

THE VANDERBILT POLITICAL REVIEW

A world kept
in the dark



Opinion by Guy Kopsombut, Senior, College of Engineering



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AND PROFESSOR KATHERINE CARROLL

FALL 2009

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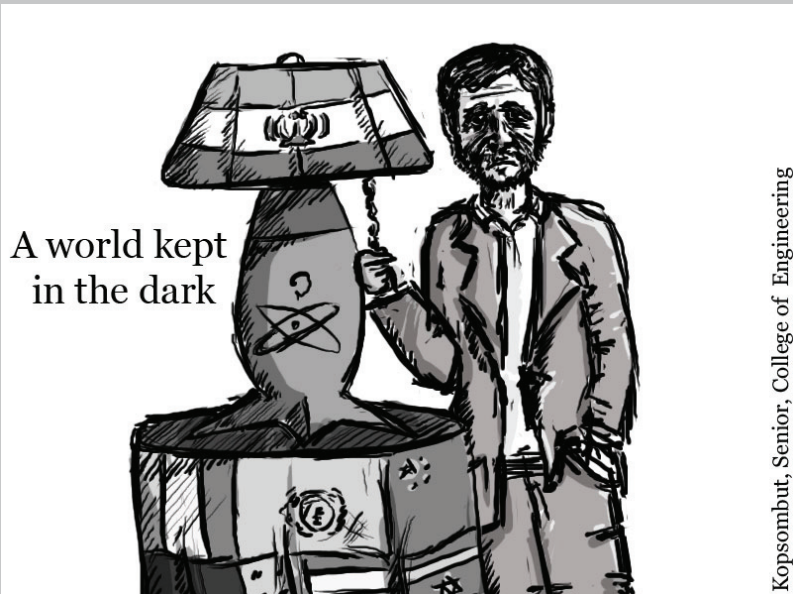
The Vanderbilt Political Review would like to extend a warm “thank you” to the Commons and Dean Francis Weislo for their continuous support of our nonpartisan publication and its events.

Thanks to their support, you can now become involved with VPR in more ways than ever:

1. VPR Dinner Discussions: 2 dinner discussions are held at Dean Weislo’s residence during each semester. Thus far, we have had Dr. Balsler of the Vanderbilt Medical School host a discussion on health care reform, as well as a Holiday-themed discussion about religion and politics. Space is very limited, so if you are interested in attending contact vanderbiltpoliticalreview@gmail.com so we can send you an invitation.
2. Intercollegiate Conference: In Spring 2010, VPR will invite colleges from across the state to visit the Commons for intercollegiate panel discussions regarding political, economic, and social issues. Details to come soon!
3. Website: Next semester, VPR will have a website featuring political commentary by VPR editors as well as the rest of the Vanderbilt Community. Previously published essays will also be featured, with an opportunity for everyone to respond to them.

Thank you for your continued interest and enthusiasm in VPR. We hope these three exciting new opportunities contribute to the enhancement and revitalization of the political discourse on our campus.

ON THE COVER



Political cartoon designed by Guy Kopsumbut, Computer Engineering, Class of 2010.

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FROM THE BOARD: OUR ASSAULT ON REASON: DEATH PANELS, KENYAN BIRTHS, AND SOCIALISM

Jadzia Butler

President, *The Vanderbilt Political Review*

It seems that this single year brought more political activism than America has seen throughout the past decade. In part, this can be credited to the efforts of our government to become more open with the American public through town hall meetings, Facebook, Twitter, and weekly radio addresses. Given all of these opportunities to confront Executive and Legislative officials and ask them questions regarding their policies, you would think that the people have, once again, become the involved and informed participants in government that the Founding Fathers envisioned and hoped for as they drafted the Constitution.

Think again.

The majority of town hall meetings amounted to nothing more than sending government officials into a virtual snake pit. As one Representative tried to explain the government's steps towards healthcare reform, he was interrupted by a man hollering, "Obama's a socialist!" while a woman burst into tears, blubbering, "I want my America back!" The Representative, who happened to be a Republican from South Carolina, attempted to respond to these concerns, until one man stood up and yelled, "Get your government hands off my Medicare!" To that, he could only stand in stunned silence.

The Tea Party protests fared no better. Thousands of Americans marched defiantly throughout the streets of our nation's capital, likening President Obama's increase of taxes for the upper income brackets to the British's taxation without representation (ignoring the fact that, unless they were from D.C., they actually did have representatives in government). Posters with blown up copies of the President's Kenyan birth certificate were waved in the air, each one suspiciously different from the next. These were met with posters exclaiming, "Say NO to Death Panels!" held by constituents convinced that the White House was out to kill grandma.

These protests, which will surely cost Democrats some seats in 2010, are still

by no means a victory for Republicans. Conservatives certainly have many causes for concern regarding the new administration's policies. It can be argued that the new healthcare plan, if passed, will cost a fortune and send our deficit spiraling to unfathomable heights. It can possibly drive private insurance companies out of business, leaving those happy with their current plans stuck trying to find new options. Government bailouts of banks and automobile companies may only be artificially propping up businesses destined to fail, rather than giving them a chance to dig themselves out of their rut or simply allowing their failure due to negligent practices.

Unfortunately, these issues are not the issues discussed by those taking a stand at the town hall meetings and on the streets of the capital. Although the American public is definitely more vocal and involved than it has been in recent history, it is by no means more informed. The sources of the protestors' contentions will never be addressed simply because they can't be. They aren't real issues. These protests will only drive the Democrats into the ground while dividing the Republican Party into several different factions—each claiming to be the true representative of "conservatism."

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Anger is never without Reason, but seldom with a good One." At Vanderbilt, we have the privileged access to resources such as our professors, alumni, guest speakers, and an endless supply of books, newspapers, and articles that enable us to come to educated conclusions about our government's policies. With these resources, will some of us find cause to protest? Certainly. Will others find cause to celebrate? Let's hope so. In the meantime, the one thing we can all stand for is the fight to put the reason back into political activism, while eliminating the overwhelming anger that has distracted us from the real issues at hand. See you on the Capitol lawn.

A PROFESSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

KATHERINE CARROLL

Interview by Jadzia Butler

President,

The Vanderbilt Political Review

VPR: First and foremost, what took you from Vanderbilt to Iraq?

KC: I came to Vanderbilt as an Assistant Dean to the College of Arts and Science in 2001. I didn't teach in the beginning, but then it was the post-9/11 era and there weren't a lot of political scientists who taught just specifically about the Middle East. I realized I had missed teaching and I wanted to go back to that. However, there are a number of reasons I went to Iraq. It made perfect sense for me to go, personally and professionally. I was sitting in my office one day and a man knocked on my door and said, "We're looking for people to come and join this program and go to Iraq to help teach the army about the culture." He said, "I hope you don't mind leaving town for a while, living with them, having an increased salary, and whatever you learn there you can use for future research."

VPR: Regarding their culture, what were some of the specific things that you would teach them?

KC: There's a lot that you need to know about Iraqi culture. It's really difficult to point out just one or two things. My concern was simply that the soldiers be constantly learning about it. The more an American soldier knows about the environment he's in, the more likely he'll be able to make good decisions. That makes him less likely to make the kinds of mistakes that have been going on. And that is crucial in Iraq. Now, we tried to make our cultural information operationally relevant. So what a soldier really needs to know about culture are things such as, on what day of this month are a million people going to march through my area of operations? And what are they going to be doing? And what should

them up. They didn't get a Marshall Plan. They thought they were going to get one, but they really didn't. We threw a lot of money at them, but it just didn't work out because we turned over sovereignty a little too early.

VPR: How has this war changed the way Americans view the Arab World?

KC: I think that, in terms of my students here, when they see that the army became comfortable with the Iraqis it makes them think, "Oh, I can become comfortable in the Arab World." There's a wide variety of people who, for one reason or the other, now travel to the Middle East. I think it's a great thing that people are interested in the Middle East and Islam, because Iraq opened the door for them. If Iraq becomes more and more successful, then we will begin to see the Middle East as a place where we can have a greater number of relationships with. Travel, college exchanges, etc., etc. I always told the Iraqis when they said, "America's going to abandon us after this. You came here, destroyed our government, we went through hell, and now you're going to abandon us here." I always tell them that I'm not aware of a history of any other situation in which thousands of young Americans became so familiar with the Middle Eastern culture and were so invested in the success in a country. We had soldiers who were only about 25 years old who were literally mayors of small areas of Baghdad for a year at a time, who were familiar with all kinds of sheiks, business centers, government officials, and even what time of day the trash got picked up. Those guys, when they come home, are going to be in business, they're going to be in Congress, and be very successful partly because Iraq boosted their knowledge and leadership skills. They're not going to abandon Iraq. There's a generation in the military that invested in this country and knows a lot about it. They're going to keep interacting with the country because they're familiar with it and understand it. I think that will make a difference for a long time.

VPR: Are Middle Easterners starting to notice the positive aspects that this war has brought or are they still fairly pessimistic about what happened?

KC: It's going to take a long time for the Arab World to acknowledge the benefits brought to Iraq. That's because, in balance, it wasn't beneficial to Iraq.

But that doesn't mean there weren't benefits. Nobody likes what happened, and nobody likes a foreign occupation. Especially from a country that has such a bad reputation. In general, though, Arabs like Americans. And they would like to come over here and study, and they would like to have their society more like ours. A vast majority of them agree with us in terms of democracy and other issues. In general, though, it's going to take a long time for the Arab World to forgive us for this. That being said, what I've learned is that the army is a learning organization. It has the capacity to understand its mistakes and take action to correct them. Sometimes they don't do so fast enough, or you can't believe they made a certain mistake to begin with, but nevertheless, it was able to adjust to its environment. I saw a lot of goodwill towards the Iraqis on part of the American military. It was a great experience for me, as someone who doesn't know that much about the

"I'm not aware of a history of any other situation in which thousands of young Americans became so familiar with the Middle Eastern culture and were so invested in the success in a country."

military, to be there and try to help them towards these better relations with the Iraqis.

VPR: Will you ever go back?

KC: I'd love to go back to Iraq. The problem is that now all the jobs are in Afghanistan, which is just a little too scary (laughs). I also don't know anything about Afghanistan, so I don't know what I'd bring to the table there. But I'd certainly go back to Iraq even as a tourist in the next couple years.

VPR: As a tourist? Were you ever scared for your life while you were there? You were in a war zone, and yet you seem so comfortable with being there.

KC: I was really scared in the beginning. But you just get over it. If you're going to be scared, you can't function. When I first went to Iraq there was another guy doing my job and he said to me right

when I first got there that you have to accept your own death and then you can function there. If you accept the inevitability that you're going to die, once you're ok with that then you'll be able to function. He was right. I went through this mental process early on, expecting that I was going to die. Expecting it and being ok with it definitely helped me. After I went through that, I never got scared again. Well, I was a little scared of rockets. For some reason that was something that I never got used to. But besides that, I wasn't scared. And that both shocked and empowered me.

*Interview performed by
Jadzia Butler*

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THE CASE AGAINST THE DEMOCRAT'S HEALTH CARE

PROPOSAL: WHY GOVERNMENT GETTING INVOLVED IN HEALTH CARE SHOULD MAKE YOU SICK

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On November 7th, the House narrowly passed the "Health Care for America" act. This bill creates a government run insurance option, forces individuals to purchase health insurance or pay a fine, expands Medicaid and prevents health insurance companies from charging different rates or refusing coverage due to a person's medical history. [1] While many Democrats are championing this bill, if it becomes law, it will be an absolute disaster.

Liberals will often try to argue that health care in America is dreadful and government-run health care in places like Canada, France and Britain is far superior. This could not be farther from the truth. Americans are overwhelmingly satisfied with their healthcare. The reality is that 83% of Americans rate the health care they receive as "good to excellent," while only 3% of Americans say the health care they receive is poor. [3] Liberals like to tell horror stories of

people denied coverage as if it is commonplace. They say insurance companies are villains because they check people's medical history and sometimes deny people. However, health insurance companies average only a 3% claims denial rate. [7] In addition, the way insurance works is that one group of people pay premiums in one pot, and the people who do not get sick end up paying for the people who are sick. If a company takes on more sick people, this creates a higher cost for everyone. Thus, the companies are forced to investigate people, and most also prevent insurance fraud.

One may also argue that medicine should not be about profit and instead should be about caring for people. Nevertheless, profit is what drives innovation. Profit motivates and creates competition leading to lower costs and higher effectiveness. Ultimately, when companies compete, consumers win. Over the last twenty years, private American companies trying to make a profit have created half of all new major medicines worldwide. Over the last thirty years, they have played a crucial role in eighty percent of worldwide medical advances. It should be noted that the United States government has produced a whopping 4% of the drugs on the market today. [7]

Some of the problems in countries with government-sponsored health care are mind-boggling. You would be hard pressed to find a Democrat who would tell you that the French health care system is expected to have a ten billion euro deficit this year. [5] 92% of French citizens have private health insurance, in addition to the government system. In Canada, there are hundreds of thousands of people on waiting lists for some kind of health care treatment. The Canadian Supreme Court has even said that many Canadians waiting for treatment suffer chronic pain and that "patients die while on the waiting list." In Canada, over a million Canadians say they cannot find a regular family doctor. Demand for private clinics is so high that they are opening across the country even though they are illegal. [7] In Britain, there are 850,000 citizens waiting for admission to government hospitals and the government is trying to cut waiting times for hospital care down to 18 weeks. [2] Every year, up to 50,000 operations are cancelled due to shortages. About 40%

of cancer patients never even get to see an oncology specialist. Because of this, almost 20% of colon cancer cases considered treatable when first diagnosed are no longer curable by the time health care is offered. [7]

If the Democrats' health care bill passes in the Senate, the ramifications will be devastating. The government does not run programs as smoothly and effectively as private companies can, since there is no competition and few incentives. Do you want your health care run like the DMV? Healthy people who take care of themselves should not be forced to pay for people who choose to smoke or overeat. With our country already in so much debt, it is quite alarming that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, the proposed health care program will cost 1.055 trillion over a decade. [6] To pay for this, Democrats' suggest an additional \$572 billion in taxes. This means people in the top tax bracket will pay 45% of their income to the government, without even counting state income tax. In my home state of New York, those in the top tax bracket would be forced to pay 57% of their income to the government. [4] The idea that most of your paycheck goes to the government is quite simply outrageous, not to mention bad for business. Not only will the bill cause public health care to take up an even greater share of the federal budget, but it will also significantly increase the cost of insurance premiums. According to WellPoint insurance, premiums would TRIPLE under the new law. [6]

It is true that there are nearly 50 million uninsured Americans. However, it is also true that many of those people are only uninsured for brief periods and others are eligible for Medicaid but fail to apply. [2] Being uninsured does not mean one cannot receive health care. Government-run hospitals and non-profit organizations provide health services for people without insurance. In addition, by law, a hospital must provide care even if a person is not insured.

No one should ever have to go bankrupt while paying for life-saving treatment. Consumers make tax deferred contributions into an account to be used for medical expenses. Over time, an HSA gains value. When you are sick with something small like a cough, you pay for it. If you get sick with something se-

rious like cancer, they pay. HSAs give consumers control of the money, and so when they pay for treatment of minor illnesses, they will be encouraged to put an effort to find cheaper prices.

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MARXIST HEALTHCARE: SEPARATING THE TRUTH FROM THE BOLSHEVIK

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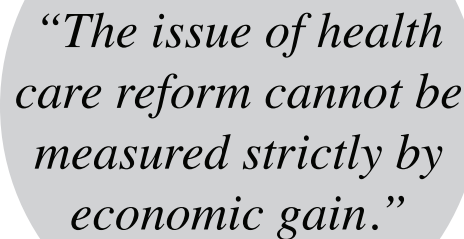
The low availability and high cost of health care coverage in the United States necessitates reform. Conservative views employed by the Republican Party define health care as a competitive commodity, and not an inherent right. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, perceives health care as a universal right and not a privilege. Under the current capitalist health care market, coverage is rationed such that many Americans do not have access to affordable health care. Health care costs account for a significant portion of the lower and middle class expenditures and are contributing to the growing income disparity in the United States. [1]

H.R. 3962, also known as “The Affordable Health Care for America Act,” passed the House of Representatives on Saturday November 7th following months of debate and widespread media attention. This legislation, if made into law, would impose necessary reforms on America’s health care system. The House’s legislation prohibits health insurers from charging different rates or refusing coverage based on gender or medical history. [2] Refusing coverage based on medical history unfairly discriminates against patients while subsequently raising costs for hospitals and the government by artificially reducing the number of insured patients. The bill places a surtax on workers’ wages up to 8%, which is applied to employers not providing health insurance coverage. While this surtax raises fixed costs for all industries limiting consumption, it encourages employers to expand health care coverage. The Act further expands coverage by extending Medicaid to 150 % of the federal poverty level, subsidizing low and middle-income Americans to buy insurance, and implementing a public option for government-run health care. These measures directly reduce consumer costs and improve the overall quality of life. A government-run insurance plan increases competition in the health care industry by offering an alternative to the private sector, thus increasing the supply of health care and decreasing consumer cost.

The status quo is a laissez-faire market that fails to correct inefficiencies in the health insurance market: the uninsured rate has remained relatively constant for almost two (2) decades[3], and the rate of underinsured Americans is of even greater concern. [4] The private sector has failed to correct itself and expand overall coverage. Despite skepticism surrounding federal regulation over the health care, industry reform is necessary. The federal regulatory system outlined in the legislation does not, as former governor Sarah Palin (R-AK) claimed, assemble “death panels” to decide the worth of human life. In fact, the disarray from a lack of federal regulation discourages the preservation of human life as coverage availability and premium costs determine the fate of car crash victims and patients in critical condition, often siding with economics over moral-

ity. All twenty-two of America’s fellow rich, developed countries have universal coverage that reduces many costs from dead weight loss while assuring health care. The public option and federal regulation would cut many state government costs thus reducing state budget deficits, a major problem for many state governments. Current Senator and former Governor Mark Warner (D-VA) explains: “I wish the President would have started the debate by explaining to the American people that our current health care system is not financially sustainable, for even another decade. Driving down health care costs should have been the focus of the debate.” [4]

This Act further promotes competition by repealing the insurance company exemption from anti-trust laws, a policy abused by growing health insurance companies. Anti-trust regulation increases competition by limiting the market share of any single



“The issue of health care reform cannot be measured strictly by economic gain.”

company or group of companies. This increases allocative and economic efficiency by preventing monopolistic controls like price fixing and artificial shortages. The Act also prohibits abortion coverage in the public insurance plan, requires Americans to obtain health insurance, and lastly taxes the income of individuals making over a half-million dollars (and families making over a million dollars) by 5.4%. [2] Speaker Nancy Pelosi estimates that the Act will reduce Medicare costs up to 400 billion dollars and reduce the U.S. deficit by 100 billion dollars over ten years[3]. These rough estimates are not exact, but their interpretation of the economic effects of the Act is correct: it will help reduce government spending and eliminate much of the dead weight

loss in the private sector. The issue of health care reform cannot be measured strictly by economic gain.

The government best serves the people by interfering in the market when the market fails to correct itself. While middle class Americans stretch their incomes to afford health insurance, drug patent laws are abused by pharmaceutical corporations that devote their excessive profits to advertising and higher salaries instead of drug research and development[6]. The availability of employer-paid insurance dramatically increases with higher income. [1] 56% of lower-middle income Americans have employer-paid health insurance, while only 22% of bottom income Americans have employer-paid insurance. Furthermore, many issues of cost such as prescription drugs are resolved with health care reform. In a multi-payer universal coverage system like Germany, prescription drug prices are much lower. Pharmaceutical corporations are subsidized by the United States government and must compete against a well-organized, coherent health care system with greater bargaining power. This institutional component of universal health care, combined with greater use of generic drugs, can reduce prescription drug costs up to 85%. [7]

From all facets of the health care debate, reform is simple: the American health care system is fundamentally flawed and unsustainable. Passing health care reform has economic and social benefits. T.R. Reid, author of *The Healing of America*, goes further and defines health care reform as a moral imperative that the United States must address: “It takes a strong leader to make (special) interests accept change.” Coverage and treatment for all citizens is fitting and proper for the world’s richest country. The health care debate will not be finalized until the Senate and the House of Representatives pass identical legislation to be signed by the President. The final outcome and results of this provisional legislation are unpredictable, and Democratic reform is still uncertain

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SHOULD THE UK JOIN THE EURO?

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The Euro dates back to January 1st, 1999, when it became the legal tender for participating European countries within the EU. With the single currency comes a central bank, called the European Central Bank, which conducts monetary policy covering all the members of the Eurozone. There are no longer any separate national monetary policies, and no country can introduce any policies of their own, such as ones involving interest rates and exchange rates. The UK obtained a special opt-out agreement in the original Maastricht Treaty of the EU, stating that it would only have to join if the government decided to do so.

This topic has been debated time and time again, and it will most likely continue to be debated for quite a long time. While there are definitely some economic benefits to being within the Eurozone, there are also major cons to having the Euro that go along with several other political as well as social (or rather, cultural) negatives. While this may change in the future, at this point in time it seems to be disadvantageous for the UK to join the Euro.

Economics

The biggest argument against the UK making a move to join the Eurozone stems from the huge loss of autonomy when it comes to economy policy and governmental control. If the UK were to join the Eurozone, all control it has over monetary policy would be handed over to the European Central Bank, who would then prescribe policies at its whim. This could prove to be disastrous given cer-

tain economic circumstances. For instance, the lack of exchange rate controls removes a highly effective mechanism for adjustments of imbalances between countries that can arise from shocks to their economies. This has worked well for the UK in the past, and, as such, this option should be retained. Furthermore, the UK would no longer be able to stimulate its economy during a recession by devaluing its currency and increasing exports. The UK is thought by some to be more sensitive to interest rate changes than other EU countries (mainly because of the high number of owner-occupation on variable-rate mortgages in the housing market), and joining a currency union with no monetary flexibility would correspondingly require the UK to have more flexibility in labor markets and in the housing markets. Problems such as these are only a few examples of how the loss of power to change and implement economic policy would be highly disadvantageous for the UK. Furthermore, many assert that the UK is already a big competitor on the global scale, so the argument that the UK would lose economic influence if it were to not join the Eurozone is decidedly weak.

Political

On the political front, the debate seems to be a little more straightforward. Following along with having more economic influence, supporters claim that moving to the Eurozone would garner the UK more political say and influence within the region. The UK would have a stronger voice when it came to deciding policies and creating more integration. However, many more view the move to the Eurozone as, essentially, a political disaster. With this move, the British government will have virtually no say on monetary policy. Instead, it will be completely controlled by the European Central Bank, and the UK government will have no way to deal with any crises that may occur within the economy. With the way the government is currently set up, if there are massive problems occurring, the citizens are able to bring in a new government through elections to fix problems within the economy. Under the European Central Bank, even bringing in a new government would be essentially useless.

Opponents of the Eurozone also believe that this move would bring less

political influence, rather than more (as supporters believe). The European Union, some assert, is basically a French and German institution; it is their brainchild that caters mainly to their needs and interests. Upon joining the EU, Britain attempted to gain some political clout within the system, but most of her interests and desires were either ignored or strongly contested. Some would say that it has never been in the interest of the UK to be within the Union at all. If the UK were to join the Eurozone, they would be put even further under the EU's rules and regulations that do not cater to the needs of Britain at all, which are decidedly different from the needs of mainland Europe. There are hopes of Britain becoming the leader of mainland Europe, but some say that it is not a realistic goal, nor is it advantageous or beneficial for the nation to be in such a position.

Social

In addition to the economic and political realms, joining the Eurozone also has an effect upon the social realm of the UK. Supporters believe that having a European currency will strengthen the "European Identity". Having more and more countries sharing the same legal tender creates a bond that gives a sense of community and togetherness to those involved. It is this very point, though, that opponents resist. Proponents of the Pound have a very nationalistic view of the currency situation, and believe that the Pound is something inherently British, and taking this away would be taking something away from the very fabric of English culture and society. This feeling of autonomy is incredibly prominent throughout the people, and this view that the Pound should be kept, if only to preserve their cultural independence, is not in any danger of fading. If the Euro were to replace the Pound, many feel that a part of the country itself would be lost.

Conclusion

It is clear that the debate regarding the choice to join the Eurozone is substantial and complex. While it may have died down a few years prior to today, it is returning with much more importance due to the current economic crisis. Some believe that now is the time, more than ever, to join the Eurozone and avoid many economic hardships to come. Others believe that by the time the UK were

to actually change to the Euro (as it is a years-long process), the current recession will have passed and the UK would only have a substantially higher sum of debt to deal with, as the process to change over to the Euro would be a massively expensive one. The UK already benefits from intra-European trade due to the agreements made in the past, and many believe Britain to have its own special identity unique to itself, which would be forever tarnished if the Pound were to disappear from the hands of the British people. The loss of governmental economic power would leave the UK at the mercy of the other European powers, and its economy could possibly fall into disrepair with no governmental control to sustain it. It seems that the cons, at least at the present time, outweigh the pros, and the UK should remain tied to their traditional currency.

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ECONOMICS, GORILLAS, AND FRYING PANS

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“If you walked into class every single day and a thousand pound gorilla hit you over the head with a hundred pound frying pan, would you keep walking through that door?”

—John Paquet, high school physics teacher

I heard this query often during my high school years. I now offer it to anyone curious as to the cause of our current economic situation. The entire world is in the midst of an economic meltdown. In similar times of economic crisis, history has shown that not only Americans, but people of all nations turn to their governments as the answer to economic problems. Meanwhile, they ignore the ever surmounting evidence that the government and its intervention is the problem itself. It is, in fact, the cause and they are content with closing their eyes to the truth, pretending the last set of regulations and restrictive agencies never happened. It's time we grasp reality and accept that they have, and that our worsening economic state degrades proportionally with government involvement in it.

Throughout the history of American enterprise, it has been said by our friends and our enemies that we are a capitalist nation. The truth is, however, that the American economy has never been truly free. Even as our conception when the ideas of personal freedom were strongest, the government could and did intervene with business affairs. That being said, we can still see the times of greatest industrial growth in our nation came when government was least involved—in the 19th century, more specifically its latter half. It was this period of time that American enterprises expanded to massive and productive scale (we should appreciate these men, not scorn them, as is tradition, since our school's namesake was one of them). Similarly, these corporations were cut down and piecemealed by antitrust laws of the latter part of that century and the early part of the 20th century because they were efficient and because they were productive. For a modern example of this occurrence, ask yourself what field of industry has increased the most in the last three decades? Then ask yourself which industry has had the least government regulation in that time. It is no coincidence that the computer industry has expanded at an exponential rate since the 1980's. It is also no coincidence that since the enactment of antitrust laws against Microsoft, it has increasingly produced inferior products, i.e. Windows Vista.

Every time the economy begins to fail, its failure is blamed on the free market (which we've never had) and more government policies go into effect, as if there weren't any before. Our current debacle is a result of such cycles. In the years of the Great Depression, the era of the single greatest increase in the power of the American government over its people and their economic lives, FDR created Fannie Mae to aid Americans in obtaining loans to buy homes. During the Vietnam era, the second greatest expansion of government power in our history, Lyndon B. Johnson created Freddie Mac with the intention that it compete against Fannie Mae and between the two of them, low income American families would be able to secure well founded loans to obtain new homes. Despite the obvious government connections with these entities, they were always said to be “private.” Their ultimate failure (and then official nationalization) in

2008 came as a result of more than ten years of pressure from politicians for the two companies to drastically cut interest rates so that every American family could have a home. When millions of Americans defaulted on loans they never would have qualified for under free market conditions, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac failed and dragged down with them every financial institution that had invested in these loans in form of credit default swaps as well. Instead of allowing these companies to deal with the consequences of years of faulty financial logic and letting them fail, a new term was coined in the American economic scene, “too big to fail.” This term, though undefined and relative, has since been applied to other companies than just financial institutions. To prop up these institutions, the government has bought up the stock no one else would logically invest in, making it the majority shareholder in many cases. Many of these companies, such as GM, have been operating at a deficit for years, producing products that are inferior to their competitors and at a greater cost. In a free capitalist market, no company doing so would survive even a decade, but government involvement acted as a crutch and now GM is being supported by the government so it can continue to make vehicles that do not sell instead of being forced to adapt to changing economic conditions and increase efficiency to beat out competitors. The proposed solution to all this: the Bush/Obama “stimulus package,” many proponents of which point to the temporary halting of a plummeting stock market as signs of its success. The situation is distorted by the belief that a country's wealth and capital are based on the currency it has to spend. People believe that spending excess of hundreds of billions of dollars will jumpstart our economy. Meanwhile, who stops to ask where that money comes from? The American government has either found some mystical source of capital we've never heard of, or else they are merely printing more currency. Accepting the unlikelihood of the former, the latter is not equivalent to having wealth. A country's wealth is only a consequence of its production. The fact that production in America decreases almost daily demonstrates that we cannot be accumulating more wealth realistically. Therefore, the money from this “stimulus” only creates a greater and greater il-

lusion of money in the economy, in the same way the speculation on the stock market created an illusion of capital in the 1920's. History shows us that illusions of economy did not work then and, similarly, they will not work now.

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**THE GOP:
STILL WANDERING
THROUGH THE WILDER-
NESS**

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I was recently having a conversation with a conservative friend of mine when he gleefully pulled out his Blackberry and read to me that day's Rasmussen Presidential Approval Index, which had just hit a new low. This had become something of a routine for us: he reads to me dwindling poll numbers as evidence of the impending doom that awaits Democrats in 2010, while I brush them off as incredible and premature. However, I must admit there is reason to worry. According to Gallup, Obama's approval ratings have dropped 15-20 points since his inauguration in January. While a decline in approval ratings during the first year is normal for a president, this rate of change is unusually high. Furthermore, there seems to be a general anti-incumbent attitude this year. With anger mounting over the stagnant economy, it is likely that many will want to vote out the party in power, the Democrats. The health care debate is not helping matters either. The Democrats' largest promise has proven to be their biggest public relations problem, infuriating the right while frustrating the left and confusing the middle.

But all is not lost for my fellow Democrats. Our shred of hope comes from the simple observation that however self-destructive we may have become since gaining power, the Republicans have us beat. After November 2008 delivered the biggest setback for the GOP in decades, questions began to arise about which direction the Republican Party would move. Looking back, the problem with these questions might have been the premise that the party would choose any direction at all. Rather, the

Republicans seemed to have adopted a strategy of incoherent infighting and freelance radicalism. A party that just a few years ago was known for its fall-in-line discipline has now degenerated into a leaderless, divided, inefficient specter of its former self.

The most glaring problem currently facing the GOP is its dire lack of leadership. After 2008, the GOP's options seemed to be characterized most commonly by the faces of Sarah Palin and Mitt Romney. Palin, representing former Bush-voters who were terrified of Obama stealing their guns and bibles, was said to be too conservative to appeal to Independent voters. On the other hand, Romney, representing the traditional business interests of the Republican Party, was said to be too socially liberal to energize the religious right. As other candidates for the new leadership of the GOP emerged, all seemed to fall into one of these two camps. Michael Steele, the actual leader of

“However self-destructive we may have become since gaining power, the Republicans have us beat.”

the RNC, has become largely irrelevant. Instead of trying to find some middle ground, the Republicans have chosen a strategy of no real leadership at all (going rogue, if you will). This has allowed for the emergence of Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck as the overriding voices of the Republican Party. Frankly, Democrats could not have gotten luckier. Between Beck's conspiracy theories, Limbaugh's race baiting, and the millions of angry teabaggers who listen to these men religiously, Independents will think twice before voting Republican.

This division has been particularly evident in recent weeks. First, in a special election in New York, prominent social conservatives, including Sarah Palin and Mike Huckabee, endorsed an Independent conservative candidate

over the moderate candidate chosen by the Republicans, driving the Republican out of the race and ultimately leading to a Democratic victory. Other prominent moderate Republicans, including Charlie Crist, have also been targeted by conservative groups, who want them to move to the right. Another example of the division occurred when social conservatives voted for an amendment to the House healthcare bill to strip funding for abortion from the bill. Once the bill passed, fiscal conservatives, who had warned the social conservatives not to vote for the amendment, blamed social conservatives for adding the amendment and making it easier for moderate Democrats to vote for the overall healthcare bill. These occurrences demonstrate how the GOP is largely ineffective without strong leadership.

Realistically, the Democrats will probably lose several seats in 2010. However, there is no need for panic. Until the Republican Party can conjure up some strong leadership that is not on the payroll of Fox News, and circulate a coherent unified message that does not involve death panels or secret Kenyan citizenship, the Democrats do not have much to worry about.

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**THE CLIMATE AND
ENERGY CRISIS:
A NATIONAL SECURITY
PERSPECTIVE**

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The issues of climate change and alternative energy systems in the United States are often characterized in terms of their moral or economic implications for policy-making. Rethinking America's approach to the environment is, much like healthy eating or exercising, often dismissed as “a good thing to do” but something no one really has the time or energy for. I would like to offer a new perspective on the climate crisis, one driven not by a vague inspiration to “do the right thing” but rather by an imperative national security threat that global warming is increasing. I will address aspects of the climate crisis that directly impact our security interests and

foreign policy, and that are ignored by American citizens and our leaders at our own peril.

There is usually considerable discussion over the sources of American oil imports, and the dangerous repercussions of funding autocratic regimes and anti-democratic organizations through our oil demand. While these policy consequences are dangerous enough, there is a more subtle but arguably more deadly source of security threats beyond our petroleum addiction into the effects of climate change in underdeveloped regions. The documented (and accelerating) impacts of global warming such as rising sea levels, frequent natural disasters, and extreme weather patterns will have the most severe impacts on the world's least-developed regions. Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia in particular will feel the strain that climate change adds to already fragile economies and explosive political situations. The nations that are least prepared to handle the pressures that climate change is exerting on the weather, food supplies, and freshwater sources will feel these pressures the most strongly.

The likely consequences of climate change on these vulnerable regions are already visible today. As agriculture is threatened and traditional food resources become unavailable in both rural and urban areas, poverty will deepen. This expansion of poverty will come in conjunction with an international water crisis that is being fueled by climate change and environmental degradation. The Middle East and Northern India, for example, are regions currently categorized as "Very High Stress" in freshwater supplies with more areas rapidly approaching this category.[1] Faced with intense socio-economic crises, the governments of affected underdeveloped nations will likely be overwhelmed by the implications of global warming, and lack the political clout to address the issue in any effective way. The resentment caused by intensifying poverty will expand the already vibrant drug and human trafficking chains that thrive on the political instability of these regions, and increase the appeal of extremist and fundamentalist organizations as well. It is no secret that terrorist organizations feed off of poverty and disillusionment as a primary mode of recruitment; Afghanistan is a

prime example of the effects of chronic poverty and political inefficacy as a disastrous combination for democratic stability.

In a recent report by NATO entitled "Thinking Beyond Kyoto," US General Anthony Zinni argued that if the United and other international leaders fail to reduce greenhouse gas emissions today, there will be a military price to pay in the future.[2] Given the complexities of global warming's impact on international politics, it is not hard to see why. All of these interconnected problems hark back to the effects of global warming, and all of them will be detrimental to US interests worldwide. A growth in poverty and the expansion of anti-democratic forces internationally stands in contradiction to the aims of American foreign policy, and must be considered with an eye to our own international goals. It is time to rethink global warming and understand it not just as a moral or cultural

"As agriculture is threatened and traditional food resources become unavailable in both rural and urban areas, poverty will deepen."

but also as a problem that is integral to our interests and security as global leader.

[1] The World Water Council. "The Water Crisis: The Concept of Water Stress". <http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/index.php?id=25>

[2] The NATO Parliamentary Assembly. "177 STC 07 E bis- CLIMATE CHANGE: THINKING BEYOND KYOTO". <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=1177>

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**WORLD CUP 2010:
HOPES SET TOO HIGH
FOR THE RAINBOW
NATION**

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In 2004, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) announced that South Africa would be the host for the 2010 World Cup. For the first time in history, the World Cup is going to be on the African Continent, making South Africa not only stand as its own country, one already faced with the difficulties of post-apartheid, but as a representative for all African countries. The South African government views the World Cup as a chance to sustain and promote its economic development goals. The hosting of the World Cup has become an opportunity for South Africa to reshape its society in an attempt for the resolution of a troubled history. By winning the bid to host the FIFA World Cup, South Africa has both the opportunity and the daunting responsibility to not only ensure a successful tournament, but also to capitalize on the potential political, social, and economic benefits the tournament could provide. However, the ability for South Africa to capture the opportunities for economic gains and social reform will be difficult due to the inadequate structures and programs of post apartheid [2] as well as the substantial costs of hosting the World Cup. [1]

From its beginnings in the 1930s, the World Cup has grown to be one of the most impressive sporting events in the world, and the 2010 World Cup is expected to be the planet's biggest sporting event ever. Well over a billion people are expected to follow the month long tournament between the world's top 32 soccer playing nations. Questions of a 'plan B,' or whether or not South Africa is ready to host this mega event are no longer prevalent. The only question that remains is, can the World Cup be a springboard for broader development both in the country and the rest of the continent?

A mega sports event such as the World Cup has economically been viewed as a means for rejuvenation. However, the true impact of such an event is greatly

debated. Countries who have previously hosted the World Cup expected the tournament to provide greater economic returns than the considerable costs it required to host such an event. However, mega events have historically underestimated costs and environmental impacts, and overestimated the potential revenues and the effects on economic development. This is because the research usually done before the event takes place intends to benefit potential investors [5] and persuade the government that hosting such an event will provide a positive economic return.[6] Furthermore, the World Cup requires considerable investment in facilities, infrastructure, and organization expenditure, for which the host country is responsible. Yet, FIFA limits the financial benefits of the host country by creating a contract that regulates the profits of the tournament.

There are fewer examples of economic successes in hosting a mega event than there are costly plans in which the host country obtained a large debt. [2] Previous World Cup hosts such as Germany, the United States, South Korea, and Japan, all suggest that the economic boost the world cup provides have consistently grossly overestimated the economic impact on the host country. Furthermore, all four host countries reported minimal economic gain, and some reported economic loss. Therefore, it is important to understand that huge short term economic boosts have historically been incorrect in their forecasts in order to assess the expectations of South Africa and to predict the extent to which South Africa will realize the claims towards using the World Cup as a tool for economic development.

With the welcoming of the single biggest sporting event in the world, the World Cup only creates a larger disparity between the haves and the have-nots. The lavish spending for constructing and renovating world class stadiums has shown no visible or discernible benefit for the hundreds of thousands still waiting for stable homes, reliable electricity, education and preventative health care service. Mass tourism often brings overdevelopment and uneven development, environmental pollution, and invasion by culturally insensitive and economically disruptive foreigners, which have historically been displayed in the case of the World Cup. [4] Many of the world-

class stadiums being refurbished or built are next to the slums with no reliable electricity, or even running water. Hiller argues, "When local people in the millions lack adequate housing, food and other subsistence needs, preparing for a 'circus' when people need 'bread' will always appear inappropriate" [3] Hiller goes on to conclude that adding human development to mega-event planning may raise expectations that would almost surely result in criticism for failure to achieve development goals after the final match is played. There is no doubt that South Africa will host a successful World Cup, but looking beyond the two months of soccer, South Africa may be setting itself up for great disappointment, and a large sum of debt, than a new Africa.

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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND ITS GROUP CONFLICT IMPLICATIONS

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The systematic selection of minority candidates, typically African Ameri-

can, for jobs and college acceptances based on their race is the typical interpretation of affirmative action. An influential explanation for tension in relation to affirmative action is realistic group conflict theory, which explains motivations behind negative perceptions of affirmative action by whites. Whites perceive affirmative action as damaging, but to understand why, one must understand group conflict behavior. In that theory, groups who view others as threatening to access to resources will act negatively toward that out-group. In regards to affirmative action, whites understand the systematic hiring and acceptance of minority candidates over other candidates as a threat. Using group conflict theory, the causes for this opposition will be apparent, and solutions to the tensions between whites and minorities will be offered- explaining that lack of education, lack of inter-group interaction and other factors contribute to the problem.

Tension exists between whites and minority races on the issue of affirmative action for many reasons, including what Lawrence Bobo states in "Whites Opposition to Busing: Symbolic Racism or Realistic Group Conflict?": "American social organization allows and fosters in whites the belief that blacks, in so far as they demand changes in the racial status quo, are a threat to their life-styles, as well as to other valued resources and accepted practices." [1]

The key to the disagreement with the practice of affirmative action by whites stems from an inherent or learned belief that minorities' success threatens whites' current success, combining the ideas of social identity theory and group conflict theory. Whites or those whose social identity is "white" naturally rally to the cause that promotes his or her social group. Bobo continues that there is both an objective and subjective perception of threat by out-groups. [1] Hence, the basic problem that causes strife between minorities and whites is perceived as a threat-the thought that white's access to resources is being attacked.

Americans hold the notion that there are only a set number of possible resources. In Bobo and Hutchings' words from their study, "Perceptions of Racial Group Competition," "significant numbers of people of all racial backgrounds see group relations in zero-sum terms." [2] Americans view jobs, college accep-

tances and other positions similarly to natural resources. To minorities, affirmative action balances out other institutional inequalities that affect them, whereas whites sense unfairness in the system—a system skewed against merit. McClain and Karnig’s work, “Black and Hispanic Socioeconomic and Political Competition,” contends, “The success of each [minority] group may be independent of each other but at the expense of whites.” [3] Despite what logic might conclude (that minority groups will compete with each other for resources), the successes gained by minority groups through affirmative action primarily affects the dominant racial group: whites. Therefore, many whites feel the threat of minority groups infringing on the territory of dominance that whites have staked out. In addition, affirmative action is symbolic of the surge in socio-political power of minorities and thus a subtle reminder to whites of a change in the status quo and potentially a decrease in whites’ socio-political power.

Common factors that cause negative feelings among whites to affirmative action are racial alienation, lack of education, conservative predisposition, negative racial stereotyping and lack of inter-group contact. A suggestion to fix the rift between whites and minorities is an increase in collegiate education. Bobo and Hutchings explain that it is not more education, but rather collegiate education that prevents perceived threat. The most highly educated whites feel the least threat, those with high school degrees the most threat, which is more than the least educated whites. [2] A reason for the lower levels of threat among poorly educated whites might be related to inter-group interaction. Middle-upper class whites might have less contact on a daily basis with minorities, whereas lower class whites likely interact with minorities at a higher level, whether it is living in the same neighborhoods or working the same jobs. In terms of threat, it is not the highly educated whites (who understand the need for racial equality) nor the lower educated whites (who can relate to most minorities on a socioeconomic level) who perceive threat from minorities. Partially educated whites in direct competition for jobs and college acceptances with minorities who do not have a superior education or a close relationship with minorities feel most threat-

ened.

In addition to increased education, there is a positive correlation between the perception of minorities as threats and whites’ racial alienation, social distance and negative stereotyping. [2] If whites buy into negative stereotypes and distance themselves from minorities, the problem will deepen. Conservatism, both political and social, appears to be a tell-tale sign of whether whites oppose affirmative action. Bobo and Hutchings contend that liberalism leads to an accepting opinion towards minority success and less belief in minorities as threatening. They say, “Whites who adopt a conventional liberal interpretation (i.e., structural) of the status of Blacks are less likely to see Blacks as a collective threat.” [2] A new wave of liberalism, a more liberal president, or congress might prompt a more accepting view of not only affirmative action but also minorities in general. The current president and congress are fairly liberal and the time seems right for a change in the racial attitudes of the United States. Therefore, realistic solutions to this phenomenon of group conflict behavior could emerge.

Group conflict theory can explain the friction between whites and minorities in the realm of affirmative action, while uncovering the underlying reasons why whites see minorities as threats. Perceived threat and belief in zero-sum socio-political resources are legitimate reasons to oppose an institutionally mandated form of affirmative action. The key is for the United States to design a non-zero-sum-oriented system, involve cooperation and remove barriers to inter-group interaction. This would allow affirmative action to be a non-issue, or simply abolished because of the development of an equal social and political America.

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FREE PRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

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“Chinese authorities have broken their promise to improve the country’s human rights situation and betrayed the core values of the Olympics,” Amnesty International stated on July 28, 2008. The next day, members of the press were mysteriously unable to access the organization’s website from the Olympic Main Press Center.

The Beijing Olympics drew international attention to censorship and harassment of journalists in the region, but restriction of press freedoms is not limited to China. According to the nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, Freedom House, only 18% of the world’s population enjoys the benefits of a free press. It is a global issue – one that should not be ignored.

An independent press is crucial for the development of a thriving global community. Journalists open the eyes of the public to the world across the street and across the ocean. They inform and empower people with the ability to make responsible decisions. A free press is both the voice of the people and a powerful force able to hold public officials accountable for their actions.

Alternatively, the propaganda campaigns of Nazi Germany and other political groups demonstrate that a restricted media can be a dangerous weapon. A misinformed public is susceptible to manipulation by political leaders twisting information to further their own goals. Control of the press has played a role in nearly every humanitarian crisis throughout modern history, including the war in Rwanda, the Holocaust, and the repression of Tibetans by the Chinese government.

A free press is a powerful tool to prevent government abuses and humanitarian crises. When citizens are informed

about the issues of the world, they are empowered with the ability to resolve them. To that end, media organizations must be economically and politically independent in every country.

A transition to a global independent press constitutes a tremendous shift. It involves a change for 82% of the world's population. In addition, it requires that political leaders relinquish control of an industry with the potential to criticize them or perhaps even orchestrate their downfall. Recognizing the enormity of such a change, the United Nations must become more actively committed to this issue. Article 19 of the U.N.'s 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." It is time for the U.N. to act more definitively on this issue and pressure members to uphold Article 19.

Action by the U.N. alone will not suffice, however. The responsibility falls to each individual. As citizens of a global community, we must strive to be informed, seeking out information and weighing the validity of all information we receive. Members of the 18% with an independent press as well as members of the 82% without it should use their influence-- however large or small-- to pressure governments to relinquish control of the press.

In November, the International Olympic Committee stated that the Chinese government had loosened limitations on press freedoms as a result of the Beijing Games. Bowing slightly to international pressure, the Chinese government indefinitely reduced restrictions on foreign media in the country. It is a small step, and many members of the media remain skeptical, but it is a move in the right direction. More importantly, it is proof that pressure from countries and individuals can have a positive effect. We must exercise our voices to secure the right of all people to exercise theirs.

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