

Eugene Lorton
1869-1949

Opinion

"Publish and set up a standard; publish and conceal not." Jeremiah 50:2

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EDITORIALS

Funds flap

Hurried spending bill goes to governor

It's not exactly clear why legislators are in such a hurry to get a spending bill to the governor, but they have managed to do that in what may be record time.

There are some much-needed items in the \$5.3 billion general appropriations bill that is now headed to Gov. Brad Henry's desk, but there are some much-needed measures left out of it.

The bill includes about \$2 billion for public education. House leaders say passage of education funding this early will help schools plan their budgets.

Other important elements were funds for state employee pay raises — though the level of funding is a bit of a surprise — and money for teacher health insurance.

But noticeably absent from the spending plan was any funding for Tar Creek Superfund site relocations, early childhood education, capital gains cuts, retiree tax relief, and screening for breast and cervical cancer, among other important needs.

These are no small matters. The Tar Creek site, as most readers know, has languished on the federal Superfund list for two de-

CADES with little help for hundreds of area families — despite mountains of evidence that the mining contamination poses health risks. Henry had proposed a limited voluntary buyout plan of \$5 million for families with small children.

Oklahoma is the only state in the U.S. that does not provide breast and cervical cancer screening for women on Medicaid. This modest \$2.5 million program would not only save lives, it would save taxpayers a bundle in treatment costs.

Early childhood programs are among the most important means of developing a healthy, productive work force and reducing costs such as welfare and corrections. Yet lawmakers did not see fit to approve a measly \$2 million for this new public-private, collaborative effort.

It's not known if the governor will sign the spending bill, though he's surely got to be unhappy over these major omissions. So too are many Oklahomans who would benefit from these important programs — that is, if only they were funded.

Out

Impeachment? Fisher should resign first

The Oklahoma City newspaper, the Daily Oklahoman, has called on the Legislature to impeach state Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher.

Impeachment, which is a time-consuming, draining and often divisive process, should not be necessary. Fisher ought to spare the state of Oklahoma the trouble and resign. The problem might eventually resolve itself; Fisher faces felony charges that, if proven, would force him from office.

Fisher's tenure has been marked by scandals, big and little, almost since he was first elected in 1998. The scandals culminated earlier this year when a multi-county grand jury indicted him on four felony counts alleging that he misappropriated departmental continuing education funds and funds from a charitable foundation set up in his name. A top aide, Opal L. Ellis, was indicted on six felony charges.

Last week Oklahoma City police found an open can of beer in Fisher's pickup, which was parked outside his office. The open container was not illegal, because Fisher was not in the vehicle when it was found. It is troubling, however, given that Fisher pleaded no contest last year in Oklahoma City to a municipal charge of drunken driving.

The Democratic majority in the Legislature may be reluctant to begin impeachment proceedings against a fellow Democrat. Indeed, lawmakers already missed an opportunity to make the insurance industry regulator's job appointive — as it is in all but a dozen states — instead of elective. A resolution to put a proposed constitutional

amendment before state voters failed to come out of committee in the House.

Unfortunately Fisher's conduct in office embarrasses all Oklahomans, regardless of political affiliation. The last thing the state needs is a public trial airing, among other things, this: Fisher allegedly set up a charitable foundation, ostensibly to buy shoes for poor children; money was raised but no shoes were purchased.

Fisher, rather than indulging an ill-conceived fantasy of running for the U.S. Senate, ought to resign the office of trust that Oklahoma voters bestowed on him.



Oklahoma State Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher and his attorney, Irvn Box.

Associated Press

Far out

Scientists find a distant 'planetoid'

Poor Pluto. First it was called a planet. Then that title was taken away. Its sole claim to fame was that it was the farthest thing from the sun in the Milky Way galaxy that even resembled a planet. Now, even that claim is in jeopardy.

Scientists at the California Institute of Technology have announced the discovery of a "planetoid" in the far reaches of the galaxy. The object, officially known as 2003 VB12 but dubbed Sedna by the astronomers at Cal Tech, is about 8 billion miles from Earth, is about half the size of Pluto — 800 to 1,100 miles in diame-

ter — and half rock and half ice.

One year on Sedna — named after the Inuit goddess who created the sea creatures of the Arctic — is the equivalent of about 10,500 Earth years. It is shiny and might have a moon. It is the largest object found orbiting the sun since the discovery of Pluto in 1930. It also is very, very cold.

The Cal Tech astronomers predict that more "planetoids" or space objects will someday be found orbiting the sun.

It's another grand find for science. But, sadly, more bad news for lonely and disrespected Pluto.



LETTERS

Be careful of anarchy

For years there has been an effort by a part of our citizenry to subvert the Constitution of the United States and in some cases state constitutions. This effort is conducted by some elected officials, some appointed officials and some hired officials, all of whom are relatively small in number but in major positions of influence.

This is being done through the appointment of people to the courts who do not believe the Constitutions to be defining documents in our system of laws. Many appointed to the courts bring with them an agenda that is not in accord with the will of the people and cannot be enacted by legislative action. They read into the Constitution things that do not exist and act as legislators requiring actions that usurp the power of our elected bodies.

We are seeing the result of these efforts in the form of anarchy among elected and appointed officials allowing marriages of couples who do not fit any definition of a married couple except their own. This is in defiance of the federal law defining marriage as the union of a man and woman. It is also in defiance of 38 states where the Defense of Marriage is law and in defiance of the majority of the citizens of our country.

To those who subvert our Constitutions, you must remember anarchy is anarchy, whether it occurs in courtrooms, chambers of the Senate, municipal offices or in the streets. It degrades our systems of laws and at some point will spill into the streets.

Herman Moon, Owasso

Concentrate on other issues

The United States has led the world as a proponent of freedom and equality. Yet now, the president of a nation that is so protective of personal freedoms is on a mission to rip away the rights of tens of thousands of Americans by attempting to amend the Constitution to ban same-sex marriage. Constitutional amendments have always ensured equality, justice and freedom of expression and religion, even without the support of many Americans.

The president wants to protect the institution of marriage when one in two marriages ends in divorce and more couples than ever are living together without being married. This is what he is trying to protect? More important, why is the president not taking a stand for more pressing issues like poverty, education and health care?

His attack on the gay community is unnecessary, looking for a

solution to a nonexistent problem. How will allowing same-sex marriages make any difference to the American way of life, other than giving credibility and stability to thousands of gay families? Many of these families are already raising children in loving and stable homes and are not going to vanish or dissolve just because they are not allowed to legally marry.

Kirstie Tindale, Tulsa

Asbury owed an apology

I found it shocking that the Feb. 29 Tulsa World front page article on gay marriage would take precedence over the inspirational article on the new Asbury United Methodist Church.

The gay marriage story took up so much front page space that the Asbury article had to be continued on an inside page. If, and it is a big if, the first one had to be in the Tulsa World at all, maybe it should have been inside, or even better, in the comic section.

I sincerely feel that priorities were reversed. I am not a member of Asbury but I have several good friends who are and I think they are owed an apology.

Barbara A. Nelson, Claremore

Fighting back

Recently gasoline prices increased by 5 cents per gallon then three days later, by 6 more cents per gallon. Am I the only one who thinks that the oil companies do this to take advantage of the element of surprise and catch us needing gas just when the price jumps?

Well, here is something for the oil tycoon fat cats to consider. Raising prices does not increase profits from what I buy because I reduce my consumption each time prices increase in this manner. I stop going out to eat and shop unless I can do it on my way to and from work. Thus the oil companies' greed not only harms its own bottom line, it also affects other businesses.

I hope that other consumers will begin expressing disapproval of these tactics in a similar fashion. So when other businesses get tired of not seeing enough customers coming through, express displeasure to the oil companies. They don't seem to understand that the average consumer is tired of being gouged and is looking for ways to fight back.

J.D. Clevenger, Owasso

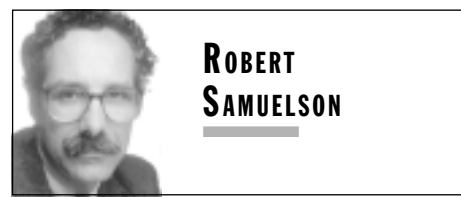
Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, Tulsa World, Box 1770, Tulsa, Okla., 74102, or send e-mail to letters@tulsa-world.com.

Many problems stem from affluence

WASHINGTON — It may seem a bit unnatural, but more and more of our social problems and complaints stem from our affluence, not our poverty. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson made that point last week — unintentionally, to be sure — when he announced that obesity now rivals smoking as the largest cause of premature death. The Centers for Disease Control reckons that obesity contributes to about 400,000 deaths annually, just behind tobacco (435,000) and ahead of alcohol (85,000), car accidents (43,000) and guns (29,000). Obesity and its complications — more diabetes and heart disease, for instance — now account for an estimated 9 percent of U.S. health spending. When we were poorer, obesity was not a big problem.

The supposed villains here are fast-food restaurants and food companies that have supersized us to corpulence. There's some truth to this, but the larger and more boring truth is that food has gotten cheaper, and as a result, we consume more of it — and more away from home. In 1950, Americans devoted a fifth of their disposable incomes to food (and less than a fifth of that to eating out). Now food's share is a tenth (and almost half is out). We eat what pleases us, and so why should anyone be surprised that the average American now consumes about 150 pounds of sugar and sweeteners annually, up roughly 20 percent since 1980?

It's misleading to ascribe all the resulting flab to American self-indulgence. China shows signs of an obesity problem, says Roland Sturm, an obesity expert at the Rand Corp. So do some other countries escaping poverty. "It's definitely one side effect of getting wealthier," he says. Now the idea that people spend less on basics like food is usu-



ROBERT SAMUELSON

ally considered good, because it means they can spend more on other things. But there's no guarantee that they'll spend wisely on food or anything else.

Getting wealthier spawns other complaints. One is the "time squeeze" — the sense that we're more hurried than ever. We all know this is true; we're tugged by jobs, family, PTA and soccer. Actually, it's not true. People go to work later in life and retire earlier. Housework has declined. One survey found that in 1999 only 14 percent of wives did more than four hours of daily housework; the figure was 43 percent in 1977 and 87 percent in 1924. Even when jobs and housework are combined, total work hours for women and men have dropped.

Still, people gripe — and griping rises with income, report economists Daniel Hamermesh of the University of Texas and Jungmin Lee of the University of Arkansas. They studied the United States, Germany, Australia, Canada and South Korea. People who were statistically similar (age, working hours, children) complained more about the "time squeeze" as their incomes rose. The economists' explanation: the more money people have, the more things they can do with their time; time becomes more valuable, and people resent that they can't create more of it.

Psychologist Barry Schwartz of Swarthmore College makes the broader point in his new book, "The Paradox of Choice: Why

More Is Less." Our individual culture worships choice, but too much of it leads to choice congestion. Consumer Reports now "offers comparisons among 220 new car models, 250 breakfast cereals, 400 VCRs, 40 household soaps ... 350 mutual funds and even 35 showerheads," Schwartz writes. People feel overwhelmed by the time it takes to make the "best" choice — and may later regret having made the wrong choice. Purchasing blunders may irritate, but bigger mistakes of choice (in careers, work versus family) can be profoundly depressing, Schwartz argues.

As material wants are satisfied, psychological desires ascend. But these defy easy economic balm. "Most of what people really want in life — love, friendship, respect, family, standing, fun ... does not pass through the market," writes Gregg Easterbrook in his book "The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse." (Note how paradox pops up in these titles.) Indeed, affluence may make matters worse. In 1957, 3 percent of Americans felt "lonely," according to a survey cited by Easterbrook; now 13 percent do. Although more people can afford to exist apart, it may not be good for them.

None of this discredits the value of economic growth, which has made life better for millions. These problems are less serious than those of poverty and unemployment. Nor are they always intractable. To check obesity, we can eat better and exercise more. To control ordinary anxiety, we can recognize that some choices just don't matter that much. Still, affluence's afflictions remind us of an eternal truth: it matters not just how much wealth we have but how well we use it.

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