

EDITORIAL

OTHER VIEW

The Tulsa World on the Republican Legislature:
We congratulate Sen. Glenn Coffee, R-Oklahoma City, on his election as the first Republican president pro tem of the state Senate. The same good wishes go out to Rep. Chris Bengtson, R-Tulsa, elected as House speaker.

While the House has been controlled by Republicans for several years this marks the first time in state history that Republicans also control the upper chamber.

Coffee told senators that the upper chamber would be about ideas. We hope that he will listen to ideas from both sides of the aisle because what's best for Oklahoma seldom breaks down along party lines.

Already Democrats have complained that rules changes will stifle debate.

A bill, Nick's Law, to expand health insurance to cover children with autism — a measure that passed the Senate four times last session but failed to make it out of committee in the House — may never come up for debate this session because of a rules change. We hope this is not the start of cutting good ideas off at the pass.

Senate Republicans again will push for: Voter identification at the polls.

Evidence suggests that Oklahoma does not have a major or even a minor problem with voter fraud.

Creation of an Office of Accountability. Do we really need yet another layer of bureaucracy?

Lawsuit reform. Be careful what you wish for.

Making statewide elected officials subject to a 12-year term limit, which exists for lawmakers. Why do we need a law spelling out what voters already can do at election time?

Where are the agenda items that will make life better for the average Oklahoman? Where are the agenda items for reducing poverty and incarceration rates and making sure every Oklahoman can receive affordable health care?

We only hope that when the legislative session ends Oklahoma will be a better, not worse, place than when the session started.



Republicans propose corporate immunity

Republicans have filed the first of what likely will be a number of corporate immunity bills masquerading as "lawsuit reform" during the upcoming legislative session.

Legislators have filed resolutions to call statewide referenda on capping noneconomic damages and attorney fees, and have filed related legislation to do the same thing. The resolutions do not require the governor's signature.

Manufacturers of unsafe products and dangerous drugs, greedy insurance companies that would rather delay and deny claims, and doctors who routinely harm patients all will be given a free pass under corporate immunity.

Although we don't believe handing a blank check to corporate CEOs and insurance companies is good policy, the people of Oklahoma may have the ultimate say on whether

they or legislators run the courts. It comes down to whether Oklahomans trust politicians or 12 of their neighbors to decide what's fair when someone is injured or cheated.



Jeff Raymond

Guest Opinion

Debt and business-against-business lawsuits far outnumber personal-injury lawsuits Oklahoma. Businesses will continue to sue each other for huge amounts of money, as they regularly do, but average Oklahomans soon may lose that right. This lays bare who really benefits from corporate immunity.

Republicans claim they have voters on their side. Yet Gov. Brad Henry was elected twice — winning

by 66 percent in 2006 — and has opposed the proposed throw-the-baby-out-with-the-bathwater changes to the state's legal system.

True lawsuit reform would involve greater regulation of the insurance industry and stronger oversight of the medical profession. True lawsuit reform would speed up the legal system and reduce its costs. True lawsuit reform protects everyone, not just negligent doctors and corporate CEOs.

Caps blatantly discriminate against the elderly, the poor, ethnic minorities, children and stay-at-home mothers. Caps deny justice to the most severely injured — those who most need it and most deserve it.

Contingency fees are an essential, often-misunderstood part of protecting ordinary Oklahomans. Finding an attorney to take a case on contingency is the only way

injured and cheated can afford to stand up to those with nearly unlimited resources and a refusal to admit wrongdoing.

Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, who works as a Tulsa defense attorney and has filed caps legislation, will no doubt continue to charge whatever he sees fit while denying that right to other members of his profession. Corporations will continue to pay untold sums to their legal teams.

Capping damages and attorney fees is an affront to the free market and fundamental fairness. Insurance companies and corporations will benefit. Taxpayers will foot the bill. Someone must pay when Oklahomans are injured too badly to return to their normal lives.

Caps are a solution in search of a problem.

JEFF RAYMOND is executive director of OKWatchdog, an Oklahoma City-based nonprofit consumer and patient advocacy organization.

For D.C. elite, just saying 'sorry' makes it all right

Did you know there is a super secret handbook of instructions for the political elite in Washington, D.C.? It's true. This handbook gives detailed instructions on how to say you're sorry when caught breaking the law.

The Washington privileged — along with their six-figure salaries, free health care, easy work schedules and pension plans the average taxpayer can only dream of — are issued a secret gold-embossed handbook titled "The art of saying you're sorry after you're caught red-handed."

Its subtitle: "The easy way out of any jam."

Treasurer Secretary Timothy Geithner right now is clinging to his copy tighter than a clam with lockjaw. He is so thankful for the A-to-Z topical guide in the back of his handbook.

This topical guide made it

easy for him to quickly scan down and go straight to the topic that applies to his particular situation. He passed A = adultery, B = bribery, D = drunken driving, and finally arrived at "T."

Under "T" is a listing of key words such as tipsy, turncoat, temper tantrum, taking bribes and, finally, TAX CHEAT.

Tim is referred to page 34, which reads: "So, you have been caught red-handed cheating on your taxes. First of all, don't panic, because as the late pioneer computer scientist Grace Hopper said,

"It's easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to get permission."

"Remember, you are better than other hardworking Americans, and paying taxes is for the little people. And thank your lucky stars you are not one of them because if you were, you would have been hounded day and night by the IRS, your wages would have been garnished, and you would have been found guilty and thrown under the jail.

"The key in getting out of this jam is to use the following words and phrases (that would never work in the real world) to describe your cheating ways: 'I made an honest mistake.' 'I am human.' 'It was an oversight on my part.' 'It was a careless mistake.'

"You get the picture. But remember, you must look and act contrite, even though we know your con-

trition is as phony as a three-dollar bill and similar to what someone once said: 'A thief is sorry he is to be hanged, not that he is a thief.'

"Above all, bear in mind that your fellow elite will back you up regardless of their party affiliation. They read from the same handbook. They realize the bell may toll for them one day.

"So, let's practice your 'I'm sorrys' as you look down at the table and, if possible, get a little misty-eyed.

"Good. Now sheepishly look at your inquirers and say in a childlike voice, 'I'm sorryrrrr for the oversight in not paying my taxes. I am only human.'

"Very good. Now cheer up and go testify, tiger!

"Oh, one more thing. That 'raise your right hand, swear under oath and tell the whole truth thing.' Forget

about that; it only applies to the common folk."

Tim smirks and thinks to himself, "Thank you, secret handbook, I can do that. Dang, it's good to be one of the elite in Washington, D.C. You can get away with anything and all is forgiven, as long as you say 'I'm sorryrrrr!'"

I for one will sleep better knowing the treasury secretary, who oversees the IRS, is sorry for cheating on his taxes all those years.

I am confident, as I am sure you are, that if any of us makes an "honest, innocent mistake" on our taxes, Tim and his band of agents will cut us the same break he received.

After all, all you have to do is say you're sorry.

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TODAY'S VERSE
A SELECTION

'Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.'

Ephesians 6:11