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MAJOR OVERHAUL?

Will Stitt, Legislature Continue Efforts To Reshape State Government, Consolidate Power In A CEO Governor?



Special Report begins on page 5



PUBLISHER Beverly Hamilton
bhamilton@okobserver.org

EDITOR Arnold Hamilton
ahamilton@okobserver.org

ADVISORY BOARD

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Swamp Thing

Oklahoma's senior U.S. Sen. James Inhofe long ago proved himself a hopeless lout. We had higher hopes for the state's junior Sen. James Lankford.

Sadly, the Baptist preacher-turned-politician has sold his soul to the Trump Cult. He guzzled the Kool-Aid.

Lankford declared on Twitter that White House counsel "definitely answered many of the questions" raised by House prosecutors in Trump's impeachment trial – even though the president's lawyers failed to address most of the charges.

On CNN, he insisted Trump not only was fighting corruption in Ukraine, but also in Iran, Venezuela, Turkey, North Korea, Cuba, China, Columbia, and Libya – a preposterous claim given Trump's business career and White House antics.

When news broke that former National Security Advisor John Bolton's upcoming book would detail Trump's extortion scheme – withholding vital military aid until Ukraine agreed to investigate the Bidens – Lankford declared on Facebook:

"If John Bolton's got something to say, there's plenty of microphones all over the country that he should step forward and start talking about it right now."

He also suggested it would be helpful for senators to be given access to Bolton's manuscript.

Hmmmm ... if only there were a way to compel Bolton to share his story. Like ... maybe ... a Senate subpoena?

Lankford's parroting of mindless Republican talking points during the impeachment process is shameful. He had moral standing to be a fair and honest arbiter of presidential misconduct. That quickly evaporated.

Henry Bellmon, the late governor and U.S. senator, warned against too quickly sizing up elected officials. "The problem with you journalists,"

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Observerscope



You won't want to miss Feb. 13's Observer Newsmakers, with Rep. Jason Lowe and Moms Demand Action's Jennifer Joy discussing his gun safety efforts in the 2020 session. See back cover for details.

Laurel: To U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn, leading the charge to name downtown OKC post office for civil rights icon Clara Luper – a designation, Horn says, that would serve as a reminder “the fight for freedom and equality is not over.”

What's your cleverest sobriquet for Donald Trump? How about PINO – President In Name Only – as in a fine red wine? Or The Resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., P purposely omitted? Keep your responses clean, please.

Two key dates: Feb. 7 is deadline to register for the March 3 Super Tuesday presidential primary. The 2020 Census kicks off April 1.

Dart: To Attorney General Mike Hunter, joining 20 other GOP AG's in signing a letter denouncing Senate impeachment trial. This isn't about justice. It's Hunter pandering to his Faux News base.

OK Democrats hit a grand slam hiring Scott J. Hamilton as their new executive director. We're biased, of course. The former Cimar-ron Alliance leader is a longtime Observer Advisory Board member.

Laurel: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, signing 774 commutations, 290 pardons and 101 paroles last year – an important step in reforming OK's broken criminal justice system.

Stop the presses! GOP U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas recently said this in committee: “We know the climate is changing and that global industrial activity has played a role in this phenomenon.” – Eos Earth & Space Science News

Dart: To U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn, one of only eight Democrats to oppose a resolution limiting Donald Trump's ability to wage war in Iran. If a presidency ever demanded oversight, this is it.

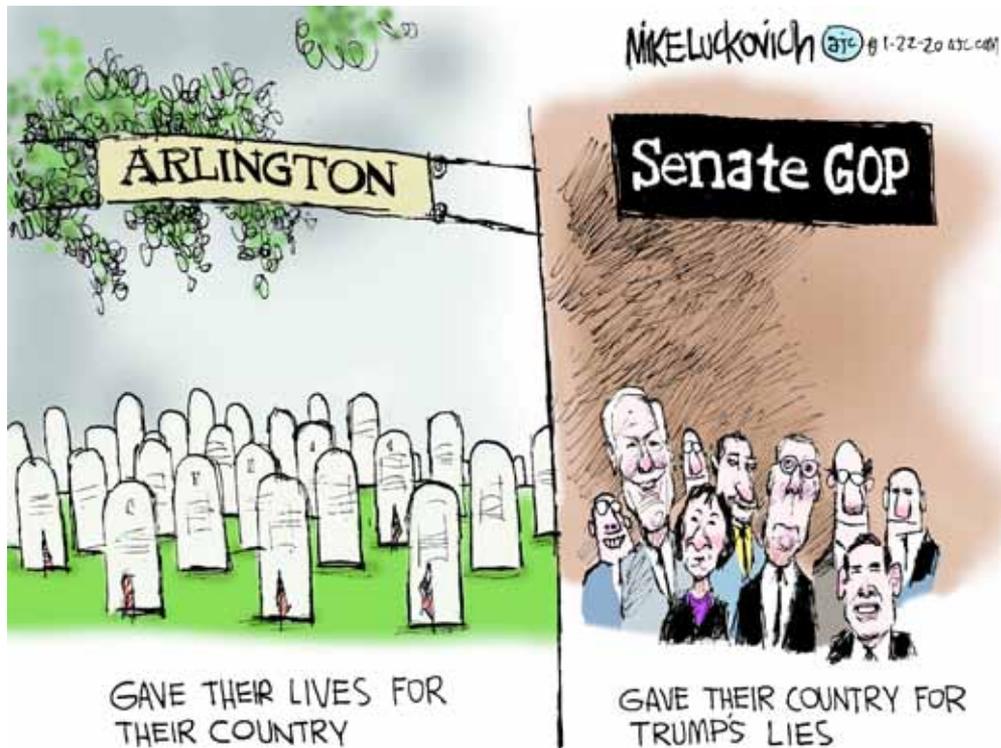
Have you heard about the new Gov. Kevin Stitt doll? Wind it up and it does whatever the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs' Koch-heads tell it to do, like arbitrarily cut state regulations 25%.

Oilman Harold Hamm and Hobby Lobby's David Green are backing Republican David Hill's quest to unseat Democrat Kendra Horn in CD-5. Hill is former CEO of oil/gas equipment manufacturer Kimray.

Great news for those of us devoted to the written word: Americans on average visited a library 10-plus times last year – twice as often as they attended a movie. – Gallup

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Oklahoma is making no progress towards becoming a Top 10 state with Kevin Stitt as governor.

Instead, he had replaced agency heads with decades of experience hired by citizen governing boards that were appointed by previous Oklahoma governors, House of Representatives speakers and Senate pro tempores. In their place he put a crop of white sons of his corporate friends and industry insiders, who have no practical knowledge of or commitment to state service, critical citizens' needs or the billion dollar agencies that they are now supposed to lead.

His latest plan is to end merit protection rules put in place to protect citizens from the incompetence and corruption of ever-changing state employees who were appointed and replaced by the latest elected officials faster than they could learn their jobs.

Citizens' taxes are paying for competent government service at least at the front line level by employees who know what they're doing and how and why government works like it does. No, state em-

ployees aren't perfect, but much of the problems are due to budgets that asked them to "more with less" as co-workers were cut and never replaced.

Gov. Stitt, state government is not big business where everyone bows down to you. There is no profit margin here. Government should be serving the people, not the boss. Your job is to balance the demands of your corporate carpet-bagging peers with needs of the Oklahoma citizens who are your real employers.

Phyllis Bryant
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Just my thanks to you for your recent article "Stitt's Tribal Blunder." All well put and appreciated. Still reminds me of Custer at Little Big Horn. Didn't Stitt learn anything? You are courageous.

Eula Doonkeen
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Will the United States remain a representative republic if President Trump wins re-election? I

don't think so.

Robert S. Kennedy
Harrah

Editor, The Observer:

If the Iranian General Soleimani was indeed on the verge of ordering his forces to attack multiple targets in the Mideast, including many containing U.S. diplomats and military personnel, would not his death precipitate an outbreak of attacks on those "imminent targets?"

In 1963, the Kennedy administration ordered the assassination of South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother as a "necessary step in defeating the Viet Cong." Eleven years later we extricated our remaining forces along with a nominal number of South Vietnamese families but not until 57,000-plus of our own troops and an untold number of Southeast Asians were killed. Likely the total deaths in North and South Vietnam as well as in Laos and Cambodia numbered in the millions.

North Vietnam and South Viet-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Three Ways To Know Whose Side The Legislature Is On

What will state lawmakers do for workaday Oklahomans in this year's session?

It's not an idle question. With few exceptions, the Legislature often proves itself far more adept at serving special interests than meeting rank-and-file needs.

Recent examples? Refusing to act on medical marijuana until forced by voters. Slow-walking voter-approved criminal justice reforms. Restricting local control in order to thwart initiative petitions on living wage and drilling.

Like baseball's opening day, however, each year's session begins with a hope-springs-eternal glow. Maybe this is the year ...

If it is to be, here's three sure-fire ways the state-house can demonstrate it not only is aware of, but also cares about the plight of the 99%:

1. Enact Sen. George Young's proposed minimum wage hike, SB 1165, requiring employers pay at least \$10.50 an hour or match the federal minimum wage, whichever is greater.

Oklahoma is beset with poverty: the 2019 rate was 15.5%. That means one in four children frequently goes to bed hungry, unacceptable in what we proclaim to be the richest country in the world.

Boosting the minimum wage for the first time in a decade would be a small, but important step in stabilizing the lives of the state's working poor. No way the current \$7.25 an hour is a living wage, even in low-cost Oklahoma.

Moreover, Oklahoma is becoming an outlier by clinging to the \$7.25 federal rate. It is true Texas and Kansas haven't budged, either. But it's also true – and noteworthy – that 31 states now require a higher minimum wage.

That leaves us behind Arkansas, for example, which jumped to \$10 an hour Jan. 1 from \$9.25. And it's headed to \$11 an hour next year.

Those opposing minimum wage hikes insist it fuels unemployment. Really? Arkansas' unemployment rate is 3.5%, Oklahoma's 3.3%.

Increasing the minimum wage hasn't wrecked the economies of those 31 states or fueled skyrocketing poverty rates.

Failing to enact a higher minimum wage not only immoral – it also puts counties along the Arkansas and Missouri [minimum wage: \$8.60] borders at a competitive disadvantage.

2. Resist the temptation to monkey with Medicaid expansion, especially Gov. Kevin Stitt's hair-brained block grant scheme that likely would make it even harder for the working poor to access healthcare before it's too late.

Let's remember: Lawmakers failed for nearly a decade to act on Medicaid expansion, despite outside consultants saying it is a no-brainer to take the 9-1 federal match – federal tax dollars Oklahomans already sent to Washington.

Now the Legislature threatens to step in? Just because a record number of Oklahomans signed an initiative petition [SQ 802] to force a statewide vote on full Medicaid expansion that could extend health coverage to a quarter-million Oklahomans?

Trust the voters. It's that simple.

3. Restore refundability of the Earned Income Tax Credit, eliminated in 2016 during the state's largely self-inflicted [think: income and GPT tax cuts] budget crisis.

The Legislature's unconscionable decision was a dagger to the state's working poor, costing those families about \$250 a year – money sorely needed for the basics: groceries, gasoline, rent.

Even the bill's author, then-Rep. Mark McCullough, now concedes it was a huge mistake.

"(R)efundability ... is the key to its success," he wrote in a recent Tulsa World op-ed. "Workers get a refund on their taxes even if they don't pay income tax. It is an economic incentive to work" rather than "solely rely on welfare programs to try and get by."

Living wage. Medicaid. EITC. Three easy ways to know whose side the Oklahoma Legislature is on during the 2020 session.

Budget, Election Year Pressures Greet Lawmakers

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

The 2020 legislative session convenes Feb. 3 with more than its share of uncertainty.

Will it be heralded for tackling serious problems? Will it be lamented for political game-playing and inaction? Will it be remembered at all?

The more than 2,000 new bills recently introduced suggest any of the three scenarios are possible – some are inane, others deadly serious, and more than a few would transfer significant power from rank-and-file Oklahomans to the already powerful and well connected.

Add to this year's legislative stew two potentially bitter ingredients: state revenues are sagging – again – and it's an election year.

Here's a primer for the next four months:

BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A DIME?

Last year's session was a breeze thanks to 2018's hike in the Gross Production Tax. The cash infusion allowed lawmakers to make modest investments in vital state services, including K-12 and higher educa-

tion, and escape another round of Draconian cuts.

This year, however, agencies have been warned to expect standstill budgets, at best. Gov. Kevin Stitt wants serious belt-tightening, demanding FY 2021 budget requests be lower than the current fiscal year.

With oil and gas activity down significantly, revenue estimates are hardly rosy:

The State Board of Equalization projects lawmakers will have \$8.3 billion in state funds available for spending – a .1% [or \$9.4 million] more than FY '20.

Stitt hopes to recover \$250 million in unspent one-time funds from state agencies that can be redirected to key services – education, criminal justice and healthcare.

The state's over-reliance on carbon-related taxes remains a cancer that threatens Oklahoma's future prosperity. It's difficult to imagine the 2020 Legislature making progress where four decades of Legislatures haven't.

That means, for example, retirees are not likely to get their first cost-of-living adjustments in a decade – immoral. [See Paul Shinn's essay on Page 15 for more details.]

It's important to remember, though, lawmakers are to blame for starvation budgets. Tax cuts that pleased the state's wealthy donor class – approved under both Republican and Democratic leadership – left state finances more exposed than ever to the vicissitudes of the energy and agricultural markets.

Nothing short of fully restoring cuts to income and gross production taxes will give Oklahoma any long-term relief. That is unlikely to happen so long as GOP statehouse leadership retains its grip on power. It remains committed to the discredited Supply Side economic theory, even though neighboring Kansas provides a sobering example of the havoc trickle-down wrought.

ATTACK OF THE WOOLY BOOGERS

Heading into session, we aren't entirely sure whose ox is about to be gored – though early indications are it won't be the 1%.

The GOP strategy clearly is to shift as much of the tax burden onto workaday Oklahomans and off the silk-stocking crowd as possible. Much of this is likely to be slipped into so-called "shell bills" – those introduced without specific language or betraying intent.

As the session nears its end, and budget negotiations intensify, nasty "wooly boogers" are slipped

Deborah Astley

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into measures in hopes the public – and many legislators – won't catch them or absorb their implications.

Take note of two measures identifying Speaker Charles McCall, R-Antlers, as principal author – HB 3826 and HB 3827 – both involving “initiative petition reform.”

GOP powers – and their big money donors – aren't keen on rank-and-file Oklahomans exercising their constitutional right to the initiative process. It slows down the process of abetting polluters and locking the courthouse door to workaday Oklahomans.

Leadership isn't hiding its entire agenda, of course.

Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat, R-OKC, wants to eliminate the Merit Protection Commission [SB 1718] which insulates state workers from the Legislature's worst, most partisan instincts – and helps cut down on patronage.

In addition, Treat's SB 1775 advances Stitt's scheme to fold the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority into the state Department of Transportation, authorizing the governor to appoint all six board members.

That would give one person, the governor, control over one of the state's biggest awarders of contracts? What could possibly go wrong? Brother-in-law deals, here we come?

STEMMING THE VIOLENCE

Rep. Jason Lowe had hoped to block permitless carry from taking effect Nov. 1 via either the veto referendum or a lawsuit challenging its constitutionality.

When neither succeeded, the OKC Democrat instead filed HB 3357 that would repeal the new law.

He also introduced HB 3897 that would prohibit long-barrel firearms from being carried into restaurants, arguing it “isn't good for business or the mental health of the restaurant's patrons.

“Oklahomans, especially children, veterans suffering from PTSD, people suffering from mental illness, should have the ability to enter a restaurant in Oklahoma and not feel threatened or endangered by the presence of military-style weapons.”

Meanwhile, Lowe's Democratic colleagues, OKC Rep. Jason Dunnington and Tulsa Rep. Melissa Provenzano, filed HB 2939 that would create a so-called “Red Flag” aimed at getting guns, at least temporarily, out of the hands of individuals determined to be potentially violent.

In addition, Dunnington hopes to restrict new sales of high-capacity gun magazines – the kind deployed with devastating consequence in mass shoots like the outdoor concert in Las Vegas. HB 2940 would set a 10-bullet limit on high-capacity magazines sold in the future.

As Dunnington put it last summer, “I believe Second Amendment rights and common-sense gun reform are not mutually exclusive.”

Odds are long, of course, that Lowe's or Dunnington's measures will gain much traction this session, especially given that most members of the GOP-dominated Legislature are reliable votes for the NRA and

gun manufacturers.

But Republicans hoping to maintain their legislative supermajorities are playing with fire if they knee-jerk resist any gun restrictions.

It is worth noting that an ascendant political cohort is suburban, college-educated women – a driving force, for example, behind groups like the pro-gun safety Moms Demand Action.

DESERVING SERIOUS ATTENTION

Republican Daniel Pae and Democrats Merelyn Bell and Mickey Dollens are working to help address an epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous people.

The measures grew out of an interim study that looked closer at staggering statistics: Murder is the third leading cause of death among native females ages 10-24 and nearly 6,000 American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls are listed as missing, according to recent National Crime Information Center data.

Moreover, the National Institute of Justice reports 84% of native women experience violence in their lifetime – 97% of which is perpetrated by non-natives. And the Seattle-based Urban Indian Health Institute has identified 506 cases of missing and murdered native women and girls since 2010 in 71 cities across the country.

Oklahoma is No. 10 nationally in the number of missing or murdered indigenous women, according to the UIHI report.

Bell's HB 3892 and HB 3893, Pae's 2847 and 2848 and Dollens' HB 3345 are aimed at helping local, state, federal and tribal systems work seamlessly to ensure murder and missing indigenous persons cases don't fall through the cracks.

Meanwhile, Dollens' and Tulsa Rep. Monroe Nichols' HB 3347 could give student-athletes more control over their financial lives and modernize archaic, unfair rules that treat student-athletes differently than other scholarship students.

The “Fair Pay to Play” act could help pressure the NCAA into adopting an Olympics-style approach that allows student-athletes to cash in on their likeness or image.

How could they potentially profit? Through endorsement deals. Being paid for signing autographs. Wearing Nike shoes or appearing in Adidas ads. Even producing YouTube videos on proper place-kicking or jump-shooting techniques?

Both Dollens and Nichols played NCAA Division I football – Dollens at Southern Methodist University, Nichols at Tulsa University. Both know what it's like to juggle the demands of classroom and film room, practice field and cross-country travel, game playing and social life.

Both also know what it's like to endure a labyrinthine world of NCAA rules that permits scholarships, meals and lodging but little else – including most opportunities to earn running-around money or to help provide critical support for their families.

The proposed Oklahoma law would not be enough alone to compel the NCAA to change. But in concert with other states — California, for one, already passed a related law — it could lead to much-needed change.

WACKADOODLE MEASURES

If such an honor existed, Broken Arrow GOP Sen. Nathan Dahm would be a prohibitive favorite to win the Legislature's 2020 Andy Warhol Award.

Regrettably, Dahm's 15 minutes of pre-session fame are not the result of legislative heavy-lifting but of a frivolity that besmirches the reputations of serious lawmakers earnestly seeking to solve real problems.

You might recall Dahm, a Broken Arrow Republican, first grabbed headlines last fall when he proposed naming a stretch of Route 66 after President Trump.

Bipartisan, non-partisan, partisan — didn't matter — blowback was swift. Not surprising, given the iconic Chicago-

Santa Monica route already is designated the Will Rogers Highway, honoring Oklahoma's most famous son. Why honor a New Yorker better known for riding golden escalators?

After that trial balloon crashed, Dahm conjured up another dandy: "Make America Great Again" and "Keep America Great" license plates.

Ah, yes, nothing says "Oklahoma" quite like parroting Trump campaign slogans.

What's next? Re-Elect Trump plates? President 4 Life? Trump 4 Mount Rushmore? All Hail Trump?

Is Dahm simply trolling Democrats and never-Trumpers?

The fine print in his proposal suggests he actually is quite serious: For each specialty plate sold, \$10 would be sent to both the pro-veteran Folds of Honor and Warriors for Freedom foundations.

But, wait — as the infomercial pitchman screams — there's more!

Dahm also is proposing a resolution that would give the Oklahoma Legislature the opportunity to declare 2020 the "Year of the Bible" and a law that would thwart Oklahoma municipalities from becoming so-called "sanctuary cities."

Unfortunately, history is rife with not-so-pleasant outcomes when a state embraces a particular religion, efforts persist nationally to break down the wall separating church and state.

One group, Project Blitz, shops so-called "model legislation" in efforts to create a Christian theocracy. One proposal would require "In God We Trust" signs to be posted in public schools and government buildings. Another would let religion trump science on school tests. Example: is the Earth 4.5 billion years old as science reveals or 6,000 as Christian fundamentalists insist? Either would be acceptable under the model legislation.

Dahm insists "we have turned away from the foundational principles and truths that established our country. This resolution allows us to recognize the influence the Bible has on our land."

This is the sort of nonsense you get during an election year — a dog whistle of sorts to help turn out the GOP's fundamentalist base.

One more thing to watch this session: Stitt claims he's on the verge of announcing his alternative to the Medicaid expansion state. A Republican-dominated Legislature has worked nearly a decade on this costly problem and been unable to produce a workable alternative.

It seems unlikely Stitt will succeed where others haven't — especially if he pursues a block grant approach likely to further restrict working poor access to health care.

But ... if the Legislature does approve Stitt's alternative, you'll know in a nanosecond what kind of session this was: one that will be remembered for its game-playing, not serious legislating.

Observer Advisory Board member MaryAnn Martin contributed to this report.



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Why Are Oklahoma Lawmakers Still Resisting Death With Dignity?

BY CHADWICK COX

“Rational death” is the concept that individuals might decide to end their life based on satisfying some compelling reason, such as relief from a continuing painful life. Such individuals consider that they have a right to end their suffering. Too often, they do kill themselves in painful, undignified and lonely acts due to current laws written by lawmakers in disagreement with self-determination under these circumstances as being a right. That disagreement results from a religious bias.

Although there are probably many reasons that serve as the bases for a rational death, the following example is likely to be the most common one. Brittany Maynard received a prognosis of a brain tumor that would kill her in a matter of months. She decided that she would rather die under her own terms than go through an extended loss of her cognitive

self and functioning skills before her inevitable and near death. She sought physician-assisted death but found in California at that time such assistance was illegal. She wanted a dignified death so refused to resort to the many ways one can end their life in a more lurid manner that many people are forced to do in other states with punitive laws related to rational death.

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

Her husband has written of her passing: “Brit-

tany's passing was truly peaceful. She fell asleep five minutes after taking the life-ending medication. She passed away 30 minutes later exactly as she hoped: in my arms, in her bed, surrounded by the family, friends and pets she cherished. She died on her own terms. There was no anxiety, no fear – only love and appreciation as she fell asleep.”

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

Several other states are likely to pass similar DWDA's in the near future. In Oklahoma, then-Rep. Steve Kouplien introduced such bills in 2015 and 2016 but they were never heard in committee.

Later, Sen. Gary Stanislawski introduced SB 108 [subsequently co-authored by Rep. Sean Roberts] creating the Death Certificate Accuracy Act that required the certifier to list certain information. The bill was finally approved by vote of 33 Republicans versus nine Democrats and three Republicans. This became law when signed by Gov. Stitt on May 6, 2019. The bill requires the death certificate show suicide – even if the death was meant to prevent the eminent cancer caused death.

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

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

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

The rationale for thinking that suicide should be prevented is sound when considering that youth can be overwhelmed with emotions when they do not know how to properly respond. Several disorders in adults, such as severe depression and PTSD, are treatable and can relieve suicidal tendencies.

However, being faced with certain death in a relatively short time is another matter. Even that short time may be filled with real discomfort. Suicide prevention in those people with a death prognosis actually sounds irrational.

Even then, some states have laws that can make

the surviving family uncomfortable as it does now in Oklahoma.

The states that have DWDA's are patterned after the law passed in Oregon in 1997. One public concern in particular was the death procedure should be preceded by a rational and verified request from the individual wanting the death procedure. The law requires two physicians to interview and approve the applicant before being able to request a prescription.

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

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

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

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

The most frequent reports of end of life concerns were loss of autonomy [nine out of 10], decreasing ability to do those things that make life enjoyable [9/10] and loss of dignity [6/10]. Of those receiving a prescription, about [6/10] consume the prescription and all die. Many of the rest were pleased to have that option but never felt compelled to take it. About 90% that die do so at home, about 90% were with hospice, and about 60% had cancer.

This procedure is not right for many, but for others the assisted death is a less anxious and very sure ending compared to all the other alternatives.

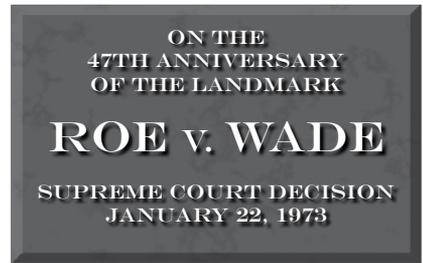
Will Oklahoma ever pass a DWDA? That is unlikely for the foreseeable future. The fact that all votes for SB 108 were from Republicans and the negative votes were all Democrats with a few Republicans is telling.

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

Chadwick Cox lives in Norman.

We Believe...

Reproductive Justice is a vital part of Religious Liberty.



Ken Ackley and Karen Pope
Janice Alexander
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Can We All Get Along?

BY CAL HOBSON

And the answer is I guess not. Rodney King, not exactly Los Angeles's nominee for Citizen of the Year, during any year, uttered that query shortly after enduring a beating on Mar. 3, 1991, by four members of the City of Angels' police force.

Unfortunately for the men in blue, the whole knock-about was videotaped and that display of wrongdoing eventually sent them to prison, while King ended up in the hospital, badly injured but later the recipient of a multi-million dollar settlement. He later drowned while swimming in his own backyard pool.

That skirmish was 27 years ago and therefore, at best, the answer to my headline above is "probably not."

Look, political factions are expected to wrangle and the candidates to parrot party lines and aggressively denigrate those taken by opponents while using every legal method to win at the ballot box. I'm cool with all that but, having first run for an elected po-

sition 46 years ago, and survived mostly intact after being on various ballots 17 times, I know a bit about the intensity and focus that automatically arises in elections.

But I don't like the developing trends. Here are a few reasons why:

I Money and barrels of it, much of it untraceable to the donors, is the fuel that flames overly white hot, and often slanderous, commentary found in politics today.

Thanks to the 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*, elections are often driven much more by money raised than the candidates themselves. The two best indicators as to the outcome of contested races for almost any office are: [1] incumbency and [2] who spent the most money or – and here is the problem – had the most money spent on their behalf by unknown, unaccountable, mostly untraceable, "dark money" groups.

Voters know what that term means but they just

don't know who among their fellow citizens are the givers, both large and small. Perhaps the names Soros, Adelson, Koch, Bloomberg and a few thousand more are familiar to us, but just try and inform yourself about their contributions to those who want to set public policy for the rest of us.

You might as well try to figure out where Jimmy Hoffa is buried.

2 The First Amendment is now used more as a cudgel than just simple words that provide the constitutional right for us to exchange ideas, differences and information.

Even more worrisome, journalists, in their role as conveyers of the thoughts of others, are often identified by some as "the enemy," putting them perhaps in the same class as terrorists, thugs, lawbreakers and despots who treat a ballot box as though they alone have entree to it.

One should remember our most thoughtful and intelligent president, Thomas Jefferson, viewed the press in such high regard that he once said "a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

And yet our second president also opined that "newspapers sit on a throne of lies" and "as for what is not true you will always find abundance in the newspapers."

So what can be drawn from the intellectual insights about the news by one of our earliest presidents and the current holder of the highest office in the land? Both endured the slings and arrows of quill and pen, or now electronic ones. Neither man liked the criticism but only one – Jefferson – would retain press over the presidency.

3 Hen's teeth are apparently very rare but not as scarce as recent, fact-based visual debates between candidates and it seems to me the loftier the post being contested the less substance is to be found.

As an example, watch the Kennedy-Nixon debate of 1960 and then observe any segment of the Clinton-Trump confab in 2016. Exactly 60 years ago, two thoughtful, experienced and informed leaders, men of wisdom, energy and education, were quizzed by one thoughtful and knowledgeable moderator. Serious people, serious times.

By comparison, in 2016, we observed a gaggle of candidates on both sides hurling personal attacks galore focused on personalities and flaws. Soap operas now versus a meaty version of C-SPAN back before it existed.

4 Getting along, of course, does not mean just going along. Example: today's struggle between Gov. Kevin Stitt and many of Oklahoma's powerful Native American tribes.

Sometimes, even when words are impossible to interpret in more than one way, opposing forces opt to diverge in their opinions of the English language against logic and common sense because doing so

serves other less obvious purposes. That is where Stitt has cornered himself today concerning gaming compact language.

Our governor has found his state agencies and the Legislature malleable, acceding to his manipulations and power accumulation. Therefore, he simply expected, without basis in fact, that independent, sovereign, tribal nations would do the same.

Getting along with Stitt, who has relatively high approval ratings, means doing it his way even when the law, precedent, treaties and public opinion dictate otherwise.

5 And finally, as extreme examples of our inability to find consensus through compromise in a political world, regardless of country, think about two, almost unique and unprecedented dramas playing out currently.

First, our best and brightest lawmakers, thought to be found in the United States Congress, have heard and presumably absorbed months, perhaps years, of information relating to the behavior, conduct and actions of President Trump.

Same words, same witnesses, same documents, same testimony for all, Democrats and Republicans alike.

However, they could not have come to more different conclusions driven exclusively and only by party label. Previous presidents who were impeached were done so on bi-partisan votes and President Andrew Johnson in 1868 was acquitted by only one vote with nine Democratic senators and 10 Republican ones voting no.

Second, and perhaps the most striking of examples that underscore Rodney King's query about "getting along," millions in the world have become transfixed while watching England's Royal Family, The Windsors, splintering before our very eyes.

A favored grandson of Queen Elizabeth, Prince Harry, his American wife, Meghan Markle, and new son, Archie, found the lines of communication so unbearable, unacceptable and damaging in their lives that they have moved to Canada and have been stripped of certain titles, financial support, perks and privileges so treasured in the world's longest ruling royalty. Millions may worship the Windsors from a distance but within Buckingham Palace, the sounds of disunion are deafening.

This example may seem trivial, dissimilar to others discussed above. Perhaps.

I use it to emphasize the depth, the pain, the life-long rifts that "failure to communicate" can cause in even the most revered and respected of families, friends, organizations, political bodies, corporations, tribes, teams and other structures.

I use it to highlight what I hear in coffee shops, classrooms, churches, clubs and most anywhere that two or more Americans sit down to discuss the day's current events. Conversations go like this: First person allows that "I know this is true because I heard it on NPR" followed by second conversationalist re-

sponding “just a bunch of liberal claptrap because Rush says so” followed by ... well, you know what.

Every four years, our country, the longest existing democracy, selects a president. Every four years pundits opine that it is the most transformative, most important election ever and that failure to choose the right leader will surely destroy the United States of America as we know it.

I don't know if any of that is true, but I do know, as a close observer of politics for seven decades, our citizens are more deeply divided on issues great and small, than at any other time in my memory. Foreign or domestic policy, the national debt, taxes, trust in government at any level, or simply whether our local

town council member is on the take or not. Pick your poison because someone is always ready to pick a fight!

Democracy is both the best and most fragile of all forms of governing created by mankind. However, there is no guarantee it will go on forever. If you think so, ask the longest serving royal in the world, Queen Elizabeth II, about life's guarantees. Her view may have recently changed on that as she putters around the hallowed halls of her home, muttering, “Can't we all just get along here?”

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

Retired Public Servants Deserve COLA

BY PAUL SHINN

Retired Oklahoma state and local public servants have now gone a decade without a cost of living adjustment, while inflation has eaten away at their income. For decades they taught our children, kept our streets safe, guarded prisons, fought fires, and provided essential health and social services. They dedicated their lives to making our state better.

Now it's past time to repay our debt to them. We should start on this by providing a long-overdue cost of living adjustment [COLA].

Public employment has long been a path to the middle class, particularly for women and people of color, who are better represented in government jobs than in the workforce as a whole.

Women older than 65 typically have 25% lower income than men, and participating in traditional public retirement systems narrows that gap. Pensions are equally important for blacks who lost wealth during the great recession and afterwards. This group also typically has very low levels of retirement savings.

Robust retirement benefits help keep our retired public servants in the middle class. Inadequate benefits can make it difficult or impossible to keep up with costs like health care, utilities, and food, let alone enjoying the “golden years.” This is particularly a challenge for firefighters, highway patrol officers, and some teachers who were not allowed to participate in Social Security.

Oklahoma has made that challenge for retirees a lot harder over the last decade. In our state, retirees get a benefit increase only when approved by the Legislature. The last COLA was granted in 2008, more than 11 years ago. The average state employee who retired that year had – and still has – a benefit of \$1,303 per month. Since they retired, inflation has lowered the value of that benefit to \$1,042 in today's dollars.

Worse yet, premiums for retiree health insurance have climbed 42%, more than double the rate of inflation. Health insurance alone can take up half or more

of the monthly retirement check.

Most state, city, and school employees are required to participate in one of six state-operated retirement or pension systems. With the exception of some recently hired state employees, all who serve long enough qualify for a defined benefit, which is a fixed monthly payment that depends on years of service and the salary earned in the last three to five years of a career.

Retirement benefits are paid from funds restricted only for retirement. The retirement funds come from four different sources. Employees pay a percentage of their monthly pay into the retirement fund. Their employers, like state agencies, school districts, or local police or fire departments, pay a percentage of payroll. State taxes provide additional funding for some of the retirement funds.

All of these receipts are invested so that the balance of the fund grows enough to pay current and future retirement benefits.

According to the National Institute on Retirement Security, investment earnings pay nearly 55% of costs of pensions, so the state gets a great return on the first three sources of funds.

At a legislative study on COLAs, Rep. David Perryman, D-Chickasha, stated, “You shouldn't retire people into poverty ... Our failure to approve a cost of living adjustment will put them there within a few short years.”

That's not what we promised these public servants when they took their jobs, or when they retired. Raising the COLA by 4% would be a good step, but it only restores only about one-fifth of the purchasing power that retirees lost by retirees since their last COLA.

A COLA of at least 4% should must be enacted this year. It's the right thing to do for our retired public servants.

Paul Shinn is tax and budget analyst for the Oklahoma Policy Institute; okpolicy.org. He also is a retired state employee.



What Is Killing Oklahomans?

BY BOB JACKMAN

Mark Twain said, “Patriotism is supporting your country all the time and your government when it deserves it.”

His wise counsel also can be applied to our state, where government is failing to tackle deadly problems.

Did you know, for example, Oklahoma’s life expectancy – 73.3 years – is the nation’s fourth lowest? Or that three of the five towns with the nation’s lowest life expectancies are in Oklahoma: Stilwell, Eufaula and Checotah – where residents, on average, can expect to live only 58 years?

These are Third World outcomes that can be laid at state government’s doorstep – the unsurprising result of woefully inadequate public health services, failure to protect air and water quality, and toxic poli-

tics shaped by an aversion to science and scientific method.

The devastating picture comes into sharp focus when considering the Grand River Dam Authority’s river park boondoggle, dangerous levels of toxic mercury contaminating fish in public and private bodies of water, PFAS plumes at all major airports, and environmental havoc wreaked by massive poultry operations.

Oklahoma’s poor life expectancy is, of course, usually blamed on lack of exercise, poor diets, high smoking rates, drug issues, suicide, alcohol-fueled car and motorcycle accidents, poverty-related stress, obesity and diabetics. You can add in air and water pollution, causes not often considered or examined by state health experts.

Is it possible Stilwell, Eufaula and Checotah suffer Third World health problems because the air is so polluted and the water so degraded? Pollutants can act as harmful agent-triggers, accelerating the demise of residents with serious health conditions.

Keep this hypothesis in mind as you also ponder a relatively new non-medical term: Deaths by Despair.

Your "right to know" in the context of your workplace and community environments is the legal principle that the individual has the right to know the harmful chemicals to which they may be exposed in their daily living. It is embodied in federal law in the United States as well as in local laws in several states. The state of Oklahoma has a legal responsibility to fully disclose all toxic, man-made chemicals and metals that its citizens are exposed to – but it fails to honor this rule of law!

MASSIVE POULTRY OPERATIONS

Did you also know that northeastern Oklahoma is downhill and downstream from mega-tons of chicken litter produced yearly in northwest Arkansas' Benton and Washington Counties 1,835 mega-sized poultry houses? Their combined capacity is 42 million chickens a year. Each poultry house raises five to seven flocks per year, each including ... each flock is from 40,000 to 60,000. Newer houses are 600 feet by 60 feet, including necessary new water wells.

Chicken litter contains poop contaminants that present a potential threat to human health if permitted to enter the food chain or water resources.

Plus, poultry veterinarians often use one or more of 17 different medicines including arsenic and antibiotics to keep birds healthy and protect against outbreaks. Some of it ends up in litter blanketing the floors.

Unknown amounts of litter substances hazardous to humans are delivered to Oklahoma by rain run-off into the Illinois River Basin's streams, seepage into aquifer groundwater and via airborne micro-particles.

Is this perfect storm of toxins contributing to shorter life expectancy in Stilwell, for example?

A full-court science blitz could furnish answers, but Oklahoma's elected officials fear independent examinations.

Consider this, from the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission's Litter Spread Sheet: It is estimated 250,000 tons of chicken litter are applied yearly to farmlands in counties in northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri – all underlain by the Boone-Rubidoux Freshwater Aquifer shared with northeastern Oklahoma.

Oklahoma officials have blinders on or simply choose to ignore groundwater pollution in Green County. The question arises: Has litter pollution increased the degradation of northeastern Oklahoma streams as well as residential and community water wells? That's unknown, due partly to a lack of in-depth testing by Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Geological Survey-Oklahoma. Both agencies blame a serious lack of funding

for the absence of such testing.

The \$13 million Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan's favorite buzzword – sustainability – actually omitted the importance of sustainability of ground water quality. It did not cover the danger from thousands of Arkansas and Missouri poultry-house water wells draining and contaminating northeast Oklahoma water wells.

It's imperative that new expensive high-tech water-quality tests be funded and used by the USGS in its in-progress North East Oklahoma Boone-Rubidoux Aquifer Study. The same is demanded from GRDA's Comprehensive Water Source Program and the city of Tulsa's Spavinaw River Basin municipal lakes.

What's demanded is testing for [a] excess nitrogen, a toxic primary nutrient in chicken litter; [b] microcystin to detect blue-green algae; and [c] heavy metals including mercury and lead and PFAS.

Science staffers at Oklahoma's state agencies knew that poultry litter was degrading water quality, but their appointed administrators permitted an invasion of mega-poultry houses that proved environmentally destructive.

Are these industrial poultry houses part of what is killing Oklahomans?

Elsewhere in Oklahoma tests are needed for PFAS – polyfluoroalkyl family of man-made, forever highly-toxic chemicals. Military records reveal Oklahoma's five major airports all have PFAS soluble and highly mobile toxic plumes in their ground water.

How far has PFAS migrated throughout nearby neighborhoods in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Midwest City, Altus and Enid?

Other states provide a road map for Oklahoma policymakers on why wider spectrum smart tests are the new normal. Ohio, for example, announced statewide tests for PFAS in the drinking water 1,500 public schools. Test-sampling hunted for man-made toxic substances, helping identify harmful chemicals not detected by standard testing.

Will Gov. Kevin Stitt fund wide-spectrum tests for lead, mercury and PFAS in Oklahoma's 1,816 public schools drinking water from his \$1 billion Rainy Day Fund?

If not, he may be teeing up more public health problems – especially in rural counties – fueling higher mortality rates and allowing mercury to impair students' IQs.

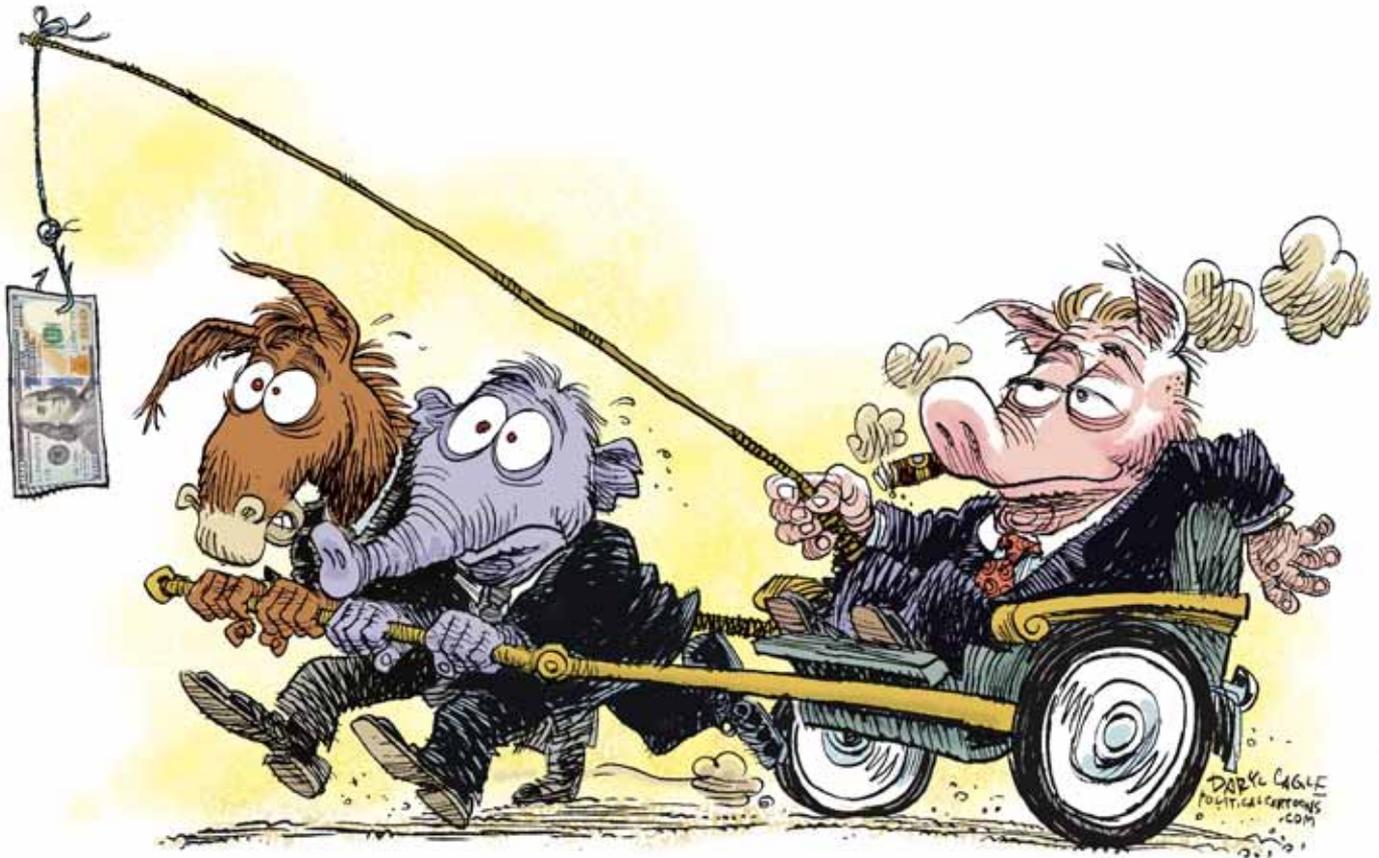
Oklahoma U.S. Sen. James Lankford was asked last year to help secure federal funds that would enable USGS-Oklahoma and ODEQ's Water Quality Studies testing. No response.

Lankford did support spending \$13 billion necessary to build the USS Gerald R. Ford, the most expensive aircraft carrier-war ship ever.

Where are his priorities?

MERCURY IN FISH

Did you know ODEQ's annual water quality report now warns Oklahomans not to eat certain fish from



Conservative Dems And Tax Reform

BY PAUL CARTLEDGE

Tax reform has a wonderful ring to it, but as long as Republicans rule it is not going to happen. In fact, we have not seen the end of Republicans tilting the tables to further enrich the wealthy.

Republicans hate taxes; taxes are the fuel democracy runs on, and the oligarchs who fund the Republican Party hate democracy.

Majority rule – one man, one vote – is not a principle embraced by the uber-wealthy. Republicans love and respect wealth. Wealth is de facto the realm of the few.

So, when the unwashed masses that comprise the majority vote for politicians who actually believe the rich should pay their fair share of taxes, the Republican reaction is to sabotage the system that enables majority rule.

They have succeeded to the point that the United States today is a plutocracy, government of the rich by the rich and for the rich. Money and the pursuit of wealth has so poisoned our values that democratic, Christian principles – caring for your neighbor and providing for the least among us – are antiquat-

ed concepts that have no place in American society today.

There is a faint hope that the 2020 elections will result in democratic majorities in both the Senate and the House, and a Democrat in the presidency. Should that come to pass, then one might imagine that tax reform is inevitable, that we can roll back the trillion-dollar-plus tax cut that Trump and the Republicans gifted to the wealthy.

There is a fly in the ointment in that a good number of Democrats serving in Washington are beholden to wealthy corporate donors.

Tax reform is needed at the federal and state levels if democracy is to survive the next decade. And while tax reform at the federal level is a remote possibility, it is a pipe dream in states like Oklahoma where the Republican Party is in complete control.

The majority of active members of the Oklahoma Democratic Party are over the age of 60, so the party is dying by attrition. Not all, but a vast majority of the persons comprising the Oklahoma Democratic Party fancy themselves as conservative Democrats.

Surprisingly, that moniker extends to some of the younger people who participate in the party at local levels.

Oklahoma Democrats have not broken out of 20th century paradigms in which the two parties' major differences revolved around taxation and spending.

Oklahoma conservative Democrats seem oblivious to the fact that the Republican Party has pulled off a coup and that the minority party is in firm control of politics at national and state levels.

Oklahoma Democratic Party officials seem content to hold fundraisers to help campaigns of conservative Democrats who want to run against ultra-right-wing Republicans who trounce them at election time. That behavior fits neatly into the adage about people who do the same thing over and over and expect a different outcome. It can be described by several unflattering adjectives.

Oklahoma Democrat Party members shudder at the notion of basing a campaign on the most press-

ing national issues of the day, like global warming, income inequality, universal health care, and the racial animus that divides our populous. This remains true in the face of countless national polls that reflect that between 60% and 70% of Americans consider these issues important and in need of meaningful reforms.

Are Oklahoma voters that far out of touch with reality?

If the Oklahoma Democratic Party is to ever have any meaningful role to play in Oklahoma politics, it is imperative the party offers the voters something other than vanilla conservatism. Granted, politicians who would embrace these progressive ideals will be lambasted by the state's media titans and will have little chance of winning many seats in the near term. But what have they got to lose?

The only way to go from here is up.
Durant resident Paul Cartledge is former chair of the Bryan County Democratic Party.

Trump And A Free Press

BY KEN NEAL

In 1733, a little publication called the New York Weekly Journal criticized the governor and got the editor in big trouble.

That's not unknown our day. I have been in trouble with a number of governors through the years.

But because of the precedent set by that obscure printer, we in the media have the right, nay, the obligation, to criticize elected officials.

Who was he? He is not well known to the public, but he is a hero to journalists. He was John Peter Zenger, a German immigrant. In his world of the early 18th century, simple publication of information opposed to the government was libel per se.

His publication listed actions of the corrupt royal governor, William S. Cosby, and accused the government of rigging elections and allowing the French enemy to explore New York harbor.

It accused the governor of crimes and more or less called him an idiot. Zenger didn't write the articles; he just published them.

In 1733, he was charged with libel. Since publication of information opposed by the government was libel under the law, it seemed that the case against Zenger was open and shut.

When his trial began, the courtroom was jolted by the appearance of the most famous lawyer in the colonies, a fellow named Alexander Hamilton, who admitted that Zenger had published the articles but demanded the prosecution prove them false.

"It is not the cause of one poor printer," he claimed, "but the cause of liberty."

The judge ordered the jury to convict Zenger if they believed he printed the stories, but the jury

returned in less than 10 minutes with a not guilty verdict. Zenger and Hamilton were heroes. Although freedom of the press came with the First Amendment to the Constitution more than 50 years later, the Zenger trial had set the American press on the road to freedom.

Perhaps you see the parallel between that colonial government and the Trump administration. Both are corrupt; both hate criticism; both dealt with a foreign government in ways that would hurt their country.

Forward to today. Once again, the Free Press is being attacked by Trump's boys, not by words but by action.

Because one NPR reporter had the temerity to insist Secretary of State Mike Pompeo answer questions about the Ukrainian scandal, another NPR reporter was removed from the list of reporters allowed to cover Pompeo's trip to Ukraine.

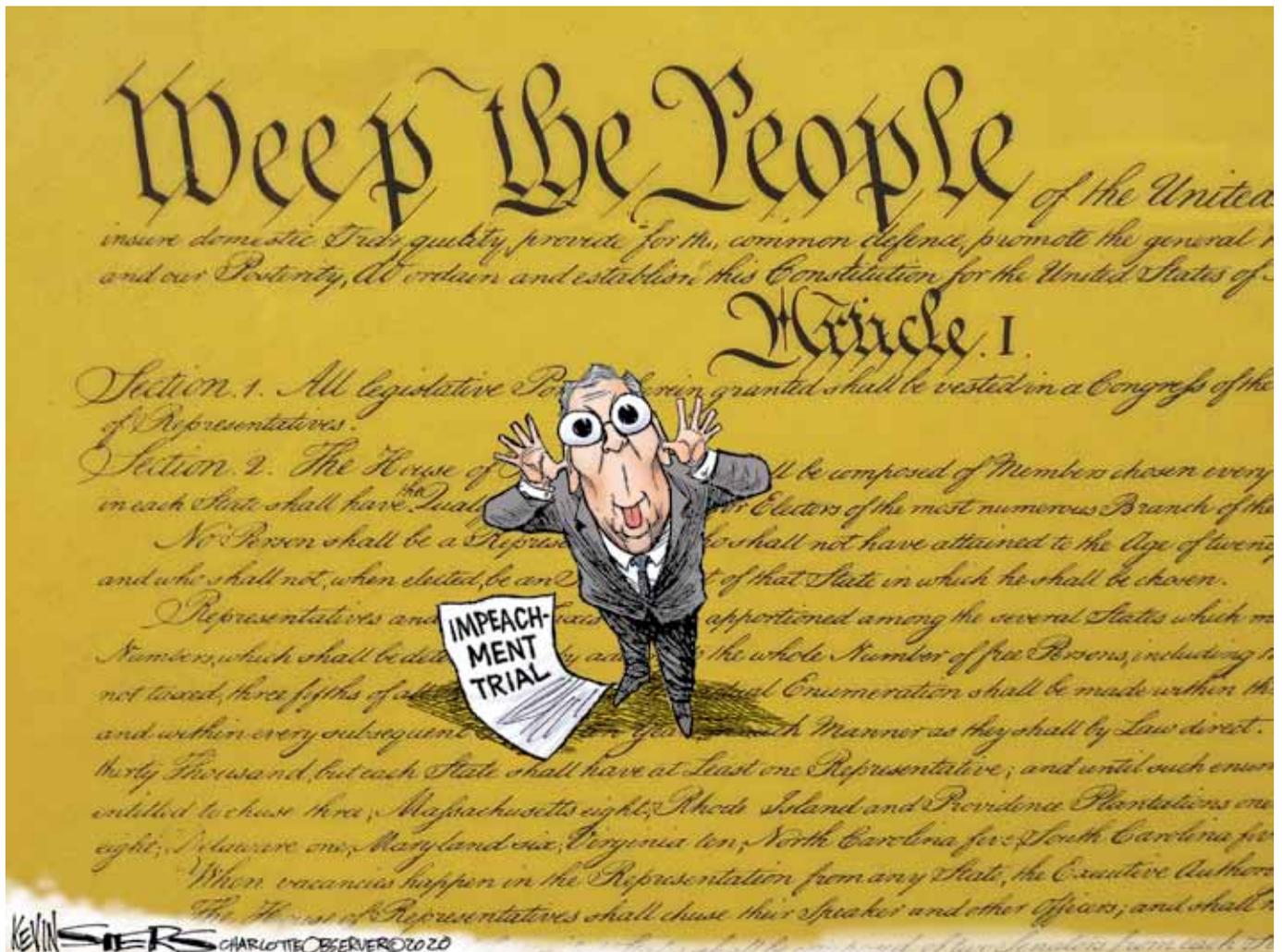
It's not the first time Trump has punished the press. He revoked CNN reporter Jim Acosta's White House privileges only to be ordered by a judge to return them. Trump regularly punishes the press in word and deed.

Trump applauded Pompeo for his crude and rude treatment of the NPR reporter who asked the tough questions. [Never answered by Pompeo, by the way.]

Sadly, many people in the public dislike the media so much that they side with Trump. White House denizens reportedly laughed and applauded Trump's boorish remarks.

But the media, particularly the press, doggedly re-

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FEBRUARY 20, 2020

Post-Acquittal Future Could Be Ugly For GOP

BY ROGER RENSVOLD

The suspense of Trump's impeachment was killing me. I called my friend Winnie, aka The Reverend Mother Bronwyn of Crosstimbers, and asked for a glimpse into the future.

After smudging the house, chanting the incantations and killing a black rooster, we sat nude in the middle of her pentagram, peering into her crystal ball. First, we saw the immediate future.

Every single Republican senator, all 51 of them, voted to retain Donald Trump in office. Their solemn faces betrayed not a single trace of doubt or shame.

Katy Tur, covering the vote for MSNBC, abruptly went to commercial break. In the crystal ball, we could see her run into the corridor and puke. Katy

made it look perky-cute.

Winnie I stared at each other. "Why?" I asked. "Let's find out," she replied, rubbing the ball with a black silk scarf. "*Cogitationes vestras revelare!*"

First, we saw Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, slumped behind his office desk. We heard his thoughts: "The shit a man's gotta do. But after all these years, nobody's gonna run me out of the Senate. If the folks back home wanna go Klan, f***'em, I'm all in for the Klan. After all, George Wallace started out as a reformer, but got stomped in his first primary by some race-baiter. It learned him. He said, 'I decided, ain't nobody never gonna out-n****r ol' George!' And ain't nobody never gonna out-Trump ol' Lindsey."

TRUMP ON TRIAL

Next, we saw Sen. Mitch McConnell sitting in front of a fire in his Georgetown brownstone, talking to his wife. “God, I hate Donald. Such an uncouth man; back home in the Bluegrass, he’d be horsewhipped. But if we’d thrown him out of office, then the party would have split between the Romney pinkos and the Tiki-Torchers. We’d lose any chance of ever steering this country away from the socialist ditch that AOC, Warren, Sanders and the other girls want to put us in.”

Next, we saw Sen. Mitt Romney in a first-class United seat, on his way home to Utah. He was staring pensively out the window at the desert mountains, apparently thinking about what he’d write in his memoirs. Winnie and I eavesdropped.

“Trump was, according to most scholars, the most corrupt, least qualified person to ever be president. He was totally unsuited for the role of Commander-in-Chief. But the Senate reasoned that future presidents would not be like him. They would be strong, smart, capable, and badly in need of the power to deal swiftly and firmly with emerging threats. Removing Trump, and normalizing impeachment as a political tactic, would have taken that power away; from not only Trump, but also from all of his successors. It would have endangered the Republic.”

“So what happens next?” I asked the Winnie.

She muttered something in Latin and breathed on the ball, then wiped away the mist with the pelt of a black cat. It didn’t work. The people we saw seemed to be jerking around at random, and we heard nothing but white noise. “We have a bandwidth problem,” she said. “Let me get a larger ball and another chicken. You wait here in the pentagram, there’s a karmic shitstorm raging outside it.”

“I don’t see or feel anything.”

“Lucky you.”

She was back in a minute, and placed the crystal ball on the outstretched left wing of the still-twitching bird. “Let’s try this. We’ll look at things in the future that aren’t moving around, and don’t have any sound associated with them. Like newspapers. *Crastina nuntium legere!*”

The New York Times, Friday, Nov. 4, 2020:

CRUSHING DEFEAT FOR GOP

Sanders Receives Historic Mandate

Dems Gain 100 House, 10 Senate Seats

We looked at each other. “Well, that’s something,” I said. “Can we see the editorial page?”

“We can try. *Epistolas legere!*”

We couldn’t read the small print, but we could make out the titles of the various op-ed pieces.

Trump’s Legacy; An Imperial Presidency
‘Abolish Filibuster,’ Bern Demands; Senate Complies

Official DC Berns

Professors, Activists Take Over Agencies

The Progressive Apocalypse Is Here
Gun Owners Scramble To Hide Weapons
“Can we scan ahead a few weeks?”
BERN BANS INTERSTATE SALE OF GUNS
Emergency Power Act Invoked
Riots Across the South; States File Federal Lawsuits

“Can we follow just that thread?”

“Maybe, if we concentrate.”

COURT: GUN BAN UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

BERN WILL IGNORE RULING

Bern To Roberts: ‘Go Ahead, Impeach Me!’

HHS Secretary AOC to SCOTUS: ‘FUMFs!’

“And so the language of acronyms continues to evolve.”

“Apparently.”

“Let’s see what else is going to happen.”

The further we got away from the present, the less legible the text became. Soon we were reading only the headlines of unknown future dates.

AL, MS DECLARE SECOND CIVIL WAR

Bern Sends Three Airborne Divisions, Special Forces

Cyber Command Shuts Down Internet, Electricity Across South

CHURCHES LOSE TAX EXEMPTIONS

Bishops, Ministers March On Washington

DOE Sec Chomsky: ‘Pray About It.’

NEW HATE SPEECH LAWS GO INTO EFFECT

Ex-Pres Trump Arrested

Giuliani, Barr, Trump Family Flee Country

CIVIL WAR W II OVER IN 10 DAYS

AL, MS Lawmakers Dead, Under Arrest

Ten Million Guns Collected, Destroyed

UKRAINE JOINS NATO, WILL HOST US TROOPS

GOP Senators Call Action ‘Warmongering’

Bern To Critics: ‘Impeach Me!’

BERN STATIONS NUKES IN BALTIC STATES

Putin Asks for Summit

Bern: ‘Tell Your People To Call Our People’

M4A TO COVER SEX CHANGE

AOC: ‘This Is America. Be What You Want To Be.’

SENATE APPOINTS FIRST WICCAN CHAPLAIN

Twenty GOP Senators Walk Out On Opening Ritual

Sen. Graham Spattered With Chicken Blood, Faints

CIVIL WAR II TREASON TRIALS BEGIN

Federal Death Penalty Reinstated For Defendants

SCOTUS: Law Is Ex Post Facto, Unconstitutional

Bern to SCOTUS: ‘Impeach Me!’

“Damn, Winnie,” I said to the Rev Mom, “all of this gave me a headache. Got any Tylenol?”

“How ‘bout some industrial-strength weed?”

We lit up and ritualistically passed the bong back and forth over the dead chicken. “So all this began –”

“Will begin –”

“Will begin when the Senate fails to remove Trump from office. Shouldn’t you warn them?”

TRUMP ON TRIAL

“They wouldn’t believe me.”

“Could you do a working to make them believe you?”

“Maybe.”

“If you could make them believe you, would you warn them?”

The Reverend Mother smiled beatifically. “No. I’m looking forward to smudging the Senate and killing some black roosters there.”

Roger Rensvold, a Democratic precinct chairman in Midwest City, fought in Vietnam, flew experimental helicopters, taught in a Hong Kong university, and published original research in scholarly journals. He has never, to his knowledge, published fiction.

Shame Of The Senate

BY JOE CONASON

Well before completing his first term, President Donald Trump firmly established himself as the worst president in American history, which should surprise nobody. What we have seen this week suggests that many of the senators now hearing his impeachment trial will join him in historic infamy.

From the very beginning of Trump’s impeachment, a majority of Republican senators have indicated that they would not dare to sanction his unmistakable wrongdoing.

The Republicans stood mutely as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-KY, told the nation that he would manage the trial in lockstep with the president’s lawyers. They said nothing when the president brushed aside the constitutional separation of powers and the prerogatives of Congress by withholding all evidence and witnesses. They pretended to believe McConnell when he promised to conduct the trial fairly, and apply the same standards and procedures seen during the impeachment of former President Bill Clinton. And then, knowing that McConnell planned to railroad Trump’s acquittal, they falsely swore an oath to do “impartial justice.”

During the first two days of the trial, as the House Democrats set forth the facts and the law, Republican senators have done little to redeem themselves and much to betray that oath. Some of them have violated Senate rules in departing early from the long sessions mandated by their own leadership. Some have rudely made a show of ignoring the case presented by the House managers – including Sens. Marsha Blackburn, R-TN, who brazenly perused a book on the Senate floor; Rand Paul, R-KY, who doodled on a pad; and Richard Burr, R-NC, who amused

himself with a fidget spinner. Those juvenile acts likewise made a mockery of their responsibilities.

Others have acted out in ways that revealed the truth their party now aims to conceal. So Sen. Ron Johnson, R-WI, a member of the Senate Ukraine Caucus, leaped up from his seat red-faced when one of the impeachment managers displayed a bipartisan letter he had signed in 2016 demanding the removal of Ukraine chief prosecutor Viktor Shokin. That letter decisively disproves Trump’s central accusation against former Vice President Joe Biden – and badly embarrassed Johnson, who later said that he didn’t remember signing it and had been misled.

He looked like a fool, but that isn’t news either.

Perhaps the most egregious conduct in the Senate so far, aside from McConnell’s scheming to fix the trial, can be laid to Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-SC. His longtime association with the late John McCain encouraged mistaken assumptions about his character that he is now disproving every day. While he connives with McConnell to conceal the evidence of Trump’s impeachable conduct, he must endure the continuous playback of video clips that prove his monumental hypocrisy, cynicism and bad faith.

Back when he was an eager young House manager, hoping to make a name for himself by prosecuting Clinton’s sexual peccadilloes, Graham delivered impassioned pleas to the Senate, demanding attention and fairness.

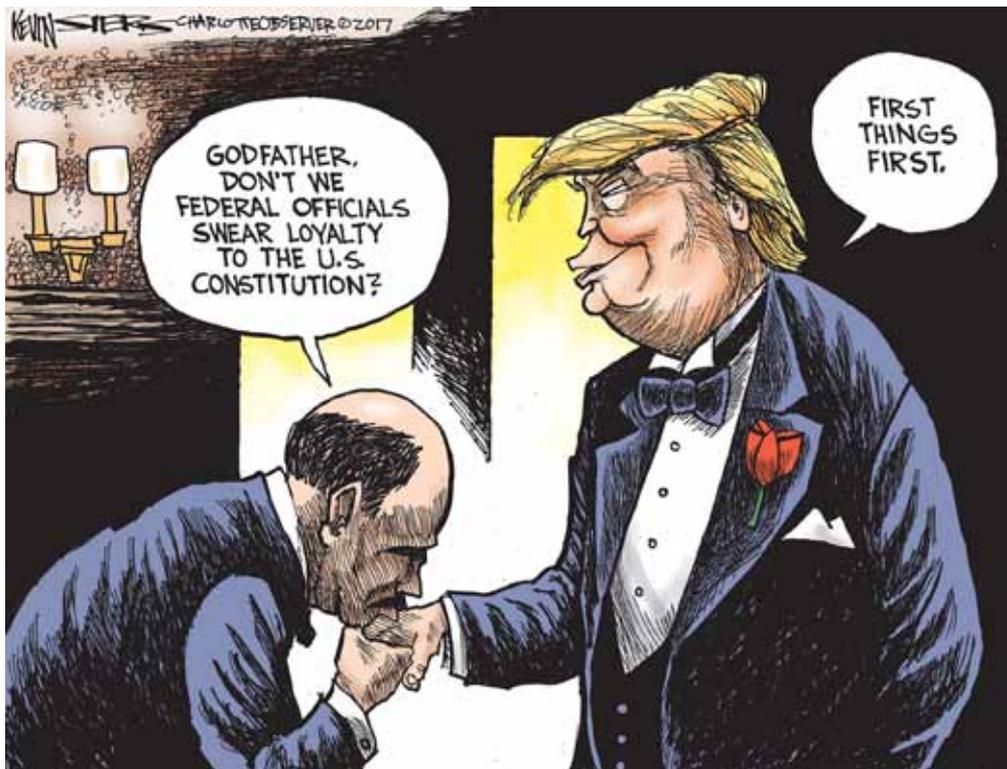
“Do justice to the case,” he said to the senators who might have decided to acquit Clinton in advance. “Don’t decide the case before the case’s end.” While he now excuses and even defends Trump’s stonewalling, Graham said in 1998 that a president who defies congressional subpoenas is subject to removal from office.

“The day Richard Nixon failed to answer that subpoena is the day that he was subject to impeachment,” Graham intoned, “because he took the power from Congress over the impeachment process away from Congress, and he became the judge and jury.” Such an arrogant presumption describes precisely what Trump has done more brazenly than Nixon ever dared, yet Graham and his Senate colleagues don’t even whisper an objection.

Four years ago, Graham predicted that if Republicans were to nominate Donald Trump for president, their party “would be destroyed” and “would deserve it.” His defense of Trump, even knowing the crimes perpetrated by him, is destroying the reputation of Graham and every other Republican senator implicated in the cover-up. They could restore a semblance of probity by reversing course on subpoenas of witnesses and documents, but that seems unlikely.

Instead they are engraving the shame of the Senate, once the world’s greatest deliberative body, on their own souls.

TRUMP ON TRIAL



I'm Watching This Movie

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

I am watching this movie about a mob boss who is on trial for really serious crimes, but somehow he figures out a way to get a bunch of his accomplices in the crimes on the jury for the trial – can you believe that?!

And get this, the foreman of the jury has a wife who actually works in a really high level and high paying job for the mob boss! She literally owes her job to the mob boss, and the court still allowed this guy to be on the jury! I know, right!

The evidence against the mob boss is overwhelming. There are even tapes of him saying and doing things that he and his defense lawyers claim he never said and did. In one of the tapes he is caught telling some of his associates [criminally indicted associates whom the mob boss denies even knowing – never even talked to them he says] to get rid of a woman who is getting in the way of his criminal schemes. He tells them to “take her out.” Later he tells another person that “she’s going to go through some things.”

This movie reminds me so much of *The Godfather*, really.

Through his corrupt power over key persons in the justice system who are compromised and complicit in the crimes of the mob boss, he ends up having control over people who are related to the trial who

could force him to turn over incriminating documents, but they won’t turn on the mob boss. They are probably afraid that if he goes down, so will they.

All the mob boss’ lawyers can do in his defense is attack and try to intimidate the prosecutors, but it doesn’t really matter because in the end the mob boss’ lawyers know that they have enough of the mob boss’ accomplices on the jury.

There a lot of witnesses to the crimes, and the mob boss would do almost anything to keep these witnesses off the stand. The mob boss has told the witnesses that they should not testify, and the witnesses who had the courage to testify in the pre-trial hearings were intimidated by the mob boss, believe it or not, while they were on the stand! To make matters even worse, the jury in the trial has said they won’t even listen to any witnesses or listen to any of the tapes, and the judge seems OK with it!

I am having trouble watching the movie to the end because it seems so crazy and unrealistic, but I have watched so much already, I guess I will have to see how it ends. I just hope no one ends up sleeping with the fishes.

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.

STAR TRIBUNE
S&K



Policy, Party, Person

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

An astute political philosopher [and friend] described a moment during a university debate about the last Texas senate race. As my friend reported, one of his right-wing colleagues, a Trump supporter, an otherwise decent and principled man, endorsed a kind of decision procedure or formula when faced with a choice of candidates: “policy first, party next, and person third.”

The procedure helped clarify something I still find baffling, probably because of an overly idealistic view of the way people make judgments about political matters.

Our president is a loathsome human being – that much is clear. We need not enumerate [as has been done so often] his vices, nor do we need to describe

[once again] the disgraceful actions that have been the behavioral expressions of these vices.

For me, the content of Trump’s character outweighs other relevant factors that citizens and voters might consider when deciding whether he deserves our political and moral support – or whether he deserves to be removed from office. Why do people – good people, decent people – still support Trump? Do they have a formula that puts character last?

In 2016 Trump claimed he could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue in New York, shoot somebody, and he wouldn’t lose voters. Three years into his presidency, we must admit that he was probably right.

Any of Trump’s words or actions that we find reprehensible would be outweighed by whatever factors

Please Don't Eat Your Own

BY MICHAEL WHELAN

Dear Everyone [but especially my political friends]:

I can barely handle scrolling through my social media anymore.

One thing has become crystal clear to me. Many of you are actively undermining your principles by dragging people who share [and are actively fighting for] the vast majority of what you believe in.

Listen, we are *all* flawed. If you expect perfection from others, you are always going to end up disappointed. You can't be taken seriously if you make an enemy out of everyone.

Remember that you're not perfect, nor are your opinions. There are really bad people in this world; if you must pick fights, pick fights with them.

Here's an exercise: go through your Facebook feed. How many of your posts are negative? How many are trashing or vaguebooking people who should be your allies?

Has sadistically shaming someone ever made you truly feel better? Wouldn't that energy be better spent on positively promoting things you believe in? Couldn't you spend that time fighting people who sincerely want to tear down everything you stand for?

If you see yourself in this post, you're meant to. I'm not dragging you, I'm imploring you. I love your fire and passion. I want to see it productively focused.

Michael Whelan is a Tulsa attorney, political consultant and former Tulsa County Democratic Party chair.

Trump voters take to be overriding. The formula mentioned above identifies these factors: policies first, party next, person last.

Moral character is a third wheel. The bullets continue to fly.

I have no doubt that the procedure is, as a matter of fact, used by many of Trump's supporters. We have heard it, especially among Republicans in the Senate and House. They don't support his lying, bullying, name-calling, and occasional cruelty, or his attack on democratic institutions. But they support his policies, and he's a Republican [in some new Trumpist sense].

Republican politicians and voters seem to be saying: He may be a demagogue, but he's our demagogue, and at least he has the right enemies. We can live with his "flaws" [an understatement] as long as he can get things done, make America great again, drain the swamp, and help Republicans at the ballot box. We're willing to overlook the ways he has transformed the central tenets of the Republican Party [unlike other conservatives who have run away from the Trumpist GOP].

Thus the PPP principle, as I'll call it, functions as a decision procedure and a rationale [rationalization?] for supporting Trump. Given its apparent prevalence among Trump's allies, the principle deserves our attention.

First, the principle oversimplifies the elements contained in each of the supposedly most important and well-defined categories. The range of relevant policies is quite large and the differences across the major parties may not clearly delineate a party choice.

For example, one of my [thoughtful] friends is, as

he says, a hardcore defender of the Second Amendment [he's a hunter], an ardent supporter of Israel, against useless wars, hates PC language, and agrees with the Trump administration that China is screwing us in trade. Trump supporter?

No. My friend is a Democrat who disagrees with Trump on healthcare, education, immigration, climate change, and the role of science in public policy. He also finds Trump despicable as a person. [More on that later.]

The reference to "policies first" is simply unhelpful; it underdetermines a voter's choice since the range of policies is so wide and the relative importance of the various policies is unstated. The PPP principle leaves



us with a difficult decision; it doesn't produce an unambiguous voter preference.

Something similar could be said for the reference to a political party. As many pundits have pointed out, a majority of voters are largely sympathetic to the progressive economic ideas associated with the Democratic Party. Yet many of these same voters find themselves more at home in the cultural atmosphere of the Republican Party when it comes to "God, guns, and gays," abortion, same-sex marriage, and recreational weed.

Voters who are disturbed by the influence of the rich on our politics may also despise what they see as the lofty liberal cultural elitism found on college campuses, in the entertainment industry, on the pages of the New York Times, and in the Democratic Party. How does the formula help such voters choose which party deserves their support? A reference to party is more politically messy than some think.

So there are practical difficulties in applying the PPP principle as a decision procedure in the hope that the best candidate, given a voter's preferences, is identified in the process. However, there are deeper problems with the principle.

We are thinking about reasons for supporting one candidate over others. The principle attempts to identify the pertinent factors we should consider. It seems to me there are at least two other considerations, more abstract but extremely important, and suitably related, that are significant: worldview and political philosophy. Therefore, the PPP principle is incomplete.

Most of us have some notion of the meaning of a worldview. It consists of a complex set of fundamental beliefs and commitments that form the basis for how we live, what we value and desire, how we interact with others, fix our beliefs [where we look for knowledge, and construct our self-identity, and which shapes our hopes and purposes.

A worldview grounds basic attitudes and emotions: Optimism, pessimism, resignation, cynicism, love, trust, guilt, hope.

A worldview attempts to answer the central questions of human life. What exists? How can I attain knowledge? How should I act and live? What is human nature? What can I hope for?

Suppose I'm considering two candidates. One's worldview is influenced by various arguments for determinism [psychological, historical, neuroscientific] and sees politics as a way to address the inequalities of the natural lottery by helping people to overcome obstacles. Another candidate has a broader notion of human agency, an uninhibited conception of free will, and views government primarily as a way to protect negative freedom and natural rights.

Or consider a candidate who is an evangelical Christian and whose theocratic view of the relation between church and state guides her policies. Another candidate's study of evolutionary biology, phys-

ics, and world religions informs a more expansive religious pluralism that sees a danger, politically and socially, in exclusivist forms of religion.

It matters for our judgment when we find out that former Speaker Paul Ryan's worldview has been profoundly influenced by Ayn Rand's views of human nature, morality, and economics; or that Barack Obama's worldview and politics were influenced by M.L. King, Saul Alinsky, and Reinhold Niebuhr.

These examples show there is an intimate connection between a worldview and a political philosophy, although the relation may not always be explicit and may be hard to excavate on the campaign trail. If a candidate identifies as a libertarian or a democratic socialist we know a great deal about how that candidate construes the proper role of government and what values are taken to be most basic: liberty or equality or some conception of justice.

One reason for thinking the original list of relevant factors [policies, party, person] is incomplete is because the first two factors, at least, are derivative. Given a candidate's policy positions and party membership, we might wonder why a candidate adopts these positions. Why is the candidate a member of a particular party? The answer directs us toward something more basic about the candidate's view of the world and the values endorsed in a certain view of the relation between the individual and the state.

Policies are aspirational; their successful implementation is dependent on the dirty contingencies of history, political power, and democratic compromise. Policies may hide the art of the possible. We may learn more about a politician by looking deeper. The PPP principle ignores this.

Moreover, the principle ignores relationships that may obtain between or among the elements. It treats the factors as if they are isolated variables that must be weighed independently. In doing this, the principle attempts to solve the problem of weighting [weighing the relative importance of the factors] in an arbitrary [apriori] way. Why put principles first, party next, and person last? Why just this order?

Both of these problems – the assumed independence of the variables and their relative weight – emerge in an especially acute way when we consider Trump, because of the relationship between the particular person and his deeper commitments. We can't separate his character from his worldview, which generates and informs his policies, and expresses his governing philosophy.

What is foundational in Trump's view of the world? I have argued in these pages that in the case of Trump, the personal and the political are connected in an essential way. These connections are rooted in his overriding narcissism: As an asshole, he thinks he's entitled to ignore moral norms and treat others shamefully. As a bullshitter, he's unconcerned with truth. As a chauvinist, his egoism is expressed both individually and in his preferences for the group with

which he identifies: his sex [he can grab women's genitals if he pleases], his race, and his nation.

The ABC's of Trump – asshole, bullshitter, and chauvinist – are essential aspects of his character. These personal traits are internally related to his authoritarian, anti-democratic sensibilities and his anti-constitutional actions and policies [for example, his immigration policies], as well as his political philosophy. His character helps explain his tendency to praise and feel kinship with other authoritarians.

Trump's nationalism is more basic than the policies that relate to this part of his worldview: tariffs, anti-immigration, rejection of trade and climate change agreements, the negation of treaties that he finds inimical to national interests.

An important aspect of his worldview is what might be called his ruling metaphor: life as a kind of game. In life there are winners and losers – a grotesque way of sorting the worth of people. The game of life is played without commitment to conventional rules; no honor, no integrity, no sense of community, no notion of justice. Lying and cheating as a way of life – in business and as a way of governing. We live in a nasty Hobbesian world ruled by self-interest – so you have to be ruthless, a “killer,” as Trump's dad taught him, in business, the pursuit of celebrity, governing, and relationships to others.

For Trump, the fundamental categories of life are the balance sheet, ratings, fame, and the final score. Within the nexus of the grounding categories that are central to his worldview, we understand his policies and political philosophy. The elements are inseparable. His impeachment is the predictable result of who

he is as a man and how he sees the world.

The idea of separating various factors indexed by the PPP principle and making each a respectable, independent basis for overlooking the moral disaster of Trump's character is a counsel of despair. It's certainly not the product of political wisdom.

My reason for thinking the content of Trump's character outweighs other relevant factors is that character infects all else. My argument focuses on relations.

In calling Trump “morally lost and confused,” the editor of Christianity Today may have been thinking relationally or he simply may have had enough of the intrinsic badness of Trump's character, given his Christian worldview. The editor may have finally recognized, in the words of John McWhorter, that a truly inferior person is leading our country.

A professor at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, TX, offers a final response to the principle. “... [E]ven if I agreed with his policies 100%, he's [Trump] such a despicable human being that I would be opposed to him being president. The damage he does to the moral character of our culture and institutions and to our relations to the rest of the world far outweighs any policy agreements I might have with him.”

Trumpsters should reject the pseudo-formula that allows them to overlook the most basic moral requirements for being a political leader. In Trump we have a living counterexample to the PPP principle and an answer to the question: how bad must a person be to outweigh the importance of the policies with which one happens to agree?

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

Time For Democrats To End Caucuses

BY FROMA HARROP

“It is quite astonishing to see with what deadpan and neutral a tone our press and television report the open corruption – and the flagrantly anti-democratic character – of the Iowa caucuses.”

I quote the late Christopher Hitchens because I couldn't put it better.

In a primary, eligible voters can show up anytime while polls are open, cast anonymous ballots and go home. In the caucuses, they must show up on a winter night and spend several hours jostling with neighbors and strangers as they show support for one candidate or another.

This setup favors activists who are not deterred by snow, cold and the dark. They tend to be educated and have the luxury of free evening hours. They're also aggressive and skilled in working the intricacies of the caucus process.

The caucuses disfavor working people who must juggle two children and three jobs. Add to that any-

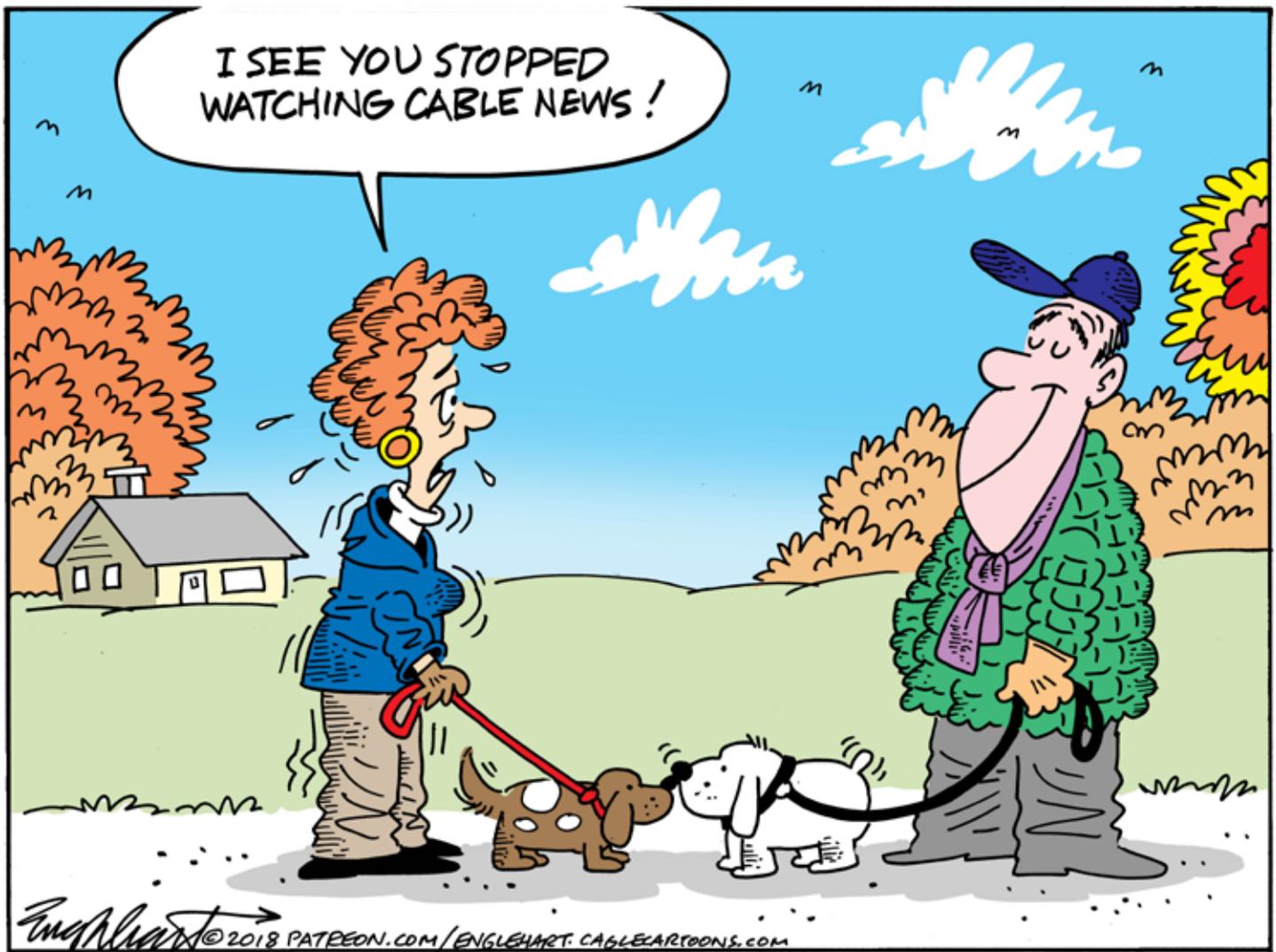
one who works nights at McDonald's or drives an Uber after hours. Or who depends on a public transportation system that slows down in the evening.

The obvious winners in this unfair setup are candidates with passionate followers. Bernie Sanders has notably been a beneficiary. In 2016, he did better in the caucuses, where his activists could exert control, than in the primaries, where a wider electorate cast simple ballots without pressure.

Caucuses routinely suppress voter participation, according to the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. In 2016, turnout at the Iowa caucuses was under 16%, whereas the New Hampshire primary attracted 52% of eligible voters.

Washington state, which held both a caucus and a primary in 2016, offered a real-world contrast of the two. In March that year, Sanders swept Washington's Democratic caucus, walking off with 74 delegates to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38



Seven Questions For America's Mainstream Media

BY JEFF COHEN

1 Why don't you refer to our current healthcare system as a "corporate-run system?"

At Democratic presidential debates and elsewhere, network TV journalists have aggressively challenged the notion of "abolishing private health insurance" – without discussing what health insurance companies actually contribute to healthcare beyond bureaucracy and profiteering.

At last June's debate, NBC's Lester Holt asked candidates to raise their hands if they would "abolish private insurance in favor of a government-run plan." Over and over, when mainstream journalists refer to Medicare for All – wherein the government would be the provider of health insurance, while doctors and

hospitals remain private – they mislabel it "government-run healthcare" or a "government-run system." Yet they never call our current system "corporate-run healthcare."

2 Why don't you provide actual data on the public's attitudes toward health insurance firms? A 2016 Harris poll found deep disdain for health insurance companies, with only 16% believing that these firms put patients over profits. In a 2018 Forbes article on "The Top 5 Industries Most Hated by Customers," the health insurance industry was ranked fourth [after cable TV, internet providers and wireless phone] – based on American Customer Satisfaction Index rankings. Yet at Democratic de-

bates, we've repeatedly heard from journalists about the millions of U.S. consumers who supposedly relish private insurance. While I've yet to meet one of those satisfied customers, it's a mantra from media outlets [which are often sponsored by health insurers]. More to the point: I've yet to meet anyone who would refuse a plan with more complete coverage at less cost to him or her: "No, I want my beloved Aetna!"

3 Why do you so rarely care about the views of unions ... unless they're in conflict with environmentalists?

For more than 30 years, the media watch group FAIR has documented that the views and voices of labor unions have been marginalized by mainstream media. An exception occurred at the CNN-hosted presidential debate last month, when Bernie Sanders explained his reasons for opposing NAFTA 2.0. [Below is from the transcript.]

SANDERS: *Every major environmental organization has said no to this new trade agreement because it does not even have the phrase "climate change" in it ...*

PANELIST: *But, Sen. Sanders, to be clear, the AFL-CIO supports this deal. Are you unwilling to compromise?*

4 Why do you also invoke unions to cast doubt on Medicare for All?

While presidential debate panelists [and corporate Democrats like Joe Biden] have frequently brought up union-negotiated health benefits as an argument against Medicare for All, they rarely mention how U.S. unions have sacrificed wage gains and other benefits to stave off employer cuts to their healthcare. As flight attendants' union president Sara Nelson told Politico: "When we're able to hang on to the health plan we have, that's considered a massive win. But it's a huge drag on our bargaining. So our message is: Get it off the table." As Biden recently admitted, attaching health insurance to a job [whether unionized or not] is an iffy proposition for any worker.

5 Why do you interrogate politicians over the price tags of social programs but not war?

CNN devoted the first portion of last month's debate to war, military deployment and foreign conflict – but not one of the 25 questions from CNN journalists asked about the price tag of endless war and militarism. This despite the fact that roughly 57% of federal discretionary spending goes to the military and Trump keeps lavishing more money on the military than the Pentagon asks for. When it comes to war spending, mainstream journalists don't ask: "Can our country afford it?"

After CNN's debate turned from war to progressive proposals for social programs benefitting the vast majority of the public, panelists turned from lapdogs to watchdogs on the issue of cost. Sanders was asked, "Don't voters deserve to see a price tag [on Medicare for All]?" and "How would you keep your plans from bankrupting the country?"

To pound home the bias visually, CNN's banners across the bottom of the screen blared: "**QUESTION:** *Does Sanders owe voters an explanation of how much his health care plan will cost them and the country?*" And the absurd: "**QUESTION:** *Sanders' proposals would double federal spending over a decade; how will he avoid bankrupting the country?*" There were no banners about military price tags.

6 Why do you probe the costs of reform while sidestepping the higher price tags of the status quo?

Despite CNN's grandstanding claims that Sanders has not provided a price tag on his health plan, he repeatedly says that Medicare for All will cost \$30 trillion or a bit more over 10 years. And he immediately adds another assertion that has provoked little media interest or rebuttal – that persisting with the status quo will cost far more, according to federal government sources, perhaps \$50 trillion or more. The higher cost is due to corporate profits, executive pay, bureaucracy, etc.

Bias is stark when journalists obsess on the estimated cost of reform while ignoring the estimated cost of the status quo. It's media propaganda by omission.

Similarly, conservative media have savaged the jobs-creating Green New Deal proposal – which, indeed, will cost trillions — without acknowledging the far higher price tag of continuing the status quo.

7 Why do you ignore the 2016 presidential result in your incessant punditry on which Democrats are electable in 2020?

I'm unaware of a single serious analyst who asserts with a straight face that Hillary Clinton lost to a faux-populist in 2016 because voters perceived her as "too far left" or "too radical." But she obviously did lose votes because she was seen as too status quo, too cozy with the corporate establishment.

In key swing states, Clinton failed to energize voters of color, lost young voters to third parties, and lost working-class whites who'd voted for Obama and Sanders. Democrats have been defeated in six presidential elections since the Reagan era, but one would be hard-pressed to find a single defeat attributable to far-leftism.

Establishment journalists seem intent on ignoring this history as they cover Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. Over the last year, corporate outlets have continuously portrayed progressive reforms as scarily left-wing, in the face of polls showing they are broadly popular [not just with Democrats] – such reforms as increasing taxes on the rich [a new Reuters poll found most Republicans favor a wealth tax]; free public college and cancelling student debt; Medicare for All; and the Green New Deal.

News articles matter-of-factly denigrate these popular proposals as "shoot-the-moon policy ideas" [Washington Post] that may push the Democratic Party "over a liberal cliff" [New York Times]. I sometimes wonder if the computer keyboards in certain

newsrooms – besides letter and number keys – have a single key that spits out the eight-word phrase: “too far left to win a general election.”

Unfortunately, many Democratic voters in Iowa, New Hampshire and elsewhere are unduly influenced by mainstream media, despite the punditocracy’s awful track record in 2016 and earlier on predicting who’s “electable” in a general election.

Elite journalists regularly quote their “expert” sources in the Democratic establishment who express worries that if Bernie Sanders wins the nomination, he’ll lose badly in November.

Or do those who own or run corporate media [and corporate Democrats] have a different worry – that Sanders will win the general election, shake up the system, and take away some of their wealth and power?

Jeff Cohen was an associate professor of journalism at Ithaca College and founder of the media watch group FAIR. In 2011, he co-founded the online activism group RootsAction.org. He is the author of Cable News Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media.

© Reader Supported News

Should Facebook, Twitter Stop Trump’s Lies?

BY ROBERT REICH

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg says he’ll run political ads even if false. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey says he’ll stop running political ads.

Dorsey has the correct approach, but this entire debate about ads skirts the bigger question: Who’s responsible for protecting democracy from big, dangerous lies?

Donald Trump lies like most people breathe, and his lies have grown more vicious and dangerous as he’s been cornered – conjuring up conspiracies, spewing hate, and saying established facts are lies, and lies are truths.

This would be hard enough for a democracy to handle, but Zuckerberg’s Facebook sends Trump’s unfiltered lies to 43% of Americans, for whom Facebook is a source of news. And Dorsey’s Twitter sends them to 67 million Twitter users every day.

A major characteristic of the Internet goes by the fancy term “disintermediation.” Put simply, it means sellers are linked directly to customers with no need for middlemen.

Amazon eliminates the need for retailers. Online investing eliminates the need for stock brokers. Travel agents and real estate brokers have become obsolete as consumers get all the information they need at a keystroke.

But democracy cannot be disintermediated. We’re not just buyers and sellers. We’re also citizens who need to know what’s happening around us in order to exercise our right to, and responsibility for, self-government.

If a president and his enablers are peddling vicious and dangerous lies, we need reliable intermediaries that help us see that they’re lies.

Intermediating between the powerful and the people was once the job of publishers and journalists – hence the term “media.”

This role was understood to be so critical to

democracy that the Constitution enshrined it in the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of the press.

With that freedom came a public responsibility to be a bulwark against powerful lies.

The media haven’t always lived up to that responsibility. We had yellow journalism in the 19th century, and today endure shock radio, the National Enquirer, and Fox News.

But most publishers and journalists have recognized that duty. Think of the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate investigation, and, more recently, the exposure of Trump’s withholding \$400 million in security aid to Ukraine until it investigated Trump’s major political rival, Joe Biden.

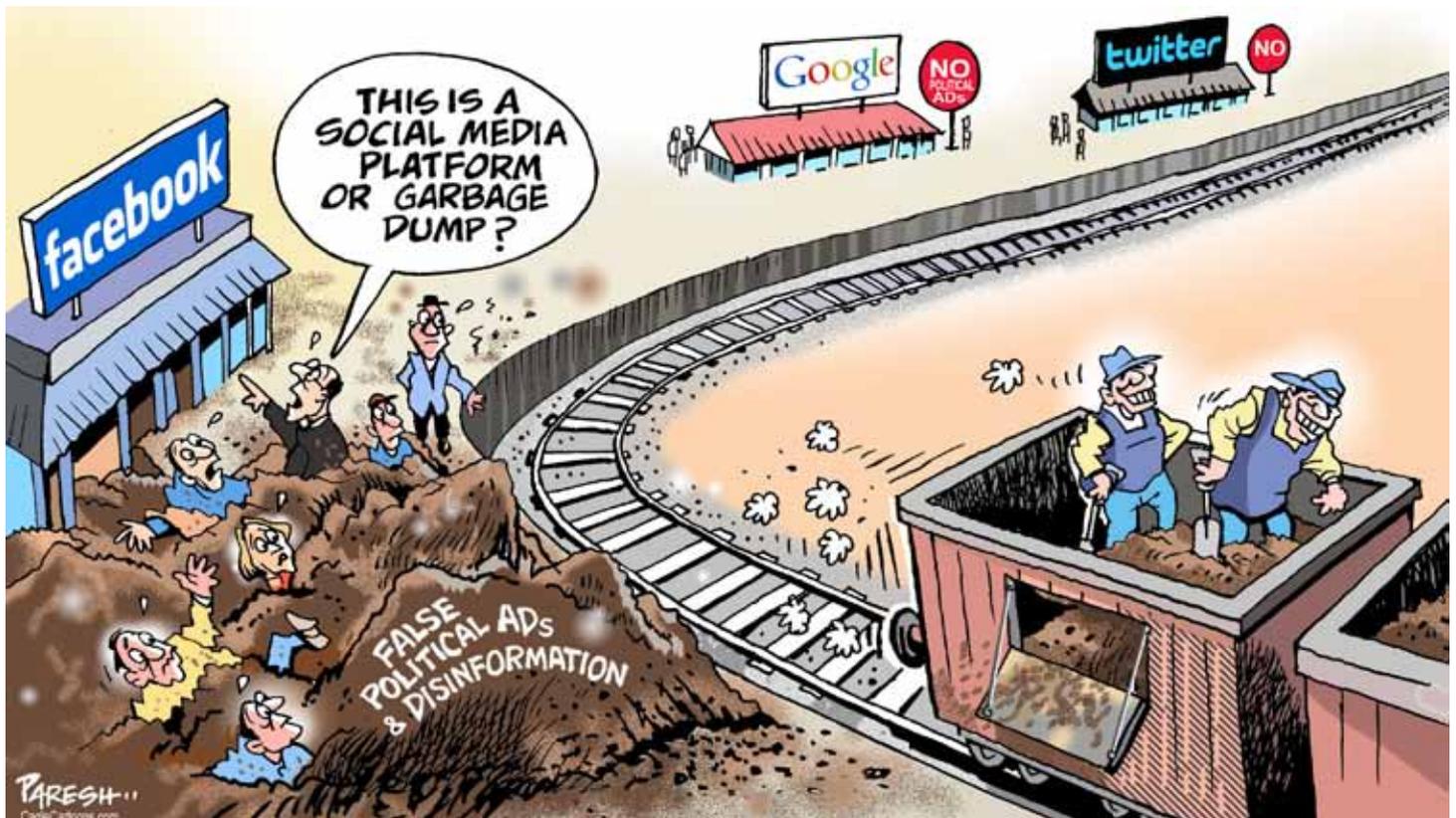
Zuckerberg and Dorsey insist they are not publishers or journalists. They say Facebook and Twitter are just “platforms” that convey everything and anything – facts, lies, conspiracies, vendettas – with none of the public responsibilities that come with being part of the press.

That is rubbish. They can’t be the major carriers of the news on which most Americans rely while taking no responsibility for its content.

Advertising isn’t the issue. It doesn’t matter whether Trump pays Facebook or Twitter to post dishonest ads about Joe Biden and his son, or Trump and his enablers post the same lies on their Facebook and Twitter accounts. Or even if Russia and Iran repeat the lies in their own subversive postings on Facebook and Twitter.

The problem is we have an American president who will say anything to preserve his power, and we’ve got two giant entities that spread his lies uncritically, like global-sized bullhorns.

We can’t do anything about Trump for now. But we can and should take action against the power of these two enablers.



If they are unwilling to protect the public against powerful lies, they shouldn't have so much power to spread them to begin with.

The reason 45% of Americans rely on Facebook for news and Trump's tweets reach 67 million Twitter users is because these platforms are near monopolies – dominating the information marketplace.

No television network, cable, or newspaper comes close. Fox News' viewership rarely exceeds 3 million. The New York Times has 4.9 million subscribers.

Facebook and Twitter aren't just participants in the information marketplace. They're quickly becoming the information marketplace.

Antitrust law was designed to check the power of giant commercial entities. Its purpose wasn't just to hold down consumer prices but also to protect

democracy.

Antitrust should be used against Facebook and Twitter. They should be broken up. So instead of two mammoth megaphones trumpeting Trump's lies, or those of any similarly truth-challenged successor to Trump, the public will have more diverse sources of information, some of which will expose the lies.

A diverse information marketplace is no guarantee against tyranny, of course. But the system we now have – featuring a president who lies through his teeth and two giant uncritical conveyors of those lies – invites tyranny.

Former Clinton administration labor secretary Robert B. Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley.

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Doing The Tax-Dodge Tap Dance

Sen. Russell Long, the powerful Senate Finance Committee chair from 1966 to 1981 from the great state of Louisiana, liked to recite a little jingle highlighting the thorny political process of tax reform: “Don’t tax you. Don’t tax me. Tax that man behind the tree.”

Yes, let’s do just that! Today, our nominee for “that man behind the tree” is the superrich – the .1%. Over the past 40 years or so, these plutocratic elites have used their political clout to create a radical level of wealth inequality that is tearing our country apart. The gap has become a chasm, separating the lavish fortunes of a privileged few from the well-being of the many.

Currently, this small fraction of our country now owns the same amount of wealth as the bottom 90% of our country – a statistic that has not been seen in our country since prior to World War II. This wealth gap is antithetical to our people’s democratic ideals, fundamentally unjust and socially destructive – in a word, un-American.

In large part, the fortunate few have amassed and expanded their vast fortunes by hiding in the forest of tax policies that let them avoid paying their fair share. Of course, tax dodging is complicated, requiring sophisticated techniques and tricky maneuvers perpetrated by a large but secretive industry of pricy tax lawyers, lobbyists, wealth managers and other fixers to exploit special exemptions, convoluted loopholes and arcane breaks.

This avoidance industry also provides uber-rich clients with a wide selection of underground channels ranging from exotic offshore tax shelters to the ultimate dodge: renouncing U.S. citizenship.

For a lesson on how to tap-dance around one’s tax obligation, follow the lead of Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump’s son-in-law and White House senior adviser. A 2018 New York Times investigation reveals that a few years prior to becoming a Trump operative, Kushner and his family’s real estate corporation spent billions buying up properties, quintu-

pling Kushner’s net worth to almost \$324 million.

Yet, according to financial documents, the lucky lad appears to have paid little or no federal income tax from 2009 through 2016!

Why? Largely because a special tax break allows big-time developers to take depreciation deductions for losses caused by wear and tear on their properties. But – watch the fancy footwork here – various buildings owned by Kushner appear to have suffered no actual losses and, in fact, have likely increased in value. The trick is that the depreciation provision assumes such properties decline in value every year, even when they clearly do not.

Then came a spectacular buck-and-wing dance move: The law allows developers themselves to calculate depreciation – and the IRS almost never audits those claims. In 2015, for example, Kushner pocketed \$1.7 million in income but claimed \$8.3 million in losses from “significant depreciation” in his real estate holdings.

Another break allows developers to dodge capital gains taxes when they make a profit selling property. That income, if used within a short time to buy other properties, is not taxed. So – voila! – tax law subsidizes them to accumulate yet more wealth and do the tax-dodge dance on an even bigger scale. The Times found that this break helped the Kushners profit from more than \$2 billion in real estate sales yet helped Jared Kushner avoid taxes on that income.

Once ensconced in the White House, Kushner promptly helped his daddy-in-law pass a big package of new corporate tax breaks. Surprisingly, there were real reforms that eliminated some of the capital gains flimflam from which both he and Trump had long profited. Unsurprisingly, the Kushner-Trump “reform” included an exception that allows one particular business group to keep profiting from the flimflam: real estate developers.

And that, children, is how the rich become super-rich.

What's The Charitable Thing To Do About Inequality?

Our society has coined expressions like “philanthropist” and “season of giving” to encourage and hail people’s charitable spirit.

Look on the flip side of those shiny coins of generosity, however, and you’ll find that they’re made of a base substance of societal selfishness. After all, the need for charity only exists because we’re tolerating intentional injustices and widespread inequality created by power elites.

A supremely wealthy society [which so loudly salutes its historic commitment to the deeply moral values of fairness, justice and equal opportunity] ought not be relegating needy families and essential components of the common good to the vicissitudes of a season and the whims of a few rich philanthropists.

Yes, corporate and individual donations can help at the margins, but they don’t fix anything. Thus, food banks, health clinics, etc. must constantly scrounge for more charity, while big donors have their “charitable spirit” subsidized with tax breaks that siphon money from our public treasury.

Especially offensive is the common grandiose assertion by fat-cat donors that charity is their way of “giving back” to society. Hello – if they can give so much, it’s probably because they’ve been *taking* too much!

As business columnist Andrew Ross Sorkin points out, “All too often, charitable gifts are used ... to make up for the failure of companies to pay people a living wage and treat their workers with dignity.”

Sorkin notes that it’s not just the unemployed who rely on food banks but janitors, nannies, Uber drivers, checkout clerks and others who work *full time* but are so poorly paid they can’t make ends meet. That’s not a sad charity case but a matter of criminal exploitation by wealthy elites – and the charitable thing to do is to outlaw it and require a living wage for all.

We must shift from charity to fundamental structural change.

“The aim,” says Sorkin, “should be to create a society where we don’t need places like food banks in the first place. ... we should be trying to put the food banks out of business.”

In the absence of structural change, our society relies on charity and government programs to address issues regarding poverty and hunger. While it’s fashionable in many enclaves of the rich to bemoan government programs that use tax dollars to aid the poor, guess who receives by far the fattest benefits from the public treasury. Bingo – if you said

the rich!

Consider recent actions by President Donald Trump’s secretary of agriculture, Sonny Perdue. He’s been dubbed the “Georgia Goober” for his ignorant insults and preposterous policies, and he issued a harsh new regulation in December that’s both. It slaps poor people living in depressed areas with a sneering work requirement in order to be eligible for meager food stamp benefits, which amount to only about \$127 a month.

Yes, Perdue is literally taking food from poor people, piously claiming it’ll help them become self-sufficient. “[G]overnment dependency has never been the American dream,” preached Purdue, who has personally been dependent on a government check for more than two decades.

Crass hypocrisy, however, is integral to the Donnie & Sonny policy approach. Last year, they pushed out a \$28 billion tax bailout for farmers impacted by Trump’s inept tariff tiff with China.

Many U.S. farm families have been wrecked by Trump’s failed ag policies, but they’re not the ones who got the Trump government’s helping hand. The bulk of the billions went to the biggest, richest agribusiness interests that neither needed nor deserved a public handout – about 75% of the total was taken by the largest 10% of farm corporations [including foreign-owned operations].

And unlike a food stamp recipient getting a pittance to buy a little bit of food, some ag-biz outfits pocketed more than \$2 million each from us.

But wait. Trump and Perdue have more meanness in store for the poor. They’re pushing another federal regulation that’d cut off food stamps if a low-income family has barely \$2,000 in “assets.” Hello – that means a family that has an old used car to get to their poverty-wage jobs would be denied food assistance.

What’s wrong with these shameful public officials who perversely pamper the rich while taking pleasure in punishing the poor? It’s immoral. – *Jim Hightower*

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America's Drug Crisis

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

President Trump's 2020 budget is a grim message for seniors and the needy. It leaves many Americans out in the cold with drastic cuts in programs that benefit them.

Simply put, they'll have to get by with less this year. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid could lose billions of dollars if Republicans have their way. The Affordable Care Act could be repealed and programs like Meals on Wheels eliminated.

This president once promised to take care of people in need; without question this budget violates his promise to Americans by weakening Medicare, gutting Medicaid, and deeply cutting Social Security Disability Insurance [SSDI].

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

Probably it's just that the Trump-GOP administration has other priorities and would promise anything that would keep its power base happy, cutting taxes for the ultra-rich.

These Trump-GOP tax cuts of 2017 led to historic budget deficits and are being used as an excuse to push unfair and harmful cuts to our time-honored social safety net. Sacrificed as well is the financial security of millions of workers, as well as retirees.

All these efforts are to pay for tax breaks for the rich whose basic needs are quite amply met or to fund completely unrelated programs.

It looks like the battle the current administration is fighting is the one that protects only the wealthy. The middle and working classes need equal protection, their earned benefits strengthened to ensure good



health in retirement years.

The horrific national debt must be addressed now but not destroy the middle and working classes in the process. That's mainly because of the GOP's determined and fixated opposition to Social Security and Medicare, programs that millions of the most vulnerable rely on for survival.

One significant example is reflected in controlling prescription drug prices. Here we are, the United States of America, the richest country in the world: one recent poll mentions that of people needing prescription drugs, one in four find it difficult to afford them and in our state, one in three adults aged 19-64 asked for lower-priced meds, stopped taking some meds or skipped some doses.

As one of the older ones, I find myself in the donut hole two to three months every year, significantly paying more for my diabetic basic drug. Believe it or not, no regs or laws prevent companies from charging outrageous prices.

So we Americans pay the highest prices for prescriptions in the world. Currently at least 20 outpatient drugs carry a list price of more than \$25,000 for a one-month supply, according to a March analysis by AARP's GoodRx.

The new House has passed legislation allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices directly with drug manufacturers, permitting drug importation from Canada, and stopping "Pay-for-Delay" agreements that delay introduction of generic drugs. The chronically ill Americans like me are forced into that ugly donut hole every year to find a solution or to do without – until Jan. 1 rolls around. Fortunately I have only one prescription that falls into that big hole, unlike

many other diabetics.

There's some good news for us. Recently a Congressional panel reached a deal on several bills primarily meant to ensure access to generics. Let's make sure our U.S. senators, Jim Inhofe and James Lankford, and those in other states enact them into law.

For years, make that decades, patients and even presidents have complained about the spiraling of prescription drug prices. Little changed until May 2017 when the AARP Bulletin ran an extended report on it.

Astonishingly, the explanation is pretty simple. America's health care system is quite a complex world of strong patent laws; however, corporations like Lilly and Abbott are endowed with extraordinary power – to charge any price they want for life-saving drugs.

In a fast-changing world, we live in an unchanging one where these companies can charge obscene prices

for these necessities. In our good 'ol US of A, medical drug prices rise faster than the rate of inflation.

Are you ready for this? The average annual cost of a brand-name drug has more than tripled in the past decade, jumping from \$1,868 in 2006 to \$6,798 in 2017, according to the AARP Public Policy Institute. "Older adults now take an average of 4.5 medications each month, which can add up to a total retail cost of more than \$30,000 a year for brand-name drugs."

Hope lies ahead, however, if we exercise our prerogative. Keep informed and pass the info to our elected reps. Let President Donald Trump's most important legacy be making our democracy work again. How? Utilize both our brain and technology for our survival – better yet a brighter future for all of 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.

As Deficit Explodes, Trump Eyes Medicare, Social Security Cuts

President Trump is weighing future entitlement cuts, a tectonic shift from his stance during his 2016 run for the White House.

In a CNBC interview on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Trump indicated he was open to cuts in social safety net benefits, including Medicare and Social Security.

This is what many on the political left feared Trump and Republicans who then controlled both houses of Congress rammed through tax cuts in late 2017, blowing a massive hole in the federal budget deficit.

The tsunami of tax-cut-fueled red ink is expected to top \$1 trillion in FY 2020, giving Trump and his anti-government GOP cronies an excuse to cut programs that help workaday and poor Americans.

Asked whether entitlement cuts would ever be on his agenda, Trump told CNBC, "At some point they will be."

In the CNBC interview, Trump called tackling entitlement spending "the easiest of all things" and suggested higher economic growth would make it easier to reduce spending on the programs.

"Well, we're going – we're going to look," he said. "We also have assets that we've never had. I mean we've never had growth like this."

According to Associated Press reporters Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Aamer Madhani:

Early in his presidential campaign, Trump said he was a different sort of Republican, one who would not cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid.

The Medicaid promise was ultimately abandoned. The unsuccessful Republican drive to repeal "Obamacare" would have also limited future federal spend-

ing on that federal-state health insurance program for low-income people.

More recently, Trump's 2020 budget called for deep cuts in Medicare payments to hospitals.

After the CNBC interview, White House spokesman Judd Deere told the AP there had been "no benefit cuts" under Trump, and said the president has kept "his commitment to the most vulnerable Americans, especially those who depend on Medicare and Social Security."

But Leslie Dach, chair of Protect Our Care, an advocacy group created to defend the Affordable Care Act, said Trump tipped his hand in the Davos interview.

"The president has made it clear," Dach said, "that he wants to make draconian cuts to both Medicare and Medicaid – something that the American people vehemently oppose – and today he said he's going to try again."

Wish-Craft

I recently met a magical fairy who said she would grant me one wish.

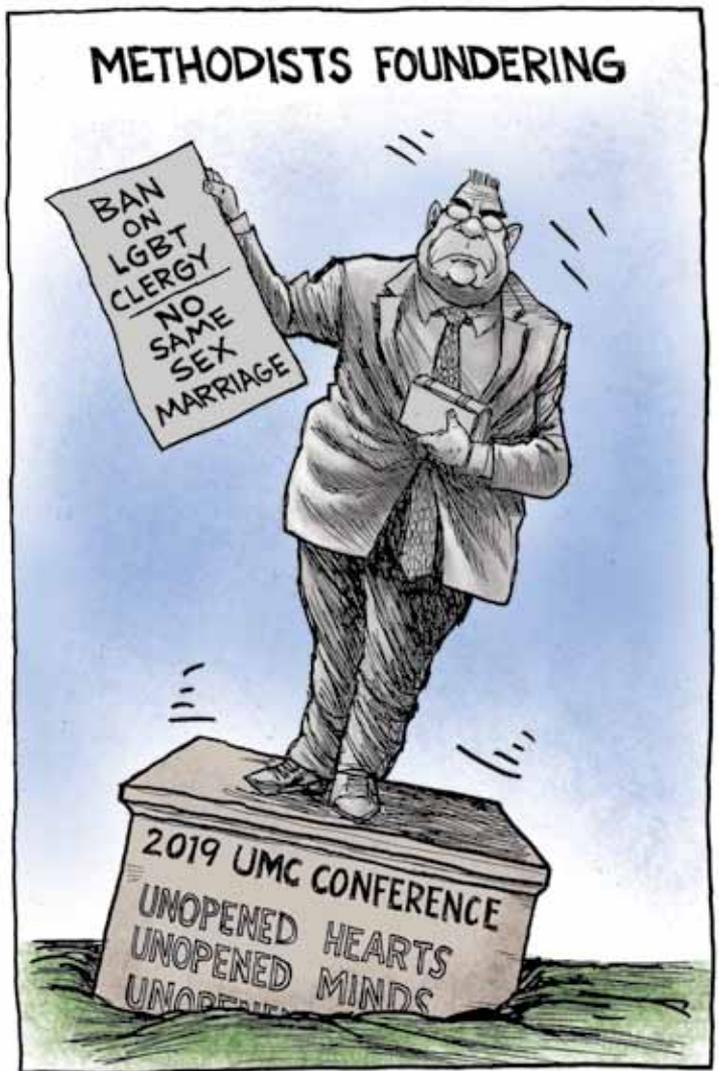
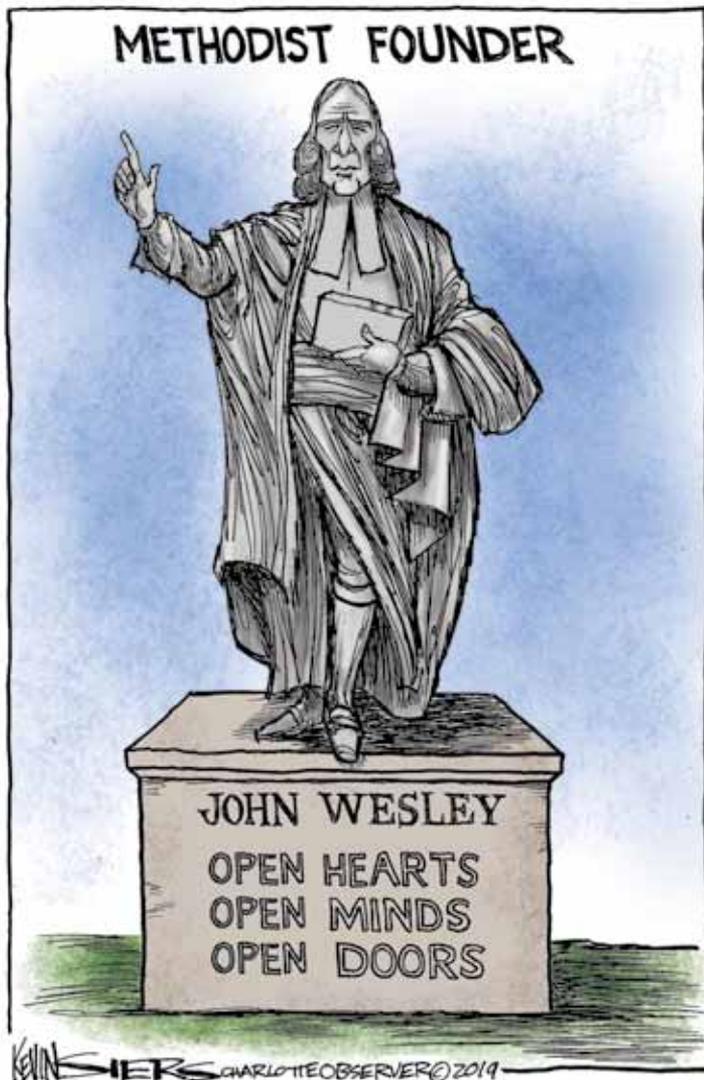
"I wish to live forever," I said.

"Sorry," said the fairy, "I'm not allowed to grant that particular wish."

"Fine," I said, "then I want to die the day after Congress is filled with honest, hard-working, bipartisan men and women who act only in the people's best interests!"

"You crafty bastard," replied the fairy.

– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing



AT A CROSSROADS

Is Another Schism In Christianity Inevitable?

BY MITCH RANDALL

The United Methodist Church is expected to split into two denominations.

Church leaders announced the potential split after years of attempting to find common ground on the issues of LGBTQ ordination and the church's response to same-sex marriage.

The split will create a "traditional Methodist" denomination opposing LGBTQ ordination and same-sex marriage while opening the door for the United Methodist Church to affirm LGBTQ ordination and same-sex marriages.

The Washington Post reported that church leaders stated the plan offered "the best means to resolve our differences, allowing each part of the church to

remain true to its theological understanding while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity and respect of every person."

The United Methodist split might be revealing a larger division emerging within Christianity.

While doctrinal issues such as clerical authority, the Eucharist, baptism, the Bible and other important issues set the stage for the rise of denominationalism over the last 1,000 years, a new paradigm shift appears to be under way.

The ordination of LGBTQ people and same-sex marriage are forcing Christian churches to rethink their identity and practice when it comes to human sexuality

Two important questions are at stake in this debate: [1] Who can be a “Christian”? and [2] What constitutes appropriate and ethical behavior?

While few argue that LGBTQ persons cannot be Christians, the more conservative wing of Christianity claims that same-sex attraction and nontraditional gender identities are set against a created order.

The argument is made that anyone acting outside this normative order engages in sinful and unnatural behavior.

The more liberal wing of Christianity argues that LGBTQ persons are created in the image of God and their behaviors are not contradictory to the created order.

In other words, LGBTQ persons are acting out of their created existence and natural design. Therefore, it would be inappropriate and unethical to withhold the rites of the church.

While this debate will surely continue, the larger issue at stake concerns the very identity and mission of the Christian church.

Who can be considered a Christian? Do Christians have to adhere to a specific criterion of beliefs in order to be called Christian? Is the mission of the church to convert people to a certain set of beliefs or welcome them into a community following Jesus?

Two significant movements seem to be emerging regarding these questions.

For several decades now, the right wing of the evangelical movement has stressed the importance

of doctrinal purity over all else. One must believe and practice correct doctrine before a Christian can find favor with God.

The second movement stresses the importance of relationships. Critics of this movement argue that advocates devalue or water down doctrine, but proponents refute that claim by stating their practices are derived from theological convictions.

With both movements unwilling to compromise, the situation has created a fracture crossing denominational lines. If the fracture continues to widen, the split of the Christian church seems inevitable.

Just as the Great Schism divided the church in 11th century and the Reformation in the 16th century, the fracturing of the church in the 21st century would be a watershed moment.

In Acts 15, the first great debate and schism erupted for the first century church. The issue at stake was whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised before being accepted into the community.

Jewish sympathizers wanted to keep circumcision as a physical sign for conversion, while others felt the practice unnecessary for Gentiles wanting to follow Jesus.

Paul wrote to the Galatians about this particular issue, advocating for a more inclusive principle. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love” [Galatians 5:6].

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As the church faces an uncertain future, this same dynamic is at play. The church is once again at the crossroads of doctrinal allegiance and human relationship. Both viewpoints feel as though they are on solid theological footing.

As the debate continues, only time will reveal the outcome. However, if the United Methodist Church's resolution is any indication, Christianity is facing yet another schism.

The growing division among Christians begs the question how this will affect the witness of the church in the United States.

Last year, Pew Research Center released a report demonstrating the decline of Christianity in the United States.

Sixty-five percent of American adults identified as "Christian," a decline of 12% from 2018 to 2019. The decline startled many within the church.

However, Philip Jenkins, distinguished professor of history at Baylor University, noted the decline had more to do with people of faith being unwilling to identify with the institution of the church.

"So, is American religion changing? No question," Jenkins wrote. "But how far is this a real decline of faith, and how much is it a reduction in people's willingness to affirm membership in institutions they neither like nor trust?"

Jenkin's observation and question are valid. Yet, if people are growing weary of the institution of the church, we must ask why. Why are more and more people – even Christians – leaving the church in growing numbers?

Both sides of the current schism will blame the

other. Conservatives will claim the church has grown too lax, arguing human secularism has crept into the church's teachings and practices.

Liberals will argue that Christianity has grown too rigid, more concerned about doctrinal accountability than actually loving one's neighbor.

Regardless of the accusations and blame, the church still stands at a crossroads. The future of the church hangs in the balance. Every Christian should thoughtfully and prayerfully ponder these issues.

Addressing LGBTQ inclusion and exclusion is vitally important. Whichever direction the church finds herself taking, the future of the church and our witness will be affected for generations to come.

Will the church continue to decline in the United States, or will it find new life through rebirth for a new era?

Only time can reveal the future, so for now we remain at the crossroads, arguing which direction to travel. It's a lively debate and one worth pursuing.

For me, I will travel the road of inclusivity. I understand the possibility of my error, but I would rather err on the side of being too inclusive than pushing someone away.

Again, while the discussion of LGBTQ inclusion in the church has a place at this crossroads, the questions we face are more universal, relating to our ongoing quest to discover and live out our identity and mission.

The church is simply asking, as it has done before, "Who are we and what is our purpose?"
Former Norman pastor Mitch Randall is executive director of EthicsDaily.com.

Caucuses

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

Hillary Clinton's 27. When Washington held a primary two months later, Clinton won by 6%.

Only about 26,000 people "voted" in the Democratic caucuses, while more than 660,000 voted in the primary. The state Democratic Party is switching to a meaningful primary in 2020.

Were caucuses how conservative state runs a general election, liberals would rightly accuse election officials of practicing voter suppression. The Supreme Court might even strike down its election laws as unconstitutional. But this is a party matter, and it is up to the Democratic National Committee to fix the problem.

In assessing a candidate's ability to prevail in a general election, some members of the punditry put great importance on the level of voter enthusiasm. Should that matter? It shouldn't, not in a democracy.

Votes are supposed to be equal. A vote cast with mild affection or indifference – even with nose held – counts every bit as much as a vote made with thumping heart.

Some friends, particularly younger ones, worship the ground Bernie walks on. I back Joe Biden but don't adore him. [I could be happy with another moderate, say, Amy Klobuchar or Pete Buttigieg.] To me, Biden is a solid progressive and, more importantly, the Democrat whom President Donald Trump most fears.

What excites me, though in a bad way, is the belief that a Sanders nomination – or his trashing of the actual Democratic nominee, as he did in 2016 – would deliver another four years to Trump.

Whatever the results in the Iowa caucuses, one can be confident that they will leave an exaggerated impression of the level of Sanders' support. They will reveal the preference of a tiny slice of a tiny slice of the electorate and, in the Democrats' case, of an electorate more heavily weighted toward the white liberal gentry than the party at large.

Only the Democratic Party can end this undemocratic means of choosing its nominees. And it should.

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China's Environmental Malpractice Hurts Everyone

BY FROMA HARROP

A lot of things are going wrong on this planet, and a lot of those problems are made in China. The deadly coronavirus is being linked to “wet markets” that traffic in wildlife. Not only have these markets enabled the virus to pass from animals to humans but they have also contributed to the decimation of the world’s wildlife.

The coronavirus outbreak has led China to quarantine more than 50 million of its people – the population of California, Oregon and Washington put together. After the SARS crisis, Chinese scientists called for the closing of these markets. The government ignored them.

China spends enormous sums on prestige-oriented biotech research and very little on the public health services needed to prevent and combat these contagions, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. Another example was the Chinese government’s cheapskate response to the African swine flu, which led to the death of nearly half the country’s hogs.

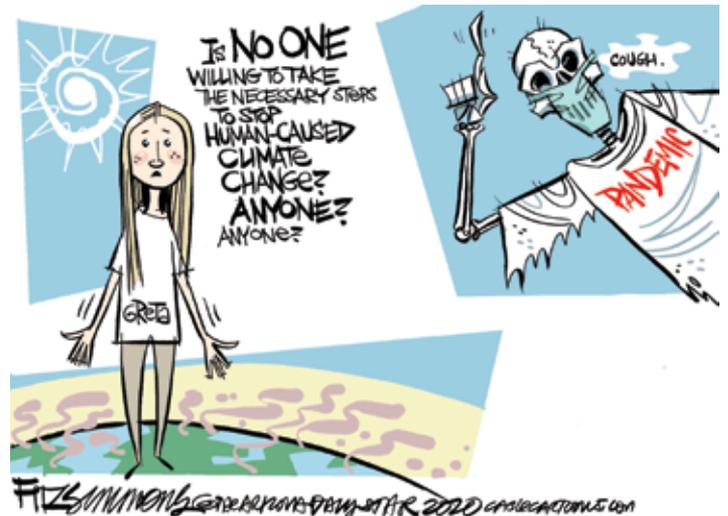
The greatest threat to the planet is global warming. China has been sabotaging international efforts to stop the burning of coal – the dirtiest of the fossil fuels in releasing greenhouse gases. China uses about as much coal as the rest of the world put together.

Higher temperatures undoubtedly helped fuel the cataclysmic fires in Australia. The disaster shocked the country, killing at least one billion kangaroos, koalas and other animals. At the same time, Australia is a major coal producer and exports the fossil fuel throughout Asia, China included.

Apart from coal’s huge role in climate change, it emits the nasty smog that preys on people living near the plants. This is the old-fashioned pollution that causes asthma, cancer, dementia and heart disease, and contaminates local water supplies.

Air pollution is linked to an estimated 1.6 million premature deaths per year in China [and over two million in India]. You see China’s people wearing face masks under the darkened skies and wonder why there isn’t rioting in the streets – despite the government’s iron-fist control of the citizenry.

While most of the Western world is rapidly closing down coal plants, China is building more coal-burning capacity than the rest of the world combined. As China’s economy slows down, it is reopening some coal mines. Premier Li Keqiang is now actually pushing for more coal-fired power.



China’s new coal plants are popping up far beyond Asia, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example. The air quality in its capital, Sarajevo, is so foul that the Swedish embassy there said it is “in a category of its own.” The Western Balkans are already saddled with 16 communist-era coal power plants that have been tied to 3,900 deaths across Europe every year.

The Chinese government is actually funding these new coal projects. The outrage was such that locals recently launched rallies across Bosnia-Herzegovina to protest their government’s complicity in the pollution problem.

It is not my intention to blame all the world’s environmental ills on China. China is by far the world’s biggest emitter of carbon dioxide gases, but the United States is well ahead of the 1.4 billion-person country on per capita emissions. But we and other Western countries have at least been reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and China’s keep growing.

China is big on producing solar panels, and the International Energy Agency projects that by 2024 it will account for 40% of the global growth in renewable energy. But irony of ironies, China’s densely polluted air is reportedly preventing solar rays from reaching its solar panels.

China is now an economic superpower. With that comes the obligation to pass up some business for the good of everyone. A proud country should not want the label of environmental pariah.

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Dysfunction And Disaster In King Donald's Court

A VERY STABLE GENIUS

Donald J. Trump's Testing Of America

By Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig
Penguin Publishing Co.

480 pages, \$30

BY LLOYD GREEN

In January 2018, Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury* made headlines as it depicted a president out of control and a White House that careened from crisis to crisis. Donald Trump threatened legal action against author and publisher. He also lauded himself and his electoral college victory: "I think that would qualify as not smart, but genius ... and a very stable genius at that!"

Trump's outburst confirmed what many already feared. In the aftermath of the firing of FBI director James Comey in May 2017, Rod Rosenstein, then deputy attorney general, reportedly weighed secretly recording the president with an eye to removing him from office under the 25th Amendment.

Now Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig of the Washington Post offer *A Very Stable Genius*. As befitting Pulitzer winners for investigative reporting, their book is richly sourced and highly readable.

It sheds new light on how the 45th president tests the boundaries of the office while trying the patience and dignity of those who work for or with him. It is not just another Trump tell-all or third-party confessional. It is unsettling, not salacious.

Trump himself was quick to criticize the book, calling its authors "two third rate Washington Post reporters."

In a Saturday night tweet, the president said the book was "all for the purpose of demeaning and belittling a President who is getting great things done for our Country, at a record clip."

Rucker and Leonnig lift the curtain on internal battles over immigration and the attempt to replace John Kelly with Chris Christie as White House chief of staff. It also closely examines the scrum between

Bill Barr, the attorney general, and Bob Mueller over Barr's handling of the special counsel's report on Russian election interference and links between Trump and Moscow.

Trump's West Wing is tantamount to a family business and everything is personal. Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump obtain security clearances because they are kin.

After publicly punting the issue to Kelly, Trump is described as applying pressure privately. "I wish we could make this go away," he reportedly told Kelly. "This is a problem." Said differently, protocols and national security were treated as impediments, not safeguards, when Javanka got involved.

When Trump cuts Kelly loose, Kushner and Ivanka are depicted as coveting the job. Their ambitions go unfulfilled but they continue to lurk in the background.

Told by Rudy Giuliani that Trump wants him as his chief of staff, Christie asks why he would want the job if Kushner isn't leaving. For record, as a federal prosecutor Christie sent Charlie Kushner, Jared's father, to prison for "one of the most loathsome, disgusting crimes" on Christie's watch.

"Why the f--- am I going to take this job?" the former New Jersey governor exclaims. "You guys are nuts. I'm not going in there."

Still, Ivanka purportedly telephoned Christie's wife, Pat, to assure her bygones would be bygones. It didn't work.

A Very Stable Genius also chronicles the back and forth between Trump's lawyers and the special counsel's office and the interplay between Barr and Mueller. Under George H.W. Bush, Barr was attorney gener-

al and Mueller headed the criminal division at the justice department. The two men were friends.

Yet when Barr rolled out his summary of Mueller's report, Le-onnig and Rucker write, the special counsel "looked as if he'd been slapped." When Mueller sent a rebuttal letter, objecting to Barr's summary, Barr was "pissed," thought the letter "nasty" and felt personally "betrayed." Barr and Mueller spoke by phone, a tense conversation that ended on "an uplifting note."

As for Trump and name-calling, nothing has changed. As a candidate, he mocked John McCain, a gold star family, a Latino judge and a disabled reporter. Life at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. has not allayed that spirit.

At a meeting in the Pentagon's inner sanctum, the "Tank," the draft-dodging Trump derided America's generals as "dopes and babies." He added: "I wouldn't go to war with you people." Debasement was a coin of the realm.

When Kirstjen Nielsen, secretary of homeland security and a Kelly deputy, balked at Trump's demands on immigration, he berated her looks and height. For good measure, according to the authors, Trump would call her at 5 a.m., just for the sake of harassment.

After James Mattis advised Trump of his intent to resign as defense secretary, Trump moved his departure up two months. At a cabinet meeting, the president bragged that he had "essentially" fired the four-star general. For the president, policy differences invariably exploded into a matter of honor.

Mattis' resignation letter omitted any praise for the commander-in-chief. "Because you have the right to have a secretary of defense whose views are better aligned with yours," he wrote, "I believe it is right for me to step down."

Likewise, Trump mocked H.R. McMaster, Michael Flynn's replacement as national security adviser, for his mien and wardrobe. The scholarly McMaster was always on

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borrowed time.

Says one of McMaster's aides, Trump "doesn't fire people ... he tortures them until they're willing to quit."

Clearly, Trumpworld has its share of casualties. Paul Manafort,

a campaign manager, and Michael Cohen, a lawyer, sit imprisoned. Flynn and Roger Stone, a longtime political confidante, await sentencing.

Trump's allergy to reality remains on display. His contention

he doesn't know Lev Parnas is belied by video and email. The U.S. now admits 34 troops attacked by Iran's missiles were treated for concussions.

Leonnig and Rucker quote Bill Galston of the Brookings Institution, who says Trump "appears to be daring the rest of the political system to stop him –

and if it doesn't he'll go further. The law has no force without people who are willing to enforce it."

As the Senate marches toward an impeachment trial and the countdown to the election ticks on, truer words have seldom been spoken.

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Equality Deferred

BY SUSAN ESTRICH

It was in 1972 that Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment. The amendment provides "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

Forty-eight years later, Virginia became the 38th state to ratify the amendment – which would make it law but for the fact that the deadline for ratification passed in 1982.

When the ERA was first passed by Congress and sent to the states, Phyllis Schlafly and other anti-feminist women organized to fight it. Schlafly, while preaching that a woman's place was in the kitchen and the family room, spent her life giving almost as many speeches in almost as many places as my hero, Gloria Steinem. Hiding behind the curtain of hypocrisy, the Schlafly gang succeeded in frightening millions of women by suggesting that they would end up losing all their benefits while being stuck in unisex toilets.

No legitimate constitutional scholar agreed. Frankly, it was ridiculous. By the time the ERA was passed, the United States Supreme Court had recognized that it needed to look at the 14th Amendment, guaranteeing equal protection of the law, with an enhanced level of scrutiny. They were throwing out gender preferences whether the issue was drinking beer or access to education.

While not applying strict scrutiny, the court has been applying a sort of middle ground, heightened scrutiny if not the "strict scrutiny" [strict in theory and fatal in fact] applied to race. It was never entirely clear what the ERA would do that the Supreme Court was not.

Still, it mattered. It mattered symbolically. It mattered as a measure of where the country was in terms of women's rights. It mattered because the approach of Schlafly was aimed at creating a huge divide between nonworking and working mothers, between single mothers and rich wives, and at frightening traditional women into thinking that they were the targets. The "ladies" versus the "women," I used to call it.

It was a gap between the women who thought registration for the Selective Service System should apply to everyone and the ones who told the court that they did not want to spend their childbearing

years in the infantry. I remember once, as a young Judiciary Committee staffer, suggesting that given the importance of leadership in combat to later promotions, the combat bar on women created a wall to their advancement. Everyone in the room, Kennedy Democrats to a one, told me I was out of my mind.

In 1979, when the ERA deadline was extended, many people figured it was still as good as dead. Then-President Jimmy Carter never made it a priority. In one of the first speeches I wrote after my boss Ted Kennedy announced his entry in the presidential race, I threw in a line about how Carter had never met with women's leaders to discuss a strategy for ratifying the ERA. And the next week, he did. Hot damn. That was power for a 27-year-old. We used the lack of leadership on the ERA in so many speeches. And Reagan won.

Arguing that the amendment can be ratified after the deadline has passed is the tough side of the argument. Where the country stands at a moment in time is a little bit different than whether you can collect enough ratifications over the next 40-some years. The latter could take years to decide.

Meanwhile, Virginia's recent ratification – following Democrats' taking control of both chambers in the Legislature – is bittersweet. So long in coming. So much resistance along the way.

But what troubles me the most in reviewing what happened in Virginia is that the arguments have barely changed.

We know that the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s did not change the composition of the Power Elite nearly as much as we hoped. Equality, as defined by law, generally means women succeeding under boys' rules – rules designed for people who do not have primary responsibility for raising their children.

If you ask me, whether equality is strictly defined is not even the right question; it's whether the demands of a job, for instance, are so all-consuming that they eliminate women [not men] from succeeding.

There were the opponents in Virginia not recognizing any of this, seemingly unconcerned that so many women and children are struggling to survive. What was the issue? "God, help me. They are still trying to frighten everyone with those unisex bathrooms"? Been on a plane lately?

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

he would say, “is you’re too busy putting white hats and black hats on politicians. You never know when they’re going to change hats.”

Wise counsel, to be sure. But Lankford’s lack of discernment is astonishing, especially given his years of counseling thousands of impressionable youth at Oklahoma’s Falls Creek Baptist camp.

Perhaps his very public perfidy helps explain why so many Generation X and Y-ers are abandoning organized religion.

From white hat to black, Lankford’s transition from man-of-the-cloth to resident of the swamp seems complete. #Sad

Bully

As a political novice who rarely voted and never held public office, Gov. Kevin Stitt clearly misunderstands the term “bully pulpit.”

The spotlight on presidents and governors affords a unique platform from which they can attempt to rally the citizenry behind public policy objectives or causes.

Yet Stitt only appears to hear one word: bully.

In his thirst to become the most powerful Oklahoma governor ever, Stitt has attempted to bully one agency head after another – hoping to drive them from office so he can choose their replacement.

An early casualty was former Corrections Director Joe Allbaugh who abruptly resigned in June without giving Stitt a heads-up. A month later, Oklahoma Health Care Authority CEO Becky Pasternik-Ikard, quit under pressure.

Both were huge losses for the state. Albaugh won high marks for managing a woefully underfunded and understaffed prison system; Pasternik-Ikard was one of the nation’s foremost Medicaid experts, not insignificant given that Medicaid expansion is due to appear on Oklahoma’s ballot this year.

Last September, Higher Education Chancellor Glen Johnson announced his departure after Stitt publicly compared him to John Blake, the former University of Oklahoma football coach fired because of his losing record. Like Allbaugh, Johnson is credited with deftly steering higher ed through the nation’s steepest budget cuts.

Now, Stitt has forced out another key state agency head – Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner Terri White.

White joined the agency in 2001 and was appointed commissioner in 2007, making her the nation’s longest serving mental health commissioner. She announced on Jan. 29 she would be leaving Feb. 1. No long goodbyes for a job well done.

Stitt persuaded state lawmakers last spring to give



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him authority to hire and fire the directors of five of the largest state agencies: transportation, corrections, juvenile affairs, health care authority and mental health-substance abuse services.

“With this legislation we are ensuring Oklahoma’s government is truly accountable to the people of Oklahoma,” the governor said at a bill signing ceremony.

When White’s successor is chosen, Stitt will be responsible for selecting the leaders of all five agencies.

Stitt contends voters gave him a mandate in 2018 to reshape state government and make it more responsive. Actually, voters elected him because he had an R behind his name – not to blow the system up.

There are myriad reasons the state’s founders worked to keep one official – like the governor – from gaining too much power. It creates opportunity for mischief – special interests could exert excess influence over a single powerful official.

With White’s departure, Oklahoma government yet again loses valuable expertise. When the next crises strike – and you can bet they will – everyone will know who to blame if the state fails miserably to deliver vital services: Kevin Stitt.

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

nam were never separate countries. The Geneva Accords of 1954 drew a line at the 17th parallel meant to be temporary until free elections in 1956 would unify the country under one government. The elections were not permitted by Diem touching off a civil war that lasted until 1974.

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In our U.S. justice system, the accused should not be prejudged before trial. The grand journey – in this case, the House of Representatives – has determined that evidence presented justifies a trial by a jury – in this case, the U.S. Senate.

It is wholly inappropriate to conclude innocence or guilt before a trial.

When a juror expresses a pretrial conviction of guilt or innocence they are usually removed as unqualified to serve on the jury. Our U.S. senators will no doubt perform their professional duty and consider all the evidence in the articles of impeachment before determining guilt or innocence.

Everyone else should hold their tongue – just shut up – until the system plays out and the Senate has made its determination.

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Nathaniel Batchelder is director of the Peace House.

Editor, The Observer:

Where are our heroes who don't come back from our forever wars?

They are unknown or forgotten by our U.S. senators and members of Congress.

So, it's easy for these lawmakers to fail to stop wars. Out of sight, out of mind.

The hallways of the U.S. Capitol as well as Senate and House office buildings have bare walls.

Let's put the faces of the fallen on those walls and maybe, just maybe, our representatives would think about how beautiful these heroes were, and holler to stop killing our boys and girls with roadside bombs and suicide bombers.

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Gov. Kevin Stitt quickly turned tail on his decision to hire a Seattle law firm to help in his dunderheaded battle over tribal gaming compacts. So we should be happy the money now is going into the pockets of OK lawyers instead?

Worrisome Statistic I: 3.6% of senior adults ages 65-plus report chronic drinking [more than one drink a day for women, two for men] or binge drinking [more than four or five drinks at a time]. – AARP

Worrisome Statistic II: Alcohol-related deaths among U.S. women rose 85% from 1999-2017, adjusted for population growth. – National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism



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55 lakes – including Lake Stilwell – with unacceptably high levels of mercury?

Yet ODEQ said it will not be testing Stilwell's schools and hospital drinking water for mercury.

Why has ODEQ, the Oklahoma Department of Farm and Forestry, and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board not notified farm and ranch owners that their private ponds and lakes near the 55 lakes also may have mercury in certain fish.

This is a major public health screw-up!

Recent studies confirm mercury levels are increasing worldwide – including in Oklahoma – due to increased discharges from coal burning power plants, municipal waste incinerators, heavy industries, diesel and Asia's many coal burning power plants.

You may remember The Oklahoma Observer first reported that eastern Oklahoma has become Mercury Alley with Stilwell's federal mercury-in-rain gage registering the nation's second highest level.

Seven states including Washington and North Dakota have a state toxicologist but not Oklahoma. These scientists are needed to identify environmental pollution in water, air and on land.

For example, Maine's state toxicologist furnished air canisters to individuals to help test for suspected toxic air vapors from petroleum storage tanks.

As one toxicologist reminds, "We have to remember with water, there are no substitutes!"

LIFE EXPECTANCY DISPARITIES

Centers for Disease Control data reveal the 58-year life expectancy in Stilwell, Checotah and Eufaula pales in comparison to the Grand Lake Area where one can expect to live 87 years.

That's 29 years difference!

This gross inequity between rural, working-poor communities and financially-comfortable elites in the resort area is an Oklahoma embarrassment. To become a Top 10 State – Stitt's oft-quoted goal – this startling difference must be aggressively narrowed.

The Grand River Dam Authority, a state agency established in 1935 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression projects, was created for the benefit of Oklahomans. It now could be one of the most profitable non-profit state agencies in the southwest.

GRDA's Annual Financial Report for 2018 revealed it was sitting on between \$30 million and \$80 million in cash or its equivalence for new projects. Newspaper reports disclosed that the GRDA CEO's annual salary is \$330,000, not including benefits. We also learn from the report that GRDA has 11 executive VPs and nine other VPs receiving salaries ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000 per year – plus terrific benefits.

Oh, and don't forget: GRDA has a new \$14 million administrative center in which to house them.

These employee costs don't even consider the seven GRDA directors, whose remuneration is unknown.

The GRDA legally absorbed and expanded its authority over Oklahoma's scenic Illinois River watershed that includes Cherokee, Delaware and Adair counties [Adair is home to Stilwell]. GRDA's Illinois River Basin VPs should be conducting high-tech water and air quality testing for PFAS, litter-toxic substances, herbicide, mercury and airborne microscopic particles especially harmful to children's lungs, and for mutated bacteria that can be impervious to common medicines.

An alarming haze of light brown, toxic smog particles can be observed from a low-flying private airplane all along Oklahoma's east side – from Broken Bow to Stilwell to Miami. The 300-foot haze band is encountered at an altitude of 3,500 feet. It originates from industrial plants, coal burning power plants within Oklahoma and northeast Texas, and from the exploding population [520,000 and counting] of semi-metropolitan area that includes Fayetteville to Rogers.

Rainfall-carried deposits of mercury and other smog particles, combined with poultry litter make Oklahoma's pristine Green County increasingly a polluted environment. In fact, climate change is making things worse, increasing the frequency of heavy rains.

Has Green Country become a ticking environmental time bomb? See the true movie *Dark Waters*.

The health departments in rural counties with the worst health outcomes and the highest poverty are almost universally short staffed and swamped. Yet well-heeled GRDA has not publicly expressed concern or obligation to help their neighbors medical needs.

At the same time, however, GRDA is spending \$12 million to build and operate a new water recreation park on the Illinois River's Lake Francis. The GRDA park is near Watts, OK, close to Siloam Springs, AR.

Utilizing Google Earth Pro high-resolution satellite coverage, you can see 183 large, shiny poultry houses producing tons of litter, upstream from Lake Francis along the Illinois River watershed in Arkansas.

You can't chlorinate a flowing stream. The first child contracting waterborne disease from swimming in Lake Francis could find his home's front porch filled with contingency lawyers.

Cutting edge smart testing has yet to be conducted at Lake Francis' or the Illinois River's waters and park grounds. Why? Who knows. The GRDA is self-audited; calls and emails to its VPs were not returned.

It begs the question: Is Oklahoma's cash-rich state agency known as GRDA part of problem or part of the solution to what is killing Oklahomans?

Unexpectedly, after finishing this article, but before it could be published in the February Observer, the New York Times published a lengthy article Jan. 9 that raised many of the same questions – "Who Killed the Knapp Family" by Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn.

It clearly captured the interest of the Times' nearly 4.9 million print and digital readers – quickly jumping near the top of the newspaper's most-read list.

The Times stated – and I agree – that rural working class communities and individuals across the nation are figuratively dying of despair. That's what happened to the Knapp family and to many Oklahomans.

Sadly, those struggling to survive are often blamed for their woes – when in fact the opposite it is a broken system of capitalism that has created such despair. As one expert put it, "The economy just seems to have stopped delivering for those people."

This we know for certain: Oklahoma government stopped delivering smart health related services to its in-need people because it gave higher priority to tax cuts for the wealthy.

It's a case of déjà vu all over again. In its April 1955 issue, the Saturday Evening Post quoted Oklahoma Gov. Johnston Murray as saying the state is "in a mess."

It is 2020 and Oklahoma is still "in a mess."
Bob Jackman is a petroleum geologist living in Tulsa.

Free Press

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

ports the news about Trump and the news is decidedly bad for the president.

The occasions when the New York Times and its reporters have told of us of Trump transgressions are many and they continue.

Ask yourself what we would know about his blatant lies [16,000 so far] and major missteps abroad if not for the free press.

Pompeo tried to embarrass the NPR reporter by making her show him Ukraine on a map. Speaking of knowledge, it's doubtful Pompeo or Trump know of John Peter Zenger or if they do, the real significance of the Zenger trial and decision.

Zenger only wanted to print the truth. The American press, the freest and best in the world, is still doing that, despite the best efforts of the Trump gang.

Ken Neal is former opinion editor of the Tulsa World.

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