Democratic Party.

According to St. Clair, during the 2016 presidential campaign Sanders should have done precisely with the MPP is now doing – mobilize his followers to support civil disobedience and direct-action protests and link up with those directly challenging corporate power.

The MPP on its website is calling for a new economic bill of rights that would guarantee employment, food, clothing, leisure, a living wage, housing, healthcare, social security, education and freedom from monopolies and unfair competition to every American.

Based on the model of FDR's New Deal, it wants to set up a massive public works program that will help generate full employment and revitalize America's infrastructure.

Other planks call for free Medicare-For-All, free public college and quality education, the abolishment of free-trade agreements that benefit large corporations, a fair tax code that increases inheritance taxes and tax on the wealthy, banning offshore oil drilling and fracking, improvement of public transportation, sustainable agriculture and strong legislation that supports labor unions and workplace democracy, including through encouragement of workers cooperatives.

A skeptic would suggest that these latter measures are unfeasible in the American system and that some of the measures are being advanced by the Democratic Party.

Public opinion polls show, however, that most of these measures are widely supported by the electorate, while the Democratic Party leadership remains wedded to large corporations.

The frontrunner in the 2020 party primary, Joe Biden, stated that the "rich and powerful" are not a problem and has a long record of supporting corporate friendly legislation. Many of the other contenders also have dubious backgrounds, including Kamala Harris who upheld the death penalty in the state of California as a district attorney and covered up for prosecutorial misconduct.

If a third party should emerge anywhere, Oklahoma is a prime target. Over a decade of austerity policies have decimated public and higher education in the state and cut basic services to Third World levels. A Guardian article in 2017 described a dire situation where a teacher was seen panhandling to buy supplies for her classroom, county jails were dangerously overcrowded and riddled with abuse, and families had to wait 10 years just to get on a wait list to obtain state support for caring for a disabled child – all while nearly one in four children struggled with hunger.

The state Legislature in the face of this crisis remained fixated on sustaining low tax rates for the oil corporations that fund its representatives. Fracking pioneer Harold Hamm, the 43rd wealthiest man on the planet, is a prime donor of the state's Republican Party, while the Democrats receive substantial funding from oil industry billionaire George Kaiser, a self-professed "red state robber baron" who helped turn the state into his own private tax haven.

Historian Richard Hofstadter compares third parties in American history to bees who sting and then die. Their sting is nevertheless sharply felt, even if for a fleeting moment, along with their buzz.

The MPP is a promising new organization that could yield a major impact. The time is indeed ripe for a new third party to blossom and there is no time to lose.

Tulsan Jeremy Kuzmarov is author of four books on U.S. foreign policy including most recently Obama's Unending Wars: Fronting the Foreign Policy of the Permanent Warfare State [Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2019] and The Russians are Coming, Again: The First Cold War as Tragedy, the Second as Farce, with John Marciano [New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018].

Only Civic Driven Voter Turnout Can Defeat Tweeter Trump

BY RALPH NADER

Does the Democratic Party know how to defeat the foul-mouthed, bigoted, self-enriching crony capitalist Donald Trump? Trump pretends to be a populist. In reality he does the bidding of Wall Street instead of Main Street and weakens or repeals governmental health and safety programs.

Defeating corrupt, disgraceful, disastrous Donald should be easy. He is, on many documented fronts, the worst and most indictable president in U.S. history. Moreover, Trump is personally obscene and is a walking tortfeasor against women.

He is a politician who doesn't read and doesn't think. He doesn't know anything about government and doesn't care about the rule of law. All he seems to know how to do is stoke the war machine with taxpayer dollars and shut down law enforcement agencies designed to protect the health, safety, and economic wellbeing of citizens from today's Big Business robber barons.

Dumb as he is on the matters of public policies, Trump is a cunning schemer and a master of deflection. For Trump, every day is a reality show, in which he must dominate the news cycle with his destructive, personal politics of distraction.

The mass media, looking for ratings and readers, can't get off its Trump high. He even taunts them with this conceit.

In our autocratic two-party duopoly, the country is left with the anemic, corporatized Democratic Party establishment to save the country. Every day the Democratic National Committee [DNC] feverishly calls big donors. Most candidates are addicted to the narcotic of campaign money and think their pathetic political consultants will solve their electoral problems.

Then there are the 20 or so Democratic presidential candidates exhausting themselves by trying to stand out from one another while fitting into the straightjacket of the DNC's rules and debate format. Some are advancing major changes and reforms, such as Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. The DNC apparatchiks, however, would rather have Joe Biden. Even so, some party bosses worry that his age, gaffes, and past record could make him a Hillary redux, should his current makeover not stick.

None of the presidential candidates are taking on Trump directly. A few glancing ripostes, sure, but most Democratic candidates think attacking Trump is a distraction from their proposals for America. They don't seem to be listening to viewpoints such

as those stated by Ana Maria Archila, of the Center for Popular Democracy: "Don't just condemn the racism and the language but use it as an opportunity to argue for a vision of the country in which we can all be included." In reality, the Democratic candidates all fear taking Trump on daily in this way, because of his intimidating personal smear tactics supinely reported by the mass media, which rarely allows rebuttals to Trump's trash talking.

Now comes the possible crucial third factor in the race. Well-funded, vigorous voter turnout drives in 10 states that are driven exclusively by the civic community. Freed of the shackles of the serial loser DNC, this independent civic drive can easily turn the tide in these key electoral swing states.

Based on past elections, there will be 120 million non-voters in 2020. Bringing out 10 million non-voters in states like Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Missouri, Arizona, Colorado, and Montana could swamp Trump, who is stuck with greasing his minority base of frenzied supporters. Getting out the voters who stayed home four years ago is also a priority.

An independent civic initiative, funded by small and large donations, can also jettison the Republican control of the Senate and end the Republican stacking of the federal judiciary with corporate right-wing ideologues. The DNC can help ensure a Democratic Senate by convincing some tractionless presidential candidates to return to their states and run for the Senate. Gov. Steve Bullock of Montana will be more valuable in the Senate than clinging to the debate stage.

Then there is the prospect of Trump defeating himself. He never recognizes any boundaries and is convinced that he can get away with anything because he always has. He is a repulsive loud-mouth and has been a serial fugitive from justice since his years as a shady businessman.

Trump knows that the Democrats don't want to get down in the mud with him. So he makes the mud their quicksand, with the media dittoheads replaying his reality TV show monologues. If there are any Democratic Party activists who know how to goad Trump regularly, they had better step forward.

The sum of Trump's electoral strategy is lying by the hour, creating false scenarios, false achievements, and phony promises conveyed by relentless intimidation. His Achilles heel is being goaded by

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How To Lose The Rule Of Law

PLAUSIBLE LEGALITY

Legal Culture And Political

Imperative In The Global War On Terror

By Rebecca Sanders

Oxford University Press

248 pages, \$45

BY MARY ELLEN O'CONNELL

It's been almost 20 years since 9/11 and the declaration of a "war on terror." That "war" didn't rid the world of terrorism, but it did fundamentally alter perceptions of lawful and moral conduct in foreign affairs. The use of torture, indefinite detention, government surveillance, assassination and other crimes in the name of American security led to widespread political and scholarly condemnation – but no longer.

Rebecca Sanders investigates why Americans so swiftly abandoned bedrock legal norms in her insightful book *Plausible Legality: Legal Culture and Political Imperative in the Global War on Terror*.

The United States is uniquely dependent on the rule of law. It was founded as a nation under law, not the rule of a monarch or a political institution. The founders hypothesized that law could bind a disparate people together, one lacking a common history, ethnicity and religion. In the United States the rule of law is not a luxury; it is the very definition of who we are.

Sanders, a political scientist at the University of Cincinnati, orients her book around this exact point – the existential importance of law to the United States. She finds that by 9/11 the country had developed a culture antithetical to law, one in which "legal rationalization" has come to dominate.

We now value the rhetoric justifying noncompliance as much as, and sometimes more than, compliance.

The book is a wake-up call to this marked deterioration of the country's founding concept. The erosion in respect for law that it describes becomes rapid with the end of the Cold War. Some lawyers do continue to demand law compliance – consider the lawyers defending prisoners at Guantanamo – but Sanders fears the erosion has gone too far to be corrected. Beyond the acute post-9/11 crimes, she studies the steady weakening of the American commitment to the rule

of law in general.

Norms "could eventually be undone ... through a quiet and unexceptional process of plausibly legal re-interpretation" [168]. This is the point of her book. It is a political, sociological and historical analysis, not a legal one.

To unravel how the United States reached this point, Sanders constructs three heuristics based on evidence of certain attitudes toward law in various periods of the nation's history. All three attitudes are present throughout, but she finds one or the other tended to dominate at certain times.

From the founding period to the start of the Cold War, Americans in power engaged in a "culture of exceptionalism." During the Cold War, the government adhered to a "culture of secrecy," but when secrecy could no longer be maintained, a culture of "legal rationalization" or "plausible legality" took over.

Sanders's heuristics are more useful and accessible than typical political science models for analyzing historical and social attitudes toward the law. Political science models tend toward overgeneralizations, as in the prisoner's dilemma model, or too much detail respecting particular incidents, as with so many models of the Cuban missile crisis.

Sanders avoids these problems by focusing on actual events and providing enough historical facts to support her case for a dominant attitude toward law by U.S. foreign policy makers in three periods. She is able to link the identification of these dominant attitudes to the reasons for foreign policy decisions in defiance of law. These heuristics work to open awareness of how government officials sworn to uphold the law could so patently violate it.

Exceptionalism characterizes all periods of American life and helps to explain the attitude that the United States is a superior nation entitled to ignore the rules that bind lesser states. It is an attitude as

evident in the first years of the Republic as it was at the end of the Cold War when the country emerged as the sole superpower.

It is not, however, the attitude most destructive to the rule of law. Nor is the attitude of secrecy, which is also part of every era. Keeping law violations secret is a form of admission of wrongdoing. "Plausible deniability" was cooked up especially for the Cold War. It fit the culture of secrecy that grew out of a recognition that torture, invasion and assassination would not be tolerated in the human rights era that emerged following the Axis Power's atrocities in the Second World War. American presidents, therefore, adopted illegal practices but in such a way that allowed plausible deniability.

When the Cold War ended, however, so did the perceived need to keep law violations secret. The Clinton Administration dramatically disregarded the UN Charter prohibition on the use of force with a 78-day bombing campaign during the Kosovo crisis. It could not be kept secret and was the first major U.S. use of military force since 1945 in which no reference was made to the UN Charter to justify the start of the attack.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is said to have told her British counterpart to get new lawyers if his were making a fuss about violating international law in attacking Serbia.

Clinton also ordered the bombing of Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan on, at best, flimsy justifications. Bombing and missile attacks are hard to hide and that came to include the first use of a drone to carry out an extrajudicial execution by Hellfire in 2000.

By 9/11, classified policies and practices were impossible to keep under wraps. Civil and human rights advocacy groups demanded government transparency, and U.S. officials understood they needed legal cover to avoid the scrutiny of courts and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] for very public law violations. And they succeeded because both government and

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academic legal scholars moved U.S. policy from plausible deniability to "plausible legality." Suddenly Congress and the courts embraced this ideological shift with open arms, caught up in the new culture.

The transition was aided by Bush

Administration officials expecting scrutiny from liberal human rights lawyers. Administration lawyers moved to provide legal cover with little apparent concern for the normative principles embedded in the substance of rules. Killing outside armed conflict hostilities, holding

800 men and boys captive at Guantanamo, and torturing detainees were all asserted to be lawful. The administration's lawyers wrote memos, briefs and law review articles. They correctly predicted that the courts, Congress and the public would find their arguments plausible. Within months of 9/11, the United States had replaced plausible deniability with plausible legality.

The approach did not end after Bush's presidency. Barack Obama signed an executive order ending torture, but he failed to fulfill other U.S. obligations under the Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Conventions regarding the prosecution of perpetrators of torture, including lawyers who gave erroneous legal advice.

Beyond ending torture, Obama did little. He refused to take on the political cost of ordering Gitmo closed under his commander-in-chief authority, and he dramatically increased assassinations by drone. He personally authorized the extrajudicial killing of a U.S. citizen. To obscure it all, Obama's lawyers took up the practice of plausible legality in their own memos, articles, briefs, speeches, tweets and blog posts.

Sanders's critical point is that the plausible legality culture of our times not only led to extraordinary suffering, but it also is uniquely undermining respect for law. The culture of legal rationalization is more destructive than the cultures of exceptionalism and secrecy. If the courts accept absurd definitions of torture, fair trial, imminent attack and zone of armed conflict, why should anyone take any law seriously? Her concern is supported by even more evidence a year after the book went to press.

Donald Trump's lawyers pay little or no attention to the law prohibiting the use of force, extrajudicial killing or indefinite detention. Treaty obligations and Security Council mandates are often deemed inconvenient and given little, if any, consideration.

Disrespect for international law has migrated to

disrespect for U.S. law. Colleagues focus now on the risk of losing our democracy [see Aziz Z. Huq and Tom Ginsburg, *How to Save a Constitutional Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, 2018], but failure to comply with bedrock norms of international law is the first step toward contempt for law in general, including the Constitution.

Reversing the crisis will require a comprehensive approach, and Sanders is justifiably pessimistic over the prospects for success. Getting the United States to end serious international law violations is an almost overwhelming challenge.

Much basic knowledge of international law has been lost in the years of plausible deniability and plausible legality. Positivist and materialist legal theory and realist political theory have combined to leave us with no answer to the question, Why obey law that conveys no short-term benefit or detriment? Understanding law compliance for the good of the other has been lost. [I go into detail on the impact of realism on legal culture in a chapter in Karen Greenberg's forthcoming edited collection, *Reimagining the National Security State: Liberalism on the Brink*, Cambridge University Press, 2019.]

Sanders touches on realism, exposing the theory's antipathy for law. But, in my view, as a political scientist she could have gone much further in exploring realism's impact. Realism is based on Thomas Hobbes's dark view of human nature. It concludes that only material power matters in international relations.

Law is an ideational construct dependent on good faith and belief in the common good. It requires a Grotian understanding of peoples' basic goodness and capacity for altruism.

Sanders considers that liberalism and neoconservatism are the alternatives to realism. They are not. Both "isms" are heavily influenced by realism. The

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Turnout

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

mockery and accusations symmetrical to what he is dishing out. That's the way overreaching bullies are brought down.

His vanities are the roadmap. He is sensitive to charges of having a "low-IQ," of his presidency being characterized as a "disaster," of being anything other than "a stable genius," of being nicknamed, of having a snarling visage with unattractive bulging body parts, of being a racist, a tool of Wall Street, wasteful of taxpayers' money, and of not creating infrastructures, jobs he promised.

The Trump presidency has brought us the first ever reduction of life expectancy in the U.S., the stagnation of wages, and an avalanche of cancerous particulates into the water and air of our country. Including his coal country base!

He gives his crowds verbal "red meat," while giving Washington away to the big bankers and the "greed hounds" of big business. He is a flatterer and flummoxer of people who let their emotions displace what is best for the communities where they live, work, and raise their children. People are being battered by record-breaking intense heat, storms, floods, tornados, droughts, and Trump tells them the climate crisis is a hoax. All while his programs worsen the situation.

It is time to persuade a large majority of voters that Trump is the Fake President destroying the best in America and bringing out the worst. But he has to be directly confronted on all fronts. No more free rides for the Tweeter

Nader.org

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

to promise it will produce a better, Oklahoma-centric plan. The pledge rings hollow – akin to Donald Trump’s vow to come up with a big, beautiful replacement for ObamaCare.

The working group is to begin meeting this month. It should not take long to determine its priorities: Expanding health coverage to as many working poor as possible or protecting a system that lines the pockets of big insurance, big pharma and big healthcare providers?

In the meantime, we urge all who care about the health of the least among us and about the future of rural hospitals and nursing homes to take action.

First, sign the SQ 802 petition – 178,000 valid signatures are needed by 5 p.m. Oct. 28 to force a state-wide vote on Medicaid expansion.

Second, remind working group members, via phone call or letter, that Medicaid expansion is a no-brainer. The next 16 months will determine whether Oklahoma is destined for a healthier, more prosperous era – no matter where you live or how much you make – or to remain a bottom-feeder on virtually every health index.

Living Wage

First-year U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn’s vote against H.R. 582 – aimed at raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour – ignited fierce debate among 5th District Democrats.

Some railed against what they regard as Horn’s “blue dog” conservatism – in effect, Republican lite. Others seemed to accept her explanation she’s not opposed to a minimum wage hike – just to H.R. 582’s “one-size-fits-all” approach.

Ultimately, Horn’s vote is not likely to be anything more than symbolic. Though the Democratic-controlled House approved it, the GOP-dominated Senate won’t even consider it for fearing of alienating its corporate masters.

Still, symbolism is important in politics. Democrats must stand unwaveringly with the nation’s working class – providing voters a stark contrast with Republicans whose fealty is to the 1%.

Horn is correct that a reasonable minimum wage is different in Shawnee than in San Francisco. Yet we would argue \$15 an hour is actually closer to a living wage in central Oklahoma than in the Bay Area.

It is worth noting, however, the Congressional Budget Office offered a mixed assessment of the proposed hike from \$7.25 to \$15 an hour, saying it could cost an estimated 1.3 million jobs while increasing wages for 17 million workers.

While we, too, were disappointed in Horn’s vote, we balance it against support she has given to myriad is-

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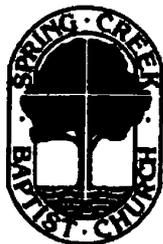
sues of importance to progressives. For example, she was the only member of Oklahoma’s DC delegation to favor a resolution condemning President Trump’s racist tweets aimed at four Democratic congresswomen.

It’s also important to contrast Horn’s record against what could be expected from her already announced 2020 Republican challengers, longtime GOP operative Terry Neese and state Sen. Stephanie Bice. They undoubtedly would be rubber stamps in the Tom Cole-Frank Lucas-Markwayne Mullin mold.

Horn’s victory in central Oklahoma’s 5th District represented a giant leap forward for a beleaguered state Democratic Party and for long-suffering left-of-center voters. Her one minimum wage vote is not sufficient reason for progressives to sit idly while right-wingers take direct aim at unseating Horn.

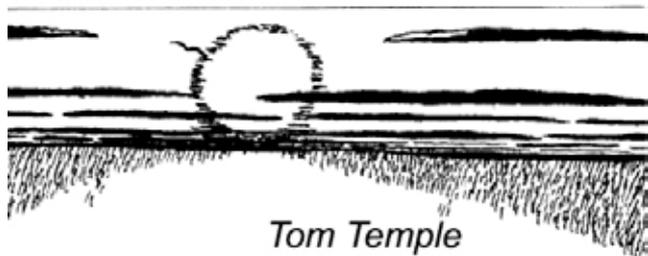
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Observerscope



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Can you spell i-r-o-n-y? A potential Bible shortage could be a consequence of Chinese tariffs proposed by evangelicals' beloved president, Donald Trump. How so? Millions of Bibles are printed in China.

Hmmm ... Speaker McCall OKs GOP lawmakers' interim studies into virtual learning and state funding formulas for virtual charters but rejects Democratic proposals to probe virtual charter attendance and performance. Simply favoring the home team or protecting big donors promoting vouchers?

Oklahomans shine brightly in national Young Democrats hierarchy: Joshua Harris-Till is new president, Sache Primeaux-Shaw is National Native Caucus chairwoman and Tasneem Ahmad Al-Michael is National College Caucus chair.

Tulsa Democrat Melissa Provenzano's request to study virtual charter attendance was rejected, but Speaker Charles McCall OK'd her efforts to dig into crippling student loan debt – a grave problem for many Oklahomans.

The feds' decision not to house immigrant children at Fort Sill is a testament to the power of citizen activism. Opponents showed up in big numbers in Lawton to oppose Trump's inhumane policy.

We mourn the passing of former OK Ethics Commissioner Jim Loy, who teamed up with the late John Raley to clamp down on special interest gift-giving to lawmakers. The clean government rule didn't endure, but it was the right thing to do.

Trump effect? 84% in recent IBM-Watson Health-NPR poll say they believe Americans generally have gotten angrier in the past year. Forty-seven percent of respondents conceded they, too, are more irate.

If you still harbor doubts about the opioid epidemic, consider this: 1.4 billion pills were prescribed in Oklahoma between 2006-12 – or about 54 per Oklahoman, the nation's sixth highest rate. – DEA data

Wow! In case you missed it, former President Carter, 94, and wife Rosalynn, 91, celebrated their 73rd anniversary last month. True American heroes.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

organs from a dead body. If the fetus is a person, it is a person with a vastly expanded set of legal rights, rights available to no other class of citizen: the fetus may make free, non-consensual use of another living person's uterus and blood supply, and cause permanent, unwanted changes to another person's body. In the relationship between fetus and woman, the woman is granted fewer rights than a corpse."

Speak Up, Speak Out so that women can remain free!

Barbara Bannon
Tulsa

Editor's Note: Barbara Bannon is co-chair of the Reproductive Justice Team of All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa.

Editor, The Observer:

Imagine this 2008 scenario: Obama wins the presidency via the Electoral College, eking out close victories in four key states because of an unusual African-American voter turnout. McCain wins the popular vote by nearly three million.

Obama, thrice married with an undeniable reputation as a womanizer, brags how he "gets his way" with women because of his "star status."

Once elected, several of Obama's staffers are arrested and brought to trial for financial shenanigans and/or for their connections to the Russian's successful effort to meddle in our election.

Subsequent to being elected, Obama has FOUR "closed door" meetings with Vladimir Putin. No transcripts or other records of what transpired in those meetings will ever be available.

Outcome: Obama is impeached and removed from office in about a year by the Republican-controlled Congress.

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Franken touched a woman's breasts
Which was done in total jest
Gestures by President Trump
Encompass a woman's rump
Who wins or loses this quest?

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa



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

Build A Wall To Keep Them In

BY FROMA HARROP

Last winter, I found myself in a hospital intensive care unit for three days. I was hooked onto all kinds of boxes, bags and beeping machines. Stuck in the bed, I watched a lot of bad TV.

The people who came into my room became my only contact with the human world. At least half were immigrants in jobs ranging from menial to super-duper specialist. Nearly all the hospital staff was caring, but somehow the foreign-born workers tended to form a more intimate connection.

What was it? The answer, perhaps, is that most came from less prosperous parts of the world where physically helping one another – as opposed to clicking an app for a service – is an expected part of life.

They didn't just drop the lunch tray for the woman in room 402 but rather interacted on a personal level. Enjoy your lunch. Is there anything else you need? Is the tray where you want it?

I know they kept it up even though many of the patients they dealt with were selfish and dismissive of foreigners as important.

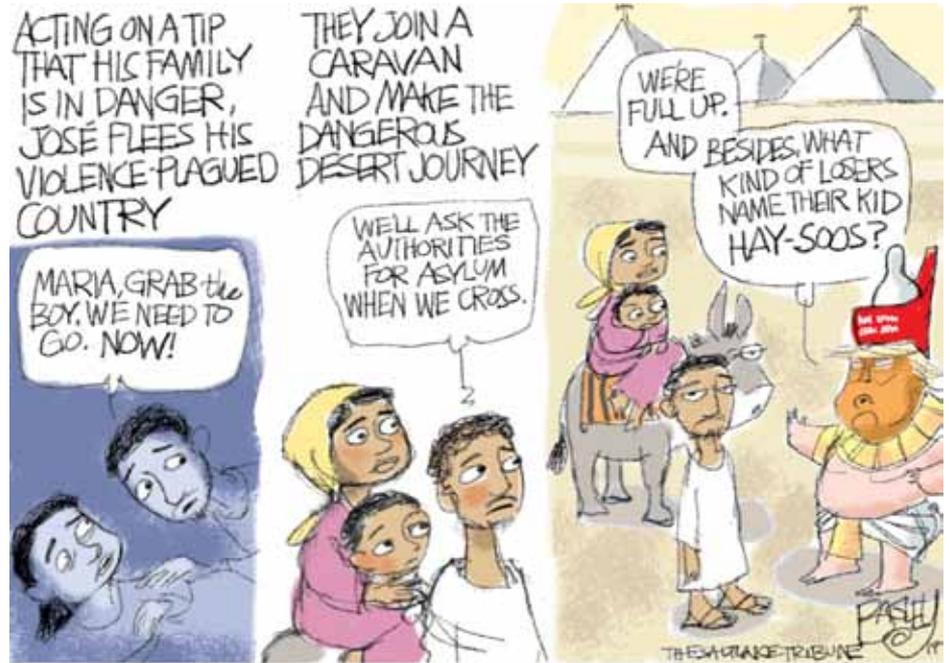
Before going on, let me make clear that I support an orderly immigration system and respect for our laws. And I generally support reforms that give heavier weight to skilled immigrants.

However, we must not undervalue qualities not necessarily associated with "skills." I refer to poor people brimming with energy and kindness.

Americans will increasingly depend on such immigrants as an aging population requires more medical attention. The Institute of Medicine projects we will need 3.5 million additional healthcare workers by 2030.

Demand will rise for 650,000 additional workers to do "direct care," according to the Health Resources and Services Administration. These are the home health and personal care aides and nurses who will enable more older Americans to live at home, where most of them say they prefer to be.

A visit to any sizable hospital shows how reliant today's health care system is on a mixture of native and foreign-born. I recall two female nurses, really nice natives of Indiana and North Carolina, and a male nurse from Brooklyn. Another was an American-born Latina whose parents had immigrated to Florida. Those were the native-born Americans.



The head doctor at the ICU was from Russia. He would come by to explain my interesting case, critically low sodium, to residents hailing from all over. [By the way, sodium deficiency becomes a common problem during heat waves when people sweat a lot.]

The doctor never treated me with detachment. I was more than a body with bad numbers that needed fixing. He would squeeze my hands as reassurance.

Other workers cleaning rooms or wheeling oxygen tanks out of elevators had voices from the Caribbean. The woman from food services came from Ecuador. She took my meal orders with four-fork professionalism. As we got to know each other, she became especially attentive. It took her a while to warm up, perhaps because – as I've noted – many patients treat workers, especially foreign ones, as unimportant servants.

I'll never forget the man with one of the least glamorous jobs in the place – collecting plastic bags of garbage at night. It was 10 p.m. on a Saturday, and I was feeling a bit lonely reading on my lighted Kindle.

The man silently emptied my trash can and, upon seeking me sitting in the dark, said in an African accent, "I hope you feel better very soon." I almost cried.

America needs people with technical skills, that's true. But some virtues cannot be measured by standardized tests. In reforming our immigration program, let's recognize that humanity is another quality that often seems in short supply.

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Rule Of Law

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

liberalism of the post-Cold War period, which John Mearsheimer calls “liberal hegemonism,” and neo-conservatism accept the use of military force regardless of legality to promote their agendas. The only actual theoretical alternative to realism in the Western philosophical canon is the commitment to the rule of law based on fundamental moral principles.

As the United States acquired more material power following the Second World War, George Kennan at the University of Chicago in 1951 was able to open the way for realism’s future dominance when he condemned the traditional “legalism-moralism” of U.S. foreign policy. He produced a slogan that cleared the way for today’s “realism-materialism” as the ideology that led inexorably to the election of Donald Trump and away from, first, international law and, now, the rule of law.

For Sanders, Trump’s positions are striking, not simply because they endorse human rights abuses in the name of counterterrorism, but because they so flagrantly embrace violations of American and international law. ... [T]hey point to efforts to push legal culture ... toward a culture of exception. President Trump’s hostility to legal norms and judicial review are indicative of an emergent strand of Western politics outside liberal, legalistic rights culture. [153]

China’s emergence as a world leader demonstrates

the imperative need to overcome the Trumpian trend. China’s challenge to the U.S. could finally persuade Americans to return to the long-standing commitment to authentic law at home and abroad.

Some hopeful indications have emerged with, for example, the resolutions to withdraw from the Yemen civil war and new political interest in environmental protection, arms control, refugee rights and ending inequality. These goals require treaties and other tools of international law.

Sanders is right, however, that “[t]hroughout the global war on terror, American policymakers manipulated law to permit what it should constrain. Forging a national security legal culture that resists this logic is necessary if human rights and humanitarian law are to effectively check human rights abuses in the future” [168]. Building a new legal culture of resistance to law violation is a task of revolutionary dimensions.

The decline in respect for law to this point took decades. We do not have decades for a turnaround. Sanders’s book pinpoints the problem and provides a concrete and, I believe, doable project: Teach against the dangerous concept of plausible legality. Replace it with renewed understanding of genuine legality and revive the American ideal of legalism-moralism.

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