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MELTDOWN

*Pandemic, Oil Price Collapse Wreak Havoc
On State's Budget. How Should Lawmakers Proceed
In Uncharted World Of Virtual Policymaking?*



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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Not A Prayer

If you look up “incorrigible” in the dictionary, you’ll find Gov. Kevin Stitt’s mug shot.

When he assumed office in January 2019, the hail-fellow well-met mortgage broker seemed to understand he didn’t know what he didn’t know. He publicly engaged groups of all political stripes. He even became the state’s first governor to greet those gathering at the Capitol for Muslim Day.

Alas, just as it’s impossible for a leopard to change its spots, so it is for Stitt – a reality that became clear in the midst of a pandemic claiming more lives every day.

First, the governor whiffed on a golden opportunity to unite all Oklahomans against the viral enemy. Instead of inviting a wide swath of faith groups to participate in a prayer service televised statewide, Stitt surrounded himself with only his kind of people: evangelical Christians.

It was a Who’s Who of the sort of faith leaders that predominate the southeast Tulsa area from whence Stitt came to the Capitol: Transformation Church’s Michael Todd, Life Church’s Craig and Amy Groeschel, BattleCreek Church’s Alex Himaya, just to name a few.

No Methodist or Episcopalian. No Catholic or Presbyterian. No Jew or Muslim or Hindu. No one representing Oklahoma’s no-religion citizenry.

We’ve seen this movie before. Remember that Stitt’s cabinet is white male dominated – remarkable in an era when most political leaders seek to assemble teams that reflect the broader communities they represent.

The left-out faith groups subsequently scheduled their own unity service, but you’d hardly know it. It wasn’t carried by the state’s big city TV stations that afforded Stitt’s brand of evangelical Christianity a one-hour, primetime infomercial.

As if Stitt’s prayer service faux pas were not enough, the governor’s lawyer in the tribal gaming suit followed up with an insulting letter to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Observer'scope



Our monthly Newsmakers series at OKC's Full Circle Books will be on hiatus until the COVID-19 threat passes. In the meantime, check out Observercast for timely interviews and policy discussions. See back cover for details.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, unable to get his stories straight about his pre-pandemic stock sell-off. He claimed he was meeting with pro-lifers when other senators learned of the potential economic calamity. Turns out he met with anti-abortion activists a day earlier.

Hopes of creating an independent state redistricting commission to begin work next year appear dashed. The pandemic put all signature gathering on hold, making it unlikely there's enough time for SQ 810 to appear on the November ballot.

Laurel: To the state's mayors – especially Norman's Brea Clark, OKC's David Holt and Tulsa's G.T. Bynum – whose clear-eyed leadership amid the pandemic contrasts sharply with Gov. Kevin Stitt's flailing.

The pandemic is hitting Oklahoma higher education particularly hard – \$21 million in fiscal costs related to COVID-19. That's on top of a 26% funding cut over the last decade, offset only by a few crumbs last session.

Dart: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, playing politics by modifying his executive order to explicitly cite abortion as an elective procedure off-limits during the pandemic. His shameful action already is being challenged in federal court.

Unemployment claims in Oklahoma jumped a staggering 865.1% the last full week in March – more than the prior 10 weeks combined – due primarily to the pandemic.

Laurel: To OETA, nimbly revamping its entire daytime schedule to focus on remote learning for students whose school year abruptly ended amid the coronavirus.

The late U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn's least appealing trait? His insufferable religious certitude. His most appealing? Unlike our current U.S. senators, he didn't play political games.

Dart: To Donald Trump, slapping his name atop a Centers for Disease Control postcard giving basic medical advice during the pandemic. A thinly-disguised re-election pitch, paid for by taxpayers.

What is it with Okies and guns? Firearms and ammunition sales skyrocketed amidst the COVID-19 threat – up 400% in one week at a Norman gun shop. What are panic buyers gonna do? Shoot the virus?

Laurel: To U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn, who successfully lobbied OKC not to cut off past-due water customers during the pandemic. It would add to health threat if those struggling to pay their bills couldn't wash their hands.

We mourn the passing of our friend Sam Armstrong-Lopez, the superb press secretary for Gov. Henry Bellmon and former OKC TV reporter/news director. Gone much too soon at age 65.

Oklahomans fell victim to \$10.3 million in imposter scams, identity theft and other fraud last year. – AARP

Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Kendra Horn is the first bona fide Democrat we have had from Congressional District 5 since Mike Monroney – and that was in the '50s.

We should keep her.

Donald M. Smith
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I and other GLBT voters are an important demographic of the national vote and have become more so with the enthusiastically received presidential campaign of Mayor Pete during the last year. We need to exercise that strength when the time comes to insist that the eventual Democratic nominee and his running mate are not just sympathetic – because I don't want "sympathy" – but who are demonstrably on board with supporting the reversal of homo-hatred in our national government and useful in abolishing homo-hatred in the states where it still exists.

I'm not looking for "special rights" or dispensation from existing laws. But I am demanding that laws such as denial of adoption to otherwise suitable gay couples,

that laws allowing the eviction of tenants just because they're gay, that laws allowing religious discrimination to be used to fire or to prevent hiring based on orientation be revoked.

A system of laws that sorts out some people who do no harm from the rest of our society is not justice.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-TN, wants to force the federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to issue waivers allowing states to discriminate against students with disabilities because of COVID-19. This is illegal and immoral. You can't issue get out of jail free cards to violate civil rights protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] and the Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA].

Imagine if he proposed limiting education access for female students or black students!

Well, this proposal is the same kind of civil rights abuse and deserves the same kind of response

from voters like us.

Please look up your U.S. congressional representative and senators and tell them that students with disabilities, who often need more, not less help to succeed in school, must have the same educational opportunities as other students during this crisis. You can get their info on this link: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/FindMyLegislature.aspx>.

Colata Harlan
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

I keep thinking it just couldn't be possible Trump and his GOP sycophants are this stupid – going by the risk in each county.

First it was states. And now counties. Soon it will be by city, neighborhood or street because no one ever travels across a state, county, city or neighborhood boundary for business.

Karen Webb
A former Oklahoman now living
in Portland, OR

Editor, The Observer:

Fifteen virus cases, down to zero Mimics his actions to Nero His absurd misdirection Indicates his lack of discretion And does not make Trump a hero.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I wrote to a member of Congress, Katie Porter from California, to ask if the government was providing free coronavirus testing for undocumented people. Here is her answer:

"This varies by state. Here in California, Gov. Newsom signed a bill this week that will offer health-care to low-income, undocumented adults between the ages of 19 and 25, and that includes testing."

I am praying that the federal government will provide this nec-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Lawmakers Working To Neuter People Power

The Oklahoma House recently stuck a dagger into the heart of People Power.

In a breathtaking, late-in-the-day power grab, lawmakers lopsidedly approved HJR 1027 which aims to make it all but impossible for citizens to force a statewide vote on key issues the Legislature fails to address.

The proposal's backers – including its author, Rep. John Pfeiffer, R-Orlando – insist their goals are benign: they simply want to ensure rural Oklahoma isn't at the mercy of fast-growing urban centers.

There's a political science term for that: baloney.

First, rural Oklahoma is hardly at the mercy of the state's urban centers. Though 60% of the state's four million residents live in metro Oklahoma City and Tulsa, half of legislative seats are held by rural lawmakers – 50 of 101 [one vacancy] in the House and 25 of 48 in the Senate.

Second, Oklahoma already has one of the nation's most onerous initiative processes – only 17 of the 81 citizen-initiated petition drives in the last 30 years even reached the ballot.

It's not hard to figure out why. Currently, to force a statewide vote on a constitutional amendment, about 178,000 registered voters must sign a petition – that's 15% of the total ballots cast in the most recent gubernatorial election. Increasing the difficulty: the state gives petition circulators only 90 days to secure enough valid signatures.

So what do signature collectors typically do? They go first to where the people are – the state's two big urban centers.

HJR 1027 would require petition circulators to collect a minimum 15% of the required signatures – about 35,600 – from each of the state's five congressional districts.

Just think about that ... imagine what it would take to collect that many signatures in Oklahoma's 3rd Congressional District, stretching 400-plus miles from the Panhandle east to Osage County, and 300 miles south and west to Hollis. Its biggest towns, Enid and Stillwater, are home to about

50,000 each – that's total population, not registered voters.

If HJR 1027 had been the law, 2020 Oklahoma would look significantly different. No criminal justice reform, medical marijuana, wine and strong beer in groceries and convenience stores.

Ironies abound in the legislative efforts to claw back power the state's Founders bestowed on everyday Oklahomans to protect themselves from abusive powers-that-be.

First, over the last generation, the Legislature itself placed the most state questions on the statewide ballot – most designed to boost turnout among those voters supporting the statehouse status quo.

Second, some arguments for HJR 1027 actually bolster the case for keeping things as they are.

Take Lane Rep. J.J. Humphrey's complaint, for example, that 2016's voter-approved criminal justice reforms created "a nightmare in rural Oklahoma. We're paying for the jails. We're paying for repeated crime. And we're not getting the [promised] treatment."

It's true SQs 780 and 781 aimed to reserve prison for violent offenders and steer non-violent lawbreakers into less-costly programs like substance abuse and mental health treatment.

Though Oklahoma's inmate population is lower [thanks in part to Gov. Kevin Stitt signing hundreds of commutations], SQ 781's prescription – taking the savings from fewer inmates to pay for treatment – never was filled. Why not? Because the Legislature failed to re-direct the savings as voters intended.

Lawmakers were able to ignore the will of the people because 780 and 781 were statutory – not constitutional – changes. Fewer signatures are needed for proposed statutory changes to qualify for the state ballot.

If the Senate's virtual session opts to take up and approves HJR 1027 – ensuring it appears on the ballot – rank-and-file Oklahoma voters should send a clear message: statehouse poobahs work for them – not the other way around.

REMEMBERING DR. NO

*Despite Republican Right
Lionizing Of Coburn's Public
Service, The Ex-Senator's
Political Legacy Is Far More
Complicated, Especially When
It Came To Health Care For His
Most Vulnerable Constituents.*

BY CAL HOBSON

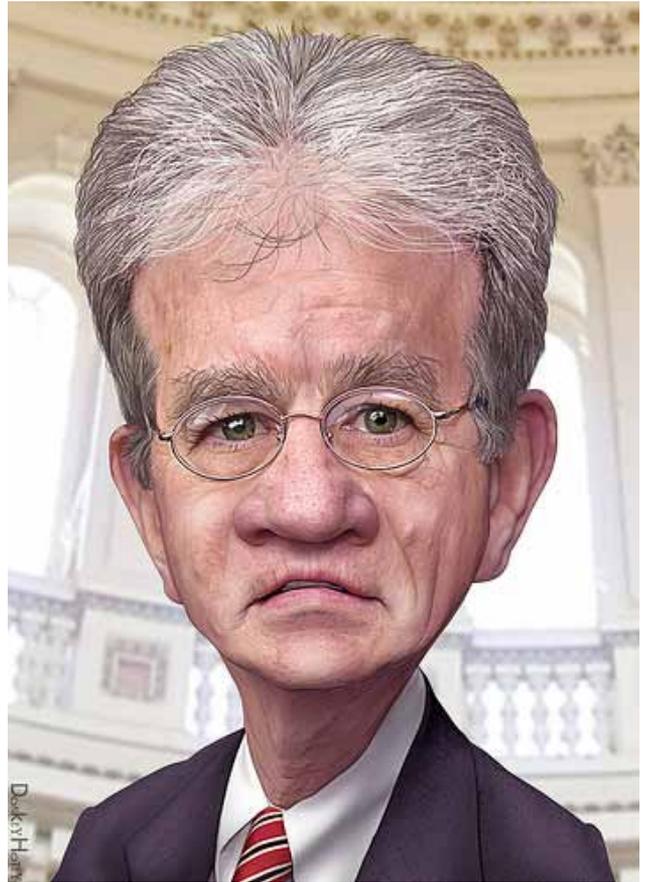
I am well aware of the adage that one should not speak ill of the dead. I also recognize the reverence, respect and almost idolization that many Oklahomans feel toward Sen. Tom Coburn, who passed away Mar. 28. He was 72 and had long battled prostate cancer after being first diagnosed in 2011.

I am also cognizant that the doctor/politician was self-confident and compassionate toward many of his patients, but often intolerant and insulting to those with whom he differed politically – and there were more than a few.

Coburn railed against career politicians yet he served 16 years in the Congress before his growing health challenges forced him into early retirement in 2015. While he was, and remains, wildly popular in the Sooner state, his time as a federal elected official was marked more by conflict and controversy than accomplishments and accolades.

Coburn treasured his title in the Senate as “Dr. No,” spending most of his time and energy on blocking the work of others while producing few bills of his own. Naturally pleasing to the large Tea Party and conservative voting populations in Oklahoma, he was viewed with disdain, dislike and even stronger descriptors in Congress but it bothered him very little.

The more the Washington Post or New York Times pilloried him, conversely and continuously The Oklahoman newspaper praised him. His few Town Hall meetings turned into long monologues from Coburn initially followed by gripes, complaints, criticisms



Courtesy: DonkeyHotey

and negative characterizations about government from constituents in attendance who were often older, white, male and angry.

The Affordable Care Act, pejoratively known in many circles as ObamaCare, was an especially rich and easy target for the good doctor from Muskogee. His fervent criticism of it, and the rejection of billions in federal largesse it would bring, has led directly and indirectly to the current and almost obscene state of health indicators among our citizens. Only Mississippi has an overall sicker general population and, like Oklahoma, it is one of only 14 states still refusing to accept the ACA or expansion thereof.

If you think I overstate Coburn's culpability on the matter, remember our wayward and wobbly former governor, Mary Fallin, was primed to accept the federal health initiative as she prepared to run for a second term but then Terrible Tom announced he would run against her if she did. Fallin scrapped that effort, Coburn stayed on the sidelines and gave her tepid support for re-election in 2014.

Since and before, hundreds if not thousands of our friends and neighbors have died needlessly, especially in rural counties, due to a lack of preventative care, early disease diagnosis, proximity to hospitals and specialty doctors – all of which would have come courtesy of provisions in the ACA. Those facts matter and are proven by death rates, shorter life spans and rampant existence of fatal frailties among our citizens such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other illnesses too numerous to mention.

Regardless of all that, and in the minds of many, Coburn's greatest contribution to good government was the publication annually from 2011-14 of what he dubbed "The Wastebook."

Clearly, in a \$4 trillion budget, unnecessary, wasteful and duplicative items can be found and Coburn reveled in doing so. The "Bridge to Nowhere" became conservatives' favorite battle cry and would invariably come up at Town Hall meetings as the greatest example of government run amuck. The much-maligned structure was to be built in Alaska which made it even easier to criticize since few Okies would ever need to use it.

Regardless of the worthiness of any one project, the use of earmarks in appropriations bills has declined significantly post-Coburn and he deserves credit for highlighting the inherent abuses of them by both par-

ties. Of course, the money still somehow flows because the national debt has ballooned to \$21 trillion with the greatest increase coming during the first three years of the Trump administration.

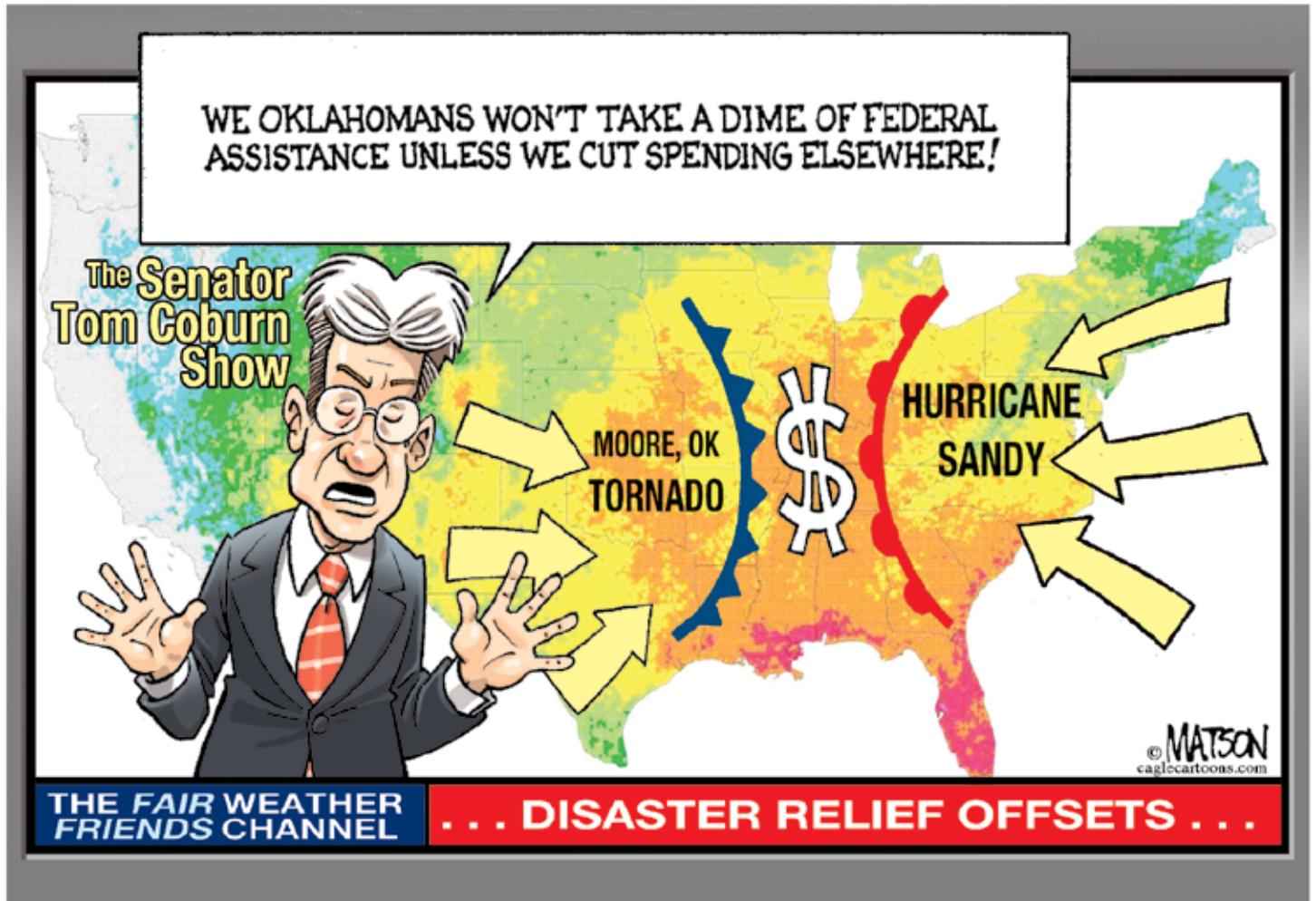
Politicians of all stripes prefer to spend tax money rather than find ways to raise it or cut it. The debt bomb, as he described profligate spending, was the topic of one of his three books and of course the focus of many papers and public speeches where he excelled with simple, understandable and popular solutions to difficult, complex and controversial problems.

Unfortunately, as H. L. Mencken opined, they were also often wrong, politically undoable and, in the unreal world of Washington, a waste of time.

Our now too-soon departed doctor/politician also loved to tilt at other windmills with three of the best examples being term limits for Congress, outlawing abortion, and a constitutional amendment on spending restrictions none of which ever came close to reality. Those were the kinds of hot button issues that attracted Coburn and conversely small government types and evangelicals to him.

The Tea Party movement of 10 years ago viewed him in almost saintly terms and he gave them no reason to doubt such a designation.

Unfortunately, Coburn's medical and political ca-



reers were not without their own personal controversies, one involving a malpractice suit, which was settled out of court, and the other his involvement with a D.C. religious organization known as The Family.

In 2008 one of its members, then U.S. Sen. John Ensign, R-Nevada, came in for heavy criticism due to an extramarital affair with a Hill staffer. As a doctor and church deacon, Coburn intervened on the issue, forcing Ensign to send a letter terminating the relationship, which Ensign promptly violated. Years later the Senate Ethics Committee accused Coburn of helping cover up the affair.

With the exception of one brief comment to the New

Deborah Astley

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York Times he never spoke publicly about his role in the "Family" scandal.

Coburn clearly was one of the most conservative members of Congress after his arrival in the house in 1994 as a part of the Newt Gingrich Revolution. He opposed same sex marriage, embryonic stem cell research, denied global warming was real, advocated expanded gun rights, pushed the death penalty including for doctors who performed abortions, and publicly chastised NBC for airing *Schindler's List*, the much admired movie about the horrors of the holocaust.

Because of these issues, and many others similarly positioned on the conservative litmus test, he was for years his party's scion of social purity.

For budding Republican wannabes, an endorsement from Dr. Tom was more valuable than gold itself and his proteges are found today scattered throughout key positions in government, including the current Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat, R-OKC.

For background, Coburn was born in Casper, WY, and the family later moved to Muskogee. His father was a talented and inventive optician who in 1975 sold the Coburn Optical Industries Co. based in Virginia for some \$57 million to Revlon, thus providing ample and permanent financial security for his family. The younger Coburn earned an accounting degree from Oklahoma State University, where he was designated a Top 10 student in the Business College, and later a medical degree with honors from the University of Oklahoma. In 1968 he married Miss Oklahoma 1967, Carolyn Denton. They have three daughters, one an accomplished opera star, and nine grandchildren.

In summary, he was an ardent and clever conservative, confident his ways and philosophies were correct, almost chiseled in stone. He was neither an Oklahoma original, as U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, R-OK, declared, because politically his obstructions and continuous no votes hardly qualify as original in DC; nor was he an Oklahoma legend as current Gov. Kevin Stitt opined upon hearing of his death. Legends are folks like Robert S. Kerr, Carl Albert, Dean McGee, Angie Debo, Jim Thorpe, Kate Barnard, Sequoyah and Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher among others.

What Coburn did worthy for recognition was serve 15,000 patients and deliver 4,000 babies, which reflect a life of significant medical accomplishment. Politically his rigid and unforgiving opposition to the Affordable Care Act was regrettable and even deadly because, without a doubt, his intractable position cost the lives of Oklahomans who needed, deserved and were desperate for decent, affordable medical insurance and health care just as their senator, Tom Coburn, had all of his life.

In my opinion, that wasn't asking too much, but it was more than the good doctor was willing to give in his capacity as the not-so-good senator.

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

UNPACKING SOONERCARE 2.0

Is It Designed To Limit Participation? Is It A Move Toward Universal Health Care? Will It Provide What Oklahomans Need For The Next Five Years? How Does It Differ From SQ 802's Medicaid Expansion?

BY JAN NEW

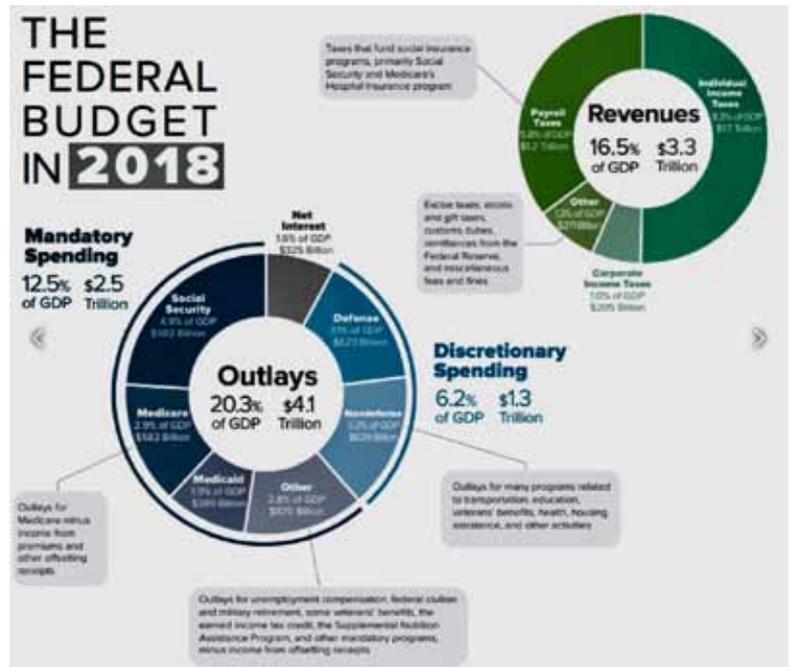
Since September 2018 [Observer, “Starving the Beast”] national health care expenditures have risen from \$3.3 trillion to more than \$3.6 trillion, and from \$10,348 per person to \$11,172 per person. While Medicare led the increase and serves nearly 60 million people, Medicaid, a program of government funded health care for vulnerable, low-income Americans, is second – now serving over 70 million in 51 states [including CHIP or Children’s Health Insurance Program].

National health expenditures, primarily Medicare and Medicaid, remain at 17.7% of the GDP. Together, they are the second and third largest sectors of the mandatory portion of the federal government budget.

SOONERCARE 2.0 APPLICATION

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority [OHCA] is the state agency that operates the Medicaid Program. Section 1115 of the Social Security Act allows waivers of standard program requirements to enable state demonstration projects – now specifically Trump administration priorities previously listed.

Under Gov. Kevin Stitt’s administration, OHCA has developed SoonerCare 2.0, a waiver demonstration project that appears to address most of the reforms encouraged by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services [CMS]. What has not yet been publicly discussed is the targeted population; the particular care standards eliminated in order to focus on others; the work and premium requirements; and the loosely described “delivery systems” and “payment models.”



Additionally, whether SoonerCare 2.0 – dubbed Oklahoma’s Healthy Adult Opportunity Demonstration Application – meets the intent of more than 178,000 Oklahomans who signed the initiative petition [SQ 802] last fall is doubtful. In fact, the governor appears to be ignoring his responsibility to schedule SQ 802 on an upcoming ballot.

In March 2018, Stitt directed the OHCA to develop SoonerCare 2.0 with the acknowledged expectation that it would be approved, implemented, and prevail over SQ 802. The governor delivered OHCA’s Demonstration Application to Washington, Mar. 6, and approval is anticipated in June.

KEY PROVISIONS

OHCA’s 65-page application identifies five goals, further developed with various hypotheses about improved services to be tested; new performance indicators are to be collected and reported to CMS:

- Improve access to high quality person-centered services that produce positive health outcomes for individuals.
- Strengthen beneficiary engagement in their personal health care plan, including incentive structures to promote responsible decision-making.
- Enhance alignment between Medicaid policies and commercial health insurance products to facilitate smoother beneficiary transition.
- Support coordinated strategies to address health determinants that promote upward mobility, greater independence and quality of life.

- Promote efficiencies that ensure Medicaid’s sustainability.

The SoonerCare 2.0 waiver application acknowledges there are 220,772 uninsured Oklahomans with household income under 133% of the federal poverty level [FPL] – therefore, income-eligible for standard Medicaid services.

The SoonerCare 2.0 application instead targets working adults, ages 19-64, a subset of the uninsured, numbering 154,505 individuals, some of whom may never apply because of an inability to comply with other program requirements – namely, work and/or premium payments and co-pays. What happens to these nearly 70,000 Oklahoman’s who are too young, too old, or can’t comply with requirements?

SOONERCARE 2.0 TRADE-OFFS

In order to add “integrated behavioral health services provided by licensed behavioral health professionals in a primary care setting,” certain other standard Medicaid benefits have been excluded from SoonerCare 2.0:

- Non-emergency medical transport.
- Early periodic screening, diagnosis, and treatment; and
- Long term care

This writer currently attends a local Mental Health Working Group including representatives from agencies, private providers, first responders, law enforcement, and the judiciary. One of many concerns is lack of transportation resources to move people to locations where they can be evaluated, referred as needed, and treated.

Additionally, this working group has discussed the difficulties of determining underlying or associated health conditions when responding to individuals with substance usage problems, mental illness, or emotional disturbances. Eliminating coverage for early health screenings, diagnosis, and treatment is inimical to treating addiction and mental illness.

‘COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT’

A recent Kaiser Family Foundation report showed Oklahoma had 165,000 non-elderly adults enrolled in its Medicaid program in 2017. Of those, 69% had a working member of the household; 66% were working full-time or part-time themselves; and the dominant reason for not working was “caregiving.”

OHCA’s demonstration application states that SoonerCare 2.0 is intended to “promote upward mobility, greater independence, and improved quality of life.” To achieve the objective, the new program requires “transitioning” and new applicants to complete 80 hours a month of “community engagement” [unless exempted]. This requirement can be fulfilled by specific work, school, or volunteer activities, and there is a monthly reporting requirement. Non-compliance can result in eligibility termination with a need to re-enroll.

PREMIUMS AND COST-SHARING

Under SoonerCare 2.0 beneficiaries are required to pay premiums, deductibles, co-payments, and similar

cost-sharing charges. Monthly premiums are based on a three-tiered system ranging from \$0 per month at 0% FPL up to \$15 per month for family coverage for household income between 100% FPL and 133% FPL. Co-pays up to 5% out-of-pocket costs are also included. Individuals can lose coverage for non-payment of premiums but may re-apply.

While an \$8 per month premium with co-pays up to 5% does not seem exorbitant on its face, for an individual whose income is 133% FPL or \$1,414 a month, the effect of premium, co-pays, plus federal, state, and local taxes can put a strain on disposable income for shelter, food, utilities, and other expenses.

COMMON CONCERNS ACROSS STATES

The Kaiser Family Foundation has reported barriers to compliance with work requirements and premiums/cost-sharing. Summarizing several key findings from their report:

- Full-time working adults with Medicaid and their families still face financial and food insecurity.
- Medicaid beneficiaries generally have high rates of functional disability with underlying medical conditions affecting their ability to work.
- Many who cannot work are caretakers or in school – recognized exemptions in SoonerCare 2.0.
- Many Medicaid adults do not use computers, internet, or email to comply with work reporting requirements. [SoonerCare 2.0 provides a mail-in option.]
- People who are income eligible lose coverage for failure to pay premiums or comply with work and reporting requirements. [SoonerCare2.0 provides re-enrollment opportunities.]
- Work requirements often don’t result in job offers with employer-sponsored health care – an underlying premise of the work requirement.
- The loss of Medicaid coverage and failure to re-enroll results in uncompensated expenses for providers.

Other concerns were updated in a December 2019 report from the American Academy of Family Physicians [AAFP]. The academy and Pew Research make it clear that with the 41 states implementing waivers, both Medicaid and Medicaid expansion have become a nationwide patchwork of programs designed to promote the objectives.

However, AAFP states the Trump administration’s support for untested provisions and fast-track approval has resulted in “... harmful changes to state Medicaid programs that affect non-expansion Medicaid populations, specifically work requirements; time limits for coverage eligibility; coverage ‘lock-outs’ for failure to pay premium; and the necessity to renew eligibility.”

FUTURE OF SOONERCARE 2.0

Whether or not SQ 802 will be approved by voters over the SoonerCare 2.0 demonstration program remains to be seen.

Whether SoonerCare 2.0, with its targeted population – excluding a large number of income-eligible Oklahomans – will succeed in meeting stated goals

for an additional 150,000 Oklahomans or whether it will encounter the problems identified in the Kaiser Family Foundation report are at least questionable.

Also questionable is the elimination of standard Medicaid benefits, particularly non-emergency transportation; early screening, diagnosis, and treatment for underlying medical conditions; and long-term care.

Will added benefits of providing better short-term, “integrated behavioral health services” off-set the eliminated services? Does Oklahoma have an adequate number of primary care beds and licensed professionals to address the anticipated increase in behavioral health services?

Finally, will SoonerCare 2.0 provide what Oklahomans need for the next five years? Do you believe SQ 802 for standard Medicaid services is a better option?

The choice will be yours when SQ 802 is on the ballot. Only you can decide.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Public notice and opportunity to review SoonerCare 2.0 was to begin March 16, with conclusion of online comments April 15. Six public and targeted forums [five in Oklahoma City and one in Tulsa] were originally scheduled Mar. 3-Apr. 24, but it is unknown whether this schedule has been delayed due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

There is still a chance to send your comments about the SoonerCare 2.0 application to Chief Operating Officer, State Medicaid Director, 4345 N. Lincoln Blvd. Oklahoma City, OK 73105 [Phone: 405-522-7300] *Jan New is a retired public administrator of municipal, state, and federal programs, with private industry and national trade association background.*

How Cherokee Nation Is Taking On COVID-19

BY CHUCK HOSKIN JR.

The dangerous COVID-19 virus continues to spread across the world, and now it has officially reached Cherokee Nation. A Cherokee citizen in Tulsa County was the first identified death from the virus in Oklahoma, and additional cases have been identified within our health system.

As Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, this threat to our citizens has my full attention. I will do all that I can to protect Cherokees, our workers and our communities. My administration, Deputy Chief Bryan Warner, the Council of the Cherokee Nation and the management team at Cherokee Nation Businesses are actively evaluating the crisis and taking actions to put safety first.

In every decision we make, we are guided by our commitment to protecting our people while ensuring the continuance of tribal services. In concert with our Emergency Management department, we have activated our Emergency Operations plan. I'd like to elaborate a bit about what that means.

Cherokee Nation and Cherokee Nation Businesses are working with community groups and volunteers to get needed food and other supplies to elders.

As we work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our Cherokee communities, protecting the nearly 3,000 Cherokee first-language speakers is a special priority. We've established a hotline for our Cherokee first-language speakers to share information about preventing the spread of COVID-19 and to provide help if they need food, medications or other essentials.

We have produced safety videos and printed materials in both Cherokee and English to distribute to our citizens.

Another priority is keeping our children and families healthy, especially now that public schools have been closed for the remainder of the semester. Sequoyah High School is now offering free “grab and go” breakfasts and lunches Monday through Friday to any child under 18. All children are welcome, whether or not they are tribal citizens.

We have redistributed the food from shuttered Cherokee Nation Businesses hotels and casinos to our local communities. This takes a lot of hands to accomplish.

At our Cherokee Nation health facilities, we have rescheduled all non-emergency appointments for optometry, dental, audiology, radiology, physical therapy and elective surgery.

When possible, prescriptions have been extended from 30- to 90-day supplies.

We have eliminated as many face-to-face visits as possible and encouraged patients to use our pharmacy convenience options such as drive-through, online refills, phone ordering and mail delivery. This avoids hundreds of trips away from home to visit a health center.

We have made temporary policy changes across the Cherokee Nation that allow tribal citizens to conduct their business with our staff over the phone, mail or online.

Additionally, we've ramped up telemedicine access,

and we are fast-tracking new telemedicine practices to continue to serve patients while protecting medical staff.

Cherokee Nation Health Services is following the current evidence-based guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to prioritize testing for COVID-19 to high-risk patients.

Preserving limited testing resources for our most vulnerable patients is essential until more tests become available.

Like other health systems around us, we are working with our partners in federal and state agencies to bring more testing and additional resources to bear as quickly as we can.

Finally, Cherokee Nation continues to advocate with the U.S. Congress to ensure that tribal governments are included in COVID-19 stimulus packages.

We continue to monitor this pandemic closely and evaluate our next steps. It is more important than ever to stay connected with one another.

Yet, we must do so safely. The most effective way

to protect yourself and others is to stay at home, if at all possible.

As we work through this unprecedented time, I want each of you to know that the health and safety of Cherokee families remains my highest priority.

Together, we will get through this. *Chuck Hoskin Jr. is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.*



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COVER STORY

SOBERING NUMBERS

Pandemic, Oil Price Collapse Will Force Legislature To Dip Into State Savings To Pay This Year's Bills. Next Year's Budget Numbers Are Even Bleaker. How Should Lawmakers Proceed?

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

As COVID-19 spread and oil prices collapsed last month, an internal statehouse memo contained a phrase that legislators dread most: "revenue failure."

After a relatively peaceful 2019 budget-writing season – thanks to a hike in gross production taxes – Oklahoma may be entering the worst fiscal crisis since the great oil collapse of the early 1980s:

A \$200 million-plus revenue failure in the current fiscal year that ends June 30 and nearly half a billion dollars less to spend in FY 2021 that begins July 1.

Sobering numbers.

The double-whammy of a global pandemic and a Saudi-Russian clash over oil production wasn't on most radars when the State Board of Equalization met last December to certify how much legislators legally could spend in the next fiscal year.

But even then, state fiscal experts already were warning that storm clouds were gathering, suggesting a flat FY 2021 budget at best. By mid-February, state appropriators were told they'd have \$85.5 million less to spend next year than this.

Then came March and COVID-19 and 99-cent-a-gallon gasoline and news 11,000 oilfield jobs were lost between Jan. 1 and mid-March, before the pandemic locked down Oklahoma's – and the world's – economies.



Now, with less than two months remaining in the current legislative session, uncertainty reigns – not least of which because the pandemic is requiring lawmakers to avoid the Capitol if possible and conduct as much business online or via teleconference as possible.

This much seems clear: The state’s constitutionally-mandated Rainy Day Fund – currently brimming with \$800 million-plus – can easily cover this year’s projected revenue failure, even though lawmakers are limited to harvesting more than about \$300 million.

What is less certain is what next year’s budget will look like. Yes, state savings will still be available. So will an estimated \$850 million in federal emergency dollars. But if a locked-down economy reduces state revenues to a trickle, the currently estimated \$450 million shortfall could get worse.

That leaves little optimism that vital state services – from common and higher education to child welfare – can expect additional financial help in recovering from Draconian budgets during the 2010s when Republican leadership insisted on experimenting with tax-cutting, trickle-down policies.

Some state lawmakers tentatively planned to return to NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. the first full week in April to map the way forward – not only for what’s left of this year’s session, but also for FY 2021 state government spending.

With the Capitol in lockdown to reduce the virus spread, decision-making could be more opaque than



Regular unleaded was selling Mar. 25 at OKC’s Costco for prices not seen since the early 1980s.

ever.

It’s long been standard operating procedure, of

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course, for budget deals to be cut behind closed doors by only a handful of the state's 149 elected senators and representatives – thanks in part to the Legislature cleverly exempting itself from open meetings requirements.

Often, most lawmakers get less than 24 hours to review the spending plan before they are expected to vote.

With the pandemic and oil price collapse, this year's budget process demands more transparency than ever. But that seems less likely given the legislative session's final weeks mostly will be conducted virtually rather than on the House and Senate floors and in committee rooms.

What if lawmakers could approve a congressional-style continuing resolution that keeps current spending levels until the coronavirus threat passes? They could then return to the Capitol to hammer out next year's budget details – with the potential for more citizen input and more transparency.

Alas, that probably isn't an option given time constraints – the new fiscal year begins July 1 – and the state Constitution's mandate that lawmakers enact a balanced budget. This year's session must adjourn no later than 5 p.m. on May 29.

Special sessions are a potential option, yet more complicated than usual given the COVID-19 crisis.

Still, it's troubling that next year's budget is being shaped without all legislators at least in proximity to offer input eye-to-eye.

So, what should lawmakers do? Now is the time to laser-focus on one objective: crafting and approving

next year's budget. Period.

That would require them to punt – for now – on some important legislation. Think: sorely needed criminal justice reforms.

It also would demand pulling the plug on typical election-year statehouse hijinks – pursuing hot-but-ton social issues [think: abortion restrictions] aimed primarily at ginning up the supermajority party's base.

And it certainly would mean leaving Medicaid expansion up to the voters, via SQ 802, rather than ramming through Gov. Kevin Stitt's potentially disastrous SoonerCare 2.0 proposal without full public deliberation. [See Jan New's report on page 9.]

Further, given restrictions against mass meetings, lawmakers must take special steps to open the budget-writing process to public scrutiny.

Business as usual won't cut it. No springing the budget last-minute on the vast majority of legislators who then are expected to pass judgment without time for a serious, point-by-point review.

In fact, this crisis requires that statehouse leaders establish a public comment period. Post the proposed budget online in a format that is decipherable for non-lawyers and non-accountants. Give rank-and-file Oklahomans time to review it and email comments to their local legislators and leadership. Seventy-two hours? A week? Two weeks?

How many would avail themselves of the opportunity to give input? Who knows? But it's the least state leaders can do to encourage Sooner camaraderie. The reality is, we're all in this together. Or should be.

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Accurate Count Vital For Oklahoma

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy [OICA] is reminding all Oklahomans that now is the time to respond the U.S. Census.

“Everyone should have gotten their Census mailers by now,” said Joe Dorman, OICA’s chief executive officer. “The mailers show how to answer the Census on the internet, which is quick and convenient – especially for those who are practicing social distancing by staying at home. And if those who do not answer the Census will likely have a Census worker knock on their doors in the coming weeks.”

The U.S. Census Bureau put letters in the mail early last month that should have gone to every household in America. Now, the responsibility falls on Americans to respond to the Census, which is required every 10 years. Dorman noted that for those who did not receive a mailer from the U.S. Census, they could

complete their Census questionnaire by telephone.

Citing his hometown as an example, Dorman noted “the post office in Rush Springs will not deliver to physical addresses, only post office boxes,” he said. “The Census sends to physical addresses, so none of the more than 1,000 people in the Rush Springs town limits have received a Census mailer. For those people, calling in is the best option.”

The 2020 Census will ask a few simple questions about you and everyone who is or will be living with you on April 1, 2020. To respond to the Census by telephone, call 844.330.2020. There are other numbers for a variety of languages, including Spanish at 844.468.2020. For hearing impaired Oklahomans, the TDD number is 844.467.2020. Phone lines are open every day from 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. CDT.

The Census Bureau offers resources in English and 59 other languages so that everyone living in the United States can respond to the 2020 Census like our founding fathers intended when they put the Census in the U.S. Constitution.

“It is critical for every Oklahoman to respond to the Census, because the number of people in our state will determine how much of our federal tax dollars we get back in Oklahoma in the form of services,” Dorman said. “That is especially important when it comes to services that help improve the quality of life for our state’s children.”

Estimates are that for each person counted the state will get \$1,800 back from the federal government. Oklahoma is estimated to have more than four million people living here, Dorman noted.

“If we miss even one out of every 100 Oklahomans, then we stand to lose \$72 million every year,” he said. “Multiply that by the 10 years until the next Census, then Oklahoma would lose close to three-quarters of a billion dollars of our tax dollars that could go to so many worthwhile services, especially those for our children.”

Dorman concluded by encouraging everyone living in Oklahoma on April 1 to respond to the Census, either online, by mail, or – most conveniently – by telephone. For example, foster parents would count their foster children living with them on April 1. Also, college students should be counted where they are on April 1.

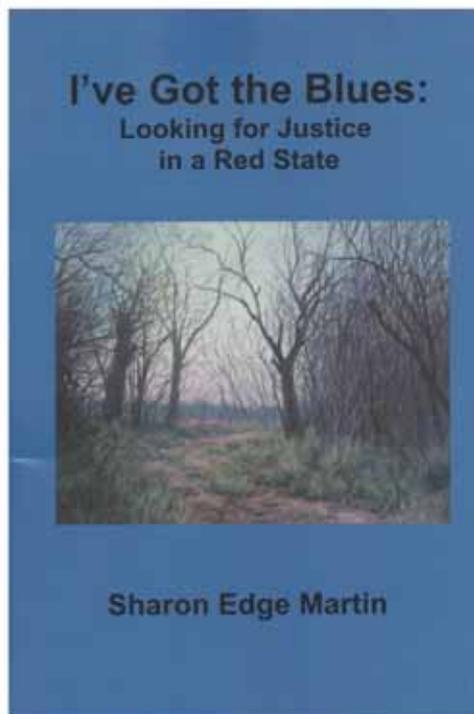
“The Constitution requires that we count every ‘person,’ period; and that includes persons living here who are not citizens. Every ‘person’ we count in Oklahoma means more of our federal tax dollars coming back to us and a greater ability to take care of critical needs here in our state.”

To find out more about the Census, go to www.2020census.gov. There is an Oklahoma state-specific website with information on the Census at <https://okletscount.org/>.

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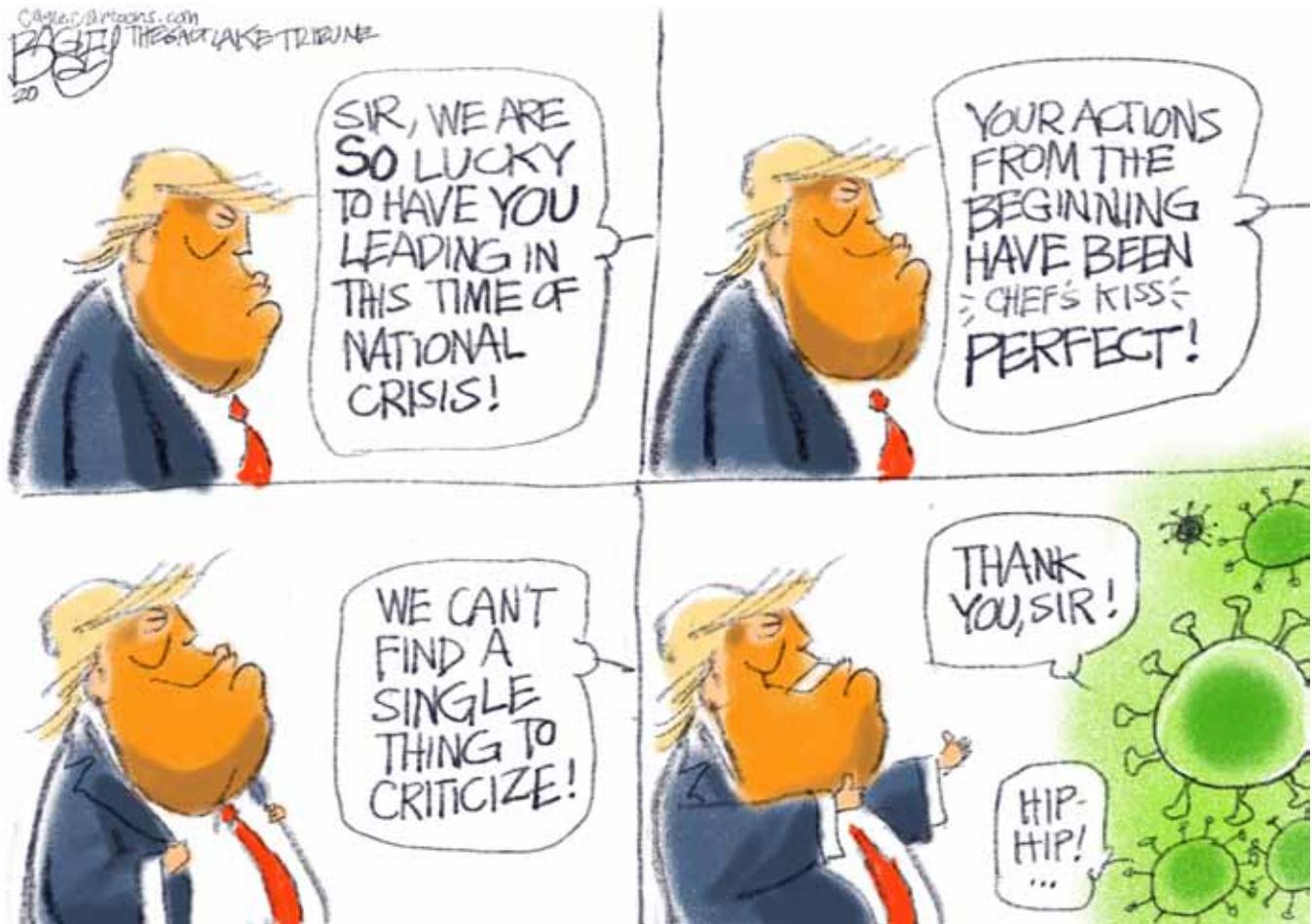


“This collection of essays, many of which first appeared in The Oklahoma Observer, speaks to, and helps make sense of, the issues of a specific era. But really, it’s timeless.”

— Arnold Hamilton, Editor, The Oklahoma Observer

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PUBLIC FORUM



'We Don't Need No Damn Gubmint'

BY TIM JARVIS

While blaming Donald Trump for the lack of a federal response is a bird's nest on the ground, let's not forget that he is merely the latest lackey to carry the water for so-called libertarians like the Koch Brothers and Rand Paul, and virtually every Republican politician. What have Republicans preached ever since Reagan?

Various translations have been proffered, but the one that I hear most from my longtime Oklahoma friends is "we don't need no damn gubmint." Uh-huh. As a result, lots of folks are going to get sick, and many innocent ones are going to die. This administration was *not* blindsided by this pandemic.

I just finished a book on the settlement of Ohio in the late 1700s. The author found diaries which talked about how various illnesses [typically the flu] would occasionally sweep through the villages, killing many people. That was in the "olden" days ... or was it? Is this one of those déjà vu moments all over again?

Our current crop of Republicans see nothing

wrong with culling the herd like that; some have been stupid enough to even verbalize that sentiment.

Why spend any federal money on something like an agency that would prepare society for something like a pandemic? To paraphrase Dear Leader, why not just wait until one gets going and then reassemble those experts. They shouldn't need more than 48 hours to prepare – right? Anyway, it should be left up to the states!

These sadistic buffoons, at both the federal and state levels, have done nothing but cut the very agencies that protect *all* of society while giving their handlers tax breaks. Speaking of those handlers – I wonder what its like isolating yourself in one of several mansions, or off-shore in a yacht until all calms down.

This morning [St. Patrick's Day] I read an article that indicated Trump has [allegedly and finally] realized this pandemic is real. It isn't a hoax after all! He's still looking for a scapegoat, because in his

PUBLIC FORUM

narcissistic, ego-filled bubble he's never responsible for anything bad. Trump is the exact opposite of Truman, who said "The Buck Stops Here."

Right on cue, Trump's toadies want the Dems to stop all the finger pointing. "This is not the time," they hysterically screech. If it's not time now to point out their absolute inability to govern, then when is the right time? They always say that when they are caught red handed on the wrong side of history.

I saw where the human-tortoise hybrid from Kentucky is whining about his opponent attacking him on his recent lack of leadership in the Senate. The weekend when the Dem-controlled House put together a bill to help Americans, McTurtle was schmoozing at a cocktail party with Supreme Court Justice BeerMe! Kavanaugh instead of keeping his butt in D.C. doing the peoples' work.

The Repubs apparently refuse to call any bailout money going to the airlines or other companies a "bailout." Hmm ... I wonder why? Maybe because it's *socialism*, the Scary Word of the Day?

Plus, they used that word in a derogatory manner against Obama when many of these same people came close to ruining the economy in 2008 and Obama had to "bailout" the banking and auto indus-

tries.

Don't get me wrong; I'm all for a helping hand when needed, as long as the money gets to the people that are actually at risk of losing their jobs.

Many of these companies used that generous tax break from a couple of years ago to buy back their own stock rather than actually have it, you know, tinkle down. That artificially propped up their stock prices which allowed the execs get large bonuses. The hypocrisy of these jackals is astounding. Socialize the risk, privatize the profits.

I hope Elizabeth Warren stands strong in the Senate and forces some significant strings to be attached to any bailout. Maybe we should give "tinkle up" a try.

Let's remember this in November. Let's remember not only Trump's bungled response, but all of his gutless enablers as well, including the Republican cowards that serve as Oklahoma representatives that have simply kowtowed the daily right-wing talking points and expressed extreme loyalty to Dear Leader. They could care less about us, their constituents. All they care about is that nice fat paycheck from the federal gubmint along with all those sweet perks of being self-labeled as a "leader."

Tim Jarvis lives in Edmond.

Our Chernobyl?

BY BARBARA BANNON

Chernobyl, grand proof of where lies, fear, cheating, loyalty over skills, experience, honesty and expertise can lead.

Is this pandemic our Chernobyl?

I hope so, because maybe then we can stop the lying, cheating and greed that has become the norm in this country.

Suppressing voter turn out, removing voters from the rolls, requiring identification are all ways to keep people from voting and this has become an accepted strategy in this country. Putting people in

prison because they can't pay excessive fines – imprisoning our own people for profit another accepted behavior.

Charging excessive amounts of money for products, services, access to education, housing, medical care and medication are dominant behaviors leaving the majority of citizens without. Laws that are written and passed to protect investors at the expense of our communities and long-term investment in our country.

Don't get me wrong – I know this behavior didn't start with this administration but in my years as an observant adult I've never seen more blatant outright corruption and greed than now.

Maybe this pandemic is our wake-up call!

One of the other insights I hope we've all gained is the understanding of who really are the "essential" people in our communities and country. Maybe the people who provide and stock our food, make our products, do the every day work of keeping this country running and healthy will get the rewards they deserve. Maybe we'll understand that labor creates capital and they are the job creators.

Barbara Bannon lives in Tulsa.

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1971

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

Empowered by defeating an incumbent Republican, Oklahoma Gov. David Hall 50 years ago spearheaded progressive tax reform and spending on education that stunned “the establishment” but won party-line approval by the Democratic-controlled Legislature.

Shortly past noon on Jan. 12, 1971, the silver-haired, 41-year-old Hall delivered a historic “state of the state” and liberal budget speech before a joint session of lawmakers. His program was so liberal that the Daily Oklahoman declined to publish the text. The day before, the Oklahoman carried full text of the departing Republican’s swan song.

Glaring within the message that I wrote and the bills that the late G. M. Fuller drafted was repeal of an ugly loophole benefiting the very rich including powerful newspaper publishers. It was an income tax exemption on dividends from Oklahoma-based corporations. Many owners of corporate firms simply could dodge state income taxes by paying themselves only with dividends not salaries.

Hall proposed income tax increases of \$43.5 million; oil and natural gas tax hikes of \$39 million and a \$1 million coal tax hike. Of the \$76.6 million increase, 78% was proposed for enriching education. Public schools would gain \$40 million of the new revenue and \$20 million would go to universities and colleges. Vo-tech got a boost that funded opening two new schools. The rest was scattered across budget-starved agencies.

With few exceptions, most notably state Rep. David Boren and state Sen. Clem McSpadden, both who later challenged Hall’s re-election bid, Democratic legislators approved slightly amended versions of both the tax increases and spending provisos.

All Republicans in the Legislature loudly voted “no.”

Senate President Pro Tem Finis Smith and House Speaker Rex Privett strongly supported the program including the tax increases. Old timers claim that while forecast of political defeat faced lawmakers who voted “yes,” in fact no loss in the 1972 elections was attributed to that decision.

Editorials were viciously slanted in opposition with loud howls from oil patch lobbyists. The State Chamber boss declared that Hall was anti-business, a claim Hall stalwartly disputed claiming that a better educated work force benefited free enterprise and would attract industry. The needs were glaring. A part of the Hall platform also enhanced tax breaks for a limited time for new industry.

“Last year we ranked 45th in our per pupil expen-

ditures for public schools,” Hall explained. “We are near the bottom for higher education.” Basically, Hall pressed for tax-paid schools offering free kindergarten through junior college or “K-thru-14” for all children.

With the newly injected cash, during Hall’s term there was no tuition increase for college and university students. Advances were widespread among public schools across Oklahoma.

“Since 1947 there have been no substantial changes in our income tax laws,” Hall said during the 1971 address, adding that Oklahoma’s income tax was 7.1% of federal income taxes paid in the state, compared with an average of 16.1% in the other 33 states with income tax systems.

Persons with income over \$200,000 “who paid no income tax to this state last year because of various exemptions and deductions” he said would “be taxed a fair and equitable amount of such income.”

Seeking a 3% increase in natural gas taxes, he noted that 60% of production was shipped out of state where the burden of the tax would flow.

Over ensuing years, Oklahoma governors and legislatures repealed much of Hall’s taxes. Rising costs of common schools were increasingly borne by property and homeowners. Higher education tuition soared even at junior colleges and vocational schools.

In 1970, Hall defeated Gov. Dewey Bartlett by a narrow 336,157 to 330,338. Days after Hall’s 1971-1975 term was completed, he was indicted, found guilty by a federal jury and served prison time. He died May 6, 2016 in La Jolla, CA.

Norman resident Joseph H. Carter Sr. was Hall’s speechwriter, press secretary then executive assistant.

Not Our Only ‘Fire’

BY B.A. GEARY

The Coronavirus pandemic and its changes to our daily lives mustn’t numb our awareness of other worldwide catastrophic threats – climate change, which still requires radical action, and a third “fire” that needs to be put out.

Scientists and doctors like Anthony B. Miller, MD, longtime World Health Organization advisor, have warned about this figurative “fire” for many years. Tackling it poses a significant challenge. Since it supplies considerable benefits – fun and great convenience – people are reluctant to consider its negative biological impact on humans and wildlife.

During the time the Soviets were irradiating the U.S. Embassy in Moscow [1953-78] the embassy had the highest cancer rate in the world. This was reported by U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew

PUBLIC FORUM

Brzezinski, speaking to Chicago Daily News columnist Keyes Beech in March 1976.

The Soviets believed correctly [and were proving] that man-made non-ionizing radiation was harmful. Strangely, the U.S. State Department, even as victim, publicly tried to ignore the facts and the U.S. government is still largely quiet about them.

Electromagnetic radiation, man-made non-ionizing radiation, is indeed the third “fire” we face. It is now almost everywhere among us.

Think of all the radiation from cordless phones and cell phones we carry, and from cell towers in residential neighborhoods; from wireless in schools, libraries, restaurants, hospitals and our homes; from “smart” electric, gas and water meters on our homes and from the ominous advance of 5G [“the next generation of wireless”], already beamed down by literally thousands of satellites.

Thanks to those many sources of radiation – plus Bluetooth, laptops, iPads and other tablets, iPods, wearable devices, baby monitors, gaming systems, hearing aids, etc. – a common radiation reading in a U.S. household today, on a 24-hour basis, approximates the amount of radiation [20,000 to 128,000 microWatts per square meter] used by the Soviets against the U.S. embassy.

There has never been a safe level of microwave radiation determined in the scientific literature. Man-made radiation interferes with the natural electric circuitry of our bodies and damages our health and our DNA.

Bio and health effects can occur at extremely low levers of exposure, and effects can be expected to be cumulative. Statistics show dramatic growth in cancer numbers where cell phones and wireless devices are used/stored on the body or where there are heavy cell tower emissions.

One U.S. agency that has been particularly unhelpful in protecting people and the environment from non-ionizing radiation is the FCC [Federal Communication Commission]. Infested by the telecom industry it is supposed to regulate, it has no competence in matters of safety or health, resists scientific accountability, and has opposed adamantly any safety testing for 5G.

Now, with coronavirus keeping U.S. children out of school, one FCC commissioner is recommending that WiFi be provided for studies at home! The fair and kind thing for children, however, would be to provide WIRED internet at home, not harmful microwave radiation. Our ignorance is showing again badly.

By comparison, Russian official action to protect children puts us to shame. The Scientific Research Institute of Hygiene and Children’s Health in the Russian Ministry of Health and the Russian National Committee on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection

[RusCNIRP] say to reduce kids’ exposure to WiFi at home, and even provide 15 very specific guidelines.

What can be done to protect us and our children from constantly increasing radiation exposure and the ignorance that enables it?

We can hope that U.S. courts will decide against the FCC in lawsuits concerning the commission’s faulty health guidelines. We can oppose at every legislative level – federal, state and municipal – the continued gradual installation of 5G infrastructure and demand that it be uninstalled for the sake of life on this planet.

We should be aware that a just-signed federal law, S.893, requires the president to develop a strategy to secure and protect 5G. That dangerous push is unacceptable if we care about survival. Fully implemented 5G will leave no safe place on earth.

As individuals, we can consider how to minimize our own reliance on devices that emit non-ionizing radiation and can learn how to use technology in safer ways. The well-entrenched myth of 5G wireless providing the fastest internet needs to be exposed. Truth is, fiber optic is faster [and safe].

Thanks to Safe Tech educator Cece Doucette, here is a link to a public service video from WACA-TV with a 23-minute demonstration of the EMFs [electromagnetic fields] in many North American homes, and solutions to lower radiation exposure: <https://vimeo.com/159873631>.

B.A. Geary lives in Tulsa.

*When leaders lie,
more concerned with their power
than they are with our lives
and deaths;*

*When the rich look down,
refuse to acknowledge
that it’s our labor that makes them rich,
that they owe us, not we them;*

*When we see the world we know
slipping back into the slime
because too many prefer fairy tales
to truth,*

*Let this be a call to act,
a call to resist the greed
and despair,
a call to unite*

*To save what’s left
and what’s right
in this country
of ours.
– Sharon Martin*

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1st Amendment Confronts Thorny Traps As COVID-19 Pandemic Mushrooms

BY JOHN M. WYLIE II

A new pandemic likely will plague the 1st Amendment long after doctors find a vaccine and treatments for the COVID-19 virus now rocking the world.

The ensuing chaos could threaten human life, normal business, and societal functions at least as gravely as the virus itself already has.

Already, Spanish troops found nursing home residents living abandoned, silent and without caretakers amidst the rotting bodies of those who had already died. Some of the living were near death, others not yet visibly ill from the virus but all were without anyone present who knew and could speak for them.

Top U.S. Health and Human Services official Roger Severino had to issue a stern order Mar. 28 reminding health care providers that federal law protects "ev-

ery human life from ruthless utilitarianism. HHS is committed to leaving no one behind during an emergency."

The aged, disabled or others with "quality of life" issues "should not be put at the end of the line for health care during emergencies," HHS civil rights director Severino added. He was responding to hospital protocols spelling out how to determine which patients should receive only palliative care until death.

Yet the very people Severino sought to protect are those least able to protect themselves by exercising their 1st Amendment free speech rights. All family or other visitors are now barred to block new infections.

A similar policy in Spain apparently was in part responsible for patients left dead in their beds or alive but "completely left to fend for themselves," Spanish

Defense Minister Margarita Robles told the Associated Press Mar. 24.

Anyone ever personally or with a loved one confined to intensive care knows the vital need to have a family advocate present to ensure the patient's 1st Amendment rights – and lives – are protected.

At the root of the future crisis is the conflict between the part of the 1st Amendment we all know by heart – the right to uncensored speech and press – and the 5th Amendment for an accused person to remain silent.

The right of silence, however, is also an integral part of the 1st Amendment since it prohibits government interference in freedom of speech, the press and peaceable assembly to seek redress of grievances.

Such freedom provides two rights. Black's Law Dictionary reminds us that freedom is "the right to do what one wants without being controlled or restricted by anyone."

That includes the right to not make statements or repeat statements as facts that are untrue or of questionable validity.

Yet in today's hyper-speed information world, bogus information all too often gains a life of its own. Disaster results when the false narratives swamp the truth.

So how does anyone writing for an audience – whether 50 on Facebook or millions in newspapers, television, online services or other media – balance the 1st Amendment rights to speak out or highlight the words of others [even knowing they are false or unverified] vs. the right to ignore such material by exercising their right to be silent?

How does anyone keep the 1st Amendment front-and-center in arguments when, just as happened during the missile-gap debates decades ago, extreme but big-megaphone snake oil pushers demand their "1st Amendment rights" in your copy?

GET A SPINE

Nothing said by anyone with a report or opinion about the current pandemic is entitled to live coverage on any medium. Those running live media should only provide live coverage of those who: know, understand and share facts; provide new insights and understanding as well as concise status updates; and who avoid personal attacks on real or perceived rivals or opponents or wander off to pontification on unrelated political talking points.

REMEMBER SOLID REPORTING

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's daily briefings are the gold standard, but even they can be boiled down by most audio/video services. Most outlets can run the full unedited briefings online for those who want to review them.

The most newsworthy material can be pulled from recordings.

Writing, whether straight reporting or straight opinion pieces labeled as such, are not just stenography. They are coverage or explanation of an event or series of events organized, condensed and when need-

ed simplified or expanded so the reader, listener or viewer who wasn't there can feel as if he or she was.

PUT ACCURACY AND HONESTY FIRST

In the mad rush to get a story first, two or three versions often are sent before the news organization or blogger or poster gets everything right. Slow down a little! Get the most important facts that are 100% solid out immediately, but take enough time to properly vet and verify the rest of a complex story. Those whose only joy in life is griping won't care, but the ones you care about – who will pay for good solid information – care most about getting news they can rely on to share with friends, colleagues or subscribers.

BE CAREFUL OF SNAP JUDGMENTS

We may look back in a decade and say this was a brilliant column which showed great insight and foresight. Or, when all the facts are known about the origin, transmission, vaccine against and cure for Covid-19, we may ask how we could have been so dumb. We make no promises that this is a roadmap to the events we will have seen by 2030, only that it represents what we can deduce from the knowledge we have at deadline – noon Sunday, Mar. 29, 2020.

The live broadcasts can cause serious damage, according to hospitals and medical research facilities treating autoimmune disorders such as the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation's Rheumatology Center of Excellence in Oklahoma City.

It issued a news release saying that President Donald Trump's live TV "touting" of the drug hydroxychloroquine and its cousin chloroquine as a potential Covid-19 treatment "has created a potential crisis for patients with lupus and autoimmune diseases" for which they are prescribed and life-saving. The center and others working with such patients got Gov. Kevin Stitt to issue an emergency order limiting access to the drug so those who truly need it don't face the inability to refill prescriptions. Breaks in taking the drug on schedule can worsen the conditions.

Clinical trials have started, but warns Dr. Joan Merrill, an OMRF researcher and chief advisor of clinical development for the Lupus Foundation of America, said early results such as those announced on live TV by Trump often seem promising "but do not pan out" after further testing "so it is best not to overhype these drugs right now."

In a widely publicized case, an Arizona man died and his wife was seriously ill after they took a fish tank cleaner with the same active ingredient as one of the drugs and were poisoned by it. The woman told NBC news that she had a container of the fish cleaner on a back shelf at home because she had used it when they kept fish, and recognized the name from hearing the President discuss the drug on TV.

ARE BOOMERS A BUMMER?

As life expectancy grew and medicine experienced huge breakthroughs, senior citizens became a larger percentage of the population – and the cost of their health care became a growing political issue. It was

often called the third stage of American politics, because the group makes up such a huge part of the nation's population and its members vote with a fervor far beyond that of other groups.

But it was the baby boomer generation that adopted various versions of the slogan "Don't trust anyone over 30" during the mid-'60s, when the anti-Vietnam War movement and other protests were growing.

It originated with a guy named Jack Weinberg, an activist with the Free Speech Movement at the University of California-Berkeley, who told *The Berkeley Daily Planet* in April 2000 that the line originated as he tried to get rid of a reporter trying to link student activism to Communism.

It spread like wildfire, and was still in use by some younger activists when Weinberg, as a long-timer promoting labor union and environmental causes, gave the interview.

Before that phrase could die out, Gov. Richard Lamm of Colorado [now 84] gave a speech almost exactly 36 years ago in March 1984 which was widely reported to have urged that elderly people who are terminally ill have a "duty to die and get out of the way."

It drew national headlines and became a worldwide phenomenon when a folk singer included a song about it – "Growing old in Colorado" – in his 1985 album "1 million lawyers and other disasters." Its final verse said he and his wife would "do what the governor wants us to," by sticking their heads in an oven, lighting two matches, and "blow ourselves Rocky Mountain High."

Lamm has long said the quote was taken out of context and that what the speech did was to present ideas of balancing the high cost of life-extending machinery that would eventually lose the ability to prolong life any longer.

The actual quote, he said in a statement in 1984 and repeated in the new *Westworld* article, was, "We've got a duty to die and get out of the way with all of our machines and artificial hearts and everything else like that and let the other society, our kids, build a reasonable life."

He still insists that, "we have a bigger duty when we ration medicine to a five-year-old than to an 85-year-old."

Lamm doesn't address barring family or a close friend from serving as the eyes, ears and 1st Amendment voice for aged COVID-19 patients unable to effectively advocate for themselves.

That idea is growing as the virus [and fear of it spreads]. The *Wall Street Journal* in a lengthy front page story Mar. 26 reported multiple versions of restrictions on seniors: polling places were removed from 128 assisted living centers and nursing homes; in Pittsburgh an assisted living center confined all residents to their buildings, barred all visitors, and even ended Bingo games except those that could be conducted by residents sitting just inside the doors to their units where they could hear numbers called

from the hallways. Before imposing the final restrictions management revised protocols 17 times in six days.

The *New York Times* reports that even owners of second homes in part of Door County, WI, are being told to remain away from their property and the community despite in many cases having owned the houses longer than permanent residents. The story's headline offers little hope they'll be able to seek redress of their grievances: "We are trying to protect our own': The town's keeping part-timers out."

Delaware County, NY, in the Catskills region is among several that has sent blunt orders telling second homeowners to stay away.

"We're really trying to get people to understand how dire this is. We don't want anyone to die," Shelly Johnson-Bennett, the Delaware County planning and watershed director said.

The restrictions – and the 1st Amendment issues they raise – keep growing, just like the virus itself and its toll of sick and dead.

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.

Parachute Club

Yesterday my daughter e-mailed me again, asking why I didn't do something useful with my time.

"Like sitting around the pool, drinking wine isn't a good thing?" I asked.

She is "only thinking of me," she said, and suggested, I go down to the Senior Center and hang out with the fellas.

So, I did and when I got home, decided to play a prank on her.

I sent her an e-mail saying that I had joined the Senior Parachute Club.

She replied, "Are you nuts? You're 86-years-old and now you're going to start jumping out of airplanes?"

I told her that I even had a Membership Card and e-mailed a copy to her.

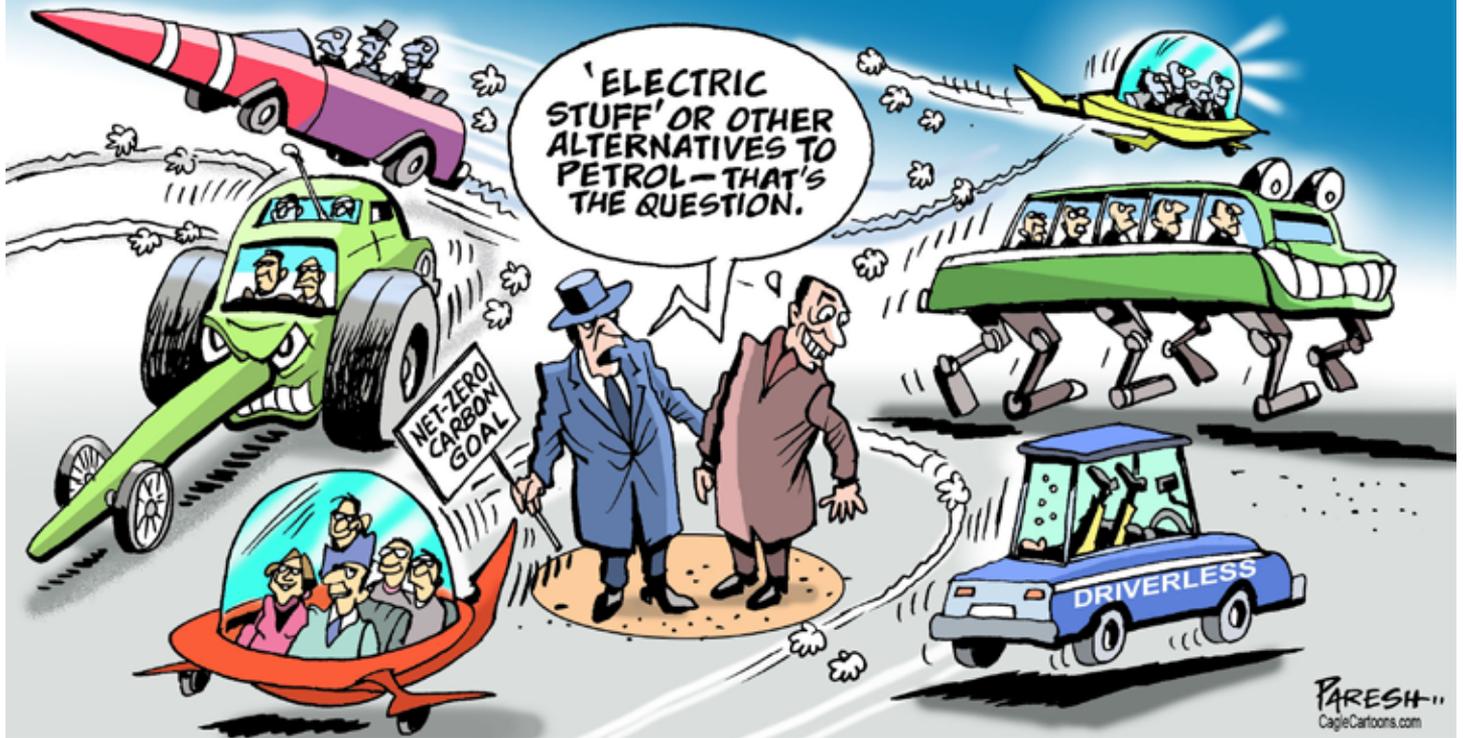
Immediately, she telephoned me and yelled, "Good grief, Dad, where are your glasses? This is a membership to a Prostitute Club, not a Parachute Club."

"Oh man, am I in trouble," I said, "I signed up for five jumps a week!"

The line went dead.

Life as a senior isn't getting any easier, but sometimes it can be fun.

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



Renewable Energy In The Future

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

Actually the dawn of the Renewable Energy [RE] future already is here. Having established itself as second only to Texas in the production of wind-powered energy, Oklahoma continues utilizing it at a high rate and is now pursuing solar-powered energy with gusto. And it is not alone.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has created several important initiatives that support RE, including using electric vehicles [EVs] and other sustainable practices. When asked which technologies he considered crucial to continue its evolution, he responded, "Our main focus is twofold: protecting our environment while making the economy work for everyone."

To meet these goals, Los Angeles is now making investments that will pay off in less fossil fuels, cleaner air, greater prosperity for the workforce, and a carbon-neutral future for its communities. When asked about myths surrounding RE, Garcetti noted that some people falsely believe clean will mean higher energy bills - which is simply not true.

The price of RE has steadily decreased over the past decade, and in fact is now trending toward becoming the cheapest option available almost everywhere.

Today in any discussion about RE sources, it's important to note that RE has nearly doubled in the U.S. over the last five years, providing 17.6% of electric

generation. It's not that REs don't have challenges.

"Right now, all-renewable isn't practical," according to Paula Gold-Williams, president and CEO of CPS Energy in San Antonio, TX, the largest municipal-owned energy utility in the country. "They're weather- and time-dependent, and energy storage right now is expensive."

But that will all change someday; in fact it's already beginning to change.

With her background in accounting - hence not the obvious pick to run CPS Energy - Gold-Williams is bringing a fresh perspective to the new age of renewables. She claims she's utilizing her diverse career experiences to help shift the focus at CPS from poles, lines, and pipes. REs are an essential part of any discussion about energy in the 21st century in figuring out its role in people's lives, she said.

The way she looks at the future of the energy industry is that it is in the middle of trying to figure out how to make energy a more active part of people's lives. When that does occur, says Gold-Williams, energy will enable technology to respond to how people want to live. That means energy providers will have to move very carefully when adopting new energy generation technologies.

One example of this approach is the plan called Flexible PathCPS Energy that was launched in 2018

as a stable pathway in reducing reliance on fossil fuels. The Flexible Path is a generation strategy that will last for the next 30-40 years. It will combine renewables with new technologies and approaches to fossil-fuel energy sources. An example is the creation of small capacity plants of two to three megawatts.

CPS Energy is now a leader in renewable energy. At the Southwest Research Institute it recently completed a new battery storage facility that consists of a five-megawatt solar power facility combined with a 10-megawatt storage system. This installation allows CPS Energy to “shift” energy, thus capturing it during the sunlit hours, storing it in batteries, and then dispatching it later when the demand increases.

Gold-Williams is leading a 159-year-old energy company. True, she is not exactly the usual suspect to lead a utility company. She has over 30 years of experience, however, in leadership that ranges from telecommunications to food services. As she says, “I have always been open to learning new things.”

When asked about the most formative piece of career advice she had received, she replied: “Be present in the moment for opportunity and just say YES. Over her career she volunteered for projects others didn’t want. She considers herself a lifelong learner, and she feels that taking projects and roles others didn’t want would provide opportunity to learn even more. Apparently it did.

One final example of where we are with electricity.

The future of cars is here, and it is definitely electric. In case you are not aware, if you’ve been thinking of electric vehicles as the future, you are wrong. They are the present. About a year and a half ago EV sales topped one million and they are currently selling at a rate that should exceed last year’s with room to spare. Many reasons exist why you should make your next car an electric one.

Manufacturers are increasingly betting on EVs moving away from conventional and even hybrid vehicles. Electric vehicles have a lower pollution rate since electricity generation produces significantly lower emissions than do fossil fuels, and they bring cost savings.

For those concerned about whether the infrastructure is in place to support EVs, relax – today’s EV infrastructure is more advanced than you think. Most EV owners charge their vehicles at home, where electricity prices are the lowest. Companies are increasingly offering charging stations to their employees, as are hotel chains and other public areas.

A century ago the automobile revolutionized our society and the nation rose to the challenge. Today electric vehicles are no less exciting and we are meeting the new challenge head on.

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.

Virginia’s Goal: 100% Renewable

Virginia, which now has a Democrat as governor and Democrats in control of the statehouse, has followed the lead of several other blue states and committed itself to transition away from fossil fuels to a clean, renewable, carbon-free energy, as Vox reported. It makes Virginia the first state in the South to commit to 100% clean energy.

Last September, Gov. Ralph Northam signed an executive order for the state to run on 100% renewable energy completely by 2050. His order forced several state agencies to create a plan for meeting that goal and for moving 30% of the state’s power to renewable sources in the next decade, according to PBS. The order also brought Virginia into the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative [RGGI], a carbon-trading market that includes California, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico, New York and Washington — along with Washington DC and Puerto Rico.

The bill actually pushed Northam’s mandate up five years for Dominion Energy, one of the state’s two power companies. It will run on clean energy by 2045, at the latest. The other, Appalachian Power, will have to 2050 to transition.

The bill also calls for setting targets for massive investments in energy efficiency, energy storage and in-state solar and wind power, according to Green

Tech Media.

The Virginia Clean Economy Act will also hold costs down and protect low-income and vulnerable communities. It also requires the state’s energy suppliers to boost power storage, increase their offshore wind energy generation and invest in rooftop solar panels, according to Vox.

“The cost of doing nothing is staggering,” said state Sen. Jennifer McClellan of Richmond, as the Virginia Mercury reported. “Yes, this is a big bill, but it does some very important things that Virginia is far, far behind in doing.”

While the bill faced criticism from Republicans who sounded the usual dog whistle of clean energy costing jobs and being expensive, it also faced Democratic defections, mainly from delegates who believed the bill isn’t strong enough.

Virginia has two major power suppliers, Dominion Energy and Appalachian Power. The two hold enormous lobbying power and have resisted progress toward clean energy. However, a broad coalition sprouted up to support the Virginia Clean Economy Act.

As GreenBiz noted: “[A] broad coalition of clean energy businesses, environmental groups, grass-



What I Learned On My Coronavirus Vacation

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

As the coronavirus outbreak morphed into a pandemic and it became more and more evident that the United States would be profoundly affected, it also became evident that effective leadership would be needed.

It was also clear that strong leadership would require a commitment to values and virtues that are absent in Donald Trump's character and to sources and methods that are missing in his approach to the presidency.

In a sense, we didn't learn anything new about Trump. Yet the situation we found ourselves in distilled certain themes, made them stand out, and gave even Trump supporters a new opportunity to stand in the glare of lack of seriousness and competence.

Here's what I [we] learned as the virus disrupted

normal life in America. Reminders for some – suspicions turned into new knowledge for others.

TRUTH MATTERS

It may seem that discussions about the nature, efficacy, and even the existence of truth are abstract and useless academic exercises – until the issues are dramatized by their relation to human welfare. Post-truth? Alternative facts? Thousands of falsehoods and misleading statements from the president. No harm – no foul?

But there is harm here, and death – if we don't get things right. How serious is the virus? How is it transmitted? How can it be contained? We need true answers to these questions. We need true beliefs about the natural world and social behavior in order to respond adequately, to mitigate human suffering. We need someone to tell us the truth.

SCIENCE MATTERS

Science may not be the only way to acquire true beliefs, in general, but it is surely the most reliable way to understand nature, and social science is enormously important in understanding human beings. If truth matters, then science matters, as we have seen in the development of the pandemic and as we apprehend every day in the activities of medical science and health practitioners.

It has somehow been possible to politicize issues associated with climate change and to downplay scientific consensus. It is more difficult to demean science in the face of a pandemic. Our appreciation of scientific inquiry should make it easier to generalize and take seriously the role of science in a broader range of public policy concerns.

EXPERTS MATTER

If truth matters and science matters, then expertise in the relevant scientific areas matters – and a broader principle is at work. It makes sense to consult virologists and epidemiologists when a pandemic threatens, rather than self-serving politicians and cable television partisans. It also makes sense to recognize the value of expertise more generally – and to understand our own limitations when we need help and more knowledge.

From the beginning of Trump's administration, "draining the swamp" seemed to have more to do with expelling those with experience and expertise than purifying a scummy collection of bureaucrats. [See Michael Lewis's description of the transition to the Trump administration in *The Fifth Risk: Undoing Democracy*, 2017].

This point about expertise is of no small import when we consider Trump, whose distrust of experts follows from his sense that no one knows more than he does about ... everything!

Some of the more disturbing parts of *A Very Stable Genius: Donald Trump's Testing of America*, 2020, by Phillip Rucker and Carol Lenning, are the descriptions of cabinet members and staffers attempting to give Trump remedial tutorials about history, geography, and international affairs. Rucker and Lenning: "As the President repeatedly told Kelly when he proposed a subject briefing: 'I don't want to talk to anyone. I know more than they do. I know better than anybody else.'"

Experts? Who needs them when you know everything? From January until the middle of March, Trump was at least consistent. He repeatedly contradicted the experts about the developing epidemic.

TRUST MATTERS

Because we recognize our limitations and must consult experts and more knowledgeable practitioners, trust matters: in your physician, financial advisor, mechanic, or handyperson. Trust is decisively important in social life and no less so in good government.

What happens when a political leader is indifferent to truth, denies the relevance of science, and

distrusts or ignores experts? Those who look for leadership are set adrift, without secure guidance.

It took almost two months for Trump to take seriously the warnings about the coronavirus. For citizens there was no reason to trust anything he said about the growing pandemic, given his track record. Later, it was clear that health care experts had taken control of the conversation as Trump stumbled through instructions, reading from a teleprompter in muted tones, the normal bombast absent.

COMPETENCE MATTERS

As the virus spread worldwide, I found myself reading *A Very Stable Genius*. The book provides an alarming narrative of incompetence at the highest level. "He [Trump] was at times dangerously uninformed," said one senior former advisor."

After meeting with President Emmanuel Macron of France, "A senior European official observed, 'He's totally ignorant of everything. He doesn't care. He's not interested.'"

The authors interpreted the concerns of Trump's advisors: "This guy doesn't know what he's doing."

Reflecting on the rise of fascism in Germany, an aide says: "I like to believe [Trump] is too self-engrossed, too incompetent and disorganized to get us to 1930 ... But he has moved the bar ..."

It has taken a pandemic to shine a public light more dramatically on Trump's incompetence, as thousands [or more] pay the price for the administration's inept early response to the growing threat.

From early January until later in March, Trump insisted that everything was fine. His first instinct was to deflect and dissemble, saying that things were under "tremendous control," cases were getting "progressively better," and "going very substantially down." "It's going to disappear." "Anybody that [sic] wants a test can get a test."

Trump dithered while the boat was taking on water.

Trump's incompetence hasn't been merely a function of poor management. The problem lies at the heart of Trumpworld, which often has a tenuous relation to the real thing. A pandemic has the inconvenient power to puncture fiction. As one health expert said, Trump's claims were "dissociated from reality."

NARCISSISM IS DANGEROUS

There is a difference between self-confidence or high self-esteem, and narcissism. A leader might have responded to the pandemic by telling the truth, confidently reassuring people, listening to knowledgeable public health experts, and making difficult decisions.

Instead, Trump's initial response was to see the outbreak as a threat to his chances for re-election. He misinformed the public because he was focused on the political implications of the epidemic, not threats to public health. Did he care about the nasty possibilities?

We saw the usual expressions of his narcissism:

unconcern with truth [attacking the media]; conspiracy theories; blaming others [foreigners, Democrats, the Obama administration]; inflating the impact of the little he did, early on; walking back falsehoods; and finally, rewriting history. [Trump: "I felt it was a pandemic long before it was called a pandemic."]

His narcissism prohibited him from seeing the outbreak, initially, as anything other than a public relations problem for himself. We are now confronting, in part, the consequences of his delusional, inflated ego, which prohibits him from seeing things as they are, instead of how he wants things to be.

COMPASSION MATTERS

Bill Clinton felt our pain. Does Trump feel anything at all about other people?

Trump's initial response to the spreading virus was consistent with the way he treats other human beings. His cruel and abusive treatment of others is well-documented in *A Very Stable Genius*. In the index, under the main category, "Trump's characteristics," is the first entry: "Abuse of subordinates." The list of persons abused is extensive.

Other Trump characteristics listed in the index: childishness, hunger for praise and recognition, ignorance, image focus, impulsivity, insecurity, lying, paranoia, rages, reading difficulty, short attention span, solipsism, unwillingness to take responsibility.

What's missing? Compassion, empathy, feelings for others, generosity, benevolence, respect – character traits we need from a leader in a time of crisis.

CHARACTER MATTERS

A lack of other-regarding traits of character such as compassion or benevolence leads to a more general point about the importance of moral character, including other admirable traits: honesty, responsibility, courage.

Trump's hoped-for downfall would not quite mirror the structure of classical tragedy, since he's neither good nor noble, and his demise would be a very good thing indeed. Yet Trump's response to the pandemic has highlighted his deep flaws, which might, for

some, be the tipping point.

Trump has had to confront a reality, and hard truths, that are impervious to his attempts to fabricate and manipulate, all for the sake of self-glorification and conceit.

One of the central ironies of life is the way that great power may hide great weakness. Weaknesses are varied: moral, intellectual, practical. Power may mask lack of wisdom, despite the display of material success. The most powerful man in the world – yet one who is truly inferior in so many ways.

The Plague, by Albert Camus, tells the story of the onset of a plague in Oran, a city in Algeria. Like any great novel, it may be read in a number of different ways: an allegory about the Nazi occupation of France in World War II; the expression of certain existentialist themes, such as confrontation with suffering and death; the absurdity of the human condition; the problem of evil.

In the beginning the situation is eerily similar to our own. Dr. Rieux, the main character, a doctor, a relative expert in matters of health, must face city officials who deny the seriousness of the situation, the possibilities associated with dead rats and the history of bubonic plague. Inevitably, they are forced to use extreme measures to confront the plague, quarantining the city from the outside world, trapping even unlucky travelers in the disease-filled city.

The details of Camus' narrative are relevant for the way we are confronting our own plague, what is happening to us now. But it is the ending I find most interesting.

At the end, when the plague subsides and citizens are celebrating a return to normal life, we find out that Rieux has been the narrator. In the final paragraph of the book he warns us that the victory over the plague is not final. The plague will always be with us.

"And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city."

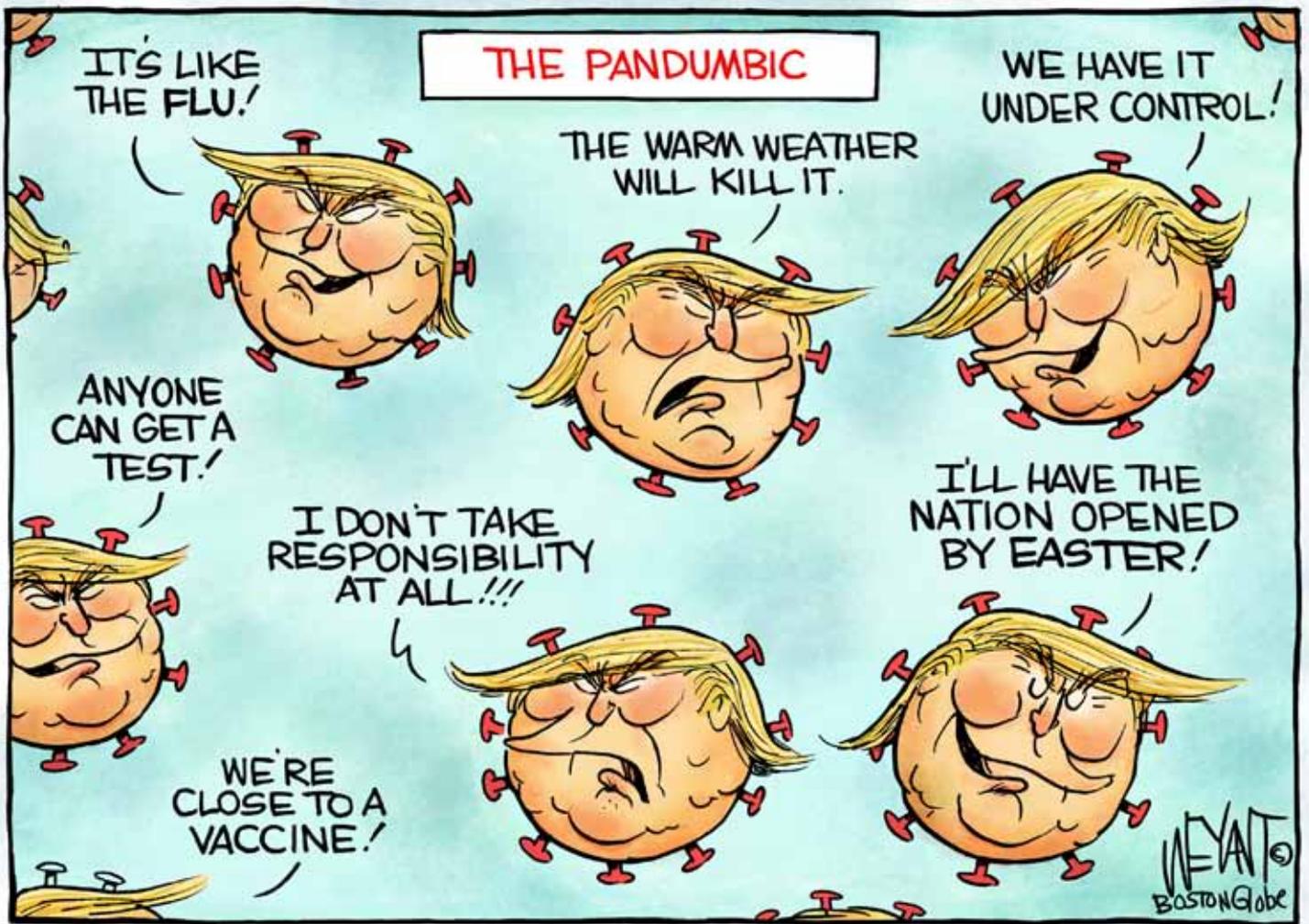
Perhaps we should read Camus' work as an allegory of our own political life, as well as an enlightening and realistic story that represents our own struggles with a virus and our future. On this account our victory over a virus in 2020 would be both political and literal - but not final.

The rats are among us. Vote Biden in 2020. *Randolph M. Feezell, PhD, grew up in northwestern Oklahoma and is professor emeritus of philosophy at Creighton University in Omaha, NE.*



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Trump's Pandemic Responses

JAN. 22: "We have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China."

FEB. 2: "We pretty much shut it down coming in from China. It's going to be fine."

FEB. 24: "The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA ... Stock Market starting to look very good to me!"

FEB. 25: "CDC & my administration are doing a GREAT job of handling Coronavirus."

"I think that's a problem that's going to go away. They have studied it. They know very much. In fact, we're very close to a vaccine."

FEB. 26: "The 15 cases within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero."

"We're going very substantially down, not up."

FEB. 27: "One day it's like a miracle, it will disappear."

FEB. 28: "We're ordering a lot of supplies. We're ordering a lot of, uh, elements that frankly we wouldn't be ordering unless it was something like this. But we're ordering a lot of different elements of medical."

MAR. 2: "You take a solid flu vaccine, you don't think that could have an impact, or much of an im-

pact, on corona?"

"A lot of things are happening, a lot of very exciting things are happening and they're happening very rapidly."

MAR. 4: "If we have thousands of people that get better by just, you know, sitting around and even going to work - some of them go to work, but they get better."

MAR. 5: "I NEVER said people feeling sick should go to work."

MAR. 6: "I think we're doing a really good job in this country at keeping it down ... a tremendous job at keeping it down."

"Anybody right now, and yesterday, anybody that needs a test gets a test. And the tests are beautiful. They are perfect just like the letter was perfect. The transcription was perfect. Right? This was not as perfect as that pretty good."

"I like this stuff. I really get it. People are surprised that I understand it. Every one of these doctors said, 'How do you know so much about this?' Maybe I have a natural ability. Maybe I should have done that instead of running for president."

"I don't need to have the numbers double b/c of 1 ship that wasn't our fault."

MAR. 8: "We have a perfectly coordinated and fine tuned plan at the White House for our attack on Coronavirus."

MAR. 9: "The Fake News Media & and their partner, the Democrat Party, is doing everything within its semi-considerable power to inflame the Coronavirus situation."

MAR. 10: "It will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away."

MAR. 13: National Emergency Declaration.

Editor's Note: This list was compiled from the president's public statements and tweets on the COVID-19 crisis. It is far from exhaustive, of course, and does not include statements uttered at daily briefings that more closely resemble his now-shelved campaign rallies than serious health updates.

What Life Has Become

BY DAVID MCLEMORE

The phone rang at 8:20 a.m. Friday, Mar. 9, 2018, scaring the dogs. We don't know many people who would call that early. Ginny answered. It was her rheumatologist with news that the routine blood test she had three days earlier showed she had leukemia. Less than two years later on Nov. 27, 2019, she was dead.

Ginny is Virginia Messec, my wife and partner for 43 years, mother of our two adult sons, former newspaper editor, and kindest, fiercest warrior I know. She had wrestled with rheumatoid arthritis for three decades. Three days after that phone call, she met her new oncologist for a bone marrow biopsy that confirmed AML – acute myeloid leukemia – and that immature white blood cells were filling her veins at a stunning rate.

She began chemo two days later at Southwest Methodist Hospital in San Antonio, launching a 20-month odyssey of repeated chemo, hospitalizations, office visits, blood transfusions, and diminishing return on hope. It was a long battle and she fought on. She made it clear to her doctor that she was not going to die in the hospital. And by mid-November, he said the decision was hers to make. The oncology nurses across the eighth floor rushed to tell her goodbye. Two weeks later, the night before Thanksgiving, she died at home on her terms under hospice care, surrounded by her two dogs and me. She was 64.

Death is a part of life, they say. We knew for some time that traditional chemo wasn't working and the oncologist had trick of a variety of new oral chemo

drugs had hit a wall. So, yes, cancer sucks, all the more so because it requires a valiant effort to fight it, even though it is winning. Ginny's mantra as it evolved over those 20 months was, "You live, until you don't." What doesn't become clear until later is how big a hole death tears out of the heart of the survivors. Grief is highly subjective but it can be a staggering weight to carry, especially if you don't have the women who helped carry all the other burdens a life together can bring.

So, you look through old photos, you expect any moment now to hear laughter, hear her call out from the other room. And you decide there's really not that much of interest outside your door. Favorite taco places or restaurants have no appeal. That's where you went with her. Life is something you shared. Friends and family are thoughtful and mean well and keep tabs on you and you smile and thank them and watch some more NCIS reruns.

That's what my life had become. And then, the world caught up with me, thanks to a new strain of so-far untreatable virus and a global pandemic. As Covid-19 runs through the world like metastatic cells set free, the government struggles to find some way to limit the damage and eventually settles on doing nothing. States and cities order schools and restaurants closed, public gathering and sports events shuttered, and workers sent home. And people discover "social distancing" as a new way of life.

Facebook, Twitter, and the myriad outlets of social media glow with the heat of ever-increasing suggestions on how to live apart from the world. Advice gushes out from computer screens on what books to read, what to watch on Netflix or Hulu, what do you do with the kids, how to shop for groceries online or order pizza from DoorDash. And mostly, what the hell do you do with all those hours in a day?

Initially, it all meant little to me. This is how I've spent my days the last four months. Not to denigrate the efforts to reduce the impact. Covid-19 is a scary, deadly virus. As of Mar. 18, it has already killed 8,885 people worldwide and 122 in the U.S. But this separation from the world was already my life.

And I liked it. I watch TV, play with the dogs, and read. But mainly, I am remembering Ginny. I miss her terribly and continually. I truly believe that as long as we remember the dead, they never truly die.

Yes, that is grief speaking. But it keeps the darker mist of grief at bay. And it reminds me of Ginny's credo that life is for living. It is my pause button.

But it also connects me to the land of the living. Suddenly, I am joined to a world in self-exile. Together, we now parse our days, keeping tuned to the news of what gains the virus makes as it marches across the globe, counting the death toll, checking to see if it grows closer and wonder at the fumbling efforts of our government to deal with it.

We regularly check our temperatures and wonder if that runny nose and allergic cough is developing into something more sinister. And ask when the

promised tests will be available. We maintain contact with others via social media to gripe, to joke and to offer what help we can, within the frame of social media to see how others are doing, how they are coping and relay our efforts to deal with the terrifying boredom.

For the first time for many of us, we truly know we are not alone. We live and are in this tiny boat together, struggling through rough seas to find our way to shore. And there is hope in that.

And perhaps that's what we all need right now – a moment to pause, to reflect, and remember who we are and who we love. And how we should live. And right now, separating from the world is necessary that we stay well and keep alive.

That's Ginny's gift to us all: You live, until you don't.

David McLemore is an Oklahoma State University alum and former longtime San Antonio Bureau Chief for the Dallas Morning News. This essay first appeared at the Stanford Newsletter Experiment, available by subscribing at <https://jasonstanford.substack.com>.

Rainbows Behind The Virus Crisis

BY FROMA HARROP

Milan is the V-8 engine of Italy's economy. Known as an industrial and financial powerhouse, Milan is also famous for its foul air. Now the city and its region, Lombardy, have become the epicenter of Europe's coronavirus pandemic. To stop the virus' spread, factories, offices, restaurants and bars are closed. People are ordered to stay at home. The traffic is gone.

And the air is much cleaner. Satellites report a dramatic drop in the region's air pollution. Since the lockdown started on Mar. 9, the levels of nitrogen oxide in northern Italy have plunged dramatically. NO₂ is a toxic gas that can cause inflammation of the body's air passages. Clean air has been a bright spot in the region's immense suffering.

Earlier, when China closed down its industry and told residents in the infected areas to shelter in place, the satellites noted a large drop-off in China's air pollution. Once the virus was contained and China restarted economic activity, pollution picked up.

This is not, of course, a call to freeze the American economy until the U.S. totally wipes out the coronavirus. Business must resume at some point, though let's pray that our political leaders have the wisdom to retain the ban on large human gatherings until this horrid microbe is under control.

This is merely a call for the world's industrialized peoples to breathe deeply and think: Clean air is kind of nice. Smog, the kind of air pollution you see and smell, also causes lung disease. And a byproduct of cleaning the air is a lowering of planet-warming gas emissions. Climate change will remain an existential threat long after coronavirus is tamed.

Perhaps this direct experience – easier to comprehend than the scientists' complicated models – will build support for a faster move to clean energy. My editor, Alissa Stevens, in notoriously smoggy Los Angeles says, "Skies are clearer than we've ever seen." The city was recently treated to a double rainbow over the Pacific Ocean, visible end to end. Everyone understands that.

The coronavirus has shuttered Venice, Italy. The massive waves of tourists are gone. No day-trippers. No gigantic cruise ships. The remaining Venetians have been ordered indoors.

But for some populations in Venice, social gatherings are booming. Shoals of tiny fish have returned to the canals. The daily flotilla of boats that churned up waves, making the water muddy, has been stilled. The canals are now hosting crabs and new plant life. Large water birds can be seen diving for fish, and ducks are leaving eggs.

Though tourism is Venice's economic lifeblood, not everyone there is totally unhappy with the quiet. There's been a growing movement in recent years to curb the city's overwhelming tourist numbers [20 million a year!] and restore some serenity to "La Serenissima."

Bad air can add to a virus' death toll. Researchers in China and the U.S. looked at mortality during the earlier outbreak of the SARS virus. They found that patients in areas with heavy pollution were twice as likely to die from the virus as those living under clearer skies.

Cai Xue'en, a delegate of China's National People's Congress, told Bloomberg News that in the wake of the coronavirus epidemic, "I think environmental protection will rank even higher for both the central and local governments."

No, we don't want a return to the pre-industrial age. Those who argue that an economy in deep recession, or even depression, is also bad for people's health have a point. But reduced pollution gives us a window into what we could experience daily were the environment cleaner. Sure, that may involve economic tradeoffs, but some would be worth making for a life more in tune with the Creation.

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Jim Hightower



Pandemic Profiteers, Trump And Peter Cottontail

Wartime profiteering is an especially vile form of corporate greed, yet it has been as common in our country as war itself.

Indeed, during the American Revolution, assorted corrupt merchants and traders lined their pockets by controlling the supply and jacking up the prices of various goods they sold to the Continental Army and the general public. Often, though, feisty colonials struck back at the gougers. In 1777, for example, when a Boston merchant was found to be hoarding imports of coffee and sugar to create an artificial shortage so he could charge the area's families exorbitant prices, a band of enraged Beantown women took matters into their own hands. They beat up the guy and confiscated his stock!

We could use a roving gang of indignant citizens today to confront the shameful greed of such corporate scammers as Boeing, American Airlines and Marriott, as well as such billionaire hucksters as Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk. They are among a new breed of *pandemic profiteers* that have rushed to Washington, shoving aside millions of workers, small businesses, poor people, students, nonprofits, farmers, cities and all other devastated victims of the COVID-19 crisis, demanding that corporations be first in line for a massive government rescue.

Take Boeing. Please! Already disgraced as a death-plane producer, its lobbyists brazenly swarmed into the White House and Congress, pleading for \$60 billion from taxpayers to protect its profits. Rather than booting Boeing and other uber-rich panhandlers out the public door, President Donald Trump and GOP Congress critters obsequiously soothed the fevered brows of these champions of socialist capitalism with a *half-trillion-dollar* handout of the people's money.

Which corporations would be favored? No telling. How much would each get? We'll tell you later, maybe. What's the criteria? Don't ask. What about the workers and suppliers? Let them apply for food stamps. Aren't you cutting food stamps? Shhhhh.

Luckily, enough Democrats had enough moral fortitude to block some of the grossest giveaways in the Republicans' \$500 billion corporate boondoggle, but the greedy, profiteering giants should not be given a single dime until the real and urgent needs

of the people are met. Profiteers should be *last* in line ... or turned over to descendants of those Boston women from 1777.

Meanwhile, glorious news about the coronavirus crisis itself! The renowned professor of pandemicology, Dr. Donald Trump, has found a magical medical antidote for the disease that had eluded lesser scientists: The Peter Cottontail Solution.

While sitting in the Rose Garden for a virtual Fox News town hall, the resident White House pandemicologist said that it suddenly dawned on him that, hippity-hoppity, Easter's on its way! So, he went on to declare that he was ready to lift all those pesky health restrictions and "have the country opened up" by Easter, which at the time was just 2½ away.

Would our public health crisis be over then? Dr. Trump said he didn't worry about such factual details. He explained to the Fox audience, "I just thought it was a beautiful time," noting that all of the nation's churches could fill up on that Sunday, bringing people together in celebration of his re-awakening of the moribund economy.

But wouldn't such a holy mass gathering actually reinvigorate the diabolical COVID-19 pathogen, spreading its destruction further, deeper and longer? Sure, said the good doctor. "You are going to lose a number of people," he said. But Wall Street and Corporate America are crippled by employees' staying home, so "We have to get back to work." This rallying cry for workers to pump up the sagging stock market by promptly returning to their offices and factories amounts to a crass "Die for the Dow" ethic espoused by Wall Street barons and billionaires.

Of course, for the cold inhumanity of such a dreadful policy idea to be made clear, it needs to be officially embraced as "Texas Stupid." Sure enough, one of my state's right-wing politicians, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, lunged into the national spotlight of Fox News to one-up Trump. He blathered that returning America to full economic throttle pronto is worth sacrificing the lives of "those of us who are 70-plus" years old. "Let's be smart about it," Lt. Dan added, thus demonstrating to millions that he and this idea are even dumber than a dust bunny.

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What Does Small Government Buy?

Suddenly, America is a nation of socialists, asking in dismay, “Where’s the government?”

These are not born-again Bernie Sanders activists but everyday people of all political stripes [including previously apolitical multitudes] who’re now clamoring for big-government intervention in their lives. Nothing like a coronavirus pandemic to bring home the need that all of us have – both as individuals and as a society – for an adequately funded, fully functioning, competent government capable of serving all.

Alas, as everyone can see in our present moment of critical national need, government today has been reduced to a rickety medicine show run by an inept, small-minded flimflammer peddling laissez-fairlyland snake oil.

“We have it totally under control,” President Donald Trump pompously declared after the first U.S. case was confirmed in January. As it began rapidly spreading out of control in February, he tweeted nonchalantly, “It will all work out well,” adding, “We’re doing a great job.” But an increasingly anxious public found that reliable test kits couldn’t even be purchased from Trump’s hollowed-out government health agencies. Still, he shrugged off all concern and responsibility: “Looks like by April, you know, in theory, when it gets a little warmer, it miraculously goes away.”

Not exactly a can-do Rooseveltian response to a national crisis, but he stayed blase, denying scientific reality and assuring us, “One day – it’s like a miracle – it will disappear.”

Of course, it hasn’t, and by March, the inconvenient fact of a rising death toll exposed this imposter of a president as incompetent, uncaring ... and silly.

So, after weeks of the complete absence of White House leadership, a deadly pathogen is raging practically everywhere across our land; unknown millions of us are being infected; a “closed indefinitely” sign has been hung on the American economy; and even our people’s social and civic interactions – the essence of community life – have been halted.

Right-wing politico Grover Norquist once said he wanted a government so small he could “drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub.” Trump is now showing us what such a small-minded government looks like. And what it costs us.

Suddenly, social distancing has become the official ethical standard for human relationships, abruptly supplanting eons of ingrained communal behavior by us humanoids [handshakes, hugs, pub

life, ceremonial gatherings, etc.]. Awkward. Disconcerting. Isolating.

Yet, as we frantically scramble to deter the health ravages of COVID-19 and grapple with the global economic devastation it’s causing, we might benefit by pondering how social distancing is a self-inflicted cause of the contagion’s disastrous spread. For some 40 years, American corporations and governments have colluded to push economic, political and social policies that have intentionally distanced the financial fortunes of the wealthy from the well-being of the workaday majority.

Consider the interrelationship of multimillionaires with the unseen kitchen staff of restaurants where they dine. To further enrich themselves, such multimillionaires have forced low-wage policies on food preparers, denied health coverage for them and lobbied to kill proposals to provide paid sick leave. So, one kitchen worker sneezes. He or she is infected with coronavirus but doesn’t know it due to having no health care coverage for testing. Even though running a fever, the staffer must come to work so as not to lose the job. Later, somewhere a multimillionaire sneezes. After all, COVID-19 doesn’t distinguish between rich and poor.

The very proposals that plutocrats have been blocking for years [living wages, “Medicare for All,” paid sick leave, family medical leave, free college and trade school tuition, home health care and others] are exactly what a sane government and egalitarian economy would adopt to fend off the wholly destructive inequality that now confronts every American.

While we’re now forced to temporarily distance ourselves from one another, the lethal disease our country has is the widening separation of rich elites from the rest of us. And the cure is a national push for renewed social *cohesiveness*. As a friend and fellow writer recently put it, COVID-19 “puts into focus a biological, psychological, economic, and socio-political fact we too often deny: We are a species of completely interdependent beings. – Jim Hightower

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Biden's Renaissance Reflects Push Back Against GOP Assault On Civil Rights

BY CARL P. LEUBSDORF

The civil rights revolution is not dead.

And when Rep. James Clyburn exhorted his fellow South Carolina African Americans to vote for Joe Biden, this is what he was really saying:

It's time to stand up to the Republican-nominated federal judges and the Trump administration appointees who are reversing the expansion of democracy that the civil rights revolution sought for all Americans, black or white, straight or gay, native-born or immigrants.

In a sense, that has become one of the underlying messages of the surprising turn in the Democratic presidential race, as large numbers of African Americans in the South and moderate suburbanites in the North fueled the comeback that restored Biden's front-runner status.

For the last dozen years, following Barack Obama's election in 2008, Republicans on the state and national levels have engaged in a concerted effort to roll back the voting rights advances of the 1960s, epitomized by enactment in 1965 of the Voting Rights Act. Rather than expand the electorate, they have sought to contract it.

As a reporter and columnist, I've covered it all from the drives in the 1960s for voting rights and school desegregation in the South to the 21st Century GOP counter-attack. Nothing has been more dispiriting than to see this negative turn in the federal courts, which once helped to produce those advances, and the collapse of the bipartisan congressional coalitions, which enacted them.

Lest we forget, it's only since Obama's election that Republican fears of the ascending voting majority of liberal-to-moderate whites and the country's growing minority population have prompted the GOP to turn away from the equal rights advances it initially helped to enact.

The most deadly assault has come from, of all places, the U.S. Supreme Court, most notably its 2013 decision that invalidated the provision of the Voting Rights Act that required the federal government to pre-clear voting law changes, mainly in Southern states like Texas with historical records of discrimination.

No institution so epitomizes the backlash as the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. Three ground-breaking Republican jurists, nominees of President Dwight Eisenhower, once led its assault on the segregation and illegalities of the past. Now, GOP appointees have made it a conservative bastion, most

recently responsible for declaring unconstitutional a measure aimed at helping millions of less fortunate Americans, black and white, the Affordable Care Act.

Half of the states have enacted restrictive voting legislation since 2010, reports New York University's Brennan Center, almost all by Republican governors and legislatures.

They include shortening pre-voting periods, enacting stricter voter identification requirements, reducing the number of voting places despite a growing population, and making registration harder for college students.

In some places, the impact has been significantly politically: analyses showed a major factor in Trump's narrow 2016 Wisconsin victory was the state's voter ID law's effect in discouraging minority voting; GOP leaders acknowledged that was one of the measure's goals.

The ostensible reason for the Court's voting rights decision was that its list of targeted states was outdated. To be fair, that argument had some merit, and the call for Congress to update it made some sense — on paper.

But in a day of partisan gridlock, surely some of the astute jurists who wrote that decision knew that the chances of corrective measures were minimal. It's worth noting that Chief Justice John Roberts has displayed animosity toward the Voting Rights Law from his earliest days as a young government lawyer.

Predictably, congressional Democrats introduced measures to update the law, and, equally predictably, Republicans looked the other way. The House voted late last year to restore the pre-clearance authority, with just one Republican vote, sending the legislation to certain death at the hands of Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, the self-styled "grim reaper" of liberal legislation.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has sided in some key judicial cases with efforts to limit voting rights, unlike prior administrations which supported efforts to expand voting.

When the history of Biden's comeback is written, and especially if he goes on to win the Democratic nomination and defeat Trump, accounts will cite Clyburn's endorsement as a crucial moment.

As Peggy Noonan noted in a perceptive column in *The Wall Street Journal*, his speech wasn't just an endorsement but "a template" for Biden's campaign "about the price you'll pay to stand where you

stand.”

And who could be a more appropriate person to do so than Clyburn? Before becoming a powerful congressional figure and the No. 3 leader of the House Democratic majority, he was one of those young African American students who led the fight for equality by demonstrating and getting themselves arrested to tear down legal barriers.

Along with the even more fabled Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, Clyburn is one of the last of those groundbreakers to be active in public life. It would serve him and history well if the campaign for which his speech reversed Biden’s fortunes could become the administration that reversed the retreat from the commitments many believed had become a permanent part of American life.

Carl P. Leubsdorf is the former Washington bureau chief of The Dallas Morning News.

Can People Change?

BY ANN DAPICE

In an interview with CBS’ Norah O’Donnell, Maine Sen. Susan Collins was quoted as saying, “Trump has learned a pretty big lesson from impeachment. I believe that he has learned from this case” and she predicted that he will be much more cautious in the future.”

President Trump himself rejected her comments saying that no lesson was learned. He followed the acquittal by a purge of administration officials who had testified against him in the impeachment hearings. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who also voted to acquit Trump, acknowledged that his behavior since did not suggest that he’d learned much from the months’ long ordeal.

So, the question is, can people grow, develop and change? I remember a student asking me decades ago how conflict was related to development. Another important question.

A retired, still passionate, “social activist” asked recently week if the presidential debates are any more than “mud wrestling.” They can provide voters with useful information, but they can also devolve into chaos providing little or no information helpful to citizens. Technology allows us to access records and make available many more behaviors than of past presidents.

Should voters ignore the past, or even recent actions, as President Trump’s supporters appear to do? The serious question is whether past behaviors are likely to continue such actions as president.

What behaviors or conditions are typically chronic, long standing, or addictive? Do people grow cogni-

tively, physically, emotionally, and spiritually? What do adults have available to encourage their ongoing development?

Behavioral psychology describes several factors: moral development, psychological type, and self-actualization.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Lawrence Kohlberg studied moral development across cultures. He showed that the first level of human development is egocentric in scope.

It is normal and necessary for children to be egocentric since they are fully dependent on their families for survival. Adult relationships, however, require concern for others beyond oneself, and when an adult remains at a childlike level of development, there are consequences for the family, the larger society, and in this case, the world.

The second level of development is ego-ethnocentric in attitude, focusing on concern for one’s own family and group. The ethnocentric concern may be limited to face-to-face relationships or may extend as far as to those who work in the same business, same profession, or even to one’s race, religion or nation. Research shows that few people develop beyond this level.

The third level is universalizing in attitude, focusing on others beyond one’s own kind or nation to a larger world. Since these people are rare, and since most ethical theory requires these stages of development, there is an enormous gap between who we are and who we need to be.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE

Early in his work in psychoanalysis, Carl Jung observed that we humans consistently use two functions in our behavior: perceiving and judging. Through perceiving, we become aware of things, people and ideas. Through judging, we come to conclusions regarding our perceptions.

He described two ways of perceiving: one through sensing – becoming aware through the five senses; the other through intuition – indirect perception by the unconscious of what is coming from outside.

Jung also described two ways of judging: thinking and feeling. Thinking uses logical process and feeling assigns value. In addition, he described two “attitudes” – introversion and extraversion. The introvert’s major interests are in the inner world of ideas. The extravert is more interested in people and things in the outside world. For each function or attitude, individuals have a preference [e.g., sensing or intuiting, thinking or feeling, extroverting or introverting]. Jung stressed that we need to develop both sides in order to be whole.

Building on his work, Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers developed these concepts further. Isabel Myers developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator [MBTI]. She added a fourth preference to the MBTI – the use of judging or perceiving on the outer world. An individual’s “type” then has four letters: either “E”

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Pandemic Presents Opportunity For Historic Change For Justice

BY RALPH NADER

Many of us have heard that the Chinese character for “crisis” is also the character for “opportunity.” During the coronavirus crisis, we have a duty to apply political solutions and emerge much superior than before the pandemic struck an unready country. The time for serious civic reforms is now!

Here are five fundamental opportunities for structural reforms and transformations:

1. The U.S. needs a permanent framework of explicit Congressional standards and accountability procedures for gigantic corporate welfare grants, loans, and other guarantees especially during emergencies. Without these standards, the U.S. government has repeatedly bailed out capitalism with “socialism for the rich.”

The most recent example is the \$2.2 trillion salvation package for big corporations, small businesses,

local and state governments, workers, and a little for consumers. The bailout package is nearly 1,000 pages of vague language, loopholes, and other gateways for waste, fraud, and corruption.

To put it mildly, Congress is granting the Treasury Department huge discretion to provide more taxpayer welfare to the business community. We know how this is going to turn out in the highly partisan, corporatist, secretive administration of Donald Trump.

The same lack of standards and openness afflicts the corporate “socialism” of the Federal Reserve even more deeply. The Federal Reserve has occult ways of incurring debt and printing money to save the big boys of Wall Street and those in their dependent commercial circles.

2. Congress must be held to a higher standard and must carry out its constitutional duties. Congress

is the duly authorized branch of the government to establish clear public missions and exercise prudent oversight of government initiatives. But as constitutional law specialist, Bruce Fein, has testified repeatedly – “Congress is an inkblot,” abdicating its constitutional duties either to the executive branch, the courts, or to the ether.

Working a 2½ day week, when not on recess, Congress has less time to conduct rigorous appropriations and oversight hearings to be followed by competently drafted legislation.

So pathetic is Congress that since 1992, it has allowed the Defense Department to violate the requirement for annual auditable budgets – with impunity. Congress has rubberstamped trillions of dollars for the Iraq and Afghan wars under a special escape from customary Senate and House hearings. The military contracts with giant arms contractors are a wildly out-of-control fleece-fest marked by greased palms and golden handshakes.

And most troubling, Congress is complicit in endless wars, neither to be declared since World War II, nor to be evaluated regularly by the most powerful of our three branches of government.

3. We must never allow ourselves to be driven into a state of perilous domestic unpreparedness due to the grotesque misallocation of federal funds behind the warfare state. The Empire’s insatiable demands worldwide have created new enemies and starved funding for domestic necessities. Of the federal government’s operation budgets [excluding self-funded insurance and social security] nearly 70% goes to the military budget, interest on deferred debt for wars, the Veterans Administration, and pieces of other Departments such as Energy and Homeland Security.

The coronavirus assault finds the mighty, often-forged U.S.A. without adequate emergency planning for a pandemic. The U.S. has been unable to ready hospitals, add skilled staff, and conduct critical pandemic medical research. U.S. hospitals even lack basic equipment such as ventilators, face-masks, and – astonishingly – swabs. U.S. readiness requires a social safety net like what citizens in other Western countries have. It means more self-reliant production in the U.S. for pharmaceuticals [now outsourced heavily to China and India] along with the production of all basic necessities. The rules of corporate-managed “free trade,” have left us without a national defense from corporate avarice run amok.

The days of abandoning crucial elements of our protective economic sovereignty must be declared over once and for all. Our country must take care of itself right down to producing critical swabs, now rationed by a dominant Italian manufacturer besieged with virus-induced needs in Italy.

4. The media has to be smarter, dig deeper, and not wallow in official source journalism, while ignoring the knowledge and experience of citizen

groups. Members of the media spend too much time ditto-heading each other, interviewing their own reporters, and not covering the daily power struggle between the haves and the have nots. Instead, some editors pursue long investigative features in search of prizes. Unfortunately, too many [but not all] journalists are content to rehash the news of the day with establishment talking heads.

Like politicians running for public office, the mass media mostly ignore the devastating impact on our country of the devouring, corrosive, burgeoning military-industrial complex [remember President Eisenhower’s warning] desperately looking for enemies abroad to justify their gigantic contracts.

5. The foundation on which all of the above relies ... is the citizenry. Focusing on the 535 members of the Congress, a mere 1% or less of citizens forming congressional watchdog groups over their two senators and representatives in every congressional district can regain command of Congress. Only through citizen action will Congress perform its constitutional duties and turn the ship of state from corporatism to a functioning democracy.

In my small paperback, *Breaking Through Power: It’s Easier than We Think*, I outline specific, modest actions citizens can take to laser-beam focus back home on their legislators. What is needed is a left/right alliance on many fundamental changes. Such a latent, converging alliance, where people live, work, and raise their families, is politically unstoppable.

Marshaling decisive public opinion can overwhelm the divide-and-rule tactics of manipulative plutocrats. It happened before in our history and it can happen again in major ways – starting small and building quickly in each district.

Wide reaching, predictable crises, such as the coronavirus, invite long-overdue advances in the evolution of democratic societies. These include full Medicare for all, living wages, and law and order for big business. We need to make the most of these life-sustaining opportunities. Right now!

Please visit SinglepayerAction.org, [Fight for \\$15](http://Fightfor$15.org), and Citizen.org.

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Virginia

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roots groups and lawmakers came together to craft the bills, negotiate with the state’s major utilities and shepherd them to final passage.

A number of businesses that are not tied to the energy sector also spoke up in support of these bills, helping state legislators understand that there is broad business support for decarbonizing the entire Virginia economy.

Furthermore, a study by Advanced Energy Economy concluded the bill would lower rates, create jobs and boost the state’s GDP. – *Jordan Davidson*

Unions That Oppose Single-Payer Are Doing Their Members A Disservice

BY MICHELLE CHEN

In early February, as the momentum of the primaries gathered behind Bernie Sanders, the senator's universal health care plan took center stage in Las Vegas, promising working-class Nevadans comprehensive access to health care and relief from soaring medical costs.

Nonetheless, one of Medicare for All's biggest critics in the lead-up to the Nevada caucus seemed to come from one of Sanders's key constituent groups: organized labor. The Culinary Union, UNITE HERE Local 226, circulated a flier that warned that Medicare for All would "end Culinary Healthcare." The flier argued that the plan to give everyone in the U.S. good health care would mean an end to the "good health care" that powerful unions have fought for over the years.

A few days of social media mayhem ensued, with pro-Sanders critics accusing Local 226 — which represents roughly 60,000 hospitality workers, mostly women and people of color — of sowing division with a reactionary stance on the left-most health care reform proposal in Washington. Then came another twist: On caucus day, many union members broke with their leaders and voted for the candidate who would supposedly end their union health plans.

The drama around Medicare for All in Nevada reflected an evolving debate on single-payer health care in the labor movement: Although a public, universal health care system would potentially prevent thousands of needless deaths as well as eliminate the hefty medical bills, premiums and copays that plague many workers and their families, leaders of unions — which collectively represent about one in 10 workers nationwide — are divided on Medicare for All.

Many labor organizations have deep economic and political stakes in the health insurance industry, often because they help provide health care to members under multiemployer insurance plans. Local 226 is one of several unions that run their own health centers, financed through a so-called Taft-Hartley trust fund, a jointly managed benefits fund established through collective bargaining that supports workers in multiple firms.

Overall, affordable health insurance is one of the keystone benefits that union contracts typically provide, for which unions have historically bargained as a form of compensation. Over time, labor advocates say, unions have been compelled to effectively prioritize long-term health care over other bargaining issues, as negotiations on insurance tend to crowd out discussions on take-home pay and other components

of a compensation package.

But over the past several decades, collective-bargaining agreements have become so backloaded with costly health care programs that the benefits that union members guard so jealously are precisely what's making their contracts unsustainable. As Truthout has reported, transitioning to a public universal health care system would liberate unions from having to haggle over insurance co-pays at the expense of demands on wages or pensions.

Mark Dudzic, national coordinator of the Labor Campaign for Single Payer, says that, as health care reform has become a central issue in Washington, the politics around it have changed: "People like Bernie [Sanders] have injected it into mass political consciousness," helping convince more unions "there's a political path to win this," he told Truthout. Dudzic estimates that, based on public support for single-payer legislation in Congress, organized labor groups representing the majority of the union workforce support a universal, national health plan.

Dudzic sees universal health care as a path to dismantling the power imbalance intrinsic to a collective-bargaining dynamic, which holds workers hostage to employer-based insurance plans.

"[W]hen we go into the bargaining process," he said, "employers know that they can hold that as a sword over our heads, on every other issue that we're bargaining over, and we can't walk away from that table with huge concessions on health care, so when that sword disappears, we have more power. Just like an individual worker has more power if she knows that she can leave her job and not lose her health care."

Many labor organizations have deep economic and political stakes in the health insurance industry because they help provide health care to members under multiemployer insurance plans.

While hundreds of unions and labor federations have broadly endorsed Medicare for All legislation, not all unions are actively campaigning for single-payer.

In 2017, the AFL-CIO conference unanimously passed a resolution aiming "to move expeditiously toward a single-payer system, like Medicare for All, that provides universal coverage using a social insurance model, while retaining a role for workers' health plans." The conservatively worded statement seemed to endorse some form of universal health care, but not as a replacement for existing union benefits. In

recent months, AFL-CIO and American Federation of Teachers leaders have apparently waffled on earlier support for Medicare for All.

Last September, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO convention went further than the 2017 resolution by pledging to make their presidential endorsement conditional on support for Medicare for All. California's single-payer legislation, which would implement a Medicare-for-All-type system statewide, has been endorsed by more than 30 unions and labor organizations, including the Los Angeles Federation of Labor, several municipal workers unions and UNITE HERE Local 11.

Health care workers, who are on the front line of the health care crisis as providers and patients, have been leading the charge for single-payer.

National Nurses United [NNU] points to recent nurses' strikes as an illustration of the cruel intersection of health care and labor crises: nurses have recently gone on strike in Vermont and Minnesota both to protect their own health care and advocate for better working conditions – and thus better care – for their patients.

"If we didn't have to fight so hard for that one aspect of our union contract, we would have more time to fight for other protections, like better wages, and for nurses – better patient care conditions," said NNU President Deborah Burger via email.

Sal Rosselli, president of the National Union of Healthcare Workers [NUHW], recalled that in the 1980s, when he organized with SEIU Local 250 in California, the union bargained hard to secure quality health plans for health care workers and their families. But as health care became increasingly corporatized, union leaders got mired in "a defensive fight, every contract cycle" with tight-fisted employers.

NUHW, representing 15,000 hospital and clinical personnel across California, champions Medicare for All not only as a basic public good, he says, but because it would help unions pursue stronger benefits and protections beyond just health insurance.

NUHW acknowledges reasonable concerns among some Medicare for All critics about the potential loss of health care industry jobs under the transition to single-payer. While there will be economic disruption when replacing the health insurance bureaucracy with a leaner, state-run program, Rosselli noted that NUHW members would be able to gain new jobs from a health care system that provides more comprehensive coverage and includes more people.

"When we accomplish Medicare for all," Rosselli said, "and have comparable access to care for all people that live in this country, there is going to be a demand for hundreds of thousands of jobs in the health care field – there's already shortages ... So, there will be tremendous opportunity in all kinds of ways."

Sanders's Medicare for All legislation also has built-in safeguards for workers through the transition process. Union employers would be mandated to pass

any health care savings from Medicare for All down to workers in their contracts – for example, by providing the equivalent value of their old health insurance plans in the form of wages and other benefits. His bill also pledges to support health care workers affected by the transition with up to five years of compensation and aid for displaced workers.

[The Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, estimates that within the five-year timeframe, the government could effectively implement a "just transition" to include retraining, relocation assistance and wage replacement for about 746,600 workers, for about \$61.5 billion annually for two years – roughly 2% of total operational spending.]

Union employers would be mandated to pass any health care savings from Medicare for All down to workers in their contracts.

The divisions around single-payer within the labor movement attest to a history of unions embedding themselves in the employer-based insurance industry, for reasons both practical and political. During the early 20th century, the American Federation of Labor joined with industry groups to oppose a proposal by social reformers for a universal health care plan, preferring instead to maintain labor's status as a welfare provider to union members. From the 1950s through the Obamacare era, employer-based health plans solidified as part of the social contract that unions offered members, becoming entrenched as part of a standard collective-bargaining package.

According to Anand Singh, president of UNITE HERE Local 2, shifting health care responsibilities to the government could help expand unionization in the long term, because currently, fear of high insurance costs is one factor that ramps up employers' union-busting campaigns and staunch opposition to workplace organizing. "Workers have a lot of reasons to join a union: a voice on the job, respect on the job. But [with respect to] employers, right now, health care is an impediment for workers really having that voice and exercising the right to join a union," Singh said at a recent media conference.

Carl Rosen of United Electrical Workers, a left industrial union that has long championed a broad social welfare agenda including single-payer, said that he understands why some unions argue that they want to maintain the benefits that they fought hard for. Workers in his union have had the same fights, he said, but "you'd be hard-pressed to find any members in our union – the ones who've actually been involved in those fights, who've had to go on strike in order to preserve their health care, who have had to take lesser wage increases than they want, etc. – you won't find any of them saying, 'Therefore I want to keep exactly what we have right now, because I had to fight to get it.'"

Shifting health care responsibilities to the government could help expand unionization in the long

CONNECTING THE DOTS

How A Covert Cabal Plotted The Takeover Of American Democracy

SHADOW NETWORK

Media, Money, And The Secret Hub Of The Radical Right

By Anne Nelson

Bloomsbury Publishing

394 pages, \$28

BY BRUCE PRESCOTT

If Anne Nelson's *Shadow Network* misses any connections to the secret hub that links the media, the money and the multifarious groups that comprise radical conservatism and the religious right, surely only a few people know about them.

More than 40 years ago Christian Nationalist Fundamentalist Baptists launched a political takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention [SBC]. Simultaneously, they helped begin a parallel takeover of the Republican Party by electing politicians amenable to assisting them in the reconstruction of American society and democracy.

Nelson provides the single most readable, comprehensive and up-to-date discussion of the influence on our society by the secretive Council for National Policy [CNP]. This shadow network has been operating and expanding for 39 years.

The cabal produced our current national tragedy and provided coordination, money and direction to most of the cast of elected GOP characters now running amok across the national and world stage.

These theocratic revolutionaries are media savvy, well-funded, highly organized and patient. They work through existing constitutional frameworks, subverting them as necessary to gain power. Once firmly in control, they consolidate their power by changing all constitutions, policies and procedures to align with

their goals.

It took them 10 years to completely control all the institutions, agencies and pulpits of the SBC – purging progressives, moderates and conservative dissenters at every level of the denomination. A blueprint they intend to apply to give them dominion over our nation and the entire world.

The takeover of the SBC was prompted by the changing political and social ethos of the 1960s and 1970s. It was a backlash to the success of the civil rights movement and to the burgeoning advocacy for equal rights for women and gays.

Initially, the secretive Council for National Policy [CNP] was founded to organize efforts to get out the “conservative Christian” vote for approved candidates. The role of the CNP grew as its efforts were successful and its influence expanded.

Leaders of the CNP knew early on that they needed more than the Baptist vote, the evangelical vote and the Catholic vote to accomplish their objectives.

Every chapter of this book offers more links to the varied organizations that populate the radical right – often with competing goals but all with a common enemy: liberal democracy. They truly have no enemies on the right.

Nelson masterfully weaves a narrative that traces

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Navigating America's Political Divide

CODE RED

*How Progressives
And Moderates
Can Unite To Save
Our Country*

*By E.J. Dionne Jr.
St. Martin's Press
262 pages, \$27.99*

BY
MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

Trying to navigate American politics the past few decades has not been easy. It requires seeing past the mindless talking points that get repeated every night on cable news. One has to recognize that while all politicians lie, not all politicians' lies carry the same moral weight. Sheer exhaustion – as first the internet and then Facebook and now Twitter all conspire to bring you more information and faster – must be avoided.

The election of Donald Trump as president threw even the most seasoned and sensible of commentators back on their heels. The conservative party embraced the least conservative politician imaginable. The constitutional foundations that had survived even the 2000 Florida election meltdown seemed inadequate when the candidate who received a stunning three million more votes lost the election. The Democratic Party seemed to have squandered all the hope that had swept Barack Obama into of-

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fice in 2008, unable to conquer the intransigence of Sen. Mitch McConnell, whose contempt for constitutional norms rivaled Trump's.

To make sense of it all, we need a map and there is no better mapmaker in the realm of contemporary politics than E.J. Dionne

Jr. No wonder three D.C. institutions – the Brookings Institution, Georgetown University and The Washington Post – all claim a piece of him and a fourth, Kramerbooks & Afterwords Cafe, offered him a lunch table at which he and an impressive list of guests shared

information and analysis over crab cakes or chicken quesadillas. [That is where I got to know him.]

Dionne's new book, *Code Red: How Progressives and Moderates Can Unite to Save Our Country*, is the latest in a genre he has perfected, the book-length moral exhortation cum political analysis. He accurately describes the dire situation our nation finds itself in, offers precise suggestions about how to get out of it and he does it with his characteristic sense of decency. If it is possible for a book to bristle, this book bristles with decency.

"The problems with the [moderate argument against progressives] were underscored by the outcome of the 2016 election: Moderation alone does not guarantee victory, and the progressive critique of the center has become more persuasive as economic inequality has widened," he writes. "The problem with the [progressive critique of moderates] is that every electoral contest involves both mobilization and persuasion. The important question is to establish where the balance between the two lies at a given moment. Neither can be ignored."

He repeats the advice of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr that we are "to seek the truth in our opponent's error, and the error in our own truth."

In an adversarial, partisan culture, Dionne sees not just hope but a strategy. "Both sides should also remember that successful political movements often define what they affirmatively believe after first coming together in opposition to a status quo they deplore." He wryly adds: "Call it the power of negative thinking."

He notes how Ronald Reagan and Trump both began with a critique of what they disliked about the status quo, a critique that united moderate and conservative elements in their party and crafted their agenda as a kind of photographic negative of the object of their critique.

One of the most mischievous varieties of political analysis, often found in media outlets, rests on the false belief that the political center possesses a kind of privileged status, a belief that presumes a moral equivalence between the two parties. There is no longer any such equivalence if ever there was. "Long before Trump, Republicans had moved much further to the right than Democrats had to the left. Research on congressional votes cast from the late 1970s to 2013 ... found that Democrats had moved 33% more left while Republicans moved 150% more right."

Dionne delightfully skewers any romanticization of Reagan, or even of the pre-Reagan Republicans, that still afflicts too many moderates. He believes the first wrong turn came in 1912, when the conservative wing of the party, which backed William Howard Taft, defeated the progressive challenge from Theodore Roosevelt.

Still, it was Reagan – who famously quipped, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help'" – who directed the GOP down the path that came to

fruition with Trump: "From Lincoln through Nixon, the Republican Party had often seen government in precisely the terms that Reagan mocked: as a means of helping people and the country as a whole through reform, public investment, and sensible rule-making."

Dionne also analyzes the ugly role that race-baiting played, first in Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy" and in Reagan's campaign appearance in Philadelphia, MS, and culminating in Trump's birtherism.

The history of how the left came to where it is today is even more complicated, not least because populism was more of a Democratic than a Republican phenomenon until Pat Buchanan articulated the cultural stances Trump would ride to victory.

Dionne correctly notes that the core divide within the Democratic Party since 1968 has been less ideological than one of sensibility, "a largely white, educated, reform-minded, and often suburban middle class constituency that rallied to [Eugene] McCarthy; a multiracial, cross-class, urban-inflected constituency that embraced [Robert] Kennedy." Obama was able to reach across this divide better than any Democratic candidate since 1968.

Dionne sees the rise in democratic socialism's acceptability as rooted not only in the retreat of the Cold War threat, but even more in the swing in foundational public opinion away from the Reaganite confidence in markets and individualism.

"Now, our common sense, while still skeptical of government's competence [after the Trump years, who could not be?], is deeply troubled by economic concentration, the power of corporations, the growth of monopoly power, and the unfairness of the distribution of wealth and income," he writes. "And mistrust of government now stems at least as much from a belief that it has been captured by powerful economic interests."

The libertarian, conservative sources of mistrust of government and confidence in markets no longer persuade when Amazon pays no taxes. This shift in popular sensibility shrinks the available constituency for Clintonian Third Way or Obama neoliberal approaches to the challenges the nation faces and the politics the moment demands: Both of those presidencies are examined by Dionne with sympathy and candor.

The ascendancy of Sen. Bernie Sanders in this year's first three nominating contests was unthinkable even 12 years ago, and there are still certain circles where it is considered heresy to criticize Obama. But Dionne is right to insist that we learn lessons from Obama's failures as well as his successes.

Only one chapter misfires. Dionne is far too tolerant of identity politics and fails to confront the very real way that Trump's presidency was rooted not primarily in a critique of trade policies, but in a critique

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

some gaming tribes, clearly attempting to bully them into a settlement while casinos are closed because of the pandemic.

Stitt then completed the boneheaded trifecta by expanding an executive order to include abortion as an elective procedure during the coronavirus outbreak.

Unsurprisingly, the governor's directive was immediately challenged in federal court – more tax dollars wasted on defense of what clearly is political red meat tossed to evangelical voters in an election year.

We can now bury any notion that Stitt might shed his order-barking private-sector CEO persona in favor of an open-minded, thoughtful public servant leading a religiously, economically and racially diverse team of four million.

Pandemic Policymaking

The Legislature's decision to go virtual was absolutely the right call. Even before a Senate staffer tested positive for COVID-19, several lawmakers were self-quarantining either because of possible exposure to the virus or to safeguard immunocompromised loved ones.

Having hundreds of lawmakers, lobbyists and staffers crowd daily into an already renovation-cramped Capitol was dangerous in the throes of a pandemic. There are few legislative or agency board meetings and actions worth risking the lives of policymakers and stakeholders.

Even so, it's important that rank-and-file Oklahomans recognize the switch to online or teleconference decision-making is not without peril.

State affairs are not on autopilot. Laws and rules still will be enacted and budgets written. But it may be more difficult than ever for the public to hold its elected and appointed elite accountable.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority's first "public" meeting on Gov. Kevin Stitt's Medicaid expansion proposal – Soonercare 2.0 – illustrates the concern.

Like all state agencies, the OHCA board is required to post meeting notices through the Secretary of State's office. It had a regular board meeting set for 3 p.m. on a Wednesday ... then added a "special" board meeting at the same time ... then cancelled the regular board meeting ... then cancelled the special board meeting ... then set a "virtual public hearing" – which did not require a quorum or timely notice posting – on the governor's plan that could restrict health coverage for hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans.

Or at least that appears to be what happened. Can you spell w-h-i-p-l-a-s-h?

How could rank-and-file Oklahomans be expected to keep up, unless they devoted every waking minute

TOM GOODWIN

Cheyenne, OK

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



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to refreshing their browsers? The on-again, off-again bumbling was especially troubling given the importance of Medicaid expansion to public health and to financially strapped hospitals and clinics.

Moreover, let's consider what could happen when lawmakers take virtual action on this year's \$8 billion-or-so state budget. What could possibly go wrong when 101 legislators are voting via online or phone meetings? Or when they give their proxies to leadership?

Will rank-and-file Oklahomans know in real time how the money's being spent? Will they be able to make their voices heard before the final legislative decisions are made? What if they don't have access to the internet?

In the best of times, legislatures and congresses, as institutions, rarely garner high marks in public opinion surveys. Now, in troubled times, legislative leaders desperately need rank-and-file Oklahomans to trust them when they pledge to play it straight with virtual decision-making.

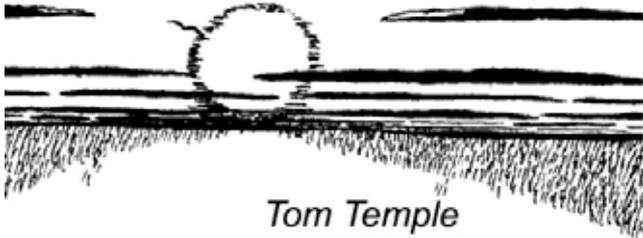
Ronald Reagan's line – "trust, but verify" – seems especially poignant amid a frightening pandemic. The problem is, the Legislature's emergency rules make it so much harder to do so.

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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

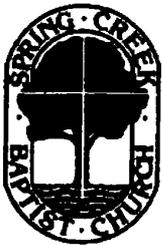


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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

A new Marquette University study names Oklahoma and Mississippi as least responsive states to open records requests. No surprise given the Lege long ago exempted itself from the open meetings act and this session killed Rep. Ben Loring's HB 2914 that would have forced lawmakers to abide by same rules as other public bodies.

Laurel: To our friends Garvin Isaacs and Tanya Cox-Toure, honored with 2020 Oklahoma City University Law Alumni Awards – former state bar president Isaacs as distinguished alum; Planned Parenthood's Cox-Toure for community and public service.

Oklahoma was only Super Tuesday state whose turnout declined when compared to 2016. No surprise on the GOP side, given Trump had no serious challenger. But Democrats? U.S. was in a state of emergency before COVID-19.

In response to COVID-19, Chief U.S. District Judge Timothy DeGiusti indefinitely postponed a hearing into the tribes' lawsuit against Gov. Kevin Stitt over gaming compacts. He also extended mediation deadline to May 31.

We bid farewell recently to one of Oklahoma's finest, Bob Stephenson, one-time St. Louis Cardinal shortstop-turned-oilman/philanthropist who was a warrior for moderate Baptist causes. Our thoughts and prayers are with Norma and his family.

The wall builder himself, Donald Trump, recently OK'd 35,000 additional guest-worker visas ahead of this summer's busy season, meaning 101,000 are welcome to do the dirty work, but not build a life here. #PresidentHypocrite

Two Tennessee brothers hoarded 17,700 bottles of hand sanitizer, hoping to cash in on the pandemic. They were publicly shamed into giving their stash away, most to a local church.

Changing Times: Cremation is now the preferred "burial" choice for Americans – 76% of whom want their ashes spread at a specific site or given to family. – Choice Mutual

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

essary testing and not leave it up to the individual states.

Trump is threatening to make it impossible for undocumented people to become citizens if they receive any government services. This threat is endangering all of us. You can catch coronavirus as easily from an undocumented person as you can from a citizen. Undocumented people are everywhere we go: in grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, hotels, etc. We are in close contact with them almost every day.

If you know any undocumented people, I hope you will encourage them to ignore Trump's threats and seek medical treatment if they need it. The longest Trump can stay president is four years and nine months. Once we get a new president, he or she will probably undo everything [or almost everything] Trump has done. Eventually, the voices of our young people will be heard and we will start treating undocumented people like valued members of our society, which they are.

Most of us understand by now that our economy would crumble without undocumented people.

How we treat "the least of these" is a good measure of who we are as a society and as a state.

Fannie Paschall Bates
Fort Worth

Editor, The Observer:

In February, the first month, President Trump did little about COVID-19 [he did dump \$700 million in personal stocks, in anticipation of the crash].

Now, in the second month, he announced on his Mar. 24 Fox News Virtual Town Hall meeting: "Let's end this by Easter, get the churches full again, and let's get the economy and jobs moving again."

Not a single public health expert agrees.

They all say, "Only rigorous sequestering will stop COVID-19's lethal and continuing spread." Most add, "Health care and safety must come first, that's more immediate than bailing out large corporations."

Millions were advised on Fox News to hope for a quick end to the global spread of this highly infectious disease against which humanity has no natural immunity.

President Trump has been unwilling, or unable, to assemble a team of public health experts to develop sound recommendations for America, leaving U.S.



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governors and mayors on their own.

The U.S. is 40 to 50 days behind in establishing a coordinated, reliable national response, and reportedly "has the greatest number of COVID infections in the world."

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

They are called hillbillies, rubes, country bump-

kins, good ol' boys, peckerwoods, yokels and crack-ers.

They are the rednecks. In Oklahoma they are as plentiful as chiggers, beer-bellies and jokers.

To rednecks, quality entertainment is sitting in the backyard with a six-pack of beer and a bugzapper.

To rednecks, women are only good for producing babies, raising the kids, cooking, cleaning, and action in the bedroom.

We did not know how many rednecks have been elected to the U.S. Congress until members were asked to sign an amicus brief asking the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade* that legalized abortion. Of the 435 members of the U.S. House, 208 signed the brief, including eastern Oklahoma Rep.

Shadow

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

the entire history of the Council for National Policy. It is page-turner reading, but it's not fiction.

Thoroughly researched and documented, you will find mention of all the organizations and most of the main characters – both state and national levels – that have been involved in right-wing politics for more than 40 years.

Details and connections are made that are not to be found in entire bookshelves of volumes on the

Code Red

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

of political correctness. He states, "Calls for an end to identity politics are reasonably interpreted by African Americans, Latinos, women, and LGBTQ people as not-so-veiled attempts to make politics primarily about straight white men [again]," but he does not state what those reasons are. He calls for a balance between class politics and identity politics but that would not solve the problem with identity politics.

Ours is a nation of hyphenated Americans to be sure. Even the Native Americans came across the land bridge from Asia. But my Polish grandparents, who never learned English, did not need linguistic facility to express their pride in the service their four sons gave to our nation's military. For most of America's history, the hyphen was actually an arrow: The Italian-American and the Irish-American and the Mexican-American were proud of their heritage, but they were intent on becoming fully integrated into American society.

One can celebrate one's provenance without wallowing in it, still less claiming a privileged hermeneutic or fretting about cultural appropriation. The cultural history of America is one of cultural appropriation and thank God for that: What is more American than listening to a Russian singer performing an Italian opera while driving in a Japanese-made car en route to pick up some Mexican food for dinner?

Markwayne Mullin.

The fly in Mullin's ointment is once the baby is delivered, his Republican Party shows no interest in helping the mother raise the kid.

Roe v. Wade said that a woman has a constitutional right to privacy when it comes to her own medical decisions.

Thanks to the landmark decision, states could no longer outlaw abortion. Women claimed a freedom from men dictating to women the amount of control they have over their own bodies.

Rednecks like plumber-turned-congressman Mullin should be sent home to potty patrol.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

subject. Nobody has done a better job following the money that made things happen – almost all of it tax deductible and legally or illegally laundered.

This book is essential reading. Don't enter a voting booth without reading it.

Norman resident Bruce Prescott, PhD, is a retired Baptist minister and former director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists. He also is an Oklahoma Observer Advisory Board member.

Dionne's criticism of Mark Lilla's magnificent New York Times essay "The End of Identity Liberalism" is unpersuasive. The fact is that discrete groups have ceded leadership away from religious and political leaders and conferred it on academics for whom identity politics is first and foremost a strategy for maintaining department funding. Multiculturalism is a fact, not a goal, for society, and diversity is a thin standard for excellence.

I encourage Dionne to reread Leon Wieseltier's essay "Against Identity." There is no way to reconcile the antisocial side of identity politics with the demands of a liberal polity.

Many establishment Democrats were terrified that Sanders would be the party's nominee. Their fears were unwarranted. But they would do well to read Dionne's book, which offers critical practical and theoretical guidance for uniting the party, all of it rooted in thoughtful commentary, exhaustive examination of the literature of political science and a keen eye for historical analogies. His closing chapters remind us all on the left that continued intra-party strife will kill any chance at keeping Trump from a second term and, what is more, prevent us from pointing the nation toward a more decent and more just society.

Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for the National Catholic Reporter.

Change

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

for extraverting or “I” for introverting, “S” for sensing or “N” for intuiting, “T” for thinking or “F” for feeling, and “J” for judging or “P” for perceiving.

E [Extravert]: Focus is on the outer world of people and things; or I [Introvert]: Focus is on the inner world of ideas and impressions.

S [Sensing]: Focus is on the present and on concrete information gained from your senses; or N [Intuiting]: Focus is on the future, with a view toward patterns and possibilities.

T [Thinking] Decisions tend to be based on logic and objective analysis of cause and effect; or F [Feeling]: Decisions are primarily based on values and subjective evaluation of person-centered concerns.

J [Judging]: Preference for a planned and organized approach to life and having things settled; or P [Perceiving]: Preference for a flexible and spontaneous approach to life and keeping your options open.

These preferences yield 16 possible types [such as ESTJ, ISFP, ENFJ, INTP, etc.] The 16 combinations yield very different personality characteristics.

In the U.S., the dominant type is ESTJ. Extraverts make up approximately 75% of the population. Sensing types are also approximately 75% of the population.

Thinking and feeling types are found equally in the population, but men are more likely to exhibit a preference for “thinking,” and for women, “feeling.”

Judging and perceiving types are also found equally in the population. Because of the large majority held by extraverting and sensing types, and because our science-dominant society encourages logic and decision making, we are socialized to be the dominant type ESTJ.

Related to change, growth and development, sensing types focus on the past, while intuiting types pre-

fer the future. And sensing types who focus on facts, not concepts, will be confused by the multitude of facts, accurate or not, and may not know how to sort information, especially the great amount available through the internet.

We are thus vulnerable to those who would use information in false purposes.

PSYCHOLOGY OF BEING

Abraham Maslow wrote that the term “self-actualization” had been understood to imply selfishness instead of altruism, that people had interpreted it to mean lack of dedication to and neglect of others when, in fact, self-actualizing people are altruistic, dedicated to transcending the self and serving others.

He wrote of the need to study this fear of human goodness and greatness, this lack of knowledge of how to be good and strong, this inability to turn one’s anger into productive activities, this fear of maturity.

So, can people change? Can we learn to use, and even understand, the conflicts requiring positive directions instead of holding onto a desperate past?

New understandings and ideas may question what we’ve held to be true, but there are gentle ways that help all of us examine ourselves and others.

Have the candidates in the many debates changed? Did they come to understand the wrongs they had done? What behaviors show that this has occurred?

Can we change? Of course! Technology is living proof. Anyone actually know what dialing a phone means now?

Ann Dapice received a PhD in psychology, sociology and philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania. She is Education and Research director for T.K. Wolf Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization and Founder/Executive Director, Institute of Values Inquiry.

Unions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

term.

If private health insurance were replaced by a state-run system, Rosen adds, unions would be challenged to shift the value of their contracts into other types of compensation, “and any union that doesn’t have the confidence that they can do that – that’s an issue that they’d better do some soul searching on: why they don’t think they’d be able to bargain to move that money into other parts of their package.”

In other words, making health care a state responsibility would expand the horizon of possibility in collective bargaining. Whether workers want better wages, training and education benefits, or childcare, both employers and unions would be pushed to be-

come more creative in their demands and more responsive to workers’ aspirations.

For now, as Dudzic put it, “When we bargain for health care, we bargain against ourselves.”

Labor advocates increasingly see Medicare for All as an imperative for health care justice for working people, and unions must grapple with the prospect that the health care that they have bargained for as a union advantage could become a universal public entitlement. While single-payer would disrupt how they negotiate contracts, union workers might see it as a fair trade for enshrining health care as a right, not a bargaining chip.

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