

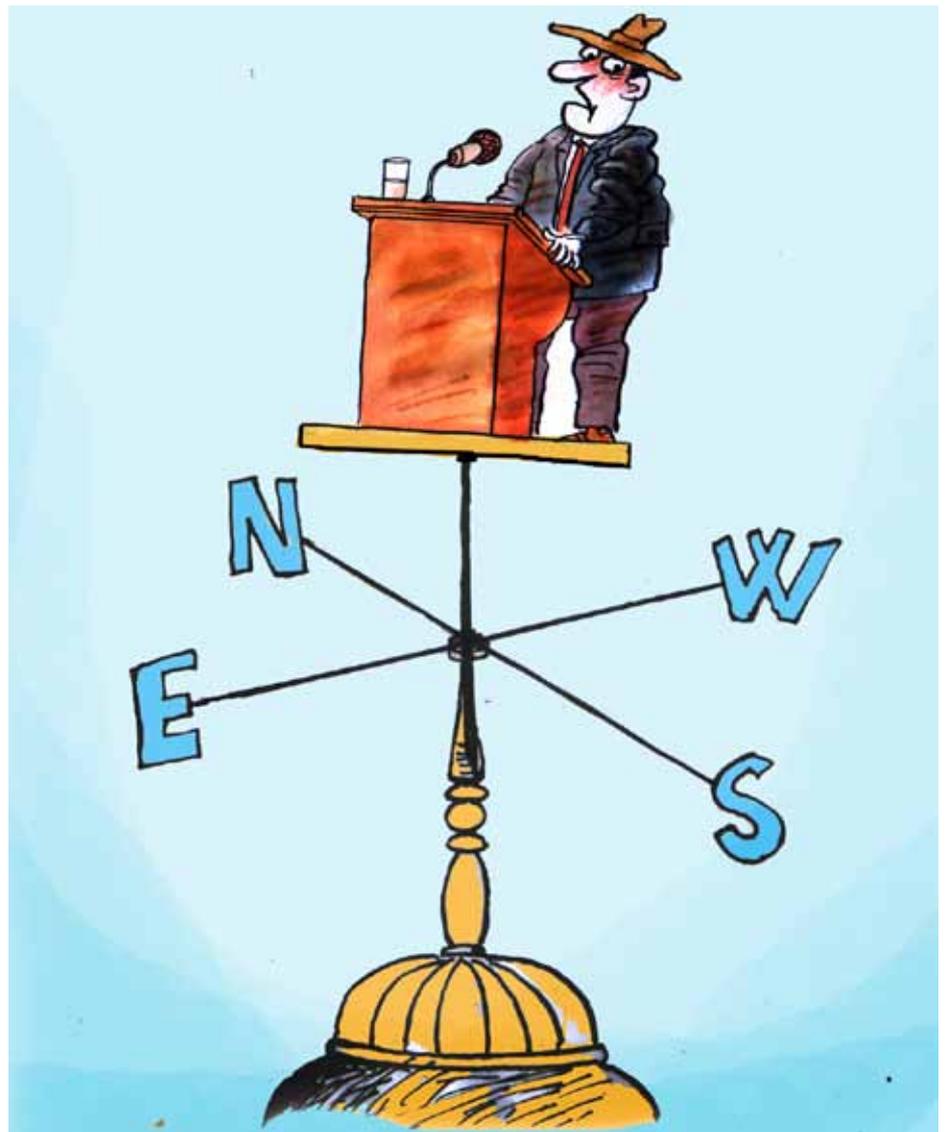
THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

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MINI-MEET

*The Good,
Bad And Ugly
Of A Disjointed,
Whipsawed,
Pandemic-
Shortened
2020 Session*



Cover Story Begins on Page 6



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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

FOUNDING PUBLISHER

Helen B. Troy [1932-2007]

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy [1933-2017]

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Observations

Yes On 802

Voters finally get the opportunity June 30 to take action where a Republican-dominated statehouse has failed for more than a decade.

A yes vote on SQ 802, the Medicaid expansion proposal, is a no-brainer.

The federal government will send Oklahoma \$9 for every \$1 committed from the state treasury – Sooner-generated federal tax dollars that instead of being spent in other states.

An additional 200,000 of the state's working poor finally will gain access to life-saving health coverage.

And health facilities teetering under the weight of uncompensated care will get a financial lifeline that ensures they can keep the doors open, especially in rural Oklahoma.

This is one of the most important state questions ever presented to Oklahoma voters. It will determine whether our collective health continues to scrape the bottom of the barrel in national indexes or whether we embark on a new era that guarantees all Oklahomans, regardless of socioeconomic status or street address, can access life-saving wellness and emergency care.

We cannot afford to pass up the opportunity to create a better, healthier Oklahoma.

Tesla

Like Pavlov's dogs, some of Oklahoma's elected elite began salivating the moment Elon Musk publicly threatened to move Tesla out of California because of what he regards as burdensome coronavirus restrictions.

"Oklahoma is open for business," Gov. Kevin Stitt quickly tweeted in response. "We're doing it safely, responsibly and based on the data in

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



Yes! Please send me a one-year subscription for only \$50. This special offer includes my certificate for a free book courtesy of Full Circle Bookstore [a \$20 value]. See page 41 for details.

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Observerscope



We hope to jump-start our monthly Newsmakers series in August – pandemic permitting – at OKC’s Full Circle Books. In the meantime, check out Observercast for the latest interviews and analysis. See page 36 for details.

Laurel: To the thousands of Oklahomans who peacefully joined protesters nationwide demanding change after the murder of George Floyd. Vigilant people of good will can lead us to better days.

We can’t stress enough the importance of Oklahomans completing in the Census – only 53.8% have so far. This could cost the state billions in federal funds. Visit my2020census.gov or call 844.330.2020 to participate.

Dart: To Gov. Kevin Stitt, who’s evidently not as committed to transparency as he claimed. His state Health Department leadership is no longer reporting the number of infections, deaths and recoveries in nursing homes, ZIP codes, cities and small counties. h/t Oklahoma Watch

Our thoughts are with Tulsa Sen. Ashley Ikley-Freeman, seriously injured in a Turner Turnpike accident en route to the Capitol for the Legislature’s final hours. She is now recuperating at home. Another driver was killed in the weather-related mishap.

Laurel: To Bob Craig, retiring as the Senate’s Chief Sergeant at Arms after 50 years of helping keep upper chamber order. His towering, firm but friendly presence will be missed.

The Wall Street Journal reports Harold Hamm’s net worth plunged amid the coronavirus pandemic and oil price collapse. He lost more than \$3 billion in the days after Saudi Arabia and Russia ignited a war for market share.

Dart: To the State Chamber, weighing in on behalf of Epic Charter Schools – and against state investigators – in a court battle over access to company records. Could it be because Epic’s founder, David Chaney, sits on the chamber board?

The future is here: According to the Energy Information Administration, the U.S. consumed more renewable energy last year than coal – the first time since 1885.

We mourn the passing of our dear friend Bill Garthoeffner, the former priest-turned-Catholic Social Ministries director who may be best known for helping resettle thousands of Vietnamese families and refugees in OKC. He was 93.

Laurel: To Oklahoma Historical Society Executive Director Bob Blackburn, announcing he will retire Jan. 15 after four decades of collecting, preserving and sharing state history. Dr. Bob will be sorely missed.

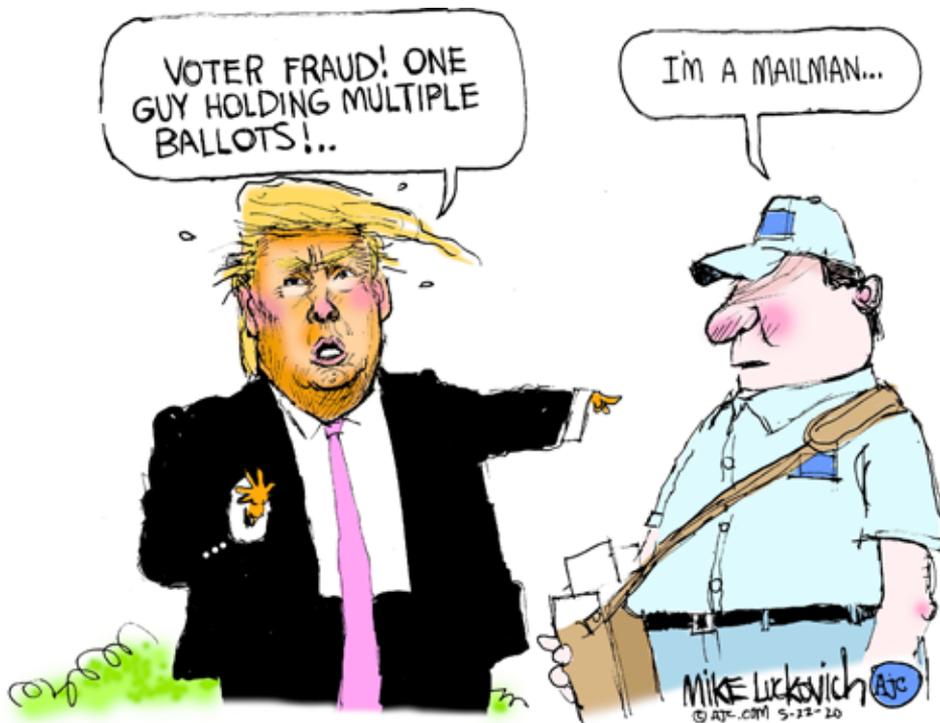
The Oklahoma Supreme Court ordered Secretary of State Mike Rogers to accept the 260,000 or so signatures gathered on SQ 805 petitions – the latest effort at criminal justice reform. Look for it on the November general election ballot.

The mainstream media narrative is facemasks serve as a flashpoint in our political divide. Maybe so. But last month’s Democracy Fund-UCLA Nationscape Project survey found 89% of Democrats and 81% of Republicans have worn masks in public.

Robin Roberson’s ouster and Shelley Zumwalt’s installation as Oklahoma Employment Security Commission director is akin to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. There’s still a backlog of thousands of unemployment claims, some months’ old.

Think the lack of access to broadband internet is a uniquely rural problem? Think again. Tulsa Public Schools recently purchased 1,500 mobile hot spots to ensure access to distance learning this summer.

Letters



Editor, The Observer,

The Observer has printed erroneous information about the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend, which should be corrected.

The Permanent Fund Dividend is a payment from the Alaska Permanent Fund, a sovereign wealth fund which receives and invests severance taxes from the oil and gas industry and pays an annual, not monthly, royalty payment to all residents of Alaska with some exceptions defined by statute. Over 38 years, the annual dividend has varied from \$331.29 to \$2,072. The dividend in 2019 was \$1,606.

In 2008, Gov. Palin pushed through an increase in the severance tax and issued the Alaska Resource Rebate, a one-time payment of \$1,200 in addition to the PFD for that year.

The Permanent Fund Dividend is not a social program and is not close to being a Universal Basic Income. The social benefit of the royalty payment is mitigating extreme poverty while adding to the general prosperity of the state economy.

Overstating what the program is and does for the residents of Alas-

ka does a disservice to arguments for any proposed UBI. Proponents of UBI would be wise to make a close study of the program and the research done on its effects.

Terry Decker
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

Who should Joe Biden and his advisors choose to be his vice-presidential running mate?

We avoid talking about the age of Biden which, like it or not, will be the prime unknown factor in our American future should he win. He appears healthy now, but age, time, and genetics don't adhere to the man-made calendar.

It cannot be just a woman – white, black, brown, red, young, experienced, with a history, without a record, straight, gay, married, divorced, with children, barren, or any fad demographic or faction; all the accidents of birth make no difference. It has to be someone who can take over as president and command the respect of those who would implement the orders and policies of the Biden administration and possibly run for a suc-

cessful term as president herself as well as deal with challengers in the Democratic Party for the 2024 election.

NONE of the known possibilities and NONE of the ones who have “bowed out” of a race that was never formalized in the first place have or had anything close to the requirements [yes, constitutionally, but not competently] to step into the Oval Office and be anything other than a caretaker president. With the continuing damage, much of it irreparable, created by the unspeakable cruelties of the despicable man now known as president, there is no time to be wasted on weak placeholders in the White House.

Only Michelle Obama and Elizabeth Warren have the name and character to fill such a job requirement.

All of this plays out on a backdrop of an insane man who stops at nothing to get what he wants, one way or another, supported by a pyramid of near equally grasping and mendacious toadies and sycophants that only a Shakespeare could organize into a comprehensible plot and satisfying final curtain.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Old enough to remember World War II, I recall my two uncles serving in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, one of them driving landing craft at Iwo Jima. They both came home safely and our entire nation rejoiced in having emerged victorious in what may very well have been our last “good war.” It is clearly on record as being our last “declared war.”

I risked three years of my life in the 1960s when, I later learned, we were actually intervening in a civil war that was none of our business. Our nation and our freedom were not being threatened. We were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45



Time's A-Wastin' For Census, Redistricting Reform Initiative

There's good news, bad news and worse news when it comes to reforming the way Oklahoma's legislative and congressional districts are redrawn after every decennial Census.

Good: The state Supreme Court on May 27 finally OK'd an initiative petition drive aimed forcing a statewide vote on creating an independent, non-partisan redistricting commission.

Bad: Because legal challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic froze signature gathering, it's all but impossible time-wise for SQ 810 to appear on the November general election ballot.

Worse: With state lawmakers set to craft new district lines next year, the state's abysmal 2020 Census response rate – currently 53.8% – threatens to yield another decade of gerrymandered districts.

This is no small matter. It's about fairness. It's about the spirit of one person, one vote and districts reflecting communities of interest.

The current system is broken. Democratic supermajorities drew the lines in the 20th Century; Republican supermajorities do so now. The primary goal was the same: protect the political status quo, the interests of workaday Oklahomans be damned.

The result is crazy-quilt districts that allow politicians to choose their voters rather than the other way around.

SQ 810 was conceived as a way to end the shenanigans. It would transfer redistricting power to a nine-member commission comprised of non-elected officials – six chosen by a panel of retired Oklahoma judges and led by the state Supreme Court chief justice. Those six would then select the remaining three. Of the nine, three would be Republicans, three would be Democrats and three would be unaffiliated with either major party.

More than 20 other states now deploy non-partisan or bipartisan panels to re-draw legislative and congressional boundaries, including Red States like Arizona, Alaska, Idaho, Iowa, Missouri, Montana, and Utah.

You can bet workaday Oklahomans would love to join the 21st century when it comes to reapportion-

ment. They are increasingly expressing their displeasure with the status quo via initiative petition – effectively taking action where lawmakers won't. Prime examples: criminal justice reform and medical marijuana.

The calendar, though, works against SQ 810 taking effect in time to impact this decade's redistricting process.

The petition's organizing group, People Not Politicians, will have only 90 days to collect about 178,000 signatures to qualify for the statewide ballot. That's a tall order any time, but especially now given that petition processes are frozen under a State of Emergency in effect until June 6 and social distancing creates logistical hurdles.

The next step is for the Secretary of State Mike Rogers to authorize the signature gathering. If he dawdles, SQ 810 backers may have little choice but to ask the state Supreme Court to compel Rogers to act.

Enough signatures would have to be gathered, certified and any further legal challenges resolved by Aug. 24 for the redistricting state question to appear on the November general election ballot.

Not impossible, but highly unlikely.

The probability that Oklahomans will remain at the mercy of politicians picking their voters rather than the other way around for 10 more years is especially disheartening given that just over half the state's residents have completed the 2020 Census.

Not getting everyone counted skews the legislative and congressional district line-drawing even more and undermines funding for vital services.

"For each Oklahoman not counted, our state loses an estimated \$1,675 in federal funds each year for the next 10 years," state Sen. Carri Hicks, D-Oklahoma City, wrote on Facebook.

"Over the next decade, that is almost \$17,000 for every individual missed.

"That money will simply go to other states. Oklahoma can ill afford to miss out."

Whether it's completing the census or enacting redistricting reform, time's a-wasting, Oklahoma.

Cheers And Jeers

In Pandemic-Shortened Session, Lawmakers Too Often Elevated Wealthy Interests Over Workaday Oklahomans

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

These numbers stand out from the recently completed legislative session: 7.7, 36 and 10.

The first represents the \$7.7 billion standstill budget lawmakers crafted despite Gov. Kevin Stitt's objections. The second – 36 – reflects the pandemic-shortened session's on-site, in-person legislative days. And third – 10 – marks the Legislature's successful overrides of gubernatorial vetoes, the most in a single session in at least a half-century, if not ever.

Half the veto overrides preserved legislation authored by House Speaker Charles McCall and rejected a Republican governor's attempts to stick his thumb in the Republican speaker's eye.

Clearly, the Kumbaya era of GOP-dominated state government is over.

The friction between an inexperienced, politically-naïve governor and lawmakers who suddenly discovered their backbones undoubtedly intensified because of COVID-19 and collapsing oil prices – a double whammy that sent state revenues into a tailspin.

Even so, 36 days provided enough for legislators to cook up an election year buffet of good, bad and ugly bills that will impact rank-and-file Oklahomans for years to come.

Here's what we'll remember, for better or worse, from the second session of the 57th Oklahoma Legislature:

CHEERS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS: K-12 education was effectively held harmless in the FY 2021 budget despite the revenue crisis – a sign GOP lawmakers learned valuable political lessons from the 2018 teacher walkout.

That is not to suggest, of course, public ed is riding high. The fact is, the standstill budget did precious little to reverse a decade of the nation's deepest funding cuts. But if Stitt had his way [across-the-board cuts], next year's budget would have set public education back again.

Lawmakers also imposed stricter transparency and accountability on virtual charter school operators – think: Epic Charter Schools – whose seemingly shady fiscal and recruiting methods are robbing traditional brick-and-mortar schools of millions of sorely-needed dollars.

Further, they empowered local school districts to enact four-day schedules – flexibility that is particularly important in rural Oklahoma because of funding and transportation issues.

Last, but not least: The House killed attempts to massively expand the state's private-school voucher program – the Lindsey Nicole Henry “scholarships” – even though it had strong support from Stitt and his far-right Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs [OCA] cronies who want to destroy what they regard as “government” schools and replace them with for-profit or parochial schools.

This is bad public policy that will not die, of course, no matter how many times legislators drive a stake through its heart. Its backers hoped they had a tail-

Deborah Astley

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wind during the pandemic, given U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos' support and Stitt's scheme to expand vouchers using federal emergency stimulus funds. You can bet vouchers will be on the governor's agenda again next year.

STATE RETIREES: For the first time in 12-plus years, 113,000 state retirees, including educators, will receive a cost-of-living boost – 4% for those retired five-plus years and 2% for those retired between two and five years.

To his credit, Stitt signed the COLA, despite opposition from the OCPA's anti-government Koch-heads who seem to regard public service workers as slave laborers.

MENTAL HEALTH: Lawmakers took an important step toward addressing Oklahoma's mental health and substance abuse woes by requiring health insurance companies to cover those disorders the same as physical ailments.

According to Mental Health America data, Oklahoma is the nation's 41st least healthy state, hardly surprising given previous legislatures routinely doled out smaller increases to the state Department of Mental Health and Substance Services than to other agencies.

Moreover, the underfunding left the department in a position where the lion's share of its budget – 60% – was needed for community-based treatment and recovery services and only about 5% was available to invest in prevention services.

It's important to remember that mental health and substance abuse disorders helped make Oklahoma the world's incarceration leader.

RURAL BROADBAND INTERNET: When the pandemic hit, forcing public schools to close early, Oklahomans quickly discovered how much work remains to ensure all children have equal access to the technology required for distance learning.

House Speaker Charles McCall, himself a son of rural Oklahoma [Antlers], authored legislation creating a 14-member council aimed at developing plans to improve availability, quality and affordability of high-speed internet across the state.

Nearly one in four Oklahoma students lacks a home internet connection – 167,000 out of 700,000 – according to a recent survey of the state's school districts. The problem is especially acute in rural areas that lack cutting-edge technological infrastructure found in urban centers. But even in bigger cities, poverty leaves many students without easy access to broadband – especially when schools are closed.

Expanding broadband across the state has implications, too, for the long-term economic health and viability of rural Oklahoma. It's all but impossible these days to compete in the global economy without high-speed internet connections.

A Federal Communications Commission report, cited by the Oklahoma Policy Institute, showed 94% of Americans have access to the official broadband threshold speed of 25 Megabits per second. In Okla-

homa, only 79% do.

Broadband legislation became another flashpoint in the battle between the governor and House speaker. The Legislature overrode two vetoes, effectively telling Stitt he alone is not the state's information technology czar.

BOTTLED UP: Often times it's what the Legislature kills that serves as some of the session's finest moments. School vouchers is one such example.

This session, lawmakers also rejected plans that would have made it all but impossible for rank-and-file Oklahomans to circulate initiative petitions and force statewide votes on key issues. And they thwarted a scheme advanced by Senate President Greg Treat, Edmond Rep. Mike Osburn and Stitt aimed at obliterating the state's excellent merit protection system.

Additionally, the Legislature killed Okmulgee Sen. Roger Thompson's proposal that would have given candidates and officeholders wider latitude to divert campaign contributions for personal use [including paying their mortgages] and a measure aimed at blocking local governments from taking action during health emergencies.

JEERS

VOTE BY MAIL: The Legislature typically operates at a snail's pace, except when it comes to preserving political power.

That was vividly displayed again this session when the GOP supermajority took only three days to overturn a state Supreme Court ruling that lifted the requirement absentee ballots be notarized – no small matter during a pandemic.

The justices' common sense reasoning: notarization was unnecessary because absentee voters already are required to sign their ballots, which serves as a legal affidavit, making any funny business punishable by law.

Republicans, of course, live in a perpetual state of fear that expanded mail-in voting will work to Democrats' advantage, though there's plenty of reliable research suggesting it doesn't give either major party a leg up.

So, GOP lawmakers came up with a too-cute-by-half alternative to the Supreme Court ruling. They reinstated the notary requirement, except if an election is within 45 days of a public health emergency – like COVID-19. In those cases, in lieu of a notary seal, absentee voters can attach a photocopy of a state-issued ID, such as a driver's license or voter registration card. Since the coronavirus health emergency was not scheduled to expire until June 6, that exception will be in effect for this year's primary on June 30.

This still creates unnecessary hurdles for voters, especially during a pandemic. Though it might be difficult for the powers-that-be at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. to understand, not all Oklahomans have easy access to photocopiers. And even if they have a tag agency, bank or library nearby that could provide

the service, it still would require the immunocompromised, disabled or elderly to go to public places where they could come into contact with COVID-19.

GUNS, GUNS, GUNS: The Legislature solidified its reputation as a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Rifle Association when it passed – and Stitt signed – the nation’s first anti-Red Flag law.

Here’s how the proposal – already on the books in 19 states – generally works: Relatives or friends, alarmed a loved one is threatening suicide or to harm others, could seek a protective order from a judge that would empower authorities to temporarily confiscate firearms.

It is not Gestapo-like weapon-seizing. It simply would give time and space for individuals, their families and friends – perhaps with court-ordered professional help – to work through what could become violent flashpoints.

It was bad enough the 57th Legislature wouldn’t even consider the common sense legislation by Reps. Melissa Provenzano, D-Tulsa, and Jason Dunnington, D-OKC. They took their opposition a step further, enacting instead a bill by Sen. Nathan Dahm, R-Broken Arrow, and Rep. Jay Steagall, R-Yukon that prevents municipalities from enacting ordinances that could restrict gun access to an individual deemed to be an imminent danger.

Remember when Republicans considered local control sacrosanct?

ABORTION: The GOP Legislature made its regular election year play to its evangelical base, approving the so-called “Unborn Person Wrongful Death Act.”

Durant Republican Sen. David Bullard’s measure would allow parents and grandparents to recover damages for mental pain and anguish related to an abortion. Who would pay? The doctor who performed the abortion would be solely liable.

Let us pause to consider the breathtaking hypocrisy of Republicans who’ve all but padlocked the courthouse door to workaday Oklahomans injured by corporate interests – but who now would expose doctors to lawsuits because ... why? ... they dared perform a legal medical procedure.

This specious legislation won’t stop abortion, of course, but it will cost the taxpayers dearly to defend a clearly unconstitutional measure.

BOTTLED UP: Whether it’s fear of their evangelical base or anti-LGBTQ bigotry, lawmakers refused to consider a measure that would have banned so-called conversion therapy – a tactic that mental health experts decry as child abuse.

The Legislature also failed to help Oklahoma’s working poor, ignoring proposals to restore the Earned Income Tax Credit and establish a living wage.

Interestingly, lawmakers did summon the will to protect businesses from being held liable for any spread of COVID-19, so long as they make “the effort,” as Senate author, Republican Julie Daniels of Bartlesville, put it, to follow public health guidelines.

It took only 36 in-session days for the Oklahoma Legislature to do what it’s long done best: give priority to wealthy corporatists and deep-pocketed special interests over workaday Oklahomans.

A stark reminder that elections have consequences.

Energetic, Expressive Executive Or Baffling, Bodacious Boss?

BY CAL HOBSON

I’ve been lucky enough to know 10 of Oklahoma’s 28 governors and the best I can offer today about our current one, Republican Kevin Stitt of Jenks, is he’s one of them.

Some days he’s enthusiastic, thoughtful, considerate, articulate, informed and at the top of his game. Other times? Just the opposite. He can appear petty, woefully unprepared, abrupt, unfocused and, frankly, lost.

Sometimes he reminds me of the decisive, multi-millionaire executive he is, who knows where he is going and can hardly wait to get there. More often though Stitt appears unsure, surrounded by too many yes men similarly sanctimonious, all clinging to our newly created state symbol – Imagine That – or overused campaign commentary about Top 10 This and Top 10 That.

Let me pose a question. Is there a comprehensive plan of action for our four million citizens inside his endless appearances in blue suits, red ties and single pair of brown shoes or have voters elected a petulant passel of platitudes whose only consistency is inconsistency?

Consider the following:

1. THE FORMER GATEWAY MORTGAGE CO. president and newly-minted politician inherited a balanced budget, underpinned by a large and growing savings account, docile teacher and public employee unions, and super majorities of adoring, compliant fellow Republicans in both the House and Senate. Lucky for him, taxes had been raised by the previous governor and legislature, actions he vehemently opposed on the campaign trail but gleefully and abundantly spent after taking office.

It seems the following is how Gov. Stitt viewed his situation the day he was sworn in. Pay raises? Classroom investments? Glad I finally got that done. An expanded road plan courtesy of increased gasoline taxes for the first time in 25 years? Great! Ribbon cuttings galore! Mary Fallin? Nice lady but out of her league. President Pro Tempore Greg Treat and Speaker of the House Charles McCall? Look forward to getting to know those guys.

We'll work together as we pursue my goal of Top 10 status but they need to remember who is in charge here and it isn't them. After all, I started with only \$1,000, a computer, supportive wife and a kitchen table 20 years ago.

How hard could this new job be after what I accomplished in that previous life? And this one will be a lot more fun!

2. ALTHOUGH SPANKING NEW GOV. STITT didn't vote very often before casting a ballot for himself to fill the job in 2018, he hit the ground running, asking for and receiving new appointment powers over major agency executives and their soon to be neutered boards and commissions.

He attempted to ban most lobbyists, except those approved by his staff; fired or removed almost every incumbent cabinet member regardless of previous performance; brought in a platoon of white males to replace them, most of whom were graduates of Oklahoma State University with experience, for good or bad, in the energy business. Some smallish scandals have popped up first in the Health Department, second in the purchase of protective gear related to coronavirus and third in key cabinet turnover but for the most part those difficulties were about what is expected in a brand new administration.

At first Stitt appeared to be in charge – demanding and determined – as he promoted his popular though vague Top 10 Plan for our state. No playing favorites or picking winners and losers from him, Stitt confidently declared, apparently not understanding almost every action as governor does exactly that. If he really didn't know that fact the day he took his oath of office in January 2019 he soon learned it ... with relish.

3. WHAT'S THAT LINE ABOUT DON'T TAKE a pocket knife to a shootout at the OK Corral? Best I can tell our CEO, who is also an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation, did just that back in July 2019.

Without providing much, if any, advance notice to the other 38 sovereign nations who call Oklahoma home, meaning our tribes, confident Kevin spoke declared unilaterally in the Tulsa World that the gaming compacts between our state and most tribes expire Dec. 31, 2019. He further observed that exclusivity fees must go up, maybe as high as 25% from about 6%, but that he might allow sports wagering and would get in touch with governors and chiefs when he got around to it.

To say the reaction from tribes was anything but positive would be similar to saying Gen. George Custer had only a modest setback that day at The Little Big Horn.

However, all was not quite lost yet as Attorney General Mike Hunter, plus several outside law firms, were engaged to start serious discussions. Those went nowhere because, contrary to the opinions of the vast majority of lawyers on both sides, Stitt refused to budge on the sticking point of compact expiration.

General Hunter soon realized the futility of representing the executive branch and withdrew his involvement. However, not deterred, Stitt hired several more law firms, registered both in and out of state, and blew through millions more of state tax dollars. The parties remain in federal court and a ruling should come down any day if not before you read this column.

Few believe the state's position will prevail in whole or part but in the meantime, Gov. Stitt peeled off two of the smaller tribes, offering them, in the elaborate Capitol Blue Room, more than trinkets and beads, including additional gaming sites in counties outside of their tribal territories, sports wagering and lower fees. Who could say no to that? But like most of the buffalo in the late 19th century, those goodies will soon vanish never to be seen again when U.S. District Judge Tim DeGiusti issues his opinion.

Unnecessary bitterness and distrust will now be the watch words among all these powers and Gov. Stitt may find himself the target of hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign donations intent on giving his campaign a new 21st century meaning to the word "removal." We'll see.

4. AND THEN THERE IS THE ULTIMATE Stitt SNAFU [Situation Normal All Fouled Up]. Immediately after election in 2018 our green governor cracked the door open to consider accepting Medicaid expansion. Perhaps not aware of the antithesis toward ObamaCare among his Republican colleagues, he initially expressed interest in drawing down the 90-10 federal match in health-starved Oklahoma but immediately was taken to the woodshed by legislative leaders. Since then his opposition has hardened regardless of the fact citizens garnered a record 315,000 signatures to place the Medicaid expansion issue in the form of SQ 802 on the June 30 primary ballot. It is widely expected to pass.

However, during the just concluded legislative session, apparently not satisfied with the citizens' initiative to settle the decade's old squabble over expansion, our governor, with a major assist from his D.C. mentor President Trump, created what he dubbed Stitt 2.0, a slimmer, cheaper, more conservative version of expansion. Notwithstanding growing dissension between lawmakers and the executive branch, Gov. Stitt requested, and promptly

received, enabling legislation that would statutorily commence his plan effective July 1, 2020. Legislators also provided for a methodology to pay for the state's share via an increase in a hospital provider fee currently pegged at 2.3% going up to 4% which would raise about \$134 million.

Everybody in the state except for Donnie De-wayne Doofus of Dibble knew Stitt's purpose in developing this scheme. It served as an attractive alternative for conservatives to the citizen-drafted constitutional approach and by passing it so late in the session, it could only add to whatever confusion existed when voters cast their ballots on June 30. Remember, one of the best ways to defeat a state question generated by citizens themselves is to sow doubt which often translates into negative votes.

Thus was conceived a brilliant plan by an ever more clever businessman just now coming into his own as a cunning and calculating politician. Some

consultants and pundits even saw higher office as attainable for the attractive, God-fearing and wealthy scion of Oklahoma's First Family. Sarah plus six photogenic children with no skeletons in a spick and span closet. Perfect.

However, one stunning, unforeseeable stumbling block reared its ugly head at the very last minute and came from a most unpredictable source. Gov. Stitt himself vetoed his own requested legislation bill at the last possible moment. Then, following that shocker, the Legislature countered by not even attempting an override leaving voters with only a very simple choice – vote yes on SQ 802 which would insert Medicaid expansion into the Oklahoma Constitution, already the second longest in the nation, or vote no and remain one of only a dozen states which allows its health money be spent in other states.

For me, that is an easy and obvious Hobson's Choice, but I'm probably partial due to the name.

To wrap up my examination of Stitt World, with the exception of my unstable and racist Gov. William "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, no Oklahoman has risen to this state's highest office that has been more unpredictable, illogical, nonsensical and acted against his own best interests politically more often than Stitt.

Tribes despise him, both sides of Medicaid expansion dislike and distrust him, almost every legislator in both parties know he more than fudges the truth, reporters recognize facts are often missing or hedged from press conferences, some lobbyists fear him so they mostly try to avoid him and, most critically important of all, favorable polling data has gone with the spring winds.

Will Stitt run again? Does he even want to and, if so, could he win a second term?

What more seasoned and sensible Republican[s] might step in to challenge Stitt before public policy gaffes become more of national, late-night punch lines? And finally, is there a Blue Dog Democrat electable against him who can carry more than the three most populous counties – Oklahoma, Tulsa and Cleveland? Probably not, but the governor is doing everything in his power to help make that possible.

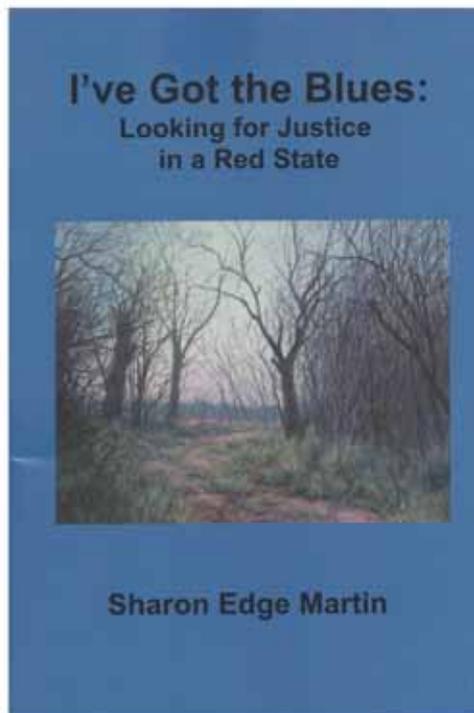
So, at the halfway point of term one, the only thing we know for sure is that his first two years as our 28th governor are not what anybody could predict with any accuracy.

However, there is one other thing we know for sure: If he wants to become only the third Republican in state history to serve a second term, the last two years of his first round better be a whole lot different than the first two or he will become what Hobson's Choice really means in English horse livery lore.

No choice.

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

NEW
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– Arnold Hamilton, Editor, *The Oklahoma Observer*

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Why I'm Voting For Medicaid Expansion

BY CHUCK HOSKIN JR.

On June 30, voters will make a big decision about the future of health care in Oklahoma. SQ 802 would have a \$27 million economic impact on Cherokee Nation Health Services.

That money would go to support good jobs for health care professionals and provide life-saving treatments and medicine to Cherokees. As our health care heroes battle the spread of the COVID-19 virus, it is more important than ever to provide the support they need.

I hope you will join me in voting YES on State Question 802. By bringing home our tax dollars to provide health coverage, we will improve health and family finances for Cherokees across Oklahoma, help keep rural hospitals open, and boost the economy.

Currently, 36 other states get billions of dollars in health care funding through Medicaid expansion. For the past decade, Oklahoma has chosen not to participate in Medicaid expansion, sending millions of Cherokees' federal tax dollars to neighboring states, like Arkansas, Louisiana, Colorado and New Mexico.

Cherokee Nation's tribal health system is partially funded by federal dollars through the Indian Health Service. However, those IHS appropriations have always been well below the full cost of caring for our tribal citizens. To make up the difference as best we can, we need Cherokees to have insurance coverage, whether through Medicaid, Medicare, the Veterans Administration or private insurance.

Passing SQ 802 will allow almost 14,000 Cherokees and other American Indian patients in our Cherokee Nation health system access to health coverage.

Expanding coverage for Cherokee citizens will dramatically strengthen the finances of our tribal health system. Expansion will allow us to provide more care at no cost to the state, because services for a Medicaid patient at a tribal facility are 100% federally reimbursed. The funds will allow us to treat more patients, provide more medications, and pay for more referrals when Cherokees need care outside our health facilities.

Election At-A-Glance

KEY DATES

June 5: Last day to register to vote.

June 24: Last day to request absentee ballots.

June 30: Polls will be open statewide from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Visit <https://www.ok.gov/elections/> to register to vote or request an absentee ballot.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

The headliner is SQ 802, the Medicaid expansion proposal that would extend health care access to about 200,000 working poor and help save rural health facilities on the brink of financial collapse from uncompensated care.

The Republican-dominated statehouse has refused for more than a decade to expand Medicaid, claiming the state cannot afford the required match. That's bunk. Their opposition was rooted in their disdain for former President Obama.

The truth is, Oklahoma cannot afford any longer to forgo the 9-1 federal match. It's up to voters to do the job the Legislature and two governors wouldn't.

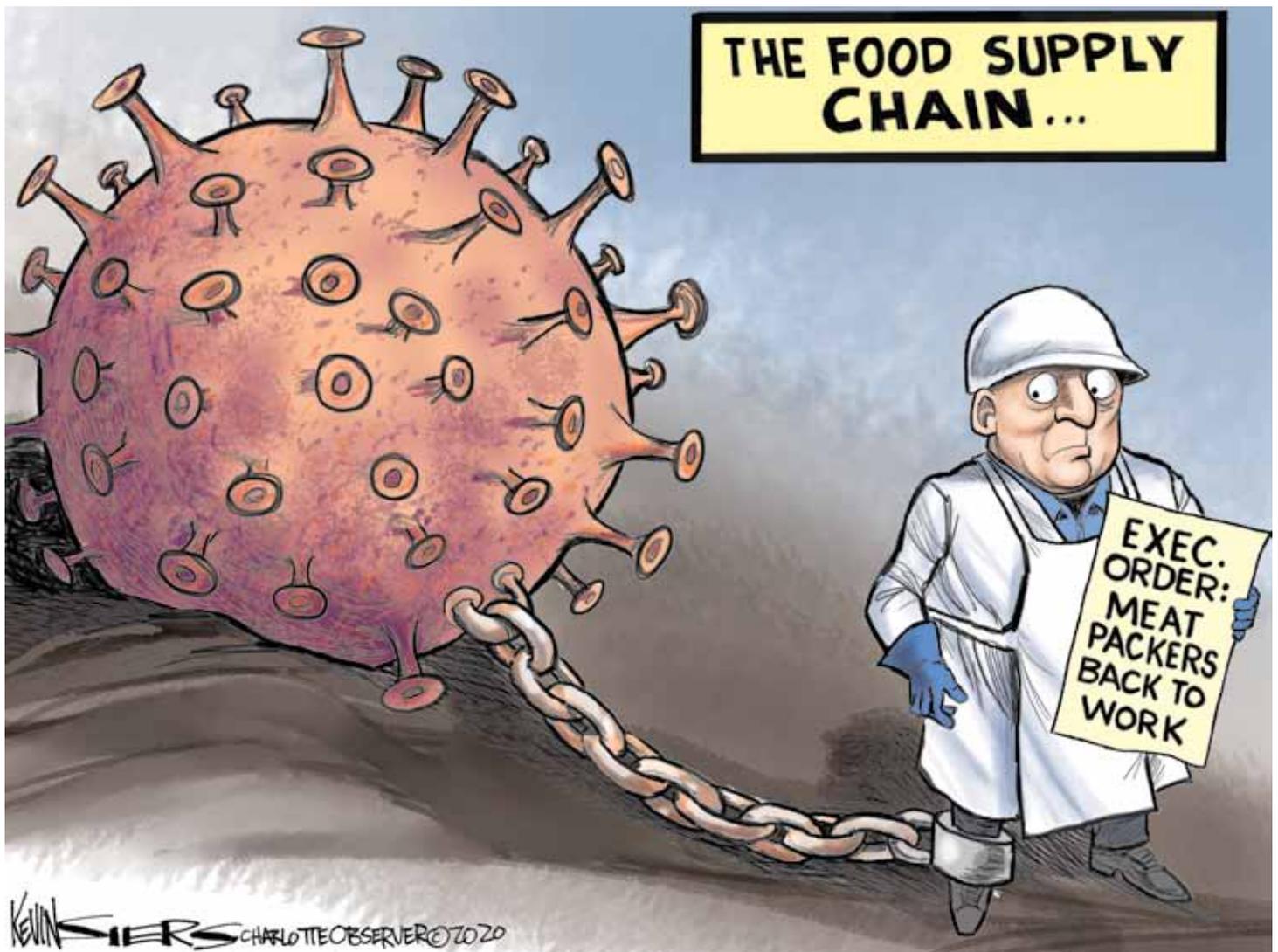
The June 30 ballot also includes primary battles for major party nominations for Congress and statehouse. Visit okobserver.org starting June 15 for overviews of the hottest races.

Cherokee Nation Health Services provides some of the best early and preventative care in the country. Unfortunately, many Oklahomans in our community are forced to put off essential medical care because they do not have health insurance. Many have gone without heart medication or cancer treatment until the problem became much worse. Even more Oklahomans have gone bankrupt or felt extreme financial stress over the cost of care without insurance. This creates a financial strain that impacts all of us. Too many rural hospitals in Oklahoma have shut down because their patients were not able to pay for care. Passing SQ 802 will go a long way toward reversing these trends.

On June 30, I urge everyone in the Cherokee Nation and across Oklahoma to vote YES on State Question 802. For this election, you have until June 5 to register to vote and until June 24 to request an absentee ballot in the mail. Visit www.yeson802.org if you would like to get involved in the campaign to pass SQ 802.

A yes vote will make a lasting difference for better health and financial security of Cherokees and all four million Oklahomans.

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



Pandemic Meat Processing: A 'Jungle' Of Regulatory Issues

BY JAN NEW

In early May, Oklahomans awoke to a news story reporting over 110 cases of coronavirus infections at Seaboard Foods meat processing plant in Guymon. Some current and former employees reported problems with distancing, cleanliness, and unsafe working conditions.

Reportedly, Seaboard was producing 4.2 million pounds of pork products each day and employed 2,700 people in Texas County.

Meat processors were not exactly ordered by President Trump to re-open, according to Daniel Hemel, University of Chicago law professor. What the President did was assign certain authority to Agricultural Secretary Sonny Perdue while emphasizing the im-

portance of “continuing operations and fulfilling orders” without directly ordering plants to open and without or protecting plants from liability. [Executive Order 13917, April 28, 2020]

Meat processors have significant financial concerns about the downstream food supply chain commitments with feed lots, stockers, and farmer/ranchers. Each stage of the process is timed – from “farm to fork” – and time is money.

In Oklahoma and at other processing plants, the daily production is driven by demand and the number of animals contracted for delivery. Stop a plant, the supply chain backs up. Everyone is adversely affected, including workers dependent on their jobs and

companies looking at their financials. Ultimately the issue of animal “depopulation” occurs – not a popular topic but an industry reality.

In the case of Seaboard, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry [ODAFF] has stepped in to assist with depopulation, disposal of animal remains in an environmentally responsible manner and coordination of efforts with other agencies. In the intervening days since initial reports, the governor appointed a new state health commissioner, Col. Lance Frye, State Air Surgeon of the Oklahoma Air National Guard. Along with CDC, the Oklahoma State Health Department, FEMA, and OSU laboratories, he recently visited Guymon. The Oklahoman reports Air and Army National Guard members are helping with contact tracing and movement of testing sites.

MEAT PROCESSING IN RETROSPECT

One hundred sixteen years ago when America was still in its industrial infancy, a young writer disguised himself and went to work in a meatpacking plant. Subsequently, Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle*, which exposed the labor and sanitary conditions prevalent in the industry. His description of horrifying and gruesome conditions is credited with changing public attitudes and leading to passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act.

The Jungle is still a difficult book to read as it details the impossibly difficult lives of European immigrants who arrived in America at the turn of the 20th

century with high expectations of a better life and who went to work for meat processing plants. They suffered from back-breaking toil with insufficient protections; poor sanitation; exposure to disease, maiming and premature death; low wages; poor or no housing; insufficient food; discrimination, threats, abuse, and the humiliation of sexual harassment.

All these conditions are documented in Sinclair’s 1906 book. Today most Americans believe regulation and modernization have brought an end to earlier problems.

There is no question that progress in meat processing has been made over the last century. Also, contemporary grocery shelves are filled with a surfeit of meats, poultry, seafood – shrink-wrapped and typically bearing a USDA food inspection label.

We reportedly have one of the safest food supplies in the world, but



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As in the early 20th century immigrant laborers joined the industry in the 1980s at the same time the Reagan Administration was urging deregulation of OSHA.

According to CEPR, 44.4% of frontline meat packing workers are Hispanic; 25.2% are black; 19.1% white; 10% Asian and Pacific Islanders; and 1.2% other. Additionally, 51.5% are foreign born and half of them live in a limited English-speaking household.

CEPR also reports that 44% have less than a high school education and report at least one child in the home. The CDC found 40 languages were spoken at the Smithfield Plant in South Dakota – with English being only one of the Top 10, yet company safety memos were written in English only.

The Southern Poverty Law Center sums up the impediments that still exist in the meat packing workforce: 1. lack of education and language barriers; 2. immigration status; 3. dangerous working conditions; 4. fear of job loss; 5. little access to legal resources; and 6. poverty and shame.

Added to these, the CDC issued a report May 8 that 4,900 workers at 115 packing facilities had been infected with COVID-19 – further citing “physical distancing, hygiene, crowded living and transportation conditions as influencing factors for the spread of the virus.”

Following the president’s executive order recommending the re-opening of closed packing plants, the AFL-CIO and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union criticized the guidance document jointly issued by the CDC and OSHA for Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers, for its lack of enforceability.

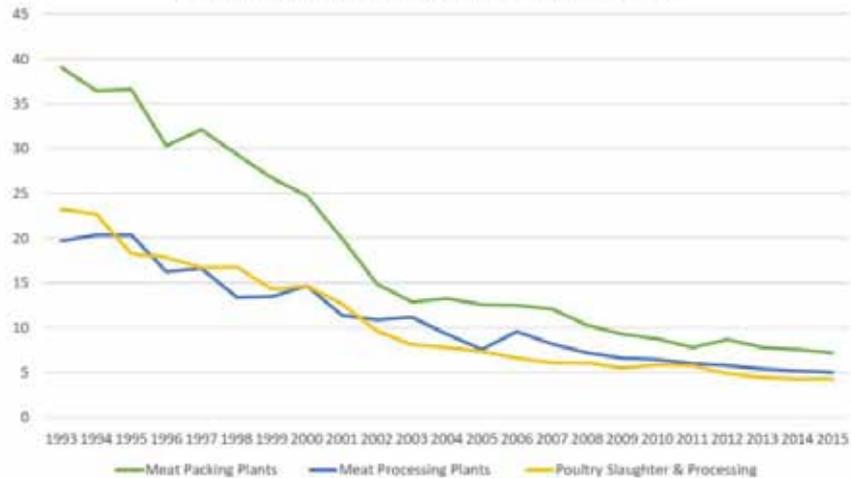
In contrast, NAMI reports over 500,000 employees in the animal slaughtering and processing industry, including nearly 70,000 slaughterers and meat packers. They point to a 30-year reduction in rates of industry and illness for full-time workers at meatpacking and processing plants and poultry slaughter and processing plants.

However, some advocacy groups as well as a Government Accounting Office report that the injury rate for meat workers is higher than the rest of the manufacturing industry and that injuries are likely underreported.

As Eric Schlosser pointed out in 2002’s *Fast Food Nation*, the meat packing industry is yet a dangerous occupation characterized by many of the same problems identified in *The Jungle* – immigrant labor, illiteracy, and impoverishment now complicated by deregulation and the Coronavirus pandemic.

The preservation of a representative democracy and They both depend on informed voters. It matters that

Rate of Injury and Illness Cases Per 100 Full Time Workers
Meat and Poultry Industry Sector 1993-2015



you vote, who you vote for, and what they do with your vote.

Jan New is a retired public administrator for municipal, state, and federal programs, private industry, and national trade association program development.

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State Rep. John Waldron Posed This Question On Facebook ...



... The Responses He Got Were Despairing. And Very Bad News For Oklahoma's Future

BY MICKEY THOMPSON

In all caps, the banner headline in the Opinion Section of the May 24 New York Times blared: **NO ONE KNOWS WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.**

Obviously, the article was about one of the million different aspects of our nation's ongoing struggle with the pandemic. Still, without getting into a theology debate, surely we can agree that, at least on some level, the statement in the headline is absolutely true.

We are a deeply divided nation. We are angry, worried, confused and – at least many of us – more than a little bit scared, feelings exacerbated because no one knows what's going to happen.

This lack of certainty applies to almost every aspect of American life. It absolutely applies to what may, or may not, unfold as relates to reopening our schools this fall.

Well, let me offer a bit of certainty in this uncer-

tain world. I know for a fact at least part of the answer to the question of what is going to happen with our public schools in this upcoming year. That answer isn't what anybody who cares about our kids, or about the future of our state, wants to hear. But that answer is as inevitable as night following day.

The overall quality of public education in Oklahoma will decline next year. And the next year. And the next.

I know, I know. It sounds like I'm bashing Oklahoma's educators. That is absolutely not what I am saying. You want to talk about Oklahoma HEROES? I'll show you about 40,000 heroes. Not just during a pandemic, when many parents have suddenly realized that, well, maybe being a school teacher isn't really such a walk in the park. Some old guy named Aristotle said, "Teaching is the highest form of understanding." I'll go with that.



Charles Nabring Salary and benefits concern. You know what it really boils down to is just respect. Get principals back in the hallways and front office and out of the hair of the teacher. We know what to do. We are well trained. Also there needs to be a minimum age for high school teachers and a ethics clause in teacher contracts. That's to start. oh yeah text books are worthless in the information age. Don't get me started on state testing. Their testing you on everything that really doesn't matter in the real world. How would a teacher who has never done anything outside school and teaching know what to teach students.

Like · Reply · 2w



Cheryl Miele Discipline, standards that are developmentally appropriate. Pay has got to increase TX teacher in my position makes 11,000 more at a private school. Public school there is even a bigger difference. Lower cost of health insurance.

Like · Reply · 2w



Erin Furgason Pierce I left teaching but not the state. I was working too many hours and didn't have enough time for my family, especially considering the low salary. I might come back if I had a lot more paid plan time. I also didn't like that I was being forced to use the district's chosen curriculum and I didn't have the freedom to use my individual talents and strengths (TPS). I love teaching and miss the kids, but not the endless 'accountability' and testing.

Like · Reply · 2w



Danielle Martin In order for me to return, I would need At Least what I am making now, along with my expected raises year to year, similar workload as a special education teacher.

My last position I'm OK, I was a SpEd teacher, teaching 6 classes per day, 5 different courses (pre-algebra, algebra 1, intermediate algebra, algebra 2, & geometry), several hours of the day I had to teach multiple courses at the same time to different groups of students in the room (geometry & pre-algebra, algebra 1 & algebra 2, algebra 1 & intermediate algebra), plus I had a caseload of 30+ students for whom I was responsible for all IEP paperwork, I had only 1 conference period, & no modified curriculum. I will never again work 7 days a week until midnight+ for less than 38,000. It was unhealthy, and the reward of teaching was not worth going further into debt just to remain alive with no life outside of work.

Like · Reply · 2w · Edited



Maybe it sounds like I've allowed the negativity that permeates almost every aspect of current life to destroy my hope for a brighter future for our state. I hope that's incorrect, but admit it could be having some effect. But some recent activity on a Facebook site watched by more than 60,000 educators and public education supporters has awakened me to the reality of life in our classrooms.

Hundreds of Oklahoma-trained teachers shared their perspectives responding to a Facebook post in early May by state Rep. John Waldron, a Tulsa legislator who himself is a career educator. Waldron asked these simple questions: Did you leave OK to teach out of state? What would it take to bring you

back?

The outpouring of responses left me in tears. I stated as much on Facebook, which prompted the editor of this esteemed journal to offer me space to elaborate. So, here is my point-of-view on the troubling future of public education in the only home I've ever known.

Bleak.

This isn't the Dust Bowl, folks. It's worse. Those Okies mostly came home from California. These Okies aren't coming home. Even after the significant teacher pay raise enacted in 2018, salaries still aren't competitive enough and the "brain drain" of us losing some of the best and brightest educators

continues. Yes, the infusion of funding for teacher pay at least slowed the exodus. But what I learned from reading hundreds of these teachers' comments was a shocker.

Yes, pay is still an issue. And the ridiculously high cost of health insurance in Oklahoma and our stingy treatment of veteran teachers' years of experience for retirement qualification purposes are also huge roadblocks to attracting teacher talent back home. Class size is a big problem, pandemic or not. And teachers face too many distractions [especially mandated testing]. But the biggest negative about teaching in Oklahoma?

Lack of respect and support.

In the home of the "Oklahoma Standard?" A place where teachers are supposedly revered? I'm just relaying what Oklahoma's educator diaspora said.

You could see quickly in subsequent posts that Rep. Waldron got the message. And, God love him, he's taking it as a positive.

Why? Because what has been described as the biggest negative about teaching in Oklahoma ISN'T ABOUT MONEY! Being a realist, Waldron knows that increased funding for public education in the near term just isn't in the cards. He knows the state's key sources of tax receipts are all taking a severe hit due to the double-whammy of COVID-induced economic slowdown and the corresponding dramatic decline in the state's cash cows: oil and agriculture.

But he has proffered via social media in more recent days that maybe there are things the legislature CAN DO to change the cancer of disregard and disrespect that has crept into the classroom. I hope he's right.

But while well-intentioned, what I've seen him suggest is off-target. I don't see our state Legislature being effective in trying to improve this crisis of "school culture."

To me, first and foremost, local school boards must step up and support teachers, whether it's hiring better administrators, having courage to defend teachers in the face of increasingly hostile [misinformed] parents, or by reexamining policies related to a more acceptable standard of conduct for students. And the only folks who are going to hold volunteer school board members accountable? Local district voters.

While I'm skeptical that state lawmakers can make much headway on school culture issues, I'm not suggesting there isn't vital work our Legislature can do to help public education, even in a time of budget contraction. We must instigate and accomplish major structural reform in public education. We must also, once and for all, enact sweeping tax reform. We must modernize the education delivery system. We must customize what we offer students. And we must economize.

"Distance learning" must be a more significant part of the school reform equation. Maybe the pandemic will teach us something after all? Schools

must be more adaptable and responsive to all sorts of learning methods.

Technology must be a higher priority. We aren't keeping pace with technology. How do we expect to equip the citizens/workforce of the mid-21st Century if we don't provide the best tools [hardware, software, programs, apps, access, etc.] for today's kids?

"Extra-curriculars" must be funded as just that. Yes, football, band, theater, choir, academic team, FFA and on and on must have budgets funded, at least in some significant part, by private dollars. Money from parents' pockets? Yes.

It pains me to suggest this because I realize such a "user fee" plan could eliminate key programs – especially the "less popular" offerings such as the arts and particularly in the poorest districts. But we must be serious about how the increasingly limited dollars are allocated, which means these extremely vital parts of our kids' learning experiences must be privately funded to a greater extent. Community and business sponsorships. Grants. Even more investment from the tribes [I'm pretty sure that could happen if the governor wasn't so busy stabbing them in the back.]

We simply can't afford to spend tax dollars for every activity for everybody.

And last [and most important] on my list: The byzantine public-school funding formula must be re-invented and school consolidation must accelerate. The days of subsidizing tiny rural schools must end. "But you realize you're gonna kill a bunch of communities!" Sorry, folks, those towns are long-since dead. Some of them have nothing but a schoolhouse and a courthouse.

Oklahoma has too many school districts [just as we have too many counties, and all the infrastructure that goes with them]. Consider that Oklahoma has 1.2% of the U.S. population, and 3.6% of the nation's public-school districts.

I'm not suggesting consolidation is a panacea for our school funding woes. I'm saying it is a political requirement. It has been the favorite hiding place for several generations of lawmakers [of both political parties] who didn't have the courage to tackle it. And, without tackling this issue, many other needed reforms don't see the light of day.

Would everyone please not roll your eyes if I suggested our governor's No. 1 priority going into this legislative interim should be to establish a Blue Ribbon Commission tasked with reinventing public education in Oklahoma? THIS is the single most important issue facing our state. All this talk about being a Top 10 state. That aspirational notion will disappear in the Oklahoma wind if we don't reinvent the way we structure, operate and fund our public schools.

I have zero confidence that this governor has the first clue of the ultimate degradation of the quality of public education, and, thus, the gradual decay in the quality of life that is seething through our state.

But I would love nothing more than for Kevin Stitt and the Republicans who control our Legislature to step up and prove me wrong.

Mickey Thompson's diverse career included being a newspaper reporter, editor and publisher, a university relations director, the head of a now-defunct large oil and gas association, and CEO-partner

in two oilfield services companies. Recently, he headed the organization Restore Oklahoma Now Inc., the sponsor of SQ 795, a 2018 ballot measure that would've amended the state constitution by restoring the state's gross production tax rate to 7% across-the-board and using the additional tax funds for teacher pay raises.

What The Future Of Public Education Could Be

BY JOHN THOMPSON

During the last three months, I've sought to clear my mind, think anew, and converse with my neighbors. I still haven't figured out much, but it's time, I believe, to share some preliminary musings about the future of public education. It was dialogue at the neighborhood park that prompted this piece.

I've been wrestling with two quandaries. Yes, in the short-run, the tactical use of digital technology is the priority, but the longer-term priority must be human-to-human relationships. The last thing we want are 21st century schools driven by screen time.

Also, many are saying that times like these call for transformational change that breaks completely with the past. They may be half right. But we also need to discuss the lessons of history, especially those that inform the question about the economic futures of today's youth, "Generation Z."

First, I'd start the reopening of schools by showing and discussing, and borrowing from great musical and artistic events. I've been stunned, and often been left in tears by *Graduate Together: America Honors the High School Class of 2020*, which also featured President Barack Obama; Jason Alexander's Passover Seder; *One World: Together at Home*; and 300 singers from 15 countries singing *You'll Never Walk Alone*.

Its unlikely that many of today's teachers would be allowed to do so, but I used to start my inner city high school classes' orientation week with music, poetry, and film clips [like Amiri Baraka's *The X is Black* and Denzel Washington in *Cry Freedom*, playing Steve Biko, explaining colonialism], while telling them [with a straight face] they had to become Bruce Springsteen fans to pass. So, we'd also start with his *American Skin*. The students loved the song about the police shooting of Amadou Diallo, but some teachers would complain when students kept singing *41 Shots* all day long.

So, I'd also use some of his new HBO *Western Stars* video, as well as parts of Ken Burns' *Country Music* series on PBS, in order to prompt a discussion about the tensions in American culture be-

tween individualism and community, and how we have allowed community values to decline.

And that leads to my first point: Since we've already got so many amazing programs available, why reinvent the wheel? Why not share that low-hanging fruit? Why not share the greatness of PBS and other TV programs, and borrow from the range of digital and multimedia sources to grab kids' hearts, as well as heads, and their creativity?

Were I teaching today, I'd have used much of the spring in one-on-one digital and telephone conversations, discussing what each student loves and what each one would love, and get each kid hooked on a genre, artist, musician, or whatever. Surely, it would be easy to sell many kids on great Nature programs, such as the Smithsonian's new David Attenborough series, or a series about the race to the Moon. I'd then focus on each kid learning in depth about the things that enthralled them.

And my Baby Boomer's tastes in music and video lead to the second question: do we want to draw on the lessons of history as opposed to taking a blind leap into "transformational change?"

In Oklahoma City during the 1980s, it looked like the world was coming to an end with AIDS, the banking and savings and loan collapse, and extreme, rapid deindustrialization driven by the Reagan administration's Supply Side Economics. I became an inner city teacher after the Hoova set of the Crips took over our neighborhood and I got attached to the kids growing up in crack houses. So, I keep asking how that reality was successfully spun as "Morning in America."

All views deserve a place at the table, and educators should NOT impose our politics on students. But we should be asking today's kids to study the past and create their generation's own narratives. And if we don't provide a balanced approach to helping students make sense of their world, there will be no shortage of rightwingers peddling their stories.

More specifically, I'd start with our great education historians, including Larry Cuban's synthesis of his latest masterpiece in progress with the school

reopening processes across the world, and David Berliner's personal story about polio when he was a child, as well as Diane Ravitch's analyses. We also should be drawing upon Jill Lepore's history of education during the Great Depression in the New Yorker.

Lepore's "The Last Time Democracy Almost Died" described School Superintendent John Studebaker's "ambitious plan to get Americans to show up in the same room and argue with one another in the 1930s." Starting in Des Moines, IA, his idea spread to schools across the nation. We saw what works in our democracy; discussions where "the people of the community of every political affiliation, creed, and economic view have an opportunity to participate freely."

Yes, educators should learn about the wide-ranging discussions that occurred in community schools during the Depression and the rise of totalitarian threats, but there's another important point in terms of Gen Z's economic future. How do we devise a Green New Deal without remembering the New Deal? And we need to discuss what was wrong as well as right with the New and Fair Deals, such as racial discrimination.

All of our problems, such as COVID-19, inequality, climate change, and battles over migration and refugees, are intertwined and solutions must be a team effort.

Yes, we should hire thousands of contact tracers to fight the pandemic, and that would start many Gen Zers down career paths. We need a bunch of young adults to support teachers when reopening our schools. We also need young people to mentor students on digital literacy and ethics.

I agree with Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel about the need for outdoor learning. We also need a 21st century Civilian Conservation Corps where kids learn about global warming, and solutions and career options for battling it. During my entire first night as an environmental educator, I held the city's most infamous Y.O.G. [Young Old-Time Gangsta] as he endured a migraine headache. A decade later, he came to my aid when I was confronting a convoy of gang-bangers during a riot at our school.

I was repeatedly struck by the way kids responded when taught challenging, hands-on, multidisciplinary lessons. He was one of many who taught me:

Listen to the Kids, and They Will Teach You how to Teach Them.

We also need to face the hard facts about how difficult school will be next year. If recent history is repeated, it will be especially difficult to talk honestly about the challenges that our poorest children of color, who disproportionately attend the least effective schools, will face. For instance, what will it take to assist the 15% to 40% of poor students in some districts who have gone a week or more this spring without logging in to their online lessons?

Our schools' immunity to attacks on public education have been weakened by corporate school reformers, but I don't want to go too far down that road. We need to call a truce to the reform wars.

So, I'll just note that school reformers were sincere, but they refused to listen, and didn't understand how they were turning schools, especially the highest poverty schools, into sped-up 19th century assembly lines. The good news is that only a few true believers still push test-and-punish accountability. The bad news is that corporate reform did the most damage to the highest-challenge schools, which is where the pandemic is likely doing the worst harm.

Now, an important glass is half-full. The founding principle of school reform was that mentioning poverty, segregation, and trauma was "benign racism" and "low expectations," and that quantitative metrics should "exit" educators who used those "excuses." Even though we're also hearing a new round of teacher-blaming, almost no reformers still deny the damage done by poverty and adverse childhood experiences will be made worse by the virus.

I believe education is primarily an affair of the Heart, not the Head. The subtitle of my book, *A Teacher's Tale*, was: *Learning, Loving, and Listening to Our Kids*. So, I was thrilled to see the new chalk message that students drew on on our neighborhood park's sidewalk. These musings were prompted by their words: "LISTEN, LEARN, LOVE."

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

Sweet Dreams

An assistant to Donald Trump told him she had a fantastic dream last night: There was a humongous parade down Pennsylvania Avenue celebrating Trump.

Millions lined the parade route, cheering when the president went past. Bands were playing; children were throwing confetti into the air; there were balloons everywhere.

It was the biggest celebration Washington had ever seen.

Trump was very impressed and said, "That's really great! By the way, how did I look in your dream? Was my hair OK?"

His assistant said, "I couldn't tell, the casket was closed." – *Thanks to Frank Silovsky for sharing*

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An American Prince Prospero

BY KARA GAE WILSON NEAL

In 1842, American author Edgar Allen Poe wrote an allegory entitled “The Masque of Red Death” which lends itself to universal interpretation. It is a story worth adapting to our times and ironically similar to our own vain-glorious Prince Prospero in the White House. [Poe’s words are in italics.]

The Coronavirus had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Breath was its Avatar and its seal. There were sharp pains, fever, sudden dizziness and then labored breathing, with dissolution.

But the ruling Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious [well, maybe not so sagacious]. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence like-minded hale and light-hearted friends of the court from among the knights, dames, governors, and members of Congress who didn’t wear masks and who followed his lead, since he could do no wrong. All else was Fake

News.

With these chosen friends and family, he retired to the deep seclusion of one of his most beautiful castles. *This was a magnificent structure. A strong and lofty Wall girdled it in.* The Wall was always under-construction at the expense of the poor, the military, the farmers and small merchants who were promised by Prince Prospero that the Virus would soon be gone. His edict was: Business As Usual! Build That Wall! Higher! Longer! No price too great to pay, no budget too small to tap for the Prince’s protection and that of his followers.

The Prince assured all that life would be better soon, even without the leadership and presence of the Prince. No more weekly proclamations to the dying rabble of progress made or lost against the Virus. Not his job. Too depressing. Especially now that the Prince had retreated in the castle with ample supplies of Personal Protective Equipment for his family and friends, secured by his pale, dour son-in-law, through whatever means necessary. Those

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outside the wall could surely find PPE on their own. After all, the Prince was not a “shipping clerk!”

The Prince and the courtiers, having entered the walled castle brought hammers and welded bolts for the iron gates. They resolved to leave means of neither ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or frenzy from within. The supplicants who jostled for his favor would not risk displeasing the temperamental Prince, for there was always a penalty for signs of doubt or disloyalty.

The castle was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. There was always Clorox and Lysol which could be used within or without as disinfectant. Meantime, it was folly to grieve, or to think. Security was within the Wall. Without was the Virus.

Within a few months, while the pestilence raged most furiously, Prince Prospero rallied his thousand guests with a masked ball of unusual magnificence.

Within the castle was a gigantic clock of ebony in the most remote chamber. The room was draped in rich dark velvet. Despite the revelry at the ball, no one could ignore the resounding echoes of the clock that emanated from that gloomy room. The sounds filled the castle at the chiming of every hour. When the chimes of the clock rang, the giddiest grew pale and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation.

In spite of the persistent and regular intervals of the clock resonating throughout the castle, it was a magnificent ball. The tastes of Prince Prospero were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects.

His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric luster. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be sure that he was not.

Among the masked guests moved a stranger. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask was made to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse.

At first the Prince and his favored guests ignored, even ridiculed, the stranger. Surely, he was part of a Hoax. The Prince and guests demanded the arrest of the stranger who fled their company. Led by the never-uncertain-but-often-wrong Prince, they chased him to the dark velvet chamber where the clock was chiming.

The revelers, like lemmings, followed their Prince into the dark chamber and, seizing the mummer, gasped in unutterable horror to find the gravecerements and corpse-like mask untenanted by any tangible form.

And now, finally, was acknowledged the presence of the King of Viruses. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the protesting revelers and died each in the despairing posture of his fall.

And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the Prince and his base of supplicants. And Darkness and Decay and the King of Viruses held dominion overall.

Tulsa resident Dr. Kara Gae Wilson-Neal is a retired teacher, principal, and superintendent who was inducted into the Oklahoma Educator's Hall of Fame in 2015.

Let's All Pull Together

BY BOB D. ROUNSAVELL

This title has more than one application. Our planet is currently threatened by two heinous man-made problems, both with the potential of wiping out life on earth, including us humans.

The first – climate change – is brought on primarily by persons who have chosen to get wealthy utilizing energy that pollutes our environment and thus lead to devastating effects.

Likewise, the pandemic caused by the heretofore unknown coronavirus may kill us all before we can know its true nature and control it. Both of these challenges to life will only be overcome if and when we humans get together and overcome them.

So how did we get to this crisis stage? It officially began on the first day of the Donald Trump presi-

dency. On his inauguration he proclaimed that he would not only minimize the use of science but might totally ban its use. He has done quite a good job, I think.

Rather than utilize man's greatest tool of analysis to solve problems, the Trump administration chooses to depend only on those people who will carry out his wishes, as his employees did for him as corporate executive. His first official act was abrogating the treaty with Iran which Secretary of State John Kerry in the Obama presidency had negotiated with hardliners to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. His second presidential action was on the global Paris Protocol, which the whole world had

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Trump's Classic Fascism, Racism

BY JUAN COLE

"Between 18 and 20 December 1922 Turin Fascism unleashed a three-day terror campaign on a recalcitrant anti-Fascist labour movement." So informs us Antonio Sonnessa.*

Turin [Torino] was a site of resistance to Fascism. It had a powerful labor union, dissident newspapers, a Communist Party [Antonio Gramsci was there and writing]. Mussolini may have taken over, but Turin was not going quietly. Hence Something would have to be done about Turin. Uppity workers were not allowed.

Professor Sonnessa writes:

"Even after the Fascist seizure of power in October 1922 the Turin working class continued to resist Fascism. Between October and December 1922 the ability of the Turin labour movement to offer resistance to Fascism was shown by: the clandestine production and distribution of the Turin-based Communist newspaper Ordine Nuovo [New Order]; political, factory and paramilitary organization; campaigns in support of political victims; popular uprisings against

Fascist encroachment on workers' neighbourhoods; an important factory election victory."

The black shirt thugs came in to break heads and put an end to this organizing and resistance to the Mussolini coup. Wikipedia writes that after two Fascists in the city were assassinated,

"Fascists raided and burned down the Camera del lavoro, the trade union headquarters, and attacked on two clubs of the Italian Socialist Party. This was followed by the destruction of the Turin-based Communist newspaper L'Ordine Nuovo. A number of the editors were taken to the central park in Turin and were threatened to be executed by Fascist squads. The fascists rounded up communists and trade unionists in the city and executed a number of them in gruesome manners with one victim, Pietro Ferrero, being tied and dragged behind a truck until he died and another victim being bludgeoned to death. Officially, 11 people were killed and 10 were seriously wounded by the Fascists."

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2020 PRESIDENTIAL RACE



An Open Letter To Uncle Joe

BY RANDOLPH M. FEEZELL

Dear Joe,

Undoubtedly you have highly paid political advisors and pollsters who are whispering in your ear, so why would you listen to me? I'm just another millennial, one of those "young voters" who were hyped by Bernie's message in 2016. I'm not quite an aggressive, hostile Bernie bro, but I'm active and engaged.

I thought this would be the year when a progressive candidate had a fighting chance and a majority of voters would embrace our issues: Medicare for All, climate change, tuition-free college, income inequality, raising the minimum wage, corporate money and influence, a wealth tax, immigration reform.

I had hope and enthusiasm and optimism. As the primaries unfolded after South Carolina I didn't want

to face the facts about democratic realities – kind of like Trump in a way. [Hillary received three million more votes!] I was devastated when Bernie dropped out, or "suspended" his campaign, as he said.

I think of myself as part of a movement. We're not an irrelevant hiccup in American politics.

You were not my first choice among Democratic candidates, nor my second, third, fourth, or fifth. Your political history is tainted by bad associations – corporate, martial, internationalist, traditionalist – that I reject.

My first thought was: Democrats who voted for you or the other moderates can go to hell. They deserve to lose another election. Most of my progressive friends felt the same way. I don't want to return to the good old days of you and Obama and your lukewarm pragmatism – which gave us Republican-in-

spired ObamaCare rather than a single-payer health care system. We need seismic change, not mushy compromise.

At that point I would have signed the open letter that a coalition of progressive groups sent to you. No “return to normalcy.” They said, “For so many young people going back to the way things were ‘before Trump’ isn’t a motivating enough reason to cast a ballot in November.”

I agreed with their demands and the implied threat. Give us what we want, in your rhetoric and your platform, or we stay home in November.

A funny thing happened on the way back from our failed rallies. I had a conversation with one of my Dad’s old boomer friends. Since graduate school he has called himself a “libneck”, as in “liberal redneck.” [It’s tongue-in-cheek.] He’s one of those ‘60s type liberals influenced by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, Nixon’s lies, and campus politics.

He also calls himself a civil rights liberal. He insists that M.L. King’s color-blind language is what proved to be most persuasive to Americans. We should be judged by the “content of our character,” not the color of our skin, or whom we sleep with, or what we smoke. We are human beings and citizens, not merely members of groups that supposedly define our identity and mark boundaries that separate our experiences from others. We should be treated with respect, not because of a special identity but because we’re persons.

My liberal redneck older friend recommended a book: *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, 2017, by Mark Lilla. I assume that many of your smart advisors have read it, because it was all the rage in learned circles when it came out. I missed it then. I’m not sure it would have had the same effect on me in 2017 as it did now, in 2020, after three more years of living with an amoral demagogue as president.

I learned two things from Lilla’s little book, apart from his fascinating story of American politics, from Roosevelt’s New Deal solidarity liberalism, through Reagan’s small government Republican revolution, to the emergence of what he calls “identity liberalism.” He may or may not be right about the central role of identity politics in the “abdication” of liberalism in American political life. His excoriation of identity liberalism is powerful, but I was most persuaded by his conception of politics as a deliberate process of working through democratic institutions.

For me, a frustrated progressive, the most straightforward message from Lilla, a frustrated liberal, is fairly basic.

First, to be successful in American politics, liberals and progressives [however we understand the distinction] must offer voters a compelling image of what we share, not what divides us.

As Lilla says, “They must offer a vision of our common destiny based on one thing that all Ameri-

cans, of every background actually share. And that is citizenship. We must relearn how to speak to citizens as citizens and to frame our appeals – including ones to benefit particular groups – in terms of principles that everyone can affirm. Ours must become a civic liberalism.”

Second, elections matter, decisively, at all levels of government. The success of a more “radicalized” Republican Party since the 1980s has taught liberals “the absolute priority of winning elections today.”

A progressive agenda may be, in our judgment, morally superior to the message promulgated by the Republican right, but it will be politically useless unless it is advanced by the institutions of democracy. Liberal concerns are justifiably directed, not wholly but significantly, toward the plight of various minorities in society.

“But in a democracy the only way to meaningfully defend them – and not just make empty gestures of recognition and ‘celebration’ – is to win elections and exercise power in the long run, at every level of government. And the only way to accomplish that is to have a message that appeals to as many people as possible and pulls them together. Identity liberalism does just the opposite.” [Lilla]

My progressive friends might find Lilla’s message pedestrian and uninspiring; I don’t. Movements are exciting but they need institutional muscle in order to succeed. Protests and rallies may be meaningful vehicles for self-expression but they don’t constitute “democratic persuasion,” as Lilla argues.

Lilla reminds us of something that Hillary Clinton highlighted. “Martin Luther King Jr. was the greatest movement leader in American history. But ... his efforts would have been futile without those of the machine politician Lyndon Johnson, a seasoned congressional deal maker willing to sign any pact with the devil to get the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act passed.”

So, Joe, where does this leave us? I’m going



to make an analogical argument. My progressive friends are making demands, trying to extort your explicit public support for their positions by threatening to stay home in November, refusing to support the Democratic ticket if they don't get their way. Some have even said they might vote for Trump.

Recall the letter progressive groups sent to you. They said going back to a time before Trump just isn't a sufficient motivation to vote for you. Therefore, they want you to sound more like an agent of Big Change. I now think that would be a big mistake – politically speaking.

I don't think you should placate progressives or pander to their desires. We progressives have nowhere else to go. But I do think you should communicate a clear message about what you share with them.

You were not "installed" by the party, as one progressive said. There wasn't a coronation by the establishment, nor do I believe that you were anointed by the corporate press. You received more votes than other progressive candidates because Democratic voters judged you to be the more likely candidate to defeat Trump.

People were not yet convinced by Bernie's spirited support for Medicare for All or the progressive critique of the power of big corporations and money in our politics.

The tone of your message was surely in tune with Lilla's insistence that an image of unity is more persuasive – at this time – than the combative notes of division coming from Bernie or the Divider-in-Chief.

What Lilla says about identity politics could be said about the politics of progressives [and, of course, there is a significant overlap in the two groups]: "The paradox of identity liberalism is that it paralyzes the capacity to think and act in ways that would actually accomplish the things it professes to want."

Here's what you should tell my progressive friends. Focus on what we have in common rather than what divides us – like Lilla's message to liberals about how to talk successfully to American voters and how to win elections.

We share a sensibility about the role of good government in helping to make lives better. We share a vision of the good life that has an important place for the notion of the common good, and we agree that the Reaganite government-is-bad and big-business-is-an-unqualified-good mantra should be rejected.

We share a distaste for Trump's authoritarian, anti-democratic sensibilities, his tribalism, his attempts to succeed personally by employing strategies to divide us, to demonize and belittle political opponents, and to encourage disrespect of fellow citizens and human beings.

The notion that a progressive would refuse to vote for Joe Biden, thereby helping Trump to win or to vote for Trump because she detests the Democratic corporate establishment, is politically stupid. Lilla wants

us to think strategically and plan for the long haul, like the Republicans have done. He has persuaded me. "Voting for candidates doesn't require ideological purity." As he says, "We need no more marchers. We need more mayors."

Joe, remind progressives about the effects of four more years of Trump on healthcare, the environment, immigration, and racial harmony.

Progressives should think of political moderation as a practically necessary step toward their ultimate ends. They should have the patience of effective actors and the persistence of their Republican opponents, rather than the impatience of revolutionaries.

We must hope that ObamaCare, if it survives, begets a Public Option, which begets a single-payer system. We hope a return to Obama-era environmental regulations will lead to a Green New Deal. Four more years of Trump are unthinkable. Regardless, we will keep working to change public opinion.

It pains me to say that Lilla's criticisms of identity liberalism forced me to consider one other aspect of your candidacy. If he is correct to think that identity politics is such a huge problem for Democrats, and even an inkling of political correctness is unwise, you may have made a mistake in pledging to choose a female to run as the vice president nominee. [I can hear my liberal friends gasping.]

When asked whether you would commit to a female running mate, it might have been better to say [even while thinking that you would, in fact, choose a female]: "I pledge to choose the best candidate, someone with experience and wisdom, with whom I can work, and who would be effective as president. There are numerous women, as well as men, who fit this description. I believe in merit and that will be the basis of my decision."

It's not too late. Resist the pressures from identity liberals. When you announce your running mate, use the language of merit instead of the language of identity. Don't say: "It's time we choose a female for VP [despite the fact that it is]; instead say: "It's time to recognize that being female is irrelevant for being VP."

Appeal to equality of citizenship, not membership in a group. You don't have to satisfy progressives or any other type of liberal. It may seem to be a subtle distinction. Identity liberals want you to affirm a woman as a woman – or a black woman, or a Latina woman, or an Asian woman. If Lilla is correct a broader appeal to merit, one stressing unity rather than difference, might be more effective. Affirm that you are choosing the best candidate to do the job.

Feel free to pass on my letter to other progressives. In some ways it is as much directed toward them as it is to you.

Happy November!

A Progressive Millennial

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

It's A Simple Choice: Chicken Salad Or Chicken S---

BY KEN NEAL

"Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without." – Confucius, 551-479 BC

"Striving to better, oft we mar what's well." – Shakespeare, 1564-1616.

"The best is the enemy of the good." – Voltaire, 1694-1778

These three sages – in separate times and separate cultures – told us the same thing: Sometimes when we hold out for the perfect, we overlook, or stop the good.

I fear this process is under way in the 2020 presidential campaign. Joe Biden, the venerable Democratic candidate, is far from perfect.

We know he is a good man, well educated in the ways of the U.S. Senate and the presidency; but he is indeed a diamond with a flaw. He talks too much; sometimes he is too flippant and prone to say the wrong thing. But only the most rabid Republicans would deny he is a good man.

Case in point: Biden's interview with Lenard Larry McKelvey, aka Charlamagne Tha God, an American radio presenter, television personality, and author.

After 18-minutes of questioning of Biden, Tha God said he had still more questions. At this point, a clearly irritated Biden snapped, "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, you ain't black."

Some blacks immediately jumped Biden for the remark and he quickly apologized for a "smart crack." Tha God drilled Biden on various black problems and in subsequent interviews repeatedly said actions, not words, actual programs, not discussions, are required for black advancement.

Well, of course. But consider what Biden said before the "you ain't black" crack. "Look at my record, look at what I've stood for!"

Is there a living soul in the Democratic Party that doesn't know Donald Trump is the pebble and Joe Biden is the diamond, if a bit flawed?

Trump has a long record of racism and bigotry dating back to his days when he was a partner with his father. Through the years he has shown his racist colors in many ways. And do black people not remember that this is the man who claimed Barak Obama was not born in the U.S. and pillories Obama at every turn?

Trump has fumbled the management of the COVID-19 crisis. According to some models, his dithering even as the virus was in the American population has cost thousands of lives.

Do they not remember what he said when counter

protesters faced a white supremacy and neo-Nazi mob in Charlottesville, VA? "There are good people on both sides," declared Trump.

Every elected official will tell you that he or she can't do any good unless first elected. Blacks should ask themselves which candidate is apt to push programs and initiatives to help them as they vote this fall.

It is painful to tell an abused black community that progress on the racial front is slow and will continue to be slow. Just remember the hard fought political and social battles that have improved the lot of blacks today.

Biden is under fire because of his role in passing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 which provided incentive grants to build and expand correctional facilities to qualifying states that enforced mandatory sentencing of 85% of a person's sentence.

That law, like most criminal laws, affected blacks unduly because blacks are inordinately poor and poverty fosters crime. At the time, there was a national cry to get tough on crime. Today, we can see that was a mistake; crime and poverty solutions are much more complicated than a "lock 'em up and throw away the key" approach.

Joe Biden, after 30 years in the U.S. Senate and eight years as vice president, is qualified by experience more than most candidates for the presidency.

He does have a record that he correctly contends is a good one on the issues most Democrats hold dear. Has he measured up at every opportunity? Of course not. He has voted on or expressed himself on hundreds of issues through the years. He is bound to have been wrong at times.

Here is where the insistence on perfect hurts the good. No one has been error free in a career of such duration.

And, above all, he is not running against Abraham Lincoln, but against arguably the worst president in the country's history; one who almost daily damages the country with his deranged actions.

Remember: Once elected, blacks and kindred whites can give Biden unshirted hell if he does not perform. In the meantime, blacks [and whites] must ask themselves who would be the better president? Biden or Trump?

Gee, it's a choice between chicken salad and chicken manure!

Ken Neal is former opinion editor of the Tulsa World.



Mask-U-Linity's Deadly Consequences

BY JOHN WOOD

Donning my colorful galaxy cloth mask, I drove to a nearby gas station to fill up my mower's five-gallon tank. I have been self-quarantining for the last few months and adventures like this are strangely not a daily occurrence anymore.

I'm not alone, as a recent Gallup Poll found 58% of Americans say it's healthier to stay-at-home as much as possible, albeit down 17% as states open up. As numbers go down, the number of deaths rises – eclipsing 100,000 on May 27. The government projects 3,000 deaths daily into early June, according to the New York Times.

At the station, I pulled out the gas pump handle with my light blue latex gloves and placed it in my car's tank. I already knew to be careful before COVID-19 – a 2011 study by the personal hygiene company Kimberly-Clark found more than 70% of gas pump handles were contaminated.

At the OnCue, I was the only one with a face covering out of 14 that I had observed. Even cashier be-

hind a sneeze guard was not wearing a mask as she greeted me with a cheery, "Hi." A little disorienting.

REFUSING TO WEAR A MASK

Stillwater is now nationally infamous because its city leaders retreated in early May from a mandate that customers wear masks to reopen restaurants and stores. A mere three hours into the order, city officials withdrew the mandate because of threats of violence directed at Walmart employees as well as phone calls to police and city officials citing Second Amendment remedies.

Mayor Will Joyce told MSNBC that Stillwater lacked police to enforce such an order. "And so, it's been a struggle [to] make people understand that wearing that face covering is an easy and an effective way to help slow the spread of this virus." In the Stillwater News Press, Norman McNickle, city manager added it was only minor inconvenience to wear a mask as it protects the person wearing it and anyone they meet.

In a press release, Joyce said: "I hate that our businesses and their employees had to deal with abuse

today, and I apologize for putting them in that position. I am not the kind of person who backs down from bullies, but I also will not send someone else to fight the battle for me.”

Elsewhere, for example, CBS News reported that a Colorado man shot a Waffle House employee the day after staffers told him to wear a face covering inside the restaurant. In addition, a St. ClairShores, MI woman assaulted and spit on a grocery employee after being told to leave for not wearing a mask. The Macomb County prosecutor described the incident as “incomprehensible” to attack an essential worker.

As events like these were experienced nationwide in the following weeks, Governor Stitt felt the need to say they were merely a “personal preference.”

I guess we are allowing the bullies to win now?

WHY NOT WEAR A MASK?

From my research, I can surmise that it is a combination of things. At first glance, it’s anxiety and Trump’s antics.

In many ways, this is not surprising considering a few long months of millions of people cooped up at home and tens of thousands dying, and millions infected with COVID-19. This is on top of unemployment that surpassed 30 million, a number unheard of since the Great Depression. Unlike then – when Franklin Delano Roosevelt rose to the occasion and became a defining figure in American history – today’s federal government is failing to lead.

Indeed, President Donald Trump has made an infamous mark on history. Falling to the depravity of partisan politics, Trump’s bungled response even yielded a recent peer-reviewed article in the medical journal *The Lancet*, which asserted the national response to the pandemic has been rather “inconsistent and incoherent” while the Centers for Disease Control [CDC] has been sidelined.

Trump even blamed the CDC director on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, declaring the CDC “let the country down” with early testing problems. At other times, he has blamed China, calling it the “Wuhan” or “Chinese” virus. He’s even called the pandemic media-hyped and a “Democratic Hoax.”

In addition to the blame game, Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have been critical of masks. “I don’t think I’ll be doing it,” Trump declared in March. This is alarming because Trump’s own guidelines recommend that Americans wear a face covering in public spaces to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The CDC website says: “The cloth face cover is meant to protect other people in case you are infected.”

The CDC website further explains the reason is protect those vulnerable and others in case the mask wearer is asymptomatic, but contagious, which is said to be the case between the fifth and 14th days before showing symptoms.

A noble good deed to help others.

This contrasts with Trump’s hyper-individualist point of view, famously showcased in his Honeywell mask factory visit, of course, when he didn’t wear a

mask. The Guardian reported him viewing N95 masks as Guns N’ Roses “Live and Let Die,” blared from the factory floor’s speakers, certainly symbolic of the moment.

A few weeks later, he visited a Michigan Ford Motor company where they are creating masks, which had a seemingly strict requirement to wear them. As reporters asked him why he was not, his retort was that he didn’t want to give media the satisfaction of seeing him wear one. He even admitted to actually wearing one upon entering the plant.

Trump is surely out of step with the American public on this one. A May New York Times poll found 80% would wear a mask when coming close to people outside their home.

DIGGING DEEPER

Resistance to mask-wearing is beyond Trump and anxiety, but also often a “partisan pandemic,” a sign of weakness, typically gendered, and certainly anti-intellectual.

To illustrate, a YouGov poll in mid-May found Democrats were more likely to wear a mask than Republicans – 67% to 54%. The survey also discovered that 86% of Republicans trust Trump “somewhat-to-very much” to successfully manage the pandemic, but only 10% of Democrats do.

Trump’s tweet storms have fanned the fires of right-wing groups, whom a conservative New York Times’ columnist calls his followers “rippers” – they “see everything through the prism of politics and still emphasize division.”

A mask is also a sign of weakness. Steven Taylor, the Psychology of Pandemics author, told CNN that people rebel when told what to do. “People value their freedoms,” he said. “They may become distressed or indignant or morally outraged when people are trying to encroach on their freedoms.”

Furthermore, David Abrams, a NYU’s School of Public Health psychologist, finds masks a symbol of vulnerability – a sign that one is scared. Rejecting a mask, by contrast, demonstrates strength.

London and California researchers found it was gendered. They studied nearly 2,500 people found that men are less likely to wear masks than women because some think it is shameful, “not cool” on top of being a “sign of weakness.” Interestingly, they found less significant differences between both genders toward masks when they are legally mandated as both would choose to wear them.

So, city officials bullied into backing off from mandating masks clearly sets a dangerous precedent.

It’s also anti-intellectual. Historian Richard Hofstadter argues in his classic 1960s book, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, argues that a distrust of experts is often partnered with populism and religious fundamentalism. He said that conservatives may feel threatened by scientific research, such as climate change and evolution. Often populists view experts as an elitist class seeking power over ordinary citizens.

Today, this anti-intellectualism is reflected in challenging and ignoring CDC scientists. Instead of experts, The Guardian reports, Trump often tweets rightwing media-fueled conspiracy theories, instead often borrowing Russian-inspired story lines to stir up his conservative base with a laser-like focus on election 2020.

PUSHING CONSPIRACY THEORIES

"It has all the ingredients for leading people to conspiracy theories," said Karen M. Douglas, a social psychologist who studies belief in conspiracies at the University of Kent in Britain.

Confusion and helplessness, she said, are the fuels necessary to stoke partisan flames. And all these conspiracy theories have something in common: believers gain security and control by acquiring the secret truths that "they" don't want you to hear, no matter how illusory and damaging to public trust.

Social psychologist Ilan Shira told CBS News that conspiracy theories originate by creating someone to blame. Bad things don't just happen, someone is responsible and must be stopped and punished.

As she aptly describes the phenomenon, "It's not our fault. It's them."

Therefore, when a virus from bats is spread from China, it is alternatively portrayed as the fault of a Chinese lab, or even Bill Gates, or just fake and/or

overly hyped by Democrats.

New York Times even recently finds rightwing congressional candidates subscribe to QAnon, which portrays a supposed secret "deep state" plot against Trump and his followers. Watch for the "Do you know Q?" signs at Trump rallies, even a billboard was sighted around Ardmore on I-35, according to Reddit.

In his new book, *Is the Republican Party Destroying Itself?*, Thomas Patterson argues that "America's right-wing media are a propaganda machine the likes of which the world has rarely seen." The rightwing media, he writes, has placed a stranglehold on the Republican Party, as they have "opposed any form of compromise" and "concocted alternative realities." All ingredients that undermine our Democracy, according to Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt's *How Democracies Die*.

Even educated people are susceptible to this conspiracy mindset.

The Behavioural Public Policy journal found in 2013 that educated people often say they are immune to propaganda. Tom Nichols, who wrote *The Death of Expertise*, calls this the "smart idiot" effect. This might explain why highly educated Republicans are more likely than those less educated to say climate change is fake and a conspiracy of self-serving scien-

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A Pandemic Parable

BY MARK Y.A. DAVIES

A woman went down to the grocery store where she had to work as a cashier during the pandemic to support her family. She encountered persons who did not respect the risk that her job posed to her, who stripped her of her dignity, mocked her for wearing a mask, and left her each day in danger of possible death.

Now it just so happened that an evangelical Christian was going down the same checkout lane, and when he saw the woman at the register, he crossed over too close to the woman, inside the distance of six feet while not wearing a mask, and said to her, "it's too bad you have to wear that silly mask so I can't see your pretty smile." He paid for his groceries, spraying droplets on the credit card reader as he spoke, and went on his way.

Likewise, an evangelical minister came by that same checkout lane, saw the woman cashier, and crossing inside the distance of six feet and also not wearing a mask invited the woman to come to his church next Sunday because unlike so many other churches who continued to have online services, his church has decided to reopen a few weeks ago. He paid for his groceries, spraying droplets on the credit card reader as he spoke, and went on his way.

A Muslim woman with a head covering and a mask, who was also shopping in the store, came to where the woman cashier was. But when she saw her and the way the people in front of her had treated the woman, she was moved with compassion. The Muslim woman stayed at least six feet away from the cashier, thanked her for her help, and wiped the credit card reader with disinfectant after using it.

Then she noticed that the mask the woman cashier was using was rather tattered and did not fit her well, so she placed the groceries in her basket and told the cashier that she had something in her car for her.

In the next few minutes, the Muslim woman returned into the store with box of new N95 masks and gave them to the cashier, thanking her again for her help in allowing her to come and purchase food for her family.

What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the woman?

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

Pandemic Beatitudes

Blessed are the mask wearers, for they help keep persons of sacred worth from dying alone and scared, separated from family and friends.

Blessed are those who care for the sick and comfort the dying, for they are the presence of Beloved Community.

Blessed are those who mourn the dead rather than minimize their death, for they will retain their humanity.

Blessed are the scientists searching for treatments and vaccines, for they are bearers of hope.

Blessed are the food providers for those who can and cannot pay, for they are sustainers of life.

Blessed are those who keep their distance, for they allow our beloved ones to remain close.

Blessed are those who refuse to profit unjustly from the pandemic, for they bear witness to justice and common decency.

Blessed are employers who keep workers safe, for

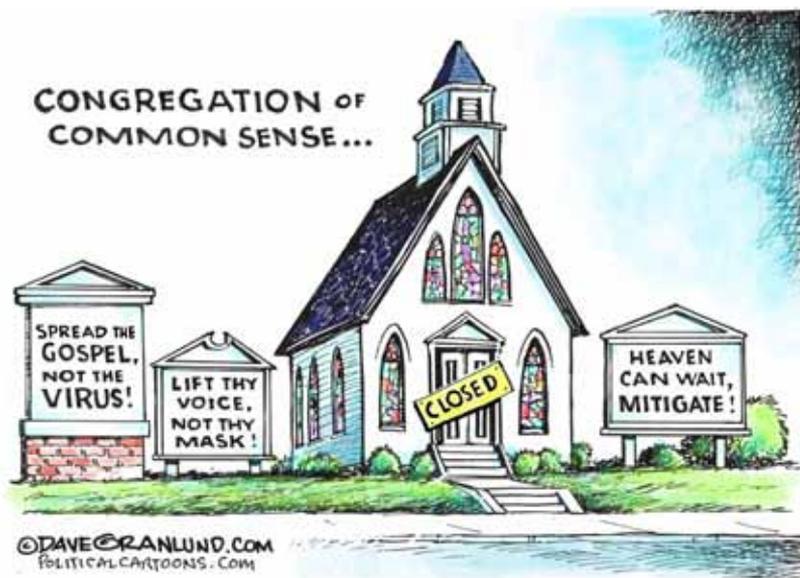
they value life over profit.

Blessed are leaders who make compassionate decisions based upon knowledge and evidence, for they forge a wise path.

Blessed are the truth tellers, for they provide the best information possible to keep all of us safe.

Blessed are those who do not use the pandemic to divide us, for they work for the common good of all.

– Mark Y.A. Davies



Jim Hightower



What's Behind A Mask?

For future historians and artists who'll chronicle today's health and economic crisis, one humble item will stand out as the chief cultural emblem of the times: wearing a mask. Or not.

These low-tech, low-cost, high-impact coverings for the nose and mouth are so simple and effective at helping reduce the COVID-19 infection rate that our top political leaders' failure to produce, distribute and require them en masse when the pandemic first spread ranks somewhere between stupid and criminal.

Yet, following the visual example set by doctors, nurses and other health professionals [including morticians!], the people themselves took the lead, rapidly making homemade masks a booming cottage industry and a charitable act. Artists quickly chipped in with creative designs. Impish youngsters put masks on public statues. Cartoonists masked their characters.

And, of course, satirists produced photos of President Donald Trump wearing a mask ... over his eyes.

Meanwhile, big corporations rushed out like masked thieves and deceivers to exploit the crisis. On the one hand, their lobbyists shoved to the front of the line to grab billions in public relief funds meant for small Main Street businesses. On the other hand, they've been churning out touchy-feely PR campaigns portraying Amazon warehouses, Hefty trash bags, McDonald's fries and Walmart clerks as the epitome of all-in-this-together Americanism.

Their not-so-subliminal message in this global pandemic is that what unites us as a people is crass commercialism – so buy something from us!

Then there are the billionaire-funded, right-wing political fronts that are staging a series of small [and small-minded] protests against – wait for it – masks. Yes, to advance their extremist, laissez faire ideology, the Koch Brothers' network and others are actually working to divide Americans during this time of national crisis by demonizing, of all things, mask wearing! They've incited a gaggle of latter-day Patrick Henrys to confuse patriotism with nutballism.

Thus, masquerading as brave defenders of individual liberty, some have felt free to trample on America's Common Good. Loudly proclaiming that being asked to make a minor, temporary, life-saving

wardrobe adjustment is pure tyranny, they freely breathe their COVID-19 infections into our public air, often while mocking and even assaulting retail employees, bus drivers and others who're just trying to get everyone to live and let live.

In this strange time, the modest mask has become a complex social symbol of competing acts of generosity, greed and goofiness. The good news is that generosity is prevailing over the other two.

Some people in particular ought to be wearing a mask wherever they go in public – not a protective medical mask but full-facial ski masks, like those favored by bank robbers and muggers.

Take Zach Fuentes, for example, a former deputy chief of staff for the commander in chief himself. He resigned from his White House duties in January, looking to parlay his government experience into some sort of lucrative, entrepreneurial future. Then, the pandemic hit America, and tens of thousands of people began to die. The dual horror of a rampant contagion and Trump's incompetent government quickly spread the crisis, but Fuentes thought, "Aha, opportunity!"

By April, he was in the federal contracting business, having set up a corporate facade for hustling deals to provide medical supplies to government agencies. Only 11 days after he opened for business in Washington – Bingo! – the lucky greenhorn won a \$3 million contract from the Department of Health and Human Services to ship respirator masks to Navajo Nation hospitals in Arizona and New Mexico that were being overrun by hundreds of COVID-19 cases.

Fuentes was apparently awarded the contract with little competitive bidding, even though he had no knowledge about medical supplies or experience in federal contracting, and even though his price of \$3.24 per mask was triple the pre-pandemic cost of \$1 each.

Oh, he also had no masks. No problem there, though, for he had a source: China. An obvious bit of irony there, since Trump is frantically trying to blame China for his own massive screw-ups in handling the pandemic in our country.

Worse for Fuentes, though, the bulk of the Chinese masks he procured for the Navajo hospitals

may not provide adequate protection, may be unsuitable for medical use or were not the type he promised to deliver.

So, the Navajo people didn't get the help they urgently needed; Fuentes and the Chinese supplier each made off with a bundle; and we taxpayers got mugged.

This is what happens when government is turned over to insider profiteers. These bungling bandits should at least have to wear scarlet masks so we can point them out to our children and say, "Don't let them control your future."

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We Need More Iyyikowa

Charles Dickens, writing about the inequality and social turmoil leading to the French Revolution, noted, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

So it is today, with the horrific COVID-19 killer both ravaging the globe and intensifying the inequality that was already rending social unity.

Consider the experiences of one especially hard-hit group in our country: Native Americans. The Navajo Nation alone has become one of the worst of America's COVID hotspots, with a higher death rate than all but four states.

Yet, in an example of the worst of times, Trump & Co. delayed disbursement of \$8 billion in coronavirus relief funds that Congress had set aside for tribal governments. The disease raged through Indian Country for six crucial weeks while Trump officials sat on the money. People died.

In one symbolic screw-up, an American Indian health agency in Seattle urgently requested test kits and medical supplies, but when a shipment finally arrived – good grief! – it contained zippered body bags and tags that read, "Attach to toe."

Yet, the crisis has also been the best of times, with front-line health workers performing heroically, and regular folks everywhere coming through with countless acts of generosity and community spirit. One incident in early May was especially poignant, again involving the Navajo Nation.

A GoFundMe appeal sought a couple million bucks to help that tribe deal with the spreading virus, but donations quickly surged past \$3 million, mostly in small amounts pouring in from a surprising source: Irish people!

Huh? To connect the dots, go back to the Potato Famine of the 1840s, which killed a million Irish and forced another million to emigrate.

In the midst of their despair, though, a modest

donation of \$170 had arrived in the Emerald Isle in 1847, lifting the nation's spirit – not because of the amount but because it came from the equally impoverished and suffering people of the Choctaw Nation, 4,000 miles away in Oklahoma. This act of deep humanitarian empathy created a special bond that has endured and been celebrated ever since by generations of Native Americans and people of Irish heritage.

The Choctaw have a word, "iyyikowa," that means serving those in need. That's what turns the worst of times into the best ... and we need more of it.

Times of great adversity not only bring out the best and worst in society but also some of the stinkiest and slimiest creatures. Think of war profiteers ... or hucksters who prey on the elderly ... or Betsy DeVos.

Even in the Trump Kakistocracy, DeVos stands out as an especially loathsome plutocrat, constantly trying to weasel her far-right, corporatist agenda into law.

Unfortunately, as education secretary, the billionaire heiress is in a position to be an out-of-control wrecking ball on America's public schools.

Indeed, she routinely connives to drain our tax dollars from public education and give them to for-profit private schools – including some she personally invests in.

Worse, she keeps trying to rig the rules so fly-by-night for-profit colleges can more easily defraud their low-income students and grab more profits for the rich investors who own these educational chains.

Now the devilish DeVos has grabbed on to the government's big coronavirus relief program as a way to impose her ideological agenda on American education. While We the People have been focused on our health and economic survival, she has quietly been pushing school districts to use some \$58 billion in COVID-19 emergency funds to create voucher-style grants to fund wealthy private schools at the expense of lower-income families. Officials in New Orleans, for example, say her plan would put 77% of their pandemic relief allocation in private hands, and Pennsylvania says more than half of its relief money would flow from the "most disadvantaged to more advantaged students."

Not satisfied with perverting the national disaster program into a slush fund for her privatization agenda, DeVos then tried to pervert language and logic when Congress caught on to her diversion scheme. If the public money were to go primarily to public schools, her political staff retorted, it would place wealthy non-public schools "at a disadvantage." Yes, in DeVosWorld, the needs of the poor rich must come first so they're not discriminated against by the ... you know, actual poor.

Kakistocracy is government by the very worst people in society, and now it has a proper name: Betsy DeVos. – *Jim Hightower*



Trump's Obama Obsession Could Be His Achilles

BY CARL P. LEUBSDORF

No foe provokes Donald Trump like Barack Obama. Now, their animosity is taking center stage in the 2020 presidential race.

It's raged for a decade, ever since Trump joined the racist chorus questioning Obama's legitimacy.

Some think the former president's derisive response at a 2011 Washington press dinner of Trump's repeated but unproven claim Obama was born in Kenya helped spur the real estate mogul to seek the presidency.

As president, Trump has sought to obliterate Obama's legacy, from ObamaCare to the Iran nuclear agreement.

Now, Obama has decided to go public with pointed criticism of Trump's management of the coronavirus pandemic, prompting the president to launch an

incendiary new line of attack suggesting his predecessor masterminded a criminal conspiracy to undermine him.

He calls it "Obamagate," invoking other political scandals since "Watergate" sank Richard Nixon. Trump wants Senate Republicans to investigate the former president, a demand they have so far wisely resisted.

In a sense, it's typical Trump, changing the subject when under fire. It's also created the odd situation of a campaign debate between the president and his predecessor, rather than his likely Democratic rival.

That poses problems for both sides. Obama's prominence makes presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden look disengaged from the debate. But Trump is showing his unpleasant side even some

backers disdain.

Besides, of the three, Obama is the most popular, raising a question if it's politically wise for Trump to elevate his role in this election.

When Trump joined the "birthers" questioning Obama's legitimacy, many thought he was trying to establish Republican bona fides. At the 2011 White House Correspondents' Association dinner – with Trump present – Obama retaliated.

As his legitimate Hawaii birth certificate flashed on screens, Obama said "no one is happier, no one is prouder to put this birth certificate matter to rest than The Donald," adding "that's because he can finally get back to focusing on the issues that matter — like, did we fake the moon landing? What really happened in Roswell? And where are Biggie and Tupac?"

Mocking Trump's "credentials and breadth of experience," he compared his choices on *Celebrity Apprentice* with "the kind of decisions that would keep me up at night."

Though Trump denied that affected his decision to run, Obama became his frequent target, in the campaign and afterward.

He blamed Obama national security officials for what he calls the "Russia hoax," the contention Russia helped him win the presidency that led to special counsel Robert Mueller's two-year probe, whose origins various Republicans are now investigating.

But his verbal animus soared after a leaked phone call in which Obama called the government's handling of the pandemic an "absolute chaotic disaster."

On Mother's Day, Trump unleashed 126 tweets and re-tweets, many bearing the hashtag OBAMAGATE and attacking Obama's criticism of the administration's decision dropping prosecution of ousted National Security Adviser Mike Flynn.

A typical rejoinder retweeted conservative commentator Buck Sexton's claim "the outgoing president used his last weeks in office to target incoming officials and sabotage the new administration." Added Trump: "The biggest political crime in American history, by far!"

On May 11, The Washington Post's Philip Rucker asked Trump at a White House press briefing what Obama's alleged crime was.

"Uh, Obamagate. It's been going on for a long time," Trump replied. "It's been going on from before I even got elected, and it's a disgrace that it happened, and if you look at what's gone on, and if you look at now, all this information that's being released – and from what I understand, that's only the beginning – some terrible things happened, and it should never be allowed to happen in our country again."

He told Fox Business network's Maria Bartiromo Obama "probably directed" security officials who "tried to take down the duly elected president of the United States."

And he tweeted, "If I were a Senator or Congressman, the first person I would call to testify about the biggest political crime and scandal in the history of the USA, by FAR, is former President Obama. He knew EVERYTHING." He aimed the tweet at Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-SC, who is investigating the Russian probe's origins.

Obama's response: "Vote." Then, in two virtual graduation speeches last Saturday, he questioned Trump's handling of the pandemic – without mentioning his name.

He told graduates of historically black colleges and universities the pandemic "has fully, finally torn back the curtain on the idea that some of the folks in charge know what they're doing. A lot of them aren't even pretending to be in charge," he added, a seeming reference to Trump's assertion he bears no responsibility for covid-19 testing failures.

Later, Obama told a nationally televised program honoring high school graduates the pandemic showed "a lot of so-called grown-ups, including some with fancy titles and important jobs" still favor "doing what feels good, what's convenient, what's easy." That "is why things are so screwed up," he said.

Trump's twitter response: "OBAMAGATE." The next day, he called Obama a "grossly incompetent" president.

With polls showing Trump lagging in key states, he is undoubtedly trying to fire up his conservative base. But he risks firing up Obama, who would like nothing better than to oust the man who would destroy his legacy.

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

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New Study: Ocean Microplastics Drastically Underestimated

BY JORDAN DAVIDSON

New research suggests there may be far more microplastics in the ocean than initially estimated.

Microplastics, which breakdown into miniscule pieces of plastic, are notoriously tricky to catch. Their small size allows them to get buried in ocean sediment and to escape through nets.

Now, a team of researchers, led by scientists at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory in England, used a finer net to get a more accurate picture of the amount of plastic in the ocean. Their research suggests the seas may be holding as many as 125 trillion microplastic particles, according to the study published in the journal *Environmental Pollution*, as Newsweek

reported.

Microplastics are usually defined as tiny pieces of plastic that measure less than five millimeters across. However, despite the abundance of microplastics in the ocean, scientists have actually had a difficult time quantifying and classifying them. Usually, researchers gather samples with nets with a mesh size of 333 micrometers, or 0.333 millimeters, but these do not account for smaller pieces of plastic debris, as Newsweek reported.

The Plymouth Marine Laboratory scientists, along with researchers from the University of Exeter, used nets with a mesh size of 100 micrometers, or 0.1 millimeters, to get a more accurate picture of the micro-

plastics swirling around coastal waters, according to a University of Exeter press release.

“It is quite well known what impact larger pieces of plastic have on marine animals, like turtles eating plastic bags mistaking them for jellyfish, but we wanted to know if microplastics are a problem to smaller marine animals like mussels or zooplankton,” said Pennie Lindeque, lead author of the study from Plymouth Marine Laboratory, to Newsweek.

“However, first we needed an accurate picture of how many small microplastics there are in the sea, and what sort of plastic they are. We are interested in really quite small microplastics – around 100 micrometers in size, similar to the width of a human hair – and suspected that the standard sampling methods using a net with pores about 333 micrometers in size, wouldn’t give an accurate picture.”

The researchers compared the efficacy of a 100 micrometer net to what’s collected by a 333 micrometer net and a 500 micrometer net. They found that their net collected 2½ times as much microplastics as the 333 micrometer mesh net. It collected 10 times more microplastic than a 500 micrometer net, according to the study.

The scientists then extrapolated that data to determine that there are roughly 3,700 pieces of microplastic in one cubic meter. That means that previous

global estimates of 5 trillion to 50 trillion particles of microplastics are severely low. The true number, according to the data in the study, is somewhere between 12.5 trillion and 125 trillion particles.

“There is often a mismatch between the number and type of microplastics used in experimental studies and those found in the natural environment,” said Rachel Coppock, Marine Ecologist at Plymouth Marine Laboratory and a co-author on the study, in a statement.

“This study confirms that microplastic concentration increases with decreasing size and also provides a framework for determining microplastic concentrations in exposure studies, particularly with animals such as zooplankton that eat micron-sized food.”

The researchers focused on coastal water since that is where microplastics are likely to have the greatest impact on marine life. They sampled the water on both sides of the Atlantic, choosing a spot off the coast of Maine and another in the English Channel, according to Newsweek.

“I was surprised at the extent that we had been underestimating the microplastic abundance in the marine environment; I was also surprised how consistent the results were on both sides of the North Atlantic, the eastern seaboard of the U.S. and the southwest coast of the UK,” Lindeque told Newsweek.

Put To The Test

BY ANN DAPICE

As infants we are weighed and measured. As toddlers we are assessed for turning over, crawling, walking, and talking. In school we will be given report cards to indicate out strengths and weaknesses. There are certain markers that determine our progress to the next grade. This will continue throughout the K-12 grades.

College and university admission will often require exams – as will graduate and professional schools. Institutions are often ranked according to their testing requirements. There are written and practice tests to be allowed to drive, fly a plane, and qualify for myriad occupations. Once we are employed, we will generally be evaluated periodically and must achieve certain work behaviors to remain in a job.

Some people are seen as test smart. As an educator I have written and scored many tests and have taught student test-taking skills. These provide assistance in sorting out variables that are not content related and help relieve the anxiety that testing generally involves.

It is not an overstatement to say we are ruled by testing and evaluation. Anxiety is often an appropriate response given its power. In addition to anxiety, people who do not test well may turn to bluffing and

denial about the necessity of education and science.

There are questions about testing and evaluation in general. What do tests show? How accurate are they? Are they multiple choice, true/false, or essay? Do they combine the different strategies? Do they measure what is necessary to know? Do they assess pencil/paper and computer skills more than behaviors required for practice? Do they evaluate clear understanding or “easy to forget” rote memory? Do they measure critical thinking? What can be measured?

Then there is testing for disease. Such testing can be simple and noninvasive such as temperature, pulse, blood pressure, less invasive such as collection of mucus, sputum and urine, or it may require samples of blood, spinal fluid, or organ tissue. In recent decades we have been able to move beyond x-rays, to treadmill stress tests, computed tomography [CT scan] and magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] to measure detailed images of organs and tissues and functional MRI that shows brain activity.

Having a test done to determine disease becomes anxiety producing as would be expected depending on the disease, its prognosis and treatment.

The testing we hear about presently is for a specific viral organism that can cause serious disease and

death. Its worldwide nature causes it to be categorized a pandemic. It has only come to our attention in recent months. At this writing [May 25] the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University reports that there have been 1,662,768 confirmed cases and 98,223 deaths in the U.S. with 5,518,905 confirmed cases and 346,700 deaths worldwide from Covid-19.

Due to a number of factors, including age, chronic medical conditions, and close contact, nursing homes have experienced high numbers of disease and death with family members not allowed to be with their elders at death.

The numbers of actual disease are certainly higher where people test positive but experience no symptoms. They can infect others not knowing they have the disease. The statistics will be higher than counted where people have been told to remain home and only use medical facilities in extreme cases.

Since there is no known treatment and some individuals are without symptoms, accurate testing to prevent further communication of disease becomes critical. Research is ongoing for a test that is quick, easy to use with immediate feedback, can be used for large populations, and does not give false negatives. At present the quick test in use is inadequate for these purposes. The ultimate goal, but not quickly realized, is to develop an immunization.

Its communicability has radically changed lives worldwide as economies have suffered from “lock-downs” that only allow “essential workers” such as health personnel to leave home. Global practices have varied but in the U.S. people have been told to socially isolate at home, keep six feet away, and wear masks.

Businesses have been closed, jobs lost, travel severely limited, schools closed with traditional graduation ceremonies cancelled, conferences cancelled, and mixed messages have been given for religious services other than virtual.

President Trump and state governors have openly disagreed, as have agencies such as the Center for Disease Control.

Pandemic policy from previous administrations and those responsible have apparently been removed during the president's tenure. This includes resources critical to preventing and responding to the spread of disease – masks, gloves, gowns, eye gear, and tests. Doctors and nurses have had to wear masks over long periods of time and even use plastic trash bags in place of protective gowns. Hospital beds have not been sufficient and surgery for other conditions has been postponed.

Unfortunately, the president has promoted treatment with a malaria drug which has not been shown to treat COVID-19 and has serious side effects. He

also suggested the injection of disinfectants to kill the virus. Early on he dismissed concerns, saying the virus was under control and like a “miracle” it would disappear by April.

In recent weeks we have seen violence against Asians related to the president's description of the disease as the “Chinese Virus.” People have also acted violently when asked to use masks. Deaths and the loss of jobs are serious.

While Covid-19 numbers continued to rise this Memorial Day, people ignored warnings from health professionals and rushed to the beaches ignoring social distance and masks. Perhaps our lifelong testing has not adequately assessed our knowledge, concern for others and thus our behavior.

In 1957, a popular song writer and singer wrote the following:

*Well, the Bible tells us about a man
Who ruled Babylon and all its land.
Around the city, he built a wall
And declared that Babylon would never fall.
He had concubines and wives,
He called his Babylon “Paradise.”
On his throne he drank and ate,
but for Belshazzar it was gettin' late.
Well, the people feasted and drank their wine
And praised the false gods of his time.
All holy things they scorned and mocked,
But suddenly all their mocking stopped.
For on the wall, there appeared a hand,
Nothin' else, there was no man.
In blood the hand began to write,
And Belshazzar couldn't hide his fright.
Well, no one around could understand
What was written by the mystic hand.
Belshazzar tried, but couldn't find
A man who could give him peace of mind.
But Daniel, the prophet, a man of God,
He saw the writing on the wall in blood.
Belshazzar asked him what it said,
And Daniel turned to the wall and read:
“My friend, you're weighed in the balance and
found wanting,
Your kingdom is divided, it can't stand.
You're weighed in the balance and found wanting,
Your houses are built upon the sand.” – Johnny
Cash*

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

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Remembering Oklahoma's Legendary Watchdogs

OUR GREATEST JOURNALISTS

Fifty Years Of The Oklahoma Journalism Hall Of Fame

Joe Hight, Editor

Oklahoma Hall Of Fame Publishing

210 pages, \$39.95

BY JOSEPH H. CARTER SR.

When Joe Hight envisioned a book about the lives and roles of 468 news people, he envisioned it as a summary of Oklahoma folks inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of fame. Two tragic events of history lurk to exaggerate the historic value of the tome.

While Hight used the 50th anniversary of the J-Hall as a stopping place to start the book, the Hall of Fame itself has over the decades also focused on prominent newsmen including some whose roles pre-date statehood. What is the book's historic value?

Historians rely heavily on newspaper archives and, of late, preserved recordings of radio-TV newscasts as bases for recounts of keystones of historic merit. More difficult is learning the names and backgrounds of those reporter-editors who fashioned the timely reports. Hight's book provides invaluable insight that historians also should research in judging the merits of published or broadcast news reports they will cite. What makes this timely to date?

FIRST: In the final few months of amassing the book, COVID-19 struck worldwide with life-changing, deadly ferocity. Industry stopped. Businesses closed. Most institutions suffered alterations that portend to bend the basic fabrics of society in long-range proportions.

SECOND: The increasing death of scores of local

Oklahoma newspapers and thousands worldwide has dramatically ended many constant watchdogs of governments and industry. With the rise of electronic communications such as Facebook and Twitter, advertising revenues vital for publishers fell dramatically. To save money, newspapers that survived necessarily cut newsroom staffs and budget.

"There's blood on newsroom floors across the country," writes veteran journalist Molly Bingham of ORB Media. The people who gather, distill and distribute information in the United States have had their jobs cut, been laid off, bought out and furloughed. The lost ad revenue during this crisis is causing a 'bleed out' in the industry – just when having facts might matter more than ever to your survival. All news organization are suffering mightily – local ones more than ever."

Pundits and philosophers, as well investors and politicians, now are faced with a new era that could be spelled as bad news for democracy. New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg forecasts "a transformed and blighted world."

While newscasts continue, on-the-air reporters traditionally fetch and repeat news items delivered by pencil-and-paper beat newspaper reporters or the vital Associated Press [AP].

When newspapers fail, their fees paid for AP wire

stories are lost. As a result, the number of AP correspondents and rewrite-editor desk folks has diminished by more than one-half. As a result, the extensive and reliably edited AP reports vital to daily newspapers and radio-television newscasts necessarily declined in numbers while most AP correspondents meritoriously maintain high integrity in their reports.

This writer's career involved reporting-editing at now defunct UPI, plus two weekly and three daily newspapers. Only one of those publications is alive today: The Sapulpa Herald. Investor-owned chains now control most of the surviving newspapers that depend heavily on mandatory legal ads. Big and vital ad spending once devoted to print media increasingly goes to radio-TV and internet. During the COVID-19 shutdown, retailers abruptly and necessarily stop buying ads. The Norman Transcript, for example, was forced to five-day-a-week publications instead of daily papers.

As a result of these mammoth changes, the essence of Oklahoma's government, business, industry and institutions face incredible new conditions post-2020 AD. Who will be the watchdogs? Who sits through and reports boring subcommittee hearings? Who will tame the crooks, the corrupters and the bad cops? Who exposes the tyrants?

Historians, by definition, look back and summarize the past. Oklahoma has enjoyed a century and half of great prosperity and rich democracy that should be recorded both by researching the archives but by weighing the abilities and credibility of the folks who reported and wrote from the scenes.

Lead Editor Joe Hight's 210-page book is a summary of those on-the-spot journalists and looms as the principal source in showing the work, achievements and the caliber of journalists who did the investigations, the editing and selection of what was fit to print.

For the future, the book may be a powerful guide for figuring who

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reports on the rebuilding of a teetering society through hard-nose reporting, sustained editing while working for a free, independent amply financed press.

Norman resident Joseph H. Carter Sr. is author of President or Precident: Carl Albert's History Chang-

ing Choice [Amazon], Never Met A Man I Didn't Like: The Life and Writings of Will Rogers [HarperCollins] and The Quotable Will Rogers [Gibbs Smith Publishers]. He contributed to Our Greatest Journalists: Fifty Years Of The Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame.

been toiling on to prevent climate change or global warming created by greenhouse gas emissions since at least the Clinton presidency. These two presidential moves have led to abandoning U.S. leadership in global initiatives despite the nation's responsibility as the sole military superpower, making the world far more dangerous.

President Trump has totally politicized the government with unqualified people interested only in accomplishing what he asks of them. These choices have not been designed to actually solve national problems, but rather to carry out his wishes. U.S. policy is mostly designed to look and become an expression of Donald Trump's view of reality. And that adds up to one holy mess that will ultimately bring down the world, not just the U.S.

My hope is that we elect a new president more knowledgeable about the two impending disasters and more interested in preventing them for our greater good.

So where do we go from here?

There really is only one answer. In November, vote for the U.S. and a better world. Otherwise the future will be very uncomfortable. To me, that vote is for Joe Biden and the Democratic slate for the U.S. Con-

gress, in the House and the Senate.

America needs to be the world's best democracy once again. If not, we will find ourselves citizens without any basic rights such as a free press empowered to keep us well informed by presenting accurate information daily.

Second, we must resolve our immigration problem once and for all lest we see a serious loss of diversity in our population. Women must be granted human rights so they can be fully productive and provide us their wisdom and smarts. So must citizens of color be enabled and nurtured to do the same from a totally different perspective, that of the hardest hit bearers of climate change outcomes.

There are many hard choices ahead, but there's really only one solution that will extend life on planet earth. Until and unless we all pull together in the same direction, there will be no future worth living. The president and his cohort are wishing for a different outcome. A life worth living is worth far more than any money offer.

It's all about us and how we treat one another and the world. Let us then pull together for a better life. It's all of us or none of us. Our children and grandchildren demand the right decision from all of us. *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.*

Will Pandemic Change Lifestyles?

BY FROMA HARROP

When the pandemic hit this winter, city people with second homes moved into them. This upset the rhythm of beach, lake and mountain communities that attract a lot of "summer people" – but not until the summer.

As for winter destinations – Florida, Arizona, Texas or any ski area – the snowbirds seem to be lingering into the spring. Full-time locals may wonder when they will leave. They're going to leave, right?

Off-season was traditionally a time for year-rounders to enjoy less traffic and a calmer scene at restaurants and stores. For those of modest means, it offered respite from the affluent part-time residents with their lust for the best tables and air of permanent leisure.

The question now is whether the coronavirus has messed up the migration patterns for good. After all, restrictions on gathering remain largely in place in the urban centers, where the second-home people have their first homes. Pleasures of city life have been greatly curtailed.

That seasonal residents tend to have more money than the permanent locals has long raised resentments along socioeconomic lines. The irritation is further inflamed by the belief that city people

may be bringing in the virus along with their fancy laptops and single-malt scotches. Meanwhile, small towns and rural areas usually don't have the medical infrastructure to treat large numbers.

This phenomenon is seen in Europe as well, only with more conflict. Some countries, such as Norway and Belgium, forbid people from self-quarantining in their second homes.

That's a more perilous path here. In late March, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis tried to set up highway checkpoints to stop cars from New York and Louisiana, two coronavirus hotspots, and order their passengers to self-quarantine for two weeks.

"It's not fair to the people of Florida," DeSantis said, that outsiders keep coming in. Thing is, many of those "outsiders" own houses or condos in Florida. Do they get to skip property taxes this time around?

Many residents of the largely abandoned cities, meanwhile, seem to enjoy having the place back to themselves. What happens when our world reopens in earnest?

The lockdown has demonstrated that many can do their jobs from wherever there's a good internet connection. If remote work becomes more permanent, second-home people may have even less of an incentive to leave.

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

our state. @elonmusk, let's talk! P.S. Route 66 would make a great place for a test drive ... ”

Edmond Rep. Ryan Martinez, the state House's Business and Commerce Committee chair, followed up with a message to Musk, promoting Oklahoma's assets as “a low tax base, a low cost of living, great incentives and services and plenty of space to build a manufacturing headquarters and house all of your people.”

Since then, Stitt and Musk took a selfie together the Space X-NASA launch in Florida that ferried two American astronauts to the international space station. And credible news media reported Tulsa and Austin are finalists for the new Tesla operation.

Let's be real: Tesla expanding to Oklahoma is about as likely as an August blizzard. Instead, let's explore what would it cost to lure Tesla to Tulsa.

It's true that a Tesla plant manufacturing electric cars would be a godsend for a state whose economy sorely needs diversifying. But low taxes and wide-open spaces would not themselves be sufficient to seal the deal.

It would require, as Martinez put it, “great incentives.” In lay terms, that means Oklahoma taxpayers willingly diverting public funds to Tesla and away from core state services like public education and health care.

Unfortunately, that is how the economic development game is played.

When pursuing relocation or expansion, corporate interests routinely pit states and cities against each other to bid up incentive packages. When an industry is dominant [think: Oklahoma oil and gas], its heavyweights threaten to relocate or curtail operations, hoping to squeeze tax breaks that maximize profits and minimize losses.

Free market? Hardly. It's corporate welfare. And it has cost Oklahoma dearly, especially over the last decade.

Prime example: Public and higher education endured the nation's deepest budget cuts after lawmakers slashed income and gross production taxes, disproportionately benefiting the state's wealthy – aka the political donor class.

In 2018, with throngs of teachers and public school advocates rallying at the Capitol, the Legislature's Republican supermajority modestly hiked the GPT, producing modest education funding increases.

Now, though, efforts to fully restore funding for public schools, colleges and universities are again stalled because of the projected \$1.4 billion budget hole resulting from the pandemic and sub-zero oil prices.

Before seriously considering whether to write a taxpayer-financed check to Tesla, statehouse leaders would be wise to review history. What's worked best



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over the years is taxpayers and government investing in programs and services that build a better Oklahoma from the ground up.

“Great incentives” did help lure a General Motors assembly plant to Oklahoma City, but market changes – and a tornado – closed it.

Desperate to jump-start a languishing economy, Oklahoma City offered an impressive package to United Airlines for a new maintenance facility, but Indianapolis won the prize.

What capital leaders learned from that experience is “great incentives” are not enough to win these battles. Corporate poobahs viewed Oklahoma City as a tough sell to its executives and white-collar employees because it lagged on the quality of life index – education, health care and things to do.

So Oklahoma City invested in itself instead, approving the sales tax-financed Metropolitan Area Projects that proved transformative. Brainpower, innovation and start-ups followed, helping build a more secure foundation for the long-term.

Even if Oklahoma could get someone as mercurial as Musk to relocate, how long would it last? History teaches us there are far better ways to invest in Oklahoma's future – starting with public and higher education.



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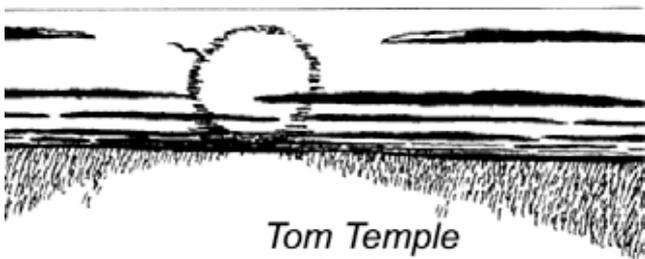
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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Former three-term OKC Sen. Brooks Douglass, who as a teenager survived a home invasion in which his parents were murdered, has died after a long battle with cancer. He was 56.

As California goes, so goes the rest of the nation? Not always, but it is worth noting the University of California system has decided to stop using SAT and ACT college admissions exams. Oklahoma not too long ago tightened its reliance on ACT.

A June 30 primary battle to watch is Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District where two-term state Sen. Joseph Silk of Broken Bow attempts to unseat four-term U.S. Rep. Markwayne Mullin. Both are so far right you need a telescope to find them.

Remember when President Trump insisted COVID-19 would vanish with the summer heat? Public health experts now warn intense heat waves could make the virus deadlier if those isolating at home cannot keep cool.

Good News: The Oklahoma House gave passenger rail service a boost by approving HR 1036 which encourages extending Amtrak's Heartland Flyer service north from OKC to Newton, KS.

Fewer freshmen are enrolling in remedial college courses in Oklahoma, down to 34.6% in 2018 – 7.9 percentage points lower than in 2011-12, according to State Regents. It's a sign Superintendent Joy Hofmeister's eight-year strategic plan is working.

Paycom has sued the rightwing Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, charging it misrepresented company founder Chad Richison's coronavirus-related comments in a letter to Gov. Kevin Stitt. The Koch-headed OCPA has trafficked in misinformation for years.

Alaska's Girl Scouts were stuck with 144,000 boxes of cookies when the pandemic halted sales. The federal CARES Act will help make up the funding gap.

There's no crying in baseball? Au contraire. Major League Baseball stands to lose \$5 billion in ticket revenue if a full 162-game Major League Baseball season is played without fans – TicketIQ

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

most definitely not fighting to keep the enemy from conquering us. "The Gulf of Tonkin Incident" was a fabrication made in 1964 which led to the killing of millions of Southeast Asians and 57,000-plus of our men and women and the maiming of countless others.

People are still being killed by that war via booby-traps, mines, Agent Orange and the napalming we did about 50 years ago. The war memorial next to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington causes me to cry when I touch the names of my classmates who perished in the Tet Offensive of 1968.

Whenever a person thanks me for my service, I respond that "I'm not proud of it!"

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In the rush to embrace technology accelerated by the response to COVID-19, Gov. Kevin Stitt is talking about saving money by decreasing government's space in office buildings because everyone can continue working from home. I hope state, federal and local government leaders remember that many Oklahomans are not online or not proficient in locating and using services online.

Some who are in danger of being left behind include many seniors, people with some disabilities, lower income individuals, homeless people and people living in rural areas with poor bandwidth. Some may not have friends and family members able or willing to navigate the Internet for them.

These citizens may be among the most vulnerable, but access to help could be cut off completely if everything goes to online only services. Shouldn't government work for them, too?

Solutions could be as simple as continuing to list responsive phone numbers on publications and public service announcements, and leaving offices open where Oklahomans who aren't online can still get personal attention.

While public servants can't control the unexpected impact of COVID-19, they can remember to include options other than online resources when planning for delivery of future services.

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Those killed [and likely it was more like 22] were murdered for questioning the Fascist definition of law and order and for even thinking about challenging property rights and the prerogatives of the factory owners.

Trump's late May tweet quoting a racist official from Florida in the 1960s – “when the looting starts, the shooting starts” – is a further attack on the rule of law by the most self-consciously fascist president in American history.

Rioting and looting are crimes, and the perpetrators can and should be arrested and prosecuted. But the slogan Trump quoted isn't about that sort of procedural justice. It is a call for an arbitrary death penalty to be imposed for a crime against property.

Moreover, many peaceful protest actions are routinely mischaracterized by right-wing politicians and journalists as “rioting” or “clashes,” and they are routinely met with tear gas and the breaking of heads. In the conservative tradition of Gustave Le Bon, street crowds are frequently seen by the Right as inherently dangerous and illegitimate. Public protest, however, is an American right; it is in the Constitution and it is how the United States began as a country.

As for looting, crimes against property are the supreme crimes in fascist systems. [There was also some anti-Fascist violence in Turin]. Simple dissidence against the militarized police and society of the Fascist state is a capital crime.

The unsavory origin of Trump's slogan goes back to Miami police chief Walter Headley, who in 1967 had launched a program of repression against African-American neighborhoods. Headley complained that it took three days for Los Angeles police to get permission to reply with force to crowd actions in that city. In contrast, he said, he had given his police standing permission: “When the looting starts, the shooting

starts.”

The Fascist goons of Turin would have really liked that one, though I'm not sure you could make it rhyme in Italian.

Headley would not allow the few African-Americans on his force to be called “policemen,” only “patrolmen.”

The hierarchies of racism were even embedded in language.

He threatened African-American neighborhoods with attack dogs and shotguns, and one newspaper of the time observed, “his men have been told that any force, up to and including death, is proper when apprehending a felon.”

Criminal mischief or vandalism in Florida law, at least nowadays, is punishable by a fine of \$5,000 and up to five years in prison.

Headley arbitrarily and unilaterally raised that penalty to death for African-Americans.

And so has Trump, who allegedly dislikes African-American workers so much that his local managers used to hide them from him when he went out to inspect his hotels and casinos.

America's systematic racism and discrimination has consigned most African-Americans to the lower echelons of the working class, so they bear some resemblance to the beleaguered workers of Turin in 1922.

After the Fascist destruction of the workers' movement in Turin, it was all over for dissent in Mussolini's Italy. Nothing but conformism and idol worship of Il Duce was thereafter permitted.

So there was no way to complain when Mussolini rounded up Italian Jews and sent 8,000 of them to die in Nazi death camps, or when 5,000 political prisoners were killed in the the Risiera di San Sabba death camp in Trieste.

Trump has systematically fired inspectors general, has thumbed his nose at Congressional subpoenas, has suspended environmental laws, and generally has mounted a deep and wide assault on the rule of law.

If Americans let him get away with shooting down protesters like dogs [or even persons guilty of felony theft] with no pretense of due process, that will be a huge step toward our own Risiera di San Sabba Camp.

*Antonio Sonnessa, “The 1922 Turin Massacre [Strage di Torino]: Working class resistance and conflicts within fascism,” *Journal of Modern Italy* Volume 10, 2 [2005].

Juan Ricardo Cole, a public intellectual and essayist, is the Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His blog, Informed Comment, can be found at <https://www.juan-cole.com>.



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Study: Supreme Court Almost Always Rules In Favor Of Excessive Force

BY JOE JURADO

It's a widely accepted belief that the legal system will almost never hold police officers accountable for their actions, and now, a recent study has provided the numbers to back that claim.

An investigation conducted by Reuters examined 500 cases to see if the Supreme Court proves Justice Sonia Sotomayor's assertion that the court acts as "an absolute shield" against police accountability.

The study found that "qualified immunity" has acted as a barrier that prevents officers from even being tried for excessive force. Qualified Immunity is a doctrine that was introduced in 1967 by the Supreme Court to protect government officials from unnecessary litigation.

From The Equal Justice Initiative:

The doctrine provides that a police officer can't even be put on trial for using excessive force unless the person suing proves that:

- 1. the evidence shows or could convince a jury that the officer used excessive force; and*
- 2. the officers should have known they were violating "clearly established" law, because a prior court case had already deemed similar police actions to be illegal.*

This two-part test means that even if a court finds that the officer used excessive force, it will grant immunity if the facts don't match an earlier case finding the same conduct to be illegal.

Masks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

tists.

This all might also explain why Republican Congress members tell New York Times reporters "there is no need" to wear masks and the Senate is now focused on Hunter Biden instead.

And why the AP in late April found Oklahoma is among the worst states in testing capacity.

Gov. Kevin Stitt's re-opening the state was "hasty at best," according to doctors and some mayors. As May turned into June, the state's infection rate unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, climbed.

I take particular solace in that some places are enforcing social distancing and mask policies – think: the California Costco where a viral twitter video depicting a worker who took away a customer's cart because he refused to wear a mask.

The customer barked that he didn't have to wear one because he lives in a "free country." In response,

The "clearly established" law requirement makes it hard to win against the police, Reuters found, because courts are increasingly requiring a nearly identical case to use as precedent – and a court can almost always find or make up a factual difference between the case it's reviewing and an earlier case.

Since 2009, judges have been allowed to ignore altogether the question of whether an officer used excessive force. That way, they avoid setting a precedent for future cases, which allows the same conduct to repeatedly go unpunished.

The study also found that the Supreme Court was 3½ times more likely to intervene on behalf of a police officer than a civilian. In those cases, the court almost always rules in favor of the officer.

Justice Sotomayor has been critical of this approach in recent years. In a 2018 dissent, she said that the "one-sided approach to qualified immunity transforms the doctrine into an absolute shield for law enforcement officers, gutting the deterrent effect of the Fourth Amendment."

The federal government doesn't keep track of the number of people killed or seriously injured by police.

Reuters estimated that 1,000 people are killed each year at the hands of the police. Very few, if any of them, will get the justice they deserve.

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U.S. Rep. Ted Lieu, D-CA, tweeted: "#Costco has the right to require that customers wear a mask. Businesses have the right to prevent people from spewing saliva droplets in their stores. Because we live in a free country."

Likewise, recently Staten Island shoppers chased a woman out of a store for not wearing a mask.

If our Oklahoma business and political leaders took this pandemic as seriously as they have on the coasts, we would be able to leave the house more often and physically spend more money in town outside takeout and porch drop-offs.

Alas, I know where I live – that's not happening anytime soon.

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

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