

# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

MARCH 2020 • VOLUME 52 NUMBER 3 • \$5.00

## FORTIFIED FACULTY

*Why The Legislature's Rush To Arm Teachers  
Isn't The Answer To School Violence*



Special Report begins on page 6



# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

www.okobserver.org

VOLUME 52, NO. 3

**PUBLISHER** Beverly Hamilton  
bhamilton@okobserver.org

**EDITOR** Arnold Hamilton  
ahamilton@okobserver.org

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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

## FOUNDING PUBLISHER

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## FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

## [ISSN 0030-1795]

The Oklahoma Observer [USPS 865-720] is published on the first Wednesday of each month by AHB Enterprises LLC, 13912 Plymouth Crossing, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Periodicals postage paid at Edmond, OK and additional entry office. Phone: 405.478.8700.

## POSTMASTER

Send address changes to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

1-Year [12 issues] \$50. Send check to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Online: Visit [www.okobserver.org](http://www.okobserver.org) to use a credit card.

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## LETTERS TO EDITOR

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# Observations

## New Platform

We are excited to announce The Observer is expanding onto a new media platform – podcasting – in an effort to broaden our audience and help create a better, more informed Oklahoma.

For 52 years, you've relied on our print edition to provide news and commentary you can't get anywhere else. Since 2007 when we joined the digital age, you've gotten up-to-speed at our web site, via our Facebook postings, and by following us on Twitter. Four years ago, you helped strengthen The Observer community by attending our monthly Newsmakers events at Full Circle Books.

Now, Observercast offers a weekly deep dive into Oklahoma politics and policy, hosted by Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton and Advisory Board Member MaryAnn Martin, who's not only the genius behind Newsmakers, but also our podcast producer.

Observercast features interviews with politicians and policy experts whose insight will help you make sense of the most important and vexing issues facing our state today.

Our first episode – This Is Not Normal – drew on the expertise of House Democratic Leader Emily Virgin, former Gov. David Walters and former Senate president Pro Tem Cal Hobson, who discussed Gov. Kevin Stitt's efforts to create a CEO governor and what it portends for a state that historically diffused power as an anti-corruption strategy.

Our second episode – Lack Of Candor – zeroed in on legislative efforts to upend the state's successful seven-decade civil service system through eliminating the Merit Protection Commission and gutting hiring and firing standards that guarantee the state's 33,000 workers due process.

Pat Hall, a longtime Capitol lobbyist who previously served as Oklahoma Public Employees Association executive director, and Ryan Kiesel, ACLU of Oklahoma executive director and former state representative,

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# THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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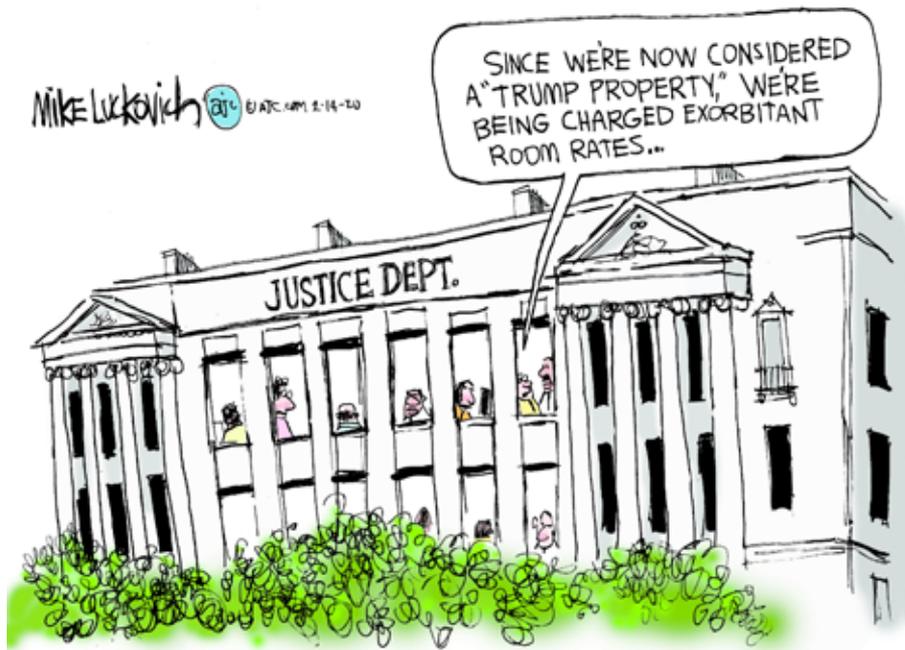
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Mark your calendars for Mar. 12's Newsmakers, featuring Cherokee Nation Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. and former Senate President Cal Hobson discussing state-tribal gaming compacts and sovereignty. See back cover for details.

Dart: To the 21 [at press time] Oklahoma sheriffs who've declared their counties Second Amendment sanctuaries. How Trumpian of them to decide which laws to enforce.

We mourn the passing of our dear friend Iris Lochner, Dust Bowl survivor, yellow dog Democrat, gifted artist. She not only was a staunch Observer supporter, but also bequeathed us her complete collection of Molly Ivins' books. She was 90.

Laurel: To Sen. Ron Sharp, R-Shawnee, standing up to EPIC Charter Schools' legal bullying. In exercising legislative oversight, Sharp asked inconvenient questions publicly about EPIC's operations, prompting them to allege libel and slander. A judge tossed the frivolous suit.

Speaking of EPIC, the state Department of Education fined the online charter school \$530,527 for exceeding the legal limit on administrative costs. EPIC blamed a coding error, but the excuse didn't fly with State Supt. Joy Hofmeister.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment, declaring in a page one headline "Dems target oil, gas industry." Will we ever see "Repubs target middle class, working poor" in response to tax cuts benefitting the rich? New ownership makes no difference: rightwing bias still bleeds into the news columns.

Sitting down? PhRMA, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, has 47 lobbying firms on retainer and 183 registered DC lobbyists – double the oil industry's Washington trade organization. – Wall Street Journal

Laurel: To Reps. Ken Luttrell, R-Ponca City, and Collin Walke, D-OKC, recently named co-chairs of the House Native American Caucus. Both are enrolled members of the Cherokee Nation and hard-working public servants.

Gov. Kevin Stitt's dream of merging the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and Oklahoma Turnpike Authority into a super-agency sped through Senate committee last month. There is ample reason to pump the brakes on this idea and demand an in-depth, public discussion, not a railroad job.

Dart: To Sen. Gary Stanislawski, R-Tulsa, making like Pinocchio with a whopper-filled letter to the Tulsa World claiming tax credits for vouchers don't rob from public ed. Fact: Hiking voucher spending from \$5 million to \$30 million means \$30 million less for schools or other vital services.

We bade farewell last month to an Oklahoma hero, Jim Huff, a career educator who served on the front lines of OKC schools integration and as an indefatigable defender of church-state separation. A former AFT president, Huff was the Democratic rep to the OK County Election Board until just before his death at age 79.

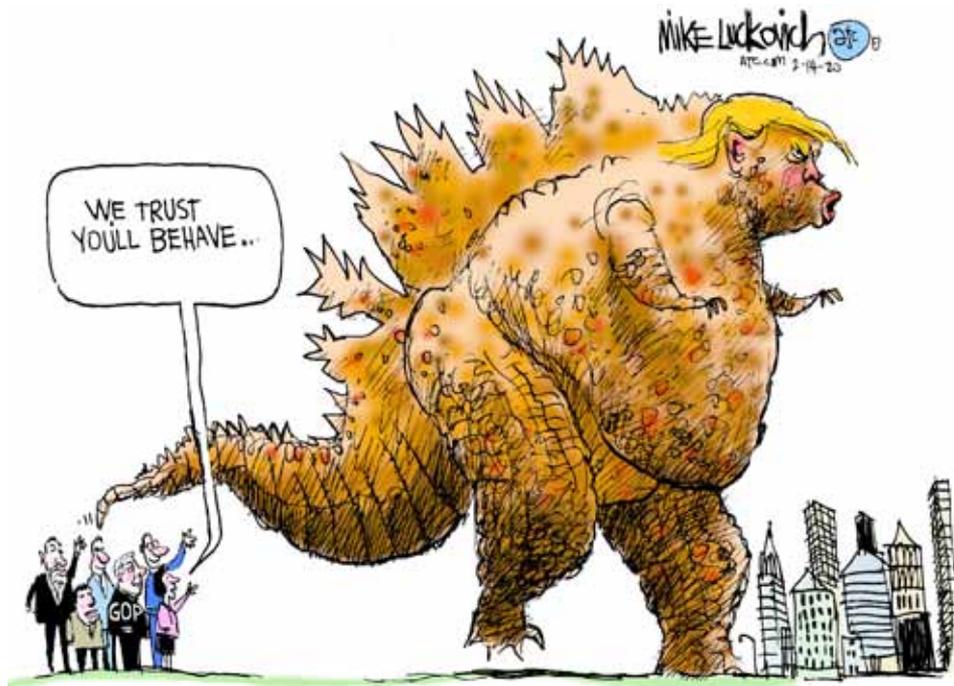
Laurel: To Rep. Jason Lowe, D-OKC, and Moms Demand Action, launching another petition drive to overturn the state's dangerous permitless carry law. If it survives legal challenges, the campaign to collect 95,000 signatures could begin as early as this month.

Poor Donald Trump. His Celebrity Apprentice-style State of the Union address was a ratings disaster – down 20% from last year and worst since Barack Obama's valedictory in 2016. – Nielsen

Dart: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, forcing out the state's superb mental health department director Terri White. Like his hero in the White House, Stitt doesn't recognize, much less value expertise. #Sad #RichWhiteGuysRule

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

# Letters



Editor, The Observer:

First she pronounced, as if from her throne, that many people were urging her to get into the presidential race.

Then she called U.S. Rep. and presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard a "Russian asset," and is now getting her own assets sued for slander.

Most recently, she let it be known that "nobody likes" Sen. Bernie Sanders.

I suggest that Hillary Clinton, whose lazy arrogance caused her to lose an un-losable election to a bigoted buffoon take her self-aggrandizing and divisive comments elsewhere.

The only valuable advice she could offer any candidate is, "Don't do what I did," a concept much too self-reflective to penetrate her ego.

Gary Edmondson  
Duncan

Editor, The Observer:

In the article "Trump And A Free Press" in the February Observer, Ken Neal writes that the Zenger trial was in 1733 and that his at-

torney was Alexander Hamilton. According to a number of on-line sources, Alexander Hamilton was born either in 1755 to 1757. The attorney in the Zenger trial was Andrew Hamilton, not Alexander Hamilton.

Janet Allen  
Tulsa

*Editor's Note: We heard from several eagle-eyed readers who caught this error that our editors missed. Thanks for keeping us on our toes!*

Editor, The Observer:

Gov. Kevin Stitt has a cheap plan to shortcut Medicaid health care expansion after 313,000 citizens signed petitions to successfully bring that issue to a vote of the people in 2020. He can't find money to raise state employees' salaries more than \$50 a month or fund cost of living raises for retired state employees waiting for 11 years.

But Stitt's got \$1.1 million to pay a Washington, DC carpetbagger called Guidehouse to swoop in and reorganize state government

before Stitt, a newcomer to government even understands what government does. [Guidehouse already reorganized Arkansas. Why don't we just go look at their website?]

He happily added another new Tourism employee and paid the Canadian company Operative Brand Consulting \$259,065 on a contract totaling \$415,000 to market our state. [That's certainly easier than fixing it.] I'm sure Oklahoma's top advertising/branding experts are thrilled after sharing their ideas for free since last summer at Lt. Governor Matt Pinnell's request.

The end result is a crummy, recycled idea that OKC Tourism Department used up in the 1990s. Imagine that.

Red Goldfarb  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Am I the only one to notice the irony in Trump's State of the Union speech? During Black History Month, Trump recognized the birthday of a well-decorated black man, Col. Charles McGee, who turned 100 years old. McGee is a member of the famous World War II Tuskegee Airmen, the fighting unit made up of mostly black Americans that flew fighter planes to escort American bombers on bombing runs. Col. McGee flew 130 missions fighting the Nazis and 409 missions during his career spanning World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Col. McGee earned a Bronze Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and Legion of Merit. Legend says that the Tuskegee Airmen never lost a bomber they protected during the war!

Trump did *not* award Col. McGee the Presidential Medal of Freedom – that was awarded to talk show host Rush Limbaugh!

Limbaugh, like Trump, was a draft-avoiding citizen during the Vietnam war era. Trump infamous-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



## *Style Over Substance? Imagine That.*

Did Oklahoma yet again put the proverbial cart before the horse?

It's a pertinent question after Gov. Kevin Stitt, Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell and other leaders recently rolled out a new state brand as part of the drive to propel Oklahoma into Top 10 status.

As one who was raised in Oklahoma and chose to return as a tricenarian, I'm old enough to remember Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma is OK" on our car tags, then-Gov. Dewey Bartlett's efforts to transform "Okie" from pejorative to endearing, and other efforts to recast our state's image in the national consciousness.

Did any of the previous strategies elevate Oklahoma to the Top 10 status? Sadly, no. If they had, Top 10 wouldn't be Stitt's mantra.

Since history has made clear that a slick logo and slogan aren't enough to conceal a state's shortcomings, the question is: how do we get to Top 10?

Actually, the path is as simple as the journey is difficult: To become Top 10, we must first take steps to escape the Bottom 10. That means serious new investments in common and higher education. In health care. In child welfare. In infrastructure. In the environment.

What would transform Oklahoma from "flyover state" to "destination" – Stitt's words – is to create an appealing quality of life that persuades our best and brightest to chase their dreams here and out-of-state businesses to join us.

For far too long, state leaders instead prioritized wealthy special interests – think: oil and gas and Big Ag – over the common good.

They invested workaday Oklahomans' income tax dollars in corporate credits and incentives. They cut income taxes [disproportionately benefitting the state's wealthy elite] rather than invest in smaller classes, higher teacher pay, high-speed internet access for students and rural health care.

By contrast, Oklahoma City and Tulsa showed a different, more successful path forward. They rallied

taxpayers and private investors around the sorts of projects that help create a vibrant, attractive quality of life – ballparks, sports arenas, concert halls, state-of-the-art libraries, walking and biking trails, new housing, upgraded schools ...

Oklahoma City and Tulsa propelled themselves into the national consciousness. The state can, too.

A new brand is no substitute for a statehouse commitment to invest in all Oklahomans and their communities, not just in the special interests that can afford the most lobbyists or write the biggest campaign checks.

For the record, I'm ambivalent about the new branding design. I like the colors and the extended K in Oklahoma. But I don't get how – as Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell proclaimed – it "represents our heritage and history, our booming industry, our beautiful one-of-a-kind vistas, and most importantly, our greatest asset: our people." Or helps propel us to Top 10.

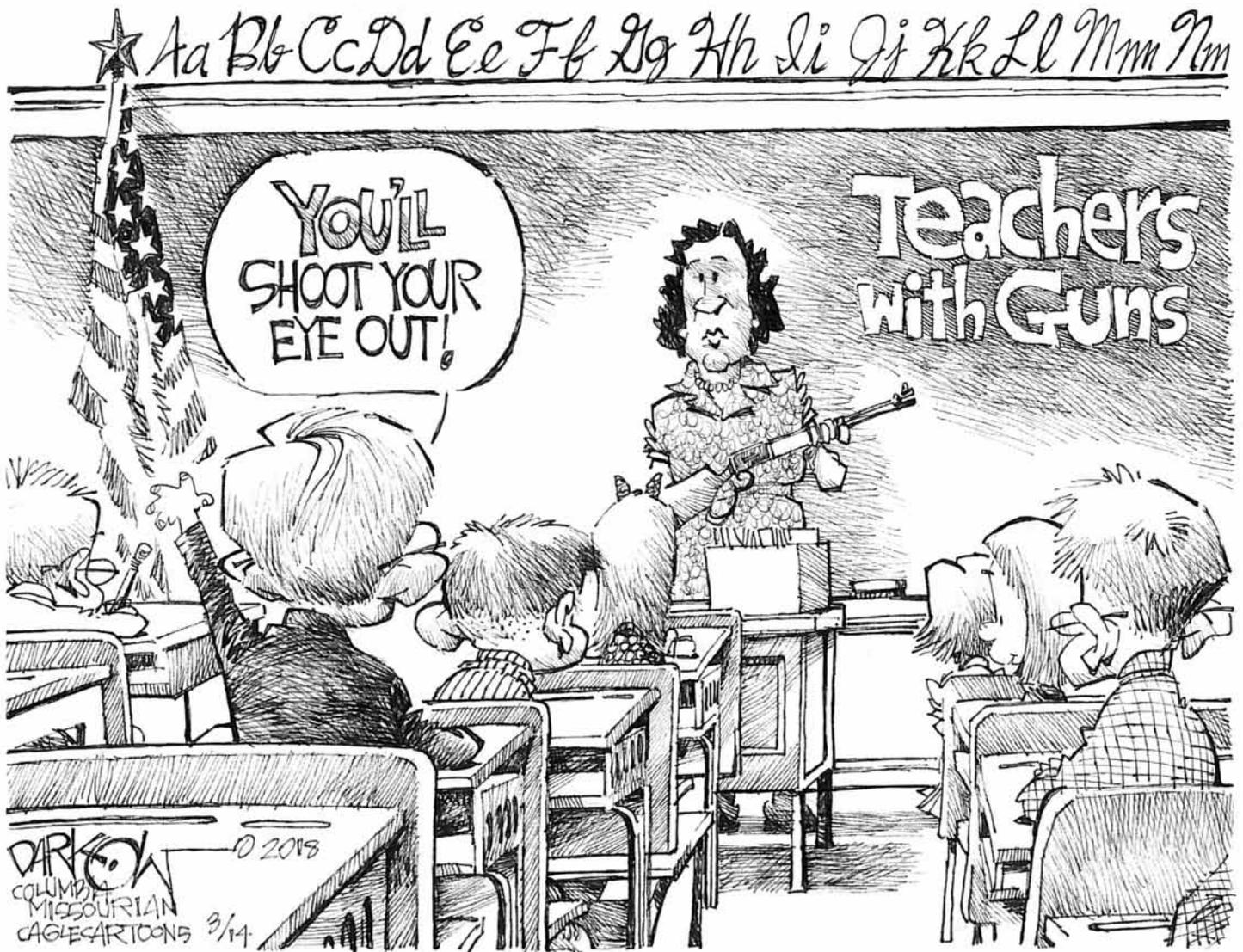
Perhaps I'm just not as hip as the creative minds that conceived of it. Or perhaps I'm too cynical because I've seen this style-over-substance movie before.

In fact, it played out during last month's annual higher education day at the Capitol. Social media blew up with photos of lawmakers with students and administrators, implying a solidarity with higher ed stakeholders.

One particularly duplicitous tweet was from Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat, who reminisced that his collegiate years at OU "greatly changed my life for the better." He then assured students "the #OKSenateGOP has their back."

What he didn't point out, of course, is the Republican-controlled Legislature cut higher ed funding 26% in the last decade, contributing to declining enrollment, higher tuition and fees, and skyrocketing student loan debt.

Rebranding alone can't ensure Oklahoma's future prosperity. Only a collective, long-term investment can make it happen.



## *What Oklahoma Schools Really Need To Help Fight Gun Violence*

**BY JOHN WOOD**

**I**f I have to carry a weapon to work, it'll be the last day I teach," said Toby Brown, PhD, a Stillwater High School Technology teacher now in his fifth year.

"It's not why I took this gig," added Brown, recognized last September for his achievements in teaching by Simmons Bank and in 2018 as SHS's teacher of the year.

Brown's sentiment reflects a 2018 Gallup Poll that found seven in 10 teachers said arming themselves or other teachers nationwide would not be effective in limiting casualties in a school shooting. In a 2019 poll, Marist found only 39% of the public agreed that allowing teachers to bear arms would make a differ-

ence, while 55% disagreed.

Even with this negative outlook nationwide, the 2019 Oklahoma Legislature approved permitless carry legislation that took effect Nov. 1. Brown is therefore responding to this legislation that nixed any required training whatsoever to carry a gun, with exceptions for schools and businesses that restrict them.

Oklahoma is one of 16 states with permitless carry. A 2013 AP survey found a third of all Oklahoma households were equipped with a gun. Now that you can place a gun on your hip without question and without demonstrated knowledge about how such a deadly weapon even works, that number has likely

risen.

This legislation doesn't seem to be enough for the far right in Oklahoma's Legislature, though, because there is also a push this year for something called "nullification" – laid out in Stilwell Republican Rep. David Hardin's HB 2781.

The bill not only would declare any federal firearm requirement invalid, but state employees like myself would have their freedom of speech stripped away for "supporting federal firearm laws and regulations," even creating penalties for such support.

Cue in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, where he introduces the concept of "thought crime" in which any politically unacceptable thoughts can result in a jail sentence.

Welcome to our post-truth world.

In 2018, Oklahoma became one of at least nine states that allows districts to authorize teachers to carry a firearm, according to the National Conference of Legislatures.

What's more, last spring, Rep. Sean Roberts, R-Hominy, sponsored HB 2336, striking any need to train teachers who carry a classroom firearm. The bill passed the state House in spring 2019, but it stalled in the state Senate.

While those knowledgeable about the subject all told me that they felt such a bill would not pass during this election year, it did win Senate approval last month – along a largely party-line 37-7 vote. The measure was returned to the House to consider Senate amendments.

Durant Republican Sen. David Bullard, himself a former teacher, told the Associated Press he co-authored the bill because school kids are vulnerable, and schools can't afford security officers.

### **WATERED-DOWN TRAINING**

While HB 2336 didn't erase all training and requires school board approval, it did weaken CLEET training requirements from 240 hours to only 72 hours or just eight hours of concealed carry training. In addition, applicants are required to possess a valid handgun license.

Since Gov. Kevin Stitt made an electoral promise to undo former Gov. Mary Fallin's rational veto of permitless carry, I would expect him to sign this bill, too, if it reaches his desk.

Todd Robinson, a first-year English teacher at Edmond High Santa Fe, told me that gun-packing teachers worry him. He said further that those who possess a weapon should understand how to operate it.

"Growing up in the countryside, I have experience with those who don't know how to use them," he said. "I want to make sure they can hit the intended target and remain calm under pressure." He said that without training, guns present a lot of potential danger. "It could put kids and other teachers in a dangerous position."

Concealed Carry University [CCU], a pro-gun website, says that training is necessary. It points out that accuracy under duress is very typically poor, as

77% of all shots fired in self-defense situations will miss their targets, even when fired by those trained. That's worrisome. Its website says further, "[c]onfidence should be in your abilities, not your gun" and stresses the importance of "muscle memory," in other words – "practice."

Unfortunately, even police officers are not immune to missing their target, even after training. A 2015 study by researcher Dr. Bill Lewinski, Foreign Service Institute's [FSI] executive director, said that after finishing academy instruction and a lot of practice, new officers "were a mere 13%" more accurate than novices in shooting at distances where a high proportion of officer-involved shootings occur. That is not comforting to me at all.

State regulations require local police to spend time on the rifle range twice a year. However, Lewinski says that even their firearms training is not extensive enough and occurs too sparsely for officers to gain, and maintain, the expert level of accuracy expected of them.

As an enlisted Marine and as an officer, I had to train once a year. And our M-16 and 9mm use was well-regulated, reflecting the Second Amendment's first clause. Imagine our military force without weapons training?

And yet, the National Rifle Association [NRA] has another view publicly expressed after the 2012 Newtown, CT, elementary school shooting that left 26 dead, including 20 children. On CBS News, the NRA's executive vice president, Wayne LaPierre, famously declared "the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun."

Really? I remember the rather controversial and highly-publicized George Zimmerman case. He shot and killed unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin. What's interesting is that Stanford University Law Professor John Donohue, co-author of a National Bureau of Economic Research study on gun violence and concealed carry laws, said he doubts the "good guy with a gun" claim.

Donohue's report asserts that in many cases, the "good guys" are more confident and more aggressive because they are armed. As a result, he finds, people often die who otherwise would not.

According to Donohue, "It's not very often that somebody with a gun who's a private citizen plays a useful role in ending mass shooting events."

At the time, the Washington Post reported the NRA "opposed laws requiring mandatory training for gun purchases."

### **HITTING THE FAN**

Stillwater High School Principal Uwe Gordon told me his school has regular drills. Most intrusion situations last only five minutes. "That's fast and takes too much for chance," he said. The state requires these drills twice a year. "We need to practice, but it does stress people out, even in class. They plan a hallway drill between classes, "but that means no

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# BULL-HEADED

## *After Just 14 Months In Office, Governor's Intransigence Threatens His Re-Election*

BY CAL HOBSON

It is one thing to have an independent streak but when it runs from one shoulder blade to the other that's obstinacy not independence.

If rookie Gov. Kevin Stitt maintains his tone deafness when it comes to issues of importance for large segments of his constituents, he may return to the mortgage business sooner rather than later. Say what? Examples follow.

**1** Just why would he pick a fight with Oklahoma's economic juggernaut? No, not the oil industry [he wouldn't dare cross them], although it is very significant. Rather, Stitt has chosen to play the role of Gen. George Custer versus Sioux Chief Sitting Bull, not at the Little Big Horn, but in opinion polls and, worse yet, federal court.

Yes, I know the tribes filed the lawsuit on New Year's Eve but Gov. "My Way Or The Highway" Stitt left them no choice by staking out a position contrary to federal, state, treaty, compact and precedent language ... not to mention common sense and good judgment.

At your expense, and the tribes, sue 'em Stitt has gone through four sets of lawyers from Michigan, Washington state and now Oklahoma City while carelessly and casually shelling out over \$1 million trying to find someone, anyone who agrees with his lonely and unfounded position that the compacts signed with tribes 15 years ago did not automatically renew Jan. 1, 2020. They did, and have, as found in section 15A and affirmed recently by the governor who negotiated the words, Brad Henry and his finance director, Scott Meacham. Former Gov. Frank Keating, a fellow Republican, also counseled Stitt on his waywardness, all to no avail. As a matter of fact, no previous governor and very few current legislators have stepped forward to publicly endorse The Lone Ranger's stance vis-a-vis our 39 tribes. Even Tonto cannot be found.

Be aware this is no little dust up. The entire country is watching with more than a passing interest. Like it or not, Americans love to gamble and there are now 514 tribal casinos in the Lower 48, including 143 in Oklahoma with an economic impact of \$13.7 billion. The state budget, by comparison, is only \$8.2 billion in the coming year. These numbers

do not include commercial casinos, as found in Las Vegas, that Stitt has used as a stick to prod our tribes to the negotiating table. So silly and short-sighted.

Does anybody believe MGM, Caesar's Palace, The Venetian and other for-profit corporate monsters would invest in our schools, roads, hospitals, colleges and other entities if they were licensed to build casinos here? Of course not. They only want access to the Texas market of gamblers and the shortest road to that pot of gold runs down I-35 right, past Riverwind near Norman and the biggest casino in the world ... Winstar at Thackerville.

Only a guy who hasn't paid any real attention to his state government prior to being elected as CEO could be so profoundly wrong about this subject and time is running out for Stitt to smarten up about it. Let's call this mess Stitt's Strike One.

**2** Almost as curious as his clueless incomprehension of the compact conversations is his intractable opposition to Medicaid expansion. Things have changed since ObamaCare passed nearly a decade ago, with 30 million more Americans insured now but 20 million still remaining without it and nearly 200,000 of those being our neighbors, friends and family members. For every state dollar invested in health care it draws down nine federal ones currently being spent in the 36 states that have long accepted the Affordable Care Act.

Most recently, and primarily due to the citizens' petition that garnered over 330,000 signatures to accept expansion, Gov. Stitt has scurried to, of all places, Washington, DC, to get instructions from the Trump Administration on how to blunt the work of his own constituents. Why in the world would Stitt go swimming in the Washington Swamp looking for solutions to Oklahoma's health crisis, second worst in the nation, when he need only go up Lincoln Blvd. a few blocks and sit down with Patti Davis, executive director of the Oklahoma Hospital Association?

Because, like Trump, the word ObamaCare gives Stitt the shivers, as it still does most Republicans in the Legislature. They apparently would rather see people die prematurely, rural hospitals and nursing

homes close, and doctors flee to urban areas rather than admit something passed into law, and affirmed by the Supreme Court, but carrying the name of the 44th president of these United States, was a good idea.

Beyond sad and probably Strike Two, after the tribal debacle, when the once Mighty Stitt goes up to bat in 2022.

**3** If treating tribal members and Medicaid expansion advocates as though their views are irrelevant to him are not enough to possibly doom him for re-election, Stitt's Third Strike could be the narrowness, in race and gender, reflected in his closest circle of advisors. Of 16 key personnel, including the lieutenant governor, chief of staff and chief counsel, 13 are white men, two are white women and one is a black man. There are two vacancies, including liaison to the tribes after the resignation of Lisa Billy, a Choctaw/Chickasaw and former 12-year state legislator who resigned after first privately and then publicly differing with Stitt on the tribal tiff.

As to the Baker's Dozen of white guys there are many similarities more than just their maleness and ethnicity. Almost all have connections to Oklahoma State University, reside in the Tulsa area and/or attend large, non-denominational churches. Several have ties to Gateway Mortgage, the Stitt family firm and they, of course, have one other trait expected these days of prominent political appointees. They are campaign donors.

So I ask you: what could possibly go wrong when this group sits down in the Capitol's Blue Room to set priorities and policies for Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians, African Americans, women, gays and other unrepresented segments of our society?

It simply underscores the old adage that it is better to have a seat at the table than to be served on it. No Medicaid expansion recipients here; no tribal members; little geographic or educational diversification; business backgrounds for the most part. In other words, now that even his claim to be Cherokee has been called into question by a major investigative piece in the New York Times, the governor himself may be a victim of the dreaded Elizabeth Warren Syndrome.

In summary, and regardless of the major missteps outlined above, Stitt remains an odds-on favorite to be selected for a second consecutive term. However, with three legislative sessions yet to be completed, coupled with a softening economy primarily due to a troubled energy industry, it would be wise for the governor to extend the peace pipe to tribes, join his constituents to expand Medicaid, add a few folks of color in the cabinet but most of all listen more and talk less.

And that last step may be the hardest of all. *Cal Hobson, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore.*

# *Selling State Water Back On Tap?*

**BY MIKE W. RAY**

**F**or the second time in this century, an attempt is being made to sell Oklahoma water to another state, this time to Missouri.

The proposal is embodied in HB 4127 introduced by state Rep. Sean Roberts, R-Hominy.

The Grand River Dam Authority [GRD]) "shall conduct a study on the sale of the waters under its control to the State of Missouri," HB 4127 states.

The bill was assigned to the House Rules Committee, which is commonly referred to as a "graveyard" for unpopular legislation. As the late February deadline neared for committees to act on legislation this session, HB 4127 still had not been scheduled for hearing.

"This is all about money," former state legislator Jerry Ellis of Valliant said.

Another former state representative, Dan Sullivan, the CEO and president of the GRDA, receives a salary of \$330,000 a year after the board of directors approved a \$40,000 per year raise last August. "The director makes \$1,000 a day, excluding Sundays," Ellis noted. "If the GRDA is permitted to sell water under its control, he would likely receive another fat raise."

## **TWO IMPORTANT LESSONS**

A "high-dollar water lawyer" from Albuquerque, NM, "taught me two things," Ellis said.

-- First, any individual, organization, agency or state that wants to siphon water from Oklahoma "needs to prove that they have exhausted all available avenues to provide water for their people and their needs in their state," Ellis asserted. "Before they come after our water, have they built reservoirs, drilled wells, and enforced conservation where necessary?"

-- "On the other side of the coin," Ellis continued, "before any decision is made to sell Oklahoma's water to another state, one question should be asked: Have the water needs of every citizen of this state been fulfilled? And the answer to that is 'no'. Just ask the folks in western Oklahoma, for starters."

Water is "an invaluable natural resource that we must protect," Ellis said.

## **WATER RICH MISSOURI**

"Why on earth would we need water that's under the GRDA's jurisdiction - unless there's money to be made for someone, or for several someones in both states," said a former Oklahoma newspaper reporter who's a Missouri native, is now retired and living in the "Show Me State."

"We have scads of lakes and rivers," she said.

"Not only do we have the Missouri and Mississippi

# Cherokee Nation Heirloom Seeds Bound For Global Seed Vault

BY CHUCK HOSKIN JR.

For generations, the Cherokee people have planted and harvested crops to nourish our families. Agricultural maintenance and crop cultivation were essential parts of our lives well before Europeans set foot on this continent. Corn, beans and squash have been planted together – the traditional “three sisters” – for as long as anyone can recall.

Our ancient crops were drought and insect resistant. They had a long storage life, which sustained us through many winters. However, as modern hybrid varieties grew in popularity and gardening became more commercialized, many of the older heirloom plants that traveled with us from the East fell out of favor. They became very hard to find in stores and on grocery shelves. Even the seeds were hard to come by.

With an eye toward ensuring our people would still have access to these hardy, historic heirlooms, the Cherokee Nation took action by opening a tribal seed bank. Begun in 2006, the seed bank has steadily grown and widened its scope. In the decade since, our heirloom seed program has reinvigorated the traditional crops that came across the Trail of Tears with our ancestors to Indian Territory.

Today, the Cherokee Nation is the first tribe in the United States to receive an invitation to deposit its traditional seeds in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, a long-term seed storage facility housed deep inside a mountain on a remote island in Norway. Svalbard is about 800 miles from the North Pole. It is the world’s most sheltered storage facility, created to safeguard as much of the Earth’s unique genetic material as possible. Sometimes called a “doomsday vault,” Svalbard now holds about one million crop seeds from across the world and can store up to 4.5 million varieties.

Nine Cherokee seeds were recently vacuum-

sealed and meticulously packaged according to specific guidelines before being shipped to the Svalbard seed vault, where they will be stored indefinitely. The seeds selected include Cherokee white eagle corn [the tribe’s most sacred corn, which is used for cultural ceremonies], Cherokee long greasy beans, Cherokee Trail of Tears beans, Cherokee turkey gizzard black and brown beans, Georgia candy roaster squash and three other varieties of corn. The chosen crops represent a core part of Cherokee identity.

These varieties are genetically unique to the Cherokee Nation. They are the same crops our people have been farming for hundreds of years. They are important both culturally and scientifically. The preservation of these seeds has always been a priority for our people. Losing a plant variety is irreversible in the same way as the extinction of a bird, reptile or mammal. If the worst should happen, there is peace of mind in knowing these precious seeds are protected in the Svalbard vault.

Today, a new generation of Cherokees is embracing the planting and harvesting tradition. It makes me proud that we are carrying on this great Cherokee practice, just as countless generations before us have done.

The Cherokee Nation seed bank continues to grow and get more popular every year, as staff fulfill requests and ship more than 10,000 seed packets annually to our citizens around the world. It remains a vital link to keep the Cherokee Nation connected to our homeland while preserving our history and heritage.

If you are a citizen of one of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes and would like to request seeds from our seed bank, please visit <https://secure.cherokee.org/seedbank> for details.

*Chuck Hoskin Jr. is chief of the Cherokee Nation.*

rivers, both of which have experienced record floods in recent years, we have the White, Kings and James rivers, which enter Table Rock Lake, plus Taneycomo and Bull Shoals lakes; below us there’s Beaver Dam near Eureka Springs, plenty of water that way; in southwest Missouri closest to Oklahoma there’s the Elk River, a large river used for floating, which goes through Noel, MO, a short distance east of the state line.”

Furthermore, she said, “It seems like they’d have to pump water uphill to get it here.”

“I wonder how many pumps they’d burn up sending that water uphill,” echoed Ellis.

## **GRDA MISSION: CONSERVE WATER**

The Grand River Dam Authority was created by the Oklahoma Legislature in 1935 to be a “conservation and reclamation district for the waters of the Grand River.”

GRDA manages more than 70,000 surface acres of water in northeast Oklahoma, including Grand Lake and Lake Hudson, both on the Neosho River, and W.R. Holway Reservoir [formerly known as Chimney Rock Lake] southeast of Salina on Saline Creek.

The GRDA carries out its mandate by controlling and storing the Grand River's waters and by generating waterpower and electrical energy "to use, distribute, and sell within the boundaries of the district."

The GRDA has three hydroelectric facilities and distributes wholesale electricity to 24 counties in eastern and northeastern Oklahoma. In early 2012 GRDA added wind energy to its portfolio by partnering with Canadian Hills Wind Power Project of western Oklahoma to acquire and distribute wind-generated electricity. By the end of that year GRDA power reached into 75 of the state's 77 counties, serving 16 municipalities and 23 member-owned rural electric cooperatives. The indirect or direct service reached 500,000 electric meters, and GRDA was the nation's sixteenth-largest public power utility.

In addition, on July 1, 2016, the Grand River Dam Authority absorbed the mission and responsibilities of the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission. That mission is to protect, enhance, and preserve the aesthetic, historic, archaeological and scientific features of the Illinois River and its tributaries [Lee Creek, Little Lee Creek, Barren Fork Creek, Flint Creek, and the Upper Mountain Fork].

#### **TEXAS' THIRST FOR WATER**

In about 2007 Tarrant Regional Water District headquartered in Fort Worth tried to buy water in Oklahoma before it empties into the Red River, because the latter is salty. Oklahoma declined the request, citing

laws that protect its water.

The regional water district then sought a permit from the Oklahoma Water Resources Board [OWRB] to take surface water from a tributary of the Red River at a point located in Oklahoma's portion of one of the river's sub-basins.

Tarrant Regional figured that the OWRB would likely deny its permit application because of Oklahoma water laws that effectively prevent out-of-state applicants from taking or diverting water from within Oklahoma's borders. Consequently, TRWD filed suit in federal court simultaneously with its permit application, seeking to enjoin the OWRB from enforcing the state statutes on grounds that they were preempted by federal law in the form of the Red River Compact and violated the federal Commerce Clause by discriminating against interstate commerce in water.

The case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, where Tarrant Regional's arguments were soundly rejected, 9-0, in 2013.

In the opinion, Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote that the sovereign states possess an "absolute right to all their navigable waters and the soils under them for their own common use." The high court also pointed out that the Red River Compact allocates water rights equitably within the Red River basin among the states of Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, and was approved by Congress in 1980.

*Mike W. Ray spent 45 years as a journalist on newspapers in Oklahoma and Texas, two years in public relations with Southwestern Bell Telephone, plus 19 years as a media director at the Oklahoma House of Representatives.*

## *Political Posturing Creates Bogus Issues*

**BY GARY EDMONDSON**

As sure as an election approaches, you can count on Republicans to trot out meaningless issues to try to excite their base.

At the state House, GOPers propose a steady stream of unconstitutional anti-choice laws – without promising to commit their salaries and personal fortunes to defending them in court when they are invariably challenged.

But the locals can play this game of political posturing as well. Logan County Sheriff Damon Devereaux is one of 21 sheriffs who've declared their counties to be gun sanctuaries. He "promised his citizens to enforce the right to bear arms, rather than any laws that would infringe on it," according to KFOR-TV.

Stephens County Sheriff Wayne McKinney followed suit, releasing an official statement that includes: "Let it be known that the Stephens County Sheriff hereby expresses his intent that no public

funds will be used in any manner to restrict the Second Amendment rights of the citizens of Stephens County, or to aid federal, state, or any municipal agencies in the restriction of said rights ... "

What a powerful statement of bunkum and self-incrimination.

Let's start with the obvious fact that there exists not one threat to the Second Amendment in this open-carry state or the country. It would take 38 states to amend the Second Amendment. Realistically, you'd be hard-pressed to find a dozen states supporting any Constitutional change. Look at a map.

Sheriff McKinney's insists "that no public funds will be used in any manner to restrict the Second Amendment rights of the citizens of Stephens County." Yet, when I enter the Stephens County Courthouse, two of his deputies – paid with public funds – are staffing a metal detector, setting a limit

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# Armed Teachers

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takebacks.” He said over the intercom it yells, “Lock down, Lock down.” People panic.

Twenty-two-year teaching veteran and criminal justice teacher Jason Carley said, “In a situation like this, people don’t think about the logistics of a teacher having a rifle.” He asked where teachers would place their guns in the classroom during class? He added that in a chaotic situation, with everybody running around, it would be incredibly dangerous, especially for an untrained teacher.

Brown interjects, “You don’t want to be shooting down a hallway at moving targets, especially with kids in the way. A no-training requirement is ludicrous, just another way the Legislature will further endanger our students in our state.”

## DIGGING DEEPER

Carley adds, however, “There are a lot of challenges to adolescence. They tell me how stressful their lives are” – something he says you can see on social media.

In fact, principal Gordon points out, social media is a main culprit; it’s certainly “self-induced.” He said that students on social media are often chasing “likes” and it can make or break their day.

One time, a student Gordon described as a “loner”

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## NRA plan for school security...



once tweeted a racist joke. The kid told the principal, “Well, I had 10,000 likes in an hour, and I don’t have more than 10 real friends.”

Elaborates Carley: “I find that girls often say that if they don’t have enough likes they end up having a bad day.”

Their assessment is backed up by research: A 2018 Clinical Psychological Science study found a rise in sleeplessness, loneliness, worry, and dependence among teenagers – an increase that interestingly coincides with the release of the first iPhone a dozen years ago.

“I think it comes down to mental health,” Stillwater’s Dr. Brown said. “Kids bring it to school. The violence is everywhere. It’s attention seeking in an unhealthy way. Social media seems to determine their sense of self.”

Gordon reminds, of course, that life is about disagreement. “There are kids who are rude, mean, and angry – that’s sad. We must figure out how do deal with that.”

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Edmond Santa Fe’s Robinson points out “we have officers in our school.” Adds Gordon, “Having SROs [School Resource Officers] helps change the culture of the school because it makes people feel safer.”

What also is needed, he said, is more counselors and teachers, not more guns.

In 2019, the Oklahoma Policy Institute found that Oklahoma has 435 students for every counselor – twice the 250 student-to-counselor ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association’s [ASCA]. While the state Department of Education asked the Legislature for \$58 million dollars to fund more school counselors, Stitt’s budget ignored outside of the classroom needs. This after Oklahoma schools absorbed a 28% cut – \$1,058 per pupil – over the previous nine years, according to a 2017 Center for Budget and Policy Priorities report.

A dearth of counselors means that many more students will fall through the cracks and not get the help

they need. This is especially troubling given Oklahoma's unfortunate standing in the top quartile of a national Childhood Trends study exploring the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs].

ACEs "are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being," especially when it comes to divorce and economic hardship.

As you may know, Oklahoma has only the 33rd best economy, according to Wallethub.com. It also, unfortunately, possesses the nation's fourth highest divorce rate, according to a 2017 American Community Survey.

Brown says it's all about student connection. "I smile at students. I had a kid hug me to thank me – relationships matter! But it's my job to keep them safe, not take a bullet."

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

*Editor's Note: Hardin's "nullification" bill – HB 2781 – did not receive a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee before the late February deadline. However, it is not unheard of for proposals to be revived late in session and tucked into other bills as amendments. Stay tuned.*



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## *School Choice Hucksters And Predatory Capitalism*

**BY SCOTT PARKS**

I loved my life as a newspaper reporter. Story-telling transported me outside myself and took me into the minds, homes and workplaces of people different from me.

I am struggling to grasp how otherwise normal people can embrace the presidency of a sociopathic narcissist who will do and say anything to accrue power and money.

Trump exemplifies the 1% in America: mostly white, wealthy members of exclusive clubs and private schools that no average American could afford to attend.

When my children were school age, I began writing

about public education. I thought it might provide insights I could use as a parent.

At the time, Dallas ISD was asking a federal judge to release it from the requirements of a long-standing desegregation court order designed to help black and brown students.

To prove up its assertion that Dallas ISD no longer discriminated against children based on race, the district's lawyers cited John J. Perishing Elementary School in North Dallas as an example of equality.

The district, through busing and special academic programs, had managed to construct a student body that was equal parts white, black and Hispanic. Test

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scores were above average. And so was the faculty. It was a good school.

Pershing is surrounded by an upscale neighborhood of million-dollar homes. Expensive SUVs decorate many driveways.

I spent a day at Pershing while researching a story on desegregation. It was a positive experience. It never occurred to me that integration was anything but desirable. I guess some people would assert that I had been brainwashed by a liberal arts college education.

As I left the school that day, I saw a young mother and her two children walking out their front door to get into the car. I hurried over to talk to her about Pershing.

"It's a pretty good school from what I can tell," I told her. "Equal number of whites, blacks and Hispanics. PTA moms said they believe the school prepares kids for adulthood in an increasingly diverse world.

"Will you send your kids there?" I asked.

She looked me and said, "That may be a part of your world, but it's not a part of mine." And she drove off. Her comment has been frozen in my mind ever since. It reminds me that everyone doesn't think like me.

Trump and his Secretary of Education, Betsy

DeVos, are intent on destroying public education. They disparage public schools as "failing" instead of proposing improvements.

Trump called public schools "government schools" during his State of the Union speech the other night. He advocated school choice programs that would allow the diversion of millions of taxpayer dollars from public schools to private schools. He used a black family as a prop to illustrate who might benefit by escaping from a failing school if they only had the money to attend a better private school or tax-supported charter school.

But Trump's target audience is really the folks who never accepted the premise of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown versus Topeka Board of Education* – that race-mixing in schools is inherently a good thing. The critics of integration could be black or white, black separatists or white separatists. By touting school choice programs, Trump panders to people who believe their children will be better served by being in a racially segregated environment.

The school choice movement also plays into the hands of religious denominations that want to grow their church schools by diverting the tax money we all pay for the common good away from public schools. This is part of Trump's strategy to mine

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votes among Christian evangelicals. Damage to public education is one result.

The system of a free public education for all people has been the backbone of American communities since the turn of the 20th century. A vote for Trump is a vote for charter school entrepreneurs and other education hucksters who want to get their hands on public school funding to enrich themselves.

The phrase “school choice” is marketing. It

sounds good. Who could be against choice?

Truth is that Trump doesn't give a damn about choice. He's just another rich, amoral politician whose only god is a predatory form of capitalism that destroys everything in its path.

*Scott Parks is a retired Dallas Morning News reporter and Denton, TXI Record Chronicle managing editor who also served as news director at Tulsa's CBS Affiliate, KOTV.*

# *Reproductive Rights Are Civil, Economic Rights*

**BY BARBARA BANNON**

What does reproductive freedom have to do with wealth or poverty? Everything!

Women's reproductive and economic freedoms do not, and have never, existed separately. Greater reproductive autonomy, whether in the form of access to birth control, abortion, paid family leave, or child-care affords women and children greater economic security and mobility.

Expanding that autonomy will benefit not just individual women, but all working families.

Full protection of reproductive rights is indispensable to physical/mental health, economic opportunity and security for women and their families.

Those who continue to oppose full civil and economic freedom for women are showing great disregard for the meaning of real individual freedoms historically proposed as a foundational value of this Country.

State or federal regulation of women's reproductive organs is tantamount to state/federal ownership – it is slavery!

No human should be forced to bear a child against their will and no child should be birthed into a life where they can't be cared for appropriately, aren't wanted or loved.

We know full well the results of bringing children into such situations. One economic and societal example is the effect of legalized abortion on crime. Researched by Steven Levitt and John Donohue, their studies showed that children who are unwanted or whose parents cannot support them are likelier to become criminals, and that there is an inverse correlation between the availability of abortion and subsequent crime.

2020 is the Centennial of the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote. Getting that right was a struggle that took decades to win, a fight we

shouldn't have had to fight.

Those decades were years in which women were owned by men as chattel and had no say so in their lives. This was codified in the law. We then had to fight to get access to birth control, another battle we shouldn't have had to fight.

And now, even though we have the vote, we are still fighting for the freedom to decide for ourselves whether, or when, we reproduce - this is a fight we shouldn't have to fight!

Oklahoma is, once again, passing legislation that removes the access to abortion by criminalizing doctors who perform abortions. State Rep. Jim Olsen, R-Roland, said the goal of his bill is to eliminate abortion in the state.

I have to believe that those who are ill informed or are willfully ignorant would advocate for what is essentially forced birthing.

It's hard for me to understand that anyone who really cares about civil rights and freedom, or the welfare and well-being of children, would continue to intervene through legal restrictions in the personal reproductive decisions of the female citizens of this country.

The argument that abortion is destroying a life is a straw man argument that completely ignores the life of the woman. Those who bring life into this world, women, and are gracious enough to invite a potential life to share their body can be, in a free society, the only ones to make that invitation and decision.

This is a fight we shouldn't have to fight in a free country and everyone who believes in freedom needs to *speak up and speak out* against the forces that work to undermine the freedom of women and their families!

*Barbara Bannon lives in Tulsa and is co-chair of the All Souls Reproductive Justice Team.*



## *America's Future*

**BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL**

We humans are in a bit of a funk. Although there's excitement over innovations in the field of technology, two basic problems could spoil the future. The first – climate change – threatens our planet. Close behind is America's forsaking its obligation to lead the world in saving the earth from its ravages, in fact abandoning the rest of the world in searching for solutions.

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

Our democracy is threatened by the lack of strong leadership. Our president continues to lead by shooting from the hip and his aim is awful. Our two parties offer little encouragement for creating an environment that supports solutions resulting from honest dialog among the various competing interests. On most days Democrats and Republicans seem content only on passing their partisan version of a law rather than producing a strongly debated

and negotiated legislation expressing the highest ideals of our diverse population.

Let's consider that for a minute. Our history has been remarkable with the two political parties working together to create legislation in the best interest of the nation and both sides. A democracy functions when there is the will to provide a solution for national problems and, once a decision is crafted, a workable plan can be worked on to solve the needs of the majority of citizens.

The first 10 amendments to our Constitution were ratified on Dec. 15, 1791. With its first fondly known and honored *Bill of Rights*, the Constitution has made America the world's greatest country in the 20th century. Millions of people have come to fulfill the universal aspiration for freedom [religion, speech, and press] and the right to petition government for redress of grievances.

On our TV screens these last few weeks we witness the latest group from Central America following those from Europe led by Spain under Columbus

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in the late 15th century and the Puritans [English] soon after, having followed Eric the Red and found Native Americans. Until pulled by the Emperor, China is theorized to have come even before Europe. Those immigrants from Europe [France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia], the Middle East and from Asia like Japan, the Philippines, Korea and Vietnam were pushed here by upheavals of various kinds in their native lands and pulled by the promise of a better future. The Native Americans, including Aztecs of Mexico and their neighboring Inca and other descendants of the Olmecs, had come centuries before all of these Europeans across the limitless continent from both the north and the south.

It's easy to understand why so many people from all over the world wanted to come here. America is admired for its ability to continually offer immigrants sanctuary from oppression of their rulers or even their natural surroundings and provide citizens fundamental rights to pursue their dreams.

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

On a Saturday, Oct. 27, 2019, some Americans were killed in their place of worship and several more wounded when a known anti-Semite walked in and committed America's largest mass murder of Jewish people. Rushing in to stop the shooting and help, two police officers were among the wounded. Religion is one of our most important and sacred institutions, protected by the First Amendment. This is only one of several mass shootings recently. Sunday or a day of worship, it appears, may no longer be any safer than another day or a place of worship no longer a sanctuary from violence.

When people are prevented from worshipping or from speaking freely, or when freedom of the press is no longer allowed, even deemed a threat, then we are all in trouble. When Americans can no longer peaceably assemble or petition government for redress of grievances, then bet your almighty dollar we are neck deep in mud. Our much-vaunted democracy is in trouble.

In November 2018, America cracked open the door of opportunity when Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives. The question before us now becomes: Can the majority Democrats enlist enough Republicans to restore a working democracy?

With climate change now threatening us on a daily basis, precious little time remains to restore the environment to a healthy condition capable of supporting human life, in fact any life.

In 2020 let's retire The Donald, and work for an outcome where Democrats, Republicans, and Inde-

pendents resume a healthy relationship and restore a working democracy. We need a democracy that will regain the world's confidence in and respect for us, as well as ensure humankind its continued existence when we assume our role of world leader by virtue not just of being the sole military superpower but moral leadership with the restored status as the symbol of democracy with a capital D.

The task ahead will be difficult requiring input from each of us. We must learn to trust one another again, even break the circles in which we've isolated ourselves.

Let's begin the new decade with the sense of the *peace* that prevails and truly surpasses all understanding. That's what the Black Mamba wanted Americans to bring about. Let's bring to fruition his last efforts with one daughter and several neighbors before that helicopter failed to clear the Calabasas.

Hopefully others in our generation like King James, along with the NBA All-Stars, and the Super Bowl athletes usher in a new Jerusalem that has successfully conquered our angst, thus fulfilling Kobe's dream and those of countless other Americans.

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

## *How Is Your Economy?*

**BY SHARON MARTIN**

Just over half of Americans are invested in stocks or mutual funds. When the market is posting record highs, that's great, but here are some questions for you:

Do you have enough invested to retire?

Can you handle the ups and downs of the market in retirement?

How much of the market do you own?

If you are in the bottom 80% in terms of wealth and you own stock, you have a share of less than 10% of the entire market. The top 10% owns more than 80%. In this upside down world, let's hope you either have a defined pension or are in the top 10%.

If you're still working, it doesn't matter what the stock market is doing if you can't make a living with your job.

The U.S. added 225,000 jobs in January, and the unemployment rate edged up to 3.6%.

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The unemployment rate doesn't matter if you are holding down two jobs to make ends meet.

Maybe your take-home pay went up after the 2017 tax bill went into effect. That happened because employers took less out of employees' paychecks, money meant to cover future taxes. What happens when the taxes come due?

Some of you expected your wages to rise when corporate taxes went down. Unfortunately, many corporations used their tax breaks to buy back stocks. That improved the value of their stock holdings.

How many shares of your company's stock do you own?

The president is on the campaign trail, where he's been since he took office. He's bragging about low unemployment and the terrific economy, and he's taking all the credit. Does that mean he'll take credit for the millions of Americans whose incomes haven't kept pace with the economy?

Will he take credit for every wage earner who is one illness away from bankruptcy?

Democrats must hone their economic message. A terrific economy for the top 10% isn't good enough.

Voters must demand an economy that serves all citizens.

This isn't a right or left issue. This is a moral issue.

You know who has wealth packed at the top and poverty spread out below? Third-world countries. Unless we get our economic house in order, that's where the U.S. is headed. That truth should help you decide who gets your vote in the upcoming elections.

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

# *I Choose To Fight*

**BY VERN TURNER**

The recent displays of childish pique by what passes as president of our great country has triggered something in me that I thought was long dormant, the will and the desire to fight back. I asked myself what I'm fighting back against. As I pondered this basic question, a litany of disturbing and open attacks on the rule of law, our professional public servants, the environment and the middle and poorer classes of hard-working Americans emerged.

Let me begin with a couple of quotes from very-well known and prize-winning writers. The first is from Eric Hoffer in the *True Believer*:

*It is the true believer's ability to "shut his eyes and stop his ears" to facts that do not deserve to be either seen or heard which is the source of unequalled fortitude and constancy. He cannot be frightened by danger, nor disheartened by obstacle, nor baffled by contradictions, because he denies their existence.*

The second piece was written in 1951 by Hannah Arendt, titled *Origins of Totalitarianism*:

*The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction ... and the distinction between true and false no longer exist.*

This massive con game began in earnest for the American public on that fateful day when a very small man in a very large body descended a golden escalator to tell the world what a racist, hateful, dystopian wretch he was. In so doing, he placed himself above all others, our own government and the media that he depended on to support his con game.

For those who felt they were getting the short-end of the stick, for those businessmen who wanted no regulations or controls on their abilities to make even more profits, for the racists who had been holding their tongues of hate and bigotry, and for those disenchanted by the gridlock in Congress that made them not trust their government even though they elected those very grid lockers.

Donald Trump saw the primitive needs and outbursts of those who lacked the intellectual agility to work out their grievances through proper, available channels and allowed their latent rage within to explode in a fetid fealty to perhaps the least qualified person ever to lead anything, never mind a great nation.

So, as with any con man, Trump played the anger card, the race card, the self-pity card and the xenophobia card. Oh, right. The self-absorbed oppressed needed a scapegoat. Obama was leaving office, so their anger, hatred and self-pity had to be channeled elsewhere. It couldn't, after all, be their fault that they weren't getting ahead. No, it turned out to be "Let's get another tattoo and blame those damned Mexicans for our sloth and lack of ability." It's so much easier to blame all one's ills on "the other," so that's what they did and Donald Trump was their cheerleader and hero. But there's much more.

There is the malignant narcissistic personality disorder that drives the Id and the mouth of this pathetic, wretch, Donald Trump. He has always wanted to walk with the elite, but the elite – as he sees them – won't have anything to do with him because he is a *terrible* business man, completely unethical and wholly unlikable. Why? Because everything in Trump's life is about himself. Even as "president," it is about himself. And while he's making himself into

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a daily spectacle of lunacy, he keeps blasting the media, the tool that makes him famous, so that his minions and followers will despise them too and not trust *any* truth that they might write. The events surrounding his impeachment/trial period have created the next phase of this monster.

Now, it's vindication time. It will soon be clear to all, if it isn't already, that Trump's psychopathy will manifest itself in ways no other president – not even Nixon – would even consider. He is going after the soul of our democracy and doesn't care a damn about the consequences. It is now that he will use his attorney general to purge all his enemies, real and imagined. He will use

his attorney general, someone equally compromised as to the actual letter of the law and his own bizarre interpretation of the Constitution, to interfere in the DOJ to ease the sentences for his old, still faithful cronies.

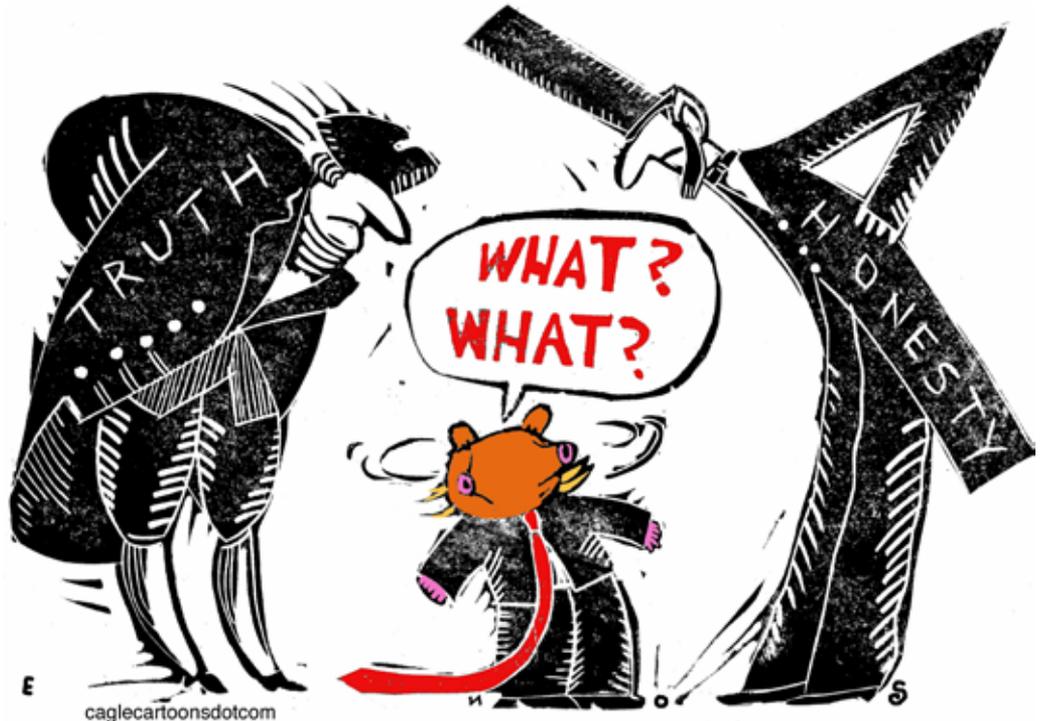
Yes, readers, that is exactly what happens in a despotic dictatorship. This is more that cronyism. This is outright usurpation of the rule of law.

The Constitution and our laws are now just small hurdles for this president to step over on his way to ... what? A second term? Really? Really. Then what? What then? Who will be next on the block? How many generals and professional staff, lawyers and operations chiefs will be purged because they wouldn't hold the flag, raise their right hands and pledge an oath of obedience and loyalty to *Donald John Trump*?

Not to the Constitution. Not to the people of this once proud democratic republic, but to a creature with such severe psychological damage coupled with an abject lack of knowledge about *anything* other than his own pathetic self and his drooling, barely coherent, corrupt offspring.

I've had enough. At my advanced age, I still have energy left to honor those who fell defending our Constitution and our liberties. My best tool is my keyboard, but I will write and call and knock on doors this year to advance the election possibilities of *every* candidate opposing a Republican. Obviously, I will work wherever I can to promote the Democratic Party's nominee to unseat Trump.

The No. 1 priority in this nation, at least for think-



ing and caring adults, is to remove Donald Trump from office as quickly as possible so the disinfecting of the White House can begin immediately. That stupid wall must be dismantled and the materials used for housing the indigent, the homeless and the poor. There must be re-establishment of the institutions and laws and safeguards that he has destroyed and release the immigrant children from those god-damned cages and reunite them with their families.

But there is much to do meantime. Those of you having media and A/V capabilities should create compendiums of Trump's rallies where he throws up all over the American people and himself and make them viral on YouTube and other outlets. Bloomberg just released a campaign ad that does just that and compares Trump's toilet mouth with real eloquence from actual civic leaders – i.e., every other president we have on tape. We must go to the offices of Republicans and make sure they hear the protests and the consequences for their cowardice and stupidity. Then, walk over to the offices of the Democratic candidate – it won't matter who – and volunteer to spread their word, get voters registered and stuff envelopes.

No task is too small, but each task is critical in the fight for our very country and our Constitution. Please join me in this fight. It may be our last as free men and women if we don't win it. *Denver resident Vern Turner is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. His latest book, Why Angels Weep: America and Donald Trump, is available through Amazon.*

I FIGURED OUT WHY WE'RE CALLED MILLENNIALS.

IT'LL TAKE A MILLENNIUM TO PAY OFF OUR STUDENT DEBT AND SAVE UP TO BUY A HOUSE...

OTHER THAN THAT IT'S A GREAT ECONOMY.

BOOMERS GOT THE BOOM.

FITZSIMMONS © THE DAILY STROKE

# Who Beats Trump?

*Young Voters  
And Social Democracy*

*How To Lose  
All 50 States?*

**BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES**

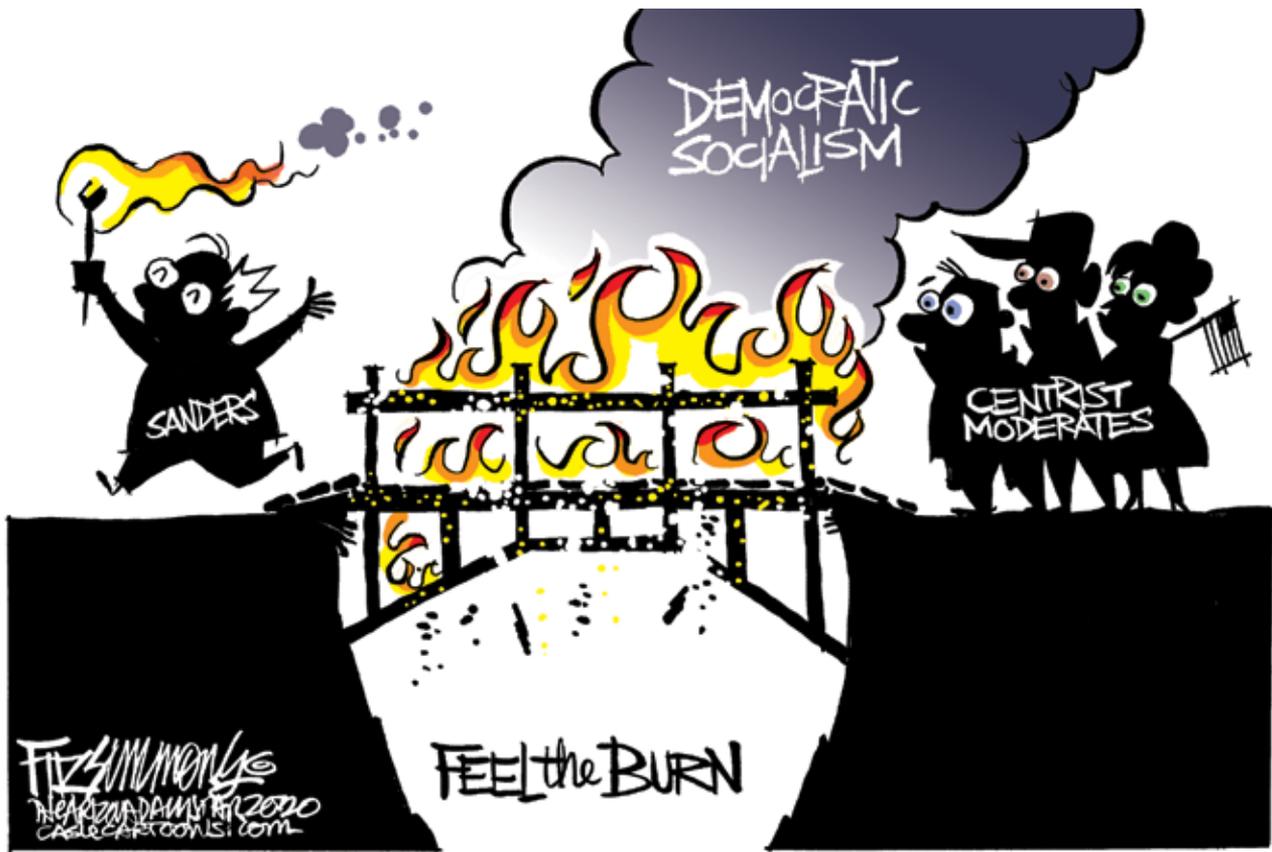
We should not be surprised that the clear majority of Democratic voters under 45 support Bernie Sanders and his Social Democracy platform – a platform very similar to that of Elizabeth Warren. Unlike people over 45, these young people have lived most of their lives in the aftermath of the Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush destruction of many of the social services and safety nets that exist in all of the happiest, healthiest, safest, most educated, and least corrupt

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**BY SUSAN ESTRICH**

Easy. Nominate Bernie Sanders. I've been through my share of blowouts. I was a kid when George McGovern won Massachusetts – and nowhere else. I was in Florida working for Jimmy Carter [on loan from Ted Kennedy's office] when we lost not only the White House but also the Senate majority in Ronald Reagan's first landslide. I was in Minnesota waiting to see if Fritz Mondale would carry any states. Two weeks before the

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## Young Voters

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countries in the world.

Many of these young people have seen their parents and grandparents struggle under massive medical debt [some of them have already incurred significant medical debt themselves], they have watched wealth inequality become more extreme than ever before, and many are afraid to go to the doctor because they know that in this system they are one serious illness from bankruptcy.

For many of these young people, a financial crisis caused by reckless banks wreaked havoc in the lives of their families, from which some have never recovered. Many of them are also living under crushing student debt that they had to incur because our society chose not to support strong public education at all levels.

The criticism that young people support Sanders and his Social Democracy platform because they think Sanders will give them free stuff is the most disingenuous criticism I have ever heard, especially when it comes from persons from generations who paid a fraction of the current cost of college, a fraction of the current healthcare costs, and who enjoyed a much better societal infrastructure than decades of austerity have delivered to us, all the

while doing almost nothing about the most pressing crisis in human history – the climate crisis.

Young people are not for Sanders because they want free stuff. They are for Sanders because he gives them a consistent message of hope that we might garner the political courage to give young people and future generations a chance at survival, greater equality of opportunity, and maybe even the possibility for flourishing.

Personally I think Elizabeth Warren's vision and plans are stronger and more thorough than those of Sanders, which is why she has been my No. 1 choice, but I absolutely understand why young people and many others show such strong support for Sanders.

It is not because they want free stuff, and it is not because they don't know history. It is because they have first-hand experience of the failure of the last 40 years of American politics and know in their hearts and see from the example of many other countries that there is a better way.

*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.*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

1988 election we were going to lose, with the help of then-Gov. Jim Hunt from North Carolina, I spread money all over the country for down-ticket races so Michael Dukakis didn't carry down the Democratic Party when he lost 40 states. I was on television looking at the exit polls from Ohio when I realized they were all wrong, and that John Kerry would lose. I canceled my law and politics class in 2016, the day before the election, because I didn't want to lie to my students and tell them that I thought Hillary Clinton was going to win.

I understand why Democratic ideologues are voting for Bernie Sanders. I used to be one myself. But losing one election after another – two to Reagan, one to George H.W. Bush, two to George W. Bush and, of course, one to Donald Trump – is painfully instructive.

This is not horseshoes. This is not a battle for the heart and soul of the Democratic Party. It is a battle to beat a dangerous president.

And the truth is that the only Democrat with a chance of doing that is Mike Bloomberg.

I never thought I'd say this, but I will: I will do anything to help Bloomberg win. Which is to say, I will do anything to beat Trump.

Bernie Sanders would lose in a landslide. So would Elizabeth Warren – if a senator from Massachusetts runs fourth in neighboring New Hampshire, he or she will do even worse in a general election. Her candidacy is all but over.

Pete Buttigieg is the brightest star on the Democratic side. If he were 10 years older and didn't look like Beaver Cleaver, I'd be ringing doorbells. Of course there are folks who would not vote for a gay man with a wonderful husband and a brilliant military record. That's not my problem. I'll vote for him in the future. I believe he will be president someday. But not in 2020.

And then there's Joe Biden, who lost to Amy Klobuchar, a senator who is known on Capitol Hill as the most impossible person to work for. She might get away with it if she were a man [see, e.g., Donald Trump], but a woman who talks about which bills she has passed on the stage with Donald Trump, with billions against her? I don't think so. Actually, I've yet to hear a pundit or a columnist or an independent pollster even make the case.

Former Vice President Biden is a fine man. I have always liked him. He has survived hardships that I could not endure. He would be a fine president. But he has always been a terrible candidate, and this year is no exception.

Which leaves the one candidate Trump is rightly afraid of. Trump claims to be a billionaire, even if it's not actually money he made. Mike Bloomberg is the real deal. He makes Trump look like a piker. Which, of course, drives Trump crazy.

There was a Bloomberg event in Los Angeles last month. Hundreds of Clinton and Obama Democrats were there. People weren't asked for money. For most of my friends, it was the first time attending such an event. They were not there because they are lifelong Bloomberg supporters. They were there because, as Vince Lombardi, the famous Green Bay Packers coach said, winning is the only thing.

And the only Democrat who can beat Trump is Mike Bloomberg. Bloomberg-Buttigieg – that's my ticket.

Trump has done enough damage. Given how strong the economy is, Trump should be a shoo-in. He isn't because he's Trump, a hopeless narcissist; a leader so unreliable and unpredictable that leaders across the world find him terrifying; a man who managed to escape impeachment when he shouldn't have and is now busy punishing a war hero who dared to speak the truth.

We have exactly one choice. Or we lose. And if Sanders is at the top of the ticket, it won't just be the presidency we lose.

Hillary Clinton is wrong: Plenty of people like Sanders. He has accomplished a great deal politically, energizing young people, strengthening the progressive movement, giving voice to concerns that millions share. But he can't win a general election. I'm not even sure he could carry Massachusetts.

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## *Senator-Lawyers Earned Failing Grade In Impeachment ‘Trial’*

**BY DON HOLLADAY**

**I**n the end, it will be law-trained Republican senators – those most visible like Mitch McConnell, Lindsay Graham, Lamar Alexander and Lisa Murkowski – who will be remembered by the legal profession for decision-making that disgraced the rule of law, the fair administration of justice, the role of the oath, and the profession’s obligations of accountability to society. Those trained in classes at some of our nation’s finest law schools should have been the most vocal about the importance of oaths given by public servants entrusted with important constitutional responsibilities.

They should have been the least tolerant of pres-

idential misconduct which sought to place one branch of government above the law. They should have been the most insistent in demanding the fair administration of a constitutional trial. But these law school-trained GOP senators, and others such as lawyers Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, failed to honor legal principles they once learned. Unable to summon the moral courage needed to challenge Mr. Trump’s misuse of the institution of the presidency, they will be remembered for their failing grades as lawyers in the impeachment trial of the president.

The legal profession always has played an essential role as guardians of the rule of law – the bedrock

principle that says all persons and institutions are accountable, and that the exercise of power is subordinate to established law. Our 200-year-old form of government is the longest lasting of the world's developed nations. Free elections and the rule of law are core components of America's fragile constitutional democracy. It is hard to imagine more serious threats to the nation's constitutional framework than the flagrant violation of either safeguard. Yet, those were the allegations that formed the basis of the impeachment trial against the president.

The initial House inquiry was straightforward: Did Mr. Trump invite foreign interference in the nation's free election process by secretly withholding authorized foreign military aid until a vulnerable foreign leader made announcements advantageous for Mr. Trump's re-election chances? If so, did that attempted election interference constitute an abuse of the powers of the presidency? Then, after a whistleblower's complaint exposed what had happened, did Mr. Trump engage in an attempted cover-up, using means that sought to place himself above the law? We can only imagine what citizens would have never known if the whistleblower had not come forward, or if the foreign power later attempted to use the president's unlawful secret conduct in a way against America's best interests. Nevertheless, Mr. Trump and many of his ardent supporters condemned the whistleblower as akin to a traitor. They demanded to know his identity.

During the House inquiry, Mr. Trump withheld evidence and ordered executive branch officials to neither testify nor produce documents. The giving of these orders was not in dispute. Rather, Mr. Trump asserted that his defiant conduct was a proper exercise of his presidential powers. Law-trained

Republican members of Congress looked the other way, refusing to consider what constitutional scholars quickly pointed out about Mr. Trump's breathtaking assertion: A president who cannot be investigated has placed himself above the law, thereby nullifying our nation's adherence to the rule of law.

Once the articles of impeachment were delivered to the United States Senate, the Senate's GOP membership, led by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, closed ranks. Mr. McConnell and Mr. Graham set the tone for what would come in the impeachment trial. They openly mocked the legal oaths they would take as fact-finders to render "impartial justice." Instead – before the trial had even commenced – they stood in front of cameras and promised a full acquittal. Mr. McConnell pledged "total coordination" with the White House in defending the articles of impeachment. The process that the legal profession knows as a "trial" became a rigged proceeding. It became the first impeachment trial in history without witnesses being called and evidence being presented.

Senators McConnell and Graham displayed explanatory legal contortions too painful to watch. They contended that a "trial" as required by the Constitution

didn't mean a real trial where all relevant testimony and evidence would be presented. They took the position that whatever the entire facts, the outcome of the impeachment trial would still be the same, and thus there was no reason to delay the proceedings by witnesses and evidence. As all trial lawyers knew, there was only one rational explanation for such bizarre posturing: They had something to hide. The full facts, if disclosed, would not be good.

Senator and lawyer Lamar Alexander, clearly troubled by the President's undisputable misconduct, called Mr. Trump's actions "inappropriate" but then disingenuously said the constitutional remedy for such misconduct should rest with the people. Describing Mr. Trump's abuses – attempting to interfere in America's free elections and then seeking to place the office of the president above the law – as inappropriate only highlighted the absence of backbones among GOP lawyers charged with performing duties required by the Constitution.

As if on cue, Sen. Graham quickly came forward, saying Sen. Alexander's characterization of the president's conduct "spoke for a lot of us." Then Sen. Murkowski, also a lawyer, announced that in her opinion, there could never be a "fair" trial, saying Congress as an institution had failed; and so, the process should not continue. She doubled down on her pronouncement of unfairness by giving Mr. McConnell the last "no" vote he needed to prevent additional witnesses and evidence, and, in so doing, guaranteed Mr. Trump's acquittal.

Sen. Murkowski's logic was mind-boggling. Her message in translation: Since I have concluded our branch of government has failed, I am free to play politics by sabotaging even more the trial process mandated by the Constitution.

Sen. Murkowski was wrong when she announced that Congress had failed. It was she and her fellow Republicans – led by law-trained senators such as herself – who failed the institution. Their trappings of office were too great to place their futures at risk;



their fear of presidential and political reprisals was too real to leave their political foxholes; their rationalizations of self-importance became too easy to believe; their re-election survival became too important. And so, they appeased and found sound bites. They decided to postpone until later the worry of whether their negligent performances had inflicted mortal wounds on the workings of a nation's constitutional democracy.

The performance of other lawyers on behalf of Mr. Trump will also be remembered as disappointing. During the proceedings, the content of Yale-trained lawyer John Bolton's book manuscript was leaked. The content reportedly included the bombshell that Pat Cipollone – the president's lawyer who argued that no firsthand evidence of any "quid pro quo" existed – was a participant in a White House meeting which confirmed the improper exchange. If true [and veracity, along with fairness and accountability, is one of the legal profession's three most prized ethical traits], it is unthinkable that one who is an actual witness to evidence relating to the misconduct on trial would hide that fact, and then, assuming the role of a lawyer, argue on behalf of his client the lack of any evidence that such misconduct occurred.

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Mick Mulvaney, another lawyer and the president's chief-of-staff, is reported by Mr. Bolton to have also been present at the White House meeting. The forced appearance of Mulvaney and Bolton to testify was quashed by the GOP-controlled Senate's decision to hear no additional witnesses in the trial. Neither Bolton nor Mulvaney made any effort to simply step forward to say what they knew. And so, to preserve Trump's continuation in office, the search for truth was sidelined in a fiasco led by GOP lawyers acting as public servants in government's highest offices.

Another Trump lawyer, retired emeritus Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz embarrassed himself by taking a legal position he eventually tried to walk back. He presented an argument that made the impeachment process virtually meaningless, arguing that if the president does something that he believes will help him get elected, and that his election is in the public interest, then that type of quid pro quo cannot legally support impeachment. Dershowitz's argument was legally mind-blowing. If accepted, the argument would essentially nullify the Constitution's system of checks and balances. The executive branch could do what it wanted, without any oversight by another branch.

Only one Republican, Sen. Mitt Romney, R-UT, a Harvard-trained lawyer, voted to convict Mr. Trump on the first article of impeachment. His decision was exemplary. The legal profession and history will applaud his decision. Courage is a defining quality of a good lawyer. Somewhere, in the recesses of their private thoughts, other Republican lawyer-members of Congress must feel some sense of envy. They know that few are given opportunities for public displays of courage – the type exercised in the face of adversity – and they know that when such circumstances are presented, fewer still can summon the inner fortitude to respond in a way that provides a lesson for the generations that follow.

The Trump years will be remembered as a period when the government broke down. While history will look at the big picture failures – the abdication of congressional power, the improper use of executive branch power, the failure of institutional checks and balances – those of us in the legal profession will try and come to grips with why those who received intense training in constitutional values, and respect for the rule of law, become so quick as elected public officials to mock the law, to disrespect the fair administration of justice, and to trivialize the seriousness of constitutional oaths.

It was the leadership of persons trained in the law who orchestrated the sham impeachment trial of Donald J. Trump. They now own this segment of history insofar as the brazen use of the White House for the self-interest of its occupant. Their legacies will not resemble that of an Atticus Finch.

*Don Holladay is a retired attorney and adjunct professor at the University of Oklahoma College of Law. His legal career included constitutional litigation.*

**Trump awards Presidential Medal of Freedom to Rush Limbaugh**



*A Public Letter To Rush Limbaugh  
Upon His Terminal Cancer Diagnosis*

**BY MATTHEW FOX**

February 4, 2020

Dear Mr. Limbaugh,

Here we are at a low point in the history of American democracy and on the eve of the acquittal of Mr. Trump from wrongdoing by a compliant Senate that seems as married to the god Chronos [who ate his children as all climate-deniers are doing] and to the idolatry of power. And the news comes out that you are facing a showdown with cancer.

As human being to human being, I feel for your struggle ahead but of course we all live our lives and do our work in the knowing of our mortality and the coming of death. Only now it is becoming more real for you surely [and for me too since I am entering my 80th year and that too is a reminder of my own mortality].

As a priest I am with you in this latest journey of

yours.

But I also want to invite you, as you look back on your life and work [and so much of our lives is our work] to consider making these last months on earth the most useful possible. You might want to consider leaving behind some healing and gifting to balance out the immense amount of division-making and hatred, shaming and name-calling of others that you have built your sad but profitable career on.

Clearly you are a gifted individual but clearly also you have not used your gifts to spread healing or love or justice. There is a certain karma in hearing about your present condition on the eve of the fake acquittal in a sham trial of a president who, with your urging and cheerleading for years, has shown his complete disregard for truth and for human respect, for future generations [by denying climate

change] and for our constitution which he clearly violated time and time again.

One can make a list of your tirades over the decades [see <http://www.msnbc.com/politicsnation/rush-limbaughs-most-outrageous-moments-25>]. One that sticks out to me is your calling feminists “feminazis” which may make for clever radio parlance but which reveals a very sick sense of masculine superiority and violence against women seeking their god-given wisdom and freedom.

What most stands out is the primal role you have played in creating the divide that now exists in the body politics of our country. A divide completely at work in the current Senate sham impeachment trial. Your decades of spewing hate and division over the airwaves is now bearing its poisoned fruit. Yes, your party now owns the Senate and therefore the impeachment future of our president but unfortunately their ethics will mirror yours just as Mr. Trump’s do.

You are not alone, of course, but you and your ilk created Trump in the sense that you spread the message of Resentment throughout this country for decades. A friend of mine years ago drove across the country and said there were often times when he could not get NPR on the radio – but there was no place where he could not get Limbaugh on the radio.

No doubt that news may feed your ego. But dying is, of course, about letting one’s ego go so now might be the right time to reflect on your life from a more-than-ego viewpoint. What you are leaving behind is a lot of wreckage. You may want to repent of that and get your [inner] house in order before you leave us. Consider all the copycats that have cashed in on your wayward ways beginning with Rupert Murdoch who has brought your notion of Hate Radio to his Fox News Channel so now we have Hate Television too. And a propaganda tool – just like Hitler and Goebbels created for their Resentment Agenda – disguised as Fox News.

What does it mean to be dying knowing that you have left such institutions of hatred behind you that will supposedly flourish wherever the idolatry of money reigns, and where lies and falsehood hold sway over truth?

What might you do to cleanse your soul before you die? There are many options and you, being an intelligent and creative person, can surely come up with your own. But here are a few suggestions:

Why not go on the air and apologize for the hatred and divisions and lies you have spread?

Why not go on the air and apologize for the racism and sexism and homophobia you have spread?

Why not leave your mansion to the homeless and poor to live in after you are gone just as Pope Francis just did by taking a 19th century castle near the Vatican and turned it into a home for the homeless? [see <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/19th-century-vatican-palace-turned-homeless-shelter-pope-francis-behest-n1123246>]

Why not take some of your ill-gotten millions of

The New Yorker editor David Remnick didn’t hold back criticism of President Trump’s decision to honor controversial conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh with the Presidential Medal of Freedom during the State of the Union.

The day before Limbaugh was honored, he told his nationally syndicated audience that he has advanced lung cancer.

“Empathy is due to anyone who is suffering,” Remnick said. “But not high honors, not a celebration of a life’s work devoted to the mockery and derision of the Other. For the President of the United States to bestow one of the nation’s highest laurels on Limbaugh is a morally corrosive and politically cynical act. It is a kind of assault on the achievements of so many previous award winners, a list that includes Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., Václav Havel, Rosa Parks, and John Lewis. It is appalling to see Rush Limbaugh’s name listed alongside theirs.”

dollars in wealth made off of a media success story built on hatred and resentment and bequeath it to some non-profits who are doing good work on behalf of the poor?

Why not go on the air and apologize for demeaning science and future generations of humans and more-than-humans and admit your sins of denial about climate change? Read Pope Francis [whom, as bullies do, you called a “Marxist”] for his encyclical “Laudato Si” that warned us all about climate change.

There is so much you can be doing that flows from facing your own life story and learning, in the face of death, as you become “stripped to the literal substance of yourself before God,” as Howard Thurman puts it, that much of your life has been a sorry excuse for a human being. That your many talents were not put to good use but to evil use.

It is never too late to change your ways. That’s what choice promises. Why not die with a smile on your face? The smile of love triumphing over hate and truth over lies? The future of your planet taking precedence over silly games of one-up-man-ship and egoism and advanced reptilian brain syndrome? This might make your next journey far more meaningful and helpful to others than your present one has been.

Dying is a time to take stock. Use your remaining time wisely.

Best wishes that your journey deepens,

Sincerely,

Matthew Fox,

fellow human and your elder

*Matthew Fox is a spiritual theologian, an Episcopal priest and an activist for gender justice and eco-justice. He has written 37 books that have been translated into other languages over 70 times.*

RAIN TR  
SWAMP



## *Trump's Corrupt Pardons*

**BY JOE CONASON**

The power of the president to grant pardons as stated in the Constitution is unconditional, as President Donald Trump has observed. But as he prepares to bestow that favor on Roger Stone and perhaps other felons who have protected him, someone should advise him that a corrupt pardon is nevertheless a crime that can be prosecuted, if not overturned.

So Bill Clinton learned soon after he pardoned Marc Rich on the last day of his presidency, Jan. 20, 2001. Public anger exploded within days after Clinton granted a conditional reprieve to the infamous “fugitive financier,” who had skipped to a Swiss chateau, evading trial on charges of tax evasion, sanctions violations and conspiracy. Among those most infuriated by Clinton’s surprise decision were the federal prosecutors who spent years chasing Rich.

Suspicion centered on generous political and charitable donations by Rich’s ex-wife over a period of years to various Clinton campaigns and the Clinton Foundation. Mary Jo White, the U.S. attorney for the

Southern District of New York, swiftly announced that her office had opened a criminal investigation of Clinton – the president who had appointed her. That probe continued for a few years under the watchful eye of James Comey, chosen by then-President George W. Bush to replace White.

No doubt Comey and his boss, then-Attorney General John Ashcroft – who had voted to convict Clinton in his Senate impeachment trial – would have relished indicting the former president. The investigation found no evidence of wrongdoing, however. Clinton’s actual motive was to reward then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who personally called the Oval Office three times seeking a pardon for Rich in the midst of peace talks with the Palestinians. [As usual, under the “Clinton rules,” the former president’s eventual exoneration went unnoticed in major media outlets.]

But the immediate outrage over Rich’s pardon inflamed media outlets for weeks, setting the stage for both congressional and prosecutorial inquiries.

Today the same politicians of both parties who screamed about Clinton are silent.

Have none of them noticed the massive flows of donor money surrounding the Trump pardons? Never mind the blatant influence peddling by former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and various other presidential cronies and supporters. If the Rich donations were suspect, what about the cash poured into Trump's coffers by those seeking pardons and their advocates?

Dallas Republican donor Doug Deason and his billionaire father gave more than a million dollars to the pro-Trump America First PAC. Their generosity seems to have greased the pardon of David Safavian, a former federal official convicted of obstruction and perjury in the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and his wife, Miriam Adelson, have given more than \$200 million to Republican causes, including at least \$30 million to Trump-related committees in recent years and \$500,000 to a defense fund for Trump aides coping with special counsel Robert Mueller's probe. They asked that Trump pardon junk-bond crook Michael Milken and got their wish. [Mrs. Adelson also got the Presidential Medal of Freedom.]

And then there's the Pogue family, also from Dal-

las, which forked over \$85,000 last year jointly to the president's reelection committee and the Republican Party – and got a gift-wrapped pardon for its patriarch, Paul Pogue, a construction magnate convicted of tax fraud. Pushing the Pogue pardon was former Sen. Rick Santorum, the Pennsylvania Republican who brayed loudly about the Rich case.

If the Trump pardons look sketchy, consider the fact that Trump simply ignored the Justice Department process that is traditionally employed in evaluating such requests. He knows that the law enforcement apparatus headed by Attorney General William Barr will let him abuse his power freely, while perhaps uttering a feeble protest. Or not.

We will soon see how far Trump will go in abusing the pardon authority. He appears to be preparing to do far worse than handing out clemency for cash. The judge who sentenced Roger Stone to almost four years in prison accused the dirty trickster of lying to “protect the president.” When Trump pardons Stone, Paul Manafort and others implicated in the Russia scandal, he will cap the most troubling cover-up in American history.

If Clinton was subject to investigation and possible prosecution, then Trump should be, too.

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# *The Humongous Cost Of Inaction*

**BY ROBERT REICH**

In the Las Vegas Democratic debate, former South Bend mayor Pete Buttigieg charged that Sen. Bernie Sanders' policy proposals would cost \$50 trillion. Holy Indiana.

Larry Summers, formerly chief White House economic advisor for Barack Obama, puts the price tag at \$60 trillion. “We are in a kind of new era of radical proposal,” he told CNN.

Putting aside the accuracy of these cost estimates, they omit the other side of the equation: what, by comparison, is the cost of doing nothing?

A Green New Deal might be expensive, but doing nothing about climate change will almost certainly cost far more. If we don't launch something as bold as a Green New Deal, we'll spend trillions coping with the consequences of our failure to be bold.

Medicare for All will cost a lot, but the price of doing nothing about America's increasingly dysfunctional healthcare system will soon be in the stratosphere. A new study in *The Lancet* estimates that Medicare for All would save \$450 billion and prevent 68,000 unnecessary deaths each year.

Investing in universal childcare, public higher education and woefully outdated and dilapidated infrastructure will be expensive too, but the cost of not making these investments would be astronomi-

cal. American productivity is already suffering and millions of families can't afford decent childcare, college or housing – whose soaring costs are closely related to inadequate transportation and water systems.

Focusing only on the costs of doing something about these problems without mentioning the costs of doing nothing is misleading, but this asymmetry is widespread.

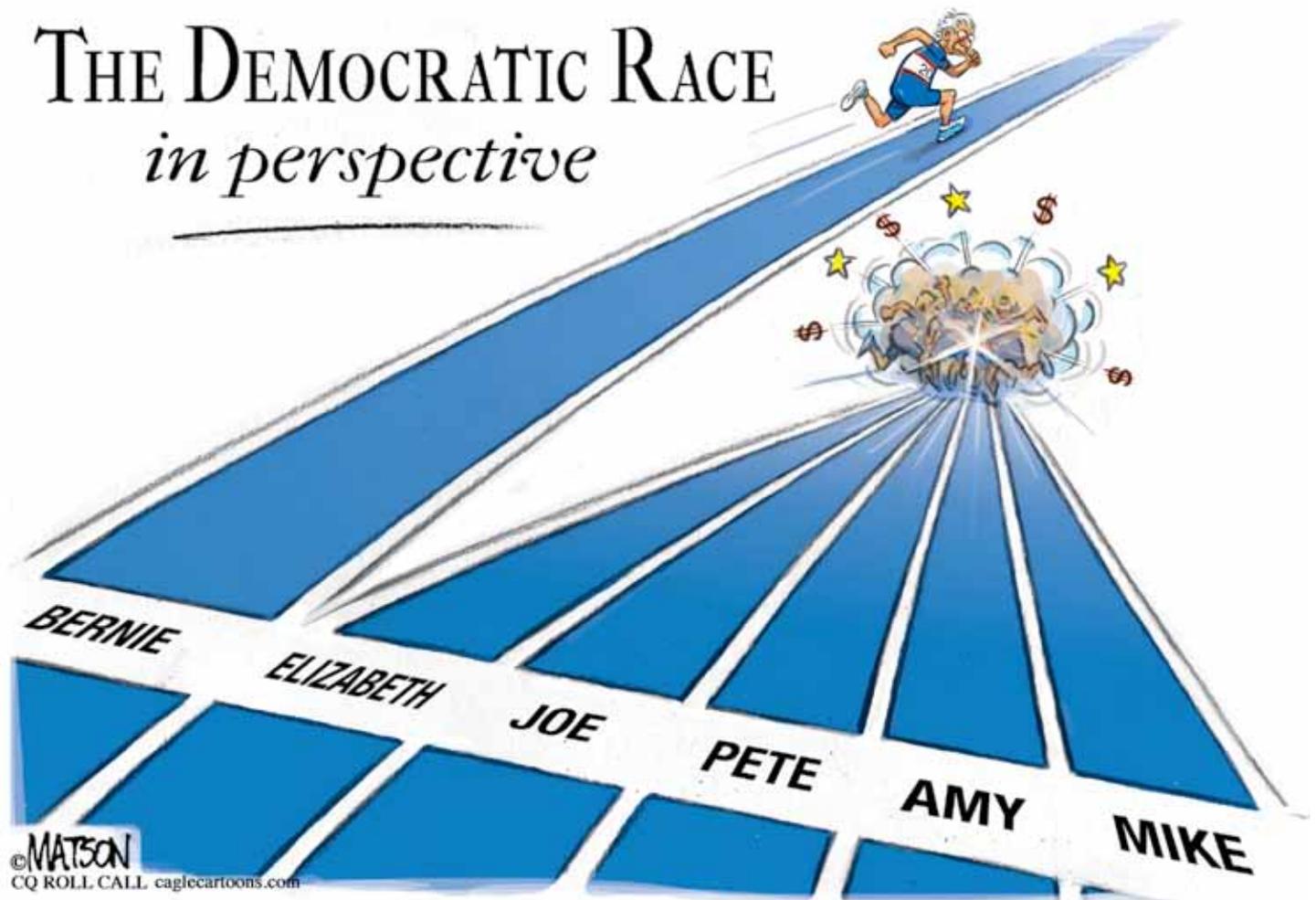
Journalists wanting to appear serious about public policy continue to rip into Sanders and Elizabeth Warren [whose policies are almost as ambitious] for the costs of their proposals but never ask self-styled moderates like Buttigieg how they plan to cope with the costs of doing nothing or too little.

A related criticism of Sanders and Warren is that they haven't come up with ways to pay for their proposals. Sanders “only explained \$25 trillion worth of revenue, which means the hole in there is bigger than the size of the entire economy of the United States,” charged Mayor Pete.

Sanders' and Warren's wealth tax would go a long way toward paying for their plans.

But even if their wealth tax paid a small fraction of the costs of their proposals, so what? As long as every additional dollar of spending reduces by more

# THE DEMOCRATIC RACE *in perspective*



than a dollar the future costs of climate change, inadequate healthcare and insufficient public investment, it makes sense to spend more.

Republican administrations have doled out gigantic tax cuts to big corporations and the wealthy without announcing specific cuts in public spending or other tax increases because – despite decades of evidence to the contrary – they claim the cuts will generate economic growth that will more than make up for any lost revenue.

Yet when Warren and Sanders propose ambitious plans for reducing empirically verifiable costs of large and growing public problems, they are skewered by fellow Democrats and the press for not having ways to pay for them.

A third line of criticism is that Sanders' and Warren's proposals are just too big. It would be safer to move cautiously and incrementally.

This argument might be convincing if the problems Sanders and Warren address were growing slowly. But experts on the environment, health, education and infrastructure are nearly unanimous: these problems are worsening exponentially.

Young people understand this, perhaps because

they will bear more of the costs of inaction. An Emerson poll of Iowa found that 44% of Democrats under 50 support Sanders and 10% favor Warren. In New Hampshire, Sanders won more voters under 30 than the other candidates combined, according to CNN exit polls. In Nevada, he captured an astonishing 65% of voters under 30.

The reason to support Sanders' and Warren's proposals isn't because they inspire and mobilize voters. It is because they are necessary.

We can no longer pretend that climate change, a wildly dysfunctional healthcare system and a yawning deficit in public investment pose insignificant challenges. Doing nothing or doing too little will make them far worse.

Obsessing about the cost of addressing them without acknowledging the cost of failing to address them is dangerously irresponsible.

*Former Clinton administration labor secretary Robert B. Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies.*

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# Jim Hightower

## *The Amazing Fall Of Donald Trump's Wall*



Big, high walls can be troublesome. Ask Humpty Dumpty. Or consider the Canaanite city of Jericho: According to a Biblical tale, its walls came tumbling down when Joshua and the Israelites encircled it and blew their horns.

However, for a real-life, epic story about wall troubles, ponder the trials and tribulations of our very own president. He trumpets that he is the most bodacious barrier builder of all, yet he can't seem to get his one "big, beautiful wall" funded or even taken seriously, much less built.

Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump has continuously stamped his tiny feet and demanded that Congress shell out more than \$10 billion of our taxpayers' dollars to erect a monster of a wall across some 2,000 miles of the U.S. border with Mexico.

Like a flimflaming snake-oil peddler, he rants that his magnificent edifice would magically keep "aliens," "rapists," "murderers," "terrorists," "drugs" and "cartels" from entering the U.S. from the south. But even when his own party controlled both houses of Congress, the presidency and the courts, his grand scheme went unloved, unfunded and unbuilt.

Still, he kept insisting ... and persisting. In January, he directed his Customs and Border Control officials to put up a short section of his 30-foot-tall wall on the border at Calexico, CA, to show the world how effective the Trump bulwark would be. Alas, though, the thing blew over! Not from a hurricane-force storm but from moderate winds topping out at only 37 miles an hour. The metal panels flung over into Mexico. Embarrassing.

More embarrassing was a personal visit Trump made to San Diego last September for a media event hailing a new supertech model of a wall that the master builder declared to be "virtually impossible" for violators to climb. Calling the design "amazing," he used a Sharpie to sign his name on the structure, declaring to the media: "I tell you this strongly: No more people can come in."

A month later, a climbing group in Kentucky built a replica of that wall and held an up-and-over competition. Winning time was 13.1 seconds! Sixty-five competitors easily topped it, including an eight-year-old girl and a guy who climbed it one-handed while juggling various items with his other hand.

Trump has, however, proven that one thing truly is impenetrable: his head. Absolutely no embarrassment, logic or factual evidence can enter his locked mind and deter his extravagant folly.

Remember when candidate Trump promised repeatedly that not only would he wall out all migrants crossing our Mexican border but – by gollies – he would also see to it that Mexico would pay the tab for his xenophobic wall?

Mexico hasn't paid a peso ... and won't. So, just as he did in building many of his luxury condos and resorts, Donald Dealmaker ran to the government, demanding that it pony up the unlimited billions of dollars for his pet political project. Aside from a token appropriation in 2018, however, Congress has said, "Ummmm ... no."

But that's no hill for a narcissistic climber. Unable to get tax money legitimately, Trump has simply stolen it, reaching into the Pentagon's budget for military funding. Ignoring the constitutional mandate that only Congress is empowered to direct the flow of money from the people's purse, Trump filched \$6.1 billion from our military last year, snatched another \$3.8 billion this month and intends to swipe at least another \$3.4 billion before the year is out.

This executive "reprogramming," as the White House euphemistically calls its daylight robbery, is being pulled off by masking Trump's wall obsession as a "national emergency." To fulfill the president's whimsical political desires, Pentagon brass has been yanking funds for military equipment and construction projects from the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, National Guard ... and, ultimately, from our fighting forces.

Presidential autocracy aside, Trump's massive larceny raises three other interesting issues of public morality.

One: His trickery sets a precedent not only for future presidents but also for our young people's behavior. Two: Our Congress critters, especially Trump Republicans, set a new standard of craven meekness in the face of this direct assault on their authority and our democracy. Three: The Pentagon, by simply kissing off a budget loss of more than \$13 billion, saying it's in excess of the military's needs, is admitting that the war machine is routinely taking away too much of the public's money.

# Health Care For People ... Or For Corporate Profits

When grassroots groups rise up against the corporate establishment trying to win some specific progressive change for the common good, the odds against them can seem daunting. As an old saying puts it: Where there's a will ... there are 1,000 won'ts.

Those won'ts tend to be moneyed powers making a killing from the status quo, so they're dead set against any change. Such has certainly been the case in the decades-long political struggle to ensure that every man, woman and child in our country gets decent health care as a human right.

Today, even though we Americans pay by far the highest price for health care, most people are denied that right by our country's profiteering, corporate-run medical industry, which treats care as a privileged commodity.

So many families are left out and maltreated by this dysfunctional system that more than 70% of Americans [including a majority of Republicans] now support replacing it with a "Medicare for All" publicly financed system that provides full health coverage for everyone, even as it saves us money.

So here come 1,000 screaming won'ts, rushing out to crush the people's will. Such usual clusters of far-right plutocratic power as the Koch brothers' billionaire club, Karl Rove's political monkey wrenchers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce clique of giant corporations have deployed their forces. But the present system is so bad, and public support for Medicare for All has grown so large so fast, that the usual corporate dismissal of such ideas wasn't working, spooking the profiteers.

Time for a powerhouse front group! Two years ago, the corporate won'ts met secretly in downtown Washington to set up an industrywide PR/lobbying juggernaut, giving it the stealth name of Partnership for America's Health Care Future. Of course, what they care about is the future of their rip-off profits, and they've committed hundreds of millions of dollars and hired an army of more than 200 lobbyists to pound the public and Congress with a nuclear level of propaganda and raw political deceit.

This Partnership of Profiteers is Washington politics at its worst – a handful of cynical self-interests using cloaks, dark money and lies to rig the system for corporate profits at the expense of human health and political morality.

As former President Lyndon Johnson used to say about special interests trying to get his support to pass some blatantly self-serving legislation: "I may not know much, but I do know the difference between chicken s--- and chicken salad."

Yet, chicken manure is all that the corporate health complex has to work with as it frantically tries to defend its current system of mass malpractice. After all, as most Americans have learned the hard way, the corporatized "care" of profiteering insurance giants, Big Pharma and hospital chains grossly overcharge us while constantly trying to shortchange or outright deny care to millions of our families.

So, unable to win public support on their own merit, the corporatists and their hired political hacks are going all out to continue their profit gouging and keep control of America's dysfunctional system. They're running a multimillion-dollar PR and lobbying campaign of lies to trash and kill all reforms that would deliver quality, comprehensive care to *everyone*, at far less cost than they can deliver.

The profiteers masquerading as a Partnership for America's Health Care Future warn ominously that such reforms as Medicare for All and a public option for health insurance would take away people's "choice" and their "control" over health care.

Hello ... we presently have no choice or control. Our "care" is managed by a handful of drug and hospital monopolists whose primary objective is not improving our health but fattening their profits. And the undeniable, ugly truth is that the "Partnership" fattens its profits by shortchanging our care.

That's one reason the American Medical Association and others are dropping out of the "Partnership's" political front. Honest health care practitioners don't want to be part of its fraud and its chicken manure PR campaign.

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# How Journalists Can Fight Back Against 'Fake News' Charges

BY JOHN M. WYLIE III

*"Congress shall make no law respecting ... or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press." – The First Amendment*

**W**hether you're the New York Times or the Deep River, IA, Record, you live where the First Amendment lets your readers label anything and everything you publish "fake news."

You know the First Amendment protects you. But that's true only if you use its unwritten Miranda clause: "You have the right to remain silent."

An unabridged Black's Law Dictionary is awfully handy to have near your keyboard. It contains not only the Constitution but also the officially recognized legal definition of every word in it, plus virtually every term used in courts nationwide.

Its definitions are crystal clear. Abridge means "to reduce or diminish" and freedom means "the right to do what one wants without being controlled or restricted by anyone."

For the press, that means government can't restrict our ability to print what we want with very few restrictions. Too often we forget that it also gives us the right to not print what we believe shouldn't be. We're journalists, not stenographers or court reporters.

Two recent examples illustrate how important this is.

The first involves now-retired Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher. He was accused of war crimes including premeditated murder of a 17-year-old terrorist, threatening to kill the subordinates who reported him to investigators, killing other Iraqi civilians, and posing with the corpse of an ISIS militant.

A military jury acquitted him of all but the last charge. One key witness against him recanted, admitting he had murdered the teen.

Since Gallagher had been held in pre-trial detention until President Trump ordered his release to house arrest, he got no jail time but faced a hearing on whether to demote him a rank and revoke the Trident medallion denoting his SEAL status. The president ordered that Gallagher keep them when he retired, which he had agreed to do.

On Nov. 25 the New York Post ran a story about the case, including the forced resignation of the Secretary of the Navy. It labeled Gallagher "embattled," certainly a valid and accurate description. But the headline called him "disgraced," clearly inappropriate given the trial outcome.

Yet "disgraced" has often been his first name in news outlets from Slate to the AP and many in be-

tween. A better choice would be exercising the right to remain silent by simply dropping any adjective. State the facts and let the reader decide.

In Oklahoma, Gov. Kevin Stitt and the state's sovereign Native American nations are in a brutal fight. He decided to unilaterally terminate a compact [equivalent to a treaty between nations] on its renewal date. The pact gives tribes the exclusive right to operate Class III gambling by paying the state an exclusivity fee. Stitt wanted the fee increased, and said he would declare the casinos illegal Jan. 1 when he claimed the compact would expire.

The tribes sued him in federal court, citing an assault on their sovereignty. Another clause in the compact says it automatically renews if the tribes have met certain conditions, which they and most outsiders knowledgeable about gambling laws say they have.

The compact also allows negotiations on terms such as fees, which the tribes say they will be happy to do but only after the renewal is confirmed.

Attorney General Mike Hunter withdrew from defending the state, Secretary of Native American Affairs Lisa Billy resigned with a blistering attack on the governor, Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell has been silent but is a staunch advocate of tourism and economic development – both of which have been greatly enhanced by the casinos, several of which are huge resorts which include major concert venues, golf courses, conference centers, fine dining and other attractions with no connection to gambling.

Perhaps worse for the governor, former OU Head Football Coach Barry Switzer, whose endorsement can make or destroy any campaign, has come out swinging on behalf of the Native Americans, ending a TV ad by wagging his finger as he would at an errant lineman while telling people to back the tribes.

The ad was one tiny part of the work of a tribal alliance formed to promote how their profits from casinos and other businesses they've initially funded provide health, housing, medical and other benefits to tribal citizens plus grants to public schools, safety and law enforcement agencies and civic causes that serve both tribal and non-tribal Oklahomans.

Stitt has been unable to match the television and newspaper advertising blitz that began with a soft message of the benefits but moved into much stronger territory – including one with a Highway Patrol lieutenant, in uniform, noting he is a tribal citizen and owes allegiance to both. The unspoken message is clear.

If Stitt tried to forcibly close the casinos, it would require using armed state officers to blockade access to tribal lands, which is of questionable legality. Forcibly entering tribal lands would be an act of war, the equivalent of invading a foreign nation.

Further complicating the situation is that well-trained and equipped tribal police forces have mutual aid agreements with their Oklahoma counterparts and in at least one county a tribal dispatch center serves both tribal and state emergency agencies.

Stitt countered with the theme that he was representing all four million Oklahomans, not just tribal citizens. That soon evolved to saying he was “elected by all four million Oklahomans.”

That was dutifully repeated in dozens of news stories until some reports noted that Oklahoma had just 3.94 million residents when Stitt was elected and 3.95 million according to Census estimates. Four million has long been an elusive dream.

Further, only 1.19 million of the 2.02 million regis-

tered voters cast ballots in 2018. Stitt got 644,579 or 54.33% in a three-way race according the State Election Board.

So instead of being “elected by all four million” voters, he was elected by 54.33% of the 58.8% percent of the eligible voters who represented just 51.1% of the state’s population or actually just 16.35% of the people living in Oklahoma. [If Oklahoma had four million people in the state as the governor claims, the percentage would drop to 16.1%.]

The lesson for all of us is simple: The phrase used by many Journalism 101 professors – “If your mother tells you something, check it out” – is more important than ever. If something anyone says seems implausible, check it out before printing it.

If deadlines don’t allow detailed checking and you can’t avoid using the quote, use “contended” or “claimed” or some other appropriate word showing that it is the word of the speaker which has not been

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## Bogus

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on citizens’ rights to bear arms.

Courthouse officials have decided that having folks wander in wearing bandoleer ammunition belts strapped across their chests to form a St. Andrews Cross, holding a carbine in the crook of an arm and with a Colt on one hip and a Bowie knife on the other is not conducive to public safety.

Seems reasonable to me, too. [Even the Wild West had gun-free zones. The Gunfight near the OK Corral was precipitated by illegal gun-toting.] But deputies operating metal detectors contradicts the sheriff’s political palaver.

The sheriffs enter shakier ground when they promise not to enforce any laws with which they disagree.

We have legislators to write laws, courts to interpret them and lawmen to enforce them. A lawman choosing which laws to enforce would be violating his oath of office. Justice is served when we can count on all laws being equally enforced.

Which gets us back to the publicly-paid deputies staffing the metal detector.

On my trips to the courthouse, I go through the metal detector, even removing my belt to make sure that the buckle doesn’t include one of those hidden frog-stabbers.

Invariably, while I’m going through this – very reasonable – screening process, some guy in a suit will stroll in carrying a briefcase large enough to hold a brace of dueling pistols and get waved on into the building.

Well, I think only one Oklahoma lawyer is currently on the wrong end of a murder charge. And the folks we know are the folks we know – until we

don’t know what happened.

I have finally quit reminding the deputies that many of the lawmen in the basement of Dallas police headquarters knew Jack Ruby when he pulled out a gun and shot Lee Harvey Oswald. One even called out his name.

So, we already have selective enforcement of a law. It applies to some, but not to a favored few. I guess arbitrarily deciding which laws to enforce is the next illogical step.

But this is truly a non-issue in open-carry Oklahoma. Just political puff and nonsense.

The issue arose in Virginia, where Gov. Ralph Northam tried and failed to get a ban on the sale of assault weapons and a ban on magazines holding more than 12 rounds.

Before the Virginia Senate tabled those measures, Culpeper County Sheriff Scott Jenkins had pledged to skirt any gun law he didn’t like by deputizing anyone in the county to allow them to keep their high-powered weaponry.

He told the BBC, ““My statement was simply that I would choose to swear in hundreds or even thousands of our citizens as deputy sheriffs if need be, to allow them to possess weapons and push back on that overreach by our government.”

Well, of course, nothing speaks more to public safety than thousands of untrained, highly-armed people with persecution complexes riding around with badges ready to prove their need to go heeled.

“Rally ‘round the rhetoric.” No one is coming for our guns.

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



# Pronouns And Politics

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

When I heard that Merriam-Webster had named “they” as 2019 word of the year, because of a significant increase in the number of searches about its meaning and usage, my thoughts turned to two people: Phyllis Hein, my high school English teacher, and William Safire, whose “On Language” columns in the *New York Times Magazine*, and books collecting those columns, were required reading for lovers of language from 1979 until shortly before his death in 2009.

Safire was a widely read language maven who wrote with panache and wit and a twinkle in his prose. Mrs. Hein toiled in obscurity in a tiny country school in northwest Oklahoma in the 1960s, yet her influence on the speech and writing of her students was as palpable as the sheer joy with which Safire approached his topics: usage, style, slang, origins, pronunciation, neologisms, jargon, and dialect, categories indexing the content of his first book, *On Language*.

Mrs. Hein’s approach to teaching English was old school, as we would now say. Multiple worksheets,

diagramming sentences, memorization, and grammar quizzes: drill and kill. No sentence fragments. [Sorry, Mrs. Hein.] Writers should attempt to studiously avoid splitting infinitives. [Oops!]

For Mrs. Hein the traditional rules of grammar were authoritative. Like most English teachers at the time she was a prescriptivist. Rules of good grammar prescribe how everyone ought to speak and write.

Linguists and learned popular writers such as Safire distinguish prescriptivists and descriptivists when categorizing opposing approaches to grammatical rules and norms of usage. Here’s how Safire explains the long “titanic tug-of-war ... among users of English.” “The struggle is between the prescriptivists [those who say ‘tug-of-war’ is the proper name of the game] and the descriptivists [those who say ‘tug-o’-war’ better describes the way the name is spoken by most people].”

Mrs. Hein’s more rebellious students already had a sense there was something fishy about her insistence on the authority of tradition and custom. As

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budding descriptivists they had their own source of authority for the legitimacy of current usage. “Whad’you mean ‘ain’t’ ain’t a word? It’s right there in the dictionary.”

Dictionary authors are descriptivists. Their task is to describe the vast and constantly changing landscape of current usage. As a matter of fact – that is, descriptively – “ain’t” surely is a common usage in everyday informal speech. If I’m a descriptivist, I ain’t a language snob, because the rules of English usage are flexible rather than invariant. Times change; rules change.

**H**ere’s how Safire distinguished prescriptivists and descriptivists. “The first group, called Language Snobs, insists that the language of the past is correct and should be followed, and the second group, or Language Slobs, wallows in solecism and holds any language used today is destined to be the brave new word of the future. English teachers are generally in the prescriptivist bunch and see themselves as clinging to the ramparts in heroic defense of the rules of clarity and precision in the native tongue, while lexicographers are usually in the descriptivist crowd, portraying themselves as scientific recorders of the reality of the living, growing language.”

There’s something unsatisfactory about the distinction between descriptivists and prescriptivists if we think that the Slobs and the Snobs are playing wholly different games, one exclusively descriptive and the other evaluative, telling us how we ought to talk and write.

Central to the descriptivist approach to language is an ethos about what is permissible in the linguistic activities of English users. It is an ethos that may reject traditional norms of speech and writing in favor of freedom of expression associated with slang, invention, and cultural context. Descriptivism seems less conservative, more progressive. Dictionaries don’t merely describe; they also excuse, allow, and legitimize. They offer an alternative linguistic morality to the stodgy conservatism of Language Snobs.

Each approach has a central, *prima facie* problem. The problem for prescriptivists is how to ground the authority of their prescriptions. Appeals to traditional forms of usage may seem to have no more force than any other appeal to history that takes the form, “That’s the way we’ve always done things; therefore, that’s the way we ought to do things now and in the future.” The evaluative “ought” doesn’t follow from the historical “is.” There may be good reasons for change: moral, political, linguistic.

The problem for descriptivists is that misuses and grammatical missteps that promote lack of precision and clarity in speech and writing may become enshrined in common usage, thus promoting woolly thinking. And Language Snobs may associate good form with aesthetic values – grace, style, beauty – underappreciated by Language Slobs.

Merriam-Webster’s decision to name “they” as word of the year expresses a novel mixture of descriptivism and a different defense of prescriptivism.

Among Mrs. Hein’s students, there was no uncertainty about the meaning and use of “they” [their, them] as a plural pronoun. If someone said, “they went to the store yesterday,” we knew that two or more persons went to the store.

I’m unsure when the singular “they” started to seep into common usage. I began teaching college students in the 1970s, first as a graduate student, then as a full-time professor. Early on I don’t recall noticing the ungrammatical, singular “they.” But something happened in the following decades.

Feminists claimed that statements such as “Each person has a right to his own opinion” are sexist and exclusive. They insisted on the use of gender-neutral, inclusive language: “Every person has a right to their own opinion.”

My sense was that my students were unaware of the background, the politics of pronouns, but their speech and writing reflected the pervasive change to the singular “they.” They seemed ignorant about the traditional grammar of certain pronouns.

Those who were sensitive to traditional grammar wrote, “Each person [anyone, anybody] has a right to his or her own opinion,” an infelicitous solution that respected customary rules of grammar while responding to feminists’ demands for inclusive language.

**M**y own solution was to find a middle way between the Snobs and the Slobs. After all, “they” is plainly plural, but I was willing to alter the gender of the relevant pronouns. To satisfy the feminists I would say, “Anyone has a right to her own opinion,” then use the masculine a few sentences later, and alternate when necessary. Or I would write: “Persons have a right to their own opinion” [probably the better solution]. I resisted the solecism of the singular “they.”

To understand how the politics of usage have changed, here are comments by a writer in the *Economist*, 2001. “The reluctance to use the third person singular is epidemic. No one who speaks in public nowadays would dare to show that they is insensitive to gender-neutral terminology. Everyone knows they has to offend against the rules of grammar rather than the sensibilities of women. The average broadcaster, if they is English-speaking, finds it hard to use ‘he’ or ‘his’ in a general sense. The average politician, though they cares passionately about education, education, education, is even readier to tear up the rules of grammar. Even the average schoolteacher, if they exists, knows they risk trouble if they chooses to be syntactically rather than politically correct. What should be done?”

The writer concludes by agreeing with “grammarians of old using ‘he’ and ‘his’ to encompass both male and female in the singular,” and adds, “If you’re a woman, don’t be insulted ... ”

Almost 20 years later the issues are more complicated. Constructions that use traditional gender categories [“Every person has a right to his or her own opinion”] are now anachronistic, because there are individuals who do not identify as either a man or a woman. Gender identity may not be binary.

The Merriam-Webster word of the year is the gender-neutral singular “they,” used to refer to a person who is gender non-conforming, whose gender identity is nonbinary. It is supposed to be a “new nonbinary pronoun.”

Merriam-Webster’s recognition of the singular, nonbinary “they” – much to the consternation of conservatives who can smell the stench of political correctness a mile away – is a descriptive acknowledgement of a usage that, if not common, is at least widely adopted. It also implicitly legitimizes more widespread usages that are or have been ungrammatical, not political.

The recognition expresses a different kind of prescriptivism, an activist approach in which the authority of a grammatical rule is based not on tradition [Mrs. Hein’s language snobbery] but on considerations that might be called political or ethical, depending on your point of view. The new prescriptivism claims it is based on appeals to equal respect, compassion, and inclusiveness.

The new prescriptivism is codified in various style guidelines promulgated by respected organizations, for example, The American Psychological Association [APA] and the Associated Press. A shared prescription is the claim that we should avoid “he” or “she” when referring to a person whose gender is unknown or to a specific person who prefers the nonbinary “they.”

The new prescriptivism ironically appears on the scene. This type of prescriptivist is a progressive politician, not a conservative caretaker of tradition.

Last fall I witnessed a campus demonstration for the singular, nonbinary “they.” Students demanded that it is permissible to use the singular “they” and – oh, by the way – it is an ethical requirement. Amid the placards, chants, and speechifying there was not a red MAGA cap in sight.

**A**s writers and speakers who are lovers of language and sensitive human beings, what should we do? How far should we go to chart a path between Language Snobs and Language Slobs, as William Safire did in his writing on language? I’m influenced by the Ghost of Grammar Past and the model of good judgment and playfulness found in “On Language.” What would Safire say? [WWSS?] Yet he called himself a “libertarian language activist.” Each person has a right to its own pronoun?

My sensibilities are still in tune with old-fashioned prescriptivism, but my liberal credentials are, for the most part, unimpeachable. I’m willing to re-think my approach. It seems to me there are a number of different situations in which we are called upon to

make a linguistic decision about the use of “they.” To what should we appeal? Tradition? Plain meaning? Politics? PC?

When we know the gender identity of a person, I think we should use traditional grammar. In speaking of a female friend, you should say, “Now there’s a woman who knows what she wants.” [Of course.]

A football coach, referring to his two sons who are also football coaches, says: “We’ve always had a very competitive household. Pretty much every day, someone was going to be mad because they lost.” That’s a misuse.

Suppose you refer to members of a group whose gender you do not “know,” in a strong sense, but it’s reasonable to assume a specific gender identity. It is appropriate to say, “Each member of the Kansas City Chiefs should do his best in the Super Bowl.” [Not “their best.”]

How about using traditionally correct pronouns in a general context? “Each voter should exercise their right to vote.” No. “All voters should exercise their right to vote.”

Here I depart from a new prescriptivist APA guide offering a more interesting example: “Each student submitted their art portfolio to the committee.” “Using ‘their’ in this case, rather than ‘his’ or ‘her’ acknowledges that some students might not use ‘he’ or ‘she’ pronouns.”

**S**hould we violate traditional grammar in a general context because there is some chance that an individual may be gender non-conforming? I would not do so, out of respect for traditional grammatical norms [which I do not think are meant to exclude either women or gender-nonconforming individuals] and a disinclination to reinforce the widespread misuse of “they” in wider contexts.

I do not mean to offend individuals whose identity is nonbinary, nor do I think they should be insulted. Perhaps it’s best simply to change the sentence and squash the issue by referring to students [plural] who submitted their portfolio.

Finally, there is the situation in which a specific person demands the nonbinary “they” because they [?] don’t want to be referred to as “he” or “she.” University of Toronto Professor Jordan Peterson is quoted as saying, “I don’t recognize another person’s right to determine what pronouns I use to address them.” [Shouldn’t he say “to address him” or “to address her”?] “I’m not using the words other people require me to use.”

In this situation I may appear to cave and use “they” as the referent. But in my mind I have respected the straightforward grammatical meaning of “they” because I have [secretly!] transformed it into a proper name. If someone wants to be called “they,” fine. “Hi, my name is They. What’s yours?”

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

## *How Billionaire Boys Club Ravaged America's Public Schools*

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### **SLAYING GOLIATH**

***The Passionate Resistance To Privatization  
And The Right to Save America's Public Schools***

**By Diane Ravitch**

**Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group**

**325 pages, \$27.95**

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### **BY JOHN THOMPSON**

Diane Ravitch started writing *Slaying Goliath: The Passionate Resistance to Privatization and the Fight to Save America's Public Schools* in 2018 as teachers strikes erupted across the nation. These walkouts began in Red States where conservative legislatures drastically cut funding to under-resourced schools. Even in the places with the lowest salaries, like Oklahoma, educators were motivated by terrible working conditions that meant awful learning environments for students.

It wasn't just the lack of money, and the resulting damage done by huge class sizes, a lack of textbooks, and neglected buildings, that motivated teachers. They also were resisting the disruption caused by corporate school reform, and the damage it had done to their kids.

Teachers were sick of teach-to-the-test malpractice, reward and punish cultures and mandates that produce in-one-ear-out-the-other skin-deep instruction. The joy of teaching and learning was being undermined by the privatization of education. Many or most of these teachers put up with "reform" as long as they could before joining the "Resistance."

*Slaying Goliath* is the third transformative book written by Ravitch after changing her mind on education policy. Although her academic histories of education had always been more balanced than progressives acknowledged, Ravitch had worked in the Education Department of President George H.W. Bush, and she had served on the board of the conservative Fordham Foundation.

In 1992, she went to a briefing with David Kearns, the former Xerox CEO, where the Sandia Report's findings were explained. Kearns and other reformers were outraged that scholars challenged the alarmism of "A Nation at Risk," the infamous Reagan-sponsored indictment of public education. They refused to release the report which explained that American schools weren't failing.

Ravitch recalls the way that education scholars were vilified for revealing that the so-called "crisis in education" was a "politically inspired hoax," and a "manufactured crisis." In a passage which exemplifies Ravitch's candor, she writes about the late Gerald Bracey, "a prolific and outspoken education researcher" who challenged the conventional wisdom that she was then defending. Ravitch then writes, "I personally apologize to him."

As the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 started to undermine schooling, Ravitch joined progressive educator Deborah Meier in a dialogue which changed Ravitch and the struggle against data-driven, competition-driven reforms. In 2010, she released the *Death and Life of the Great American School System* and three years later she published *Reign of Error*.

Ravitch "renounced" her old views and exposed the "smear campaign" which she presciently described as "privatization." They funded so-called "transformative" change, designed to drive "bad teachers," protected by "bad unions," out of schools.

Ravitch's talent with words may have been as important as her evidence-based evaluation of the inherent

flaws of the technocratic micro-managing known as “reform.” The initial political successes of the reformers were driven by the huge bank accounts funding savage attacks on teachers and school systems.

During the height of corporate reform a decade ago, Ravitch’s ability to coin a phrase seemed to be educators’ only means of self-defense. She nailed the issue by identifying “the Billionaires Boys Club” as the sponsors of “corporate reform;” now Ravitch dubs their movement “Goliath.”

Her use of the term “privatization” helped us understand that the neoliberal attack, funded by Silicon Valley and Hedge Fund elites, was interrelated with the overall privatization movement which intimidated so many Democrats into retreating from the War on Poverty and other social justice campaigns. [In doing so, she paved the way for excellent work such as OU’s Associate Dean Lawrence Baines’ Privatization of America’s Institutions.]

Now, Ravitch renames both sides of the education wars. The Billionaires tried to claim the word reform, but they never deserved that title. They are “Disrupters.” We who fought them off are the “Resistance.”

*Slaying Goliath* reviews the failure of NCLB, and how 1990s improvements in student performance as measured by the reliable NAEP assessment slowed and then stopped. Then, Obama-era reforms put NCLB’s high stakes testing, cultures of competition, and corruption of test scores and education values on steroids. But most of the book describes the emergence, the struggles and victories of the grassroots Resistance.

During the first decade of the 21st century, the Disrupters won nearly all of their political battles as their micromanaging failed to improve schools. Their testing often turned modern classrooms into sped-up Model T assembly lines, as their behaviorism turned charter schools into weapons for undermining teacher autonomy,

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due process, and professionalism. During the last decade, Disrupters suffered political and educational defeats as they learned that it is easier to kick down a barn than rebuild it.

However, Ravitch reminds us that the Disrupters are still threat-

ening. She compares today’s danger to that which faced a man who decapitated a rattlesnake but who nearly died after being bitten by the detached head.

Oklahomans should take special interest in the narratives where the snake’s head is still a threat to

our schools.

Today, many or most of Goliath's coalition have become disenchanted with standardized testing, but their Disruption model can't function without it. Oklahomans should heed the wisdom of reform-minded Paymon Rouhanifard, the former Camden superintendent, who abolished report cards after listening to complaints, and eventually denounced standardized testing.

Rhode Island, where their state superintendent Deborah Gist tried to fire all of the teachers in Central Falls, was an example of students rising up. They staged a "Zombie March," and created "Take the Test" for 50 elected officials, architects, scientists, engineers, college professors, reporters, directors of non-profit organizations, and reporters. Even with such educated test takers, 60% didn't score high enough to earn a diploma.

Gist, now Tulsa Public Schools superintendent, called their protest "deeply irresponsible on the part of the adults" for sending the message that tests don't matter.

Since philanthropists who still support Gist have also funded "portfolio management," Oklahomans should read the evidence about that kinder and gentler-sounding recipe for permanent teach-to-the-test and conflict.

Oklahoma philanthropists seem to believe the spin claiming that the New Orleans portfolio model was a success, but even the researchers who support that all-charter district's prohibitively expensive approach admit that its school quality peaked in 2013.

As Ravitch explains, "A portfolio district is one where the local board [or some entity operating in its stead] acts like a stockbrokerage, holding onto winners [schools with high test scores] and getting rid of losers [schools with low test scores], replacing them

with charters."

As she further explains, these failures are linked to the Disrupters' infatuation with mass closures of schools. To take one example, Chicago, Ravitch explains how the Chicago Consortium on School Research [CCSR] found "few gains" due to closing schools but "a profound sense of loss: lost schools, lost communities, lost relationships. These were losses that the Disrupters never understood. Test scores were all that mattered to them." Chicago lost over 200,000 black residents between 2000 and 2016. And the CCSR further explained how they "caused large disruptions without clear benefits for students."

Whether in Chicago, Tulsa, or Oklahoma City, closures may produce little or no gains, but they will lead to a "period of mourning." This is one of the many ways reason why Oklahomans should move on from the presumption that disruptive and transformative change made sense. That mindset is another legacy of not seeing "value in bonds among schools, families, and community."

Whether you call it transformative change or disruption, this mentality was committed to "blind adherence" to the corporate demand for "outputs" that "don't work for schools for the same reasons they don't work for families, churches, and other institutions that function primarily on the basis of human interactions, not profits and losses."

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

## Fake News

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

verified.

As soon as time allows, verify. If it turns out the statement would cause the Pinocchio nose that breaks car windows in Geico ads, report the details.

After that, simply follow the unwritten First Amendment Miranda Warning: You can remain silent to protect our credibility. Use silence wisely and it will protect and restore our credibility – and, dare we hope, maybe even promote more intelligent, civil discourse. *John M. Wylie II is a member of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame, retired publisher of the Oologah Lake Leader, produces a syndicated newspaper feature to encourage families to share the contents of newspapers as they once did after dinner, and writes for multiple trade journals on First Amendment-related issues and investigations involving fraud, government corruption and environmental issues. This editorial initially appeared in the February issue of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors journal.*

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helped provide a 30,000-foot view of why this effort to muzzle the state's public sector unions is so worrisome.

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Finally, we encourage you to share Observercast with your friends who may not know about The Observer, but who share a love for this state and a passion to be as well informed as possible on the issues of the day. Happy listening!

## *State Sanctioned Killing*

It's not only disheartening, but also baffling that state leaders recently announced they are ending the five-year moratorium on executions. Frankly, there is no plausible explanation save Election Year politics.

Consider these facts: In the five years since the state bungled its last attempts at execution, Oklahoma hasn't suffered a crime wave of apocalyptic proportions. To the contrary, violent crime is down.

Moreover, Oklahoma's budget picture just got murkier. Thanks to a dip in oil and gas activity, lawmakers will have \$85.5 million less to spend in 2020-21.

Why pursue state-sanctioned killing now, of all times, given it is significantly more expensive than warehousing a life-without-parole inmate?

Plus: Given Oklahoma's Keystone Kops record on lethal injection, the state undoubtedly will be headed back to federal court for more unnecessary and costly litigation all because ... what?

It wants retribution? Twenty-three hours a day in the underground H-Unit, in what amounts to solitary confinement, isn't punishment enough?

Not for the Republican supermajority at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. The "tough on crime" mantra was a pillar of its takeover of state government a decade ago.

Oklahoma, of course, never was as dangerous or lawless as the rhetoric insinuated – certainly not enough to warrant becoming the nation's, if not the world's, incarceration leader.

Alas, fear can be a powerful political elixir.

The question now is, will most Oklahomans continue to buy what amounts to a medicine show potion?

There's certainly evidence the lock 'em up, throw away the key days have passed. Just think about what happened during the death penalty moratorium. Oklahoma voters overwhelmingly embraced smart on crime reforms, instead favoring common sense solutions that included less incarceration, expanded mental health and substance abuse services, and more.

The reforms still haven't been fully implemented,



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**TOM GOODWIN**

*Cheyenne, OK*

*Reader and supporter of The Observer  
for over 30 years and counting.*



but thanks to those that have, the results couldn't be clearer: Less cost to taxpayers. Better outcomes. What could be more win-win than help transform a lawbreaker into a productive tax-paying citizen?

Gov. Kevin Stitt, Attorney General Mike Hunter and other "pro-lifers" who nonetheless support state-sanctioned killing, insist that carrying out the punishment would help provide justice for victims' families.

That's debatable. What isn't, is our criminal justice system is far from flawless. There is the very real possibility innocents have been – or are about to be – executed. Thanks to DNA and other advances, we now know one in 10 death row inmates were wrongly convicted.

Heed the wise words of Rev. Don Health, chair of the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty: "I have great empathy for the victims' families. No one can appreciate the loss that they have suffered and continue to suffer. I do not understand how killing another person promotes healing. ... The death penalty brings justice only if you define justice as retribution and vengeance."

The 2020 Legislature still has time to outlaw state-sanctioned killing. Example: Rep. Jason Dunnington's HB 2876, which was not given a committee hearing, could be folded into another bill. That would truly be smart criminal justice reform.

## *Stitt's School Plans*

Two years ago, a statewide teacher walkout thrust public education to the top of the legislative agenda. Today, it is an afterthought.

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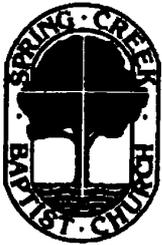
*Only a fool would try to deprive working men and women of the right to join the union of their choice. —Dwight D. Eisenhower*



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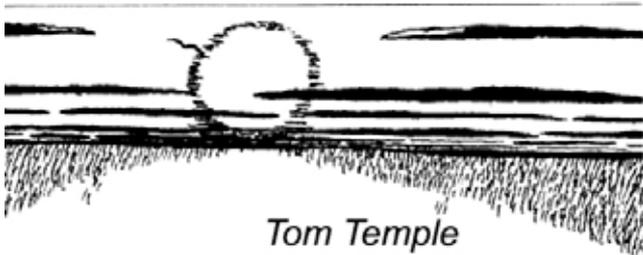
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# Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Extra shot of espresso, please: Daylight savings time returns at 2 a.m. Mar. 8, meaning we all lose a precious 60 minutes of sleep when clocks spring forward an hour.

Congratulations to our friend Rachel Hubbard, KO-SU's new executive director – a top-notch journalist and even better person. She succeeds the now-retired Kelly Burley who worked wonders to bolster public radio in Oklahoma.

Noteworthy: The New York Times and High Country News uncovered evidence Gov. Kevin Stitt's Cherokee roots trace to a white ancestor who allegedly bought his family's tribal enrollment in the 1880s.

Stilwell's life expectancy isn't Third World bad, after all. Turns out Centers for Disease Control research misfired when it lumped all P.O. boxes into one census tract. Rather than a life expectancy of 56.3 years, Stilwell's actually is about 74 – still below state [75.7] and national [78.8] averages.

Last month we dinged U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn for being one of only eight Democrats to oppose a resolution limiting Donald Trump's ability to wage war in Iran. She later supported resolutions that restricted presidential authority to attack Iran and deploy force in the Middle East.

Looking for hope in a rough-and-tumble election year? According to Time, only 17% of Millennials identified as solidly Republican in 2018. Now, if they only turn out to vote.

Leave it to the Whopper-in-chief to roll back Obama era policies requiring more fruits and vegetables in the nation's school lunches. What's next? A steady diet of Big Macs and McNuggets and fries, oh my?

Florida recently pulled 80 boa constrictors from the Everglades during its annual Python Bowl to raise awareness of the threats posed by invasive species. Sleep well, my friends.

We urge all to mark Earth Hour on Mar. 28 by turning off your lights for one hour beginning at 8:30 p.m.

# Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

ly suffered from bone spurs as touted by his doctor. Limbaugh suffered from a pilonidal cyst on his backside [a bunion on his butt!]

The famous talk show host and strong Republican supporter is someone I consider very racist. I say this as someone that listened to some of his programs in the late '80s or early '90s [I did not agree with Limbaugh's point of view, I only wanted to know what his propaganda was]. It was at a time when Limbaugh was going to sponsor a cruise ship tour for his devotees. Limbaugh hired an old time blues singer, Clarence "Frogman" Henry, to entertain during the cruise. I believe the only reason he chose Frogman is that Limbaugh enjoyed making fun of Frogman and other blacks and some whites for using the word "ax" instead of the word "ask." I heard Limbaugh laugh about it and repeat it several times: "I want to ax you a question." Limbaugh would do this many times as he promoted his cruise and advertise that Frogman would be there, too. If I remember correctly, due to a lack of interest, the cruise was cancelled.

I think it is appalling that Trump had an opportunity to present the medal to someone truly deserving – a true American hero of "the greatest generation" during Black History Month – but instead chose to give it to someone, who like him, avoided defending our country and was a racist to boot!

I can only wonder what Col. McGee thought of that slight.

Wallace Collins  
Norman

*Editor's Note: Wallace Collins is a former state representative and state Democratic Party chair.*

Editor, The Observer:

Pete Buttigieg's campaign has something called "rules of the road" – basically it means, be nice. If you're on the official Pete campaign Facebook page, they block you if you're considered by the moderators to be going off the road map. That's good as it defines the behavior adults should use in public forums and Buttigieg practices what he preaches on the debate stages and town halls of his campaign. Sometimes he's mocked by other candidate for being too perfect.

Growing up, I too, wanted to be the perfect boy, and then the perfect gay boy, and then the perfect gay man. It's not always possible or practical and that's one of

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the reasons I'm so gung-ho for Mayor Pete. I consider Buttigieg to be a good role model for gay boys and men who don't know how to handle their orientation and the opprobrium it attracts sometimes.

Granted, all people have different talents and foibles and must find and follow their own maps, but it sure as hell helps to have as your compass a man like Pete Buttigieg.

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I do so wish that Teddy Roosevelt's eldest daughter were alive now to comment on Trump.

One of my favorite "Alice Quips" regarded the notorious hard drinking womanizer and largely incompetent president, Warren G. Harding, to wit: "He was not a bad man. He was simply a slob!"

Other noteworthy Alice quotes: "If you can't say something good about someone, sit right here by me."

To Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who had jokingly remarked at a party, "Here's my blind date. I am going to call you Alice," she sarcastically said, "Sen. McCarthy, you are not going to call me Alice. The truckman, the trashman and the policeman on my block may call me Alice, but you may not."

She informed President Lyndon B. Johnson that she wore wide-brimmed hats so he couldn't kiss her.

When a well-known Washington senator was discovered to have been having an affair with a young woman less than half his age, she quipped, "You can't make a soufflé rise twice."

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The SunriseMovement.com is rounding up millions of young people coast-to-coast to vote FOR candidates supporting government action on Climate Change, and *against* climate-deniers at all levels – city, state and national.

With majorities of young people, women and minorities – African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, Muslim-Americans, LGBTQ-Americans, Other-Americans [and reasonable straight white males] – *we will turn the tide*, and usher in an era of principled American government.

Do what you can. Elections are won by *turnout, turnout, turnout*.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

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

Editor, The Observer:

Elected in 1916, America's first congresswoman, Jeannette Rankin, of Montana, said, "The first chance I got I voted no to war because women are going to have to stop war." How prophetic she was.

Of the two dozen Democratic candidates for president, only two are anti-war, Tulsi Gabbard, Hawaii congresswoman, and Houston author Marianne Williamson.

Hindu Gabbard is the first female combat vet to run for president. She is opposed to the U.S. intervention in Iraq, Libya, Venezuela and Syria.

Gabbard calls Hillary Clinton "queen of the war mongers."

Williamson has been called "the high priestess of pop religion." She backs the establishment of a U.S. Peace Department with a Secretary for Peace in the president's cabinet.

They are joined by the late gadfly and Korean War combat vet Frosty Troy, who said, "War is organized misery, not the John Wayne movies."

I stand with Frosty and Will Rogers who said, "People talk peace but men devote their life's work to war. It won't stop till as much brains and scientific study are put to aid peace as there is to promote war."

I've ben a peacenik since my daughter's father piloted a Cobra gunship and was shot down and killed in Vietnam.

Neither she nor I have recovered.

I support creation of a Peace Department as proposed by former Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
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Just look at Gov. Kevin Stitt's proposed 2020-21 budget: Oh, sure, it would provide \$11 million necessary to continue funding last year's teacher pay raises. But it would invest zero towards reducing class sizes – vital to student achievement. Or to offsetting ever-increasing operational costs [700,000 students]. Or to providing retirees their first cost-of-living increase since 2008.

Worse, Stitt would rob schools of \$30 million via a backdoor voucher scheme called the Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship – dollars going mostly to private schools instead.

And higher education – increasingly out-of-reach to many Oklahomans after a decade of starvation budgets [26% cut]? Crickets.

A Top 10 agenda? Hardly. Stitt's misplaced priorities are Bottom 10 ingredients.

Shouldn't a pro-life governor care about children once they're born? Take steps to ensure they have opportunities to become all their creator intended? Isn't that true leadership?

Governors' budget proposals routinely end up in File 13, of course. Legislators have different priorities. Yet, Stitt's priorities should concern all who support public schools. Why? Because they reflect core Republican values.

Doubt that? A day after Stitt's State of the State, President Trump invoked the term "government schools" in his State of the Union speech. That's a dog whistle for corporatists hoping to transform public schools into profit centers. It's also meant to tar public schools as liberal indoctrination centers that must be stopped in order to Make America Great Again.

Still doubtful? Take a few minutes to study the career of baroness-turned-U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. Putting her in charge of public education is like turning a five-star restaurant's menu over to Jeffrey Dahmer.

The GOP's antipathy for common education in Oklahoma intensified in the last third of the 20th century as religious groups increasingly coveted state dollars to operate parochial schools and as corporatists' antipathy toward teachers unions grew.

When Republicans seized supermajority control of both legislative houses and the governorship in the early 2010s, it created a perfect anti-public ed storm. Thanks to fiscal mismanagement that included ill-conceived personal income tax cuts and business tax credits, the GOP statehouse imposed the nation's steepest education cuts – crippling both common and higher ed.

What else hath it wrought? According to the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration, Oklahoma spent \$8 million last year on voucher programs that primarily benefit private schools – eight

times more than neighboring Arkansas.

The only other neighboring state to divert state tax dollars into vouchers is Kansas – \$700,000 last year. Texas? New Mexico? Missouri? Colorado? Zilch.

Yet Stitt wants to increase tax credits for the Madison Avenue-named Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarships from \$5 million annually to \$25 million – while tossing public schools a \$12 million bone to cover already enacted teacher pay raises.

How coordinated is the attack on public education? A so-called parent group – Choice Matters – emailed a news release praising Stitt's proposals minutes after the governor's office provided media an advance copy of the State of the State speech [it was embargoed from public release for another hour].

Anyone who thinks the Legislature solved the public education funding crisis in 2018 when it hiked gross production taxes and raised teacher pay for the first time in decade is sorely mistaken.

In fact, the assault on public schools by privatizers and profiteers is only intensifying. An election year might be the perfect time for pro-public ed forces to visit the Capitol – en masse.

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