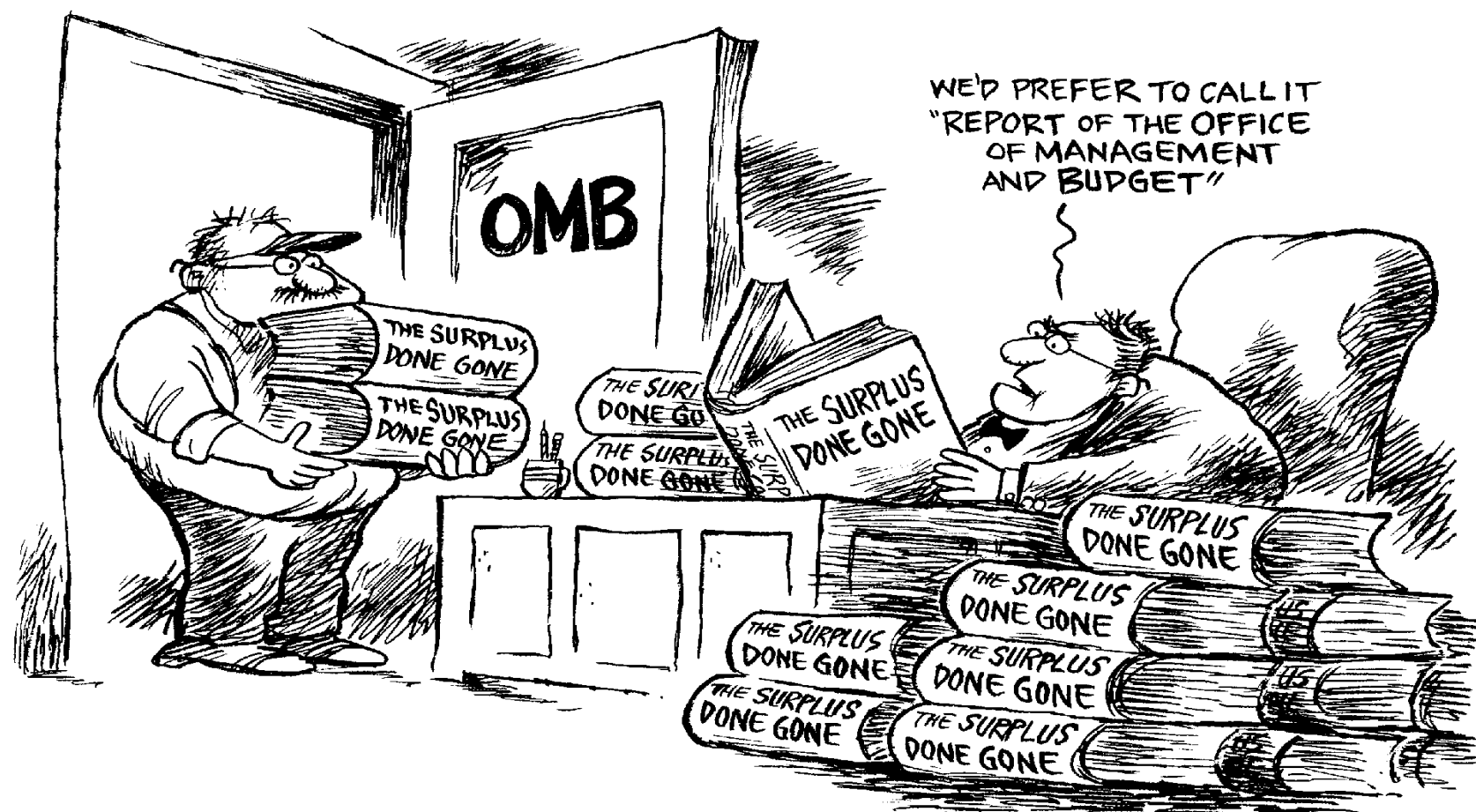


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commentary

from other pens...

Thompson keeps all guessing about future

By Nancy Zuckerbrod

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — As a movie actor, Fred Thompson often appeared in edge-of-your-seat dramas. As a senator, he's the star of a real-life cliffhanger: Will the Tennessee Republican run for re-election? Those waiting in the wings include five members of Congress, an ex-presidential candidate and the former head of the National Transportation Safety Board. And a slew of state lawmakers ready to pursue any House seats that might open up because of Thompson.

"They're already lining up. It's almost like a row of dominoes," said Rep. Ed Bryant, R-Tenn., who plans to run if Thompson does not.

Thompson, 59, is considered a shoo-in if he seeks re-election. The White House and national GOP leaders are encouraging him to run, wary of the prospect of devoting time and money to what otherwise is a safe seat in a year when Republicans must defend 20 of the 34 seats on the ballot. Democrats control the chamber by one seat.

Before leaving for the August recess, Thompson indicated he would use the time to think about his future. Congress returned this week, and Thompson appears still to be thinking.

"There's no change; nothing really to report," he said Thursday.

Thompson could announce his intentions Saturday at the annual state Republican fund-raiser in Nashville, where he's one of several speakers. Rep. Bart Gordon, one of four Democrats considered possible Senate candidates should Thompson retire, says he thinks Thompson will run.

"I think the president will convince him to run again," Gordon said. Other Democrats in the mix are Reps. Harold Ford Jr., Bob Clement and John Tanner and former NTSB Chairman Jim Hall of Chattanooga.

Bryant is the only Republican who's said he definitely will run if Thompson retires.

"My thinking is, in case he were not to run, we need to have somebody prepared to step in quickly," said Bryant, a former U.S. attorney who helped prosecute President Clinton during impeachment.

Former Gov. Lamar Alexander, who has twice sought the GOP presidential nomination, also is considered a possibility. Sen. Bill Frist, the Tennessee Republican in charge of recruiting GOP Senate candidates, has urged Alexander to consider running.

Alexander said he has not ruled that out but is content with private life. "I've encouraged Fred to run. I hope he does, and I believe he will," said Alexander, who is teaching at Harvard University.

Victor Ashe, mayor of Knoxville and a leading Republican in Tennessee, said he's not sure Thompson will run. "One of his considerations is he's not a wealthy person," Ashe said, adding Thompson could make much more than his \$145,100 Senate salary in private life.

Thompson, whose issues have been national security and government waste, admits he feels frustrated with the Senate, saying the body spends too much time on unimportant matters. He was disappointed to lose the chairmanship of the Governmental Affairs Committee when Vermont Sen. James Jeffords left the GOP and gave Democrats control of the Senate.

Thompson, a lawyer, was chief minority counsel on the committee investigating Watergate in 1973. He later represented the head of the Tennessee Parole Board, who was fired after exposing a pardon-selling scheme. The story became a movie titled "Marie," and the producers asked Thompson to play himself. It was the first of close to 20 film roles for the 6-foot-6 actor with a booming voice.

Thompson said the retirement announcements by two leading Senate Republicans — North Carolina's Jesse Helms and Phil Gramm of Texas — have not intensified the pressure to announce his intentions.

But analyst Rothenberg says it's clear the GOP has much riding on Thompson's decision.

"Thompson's a clear dunk if he runs, and if he doesn't, it's 50-50" for the Republicans, he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Nancy Zuckerbrod reports on Washington for Associated Press members in Tennessee and Kentucky.

I enjoy my neighbors' attractive lawns

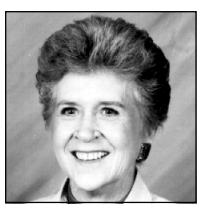
I don't know about you, but I see some long-gone green in my yard.

I'd like to say "lawn," but truthfully, there's not a lot of lawn there. I used to aspire to a beautiful lawn; I even have most of the necessary lawn equipment to maintain one. Of course, most of it is practically new, since it doesn't get used regularly.

The man was the "lawn person" in our family. My husband had total responsibility for the yard work, followed by my sons. My father used to try and try to get green grass to grow in northwest Kansas, but he continually fought against poor soil, shade trees, too little rain, and too many children's feet.

I know there wasn't enough money to buy weed killer and fertilizer, but he often would sprinkle seeds in the bare patches, and I remember his standing many hours at the corner of the house with a hose and nozzle, trying to encourage the seeds to sprout. That was after taking a rake and scratching up the heavily packed areas caused by the continual pounding of all the neighborhood kids as we hosted tag, or cowboy, or jumping from the trees.

I don't remember him ever yelling at us to stay off the lawn, although I'm sure there were subtle suggestions which fell on deaf ears. It was just too entertaining to play hide and seek or chase each other around the outside of the house. Our yard was



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one of the few which had no fence to hinder the playing, and also trees big enough to climb, as well as our having parents who allowed it.

My daddy was a patient man, desirous of a nice lawn, but aware that it was much more important to have happy children. Both my parents liked having the play centered at our house; then they could monitor all the activity. And there was a lot of it. Cousins and neighbor children were often in our yard, climbing trees, swinging down from ropes, shooting each other with rubber band guns (rubber bands made from inner tubes, that is!)

Tomboy that I was, I kept up with all the other kids, but preferred playing Queen of Sheba. I think because it was the only game where the girls got to be in charge.

Now my mother didn't do yard work well, although she tried to support Daddy's efforts by watering the grass seeds when he was working away from home - or getting us kids to. And we were smart enough not to run through the mud and track it into the house.

My mother's efforts were usually toward gardening. She liked to see things grow. On trips back to Missouri to visit relatives, she would always remark how lush their gardens were, and they didn't even own a water hose!

Mom would enthusiastically look forward to a garden, talking about how wonderful it would be to have fresh vegetables. She probably expected a lot of help from us children with weeding the garden, but I don't remember much of that. It was kind of fun to dig the little holes or ditches and putting the seeds in, but that was the extent of my interest.

And I didn't like green beans that weren't from a can, tomatoes - not at all, cucumbers only when made into sweet pickles, etc. I also thought it would be better timing if Mom would can in the cool of winter instead of the heat of August. See how much I knew about it all!

So the green in my yard is welcome. It contrasts beautifully with the brown, and will look better when the lawn boy comes and levels it with a mower. It also gives me occasion to reminisce about home and another troubled yard from my youth.

Good neighbors, then and now, keep beautifully manicured lawns, and I thank them for allowing me to enjoy theirs. I applaud their work and effort, and hope they excuse my lack of talent in that area. I regret that their view of my yard isn't as attractive as my view of theirs.

Eugenics and abortion

A pro-lifer I know has suggested that before deciding on an abortion, a woman should be required to have a sonogram so that she could see the evolving life within. I told the pro-lifer that mandatory sonograms would involve coercion by the state, which would be unconstitutional, and indeed a violation of privacy.

But her idea reminded me of a man I've known a long time who is a strong supporter, as his wife, of abortion rights. One day, looking rather startled, he had seen a sonogram of their child in progress. "I saw the fingers move," he told me, "and the legs." He sounded somewhat awed.

After the child was born, his memory of the sonogram faded, and he resumed his celebration of Roe vs. Wade. One evening, during a vigorous debate on abortion, my friend snapped at me, "If you're really pro-life, why don't you go out and kill doctors performing abortions!"

"I couldn't," I explained, "because I AM pro-life."

Recently, I saw in a Detroit pro-life publication, Lifespan News, a report of a "new high-tech ultrasound device — a \$175,000 scanner." The manufacturer, said the news story, says the imaging is so precise that "it produces crystal-clear photographs" of the face and body of the evolving not-yet-born life.

There is another dimension of this and similar devices. Not only will there be available, at the patient's bedside, such detailed images of the fetus, but doctors will be able to detect pre-birth abnormalities more easily.

As a result, some parents might decide, depending on the nature of the abnormalities, on an abortion rather than take on the emotional and financial expenses of dealing with his or her care for



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what could be many years.

But other parents might — on seeing in front of them an actual human being — not just, as some pro-choicers maintain, "a clump of cells" or a "product of conception" — decide to keep the child.

In a formal debate some years ago with an activist in the abortion-rights movement, my opponent used exactly that "clump of cells" description to scoff at my assertion that the fetus is a human being, with characteristics, including DNA, distinctly its own. Sitting behind us, as the debate continued, was another pro-choicer who, however, had recently given birth. Spontaneously, she whispered, "But it IS a baby."

My own choice to become pro-life had nothing to do with religion. It was hastened by a letter in the Feb. 18, 1990 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association by North Carolina physician Joel Hylton: "Who can deny that the fetus is alive and is a separate genetic entity? Its humanity also cannot be questioned scientifically. It is certainly of no other species. That it is dependent on another makes it qualitatively no different from countless other humans outside the womb."

"It strikes me," Dr. Hylton continued, "to argue one may take an innocent life to preserve the quality of life of another is cold and carries utilitarianism to an obscene extreme. Nowhere else in our

society is this permitted or even thinkable — although abortion sets a frightening prospect."

Since that 1990 comment, this prospect has increasingly become thinkable — with the rise of support for euthanasia and eugenics, the latter especially having become more thinkable. In her important new book "Future Perfect: Confronting Decisions About Genetics" (Columbia University Press, 2001), Lori B. Andrews of the Center for Clinical Medical Ethics at the University of Chicago points out:

"In large measure, the history of eugenics (improving the human race) is a history of brutality against the disabled. People who were mentally disabled were involuntarily sterilized in the United States — by the thousands." And the Supreme Court approved this perfectibility of the human race in a 1927 decision, Buck vs. Bell, written by the much-respected Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

As Supreme Court expert Tony Mauro has noted in Legal Times, "Buck vs. Bell has never been fully overturned." The Catholic bishops are correct, in my view as an atheist, when they link capital punishment, euthanasia and abortion as devaluations of human life. So too is eugenics.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

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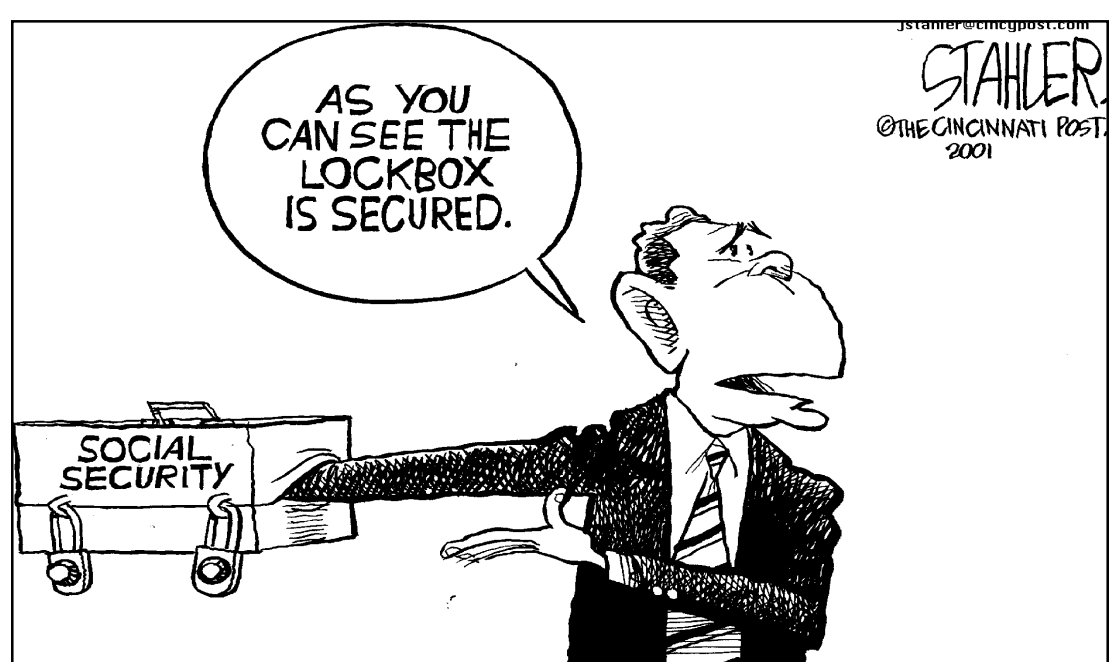
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