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GOD'S SQUAD

*Military At Risk As Sooner Delegation
Helps Tear Down Church-State Wall*

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

Mikey Weinstein lives a day's drive west of Oklahoma in the mountainous, desert Southwest, but he knows all about the Sooner state.

He knows it has 77 counties, and every one of them voted Republican in the last two presidential elections.

He knows it is a hub of U.S. military operations, including three Air Force bases and Fort Sill.

And he knows it is home to a statistically small, yet rabid – and politically influential – slice of Christian fundamentalism that abhors religious pluralism and pursues a theocracy that mirrors an apocalyptic worldview.

All of which makes Oklahoma a near-perfect locale for Weinstein – founder and president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation – to make his case first-hand that “fanatical religiosity” within America’s armed forces is threatening national security.

“Give me 300 seconds – one for each of the Spartans killed at the Battle of Thermopylae – and I don’t know how you can possibly be against what we’re talking about,”

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

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Observations

Cuckoo's Nest

Just when you think Dr. Tom Coburn is the reasonably sensible Oklahoma U.S. senator, he opens his mouth and shatters the illusion.

Coburn's straight-faced assertion at a recent Muskogee Town Hall that President Obama is "perilously close" to impeachment isn't simple ignorance of history or law – he's lost touch with r-e-a-l-i-t-y.

The obstetrician/gynecologist was, of course, unable to provide a shred of evidence to gird his legal analysis. Not a Watergate-style break-in. Or an arms-for-hostages deal. Or bald-faced lying about WMD that propelled a nation into war.

Nonetheless, Coburn ominously proclaimed, "We're in a serious time. I don't have the legal background to know if that rises to high crimes and misdemeanors, but I think they're getting perilously close."

We've come to expect such inane commentary from senior Sen. Jim Inhofe, who's piloted his aircraft way too many times without oxygen. Or from Tea Party clowns like Texas Sen. Ted Cruz or Michigan Rep. and renowned Reindeer Farmer Kerry Bentivoglio.

With Coburn, we clearly failed to heed the old maxim: Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.

After all, this is the same Coburn who once claimed lesbianism was so rampant in southeastern Oklahoma that Coalgate school girls were only allowed to go to the bathroom one at a time.

The same Coburn who claims to be Obama's friend, yet engaged in the crudest racial stereotyping when asserting the Harvard Law School-trained, African-American president wanted to "create dependency" on government programs "because it worked so well for him."

The same Coburn who describes himself as a "man of science," yet dismisses climate science as "crap" and delightedly proclaims, "I'm a global warming denier. I don't deny that."

That someone suffering such delusions could be elected twice to represent our state in the World's Most Exclusive Club is more than dis-

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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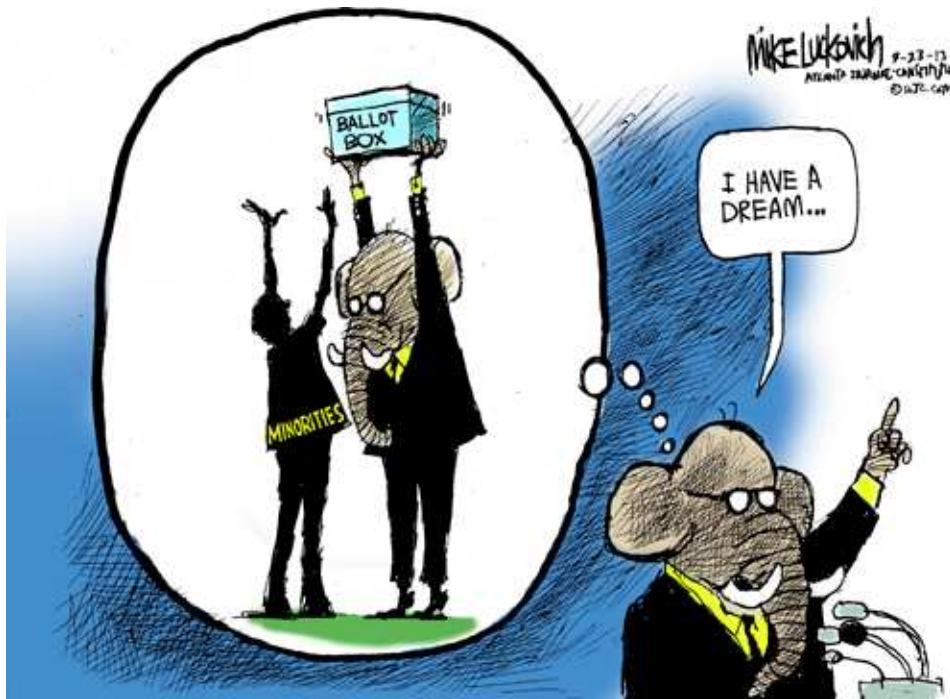
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Observerscope



Dart: To first-term state Rep. Bobby Cleveland, R-Norman, caught yet again using his taxpayer-financed, state e-mail for personal and political purposes. Can he even spell e-t-h-i-c-s?

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, formed in the wake of the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, now has an Oklahoma chapter. Check it out at www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionOK.

Laurel: To the Tulsa World's Ziva Branstetter, for exposing Gov. Mary Fallin's phony claims about "frivolous lawsuits." Follow the money: One in seven of her campaign dollars comes from a health industry that hides behind tort "reform."

Great news! Oklahoma jumped from third-worst state for adults' smoking in 2011 to No. 39 last year, according to Centers for Disease Control. Imagine the progress if lawmakers stood up to big tobacco and gave municipalities control over its use.

Dart: To former Oklahoma Secretary of State Mike Hunter, claiming Glass-Steagall wouldn't have prevented the 2008 financial crisis and that its revival would "likely crush" the recovery. What else would you expect from the COO of the American Bankers Association?

The GOP's war on reproductive rights is taking a toll: at least 54 abortion providers nationally have shut down or ended their abortion services since 2010. – Huffington Post

Laurel: To Dr. Don Pittman, honored with the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance's Russell Bennett Faith and Courage Award for his efforts to foster dialogue and respect among those of various faiths.

Scales of justice? Scooter Libby gets 2½ years for his role in outing covert CIA operative Valerie Plame, his sentence commuted and his voting rights restored. Pfc Bradley Manning gets 35 years for whistleblowing.

Dart: To State Superintendent Janet Barresi, suddenly state teachers' best friend. Surely her proposal for a \$2,000 pay raise had nothing to do with the fact her 2014 re-election is in serious jeopardy.

"Anyone who says that racial discrimination is not a problem in American elections must not be paying attention." – Hillary Clinton

Laurel: To OKC attorney Richard Ogden, recipient of this year's Cimarron Alliance Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing his tireless efforts on behalf of LGBT Oklahomans. Bravo!

Our condolences to state Rep. David Dank, R-OKC, and family in the passing of his wife, former state Rep. Odilia Dank, after a lengthy battle with cancer. She was 74.

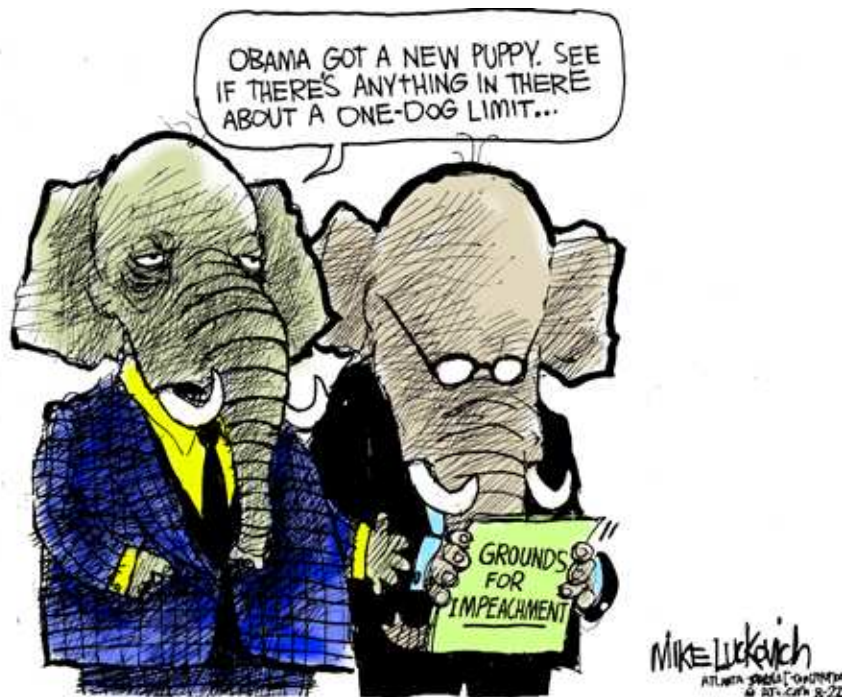
Dart: To Sen. Tom Coburn, co-authoring a proposal that could end door-to-door mail delivery and cut service to five days a week. Congress could put the postal service in the black tomorrow if it would end the backbreaking, useless pension-funding requirement.

Former Democratic state Sen. Jay Paul Gumm is accused of embezzlement in connection with his work as director of Stone County, MS's economic development partnership.

Laurel: To Integris Health Foundation Chair Stanley Hupfeld for an Oklahoman op-ed that argued compromise is not an epithet in American politics. He offered a revealing vignette about an appearance on Sean Hannity's TV show in which he was shunned by a Fox News "regular" when he dared note he found some elements of ObamaCare "attractive."

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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

Why, oh, *why* have so many Americans been hoodwinked by the gross idea that corporate democracy can be exported to countries that do not want it or have the society to implement it?

Islamic countries are even *more* engrossed in religious superstition than the U.S., a country where flag lapel pins are more important than clean underwear and impertuning for “god’s” blessings on the country conclude every speech by the president on down to City Council meetings.

The system is stalemated in the U.S. by the best Congress that money can buy and a constipated president who is praised for his equanimity, another word for complaisance.

Thousands of American service members have been killed, and millions of returning veterans are suffering from unconscionable delay or even denial of decent medical and psychological care, all their lives irretrievably altered through manipulation, propaganda and false patriotism.

Our government shells out money to the banks that feign distress when that money isn’t re-cycled

through the economic system like it was intended.

There is talk of serious reductions in social services such as food stamps, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and no serious objection from the Democratic Party, once known as the party of the people.

Civil liberties are curtailed regardless of what Obama, Clapper, and NSA will tell you, even as this posting will be cataloged in the bowels of the enormous NSA facility in Utah even before you read it.

America has become a feudal stronghold for the 1% that owns the vast majority of the wealth and still we behave as if elections are effective.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The [Aug. 23] headline on dueling editorials – *Ten Commandments monument doesn’t violate Oklahoma values* – is the second recent reference to “Oklahoma values” in the Tulsa World.

The first was when new publisher, Bill Masterson, announced the World’s editorial position was too far left and didn’t reflect “Oklaho-

mans’ values.” [He conveniently ignored that the World has endorsed extreme right-wing candidates for years.] Not only did that make me feel disenfranchised as a liberal contributor, but now I am told I don’t hold “Oklahoma values,” which makes me a second-class citizen.

Since liberals seem to be devoid of a moral compass, what are those so-called “values” and exactly who is doing the defining? “Values” is cafeteria morality, a moving target, changing with the needs of the person doing the defining.

The World is insulting liberals by painting us as out-of-step with most Oklahomans when, in fact, most Oklahomans are out of step with us. To presume conservatism is the gold standard for social interaction not only is elitist, discriminatory, and pandering, it is wrong.

Simply because more people support an idea doesn’t mean that idea is morally correct, either. Hitler came to power because he was overwhelmingly supported by the German people who considered themselves to be good Christians, but innately superior. Sound familiar?

As one of the unwashed masses, I thank God [the liberal one] that I don’t have “Oklahoma values,” and I don’t need a religious monument on the front lawn of the state Capitol to remind me to be a good little girl.

Barbara Santee
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

America has at least these four political needs: [1] Increase the minimum wage; [2] Overturn Citizens United; [3] End voter suppression; [4] Tax Wall Street sales.

Voter support for these needs has been proven to be huge. The people want them. Democracy is governed by the people by definition.

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Your Tax Dollars, Squandered

Two of my favorite bumper stickers relate to the intersection of religion and politics.

A red, white and blue one, distributed by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, declares: *Separation of Church & State is Good for Both.*

The other, an orange and white sticker produced by the Interfaith Alliance, exhorts: *Worship your faith, not your politics.*

Unfortunately, in Oklahoma these days, religion and politics don't just intersect – they're wedded. Tightly.

What many do not comprehend or appreciate is that this unholy alliance often produces bad public policy, institutionalizes discrimination and costs the taxpayers dearly.

There is no better case in point, currently, than the legal showdown over the Ten Commandments monument at the state Capitol.

Once again, taxpayers will end up footing the legal bill to defend the indefensible – in this case, the erection of a religious monument on public property.

It is true that the marker was paid for privately. But we don't let private citizens decorate courtrooms, government offices or public school classrooms with crosses or other religious symbols, do we?

So why did state officials approve the Ten Commandments monument, near the Capitol's north entrance? They surely knew it would result in a legal fight that – even if supporters prevailed – would cost far more than the symbolism is worth.

[How can I say that? Think about it: Is there any doubt that Christianity is the dominant religion in Oklahoma? What's located on just about every other corner in every town across the state? It's not a mosque or a temple.]

The sad fact is, our political leaders frequently pander to the noisiest, most extreme elements, often to avoid potential electoral headaches.

In Oklahoma today, it's simply easier to wear your Christianity on your sleeve than to attempt to quiet those who blindly trumpet that America was founded as a Christian nation, a rewriting of history all too

often perpetuated from the pulpit.

Or to stand up to those devoted to the fanatical teachings of TV and radio blowhards who insist an around-the-clock War on Christianity is threatening our way of life and dooming our nation to God's eternal wrath.

I don't presume to speak for God, but I can tell you this: If you study real, serious, sober history – and not the poppycock of pseudo-historians like David Barton – you will be reminded that America not only was to be a land that embraced freedom of religion, but also freedom from religion.

Moreover, many of our Founders were deists, believing a higher power created the world and established natural laws but – in Webster's words – “takes no further part in its functioning.”

And a War on Christianity? Silly. Those in the Glenn Beck-type Bubble are constantly on the lookout for reasons to be aggrieved. What they fail to consider is this: The real threat to organized religion in America is all-too-often the marriage of religion and politics.

Jesus had similar troubles convincing His most ardent followers – much less the religious establishment – that His agenda was not about earthly political rule, but rather other-worldly spiritual pursuits.

If you wonder why certain denominations are losing members at a time when the overall population is increasing, it might be worth asking those who quit [or never joined] a simple question: Why?

Could it be too many religious leaders and denominations are too focused on imposing their political and moral worldviews rather than encouraging members to seek spiritual enlightenment through study, prayer and worship?

Even Southern Baptists, long the nation's largest Protestant denomination, clearly recognize the damage their “brand” has suffered in recent decades. They're actually toying with the idea of a name change – a way to help create a fresh start, public relations-wise.

Those who support the Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol lawn will no doubt cheer Attor-



Never Give Up

It's just so that 90% of the people of this country don't give a damn. Politics ain't worrying this country one tenth as much as parking space. – Will Rogers

Apathy is American as apple pie. Historians will tell you that the majority of colonists favored the Crown, not Patrick Henry and his fellow revolutionaries.

There are those who crow that the country handed the November 2010 winners a mandate from a majority of Americans. Wrong! Only about half of eligible voters turned out, and the GOP received a majority of that vote. Too many progressives of both parties failed to vote.

The truth is far from the idyllic scenario painted by too many social studies teachers.

Purists don't want to admit it, but except on rare occasions [i.e., civil rights, the Vietnam protests] this country – for good or ill – is run by a minority of activist individuals.

Today, the national agenda is fueled by those who are rich enough to capture the media, often through paid advertisements. Lazy voters would rather believe a 30-second attack ad than research the issue.

There are hundreds of rightwing talk shows. Most television is a mindless morass. Most newspapers are little more than revenue machines for chains.

So what's a body to do? Be part of the few who are involved! That's a gospel I have preached across Oklahoma and America.

The claim that one person can't make a difference is hooey. It is the tiny Oklahoma Observer that crusades relentlessly against censorship in public and school libraries, exposing those who promote it.

How to fight? Find organizations that will come in

with real firepower – People for the American Way, the American Library Association, etc. [The Observer won the First Amendment Award for our work.]

My daughter Marti was co-editor of the Midwest City High School newspaper when the principal seized an entire issue because it dared reveal to the community the growing problem of teen pregnancy. It was a carefully written, balanced presentation – and the superintendent ordered it released.

Journalists must learn an early real-world lesson – the publisher has the final word. That's why a cooperative spirit that eschews surprise attacks works best.

The Republican Legislature crippled mental health, refused to help public education but found time to approve more than \$800 million in tax cuts, mostly for the rich.

The wonderful aggregation that met in Philadelphia didn't say they'd formed a more perfect Union, they said we must strive to create such a Union. America is a work in progress.

Never give up if you think you're right. Never surrender to the forces of darkness that would pervert the Constitution to fit their narrow political or religious views.

The day this country stops being a pluralistic society is the day America dies.

– While Founding Editor Frosty Troy takes some time off, we are reprinting some of his favorite columns. This first appeared in the Aug. 25, 2012 Observer.

Bare Necessities

There was a bit of confusion at Ace Hardware this morning.

When I was ready to pay for my purchases of gunpowder and bullets, the cashier said, "Strip down, facing me!"

Making a mental note to complain to my congressman about the gun registry people running amok, I did just as she had instructed.

When the gasping had finally subsided, I found out that she was referring to my credit card.

I have been asked to shop elsewhere in the future.

They need to make their instructions to us seniors a little clearer!

– Thanks to Darla Reynolds-Sparks for this gem

Got Marriage?

Three Reasons Legislature's Pro-Nuptial PSAs Are A Bad Idea

BY KATE RICHEY

This past legislative session Oklahoma passed HB 1908 into law. HB 1908 authorized the use of “welfare” or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] funds to be spent on an ad campaign promoting marriage. TANF is a program that provides a range of support services to very low-income single parent families with children.

The proponents of the bill argue that marriage is effective at fighting poverty; therefore, public service announcements [PSAs] promoting marriage are an appropriate use of TANF resources.

Let's set aside for a moment the question of whether or not marriage actually does reduce poverty, which is not at all clear. Let's also set aside whether or not it's wise to divert resources from services that directly feed, clothe, house, and care for very low-income children. Instead let's ask a more basic question: can PSAs create more marriages? We found no evidence that they can. This article outlines three reasons why marriage PSAs are a bad idea.

First, there is no evidence that commercials can really change the outcome of a decision so intimate and fundamental to each of our lives as deciding to marry.

Despite talk in the early 2000s about a handful of states and jurisdictions [e.g. Virginia, Louisiana, Washington, Grand Rapids and Chattanooga] developing marriage promotion PSAs, there's scant evidence that most of them ever actually aired campaigns. And among those that did, no summary reports or independent evaluations of their performance were ever produced.

In fact, none of the initiatives included in a federal push to promote marriage as a cure for poverty have worked. According to recent research by the Department of Health and Human Services, “a federal initiative to promote marriage as a cure for poverty dumped hundreds of millions of dollars into programs that either had no impact or a negative effect on the relationships of the couples who took part.”

Commercials aren't even consistently effective at selling fruit roll-ups – why would we expect them to effectively sell a life-long commitment? And even if the PSAs did “work,” you can't run out and get married unless you're already in a healthy relationship. Unlike fruit roll-ups, you won't find a quality life-partner on the shelves at your local grocer.

To assert that a 30-second radio spot can turn sin-

gle adults into committed pairs is naïve at best, insincere at worst. HB 1908 should raise the eyebrows of even the staunchest advocates of government-sponsored marriage-promotion. Because instead of devising a strategy of substance, lawmakers opted for a token gesture that's in line with their principled position on marriage, but won't produce any return on the taxpayers' investment.

A second concern is that the PSAs reach people in abusive and dysfunctional marriages, too. Oklahomans who experience abuse at the hands of their spouse will inevitably be exposed to these messages, and lecturing them about the sacred nature of their eternal union borders on reckless.

One of the law's authors, Sen. David Holt, R-OKC, dismissed these concerns, saying, “I don't think a PSA is going to force someone to stay in an unsafe situation.”

But the truth is that social norms do keep many in unsafe marriages by reinforcing the notion that marriage is forever and they need to make it work.

Social, religious and cultural norms condition victims [who often already blame themselves for the abuse] into believing that maintaining the façade of a good marriage is better than the shame and embarrassment of a failed marriage and the judgment of their community or church family.

If this ad campaign reinforces that fear and shame for even one person trapped in a violent or terminally dysfunctional marriage, it's too many.

Third, they grow government's say in your most intimate decisions. The lawmakers who pushed HB 1908 through the state house are fond of railing against government overreach. They are adamant that the federal government has no place in your health care choices, no business setting standards for your children's education, and little responsibility to keep your air clean and your water drinkable.

“Personal responsibility and limited government” is Speaker Shannon's mantra. This new law stands in stark contrast and represents a dramatic overreach of state government's say in the lives of its residents.

– *The author is a policy analyst for Oklahoma Policy Institute. An earlier version of this essay appeared on the OKPolicy blog. You can sign up for OK Policy's e-mail alerts and daily news digest at <http://okpolicy.org>*

God's Squad

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

says Weinstein, an Air Force Academy honors graduate.

"We're a very aggressive and militant organization, but our militancy and aggression is in support of the Constitution."

Weinstein will be the featured speaker at the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance's annual Russell Bennett Award presentation Sept. 21 at All Souls Unitarian Church, 2952 S. Peoria Ave. at 2:30 p.m. – an appearance sure to stir up a religious right that reviles him as "Satan's lawyer" and "Field General of the Godless Armies of Satan."

The timing of his Tulsa visit is significant, given that members of Oklahoma's congressional delegation – particularly Tulsa Rep. Jim Bridenstine – are busy cultivating the canard that a War on Christianity threatens America as we know it and severely restricts the religious freedoms of America's heroic warriors.

It's a fantasy, of course, conceived by an unholy alliance of rightwing conservatives in pursuit of political power and so-called religious Dominionists whose agenda features doing whatever is necessary to speed us toward Armageddon.

But the illusion doesn't keep wingnuts in Congress from introducing spurious legislation like Louisiana Rep. John Fleming's so-called Religious Liberty Amendment to the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act that supposedly would protect the First Amendment religious rights of those in uniform.

As the White House put it, Fleming's proposal actually would limit "the discretion of commanders to address potentially problematic speech and actions within their units" and "have a significant adverse effect on good order, disci-



– Mikey Weinstein

pline, morale, and mission accomplishment."

Of course, in zealot-land, the fact a Kenyan-born, Muslim, socialist president spoke against it is all the proof necessary that a War on Christianity exists.

As Weinstein notes, the opposite is true – particularly when it comes to the U.S. military. His group represents nearly 35,000 active-duty service members who have been targeted by religious zealots – oftentimes superior officers – demanding they embrace a specific strain of Christianity.

Ninety-six percent of the foundation's clients are Protestant or Roman Catholic, including 21 varieties of Baptist alone. Only four percent of service members lodging complaints through Weinstein's group are atheist, agnostic, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Shinto, Buddhist, Wiccan, Native American Spiritualist or other.

More than 800 are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Having served 10 years in the military, Weinstein, himself ag-

nostic, says he knows how much pressure can be applied in a military setting to conform to a certain religious point of view.

He founded the Military Religious Freedom Foundation about a decade ago after his children, while Air Force Academy cadets, were browbeaten to attend Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.

Weinstein says his group is working to rebuild the wall separating church and state that all too often has been knocked down in the U.S. military, effectively depriving many armed forces members freedom of – and from – religion.

It's particularly worrisome, he says, that Dominionists are asserting their apocalyptic worldviews in settings where they can mix "a fanatical religiosity ... with actual weapons of mass destruction."

"It's a tortured, poisoned view of patriotism," says Weinstein. "It's a metastasizing threat to this country."

Not surprisingly, Weinstein's support of religious freedom does not set well with the likes of Rep. Bridenstine, who in a May 2013 blog entry promoted the fact he "questioned the Department of Defense's recent interactions with anti-Christian activist Mikey Weinstein."

"As a Navy reservist with combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan," Bridenstine said, "I know firsthand the importance of faith to many of our men and women in uniform."

"I am growing increasingly concerned that well-established protections of conscience and religious expression are being slowly eroded. Right now, the military is preparing guidance on religious issues. During this process, it remains critical that senior JAG leaders understand the concerns of religious service members."

What Bridenstine and his ilk clearly fail to appreciate is how they would like it if the shoe were on the other foot. They would be irate if other religious groups were given carte blanche to proselytize or – as seems likely in a military setting – the power to make one conform or face career-ending

consequences.

It's as if they can't come to grips with the uniquely American concept that it's OK not to believe – or to believe differently than Bridenstine and Co.

For them “to say we, Christians, are the persecuted, it is not only disingenuous, it is a goddamn lie – and they know,” Weinstein says.

“This is like the playground bully – after he's been pulled aside by every teacher or monitor on the playground for beating little Jimmy into the ground – showing his hand and saying, ‘Look what little Jimmy's head did to my knuckles – they're all bruised.’”

It speaks to the strange political times in which we live that Weinstein would be so despised by the religious right.

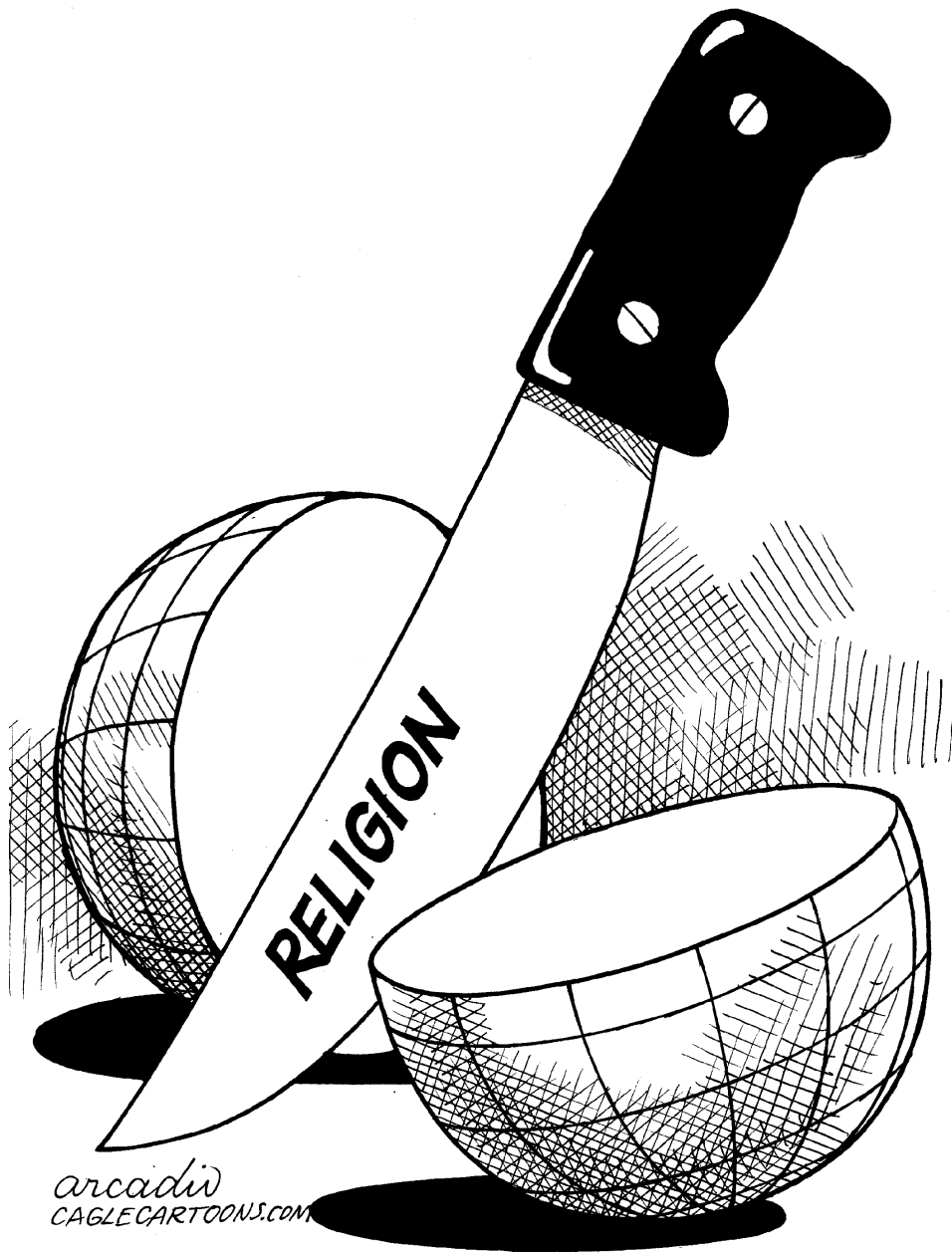
He's a lifelong Republican who served as a White House legal counsel under their favorite president, Ronald Reagan, and as committee management officer of the Iran-Contra investigation. He also served as first general counsel to Texas billionaire and two-time presidential candidate H. Ross Perot and Perot Systems.

Of course, Weinstein also was named one of the 50 most influential Jews in America by the Jewish weekly Forward. He was tabbed one of the 100 Most Influential People in U.S. Defense in 2012 by Gannett's Defense News. And his organization has been nominated five times for the Nobel Peace prize.

Weinstein clearly relishes his role as a provocateur, describing his foundation as the “demanders of the commanders” – more akin to the radical animal rights group PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) than the more staid and traditional Humane Society of the U.S.

“I'm very happy coming in and speaking truth to power,” he says, reminding it was 19th Century African-American leader Frederick Douglass who said “power concedes nothing without a demand.”

Weinstein says he is more than willing to be a “tarantula” on the fundamentalists' “wedding cake”



– but also hopes those attending the Tulsa event will actively join his group in working to restore the wall separating church and state in America's armed forces.

“We're not supposed to work 20 years, get our retirement and spend the rest of our time trying to lower our handicap on the golf course,” he says. “We're supposed

to be helping each other.

“It's not good enough to agree *with* something ... We're on this planet to *do* something ... If your thought, heart, brain, and passion supports what we're doing then also have your arms and legs do it.

“Make it clear” that what the Dominionists are doing to America's military “is not OK.”

A Not-So-Happy Labor Day For Most State Employees



BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

The state's savings account now tops \$535 million, up \$2.7 million after better-than-expected revenues recently enabled a Rainy Day Fund deposit for the third consecutive year.

The bit of good news is small consolation, however, to most state government workers, enduring their seventh Labor Day – and counting – without a pay raise.

In recent years, for whatever reason, there has been scant political will to do right by state employees, be they highway patrol troopers, correctional officers or public health inspectors.

In fact, many Oklahomans – and not just the political elite – seem indifferent, if not downright hostile, to the plight of public employees, oft stereotyped as lazy, shiftless and/or unmotivated.

It's a curious love-hate relationship. When our car falters along a rural highway, we breathe a sigh of relief when a trooper appears. When minors are at risk

in a volatile home, we cheer their rescue by child welfare workers. And when heavy rains wash away roads or bridges, we're well pleased to see repair crews Johnny-on-the-spot.

Even more curious: Oklahoma is home to more public workers per capita – particularly federal employees – than just about any other state. We have seen the enemy and it is us?

No doubt many Oklahomans are just happy to be employed, given the shaky economy. No doubt many in the private sector also have gone seven years without a pay raise – or seen token raises swamped by soaring health insurance premiums and gas prices.

But if we consider our public workers anything more than slave labor, we surely can figure out ways to compensate them more fairly – to send a signal that we appreciate their dedication, skill and hard work.

Isn't it more than a little disconcerting and embarrassing that some of our state employees – especially

those, like correctional workers, in the most dangerous of professions – are paid so poorly that they qualify for food stamps?

Though Gov. Mary Fallin refused to expand the post Labor Day special session agenda beyond the Corporate Protection Act [aka lawsuit reform], lawmakers on both sides of the political divide seem to be awakening to the plight of state workers.

For example, lawmakers with prisons in their districts urged the governor to use the special session to make Oklahoma's corrections crisis a priority.

Consider these eye-popping statistics, courtesy of state Rep. Gus Blackwell, R-Laverne: State prisons are at 97.7% capacity. Nearly 1,700 more inmates are in county jails awaiting transfer to state facilities [they often languish there for eight to 10 months]. Yet, as of July 1, only 61.68% percent of state correctional officer positions are filled.

To say state prisons are short-staffed would be a colossal understatement. They are dangerously short-staffed. What's it going to take to convince the gov-

ernor of the seriousness of the crisis? A bloody riot? food stamps and 85% for the federal free and reduced lunch program for their school-aged children.

"Shouldn't an appreciation of reality lead us to be committed to allowing full-time employees of the state of Oklahoma to earn enough income to raise a family and live above the poverty level?" asked Perryman.

Barring a last-minute reversal of Fallin's Marie Antoinette-esque "let them eat cake" mindset, then the best correctional officers – and more than 30,000 other state workers – can hope for is that the 2014 Legislature will finally cough up some more compensation.

At least lawmakers finally may have a road map for upgrading public worker salaries.

The Office of Management and Enterprise Services began studying the matter in June with an announced goal of determining the appropriate pay levels for some 33,000 state employees. An outside consultant is being paid \$77,000 to help. A final report is expected later this year.

"Shouldn't an appreciation of reality lead us to be committed to allowing full-time employees of the state of Oklahoma to earn enough income to raise a family and live above the poverty level?" asked Rep. David Perryman, D-Chickasha.

ernor of the seriousness of the crisis? A bloody riot?

Blackwell pointed out that the corrections department has about \$7 million in revolving funds, but can't spend \$5 million of it without specific legislative approval – something that could have been achieved quickly in the special session.

As Blackwell put it, "Public safety is the No. 1 legitimate core function of government. It's essential that we make sure that the officers and staff of the Department of Corrections are able to perform their jobs in an atmosphere of safety and that the citizens of Oklahoma are kept safe from the danger inherent in overcrowded prisons. The continued low number of officers coupled with the high incarceration rates is producing a situation that is conducive to extremely problematic scenarios in the DOC facilities.

"If the governor believes that tort reform is such a pressing issue that she must call a special session, then surely the safety and protection of DOC employees ought to also be on the agenda."

State Rep. David Perryman, D-Chickasha, notes that starting pay for correctional officers – \$11.83 an hour or \$24,605 per year – is less [adjusted for inflation] than new officers earned in 1973, when the McAlester prison went up in flames and the federal courts seized control of the state's correctional system.

Six-plus years without a pay raise, coupled with 11 furlough days in FY 2011, is yielding salaries so meager that 30% of state corrections officers qualify for

A note of caution: It is a time-honored tradition that the state's elected elite orders up such studies as political cover – nothing more than lip service.

A study is announced amid much fanfare. The results are later ballyhooed. And the matter ends up in a file cabinet or the recycling bin, unresolved.

Actually, what might get the ball rolling is a growing case of public employee envy. Did you notice that the State Regents for Higher Education recently awarded their staff a 5% pay hike – first since FY 2009?

As an independent arm of state government, the State Regents can pretty much do whatever they want with the money they manage.

Cue up the applause! With one action, they not only improved the lives of 268 employees, but also had the courage to highlight an oft-inconvenient truth: you get what you pay for.

The Daily Disappointment, naturally, blew a gasket, outraged at the modest salary bump.

But if Oklahoma wants the best troopers, the best educators, the best researchers ... *the best, most competent state workers* ... it must be willing to pay for them.

The State Regents were having trouble attracting and keeping the best and brightest. Compensation was a significant factor. They upped the pay. A no-brainer.

How will the governor and Legislature respond to the challenge?



TIES THAT BIND

Religious Moderates, Progressives Join Forces To Challenge Zealots On Key Issues

A new grass roots political group, the Oklahoma Faith Network, is hoping to organize moderate and progressive Oklahomans of faith into a political antidote to Tea Party-infused, religious extremists wielding out-sized influence these days at the state Capitol. Founded by Dr. Bruce Prescott, the longtime leader of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists, the fledgling organization's agenda includes:

- "Informing religious leaders about issues related to liberty of conscience and separation of church and state" and "working to involve them in the political process at the state Legislature."
- "Informing religious leaders about issues related to public education and working to involve them in the political process at the state Board of Education."
- "Informing religious leaders about issues related to universal healthcare, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and nutritional assistance for the poor" and "working to involve them in political processes on these issues."

Before moving to Oklahoma 15 years ago, Dr. Prescott was pastor of Houston's Easthaven Baptist Church and an early participant in the Texas Freedom Network [TFN], founded by Cecile Richards, daughter of the late Texas Gov. Ann Richards and now president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. TFN is known nationally for battling the extremist takeover of the Texas State Board of Education and for its support of reproductive freedom, particularly Sen. Wendy Davis' efforts this summer to thwart a draconian anti-abortion measure in the Texas Legislature.

Dr. Prescott recently discussed the Oklahoma Faith Network with Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton:

Why do we need the Oklahoma Faith Network?
 Oklahomans are a very religious people. Unfortunately, the religious voices most frequently featured

in the news media and most actively involved in politics are voices that are on the extreme fringe. The vast majority of the religious people in Oklahoma

are not connected to the Tea Party.

Most Oklahomans want good public schools – not a voucher to pay part of the tuition at a private school. Most Oklahomans want affordable health-care and are not opposed to the Obama Administration’s attempt to secure health care for the uninsured. Most Oklahomans support the government giving children free lunches at school and are not opposed to providing vouchers for food to impoverished families.

The vast majority of the religious people in Oklahoma are not opposed to paying their fair share in taxes to support efficient government services. On all of these issues the voices of most Oklahomans has been drowned out by the voices of extremists.

How did extremists achieve prominence in our political system? There are a variety of factors that led us to this point, but two stand out in my mind.

One is the tendency for most religious people to believe that elected leaders from either political party will exercise enough common sense to

ligious extremists who have come into political prominence in Oklahoma? Ruth Murray Brown, former professor of political science and sociology at Rose State College, wrote a book that summarized what many people think is the relatively harmless agenda of the religious right in Oklahoma. In *For a Christian America*, she concluded that the thread connecting all the groups and organizations of the religious right was a desire to reverse Supreme Court decisions regarding separation of church and state and give legal preference to Christian cultural norms because, historically, Americans have been predominantly Christians. Remarkably, she never mentioned the influence of Rousas J. Rushdoony and Christian Reconstructionism in this state.

Ten years after Brown’s book was published, it should be clear to anyone familiar with the writings of R.J. Rushdoony that the threat to democracy posed by the religious right in Oklahoma involves much more than a mild, though misguided, Christian nationalism. Christian Reconstructionism,

‘The most important thing for people of moderate and progressive faith to do is to overcome their reticence to engage in political processes beyond the voting booth.’

set aside rigid ideological differences and promote the common good. In the past that may have been true, but our most recent history demonstrates that politicians who make the necessary compromises to promote the common good face considerable political risks.

The political career of former Speaker of the House Kris Steele is a case in point. Gov. Fallin’s convoluted attempts to secure Tea Party support for any effort to meet the federal healthcare mandate provides another example of how rigid political ideology is undermining the common good.

The second factor leading to the prominence of extremists is that they have recruited, educated and organized themselves for political action. Most religious people find politics distasteful and, frankly, much of it is distasteful. Politics is a conflict of competing ideals and that conflict is usually personified by the people competing for public office. Often, the conflict gets low down and dirty.

Religious people usually have no stomach for this kind of conflict. Few have any desire to learn productive ways to engage in the political controversies of our day. Extremists, on the other hand, thrive on controversy and conflict. They have organized to engage in politics in their churches and they have enlisted organizations like American Majority to teach them how to be effective as they occupy the public square and run for office.

What do you perceive to be the agenda of re-

sometimes known as “Dominionism,” believes that that pluralistic democracy is heresy.

Granting citizens of every faith the right to religious liberty, as secured by the First Amendment to the Constitution, was intolerable for Rushdoony because, “In the name of toleration, the believer is asked to associate on a common level of total acceptance with the atheist, the pervert, the criminal, and the adherents of other religions.”

Much of the intolerance we are seeing from some Tea Party leaders stems from a dogmatic religious certainty steeped in interpretations of the Bible first propounded by Rushdoony and his disciples. These interpretations prompted Rushdoony to describe himself as “almost a Christian libertarian.”

He held that God ordained that the civil order must be based on strict observance of all of the Ten Commandments and biblical laws, that the government should be limited to preserving property rights and securing national defense, that God decreed the economy should be based on the hard currencies of gold and silver and opposed any form of debt longer than seven years – public or private; that God expected parents, not the government, to educate their children; and that God opposed most forms of taxation except for tithes to the ecclesiastical agencies that God expected to be the sole providers of welfare services.

In these areas and others, the agenda that the religious right has been promoting for more than

two decades bears remarkable resemblance to Rushdoony's blueprint for a biblical theocracy. You only need to turn the clock back 20 years to see how much progress the religious right has made in achieving these goals.

What can be done to see that mainstream religious voices are heard in the public square? The most important thing for people of moderate and progressive faith to do is to overcome their reticence to engage in political processes beyond the voting booth.

We need to be willing to visit the offices of our elected leaders and express our convictions on political issues in face-to-face dialogue. We need to be more active in writing letters and making phone calls to elected leaders to weigh in on matters important to the common good of our society.

We need to learn how to express our opinions by writing cogent and succinct letters to the editors of newspapers. We need to learn how to use the Internet for social networking, coalition building and grassroots organizing.

We need to realize that, unless we become more engaged in civic processes, our children and grandchildren will be forced to live in a society with ever increasing levels of conflict and violence between people of competing faiths, ideologies and convictions.

More than anything else, the mission and purpose of the Oklahoma Faith Network will be to find ways to engage people of moderate and progressive faith in these kinds of political processes.

Is the Oklahoma Faith Network related to the Texas Freedom Network? There is no formal relationship between the Oklahoma Faith Network and the Texas Freedom Network, but I admit to patterning the work of our network after an organization related to Texas Freedom Network known as the

Texas Faith Network. I lived in Texas when the Texas Freedom Network was organized and was among the religious leaders that joined their clergy and religious leader network.

Cecile Richards, daughter of former Texas Gov. Ann Richards, founded the organization. It is now under the capable leadership of Kathy Miller. The Texas Freedom Network has a well-deserved national reputation for their advocacy for public education, for their efforts on behalf of sane reproductive healthcare legislation, and especially for their efforts to expose and counter the religious extremists elected to the Texas State Board of Education.

Those extremists have been attempting to promote sectarian religious dogmas by modifying the standards for public school textbooks.

The Texas Freedom Network and the Texas Faith Network are strong proponents for liberty of conscience and separation of church and state. All of those issues are causes that we intend to address in the work of the Oklahoma Faith Network and with a sister organization, the Oklahoma Freedom Network, that we hope to see up and running sometime next year.

How can people get involved in the Oklahoma Faith Network? Is it for clergy only? No, the faith network is not for clergy only. We are looking for all moderate and progressive people, lay and clergy, who take their faith seriously. Also, the network is an interfaith network. We welcome everyone who respects liberty of conscience and will help us promote the equal right to religious freedom for everyone. In addition to yourself, give serious consideration to giving a charter membership to your pastor, or deacon, or another religious leader at your house of worship.

Editor's Note: For more information on OFN, see the paid ad on The Observer's back cover.

William's World

A lady in a supermarket is following a grandfather and his badly behaving three-year-old grandson. It's obvious to her that he has his hands full with the child screaming for sweets in the sweet aisle, cookies in the cookie aisle, and for fruit, cereal and pop in the other aisles.

Meanwhile, Granddad is working his way around, saying in a controlled voice, "Easy, William, we won't be long, easy, boy."

Another outburst, and she hears the Granddad calmly say, "It's OK, William, just a couple more minutes and we'll be out of here. Hang in there, boy."

At the checkout, the little terror is throwing items out of the cart, and Granddad says again in a controlled voice, "William, William, relax buddy,

don't get upset. We'll be home in five minutes; stay cool, William."

Very impressed, the woman goes outside where the grandfather is loading his groceries and the boy into the car.

She said to the elderly gentleman, "It's none of my business, but you were amazing in there. I don't know how you did it. That whole time, you kept your composure, and no matter how loud and disruptive he got, you just calmly kept saying things would be OK. William is very lucky to have you as his grandpa."

"Thanks," said the grandfather, "but I'm William ... the little bastard's name is Kevin."

- Thanks to Frank Silovsky for sharing this gem

WHAT'S *wrong* WITH THIS PICTURE?



WHAT THE FRACK?

It's True: Some Republicans Want To Revisit State's Costly Drilling Incentives

BY CAL HOBSON

To some degree all humans reflect their life's experiences, both good and bad. In order for readers to have a better understanding of my views, for what they are worth, of deep and horizontal drilling into oil and gas producing shale zones miles below our surface, a little personal background might be of some assistance – or not. Bear with me.

My grandfather, Ward Cyrus Bean, was a geologist in Oklahoma, plying his trade for decades mostly in the now ancient oil fields found in Carter, Garvin, Stephens and other counties.

For example, he helped bring in the Healdton play in 1915 which continues to be a prolific producer today. Later, during much of the 1930s, Dr. Bean worked for Standard Oil in Ploesti, Romania which would in the 1940s provide as much as one-third of the oil necessary to fuel the Third Reich during World War II. Ploesti became such an important but costly target for the allies that in a single mission on Aug. 1, 1943, the U.S. Army Air Forces flying from Benghazi, Libya, lost 53 B-24s and 600 airmen in the worst one day aerial loss for the Allies during all of World War II.

This example is illustrative of the value of oil then,

now and in the foreseeable future.

My other grandfather and his son, my father, Cal Hobson I and II, respectively, were both wildcatters. Hobson Sr. worked the Seminole Field in the 'teens and '20s of the last century and Dad drilled shallow wells in southern Oklahoma in the '40s and '50s.

Although they experienced some modest success the end result for both was the same: Bankruptcy, loss of homes, other properties and early deaths.

I chose a much easier and safer path: College, Air Force officer, real estate developer, and politician. Other than what I learned about the energy industry by listening to my forebearers I knew little about Oklahoma's most important mineral assets until being elected first to the House of Representatives in 1978, followed by service in the Senate where I was a member until 2006.

For those 28 years I was always appointed to the energy committees in those respective bodies. Through oil booms and busts, sitting next to smart and not so smart legislators, including me, hearing from both schemers with not a dime in their pockets and billionaires who had not a financial care in the world I saw, heard, and learned much about the "oil-bidness."

Here's an idea: Keep the severance tax and credits and earmark the revenue – by vote of the people – for education. It's 'so logical, reasonable, and forward thinking that I guarantee, due to the makeup of our administration and Legislature, it will not even be discussed let alone be forwarded to the voters for their consideration.'

Let me now delve into the topic of this article which is horizontal and/or deep drilling usually followed by the extraction process known as fracking – or perforating of various "pay zones." A widely held misconception is that both activities are relatively new and unproven. Wrong.

The first "frac job" in America was in the Kansas Hugoton field in 1946, followed by a second near Duncan in 1949. Now 35,000 wells a year are completed annually using these techniques.

Many folks remain skeptical of these methodologies and blame them for everything from earthquakes to water pollution to multiple diseases. Though those concerns may be valid, there is no question that for the short term, our country's long-held goal of energy independence will require an even greater reliance on unconventional drilling and the fracking of multiple rock and shale zones from thousands of drill sites.

We need now to turn to the complicated, complex story of how and why tax credits were created by the

Legislature to provide incentives for unconventional drilling – a bill written by Sen. Kevin Easley, D-Broken Arrow.

The year was 1994. Due to low energy prices and the advent of deeper and horizontal drilling in Oklahoma, leaders of the state's energy industry – such as Harold Hamm, Aubrey McClendon, Larry Nichols, Tom Ward, and George Frazier – approached the Legislature asking for an array of tax credits and or incentives.

After extensive negotiations it was agreed that a temporary reduction in the severance tax – which was then 7% on product produced – would be lowered to 4% for deep wells [below 12,500 and 15,000 feet] and 1% for horizontally drilled wells. Fewer than 15% of wells drilled then were horizontal and most did not touch such great depths.

The legislation, to no one's surprise, unanimously passed in both houses and then was promptly signed by Gov. David Walters, an OKC Democrat. This targeted, logical and much needed set of new laws did what they were designed to do – stimulate the oil patch and create thousands of good jobs in Oklahoma.

It importantly also set a sunset, or deadline, in the law.

Also, these credits passed in 1994 were limited to 24 months but were extended repeatedly, so later, in 2003, the period was lengthened to 48 months to align properly with the time period necessary to drill and bring on line to consumers such complicated, deep and horizontal wells.

These same energy incentives are scheduled to stop in 2015 and that fact has led to debates among some in the Legislature, but more importantly, between two leaders in the executive branch as to how, when or even if these expensive tax policies should be extended, modified, or abolished.

Those two outstanding thinkers are state Treasurer Ken Miller, a PhD economist, and budget boss Preston Doerflinger. They recognize, as do some in the energy industry, that the current tax code needs reform.

For example, due to the generosity of the credits, the state has a new banker – the oil and gas companies. Currently we owe the oilies \$300 million and,

without getting into the complexity as to why, obviously this cannot be sustained.

Before expiration of the credits, the 2014 or 2015 Legislature must deal with them do to the sunset clause. Therefore, let me offer a few suggestions it should consider as it undertakes a most difficult task:

1. Just like all the other 300-plus tax credits on the books – equaling \$5 billion – it makes common sense to revise them. The taxing power of government must be developed judiciously in partnership with the private sector. The policies created must benefit both parties, not just one over the other.

Much as financial caps are placed on other recipients of your tax dollars – think food stamps, health care, college scholarships, etc. – assistance to the energy industry should be calibrated to meet current circumstances, not those of nearly a dozen years.

Back then the prices for their products were very low and horizontal drilling extremely rare. The facts today are very different and must be addressed – 161 of 174 wells drilling today in Oklahoma are looking for oil, not gas, and most are horizontally structured.

2. Oil and natural gas are finite natural resources in Oklahoma and we are very lucky to have them. They were not created by mankind.

However, what is done with them is totally up to us. Therefore, these wonderful assets must be viewed through the lens of our world's abundant and less used renewable assets such as wind and solar.

I know. I know. Their contributions to the power needs are small. However, if encouraged properly, they will grow just as oil production went from nothing in the middle of the 19th Century when Col. Edwin Drake hit the first oil well in 1859 near Titusville, PA to today's position as No. 1 supplier of energy on our planet.

One hundred million barrels of oil are consumed daily, with the U.S. burning 19.6 million of them, providing us the amazing society we have. This obvious-

ly is not sustainable.

3. The energy credits should be retained but revamped. As usual, Treasurer Miller has come up with a logical, thoughtful and forward-looking alternative. He suggests lowering the current 7.085% severance tax to some lower number, applying it to all wells, and abolishing the deep and horizontal credits of either 1% or 4%.

4. Other suggestions will come from brilliant minds here in Oklahoma, either from the industry leaders themselves, university scholars, or workers in the patch.

5. Finally, I suggest that the severance tax and credits remain the same with the following caveat: Earmark, by a vote of the people, so it is permanent in the state Constitution, all the money derived from deep and horizontal drilling into a permanent endowment fund for education – kindergarten through graduate school and including career technology offerings.

Since some Okies always want to be like Texas, which has such a fund, we would be. It gains the advantage of protecting a finite resource, would spend only the interest earned, and would benefit our most important future asset, our children and grandchildren.

This idea is so logical, reasonable, and forward thinking that I guarantee, due to the makeup of our administration and Legislature, it will not even be discussed let alone be forwarded to the voters for their consideration.

Other irrelevant issues are on their radar screens and, therefore, this state will continue its slide back into the 19th and 20th centuries.

Thus we will stay mired in the classic definition of insanity: "doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome."

It's not their fault. Look in the mirror.

– *The author, a Lexington Democrat, served in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1978-2006, including one term as Senate President Pro Tempore*

Bird Brains

Scientists at NASA built a gun specifically to launch standard four-pound dead chickens at the windshields of airliners, military jets and the space shuttle, all traveling at maximum velocity. The idea is to simulate the frequent incidents of collisions with airborne fowl to test the strength of the windshields.

British engineers heard about the gun and were eager to test it on the windshields of their new high-speed trains. Arrangements were made, and a gun was sent to the British engineers.

When the gun was fired, the engineers stood shocked as the chicken hurled out of the barrel,

crashed into the shatterproof shield, smashed it to smithereens, blasted through the control console, snapped the engineer's back-rest in two, and embedded itself in the back wall of the cabin, like an arrow shot from a bow.

The horrified Brits sent NASA the disastrous results of the experiment, along with the designs of the windshield and begged the U.S. scientists for suggestions.

NASA responded with a one-line memo: "Defrost the chicken."

– *Snopes.com thinks this is probably pure horsefeathers, but it's too silly not to share*

Lawmakers Shoot And Miss – Again – At Planned Parenthood

BY TIECE DEMPSEY

May was a devastating month for many Oklahomans. While most were preoccupied assisting those affected by storms, Oklahoma legislators used the waning days of the legislative session to revive and approve a measure targeting funding for family planning services provided by Planned Parenthood in Oklahoma. However, it appears likely that their shot drew a blank.

SB 900 passed during the final hours of the legislative session and was signed into law on May 29. The legislation introduced as SB 900 bears no resemblance to the act that became law.

Initially SB 900 was a bill relating to inspections and investigations of hospice facilities. However, when it came out of conference committee in the final days of session, it had mysteriously morphed into the Prioritization of Public Funding in the Purchasing of Family Planning and Counseling Services Act.

Some, including Rep. Doug Cox, believed that SB 900 is Oklahoma's way to continue its assault on Planned Parenthood.

Dr. Cox, who was vocal last year against the Legislature's attempt to pass a measure similar to SB 900, spoke out again this year saying that, "Although the words 'Planned Parenthood' are never specifically mentioned in the legislation, it is worded in such a way to restrict the use of 'any expenditures or grants of public funds for family planning or counseling services by the State of Oklahoma shall be made in the following order of priority.' Their 'priority' is such to effectively cut off all such funds that go to Planned Parenthood."

Yet even if the Legislature's evident intent was to deny family planning funding to Planned Parenthood, the legislation is unlikely to achieve its goals.

Federal funds for family planning services are allocated from Title X of the Public Health Service Act. The Oklahoma State Department of Health [OSDH] and the Oklahoma Health Care Authority [OHCA] both use Title X funding to offer family planning services.

OSDH offers family planning services through local county health departments, Variety Care [a federally qualified health center], and Family Health Care Clinic in Bartlesville.

These services are offered to both males and females of reproductive age and are not refused due to an inability to pay.

OHCA administers family planning services through its SoonerPlan program. The program is available to Oklahoma residents [men and women] not enrolled

in the regular SoonerCare program with an income less than 185% of the federal poverty level. SoonerPlan pays for a host of family planning services, including contraception, which can be received from any SoonerCare provider who offers family planning services.

SB 900 will not have any effect on how OSDH expends Title X funds for family planning services since the recipients of the funds all fit within one of the designated categories. Planned Parenthood facilities in Oklahoma are not recipients of Title X money from the state. As for OHCA, it didn't consider a hierarchy of paying claims prior to the passage of SB 900. OHCA administers Medicaid funds and must adhere to the Medicaid requirement of freedom of choice.

This regulation states that Medicaid beneficiaries may obtain medical services "from any institution, agency, community pharmacy, or person, qualified to perform the service or services required . . . who undertakes to provide him such services."

This federal regulation means that any willing provider of Medicaid services, excluding those that commit fraud or criminal acts, is entitled to payment and can't be excluded because of the medical services they provide.

Following SB 900 would put OHCA in direct conflict with this federal regulation, because some Medicaid providers may not fit within the prioritized list. According to agency spokesman Carter Kimble, nothing will change as to the way a clean claim is paid going forward.

Planned Parenthood remains a vital provider of reproductive and women's health services in Oklahoma. As Dr. Cox notes, "Planned Parenthood health centers in Oklahoma provide crucial services such as breast and cervical cancer screenings. Planned Parenthood may be the only place where some patients, particularly those in the low income bracket, can obtain these life-saving cancer screening exams."

While Oklahoma was successful last year in cutting funding from Planned Parenthood to provide services for the Women, Infant, and Children program, the most recent attempts to drain funding from the facilities for family planning services are likely to be unfruitful.

– The author is a policy analyst for Oklahoma Policy Institute. An earlier version of this essay appeared on the OKPolicy blog. You can sign up for OK Policy's e-mail alerts and daily news digest at <http://okpolicy.org>

A Promise, Fulfilled

BY M. SCOTT CARTER

An open letter to former state Sen. Maxine Horner:

On Monday, a young woman walked into a classroom at the University of Central Oklahoma. Sara is bright, beautiful, and, although she is easily frightened, she is also very smart.

She joined thousands of others from across the state as they entered the Oklahoma system of higher education.

She is sitting in a classroom because of you.

Back in 1990, long before Sara was born, you pushed, fought and struggled for [and finally passed] the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program. Designed to cover the tuition and fees of moderate-income students who worked hard and showed promise, since it became law the OHLAP has helped educate thousands of students.

In our brief 100-year history, there have been many important pieces of legislation and policies that have touched the lives of each and every resident here. From our beginnings as Indian Territory to land runs, shootouts, the Dust Bowl and terrorist bombings, we Oklahomans have made our way by hard work and simple faith.

Although historians can point

to several laws as vital to our collective history, no single piece of legislation has done what OHLAP [now known as the Oklahoma Promise scholarship] has accomplished. Many leaders have come and gone, but to fundamentally change our higher education system, it took the work of a quiet, gentle lady from the Greenwood District in Tulsa.

My daughter is too young to realize just how important you are to our history. She isn't aware of the struggle you faced to make OHLAP a reality or the countless hours you spent lobbying your colleagues to support your bill.

She doesn't know that over the past decade, many others have tried to take credit for your monumental piece of legislation. But the record [and those who were there and watched you work will attest] will show that OHLAP was imagined and created by you.

But today, as Sara completes her first week as a true college student, I wanted to say thank you. Thank you for your incredible foresight and imagination. Thank you for all the hard work. Thanks for your caring and helping all those who have sought [and continue to seek] to better themselves.

Another thing, a few years ago I

enrolled at the University of Oklahoma to get a master's degree. Since I started I have met dozens of students who attended OU on an Oklahoma Promise scholarship. Each time I encounter one of them, I tell them about you. I tell them how hard you worked and how you were inspired by a news report you saw on television of a man who offered to help students go to college if they worked hard and stayed out of trouble. I tell them about Maxine Horner.

Many legislators have come and gone since you represented the Greenwood District during the 1990s. Many have been honest and sincere in their efforts to make Oklahoma a better place.

But none have taken a simple idea, created a policy and changed the fate of so many. So on behalf of every student who has ever earned an Oklahoma Promise scholarship, thank you.

And, on behalf of my beautiful daughter Sara, please know how grateful her mother and I are to you for giving her the opportunity to go to college.

Your work will never be forgotten.

– M. Scott Carter is Capitol bureau reporter for the *Journal Record*. This column appeared in the *Journal Record* on Aug. 23.

DC Okies' Shoe Fetishes

BY KAREN WEBB

It doesn't matter whether you are a refugee from a war-torn country or have lost everything thanks to the white-collar crime on Wall Street, the first thing you should do before applying for any kind of aid is get rid of any Nikes you may have.

It does not matter if rich cousin Daphne gave you the Nikes because they are the wrong color for

the season, or your rich, great-uncle Mortimer "kicked it" and you are the only family member who could wear his Nikes, or if you bought them at the Goodwill or a four-car garage sale in Nichols Hills – get rid of the Nikes.

In this case it isn't racial profiling, it is wardrobe profiling or class profiling.

Remember back during the Clin-

ton Administration when there was a war in Bosnia and Kosovo? Well, after swearing to block every presidential nomination because he didn't like Clinton, Republican Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma went to visit refugees from Kosovo.

I'll bet you thought this idea of voting against or blocking anything Obama suggests was new

for the right wing GOP. Inhofe came back claiming that the refugees were not that bad off because some of the children were wearing Nikes.

The proper etiquette is, if you are being bombed out of your house or escorted at gunpoint, the first thing you should do is check to make sure all the kids are wearing refugee footwear. No Nikes.

I was never a fan of former Rep. Dan Boren, D[sort of]-OK, but the guy they [Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District] have now may be worse. Before Boren there was Tom Coburn, who is now a semi-reasonable senator. However, when he was representing the 2nd District, he declared that lesbianism was running so rampant in southeastern Oklahoma that school girls had to go to the restroom one at a time.

But Rep. Markwayne Mullin could have them both beat. At a recent Town Hall meeting in Welch, OK, he said this:

“So I'm in the Crystal City [Virginia] and I'm buying my groceries. And I noticed everybody was giving a card. They had these huge, huge baskets and I realized it was the first of the month. But then I am looking over and

there is a couple beside me. This guy was built like a brick house. I mean he had muscles all over him. He was in a little tank top, a pair of shorts and really nice Nike shoes. And she was standing there and she was all in shape and she was, uh, and they looked like they had just come from a fitness program. I mean she was in the spandex and they were both physically fit and they go up, in front of me and they paid with that card. Fraud, absolute 100% golden food stamp fraud.”

Again with the Nikes – like you have to get a 20-year loan to pay for a pair.

Let me tell you what Markwayne thinks is appropriate: Maybe you paid a year's membership fee for a fitness club in January, lost your job, your house or who knows what in June. You need to cancel that membership. And if you have never entered a fitness club and worked out in dead Uncle Mortimer's rejects, you need to sell those. What if the guy just got off his second, minimum wage job of stocking barbells at Academy?

I once knew a kid who had a perfect body because he had good genes and did push-ups at home.

You cannot look fit and qualify for any kind of assistance. You

must appear to be starving and dress like you are sleeping under a bridge. If these people had been overweight, he would have been spouting off about them not buying diet foods.

Oh, and by the way, what is the deal about a basketful? And he gestures with his arms like buying groceries at the first of the month is some sort of “food stamp” phenomenon.

You buy groceries when you have something to buy them with and most of the sales are at the first of the month. You talk like they buy a basketful a day.

Let me tell you, Markwayne, how tired I am of listening to politicians – and I don't care if you think you aren't a politician – claim to be Christian and hate the poor and reward the wealthy, even if they don't create jobs or pay their workers so they can afford healthcare.

I can't wait until someone researches the four businesses you own to see what you pay and whether you offer benefits. Then I want to hear how you plan to create jobs with a living wage and benefits instead of voting to make sure millions have no healthcare another 40 times.

– *The author lives in Moore*

What Poverty Hath Wrought

BY FRAN MORRIS

In a recent New York Times article, it was announced that “Poverty is a Childhood Disease.” My first reaction? Well, who didn't already know that?

As I began to research the topic a little more, I realized that many Oklahomans, including our state leaders out on 23rd street, apparently do not know that. If they did, they could not continue to make decisions as if poverty was an inevitable condition brought on by poor choices and too much government assistance.

My mother started teaching school [at Scott School in what is

now far northwest Oklahoma City] when she was still a part-time student at Central State Normal School, later Central State Teachers College and now the University of Central Oklahoma [UCO].

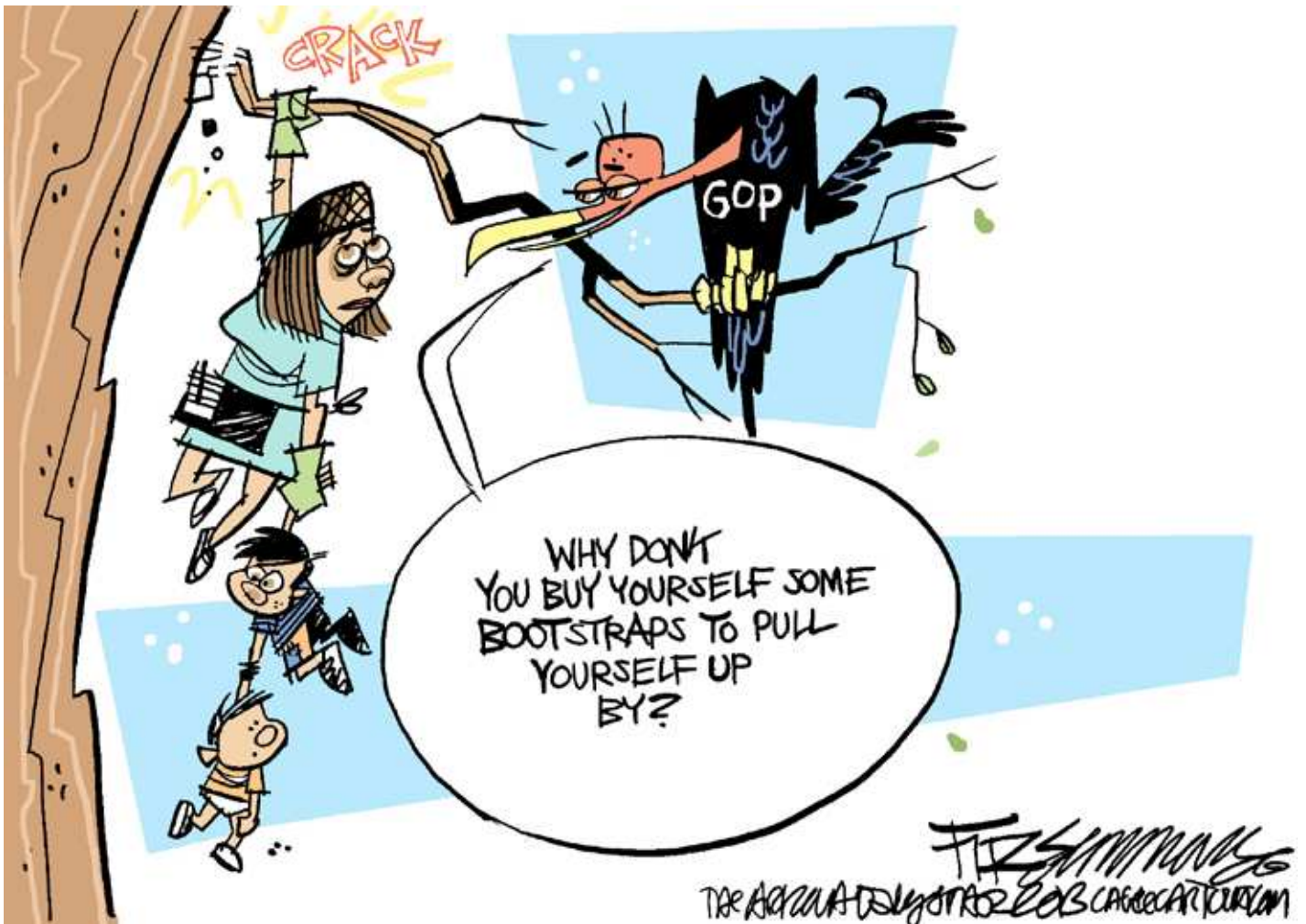
She had about 25 children ages six to 16 in one room. They were all pretty poor farm kids. I've seen pictures. They brought lunches from home. Those that had more, brought more. Everyone ate, most went to sleep when it got dark, and everyone got plenty of exercise.

They learned to read and write and do their numbers and the

better students helped with the slower ones. Most turned out pretty well.

Many years later, during depression years, my Dad had a stroke and my Mom [with five kids now] had to go back to teaching. We lived in Britton where she would board an interurban to downtown OKC, transfer to the Norman streetcar, get off at a stop in southeast OKC and walk a distance to Valley Brook School where she taught mostly children of oilfield workers.

As she grew old and spent more time telling stories about her



life, she would think about those times, and I remember once she said, “You know, that was a different kind of poverty.” It may have been the beginning of poverty being a disease.

Mom would have scoffed at the recent focus on toxic stress “in which a young child’s body and brain may be damaged by too much exposure to stress hormones, like cortisol and norepinephrine.”

She thought child psychology [my field] was hokum, but she knew that Scott School poverty [where the entire community ate what they grew, supported one another during hard times, worked and played outdoors and got restful sleep] was different from Valley Brook School poverty [where families were separated, uprooted, crowded, eating and sleeping poorly and experiencing domestic violence, obesity, diabetes, substance abuse and mental

illness].

When I first started working in the Psychiatry Department at OU, I was fortunate to have three of the best possible teachers – Dr. Marshall Schechter, Dr. Povl Toussient and Dr. Chester Pierce. They all believed that poverty is a disease. Dr. Pierce also believed that racism is a disease, as do I, but that’s another story in another essay.

I learned from the beginning to recognize symptoms that might suggest a more or less possible approach toward hope. That was 45 years ago and I’ve been able to follow some of the children and read the studies that confirm the theory.

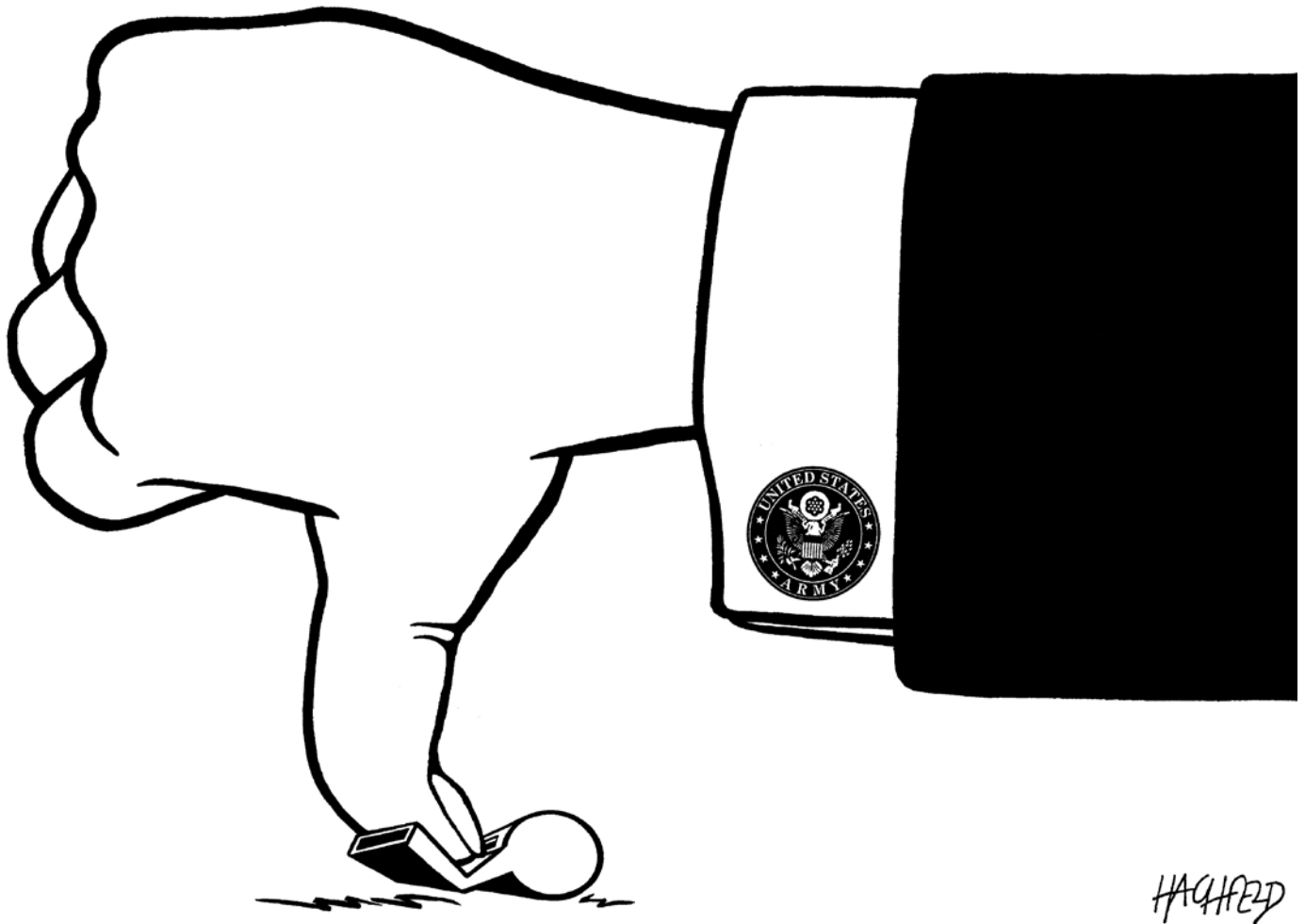
The country, however, adopted the “trickle down theory” – you know, if the rich get richer, they will suddenly become generous and be sure that the profits trickle down to the middle and poverty classes. Didn’t work. Never has.

The gap between rich and poor widens by leaps and bounds. The annual bonuses of some of those top “earners” could fund a raise in minimum wage and needed Head Start programs.

The studies have been done, the results are in. After the first few years of life, if brain development is neglected, you can’t go back. The disease of poverty produces language deficits, gaps in school achievement, high dropout rates and chronic health and mental health problems.

Dr. Perri Klass who wrote the New York Times’ story says, “In the exam room, we try to mitigate the pain and suffering that are the pernicious symptoms of poverty. But our patients’ well-being depends on more, on public health measures and prevention that lift the darkness so all children can grow toward the light.”

– The author, a longtime child advocate, lives in Oklahoma City



The Meaning Of Manning

Pfc Bradley Manning, a Crescent, OK native, was sentenced recently to 35 years in prison for leaking more than 700,000 government files to WikiLeaks. Many of the documents he provided detailed incidents of torture and the U.S. policy regarding torture in Iraq as well as death counts well above those made public by the Army. Manning has been vilified as a traitor and exalted as a hero.

Observer contributor Richard L. Fricker discussed the punishment, the case and its implications with former Tulsa journalist Denver Nicks, author of *Private: Bradley Manning, WikiLeaks and the Biggest Exposure of Official Secretes in American History*, a landmark in investigative journalism:

By virtue of your book it would be safe to assume that during your research you came to know Bradley Manning as well as anyone, and better than most of the millions who have followed his case. In the course of your research, interviews and writing did you find anything to indicate Private Manning was un-American, an enemy sympathizer or willfully disloyal to his country? There is really no question that Bradley Manning was and

still considers himself to be a patriotic American. He has never said anything to indicate otherwise [except for, supposedly, once saying that the flag means nothing to him, which sounds more like a 21-year-old academic musing symbols and nationalism]. He isn't even anti-war. Manning was proud to be a soldier and to serve his country and for better or for worse he clearly felt he was serving his country by leaking state secrets.

Were you surprised at his sentence? His 35-year sentence is about what I expected – maybe just a bit more. I wouldn't be surprised to see his sentence commuted a decade or two from now.

In your opinion was Manning arrested, confined in solitary and tried because of the information he released or more because the intelligence community and the Army in particular were in a snit because he had hung some laundry out to dry in public. Manning clearly and admittedly broke a number of laws and he was tried and ultimately sentenced for those infractions. The more serious charges, aiding the enemy and the potential 90-year sentence had everything to do with prosecutorial

overreach.

I was visiting with an Iraq/Afghanistan vet friend of mine last week who commented, “Manning got a lot of people killed.” I asked where and how, but he didn’t seem to know any particulars, which is a common conversation. Is there any claim by the Army or any evidence the Manning disclosures did in fact get anyone killed? No, no evidence to support that claim has ever surfaced. But as I wrote in *Private*, proving something like that had gotten someone killed is a tall errand, and proving that it never happened is, in a familiar logical conundrum, impossible.

Admittedly I have not read all the Manning disclosures, but a lot of what I read was only slightly above embassy gossip. What were the real secrets Manning had access to and did in fact disclose? A lot of it was that kind of idle chatter and low-level, mundane field reports. Some major revelations were woven throughout, though, like 15,000 more civilian deaths than had ever been accounted for in Iraq, and the fact that the Pentagon does do civilian body counts, which it had long denied. Frago 242 is one of the most troubling – this is the document ordering coalition forces in Iraq to turn a blind eye when Iraqis were torturing and/or executing detainees.

As you stated Manning did break some laws, but where is the line between what Manning did and the generals and colonels that retire every day and then go to work for think tanks and defense contractors? I mean these folks aren’t being hired for their good looks and charm; they have or had information, much like Manning did. The difference, it seems they are putting some lipstick on it and selling what they know or can find out through their former network. I’d like your thoughts on that. If those generals and colonels reveal classified information in the course of that work it’s supposed to be cleared first with, I believe, the Information Security Oversight Office. I think what you’re describing is someone using expertise and contacts gained in the employ of the Army, which I don’t really see as the same thing as leaking en masse hundreds of thousands of raw documents. Another big difference would be that said officers are profiting off the interaction, whereas Manning, obviously, is not.

Based on your experience how does the Army and the intelligence services in general view their jobs, themselves and more importantly the American people? Are we either patriots or traitors, with the potential to be either at any given moment? In my experience members of the armed forces in general and the intelligence sectors in particular are smart, analytical people, not typically prone to making black/white assessments like that. There does, however, seem to be a “you can’t handle the truth” mentality endemic to senior officials over the course of the last decade. James Clapper. Cofer Black. President Obama. There’s a certain arro-

gance, an idea that things are so dangerous now that we can’t afford to maintain fealty to our principles, to go through legal channels, or to be forthright with the American people. I’m not convinced – at all – that life on earth is any more dangerous today that it was in the decades and centuries past when we put in place democratic protections against the abuse of power in government.

And how has private contracting changed the landscape of intelligence gathering and secret keeping? It has, frankly, made the entire system of classification and security clearances a joke. We have something like north of 1.4 million people in America with a Top Secret security clearance. That is a hell of a lot of people with access to information, the disclosure of which, could “reasonably be expected to do serious harm to the national security.” I’m not buying it. The whole system is broken, and security clearances are valued because of what they earn the holder on the free market. In short, our system of state secrecy – that is, the system in place whereby we allow our government to lie to us in order to provide for our protection – has been reduced to a resume builder for many people in private contracting. We give more people more access to more secrets than ever before. Manning and Snowden [a private contractor, incidentally] were inevitable. So is whoever comes next.

Do you think the Manning case is closed or is their more still waiting out there? Additionally, did the Manning case put a chill on disclosures by others or perhaps embolden other Mannings just waiting for the proper time and venue? Edward Snowden has said that he was directly inspired by Bradley Manning, so we have already seen one person emboldened.

Lastly, what have you learned and what conclusions have you drawn from the case of Bradley Manning? For me, the biggest issue in the Manning case is the one people seem least interested in talking about – that is, the context of the leaks. In the age of the Internet, we started classifying more information than ever while giving more people than ever access to classified information. Our secrecy system is totally dysfunctional, rife with abuse, and has been used time and again to cover up abuse. It’s bloated, dysfunctional, and badly broken. We need secrecy, but we need it to be lean, efficient, and in sleek, working condition. We’re in quite a fix and it’s my opinion that the last several years are just the tip of the iceberg.

Denver Nicks is a writer for Time based in Washington, DC. His work has appeared in Newsweek, The Daily Beast, National Geographic Traveler, The Nation, The Huffington Post and other publications.

Richard L. Fricker lives in Tulsa and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. His latest book, The Last Day of the War, is available at <https://www.createspace.com/3804081> or at www.richardfricker.com.



↑ 21st century

Mrs. Vasquez

x flag

Alcoholic Father	single mom	Food Stamps	Parent in prison	on the move
incest	living in car	gangs	single mom	domestic abuse
below poverty line	gangs	from chronic poverty	drug abuse	absent parent
Alcoholic mother	drug abuse	homeless	single mom	deported dad
abuse	Food Stamps	crime victim	below poverty line	brother in prison
overflow	overflow	overflow	overflow	overflow

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Springer's Retirement Paves Way For Debate On Future Of OKC Schools

BY JOHN THOMPSON

For five years, Karl Springer led the Oklahoma City Public School System with skill, sincerity, and integrity. Springer has demonstrated the same dignity when discussing his retirement.

Springer told Tim Willert of the Daily Oklahoman that he is most proud of bringing the "Great Expectations" curriculum to elementary schools and Teach for America to the OKCPS, and implementing a year long school schedule. All three policies are praiseworthy.

Springer acknowledged the district's failure to "move the education bar." The system failed to produce more than incremental improvements in student performance. He also praised OKCPS teachers as being as good as, or better than, their counterparts

in the suburbs.

The same is true of Springer. Springer did a very good job of implementing the instruction-driven, curriculum-driven, and test-driven policies that have been imposed throughout the nation.

In 2008, when Springer became superintendent, he encouraged an open dialogue about the best ways to improve the 90% low-income school system. Then, as now, schools were caught in the middle of an educational civil war that divided liberals against liberals, conservatives against conservatives, and the civil rights communities against each other. He was open to the arguments of all sides.

Springer listened to administrators and politicians who endorsed the test-driven accountability of his ill-fated predecessor, a graduate of the Broad Academy,

which is the ultimate training ground for corporate reform.

These accountability-driven “reformers” prescribed an unflinching focus on a curriculum aligned to high-stakes tests, principal leadership, data, and the dismissal of educators who did not believe that schools, alone, could overcome poverty.

Springer also listened to educators [like me] who cited the cognitive and social science which explained why those policies were inherently incapable of improving schools serving neighborhoods with intense concentrations of poverty and trauma.

The key to school improvement, we argued, was the socio-emotional. The building of trusting relationships was essential, and it would always be undercut by bubble-in accountability. We called for a return to the MAPS for KIDS recommendations for teaching and learning.

At that time, the same debate raged within the Obama transition team. The president-elect initially listened to advocates for full-service community schools who opposed the scapegoating of teachers.

President Obama ultimately sided with corporate reformers and doubled down on their market-driven, teach-to-the test policies.

The president, who had hoped to emulate Abraham Lincoln’s openness to all types of ideas, agreed that there could be “no team of rivals” in the Department of Education. The USDOE leadership positions were dominated by alumni of the Gates Foundation. It was agreed that “everyone” needed to “be on the same page” in deputizing teachers as the commandoes who would defeat poverty and firing those who failed to do so.

In other words, dissent was banned in an Education Department that was in too much of a hurry for evidence-driven debates. Consequently, five years ago, Karl Springer had his options limited by federal and state governments, as well as the policies endorsed

by the “Billionaires’ Boys Club.”

Regardless of where he personally came down on the education debate, Springer had no choice but to side with those who believed that improved teacher quality, leadership, and testing could turn around schools. He now says that the OKCPS should continue that approach and he hopes that his successor can use the same playbook to produce the academic gains that he did not produce. I take him on his word.

But we now need the debate that was cut short five years ago. We need the in-depth exchange of ideas that was nurtured during the MAPS for KIDS process. Those who believe we can stay the course and still meet the challenge of teaching to Common Core standards should make their case.

On the other hand, we who criticize the playbook, not the players, should have our evidence heard. We should make our case for integrating early education with elementary instruction so students can read for comprehension. We should present our proposals for aligning instruction with socio-emotional interventions. The case for full-service community schools must also be presented.

If the community and the OKCPS leadership determine that a new superintendent could accomplish what Springer could not, and find solutions within the four walls of each classroom, then, so be it. But, we who believe that schooling must be a team effort should also participate in a vigorous evidence-driven debate before any decision is made.

– *Dr. John Thompson, an education writer whose essays appear regularly at The Huffington Post, currently is working on a book about his experiences teaching for two decades in the inner city of OKC. He has a doctorate from Rutgers University and is the author of Closing the Frontier: Radical Responses in Oklahoma Politics. For the record, he describes himself as an Obama supporter – though he remains opposed to the president’s education policies.*

What It Feels Like To Be ‘Fixed’

BY LLOYD W. SNOW

I think Diane Ravitch gets it right in her latest book, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools*.

She says – and I paraphrase – the only crisis in public education is the one ginned up by government bureaucrats, major foundations, and odd coalition of elitists and commercial hustlers who have made inflated claims about the virtues of vouchers, charter schools, virtual schools, standardized testing, merit pay, etc.

They insist that poverty has no correlation to low academic achievement and that overhauling our entire system along business lines is the way to go.

I feel like business-industry-philanthropist-politi-

cians are trying to *fix* us. Not like a car – like a cat!

Friends, our public schools are like the Statue of Liberty – we take the tired-hungry-poor-huddled masses, whether they are ELL [English Language Learners], special needs or whatever and we give them hope and opportunity.

I wish folks who think they have to fix us would explain how so many of their “reforms” will help teachers teach and children learn.

I deal with real teachers and kids. They are not numbers.

My Top 10 Reasons to be concerned about what getting *fixed* feels like in public education:

No. 10 – High stakes testing is out of control stifling entrepreneurship, creativity, curiosity and the

American spirit. We have spent billions developing and administering tests – wish we had that money in classrooms.

No. 9 – Most of us have not had enough time to learn, tweak, embrace common core, much less understand the high stakes implications for students and teachers.

No. 8 – Too many talented teachers are retiring too early for the wrong reasons, feeling undervalued, unappreciated and uninvited in education decision-making.

No. 7 – Too few young people are entering into our profession. The toxic political rhetoric along with low pay and constant criticisms are having an impact.

No. 6 – Flawed school district report cards that are not purposeful or useful.

No. 5 – Local Boards of Education losing the ability to govern. When did we lose our kids, our schools, our community?

No. 4 – Public education is being hijacked by private business and industry concerned mostly about profit, not pupils.

No. 3 – Dealing with leadership at the State Department of Education is, well, put kindly, challenging and frustrating.

No. 2 – The script [reforms] is crafted by think tanks – folks far from classrooms, kids, and teachers. For some reason our legislators feel like ALEC [American Legislative Exchange Council] and Jeb Bush's foundation know more about schools and education than seasoned teachers and administrators.

And the No. 1 reason to be concerned: 49th or 50th is *not* OK. Funding for public education in Oklahoma has fallen from 38.2% of total budget appropriations to an all-time low of 33.8% or 33.2% depending on how you interpret the data.

Bottom line since 2009: we have 40,000 more students in our state and \$200 million less funds to educate them. And, of course, these so-called reform mandates were unfunded!

My opinion: reforms absent resources are ridiculous and political nonsense. So what do we do?

My passion yesterday, today, and tomorrow: we must protect public education, the cornerstone of

our democracy. Mother Theresa was fond of saying, "Children may not be all of our population but they are 100% of our future."

I am concerned with a political agenda that may be designed solely to dismantle public education. The bottom line: teacher morale is the lowest in my 34 years as superintendent.

The truth: Public education has not failed and is not failing. Ninety-five percent of our schools are very successful. Test scores are higher than ever, our drop-out rate is lower than ever, and achievement gaps are narrowing. This is reality despite the constant critical rhetoric we get from folks with private agendas.

I am fearful that we are on a path where we have begun to re-segregate schools by using the code word "choice" that really means vouchers, privatization, scholarships, parent trigger, market place, options and on and on.

I can't help but think of one very powerful word – *greed* – the smell of money. When we turn our schools over to folks more concerned with profit than people our democracy is at stake. We saw the Wall Street meltdown. Surely we learned something from that fiasco.

I kind of feel like *Horton Hears a Who*, by Dr. Seuss. Remember where the people of Whoville save themselves by yelling, "we are here, we are here!"

Colleagues, friends, we must come together.

We must tell policymakers we are here and will not allow our public schools to be dismantled.

We must advocate vigorously for our kids and public education.

We must become an army of voices. It is not too late to be heard and be saved.

There is nothing so wrong with our schools that cannot be fixed by what is right with our schools. Coach Wooden always told his players – Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.

We cannot be silent.

I believe in public schools. Diogenes said the foundation of every state is the education of its youth. Margaret Mead said when we save our children we save ourselves.

We must save public education.

– Lloyd W. Snow, superintendent of Sand Springs Public Schools, was inducted into the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame on Aug. 2. This essay is a shortened version of his remarks at the induction ceremony.

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And The Problem Is?

I came home from the golf course today.
The wife had left a note on the fridge:
"It's not working, I can't take it anymore!!
Gone to stay with my Mother."

I opened the fridge, the light came on, and the
beer was cold.

What the hell is she talking about?

– Thanks to A.J. Henshaw for sharing this gem

Wasted

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

ney General Scott Pruitt, state Rep. Mike Ritze and other elected leaders who'll portray this as the latest skirmish in the War on Christianity.

Sadly, the voices of others – both religions and non-religious – aren't getting much attention in the Oklahoma mainstream media, where any perceived attack on religion is packaged to primarily attract viewers and sell subscriptions.

Naturally, the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma is the villain for fighting to uphold the separation of church and state principle.

But it's at least worth pondering – isn't it? – what led a longtime Baptist pastor to serve as the lead plaintiff in the case.

In a letter last year to the ACLU, Dr. Bruce Prescott noted that he frequently visits the Capitol in his role as leader of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists and as a member and official of such groups as Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education, the Oklahoma Conference of Churches, the Oklahoma Coalition for Reproductive Justice and the Sierra Club.

The monument, he says, is “an affront to every person who affirms that the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment prohibits the government from establishing religion.

“I am a Baptist minister. I am not opposed to the Ten Commandments. In fact, I exhort people to obey them. I am not opposed to monuments to the Ten Commandments that are placed on private property and/or on the grounds of religious institutions.

“I am opposed to erecting Ten Commandments monuments on public property and particularly on the grounds of the state Capitol where people of different faiths and of no faith go to exercise their rights as citizens.”

[Disclosure I: Prescott sits on The Observer's Advisory Board. His new Oklahoma Faith Network is the subject of an interview on pages 12-14 of this issue of The Observer.]

Prescott correctly notes that Baptists – his “spiritual ancestors,” as he put it – were instrumental in helping pass the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution because they were “determined to insure that every citizen had ‘liberty of conscience,’ i.e., the freedom to worship or not worship according to the dictates of their own conscience.

“That is why they were adamant in denying support for the Constitution until it separated church and state and protected the equal rights of citizenship for all religious minorities. That is a legacy of which Mainstream Baptists are most proud in our religious tradition.

“And that is why we find the Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the State Capitol so offensive. In effect, it sends a signal that certain faith traditions are endorsed and sanctioned by the government while those who adhere to other faith traditions are second-class citizens in their own society.”

[Disclosure II: I am a member of, and regularly attend, a Baptist church that is dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.]

While roads and bridges crumble, schools and prisons burst at the seams, and the mentally ill are stuck on waiting lists, too many of our political leaders insist on picking moral and religious fights that have no business in the public policy arena.

Sharia Law. Reproductive rights. The Ten Commandments. All legal battles that squander precious taxpayer dollars that could be deployed to help solve real – not manufactured – problems.

If I thought for a minute the Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds would somehow ensure all elected leaders and special interest lobbyists acted honestly, morally and ethically, I might be persuaded it's good thing.

As it is, it's simply another sideshow that we can ill-afford to finance.

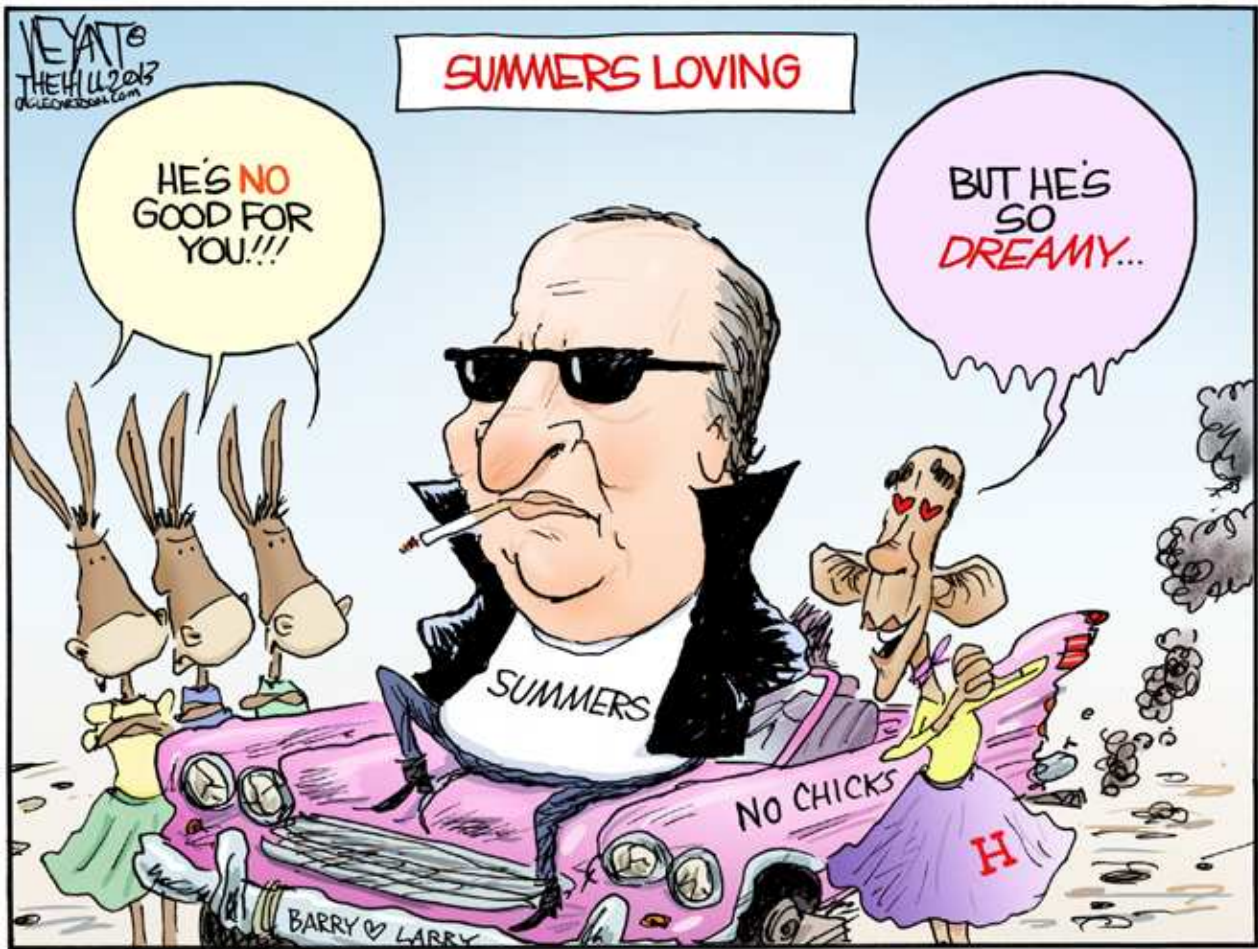
Noteworthy

The 6th Annual Heels for Hope fund-raiser is Sept. 7 at Wheeler Park in OKC. The foundation funds ovarian cancer research, education and awareness. This year's events include a 5k run, one-mile walk, and a 25-yard high heel and feather boa dash and feature former Lt. Gov. Jari Askins as mistress of ceremonies. For more information, visit www.heelsforhope.org or www.signmeup.com/93530.

•
Writer, organizer and Ms. co-founder Gloria Steinem will be featured speaker at Planned

Parenthood of Central Oklahoma's fall fundraiser Sept. 21 at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in OKC. The Choices 2013 event includes a silent auction, art sale and dinner. E-mail ppco@ppfa.org for ticket information.

•
The Oklahoma Conference of Churches' Interfaith Youth Tour on Sept. 22 includes stops at Temple B'Nai Israel [Jewish], The Sikh Gurdwara [Sikh] and Frontline Church [Christian]. The tour costs \$15 and is open to youth ages 12 and up. Visit www.okchurches.org for details.



Avaricious Brilliance For Economic Disaster

BY RALPH NADER

The widening circle applauding megamillionaire Larry Summers – of Harvard University, Washington, DC and Wall Street – agrees on one word to describe the colossal failure: Brilliant!

That circle includes Barack Obama, who appointed Summers in 2009 to be his chief economic advisor; Bill Clinton, who made him Secretary of the Treasury; and the Harvard Board of Overseers, who named him president of Harvard University in 2001.

With Clinton and his promoter, Robert Rubin, who preceded him at the Treasury post before making over \$100 million at Citigroup, Summers brilliantly deregulated Wall Street in 1999 and 2000, thus setting up one of corporate capitalism's most harmful speculative binges.

With Clinton's approval, these men pushed for the repeal of the successful Glass-Steagall Act of 1933,

which separated investment banking from commercial banking. They then blocked the regulation of mounting speculation in complex, risky derivatives that led to the tanking of Wall Street in 2008.

The collapse, caused by the plutocrats, cost eight million jobs, drained away trillions of dollars in pension and mutual fund assets, and plunged the country into a "Great Recession."

At Harvard, Summers remained brilliant in advising the university's huge endowment into risky investments that lost it billions of dollars. His brilliance also led him to say that women just weren't cut out for heavy-duty scientific work.

Wall Street likes people labeled brilliant. It hides their greed. So firms like Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase and Citigroup shelled out over \$100,000 per visit to hear him speak his brilliance.

While heading for bankruptcy and taxpayer bailouts

– decided in one secret weekend in 2008 by Robert Rubin, Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson [fresh from the chairmanship of Goldman Sachs] – the shaky bank was receiving, according to Citigroup, brilliant “insight on a broad range of topics including the global and domestic economy.”

Soon thereafter, Citigroup went belly up into the laps of you, the taxpayers.

Clearly, Summers’ brilliance did not light a path toward banking prudence and productivity for the economy. But it sure did help Summers’ bank accounts. He reaped huge fees from the hedge fund D.E. Shaw, Silicon Valley startups, including equity positions in the Learning Club that charges its debtors interest rates reaching as high as 29%.

Summers has cultivated brilliance. He speaks fast and can be bombastic as he exhales his experience with international crises, government, Wall Street and academic life. He is quick with statistics and has a way of making vulnerable, smart persons around him feel inferior.

That intimidating style did not work with former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, who came to the Obama Administration in 2009 with Summers, but as a lesser-titled economic advisor. So Summers worked the White House to marginalize Volcker who soon left.

Later, when Volcker’s proposal to develop criteria to slow banking speculation with other people’s money started moving through Congress, Summers went ballistic. But his brilliance could not stop it from becoming law.

All the above matters because Larry Summers is one of the two candidates Barack Obama is considering for the chair of the powerful Federal Reserve when Mr. Bernanke leaves in January. Many articles are being written about the pluses and minuses of Summers and his only competitor, Janet Yellen, the quieter vice-chair of the Federal Reserve who worried about the credit markets in 2007 pushing the U.S. into a recession. She also worries about the government and the Federal Reserve not doing enough about unemployment.

The media commentary, thus far, has heavily fo-

cused on the personalities, pronouncements and establishment ties of Summers and Yellen. Who will get along with Obama best? The Federal Reserve is supposed to be defiantly independent of the White House but has become heavily politicized with its massive expansion of powers, including bailouts and printing money better known as quantitative easing.

Who will best supervise the banks? That goes to the level of the independence of the candidates’ character. Author Noam Scheiber [*The Escape Artists: How Obama’s Team Fumbled the Recovery*], who is often admiring of Summers, writes: “My own view is that Summers is too fond of big shots – he’s always wanted to be part of the most exclusive club that will have him ... In my book, I describe the pleasure he took from attending dinners with top Wall Street executives as a Treasury official in the 1990s.”

Such awe of Wall Street – that has and will butter his bread – means that he would be more “credible” in the financial markets, though his brilliance may get under the skin of the Federal Reserve Governors who set interest-rate or monetary policy.

Obama’s White House circle is pitching for Summers with whom they have worked. Unfortunately, the typical Washington horserace is obscuring the many important policy issues regarding the Federal Reserve. What will a new Fed chair do to:

Establish legal limits to the expanded and legally dubious powers exercised by the Fed? Improve the Fed’s own increasingly scary financial status? Show commitment to enforcement of consumer protection laws? Reconcile the Fed’s awkward position of pushing banks to be prudent while being funded by banks and governed by bankers through its regional offices? Increase accountability by ending its refusal to be audited by Congress? End the Fed’s chronic secrecy?

The answerers to these questions should shape Obama’s selection of a new Fed chair.

What’s my choice? Either Nobel Prize winner economist Joseph Stiglitz or University of Texas Professor of Economics, James K. Galbraith who have brilliant records and writings as if people matter.

For more information see <http://forgetlarry.org/>.

Nader.org

Why The Anger?

BY ROBERT REICH

Why is the nation more bitterly divided today than it’s been in 80 years? Why is there more anger, vituperation, and political polarization now than even during Joe McCarthy’s anti-Communist witch hunts of the 1950s, the tempestuous struggle for civil rights in the 1960s, the divisive Vietnam war, or the Watergate

scandal?

If anything, you’d think this would be an era of relative calm. The Soviet Union has disappeared and the Cold War is over. The Civil Rights struggle continues, but at least we now have a black middle class and even a black president.

While the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been

controversial, the all-volunteer army means young Americans aren't being dragged off to war against their will. And although politicians continue to generate scandals, the transgressions don't threaten the integrity of our government as did Watergate.

And yet, by almost every measure, Americans are angrier today. They're more contemptuous of almost every major institution – government, business, the media. They're more convinced the nation is on the wrong track. And they are far more polarized.

Political scientists say the gap between the median Republican voter and the median Democrat is wider today on a whole host of issues than it's been since the 1920s.

Undoubtedly, social media play a part – allowing people to pop off without bearing much responsibility for what they say. And most of us can cocoon within virtual or real communities whose members confirm all our biases and assumptions.

Meanwhile, cable news and yell radio compete for viewers and listeners by being ever more strident. Not long ago I debated a Republican economic advisor on a cable TV program. During the brief station break, the show's producer told me to "be angrier." I told her I didn't want to be angrier. "You have to," she said. "Viewers are surfing through hundreds of channels and will stop for a gladiator contest."

Within this cacophony, we've lost trusted arbiters of truth – the Edward Murrows and Walter Cronkites who could explain what was happening in ways most Americans found convincing.

We've also lost most living memory of an era in which we were all in it together – the Great Depression and World War II – when we succeeded or failed together. In those years we were palpably dependent on one another, and understood how much we owed each other as members of the same society.

But I think the deeper explanation for what has happened has economic roots. From the end of World War II through the late 1970s, the economy doubled in size – as did almost everyone's income. Almost all Americans grew together. In fact, those in the bottom fifth of the income ladder saw their incomes more than double. Americans experienced upward mobility on a grand scale.

Yet for the last three and a half decades, the middle

class has been losing ground. The median wage of male workers is now lower than it was in 1980, adjusted for inflation.

In addition, all the mechanisms we've used over the last three decades to minimize the effects of this descent – young mothers streaming into paid work in the late 1970s and 1980s, everyone working longer hours in the 1990s, and then borrowing against the rising values of our homes – are now exhausted. And wages are still dropping – the median is now 4% below what it was at the start of the so-called recovery.

Meanwhile, income, wealth, and power have become more concentrated at the top than they've been in 90 years.

As a result, many have come to believe that the deck is stacked against them. Importantly, both the Tea Party and the Occupier movements began with the bailouts of Wall Street – when both groups concluded that big government and big finance had plotted against the rest of us. The former blamed government; the latter blamed Wall Street.

Political scientists have also discovered a high correlation between inequality and political divisiveness.

The last time America was this bitterly divided was in the 1920s, which was the last time income, wealth, and power were this concentrated. When average people feel the game is rigged, they get angry. And that anger can easily find its way into deep resentments – of the poor, of blacks, of immigrants, of unions, of the well-educated, of government.

This shouldn't be surprising. Demagogues throughout history have used anger to target scapegoats – thereby dividing and conquering, and distracting people from the real sources of their frustrations.

Make no mistake: The savage inequality America is experiencing today is deeply dangerous.

– *Robert Reich, Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California-Berkeley, was labor secretary the Clinton Administration. Time magazine named him one of the 10 most effective cabinet secretaries of the last century. He has written 13 books, including the best sellers Aftershock and The Work of Nations. His latest is an e-book, Beyond Outrage. He is also a founding editor of the American Prospect magazine and chairman of Common Cause.*

'Things Will Always Need Fixing'

BY ROGER B. RENSVOLD

This is the lineage of modern American reaction. In the beginning was the Spirit of the Austrian School, which begat Ludwig von Mises. And von Mises begat Buckley, and Buckley begat Goldwater, and Goldwater begat Reagan, and Reagan begat the Tea Party, along with Limbaugh, O'Reilly, Beck, Palin, Bachmann, sur-

vivalists, militiamen, gun nuts, conspiracy theorists, and a hundred other bastard mutations.

What unites them all is a belief in the "free market."

According to their common liturgy, the profit motive will provide an endless source of innovation. Human prosperity will increase without limit, all around

the globe. And it will happen automatically, because the free market is self-correcting.

Share pricing will reward good management and punish bad management. Competition will prevent the formation of monopolies and cartels. Adam Smith's Invisible Hand will gently but irresistibly guide the human race toward the best of all possible worlds.

All Christians must hold this Weltanschauung to be heretical, since it is based upon an idolatrous belief in the innate perfectibility of mankind, to be achieved by means of a perfect man-made system. All we need to do, according to this heresy, is get the system running right, and then leave it alone.

Anything that's free, will work – eventually. And, once again, that's because the free market is self-correcting over time. In other words, the free market is dynamically stable.

I had my first personal encounter with dynamic stability in 1969, when I was learning to fly helicopters. It was the hardest thing I'd ever attempted, and I wasn't doing well. My Army instructor pilots were near despair.

My biggest problem was a false expectation. I expected stability. Once I got the machine set up at a stationary hover, or in level flight, I believed that this happy condition would persist. I thought I could relax, and stop flying the aircraft. This was completely wrong.

A light helicopter, like the Bell Sioux or the Hughes Osage, is squirrely. Stop paying attention, and it starts to roll. Or pitch up. Or pitch down. Or yaw. Or, more likely, some combination of the above.

If the pilot doesn't do something, the situation will get worse and worse until the machine comes spiraling down out of the sky.

After much work and anguish, I mastered the Bell Sioux and moved on to the Bell UH1, the legendary Huey. Finally, I thought, a decent sized aircraft! Surely, this one would be more stable. Wrong. I still had to fly it.

Much later in my career, I transitioned into the Boeing Chinook, the big green banana with two rotors. By this time, I knew enough than to expect stability, but I was amazed at how perversely unstable such a huge beast could be. Without the stability augmentation system [SAS] engaged, the Hook flies just as happily sideways as it does straight ahead.

It not only looks like a banana, it has the aerodynamics of a banana. Without a working SAS, trimmed level flight is a continuous dance on the pedals.

The lessons of flying shaped my view of the world. Everything, I came to realize, is unstable. Human health and happiness are tragically transitory. Plate tectonics push up mountains, and weather brings them down. Interstellar gas and dust condense into stars, which shine for a while, and then go boom. [To us, the stars seem permanent. But on the cosmic time scale, they're as transitory as sparks flying up from a campfire.]

No surprise, then, that human affairs are also dy-

namically unstable. The key factor is the instability in the distributions of wealth and power. Wealth and power [two ways of saying the same thing] concentrate in fewer and fewer hands, as the wealthy and powerful use their advantages to acquire ever more wealth and power.

Ultimately, the situation becomes intolerable to the powerless. Some sort of revolution shakes things up, and an apparently stable status quo is instituted. But the appearance of stability is only an illusion. Over time, wealth and power begin to concentrate all over again.

Doctrinal laissez-faire is not, of course, the only heresy. So is anarchy. So is Marxism. All the -isms promise a great future, if only we can get the system right.

All these doctrines assert that imperfect men have the power to establish a perfect system, which in turn will produce a perfect world.

All of them are wrong. They don't understand the characteristic that human society shares with helicopters – intrinsic instability.

We need freedom. We also need control. We need the profit motive. We also need equitable wealth distribution. We need government by majority consent. We also need to protect the rights of minorities.

All these needs, and many others, are in permanent conflict. Today's solution won't work tomorrow. The conflicts, the struggles, the negotiations, the deals, the log-rolling, the temporizing, and the compromising – these things have gone on forever, and they must be allowed to continue.

This does not mean we should despair. It only means that we the people – we who are piloting this society – must keep our eyes open and our hands on the controls. Things will always need fixing. We must have both the means and the will to fix them.

That's why this progressive is not a libertarian. The people's government needs power. Without the power of government, the ordinary citizens of the country would have no control over the malefactors of great power, and no way to block their accumulation of even more power.

As a thought experiment, consider this: wouldn't the reactionaries be happy to hand over the government, in toto, to radicals and socialists, if the government were first stripped of all its powers?

Really – why not let the Left worry about picking up trash on the Mall?

In my view, the choice isn't between Left and Right, or among socialism, capitalism, anarchy, syndicalism, fascism, or any other -ism. It's between idealism and pragmatism. It's a choice between either facing up to the hard, frustrating, tiresome task of flying this society, or simply trimming the controls, letting go, and hoping we won't crash. Which, of course, we eventually will.

– Roger B. Rensvold, PhD, is a retired Master Army Aviator and a member of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots. He lives in Midwest City.

Jim Hightower

Getting Ahead On The Backs Of Others



Having been raised in a small-business family and now running my own small outfit, I always find it heartwarming to see hard-working, enterprising folks get ahead.

So I was really touched when I read that, even in these hard times, one extended family with three generations active in their enterprise is hanging in there and doing well. Christy, Jim, Alice, Robbie, Ann and Nancy are their names – and with good luck and old-fashioned pluck, they have managed to build a fairly sizeable family nest egg. In fact, it totals right at \$103 billion for the six of them. Yes, six people, 100-plus billion bucks. That means that these six hold more wealth than the entire bottom 40% of American families – a stash of riches greater than the combined wealth of some 127 million Americans.

How touching is that?

The “good luck” that each of them had is that they were either born into or married into the Walton family, which makes them heirs to the Walmart fortune. That’s where the “pluck” comes in, for the world’s biggest retailer plucks its profits from the threadbare pockets of low-wage American workers and impoverished sweatshop workers around the world.

Four of the Walton heirs rank as the sixth, ninth, 10th and 11th richest people in our country, possessing a combined net worth of \$95 billion. But bear in mind that “net worth” has no relationship to worthiness – these people did nothing to earn their wealth; they just inherited it. And, as Walmart plucks more from workers, the heirs grow ever luckier.

In recent years, while the wealth of the typical family plummeted by 39%, the Waltons saw their wealth grow by 22% – without having to lift a finger.

How odd then that the one-percenters [or in this case, the 1/100 of one-percenters] are hailing themselves as our country’s “makers,” while snidely referring to workaday people as “takers.” With the Waltons, it’s the exact opposite.

Indeed, you’d think that the Bentonville billionaires would realize that their fortunes are tied directly to these disparage. Apparently, they’re unaware that America’s economic recovery cannot truly be measured in the performance of the stock market but instead should be gauged by the sock market.

Most economists, pundits and politicians see today’s

boom in stocks and say: “See, the recovery is going splendidly!” But they should go to such stores as Kohl’s, Target and even the Walton’s very own Walmart and find out what’s selling. The answer would be socks. Even in the present back-to-school season [usually the second-biggest buying spree of the year], sales are sluggish at best, with customers foregoing any spending on their kids except for socks, underwear and other essentials.

This is not only an economic indicator but also a measure of the widening inequality in America. The highly ballyhooed “recovery” has been restricted to the few at the top who own nearly all of the stocks, get paychecks of more than \$100,000 a year and shop at upscale stores. But meanwhile, the many don’t have any cash to spare beyond necessities.

Walmart’s chief financial officer seems puzzled by this reality. There is, as he put it last week, “a general reluctance of customers to spend on discretionary items.” Golly, sir, why are those ingrates reluctant? Could it be because job growth in our supremely wealthy country has been both lackluster and miserly? Yes – jobs today are typically very low paying, part-time and temporary with no benefits.

Mr. Walmart-man should know this, since his retail behemoth is the leading culprit in downsizing American jobs to a poverty level in order to further enrich those at the very top, including Christy, Jim, Alice, Robbie, Ann and Nancy.

In recent months, corporate honchos at the Arkansas headquarters have directed Walmart managers not to hire at all or to concentrate on hiring temporary and part-time workers, while cutting the hours of many full-time employees.

Since the Great Recession “ended” in 2009, Walmart has slashed 100,000 people from its U.S. workforce, even as it added some 350 stores. In addition, while the giant banked more than \$4 billion in profit just in the last three months, the chieftains changed the corporate rules to make it harder and costlier for employees to get Walmart’s meager health care plan.

Yet, executives wonder why customers aren’t buying “discretionary” items. Hello – even your own workers can’t afford to buy anything in the store besides socks.

Militarizing America's Police

Attention citizens: I have received inside information revealing that global terrorists are targeting us again. Their target is not Washington, New York City or even Disneyland. Rather, it is: Concord.

You know, in New Hampshire. The state capital. Even though only about 43,000 people live there, Concord apparently has some sort of secret significance that makes it a target. We can infer this from an extraordinary defensive action being taken by local authorities.

Concord police, fully backed by the City Council, are preparing for a horrific terrorist assault. Specifically, they sought a \$258,000 grant from the Department of Homeland Security so they can gird themselves for the onslaught by purchasing a "Lenco BearCat G3" armored vehicle. Sure enough, DHS gladly coughed up the cash.

This bold stand to defend the homeland was revealed by the New Hampshire Civil Liberties Union, which obtained a copy of the grant request. Actually, it is not al-Qaida terrorists that have Concord's police gearing up for war, but, as their request put it, "the domestic type" of terrorists.

Really? Terrorists in Concord? Yes, claim police, referring vaguely to "daily challenges" and warning that the "threat is real and here."

Who are these domestic demons? The police finger two groups. First, Occupy NH. But it's a benign bunch that legitimately protests inequalities in our country, and its only "violence" has been directed at litter, having joined in local litter pickup days. Second, the Free State Project. But it's just a libertarianish outfit trying to convince 20,000 likeminded people to move to New Hampshire and support limited government. How's that for irony?

Neither group is armed or dangerous, and both are committed to nonviolence. Still, the police insist they need a BearCat G3 because of terrorist threats that might involve "chemical, biological and radiological materials, as well as explosive gases."

However, the most explosive gas in Concord is spewing directly from the out-of-control police officials who assail their own peaceful citizens as "terrorists." And the real threat to our security is DHS, which keeps shoveling our tax dollars into the militarization of America's police forces.

In fact, the real motive behind Concord's desire for this war toy seems to have been BearCat envy – it turns out that the nearby towns of Keene and Man-

chester already had BearCats, so Concord cops wanted to keep up with the Joneses in the ever-escalating police arms race.

But this ridiculous and dangerous conversion from honest police work to a martial force in our own land is not just a matter of acquiring arms, but of our police departments acquiring a military attitude.

An example of this alarming shift can be found in, of all places, the Garden of Eden.

The Biblical Garden, we're told, was heaven on Earth ... until Adam ate that apple. Then all hell broke loose. Well, hell recently erupted in the garden again – this time in Arlington, TX, on a small organic farm named "Garden of Eden."

At about 7:30 on the morning of Aug. 2, a SWAT team of armed police agents, code enforcement officers and narcotics detectives suddenly exploded all over Shellie Smith's little farm. They burst through the gate, handcuffed the terrified residents and held them at gunpoint while the agents executed the raid's mission.

Which was what, exactly? A City of Arlington spokeswoman explained, "The purpose was to improve the quality of life [and] to resolve life safety issues within neighborhoods." It seems there had been complaints about marijuana being grown on the farm and about the place being unkempt.

So, what did the derring-do raiders achieve? Widespread ridicule for their farcical bust. They captured 17 blackberry bushes, 15 okra plants, 14 tomatillo plants, some native grasses and all the sunflowers. Then they whacked down Shellie's sweet potato patch with a Weed Eater, and seized the farm's compost, along with some wooden pallets, old tires and furniture.

Notice what they did not find? Marijuana plants. Nor any other illegal products. In short, on the basis of rumor, autocratic police power was unleashed to "improve the quality of life" by destroying an organic farm.

Why would police resort to paramilitary force just to check out a few marijuana plants and some trash? Because right-wing officials and arms-industry lobbyists have been pushing hard to get police departments all across America to switch from a peacekeeping attitude to an aggressive, militarized SWAT mentality, with officers being armed, trained, and psyched to treat common citizens as enemies.

To learn more and help push back, go to aclu.org/militarization. – *Jim Hightower*

Corporate Greed Is Making Us Sick

The failure of our corporate and political leaders to make sure every worker gets good health care is causing some unpleasant consequences – like widespread stomach flu.

Ill workers often spread illness, because millions of employees who deal directly with the public are not covered by paid sick leave policies. So, when they come down with something like the stomach flu, they tend to drag themselves to work, rather than going to bed until they recover, since staying home means a loss of pay – or even the loss of their jobs.

Low-wage workers in the restaurant industry are particularly vulnerable and, since they handle food, particularly threatening. Nearly 80% of America's food service workers receive no paid sick leave, and researchers have found that about half of them go to work ill because they fear losing their jobs if they don't. As a result, a study by the Centers for Disease Control finds that ill workers are causing up to 80% of America's stomach flu outbreaks, which is one reason CDC has declared our country's lack of paid sick leave to be a major public health threat.

You'd think the industry itself would be horrified

enough by this endangerment of its customers that it would take the obvious curative step of providing the leave. But *au contraire, amigos*, such huge and hugely profitable chains as McDonald's, Red Lobster and Taco Bell not only fail to provide such common-sense care for their employees, but also have lobbied furiously against city and state efforts to require paid sick days.

Ironically, the top corporate executives of these chains [who are not involved in preparing or serving food to the public] are protected with full sick leave policies. For them to deny it to workers is idiotic, dangerously shortsighted – and even more sickening than stomach flu.

But what about our lawmakers? Where's the leadership we need on this basic issue of fairness and public health? To paraphrase an old bumper sticker: "When the people lead, leaders will follow. Or not."

Not when the "leaders" are in the pocket of corporate interests that don't like where the people are leading. Take Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin, who never met a corporate pocket too grungy to climb

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Forget Student Loans – Make Higher Ed Free

Well, finally! Hard-right congressional leaders and the Obama White House have agreed that interest rates on student loans should not double to nearly 7%, as they let happen early in July. Instead, college students will be billed at a rate that will steadily rise higher than 8%.

This is progress?

Temporarily, yes, because the new law drops this year's rate to 3.8%. But, for the longer run, obviously not. Even capping the interest rate at 8.25%, as the White House demanded, is too high, for it still saddles students with a crushing debt of some \$20,000 to \$40,000 for a four-year degree, just as they're getting started on their economic path.

But worse, lawmakers are playing small ball again, avoiding the big issue they should be addressing. Bickering over interest-rate percentages shrivels the public debate to its most picayune and meanest point, which our so-called leaders seem to specialize in these days.

They focus on the price of everything, without

grasping the value of anything. And the value of a college education – not only to America's youth, but most significantly to our whole society's economic and democratic future – is clearly established.

So the big question to be asking is this: Why isn't higher education free? Les Leopold, director of the Labor Institute, notes in a July 2 Alternet piece, "For over 150 years, our nation has recognized that tuition-free primary and secondary schools were absolutely vital to the growth and functioning of our commonwealth."

Providing free education, from kindergarten through high school, paid off big for us. Today, though, that's not enough, for open access to a college degree or other advanced training is as vital to America as a high school diploma has been in our past.

Forget interest rates, young people should not be blocked by a massive debt-load from getting the education that they need to succeed – but also that all of America needs them to have for our mutual prosperity and democratic strength.

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Greed

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into. This story starts in 2008, when the people of Milwaukee took the lead on the obvious need for a program allowing employees to earn a few days of paid sick leave each year, to be used if they fall ill or must care for a sick family member. Seven out of 10 Milwaukee voters approved that measure in a city-wide referendum.

Corporate interests, however, sued to stall the people's will, tying the sick leave provision up in court until 2011. By then, the corporations had put up big bucks to put Walker into the governorship – and right into their pocket. Sure enough, he dutifully nullified the Milwaukee vote by passing a “state pre-emption” law, autocratically banning local governments from requiring sick leave benefits for employees.

Just three months later, Walker's pre-emption ploy was the star at a meeting of ALEC, the corporate front group that brings state legislators into secret sessions with CEOs and lobbyists. There, legislators are handed model laws to benefit corporations – then sent home to pass them.

At a session overseen by Taco Bell, attendees got copies of Walker's no-paid-sick-leave edict, along with a how-to-pass-it lecture by the National Restaurant Association. “Go forth, and pre-empt local de-

mocracy!” was the message.

And, lo, they did. Bills summarily prohibiting local governments from passing paid-sick-leave ordinances are being considered in at least 12 states this year, and Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Kansas, Mississippi and Tennessee have already passed theirs.

Florida's process was especially ugly. Organize Now, a coalition of voters in Orlando, had obtained 50,000 signatures to put a sick leave referendum on last November's ballot. But, pressured by the hugely profitable Disney World empire, county commissioners arbitrarily removed it from the ballot.

The scrappy coalition, however, took 'em to court – and won, getting the referendum rescheduled for a 2014 vote. Disney & Gang scuttled off to Tallahassee this year to conspire with Gov. Rick Snyder and GOP legislative leaders. Quicker than a bullet leaves a gun, those corporate-hugging politicians obligingly delivered a “kill shot” to Orlando voters by enacting a Walkeresque state usurpation of local authority.

By spreading Walker's autocratic nastiness from state to state, money-grubbing low-wage profiteers are literally spreading illness all across our land.

– *Jim Hightower*

Loans

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Let me frame the question in terms of a real-life choice: Is making higher education available to every American more important to our national interest than letting Wall Street profiteers make a few more billions of dollars each year?

Answer: Of course. Yet, our political leaders – pushed by Wall Street lobbyists – have been making the opposite choice for years. As a result, banksters have loaded students down with a mountain of high-interest loans, rising from just over \$2 billion in total debt a decade ago to nearly a trillion last year.

Worse, this has made the financiers – either banks or government lenders – the de facto gatekeepers of advanced education and training, shutting out thousands of young people each year who want to get ahead, but are not able to hurdle the price barrier.

This is enormously costly to America. And it's completely unnecessary. The smart choice would be to make college and professional training free – as we learned from the GI Bill after World War II. Under this 1944 law, about 7.8 million veterans were trained, including some 2.2 million who went to college; 3.5 million who went to trade, technical or other schools; 1.4 million who got on-the-job training; and 700,000

who got farm training.

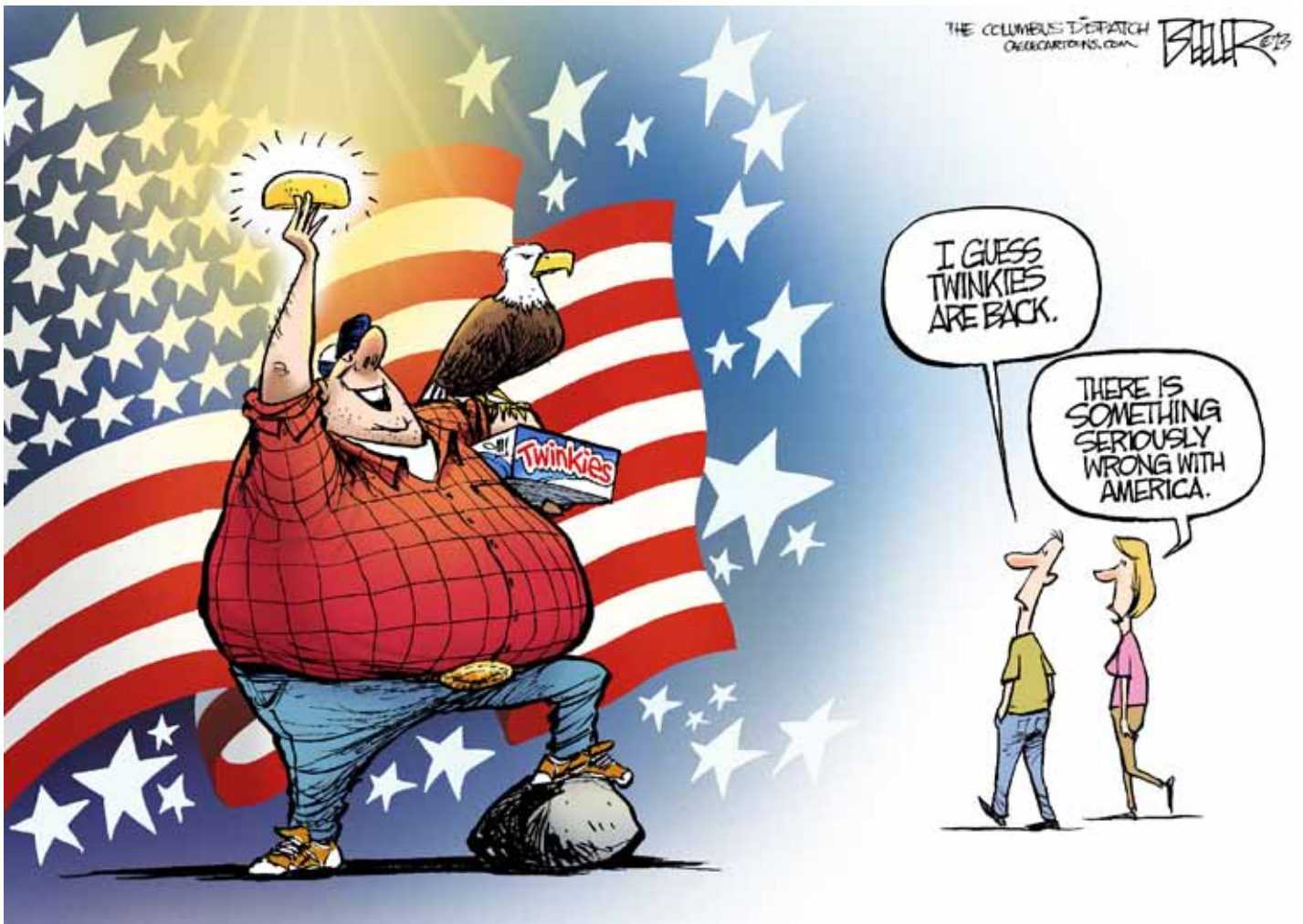
The total cost of the program was \$14.5 billion – \$1,860 per vet. A 1988 congressional study found that every public dollar invested in the GI Bill produced a \$7 increase in our nation's economic output.

Likewise, a similar investment today in universal access – i.e., free access – to higher learning and training would not only more than pay for itself, but it would also produce a widely shared prosperity and deliver the priceless return of a broadly educated citizenry. Of course, an upfront investment in a smarter, more productive, more democratic civilization is pricey. So where do we get the money to do what America needs? Get it from where it went.

Wall Street's super-rich speculators are now making millions of super-fast, robotic financial transactions per second, generating trillions of dollars a year for them – but producing nothing of real value for us, while distorting and endangering markets.

Put a tiny tax on each of those transactions, affecting only the automated gambles made by speculators, and more than enough money will come into the public coffers to free up higher-ed for all.

– *Jim Hightower*



WORLD LEADER

Five Ways In Which 'American Exceptionalism' Isn't So Grand

BY JUDY MOLLAND

America, the land of the brave and the free. America, the best country in the world. That's how many Americans like to speak of their country and, indeed, it is the reason many immigrants see the United States as the land of their dreams.

There's a dark side to this, however – ways in which this country is the best that it should not be proud of.

1. OBESITY

Arriving in the U.S. as an immigrant, I was amazed at the size of restaurant portions. So it's no surprise to learn that the U.S. has been ranked as the most obese country in the world. Obesity is indeed a national health crisis and contributes to an estimated

100,000 to 400,000 deaths in the U.S. per year. In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 35.7% of American adults are obese, as well as 17% of children and adolescents.

Experts indicate that the love of fast food, sugary drinks, processed food and sweet treats accounts for much of this, but those portion sizes are also to blame. It's so easy to gain weight here since the ethic driven into people is to finish what's on their plates. Since there's so much put on people's plates in the United States, they're invariably going to end up eating more.

2. HEALTH CARE

Individuals spent more money per person on health

care in the United States than in any other country in the world, about \$5,300 annually. In comparison, Switzerland spends about \$3,500 per person per year, Japan about \$2,000 and Turkey as little as \$446 per person each year.

The main reason for the high cost of American health care is that most medical services, materials, technologies and drugs are more expensive than in other industrialized countries. Governments in many other countries play a much stronger role in financing health care services and their citizens are obliged to help pay for it through taxes. In return, all are usually covered by national health insurance. ObamaCare, anyone?

3. GIVING BIRTH

According to a recent New York Times-commissioned analysis, the total average cost of having a baby is \$37,341, making the United States the most expensive place in the world to have one. This covers prenatal care [\$6,257], birth [\$18,136 on average], postpartum care [\$528] and newborn medical care [\$12,419].

The total is so high in part because every service is billed separately.

And it's not that women in other countries, where maternity expenses are free or inexpensive, get lower-quality care. In fact, America has one of the highest rates of infant and maternal death among industrialized countries.

Insurance doesn't necessarily help: 62% of private plans come with no maternity coverage. Mothers-to-be have to go through what the Times calls "an extended shopping trip through the American health-care bazaar" where they try to figure out the cost of things like ultrasounds and blood tests. Pricing is widely variable, and it's common for mothers to re-

ceive treatments they really don't need.

4. ENERGY USE PER PERSON

The U.S. is the global leader in the amount of energy use per person. Specifically, the U.S. is No. 1 in electricity consumption and in oil consumption, and No. 2 in coal consumption, right behind China.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that Americans account for nearly 19% of Planet Earth's total primary energy consumption, which comes from petroleum, natural gas, coal, nuclear and renewable energy.

What's to blame for these numbers? The cost of heating and cooling increasingly large homes, electricity requirements for home electronics, the high amount of energy required to produce consumer goods in the industrial sector, and the insistence on owning your own car and driving everywhere.

5. DEFENSE SPENDING

The U.S. spends far more than any other country on defense and security. Since 2001, the base defense budget has soared from \$287 billion to \$530 billion, a figure that doesn't even include the primary costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The U.S. government actually spent about \$718 billion on defense and international security assistance in 2011, compared to 2% that it spent on education. That includes all of the Pentagon's underlying costs as well as the price tag for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which came to \$159 billion in 2011. It also includes arms transfers to foreign governments.

It does not, however, include benefits for veterans, which came to \$127 billion in 2011, or about 3.5% of the federal budget.

The United States is a remarkable country in many ways, but certainly not all ways.

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Feds Launch One-Stop ObamaCare Shop For Businesses

With more provisions of the Affordable Care Act kicking in next month, the Obama Administration has launched BusinessUSA.gov/health-care, designed to be a one-stop website providing employers of all sizes educational materials on how the health care law may affect businesses and help them compete.

According to the Small Business Administration, the site "includes a wizard tool that is tailored based on size and location, so businesses can learn how the law helps them provide affordable coverage options to their employees while still meeting their bottom line.

"The site will act as a user-friendly hub that connects employers to informational content on tax credits and other provisions of the law from the Small Business Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], and

the Treasury Department."

Many parts of the ACA – signed into law in March 2010 – are already in effect, including new consumer protections, and improvements to health care coverage that ensure consumers get more value for their premium dollars.

Additional benefits will take effect later this year and beyond. Starting Oct. 1, individuals – including those who are self-employed – and small businesses looking for a better plan will have a new way to shop for private health insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplace and the Small Business Health Options Program [SHOP] found at HealthCare.gov.

Individuals may be eligible for lower costs on their monthly premiums and self-employed individuals and small businesses may be eligible for tax credits to help with the costs of coverage.

Joe Conason



What Makes Chelsea Clinton Run ... But Not For Public Office

To discover what Chelsea Clinton is doing with her life – and why – shouldn't pose much of a challenge to any reasonably industrious journalist. In recent months, after all, she has stepped into the spotlight to advance the causes that excite her. Yet the political press still seems far more inclined to ruminate over her supposed ambitions rather than report her real concerns.

Which, according to her include, among other things, an unshakeable obsession with diarrhea.

Speculation over the potential political future of the former First Daughter erupted recently in Politico, on the CNN website and on the Washingtonpost.com political blog The Fix, which published "Where Chelsea Could Run" – a close analysis of residency requirements for a New York City Council seat and her obvious lack of credentials to seek the New York state attorney general's office [she isn't a lawyer]. It is true that she gave an opening for such stories by responding candidly to a question from CNN and the BBC, saying that she has no current plans to run for office but might consider entering politics "someday."

"I'm ... grateful to live in a city and a state and a country where I really believe in my elected officials and their ethos and their competencies," she said. "Someday, if either of those weren't true and I thought I could make more of a difference in the public sector, or if I didn't like how my city or state or country were being run, I'd have to ask and answer that question."

She went on to explain: "I really felt like I could make a difference and then I should make a difference. And I had very much led a deliberately private life for a long time, and now I'm attempting to lead a purposely public life."

As both news outlets noted, her response was exactly the same answer she has given to the same question in past interviews. Still the Post blogger insisted, "It's also clear she is leaving that door open." Yes, perhaps, but so what?

Comically enough, this flurry of pointless prognostication coincided with her latest trip to Africa, where she demonstrated precisely what she means when she mentions a public life – namely, her role as the Clinton Foundation's vice chair and, increasingly, as its public face and spokesperson. She spent nine

days with her father and a large contingent of foundation donors and press [including me] on a fast-paced, exhilarating and occasionally grueling tour through Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, and South Africa, touching down at the sites of health clinics, agricultural projects, youth service organizations and other efforts to improve the lives of Africans.

The tumultuous welcome received by the Clinton delegation at every stop suggested the impact of the foundation's work, from life-saving AIDS medications and quality health services provided to millions across the continent to pioneering agricultural support for small farmers to major renewable energy projects – as well as a newly announced initiative to produce and manufacture fortified foods in six African countries with the aim of ending child malnutrition on the continent.

All of the Clintons have visited Africa repeatedly – at least nine or 10 times for the former president – creating relationships that will serve their own country well as that continent's economic and political importance grow. This year, however, marked the 15th anniversary of Bill Clinton's historic 1998 presidential visit, which had been preceded by a tour that Chelsea and Hillary Rodham Clinton undertook the year before. While the American media covered some of those visits and ignored others, the wide-ranging philanthropic endeavors of the former president – and now his daughter – have almost always gotten inadequate attention [with CNN as the honorable exception].

Interviewed in Johannesburg on the current trip's final evening, Chelsea said she is bemused by all the strained conjecture about her prospective candidacy.

"Reading those stories, I just found it a bit bewildering, because what I said in my CNN interview as well as in my BBC interview are things I've said before and have said repeatedly before, whenever I've been asked. ... I keep saying the same thing because it continues to be true."

Having offered the same answer for two years whenever a reporter has asked whether she plans to run for elected office, she wonders, "Why is that news? I understand why maybe it was news the first time, but not now. And I understand why the CNN correspon-

dent and the BBC correspondent would have asked about it, but not why it would have had kind of a ripple effect – because it's something to which I've had a consistent answer and something I've had a very consistent feeling about."

Instead of recycling stale political guesswork, she says, "I wish that there was more interest in the work we're doing here [in Africa] on the part of the mainstream press – the work that we're grateful to do and the work that I personally am now grateful to be part of."

And if that doesn't attract more journalistic attention, she is willing to confess that "I personally am obsessed with diarrhea" – meaning the symptoms of waterborne disease that leads to diarrhea, dehydration and death for millions of children annually

across Africa. Aside from her growing experience in the field, she holds a master's in public health from Columbia University. "I wish that someone wanted to talk about diarrhea and why I think we really have the chance to eradicate diarrhea, even before every country across the African continent or across the world has strong public health systems of sanitation and clean water. ... Yes, I wish the mainstream media were interested in things like our growing work in diarrhea or the work that we're doing in agriculture or the work we're doing on HIV/AIDS and how important that is."

No wonder she is puzzled. If media outlets think their readers find Chelsea Clinton so fascinating, why don't they just report what she is actually doing?

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If You Drink, Don't Enjoy It

BY FROMA HARROP

An unapologetic drinker, writer H.L. Mencken blamed Prohibition on American moralists' distaste for happiness. "A Puritan is not against bullfighting because of the pain it gives the bull," he wrote, "but because of the pleasure it gives the spectators."

Today's neo-prohibitionists know that fist-banging sermons about demon rum sound dated, so they've medicalized the warnings: Alcohol causes cancer and insanity. And they bury research showing the medical benefits of moderate drinking under extremely low-ball definitions of "moderate."

"Does alcohol make you fat?" is an incarnation recently aired in *The Wall Street Journal*. Half the experts quoted warn that drinking alcohol puts weight on. The other half said that it helps control weight.

The cautioners belong to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. It should surprise no one that an institute so named would not smile on the fruit of the vineyards.

Before we go on, a disclaimer. Alcoholism is a curse, and those so afflicted must learn to not drink at all. But for non-alcoholics, drinking should be the imbibers' business, assuming of course that the person is not driving while inebriated.

Ironically, the neo-prohibitionist approach may be counterproductive to the problem of drunken driving. The national blood-alcohol limit for drivers has been continually lowered to the current .08%. But the hideous cases of drunken driving almost always involve motorists way beyond that limit.

In Seattle last March, a driver with a preliminary breath-alcohol level of .22 killed a couple and seriously injured two young family members as they crossed a street. That's three times the legal limit.

Critics of demands for still lower blood-alcohol limits argue that they pull harmless social drinkers into the dragnet, wasting resources better spent on putting the hard-core offenders behind bars. The found-

er of Mothers Against Drunk Driving [MADD] quit the organization in 1985 for what she charged was one such neo-prohibitionist turn.

"I didn't start MADD to deal with alcohol," Candy Lightner said. "I started MADD to deal with the issue of drunk driving."

Back at the debate over drinking and weight, puritanical thinking often bubbles up from an evident concern for health. Consider the research cited in the journal *Physiology & Behavior* that alcohol may enhance "the short-term rewarding effects of consuming food."

What's wrong with that? Besides, wine cultures – Italy and France, for example – tend to have slender people. Perhaps wine marries well with healthy food choices, as in the Mediterranean diet. Perhaps moderate alcohol consumption relaxes those who overeat as a response to stress.

The *Wall Street Journal* referenced Harvard studies suggesting that alcohol in moderation actually helps maintain weight. Researcher Eric Rimm noted that after drinking alcohol, people's heart rate rose, causing them to burn more calories. The increase in calorie burning was small, he carefully added, and that desire to lose weight is not reason to drink.

Another theory is that female drinkers eat fewer sweet foods because alcohol arouses the same pleasure center in the brain as do sugary things. Again, that darn pleasure center. [Sorry, guys, the jury's still out on how you react.]

Good science accepts that temperate drinking protects somewhat against heart disease and has been associated with a lower risk for dementia. And the Nurses' Health Study found that while alcohol does raise the risk for breast cancer, adequate intake of folic acid may cancel it.

If you can drink responsibly and want to, go ahead. Just don't say you enjoy it.

'How Does A War Like This End?'

DIRTY WARS

The World Is A Battlefield

By Jeremy Scahill

Nation Books

680 pages, \$29.99

BY CECIL ACUFF

Jeremy Scahill's new book is as approaching a dark cavity in an old tree. One would instinctively say, "I don't wanna go there – there are creepy, crawly things, and, I'm better off not knowing."

Life is filled with shadowy foreboding places, but most Americans are conditioned to look the other way. They defend their ignorance with great vigor, especially as to national security and war.

But reporter Scahill has cared enough to look, probe, poke, peek, and examine the dark hollow of the Global War on Terror.

This book tells the story of the expansion of covert U.S. wars, the abuse of executive privilege, state secrets, and the embrace of unaccountable elite military units who answer only to the White House.

The Boston Marathon bombing events offer the simplest, but not encouraging answer: not easily. Twelve years of continuous war in which the full extent of U.S. activities are just now being revealed by serious independent journalists as Scahill. Few would deny the vicious cycle from which there appears to be no ready respite.

Scahill's book takes a closer look at two of the most explosive themes.

The White House gave the military explicit permission to spy, torture, and assassinate with official cover-up wherever wanted. There were torture chambers where untold numbers of mostly innocent Muslims suffered at the height of these hyper-aggressive counter-terror operations.

Fuse that with 10 years of extra-judicial drone strikes. Then would it be so hard to imagine where these new elements of terror, the freshly minted martyrs and the al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in Yemen, Pakistan, North Africa and beyond were coming from?

Iraq could serve as a lab for creating a new kill/capture machine, centered on Joint Special Operations Command [JSOC].

This would be held accountable to only a small group of White House, and Pentagon insiders.

In many ways, this was the vision the war-types Rumsfeld and Cheney longed for. No accountability,

maximum secrecy, and total flexibility.

A national magazine asked in 2009 about the responsibility for the torture and abuse allegations raised against Task Force 121 in Iraq, otherwise known as NAMA [Nasty-Ass Military Area].

At Camp NAMA was a "Soft Room" for cooperative and high-ranked detainees, Blue and Red rooms for medium-intensity interrogations. The Black Room was preserved from its days as a torture chamber under Saddam.

For good measure, the Task Force kept meat hooks that hung from the ceiling during the Iraqi dictator's reign of terror in place for their use.

Today, the Global War on Terror has been institutionalized by the Obama White House, using drone, cruise missile, and Special Ops raids. Future U.S. presidents, of either party, will inherit a streamlined process for assassinating American enemies, perceived or real. They will inherit an executive branch with sweeping power, rationalized under the banner of national security.

Author Scahill says, "I think we're living in a world where we won't be immune to the payback for some of the things we've done. Unless we, as a society, completely re-imagine what a national security policy would look like. It would be one that recognizes the dignity of other people around the world to practice their religion or determine their form of government. Unless Americans are willing to do this, they're doomed to see a repeat of a 9/11 attack, or something that's smaller scale, but constant."

Scahill's book tells the story of the expansion of covert wars, the abuse of executive privilege, state secrets, and the embrace of unaccountable elite military units who answer only to the White House.

Six hundred and eighty pages later, he concludes with a simple question: "Americans must painfully ask, how does a war like this end?"

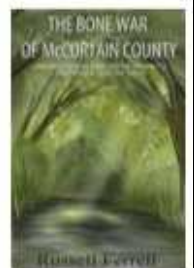
– The author lives in Perkins

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Jesus: Zealot, Sage Or Socialist?

ZEALOT

*The Life And Times Of
Jesus Of Nazareth*

*By Reza Aslan
Random House
336 pages, \$27*

BY HARRY T. COOK

I gave up the dry martini for the sake of a clearer head. I think I may now have to give up reading the op-ed page of the New York Times for the sake of keeping my blood pressure at the happy level of 130/68.

My frustration with the page may have hit a new high on Aug. 4 when, side by side, appeared columns by T.M. Luhrmann, the Times' newest darling – a Stanford anthropologist who studies goof-ball religions – and the perennially dyspeptic Catholic Ross Douhat.

Luhrmann rhapsodized about prayer as if it were not a form of para-psychotic behavior. As for Douhat, he decided to get some skin in the new game forming around the Muslim writer with the same last name C.S. Lewis gave to his fictional lion.

Can you not feel the earthquake gathering momentum in Lewis' grave? Here we have a Muslim writing a book about "Jesus" and pronouncing him a revolutionary zealot whose laser-beam focus was beating Rome at its own game.

Had that been the case, the myth of Sisyphus and his rock would have been trumped by the myth of Jesus the revolutionary, who could not keep Rome from falling down on him no matter how hard

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he may have pushed against its massive force.

If the Iranian author's name were Joe Smith – and if he were not Iranian – no one would care about his evanescent sparkler of a book in a world of scholarly fireworks. Douhat fastened on the idea that Reza

Aslan's Jesus and his church "up-ended the ancient world's violent, patriarchal, hierarchical norms."

Really? As to the upended "violent" norms, forget neither the brutal Crusades nor the more recent epidemic of child abuse among Christian clergy. As to "pa-

triarchal” norms being done away with, check out the all-male priesthood that persists in the Roman Catholic Church with no sign that it will be altered any time soon. As to “hierarchical” norms, they’re still in place and ever more strenuously enforced. Lord Acton was spot-on about the corrupting nature of power.

Had Douhat proposed a thesis on those terms to the faculty of the graduate school in which I began my scholarly journey, he would have been laughed off campus. And what is Douhat’s time bracket for “early Christian zeal”? By the time Constantine the Great had made the most expeditious conversion ever to Christianity, the church Douhat thinks his Jesus founded had fallen into bed with empire and has never left it.

Well, OK, there was Luther, but the Protestant movement quickly cobbled together its own banana republics of ecclesiastical power.

So much for Douhat’s uncertain grasp of ecclesiastical history. Meanwhile, I have been engaged with the rigors of New Testament scholarship – including early Christian history – for half a century. I have kept up my own research in the area and have read mountains of other scholars’ work for all of which forests of trees were mown down.

The principle hypothesis of my research over the past 15 years is that the Jesus of the early Christian [or Jesus Judaism] documents may be a composite character composed of a number of types, one of which J. Dominic Crossan denominated “itinerant sages.”

How I arrived at that hypothesis is how one is supposed to arrive at one – almost by accident. After living with the texts of the 20-some documents known as “gospels” for most of 50 years, I began to see not one but many Jesuses variously depicted in them – sometimes variously in the same gospel.

For the first several years on that track, I was trying to disprove the hypothesis [which is what one who aspires to scholarship ought to do]. I failed in that effort for some time. Then against my will, my up-bringing and my own self-interest, I began to take the hypothesis seriously.

What I had – and anyone seriously working on the “Jesus question” has – are the canonical texts of

the New Testament and the non-canonical texts of the gnostic gospels and related material – external authentication of an historical Jesus being slim to none.

Work with those biblical texts over the long term – having put aside your Sunday school, catechism and seminary education as best you can – and you cannot honestly say that, for instance, the Jesus person to whom the Gospel of Thomas attributed 114 sayings is the same Jesus person depicted in the Gospel of John.

As Elaine Pagels points out in *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* [pages 30-73 and 114-142], the church chose John’s Jesus.

The grief I have taken in merely putting out what remains a hypothesis with no claim made for its eternal and undivided truth has been nothing short of hysterical. My über-liberal friends and colleagues insist that Jesus was something like Aslan’s fiery zealot. My more evangelical friends – if friends they are – insist that he was the witting martyr who, by his cross and resurrection, saved us from our sins and paved our way to life everlasting. Others want to see him as a humble first century rabbi. And it goes on and on.

One thing is true: the English “Jesus” has been tortured out of the Aramaic Yeshua after being sliced and diced into the Greek, then into the Latin. Yeshua is, for all intents and purposes, “Joshua,” meaning “one who saves.”

One of the contributors to the Gospel According to Matthew has Yahweh tell Joseph in a dream to name his illegitimate son “Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Yeshua was a popular name for male children in the Palestinian world of antiquity. Flavius Josephus mentions the following: Jesus son of Phabet, Jesus son of Ananus, Jesus son of Sapphias, Jesus brother of Onias, Jesus son of Gamaliel, Jesus son of Damneus, Jesus son of Gamala, Jesus son of Nun, Jesus son of Saphat, Jesus son of Thebuthus and Jesus son of Josedek.

Withal, Aslan may be right about a Jesus having been a zealous revolutionary. Crossan is almost surely right about a Jesus being, as he put it, a “Mediterranean Jewish peasant” who may have been at the same time an “itinerant sage.” The liberation theology people may be right in saying that a Jesus was a socialist at heart. And I may be right in saying that the Jesus may be a composite of all of them.

It is not a popular hypothesis. I was once told that if I kept on with it, I might not go to heaven when I die.

I’ll take that chance.

– *The author is an Episcopal priest, journalist and author living in Michigan*

Oklahoma Friends Meetings (Quakers)

Friends believe there is that of God in everyone. They cannot prove this, but when they act as if it were true, their trust is justified.

- Author unknown

MEETING FOR WORSHIP SCHEDULE AND CONTACTS

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NORMAN: Sunday morning. Call 405.321.7971

KAIAMICHI WORSHIP GROUP (SE OK): Monthly. Call 918.569.4803.

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

heartening. It's a frightening reminder that many of our neighbors live in Coburn's alternate universe – and they breed.

Escape Hatch

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Gov. Mary Fallin's refusal to embrace ObamaCare's Medicaid expansion is pure politics: She's scared witless of a primary challenge from the GOP's extremist teabagger wing.

Yet it's also worth remembering that Fallin is, above all, a creature of Oklahoma's corporate elite – many of whom [see Chambers of Commerce and big hospital interests] think the expansion is a splendid idea that could save rural medical centers from collapsing beneath the weight of uncompensated care.

The Silk Suits, though, are all about winning elections and maintaining power. They know that if Fallin were to reverse course now, she would unleash the Tea Party beast that wields outsize influence in the GOP primary.

So, they exercise patience. If Fallin ends up with no credible primary challenger from her right flank, she would be free to change her mind with few political repercussions after the April 9-11 filing period. The same would be true after June 24, if she survived a primary challenge.

What many people don't know is Fallin could accept Medicaid expansion whenever she wants, extending coverage to about a quarter of million of Oklahoma's working poor.

Just because she's said no, no and hell no – and wouldn't even consider including it in the special session, even though Insure Oklahoma is in jeopardy – doesn't prohibit her from taking the feds up on their offer when the time is right ... politically.

Of course, Fallin may simply dig her heels in deeper and forever refuse to do the right thing. It wouldn't be the first time politics trumps what's best for Oklahoma's have-nots. Nor, sadly, will it be the last.

It would be a wonderful thing, however, if Fallin were to change her mind, even if it takes until after next June's primary [which may mean it would be the 2015 legislative session before the expansion could be approved officially].

That would be small consolation, though, to working poor Oklahomans who would go uncovered for another half a year or so – with little choice but to ignore festering health problems until they get bad enough to seek treatment at the most expensive clinic: the emergency room.

Isn't that a sad commentary on 21st Century Oklahoma politics?

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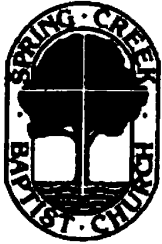
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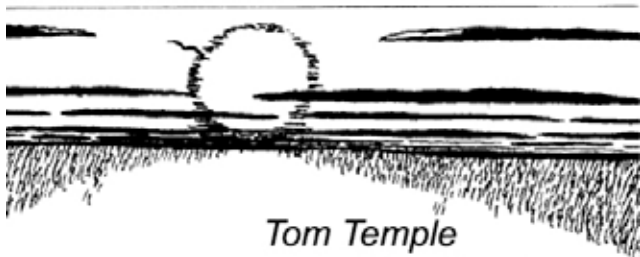


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Observerscope

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Congratulations to Geronimo High School's Alyson Glass, winner of the 2013 Bob Costas Grant for Teaching of Writing. She'll use the funds to introduce her students to the world of professional writing, via workshops, a creative writing club and publication of a literary magazine.

Dart: To a Congress that has cut \$1 billion from youth job programs over the last decade. The overall unemployment rate for teenagers is now at 25.1%; for black teens 43.1%.

If it seems Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham are featured all-too-often on Sunday morning talk shows, it's because, well, they are: Between 2010 and June 3, McCain appeared 61 times and Graham 58, outpacing Senate Dems Dick Durbin [52] and Chuck Schumer [35]. Oklahoma's Tom Coburn was on 16 times, Jim Inhofe zilch. – Roll Call

Laurel: To Refunk My Junk's Allison Griffith, teaching a furniture restoration class recently to May tornado survivors rebuilding their homes. The Edmond Fine Arts Institute hosted the session.

What's good for the goose? Gov. Mary Fallin refuses to expand the special session agenda to deal with health care crisis among Oklahoma's working poor. Yet state taxpayers pick up the tab [\$18,113 per year] for her family's premiums – a Cadillac benefit that features \$30 doctor co-pays and \$10 generic drug costs. – Oklahoma Watch

In 1978, 47% of those born between 1946 and 1964 favored legalizing marijuana, yet support plummeted as Baby Boomers aged, dropping to 17% in 1990. Now, a new Pew Research Center poll finds that half think pot should be legal. – AARP

Disgraceful: Median annual income for older women is a meager \$15,000. Unemployment among older women is 20.5%, compared to 7.2% for men. Seventy percent of older Americans living in poverty are women. – www.OWL-national.org

As expected, U.S. District Judge Vicki Miles-LeGrange declared unconstitutional the SQ 755-approved prohibition on state courts considering international or Sharia law. Poor state Rep. Sally Kern had to be sedated.

Gov. Mary Fallin and First Dude Wade Christensen are hosting 17th annual Septemberfest at the Governor's Mansion and Oklahoma History Center Sept. 7 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free.

Letters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

I agree with Jimmy Carter as he told people in Atlanta [quote from Der Spiegel, a German newsmagazine but unreported in the U.S.]: "America does not at the moment have a functioning democracy."

The Repug-ricans said they were going to spread our democracy to all those other nations. Reckon we might get it back?

Al Engel
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights [CRR] joined the Oklahoma Coalition for Reproductive Justice [OCRJ] in court Aug. 19. These organizations challenged an Oklahoma law which restricts women's access to emergency contraception [called Plan B or the morning-after pill] when they need it most – as soon as possible after unprotected sex or after accidental failure of contraception.

This law requires that females under age 17 must have a prescription for the morning-after pill, which if taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex [or contraceptive failure], will most likely prevent pregnancy and is considered safe for girls of reproductive age to self-administer. Getting a doctor's appointment and a prescription are time-consuming endeavors which could cause unacceptable delays.

Even an older woman must show identification to prove her age. What if she doesn't have an identification card?

These unnecessary barriers were set up by our Oklahoma Legislature which apparently has a fixation on female reproduction. For example, this Legislature has passed a barrage of bills over the last few years which deal with abortion. One would think that abortion foes would be among the strongest proponents of all types of contraception. Apparently not.

Happily, the court has intervened. On Aug. 19, State District Judge Lisa Davis ruled that the law cannot go into effect while the lawsuit is pending. She added that CRR's challenge has a high likelihood of succeeding.

Meanwhile, Oklahoma women of all ages can buy the morning-after pill on pharmacy shelves without restrictions.

Wanda Jo Stapleton
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: Democrat Wanda Jo Stapleton represented south OKC in the state House from 1986-96.

Editor, The Observer:

I have wondered for years why Moore gets hit over and over by tornados. It's not as if they deserved it – Moore is surely no worse than any other small metropolitan suburb, and you can't fault the citizens on courage!



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But I went to the map to see if there was some geographical reason, and there it was, plain as day: It's the South Canadian.

I grew up in Norman when it was a small town, and I used to hear the fable repeated that the Indians always said tornados would never hit Norman because when they come up out of the southwest and strike the broad, sandy South Canadian they just whirl away up north.

And it's pretty much true: up they go 'til, at a point almost exactly three miles due southeast of Moore, the river takes a 90-degree jog back to the west.

No self-respecting tornado is going to turn around and go back west, so right there, every time, the tornado that didn't hit further south hops the river and races up due northeastward and hits Moore. Look at it! You can't miss it!

So what I want to say, based on this simple discovery, is that any school, built in a town that had a knife pointed straight at its heart the way Moore has, would be criminally negligent if they did not have a safe room or tornado shelter.

If the money isn't in the budget, they should canvass for it as a charity, or pass a bond issue, or all the parents in the community should get out their shovels and go dig a shelter themselves!

This is too important, and too obvious, to ignore!

Nancy Fowler
Daisy

Editor, The Observer:

The best way to determine if a member of Congress should be retired is to be a mystery caller to the office of "The Honorable."

I tried it on the Washington, DC office of the U.S. House of Representatives' minority leader, Democratic Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi.

I was treated so cold I felt like a homeless bum in the streets of Pelosi's hometown, San Francisco.

Call No. 1: I asked to talk to someone about how she voted on the farm bill. I was switched to an answering machine.

Call No. 2: I called back and asked to speak to a live person. I got the answering machine, again.

Call No. 3: I called back, again, and said, "Listen, I want to talk to a live person. I teach in a Title I elementary school whose funds are being cut. My students go to bed hungry. Any Democrat who votes for a farm bill that cuts food stamps is no Democrat." My phone went dead.

My one-room schoolhouse teacher mama, Louise Cooper Dennis, taught me this lesson: "Virginia, there are two absolutes in life. Be a Methodist and be a Democrat."

So, this "Yellow Dog Democrat" says that after 25 years in Congress, "Fancy Nancy" has been kowtowed to long enough. The voters should hang up on her and her "blue dogs" in 2014.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

LET US SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY WITH IRAN

NOW is the time to improve diplomatic relations between the US and Iran. Ahmadinejad is gone and newly elected Iranian president Hassan Rouhani has pledged better relations with the west. He has appointed a pro-western, US-educated foreign minister, Javad Zarif. Additionally, Rouhani has expressed openness to negotiations on Iran's nuclear programs, which are currently most likely all for peaceful electrical and medical needs according to the IAEA. Enhanced inspections could settle any doubts.

Considering Middle East tensions and violence right now, Iran could be a natural ally of the US and Israel toward stability in the region. Iran has the highest population of Jews in the Middle East outside of Israel.

It is counter-productive now to marginalize Iran with extremist characterizations, military threats, and talk of more stringent sanctions. Iran needs oil revenues for food, medicine and other human needs, so there is an opening for dialogue beneficial to the interests of peace.

Improved relations with Iran could be a great legacy of our time. Ask Congress members to encourage and support the administration in pursuing improved relations with Iran in the best interests of the USA.

Contact our Senators

c/oUS Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Tom Coburn (OK)

snipr.com/ecoburn
DC Tel: (202) 224-5754
DC Fax: (202) 224-6008
OKC Ofc: (405) 231-4941
Tulsa Ofc: (918) 581-7651

Senator Jim Inhofe (OK)

snipr.com/einhofe
DC Tel: (202) 224-4721
DC Fax: (202) 228-0380
OKC Ofc: (405) 608-4381
Tulsa Ofc: (918) 748-5111

Contact a US Representative

c/oUS House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

D-1: Jim Bridenstine (Tulsa)

snipr.com/ebridenstine
DC Tel: (202) 225-2211
DC Fax: (202) 225-9187
Tulsa Ofc: (918) 935-3222

D-2: Markwayne Mullin (Musk)

snipr.com/emullin
DC Tel: (202) 225-2701
DC Fax: (202) 225-3038
Muskogee Ofc: (918) 687-2533

D-3: Frank Lucas (W. OK)

snipr.com/elucas
DC Tel: (202) 225-5565
DC Fax: (202) 225-8698
OKC Ofc: (405) 373-1958

D-4: Tom Cole (Nor & SW OK)

snipr.com/etcole
DC Tel: (202) 225-6165
DC Fax: (202) 225-3512
Norman Ofc: (405) 329-6500

D-5: James Lankford (OKC)

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DC Tel: (202) 225-2132
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*Alert prepared by The Peace House
www.PeaceHouseOK.org*



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