

# ORBIS

Amplifying Vanderbilt's  
Progressive Voices

Vol. 9/No.4/December/2009

How long should we wait for progress? ... pages 8-10

## a note from the editor

Thanks for picking up the last Orbis issue of the semester.

Our Obama cover art reflects a question that has troubled some progressive activists for several months: how long must we wait for progress? The Democrats have gained control of the White House and Congress, but the chants of hope and change that we heard a year ago haven't translated into meaningful reform yet. Specifically, we covered two campus events that highlighted the stalled efforts to close Guantanamo Bay prison (p. 8) and to repeal the military's discriminatory Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy (p. 9).

It may be premature to criticize Obama or the rest of the Democratic leadership for unfulfilled campaign promises, since only ten months have passed following the inauguration. However, the optimism that fueled the Democrats' rise to power has given way to excuses about slow political processes and miscalculations of timelines. Other issues like the status of the war in Afghanistan, marijuana decriminalization, and comprehensive health care reform also remain in limbo.

In contrast, we also highlight a Campus Progress report that discusses progress that has been made in the past year, not at the hands of the administration but by young Americans (p. 10).

Our other coverage includes a breakdown of the November 2009 election results (p. 6), and reviews of several speakers who visited campus over the past month (p. 3-5). If you are a student organization interested in being spotlighted in a future issue of Orbis, or if you have a progressive event on campus, contact us at [vanderbiltorbis@gmail.com](mailto:vanderbiltorbis@gmail.com).

Our next issue is coming out in January. To keep up with lefty news during finals and holidays, visit us online at [blorbis.wordpress.com](http://blorbis.wordpress.com).

-Erika Hyde

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# ORBIS

*Amplifying Vanderbilt's Progressive Voices*

December 2009

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Please recycle.

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Cover design: Allie Diffendal and Sam Abney

## What is Orbis?

Orbis aspires to change the atmosphere on Vanderbilt's campus and provides a voice for liberal, multicultural and minority viewpoints. This publication strives to inform the public about issues that these groups face as well as to promote diversity and unity within our community. It is a forum for discussion of social, political and religious commentary relevant to Vanderbilt, the nation and the world. Orbis was founded by a coalition of students seeking to raise consciousness about diverse ideas, cultures and backgrounds in our society. We hope to challenge the existing social atmosphere at Vanderbilt and promote a rebirth of acceptance.

# AASA invites Survivor winner to campus

By John Chen  
FEATURES EDITOR

After earning a B.S. from Stanford and a J.D. from Yale, Yul Kwon worked as a management consultant for Google. In 2006, Kwon became famous for winning "Survivor: Cook Islands." VIBE Magazine listed him among their Upcoming People Who Will Change the World, and People Magazine put him on their Sexiest Man Alive list. Yet, what Yul Kwon is most proud of is his Asian American heritage.

In celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, Vanderbilt's Asian American Student Association (AASA) invited Kwon to speak on Nov. 6 about his experience as an Asian American.

Yul Kwon's talk was more of an open conversation with the audience than a speech. He explained how he watched TV to learn English as a child, and how it bothered him that he never saw anyone who looked like him on TV or in movies, except for stereotyped caricatures like martial arts masters.

Kwon decided to go on "Survivor" to increase the presence of Asian Americans in media and entertainment. You-Young Kim, a sophomore in the audience, was impressed with Kwon's message. "I see some Asians on campus who try



Kwon poses with AASA president Sara Chen after the speech.  
Photo: AASA



Han Zhang (left), Angi Li, Yul Kwon, Helen Li and Cindy Lin socialize after Kwon's speech on Asian stereotypes in American culture.

Photo: AASA

to ignore their Korean culture," she said, "but [Kwon] seems proud of his roots."

Kwon explained that when he was invited to audition for "Survivor," producers told him to show up in glasses and a suit. He said that even though the "Survivor" show tried to cast him as a nerdy Asian, he could represent himself as he pleased, as reality shows are not scripted. This aspect was important because he wanted Asians in American media to be depicted as real people, not as stereotypes.

AASA's Community Vice President Ariel Liang said that one of Kwon's strongest messages was that "bringing out individuality and personality is definitely the most effective way to break stereotypes."

Kwon entertained the audience with a few jokes about his childhood, like how his stingy Korean parents only used the dishwasher on Christmas. He also discussed being an extremely shy child who never raised his hand in class or talked to girls.

Kwon's Korean parents taught him to be submissive to elders and that hard work will always bring reward, a philosophy that is not always true in America. Sophomore Michael Yu listened to Kwon's stories and said, "Kwon described the effects of Asian upbringing in a way [he] could really relate to."

Kwon then told a poignant story of a transformative experience he had in college. His best friend was diagnosed with leukemia, and even though Kwon dropped out of school to run bone marrow drives, his friend passed away because of the lack of Asian donors.

From that point on, Kwon was determined to make the most out of life by pushing himself to do things he was afraid of and setting an example for other Asian Americans. At Stanford, he transferred from computer science to law and began participating in class. Kwon encouraged Asian American students at Vanderbilt to push themselves in the same way.

Kwon ended by speaking of his concern that, although many Asian Americans are successful professionals, there are not enough Asian Americans in the executive levels of corporate America, popular media, or top political positions. He called this phenomenon the proverbial "bamboo ceiling." He wanted the next generation of Asian American youth to reach their potential and see themselves as an important part of American society.

After listening to Kwon, AASA board member Tae Chang recognized "the need for Asian Americans to accept their identity and to break past that identity." Audience member You-Young Kim enjoyed the talk as well and expressed concern that the small Asian population at Vanderbilt may make it difficult to attract Asian American speakers.

Community Vice President Liang lauded Kwon for making his speech understandable and approachable to audience members of all races. After Kwon's speech, Liang hoped, "Asian Americans at Vanderbilt will be inspired to bravely take action to break stereotypes, and non-Asian Americans will respect differences and reach out from their own circles to make our campus a more integrated community."

**Learn more about the Asian American Student Association at**

<http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/AASA/>

# Bill Warner speaks on 'Political Islam'

## *Youth for Western Civilization brings religious critic to campus*

By Jon Christian  
COMMENTARY EDITOR

Bill Warner, director of the Center for the Study of Political Islam (CSPI) gave a presentation in Vanderbilt's Stevenson Center on Oct. 28. In his presentation, he was sharply critical of Islam and described a track record of slavery, oppression of women, and aggressive proselytism.

Warner was invited to speak by the Youth for Western Civilization (YWC). Devin Saucier, national vice president and Vanderbilt chapter president of the YWC, was pleased with Warner's presentation.

"The purpose of Dr. Warner's presentation was to provide a rational basis for the study of a contentious issue facing western civilization, and to that end it was quite effective, in my opinion," said Saucier.

The last speaker that YWC brought to campus was conservative commentator and former U.S. Treasurer Bay Buchanan. While the Buchanan event was picketed by Vanderbilt Students of Nonviolence and other student groups, there were no protesters at the Political Islam event.

Warner, whose graduate degree is in physics, made it clear that he is unconcerned with theology, and that his criticisms would be directed solely at the textual content of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Sufis.

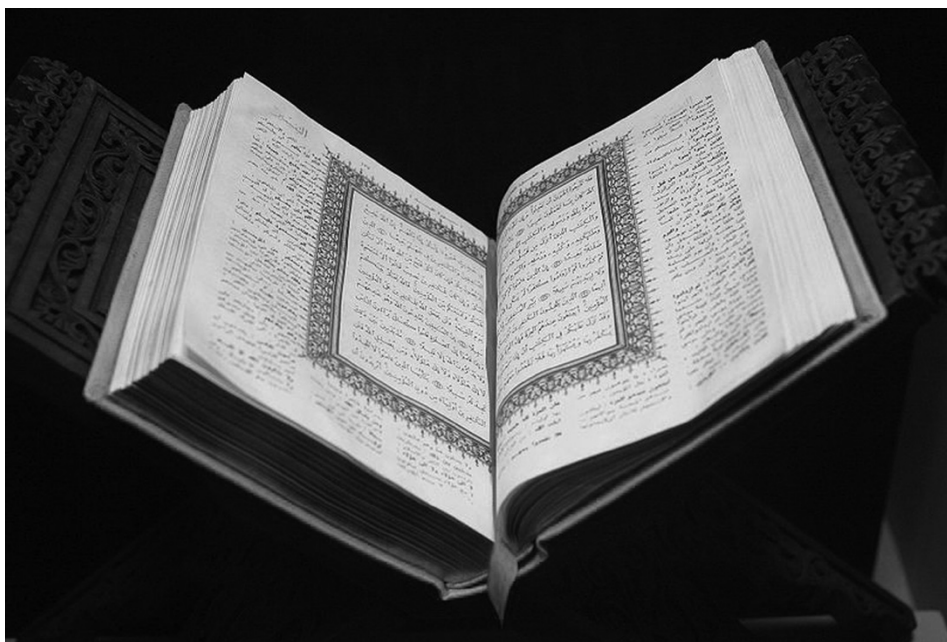
To this end, he explained, CSPI has analyzed the Islamic holy texts for quantifiable data, such as a tally of references to women, or to violence. "I'm more interested in the politics of Islam than the religion. Its eschatology is of no interest to me," said Warner.

Of particular interest to Warner are passages relating to the "kafir," or non-Muslims, to whom he states that 67 percent of the Medinan Qur'an is dedicated. The Medinan edition is traditionally the more conservative Qur'an. "Islam is unchangeable. Islam is not capable of being reformed, due to the way it is constructed," said Warner.

According to Warner, Islam differentiates between the way that a Muslim should treat other Muslims and the way he should treat kafir. This gives rise to what he calls an "ethical dualism," in which it is easy for those seeking to demonstrate tolerance in Islam to cherry-pick peaceful verses from the Qur'an or Hadith, while the majority of textual content is actually dedicated to violence and conquest. Warner and CSPI believe that this is often exploited to pass Islam off as a more peaceful religion than it actually is.

Quantitative, thematic analysis of a text is a common technique termed "coding" by social scientists. It is not often applied to religious texts, in large part because religious practice is highly interpretative, and the individual generally has significant liberty to choose the rules and beliefs that he or she wishes.

Warner said that in the case of Islam, a Muslim has only three choices: to follow the moderate Meccan or the conservative Medinan Qur'an, or to be a Muslim kafir, a cultural Muslim who doesn't necessarily follow all guidelines outlined in the faith.



According to Warner, a Muslim can obey all guidelines of the moderate Meccan or the conservative Medinan Qur'an, or be a cultural Muslim who is labeled a "hypocrite" in many translations of the Qur'an.

Photo: Cezary Piwowarski

Warner is critical of the third category of cultural Muslims and argues that they don't adhere to true Islam. "I used to play Monopoly when I was a kid. You either played Monopoly or you didn't play Monopoly. You could go around changing the rules, but then you weren't playing Monopoly."

**"Islam is unchangeable. Islam is not capable of being reformed, due to the way it is constructed."**

— Bill Warner

Warner is concerned by what he sees as a cultural forgetfulness of the historical atrocities committed by Muslims, which he terms the "tears of Islam." According to CSPI, deaths for which Islam is accountable throughout history top 270 million, a number comparable to those attributed to Christianity.

Orbis sat down with Warner in a Nashville coffee shop to discuss his experience at Vanderbilt and his work with CSPI. He is less serious in person, thoughtful and well spoken, and with a quick sense of humor.

"I'm a radical," he said with a laugh, "which at sixty-eight, feels good." He received a doctorate in solid state physics from North Carolina State University and worked as an industrial researcher for RCA Labs in New Jersey, before selling everything he owned and taking his family on the road in an Econoline van, living as a hippie.

He said that he has found work as an import entrepreneur, a street peddler, and a college professor at a historically black university. He has long been devoted to conservation, and during the 1979 energy crisis he started a small company that weatherized homes.

In tandem with Warner's forceful beliefs about Islam is his dedication to free speech. "I'm big on free speech... [but] academic freedom has become some sort of socialist welfare to aid the professors, where they get tenure and then sit on boards and interview incomers to make sure their ideology matches with the department's ideology," he said.

Warner believes that academic freedom, and what he terms "critical thought," have actually experienced a backslide during his lifetime, as more issues have become academic taboos and political correctness has become more deeply rooted.

CSPI is a small organization. It presently employs two full time scholars and a small team of volunteers. "We're not yet movers and shakers - let's just say that," said Warner with a chuckle. He described the World Trade Tower attacks as "the seminal moment" in which his general interest in

# Food Not Bombs founder visits campus

By Hugh Schlesinger  
STAFF WRITER

Keith McHenry came to Vanderbilt on Oct. 28 to speak about his experience founding and supporting the organization Food Not Bombs. Food Not Bombs is dedicated to furthering peace through the distribution of free, vegetarian food to people, often to protesters and the homeless. "The world produces enough food to feed everyone, if distributed equally," reads the group's manifesto.

Food Not Bombs is comprised of autonomous local chapters spanning the globe. These chapters are organized on the basis of communal decision-making and concentrate on serving reclaimed waste food on a regular basis. "It's not about any kind of handout," McHenry said.

McHenry and his friends first started cooking as a form of activism while they attended Boston University. They attended political rallies and reclaimed food from Bread and Company to feed anti-nuclear protesters. When McHenry moved to Berkeley in the early 1980s, he took what he had learned in Boston and put it to use in starting Food Not Bombs.

Food Not Bombs chapters have since spread across the United States and to other nations and continents. There are now an estimated 900 chapters around the world, including a number of recent additions in Nigeria, which are the first in Africa.

McHenry bursts with infectious enthusiasm and optimism. "Food Not Bombs is a unique intersection of thoughts and ideas. Man, get involved," McHenry said.

Since its formation, the group has been con-founded by opposition from law enforcement and local lawmakers. Often, the charges are that a Food Not Bombs group doesn't have a permit to distribute free food. McHenry nearly faced life in prison due to his violation of California's Three Strikes Law. "Fortunately, the judge was already tipsy by 9 a.m., and I got about 45 felonies dropped in one day," he chuckled.

Countless individuals have been arrested for participating in Food Not Bombs. Even today, the organization is seen as a possible terrorist threat and McHenry is ranked among America's most



Image: [footnotbombs.net](http://footnotbombs.net)

dangerous people by the FBI. A smiling, bearded man, McHenry looks far from threatening. "I thought it was amazing and funny that they consider him a terrorist," said freshman Jose Onate.

Because there is no central organization behind

Food Not Bombs, it is tempting for individual groups to stray away from its founding principles. In general, McHenry has found, groups tend to revert back to the founding principles of consensus, pacifism and vegetarianism. "In Edinburgh, they insisted on serving haggis. 'It's the working man's food,' they said. Next thing we know, they've found vegan haggis," said McHenry.

McHenry's ancestors were American revolutionaries, his grandfather helped plan the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and his father developed missiles. The way he sees it, he's atoning for the violence in his family history. With characteristic optimism, though, he notes that in recent years his father has started to attend Food Not Bombs events and to vote for left-wing candidates.

McHenry's appearance garnered enthusiastic applause and questions from the audience. Freshman Richard Williams commented that "everything that [McHenry] has gone through over the course of building this organization was amazing... the way they organize Food Not Bombs gives me hope for the viability of alternative forms of social organization." Some audience members, like sophomore Ari Schwartz, were amazed by the organization's success through grassroots means. Others were simply shocked by how law enforcement has harassed the Food Not Bombs activists for so many years and with so little justification.

McHenry will continue to tour the United States to commemorate his 30 years of work with Food Not Bombs.

*Jon Christian contributed reporting to this article.*

(Bill Warner continued)

religious texts coalesced into a more focused criticism of Islam. CSPI was born out of that interest. "The Center's mission is very simple: to teach that there is a textual basis for Islam," Warner said.

YWC Vice President Saucier considered Warner's speech a success. "I was glad to see multiple faculty and members of the Islamic community in attendance," said Saucier. YWC was formed in 2006 and came to national attention in 2008.

According to their official web site, "Western Civilization is our civilization and in spite of the continual assault and hatred it endures from the

radical left, we wish to revive the West, rather than see our civilization be sent to the graveyard of history."

YWC has come under fire both from the left, who have labeled them a hate group, and from the far right, who resent the fact that the group will not take a stance on contentious racial issues. For his part, Saucier seemed uncomfortable stating whether Vanderbilt's YWC endorses any form of racial ideology, stating that "those words have all matter of meanings." Saucier noted that YWC has a racially diverse membership, which he sees as "neither a problem nor a strength."

For Warner, the battle continues to spread the

textual basis for Islam. For CSPI, he said, it's all about education and letting people make up their own minds. "Reform is not my problem. I am not a Muslim; I cannot reform Islam. I am a scholar from the outside, and I judge Islam by its text. I do not engage in judging Muslims."

In spite of this, Warner does not play down the importance of his work. "Political Islam is the most important issue of the twenty-first century. You can quote me on that," he said.

Vanderbilt's Muslim Student Association declined a request from Orbis to comment regarding Warner's speech.

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# 2009 ELECTION

## Mixed results for progressives on election night

### *Republican victories in North and South*

*In Virginia, former state Attorney General Bob McDonnell coasted to victory with a 17-point margin against State Senator Creigh Deeds. Although polling in the final weeks prior to the election predicted an easy victory for the Republican, McDonnell's win represented a shift in recent Virginia politics. Both its current U.S. Senators and its two most recent governors have come from the Democratic camp.*

*In New Jersey, the race for governor was less predictable, but ultimately a battered Jon Corzine failed to keep his seat amidst accusations of corruption and low performance ratings. Media accounts of the race focused excessively on tit-for-tat fights between the candidates, including a campaign ad about Christie's waist line. Christie won 49 percent of the vote, besting the Democratic incumbent by four points.*

**MCDONNELL 59% VA**  
**DEEDS 41%**  
**NJ CHRISTIE 49%**  
**CORZINE 45%**

“You simply don’t want to be governor when the economy is bad. Democrats coming from somewhat Republican districts may now be more reluctant to vote for health care because of reelection concerns.”

—Dr. Bruce Oppenheimer, political science professor

*Do Republican victories in 2009 signal disapproval of the Democrats in power?*

It’s hard to say because those elections were so localized. There’s a natural tendency for backlash after Democratic successes in 2008. There tends to be an equilibrium effect. I mean, the health care vote was postponed, and those elections are making some Democrats more cautious, wondering if they’re going to make themselves more vulnerable.

—Dr. James Ray, political science professor

### *Bloomberg wins again in NYC, barely*

*Billionaire businessman Michael Bloomberg won his third term as mayor of New York City, but only by a surprisingly small margin over challenger Bill Thompson. The Democrat-turned-Republican-turned-independent mayor came under attack last year for lobbying to expand his city’s term limit rules in order to run for another term. Much of the coverage surrounding the race focused on Bloomberg’s lavish spending. The Christian Science Monitor reported in late October that the incumbent spent \$85 million to secure his seat. Despite heavily outspending his competitors, Bloomberg eked out a meager five-point margin.*

**BLOOMBERG 51% NY**  
**THOMPSON 46%**

*Orbis highlights the top election results from Nov. 3, including measures on marriage equality, the gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia, and local elections in New York.*

# 2009 ELECTION

## *Washington expands partnership rights for same-sex couples*

*Although it wasn't a total victory for marriage equality supporters, Washington state approved Referendum 71 by a slim margin, expanding domestic partnership rights for gay couples. The referendum maintained the definition of marriage as a union between a man and woman but it gave domestic partnerships the same rights and obligations as marriages, creating a "separate but equal" standard.*

## *Maine repeals same-sex marriage*

*Mainers passed Question 1 by 53 percent, repealing the Pine Tree State's law that legalized gay marriage just six months ago. Marriage equality has already been legalized through statutes or court orders in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont and Iowa, and the Maine ballot initiative was framed as an opportunity to pass same-sex marriage through the popular vote for the first time in the country's history. Instead, election results turned Maine into the 31st state to vote against the right of gay and lesbian couples to wed, according to ABC News.*

## *Democratic upset in New York's 23rd*

*The special election in the 23rd district, which had exclusively elected Republican representatives since the mid-1800s, became the focus of national media attention when Republican nominee Dede Scozzafava was challenged by Conservative Party candidate Doug Hoffman, who thought his opponent was "too liberal." Scozzafava dropped out of the race and endorsed her Democratic counterpart, Bill Owens, while Hoffman went on to win endorsements from prominent Republicans like Sarah Palin. These developments prompted some news organizations to characterize the race as a referendum on President Obama, who successfully campaigned for Owens.*

*What do the Democrats need to improve in order to keep their seats?*

*"If Democrats can't show Americans that their leadership in rejuvenating the economy or passing health-care is better than Republican leadership, Americans will vote Democrats out too. Democrats must deliver in the next two years or our party is in trouble."*

*—Ravi Singh, Vandy Dems president*

<b>OWENS</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>NY</b>
<b>HOFFMAN</b>	<b>45%</b>	
<b>SCOZZAFAVA</b>	<b>6%</b>	

# Challenges detain Guantanamo closing

*Guantanamo Bay detainees' lawyer reminds campus that the controversial off-shore detention facility is still open*

By Allie Diffendal  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

President Obama issued an executive order on Jan. 22, 2009 mandating the closure of Guantanamo Bay's detention facility "no later than 1 year from the date of this order."

With only three months remaining until the president's self-imposed deadline, lead counsel for seven Guantanamo detainees and Vanderbilt Alum ('99) Wesley R. Powell visited campus on Nov. 4 reminding students that approximately 215 detainees remain in the controversial facility.

"I can assure you, it's still open," Powell said.



The efforts involved in closing Guantanamo reveal the challenges of transforming a campaign promise into a political reality.  
Image: empax.org

Accounting for the slow-moving process, the White House has faulted the legal and political complexities involved in determining relocation sites for the prison's remaining detainees and in finding Congressional agreement on funding for the closure and prosecutions of the detainees.

In order to empty the prison, the administration must receive congressional funding for the closure process, transfer dozens of prisoners to military and federal courts for prosecution, and find countries willing to accept detainees cleared for release. The administration must also find housing for the 50 to 60 detainees who cannot be released or tried due to legal impediments, according to The New York Times.

The main roadblock in the months immediately after the signing of the executive order was the disorganized condition of the detainee files, according to some administration officials. Most files necessitated the compilation of multiple intelligence databases.

Another roadblock emerged when the Senate blocked funding for the prison closure by a vote of 90 to 6 in May.

Congress then passed a bill preventing the administration from using money to transfer detainees into U.S. facilities and requiring it to report all plans regarding any detainee transfer out of Gitmo to Congress prior to doing so.

Despite these stalls, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs announced in late September that the administration was seeing "significant progress" in completing the president's pledge to close Guantanamo. In the same statement, Gibbs downplayed the significance of meeting the executive order's deadline.

"We're not focused on whether or not the deadline will or won't be met on a particular day," Mr. Gibbs told the White House press corps. "We're focused on ensuring that the facility is closed and doing all that has to be done between now and the 22nd of January to make the most progress that we can that's possible."

By the time of Gibbs' statement, teams of military and civilian prosecutors had reviewed the cases of all 240 inmates imprisoned at the time Obama took office.

The Obama administration has changed leadership over Gitmo in order to address the legal and political setbacks. In May, Obama designated top advisor Pete Rouse to take over White House Counsel Gregory B. Craig's position as the project advisor to close the prison.

Craig, a former advocate of setting the deadline, has publicly admitted his miscalculation of the difficulties of the project. In late September, he explained that his early assumptions were based in part on the Bush administration's public acknowledgement of a political desire to swiftly close the facility. To Craig, that meant a relatively quick closure was possible.

Craig met privately with national security lawyers and members of the outgoing administration prior

to the 2008 election. At that time, some members of the administration warned Craig about issuing a deadline without first securing alternative locations for the detainees. Craig did not heed those orders, however, and still recommended an early deadline.

As the countdown to the Guantanamo deadline approaches, the administration is facing more refusals by countries unwilling to accept

a detainee transfer, as well as louder protests by lawmakers in both political parties concerned about moving Guantanamo prisoners onto U.S. soil.

Lawyers of the detainees, like Powell, are dealing not only with their clients' distrust of the judicial system (and of themselves by extension), but with the technicalities of finding courts in which they can represent their clients and countries willing to accept them after a trial win. Detainees can control two aspects of their lives, Powell said - "whether they meet with their lawyers and whether they eat."

Because of this distrust of the U.S. judicial system, Powell said, one client never met with him, while another fired him and was sentenced to life.

By miscalculating its ability to turn yet another campaign promise into political reality, the administration has begun to privately acknowledge its mistake in setting a strict deadline, the New York Times reported in late September.

In the past nine months, the prison has seen a mere 25 person decrease. With only three months to the deadline and a release rate of approximately three detainees per month, many (if not most) political commentators and politicians believe it is highly unlikely that the 215 detainees left in Guantanamo's facilities will find alternative housing by Jan. 2010.

Many politicians are becoming increasingly frustrated with Obama's inability to meet a self-imposed deadline, which was hastily ordered in an attempt to fulfill a grandiose campaign pledge. "It is easy to say that Guantanamo can be closed when you are a candidate for president," Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) told the Senate floor in July. "What is hard is taking a deliberative methodical approach and then formulating the proper plan to balance the safety of this country with the needs of lawful detention."

**Detainees can control two aspects of their lives, Powell said - "whether they meet with their lawyers and whether they eat."**

**Promise:** Guantanamo Bay detention facility will be shut down by Jan. 22, 2010

**Progress:** 25 prisoners have been removed; 215 remain



# Don't Ask, Don't Tell battles for repeal

## *SLDN's Emily Hecht discusses slow repeal process during campus visit*

By Erika Hyde  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The U.S. military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy is an outdated idea that deserves to be repealed, according to Emily Hecht of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN).

Hecht, SLDN's Legal Department Co-Director, spoke before a large audience at the Vanderbilt Law School in late October about the pitfalls of the DADT policy and its effects on the military. The event was co-sponsored by OUTLaw, the law school's LGBT advocacy group, and the Law Students for Veterans Affairs. SLDN is a non-profit organization that lobbies Congress to overturn DADT and provides legal counsel for service members affected by the policy.

Like SLDN's employees, Barack Obama was an outspoken critic of DADT during his presidential campaign. However, he has since shifted to a more nuanced stance that causes some members of the LGBT community to worry about his commitment to his campaign promise to repeal the ban on gay service members in the military.

DADT is the popular term for the military's "homosexual conduct policy," created by a federal statute during the Clinton administration. Since 1993, the military's adoption of the policy means

that statements made by a service member "anytime, to anyone, anywhere, that leads a reasonable person to believe you have a propensity for homosexual conduct...is enough to kick you out under the statute," explained Hecht.

"When this law was passed, no one could have foreseen how broadly this would affect LGBT members," said Hecht. Over 13,000 men and women have been discharged from the military under the policy.

Hecht outlined the uphill legal battle that faces service members accused of breaking DADT policy. They are first flagged for violating the ban on homosexual conduct in one of three ways: marriage to someone of the same sex, homosexual actions, or statements that indicate the service member's gay orientation.

Violations could be based on something as simple as holding hands with someone of the same sex or listing a gay sexual orientation on a social networking profile.

They can challenge the military's attempts to discharge them, but Hecht explained that it is "almost

impossible to affirmatively rebut" the military's charges. Service members don't have privileged relationships with their military physicians or chaplains, meaning sensitive information divulged during medical treatment or spiritual counsel could be used against them in these proceedings.

If they are discharged for violating DADT, Hecht said the outed service members are given a lifetime ban from reenlisting in any branch of the military.



SLDN Legal Department Co-Director Emily Hecht and OUTLaw co-president Dan Kuninsky at the Don't Ask, Don't Tell lecture. Photo: John Russell, Vanderbilt Creative Services.

Their discharge papers list a reenlistment code that is universally associated with misconduct, and their benefits or separation pay may be negatively affected.

A service member and Vanderbilt law student who attended the lecture but declined to be identified by name said the speech was informative and provided a lot of legal insight into the military policy. "I was made aware that the amount of service members discharged due to [DADT] has been steadily declining, which is a positive thing," the service member said.

He explained that the military does educate its members on the DADT policy to ensure that they are aware of the ramifications of violating the policy.

Much of the military's arguments for keeping DADT hinge on the idea that LGBT service members can hurt unit cohesion and order. However, Hecht explained that studies conducted on the military since 1953 have shown virtually no detrimental effects of allowing openly gay service members.

President Obama campaigned against the policy when he sought the presidency, but his inaction since

his inauguration has troubled some of the LGBT community. During a legal challenge that came before the Supreme Court this spring, the Obama administration filed a brief that defended DADT, according to Time Magazine.

The president reiterated his support for repealing DADT during the Human Rights Campaign's annual dinner in October but did not include a timeline or action plan for carrying out the repeal.

Although Obama does not have the authority to overturn the law, he could instruct the Secretary of Defense to deemphasize the policy or to limit investigations of service members. He has yet to take these steps, even as a majority of Americans are now in favor of allowing homosexual service members to serve openly, according to Hecht.

If the executive branch remains silent on its campaign promise, LGBT service members can still look to the legislature. Efforts to repeal DADT are slowly emerging as the Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2009 (H.R. 1283) gains support. The Act, which would replace DADT with a "policy of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation," has 183 cosponsors in the House as of Nov. 8.

Dan Kuninsky, a third year law student and co-president of OUTLaw, explained that he and the Law Students for Veterans Affairs President Andrew Graeve brought Hecht to campus because of the timeliness of event given the pending legislation.

The changing tide in public opinion about LGBT issues may help push Congress to finally overturn DADT. "At this point, politicians feel that we've crossed a hurdle, where it's not as risky for them to support [a repeal of DADT], since they know that their constituents won't be opposed anymore," said Kuninsky.

Whether Obama will lobby harder for a repeal of DADT or other comprehensive protections for LGBT citizens is an unanswered question. Some groups, like the Log Cabin Republicans, have criticized the president for stalling progress on DADT reform.

Others like Kuninsky recognize that the political process is an incremental one that requires time and compromise. "It's nice to finally have a president who's supportive, publicly, to people who ask him about GLBT issues... progress is definitely slow, but I can't say I was expecting anything fast, and slow progress is better than no progress at all. I'm willing to be patient," said Kuninsky.

**Promise:** Obama promises to stop Don't Ask, Don't Tell military policy

**Progress:** No action taken by Obama; House bill awaits vote

## “One Year Later: Young Americans Rate Progress on National Priorities”

*Campus Progress and its partner organizations issued a report on Nov. 3 regarding “what young people have done to achieve the change they voted for and continue to demand.” The report discusses youth action since Obama’s election on Health Care Reform, Climate Change and Energy, Jobs and the Economy, Higher Education, Gay Rights, Veterans, and Immigration. Orbis provides some excerpts here.*

*For the full report, see [campusprogress.org/cribsheets](http://campusprogress.org/cribsheets).*

### Leading the charge in the fight for equal rights

After the 2008 elections, young people organized protests across the country which drew massive crowds in response to the passage of Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in California. Young people were the dominant force in planning and attending the National March for Equality, which brought over 200,000 LGBT advocates to Washington, D.C. and dramatically increased the visibility of the LGBT civil rights movement within the Web 2.0 community.

LGBT youth and advocacy organizations have presented a list of important policy changes to the White House and have been holding ongoing meetings to advance these priorities.

### Taking Action in Congress for Student Aid

Students lead by Campus Progress, the Student PIRGS, the United States Students Association and Rock the Vote have been at the forefront of recent action in Congress, making office visits and generating calls and emails about student aid reform. In September, college students took part in a press conference with Congressman George Miller, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and Speaker Pelosi to bolster the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (SAFRA), which passed the House later that week.

Later in September, student organizations in 26 states participated in the DREAM Act back-to-school day of action, drawing attention to the need to pass the Federal DREAM Act. In October, students across the country participated in a “Raising Pell” week of action, making thousands of phone calls and sending thousands of faxes and Tweets to their Senators, urging them to support SAFRA.

### The human face of the immigration fight and organizing for change

Since the 2008 election, three undocumented youths—Walter Lara, 23, Taha Mowla, 18, and Herta Llusho, 19—who were brought into the United States when they were young children, have brought much-needed attention to the broken immigration system by successfully organizing to halt pending deportation orders. With the help of the social networking site Dreamactivist.org and the Service Employees International Union, the orders against the three honors students were eventually deferred by the Department of Homeland Security.

Center for Community Change and the Reform Immigration For America Campaign have been teaching young people the art of community organizing this last year, mentoring them on ways to mobilize actions on a local level through phone calls and canvassing.

### Active in health care reform? Let us count seven ways:

1. Launching national day of action tomorrow on campuses and in communities around the country to write to their representatives in Washington, host call-in days, and gather stories.
2. Met with key elected official and their staffs – including a coordinated day of action on October 13th with young Americans from 30 states to push youth coalition policy agenda.
3. Lead the effort to encourage the House leadership to add a provision allowing young people to stay on their parents’ health insurance until age 27 to final House bill.
4. Ran national television advertising campaign targeting young people on MTV, BET, and Comedy Central that featured Zach Braff from Scrubs.
5. Mobilized thousands of young people to rallies and town halls, generated thousands of letters, emails and phone calls, and knocked on thousands of doors in key states
6. Provided youth-specific health care information on dedicated websites, Facebook pages, and online forums with Howard Dean and Kathleen Sebelius.
7. Generated earned media, op-eds, and letters to the editor in support of reform in national and local outlets.

## IMAGE screens “America the Beautiful”

By Jon Christian  
COMMENTARY EDITOR

IMAGE presented Darryl Roberts’ “America the Beautiful” on Oct. 27, in collaboration with The Ranch and the Eating Disorder Coalition of Tennessee. The film was released on a limited basis in 2008, and Roberts is now screening it across the country.

According to this indie documentary, the fashion industry makes a quick buck by marketing an impossible standard of beauty in order to make normal looking people feel inadequate. The collateral damage, Roberts argues, are the ones who end up with a shattered self image, an eating disorder, or a body type that doesn’t conform to a narrow, corporate conception of beauty. Photos are retouched, models primed for hours, and all the beauty products in the world won’t turn a normal person into a supermodel.

So, what else is new?

The problem with “America the Beautiful” is that it spends the better part of two hours hammering home the same few points that any analytical person understands. It felt like watching a special edition of “Titanic” where

they edited out the iceberg. The tragedy is that while our celebrity-obsessed, media-saturated world – and our own campus – have serious and undeniable body image problems, this documentary failed to do anything more than re-diagnose the condition. Repeated attempts to provide critical new insight fell flat, and forays into the high-stakes narrative territories of compassion and moralizing never made it off the ground.

The film focuses on Gerren Taylor, a then-12-year-old who was discovered by the fashion industry, rose to the top for an exhilarating year, and then was left for dead after the novelty wore off and her hips got a tiny bit wider. Along the way, her education and self esteem are left in shambles as she walks runways and attends topless pool parties.

Maybe it’s understandable the way Gerren’s mother desperately markets her to modeling agencies – after all, she could have been set for life – but the way the system exploits a preteen highlights all the ethical failings of the fashion industry. For her part, Gerren struts and models like an adult, but reveals her confusion by acting out in school and at home. It’s remarkable that her mother (who sometimes seemed almost as much an antagonist as the beauty industry) let cameras into her home and onto the road with her.

Gerren’s mom tried to revitalize her career with a whirlwind European tour, but the pair’s luck had run out and Gerren eventually retired back to high school. The footage of Gerren, which felt tender and honest, was the strongest part of the film. Her innocence and hopefulness is naturally juxtaposed with her overenthusiastic mother and the fashion industry’s predation.

Unfortunately, almost everything else in the film felt like a needless digression. One long segment deviated into a discussion of a web site on which the user uploads a picture of him or herself and is then harshly judged by other users. When the filmed diverted to a talk about toxins in cosmetics, it seemed that the reels had been mixed up.

To make it worse, the viewer is assaulted with off-point statistics that only stay on the screen for moments.

The stronger non-Gerren segments included analyses of advertisements for beauty products, such as time-lapse footage of all the retouching that went into creating Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty” shots. The “Campaign for Real Beauty” has been presented

**“There’s plenty of heartfelt rage in this film, but it’s not effectively channeled into a course of action or even a discourse.”**

by Dove as an ad series that represents regular, healthy people instead of models.

It was disappointing that Roberts has so little faith in the consumer. After all, no matter how many sleazy advertisements the consumer sees, on some level the choice to let talking heads define beauty is the consumer’s alone. Advertisements can play on our insecurities, but maybe if consumers were better educated about how deceptive ads were, they wouldn’t fall prey to their ploys. There’s plenty of heartfelt rage in this film, but it’s not effectively channeled into a course of action or even a discourse. It falls into an uncomfortable middle ground between descriptive reporting and a call to action.

Perhaps most importantly, Roberts needs to learn that just because you’re shaped like Michael Moore doesn’t mean you can act like him. Moore, if not the most vigorous fact checker, always weaves a masterful narrative out of disparate shots, casual voice-overs and bold confrontations. The best Roberts seems to be able to pull off is a couple of disjointed interviews and a rumbling baritone with which he habitually apologizes for abrupt scene changes. Nothing ever emerges to weave it all together – who is in league with who, and who stands to profit from making everybody feel fat? The film lacks a clear purpose: it’s too heady (and R-rated) to appeal to the young teens who could benefit personally from it, but walking out of the theater the audience has no better understanding of who they should be boycotting or to whom they should be writing angry letters.

Unfortunately, the film lets the user down by broadening its scope so much that no real point remains. The audience sits down to watch it knowing that the fashion industry is made up of bloodthirsty business people, and walks out having watched a kindly man interview the profiteers and present confounding statistics on their devilry.



Roberts’ documentary argues that the corporate conception of beauty imposes an impossible standard on the American population.

Photo Illustration: Carol Chen

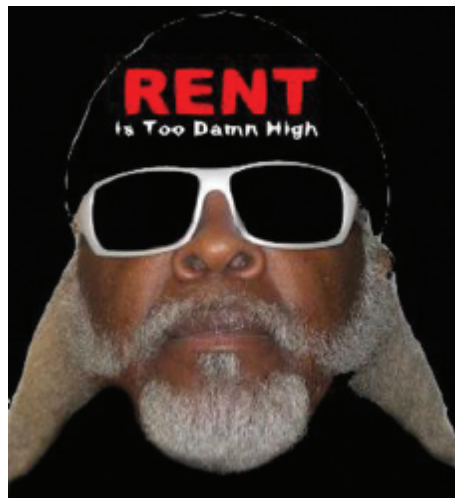
Can’t wait for next semester’s issues? Get your progressive fix at our blog:  
[blorbis.wordpress.com](http://blorbis.wordpress.com)

## Top 5 Bizarre Political Parties

compiled by the Orbis staff

### The Rent Is Too Damn High Party

This New York party, fronted by Vietnam veteran and amateur musician Jimmy McMillan, is focused on only one issue, because, as their motto says, "There is nothing else to talk about!" Visit their website to listen to McMillan's



This logo featuring RITDH party leader McMillan is available for purchase on t-shirts.

Image: [rentistoodamnhigh.org](http://rentistoodamnhigh.org)

groovy theme song, including profound lyrics such as, "When you cast your vote on November 3, you're going to see 'Rent is Too High'—that's us.... They took "damn" out [sic] our party name. They took it completely out, but that's us."

[www.rentistoodamnhigh.org](http://www.rentistoodamnhigh.org)

### Inanimate Objects Party

Started at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY, as part of a protest movement against the school policy requiring all students to use the Windows operating system, this party has promoted such candidates as Arthur Galpin, an inflatable whale, and Alby the Albino Squirrel.

[www.inflatablewhale.org](http://www.inflatablewhale.org)

### Guns and Dope Party

This libertarian/anarchist party was founded by the late cult author and bizarre parody religion proponent Robert Anton Wilson. Following Wilson's interest in chaos and "agnosticism about everything," the party campaigns on key issues such as replacing a third of Congress with ostriches, using creative slogans like, "Everyone for President," "I'll tolerate your hobbies if you'll tolerate mine," and, "Every ostrich is a tsar."

[www.maybelogic.com/gunsanddopeparty](http://www.maybelogic.com/gunsanddopeparty)

### Work Less Party

"Alarm Clocks Kill Dreams," says this party, organized around the issue of establishing a 32-hour workweek. They believe this will help ease economic problems by allowing more people to become employed and increasing consumption. Visit their website to buy a t-shirt with their slogan or to get your own copy of the classic book *Workers of the World Relax*.

[www.worklessparty.org](http://www.worklessparty.org)



The WLP thinks this recession is the fault of workaholics.

Image: [worklessparty.org](http://worklessparty.org)

### Charity, Freedom and Diversity Party (Netherlands)

Registered by a group of Dutch pedophiles in 2006, the party's primary goals include allowing sexual contact with animals and lowering the age of consent, drug use, and voting to age twelve. Their expanded (mostly) libertarian platform includes a variety of unusual and unsettling proposals, such as: "Discrimination will be allowed except as practiced by the government," "DNA may never be taken as ultimate and unique proof [of crimes]," and, "A prisoner may keep a small pet." (Note: "This right will not be extended to prisoners who have mistreated an animal. Suitable pets include guinea pigs and hamsters.")

[www.pnvd.nl](http://www.pnvd.nl)

## Local Lunacy in The News

compiled by the Orbis staff

### Yum...Prepackaged Jesus

It's flu season, so why not? Simeon Baptist Church, in Antioch, TN, now offers individually packaged communion portions to protect parishioners from the transmission of disease. Like the popular "Lunchables" snacks, the healthy worshiper needs to break a seal to get to their prepackaged wafer and juice.

[www.tennessean.com](http://www.tennessean.com)

### Isuzu Savior: Jesus Takes the Wheel



Image: [manxforthememories.blogspot.com](http://manxforthememories.blogspot.com)

One astute motorist from Johnson City, TN, noticed a persistent manifestation of Jesus' face on his truck window for the past two weeks. According to AOL news, the "folks at the grocery store he goes to are amazed by it." "Also amazing to those folks," holytaco.com reports, "The magic talky box in the livin' room that tells all them funny stories after the sun goes to sleep."

<http://news.aol.com/weird-news>

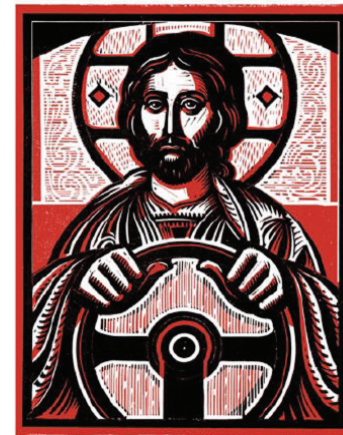


Image: [conversantlife.com](http://conversantlife.com)

### MTSU Class Pledge Their Souls

Thomas Tang, a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, was concerned that one of his MBA candidates had cheated on an examination. Determined to crack down on the problem, he asked each of his students to sign a pledge not to cheat - or they would be damned to an eternity in hell. Some potential MBAs were concerned by eternal damnation and complained. Tang says that future pledges will not concern his students' immortal souls.

[www.wkrn.com/global](http://www.wkrn.com/global)

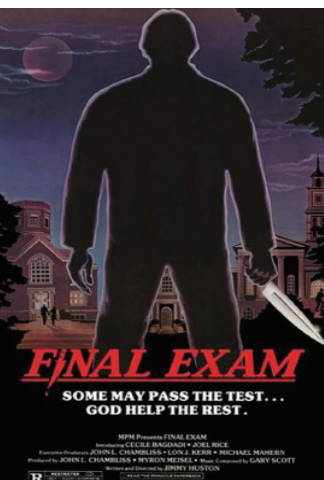


Image: [obscurehorror.com](http://obscurehorror.com)

### Eco-Conscious Vegetarians at War (With Selves)

Over the weekend of Nov. 6, Nashville hosted the Chem-E-Car Competition for the eleventh time, in which contestant universities entered shoebox-sized vehicles powered by alternative fuels. In past years, entries have been powered by beef liver and beetle enzymes. All around the world, the minds of pro-alternative fuel vegetarians race to find their (ideological) position.

Associated Press



Image: [pxleyes.com](http://pxleyes.com)