

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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SKINNING FAT CATS

*How To Solve Oklahoma's Perennial Budget Crises?
Reverse Income Tax Cuts That Mostly Benefit The Rich.*

TAX "REFORM"



Cover Story begins on page 6



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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Howdy!

With this, the first issue of our 52nd year, The Observer welcomes a passel of new subscribers – many joining us thanks to holiday gifts from our faithful family of subscribers.

As you skim through our pages, you'll quickly discover we're unlike anything else published in a state dominated by a lockstep conservative mainstream media.

While they shamelessly trumpet the interests of the deep-pocketed, silk-stocking 1%, we champion equality and fairness for all – regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual preference or socio-economic status.

We're unabashedly liberal, a rollicking journal of free voices that fearlessly speaks truth to power, laser-focuses on hypocrisy and corruption, and unfailingly stands up for the least among us.

You likely won't agree with everything we publish. Neither do we. But we believe few things contribute to a healthy democracy quite like a raucous public square, full of diverse ideas and respectful debate.

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

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

If you like what you see, we'd be forever grateful if you'd introduce others to The Observer. Our annual holiday gift campaign – see page 7 for details – continues through January, with one-year subscriptions 30%-plus off the cover price.

Welcome aboard!

Behind The Curtain

Thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court's disastrous Citizens United decision, big money is as emblematic of American politics as the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey, making it harder than ever for

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Observerscope



You won't want to miss our first Observer Newsmakers of 2020, featuring People Not Politicians Exec Director Andy Moore discussing SQ 804 at Full Circle Books Jan. 9, 6-7 p.m. See back cover for more details.

Laurel: To U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn, only DC delegation member with the courage to vote for impeachment. History will not treat Oklahoma's four GOP sycophants well.

For the record: Thanks to impeachment, Donald Trump is no longer eligible for pardon [think: Ford-Nixon]. Article II, section 2 of the Constitution gives presidents the power to pardon with one exception: "in cases of impeachment."

Dart: To Epic Charter Schools, suing Shawnee Sen. Ron Sharp for libel and slander. Sharp is doing what he was elected to do: provide oversight on state spending. The suit reeks of bullying.

Efforts to legalize recreational pot are ramping up, less than two years after voters OK'd medical marijuana. So far, the state has issued 228,000 patient and 6,500-plus dispensary licenses and collected \$20.9 million in new revenue.

Laurel: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, notifying the nativist Trump administration Oklahoma will continue welcoming refugees next year. It's the least we can do as thanks for the bounty we enjoy.

GOP lawmakers are mostly reserving comment, but they're clearly ticked that state agencies won't talk to them without clearance from the governor. Stitt's proposed budget could end up in the dumpster faster than most.

Dart: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, ratcheting up his foolish fight over gaming compacts by exercising the state's authority to audit tribal casinos. He could use a Dale Carnegie course.

While the governor plays politics with Medicaid expansion, the state's overall health declines – a 17% jump in obesity in the last six years. Thirty years ago, America's Health Rankings listed OK at No. 32. Now we're 47th.

Attention, Gov. Stitt: Oklahoma also is Bottom 10 – 47th – for broadband connectivity, according to a Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City study. Hard to compete these days without access to reliable high-speed internet.

Laurel: To Rep. Mickey Dollens, D-OKC, proposing "Fair Pay to Play" legislation that would allow college athletes to profit off their name, image and likeness – just like Olympic amateurs.

Faith alone won't be enough to secure admission to the first Governor's Prayer Breakfast, Feb. 18 at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. A table of 10 costs \$1,000. Jesus weeps.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

A lot of us are not impressed by the claim that unemployment is the lowest in 50 years because we know perfectly well there is a moral problem behind the statistics.

Since the minimum wage has never been indexed to inflation as if pretending it doesn't matter, it has the effect of constantly lowering standards of living near the bottom and making it necessary for many to hold two or even three jobs to make ends meet.

Of course these second and third jobs pump up employment figures without admitting they have what Bernie Sanders calls "starvation wages."

While taxes have been slashed to reward billionaires for their help in political campaigns, the minimum wage sinks every year toward Third World standards.

But everyone knows that when Christ said "Blessed are the poor" he didn't bless leaders who intentionally make more people poor by passing vicious laws that abuse their power and pull justice down.

Harry Compton
Bartlesville

Editor, The Observer:

I don't like or trust people who are liars, bullies, bigots, crooks, misogynists or egotists. I guess that I must be old fashioned or from the old school.

R. Hal Long
Garber

Editor, The Observer:

Talk about your archetypal Republican proposal. State Sen. David Bullard of Durant wants to give businesses who hold blood drives tax breaks based upon the success of the drive and, therefore, upon the blood of its employees.

Yep, he says such businesses should receive a \$20 tax credit per blood donor. This being a Republican bill, the actual blood donor would not receive a tax credit.

It was bad enough working for companies that coerced United Way "donations" out of underpaid staffers in order to get a decal on the front door. Under this proposal, proving yourself a "team player" would mean more than just sweating blood for the bosses.

Gary Edmondson
Duncan

Editor, The Observer:

We are 92 and 87. This is the worst form of politics ever in our life!

I can only stress how much the GOP has damaged our country – local, state, federal. I wish everyone who thinks so would call and request our senators and representatives stand up and represent the people and protect the Constitution.

Rena Charmasson
Woodward

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to U.S. Sen. James Lankford:

I would appreciate your comments about:

1. Recent news reports that some U.S. senators in your political party have received campaign donations from the Trump campaign in light of the likelihood of an impeachment trial in the Senate.

2. The report in the article "Afghan Way of Death" [New Yorker, Oct. 20, 2019] stating, among other items, that CIA-led and -commanded paralegals in Afghanistan are raiding residences and shooting to death the occupants of the residences, including women and children.

3. Trump's personal liability for \$2 million due to fraud by his charitable organization.

Thank you for your response.

Andrew T. Dalton Jr.
Tulsa

Editor's Note: Dalton wrote this letter to Lankford on Nov. 12. "Guess what?" Dalton writes to us. "No response as of Dec. 12. Perhaps you are better able to get a response." Sen. Lankford?

Editor, The Observer:

If Republican wingnuts in the Oklahoma Legislature actually manage to rename famous Oklahoma tourist attractions, like our section of Route 66, in a ridiculous

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Not A Good Way To Start 2020

It mystifies many political pros why Gov. Kevin Stitt is doubling, tripling and quadrupling down on his feud with the state's tribes over gaming compacts.

The reason actually is quite simple: Money.

Nearing completion of his first year in public office, Stitt remains a political greenhorn. But as an accounting major who built a sizeable mortgage company, he's undoubtedly read his share of balance sheets.

State government's finances are less than stellar. 2018's gross production tax (GPT) increase and an improved economy gave lawmakers their first breathing room in nearly a decade.

But it doesn't take a rocket scientist – or a mortgage broker – to detect headwinds building. Oil patch activity is down 60%. Farmers report being pushed to the financial brink. Layoff notices are in the news.

Then, less than a week before Christmas, the State Board of Equalization formally delivered a lump of coal: lawmakers are likely to have less than one-tenth of 1% more available to spend in 2020.

That offers scant hope that serious, sorely needed investments can be made in vital, long-starved state services like schools and healthcare.

In hiking the GPT two years ago, NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd.'s Republican supermajority resembled frogs in an ever-warming pot. They clearly aren't keen on another tax increase, especially since it would mean their political benefactors – Oklahoma's deepest pockets – would [or should] be targets to pay more.

Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat sought recently to apply lipstick to the pig, depicting himself as "cautiously optimistic about the revenue outlook for next year" while insisting "steps taken by the Legislature in recent years to shore up our financial standing are working."

Stitt's public comments indicate he took office believing the state could cut its way to prosperity. But in targeting a larger share of the tribe's largesse, he

is in fact acknowledging reality: a Top 10 state cannot be built on Third World revenues.

The governor's strategy is a huge gamble. Rather than quietly approach tribal leaders to discuss ways to improve both bottom lines, he publicly announced first that he wanted more favorable terms. Bad form. Disrespectful.

Stitt continues to ignore warnings from Republicans and Democrats alike that the law is on the tribes' side: the compacts auto-renew Jan. 1.

Early on in the dust-up, the governor enlisted Attorney General Mike Hunter's help, but it didn't take long for him to bow out, pitching the political hot potato back to Stitt.

Even worse, Stitt's secretary for Native American affairs, Lisa Billy abruptly resigned just before Christmas, calling the governor's strategy "an unnecessary conflict that poses a real risk of lasting damage to the state-tribal relationship and our economy."

Billy's departure was a stunner. She was a terrific choice for Stitt's cabinet: a former longtime Republican legislator, well regarded on both sides of the political aisle, who also serves in the Chickasaw legislature and appeared frequently in tribe-sponsored television commercials.

Finally, Stitt's administration sprayed gasoline onto a smoldering fire by sending letters to gaming tribes advising the state would exercise its authority to audit gaming operations beginning Jan. 2. Thirty-two tribal leaders sent a joint letter to the governor alleging he is threatening their casino vendors.

The danger in this standoff is that real people will get hurt as vital services are cut further.

And no one will have to wonder who fired the first shot.

Just when workaday Oklahomans believed progress was being made on the services that benefit them most, Stitt picks a needless fight with the tribes and the carbon-heavy economy gets all wobbly.

Not a good way to start 2020.

Simple Solution: Tax Fairness

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

At her OKC campaign rally last month, Democratic presidential contender Elizabeth Warren renewed her call for a wealth tax on the uber-rich to fund vital government services that help workaday folks.

“Whatever issue gets you going,” she said, “if there is a decision to be made in Washington, I guarantee it has been influenced by money. It has been shaped by money. It has had loopholes created by money.”

Warren just as easily could have been describing her native state, Oklahoma, which under mostly Republican leadership the last decade-plus has embarked on a crusade to shift as much of the tax burden as possible from the state’s wealthiest to its working class.

The disastrous consequences of the GOP’s fealty to trickle-down economics have been recounted ad nauseam. Oklahoma languishes near the bottom nationally of almost every socioeconomic category, abysmal rankings fueled by chronic underfunding of everything from public education to mental health.

As 2020 begins, it’s time for Oklahoma to take a page from Warren’s [and Bernie Sanders’ and other presidential contenders’] playbook and pursue “big structural change.”

Deborah Astley

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More tax reform coverage, pages 30-32

That means serious tax reform that prioritizes the needs of the 99% over the greed of the wealthiest 1%.

Admittedly, it’s a pipe dream given the Legislature’s current Republican supermajorities and GOP governor. But it will never happen unless courageous elected [and soon-to-be elected?] representatives start pressing the case that Oklahoma has a taxing – not a spending – problem.

Why now? Three reasons:

First, it’s an election year, an opportunity to seat more tax-reformers in the Legislature.

Second, Warren and Co. rhetoric serves to remind state legislators [who slightly hiked gross production taxes in 2018] that raising taxes is not an automatic death sentence politically.

Third – and perhaps most importantly – Oklahoma’s revenue ship is listing again due to continued over-reliance on what is arguably the most volatile of all industries: oil and gas.

Just before Christmas, the State Board of Equalization announced state lawmakers likely will be wrestling with what amounts to a flat budget for FY 2021 – only about one-tenth of 1% more than it spent on the current budget.

That number is skewed slightly, though, because the Legislature opted to deposit \$225 million more into savings than is required by law. Oklahoma actually should have about 2.5% more – \$206.8 million – for state services next year.

Either way, in the context of an \$8 billion-plus budget, that is pocket change. Not even close to what is needed to make serious investments in chronically underfunded vital state services.

As the Oklahoma Policy Institute’s Executive Director Ahniwake Rose put it, “Oklahoma will not be able to save or cut our way to prosperity. We should take advantage of continued revenue growth to prioritize crucial investments in education, health care, human services and public safety.

“A great deal of work remains for Oklahoma to undo the damage from a decade of budget cuts, let alone move forward with much needed improvements. We can – and should – be investing in the health, safety, and prosperity of all Oklahomans.”

The state’s tax crisis didn’t emerge overnight, of course. The Republican drive to cut income taxes ramped up in the early 2000s when the state treasury overflowed with skyrocketing oil and gas revenues.

Lawmakers – abetted first by Democratic Gov. Brad Henry, then by GOP Gov. Mary Fallin – gleefully cut

more than \$1 billion in revenue via income tax cuts that disproportionately benefitted the state's richest residents.

Even the Great Recession in 2008 didn't dissuade the trickle-downers. They clung to the long-discredited notion that slashing state taxes actually would generate more income.

See if that magic trick works on your personal finances.

The truth is, what some Republican leaders – and their deep-pocketed campaign donors – would like is to eliminate the state income tax entirely, forcing governments to rely increasingly on sales taxes.

A reminder: the income tax is the fairest of all taxes, because it is based on an ability to pay. The sales tax, by contrast, is among the most regressive. That extra penny or so on a gallon of milk means nothing to the Harold Hamms of the state. It can be budget-busting to working class families dependent on minimum wage salaries.

Warren, for one, makes a case for wealth taxes that could – another pipe dream? – penetrate the Fox News bubble, even in Oklahoma where poverty is a way of life for far too many, including one in four children who go to bed hungry.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

It's Not Too Late ...

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Photo: Caleb Long/Creative Commons

2020: A Year Of Clear Vision For Oklahoma?

BY CAL HOBSON

All humans make choices and the choices we make have consequences both good and bad. Public persons, our elected officials for example, have oversized impacts when they establish policy because what they decide becomes law and “the law” regulates and dominates our lives. So whether we vote for Mr. Jones or Ms. Smith, or vote at all, their decisions become the guideposts for the rest of us, whether we agree or not, like it or not.

The law, as everybody says, is the law.

In my first paragraph I hope I “set the table” for this column because our deciders – meaning members of the Oklahoma Legislature – will reconvene in early February for the 2020 session and adjourn by late May. Their cumulative vision, related to five big issues enumerated below, along with heavy input from Gov. Kevin Stitt, may be clear and concise or muddled and muddied.

Here’s hoping for the best but fearing the worst:
BIG ISSUE NO. 1

To expand or not to expand. That is the question. Of course, I’m talking about Medicaid and whether to extend it to an additional 200,000 eligible yet uninsured, low income, mostly working and painfully poor citizens. Only 13 other states haven’t done so, mostly found in the Deep South where health challenges are the worst. The advantages of taking back our already paid tax money far outweigh not doing so and only Obama-haters, Tea Party diehards, a majority of Republican lawmakers and business whiz Kevin Stitt still man the barricades of unfounded, baseless opposition.

I said eight years ago the denial of health care and the federal formula money earmarked to pay for it by then Gov. Mary Fallin and her legislative nimrods was the worst public policy decision of the last 50

years and, unlike fine wine, it isn't improving with age. Only Texas has more uninsured children per 100,000 citizens than we do; our life expectancy continues to erode; hospitals, doctors and other health care specialists are rarer in rural areas than passenger pigeons which are extinct – just like any good reasons not to expand.

Of course Stitt, after once expressing interest in taking our cash back from DC, as we routinely do on every other buck we send to The Swamp, got worked over by Speaker Charles McCall and Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat for violating the Republicans' 11th Commandment – Thou shall not admit ObamaCare works!

Subsequently our businessman-turned-politico has been cooking up a complicated, right-wing-pleasing, block-grant approach modeled after Arkansas's plan – yes, Arkansas' – that guarantees only less medical care, sicker citizens and permanent listing in the bottom 10 of the 50 states when measuring a fundamental human right – that being a sustainable, healthy life for as long as possible.

BIG ISSUE NO. 2

Please, Gov. Stitt, hurry up and make peace with the 35 sovereign Native American tribes that are in the gaming business. You are surrounded by 143 casinos that employ 76,000 citizens; there is not a relief column of state legislators coming to your rescue; our federal delegation hasn't signaled any support for your position; your legal advisor, Attorney General Mike Hunter, and your own cabinet appointee for tribal matters, Lisa Billy, have deserted your lonely hilltop redoubt; and worst of all, you are increasingly looking petulant, isolated, uninformed, wrong and dare I say it – childish.

Governor, if any other business except a tribe announces five or more new jobs, you and half your cabinet attend the groundbreaking, cut the ribbon, declare you are “shaking things up,” and that the nebulous Top 10 State goal is closer than ever and the “old way” of doing things at the Capitol is obsolete.

Yes, and the Titanic was unsinkable; OU had a chance against LSU; and you should get credit for last year's investments in education and health care.

Remember, you were against the tax increases that paid for them but never mind. You are a businessman, not a career politician, and for your mostly rural base of supporters, who need the tribal jobs the most, that's plenty good enough.

What's that line ... something about nose and face? I forget and so do too many other voters.

BIG ISSUE NO. 3

Governor, this one is tricky if you are really trying to create a government that remotely looks like the people it represents. Kudos to you only if Oklahoma is 90% white men who went to college at Oklahoma State University and regularly attend megachurches mostly in and around Jenks and Bixby. So far, not even close.

When asked about this concern, Gov. Big Tent said he always picks the most qualified person without consideration of other factors such as race, sex, geography, donor status, etc. For example, three middle-aged, comfortably wealthy, conservative Republican white guys, two of whom live out of state, are new University of Oklahoma regents. Fine fellows all, I'm sure, governing a campus with near a majority enrollment of women, international students from 125 plus countries, more than a sprinkling of blacks, browns, Indians, Asians, gays and maybe even a liberal or two, but hey, nobody in those populations made the cut for the exalted title of regent because, apparently, not one was qualified.

In reality, lists for important posts, such as regents, exist long before the final election returns come in every four years for governor and they usually coincide with mega donor reports maintained at the State Ethics Commission. Stitt didn't create this disparity but he has done little to nothing to reverse it.

BIG ISSUE NO. 4

Guns, guns and more guns versus training, less training and now no training. As I started writing this paragraph, the TV interrupted me with a report of another deadly shooting, in a church, in God-fearing, gun-loving Texas. Hardly made a blip because the numbers were small – two dead, including the gunman, shot down by good guy parishioners packing their own pistols – a few wounded and the only sure thing about this violent Sunday morning massacre is that it will be repeated somewhere soon in America and undoubtedly before the January issue of The Observer is even in your hands.

And how can it not? Three hundred million weapons, most legal and some not; arming about the same number of folks, most legal and some not; ready perhaps at the drop of a hat, or a wayward glance, or an ugly comment, or something as minor as forgetting to take a med, and suddenly bang, bang. It's on.

Common sense tells us that it doesn't have to be this way, but common sense around gun laws is as rare as President Trump going tweet-less for an hour. Just not going to happen. Other so-called “civilized” nations – Australia and then New Zealand – guided by elected leaders not owned by the gun lobby, moved quickly to stanch the slaughter after a horrendous mass shooting in their country by outlawing semi-automatics, expanding buybacks, increasing mental health treatment and other widely supported steps.

Our politicians, many from both major parties, shake like leaves in the spring breezes as the National Rifle Association vows political death to anyone who crosses them. Thus devoid of any backbone, and more intent on keeping their seats warm in Washington's legislative chambers as well as at state capitols, they tearfully offer only hugs, prayers



Healing Trauma: Historical And Present

BY ANN DAPICE

Many living today only recently learned of the Tulsa Race Massacre. It had been kept quiet for decades.

The Greenwood neighborhood was known as Black Wall Street. Restaurants, grocery stores and tailors were all black-owned businesses. In May 1921 a white mob burned much of the Tulsa neighborhood to the ground leaving 9,000 homeless [Tulsa Race Riot – A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, Feb. 29, 2001] and some say as many as 300 black residents were killed [<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/possible-mass-grave-from-1921-tulsa-race-massacre-found/>].

The horror was brought to life in the first episode of HBO's new series *Watchmen*. Witnesses reported seeing bodies put in mass graves, but local officials hid evidence of any crimes [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wumlyetXEmk>].

My former mother-in-law lived a few blocks away at the time and remembered seeing the horrors as a child. One of my grandsons interviewed her before her death and wrote a school paper on her memories of what happened.

The mass burials being reported are in a section of the same downtown Tulsa cemetery where members of my family are buried. Researchers in Tulsa used ground-penetrating radar to survey two sites and found irregularities that could be consistent with large-scale burials.

In the past I was involved in attempts to respond to the massacre in some kind of meaningful way as a board member of Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry – an interfaith organization in Tulsa. Recently, a few days before national attention was given to the finding of possible graves, I was in a meeting at the Mental Health Association of Oklahoma planning the 2020 Zarrow Mental Health Symposium. The conference will deal with healing from historical trauma as Tulsa prepares to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the massacre. It will also respond to the genocide and many removals of American Indians to Oklahoma, the Holocaust, and the domestic terrorism in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building [<https://www.zarrowSYMposium.org/>].

In the last 20 years the John Hope Franklin Center was established and the Reconciliation Park was constructed. There is also an annual symposium and

annual dinner in which my colleagues and I have participated in.

History that most have not learned in school is that with fast-growing European demands for sugar, tobacco and cotton, 12 million enslaved Africans were shipped to the Western Hemisphere between 1451 and 1870. The conditions were so horrendous that 36 million died en route. Physical torture was used to prevent slaves from dying. If they refused to eat the maize and water, lashings and hot irons were used on them. When slaves jumped overboard to escape the misery, suicide nets were fixed on the ships to stop them [Stavrianos, 1981].

In her 1993 book, former Cherokee Chief Wilma Mankiller wrote that in 1492 there were more than 75 million native people in the Western Hemisphere with at least six million residing in what is now called the U.S. She wrote that they spoke some 2,000 languages and had long been thriving civilizations. Others have estimated that the North American Indian population was between 12 million and 18 million before European arrival and was reduced to 300,000 to 400,000 by 1900.

Whole tribes became extinct. Loss of food and shelter predisposed humans to disease and death. Sir Jeffrey Amherst, British Army Commander, condoned the use of smallpox-infected blankets and any other method that would “extirpate this execrable race.”

There is endless documentation of the burning of Indian crops and villages. Tribes were placed on forced removals that resulted in many deaths. Cash bounties were posted for “redskins” and other body parts were taken as souvenirs [Dapice, *Violence and Abuse in Society: Understanding a Global Crisis*, 2012].

Yet none of the conquest happened without precedent. “Drawing on their colonial conquest of the ‘wild and savage’ Irish and highland Scots, the English colonists entered the new world with ideological constructions of supremacy, domination, and exploitation. The colonists perceived the Celtic ‘savages’ of the British Isles to be uncivilized people who were nomadic, had no conception of private property, were dominated by an ‘innate sloth,’ and most importantly, lacked a knowledge of God. The Native people of North America were incorporated into this previously held definition of ‘savagery.’ Conquest of the Celtic fringe taught the English two methods to control ‘savage people’ – wars of extermination and the creation of reserves.”

These experiences were “fundamental in shaping the distinctive structure of oppressive control of Native American nations” [G. R. Campbell, 1994]. There is yet another connection to the more modern “holocaust” of the century. Adolf Hitler is reported to have studied and praised the model of genocide used on the Indians [Stannard, 1992].

The Holocaust began in 1933 when Hitler came to power in Germany and ended in 1945 when the Nazis were defeated. It refers to the persecution and

planned slaughter of the Jewish people and others considered inferior to those who were pure Germans.

According to the U.S. National Holocaust Museum more records may be found and numbers may change but these are the approximate statistics: six million Jews, 5.7 million Soviet civilians [an additional 1.3 million Soviet Jewish civilians are included in the six million figure for Jews, three million Soviet prisoners of war [including about 50,000 Jewish soldiers], 1.9 million Polish civilians [non-Jewish], 312,000 Serb civilians, up to 250,000 with disabilities, 196,000 to 220,000 Roma, 196,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses, and at least 70,000 repeat criminal offenders and “asocials.”

Jews and others were directly killed in ovens located in extermination camps, but Menkel [1997], a Holocaust survivor, told her story about the extermination camp to which she was sent. “There were no ovens at Bergen-Belsen; instead the Nazis killed us with starvation and disease.”

The 1995 bombing of OKC’s Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building took off its entire north wall and damaged or destroyed over 300 buildings in the area. It killed 168 people, including 19 young children who were in the daycare center and injured more than 650 people. A series of events had invigorated white nationalist sentiment across the country, leading Timothy McVeigh to take deadly action [The Economist, 2019]. He was a disenchanted army veteran and gun rights enthusiast who planned the crime with help from co-conspirator Terry Nichols. McVeigh was executed in 2001 and Nichols was sentenced to life in prison. Until Sept. 11, 2001, the Oklahoma City bombing was the worst terrorist attack to take place on U.S. soil.

It is critical to realize that trauma and deaths of these groups are not limited to history. Healing cannot occur when American Indian women and men are now being murdered in high numbers by white men, innocent blacks are being killed by police and in church killings, and Jews are being killed as they attend Synagogue.

What we at T.K. Wolf have described as CATS – continuing acute traumatic stress – exists in the overt racism and deaths that are unfortunately blandly allowed in presidential effusions. Stress cortisol, which is adaptive for fight or flight from temporary danger in short-term trauma, or one-time events, becomes destructive in situations of continuing trauma, where research has long shown that cortisol may cause loss of immunity and even permanent damage in the brain and body.

When traumas are present with no end in sight, treatments for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are misplaced and ineffective. Research also shows that the bonding hormone, oxytocin, that helps parents nurture and protect their young, can also stoke fear and aggression towards the unknown other – the stranger.

When humans are ongoing victims of crimes, the crimes must first be stopped. People can say they



A Recipe For Sensible Gun Policy

BY JOHN WOOD

A gray-mustachioed man wearing a brown cap and a blue t-shirt nonchalantly strolled into Yukon's Twin Peaks the day after the state's new "permitless carry" law took effect.

Tim Harper was not necessarily attracted to the restaurant by the blaring of wall-to-wall televisions or its special "29-degree Beer." Rather, he told the Oklahoman, he wanted to celebrate the new law by taking "my rifle everywhere I can for one day."

A photo of Harper – his black metal AR-15 semiautomatic rifle slung across his chest – getting tossed from the restaurant quickly went viral.

Even though there was no sign in the window indicating guns were not allowed, OKC police arrested Harper on a complaint of carrying a weapon where alcohol is consumed. He was later released on \$100,000 bond.

Harper more than likely knew he was courting trouble. He is part of a nascent YouTube group that calls itself "First Amendment Auditors." They display their anti-government sentiments through their very public challenges to gun-carry restrictions anywhere, especially inside prohibited places, i.e., government buildings, churches, and private businesses.

You could say this was not Harper's first rodeo. KFOR-TV reported earlier in the year that he con-

fronted several African American men with his weapon outside Israel United in Christ Church in OKC. Harper insisted he was just asking questions.

Notably, the church is located squarely in House District 97 represented by Democrat Jason Lowe, staunchest legislative critic of the new permitless carry law. It also is only 6½ miles from Penn Square Mall where a shooting forced the shopping center's closing just days before Christmas.

Why would anyone at this church be scared of a man they didn't know, wearing an AR-15 on his chest?

Perhaps it was because Wikipedia's "Gun Violence Archive" catalogues 385 U.S. mass shootings in 2019 alone? Or because a 2019 "Violent Death Rates" study in Preventive Medicine finds that the U.S. gun homicide rate is 25 times higher than other high-income countries? Or because, as Johnathan Metzl points out in *Dying of Whiteness*, racial anxieties prompted Missouri to become the nation's first "Constitutional Carry" state in 2007. Thereafter, Missouri endured a 25% increase in firearm-related homicides from 2008 to 2014 – 47% higher than rates nationally.

Harper reportedly carried his AR-15 to a gay pride event earlier as well, even into a city park and multiple businesses, and Edmond's downtown post office where the term "going postal" was coined.

So much for Harper's one-day "celebration."

Harper's gun-carry activism is not unique in Oklahoma. One example is "auditor" Richard Hubbard - aka Perfect Picture - with 7,600 or more video subscribers.

Interestingly, the gun-rights group OK2A briefly booted Harper because of his rather public arrest. Their misgivings, though, seem to have melted rather quickly. According to 3D Politics, a rightwing YouTube channel, Don Spencer, OK2A leader, quickly pivoted and began aiding Harper.

They argued the arrest actually violated his First, Second and Eighth Amendment rights. And yet, moral absolutists like Harper seem to ignore the reality of Oklahoma gun laws, a bizarre posture for people who proclaim incessantly they are "law-abiding."

16TH PERMITLESS CARRY STATE

OK2A members must have been on a gun-fueled "sugar high" after Gov. Kevin Stitt signed HB 2597 into law early in the 2019 legislative session. It took effect Nov. 1, allowing residents and nonresidents at least 21 years old [18 if in the military] to open- or conceal-carry without a permit in a state that already ranked No. 9 in gun sales at 97.4 per 1,000, according to Security.org.

The new law made Oklahoma the 16th state to pass such legislation - just one year after then-Gov. Mary Fallin vetoed the same measure. Ironically, a 2018 SurveyUSA poll found more than 80% of Oklahomans oppose permitless carry.

I want to clarify - I'm pro-Second Amendment. However, as a Gulf War vet with eight years of experience handling rifles and pistols on active duty daily, I recognize the need to respect the compromise our Founders wrought in creating the Second Amendment.

It says, "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Pretty simple. Yet, it seems Harper and OK2A ignore the first clause and embrace only the last 14 words [out of 23] of the second.

In *Gun Fight*, a U.S. Constitutional law professor, Adam Winkler, points to rather messy fights between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists during the Constitution's drafting. While the Federalists regulated arms as a collective right through their "militia" view, it was born of British oppression. Alternatively, the Anti-Federalists feared tyranny from their own country. Therefore, they say every citizen should



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be armed because they are “real militia.”

THE FOUNDERS

Winkler finds that the Second Amendment was crafted not unlike the Constitution itself in a compromise between these two factions. As a result, he writes, “gun rights and gun control are not only compatible; they have lived together since the birth of America.”

Winkler argues the U.S. Supreme Court overturned more than 200 years of precedent when it embraced a new view of Second Amendment rights. In 2008’s *D.C. v. Heller*, the court ruled the Second Amendment protected gun ownership unconnected with service in a militia. In 2010, in *McDonald v. Chicago*, the court applied that ruling to the states.

It needs to be pointed out that in the *D.C. v. Heller* case, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia wrote that while the Second Amendment meant individual rights, it was not unlimited: “[N]othing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms.”

While this a more expansive view, it’s not quite like the aforementioned “auditor’s” extremist interpretation. We have rights, but also responsibilities as citizens to engage in discourse, which undermines an absolutist view taken by Harper and other “auditors.”

What’s more, in a 2017 peer-reviewed article, *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Saul Cornell found that permitless carry during the Revolutionary War period was merely a myth. He found the right to carry in public “remained narrowly defined and limited to a range of specific situations defined by common law and statute. In particular, the right to travel armed for reasons of self-defense was always balanced against the need to preserve the King’s Peace. The preservation of the peace trumped the right to have arms in most circumstances.”

Therefore, even during our founding, America was a pragmatic place with concerted balancing between protection and peace – not the Hollywood Wild West depicted in countless movies.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Diane Tipling, Stillwater leader of the group Mom’s Demand Action, says her activism was first animated by the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, CT.

“It pushed me over the edge,” she said. “The non-action by so many was shameful to me,” citing the lack of congressional or legislative response even when mass shootings averaged more than one a day for each of the eight years afterward.

Mom’s Demand Action, with eight local groups in Oklahoma, was started by mothers in the aftermath of Sandy Hook, just two years after the *Heller* case. Their website promotes “public about common-sense gun laws and responsible gun ownership.”

A Mother Jones writer even described these women as the NRA’s worst nightmare as they have stood up to them, moving popular opinion on the need for change to some degree.

NRA activist and state Sen. Nathan Dahm, R-Broken Arrow, is pushing bills to allow teachers to also serve as armed bodyguards as well as to allow college kids to come to class “packing.” I like the notion that he wants the state to provide tax credits for people who take gun safety classes, but our classrooms are not a place for guns.

We already regulate a technology that killed about 38,000 in 2014: the automobile. Similarly, guns caused more than 34,000 deaths the same year, according to the Violence Policy Center. At least with cars, we have a license requirement designed to ensure you can safely drive your car.

When you take a driver’s license test, you demonstrate whether you know the laws and can proficiently drive.

Training is important. A RAND study of New York Police Department firearm-discharge reports between 1998-2006, for example, found police in gunfights were accurate only 18% of the time and only 23% accurate from more than seven yards away.

Imagine an untrained civilian. That’s a lot of risk.

Speaking of risk management, we require auto insurance and safety belts, saving 255,000 lives from 1975 to 2008, according to a Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] report.

INSURANCE FOR GUNS?

Yes, much like today’s LawShield, essentially insurance for legal help if you get in trouble with your gun for the low price of \$10.95 a month. For cars the primary reason car insurance is required is because of your liability – i.e., responsibility – for any damage caused. Why is this not required like we do cars? U.S. Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, D-NY, vice chair of the Joint Economic Committee, published a recent report that estimates gun violence costs the U.S. \$229 billion a year.

A compromise on a gun license and insurance, not unlike how we deal with cars, would lend to thinking that those who are carrying guns are responsible, trained, and less aggressive. It is unlikely an insurance company would allow those like Richard Hubbard and Timothy Harper to “audit” in legally-restricted places where only an absolutist, criminal or insane person might visit with their AR-15.

What’s more, where is a Red Flag law when you need it? It permits police or family members to petition a state court to order the temporary removal of firearms from a person who may present a danger to others or themselves. A PBS NewsHour poll found 71% support such a measure.

Expect a clash in this year’s legislative session over OKC Democratic Rep. Jason Dunnington’s Red Flag bill. Dahm, for one, told KFOR: “When a tragedy happens, there are steps that can happen, but further restrictions on law-abiding citizens is not the answer.”

Without a hint of irony, Dahm says this after the largest expansion of gun “rights” in Oklahoma history. Yet he fails to ask: What about our responsibilities?

It’s about balance. Even among Americans with opposing political views, a majority surveyed in the Harris Poll/Purple Project – 55% – want more meaningful conversations, often resulting in compromise and solutions.

If we ever get to a long-term solution here, we need mutually agreed limits focused on responsible gun

2020

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

and misty gazes to survivors of the carnage while hoping through their sublimation to earn or keep a coveted A-plus rating from Wayne LaPierre, the gun manufacturers and the other merchants of death.

Only in America, land of the terrified, home of the homebound but armed for Armageddon everywhere would such an environment be tolerated and actually rewarded with an ever more exhaustive array of loosened and toothless gun laws. So much for the language in the Second Amendment ... something about a “well regulated militia,” words penned by our Founding Fathers but so routinely ignored by today’s strict constructionist crowd. Hypocrites, yes. Embarrassed, no.

BIG ISSUE NO. 5

Do legislators and the governor understand criminal justice reform is a marathon, not a sprint? Clearly, Stitt and his wife, Sarah, came to their jobs as our First Couple sincerely wanting to strike a different tone, pose and path about our world-leading rate of incarcerating humans for crimes both great and small. Stitt deserves much credit for signing a record number of pardons, many more paroles and changing out appointees at both the Corrections and Pardon and Parole Boards.

However – and believe it or not – that was the easy part. A major rewrite of Title 21, known as Crimes and Punishment, hasn’t been done since statehood and it cries out for reform; additional resources and experienced judges must be provided for drug courts; and the mental health and substance programs must be expanded, modernized and developed statewide if we are to stem the admissions of drug abusers into our very overcrowded, dangerous and under-staffed prisons.

A large, one-time pardon docket pushed by Stitt, former House Speaker Kris Steele and others made headlines and is important. Now comes the heavy lifting of real structural changes such as prison closings, criminal code modernization, statewide treatment and early identification of potential victims of not just illegal substances but also child abuse and dysfunctional families.

Tall tasks indeed but Stitt’s approval rating sits at

ownership and possibly a healthy dose of motherly wisdom.

I think we should also follow Brian Grazer’s urging in Face to Face for more intentional, unloaded, and constructive eye-to-eye conversations and a little bit of empathy to help cure what ails us instead of talking past each other.

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

72%, he has a compliant legislature with supermajorities made up of his same party, and a cabinet dominated by mostly yes-men looking to make a positive impact during their time of government service.

So if, as Gov. Stitt and his allies in the Legislature claim, Oklahomans are ready for real change, supportive of a new and dynamic 21st century direction, and are willing to pay what it takes to become a Top 10 state in virtually everything “good,” the only questions remaining are: If not now, when? If not Stitt, who?

Answer: We’ll see.

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

Trauma

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

weren’t there for the crimes of history, but that is not an excuse when crimes are in the present.

Last year right-wing extremists killed more people in America than in any year since 1995, the year of the Murrah bombing. The vast majority of these murders were committed by white supremacists. It is a threat that authorities in the West have taken too lightly [The Economist 2019].

This is the signature of our time and not just history.

Ann Dapice received a PhD in psychology, sociology and philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania. She has taught and/or served as administrator at a number of universities teaching courses in the social sciences, philosophy and Native American Studies. She is Director of Education and Research for T.K. Wolf, Inc., a 501[c][3] American Indian organization and Founder/Executive Director, Institute of Values Inquiry. Her cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research has been reported in professional journals, books, and academic presentations regionally, nationally and internationally – and in newspapers, radio, television, and the internet.

Task Force Can Help Balance Scale Of Oklahoma's Prison Crisis

BY DAMION SHADE

Criminal justice reform is paying dividends in Oklahoma. The single largest commutation in American history happened in November with more than 400 Oklahomans reunited with their families and communities. Additionally, the commutation is estimated to have saved taxpayers \$11.9 million.

These are significantly positive developments, but they represent first steps in the long journey towards getting Oklahoma's imprisonment rate closer to the national average.

Building on the state's recent momentum towards criminal justice reform, Gov. Kevin Stitt created the criminal justice RESTORE Task Force to make recommendations that could be considered during the upcoming Legislative session. The task force has the potential to fundamentally alter Oklahoma's justice system for the better.

Through its recommendations and appropriate action by lawmakers, the RESTORE task force could bring more justice to the state's prison system by reducing fines and fees, lowering the impact of cash bail on the poorest Oklahomans, renewing investments in alternatives to incarceration and treatment, and creating a dedicated re-entry system.

A key consideration will be to encourage investments in treatment and alternatives to prison. This should begin by increasing access to prison diversions like mental health courts, drug courts and other treatments.

Increased access to drug treatment is already happening in states like Texas that have invested in more treatment options this decade. Determining drug court access based on evidence-based, best practices would serve far more Oklahomans.

The RESTORE task force should also advocate for more mental health funding alongside adequate funding of the SQ 781 fund. By statute, lawmakers were required to take the estimated savings in reduced incarceration costs from recent justice reforms and re-invest those dollars in community mental health care. So far, the Legislature has not funded this reinvestment process.

Our prisons are filled with people suffering from the impacts of trauma and struggling with addiction. The majority of these individuals aren't receiving the treatment they need in prison, and the waiting lists for public services in the outside world can be months long.

Lawmakers should provide the funding for commu-

nity mental health services that would help many defendants struggling with addiction to avoid jail in the first place.

The task force can help upend the state's failed investment strategy – prisons over treatment – if they hope to get to the root of Oklahoma's incarceration crisis.

The RESTORE Task Force should recommend that legislators build on progress from last session and reduce the impact of court fines and fees on the poorest Oklahomans. More than 80% of court funding in Oklahoma now comes from fees assessed on criminal defendants who are often unable to pay. Between 2012 and 2018, this court-funding model has led to more than \$600 million in delinquent court debt.

In Oklahoma, failing to pay court debt can cost people their driver's licenses or result in arrest; the resulting jail stay can cost people their jobs, their homes, and even custody of their children. Arrest warrants due to failure to pay are particularly prevalent in communities of color like North Tulsa, where judges issued more than 20,000 such warrants in 2017.

The RESTORE Task Force should end these modern day debtor's prisons and ensure equal access to justice regardless of money.

The task force should also recommend that every defendant in each county across the state gets a timely bail hearing with an individualized determination of their ability to pay. There are counties in Oklahoma where a defendant in a non-violent felony case sits in jail for an average of six months before trial simply because they can't afford to buy their freedom from a bondsman.

The task force should also mandate automatic release for low-level misdemeanors unless a judge deems the defendant a flight risk or risk to public safety. Commissioners in Harris County, TX, recently adopted a similar reform and the early results are promising.

The bottom line is that Oklahomans don't deserve less justice than people in other states simply because of their income.

The task force should recommend better investments in supervision and services for those exiting prison. The system is critically understaffed and under resourced. For example, there are only three permanent re-entry case managers for 22 Oklahoma Department of Corrections facilities to help those exiting prison successfully enter parole.

This fundamental lack of investment means that too many formerly incarcerated Oklahomans lack the support they need to succeed.

Oklahoma voters in 2016 sent clear messages by their overwhelming support of reclassifying low-level drug offenses to misdemeanors [SQ 780] and re-investing resulting savings [SQ 781]. The task force must build on these positive efforts and make these criminal justice changes more robust.

Hopefully, the governor's RESTORE Task Force will help advise lawmakers about justice reforms that can build on the positive progress started by voters.

Damion Shade is a criminal justice analyst with the Oklahoma Policy Institute; okpolicy.org.

How Data-Driven Experiments Drove Schools Down

BY JOHN THOMPSON

In 1977, Randy Newman freaked people out with his lyrics, "Short people have no reason to live ..."
Newman's song may have been satire, and at least he didn't sing, "Short people got no reason to teach."

I mention this because recent big data research shows how to solve the short people problem. Believe it or not, if teachers have "High Expectations!," their students grow taller!

I wish I was making this up, but this finding came from the same big data model which drove one of the most destructive school "reforms," and contributed to today's teacher shortage. But now we know that the research that drove an experiment which drove so many teachers out of the profession is as valid as new "research" showing teachers produce similar gains in their students' heights.

Teacher Effects on Student Achievement and Height: A Cautionary Tale, by Marianne Bitler, Sean Corcoran, Thurston Domina, Emily Penner, "used administrative data from New York City Public Schools to estimate the "value" teachers "add" to student achievement, and [also in comparison] to student height." Their big data model found that the "estimated teacher 'effects' on height [were] comparable in magnitude to actual teacher effects on math and ELA achievement."

These impossible big data findings are no weirder than the previous, disastrous ways that corporate school reformers treated teachers and students like lab rats.

Just over a decade ago, the Gates Foundation launched a "transformative" change, based on a few non-educators' hunches, that the answer to bad schools was "building a better teacher." It funded hurried and inadequate research on "teacher effects," and found that an "effective" teacher can increase student performance by up to a standard deviation.

So, 46 states changed their teacher evaluation laws, with three-fourths of them following the Gates demand that test score growth – measured by an untested algorithm – should be used to help fire teachers.

Back then, I communicated with many of the very smart people who pushed this "growth model," known as "value-added" [VAM], trying to explain why their methodology was fine for economic theory, but inappropriate for policy studies. They ignored peer pressure; concentrations of poverty, English Language Learners, and students' disabilities; as well as predictable negative effects.

Researchers acknowledged a 10% to 15% chance that VAMs would unfairly lower a teacher's evaluation, dismissing it as an acceptable margin of error. They consistently refused to answer the question of whether they would choose a profession where they had a 10% to 15% chance, per year, of having their career damaged or destroyed by a flawed model.

Ironically, these reforms were designed to improve teacher quality in high-poverty schools. They didn't deny that VAMs were likely to be biased against those high-challenge schools.

They consistently refused to answer the question of how could a high stakes statistical model which is biased against teachers in poor schools would make teaching in them more attractive.

A decade ago when the Tulsa Public School started to implement its Gates teacher quality model, I showed a consultant scattergrams from the TPS web site. The elementary schools didn't appear to present an insurmountable challenge. But in several subjects, high-performing high schools produced large growth in student performance, in contrast to the low growth produced in low-performing schools.

Knowing that his model could not control from such extreme differences, the researcher responded in a scholarly manner, "Oh, shit!"

Above all, holding individuals accountable for test score growth, using a flawed model, incentivized high stakes testing. The resulting drill-and-kill sucked the joy out of too much teaching and learning. Too often, students turned off, as teachers either complied and committed education malpractice, or left the profession.

Even then, it was clear that edu-philanthropists were treating teachers like mules; they politely gave us instructions, after hitting us over the head with the VAM club to get our attention. They often intended to drive out Baby Boomers [and their higher salaries], so they could socialize 23-year-olds into their teach-to-the-test ideology.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

AN APPRECIATION

The Robin Meyers I Know

BY BOB BEARDEN

On Sunday Dec. 28, I awakened to learn my senior minister at Mayflower Congregational Church in Oklahoma City, the Rev. Dr. Robin Meyers was retiring effective Jan. 5. In an announcement to his many friends and church members, he said he and his wife, Shawn, had concluded that it was time for him to retire from his ministry.

It was, at least for me and I suspect for many Mayflower members, totally unexpected. Not that he doesn't deserve it after 35 years of shepherding the unruly flock that is Mayflower, but it was not something anyone there – save perhaps a few insiders – thought would happen anytime soon.

As a member of Mayflower for over 17 years, I guess I wasn't ready for that moment in time when Robin would step down. Reflecting on his impact on me personally, and the greater impact his ministry has had on Oklahoma, I have to say that it has been tremendous – especially in deep Red State Oklahoma where ministers are expected to toe the line with that Old Time Religion straight out of the Old Testament, glossing over the New Covenant handed down from that Jewish Rabbi from Nazareth, Jesus Christ.

Robin Meyers has been a breath of fresh air in a state that has long been the buckle on the Bible Belt. And he has influenced a new wave of young progressive thinkers both in religious philosophy and political bent.

Over the 3½ decades Robin has been at Mayflower, the religious philosophy he has taught through his thoughtful and thought-provoking messages have had a profound effect upon literally thousands of people, many of whom have never attended Mayflower. The religious philosophy he has espoused in his sermons and books is one of not so much of the worship of Jesus but of the following of his teachings.

In 2009 he was the keynote speaker at the Oklahoma AFL-CIO Convention in Tulsa. His speech, titled “In Praise of Unions,” was worthy of a standing ovation among the delegates in attendance. Afterwards both State AFL-CIO President Jimmy Curry and I were deluged with requests for copies of his message and with requests for Robin's contact information.

He began a mini-series of speeches at various local unions in Oklahoma and even in a couple of other states when word of his speech became known in union circles. What he said resonated with workers and their families because they saw in a non-evan-

gelical preacher a kinship absent from their midst for a long time.

That his brand of religion resonates with young people is evident in the tremendous growth Mayflower has experienced over the last couple of generations. While he doesn't speak directly from the pulpit on politics by naming names, you clearly know his thoughts and feelings

on what is happening in our nation and the world today. He is no shrinking violet when it comes to calling out a politician for something they have said or a policy they have enacted, especially when it goes against what is right. And in the books he writes, his thoughts on the ill-treatment of those less fortunate shine through.

In his long ministry to the people of Mayflower and to the people of Oklahoma, he has never failed to speak truth to power even though it has often landed him in hot water and brought the wrath of the self-righteous indignation down upon him from those who often disagree with him.

He doesn't care because he believes in speaking truth to power as the only way to really make a difference in this world. And throughout his years at Mayflower, he has made a tremendous difference in the state he loves, and on the people, who populate it.

As a writer of many books primarily dealing with religion but also touching on the effect of religion on the world and upon politics, Robin has taken to task the religious right – see his books *Why the Religious Right is Wrong* and *Saving Jesus from the Church*.

Not mainstream ideas but ideas that speak truth to power and that are thoughtful tomes of a different way of looking at Jesus, the testaments and religion as practiced today.

His books, if you haven't read any of them, are very interesting, and I would encourage you to check them out whenever you are looking for something that is both an easy read, thoughtfully written and will, at the very least, provoke your senses and



Robin Meyers

possibly change your mind about all things religious or perhaps some things religious.

Robin has been a leader in Oklahoma when it comes to speaking out about the machinations of the right-leaning members of our state Legislature. He is never hesitant to delineate the things they are doing that have a direct impact upon on the halt, lame and less fortunate among us. He stands up for workers and their families whenever and wherever he can.

His ministry, in my humble opinion, has made a difference in this state in so many ways that it would be difficult to list them all. He leaves an indelible mark that cannot be erased. Not only on reli-

gion in Oklahoma, but also on the body politic.

As we say at Mayflower at the end of every service, pray for peace, go in peace, wage a little peace and love one another – Every Single Other. Something that, thanks to Robin, is spreading across this nation and this world. Amen!

He has been a friend and a teacher to me, and I shall miss his thought-provoking messages that have so long been a part of my life!

Bob Bearden is chair of the Central Oklahoma Labor Federation Board of Trustees and a member of Mayflower Congregational Church UCC in Oklahoma City.

In 2020, Let's Do Better, Be Better

BY JOE DORMAN

As 2019 comes to a close, it seems safe to say that many Americans will not look back on the year as one of the country's finest moments.

It has become almost cliché to bemoan political polarization, lack of civility in politics and in public dialogue, inequality, or racism as a sign that something in our culture and politics has been poisoned.

For many, regardless of political party or ideology or age, this is not the best of times.

So, as we enter the New Year, here is my challenge to us all: Do something about it. Start 2020 with a shared mission and a determination that we can all be better, and do better, for our state and our nation. Let's all be personally responsible for doing what we can to improve Oklahoma for the next generation and beyond.

Former state Auditor Clifton Scott often would comment about his service that he "wanted to make sure he left the woodpile just a little bit higher than he found it."

This meant that he wanted his service to improve the state in some way better than when he started his political career.

That, in my opinion, should be the goal of not only every elected official, but also every single Oklahoman and American during these turbulent times.

There are several ways each person can do this, ranging from volunteering for their favorite cause, contributing to the financial stability of a nonprofit dear to them, or even simply advocating for an important cause with their friends and neighbors.

Certainly, filling out the upcoming census and voting in an informed manner are also critical.

At the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy [OICA], leaving the woodpile higher than it is today will mean doing everything in our power to work with policymakers to successfully implement a legislative agenda that increases opportunities for all young Oklahomans.

It also means redoubling our commitment to serving as a megaphone for underprivileged children and making sure we are broadcasting loudly and clearly about their needs and what you [and our elected officials] can do to help them.

Next year's public policy environment will be ripe with both challenges and new opportunities. It is our hope that the financial situation does not deteriorate from what the State Board of Equalization forecasts as a flat budget compared to last year.

With the decline in energy production over the past year, we are thankful that the previous Legislature saw fit to increase other areas of revenue collection to help provide for the coverage of essential services, along with shoring up the state's saving account in case of needed additional support for stabilizing the annual budget.

We hope to see increased opportunities for working Oklahomans, ranging from restoration of refundability of the Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC] to additional incentives to aid those struggling to cover early childcare.

Innovative ideas such as these have proven to be successful, and we hope Oklahoma lawmakers are able to carry these and other beneficial policies forward.

In the new year, OICA will be vigilant and watchful and work to empower those who wish to act on behalf of Oklahoma's children and families. We invite you to become one of those people, and to channel your energy and passion towards improving conditions for children and families in-need.

Please sign up to receive our action alerts at OICA.org and we will let you know how you can best make an impact.

Together, we can make 2020 the year for a brighter future for Oklahoma's children.

Former state Rep. Joe Dorman is CEO of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.



Politics Of Prevention

BY SHARON MARTIN

About a year ago, I complained to my dentist that the bottom right of my tongue was bumpy and tender. I was having some dental work done, and my bottom teeth were rough and uneven. I was hoping a little filing could fix the problem.

"I think your oral surgeon should have a look at this," he said. So I made an appointment, and based on my dentist's suggestion, I asked for a biopsy.

The oral surgeon didn't think that was necessary. The bumps were mostly white except for the one area I was constantly dragging over my lower teeth. He prescribed a mouthwash and a follow-up.

I went ahead with the dental work, and the mouthwash helped a little, maybe. Then, in the summer, a new bump showed up. This bump hurt every time it hit my teeth. I called the oral surgeon and, again, asked for a biopsy.

When I showed up for the appointment, he had a pathology report from my file, a report I had never seen from a visit several years earlier. It showed dys-

plasia on the underside of my tongue. He sent me straight to an ENT to have the bump removed.

I scheduled the surgery. Instead of a simple biopsy, he was going to remove the entire bump, including the margins around the bump, two surgeries for the price of one.

A week after the surgery, when I was still drinking my meals, painfully, he told me he was pretty sure he got it all even as he was explaining what the all was, a spindle cell sarcoma.

"They're more aggressive than other squamous cells. We are suggesting radiation."

I made an appointment at a cancer treatment center for a second opinion. I mean, radiation is pretty radical. They were more radical still. Their suggestion was another surgery because they weren't sure, based on the pathology, that the initial ENT had, indeed, got it all. In the meantime, there was a new bump at the base of my tongue.

The new bump was a squamous cell tumor, and I

PUBLIC FORUM

agreed to the surgery that would remove a chunk of my tongue. The tongue would be rebuilt with tissue from my wrist, and my wrist would be grafted with tissue from my upper arm.

In addition to almost half my tongue, the doctor removed 14 lymph nodes from my neck. I spent three days out, receiving nutrients and oxygen from tubes running through my nostrils. When they brought me around, there was a leech on my tongue keeping the blood flowing, my husband and daughter were hovering over me, and I had no idea that three days had passed. I spent a total of seven days in the hospital.

Three weeks later, I'm still drinking all my meals. And I'm thinking.

What if I'd known about the dysplasia?

Could the knowledge that cancer was a possibility have changed when I got treatment?

I'm scheduled for radiation. And knowing what I know now, I'm also scheduled to have a stomach peg so I can get enough nutrients during the painful radiation process. It's hard enough now to get the calories I need as the rebuilt tongue heals.

This is just one example of the time and money spent, and the extra pain endured, because the U.S.

medical system doesn't focus on prevention. What if I'd known about the dysplasia? What if I had regular checkups to make sure it wasn't progressing and, at the first sign that it was, I'd been treated? Could I have been saved two tongue surgeries?

That's supposing I had all the information I needed to make the right decisions. Medical decisions should be made by both professionals and patients. Both need to be educated. Prevention needs to be covered by insurance, or better yet, covered by a universal system that favors prevention over catastrophic fixes.

For those who think universal healthcare is too expensive, remember, the ounce of prevention costs far less than the pound of cure. A healthy workforce is essential to a sound economy. And making a fortune off the misfortunes of others, well, that's greed. The last time I looked, greed was still one of the deadly sins.

Meanwhile, I'm drinking my meals and dreaming of a day when I can have a salad.

Oilton resident Sharon Martin is author of the forthcoming book I've Got the Blues: Looking for Justice in a Red State. Her previous books include Not A Prodigal and Froggy Bottom Blues.

Schumer Tweet Underscores Democratic Party's Post-FDR Moral Decline

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

At 5:15 a.m. on Dec. 10, Senate Minority leader Chuck Schumer, D-NY, tweeted: "Trump, Lavrov, and Pompeo are meeting in private this afternoon. What conspiracy are they cooking up today?"

These comments epitomize the moral decline of the Democratic Party, which has disgraced itself in the Trump era by promoting a toxic Russophobia and John Birch style conspiracy theories taken from the right-wing playbook of the 1950s.

Even in the heyday of the Cold War, American presidents were not attacked and accused of carrying out conspiracies when they met with their Russian counterparts.

In those days, meetings between the two countries contributed to an important spirit of dialogue and breakthroughs such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty [SALT], Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty [IMF] and nuclear test ban treaties, as well as the Yalta agreements during the age of Roosevelt.

The latter, in a spirit of cooperation, offered a quid pro quo in which the United States recognized the Soviet Union's right to a strategic buffer in Eastern

Europe and return of the Sakhalin Island and naval base in Port Arthur in return for the fair division of Germany and a pledge that Russia would not intervene in Greece's civil war.

While neither party complied with all the terms of the Yalta agreements, at least the two countries had been talking to one another.

Today's Democratic Party is intent on hindering any efforts at diplomatic outreach with Russia as a new nuclear arms race breaks out.

They have based their impeachment efforts on Trump's alleged efforts to obstruct "needed military assistance to Ukraine," ignoring the fact that this aid has been used to brutally crush separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine.

In a prescient speech before the National Press Club five years ago, it was Schumer who warned of an impending political crisis that would introduce a new level of acrimony into the body politic if "middle-class decline" continued apace.

The solution, he said, was simple. "We must convince Americans that government can be on their

PUBLIC FORUM

side and is not just a tool of special interests,” he argued. Democrats would have to make it clear “that we will make government the people’s champion, not captive to the powerful.”

By peddling conspiracy theories and trying to obstruct diplomacy with Russia, Schumer and his colleagues, are doing the exact opposite.

Their position is being driven by a desire to not only remove Trump from office but perpetuate a new Cold War with Russia – to the benefit of special interest groups and not the American people.

The Washington Post recently had an article detailing the lack of purpose and direction behind the war in Afghanistan, which the American people overwhelmingly want to end.

The War on Terror has lost its legitimacy, having been marred by endless contradictions, including the U.S. backing of jihadist forces in Libya, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen.

The demonization of Russia and support for war in Ukraine now presents the only opportunity to sustain gargantuan military budgets, which have di-

verted money away from the kind of social programs that a government which is actually on the side of the people would enact: robust funding for education, social welfare programs, public transportation, health care and environment protection.

Voting in favor of the 2003 Iraq War, Schumer has long been known as “Wall Street’s Man on Capitol Hill.”

According to OpenSecrets.com, his fourth largest campaign contributor between 2015 and 2020 has been the defense giant, Lockheed Martin, which has given him over \$100,000.

What greater symbol of the moral corruption of the Democratic Party from the age of Roosevelt and betrayal of liberal values could there ever be then him? *Tulsa resident Jeremy Kuzmarov is author of four books on U.S. foreign policy including 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].*

Why Mayor Pete?

BY JAMES NIMMO

There’s been talk on the campaign trail about Democratic candidate Mayor Pete Buttigieg’s acceptance by some black voters of South Carolina, a very important southern state early in the primary races.

From what I’ve read, the black voters are more comfortable with the well-known names they’ll see on the ballot – the names perhaps familiar but how effective have the household names turned out to be for them?

I’m not a black voter and can’t speak directly to racial inequality but I know about gay inequality. To paraphrase Dr. King, equality denied for some is equality denied for all.

I’m a white gay voter and with that said I feel taken for granted by the status quo Democratic Party and the status quo candidates it allows to be presented. Among a short list of points that I use to tell why I’m supporting Pete – his freshness coupled *with* his

orientation, *with* his ability to clearly articulate his plans, *with* his respect for true freedom of and from religion, *with* his calm and cool stage presence, *with* his corporate experience at McKinsey and military experience in the Navy Reserve all come together in one package that I find irresistible even without the existential threats thrown at us everyday by the Orange Obscenity.

I don’t think Mayor Pete will stab his fellow gay and lesbian voters in the back like Bill Clinton did with the Defense of Marriage Act or Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, or stonewall on gay marriage like Hillary Clinton did, or take years to evolve on the topic like Barack Obama did.

I don’t think black voters have a leg to stand on when the topic is about gays and blacks being taken for granted: both demographics have been played for suckers. Pete Buttigieg offers a chance for blacks and gays to break the cycle of the doormat treatment we receive from the big names.

Black voters should pay attention. Pete doesn’t speak in homilies or platitudes and King James Bible verses. He never avoids a direct answer and talks straight forwardly to the issues I think we all care about: health care, equality both of the civil and financial kind, and the future of our planet.

Pete’s time and *our* time is *now!*
James Nimmo lives in Oklahoma City and is a frequent contributor to The Oklahoma Observer.

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Moral Failure Of Militarizing Space

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

The recent creation of a Space Force by the United States is further evidence that we humans take violence and militarism with us wherever we go. We have been an utter failure in creating peace on earth, and now with the creation of a Space Force we embark officially on the journey of a new moral failure of not creating and maintaining peace in space.

We have been militarizing space secretly for years, but now we are openly promoting and celebrating it, which means we will likely prioritize it and fund it at even higher levels than before.

Given that the United States has now created a "Space Force" and plans to officially and publicly militarize space, I am reminded of the position of my religious tradition, the United Methodist Church, on the issue. The United Methodist Social Principles explicitly reject the militarization of space. The current 2016 version of the Social Principles states:

Space

The universe, known and unknown, is the creation of God and is due the respect we are called to give the earth. We therefore reject any nation's efforts to weaponize space and urge that all nations pursue the peaceful and collaborative development of space technologies and of outer space itself.

"The Community of All Creation" section of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church that is being presented for approval at the 2020 General Conference [the section for which I served as convener of the writing team] states the following about protecting space:

Protecting Space

God's creation encompasses not only the earth but the entire cosmos, including space. Our charge to be responsible stewards thus extends well beyond humankind's immediate environs and encompasses not only our own solar system but also other galaxies. Hence, we reject the exploitation, commodification and militarization of space. We express our hope that the exploration and settlement of space, including the moon and other planetary bodies, take place peacefully and cooperatively, and in such fashion that the benefits and resources of any further exploration and development accrue to all humanity.

With the creation of a Space Force, the United States is creating a space arms race, and the only persons who will truly benefit are the capitalists in the military industrial complex. We are blowing the opportunity to make the final frontier one of peaceful cooperation rather than violent corporate profi-

teering. There are much more pressing challenges that require our attention and investment than the militarization of space.

Humanity has not yet shown itself morally ready to venture into space in the search of new worlds that will more than likely lead to us to exploiting, commodifying, and militarizing them. Our history and our current state of affairs have sadly proven that is better for us not "to boldly go where no one has gone before." We will likely ruin wherever we go like we are currently ruining earth.

Unless we figure out ways to live together in our current world house with love, hope, social and environmental justice, and peace, why would we want to take our propensity for hate, fear, injustice, environmental destruction, and violence to other worlds? They would be better off without us.

Some space enthusiasts like the billionaire Elon Musk [whose company SpaceX will likely make significant sums of money from the militarization of space] have spoken out in favor of a Space Force, saying that it is inevitable that we will need defense forces to protect our activity and exploration of space. Musk even excitedly proclaimed that this past week's creation of the Space Force was de facto the beginning of StarFleet envisioned in Star Trek.

I love Star Trek and Star Wars as science fiction. Both provide amazing truth and mythic drama about the human condition and our connection with each other and the cosmos, but space exploration is not going to play out remotely like either one of these epic stories, and we do not need a StarFleet or an Interstellar Alliance to Restore the Republic, and we definitely do not need a Death Star.

The militarization of space that is found in both Star Trek and Star Wars need not be our future in space. We have an opportunity as a species to explore space peacefully together as a joint venture of all humanity, unless we simply choose not to owing to greed for profit and power. The establishment of a United States Space Force is not an accomplishment to celebrate but rather a development to lament and from which to repent.

*For a more peaceful vision of international cooperation in space, see the most recent United Nations draft resolution on International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

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



George Orwell's 1984 Warning

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

Does the America of today worry you at all? If it doesn't, maybe it should. George Orwell gave his life by delaying crucial medical care he badly needed to finish his book 1984. Six months after it was published, Orwell was dead.

He was concerned enough about democracy to die trying to save it. His warning: Unless most Americans are willing to keep America as the most successful and longest lasting democracy, our country is going to find itself suddenly worshipping an oligarchy where only a few will be allowed success. By ignoring his health problem, Orwell believed our country's future was at stake; he forfeited his life for the world's greatest success.

The question now haunting us is this: Did George Orwell die in vain? If he did, then we are indeed on the doorstep of being ruled by Donald Trump's GOP

and its army of corporate wealthy persons who don't give a damn about you, me or our democracy.

So is our country worth saving? Do we want to continue living in a society full of people who care for one another or are we just concerned about power and money. In the long run, dollars won't buy us anything worth having. Pretty soon we need to make a decision while we still have a planet worth keeping.

Working democracies are hard to create and difficult to keep. In the June 17, 2019 issue of Time magazine, Shoshana Zuboff wrote about how human technology has become labeled "the threat of Big Other."

Even though we finally defeated the Nazi empire in World War II, Orwell was still concerned about the threat posed by totalitarianism around the world. Writing his novel, he urged "constant criticism" warning that any "immunity" to it must not be taken

lightly: “Totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere.”

Unfortunately, along with Orwell, we assumed the dangers of mass surveillance and social control could only originate at the state level. We were wrong; now we know that we’re unprotected from the threats looming outside the state – in the 2016 election.

According to Zuboff, corporations have been practicing unprecedented economic logic for 19 years. With surveillance capitalism, they are guilty of hijacking the internet and its digital technologies.

Viewed as one of Oklahoma’s most valued business enterprises, Google in 2000 invented this new economics that covertly claims private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some data are actually used to improve services, the rest gets turned into computational products to accurately predict behavior, yours and mine, no doubt making millions and even billions of dollars annually for their corporate masters.

The behavior predictions mined from those of us who make up this finely tuned customer base can be utilized in many ways. For instance, “These predictions are traded in a new futures market, where surveillance capitalists sell certainty to businesses determined to know what we will do next.”

Zuboff tells us: “This logic was first applied to finding which ads online will attract our interest, but similar practices now reside in nearly every sector – insurance, retail, health, education, finance and more – where personal experience is secretly captured and computed.” Remember us bouncing up for a Bud or Coke after a commercial?

Although rules and regs can keep our actions both physically safe and morally right, left unregulated, the predictions can become the major reason for corruption in the marketplace. Apparently, in the competition for certainty, our surveillance capitalists have learned that the most predictive data come not only from monitoring but also for directing behavior. Here lies a potential problem area. By 2013, Facebook learned how to engineer subliminal cues on its pages to shape users’ real-world actions and feelings. The result: Through these methods combined with real-time emotional analyses, marketers can cue behavior at just the moment of maximum vulnerability.

It’s controlling how we behave. It is no laughing matter, folks. These inventions were celebrated as being both effective and undetectable. One thing more. Cambridge Analytica was able to demonstrate that the same methods could also be employed to shape political and commercial behavior.

We now know that democracy has been asleep while surveillance capitalism has flourished way beyond safe limits. Thus we now find ourselves in the clutches of instrumentation power working its will through what Zuboff describes as the ubiquitous architecture of digital instrumentation.

To put things bluntly, I will quote Zuboff, “Rather than an intimate Big Brother that uses murder and

terror to possess each soul from the inside out, these digital networks are a Big Other, i.e. impersonal systems trained to monitor and shape our actions remotely, unimpeded by law.”

The key concern Zuboff has with surveillance capitalism can be summed up by the following paragraph that clearly and boldly states the threat we face today from the technology that our beloved science can lead us to, if we are not much more careful with its application. Science, merely a tool at our disposal, can help us determine the best way to proceed through the maize of knowledge that surrounds us.

“Instrumentation power does not want to break us; it simply wants to automate us. It does not care what we think, feel or do, as long as we think, feel and do things in ways that are accessible to Big Other’s billions of sensate, computational, actuating eyes and ears. Big Other knows everything, while its operations remain hidden, deleting our right to resist.”

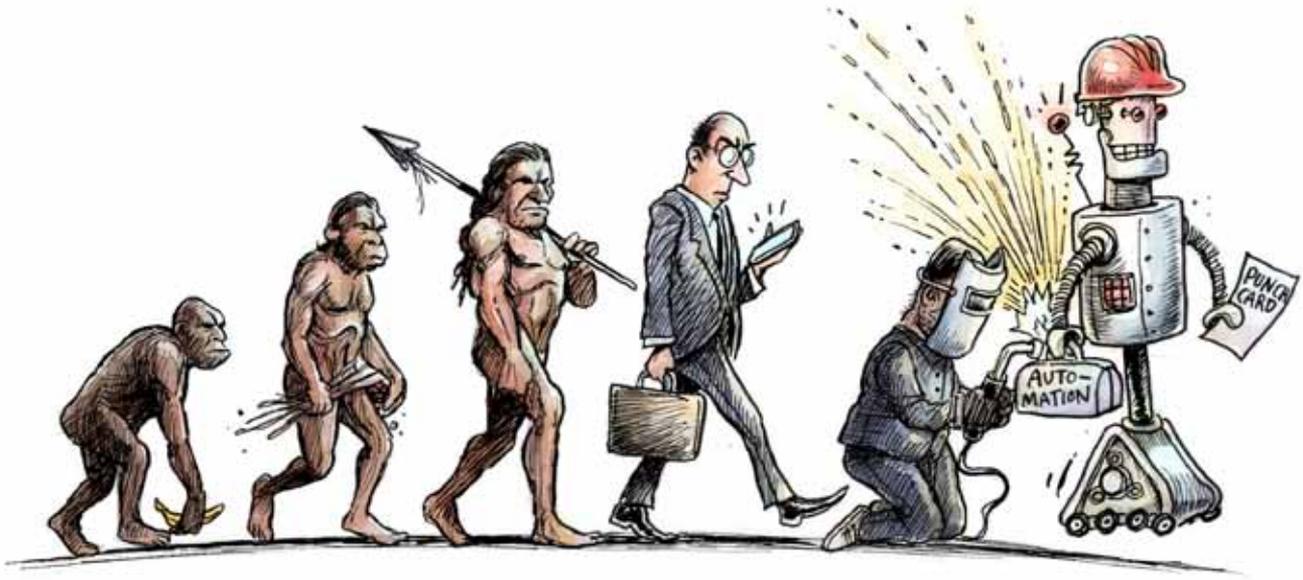
Man’s use or application of technology is what will allow him to either continue existing in a climate of rapid change or it will result in ill-advised choices not compatible with the life we want. Important is how we choose to use technology to determine how much longer we can live on planet earth.

Zuboff strongly suggests that humankind is currently at the point where choosing to both think and act critically is what will determine our future. We only have to look at what’s going on in Washington, DC to know how to save our future as a successful democracy and a safe environment in which to raise our children and enjoy our neighbors.

How will we decide for our future? Our children are growing up quickly and climate change is already upon us.

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





Five Ways To Stop Corporations From Ruining The Future Of Work

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Artificial intelligence, robots, and other advanced technologies are already transforming the world of work – and their impact is just beginning. They’ll grow the economy and make it more efficient. But unless American workers are involved, that growth and technological change will benefit only those at the top.

The challenge of making economic growth and technological change benefit all working people and not just those at the top is the same challenge I’ve written about and talked a lot about over the years. It’s the challenge of reversing widening inequalities of income, wealth, and political power. A big part of the solution is making sure workers have a voice and a union. That way they have more bargaining leverage to get a piece of the pie that in recent years has been going almost entirely to the top.

We shouldn’t think of emerging technologies as things we have no control over – as if they just happen automatically, inevitably. We have the power to shape technological progress. We need to assert our roles as workers and members of a democratic soci-

ety to ensure that new technologies benefit all of us. Here are five ways to do so:

- First, workers need a stronger voice, from the boardroom to the shop floor. Workers at all levels should participate in the design, development, and deployment of technology in the workplace – as they do in Germany.

This is not only good for workers. It’s also good for companies that otherwise waste countless dollars trying to figure out how best to use new technologies without consulting frontline workers who are closest to processes and products, and know how to get maximum use out of new technologies.

In the early 2000s, Home Depot spent over \$1 billion in automation but reduced investment in their workforce. In the end, because workers were left out of the process, many of these automated systems failed and had to be scaled back.

- Second, if we want corporations to invest in innovation and their workers we need to reform Wall Street. So instead of buying back their own shares of stock to manipulate stock prices and laying off em-

ployees to boost short-term profits, corporations can make the long-term investments that are necessary for their competitiveness and for the competitiveness of their workers.

Every corporation can get access to the same gadgets. What makes a corporation uniquely competitive is its people – how its workers utilize the new technologies.

- Third, we need to rebuild strong collaboration between government and business in researching and developing new technologies, so they work for the benefit of all. That's what we did in the three decades after World War II, when the Defense Department worked with the private sector to develop the Internet, telecommunications, and aerospace; when the National Institutes of Health did basic research for pharmaceuticals and medical breakthroughs; and our national laboratories pioneered research on bio-fuel, nuclear, wind and solar energy.

Conservatives often object that it's not the role of government to steer technological development. Yet most of the cutting-edge technology that's the crowning achievement of the United States' private sector was in fact developed as a result of public innovation and public funding.

Our government is still steering technological development. The difference now is we have the capacity to steer that development in a way that generates broad-based prosperity, not just jaw-dropping incomes for a few innovators and investors.

- Fourth, a more open and forward-looking industrial policy can help steer the nation's economic growth toward combating our central challenges – climate change, poverty, our crumbling infrastructure, costly and inaccessible health care, lack of quality education.

Tackling big ambitious goals like transitioning to clean energy can encourage collaboration between different sectors of the economy. Backed by the right technologies, they can also be sources of the good

jobs of the future.

Conservatives claim the government shouldn't pick winners and losers. But that's what we've done for years. We already have an industrial policy when the government bails out Wall Street banks, gives special tax breaks to oil, and hands out subsidies to Big Agriculture. But it's a backwards industrial policy, led by powerful industry lobbyists. We need a forward-looking industrial policy that develops the industries and jobs of the future, and does so openly, in ways that benefit working people and society.

- Finally, we need to assure that our workers are protected from the downsides: That new information technologies along with their increasing potential for monitoring and surveilling workers don't undermine worker autonomy, dignity, and privacy. That the use of algorithms to manage workers doesn't give top management unwarranted power in the workplace. And that workplace technologies don't make work more unpredictable for millions of workers.

Workers need some control over how these technologies and the data they produce are used. And for this they need strong unions.

New technologies advancing toward our workplace shouldn't reduce the standard of living of Americans. They should raise our standard of living. But that won't happen automatically.

Workers need a voice. Government needs a responsible role. We deserve a forward-looking and open industrial policy. And the rules of the game need to be fair.

We should all be able to steer the direction of technological change and influence how new technologies affect our lives.

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

Arrest Of Drug War Mastermind Exposes Futility of War on Drugs

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

On Dec. 10, Mexico's former Public Secretary Genaro Garcia Luna was charged with taking millions of dollars in bribes to protect the Sinaloa Cartel, allowing the organization to smuggle tons of cocaine and other drugs into the United States.

What greater symbol of the futility of the War on Drugs could there be and its double standards?

The New York Times editorialized that it was as if Elliot Ness had been an accomplice of Al Capone.

Luna was the main architect of former Mexican President Felipe Calderón's militarized approach to battling drug traffickers, which began in 2006 with the deployment of the armed forces against organized crime and the president's official declaration of "war" on them.

Mr. Calderón and Mr. García Luna at the time were considered successful in capturing or killing many of the most-wanted traffickers in the country.

After almost every major arrest, Mr. García Luna de-

lighted in posing with suspects alongside captured weapons and drugs in a show for the news media.

Now, however, it is his mug shot donning the news.

Mr. Luna's arrest comes on the heels of the conviction of the brother of Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez on drug trafficking and bribery charges in October.

A former small-town mayor at the trial testified that he smuggled 30-40 tons of cocaine with Juan Antonio Hernandez and channeled more than \$4 million in bribes to the president and his predecessor, Porfirio Lobo.

Lobo had come to power following an American backed coup d'états in 2009, which ousted the progressive leaders, José Manuel Zelaya, and helped to transform Honduras into a narco-state.

The Trump administration has been a strong proponent of the War on Drugs.

His Pentagon provides millions of dollars in annual military aid to Honduras for drug interdiction and supplies the Honduran military and police with equipment and training for counter-narcotics.

President Trump has also expanded the Obama administration's ill-conceived Plan Mérida.

This is a \$1.7 billion program modeled after Bill Clinton's Plan Colombia, which supplies Mexican law enforcement agencies with sophisticated surveillance and policing technologies.

Despite much rhetoric about good governance, only a small percentage of the money in Plan Mérida has ever been devoted to anti-poverty programs capable of providing opportunities for impoverished Mexican



youth, who see joining a criminal gang as the road to wealth and status, or for other crime prevention measures.

Instead, it has helped to beef up the security agencies headed by corrupt figures like Garcia Luna who have helped to ensure that the drug supply has continued to proliferate.

Support for the Plan Mérida nevertheless remains bipartisan.

In 2019, Congress provided \$139 million for it, \$61 million above the budget request, with additional funds aimed at addressing the flow of U.S.-bound opioids.

The Democratic controlled House has also passed FY '20 HR 2740 sanctioning the provision of \$126.8 million for the Mérida Initiative – even though Mexico's new leftist President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has repudiated it and sought to divert funding towards constructive social programs.

During the Democratic primary debates, any discussion of the drug issue has focused on the opioid crisis and culpability of large pharmaceutical companies for it.

No candidate so far – Bernie Sanders included - has come out strongly against the international War on Drugs or called for cutting off funding to Plan Mérida and military aid to Honduras.

This latter position is one that all progressives should adopt – especially in lieu of the arrest of Mr. Luna and conviction of Mr. Hernandez who exemplify the high-level corruption, which has made the War on Drugs a futile crusade.

Tulsa resident Jeremy Kuzmarov is author of The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs [Massachusetts, 2009] and Obama's Unending Wars: Fronting the Foreign Policy of the Permanent Warfare State [Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2019].



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Democrats Cave In Secret Budget Deal With Trump

BY RALPH NADER

While attention was focused on the House of Representatives' impeachment of Donald J. Trump, legislators from both parties were secretly huddling with White House aides to seal a \$1.4 trillion budget deal to fund the government until next September. They were rushing to do this to avoid a partial government shutdown starting Dec. 21, 2019.

Had the budget been deliberated in open Congressional hearings, the media would have reported on this backroom deal and the people of this country would have had a chance to weigh in during the proceedings. Instead, a degraded Congress pulled a fast one on the citizens. This obfuscation is especially unacceptable considering that these lawmakers work only three days a week at best – when they are not in recess altogether.

Astoundingly the Democrats also caved in on Trump's wall! After blocking Trump's funding demand for the wall for three years, the Democrats approved \$1.4 billion for the wall and even allowed Trump to divert funds from the Pentagon to that porous, wasteful barrier. In so doing, the Democrats legitimized one of the egregious, impeachable offenses Trump committed earlier this year when he seized \$3.6 billion from the Pentagon's budget in money not approved for the wall. The Washington Post reported that former secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus tweeted: "As hurricane heads for Camp Lejeune Trump takes \$3.6b from military for needless wall. Same amt Marines say needed to fix Lejeune after last storm."

Trump usurped the Congressional "power of the purse," to use James Madison's phrase, under our Constitution. Unfortunately, Speaker Pelosi declined to charge Trump with this and other similarly impeachable spending violations. Now we know one reason why – the ongoing secret budget deal.

Just as astonishing was that the Democrats caved on the funding for ObamaCare. Year after year, Democratic leaders defended ObamaCare, rather than support more efficient full Medicare for All [with free choice of doctor and hospital]. See H.R. 1384 for the most recent version of Medicare for All.

With the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals just deciding against the individual mandate in ObamaCare, what does the House Democratic leadership do? They go along with the Republicans' demand to repeal the medical device and health insurance taxes that were helping to fund ObamaCare's expansion of health insurance coverage for 20 million people.

It gets worse. The House Democrats approved a huge increase of \$22 billion to the already bloated, wasteful military budget in return for Trump approving paid family leave for federal government employees. The Democrats made this deal instead of just pushing for paid maternity leave, a right provided in all other Western democracies and numerous dictatorships in the world!

"No problem," say the feeble Democrats. It is just more of the terrible practice by the Democrats of giving equal increases for the military budget, demanded by the Republican illegal war hawks, as the price for social service funds for low-income families and children. What a grotesque way to spend taxpayer money!

To what level has this Congress lowered itself? Allowing the Trump dump to contaminate Congress even extends to cruel bigotry. They allowed Trump to extend his racist discrimination against the American citizens of Puerto Rico by reducing the Medicaid funds from \$12 billion over four years to up to \$5.7 billion over two years. The higher sum and longer term already were endorsed by Republican and Democratic leaders on two Congressional Committees.

Robert Greenstein, director of the highly respected Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, declared that "with another funding cliff looming in two years under the new agreement, Puerto Rico may continue to lack the certainty it needs to commit to long-term increases of its very low payment rates to health care providers [vendors] to stem their alarming exodus to the mainland, to provide coverage for such key health treatments as drugs to treat Hepatitis C, and to cover more poor, uninsured residents."

Over the years, Congress has weakened its exclusive constitutional "power of the purse" by giving presidents waivers. As with the war powers, Congress has delegated more of its constitutional authority to the Executive Branch.

Just days ago, the racist President Trump bragged before a large campaign rally that he has cut off "\$600 million" in aid for Palestinian relief, including aid for suffering children. This was a long-term assistance program, under past Republican and Democratic administrations, to help provide the barest necessities to displaced and impoverished Palestinians whose territories are blockaded or militarily occupied by the Israeli government.

Washington justified such expenditures for both humanitarian and security purposes. No more, says

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

Corporate Tax Avoidance Hasn't Changed Much Under 2017 Tax Law

BY MATTHEW GARDNER

Since Congress and the current administration pushed through a major restructuring of our corporate tax laws that dropped the legal tax rate from 35% to 21% almost two years ago, it's been difficult to know how well the new laws were functioning – until now.

A new report from ITEP shows that, based on the first year of financial reports released by companies operating under the new tax law, tax avoidance appears to be every bit as much of a problem under the new tax system as it was before the 2017 tax law took effect.

The ITEP report tabulates the effective tax rates paid by 379 profitable Fortune 500 corporations on their 2018 U.S. income and finds that as a group these companies paid an effective federal income tax rate of 11.3%. This means these companies sheltered almost half of their U.S. pretax income from federal income tax in 2018.

The report also identifies 91 corporations – nearly a quarter of all the companies analyzed – that paid zero, or even less than zero, on their 2018 U.S. income last year. These companies include Amazon, Chevron, Halliburton, MGM Resorts and Netflix.

If these findings sound wearily familiar, that's because they are: A first look at corporate financial disclosures in April of this year revealed 60 companies that didn't pay a dime in federal income taxes on U.S. income in 2018.

More so, only months before the tax cuts were enacted in 2017, ITEP released a multi-year analysis of the scale of tax avoidance under the 35% corporate tax rate then in effect. The study found that between 2008 and 2015, profitable companies paid effective tax rates averaging just 21%, not much more than half of the 35% they were allegedly paying.

That report, like the new one, also identified dozens of companies paying zero or less in profitable years during this period.

And many of the companies paying low rates under the new system are the very same ones that benefited handsomely from the previous rules. Just as was true before 2017, utilities and machinery companies are paying especially low tax rates, relying heavily on tax breaks for capital investment. Then as now, tax breaks for stock options distributed to top executives are a major tax avoidance source for many companies.

This should surprise no one since a straightforward criticism of the 2017 tax cuts was that they did little to close the rampant [and, by all appearances, entirely legal] tax avoidance under the old system.

It's too soon to say that this means tax avoidance has gotten worse under the new rules. 2018 is, after all, the first year of full implementation. Effective corporate tax rates are cyclical, varying over time, so these same companies could find themselves paying lower, or higher, tax rates next year.

But the findings of ITEP's new report send a clear signal that the fundamental problems with our corporate tax laws have not been fixed by the tax overhaul enacted two years ago.

It's never too late to admit you're wrong, and so one can hope that Congress and the federal administration might recognize the error of their ways and embark on a second round of tax restructuring that addresses the hard part of tax reform: loophole-closing reforms.

Sadly, that does not appear to be the administration's goal at this time: just last month White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney announced that the president "would love to see further refinements to tax policy" that would "get that corporate tax rate down just a little bit more."

ITEP's new report makes it clear that a far better "refinement" of our corporate tax laws would be to make sure that whatever tax rate we choose to levy, our biggest and most profitable companies will actually pay it.

Matthew Gardner is senior fellow at the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy [ITEP].

Raise Revenue, But Hold Drama

BY FROMA HARROP

Democratic candidates offer two basic approaches to raising revenues for public programs.

One is grand opera – accusing the wealthy of greed [Bernie Sanders] and malice, that is, "leaving everyone else behind" [Elizabeth Warren]. For this bad

TAX REFORM

behavior, there must be punishment in the form of taxation.

The other approach is to simply increase their taxes a reasonable amount and not get personal. Many rich people may not like it, but they won't feel under moral condemnation. Some even back the idea. That is Joe Biden's approach. And it was the way Democratic Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton succeeded in raising taxes on the higher income.

Warren swings between the relatively benign "good for you for being rich" and telling them to "pitch in [only] 2 cents" and naming malefactors she's singled out for hurt. One TV ad flashes hedge fund manager Leon Cooperman and the words "charged with insider trading." Cooperman happens to be one of my least favorite billionaires, but being a billionaire is not in itself a criminal offense.

[The 2 cents refers to her proposed wealth tax that would place a 2% tax on household assets above \$50 million and 6% on assets over \$1 billion. A wealth tax would be hard to levy because how do you set a value on Picassos and a ski chalet?]

Sanders is less subtle. He's called for the eradication of billionaires. You can Google the particulars.

Polls show that most Americans, and from both parties, want the top earners to pay more taxes. The basic concept is solid in all but the most hardened plutocratic circles. More importantly, it is also good policy, given the extraordinary tax cuts bestowed on the ultrawealthy by President Donald Trump and his Republican helpers in Congress – and the massive deficits they are feeding.

Biden's tax proposals draw almost no attention because they aren't accompanied by denunciations of the rich, thunder, lightning and threats. Let's examine his proposals.

First off, Biden would return the top income bracket to 39.6%. [Trump had it lowered to 37%.] He would apply that higher rate only to income above \$510,000. He would also adjust upward the capital gains tax for those earning more than \$1 million.

Biden would increase the corporate tax rate to 28% from Trump's ridiculously low 21%. That would still leave it well below the 35% on the books when Trump took office. Bear in mind there was bipartisan agreement that the 35% tax was high by international standards and needed to be lowered.

Another solid Biden idea is an alternative minimum tax that would be applied to U.S. companies that shift profits abroad to avoid U.S. taxes. We're talking to you, Amazon and Apple.

And this should get *lots* of attention: Biden would repeal the tax hike Trump and his Republican allies thrust on ordinary Americans, mainly in blue states. That is, state and local taxes would again be totally deductible and not subject to Trump's \$10,000 limit. The feds should not be taxing money people already paid in taxes.



Put together, Biden's changes are projected to raise about \$2 trillion over a decade. The revenues would go to infrastructure, health care and fighting carbon emissions.

From a practical standpoint, Biden would be raising more money than either Warren or Sanders because he can get elected and they can't. His proposals are also far more politically doable – in part because they are more modest, in part because he doesn't demonize anyone.

So let's place a bedsheet over the guillotine and put the pitchforks back in the garage. Histrionics are counterproductive. Democrats should choose Biden or another moderate and get it done.

Budget

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

the imperial Trump, exercising his Congressionally-granted waiver.

Congress has also long abandoned its constitutional authority over tariffs to the imperial presidency. Constitutional litigator Alan Morrison has challenged the White House's unilateral imposition of tariffs – now involving tens of billions of dollars – on imports from foreign countries. In January Morrison will argue before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit that the authority to impose tariffs belongs to Congress.

What is Trump doing with these tens of billions of dollars deposited in the U.S. Treasury? Congress has not approved spending them for any programs or objectives. When I asked a staffer with the House Budget Committee what is being done with loads of money, she replied that "we have it under study."

Secret government has its direct consequences for the American people, and abdication of congressional checks on the Executive Branch is harmful and cowardly.

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Jim Hightower



‘Tax The Rich’ Is No Longer Just A Political Slogan

There’s nothing inevitable about inequality. It’s an injustice that the moneyed powers and their political hirelings have chosen. We the People can choose a brighter path, one that bends toward justice, starting with a wealth tax such as Sen. Elizabeth Warren’s plan to apply a 2% per annum wealth tax only to net worth over \$50 million and another 1% to households worth more than a billion bucks.

But how can we best the billionaires who buy the political clout to push through laws that the great majority opposes [such as 2017’s Donald Trump-Mitch McConnell trillion-dollar tax giveaway to the rich] and best their brawny political blockers? Not by going around them but by pushing right through them.

First, years of rank avarice and arrogance have caught up with the superrich and their enablers, turning “billionaire” into a synonym for “thief” and focusing rising public anger on the inequality they’ve fostered.

Second, that anger has generated a stunning level of popular enthusiasm for the wealth tax. A New York Times survey found that six in every 10 Americans favor Sen. Warren’s plan:

75% of Democrats

57% of independents

Wow! 51% of Republicans

Third, not all billionaires are jerks. Eli Broad, a former union auto worker who built two Fortune 500 corporations, is a leader among a small group of superrich Americans who believes “it’s time for those of us with great wealth to commit to reducing income inequality, starting with the demand to be taxed at a higher rate than everyone else.”

He says: “The old ways aren’t working, and we can’t waste any more time tinkering around the edges. ... I have watched my wealth grow exponentially thanks to federal policies that have cut my tax rates while wages of regular people have stagnated and poverty rates have increased. ... A wealth tax can start to address the economic inequality eroding the soul of our country’s strength. I can afford to pay more, and I know others can too. What we can’t afford are more shortsighted policies that skirt big

ideas, avoid tough issues and do little to alleviate the poverty faced by millions of Americans. There’s no time to waste.”

In June, 20 other extremely rich Americans sent an open letter to all 2020 presidential candidates, declaring: “America has a moral, ethical and economic responsibility to tax our wealth more. ... [W]e’re joining the majority of Americans already supporting a moderate wealth tax. We ask that you recognize its strong merit and popular support, and advance the idea to tax us a little more.”

So far, most of the Democrats have promised to do just that if elected, with Sen. Bernie Sanders and Warren supporting game-changing tax plans that would shift significant wealth to benefit the poor and middle class. No word from Trump.

“Tax the Rich” is no longer just a political slogan; it’s a national necessity and a moral imperative. And, at long last, it’s actually within our reach. The bulk of billionaires and their right-wing political networks will fight furiously against even the idea that our society should strive for tax fairness.

Indeed, their hubris is so extreme that they’re already clamoring for Trump and GOP senators to hand them some \$200 billion more in tax cuts this year. But, as columnist Paul Krugman has observed, “they do so more or less in secret, presumably because they realize just how unpopular their position really is.”

More insidious are the out-of-touch establishment pundits and milquetoast Democrats who are aloof from the growing public anger at the raw unfairness of today’s system. They blandly propose small and slow baby steps, policies that would close a couple of tax loopholes without disturbing the basic structure of inequality. If the meek ever inherit the earth, these people will be land barons!

The stakes are enormous, for this is not finally about arcane tax matters but a struggle for America’s essential egalitarian idea that we’re all in this together. The proposal for a bold, unabashedly progressive wealth tax is a rallying cry for grassroots rebels to join forces and work together to reassert America’s historic democratic promise.

Can 'Powerless Nobodies' Fight The Corporate Powers?

The many sparkling bays along the Texas coastline of the Gulf of Mexico have long provided both a working-class living and a valued lifestyle for generations of shrimpers, oysterers and other fishing families. People and seafood, however, are not the only creatures here, for such wildlife as alligators and snakes also call many of these interconnected waterways home. Yet, by necessity and experience, the hardy people of the water have figured out how to share the bays so all creatures can get along.

But in the 1980s, a strange and invasive new critter entered Lavaca Bay, near the town of Port Comfort. Far from getting along, this species proceeded over the years to devour whole harvests of seafood, along with the livelihoods of local Gulf communities. This marauder was not some monster from the deep but a massive, 45,000-acre factory looming over Lavaca Bay. It is the Formosa Plastics Corporation, founded by the richest man in Taiwan.

As its name implies, Formosa is not here for seafood. It is the world's second largest fabricator of polyvinyl chloride, the tiny, highly toxic pebbles and powders used to make the gabillions of plastic bags, pipes, bottles, etc. that are choking the Earth. For decades, the Formosa plant has cavalierly been dumping trillions of these poisonous pebbles and tons of the polyvinyl powders into its wastewater – which end up in Lavaca Bay.

That poisonous content then spreads to other bays, nearby waterways, the Gulf itself ... and into the shrimp, oysters, fish and other creatures living there. The result has been species vanishing from these waters, creating economic and social devastation for families and port communities that rely on nature's bounty.

Wait, isn't this against the law? Of course, but petrochemical behemoths like Formosa have corrupted the law, turning Texas lawmakers and environmental regulators into their puppets. When leaders won't lead, The People must, and that's exactly what's happening in this case.

A defiant, determined former fourth-generation shrimper named Diane Wilson, along with a scrappy environmental coalition on the Texas Gulf Coast, have just won the largest citizen environmental lawsuit in U.S. history, forcing Formosa to stop its gross contamination of the bay, the local economy and the law.

It's good to have a happy-ending story for the holidays – one that's not sugar-plum sappy but genuinely uplifting.

It "feels like justice," said Wilson in early December when a federal district judge OK'd a \$50 million pollution settlement against Formosa Plastics Corporation. Judge Kenneth Hoyt, a Ronald Reagan appointee, had previously ruled that the Taiwan plastics conglomerate was a "serial offender" whose violations of America's Clean Water Act were "extensive, historical, and repetitive." How the case got there is as important as his ruling.

Wilson, the indefatigable local shrimper, had been trying for some 30 years to get state and national officials to stop Formosa from dumping poisonous plastic chemicals into the Lavaca Bay ecosystem. The corporation's deliberate contamination was destroying seasonal seafood harvests upon which she and thousands of Gulf Coast fishing families relied. She was ignored by those in power and then ridiculed and then demonized. Yet this lady of the sea wouldn't quit. She kept speaking out, mounted hunger strikes and even tried to sink her own beloved shrimp boat in the bay as a public protest.

Nothing. But then, backed by a volunteer network of regional environmentalists and a savvy group of nonprofit legal service lawyers, Wilson filed the private citizens lawsuit in July 2017 that came to trial this spring in Judge Hoyt's courtroom, finally producing an overdue measure of justice. The \$50 million settlement doesn't go to Wilson or the other plaintiffs but to projects that will revitalize local marine ecosystems and create a shrimping and oyster cooperative for local families. It also will pay for citizen-group monitoring of Formosa's compliance with the judge's orders for "zero discharge" of its plastic pollutants.

Even more significant than the money that the Formosa settlement provides, this victory sets a major legal precedent to advance other citizen lawsuits against polluters, requiring that the polluters [not taxpayers] pay for their messes. Who needs Santa Claus when "We the People" can deliver such democratic gifts to ourselves? For information on the details and impact of this remarkable people's victory, go to the Texas RioGrande Legal Aid website [<https://www.trla.org>]. – *Jim Hightower*

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Will Republicans Risk A Rigged Trial?

BY JOE CONASON

When President Donald Trump's defenders aren't simply lying about the House impeachment inquiry – it all happened in a Capitol Hill basement with no Republicans present, as one of his lawyers told National Public Radio – they complain about the lack of firsthand witnesses to presidential abuse. They assume nobody will notice that Trump himself forbid any testimony by those with the most direct knowledge of his attempts to extort Ukraine.

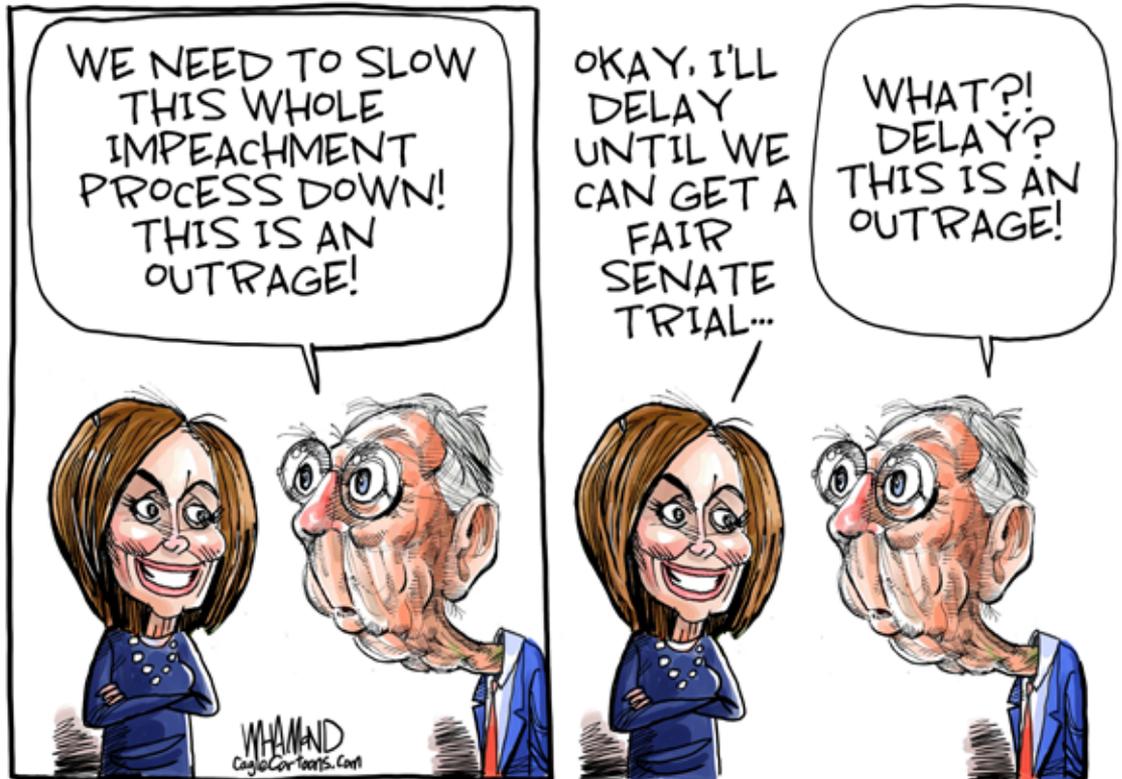
For some reason, his defenders don't regard his silencing of potential witnesses as an admission of presidential guilt. Instead, they eagerly join him in presenting the nation with an insoluble dilemma: Impeachment can't be considered serious or fair without direct fact witnesses – and there can be no direct fact witnesses because the president has every right to squelch them.

In this way, the Republicans have abdicated their constitutional responsibility to oversee a president run amok. Their craven posture assures Trump that he can do whatever he wants, just as he has declared, while they exempt him from the rule of law.

Imitating the coarse example of their political boss, Republicans are increasingly brazen in expressing contempt for the Constitution. That document mandates a Senate trial following impeachment by the House, which doesn't mean a sham tribunal or an instant dismissal. Moreover, according to Article I, Section 3 of the Constitution and the Senate rules, every senator is mandated to "swear or affirm" an oath to do "impartial justice" in any impeachment proceeding.

Yet both Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-KY, and Senate Judiciary Committee chair Lindsey Graham, R-SC, have publicly announced their rejection of an impartial Senate trial.

On Fox News, McConnell said that he is plotting how to handle the trial with White House lawyers – before he even begins to discuss the matter with



Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-NY. "Everything I do during this I'm coordinating with White House counsel," he brayed. "There will be no difference between the president's position and our position as to how to handle this to the extent that we can."

As for Graham, he told an audience in Doha, Qatar, that his aim is to ensure the impeachment "dies quickly," without any annoying examination of facts or witnesses. "I am trying to give a pretty clear signal I have made up my mind," said the same man who once demanded, when he managed then-President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial in 1999, that every senator keep an open mind. "I'm not trying to pretend to be a fair juror here," he added in further self-indictment.

Presumably, Graham and McConnell intend to swear the required oath with a premeditated intent to violate it. Evidently, they're eager to bring fresh dishonor on themselves and their institution.

It is still possible that Chief Justice John Roberts, who will preside over the impeachment trial as prescribed by the Constitution, will assert the Constitution's primacy over the partisan chicanery of the Senate Republican leaders? Roberts could insist that the Senate hold a real trial, with actual witnesses [including Rudy Giuliani, acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, former national security adviser John Bolton and others who have direct knowledge of Trump's misconduct]. And if he

hopes to maintain his reputation as anything other than a right-wing stooge – and stand up against the constitutional vandalism of his fellow Republicans – that is what he must do. We may soon see what he is made of and whether he is up to this historic moment.

Rules and clauses aside, the great majority of Americans of all political persuasions understand fair-

ness when they see it – and most of them still have enough sense to detect a political fix, too. Polls show that even Republicans agree overwhelmingly that impeachment requires an actual trial, with evidence and witnesses. If McConnell, Graham and the Republican Senate foist a rigged proceeding on the public, they will risk a furious rebuke next November.

Do Americans Even Want Time Off?

BY FROMA HARROP

A new Gallup survey finds that about half of Americans who hold second jobs say they don't do it out of financial necessity. Why, then, do they put in the extra hours? Do they just like working?

Europeans, in stark contrast, relish their free time. Workers in Denmark actually went on a general strike because they were entitled to *only* five weeks of vacation. They wanted six.

Many American workers get a lousy one or two weeks off, if that much. Yet 55% of Americans with paid vacation said they didn't even use all the time off, according to the U.S. Travel Association.

John de Graaf, who writes on free time and consumption, has a theory on why Americans don't pound the table for more paid vacation. "Until you actually get a block of time off," he said, "you don't really appreciate it."

He cites an interesting case in Amador County, CA. After the 2007-09 financial crisis, California trimmed its contribution to every county by 10%. County officials in Amador decided that rather than lay off public workers, they would cut their working hours by 10%.

The Service Employees International Union cried foul. It preferred layoffs of low-seniority people over a shorter workweek for other public employees. The county stood firm but said that it would honor the union's preference in two years if money remained tight.

Two years later, the budget still needed cutting. The union leadership predictably chose layoffs and restoring the five-day week for the others. But the workers said, "Wait a minute." They weren't asked. The union put the matter before the rank and file, which voted 71% to 29% to stay on four days with less pay.

What happened? As de Graaf observed, "Workers were now saying things like, 'Now I go fishing on Fridays.'" [Only a few, mainly men, used the freed-up day to take on outside work.]

The female employees tended to like the four-day week more than the men, according to de Graaf. They would tell him, "Well, now what I do is the kids are in school on Fridays, so I do various chores on Friday, and then I have the whole weekend off."

Amador County workers enjoyed the added advantage of all having the same day off, so they had friends to go fishing with. That's the thinking in Europe, where nearly everyone gets vacation time during the same weeks of August. Europeans realized that people want time off when friends and family do.

During the Great Depression, a number of big American companies moved to 30-hour weeks. One of them, Kellogg's in Battle Creek, MI, adopted a kind of compromise. The workweek was reduced to 30 hours, but the company paid the employees for 35 hours. Interestingly, Kellogg's found that these workers had become more productive during the hours worked.

Those holding multiple jobs – now about a quarter of U.S. workers – are far rarer in Canada and France, according to Gallup. Why would that be?

Perhaps the stronger social safety nets in those countries make ordinary people feel more economically secure. Perhaps a consumer culture flashing luxury in our faces makes Americans see some expenditures not as extravagances but as basic necessities. Work is how they can afford them.

"Other things being equal," de Graaf adds, "when Americans are given the choice of time or money, most will choose the money."

But looking at the experience in Amador County, it's possible that we just don't understand the value of time off because we've had so little experience with it. If so, what a sad commentary on the American way of life.

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On The Contrary, Sports Are Just Games

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

The headline of a column on The New York Times op-ed page was, for me, quite striking: “Sports Aren’t Just Games.” It was written by the former editor in chief of Deadspin, Barry Petchesky, who was recently fired for refusing a new company edict to “stick to sports.”

I’m not as interested in Petchesky’s account of how a private equity firm, after having acquired Deadspin’s parent company, attempted to change the nature of sports reporting at the site. As he explains, the takeover and demand to “stick to sports” are parts of a larger story about how the private equity model has affected journalism.

I’m more interested in the meaning of the directive. What sticks in Petchesky’s craw is the “stick to sports” mandate, which would require Deadspin to churn out “unimportant stories” about “just games,” thereby ignoring the relation of sport to bigger issues. At Deadspin, “We wanted to show the reality of sports, to help readers and players understand the labor issues, the politics, the issues of race and class that don’t materially change when the power dynamic



is owner/player.”

Petchesky fancies himself as a Journalist [capital “J”] or a Serious Social Thinker in search of Big Issues – which makes sports very serious indeed! His major complaint is about the attempt to separate sports from the larger social world. “Reporting sports with integrity requires knowing that there’s no way to wall off the games from the world outside.”

To reduce sports reporting to “box scores and transaction wires is absurd ... [S]ports don’t end when the players head back to the locker room.” Sounds persuasive.

He writes as if his grievances are novel and represent a cutting edge approach to sports. “From Dead-



spin's founding in 2005, the website took for granted that what happened off the field was at least as important as the goings-on between the lines, and there was no way to separate the two."

Petchesky ends the column insisting that Deadspin attempted to be "the voice of the long-suffering fan" [not merely the voice of journalists who value writing about social issues – "important" stories – more than they enjoy writing about "just games"?]. Deadspin wrote for "the fan troubled by the culture and politics of sports, the fan who couldn't help noticing that the

large issues of the real world spilled onto the field." To "stick to sports" would be "dishonest."

Petchesky's plea for the worldly relevance of sports is old news. His perspective is a variation on a well-known theme, a story that has been with us since people began wondering about the relation between playing games, which seems removed from everyday life, and the "world outside."

In the 1960s and 1970s, radical critics insisted on viewing sports through the lens of big business, commercialism, the hyper-competitiveness of capitalism

and the values it bequeathed to American culture. They insisted that everything, including sports, is political.

Sociologists insisted on examining sports using their privileged categories of race, class, and gender. Sociology of sport became a legitimate part of social science.

Journalistic debunkers and muckrakers and cynics have been in the press box and the locker room for a long time, attempting to shatter the imaginary wall between sports and the outside world.

Among self-important sports talk radio big mouths, television celebrity announcers, and well-known sports journalists, my guess is that Petchesky's viewpoint expresses an orthodoxy, not an exception. Sport isn't the toy department of life. It's so very important. "...[S]ports is everything, and everything is sports[sic]," as he says.

I want to offer a brief minority report in defense of the "absurd" notion that sports have more to do with "box scores and transaction wires" – to which I attend with the care I give to a difficult philosophical text – than with business, ideology, or social analysis.

I offer these remarks as a lover of sports, a believer whose faith is strong, having played and coached and watched these games for most of my life.

My love of sports has little or nothing to do with the viewpoint that Petchesky endorses. He wants to place sports firmly in the world to convince himself that games, which are essentially useless, are worthy of serious journalistic interest. This is one way to inflate the importance of the enormous amount of time, energy, and money devoted to playing and watching and reporting on sports.

But his interest in the "culture and the politics of sports" comes at the expense of the games themselves. He seems to realize that games are "unimportant." Evidently what he takes to be most important, and what could justify our obsession with sports, isn't sports. It's something else: politics, labor issues, drugs, domestic violence, big business and more. [At the least, we might remind him that sport is not equivalent to professional sports or the semi-professional world of big-time college athletics.]

One way to divert ourselves from the apparent uselessness of pursuing the internal goals of game-playing is to focus on peripheral matters instead of the essential elements of sports.

Sports are made-up realities, set apart from life in a variety of ways. In sports an alternative world is created, with its own ends, space, time, order, and meaning. A game or sporting event is pure presentation, like a play – nothing is produced.

Internal to the game there is a point to the competitive struggles of sports. Yet from the standpoint of the cold-blooded realities of everyday life, the goals of the game are relatively pointless – trivial. Knock the little white ball into a cup. Shoot the ball into the basket. Kick the ball into the goal. Hit a fast-moving ball

with a bat in order to follow a path that ends precisely where one begins! There is an undertow of absurdity in playing sports. There is an over-arching seriousness about nonserious things.

No wonder that in dark times, when sports participants are tragically killed or injured, inside or outside the lines, or when the families of players face disease and real-life desperation, someone says, "Hey, this is real life, not just a game."

In everyday life we don't create gratuitous difficulties for ourselves. When we attempt to achieve our goals we don't create unnecessary obstacles to overcome. To do so is irrational. Yet these elements are essential in game-playing; these are the realities of sport: the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.

In a crucial sense, sport is set apart from the "world outside," and that is where my own interest resides – in a world of illusion, a world we momentarily treat as if it were the real thing.

I must alert you to the power of metaphors in thinking about these matters. Talking about the attempt "to wall off the games from the world outside," or trying to "separate" what goes on between the lines and off the field, or noticing the way that worldly issues "spilled onto the field" – these are metaphors which seek to illuminate our situation – or as Petchesky argues, distort the "reality of sports."

The writer and philosopher Iris Murdoch reminded us of the power of metaphor. "Metaphors are not merely peripheral decorations or even useful models. They are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition: metaphors of space, metaphors of movement, metaphors of vision."

Petchesky argues that various metaphors of space, of separation and detachment, fail to show us the reality of sports. But these are the metaphors that illuminate what is essential, not accidental, at all levels of play and for anyone interested in watching sports. These are the metaphors that locate the joys of playing and the intrinsic interests of watching a fascinating unfolding narrative, with dramatic tension, exceptional displays of skill, aesthetic delight, heroic action, virtuous conduct, and finality.

In a 1979 book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch, in a chapter called "The Degradation of Sport," already responds to Petchesky's worldly view of sports. For Lasch games are our "purest form of escape." They "satisfy the need for free fantasy and the search for gratuitous difficulty," and are "activities utterly useless."

"The uselessness of games make them offensive to social reformers, improvers of public morals, or functionalist critics of society ...

"The appeal of a game is explained by its artificiality, the arbitrary obstacles it sets up for no other purpose than to challenge the players to surmount them, the absence of any utilitarian or uplifting ob-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

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The Secret History Of The Trump-Russia Investigation

CRIME IN PROGRESS

Inside The Steele Dossier

And The Fusion GPS Investigation Of Donald Trump

By Glenn Simpson And Peter Fritsch

Random House

345 pages, \$30

BY LUKE HARDING

In January 2017 a meeting took place in a deserted building in Foggy Bottom. It was conspiratorial. The office in downtown Washington belonged to David Kramer, long time aide to the Republican senator John McCain. His furtive guest was Ken Bensinger, a reporter for BuzzFeed. Kramer had brought with him a series of confidential memos. They concerned Donald Trump, the man who was about to be sworn in as US president, and his murky ties with Russia. Kramer laid them out on the table. In delicate fashion, he then excused himself and said he had to make a phone call and pay a visit to the bathroom.

Bensinger whipped out his iPhone. He photographed the papers, one by one. Kramer came back half an hour later. Kramer had served as a US assistant secretary of state under George W Bush and was deeply appalled at the prospect of a Trump presidency. For good measure, he shared the memos with other news organisations and Obama officials.

Kramer's thinly deniable leak ignited a scandal that would consume Washington life for three long years. The memos didn't quite ease Trump from power. But they did shed light on one of the biggest and longest-running mysteries in 21st-century politics: why is Trump so fulsome and such a suck up when it comes to Vladimir Putin, a KGB guy not over-blessed with charm? The author of the Foggy Bottom dossier was Christopher Steele, a former MI6 officer who spent a career digging up Russia's dark secrets. His memos alleged that the Kremlin had been supporting and cultivating Trump for at least five years. And that in best KGB tradition it had acquired a sizeable amount of Trump kompromat, which could be deployed for

blackmail purposes.

Steele knew Russia well. He served at the British embassy as the USSR fell apart, and swapped government spying in 2009 for private business intelligence. In spring 2016 a Washington-based research firm, Fusion GPS, got in touch. Might Steele use his network of sources to investigate Trump? Specifically, what Trump had got up to over the years in Moscow?

Crime in Progress is billed as the secret history of the Trump-Russia investigation. It is more or less that: an entertaining and readable account of the dossier's origins, and of the cosmic fall-out once BuzzFeed put it online, to Fusion's fury. Trump, of course, denies wrongdoing and says he's the victim of a witch-hunt. He has called Steele a "failed spy" and Marxist plotter.

The book's authors Glenn Simpson and Peter Fritsch co-founded Fusion a decade ago. As Wall Street Journal alumni they know how to tell a story. *Crime in Progress* doesn't radically alter our understanding of the collusion saga, but there are plenty of colourful details and anecdotes. Once Trump shuffles off stage – in 2020 or later – a movie version seems highly likely. Fusion began its own research into Trump in August 2015, at the behest of a Republican client. It found damning open-source evidence: court documents, corporate bankruptcies and ties to organised crime. It turned to Steele to get intelligence from inside Russia. Many strands pointed there. What Steele might find was uncertain. "We threw a line in the water and Moby-Dick came back," Simpson writes dryly.

According to *Crime in Progress*, Steele's first Fusion memo sketched out the Putin-Trump relationship. It included an eye-popping claim that the FSB

spy agency – once directed by Putin himself – had videoed the future president in a compromising situation. In 2013 Trump had allegedly cavorted with prostitutes at the Ritz-Carlton hotel. The future president had watched a “golden showers” show, it said.

That the FSB bugged hotel rooms in Moscow was an open secret, known to western diplomats and spies. Still, Simpson and Fritsch were stunned. After reading the report, Fritsch exclaimed: “What the fuck?” Simpson said: “I know.” Steele assured them the memo was credible. It drew on seven sources, including a Moscow foreign ministry official, a former Russian intelligence operative, and two witnesses from inside the Ritz. Crime in Progress doesn’t tell us who the sources are, alas. There are a few tantalising clues: a single accomplished “collector” gathered much of the intelligence, we learn. Steele calls him – or her – a “remarkable person with a remarkable story who deserves a medal for services to the west”. Great care was taken to keep identities secret. The fate of Sergei Skripal – poisoned in Salisbury by a visiting Moscow death squad – was all too possible.

Once it became clear that Trump was in bed with Russians, Steele alerted the FBI and Downing Street. The book claims he had a memorable encounter with Sir Richard Dearlove, former head of MI6, in the Garrick Club. Dearlove intimated that the Theresa May government in which Boris Johnson served as foreign secretary was suspicious of Trump’s Moscow ties. It had made a political decision not to “push the matter further”, Dearlove told Steele. (Dearlove, contacted by the Guardian, has rubbished the book’s account of this meeting)

Simpson and Fritsch made their own ultimately doomed attempts to cry fire over Trump and Moscow. They sought out Dean Baquet and David Remnick, editors of the New York Times and New Yorker respectively, the Washington Post’s national security team and other senior US journalists, Crime in

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Progress alleges. All were interested in the dossier’s explosive content. But publishing it was another matter.

The book’s blunt conclusion: the media failed. There was wall to wall coverage of Hillary Clinton’s underwhelming emails, hacked

by Russia’s GRU spy agency and given to WikiLeaks. But the more important story – that Moscow had potentially compromised a White House candidate – went unwritten.

We wait to find out the denouement.

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Taxes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

“There is nobody in this country,” she argues, “who got rich on their own. Nobody. You built a factory out there – good for you. But I want to be clear. You moved your goods to market on roads the rest of us paid for. You hired workers the rest of us paid to educate. You were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for. You didn’t have to worry that marauding bands would come and seize everything at your factory ...

“Now look. You built a factory and it turned into something terrific or a great idea – God bless! Keep a hunk of it. But part of the underlying social contract is you take a hunk of that and pay forward for the next kid who comes along.”

Two of the Legislature’s top progressives – House Democratic Leader Emily Virgin of Norman and first-term OKC Sen. Carri Hicks – were seated near the stage when Warren addressed about 2,000 in a packed gymnasium at her alma mater, OKC’s Northwest Clasen High School.

They know that Oklahoma’s future prosperity depends on fairer taxation that involves all investing their fair share. The problem is, the legislative supermajority and Gov. Kevin Stitt serve as lapdogs for the state’s big money, special interest masters.

Hopefully, the flat budget to be crafted in this spring’s legislative session will serve as a reminder for all Oklahomans that the gross production tax hike in 2018 was the equivalent of slapping a Band-

Aid over a gaping wound.

There won’t be money to reduce class sizes or improve technology in schools. Guarantee the working poor access to anything other than emergency medical care. Ensure the mentally ill get the treatment they need. The list goes on ...

What can rank-and-file Oklahomans do to help restore balance to a political system dominated by the 1%?

First, let legislators and the governor know you want the income tax rate returned to the historic rate of 6.65%. The rate was whacked to 5.25% in a series of cuts between 2004-12, reducing state revenue by more than \$1 billion annually.

While you’re at it, let your elected reps know you support restoring refundability of the Earned Income Tax Credit – a real benefit to the working poor.

Second, sign the initiative petition and vote for SQ 804 that would create an independent, non-partisan redistricting commission to draw new legislative and congressional boundaries based on the 2020 Census.

This will put an end to Oklahoma’s long, sordid history of gerrymandering – by Democrats in the 20th century and by Republicans now – in which lines are drawn for political power, not to protect communities of interest.

If Oklahoma ever hopes to achieve all that it can, it must overhaul its corrupt tax system. Time’s a-wasting.

rank-and-file voters to separate spin from reality.

Case in point: The barrage of attack ads currently targeting first-term U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn.

Two Washington, DC-area groups – American Action Network and America First Policies – are nearing a half-million-dollars in spending against Horn, the first Democrat to represent central Oklahoma’s 5th Congressional District in 44 years.

Who’s writing the fat checks funding the groups isn’t known. By registering as social welfare groups – in effect, charities – under federal tax law, they are not required to publicly disclose their donors.

All we know for sure is the American Action Network is chaired by Norm Coleman, a former Minnesota Republican senator who’s currently registered as a Washington lobbyist.

And America First Policies is linked to Linda McMahon, the former World Wrestling Entertainment executive and President Trump’s Small Business Administration administrator.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist, of course, to figure the ads are GOP- and Trump-connected, falsely depicting a do-nothing Congress in which Horn and Democrats are fixated on impeachment rather than more pressing issues. But it’s critical that voters know specifics about who’s financing the anti-Horn efforts, so they can decide for themselves how much weight to give the ads’ claims.

Though hyper-partisans are likely to view all this through a narrow 2020 election lens, it’s actually a threat to our entire democratic republic.

Sadly, it’s easier than ever – thanks to Citizens United and the Oklahoma Legislature’s defanging of the Ethics Commission – for the deepest pockets to swing elections and policymaking.

No elected official pursuing re-election – or with ambition to climb the political food chain – wants to become the target of a Dark Money onslaught from good government-sounding, innocuously-named special interest “groups.”

Which, of course, may not be groups at all – just one or two big checkbooks. Who knows?

The recent MAPS 4 vote in Oklahoma City offers just such an example. The sales tax extension was never seriously in jeopardy of defeat. Indeed, it won with a landslide 72% of the sliver of voters who bothered to turn out. But voters cast their ballots without knowing who funded the slick Love Your OKC campaign.

How could this be?

Well, five years ago, state lawmakers quietly changed a law involving municipal ballot questions, resulting in less transparency. As a voter, wouldn’t it be valuable to know who wrote the biggest checks?



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Who might have a “special” interest in a particular project?

Indeed, 2020 could offer more opportunities than ever for a sneaky, well-heeled few to finance clever campaigns designed not to inform, but rather to mislead.

Think about it. It’s not difficult to imagine the fear mongering and lying that could be unleashed against the straight-forward Medicaid expansion proposal. Or what could happen if out-of-state interests become even more desperate for Oklahoma water. Or if the showdown between Gov. Kevin Stitt and tribal nations over gaming compacts becomes even more contentious.

In seizing statehouse control nearly a decade ago, Republicans swore their allegiance to transparency. Unfortunately, that proved to be mostly lip service.

Now, though, the Dark Money scourge provides an opportunity for the legislative supermajority to put its money where its mouth is: Tighten up Oklahoma reporting laws. Give the Ethics Commission the funding to enforce them.

The state can’t fix everything, of course. Too much is federally controlled. But imagine the good that could come from state lawmakers doing everything possible to ensure Oklahoma voters have 20/20 vision on big money in politics in 2020.

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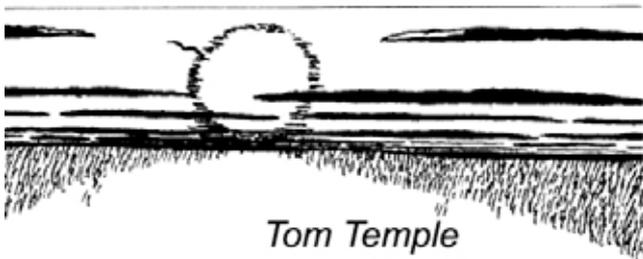
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Dart: To Sen. Micheal Bergstrom, R-Adair, proposing a state referendum aimed at constitutionally outlawing what already is illegal: voting by non-citizens. Is he auditioning for a Trump White House job?

Sen. Elizabeth Warren's private pre-Christmas meeting with Oklahoma tribal leaders reportedly went well. The Sooner-born presidential contender's DNA test created hard feelings among tribes protective of their sovereign rights to decide membership.

A head-knocking legislative showdown looms over proposed state Department of Education rules that would force nearly all school districts to resume five-day schedules. Can you spell l-o-c-a-l c-o-n-t-r-o-l?

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Markwayne Mullin, taking to social media to vilify fellow Sooner Rep. Kendra Horn for her impeachment vote. Bad form. Shortsighted.

Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell says Oklahoma's much-debated two-year-old scissortail flycatcher license plates won't be going the way of the Dodo bird anytime soon. State officials typically wait five years before recommending a design change.

Worth pondering, from Washington Post columnist Margaret Sullivan: "If every American gave 30 minutes a day to an earnest and open-minded effort to stay on top of the news, we might actually find our way out of this crisis."

Voters in Oklahoma, Tulsa, Cleveland and Muskogee counties will get to decide this year whether to allow liquor stores to be open on Sundays. Current law gives big box retailers, grocers and convenience stores an unfair advantage.

In Oklahoma, 33%-plus of adults ages 19-64 reported asking the doctor for lower cost meds, quit taking some meds or skipped doses in 2017 because of high prescription costs. – AARP

Sound the alarm! Global temperatures are likely to climb three degrees Celsius by 2100 – even if every nation follows through on its current Paris agreement commitments to reduce emissions. – Time

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

effort to honor President Trump, I think Democrats should propose some ideas of their own for sites to rename.

My suggestion: rename the Oklahoma City National Stockyards the Donald J. Trump National Stockyards. [For those unfamiliar with the Stockyards, it is one of the largest producers of bovine excrement in the world, exceeded only by the Trump White House.]

Mark Burkett
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Back in mid-20th century, the Soviets zapped the U.S. embassy in Moscow with non-ionizing microwave radiation for 25 years. Two U.S. ambassadors died of brain cancer; a third had cranial hemorrhaging, with bleeding from his eyes. Other U.S. personnel, including children, got breast cancer and leukemia. The State Department resisted telling the embassy community about the microwaves until the ambassador at the time threatened to resign. Articles in Time and The New Yorker of Dec. 20, 1976, brought the issue to the American public.

Fast forward a couple of decades to 1996, when a U.S. law gave permission for every resident of the U.S. to be zapped by similar microwave radiation. The law? The Telecommunication Act of 1996. We have all been zapped ever since – with the blessing of the FCC [Federal Communications Commission], an agency shamelessly promoting the interest and convenience of telecoms rather than regulating them.

A few congressional voices [notably that of Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut] have been raised in protest. Very recently [August 2019], a DC Court of Appeals reprimanded the FCC, ruling that the protections of the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] and the National Historical Policy Act [NHPA] must be enforced.

The court's decision should rein in the telecom free-for-all which has been allowing schools, libraries, residential neighborhoods and virtually very public space to be invaded by radiation from cell towers and smart meters. Little wonder that the general public is unaware of the problem. Unlike second-hand cigarette smoke, the radiation cannot be detected by any of our five senses. [In this regard, it is like carbon monoxide – hidden.]



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What happened at the U.S. embassy in Moscow should have alerted us to hidden dangers. As we are now confronted by endless ads promoting 5G, the next generation of wireless, we need to listen to the hundreds of non-industry scientists worldwide who warn that 5G is the “stupidest idea in the history of the world” [Dr. Martin Pall], and of its “game over” effects on humans and the planet. The long biological reach of 5G’s expected damages includes, for example, killing all the bees, on which so much of our food depends. Threats to humans and other wildlife are equally ominous.

The 5G industry, which is uninsurable, apparently also considers itself untouchable. Executives have spent nothing to investigate health effects of 5G, and they stated in a February 2019 public hearing that they plan to spend nothing.

But in the real world where survival is at stake, scientists plead in all urgency that unless 5G is stopped humans will not have to worry about global warming.

Background information on these issues can be found in several publications, notably in a new book available on Amazon, *Hidden Dangers*, by Capt. Jerry Flynn, a retired Canadian electronic weapons specialist.

B. A. Geary
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:
Newt Gingrich on FOX:

“And really, on the eve of Christmas, it is really sad to see the dishonesty and partisanship that the House Democrats are displaying.”

That was Dec. 9.

News anchor talking to Tom Brokaw:

“Tom, the contrast couldn’t be more striking tonight. At the very moment Republicans were releas-

ing their four articles of impeachment, the president and first lady were lighting the national Christmas tree, festive, seemingly unconcerned.”

That was Dec. 11, 1998. And guess who was speaker of the House? Newt Gingrich. He actually called the House in on Saturday, Dec. 19, 1998 to take the impeachment vote.

Does anyone in the GOP ever look up what they have said before?

Karen Webb
Portland, OR

Editor, The Observer:

The National Rifle Association has made a last-ditch appeal for new members.

It has declared war on congressional “extremists” pushing gun bans and gun registration, the “fake news media lying about guns and crime” and “radical billionaires” donating millions “to steamroll your rights.”

“If gun haters win control of the White House and Congress in the 2020 elections, they won’t hesitate to use unchecked power to register, tax, ban and even confiscate your guns,” says the NRA’s Wayne LaPierre.

To make their membership more inviting, the NRA is giving away a Ford Mustang or Chevy Camaro convertible, \$10,000 cash, gun collections and gear.

If only Muskogee U.S. Rep. Mike Synar were alive today to see the NRA’s panic.

With 35,000 NRA members in the 2nd District, Synar was retired for voting for protecting Alaskan wilderness from development, and a waiting period for handgun purchases, a ban on cop-killer bullets and restrictions on assault weapons.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Schools

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

Getting back to the latest research, had reformers taken the time to study their policies before enshrining them in law, would they have still rushed ahead?

Who knows? But a similar counter-factual analysis was ignored.

Audrey Amrein-Beardsley reminds us that in 2009 Jesse Rothstein “conducted a falsification test by which he tested, also counter-intuitively, whether a teacher in the future could cause, or have an impact on his/her students’ levels of achievement in the past.

Rothstein demonstrated ... VAM-based estimates of future teachers could be used to predict students’ past levels of achievement.”

In other words, the Billionaires Boys Club and their economists didn’t even know enough about schools to ask the key questions. Despite the overwhelming evidence that achievement gaps were primarily due to segregation and economics, they had already made up their minds that education researchers and teachers were the causes of education underperformance.

The rest is a history – that sounds like science fiction – of how data-driven experiments drove our schools down.

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

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ject. Games quickly lose their charm when forced into the service of education, character development, or social improvement.”

Games lose their charm when people insist they are worldly and socially relevant. Games also lose their charm by thinking of them in merely instrumental ways, by denying their pointlessness, by insisting they are primarily valuable because playing sports [or watching them] brings about something else that is valuable: life skills, tribal connections, big bucks from well-healed donors, butts in seats for rich owners. But to reduce sport to the status described by these dreary instrumental justifications is to deny the intrinsic values involved in playing or watching splendidly trivial games.

Lasch again: “The degradation of sport, then, consists not in its being taken too seriously but in its trivialization.” I think Lasch means that people like Petchesky trivialize sports by denying that inherently trivial activities could only be valuable by regarding them instrumentally or placing them in the context of non-trivial, worldly concerns: business, politics, race, class, and gender. To recognize the uselessness of games is necessary for acknowledging their real value.

As Lasch argues, “Games derive their power from the investment of seemingly trivial activity with serious intent. By submitting without reservation to the rules and conventions of the game, the players [and the spectators, too] cooperate in creating an illusion of reality. In this way, the game becomes a representation of life, and play takes on the character of play-acting as well. In our time, games – sports in particular – are rapidly losing the quality of illusion.”

Like Lasch, I regret the “attack on illusion ...from players, promoters, and spectators alike.” And like Michael Novak in his enchanting hymn to these games, *The Joy of Sports* [1976], I don’t value writers like Petchesky who “believe it is their function to prick the bubble of illusion surrounding sports.”

“The essential craft of the sportswriter is mimetic: to recreate events, to imitate and to reveal their form, to catch new sides to their significance.”

There are good reasons for reporting sports stories related to business, politics, race, class, and gender. But we shouldn’t confuse what the stories are about. They are about politics, business, race, class, and gender, not sports. If it were up to me, stories about the business of sports would be in the business section, not the sports section – a point Novak also makes.

People who love art or science, or respect religion seem not as prone to confuse the activity or mode of experience with extraneous realities: how much the Picasso sold for at auction; whether the Nobel Prize

committee is sexist; how the televangelist got caught in an adulterous affair. These are stories related to art, science, or religion. They are not about the “reality” of these activities or experiences.

Petchesky’s inflationary view of the importance of sports is actually deflationary, since his concerns ignore the internal realities and values of sports. The instrumental defense of sports also deflates its intrinsic value, since, according to this viewpoint, sport is valueless unless it succeeds in achieving its purported end; for example, when sport doesn’t succeed in educating, developing life skills, enhancing donations, making money, or creating tribal identities that are economically useful to the institutions surrounding the games. Instrumentalism leaves behind the pleasures of play.

My view is more indirect. I believe we understand the importance of sport by attending to it intrinsically and by affirming its worldly uselessness. By sustaining the illusion we do it justice. To do so is not “dishonest,” as Petchesky says; it’s truthful and less self-deceptive.

And by affirming its glorious pointlessness, we may avoid the fanaticism of crazed parents, out-of-control fans, boorish rich boosters, and “hatred” of opponents. Sport is serious nonseriousness. Sport is splendid triviality. Sports are just games.

Randolph M. Feezell, PhD, grew up in northwestern Oklahoma and is professor emeritus of philosophy at Creighton University in Omaha, NE. He is the author of four sport-related books: Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection [University of Illinois Press, 2004]; Sport and Character [Human Kinetics, 2010]; Sport, Philosophy, and Good Lives [University of Nebraska Press, 2013]; Playing Games: An Introduction to Philosophy of Sport Through Dialogue [Routledge, 2017].

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