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CONTENTS

America's Healthcare Crisis: Does Canada Hold the Answer? <i>Melana Yager</i>	3
Fundamentally Undemocratic: A Call to Amputate the Electoral College <i>Jacob Finkel</i>	6
Redrawing America's Image <i>Edward Lundgren</i>	11
Governed by Faith <i>Rory Huff</i>	14
Opening the Eyes of Congress: Saving Darfur <i>Angelo Fiorentino</i>	17
Bankrupt America: Why Creditor-Benefiting Law Must Be Revised <i>Joseph Axenroth</i>	19
Reviving Education <i>Gennevieve B. Thomas</i>	21
Rolling Towards a Higher Education: Wheelchair Users and College <i>Rose Gallo</i>	23
Health: A Human Right <i>Catherine Morgan</i>	25
The Evolution of Genesis: Religion in Public Schools <i>Dacia Pelligrino</i>	28

THE DIALECTICS

An Introduction

The Dialectics: Undergraduate Journal of Leadership, Politics, and Society is a refereed, multidisciplinary electronic publication housed at the Abington College of the Pennsylvania State University. The Journal's aim is to promote undergraduate discourse and scholarship and to encourage undergraduate students to pursue and engage in thoughtful discourses on topics of societal importance.

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AMERICA'S HEALTHCARE CRISIS: DOES CANADA HOLD THE ANSWER?

By Melana Yager

With 46.6 million uninsured people, the United States, among the wealthiest and the most advanced countries in the world, is experiencing a healthcare crisis. If not reformed, it is inevitable that the condition of the healthcare system in the United States will continue to worsen. With the crisis showing no signs of ending, and the rates of uninsured people, healthcare costs, and consumer dissatisfaction on the rise, the United States may look to Canada for solutions.

Before making any recommendations, some figures and differences between the two systems must be noted. Canada has had a national program since 1961 for hospital care and 1971 for physician services (Terris, 1990). The closest the United States' government has come in terms of providing care to a large proportion of citizens has been Medicare (a federal program) and Medicaid (a state program using federal and state funds). In 2004, the United States spent more than 16% of its GDP on healthcare, while Canada spent only 9.7%. The 2004 healthcare expenditures in the United States grossed over one trillion dollars in 2004 (National Coalition on Healthcare, 2007), but in Canada they approximated \$130.3 billion (Canadian Institute for Health Information, n. d.). Per person, the United States spent \$6,280 (National Coalition on Healthcare, 2007) on healthcare while Canada spent \$4,078 per person—and that included all citizens (Canadian Institute for Health Information, n. d.). One might think that because the United States spends so much more on healthcare than Canada does, the U.S. population would be healthier and live longer. But that is not the case. According to the CIA World Factbook, Canada ranks significantly higher in terms of life expectancy than the United States (2007b) and has a lower infant mortality rate as well (2007a).

Although the Canadian national healthcare program may have its disadvantages, as all programs do, parts of the program could be beneficial for the United States to adopt. In a 1988 Harris Poll, 61% of Americans said that they would prefer a national health program like Canada's, even with its drawbacks, to their own (Terris, 1990). More recently, in a survey done by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 57% of Americans said that in the 2008 presidential election, they would like to see a candidate propose a health reform program that would make a major effort to provide healthcare and insurance for nearly all noninsured people (Kaiser Network, 2006).

The following four proposals, derived from the Canadian system, could help solve some of the issues regarding the U.S. healthcare crisis, without jeopardizing the quality of healthcare:

1) Devising the tax system. The United States should use a progressive tax system to fund healthcare programs. One of the strong qualities of the Canadian health system that allows it to provide coverage to all of its citizens, from maternity home to nursing home, is that it is funded mainly through progressive taxes (Terris, 1990). Progressive taxes are characterized by rates of taxation that increase with one's income. In the United States, healthcare is partly funded by *regressive* taxes. Opposite from progressive taxes, regressive tax rates decrease as the amount of income to which the rate is applied increases (Investor Words, n.d.). In simpler terms, the unfortunate result of regressive taxes is that they disproportionately tax people with lower incomes. If the United States were to apply the lessons from the Canadian tax system, healthcare

could be funded more equitably among the population. Consequently, the burden of who pays for healthcare would be more evenly distributed, as the lower income groups would no longer be affected as harshly as they now are (Terris, 1990).

In addition, the United States should enact excise (health) taxes on tobacco, firearms, and alcohol. Such health taxes should not be confused with what some Americans refer to as a “sin tax,” generally placed on the same goods and put toward special public projects. A health tax on the named products would specifically go toward funding the health system (Terris, 1990).

Used in combination, the progressive income taxes and health taxes on dangerous products would benefit the United States’ struggling healthcare system in two ways: First, as already discussed, a progressive tax structure would dispense the burden of healthcare costs more justly and according to an individual’s ability to pay. Second, people would be discouraged from using perilous products. In turn, the decreased usage would lead to a lesser need for medical care and therefore lower healthcare costs (Terris, 1990).

2) Paying for services in full. To provide better care to the entire population, services must be paid in full. In the United States, those fortunate enough to have insurance at all are still required to pay premiums in advance and are charged with further expenses at the time of illness (deductibles and co-payments) (Terris, 1990). In 2004, the nationwide average for premiums was \$2,268 for single coverage and \$4,424 for a family plan (Wildsmith, Chovan, and Yoo, 2005). In 2005, deductibles ranged from \$905 to \$1,405 for family coverage (Kaiser Family foundation, n.d.). Co-payments vary according to health insurance plans, but they can range from as low as five or 10 dollars to over \$25, and that fee has to be paid at every doctor’s visit or every time a patient receives medication. In contrast, Canadians are not burdened with paying deductibles, premiums, or co-payments. The argument that universal healthcare in the United States would mean higher taxes for some can be circumvented here, as the higher taxes would be offset in part by the elimination of high premiums, deductibles, and co-payments.

3) Adopting a decentralized healthcare system. Many Americans fear that a single federal system would mean heavily socialized healthcare (Sage, 2007). Canada’s system can serve as a model: It has 13 separate single-payer systems, administered by the provinces and territories and formed around the standards of the federal Canada Health Act (Hussey, 2007). Similarly, the United States’ healthcare system could give each state in the United States a level of flexibility (Terris, 1990). Such flexibility and decentralization would make the system less socialized and allow for more efficient and better quality care to be given.

4) Ensuring choice of a physician. As in Canada, Americans must be able to choose any doctor they want. This must include doctors practicing in other states. Health insurance companies in the United States are exceedingly restrictive, limiting which doctors patients can see, curbing the number of doctors within healthcare plans, and making it difficult for patients to find a physician with whom the patient is satisfied.

Clearly, the United States’ healthcare system is in dire need of reform, and that cannot be denied. However, the difficulty is determining what kind of reform would produce optimum results in efficiency and quality of care. Thoughtfully implementing principles applied successfully in Canada’s national healthcare system could provide some answers to the problems that the United States faces. Revisions to the tax system, payment in full for services, state health departments’ formulation of their own individual health systems around federal guidelines, and freedom to choose one’s physician are four recommendations that would serve as solutions for the problems of a high rate of uninsured citizens, high healthcare costs, and consumer frustration that currently inhibit the healthcare system in the United States.

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Melana Yager graduated from Penn State in May of 2007, with a bachelor's degree in health policy and administration. She wishes to seek a career in hospital administration and eventually earn her master's in business or healthcare management.

FUNDAMENTALLY UNDEMOCRATIC: A CALL TO AMPUTATE THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

By Jacob Finkel

The Electoral College is a dangerous constitutional relic that undermines our democracy and results in disenfranchisement and unequal representation. Reform is desperately needed to allow the principle of “one person, one vote” to be guaranteed to all Americans.

In November 1876, Samuel J. Tilden was elected President of the United States. He won 51% of the popular vote. However, four months later, his opponent, Rutherford B. Hayes, was sworn in as the nation’s nineteenth president. The reason for this was the Electoral College. Four times in the nation’s history, the College has resulted in the winner of the popular vote not being elected president. That means that in over seven percent of presidential elections, a candidate preferred by a minority of voters was elected president. Only the implementation of a direct popular vote can fully ensure that a president is elected by popular will and not by a handful of voters in a key state.

The Electoral College was created at the Constitutional Convention as a compromise between a direct popular vote and having the state legislatures elect the president. The College kept the president from being at the mercy of the state legislatures, and diminished the ability of the larger states to sway the outcome of presidential elections by virtue of their greater population (each state receives two electoral votes in addition to its number of representatives, thus favoring smaller states).

The Founding Fathers were concerned that due to the lack of communications between different regions of the nation, each state would always vote for familiar local candidates. They hoped that by letting the common people select “enlightened statesmen” (Madison, Hamilton, & Jay, 1987, p. 125), who would then select the best candidate from across the nation, the interests of all would be protected. However, in this era of 24-hour news and PR campaigns, there is little danger of the public being unfamiliar with one of the major parties’ candidates. Indeed, over a year before the 2008 Presidential election, many of the major candidates already have almost 100% name recognition (Quinnipiac Poll, 2006).

Throughout its history, the College has been problematic. In fact, by 1804, the 12th Amendment was ratified in an attempt to reform the Electoral College after the tumultuous 1800 election resulted in the College failing to elect a president and the House of Representatives picking the new chief executive (Whitaker & Neale, 2001). In 1968, Independent candidate George Wallace’s strong showing generated concern that, if he won enough votes, he would be able to wring concessions out of the other candidates and choose the next president (by delegating his votes). In 2000, Al Gore received over half a million more votes than George W. Bush, yet the College resulted in the Florida recount fiasco, forcing the Supreme Court to decide the election. None of these problems would have occurred with a direct popular vote.

Of course, fixing the Electoral College is easier said than done. There have been nearly 700 attempts (Dottinga, 2006; “Rethinking the Electoral College,” 2001), proposals ranging from small improvements (such as the 12th Amendment) to abolition. Small improvements are not enough. Any attempt at reform must aim for the highest goal: the implementation of a direct popular vote. Other reforms merely put a band-aid on an electoral system that needs an amputation.

For example, a reform attempt currently used in Maine and Nebraska allots one electoral vote to the winner of each congressional district. However, this plan is actually worse than the Electoral College at representing the will of the people because congressional districts are often gerrymandered. Had the Maine/Nebraska plan been used by all states in the 2000 election, Gore, the popular vote winner, would have lost by a wider margin in the Electoral College (36 votes) than he did under the regular system (four votes) (Sagarin, 2004). Another reform plan was recently enacted by Maryland. However, the Maryland plan (to cast all of the state's electoral votes for the winner of the nationwide popular vote) was passed with a caveat: it will only take effect when enough states with a total of 270 electoral votes affix their approval and pass similar plans. In effect, if enough states heed the Maryland plan, the plan would institute a national popular vote without requiring a Constitutional amendment (Wagner, 2007).

While such an approach would not be unconstitutional (*Constitution of the United States*, Article II, Section I), it would be a constitutional disaster in the making. Once the state legislatures have begun to decree how their electoral votes are to be distributed, what is to prevent them from announcing, "the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' electoral votes will be cast for John Kerry" or "the State of Texas' electoral votes will be cast for George W. Bush"? If even one state does this, it could quickly escalate into a situation where every state in the union employs a different method for choosing its electors. The Maryland plan circumvents the will of the Founding Fathers who never intended for the legislators to pick the president themselves. Just days after Maryland passed the bill, the Governor of Hawaii, citing constitutional concerns, vetoed a similar measure, demonstrating the difficulty in instituting these "quick fixes" ("Hawaii Governor Vetoes Popular Vote for President," 2007). Such reform plans are not the answer; they merely dissipate the popular will for electoral reform. Only a national popular vote will completely address the following fundamental flaws inherent in the Electoral College:

1) The Electoral College is an inherently undemocratic institution. In our republic, each citizen's vote must have equal weight. When James Madison envisioned who the voters in the new nation would be, he observed: "Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned, more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscurity and unpropitious fortune. The voters are to be the great body of the people of the United States" (Madison, Hamilton, & Jay, 1987, p. 343). Justice Hugo Black, when crafting his "one person, one vote" principle in the 1964 Supreme Court case, *Wesberry v. Sanders*, looked to Madison's words. Strangely, since then, we, as a nation, have adhered to the "one person, one vote" principle when electing our legislators, but not our president.

Doing so has undemocratic consequences. For example, in Texas, a state that has not voted for a Democratic president since 1976, there are 2.4 million Democrats ("Few Decide for the Many," 2004). That means that in the seven presidential elections since 1976, Democratic voters in Texas have had no influence on who would lead the nation. A national popular vote would ensure that every person's vote is equal.

2) The Electoral College is plagued by "faithless electors." Over the nation's history, there have been 158 faithless electors who have voted for a candidate other than the one they pledged to support ("What is the Electoral College?", n.d.). Faithless electors can cause someone who has lost both the popular vote, and, as pledged, the Electoral College, become president. This needless byproduct of the Electoral College must be eliminated with a national popular vote.

3) The Electoral College depresses voter turnout in non-battleground states. In the 2004 election, Pennsylvania had a turnout rate of 60.3% (Franklin and Marshall, n.d.), while

turnout in uncontested Illinois was 55.4% (Althaus, 2004). Both states have 21 electoral votes; both have an assortment of large cities and rural towns; and both have practically the same number of registered voters (Leip, n.d.). But Illinois was firmly in the Democratic column, while Pennsylvania was a key battleground state. Similarly, turnout in California and Texas (non-competitive states) was below 50%, while their respective (battleground) neighbors, Oregon and Colorado, had turnouts of 68% and 63%, respectively (Leip, n.d.). Some might argue that these voting results are coincidental; however, it is simple logic that if you're a busy Republican in Massachusetts (a Democratic state in 11 of the last 12 elections), you're less likely to vote than if you lived in a competitive state. Many scholars agree that the College affects turnout "because people know that their vote won't make a difference" ("Pros and cons: The Electoral College," 2004). A national popular vote would encourage people to come to the polls, increasing turnout in non-competitive states.

Most Americans agree that the Electoral College is undemocratic. However, there have been various reasons offered why it should not be changed. Some argue that the Electoral College has been enshrined in the Constitution and should not be modified. This view is shortsighted. Simply put, the system of government that the Founders created no longer exists. They created a Constitution by which only a small portion of the federal government would be elected by popular vote: the House of Representatives. The other half of the legislature, the Senate, along with the presidential electors, were to be chosen by the state legislatures (Clark, 1917).

Now, the Senate is popularly elected and the people select the presidential electors. On election day, the names of the electors do not even appear on the presidential ballot. Rather, the people vote "directly" for the presidential candidate (in fact, they are needlessly voting for a second round of "super-voters"). These "super-voters," whom the Founders believed would have the wisdom to select the president, are in reality just rubber stamps for the people's choice—the only time they can have influence is when they thwart the people's will. This is a ludicrous system, neither fully democratic, nor as the Founders intended. To continue it merely out of habit and the perception of difficulty in instigating change is critically misguided.

Some pragmatists argue that abolishing the College is a worthy goal but adopt the view of President Jimmy Carter, a strong reform advocate, who once said, "I think it is a waste of time to talk about changing the Electoral College . . . I would predict that 200 years from now, we will still have the Electoral College" (Keyssar, 2004). Accordingly, the pragmatists argue for reform, rather than abolishment. Many of these plans are in fact harder to achieve than a national popular vote, however, as they would have to be approved by numerous state legislatures. Furthermore, as already noted, if only some states initiate reform, a constitutional crisis unrivaled in American history may quickly loom.

Instituting a national popular vote would require the approval of Congress and two-thirds of the state legislatures—a difficult task, but not an impossible one. In 1968, a Constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College and establish a national popular vote was approved by the House of Representatives by 338 to 70 votes (Whitaker & Neale, 2001). Eighty-one percent of Americans supported the amendment ("Americans Have Historically Favored Changing Way Presidents Are Elected" 2000). A majority of the Senate endorsed it. President Richard M. Nixon called for its adoption, and the polls showed that the amendment had the support of enough state legislatures to be ratified. However, several Southern senators, including Strom Thurmond, filibustered the amendment to death on the Senate floor. They thought that the South would suffer with a national popular vote (Keyssar, 2004). The motivations behind

Thurmond's actions disappeared with the enfranchisement of African Americans. With the roadblock removed, it is now time for Congress to write the 28th Amendment and institute a national popular vote.

As Thomas Jefferson said, "Each generation . . . has . . . a right to choose for itself the form of government it believes most promotive of its own happiness" (Randall, 1858, p. 651). The Constitution is a noble document, its creators wise beyond their time; so wise, in fact, that they recognized they were not omniscient and left us the ability to amend their work if necessary. The Electoral College's time has passed; it is time to implement popular elections for the most powerful office in the land. We must amputate the Electoral College from our political system.

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About the author

Jacob Finkel is a high school student who took a constitutional law course at Penn State Abington in the spring semester of 2007. Politically active since the age of 11, Jacob hopes the Electoral College will be history before he retires.

REDRAWING AMERICA'S IMAGE

By Edward Lundgren

The United States must develop a foreign policy that is sensitive to the concerns of other nations, or the country risks creating an international climate that poses great danger towards Americans and their interests. During the years following the September 11th events, Americans have become increasingly aware of a growing anti-American feeling, held by traditional allies and enemies alike. The current involvement in the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia, as well as the perceived disregard for the opinions of the world, have contributed to this anti-American sentiment.

Prior to September 11, 2001, the United States enjoyed a sheltered existence compared to much of the world, where terrorism was a common occurrence. Since then, the United States has had to re-evaluate how the country deals with the threat. In September of 2002, the Bush administration released the new National Security Strategy, which set out to define the stance that the United States will take in regards to the new threats posed to national security. These strategies include “strengthening alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends,” as well as “preventing our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends with weapons of mass destruction” (White House, 2002). Even though one of the strategies was to build alliances (White House, 2002), leaders and citizens of many countries have concluded that the United States would use preemptive actions even without the support of the international community.

This perception has harmed the endeavor in Iraq and has resulted in the adverse public image of America. The Task Force on Public Diplomacy, an independent study group sponsored by the nonpartisan Council of Foreign Relations, has found, for instance, that “in the run-up to the U.S.-led war in Iraq, botched diplomacy on all sides left a legacy of resentment, fear and anxiety” (Peterson et al., 2003). According to Sir Brian Crowe, a former British diplomat, this failure of public diplomacy has been responsible for the blow to public perception not only in the Middle East but in Europe as well: “What changed with the arrival of George W. Bush even before 9/11, at least as seen from Europe, was the conviction that pre-eminent American power could and should dispense with structural arrangements which constrained U.S. freedom of action: America had the power itself to regulate the world. This underlay not only Iraq but also, before that, the Bush regime’s rejection of Kyoto, the ICC [International Criminal Court], and the ABMT [Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty], in all of which previous administrations had more or less willingly acquiesced” (Crowe, 2004).

Before further discussing public diplomacy, it is important to define what the phrase means. According to the *Dictionary of International Relations Terms*, published by the United States Department of State, “public diplomacy refers to government sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries” (U.S. Dept. of State, 1987). In other words, public diplomacy is used to persuade and garner the support of foreign populations when developing foreign policy. Although, at first glance, this might seem as though the government would be compromising national security by yielding to the concerns of some foreign power, this is not the case. According to Mark Helmke (2002), a staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “American public diplomacy is about one thing and one thing only, American national security. It’s about defending and protecting American interests in a dangerous world.” By attempting to make United States foreign policy less threatening towards

other countries' ways of life, while still maintaining the United States' national security, public diplomacy helps to secure the nation's interests and reduces threats to its security. When the international community better understands and is more accepting of American foreign policy, the likelihood of anti-American sentiments turning into violence is greatly diminished. It is, therefore, imperative that the United States understands how it is perceived; only then can foreign policy ensure American security.

Unfortunately, however, the United States' government currently treats public diplomacy only as an "afterthought," as noted by the Council on Foreign Relations' Task Force on Public Diplomacy (Peterson et al., 2003, pg 6). In its present strategy, the government attempts to persuade foreign populations after-the-fact. This form of damage control does not utilize public diplomacy effectively and rarely does anything to improve the image of the United States. According to the Task Force on Public Diplomacy, the United States is not only "at increased risk of direct attack from those who hate us most, but it is also becoming more difficult for America to realize its long term aspirations as it loses friends and influence" (Peterson et al., 2003, pg 3).

If the United States is to maintain its dominance in global politics, it must evolve its current practices:

1) The United States must proactively approach public diplomacy. The United States' global situation does not benefit from crisis management once the damage is done; only a preemptive strategy that prevents such damage from happening can improve America's image. As the Council on Foreign Relations' Task Force on Public Diplomacy has recommended, the integration of public diplomacy in every stage of foreign policy formulation and the policymakers' understanding of what implications the foreign policies will hold for the world is crucial. The Task Force has endorsed the viewpoint of Edward R. Murrow, President John F. Kennedy's director of the U.S. Information Agency and the legendary newsman, as to the reason why public diplomacy officials must be included in the policy-making process: "(1) to ensure that policymakers are aware of the likely reaction of foreign publics to a forthcoming policy; (2) to advise how best to convincingly communicate policies to foreign audiences; and (3) to ensure that U.S. diplomats are prepared to articulate policies before they are announced" (Peterson et al., 2003, p. 8).

2) The United States must integrate public diplomacy into foreign policymaking. The executive branch must make it a priority to integrate public diplomacy into foreign policymaking. As the Task Force on Public Diplomacy recommends, a leadership position needs to be created to "ensure that the new public diplomacy structures will streamline efforts across agencies and departments rather than create even more bureaucratic infighting" (Peterson et al., 2003, p. 9). Even if there is an effort made to prioritize public diplomacy, without strong leadership that can oversee the integration of public diplomacy into the foreign policymaking process, it cannot be guaranteed that public diplomacy can have its desired effect.

3) The United States must ratify globally popular international treaties. Much of the United States' poor public image stems from the rejection of the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court. By rejecting these popular international treaties, the United States is leading other countries to believe that America views itself as being above the reach of international law. If the United States wants to save its image around the world and help its foreign policy objectives, it is important to ratify these treaties. Doing so would be a sign of good faith that the United States is a partner in the global community and not a tyrant, as some may believe.

4) The United States must promote education and infrastructure development overseas. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member, Senator Richard Lugar, has proposed increasing funding for programs that promote education and infrastructure development. As Mark Helmke, an adviser to Senator Lugar, has put it, “This is nation building pure and simple. As [Senator] Lugar has argued, let’s be honest about it. Let’s work to get our allies and the rest of the international community to help. If the United States does do that, we will see, slowly but surely, those public opinion poll numbers go up” (Helmke, 2002). Demonstrating that the United States cares about the well-being of other nations would provide a critical boost to international support of American policies and would strengthen American security.

If the United States changes the direction of its foreign policy to incorporate the views of other nations and to promote multilateral cooperation, the trend of anti-American sentiment can be stopped. The United States is at a crossroads now, and the right choices have to be made. “Public diplomacy is effective only when it builds on long term relationships that identify common interest between people and capitalizes on them. It must be strategic, consistent, and flexible in its use of channels and, above all, must encourage two-way communications” (Johnson & Dale, 2003). It is time that the United States begins to build some of those relationships.

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GOVERNED BY FAITH

By Rory Huff

In the past quarter century there has been a remarkable increase in the influence that religion plays in the selection of who leads the American people. Candidates rise and fall based on the support they receive from religious populations due to funding and record voter turnout. Our leaders are no longer chosen based on their record of accomplishment or vision of the future, but instead upon electability and the conversion of their opinions into physical votes on a select few issues. This growing impact of religious conservatism in U.S. politics has created an enormous rift within the population. Without being addressed, the phenomenon will endanger the legitimacy of our democratic process.

We are a nation that holds religious freedom as one of its most sacred principles, so much so that the First Amendment of our Constitution ordains that there shall be “no law respecting the establishment of religion.” At the time, this measure was taken to protect the public from government intervention in religious affairs. However, in our rapidly changing world of mass media, super-churches, and judicial activism, the meaning of this groundbreaking proclamation may require some reinterpretation. It may be argued that the fabled separation of church and state may now be required to defend the government from organized religion.

The “Christian Right” in the United States emerged during the anti-communist movement immediately following World War II. It did not, however, have a significant impact on national politics until the social movements of the 1970s began to take shape. Throughout the Seventies and Eighties, the religious faction of the conservative movement operated primarily to promote candidates who supported “traditional” beliefs and to organize resistance to pro-choice demonstrations. However, in 1989, with the formation of the Christian Coalition, religious conservatism exploded onto the political scene. Within five years the movement had defined itself as a powerful organization capable of mobilizing millions of voters.

Today, the Republican Party has reached a point where it is dependent on the votes and financial support of the Christian Right to secure election victories. According to a Pew Center study, 78% of evangelical Christians voted for President Bush in the 2004 presidential election; this number represents an extraordinary 23% of the total votes cast (Stencel & Lugo, 2005). The same study also highlights that, among voters who attend church more than once per week, 64% of respondents identified themselves as Republicans. After seeing the impact of evangelicals in 2004, this massive voting bloc has become very attractive to Democratic strategists. Candidates seeking the 2008 democratic presidential nomination have been more cautious than ever with regards to expressing support for traditional liberal causes, in part due to the risk of isolating religious voters. This sort of pandering to a single segment of the population sets a very dangerous precedent.

The American electoral system currently operates in a manner in which core supporters of a party are far outside the American mainstream but take part in political primaries far more frequently than the average citizen. For this reason, we often see candidates who are equally out of touch with the sentiments of the general public take their party’s nomination. By organizing large get-out-the-vote efforts during primary season, faith-based groups have successfully sought out the attention of potential nominees, and, thereby, have greatly increased their influence on the outcome of most elections. In essence, because candidates have increasingly come to rely on

the votes of religious conservatives, this group of citizens has been granted the ability to effectively handpick the party's nominee (Clifton, 2004).

Yes, America was founded on Judeo-Christian beliefs, and a majority of its population holds similar religious affiliations, but the over emphasis on religion has come in direct contrast with an even more precious American value: individualism (Jelen, 2005). The large voting bloc of religious conservatives increasingly exercises its acquired political clout by selecting candidates who share similar views on morally polarizing issues. The concept of a religious majority pushing to enact its beliefs into law is an alarming development that harkens back to the Prohibition movement of the 1920s. In order to maintain the legitimacy of our representative democracy, it is vital to take actions to ensure that a single ideology does not hold the government hostage. Greater steps must be taken to promote respect and understanding between America's various religious populations, as well as those individuals who do not practice religion at all. We are a diverse nation composed of millions of unique individuals—it is critical that our government represents that diversity.

Perhaps one of the most difficult, yet beneficial, tasks we can undertake as a nation is to differentiate between morals and values. While their core meanings are similar, the practical application of these terms in relation to politics and an individual's personal analysis of a candidate vary greatly. Morals are opinions of what is intrinsically right or wrong. Values, on the other hand, are a set of ranked desirable attributes. To clarify, there are certain values that we hold as positive (such as liberty and personal freedom), and some that we view as negative (such as corruption and government waste). We do not imply righteousness or the lack thereof by holding values, only their appeal. Morals are much more black and white. Religious conservatives generally hold concepts such as faith-based initiatives and school prayer as moral and just, whereas gay marriage and abortion are considered immoral and sinful. These differences are not brought up with the intention of nitpicking, but instead to demonstrate that when Americans vote, there are certain beliefs that unite them as a people and there are some that prove to be divisive.

It is for exactly this reason that the focus of elections should be shifted from faith to accomplishment. While individuals must maintain and exercise their right to elect officials who hold beliefs similar to their own, it is essential that voters base their decisions on criteria other than a candidate's adherence to a doctrine. The electorate should emphasize a person's proven record of accomplishment or his or her vision of the future, and not the intangible measure of his or her personal faith. A religious litmus test is a dangerous step towards single-mindedness, and it is not in the best interest of the country as a whole. Leaders, too, must work to shift the national attention from divisive factors such as religion and instead attempt to direct attention towards unifying ones such as technological progress and economic advancement. Doing so would go a long way in promoting a more cohesive society that is resolute on furthering the nation rather than a moral philosophy.

Finally, the most practical way to eliminate candidates' need to appeal to religious bodies for support is by reforming the primary system. To achieve this goal, more states must allow independent and non-affiliated voters to take part in the primary process. By doing so, the core constituents of each party would have the opportunity to choose their candidate, but the non-declared, mainstream voters would also contribute to the process. Additionally, through improving the public knowledge of how the primary system works and placing a higher value on its importance, a greater diversity of voters could be reached. This, in turn, would yield party nominees who are more representative of the entire public, as opposed to the party faithful only.

While there is little doubt that the Christian Right would continue to play an important role in this reformed electoral process, the role would be offset by the votes of the general public.

Historically, the American political system has functioned as a patchwork of special interest groups. In recent years, however, one segment of the population has come to dwarf the others. The dependency of the Republican Party on Christian organizations has reached a point where it threatens to isolate those conservative voters who hold moderate social views. In this sense, a large percentage of the population faces the prospect of losing its party identification and hence its representation at the national level.

The two-party system has approached a critical juncture: one party represents those who wish to completely cut off the link between the country's religious founding and the current system of governance, and the other represents those who wish to govern based on faith-centered morality alone. Sitting between the two groups is an under-represented, yet significant, population that believes that America can embrace its religious heritage, but the government must function with a blind eye towards matters of faith.

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OPENING THE EYES OF CONGRESS: SAVING DARFUR

By Angelo Fiorentino

Genocide, a monstrous force, continues to plague history. Thousands of men and women who fear murder, starvation, and rape are being persecuted daily by the Sudanese government and Janjaweed militias who have seized control of the Sudan. Like an infectious disease, the genocide is spreading to Chad and the Central African Republic. We cannot sit idly by and allow for this unfortunate situation to escalate. We need to act quickly before any more lives are lost.

But how can the United States get involved? Now that the war in Iraq has become an abomination in the eyes of the majority of Americans, many ask: Shouldn't we worry about the American homefront instead of policing the world? Why should we get involved with a Third World country's struggle? The answer is simple: to save lives. And we must step in to achieve that as soon as possible. As Americans, we must raise awareness about the atrocities, finance the Darfur relief funds, lobby our government, and try to get legislation passed that calls for peace in the Sudan.

The first step is raising awareness. Unfortunately, not many Americans seem to know about the genocide in Darfur. In the days prior to writing this piece, for instance, I spoke with many college students from different universities about Darfur. Half of them had never heard of the genocide, and the other half said they remembered hearing about it but were not sure what the situation was exactly. I also heard that the extremely popular internet blogging site, Facebook, has a group dedicated to spreading the word about the genocide in Darfur, and a high school student told me that a young girl from Darfur had come to his school as a guest speaker to explain the horrors that continue in her homeland. Generally, however, it appears that most people are not concerned with the tribulations of a developing country and do not know about them.

This needs to change. We must encourage people to want to know and understand the world around them and to learn about Sudan and other developing countries' misfortunes. To educate people about what is happening in the Sudan, we can introduce literature such as *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky* (Deng, Deng, and Ajak, 2005), a true story and depiction of three boys' dangerous flight from the war-torn Sudan. This type of literature can further educate people on the struggles that some foreign nations face.

We must also utilize television, the Internet, and other types of communication to educate. Let's use our communication capabilities and lightening-fast technology to e-mail our news stations, journalists, and magazine editors and ask them to allow more coverage on Darfur. If enough people empathize with the poor families and children, we can create a strong force to push our Congress to pass legislation and raise the funding for peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts.

Lobbying Congress to make sure the majority of representatives and senators see Darfur as a top priority is essential. Unfortunately, many in Congress do not yet support tough legislation against Sudan, and measures to support funding for aid and relief have been rejected. We must get our representatives to pass such measures. Citizens can access the Internet and learn where their representatives stand on legislation for Darfur and communicate with the members of Congress accordingly, asking them to vote for saving Darfur.

If peaceful and diplomatic means fail, military assistance or action will be needed. As in Rwanda, where native forces against the domineering Hutu militia were finally supported in order to fight and stop the atrocities, we must support native resistance forces in the Sudan who are fighting against the perpetrators of this genocide and supply them with proper weapons and manpower. The United Nations must also step in and provide troops.

As for us, citizens of the United States, we must gather our community together, find those who are passionate about providing help, and respond to this tragedy as a nation. The time for talk is over, and the time for action is now.

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BANKRUPT AMERICA: WHY CREDITOR-BENEFITING LAW MUST BE REVISED

By Joseph Axenroth

The Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005 heightens risk to consumers while making the easy life of creditors considerably easier. The law requires that many debtors file for Chapter 13 bankruptcy, in which the debtor is required to set up a payment plan, instead of Chapter 7 bankruptcy, in which some assets are seized and debt is erased.

The law also requires individuals wanting to file bankruptcy to first seek credit counseling. Consumer advocate groups have qualified these nonprofit credit counseling groups as “fronts for profit based debt management” that often direct debtors into expensive debt restructuring programs (Coyne, 2005). These programs often leave the debtor worse off than when he or she started. The National Consumer Law Center and Consumer Nation of America have found that credit counseling agencies “often harm debtors with improper advice, deceptive practices, excessive fees and abuse of their nonprofit status” (Coyne, 2005). There are, of course, some credit counseling agencies that do good work and generally try to help the debtors, but they are in the minority and far too often are circumvented by creditors who front as credit counselors.

Proponents of the new act argue that stiffening the penalties for individuals who file for bankruptcy is the only way to achieve any real means of prevention. The proponents completely disregard the complaints that the law is a giveaway to creditors and interpret the law as economically sensible, an expedient tool for consumer dealings, and a genuine improvement for social integrity.

While I completely agree with the adage “you should repay what you owe,” I disagree with the proponents’ rosy, overly simplistic interpretations, which fail to capture the realities of this law. The fact remains that this law was bolstered by heavy lobbying on the part of credit card companies that spent upwards of \$40 million to ensure that the bill was passed. The law has also made the government a “bill collector for private companies” (Lewis, 2007).

From the creditors’ standpoint, the problem with the previous law was that it granted too many exemptions and ways out of having to pay back debt. To a certain extent that is true. However, the new law leaves the consumer/debtor with almost no leeway. Under the new law, failure to abide by the terms of the payment plan could lead to criminal prosecutions. Historically, bankruptcy matters have largely been settled in civil courts (Lewis, 2007).

With people relying on greater use of credit cards and heavier penalties being applied for those who find themselves in debt, it is easy to see where this is going. As a country, we are ever increasingly turning to credit to settle our debts and deal with day-to-day expenses. A growing number of younger people are now exposed to the possibilities of credit cards while simultaneously being shielded by parents from credit card penalties. Some within this demographic group will eventually find themselves filing for bankruptcy, and, when that happens, these individuals will learn the facts of this law the hard way. Assuming that they manage to get out of debt and do not lose too many of their assets in the process, the individuals will face the world with a low credit rating and a greatly diminished standard of living. Considering we are a consumer-based economy, poisoning the well of soon-to-be consumers cannot possibly help with our overall economic state.

The repercussions of this new law are already taking effect, but there is still time to prevent millions of individuals who file for bankruptcy from experiencing the new law. Congress must step in, revise the law, and address the mismanagement by “nonprofit” credit counselors in the Act’s necessary and proper revision. The assumption that the debtor is solely to blame is erroneous. Oftentimes, filing bankruptcy is the only option left for good people who run on hard times: people are laid off, a child gets sick, someone in the family dies. The existing law provides people with little room for arguing their extenuating circumstance; a human perspective must be adopted in any revision.

Prevention must also be a major factor in the Act’s revision. The heart of the issue is that most individuals who file for bankruptcy only get to that stage because they do not know how to manage their finances properly. Accordingly, a new provision must provide proper education of individuals who are already in debt. The Act’s revisions must also allow for harsh penalties against creditors who take advantage of debtors.

The recent shift in political power brings renewed hope for those who believe that many changes need to be made to the 2005 bankruptcy law in order to protect an unsuspecting and threatened public. Democrats, who provided the primary opposition to the controversial provisions enacted in 2005, now hold the majority in both Houses of Congress. They must enact revisions to remedy the ill-considered 2005 law in their overhaul of current domestic programs.

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REVIVING EDUCATION

By Gennevieve B. Thomas

The national graduation rate for the year 2000 was 69%: over 30% of our students dropped out of school (Greene & Winters, 2002). According to Greene and Winters (2002), those who do not complete high school are three times more likely to end up in jail than those who do finish. Those who drop out, the authors assert, earn far less than those who do graduate. They are also more likely to use government welfare programs. As a result, many who do not complete high school become an economic burden on society. For that reason alone, we must ensure the problem is resolved.

There are multiple ways to respond to the dropout predicament in the United States. The first should be preemptive: not letting students drop out to begin with. Teachers and parents should hold themselves personally accountable to keep students on track and informed of what life would be like without a diploma. States must also provide incentives for schools to produce more graduates and penalize schools with high number of dropouts. In inner city public schools (where the dropout rate is highest), if the proportion of graduating students increases, the schools should be rewarded, since such schools would be producing more young people with a higher statistical chance of becoming productive members of society and less likely to receive government aid.

Methods must also be developed to educate those who do not graduate. One option for doing so would be encouraging those who have dropped out to obtain a certificate of high school equivalency, commonly called a GED, an abbreviation for General Educational Development. While a GED may not bring the possibilities of a high school diploma, it does open doors to work and continuing education.

Currently, a GED can easily be obtained online. However, while acquiring an online GED may be plausible for some, many people may not have access to a computer or the Internet. Therefore, alternative programs that are affordable, thoroughly advertised, and easily accessible must be available. Such programs must be placed at local community centers and schools and be promoted in radio, television, and print media. With these programs, many will have the opportunity to make a new future for themselves, one that does not involve minimum wage and barely scraping by. Those who obtain a GED may then pursue more schooling and have the confidence and the ability to seek out jobs where they can use their intelligence and skills.

In addition to addressing the problem of high dropout rates, we must also ensure that high school graduates have a firm grasp on the subjects they study. It is alarming that nearly a quarter of our high school graduates cannot read at grade level, and that the United States is one of the few countries in the world where student mean scores on tests decline in relation to norms for comprehension in reading, writing, and mathematics from grade four to grade twelve.

The 2006 U.S. Student and Adult Performance on International Assessments of Educational Achievement scores shed light upon how the United States compares to other countries in reading, writing, and mathematics. It also demonstrates what our students' overall progression is from fourth grade to twelfth. While U.S. students are not always at the bottom of the rankings, they are consistently in the middle and, in some instances (especially in math), they rank towards the lower end. Our students' performance slips from fourth to 12th grade across the board in reading/writing and mathematics (Institute of Education Sciences, 2006).

By comparing ourselves with other countries, we can see our strengths and, more importantly, we can see where work is still needed and what possible solutions may overcome our weaknesses. A review of the mathematics scores demonstrates the following: in the fourth grade, U.S. students rank 12th in a study that includes 28 participating countries; by tenth grade, our students' ranking in mathematics drops to the 20th (Klein, 2002).

To what can we attribute this performance slip? One reason, perhaps, is that students are not taught the ideas behind a subject; instead, they are taught how to perform on a test, a method that strictly emphasizes the procedure for finding answers.

Our laws reflect this approach. The No Child Left Behind Act, for instance, penalizes schools with low test scores and rewards those with high test marks. The law, therefore, forces teachers to spend a large portion of their time teaching students how to take tests rather than the concepts behind the test materials.

Our focus must be shifted to teaching the concept and the procedure, so that our students have a greater understanding of the subject matter. If taught both concept and procedure, students will not only comprehend the subject more fully, but they will also perform better on tests. If we require students to do math on their own without the help of a calculator, for example, we would be encouraging them to understand the concepts and techniques required to solve a problem. And by focusing on overarching themes and concepts as well as procedure, we would truly be teaching our students, instead of just showing them how to take a test.

I recognize our country's attempts to improve education across the board. Unfortunately, however, we often look for a quick fix or someone or something to blame. We must instead come up with solutions that involve everyone—teachers, students, parents, and the community. The problem affects all; large steps need to be taken soon.

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ROLLING TOWARDS A HIGHER EDUCATION: WHEELCHAIR USERS AND COLLEGE

By Rose Gallo

Going to college is supposed to be a milestone marking a young person's transition from adolescence to adulthood. It produces many exciting experiences: taking on a heavier workload, meeting new people, being independent, and becoming part of a new community away from family. For the physically disabled, many of the exciting experiences turn out to be frustrating embarrassments.

In order to understand how a disabled student on wheelchair experiences college, it is important to understand the basics of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). The ADA was passed to "establish a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability" (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). The federal government enforces this ban by establishing and enforcing clear standards that are meant to protect the disabled from discrimination. The ADA affects employers, public entities, and private organizations that provide public accommodations and services.

The Act is divided into three main sections. Title I prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals seeking employment. Title II prohibits public entities from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in any service, program or activity. And Title III prohibits persons who own, lease, lease to, or operate places of public accommodation from discriminating against individuals with disabilities.

Read together, the various provisions of the ADA prohibit discrimination against disabled students in public and private schools, which must provide accessible programs for students with disabilities. But, unfortunately, not all schools have integrated the ADA into their campuses and programs, and many that have failed to do so in an effective, welcoming manner. With the passage of the ADA, students with disabilities must have had a full range of options for choosing a college. Yet, physically disabled students still face many challenges when choosing or attending school.

Colleges can take simple steps so that students with disabilities are fully integrated and have an experience equal to that offered to their peers. In addition to providing basic building access in the form of elevators, ramps, and other obvious structures, colleges can utilize a variety of less obvious, often small and inexpensive construction designs and techniques to reduce the challenges that students with disabilities face.

In the dorms, for instance, colleges can provide services and accommodations prior to the student experiencing the need for the service, so that a disabled student feels independent and not a burden. Dorm rooms should be equipped with lower light switches so that they are accessible for those in wheelchairs. Unnecessary furniture should be removed from the room before the student's move-in day to ensure maneuverability for the student. Furniture that is more accessible should be provided for the student in a wheelchair. Desks should be wider to allow for the wheelchair to roll under them. Dressers should have drawers that easily open, as heavy drawers are hard to open when an individual is on wheels and tries to pull the drawers towards himself or herself.

Dormitory bathrooms must have at least one stall that is accessible to a disabled student. The facility should be wide enough to fit in and provide a toilet of a height that is easily

attainable from a wheelchair, as well as a handrail for lifting oneself out of the wheelchair. The stall door must open outward so once in the stall the wheelchair does not obstruct the closing of the door. Dorm showers should have an adjacent area for undressing and for keeping one's wheelchair so the wheelchair does not get wet. Showers should have seats and a handrail installed for safety. Sinks should be low and within reach with a long, far reaching faucet.

Public areas of a dormitory building must also take into consideration the challenges of a wheelchair user. When assigning mailboxes, officials must ensure that they are within the reach of the disabled. Laundry rooms must be equipped with front-loading washers and dryers designated for the disabled, so that disabled students do not rely on others to help them to their laundry. Having a washer and dryer with door, controls and pay slots on the front, rather than the top, would allow more independence and privacy to the disabled.

In addition to the improving the disabled students' living space, colleges should allow the students register for courses early, so the students can have a chance to examine the classrooms' area, take a test run, time how long it will take for them to get to class, see how big the classroom is, find all the building elevators and the best, most accommodating route from building to building.

For many, the excitement of college begins once inside the classroom. But for disabled students, this is where the frustrations may begin. Classrooms get packed. Desks are shoved close together, leaving the aisles too narrow to even walk down, let alone roll down in a wheelchair. The desks, usually chairs with attached tops that students slide into, cannot be used by wheelchair users. Students in wheelchair prefer desks that are similar to tables that provide space to roll under. These desks should be provided for all students so the disabled do not feel outcast and different. In classrooms with stadium seating, a row designated for wheelchair users should be provided.

The implementation of these recommendations may be expensive at first but would leave a permanent improvement on campus for everyone. More disabled students would likely attend the disability-friendly schools, representing an academic talent pool that otherwise may not have attended, and more of them would remain at these colleges for the entire length of the academic program, knowing and feeling that they are integrated and accepted.

When, on July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act into law, advocates for the disabled considered the Act the Declaration of Independence for people with disabilities. Colleges must help make that declaration come true.

Reference

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.*

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Rose Gallo is a fourth year student at the Pennsylvania State University, Abington College, majoring in administration of justice. She has a younger brother, Michael, 21, born with Spina Bifada, a disability affecting the spinal cord. Michael is confined to a wheelchair.

HEALTH: A HUMAN RIGHT

By Catherine Morgan

Governments must actively uphold health as a human right by raising standards of education and healthcare. Otherwise, those living with a low socioeconomic status will continue to be subjected to inherent discrimination.

Unfortunately, discourse about the relationship between health and human rights is often misunderstood, obscured by history, philosophy, approach, and practical matters. This misunderstanding means that the link is often negated (Mann, 1999). International treaties, however, provide the inextricable link between health and human rights. The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (1966), for instance, define the right to health as a human right, inalienable to all human beings, and equal among all peoples. CESCR's Article 12, General Comment No. 14, titled "The right to the highest attainable standard of health" outlines the essentials of health, including the right to food, housing, work, education, healthcare, human dignity, life, non-discrimination, and equality (United Nations Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2000).

Numerous studies have shown socioeconomic status (SES) to be the major determinant of health. SES is defined as "an individual's or group's position within a hierarchical social structure, which depends on a combination of variables, including occupation, education, income, wealth, and place of residence" (Hirsch, Kett, and Trefil, 2002). Inequality based on SES frequently produces the problems of ill health and lack of access to healthcare, violating the right to health.

The broadest and ultimate measure of health within a country lies in its morbidity (disease) rates. Not all social equalities are apparent through statistics, but there is a strong correlation between morbidity and socioeconomic status. It has been frequently suggested that one of the leading causes of death in the United States is social inequality. Poor education, income, and ethnicity—factors that are interwoven with low SES—are linked to poor health and shorter life spans (Reuss, 2001). Unhealthy environments, unhealthy habits, improper nutrition and physical activity, and other risk factors are more common among the poor. When considering why a social gradient in unhealthy behaviors exists, Marmot suggests that "what appear to be individual 'lifestyle' decisions often reflect a broader social epidemiology" (2005).

Lack of healthcare and inequity in the system go hand-in-hand and negatively affect the population. Approximately 17% of Americans are without healthcare, including 44% of the poor (Kangas, n. d.), and minorities suffer from an inherent discrimination within the healthcare structure. Doctors are less likely to see them for treatment, as some physicians believe that members of minority groups are more likely than whites to be late to appointments and are significantly less likely than whites to follow medical directions concerning lifestyle routines, medical regimens, and additional matters of importance (Einbinder and Schulman, 2000).

Such violations of human right to health must stop. States must be held accountable and end discrimination based on SES or group membership, and the rhetoric of human right must become accepted as a moral code among all people. This will only be possible when health is taught as a human right. The average American knows little of his or her rights because of the widespread belief that the person's rights are inherently protected through the Constitution. The

impoverished bear the largest burden from this lack of knowledge. They must, therefore, be educated to be able to protect themselves and their rights.

Only through education can a society evolve. Not only should human rights education be integrated into school programs, but the overall primary and secondary education must also be improved. With reformed education better jobs and higher incomes will follow, raising SES for many individuals and groups. With this improvement will come better living situations, nutrition, physical activities, and more sustainable resources. A higher SES would also bring less discrimination and would lead to equality among all ethnicities (Smedley, Stith, and Nelson, 2003).

Of course, education is a slow method of social reform. Therefore, the government must take additional steps to ensure health is protected as a human right. Since the moral codes of human rights intersect with the legal codes of society, public policies must ensure equity and fairness, and therefore justice (Sen, 2004). It must become the government's responsibility to "[assess] health needs and problems; [develop] policies designed to address priority health issues; and [assure] programs to implement strategic health goals" (Mann, 1999).

The government must also meet the requirements under international conventions, which define the right to health as existing through availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality (United Nations Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2000). Accordingly, healthcare must first be available to all, and federal funding for healthcare must be increased to the levels that ensure accessibility and quality. To ensure accessibility, the government must build and fund more clinics in areas where there are high numbers of citizens who have low socioeconomic status. As required in human rights agreements, doctors in these areas must treat the patients universally, regardless of race or SES.

The failure to recognize and to uphold health as a human right is an evident problem in the United States. Yet, many often overlook the crisis, in part because of its complexity, and in part because attention to human rights issues tends to be directed to developing countries. In the United States, too, the elements of human rights, and especially health as a human right, need to be taught, understood, and addressed.

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THE EVOLUTION OF GENESIS: RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Dacia Pelligrino

Parents with belief systems other than Christianity have a right to be concerned about what their child learns in a public school system.

At first glance, it may seem that the debate of what is and is not allowed to be taught in public schools has been settled. This is far from the truth, however. The reality is that the 1925 Scopes trial was just the starting point for a long stretch of court cases arguing the line between science and religion and religion's place in public schools—the finish line is nowhere in sight.

While, of late, opponents of teaching creationism and intelligent design in the curriculum have been winning more battles than the proponents, the war is far from over (Tebo, 2006). Despite the recent victory in Dover, Pennsylvania, with the 2005 case that ruled the requirement of teaching intelligent design as unconstitutional (“‘Intelligent design’ tossed out in Pa. science class,” 2006), parents should be well aware that school officials and policy makers are continually trying to test the limits to which they can bring religion into schools.

For instance, after the Pennsylvania court ruled against teaching intelligent design in a science class, a California school district decided to move intelligent design out of science courses and inject it into a philosophy classroom (Tebo, 2006). Ultimately, this particular California school district had to remove the class from the curriculum altogether after a suit was brought against it. Because the specific issue has yet to be settled by the Supreme Court, there are other school districts that are pushing intelligent design into their curricula, knowing that there are, at this point, no clear legal precedents at the national level (Tebo, 2006).

The intelligent design movement has many supporters, the most influential and notable being the current President. On whether intelligent design should be taught in schools, the Associated Press has quoted President George W. Bush as saying, “I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought. You’re asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, the answer is yes” (“Bush Supports Teaching ‘Intelligent Design’ in Schools,” 2005). With the President’s support, it is hard to imagine that more school districts across the nation will not be tempted to incorporate intelligent design in their curriculum.

While the evolution vs. intelligent design debate has been met with explosive viewpoints, and while it seems unlikely that either side will agree on a compromise, the situation should actually be considered a positive impasse. If prior debates surrounding other constitutional issues had been compromised in the past, we would now be operating under an entirely different set of rules and may not have many of the rights we cling to so dearly today.

The solution from that frame of reference lies with the idea that one side of the debate must be right in terms of constitutionality. The First Amendment of the Constitution reads, in part, that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof... .” This segment of the First Amendment has been divided into two clauses: the establishment clause and the free exercise clause. The debate as to whether or not intelligent design should be taught in school systems centers around the establishment clause and whether teaching intelligent design violates it.

Intelligent design is the belief that life is so advanced that a supernatural or higher power must have created it. Proponents of teaching intelligent design in the classroom argue that Darwin's theory of evolution has too many holes and gaps to be taught as the only possible answer to the origin of life. The scientific community has acknowledged such gaps in evolutionary theory, but, as a community, it has not acknowledged or accepted intelligent design as a valid scientific theory (Tebo, 2006). And as for the legal community, the U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III in *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* found that "the secular purposes [of the intelligent design curriculum] claimed by the [Dover Area school] board amount to a pretext for the board's real purpose, which was to promote religion in the public school classroom, in violation of the establishment clause" (Tebo, 2006).

Public school systems have a responsibility to their students to bring to the classroom a sense of neutrality. Whether discussing history, literature, social studies, or other related courses, there should be a basic understanding that these subjects are based on facts and scholarly interpretations of those facts. Nonetheless, discussions and critical thinking about topics in these subjects should be encouraged. Public school systems also have a responsibility to teach math and science in standardized and unbiased ways, not as religious topics. In a science classroom, there is only room for laws, theories, hypotheses, and rules that are widely accepted and acknowledged by the scientific community as a whole.

Some school districts would like to add a disclaimer to a particular theory such as evolution, stating the view that it is only a theory and has not been completely proven to be true. If this practice is carried out, then the disclaimer must be delivered before teaching every scientific theory in the classroom, not just Darwin's Theory of Evolution. But a science class teaching the scientific method and the difference between laws, theories, and hypotheses should already acknowledge that a theory is not as concrete as scientific law. Thus, the teaching of the definition of scientific theory renders the disclaimer unnecessary.

If schools begin to teach intelligent design as part of a scientific explanation for the origins of life, the teaching would imply that intelligent design is on par with a theory acknowledged by the scientific community. Such an implication would be detrimental, since students tend to believe that what is taught in school must be representative of the truth.

The truth is that intelligent design is the most recent answer to the Supreme Court's 1987 ban on teaching creationism in public schools. By changing the name of the idea and removing the obvious correlations to the Genesis creation account, proponents of intelligent design argue that the theory is not religiously based and should be immune to the ban on teaching creationism. This is problematic and troubling for parents who have non-Christian belief systems and for Christians who believe that religion should be kept out of public schools.

If intelligent design finds its way to the Supreme Court and is banned like creationism, parents can expect a new theory, with a new name cropping up and filtering into the schools' curriculum. If intelligent design makes its way to the Supreme Court and is not banned from public school systems, parents who do not believe that intelligent design has a place in public schools will have a tougher road ahead of them, as they would find it incredibly difficult to take on the established precedent.

Public schools are not the place for religious indoctrination. If parents wish to expose their children to religious beliefs, they certainly have that right as protected by the First Amendment's free exercise clause. Public schools cannot offer religious beliefs as credible scientific theories if they want to comply with the establishment clause of the First Amendment. As L. Lynn Hogue, a constitutional law professor at Georgia State University, has noted, "The

courts have found repeatedly in many contexts that the public school setting is inherently coercive” (Tebo, 2006). When children go to school, they should expect an environment conducive to learning, without feeling coerced to learn or practice a particular belief system concealed in their curriculum. Despite differing religious viewpoints, surely parents and teachers alike should agree that the public school system must not push a particular religious belief.

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