

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

• AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF COMMENTARY •

MARCH 2016 • VOLUME 48 NUMBER 3 • \$5.00

Dysfunction Junction

*Beset By In-Fighting, Republican Lawmakers
Scramble To Soothe Angry Constituents, Mollify
Big Campaign Donors And Solve State's Fiscal Crisis*



See COVER STORY on Page 22



VOLUME 48, NO. 3

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OUR MOTTO

To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO

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

FOUNDING PUBLISHER

Helen B. Troy
1932-2007

[ISSN 0030-1795]

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

POSTMASTER

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

1-Year [12 issues] \$40. Send check to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Online: Visit www.okobserver.net to use a credit card.

UPDATE ADDRESSES

Please notify us at least two weeks before your move to ensure uninterrupted service. E-mail address changes to subscriptions@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

LETTERS TO EDITOR

E-mail to letters@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

Observations

Perfidy On Parade

With the aid and counsel of well-heeled special interests, Oklahoma's elected elite are remarkably adept at publicly feigning support for vital state services, all the while undermining funding for said programs.

Exhibit A: public education.

Every election year, Gov. Mary Fallin and legislative Republicans swear schools are their top priority. Yet for six years, they have ordered the nation's steepest education cuts – Draconian budgets imposed when oil topped \$100 a barrel.

Their notion of investment would be laughable if it weren't so cruel – forcing school children to endure exploding class sizes, the region's lowest paid teachers to flee to other states, and school districts to cut the instructional week from five days to four.

Even worse, the political double-talk is intensifying. At the same time the GOP-dominated statehouse vows to [magically?] increase teacher pay without a tax increase, lawmakers also work – with Fallin's blessing – to steal even more tax dollars from impoverished public schools.

Their latest sleight-of-hand is innocuously branded Education Savings Accounts, a dreamy-sounding plan purportedly aimed at giving parents and students more academic choices. More accurately, ESAs are vouchers, allowing public tax dollars to be diverted to private and parochial schools in violation of the state Constitution's strict church-state separation.

Church schools have coveted thy neighbor's tax dollars for generations, so it was hardly man-bites-dog news recently when Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul S. Coakley urged the governor and Legislature to enact ESAs.

What's becoming increasingly evident, however, is the power of corporate and ideological special interests working to cripple public schools, all the while professing to be wringing their hands that Oklahoma's – and America's – students are falling behind the global competition.

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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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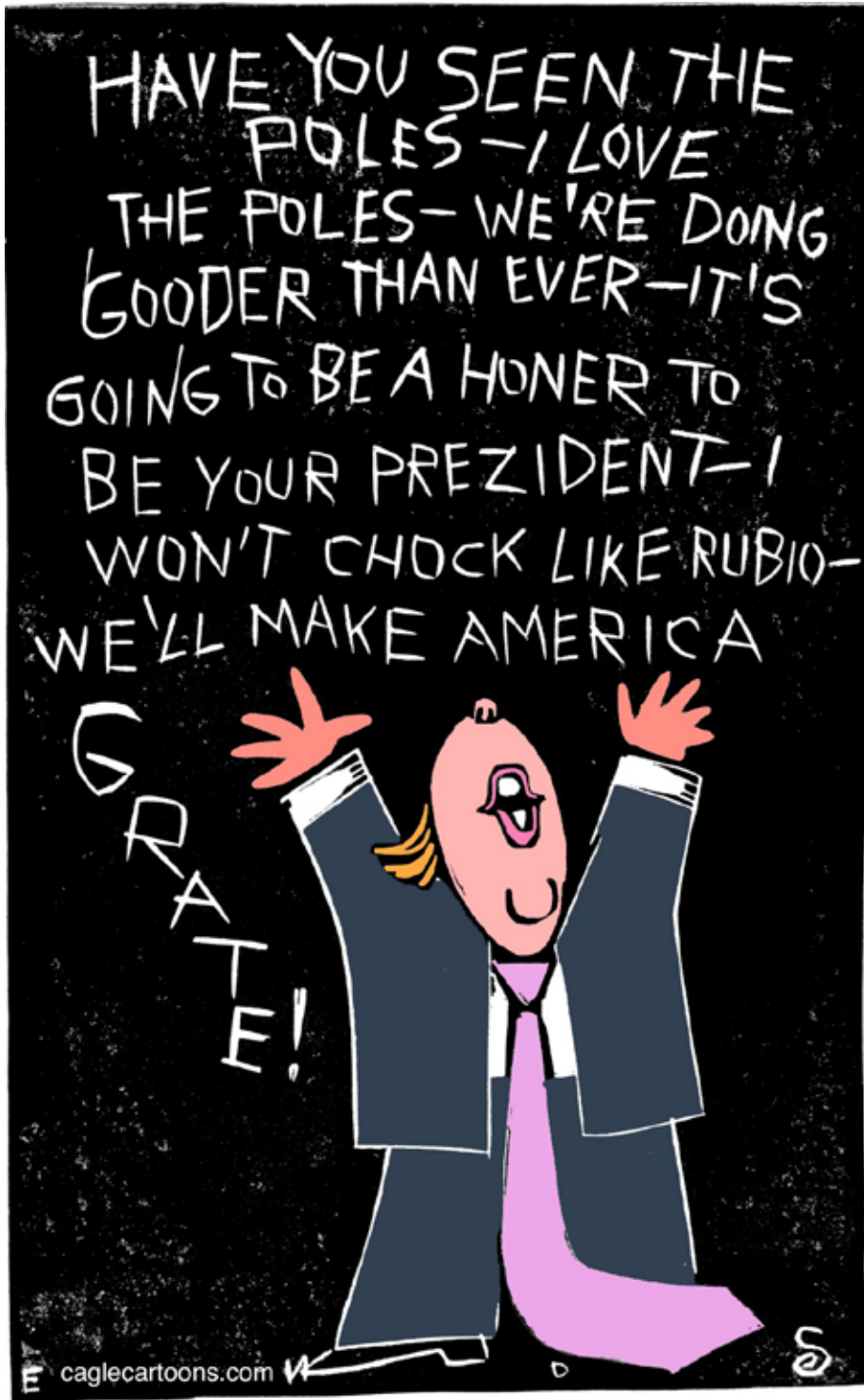
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Laurel: To Gov. Mary Fallin, ordering state agencies to drop job application questions about past criminal convictions. This not only gives ex-inmates a fighting chance at meaningful work, but also indicates the governor is serious about criminal justice reform.

An epic battle rages over modernizing state liquor laws. Liquor wholesalers and big-name beer distributors will do whatever's necessary to maintain market dominance. Anheuser-Busch's ads lambasting Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, are but an opening salvo.

Dart: To the knuckle draggers on the Daily Disappointment editorial board, asserting the Green Party's endorsement of Bernie Sanders reflects an increasingly radical state Democratic Party. This from the propaganda machine that views the GOP presidential clown car as mainstream.

Oklahoma's failure to properly fund government services creates modern-day debtors' prisons. Many languish behind bars, with little hope of ever paying all the fees and fines imposed to help fund jail operations. See Vera Institute of Justice report for details.

Laurel: To Apple CEO Tim Cook, fighting FBI demands the tech giant unlock an encrypted iPhone used by a San Bernardino extremist. Remember Benjamin Franklin's wise words: "Those who surrender freedom for security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one."

Special thanks to Chief Bill John Baker and the Cherokee Nation for hosting The Observer's editor and publisher at New Hope Oklahoma's gala fundraiser last month. Visit newhopeoklahoma.org to learn about New Hope's remarkable efforts to help children of incarcerated parents.

Dart: To carpetbagger Bob Ed Culver Jr., returning to Tahlequah after years in Texas to run as a Republican for the House seat once held by his father, a loyal Democrat. Can you spell o-p-p-o-r-t-u-n-i-s-t?

Inola is miles from the worst of Oklahoma's earthquake swarms, but it's a relief that Black Fox Nuclear Plant was abandoned 30-plus years before the Sooner State became the epicenter of shake, rattle and roll.

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Letters



"THE FRAMERS WOULD HAVE FRAMED IT THIS WAY."

Editor, The Observer:

Blaming Oklahoma's \$1.3 billion budget shortfall exclusively on the oil bust is seriously misleading. What about the series of income tax cuts passed by the Oklahoma Legislature and supported by Gov. Fallin that slashed funding for core public services by almost a fourth? Surely, systematically cutting that amount of revenue is a factor in not having enough tax dollars to pay for services.

Oklahoma's top tax rate dropped from 6.65% before 2004 to 5% beginning in 2016 with an annual revenue loss of \$1.022 billion from tax cuts alone, according to analysis by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. The pre-approved tax cut scheduled for 2018 would lower the top rate again to 4.85%, adding an additional \$100 shortfall to the annual cost of tax cuts.

Even in 2016, when the state faces a \$1.3 billion budget shortfall, our elected leaders refuse to put the brakes on the next tax cut,

which is not supposed to be implemented if we don't have the money to pay for it.

Meanwhile, the wealthiest Oklahoma are taking their tax savings to the bank. The poorest Oklahomans don't pay taxes anyway. That leaves low and middle-income families like mine to shoulder the tax burden while struggling with low wages, anemic job opportunities and ever-increasing costs of living.

Republican leaders promised tax cuts would boost the state's economy and create thousands of new jobs. Well, where are they?

Red Goldfarb
Bethany

Editor, The Observer:

Why is the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia described as "brilliant?"

Is it because he used arcane language to spice up his tired, knee-jerk reactionary rulings when he was on the losing side of a vote?

Is it because he used irrelevant analogies to describe civil rights

and flag pole sitting?

Being openly gay and in a committed marriage-without-license for 37 years, Don and I were just two of the many gay and lesbian taxpayers Scalia used as targets for his private religious vendettas that he wove into public discourse from the Supreme Court bench.

Since we were on the gay B-list and depended on the law to recognize our civil right to marriage, it was no fun reading about his diatribes that the A-list gays could happily ignore and joke about since their money and connections would easily smooth the way for them.

Those who praise Scalia for the surface shine of his court opinions were never targets of the rotten, odorous canker of his brain.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Our president ought to nominate our present U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch as Antonin Scalia's replacement.

She would be the first African-American woman on the court, is highly qualified in the law, was confirmed last year with the inclusion of 10 Republican votes and would bring the Supreme Court almost in line with the gender balance in our country. [We are nationally 51% female; Lynch would bring the Supreme Court gender count up to 44%-plus.]

Let the Republicans filibuster all they like – an ideal gift to Democrats during an election year. A filibuster would stop all other Sen-

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Pushing Back Hard Against Hate Speech

When it comes to modern political discourse, hate all-too-often seeps in.

Sometimes it takes center stage, as when Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign by first demonizing Mexicans, then Muslims.

Other times it's more like a dog whistle – couched as principled religious speak that not-so-subtly attacks “others” such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans.

Oklahoma, of course, is hardly immune to such politically-charged speech. If it's not Rep. Sally Kern spewing anti-LGBTQ bigotry, it's Rep. John Bennett spreading Islamophobia.

The – let's call it what it is – hate speech is among the reasons that a broad coalition of clear-eyed Oklahomans joined forces last month to sponsor two important events – the second annual Muslim Day at the state Capitol and a weekend Interfaith Alliance of Oklahoma-led effort by 43 houses of worship to create a #HateFreeOKC.

Both events were in response to the xenophobia that seeks to arouse suspicions about our Muslim neighbors – indeed, to depict all Muslims as terrorists.

It's ugly speech. It's unacceptable. It's a conscience-free willingness to demonize for political advantage. And it's un-American.

An estimated 200 showed up at the Capitol to participate in Muslim Day, designed to emphasize what should be self-evident – that an entire faith community must not be tarred because of the actions of a few.

The anti-Muslim demagoguery from Trump, Bennett and others is akin to the notion that all-Catholics were somehow suspicious because a former altar boy, Timothy McVeigh, bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

Or that all Baptists should be viewed warily because of the hate antics of the Topeka, KS-based Westboro Baptist Church.

It's unfathomable that we allow history to be repeated. The U.S. was born of a war for religious liberty – the freedom to believe as we wish, not as some government requires us. We also fought a civil war

over the demonizing of an entire race. And we bore the shame of the xenophobic herding of Japanese-Americans into internment camps during World War II.

Yet, here we are again – with political candidates and elected officials casting suspicion on an entire faith group for political gain.

The loose speech does not go unnoticed by those who elect or support these demagogues. Consider the case of the Oktaha gun range that declared itself to be a “Muslim-free establishment.”

A sixth generation Oklahoman, Raja'ee Fatihah, was appalled when he learned of it. A Muslim who also serves in the Army Reserves, Fatihah decided to visit the gun range, hoping he could strike a rapport with the owners and break through the stereotyping.

The initial conversation, he told a recent Capitol news conference, was courteous as he discussed target shooting. When it came time to pay, so that he could begin his practice, he decided to inform the clerk that he was Muslim.

The friendly chat, he said, suddenly turned frosty. Before long, he was asked to leave. He was no longer welcome simply because of his faith of choice.

“There was nothing about me he needs to fear,” says Fatihah, a state Department of Human Services investigator who's now suing the gun range – with the ACLU's help – in Muskogee federal court. Even so, Fatihah says, “the longer we talked, the less willing he was to allow me to use his facilities.”

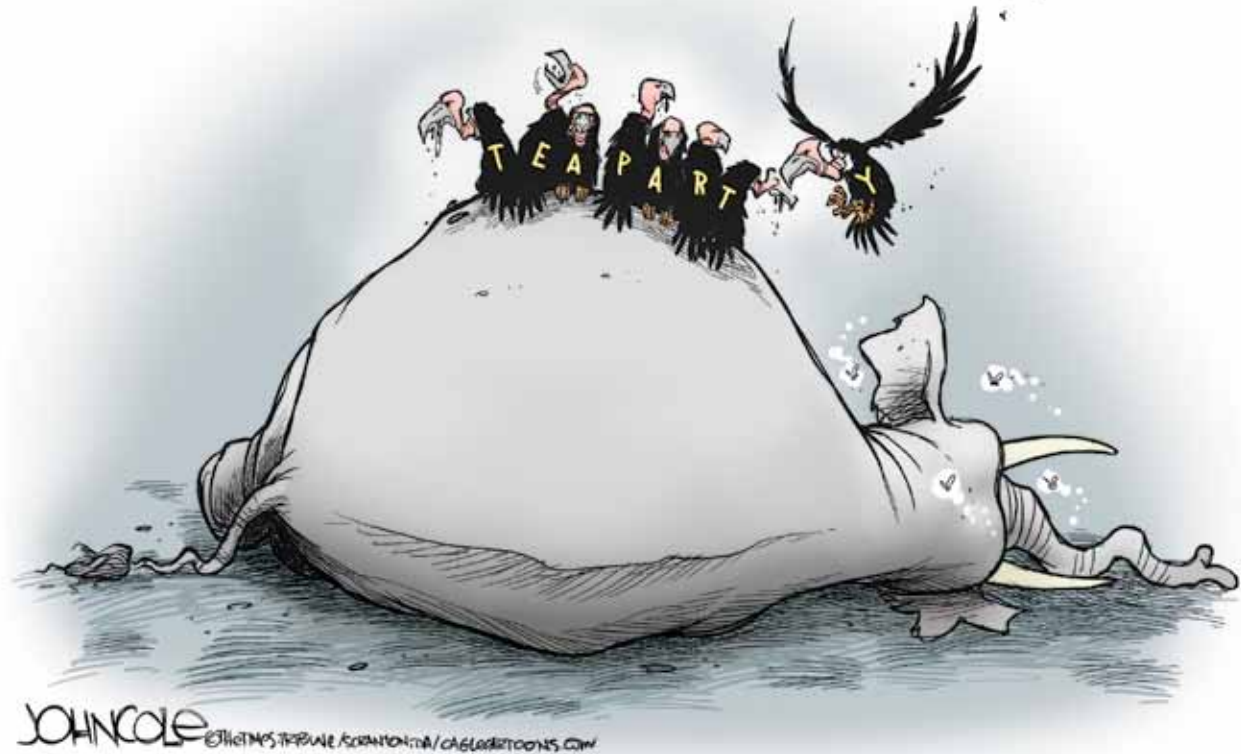
Political candidates and elected officials are in unique positions. They are afforded platforms to speak to broad constituencies – often with the added authority of a public office.

It is incumbent upon them to seek to unite, rather than divide, and to educate, rather than spin for political advantage.

It is good news that Muslims gathered at the Capitol to exercise their full rights as American citizens – and that good-hearted people of other faiths showed up to shield them from hateful protesters.

It is even better news that Oklahomans of widely differing faiths dedicated a weekend of services to speaking out against the political demagoguery aimed at Muslims.

THE REPUBLICAN ~~CAUCUS.~~ CARCASS



Who Represents You In Legislature: Talking Heads Or Action Figures?

BY CAL HOBSON

Well, now. What do we have here? During her annual State of the State speech Feb. 1 before a joint legislative session, Republican Gov. Mary Fallin surprisingly advocated finding new sources of money to help close the cavernous \$1.3 billion hole in the state budget.

Her revenue-raising suggestions total an eye-popping \$954 million, an amount that should make clear to all observers the severity of our monetary crisis.

For example, she suggested increasing the tax on cigarettes by \$1.50 per pack; closing several dubious tax loopholes; repeal of numerous sales tax exemptions; and her honor also proposed a number of sentencing reforms that, if implemented, could save millions of very scarce dollars.

So what gives with the gov who is recognizing – for the first time since being elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014 – that her administration has driven our state into the worst financial crisis in over 30 years?

That her devotion to personal income tax cuts has only exacerbated the problem. And that Oklahoma's cash cow – the price paid for oil and natural gas – is doing what it always does: that is, go down after being way up and then down again.

Unfortunately, Fallin remains opposed to delaying or repealing the .25% reduction in the income tax, saying “its impact on the state budget hole would only be \$100 million or so” and “that isn't enough to make a very big dent in the \$1 billion-plus shortfall.”

Say what?

Fallin, the No. 1 talking head at the Capitol, didn't

waste much time after her progressive speech to lawmakers before announcing her opposition to her own proposals.

Within days, Senate Finance Committee Chair Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa, passed from his committee bills to implement most of her cash-raising suggestions. But Fallin reversed field, saying without proof – written or otherwise – that Boeing Corp. was rethinking expansion here due to Mazzei's actions.

As longtime Observer Editor Frosty Troy always said, Fallin and her Tea Party supporters are all hat and no cattle.

Apparently, she was only filling a constitutional duty to make remarks to the distracted solons who yawned through the presentation. They know full well Fallin is fangless as she enters the fourth quarter of her disastrous eight-year rule of ruin as captain of the sinking USS Oklahoma.

First mates on our doomed dingy – House Speaker Jeff Hickman, R-Fairview, and Senate President Pro Tem Brian Bingman, R-Sapulpa – were only too happy to dis any revenue-raising offerings drafted by their more progressive colleagues.

In normal times, the opposition of these two powerful politicians would be the last nail in the coffin for common sense.

However, they, too, have frittered away their mojo as proven by a bipartisan 10-2 vote in the Senate Finance Committee to keep alive “vehicles” that could be used later in the session by pro-public education and health care advocates.

These 10 senators clearly are “action figures” who finally have come to the realization that their constituents want good schools, local access to their doctors and hospitals, safe roads and bridges, and a criminal justice code that wasn't written in and for the 19th Century.

Over in the “lower house,” once again the burden of heavy lifting has fallen to Republican Rep. Doug Cox, a Grove doctor who has affixed his name to the tobacco tax increase, knowing full well of the damage and deaths smokes cause hundreds of thousands of our citizens who continue to light up.

As Dr. Cox has proven his entire time at the Capitol, no task is too tough for him. Since I was the author in 2003 of the previous tobacco price proposal, I know he will, if successful, lose friends, but Cox is and always has been a stellar action figure often standing up almost alone among the know-nothings who populate the Republican caucus.

To date, I have endured watching several times the video of Gov. Fallin's remarks a month ago and while she outlined suggestions claiming to raise nearly \$1 billion, not one – save the tobacco tax – came with any details or substance to them.

Example 1: Our leader proposed closing sales tax exemptions in order to generate \$200 million but she didn't name one for sunset out of hundreds currently littering the statutes.

Example 2: Fallin urged the extracting of \$250 mil-

lion from agency revolving and non-appropriated accounts but it is an empty gesture so far – she failed to identify one red cent to implement per proposal.

Example 3: Allowing schools to use their building fund accounts for – drum roll – a teacher pay raise if the local school board approves. Are you kidding me? Every school district in Oklahoma is already applying the maximum millage rates allowed by law and the Constitution.

I can just imagine future debates by school board members to either build safe rooms for kids or give a piddling raise to teachers. Hell, the teachers I know would always put safety of the children first.

The bottom line is this: No governor and no Legislature have been more inept, irresponsible and oblivious to their first and most important responsibility as elected officials – and that is to write a thoughtful monetary blueprint for Oklahoma.

We are currently in the worst financial shape of any state in the union. Unfortunately, even a cursory reading of Fallin's State of the State speech – and listening to the response to it by Republican lawmakers – reflects elected officials in complete denial of a budgetary disaster of their own making.

Further proof she lives does not live in the real world: Fallin said that if her budget blueprint is implemented, by the end of the 2016 session she will leave future governors in much better financial shape than what she inherited from former Gov. Brad Henry. Nothing could be further from the truth.

During Brad's two terms, a lottery earmarked for education was passed; compacts signed with most tribal leaders to legalize – and tax – casino profits; the aforementioned tobacco tax increase became law, earmarked for health care; and a \$500 million higher education bond fund all became realities.

At Henry's request, I authored all four of these tough-to-implement new sources of serious money dedicated to what most of us identify as core responsibilities – education, health care, human services and public safety.

For the last six years, talking heads – not action figures – have dominated what passes for political leadership at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd., and the biggest losers are our kids, the sick and elderly.

The damage done to them has been purposeful and targeted by uncaring leaders in both the legislative and executive branches.

The grand experiment propagated by Fallin and Co. – tax cuts, smaller government and extreme social policy positions – have given Oklahoma not just a temporary black eye but accelerated the downward spiral of core services to the bottom rungs nationally.

Here are the facts confronting Oklahomans today: We are faced with a declared revenue failure this year and next. None, if any, of Fallin's revenue raising measures are likely to become law. The outward migration of top teachers will continue unabated. And the only economic development in rural Oklahoma will be competition to attract a private prison primarily

for the jobs created locally.

Conservative business leaders, such as Express Personnel honcho Bob Funk, have worked long and hard for years, if not decades, to elect Republicans to office, and these business moguls have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

And just how do you guys like it now?

Post-script: Don't tell the Repubs in the Legislature that this old liberal from Lexington has urged passage of all the above initiatives in previous Observer columns. The one they left out was the development of a \$1 billion capital bond issue for infrastructure and job creation ... until March 1, when just such a plan was revealed.

Go figure.

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

The Tax Shift Rears Its Head

BY GENE PERRY

Last month, the Oklahoma Senate Finance Committee approved SB 977, a bill that would suspend 23 tax credits for the next two years to partially address the state's massive budget shortfall.

While the bill targets numerous credits, a large majority of the impact would come from ending three important tax credits for low- and moderate-income working families – Oklahoma's Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC], Sales Tax Relief Credit, and Child Tax Credit/Child Care Tax Credit.

While many tax credits may be criticized for benefiting a narrow special interest, what makes these credits different is that they are extremely broad-based – going to over 40% of Oklahoma families – and they help alleviate some of the imbalance in our state tax system that already takes the biggest percentage of income from those who make the least.

The state's Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC] supplements 5% of the federal EITC. The EITC has received praise from both the left and right as an effective way to bolster economic security for working families while encouraging work.

U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan and President Obama have proposed very similar plans for expanding the EITC in recent years. Oklahoma's EITC was signed into law by Gov. Frank Keating in 2001.

The Sales Tax Relief Credit – sometimes known as the "grocery tax credit" – is an income tax credit that provides a rebate of \$40 per household member to low- and moderate-income households.

Oklahoma is one of only seven states that imposes a sales tax on groceries at the full rate. Taxes on this basic necessity can eat up a substantial portion of a low-income family's budget, so the Sales Tax Relief Credit is intended to alleviate a portion of that cost.

The Child Tax Credit and Child Care Tax Credit help parents to pay for child care so they can work or look for work. They also reduce taxes for stay-at-home parents and those who care for dependent elders or people with disabilities.

It's important to realize that Oklahoma lawmakers just moved ahead with a cut to the top income tax rate, which reduces state revenues by some \$150 million for the upcoming year, on the grounds that Oklahomans deserve tax relief.

Eliminating these credits would make false lawmakers' claims to be offering tax relief. Instead they will have shifted taxes directly from those already making high incomes to poor and middle class taxpayers.

In fact, ending these credits would increase taxes for more than one-third of all Oklahomans. The average middle-income Oklahoma household would see its taxes increase by \$57 – or nearly twice what these families received from this year's income tax cut [\$29].

The bottom 40% of households in Oklahoma, making less than \$33,000 a year, would see average tax increases of more than \$100 while receiving little to nothing from the income tax cut.

Low- and moderate-income families with children would be hit especially hard; many would see a net increase in their taxes of several hundred dollars.

During the committee hearing, Senate Finance Chair Mike Mazzei said that he did not intend for his bill to suspend these credits to ultimately make it into law, but it would be held in reserve in case a more targeted approach to reducing tax breaks did not find success.

We hope that as lawmakers move forward in their efforts to close Oklahoma's massive budget hole, it's not the hundreds of thousands of regular families relying on these credits who end up being targeted.

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

Langston Lecture

U.S. Magistrate Judge Bernard M. Jones will keynote the 2016 Ira D. Hall and Rubye Hibler Hall Endowed Lecture Series at Langston University on March 8. Jones, a former state district judge, became the first African American federal magistrate judge in Oklahoma last July. The event begins at 11 a.m. in the Atrium on the historic Langston campus, east of Guthrie. For more information, visit Langston.edu.

Closely Watching Oklahoma's Challenging Legislative Session

BY BILL JOHN BAKER

The new state legislative session is one we will all be watching closely. Our policymakers in Oklahoma City have a challenging task ahead as they try to create an operational budget for the state while being millions of dollars in the hole. Unfortunately, most state agencies remain funded at more than 20% below pre-recession funding levels because budgets have not kept up with inflation.

It's a tough situation, and state leaders must make difficult decisions to balance the budget. Consecutive years of making tax reductions, coupled with low prices in the oil and gas industry, will hamper what can be achieved. Collectively, Oklahoma's elected leaders have some hard decisions to make on critical issues like education and health care. I hope they leave all the options on the table this year.

In contrast, Oklahoma's tribal governments are investing more and more every year in education, while the state decreases its investment. I think Oklahoma would be wise to look at tribal governments as a model for growth and deliverables. Robust Indian nations add to the vitality of life in our great state, and our tribal governments are investing in Oklahoma's future.

When you look closely at what Cherokee Nation and all tribal governments in Oklahoma are doing, you will see we are fighting poverty, expanding business, creating jobs and offering better health care. At Cherokee Nation we have raised paychecks to a living wage while providing paid maternity leave and expanding opportunities for our citizens to go to college.

Through gaming compacts over the past decade, tribes have invested more than \$1 billion in Oklahoma education. From 2005 to 2015, the Cherokee Nation has allocated \$159.9 million to Oklahoma through gaming fees.

Locally, we also invest in education through our car tag compact. Thirty-eight cents of every dollar in tag sales goes to public education. Last year, 109 schools received \$4 million from the Cherokee Nation's license plate sales. Our contribution to education from car tag sales has increased 34.2% since 2008. During that same six-year period, the state's investment in education has declined by 11%. A new record contribution to local schools from car tags will be announced in the next week or two.

While we are contributing more, it may not seem

like it because state tax cuts offset those dollars. As more tribal gaming and car tag dollars go into state coffers, less is invested at the state level. In essence, tribes help fill the gap created by the tax cuts. As tribal governments, it's disappointing to see our investments in education eroded by the state budget process as we are trying to build a better future within our communities.

Sadly, the state budget is being balanced at the cost of our children. We need more education funding, not less. In Oklahoma, we rank 49th in teacher pay, 44th in pupil funding and 41st in K-12 achievement rates. Success for Oklahoma public education means success for all our children, not just Cherokees, so proper funding is imperative.

Our Legislature is responsible to the will of the people, so while tax cuts sound fine to the average citizen, they are devastating to the programs that build a healthy state with an educated workforce. The sweeping tax breaks have not spurred growth and have hurt Oklahoma.

At Cherokee Nation we have invested our funds into education, health care and the wellbeing of our people. Our gaming and business profits stay in Oklahoma. A full 65% is reinvested into our diverse business portfolio, and 35% goes to services for the people.

That means our citizens are able to live in decent housing and become homeowners, raise their children safely, and ensure their kids get a quality education. Being able to contribute to the local economy and community is an empowering feeling. Cherokee Nation citizens are able to share in the tribe's prosperity.

What if state leaders worked off that blueprint? What if a bold, new path were forged? I hope state leaders look at the richness and diversity of Oklahoma's tribes and say, "We should be more like that; we should invest more money in education, health care, infrastructure and the social programs that lift people up."

I believe that if we want to build a better Oklahoma, we must work together. I hope our leaders at the state level think about our collective, long-term future. Implore them to do so, and we will all see a greater return on investment and people leading brighter and better lives.

Wado.

Bill John Baker is principal chief of the Cherokee Nation

And Now, A Kind Word For Fallin

BY JOE DORMAN

I, like many of you, have grown tired of the constant attacks on candidates and public officials. I want to take a different approach and say something nice about my former opponent, Mary Fallin.

I empathize with Gov. Fallin on how bad things are at the state Capitol. Early press has covered horrible legislative ideas, even though most will not make it past the committee process. A depressed economy also creates enormous strains. I served as a legislator during two previous economic downturns and can attest how tough it will be to prioritize worthy programs with limited dollars.

I am not going to say it is not completely the fault of current policymakers, as much can be attributed to various tax cuts and policy decisions. There should be the realization by the public that Republicans constantly campaign on “right-sizing” or “downsizing” government. One could argue they are getting exactly what was promised.

While I do disagree with several policy suggestions presented in the recent State of the State, I compliment Gov. Fallin for taking what I believe is the right path with corrections reforms for Oklahoma. Several suggestions were put forth challenging the Legislature to be smarter on delivering punishments.

Oklahoma politicians often take a “tough on crime” stance as it is popular with the voters. Look back to the famous Willie Horton commercial used against Mike Dukakis as a perfect example. It has been almost impossible for legislators to authorize alternative forms of incarceration or punishments. Alternatively, adding on additional felonies, cash penalties and longer stays behind bars has increased the cost

of public safety while helping many remain elected.

Gov. Fallin outlined several ideas reminiscent of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, a program championed by former House Speaker Kris Steele. These reforms were passed but never adequately funded or implemented by the following legislatures.

Oklahoma has the highest incarceration rate for women and we rank third for men. Incarceration rates are currently at roughly 119% of capacity for our prisons, but staffing levels are well below 60% for the employees running the facilities.

You cannot tell me that the people in our state are so much worse than all the other states.

Many problems rest with the systems in place. Many felons lose their professional licenses and are unable to find work. There is also a high percentage who do not have a proper education or who are unable to function in normal society once released. Many return to a life of crime, as it is almost impossible for them to adapt outside the walls to a normal life. This, as well as so much more, needs to be reviewed and accountable alternatives implemented.

An honest discussion on a smarter way to deal with corrections is long overdue. I applaud Gov. Fallin for placing a priority on this topic and wish her well on responsible, substantive and significant improvements within the system. Now, if we can get the Legislature to play nice ...

Joe Dorman, a Rush Springs Democrat, served House District 65 as state representative for 12 years and was the 2014 Democratic nominee for governor. Currently he is the community outreach director for Heart Mobile and a member of the Rush Springs Town Council.

Consolidating Schools ‘No New Deal’

BY DAVID PERRYMAN

The impact of the Great Depression was most severe on the elderly and the young. For instance, while one-third of the nation was ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-nourished, 42% of all of the poverty stricken Americans were under 16 years old.

In *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters From Children of the Great Depression*, Robert Cohen compiled the thousands of letters that Eleanor Roosevelt received from despondent children and teens writing to ask for shoes, clothing, books, and transportation they so badly needed to attend school.

The letters underscore that the economic crisis of the Depression was wrapped around an educational

crisis that threatened the very fabric of our country. Diminishing tax revenues closed some 20,000 schools in rural America in 1934 and shortened school terms.

President Roosevelt’s conviction that a just society affords all – not just the affluent – access to education was the reason that from 1933 to 1939 New Deal funds assisted 70% of all new school construction and prevented tens of thousands of school closures by providing emergency funding to pay teachers. By the end of the Depression, needy students had received more than a billion free school lunches.

In February, State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister and the State Board of Education proposed changes

to the Administrative Rules relating to “Mandatory Annexation.” Many Oklahomans believed that rural schools had avoided “forced consolidation” for this legislative term. However, with these changes, all public schools are at risk of being closed by the State Board of Education simply because the state legislature fails to properly fund public education.

The threats in the new rules appear in Rule 210:1-3-2 (b)(1) and allow the State Board to bypass local school districts and force the consolidation of school districts when a school is 1] determined to be in need of improvement, 2] is non-accredited by the State Board, 3] is unable to commence a school year, except for a normal delay beyond the control of the school, 4] is financially unable to keep the school open for the entire year, or 5] the subject of an audit finding that some person associated with the school mismanaged funds.

Oklahoma’s public schools have weathered hostile consolidation legislation this year. Parents and teachers across the state banded together to protect the local control of their students’ education.

Now, not only are public school parents and students still faced with the harmful effect of voucher legislation, if these rules become effective, anti-public school legislators will be capable of placing public schools at risk of consolidation merely by failing to properly fund them.

This ain’t no new deal, it’s more of the same.

If you are concerned about protecting public education, you may make comments on these proposed rule changes by email to rules@sde.ok.gov or by fax to the Legal Services Office at 405.521.6256. Comments must be received by 4:30 p.m. on March 17. A public hearing is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on March 17 at the Hodge Education Building, State Board Room – Room 1-20, 2500 N. Lincoln Blvd., in Oklahoma City.

Persons wishing to speak must sign in at the door of the State Board Room prior to the start of the hearing and time limitations may be imposed to ensure that all persons who wish to speak will have an opportunity to do so.

David Perryman, a Chickasha Democrat, represents District 56 in the Oklahoma House.

Please, Sir, I Want Some More

Oliver, the title character in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* was born in a workhouse and orphaned at birth. Living in 18th Century England that was grappling with an impoverished and disenfranchised population, Oliver was one of hundreds who were “despised by all, and pitied by none.”

At nine years old, Oliver was moved to a workhouse whose governing board was composed of portly but philosophical men who were careful to make certain that, under their watch, paupers never became comfortable.

Consequently, workhouse rations were “three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays.” The operation was rather expensive at first, due to the increase in funeral expenses and the need to alter the clothing of the paupers as they rapidly lost weight.

However, as the paupers got thin and attrition decreased the number of inmates, the board was in ecstasy at its success.

It was against this backdrop that lots were cast and young Oliver was selected to approach the master for additional gruel.

When he pleaded, “Please, sir, I want some more,” the master was horrified at his insolence and the board sentenced the troublemaker to instant confinement until such time that they could rid themselves of such an unappreciative urchin.

Oklahoma educators are increasingly finding themselves in an *Oliver Twist* scenario. Teachers literally live on the cusp of food stamp eligibility and are continually being strung along by promises and pie in the sky plans for better pay.

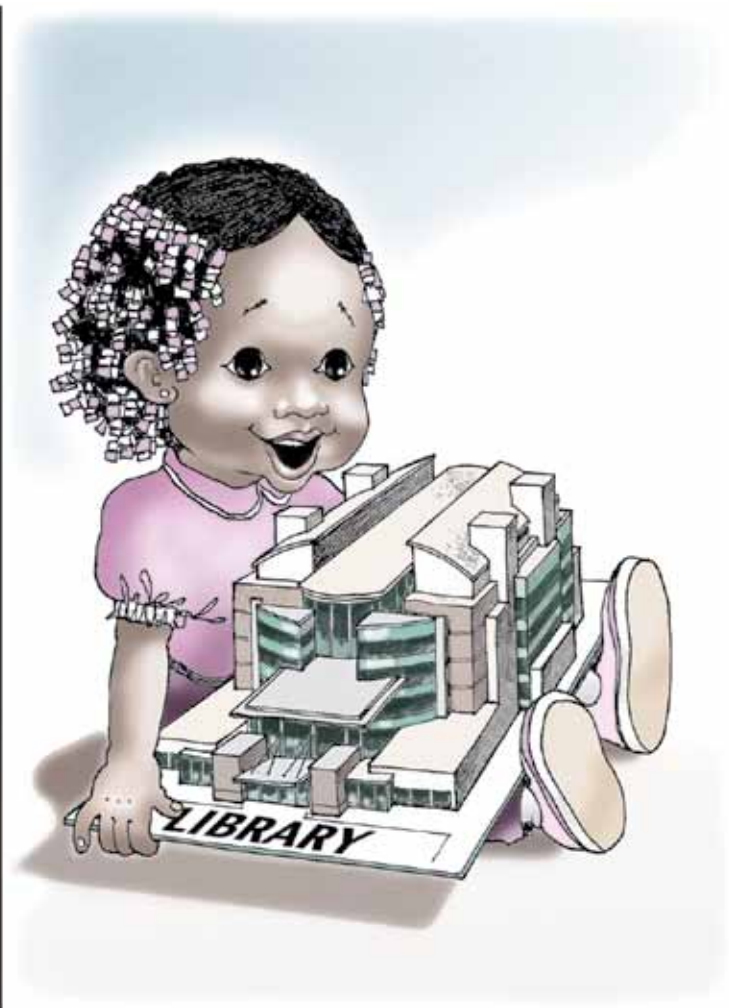
Frustratingly, those promises were not fulfilled when oil was over \$100 per barrel and they surely are not going to happen now that the state Board of Equalization has certified next budget year [FY 2017] appropriations to be \$1.1 billion less [-15.9%] than was appropriated for FY 2016. That is especially true since the real numbers will be \$1.3 billion less [-19.1%] since last year’s Rainy Day Fund appropriations and Revolving Fund authorizations are not factored into the FY 2016 baseline amount used by the board. That equates to a decrease of \$1 next year for every \$5 appropriated last year.

On top of that, the revenue failure declared in December that resulted in a 3% reduction to agencies beginning in January has been revised as the board now projects that Oklahoma’s general revenue collections *this fiscal year* will be down \$549.2 million, or 9.6% below the official estimate upon which the FY 2016 appropriated state budget is based.

That means that on top of January’s 3% reduction, a deepened reduction will be made in March after February’s revenue collections are received.

Guess what? Oil and gas prices are cyclical. Always have been and always will be. The way our state planned for this drop in oil prices is sort of like building a house on top of a railroad track and then cursing the train when it knocks it down.

Writing about Oklahoma’s educational system, Dickens would have observed, “The operation was rather expensive at first, due to the increase in funeral expenses and the vouchers handed out, but as the public school classroom size increased and the number of Oklahoma teachers decreased, the Legislature was in ecstasy at its success. – *David Perryman*



Prenatal and Cradle: When Pre-K Is Too Late

BY ANN DAPICE

For decades now education policy has focused on Pre-Kindergarten to grade 12. In the U.S. and especially in Oklahoma our schools have serious challenges.

Now science is rapidly demonstrating the critical importance of the prenatal to toddler years. In health care there is new evidence that diet before and during pregnancy has major impact on the child's health throughout life. This is "eating for two" in quality – not quantity!

Meanwhile, other prenatal and infancy interventions are similarly critical throughout the life of the individual.

For a number of years we have known that pruning in the brain is related to learning – or losing the ability to learn. Unlike pruning a tree or bush so it will

grow better, here a "use it or lose it" phenomenon occurs in the toddler where frequently used synapses have strong connections but rarely used synapses are eliminated.

Consider what this means if the very young child is not introduced to learning through time tested traditions of talking, singing, rocking and storytelling.

As a teenager I remember rocking a young cousin, singing to him the songs his grandmother sang to him – songs I would later sing while rocking my own children and grandchildren. For many families this has been expected behavior.

We now know that babies are born with abilities to identify voices, faces and communication. They recognize their mothers' voices from their time in utero. In fact, they recognize and give preference to the

voices and language[s] heard during the pregnancy since they can hear while still in the womb.

We've long known they prefer human faces to any other objects and recent research shows they will look longer at the faces of people who have talked to them. The same research says they become distressed when caregivers appear emotionally unresponsive.

In a country that often wants to legislate "English only" as a practice, research for more than a decade has demonstrated that infants exposed to more than one language have greater cognitive complexity and a larger world view. Multiple language use is an asset, not a disadvantage. We also know that timing is also critical for learning new languages. There has long been evidence that language learning is easiest done by very young children and that the older the child the more difficult learning a new language becomes.

It shouldn't be necessary to point out that most language learning worldwide is done by immersion. Children first learn language not by studying spelling and grammar books but by repeating the words and phrases of those around them.

It's also true that this early learning, if not the same as the "correct" rules used for pronunciation and grammar learned in school, can be difficult to unlearn and children can and most likely will be judged negatively by teachers for what they learned at home.

Some children learn to use both as if they were two separate languages – one for school and one for home.

In a world where the environment is comprised of parents who are well-educated according to the norms of dominant culture, who have no financial limits, who are well versed on the latest science and its implications, and who can and will readily translate that science to their child-rearing, there is no problem. But that is hardly the situation in Oklahoma – or the rest of the United States and most of the world.

In his book, *Nearness of Grace*, Arnold Mandell wrote that exaggerated pruning of unused neural connections as a result of high levels of stress hormones leads to an extremely reduced range of potential behavior that can result in consequences such as addiction and interpersonal isolation.

Too often pregnant and new mothers are seen in deep depression unable to communicate with adults, much less their newborns. Too often we see new mothers placing the baby off to the side, out of physical or eye contact because in their despair they cannot imagine how they can care for the child. Too often the mother and child suffer partner, sexual and child

abuse. News headlines remind us daily of this reality.

As one pre-K teacher said, "The only love many of my students ever receive comes from me during the day." There is none at home.

It is not only uneducated, poor mothers who are unable to do the required mothering. A co-worker in a campus setting was seen bringing her child to work daily but placing the child in the opposite corner of the room and never communicating with him at all. When questioned, she answered, "I never wanted him, I still don't want him and he is mine to do or not do with as I please."

Even with resources, some parents are not capable of caring for their children as required. One well educated mother said, "I loved my babies but they came too close together for me to rock and sing to each of them. There wasn't enough of me."

Enter talkingisteaching.org. Well supported by the research just described, we now have rapidly growing programs called "Talking is teaching: Talk, Read, Sing to your baby." Philanthropy is supporting "talking is teaching" in Oklahoma and across the country.

But education is in crisis here in Oklahoma for children in pre-K to 12. For a variety of reasons there



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is insufficient money and there are not enough teachers. The will for quality education in the state has been lacking for too long.

A recent scandal of school testing and grading shows the lack of educated policymakers who are not likely to support talking, reading and singing to babies if they don't support improved education in general.

So at a time like this with such school crisis, why would we want to focus attention on talking, singing and reading to babies? The grading of schools and determining teacher quality by testing the children shows the inadequate knowledge of those who make our policies.

Many children arrive in school with brains damaged from the "use it or lose it" pruning. If they were not exposed to necessary experiences early enough, the synapses were pruned. Whatever the quality of teaching, their brains are not ready for learning. The critical period has too often been lost.

From decades of research we know the intergenerational impact of family and social neglect and abuse. We too often place the blame only on the family member or the family.

Less frequently we examine the consequences of neglect by societal institutions. Society sees the sweet innocent babies and wonders what has happened by the time they reach school.

From religion we too often hear that more punishment is needed and hear the old quote, "Spare the

rod, spoil the child." We know that most of these children have seen plenty of hitting. We know that hitting someone in school or on the street is legally considered assault, yet somehow hitting a child, a parent in the home is "discipline." Somehow children are supposed to understand the meaning of discipline. They are supposed to be able to understand why being hit is discipline.

They are told they should be self-disciplined. Will they think that means hitting themselves repeatedly?

For decades we have had grandmothers show up at intensive care units for premature infants to provide the touch and rocking seen as one of the important needs babies have. Can society's institutions not find a way through its many institutions to talk to, sing to, rock and read to children whose futures will depend on that human learning.

We often hear, "We don't know what to do." In this case we have the science and the grandmothers who can tell us.

Ann Dapice, PhD, lives in Tulsa. She has taught and/or served as administrator at a number of universities including the University of Pennsylvania, Widener University, Penn State University, Rogers State University and Goddard College, teaching courses in the social sciences, philosophy and Native American Studies. She is executive director of the Institute of Values Inquiry, a 501(c)(3) research organization, and director of education and research for T.K. Wolf Inc., a 501(c)(3) American Indian organization.

Oklahoma Thinks Unthinkable With Health Care Cuts

BY DAVID BLATT

Should Oklahoma strip Medicaid health care coverage from people least able to afford insurance on their own? In a state that trails most of the nation in uninsured rates and health outcomes, who could defend this?

Should the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services no longer cover mental health services provided to children with mental illness by therapists in individual practice? When less than 40% of children with a major depressive episode received treatment in the past year, how could such a move even be on the table?

Yet these are two of the many bad ideas now being considered by legislators and agency heads. After years of damaging budget cuts and huge shortfalls that are forcing state agencies to reduce vital services even more, the once-unthinkable is being thought.

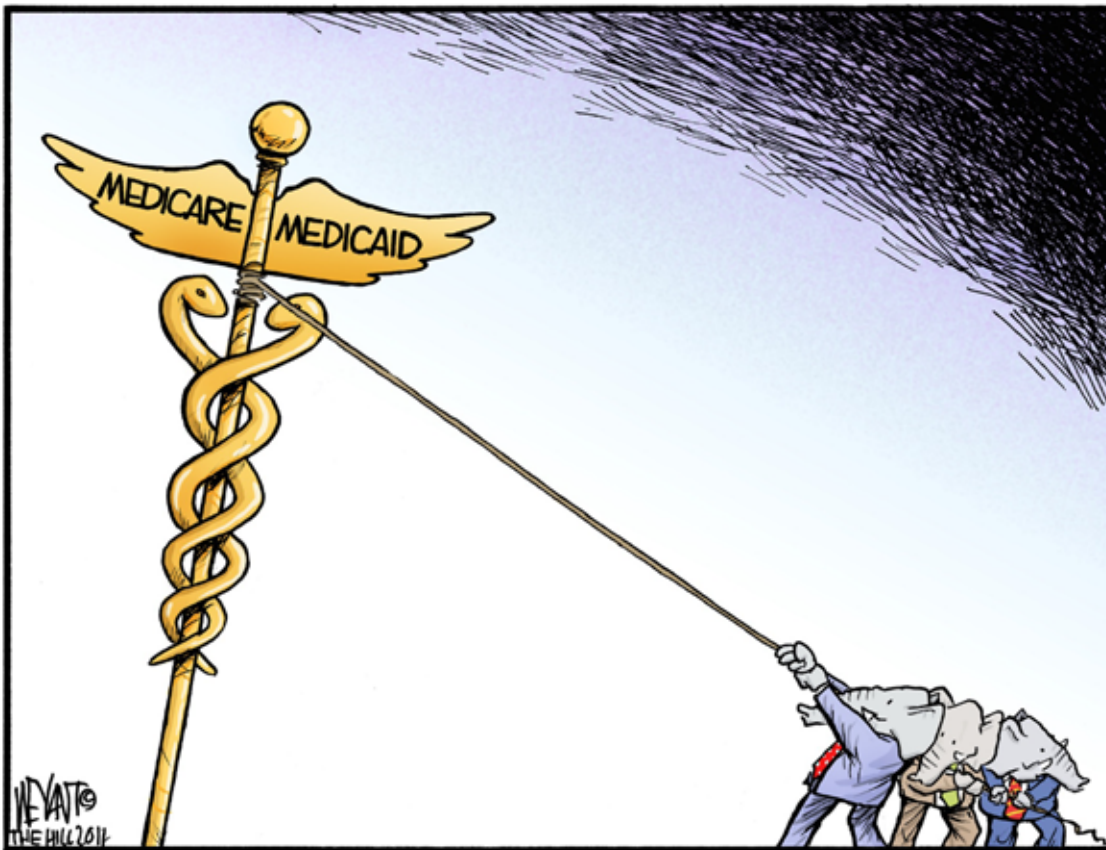
HB 2665, introduced by Dr. Doug Cox, would eliminate Medicaid coverage for any non-disabled adult

under 65. Oklahoma eligibility standards for working-age adults are already among the nation's most restrictive, covering only parents of dependent children with annual incomes below about \$8,000. Non-disabled adults without dependent children cannot be covered.

Oklahoma has already cut the Medicaid program by close to \$450 million since 2010. Reimbursement rates to providers have been slashed from 100% of Medicare levels down to 86%. Many health benefits have been reduced or eliminated, including perinatal dental services and orthodontic services, and co-payments have been raised.

To this shameful situation, HB 2665 would add some 110,000 of the state's poorest adults to the already swollen ranks of the uninsured. Hospitals and other safety net providers would face even higher costs for uncompensated care.

In a committee hearing, Dr. Cox said he introduced



his bill “with a heavy heart,” but warned, “If we don’t have a revenue stream, we’re going to have to make cuts like these.” In his view, HB 2665 may represent the least-bad option, in that it would affect a population that could work.

However, this ignores that many or most of these low-income adults can’t find full-time work, may be struggling with mental illness or chronic health conditions, may be excluded from work by a criminal record, or may need to be caregivers for children or parents.

While HB 2665 passed out of committee, ultimately it may not be a genuine threat. Federal law requires states participating in Medicaid to cover the parents of dependent children up to a certain income level. This bill directly violates this federal requirement. Dr. Cox is aware that his bill asks the Oklahoma Health Care Authority to apply for a federal waiver that would almost certainly be denied.

Meanwhile, the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services [DMHSAS] proposed a rule to no longer pay for mental health services provided by individual therapists to children enrolled in Medicaid.

Instead, only services provided by agencies, such as community mental health centers, would be covered. About 8,000 children statewide receive Medicaid services from independent master’s-level therapists.

The department proposed the rule as part of efforts to implement \$9.8 million in cuts resulting from the state’s initial 3% mid-year revenue failure.

Forced to make difficult cuts, the department jus-

tified its proposal based on data showing that children with the most severe mental health issues are already being served by state agencies and argued that no children would be denied services.

But following a strong public outcry, Gov. Mary Fallin rejected the proposed rule, stating that it would not create any savings and would risk impeding access to services and disrupt care for children, especially for traumatized foster children.

“I understand that budgetary constraints will force us to make difficult choices in the days and months ahead,” she said, “and

that these choices will likely result in less services for vulnerable populations.”

DMHSAS had counted on the proposed rule to save \$1.2 million this year. It will now have to find other ways to fill that hole, which will get larger once the state’s second round of mid-year across-the-board cuts are announced in March.

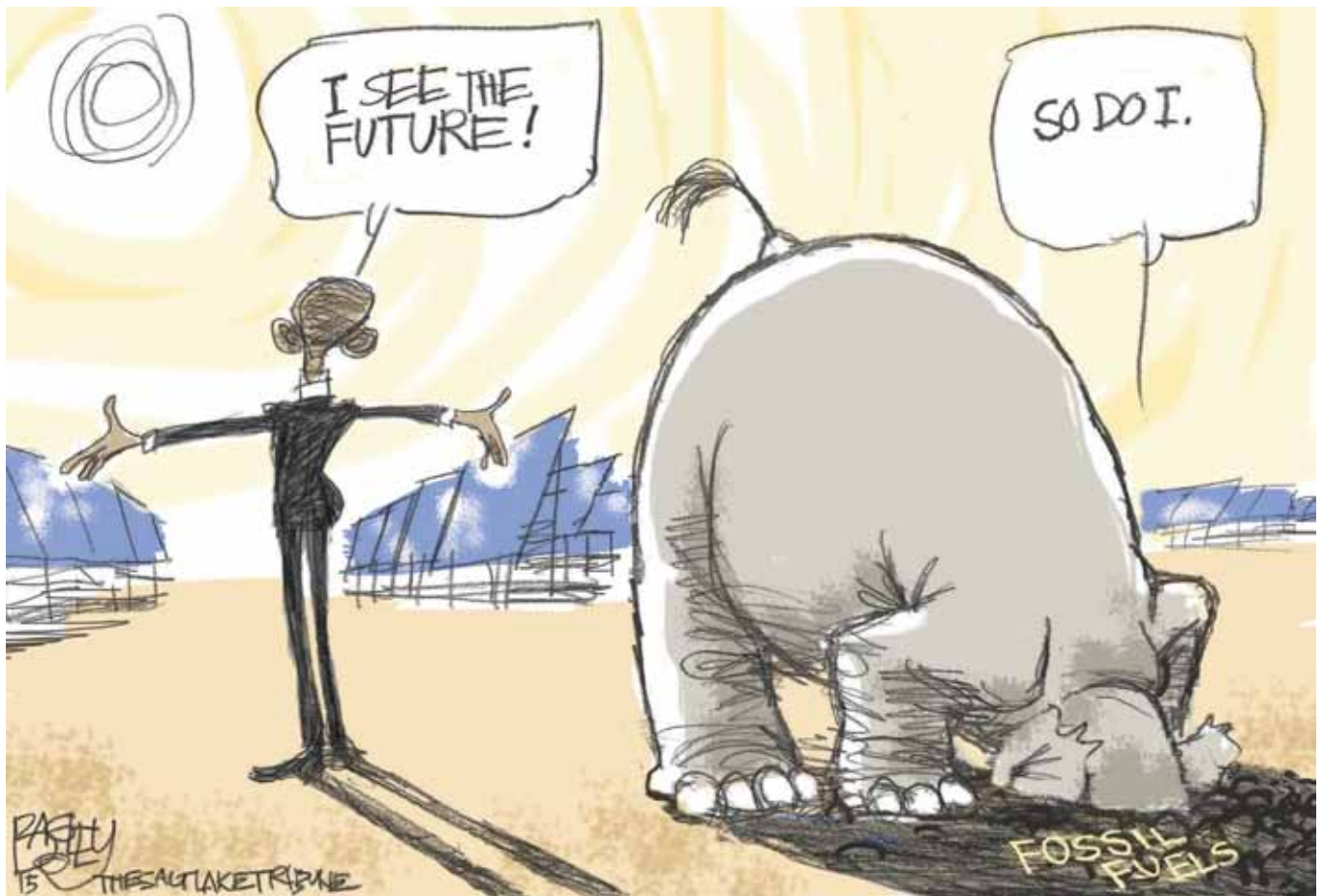
The tragedy here is that Oklahoma’s stubborn refusal to accept federal funds to expand coverage to all working age adults below the poverty level makes things worse than they need to be.

Saying yes to federal funds could save the state \$450 million over a decade by freeing up state dollars that are currently being spent by the Health Care Authority, Mental Health Department, and other state agencies on services for populations that could be funded with no less than a 90% federal match.

Just maybe, the outcry over harmful proposals to cut thousands of parents out of Medicaid and disrupt childrens’ mental health care will move state leaders to reconsider their self-defeating opposition to federal funds.

David Blatt is executive director of the Oklahoma Policy Institute. An earlier version of this essay appeared on the OKPolicy blog. You can sign up for OKPolicy’s e-mail alerts and daily news digest at <http://okpolicy.org>.

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The Wisdom Of Making Oklahoma A Renewable Energy Powerhouse

BY BOB AND MARIA ROUNSAVELL

The year 2016 will see huge growth in the field of renewable energy. In a press conference on Feb. 5, President Obama stated that the solar industry saw growth much bigger than the rest of the economy.

Wind energy is also on the rise, especially in Oklahoma which remains No. 4 in the nation for wind capacity. The state added 1,402 megawatts of wind capacity last year. With eight new wind farms, it now has total wind production capacity of 5,184 MW.

According to the American Wind Energy Association, Oklahoma has almost 700MW under construction and has hundreds of megawatts in advanced stage planning yet to be announced. The possibility is that Oklahoma will pass California this year or next, making it the third largest in wind-generated energy. Without question the U.S. is increasing its wind capacity quickly.

All these happenings are due to Congress renewing a key federal tax credit for electricity generated by renewable sources through 2016. The president's

eighth and final budget directs a lot of growth money to these.

Now is the time to develop clean sustainable energy and efficiency technology with oil prices down. Projection is for oil to continue low with the OPEC decision to freeze production at January levels and Iran ramping it up after decades of sanction. There will, therefore, be a relatively smooth transition away from carbon sources to carbon-free energy.

This past holiday, in our month in the Philippines, we were able to observe that nation's use of renewable energy, comprising one third of its energy mix. At present, geothermal energy represents the largest sustainable source used primarily because of the large number of volcanoes, both active and inactive. Geothermal has been used for several decades and will continue being a major energy source there.

It is the potential of solar energy, however, that excites the Filipinos. In fact solar excitement is high in many countries. Why? To quote the International En-

ergy Agency, solar energy will contribute to solving the world's most urgent problems because it has the potential for the following benefits: 1. increase energy security through reliance on an indigenous, inexhaustible and mostly import-independent resource; 2. enhance sustainability; 3. reduce pollution; 4. lower the costs of mitigating climate change, and 5. keep fossil fuel prices lower.

Worthy of mention is what's becoming well known. One hour of sunlight can supply all of humanity's energy needs for a full year. That realization, along with world research to utilize the sunlight to help quench the insatiable thirst of humans for energy, will very quickly jump-start the new solar industry of this century.

Although solar energy is plentiful, the challenge has been storage and distribution. What does one do when it's cloudy? How can solar energy go from a sunny location to a cloudy one?

There has been extensive research on the questions. We are slowly learning to figure out how to economically store and distribute solar energy.

Good news: the R&D in creating a worldwide solar industry shows promise. More good news: Oklahoma has a lot of solar available days in a year.

A mentor once told me in one of my darkest days in Indianapolis: "What do you do when you get a lemon? Make lemonade."

The sun has been the most significant factor in the drought plaguing our state and some others. Devastating brush and forest fires have been in daily newscasts. Every noonday there are reports of fires in Bixby or Ramona or Mannford. Many times daily, we await the report of our meteorologists, our prophets of our next day. Such is the ever-present preoccupation with the sun and its appearance or absence.

Most TV stations have a complement of at least three meteorologists; our favorite one even has a helicopter pilot that provides a bird's eye view of weather phenomenon, whether a brush fire, tornado damage or a simple panorama of wind gust activity.

Resources are being harnessed to alleviate all the vagaries of global warming/climate change, amplified by El Nino the last year. [Remember that La Nina is preparing to replace her little brother.] Surely these natural occurrences can be partially utilized to make lemonade with the abundance of sun and wind in the state. There's certainly a strong possibility that our oil industry can be transformed into developing solar power with its existing energy infrastructure.

The potential to create a new energy industry may produce the much-needed shot in the arm to help solve the state's budgetary problem of a current projected shortfall of more than \$1 billion. Do you remember the \$600 million-plus deficit we agonized over in 2015, barely a year ago?

With every bit of joyful news about lower gasoline prices come lower energy revenues from our still most significant economic segment. Every cent that we pay for our gasoline translates to millions we will

obtain in state revenue from our No. 1 industry – oil and gas.

Every single time that penny falls, I think about our Oologah pride and joy, OMES Secretary Preston Dorerflinger; Rep. Earl Sears, House Appropriations and Budget chair; Sen. Clark Jolley, Senate budget chair; and our governor, Mary Fallin.

Other cabinet secretaries and our legislative leaders are having to undergo a much more intensive, painstaking process of allocating ever-decreasing revenues to ever-increasing essential services, including education, public safety, transportation, physical and mental health, and corrections.

How about our teachers helping our children discover and develop their innate talents and thus becoming productive citizens? When did they get their last pay increase and see some reward for their contribution?

Here comes another earthquake in Medford or Edmond. When will our firefighters get a respite from the stress of mitigating the drought outcomes? When do our police officers patrol their assignments without another robbery in a convenience store or a drugstore?

How many more dollars will we take away from the cents appropriated for the mental health budget – we recently saw our labor commissioner killed by his own mentally ill son? How about our obligation to our officials in overcrowded prisons?

What about our health providers now facing the additional specter of Zika? Or our state troopers fortunately facing fewer "Mexican illegals" with an improving economy in the south but the specter of a new El Chapo – or the old one free once again through a new tunnel?

There are other significant services for sustaining a healthy, creative environment. One capable of designing solutions for pressing challenges from global warming, for peace among nations and equal opportunity for all.

Can we, will we, inject our burdened leaders with the insights and the vision to do right for our state? It is not just about monetary resources for these state problems. It is primarily about creating a government structure that can provide fiscal support for life-supporting and enhancing programs.

Desperately needed is the leadership that has the vision and the political will to make Oklahoma the leading powerhouse in renewable energy. We, the people, need to find this leader from among us and herald a new day of gargantuan enterprise and unbelievable grandeur.

Oologah residents Bob and Maria Rounsavell are a mixed couple married for more than 50 years. They met in Maria's country, the Philippines, when Bob was a Peace Corps volunteer, and Maria was his boss as chair of the Humanities Department at UP College of Agriculture [now the University of the Philippines at Los Banos]. Bob is president of the Carrie Dickerson Foundation.

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– Bernie Sanders with Native American Oak Flat defenders.

Bernie Sanders Champions Sacred Tribal Lands

BY STEPHEN FOX

Tribes across the country appreciate Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' efforts to protect sacred land in Arizona known as Oak Flat, located on National Forest land, from destruction by foreign-owned mining conglomerates Rio Tinto PLC [United Kingdom] and BHP Billiton [Australia] through their U.S. company, Resolution Copper Mining.

Taking on these mining companies and fighting back against the money these companies and their allies continue to spend on lobbyists and political contributions, Sen. Sanders introduced S. 2242, the Save Oak Flat Act, to correct not only an injustice to Native Americans but also against the American people.

Sanders' legislation repeals Section 3003, the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange Act of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act, privatizing part of the Tonto National Forest and allowing Resolution Copper Mining to develop the largest copper mine in North America.

Sanders' Save Oak Flat Act would immediately halt this giveaway of land and natural resources owned by the American people, and is co-sponsored by Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-NM, and Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-WI.

For centuries, Oak Flat (an hour east of Phoenix)

in the Tonto National Forest has been considered sacred to Apaches, Yavapais and other Native Americans, long playing a vital role in Native ceremonies, religion, tradition and culture. It has been the place where Native Americans in the region have gone to pray, to conduct ceremonial dances, to gather acorns for sustenance, to collect medicines and ceremonial items, and to seek and obtain peace and personal cleansing.

The United States has legal and moral obligations to provide access to Native Americans and to protect these traditional territories in a manner that respects the cultural, historical and religious importance to Indian tribes.

For decades, tribal governments and organizations, and hundreds of thousands of individual grassroots activists, united in opposition to the land exchange to protect these tribal homelands. Because of this staunch opposition, House of Representatives leadership twice pulled the bill from consideration because it lacked the votes for passage during the 113th Congress. The Senate also refused to advance the bill through regular order. To circumvent and silence this opposition, Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, and two Arizona Representatives, Paul Gosar and Ann Kirkpatrick, forced a closed-door deal to attach the land exchange as a midnight rider into the Pentagon bill in Decem-

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ber 2014.

In addition to the destruction of this place of worship, their bill threatens the water quality supply of the region. Tonto National Forest, established in 1905, protects the region's watershed. However, the land exchange will effectively eliminate these protections. Under current plans, the mining operation will require an unsustainable amount of water to operate and leave behind contaminated water affecting the region for generations to come.

The desecration of these lands is probably nothing you have heard a word about from Hillary Clinton or any of the Republicans. Without Bernie Sanders' efforts, these Apaches wouldn't have a chance to protect their sacred land, and if Clinton or the Republicans win this election, there will be even more corporate manipulation of government processes.

Sen. Sanders stands up for what is right in his efforts to protect Oak Flat and the American people from corporate greed. He has done that consistently and without wavering for the past 40 years. That is what kind of president we need, and that is what kind of president he will be.

The senators to convince to save Oak Flat and not desecrate Tonto National Forest are the Republicans on the Senate Environment Committee. Long after Super Tuesday and the general election, they ulti-

The defense of Oak Flat from the privatization of Tonto National Forest depends on all of us writing to the Republican Senators on the Senate Environment Committee, particularly Oklahoma's James Inhofe! Please write in support of Bernie's Save Oak Flat bill [despite McCain sneaking it into the National Defense Appropriation bill].

Senate committee members include Inhofe, the chair; David Vitter, Louisiana; John Barrasso, Wyoming; Shelley Moore Capito, West Virginia; Mike Crapo, Idaho; John Boozman, Arkansas; Jeff Sessions, Alabama; Roger F. Wicker, Mississippi; Deb Fischer, Nebraska; Mike Rounds, South Dakota; and Dan Sullivan, Alaska. Their USPS addresses are c/o United States Senate, Washington D.C., 20510. You can also write to them on line at their Senate websites.
- Stephen Fox

mately hold the power as to whether one of our national forests will be the future site of one of America's largest copper mines.

Stephen Fox is the founder of New Millennium Fine Art in Santa Fe.

Remembering Those Persecuted For Their Socialist Beliefs

BY JEREMY KUZMAROV

While more of a New Deal-style liberal than doctrinaire Socialist, the Bernie Sanders campaign has helped to advance many of the ideals long-held by Socialists including in promoting a fairer economic system, robust social programs and genuinely democratic political structure in which money does not buy influence.

As the Sanders campaign surges forward, we should remember the many Americans persecuted for promoting the ideals that Sanders is helping to legitimize and which may be slowly losing their stigma, especially among younger generations.

In 1961, the FBI under its infamous Counter-intelligence [COINTELPRO] operation launched the Socialist Workers Party disruption campaign because, according to a secret memorandum, the party had been "openly espousing its line on a local national basis through running candidates for public office and strongly ... supporting such causes as Castro's Cuba

and integration problems in the South."

The disruption campaign included breaking into the homes of Socialist Party leaders and stealing their membership lists and internal party bulletins, planting fake evidence in order to jail them or having them dismissed from their jobs and attempts to influence the board of regents at various universities to have socialist college faculty members dismissed. Numerous careers were ruined in this respect, and the universities were de-radicalized as a result.

The Senate Pike Committee on illegal surveillance concluded in 1975 that the Socialist Workers Party "has been subjected to 34 years of intensive investigation [along with disruption] without any evidence whatsoever of illegal activity."

The most violent operations were directed by black leftist organizations like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, which Sanders himself supported as a college student, and Black Panther Party,

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which was subjected to a public smear campaigns and infiltration by FBI provocateurs, who murdered Chicago leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.

Martin Luther King Jr., a strong advocate for social democracy, was also harassed for years by the FBI which wrote letters designed to encourage his suicide.

A generation earlier, Socialist Party supporters opposing the U.S. involvement in World War I were rounded up and often given lengthy jail sentences under draconian alien and sedition laws. Party leader Eugene V. Debs was subsequently forced to run for president from prison.

In November 1917, 17 members of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers of the World [IWW] – accused of bombing the home of Edgar Pew, the vice president of Carter Oil Co., a subsidiary of Standard Oil with scant evidence – were taken from police custody under the oversight of the police and savagely horsewhipped and tortured by mob vigilantes led by Tulsa city notable W. Tate Brady. The Wobblies were then ordered to leave town and shot at as they fled.

The Tulsa World editorialized that “the first step to whipping Germany is to whip the IWW [who had opposed the war and coordinated draft resistance]. Kill ‘em just as you would kill any other snake, Don’t scotch ‘em, kill ‘em. And kill ‘em dead. It is no time to waste money on trials and continuances and things like that. All that is necessary is the evidence and the firing squad. Probably the carpenter’s union will contribute the timber for the coffin.”

These inflammatory statements coming from seemingly a respectable newspaper epitomize the venomous attacks directed against leftist activists in the American heartland during the age of the red scare.

Histories of the FBI show the agency, founded as a political police with an anti-radical division led by J. Edgar Hoover in 1919, devoted considerable attention towards combatting and subverting left-wing movements under the pretext of protecting national security.

The net effect was to weaken the American left, and intimidate liberal groups from advocating more radical positions.

The legacy of the red scares is still felt today, with the Democratic Party having adopted centrist, corporatist policies over many decades.

Sanders himself has been ridiculed by his political opponents and ignored in the media until recently, though his ideals resonate among many Americans affected by the economic crisis and among young people who equate capitalism with Wall Street greed, student debt and unscrupulous wars.

As momentum surges for the Sanders campaign and socialist ideals become more openly debated and accepted in American society, we should acknowledge all the idealistic souls who were discriminated

against and persecuted as they fought for a better America.

Jeremy Kuzmarov is J.P. Walker assistant professor of history at the University of Tulsa and author of Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century [Massachusetts, 2012].

Remember, Students Learn Differently

BY DOROTHEA PAULK

Since subscribing to The Oklahoma Observer, I have been pleased to note your interest in education.

Frequently, I’ve wanted to respond. My ideas on the subject, however, are less political or academic and, seem to me, more plain, common sense. For all I know, in other words, caring and creative teaching may be occurring in our classrooms – some of them, at least. Hopefully, many of them.

In any case, I decided to speak out this morning, in spite of reservations about being somewhat simplistic. For the reality of any imposed system, testing program, accountability requirements – any policy is that teaching and learning is expected to occur.

But suppose that in many schools, it isn’t. And with the finest and most up-to-date buildings and with highly competitive salaries for our teachers, it still would not be happening in far too many and at any level from kindergarten to post-graduate.

What if what we need to do is return to the teacher-education programs of our colleges and universities? What are teachers being taught? And what are administrators being taught?

Are administrators required to have assorted or, at least, some classroom experience? Have they been required to take methods course to inform them about how students learn and, consequently, the methods teachers and professors should use to transfer knowledge in ways that work? By that, I mean ways that are memorable enough to be applied to the learner.

Learning may be visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory. It may be subjective or objective. Repetition, reasoning, examples shown or related [as in parables], teach. Memorization may be appropriate for some material. The picture for methods and their application can be perceived as complex or simple. But when

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known and in the hands of creative educators who focus on transferring their knowledge to that student, learning happens.

These methods aren't either/or but *all*, for students learn in different ways.

From my experience in the classroom, from the education I received in preparation for becoming an educator and especially from seeing poor results reported for too many of our schools, I believe that if you know how students learn, and you know the methods to reach them, the result could rid us of the Bell Curve because failures would become quite rare. *Dorothea Paulk lives in Calumet.*

What's In Your Water? It's Not Just Flint Issue

BY JIM MAXEY

The drinking water contamination in Flint, MI is a man-made humanitarian disaster. I know the focus of the news reporting singles out lead as the contaminant but there are several other toxic chemicals, also found in the Flint drinking water, that are not being acknowledged.

However, contaminated drinking water is not unique to Flint. For example, here in Tulsa, the city councilors continue to endorse the addition of several toxic and carcinogenic industrial waste chemicals to the public drinking water.

The toxic fluorosilicic acid chemical being intentionally added to the Tulsa public drinking water, as documented by Tulsa Water and Sewer Department Water Quality Assurance, contains several toxic and carcinogenic elements such as arsenic, mercury, lead, chromium, cobalt, molybdenum, aluminum, antimony, Cadmium, Titanium, Barium and several more.

I know the Tulsa councilors will tell you that the reason for adding this toxic industrial chemical waste to the public drinking water is to supposedly treat tooth decay even though there has *never* been a controlled scientific study to document that fluorosilicic acid has anything to do with reducing decay rates.

The only reason this highly contaminated fluorosilicic acid chemical waste, which is

sourced from the phosphate fertilizer industry, is being dripped into the Tulsa drinking water supply is to allow the fertilizer industry to profitably dispose of this toxic chemical soup, for which there is absolutely no other market, and so the phosphate fertilizer manufacturers don't have to pay expensive disposal fees.

Instead, via the city taxes we pay, the Tulsa councilors have determined that it is appropriate to have us pay to have our bodies used as toxic waste disposal sites.

I know that if any of you question the Tulsa councilors about their endorsing the intentional addition of these toxins to the public drinking water they will tell you this is "safe."

What they don't know, or are unwilling to admit, is that when the EPA or FDA or the U.S. Public Health Service declares the human ingestion of a certain toxic chemical to be "safe" that all the studies done to support that claim are all structured to test only one toxin at a time over a very brief time period.

What is not acknowledged is that there has never been any testing where the individual is exposed to a lifetime term of ingesting all these toxins at the same time on a daily basis. Wonder what that would show?

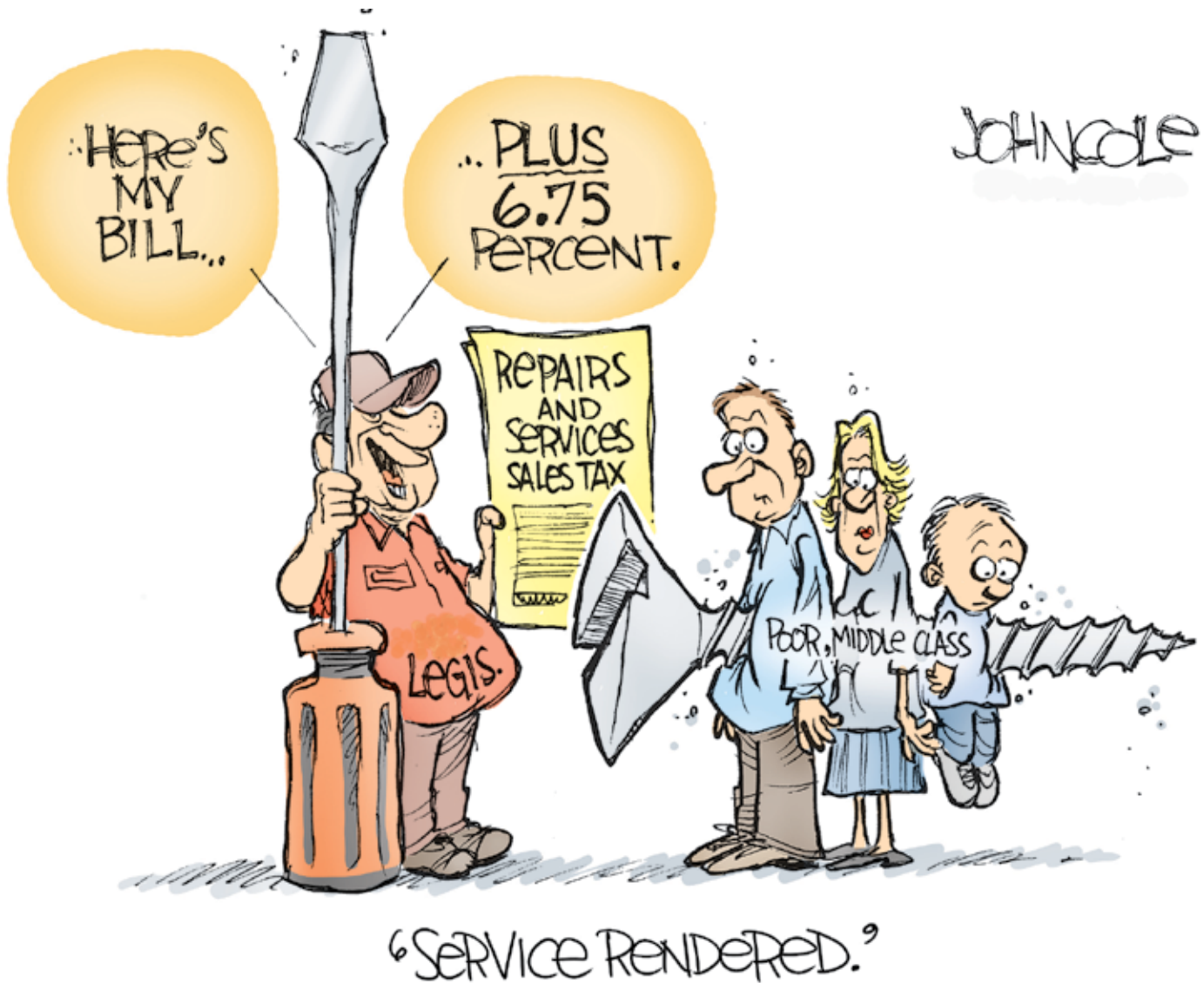
Tulsa's drinking water is just a mini-Flint with the ingested toxins being virtually identical with the only difference being the concentration.

For those of you who will straighten me out that it is "safe" to chronically ingest low parts per million of a toxic soup of industrial waste chemicals then I would suggest you look up the definition of cumulative.

Maybe it's time for us to wake up before we do ourselves in.

Jim Maxey is a dentist living in Tulsa.





Will Fragmented GOP Majority Unite To Solve State's Fiscal Crisis?

BY ARNOLD HAMILTON

For five years after seizing control of the Legislature and governorship, Oklahoma Republicans bragged about how – unlike Washington – they could get things done.

They cut income taxes and spending, fully embracing Supply Side economics. They protected the corporate welfare that keeps their big donors happy. They tilted the law in favor of corporations and against workers.

The GOP got exactly what it wanted: shrink gov-

ernment to the point where what was left could be drowned in a bathtub, as anti-tax zealot Grover Norquist infamously put it.

So why aren't Republicans celebrating?

It turns out the dismantle-government end game wasn't what many of their rank-and-file, working-class constituents expected when the GOP promised to run state government like a business.

Oklahomans now are hopping mad that Republican fiscal policies are destroying public schools, forcing

higher fees and taxes at the local level, and failing to address aging, decaying roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

How do we know this? Because the once mostly lockstep GOP majority at NE 23rd and Lincoln Blvd. is now splintered into warring factions. Lawmakers feeling the heat from back home are increasingly breaking with leadership and Gov. Mary Fallin over taxes and spending.

Three years ago, a \$1 billion bond issue was unthinkable. Deficit spending, sneered high-riding Republicans Not in the GOP DNA. Today, Republicans are considering just such a plan.

Three months ago, only a few brave souls dared suggest postponing a .25% income tax cut expected to cost the state treasury about \$140 million at a time it already is \$1.3 billion in the hole. Recently, a Senate committee voted for just such a delay.

Robert A. Funk fired off a letter to Republican lawmakers, demanding they approve Education Savings Accounts – actually, vouchers designed to steer public tax dollars into private parochial or for-profit schools, something Oklahomans overwhelming oppose.

But Funk reminded legislators that he and his fellow corporatists wield big checkbooks: “These issues represent the reason many of us have worked so hard for so many years to assure that the makeup of the Oklahoma Legislature was changed to include people willing to confront entrenched political groups which desire to protect the current system of administrative waste and union control.”

In other words, the 1% thought it was in control. As a former lobbyist recently put it, the big checkbooks are “in for a big surprise.” The new breed of uber-conservative lawmakers, he said, “don’t stay bought” like they used to.

Republicans, of course, prattle incessantly that they’re working to let taxpayers keep more of their hard-earned money. Exactly how much more are working families keeping? This year’s quarter-percentage-point cut amounts to about a \$30 tax saving, not even enough for a family of four to order off McDonald’s dollar menu every other month.

Don’t get your hopes up that Fallin and legislative Republicans have truly seen the light. They’re frantically scrambling for ways, in an election year, to convince voters they’re working to solve the state’s problems. But they are so fragmented – corporatists in one corner, Tea Partiers in another, religious zealots and xenophobes in a third – they are not likely to be able to agree on how to resolve the fiscal mess.

Worse, House leadership cut minority Democrats out of the process completely. If Speaker Jeff Hickman and Co. were interested in an adult solution, they would bypass the wingnuts and join forces with Democrats to pass sorely-needed revenue and spending reforms.

Hickman is term-limited, but others in the GOP’s Reality Caucus are scared witless of being primaried – losing to a fringe candidate so far right that even the Hubble couldn’t locate them on the political spectrum. They aren’t willing to risk their elective careers, the best interests of Oklahoma be damned.

Further, Fallin and the elected leaders in both houses are frantically two-stepping around the clock in an effort to keep their corporate benefactors happy. It isn’t working.

Recently, Express Employment Professionals chief

Republican leaders are especially nervous since losing two special elections – one for an OKC House seat never before held by a Democrat and the other for a Owasso-area Senate seat once filled by arch-conservative Randy Brogdon.

Even Fallin, who is term-limited as governor, may be wondering what the chaos portends for her legacy.

Only eight days into session, it’s already clear who will – and who won’t – be paying for the Legislature’s disastrous seven-year fiscal experiment.

Just over a month into the session, there are more questions than answers. But this much is certain: the working poor will most likely shoulder the burden for cleaning up the state’s fiscal mess.

Despite a \$1.3 billion and growing budget hole, most state leaders remain reluctant to pivot away from income tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy and now cost the state treasury about \$1 billion annually.

[This helps explain how Oklahoma ended up with the nation’s deepest education cuts at a time when oil was selling for more than \$100 a barrel.]

Lawmakers also remain less-than-committed to eliminating oft-dubious tax credits and incentives

IMPOSSIBLE EXPECTATIONS

*What
Confronts
Hillary
And All
Women
In Authority*

BY DEBORAH TANNEN

Now we know that Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright don't actually think that anyone should vote for Hillary Clinton simply because she's a woman. Does that mean we can forget about Clinton's gender? I don't think so. But the question we face is subtler, more complicated and harder to address than "Do I vote for her because she's a woman?" Rather, it's "Can I be sure I'm judging this candidate accurately, given the double bind that confronts all women in positions of authority?"

A double bind is far worse than a straightforward damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't dilemma. It requires you to obey two mutually exclusive commands: Anything you do to fulfill one violates the other. Women running for office, as with all women in authority, are subject to these two demands: Be a good leader! Be a good woman! While the qualities expected of a



good leader [be forceful, confident and, at times, angry] are similar to those we expect of a good man, they are the opposite of what we expect of a good woman [be gentle, self-deprecating and emotional, but not angry]. Hence the double bind: If a candidate – or manager – talks or acts in ways expected of women, she risks being seen as under-confident or even incompetent. But if she talks or acts in ways expected of leaders, she is likely to be seen as too aggressive and will be subject to innumerable other negative judgments – and epithets – that apply only to women.

An example: Anyone who seeks public office, especially the highest one, must be ambitious, yet that word is rarely applied to male candidates because it

to be heard over the din of a cheering crowd without shouting? Both these comments came from women. Surprising? No. Women are just as likely, if not more likely, to react this way. After all, it's from peers that girls learn to play down their power lest they be ostracized for being "bossy."

This helps answer the question that Steinem and Albright brought into focus: Why aren't more young women [or, more precisely, as Post reporter Janell Ross recently pointed out, young white women] flocking to support the first woman with a serious shot at the presidency?

The double bind lowers its boom on women in positions of authority, so those who haven't yet risen to such positions have not yet felt its full weight. They

[A]mbition is admirable in a man, but unacceptable – in fact, downright scary – in a woman.

goes without saying. And ambition is admirable in a man, but unacceptable – in fact, downright scary – in a woman.

Google "Bernie Sanders ambitious," and you get headlines about the candidate's "ambitious plans." Try it with Donald Trump, and you find references to his "ambitious deportation plan" and "ambitious real estate developments." When the word is used to describe Trump himself, it's positive, as in "Trump is proud and ambitious, and he strives to excel."

But pair the word with Hillary Clinton, and a search spews headlines accusing her of "naked ambition," "unbridled ambition," "ruthless ambitions" – even of being "pathologically ambitious." In a spoof, the satirical website the Onion exposed the injustice and absurdity of demonizing a candidate for this requisite quality through its own version of such headlines: "Hillary Clinton Is Too Ambitious to Be the First Female President."

Robin Lakoff, the linguist who first identified the double bind as it applies to women in her 1975 book *Language and Woman's Place*, has pointed out that it accounts for the persistent impressions of Clinton as inauthentic and untrustworthy. We develop these impressions, Lakoff notes, when people don't talk and act as we think they should, given who they are and what we know about them.

In Clinton's case, she explains, they come precisely from the fact that she has characteristics, such as toughness, that we require of a candidate but that just don't feel right in a woman.

The trickiest thing about the double bind is that it operates imperceptibly, like shots from a gun with a silencer. "It has nothing to do with gender," I heard recently. "It's just that she's shrill." When is the last time you heard a man called shrill? "She should stop shouting," another critic advised. How is a candidate

may well believe [as I did when I was young] that when the time comes, they'll be judged fairly, based on their qualifications.

They probably have not yet experienced the truism that to get equal consideration, a woman has to be better than her male counterparts – just as Clinton is, according to the New York Times editorial endorsing her last month, "one of the most broadly and deeply qualified candidates in modern history."

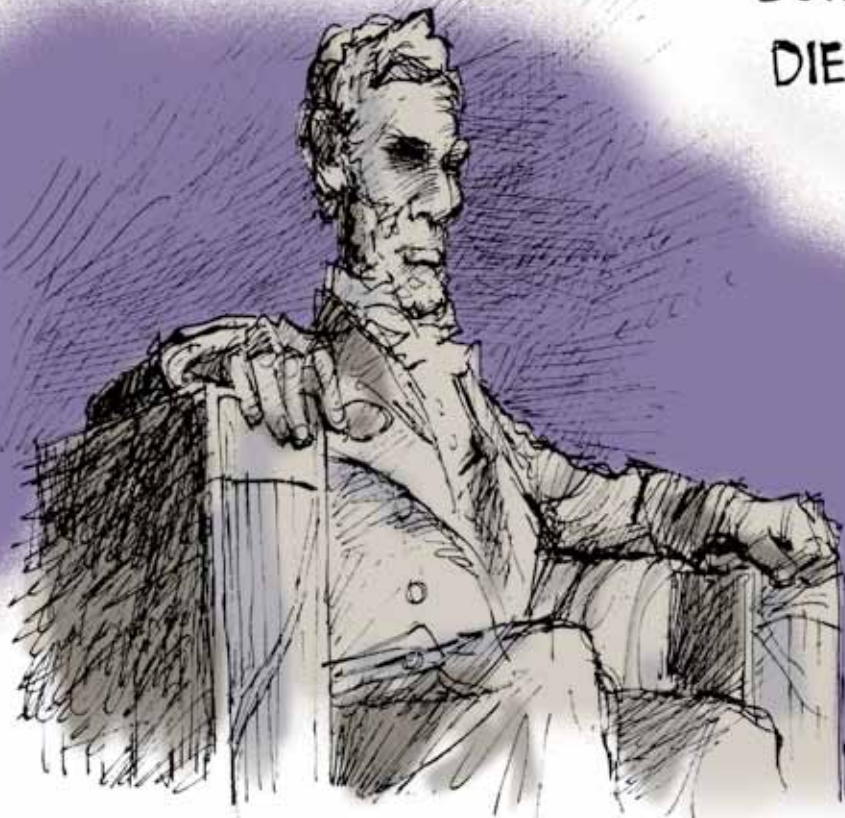
Voters of all ages must ask whether the lens through which they view Clinton is being clouded by these invisible yet ubiquitous forces. To make sure they're seeing clearly, they need to understand – and correct for – the double bind.

Dorah Tannen is a linguistics professor at Georgetown University. This essay first appeared in the Washington Post.



MIKE LUCKOVICH 
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BORN - FEBRUARY 12, 1809
DIED - SUPER TUESDAY, 2016



GOP, R.I.P.

Why Trump's Rise Is Bad News For America, Not Just Republicans

BY ROBERT REICH

I'm writing to you today to announce the death of the Republican Party. It is no longer a living, vital, animated organization.

It died in 2016. RIP.

It has been replaced by warring tribes:

- Evangelicals opposed to abortion, gay marriage, and science.
- Libertarians opposed to any government constraint on private behavior.
- Market fundamentalists convinced the "free market" can do no wrong.
- Corporate and Wall Street titans seeking bailouts,

subsidies, special tax loopholes, and other forms of crony capitalism.

- Billionaires craving even more of the nation's wealth than they already own.

- And white working-class Trumped's who love Donald and are becoming convinced the greatest threats to their wellbeing are Muslims, blacks, and Mexicans.

Each of these tribes has its own separate political organization, its own distinct sources of campaign funding, its own unique ideology – and its own candidate.

What's left is a lifeless shell called the Republican

Party. But the Grand Old Party inside the shell is no more.

I, for one, regret its passing. Our nation needs political parties to connect up different groups of Americans, sift through prospective candidates, deliberate over priorities, identify common principles, and forge a platform.

The Republican Party used to do these things. Sometimes it did them easily, as when it came together behind William McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt in 1900, Calvin Coolidge in 1924, and Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Sometimes it did them with difficulty, as when it strained to choose Abraham Lincoln in 1860, Barry Goldwater in 1964, and Mitt Romney in 2012.

But there was always enough of a Republican Party to do these important tasks – to span the divides, give force and expression to a set of core beliefs, and come up with a candidate around whom party regulars could enthusiastically rally.

No longer. And that's a huge problem for the rest of us.

Without a Republican Party, nothing stands between us and a veritable Star Wars barroom of self-proclaimed wannabes.

Without a party, anyone runs who's able to raise [or already possesses] the requisite money – even if he happens to be a pathological narcissist who has never before held public office, even if he's a knave detested by all his Republican colleagues.

Without a Republican Party, it's just us and them. And one of them could even become the next president of the United States.

Robert B. Reich served in three national administrations, most recently as secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton. He also served on President Obama's transition advisory board. His latest book is Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future.

Republicans Are Getting Savior They Asked For

BY JOE BESSLER

The Republican establishment is seriously wringing its hands over the ascendancy of Donald Trump's candidacy.

The core problem for the party is that the very audiences whose support Republicans need in order to win the general election are the very audiences that Trump dismisses with full-throated vigor. And he's winning.

A recent Tom Toles' political cartoon captures the dilemma well. Two elephants [Republicans] are talking with one another. The first says, "We've got a Trump problem." To which the other responds, "He's appealing to voters who are responding to racism bordering on fascism." The first says, "It's a real dilemma," with the other asking a concluding question, "How do we get rid of Trump but keep those voters?"

As the cartoon brilliantly illustrates, what Republicans have yet to own, but cannot do so publicly, is that Donald Trump is not the real problem. The real problem is the audience they have created and catered to for over the last 50 years.

What the Republican establishment knows is that if it cannot make stronger appeals to women, to blacks, to Hispanics, they will surely lose the national election in 2016. Yet many of their rank-and-file, loyal foot soldiers who will surely vote, at least in the primaries, find these very shifts an anathema and a betrayal to the religious/political ideology of the last 50

years.

It was after all, in national, and not only state campaigns, that the Republican establishment lurched to the cultural right in order to forge a coalition of free-market conservatives and social/religious conservatives.

Here, I especially want to call attention to the religious dimensions of this coalition. Fundamentalist/evangelical Christians have been at the heart of this ideology of "traditional values" and "American exceptionalism." And it is this very coalition, which is now so troubling in the case of Donald Trump.

While the establishment Republican candidates – realizing the need to change their discourse – have sought to back away from the religious/political ideology of the past 50 years, Donald Trump has essentially walked into the campaign, and said, in effect, "If you don't want that audience, I do."

And from bringing out his Bible, and talking about how much he respects it, to appealing to every jingoistic impulse in conservative Christian America, Trump has made the other candidates appear timid, weak and fearful.

After all, those candidates seem to be avoiding the Republican core constituency. What of those candidates' loyalty to the bonds the party had nurtured, Trump might well ask?

In the current election cycle, the Republican estab-

ishment has left itself open to the charge that they have forgotten their commitments. And virtually on cue, at least since a Sept. 15 speech, and perhaps earlier, Trump has returned to an old, favorite line of Richard Nixon's – the "silent majority."

What has become far more troublesome is that Trump appeals to that same conservative Christian audience about the threat of Islamic terror. For example, he uses the San Bernadino, CA terrorist attack that killed 14 people to move the focus of his "us vs. them" campaign from illegal immigrants to Muslims.

Warning a South Carolina audience, "It's going to get worse. It's going to get a lot worse," Trump offers

God."

He used that text to help create the religious/political ideology of a god-fearing America at war with godless Communism.

It was a powerful bond, leading not only to abuses of McCarthyism and its witch hunts, but also later to religious conservatives' sense of abandonment, railing against "that godless court," in response to Supreme Court decisions against school prayer and Bible reading in public schools in the mid-1960s, and the decision of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

So, the underlying cultural problems have been there for decades, but the Republican decision to

The underlying cultural problems have been there for decades, but the Republican decision to tap into that religious/cultural resentment and to encourage its anti-intellectualism and its bigotries, for their own short-run political gains, has been disastrous for public policy – in many cases leading to the intellectual and cultural gridlock that we find today in Congress.

himself as the only candidate who is telling the truth, even as he tells his fundamentalist, Christian audience, what they want to hear.

His strong solution? A religious test for entry into America – preventing all Muslims from legally entering the country "until we find out what's going on." Blithely unconcerned about the potential of stoking the flames of a global religious war, Trump plays the man of principle.

While policy personnel in both parties have sounded the alarm that such rhetoric plays into the hands of ISIS propaganda, Trump's political position seems strengthened for the moment.

Time will tell if the outrage from both parties slows his momentum.

But if party officials thought Trump was going to go away quietly, this new opportunity to be the strongest voice for "the people," as Trump says, for America's "silent majority" will make him a serious contender in most, if not all, Republican primaries. And in this perfect storm the Republican establishment has only itself to blame.

To be sure, the political use of Christian faith to combat "godless" Communism in the Cold War opened the door to this kind of rhetoric.

Harry Truman, in his Inaugural address of 1949, did not quote the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence ["We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal"] but the book of Genesis, that "all men are created in the image of

tap into that religious/cultural resentment and to encourage its anti-intellectualism and its bigotries, for their own short-run political gains, has been disastrous for public policy – in many cases leading to the intellectual and cultural gridlock that we find today in Congress.

Here are the highlights of the GOP appeal to conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christians:

- Richard Nixon picks up the "Southern strategy" from the Democrats following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, appealing to structures of white supremacy, themselves rooted in a language of Christian purity.

- Ronald Reagan makes common cause with Paul Weyrich and Jerry Falwell's freshly minted political action group, Moral Majority in 1979, which delivered two-thirds of evangelical voters, and many urban Catholic pro-life voters, to Reagan.

- When, with Reagan's backing the Fairness Doctrine was repealed, Rush Limbaugh launched his national radio show in 1988, attacking "liberals" and "feminazis" on the airwaves, and forging a populist, political/religious consensus with comments like this from 2013: "If you believe in God you cannot intellectually believe in man-made global warming."

- Rev. Pat Robertson launches a voter-mobilization organization called the Christian Coalition in 1989, which would become the Christian Coalition of America and among the most powerful political organizations in the country;



Throughout the 1990s Republicans played off of the 1991 book *Culture Wars* by James Davison Hunter.

- See Pat Buchanan's 1992 speech at the Republican National Convention: "The agenda that Clinton and Gore would impose on America: abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat units. That's change, all right. But that's not the kind of change America needs. It's not the kind of change America wants. And it's not the kind of change we can abide in a nation we still call 'God's country.'"

- See Charleton Heston's speeches in the late 1990s as president of the National Rifle Association, like this one from 1997: "I believe that we are again engaged in a great civil war, a cultural war that's about to hijack your birthright to think and say what resides in your heart." And another from 1999, entitled "How to Win the Culture War."

- Rupert Murdoch founds Fox News as "an alternative to CNN" in the fall of 1996 and installs Republican political operative Roger Ailes as CEO.

- President George W. Bush authorizes Karl Rove to put amendments on the ballots of 11 states to ban "gay marriage" in the 2004 election to increase voter turnout against John Kerry.

- President George W. Bush says in 2005 that "Intelligent Design" should be taught in public schools so that "people can understand what the debate [with

evolution] is about."

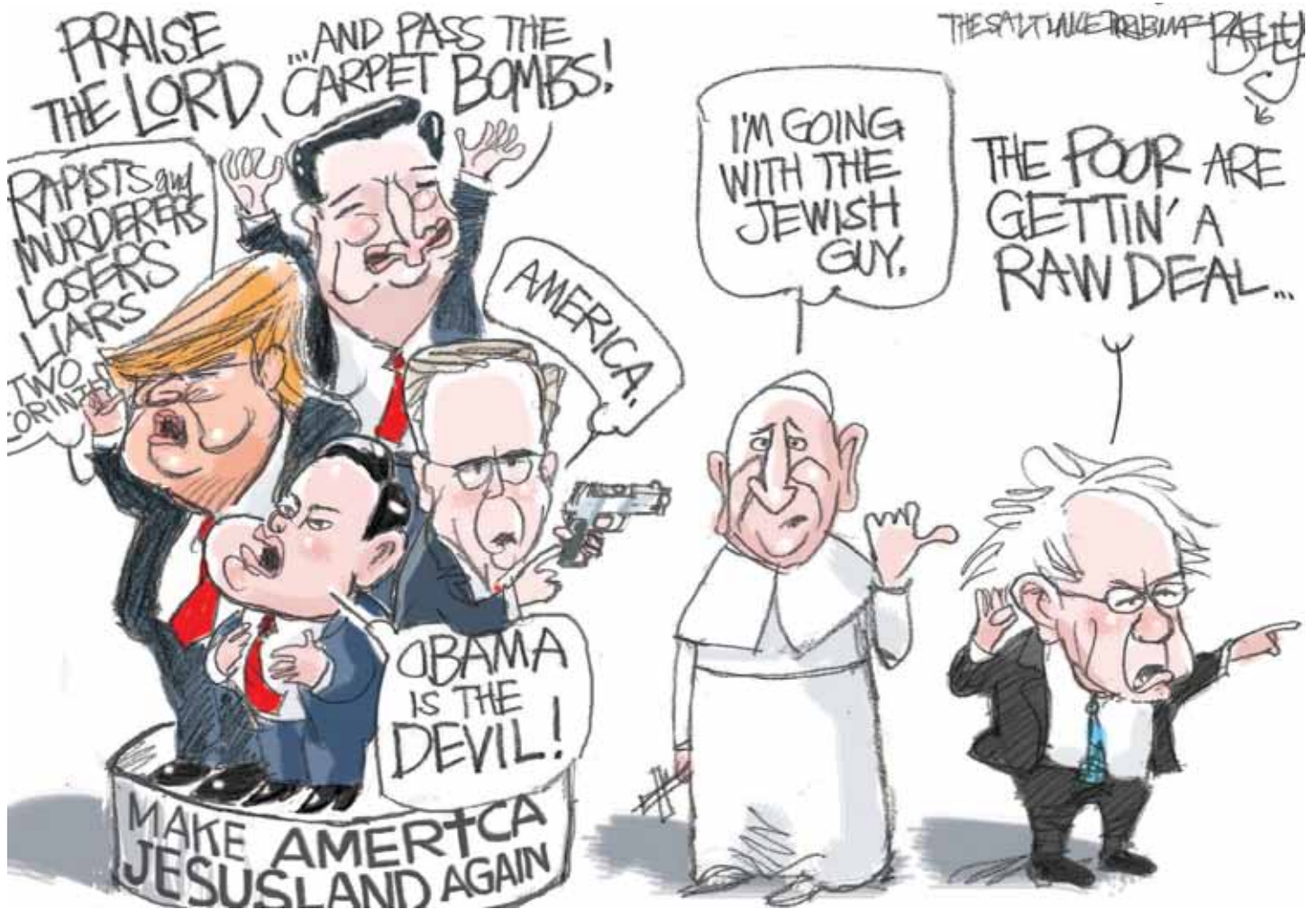
- In 2011-12 Republicans, with the help of Koch Brothers and the Tea Party, seek to repress the vote, especially in 38 states, in the 2012 national election in order to defeat President Obama.

And such a list does not begin to scratch the surface of an intentional program to link the Republican Party with the interests of conservative evangelicals and fundamentalist Christians.

I can certainly understand why political pundits of both parties do not want to speak directly about this conservative Christian component of recent Republican ideology for fear of the way it could inflame the violent, apocalyptic mentality of many within that fundamentalist audience – fueling the very message and tactics that ISIS uses.

However, if we fail to name the problem that Republican strategists for the last two generations have created by their appeals to Christian fundamentalists then we fail to see the real problem facing the nation, with or without Donald Trump.

Joe Bessler is the Robert Travis Peake Professor of Theology at Phillips Seminary in Tulsa. His recent publications include A Scandalous Jesus: How Three Historic Quest, and Does Constructive Theology Matter? What Political Candidates Can Teach Seminary Students About Theology and Pastoral Leadership, in A Passion for Christian Unity, edited by John Imbler [Chalice Press, 2009].



THE DOMINIONISM CANDIDATE

*How Cruz, Extreme Religious Right Group
Are Reshaping The GOP Presidential Race*

BY FREDERICK CLARKSON

Historians may someday see the 2016 election season as the turning point in how our society understands the Dominionist movement that is seeking to recast society in its own image. The herald of this new understanding is – ironically, as I will discuss below – a Washington Post commentary by historian John Fea, titled: “Ted Cruz’s campaign is fueled by a dominionist vision for America.”

The Post’s publication of Fea’s piece follows years of both scholarly and journalistic tip-toeing around this elephant on the table of American public life – a dynamic modern theocratic religious and political movement that prior conventional wisdom notwithstanding is not fringe.

Fea, who chairs the History Department at the evangelical Messiah College in Pennsylvania, matter of factly discusses the influence of “seven mountains

dominionism” on Sen. Ted Cruz, R-TX – who may be the most openly theocratic candidate ever to be a serious contender for a major party presidential nomination.

Perhaps just as remarkably, the Dominionism advocated by the likes of the Cruz family is wrapped in a claim that religious freedom is under assault in the U.S.

As I noted in the recent report, *When Exemption is the Rule: The Religious Freedom Strategy of the Christian Right*:

“I believe that 2016 is going to be a religious-liberty election,” Cruz declared before a raucous crowd of some 7,000 Southern Baptists in October 2015. “As these threats grow darker and darker and darker, they are waking people up here in Texas and all across this country.”

Unsurprisingly, Cruz features this claim at many of his presidential campaign rallies. This is the new normal.

But of course, Cruz’s notion of religious freedom is all about creating religious exemptions to the legal requirements to recognize the civic equality of LG-BTQ people, and the rights of people seeking their sexual and reproductive health care, as well as the rights of people – including many Christians – whose religious views are different than those of the Cruzes and their ilk.

The term “Dominionism” was first popularized in the 1990s by researchers, including Chip Berlet, scholar Sara Diamond, and me, who needed a term to describe the political aspirations of Christian Rightists who believed that they have a biblical mandate to control all earthly institutions – including government – until the second coming of Jesus. But the idea of conservative Christians gaining political power sufficient to take dominion over society predated our use of the term by decades.

The two main schools of Dominionist thought include Christian Reconstructionism, founded by the late R.J. Rushdoony, which advances the idea not only of the need for Christians [of the right sort] to dominate society, but institute and apply Old Testament “Biblical Law.”

The other, closely related form of Dominionism is advocated by the Pentecostal New Apostolic Reformation, which exuberantly advocates for Christians to “reclaim the seven mountains of culture:” government, religion, media, family, business, education, and arts and entertainment.

The religious vision and political aspirations of Ted Cruz and his father Rafael are widely known in conservative Christian religious and political circles and are being discussed in his home state of Texas. So much so, that reporter Jonathan Tilove of the *Austin American Statesman* wrote last summer about how Raphael Cruz was compelled to insist, “We are not talking about theocracy.” But Fea reports that the Cruzes are close to Christian Nationalist author, historical revisionist and longtime Texas Republican

leader David Barton, who declares that the United States was founded as a Christian Nation but has fallen away from this foundation and must be restored to avoid punishment from God.

Fea writes:

Anyone who has watched Cruz on the stump knows that he often references the important role that his father, traveling evangelist Rafael Cruz, has played in his life. During a 2012 sermon at New Beginnings Church in Bedford, TX, Rafael Cruz described his son’s political campaign as a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

The elder Cruz told the congregation that God would anoint Christian “kings” to preside over an “end-time transfer of wealth” from the wicked to the righteous. After this sermon, Larry Huch, the pastor of New Beginnings, claimed Cruz’s recent election to the U.S. Senate was a sign that he was one of these kings.

According to his father and Huch, Ted Cruz is anointed by God to help Christians in their effort to “go to the marketplace and occupy the land ... and take dominion” over it. This “end-time transfer of wealth” will relieve Christians of all financial woes, allowing true believers to ascend to a position of political and cultural power in which they can build a Christian civilization. When this Christian nation is in place [or back in place], Jesus will return.

Rafael Cruz and Larry Huch preach a brand of evangelical theology called Seven Mountains Dominionism. They believe Christians must take dominion over seven aspects of culture: family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business and government. The name of the movement comes from Isaiah 2:2: “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains.”

Fea also notes that Barton, who runs the Keep the Promise Super PAC that supports Cruz’s campaign, shares this vision:

Barton’s Christian nationalism is a product of this theological approach to culture. Back in 2011, Barton said that if Christians were going to successfully “take the culture” they would need to control these seven areas.

“If you can have those seven areas,” Barton told his listeners to his radio show, “you can shape and control whatever takes place in nations, continents and even the world.”

This is remarkable, in part, because a few years ago, journalists and scholars who wrote about Dominionism found themselves facing a smear campaign by, among others, writers at the same paper in which Fea’s commentary appears. *Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson and then-religion writer Lisa Miller were part of this national effort to discredit the idea that Dominionism was a real thing or that even if it was, that it was of much significance.

This despite the fact that then-Gov. Rick Perry,



The Conundrums Of Justice Scalia

BY RALPH NADER

The passing of Supreme Court Justice Antonin “Nino” Scalia evoked widespread commentary about how outspoken he was both on the court and at law schools and other forums where he often lectured and sometimes tangled with audiences. Knowing of Justice Scalia’s unusual expressiveness for a jurist, my colleague Robert Weissman and I wrote him a challenging letter in 2006, starting with these words:

We are writing to inquire as to how the application of the Bill of Rights and related constitutional protections to the artificial creations known as corporations can be squared with a constitutional interpretation theory of “originalism.”

We referred to the Supreme Court case which was falsely reported to have decided that a corporation is a person. This was the 1886 case *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*. This case dealt with a taxation matter and the court neither decided the personhood issue nor did it even address the issue.

Instead, the court reporter [or scribe as he was called], a former railroad company president, simply

wrote in the headnotes that “Corporations are persons within the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States ... “

Despite this fraudulent representation of the court’s opinion, subsequent Supreme Court cases started extending Bill of Rights protections to corporations. Nowhere in the Constitution is there any mention of the words “corporation” or “company.”

The word “person” meant to the Framers in those early days a human being; the Framers never said a company or corporation is a person. The Preamble of the Constitution, we should remember, starts with “We the People,” not “We the People and the Corporations.”

This is no minor distinction. Corporations have seized on this equivalence with being a “person,” to escape health and safety regulation, consumer and labor rights, and even strong regulation or prohibition of tobacco advertising that pushes a product known to take 400,000 American lives a year.

Corporate lawyers and judges have continued to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39



Why Should You And I Have To Keep Paying Mitch McConnell's Salary?

Antonin Scalia is gone. The nastiest and noisiest of right-wingers on the Supreme Court is dead.

But he can't be any more brain dead than Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader of the U.S. Senate. In a blatantly partisan ploy to prevent President Obama from nominating a successor to Scalia, McConnell has cited a historical precedent dictating that presidents who are in the last year of their term do not name new justices to the high court. "Therefore," he babbled, "this vacancy should not be filled until we have a new president."

What a silly old squirrel McConnell is! Article II of the U.S. Constitution plainly states that the president "shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint ... Judges of the Supreme Court." Note that the Constitution says the president "shall" do this – as a duty to the nation. Nothing in the founding document suggests that this power and duty is voided in an election year. In fact, 13 Supreme Court nominations have been made in presidential election years, and the Senate took action on 11 of them. McConnell's assertion is bogus [and silly], for history and the Constitution clearly back Obama.

Ironically, one who would have nailed McConnell for such a slapstick political perversion of plain constitutional language is Scalia himself. He practiced what he called "originalism" in his official judgments, insisting that the Constitution must be interpreted only by the words in it and only by the original meaning those words had for the founders when they wrote them into the document.

McConnell's squirrely stall tactic is as ridiculous as it is shameful. It's also totally hypocritical, since Mitch himself voted in February 1988 to confirm a Supreme Court nominee put forth by Ronald Reagan – in the last year of his presidency.

This leads me to ask, why should you and I have to keep paying McConnell's salary? Not only is he a Sen-

ate majority leader who doesn't lead, the lazy right-wing lawmaker really doesn't do anything, refusing to pick up the legislative tools he's been given and go to work on the many things that We The People – and America itself – need Congress to do. Imagine if you tried doing nothing on your job – just drawing your paycheck after ignoring your workload!

Repeatedly, this senatorial slug says no to every task at hand.

Repair and replace the water pipes that leach lead and are poisoning families all across America? No, he yawns. Raise the minimum wage to help bridge the dangerous wealth gap separating the superrich from the rest of us? Don't bother me with such stuff, Mitch snaps. Shut off that gusher of corrupt corporate money pouring into our elections and drowning the people's democratic rights? Not my problem, shrugs the lumpish ne'er-do-well.

And now a straightforward constitutional duty has been handed to McConnell: Gear up the Senate's "Advise and Consent" mechanism to approve or reject President Obama's nominee to replace Justice Scalia. We'll do it tomorrow, muttered the somnolent senator, content to put off his responsibility to our nation's system of justice until next year, long after Obama is gone.

We're paying this guy a salary of \$174,000 a year, plus another \$19,400 for his "service" as majority leader. It's insulting that he won't even go through the motions of doing his job. Of course, saying no to all the chores he ought to be doing for the people is exactly what the corporate sponsors of his Republican Party expect from him. They want an inert and unresponsive government, a poverty-wage economy, a plutocratic election system and a court of their own choosing.

So "Do Nothing" Mitch is their boy. But at the very least, shouldn't they pay his salary, rather than sticking us with the cost?

How Big Pharma Is Trying To Improve Its Image

Big news, people! Especially for those of you upset by the skyrocketing prices of the essential prescription medicines you take – including thousands of patients who were hit last year with a 5,000% price increase for one lifesaving drug!

Determined to do something about those despised price hikes, drugmakers themselves have reached into their corporate toolbox for the two most effective means they have to fix their price problem. Of course, putting more corporate cash into research to produce new medicines would be one of those tools, and a renewed commitment to honest competition would be the other, right?

Right! But Big Pharma gave up years ago on doing right, turning to two other corporate tools that have reliably generated a gusher of profits for them: advertising and lobbying. So here they come, wielding bigger-than-ever ad-and-lobbying budgets to deal with that pesky matter of public anger at price gouging.

If you wonder why Congress keeps ignoring what the people want it to do – while doing things that people don't want it doing – take a peek at the unique PR campaign now being run by Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. PhRMA is America's largest pharmaceutical lobbying group and represents Eli Lilly, Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Merck & Co and about three dozen other drug manufactures.

The intent of PhRMA's multimillion-dollar PR blitz and intensified offensive in Congress is not to restrain the gouging but to improve the industry's image in hopes of restraining lawmakers from taking steps to rein in prescription costs. Of course, the ads dishonestly fail to mention the selfish intent of being allowed to keep ripping off patients, instead pitching drugmakers as selfless saviors of humanity. They feature soft scenes of drug researchers in white lab coats urgently trying to find new cures, scripted testimonials from patients and, of course, scenes of drugmakers altruistically aiding poor people.

The American public is dismayed and disgusted by the flagrant greed of drugmakers that are shamefully zooming the prices of medicines into the stratosphere, turning necessities into unaffordable luxuries. As a result, there is a growing demand for Congress to take action to stop the industry's out-of-control gouging.

Hoping to counter this demand for action, drug companies have launched their massive advertis-

ing campaign, not only running radio and print ads but also placing ads on Facebook, Twitter and other social media websites. Yet it's not likely that you've seen or heard any of them.

That's because drug chieftains don't care what you and I think. Moreover, they know they couldn't possibly persuade us to let them keep jacking up our prices.

So, their "public" relations effort has made the odd and seemingly counterproductive move of sidestepping the actual public, instead narrowly targeting a very tiny audience.

As one CEO arrogantly put it: "We've identified 7,000 Americans who matter," thus dismissing the other 330 million of us as nobodies. "We're focusing on those in policy positions ... to fight structural issues," he sniffed. By "structural issues," he means convincing Congress to take no action to reform the present pricing structure of monopolistic drugmakers, whose guiding corporate ethic is: "Bleed 'em for all they've got."

So this is a *surreptitious* PR campaign meant to reach only the eyes and ears of policy elites. The goal is to have Congress – once again – ignore what the people want it to do, thus allowing the corporate few "who matter" to keep fleecing the many.

The word for this is "plutocracy." The industry is spending millions on this corporate medicine show not to protect its notorious profiteering but to protect you from public officials who might try to stop them from overcharging you. It's enough to make you sick. – *Jim Hightower*

Trade Deal Would Enrich Super-Rich

The basic problem facing the corporate and political powers that want you and me to swallow their Trans-Pacific Partnership deal is that they can't make chicken salad out of chicken manure.

But that reality hasn't stopped their PR campaign, pitching their "salad" as good and good for you! For example, a recent article touted a study blaring the happy news that TPP will increase real incomes in the U.S. by \$133 billion a year. Even if that were true [and plenty of other studies show that it's not], it's a statistic meant to dazzle rather than enlighten, for it skates around the real bottom line for the American public: An increase in income for whom?

In the past 15 years or so, and especially since 2008, it's been made perfectly clear to the workaday

majority of people that the corporate mantra of “income growth” benefitting everyone is a deliberate lie. Practically all of the massive annual increases in U.S. income, which every worker helps produce, now gushes up to the richest 1%, with millionaires and billionaires [the richest 10% of 1-percenters] grabbing the bulk of it.

Economists have a technical term for this: “stealing.” TPP is written specifically to sanction and increase the robbery of the many by the world’s moneyed few, including provisions that give additional incentives to U.S. manufacturers to ship more of our middle-class jobs to places such as Vietnam with wages under \$1.23 an hour [or around \$155 a month].

The article opened with this sunny headline: “Trade Pact Would Lift U.S. Incomes, Study Says.” Sounds like a dandy deal! But wait, a study by whom? Four paragraphs down into the story, we’re finally told that this analysis of TPP’s impact comes from the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Fine, but who’s behind that? We’re not told, even though that information is key to understanding the upbeat interpretation of the TPP trade scheme. Readers would likely be less reassured by the positive spin if they knew that the Peterson Institute is largely funded by the major global corporations that would gain enormous new power over consumers, workers, farmers, our environment and the very sovereignty of America if Congress rubber stamps this raw deal.

In fact, many of the multinational giants financing the institute were among the 500 corporate powers

that were literally allowed to help write the 2,000-page agreement they’re now trying to shove down our throats – including Caterpillar, Chevron, IBM, GE, Deere & Company, General Motors and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Oh, and what about this Peterson guy – is he some sort of unbiased scholar? Hardly. Pete Peterson is a Wall Street billionaire, one of the 400 richest people in the country, and the founding chairman of his eponymous institute. He’s also a reactionary, anti-government, anti-public-spending ideologue who was Nixon’s commerce secretary.

Hailed by the establishment as one of “the most influential billionaires in U.S. politics,” he uses that influence [and his fortune] to demonize such for-the-people programs as Social Security and to push policies to further enrich and enthrone the billionaire class over the rest of us. TPP would be his ultimate political coup against us commoners.

We don’t need any institute to tell us who would benefit from TPP. All we need to know is that it was negotiated in strict secrecy with global corporate elites while we consumers and workers were locked out. Remember, if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.

Don’t be bamboozled by glittery studies. TPP was written by and for the super-rich to further enrich themselves at our expense, exacerbating the widening gulf of inequality in America. For information and action tips, go to Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch at www.citizen.org/trade. – *Jim Hightower*

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Dominionism

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

R-TX, had made his de facto presidential campaign announcement at a massive prayer rally organized by leaders of the movement for Seven Mountains Dominionism, and that then presidential candidate and Minnesota Republican Rep. Michele Bachman’s mentor at law school was John Eidsmoe, a prominent Christian Reconstructionist theorist, who now works at the Foundation for Moral Law, founded by Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore.

Perry’s campaign later imploded [for reasons other than the Dominionism controversy], and Bachman’s campaign never gained traction, but the episode certainly prefigured current events.

Now, some four years later, former Gov. Perry has endorsed Ted Cruz for president. Cruz has won the Iowa caucuses, and the Washington Post has published a major article about the Seven Mountains Dominionism of Sen. Cruz and his father.

A great transformation in American politics and religion, once pooh poohed by established interests [which also denounced those of us who recognized and wrote about its importance] is now accepted as

uncontroverted fact. And the attack dogs of the various political establishments are not yet snarling.

Frederick Clarkson is a senior fellow at Political Research Associates and a member of the Public Eye editorial board. He is the editor of Dispatches from the Religious Left: The Future of Faith and Politics in America, and the author of Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy.

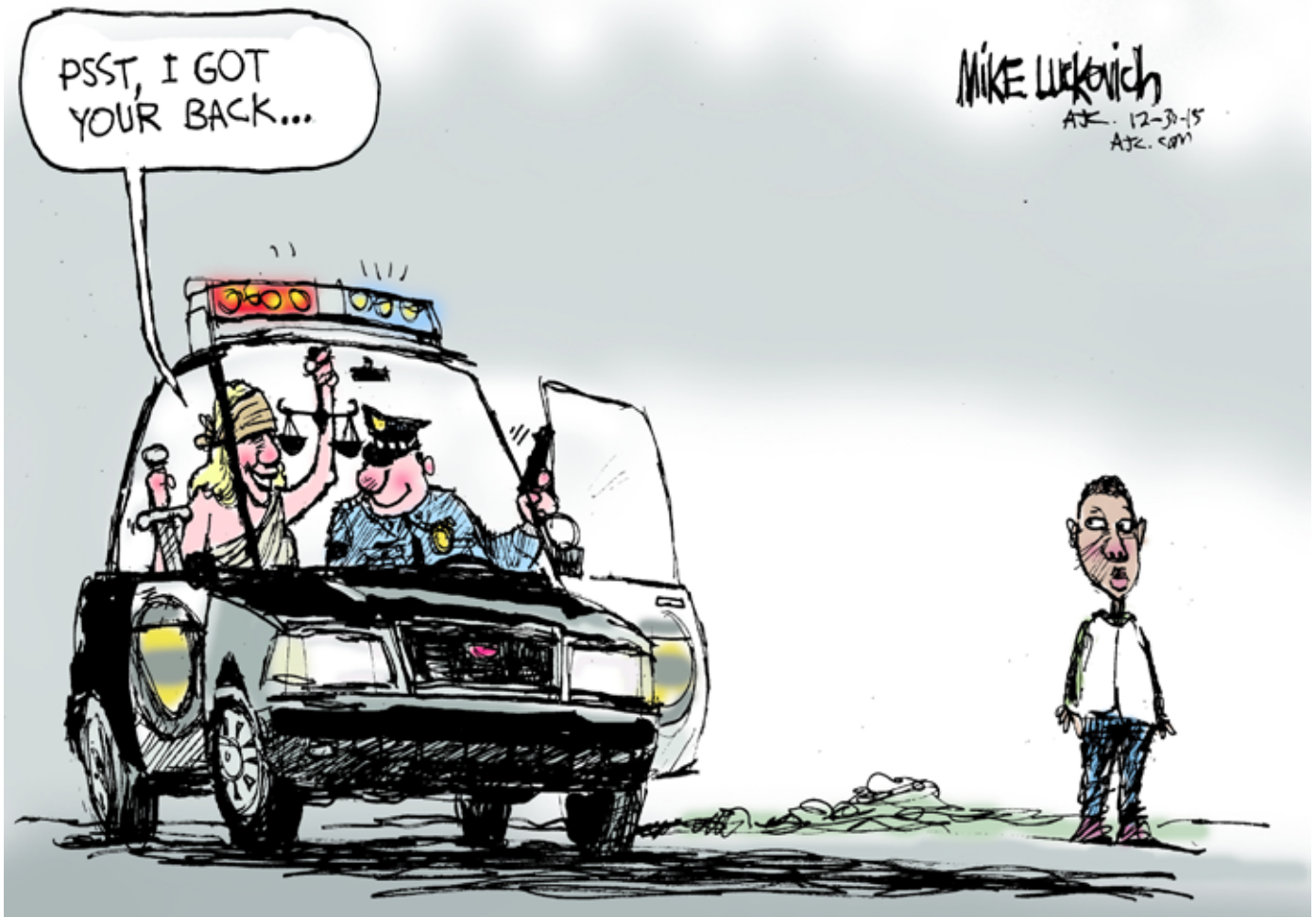
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Black Struggle Is Not A Photo-Op: Why I Refused To Meet With Obama

BY AISLINN PULLEY

On Feb. 18, civil rights activists and leaders from around the country were invited to the White House for what the Obama Administration called a “first-of-its-kind” intergenerational meeting to discuss “a range of issues, including the administration’s efforts on criminal justice reform” and “building trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.” The event’s guest list includes high-profile civil rights leaders like Al Sharpton, student organizer DeShayna Ware and others.

As the co-founder of Black Lives Matter Chicago, I was issued an invitation to this event, and various news outlets have already listed me as an attendee. But as a radical, black organizer, living and working in a city that is now widely recognized as a symbol of corruption and police violence, I do not feel that a

handshake with the president is the best way for me to honor Black History Month or the black freedom fighters whose labor laid the groundwork for the historic moment we are living in.

I respectfully declined the invitation to the White House to discuss criminal legal reform and to celebrate Black History Month. I was under the impression that a meeting was being organized to facilitate a genuine exchange on the matters facing millions of black and brown people in the United States. Instead, what was arranged was basically a photo opportunity and a 90-second sound bite for the president.

I could not, with any integrity, participate in such a sham that would only serve to legitimize the false narrative that the government is working to end police brutality and the institutional racism that fuels it. For the increasing number of families fighting for

justice and dignity for their kin slain by police, I refuse to give its perpetrators and enablers political cover by making an appearance among them.

If the administration is serious about addressing the issues of Black Lives Matter Chicago – and its sister organizations that go by different names across this nation – they can start by meeting the simple demands of families who want transparency, and who want police that kill black people unjustly to be fired, indicted and held accountable.

A meeting arranged to carry this out is one that would be worthy of consideration. Until this begins to happen on a mass scale, any celebrations of black history that go on inside the walls of the White House are hollow and ceremonial at best.

Dialogue around the issue of the criminal legal system [and the injustice of this system] is crucial to the struggle against anti-blackness. But when we confront issues of policing and incarceration, we must be very intentional about who is framing such dialogues, and what agenda that framing serves.

When we talk about criminal “justice” reform, we must first consider that which we are defining as “criminal.”

In Chicago, under Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s reign, we must ask why he is not considered a criminal for closing half of the city’s mental health-care centers. We must ask why he is not considered a criminal for conducting the largest public school closing in U.S. history. We must ask why the state’s attorney, Anita Alvarez, is not considered a criminal for conspiring to keep hidden for over 400 days the videos of the killings of Laquan McDonald and Ronald Johnson.

We must consider who is criminal and what the criminal legal system is when Dante Servin – the Chicago police officer who gunned down Rekia Boyd – can be acquitted of involuntary manslaughter on the grounds that her murder was an intentional act, and leave a courtroom with his job intact. We must consider who is criminal when Emanuel, the Obama Administration’s former chief of staff, let the Dyett High School hunger strikers starve for 30 days while fighting to save the only high school in their South Side neighborhood from closing.

We must consider what is criminal when Chicago State University, the city’s only predominantly black university, may close due to the state government’s inability to pass a budget.

We must consider what is criminal justice when not one officer, including former Commander Jon Burge, has been held responsible for the torture of over 100 black and Latino men that occurred for over 30 years in the city of Chicago – a city where torture continues today in places like Homan Square.

We must ask when and where justice can be found when just blocks away from Homan Square, Black Panther Chairman Fred Hampton and Deputy Mark Clark were murdered in cold blood by Chicago police and the FBI while they were sleeping 40 years ago last Dec. 4.

We must consider who is criminal when, the day after Christmas, 19-year-old college student Quintonio LeGrier called 911 three times and was hung up on by the operator before Officer Robert Rialmo showed up and killed him and his neighbor, Bettie Jones, a mother of five, from 20 feet away. We must consider who is a criminal when this same officer files suit for emotional distress against the young man he killed.

Truly, we must ask, who is the criminal and what is justice and who is this system for, when George Zimmerman, Darren Wilson, Jon Burge, Glen Evans, George Hernandez, Dante Servin, Anita Alvarez and Rahm Emanuel walk free? And we must ask, who then has been criminalized, who is behind bars and why are they disproportionately black and poor?

We must ask what is criminal justice when children, the elderly, the disabled and everyday working people in the city of Flint, MI, cannot safely drink their water due to lead contamination which has occurred because the local government switched the city’s water sources in 2014 in order to allegedly save money.

And finally, we ask, what can criminal justice mean in a country that houses the most incarcerated people ever recorded in human history?

In Chicago, opposition to the oppression that perpetuates these circumstances has happened in the streets, at police board meetings and in community spaces. While we continue to live in struggle, battles have been won. In 2015, we became the first city in the nation to award reparations to police torture survivors. Our young people have protested and organized relentlessly. We have a long road ahead, but the gains we have made have come through laborious organizing and antagonism of the system.

The Cook County criminal legal system, federal and all county court and prison systems are corrupt and racist. In order to make substantive change, Black Lives Matter Chicago demands an end to cash bail. We demand an end to grand juries. We demand an investigation of the Cook County state’s attorney’s office for extensive cover-ups of police crimes.

We demand an end to all mandatory minimum sentencing. We demand the defunding and ultimate closing of the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center and Cook County Jail and all juvenile detention centers. We demand community control of all police departments with the creation of an elected Civilian Police Accountability Council with the power to hire and fire police officers and superintendents, by civilian representatives voted in by each neighborhood, with mandated inclusion of survivors of police violence and torture.

We want a redirection of funds saved to support free health care for all; we want housing for abandoned youth, the homeless and nearly homeless; we want a federal jobs program for the unemployed and underemployed; we want a living wage for all workers; we want fully funded schools and fully funded crisis centers nationwide.

We demand the immediate closing of Guantánamo

Bay and the return of the confiscated land to the people of Cuba. We demand the return of all troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. We demand an immediate end to all money going to Israel while the occupation of Palestine continues. We demand an immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops in Africa under U.S. Africa Command. We demand an end to the ongoing police violence against Indigenous people and that this colonized United States be returned to Native peoples. We demand the immediate halting of the deportation raids of undocumented people. We demand full reparations for all descendants of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Finally, we assert that true revolutionary and systemic change will ultimately only be brought forth by ordinary working people, students and youth – organizing, marching and taking power from the corrupt elites. No proponent of this system – Democrat or Republican – will upend the oppressive structures

Fragmented

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

sucked up by corporations.

Remember, it was in the session's first week that senators rejected a bill that would have blocked companies from double-dipping in the taxpayers' trough by simultaneously collecting on two separate tax incentives.

And in Week Two, Fallin backpedaled on her State of the State call for tax reform, warning lawmakers that curbing corporate incentives and breaks could hurt business recruitment.

Worse, lawmakers now seem focused on increasing or expanding sales taxes – the most regressive of levies. In addition, senators voted to slash programs that help the least among us, including the state's earned income tax credit, the sales tax credit and the child care credit.

The three anti-poverty credits on the chopping block are a huge help to families earning less than \$50,000 – the very families all but left out as lawmakers whacked the state's top tax rate from 6.65% to 5% percent over the last dozen or so years.

Indeed, as the Oklahoma Policy Institute's David Blatt notes, a family earning \$30,000 annually would be forced to absorb about a \$200 tax increase if the three credits are cut.

That's more than they got from the decade-plus series of income tax cuts that helped push Oklahoma government to the financial brink, especially now that oil languishes around \$30 a barrel and natural gas languishes near \$2 per mcf.

What the first month of the session illustrates is that lawmakers fear asking their key political donors to invest in Oklahoma's future by paying a fairer share of taxes in order to strengthen public education, mental health, and other vital state services.

that maintain it. To hold the powerful accountable for their harmful and oppressive actions, we must continue to build power in the streets. We must act in concert and in coalition within our communities, because together, we have the power to uproot all oppression and systemic violence.

Aislinn Pulley is a lead organizer with Black Lives Matter Chicago, founding the chapter as part of the Freedom Ride to Ferguson in August 2014. She is an organizer with We Charge Genocide; a founding member of Insight Arts, a cultural nonprofit that uses art for social change; as well as a member of the performance ensemble, End of the Ladder. She is a founder of the young women's performance ensemble dedicated to ending sexual assault, Visibility Now, as well as the founder and creator of urban youth magazine, Underground Philosophy.

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If legislators gave all Oklahomans equal priority, they would zero in on the state income tax and on big-ticket tax incentives like the scandalously low 2% tax on drilling.

Republicans, of course, prattle incessantly that they're working to let taxpayers keep more of their hard-earned money. Exactly how much more are working families keeping? This year's quarter-percentage-point cut amounts to about a \$30 tax saving, not even enough for a family of four to order off McDonald's dollar menu every other month.

What the Forbes 400 crowd pockets, by contrast, would be a lottery-esque windfall for 95% of Oklahoma families.

The governor and legislators talk a good game about thoroughly reviewing tax incentives and breaks, but their actions suggest there will be little serious scrutiny of Quality Jobs or other corporate welfare protected by an army of well-heeled political donors and their lobbyists.

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use “equal protection of the law” to include corporate behavior. In 1988, I wrote a New York Times op-ed with public interest lawyer Carl Mayer. In this opinion piece titled Corporations are Not Persons we argued that:

The corporate drive for constitutional parity with real humans comes at a time when legislatures are awarding these artificial persons superhuman privileges. Besides perpetual life, corporations enjoy limited liability for industrial accidents such as nuclear power disasters, and the use of voluntary bankruptcy and other disappearing acts to dodge financial obligations while remaining in business.

The legal system is thus creating unaccountable Frankensteins that have human powers but are nonetheless constitutionally shielded from much actual and potential law enforcement as well as from accountability to real persons such as workers, consumers and taxpayers.

Justice Scalia espoused the doctrine of “originalism” which meant that, in cases, he interpreted the Constitution by the “original public meaning” of the words written by the Framers as understood nearly 240 years ago. That was, he believed, the only way to insulate the Constitution from the personal values of judges and the political winds of the day. He often derided “nine unelected lawyers” usurping the popular will of the people by court opinions that were the equivalent of legislative enactments.

Some months after we sent our letter, lo and behold, Justice Scalia telephoned me. After some conversation about a possible event at the American University Washington College of Law, I put the question to him. How can his “originalism” square with giving corporations the rights of personhood? He replied that a clear case of corporate personhood had not come to the court, so he hadn’t “researched it,” and when such a case did, he would research it and decide.

Then he added that, like Social Security, which he believed to be unconstitutional, the according of corporations the rights of personhood is so deeply embedded in our socio-economic fabric, that it is unlikely the status quo could be reversed. After a few minutes of further discussion, I said that I was looking forward to reading his forthcoming opinions, to which he jocularly replied, “you poor devil,” and said goodbye.

Vintage Scalia alright! Yet there were other sides to Justice Scalia. He was a major force in Bush v. Gore’s 5-4 majority opinion that stopped the Florida Supreme Court’s ongoing order for a full state recount. In an utterly specious, brazenly-political opinion by the five Republicans on the court, the recount was stopped and George W. Bush was “selected” as presi-

dent by five unelected lawyers. When questioned in public about this decision, he replied injudiciously “get over it.”

Justice Scalia recently told C-Span’s Brian Lamb that adherence to the text of the Constitution meant that he rendered opinions opposite to what he would have liked to decide. Presumably these include criminal defense opinions where he joined with the liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

By and large, however, justices bring their political values about power, its distribution and impact, to their work on the court. Justice Scalia was a corporatist, as displayed by his vote in the Citizens United case in 2010 overruling precedent and giving corporations the power to spend money without dollar limitations to support or denounce candidates for public office.

Justice Scalia was inclined, with important exceptions, to defer to executive power against civil liberties. He was also inimical to fuller voting rights and hostile to government regulation of business and allowing class actions by consumers and workers.

Leading conservative thinkers often took him to task. Law professor Richard A. Epstein excoriated Justice Scalia’s judicial activism, especially his hostility to taxpayers “standing” to sue the government and Congress “for overstepping their Constitutional authority.”

“Justice Scalia,” concludes the University of Chicago scholar, “takes a blatantly anti-originalist position by reading into the Constitution limitations found neither in its text nor its basic structure, nor in the general judicial practice running deep in our history.”

A more startling put-down from the celebrated conservative jurist and former academic colleague of Justice Scalia, Richard A. Posner, came in a lengthy critique of Scalia’s 2012 book, *Reading Law: the Interpretation of Legal Texts*. Judge Posner’s article was called “The Incoherence of Antonin Scalia.” The late Justice would have enjoyed debating the accusation.

People have strong opinions about Justice Scalia, but most would agree that he did make people think.

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A Strong Voice From The Classroom

A TEACHER'S TALE

Living, Loving, and Listening to Our Kids

By John Thompson

Tate Publishing

464 pages, \$23.99

BY JACK JENNINGS

John Thompson is a truth-teller. *A Teacher's Tale*, his new book, honestly addresses the toughest issue in American education – how to improve urban schools impacted by concentrations of poor children.

Thompson worked in higher education and then did legislative lobbying until at the age of 39 he decided to become a teacher in an inner city area of Oklahoma City. He spent nearly two decades teaching high school social sciences. He loved teaching.

Thompson says that students taught him to teach, and that included the need to understand their problems. Some were in gangs; some feared gangs; some were involved with drugs; some had parents who were. Friends watched friends get shot and die.

Amidst all this, Thompson respected his students, spent time visiting their homes, playing sports with the kids, taking them on excursions, and letting them vent in his classroom when necessary for their psychological well-being.

There is no doubt he cared, and cared deeply, about his students. Yet, he was physically assaulted many times. At the end of the book, he acknowledges that after several decades he was burned out. Just before he retired, he was hit so hard he fell to his knees and became semi-conscious.

Thompson suggests that teachers leave inner city schools because of verbal and physical abuse, not because of the exhausting pressure and the low pay. He should know! But he himself did not leave until retirement age, and then he asked to come back.

Thompson places heavy blame for the sorry state of many urban schools on the “reforms” of school choice and test-driven accountability. His school went from being a “run-of-the-mill inner city school into the type of brutal urban school that defies improvement,” as the book jacket explains.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act epitomized test-driven accountability. Teachers were pressured to raise student test scores, or face penalties. According to Thompson, this resulted in educators caring as much about raising scores by a few points as about the physical and mental well-being of students.

The choice movement promoted policies for parents to determine the public school that their child would attend, including newly created independent schools run by private corporations or non-profit organizations.

In Oklahoma City, motivated parents moved their children from neighborhood schools to charter and magnet schools. Regular public schools were left with concentrations of traumatized kids having mental or physical problems and suffering from generations of poverty.

Based on these experiences, Thompson asserts that two fundamental elements must be present for improvement to occur in inner city schools enrolling concentrations of poor students. Ensuring safety and teaching social skills are these prerequisites.

Teachers must be able to take charge of their classrooms creating a secure and safe environment for students. School choice undercut that, according to

Thompson, because regular school leaders would not suspend students who should have been sent home because they did not want their enrollments to look bad in the competition with charter and magnet schools. Another factor was that the federal rule limiting suspensions for certain children with disabilities meant that many of these students were immune to disciplinary measures.

The second necessity is to teach students the non-cognitive skills they do not learn at home. Their schooling must include the nurturing of social graces, communication skills, delayed gratification, conflict resolution, and teamwork.

Thompson argues that liberals must overcome their reluctance to address these family and character issues. An honest conversation must occur about how parents raise their children, as well as about the effects of racism on students and the hindrances resulting from a lack of money. The past and current misdeeds of students and their parents must be discussed and the ensuing trauma of students acknowledged.

Conservatives who for decades have demeaned the concept of public education as “communitic” and “godless” must be rebuked. Liberals who taunt inner city teachers for perpetuating “the bigotry of low expectations” by not trying hard enough must recognize the extreme stress of teaching in those schools.

How many of these conservative and liberal critics have walked in John Thompson’s shoes?

Thompson emphasizes that improving urban schools is hard work, not a crusade, and a marathon, not a sprint. These problems were created by decades of racism, neglect, and condescension. They won’t disappear tomorrow.

As solutions to these deep-seated problems, Thompson offers several ideas, such as building on student strengths not emphasizing weaknesses. His main recommendation is to create community schools offering health and mental health services, social welfare

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support, and community engagement. Several existing community schools are described showing the benefits of such a comprehensive approach.

Truth-tellers should be accorded special respect, especially if their truth comes from deep per-

sonal experience. John Thompson makes sense. He knows a thing or two that I don't. Needless to say, this man has few illusions about what it would take to educate youngsters in inner city schools, but he cares about them so much that he fought the odds to help

them.

Billionaires, state governors, businessmen, and charitable foundation officials have had their say about school reform, and have created the school choice and test-driven accountability movements. Isn't it time that experienced teachers – who actually

know something about the topic – have a say about how to improve education?

Jack Jennings served U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor from 1967-99, first as staff director and then as a general counsel. He later was the CEO of the Center on Education Policy [CEP].

True Dialogue, Minus The Dog Whistles And Color Blinders

RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS IN THE TEA PARTY
What The Movement Reflects About Mainstream Ideologies

By Meghan Burke

Lexington Books

140 pages, \$75

BY JOHN WOOD

Professor Meghan Burke wrote this academic book to explore how complex the ideological beliefs Tea Party members are. Even with its academic credentials and many citations, it's a short book written for a popular audience.

What's interesting is what she finds.

The Tea Party is not really "on the fringe," but essentially mainstream in regard to class, gender and race. While the Tea Party members continued to support and promote race and social class stereotypes, the movement itself has surprisingly empowered women among its ranks through leadership roles.

Burke's work is a result of two years of interviewing people across Illinois. She surprisingly finds that both conservatives and liberals had no significant difference in how they talked about racism in both a colorblind and coded way.

Colorblind means that people talk about race as if it is not a problem now – heck, we have a black president! So, there goes Affirmative Action and Voting Rights Act to the wayside. They also use coded means to talk about issues, not on specific types of people, as explained in Tim Wise's *Racism 2.0*. When Tea Party members talk about welfare, it is actually another way of denigrating African Americans; immigration is code for Hispanics; and terrorism is code for Islam.

While Tea Partiers won't say this specifically, but just ask them for examples and it'll likely roll off their tongues.

Likewise, Burke finds liberals can do the same thing as they might celebrate diversity and yet hold largely colorblind thinking as if racism and "othering" were just swept up into the dustbins of history.

Move on, nothing to see here.

She also finds that liberals will talk about enlightened ideas of equality, but make housing and other choices based on opportunity and investment, without challenging how for some people these ideals are out of reach.

Burke says most liberals like to consume diversity, but not actually work to realize it.

She says she's critical of how both progressives and conservatives talk about race. As if the civil rights movement is clearly over and only racists use the "N" word. But she says emphatically that's not true.

Much like in my previous work on the Tea Party, Burke finds that Tea Party members were eager to speak, to be listened to, and to be understood. She did not want her subjects to feel defensive, so she did not bring up race in her interviews; instead it came up organically.

Unfortunately, Burke is not optimistic about the current direction we are moving nationally. She says strides have taken place since the 1960s, but they are piecemeal and much more needs to be done in such areas as community policing, employment discrimination, housing, etc.

Also, she finds some surprising characteristics for which the Tea Party should be commended. First, women in the movement have gained leadership roles, albeit all white and largely middle class. Many women in these leadership roles seemed to identify with Sarah Palin's "Mama Grizzlies" [which has a masculine tone] reasserting women's "supposedly natural roles." Therefore, essentialism – essentially a set of attributes, in this case, framing women with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Observations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Here's what is behind the rhetoric: Ideologues, like the Koch Brothers and their faux grass roots groups, simply hate government, unless it profits them with tax breaks and incentives. Their corporatist partners in this anti-public education cabal hope to cash in on the weakened state of schools by monetizing and privatizing as much as possible.

In other words, they want public education to be first and foremost profit centers. They could not care less about the all-American principle that all children – regardless of race, religion or socio-economic status – deserve the academic opportunities to achieve all their creator intended.

The GOP-dominated Legislature is doing the ideologues' and corporatists' bidding, though it should be noted that not all Republican lawmakers are buying what the State Chamber, Archbishop Coakley, the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs and others are selling.

Indeed, it took a rare parliamentary move by House Speaker Jeff Hickman and Speaker Pro Tem Lee Denney to get a voucher bill out of committee. Hickman and Denney are ex officio members of every House committee but they rarely show up to vote – unless it's a bill important to leadership [translation: their political benefactors] and there aren't enough votes for passage among regular committee members. In this case, Hickman's and Denney's votes produced the final 9-8 margin. The no votes included four Republicans and four Democrats.

Besides siphoning tax dollars away from already cash-strapped public schools, there is a social cost to vouchers – the further segregation of Oklahoma schoolchildren by race, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

Further, vouchers would reduce accountability and transparency since private and parochial schools are largely off-limits to public scrutiny.

When it comes to the Legislature, by their deeds ye shall know them.

Finally, Pay Equity?

As preposterous as it sounds and unfair as it is, women in 21st Century America are still paid, on average, at a highly discounted rate – only 79 cents for every dollar given their male counterparts.

Women in Oklahoma are treated with even less respect, earning just 73.5 cents for every dollar paid men for the same jobs – the nation's 44th worst rate of disparity.

The bottom line? An Oklahoma woman earns an average \$11,617 less per year than the man in the next

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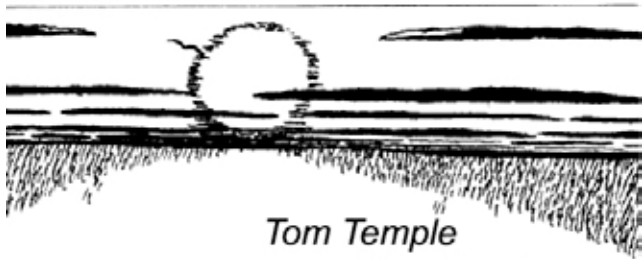
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cubicle doing the same full-time work, according to 2015 U.S. Census Bureau data.

It is small wonder that one in five children in Oklahoma is food insecure, given that women are the primary or sole breadwinners in nearly 183,000 state households.

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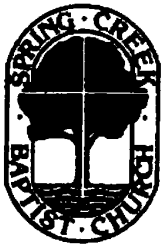


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Observerscope



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

It was a breathtaking fall from grace for Aubrey McClendon, who until his death March 2 remained one of state's most influential power-brokers despite losing control of Chesapeake Energy two years ago.

Laurel: To state Sen. Ervin Yen, an OKC physician, fighting anti-vaccination hysteria. By embracing junk science, Yen's GOP colleagues are putting the health of thousands of Oklahoma schoolchildren at risk.

U.S. Sen. James Lankford, R-OK, says a federal wind energy tax credit can be dropped because the rapidly expanding industry no longer needs a hand-up. Yet he says nothing about handouts to oil and gas producers.

Dart: To GOP state Rep. Travis Dunlap, declaring in a letter to a constituent that public education is "atheist based." Note to the village of Bartlesville: we located your idiot.

Politico's Mike Allen offers this take on the GOP presidential race: "... [T]here are now three Republican parties: the Pissed Off [Trump], the Purists [Cruz] and the Realists [Rubio]."

Laurel: To Bison 4 Equality, opposing Title IX waiver that allows Oklahoma Baptist University to legally discriminate against LGBT students. Love thy neighbor as thyself.

State Democrats' annual Carl Albert Dinner is April 8 at OKC's Cox Convention Center, the night before the state convention selects delegates for July's presidential nominating convention in Philadelphia.

Dart: To state's GOP elected elite, killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Despite a record \$8.9 billion spent in Oklahoma in 2014 by 20.9 million visitors, state leaders work to shed more state parks in desperate, short-sighted budget-balancing gambit.

For the record: 10.1 million acres were consumed last year by wildfires, eclipsing previous record of 9.9 million acres set in 2001. – High Country News

Xenophobes, beware: A record 27.3 million Hispanics will be eligible to vote in 2016 general election, a 40% increase from 2008. – Pew Research Center

Letters



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

ate business and give the Republicans the opportunity to place their misogyny and racism on full display for voters to digest.

The GOP is terrified at the thought of giving women and minorities more cause to hate their party. They very well may give her an astonishing quick confirmation!

Conditions are perfect for a black female, Loretta Lynch, for the Supreme Court!

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

U.S. Rep. Tom Cole of Moore wants Congress to give President Obama a blank check to fight ISIS, the Islamic state of Iraq and Levant.

A Republican war hawk, Cole has introduced legislation giving the president authority to “use all necessary and appropriate force.”

That will be dangerous if we elect Donald Trump or Ted Cruz president. They want to bomb the you-know-what out of ISIS.

We can't win this war on terror when we, Americans, are terrorists, too.

Our coercing by the use of violence makes us as guilty of terrorism as ISIS.

In 2001, Osama Bin Laden, the Islamic terrorist mastermind, said, “If killing those who kill our sons is terrorism, then let history be witness that we are terrorists.”

Our bombing of ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria kills innocent folks and produces more terrorists than we kill.

A non-violent strategy has been suggested by Randy Mitchell, former First Methodist Church of Wagoner minister.

“Every decade has its own wars,” says Mitchell. “Not much has changed because of warfare. Instead of launching missiles to bring shock and awe, why not spend the same billion on food, education and medical care?”

Mitchell believes the shock and awe of compassion might do something missiles cannot – “change lives for the better.”

How refreshing it is to learn that this man of God knows it is his job to save souls rather than insist it is right to take lives.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner



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

Tea Party

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

the traditionally accepted role of mother – is coupled with empowerment. While this women’s movement might be a mixed blessing for liberals, it is certainly a new in conservative politics.

Second, the Tea Party strives for democracy and is stands in opposition to moneyed politics, the result of fighting to have their voices heard in politics [much like liberals]. These people are also frustrated by a lack of upward mobility. They want change. Burke quotes scholar Amitai Etzioni, who said, “There are several strong reasons for large segments of the American public to be very angry, frustrated, and worried about the future.”

Third, these Tea Party members see hope. While they do not like President Obama’s “Hope and Change,” the Tea Party has not given up on the goal of equality opportunity, “where hard work is rewarded and where we can enjoy freedoms that are increasingly afford to all.”

Burke argues that had liberals not dismissed the Tea Party as irrational, it might have been possible

to forge a “real coalition responsive to the genuine concerns that impact all of us.”

While I agree with Burke’s sentiment in many ways, it really is a two-way street.

She dismisses, for example, that the Right lampooned Occupy Wall Street. It takes two sides to tango and neither camp is willing, it seems, to get their dancing shoes dirty.

I agree with her, though, that the media has created barriers. For example, she notes that in the last decade news shows have moved from strictly reporting the news to more commentary. With the two sides watching different news outlets, neither operates with the same facts.

In addition, Burke notes, the neoliberalism that prized individual choice in the marketplace “is perfectly congruent with the anti-government, anti-tax narrative that is the political capital of the right.”

The Right, meanwhile, deploys a coded language aimed at “othering” people – welfare is code for blacks, immigration for Hispanics, and terrorism for Islam.

The Left has done a terrible job framing these problems as systemic failures, so people naturally direct their attention to what the Right wants to do.

At the same time, Burke finds some common ground, at least theoretically.

For example, both liberals and conservatives wanted to see money out of politics, troubled by the influence of lobbying and corporations in public life. And both seemed committed to democracy as an ideal, despite skepticism it could be realized.

Burke says that systemic structural change will only happen when the Right and Left understand each other because “democracy depends on it.”

She is right – we need race consciousness, not color blindness. Electing Obama didn’t end racism, it just says we have gone a long way down a rather a long, winding road.

We also need to acknowledge the multiple barriers to equality in America, whether that means race, sexuality, class, gender, and other systems as they are interrelated.

We can’t feel guilty about this, but instead need to understand it so we can make the necessary changes through true dialogue – without coded language and without color blindness.

John Wood, PhD, is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond.



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- Author unknown

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BY WANDA JO STAPLETON

Harper Lee died on Feb. 19. She's well known as the author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the Pulitzer Prize winning 1960 novel that examined racism in the deep south of the 1930s, specifically Alabama.

This racism was seen through the eyes of a little girl, Scout Finch, age eight.

The central truth in the novel is: When it's a white man's word against a black man's word, the white man always wins.

The drama begins when Bob Ewell looked in the window of his house and saw his daughter, Mayella, kissing Tom Robinson, a black man. Robinson was trying his best to get away, but Mayella was blocking the door. Ewell called Mayella a whore and beat her severely. In order to cover her shame and guilt, she claimed that Tom Robinson had raped her.

So Ewell agreed with the lie and reported to the sheriff that "some n----- had raped his girl Mayella."

Atticus Fench, a lawyer and Scout's father, let it be known that he was going to court to defend Robinson. That's when Scout and her brother Jem were taunted by friends and neighbors that Atticus was a "n----- lover" and was no better than the "n-----s and trash he worked for."

During the trial, Scout and Jem slipped into the balcony at the courthouse and watched their father in action. Despite the significant evidence of Robinson's innocence, the jury was unanimous in convicting him. So he was sent to a nearby prison farm.

At the prison farm, during exercise period, Robinson went into a blind rage and climbed the fence to escape. Prison guards shot and killed him.

In conclusion, Atticus gave his son Jem a moral lesson when he said, "Shoot all the blue jays you want ... but remember, it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." His reasoning: "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy."

Robinson, in his innocence, is the mockingbird in this novel.

Wanda Jo Stapleton represented south Oklahoma City in the state House from 1986-96.

Pay Equity

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

State Reps. Jason Dunnington, D-OKC, and Emily Virgin, D-Norman, are working to level the playing field – not only for female workers, but also for their children who pay a dear price for the institutionalized bias.

Dunnington's HB 2929 would make it illegal for employers to terminate – or discriminate against – employees that compare their salaries with their co-workers. It also would increase fines – from a minimum of \$50 to a maximum of \$200 per pay – when it is determined employers are paying salaries based on gender discrimination.

At press time, the measure already had cleared both a House subcommittee [on a unanimous vote] and the full House Appropriations and Budget Committee. Whether it gets a hearing in the full House before a March 10 procedural deadline remains to be seen, especially given that the Republican majority brays incessantly against government interference in the free market.

Isn't it interesting, though, how often these "devoted" capitalists help pick winners and losers in the supposedly sacrosanct free market? How is it anti-free market to require pay equity but pro-free market to dole out \$1 billion or so in taxpayer-financed tax

breaks and incentives that allow private businesses to pad profits and socialize losses?

This shouldn't be a partisan fight. Republican or Democrat, all lawmakers are touched by unequal pay. Perhaps their mothers are victims or aunts, daughters or sisters.

What makes the pay disparity even more perplexing is that state and federal laws already prohibit it. "It's been on the books [in Oklahoma] for 50 years," Virgin notes, "it just hasn't been enforced."

A hopeful sign that pay equity finally could become a reality in Oklahoma: If it can squeeze through the House, Dunnington has secured an OKC Republican as his Senate co-sponsor, Kyle Loveless, giving the measure important bipartisan imprimatur.



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