

FAIRFIELD PREP

ZEITGEIST

"THE SPRIT OF THE TIMES"

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2** Abortion in America
- 6** Arms Deal With Taiwan
- 7** Obama's 1st Year
- 9** Obama's Folly
- 10** Marijuana
- 12** War of Words
- 14** Cartoon Page



"There is not a liberal America and a conservative America - there is the United States of America. There is not a black America and a white America and latino America and asian America - there's the United States of America."

- Barack Obama

OBAMICON.ME



Reflections on the March for Life: Abortion In America

By: Thomas Gaudett
Class of 2010

"Freedom is fragile and must be protected. To sacrifice it, even as a temporary measure, is to betray it."

- Germaine Greer

On January 22, 2010, about twelve students from Fairfield Prep participated in the 37th Annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. marking the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade which made it legal for a woman to receive an abortion any time during the course of her pregnancy. It was estimated this year that there were a record 500,000 people marching, 200,000 more than last year.

This simply goes to show that the abortion issue is growing in awareness and is becoming a more important issue in our nation's politics. Our group left late morning on Thursday, January 21, and attended the Opening Mass National Prayer Vigil for Life at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, in which many archbishops and bishops, 200 priests, 400 seminarians, and thousands of people were present. On Friday, January 22, we gathered at St. Aloysius Church with the other members of the Ignatian Pro-Life Network for the Mass for Life and then participated in a rally coordinated by the Jesuit Conference and Apostleship of Prayer where various members of Jesuit high schools and colleges spoke of their school's efforts in promoting life issues. Following this we marched up to the famous steps of the Supreme Court, past the Capitol Building in protest of abortion and Roe v. Wade. Finally, we concluded our trip on Saturday, January 23, by participating in the 2010 Students for Life of America National Conference at Catholic University. All of this was an attempt to better understand the issue of abortion as well as to fight for life from the moment of conception until natural death. It was during this trip that I personally learned a lot about this issue and came to an understanding that this issue is significant. This issue which never seemed important to me came alive during this trip. This issue is not just an issue of religion and the role of God, but also common sense and an understanding of how we can make our world a better place. And because of this, as a matter of both logic and faith, I stand firmly against the practice of abortion in the United States for the following reasons:

When Does Life Begin?

The key to understanding and taking a stand on the abortion issue is by recognizing when life begins. According to science, life begins at the very moment of conception. Simply put, the life that is growing in the womb of the mother will never be a cat or a dog or a giraffe or a plant, etc. It is and always will be a human life.

Despite this, most Americans do not believe that life begins at conception; in fact, most people believe that life begins at the first heartbeat, which occurs during the first month of pregnancy. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 77% of all abortions in the United States occur after the heart of the fetus has started to beat. So although it may seem as though a vast majority of Americans are for abortion, the American people are against a majority of abortions that happen in this nation. Thus, because most Americans believe that life begins either at conception or the first heartbeat, they are also at odds with the decision made in Roe v. Wade which made abortions legal up until birth.

Comparison to the Practice of Slavery

The argument over abortion can easily be compared to that of slavery. Some people thought that it was absolutely acceptable to enslave black men and women. Look at our society today. What used to be common practice and socially acceptable is no longer. But slavery was not once right and then wrong. It was always wrong, but many did not realize that. Too many people made excuses and attempted to defend the immoral actions taken against slaves who could not defend themselves. Today, we are doing the same thing to unborn children who cannot speak for themselves. Right now, people do not realize that those unborn fetuses are just as human as we are. Just like slavery, abortion was wrong in the past, is wrong now, and will always be wrong. Perhaps someday unborn humans will no longer be discriminated against.



The US Constitution

Very often it is argued that the reason abortion should be legal is because the Constitution protects a woman's right to choose. Essentially the argument is that a ban on abortion would be unconstitutional. But the fact of the matter is that *Roe v. Wade* was a result of judicial activism and is a case where the justices of the Court implied a right to privacy and then extended that right to privacy to include getting an abortion. Even though there may be an implied right to privacy in the Constitution, that also does not mean that that right cannot be limited or taken away. According to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution in the Due Process Clause, a person's right can be limited in a certain matter as long as they are granted due process of law.

Basically each person's rights will be determined by the courts on a case by case basis. An excellent example of how a person's rights can be limited is the fact that a person cannot go into a crowded theater and yell "fire." While everyone is granted the freedom of speech according to the First Amendment, that person's right to freedom of speech can be limited in a case where they are infringing upon the rights of others. Thus we are granted our rights up until they interfere or infringe on other people's rights. In the practice of abortion, even though a woman may have a right to privacy, that right to privacy and the abortion itself is infringing upon the rights of the unborn child. Thus, in this case, the Constitution does not permit a woman to choose. Even applying privacy to the use of abortion is a bit of stretch. The right to privacy granted in *Griswold v. Connecticut* which allows for the use of contraception should not be the same right to privacy granted in this case. There is not much private about an abortion. While sexual behavior in the home may be private and between two people, abortion involves a third party. Thus, even the argument about the right to privacy is a little weak and a stretch from the reality of what our Constitution really says.

Laws That Reflect the Morals of Society

People also suggest that the government simply has no right to tell people what to do. And, they are greatly disappointed by those who are supposedly attempting to force their morals upon others. I, however, would like to refute this claim by saying that for centuries our nation has created laws that correspond with the morals of the people. In fact, the Supreme Court itself has changed its view significantly matching the changes in society. Again, let us think about the practice of slavery many years ago. The Supreme Court once protected the existence of slavery, as well as segregation following the end of slavery. Many years later, the Court has changed its view and has overturned all laws that prevent equal opportunities for African Americans in this nation. Now I ask: Did the Constitution change in a way that creates a change in the Court's view? Certainly the Thirteenth Amendment is ratified and makes the practice of slavery illegal; however, there is nothing that changed in the Constitution that changed the Court's view on a whole host of issues dealing with the plight of African Americans. One great example is the separate-but-equal doctrine. Rather than there being a change in the Constitution, there was a change in the views of the Court reflecting the changing view of society. Slavery and segregation were not once legal and good and later illegal and immoral. They were always illegal and always immoral yet the people and the Court did not recognize this fact until years later. The laws of land can be a reflection of the times and the morality of the people. And if the people of the United States wish to abolish the existence of abortion, then that should be okay. *Roe v. Wade* overturned many state laws across the nation which strictly limited the use of abortion in a particular state. Abortion is a state issue, and it ought to be the right of the states to make their own judgments about the practice of abortion. To those that say that the people in this nation cannot decide collectively whether the institution of abortion is an acceptable practice, you are misguided and ignorant of the history of this nation which has seen many laws that were pure reflections on the thoughts, feelings, and morals of the people.

The Help that Parents Deserve

As much as I would like the practice of abortion to go away, the prescription for fixing the abortion in our nation is not to simply ban the use of abortion and leave it at that. The best way to fight against abortion is to stop it at its source. We must remember why exactly people are choosing to have abortions in this nation. 25% of those receiving an abortion in this country say that they simply are not ready for a child, that the timing is wrong. 23% say that they could not afford to raise a child. Another 19% say that they already have children depending on them. 8% say that they have relationship issues and do not want to be single parents. Another 7% say that they do not feel mature enough to have this child.



"There never was a good war or a bad peace"

- Benjamin Franklin
(1706–1790), "Letter to
Josiah Quincy, Sept. 11,
1773."



"If you stick a knife nine inches into my back and pull it out three inches, that is not progress. Even if you pull it all the way out, that is not progress. Progress is healing the wound, and America hasn't even begun to pull out the knife."

- El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X - Born Malcolm Little)

And 4% say that having a child would interfere with educational or career plans. How can we stop abortion? We can stop it by preventing these problems, because it is irrational to think that people get abortions for no reason. When you take these issues away, you take away the need for abortion. This is why we must help women who are pregnant by giving them opportunities to be educated and work while caring for a child. We must financially assist parents who would perhaps struggle to run a household and care for the baby. We must provide counseling and create programs who feel that they are not ready and help those who are struggling with the difficult task of caring for children. And finally, we must extend a helping hand to those who are single parents and encourage them to work hard and care for their child. We have a moral obligation to assist those in need and to provide basic necessities for all people. Parents need our help. It takes a village to raise a child. And if we care about making the world a better place, we also will care about helping parents fulfill their obligations to their children. Being pro-life goes beyond supporting the unborn, it also means that we must provide for the basic needs of all and provide all people with an equal opportunity to live a fruitful life. That is what justice and morality are all about.

Attempting to Play the Role of God

Through the practice of abortion, just like most other life issues including the death penalty, people try to justify the action of taking a life. In doing so, what that person who is making the choice is really doing is trying to play the role of god. That is not acceptable. In the same way that Adam and Eve made an attempt to be like God by eating from the Tree of Wisdom, by taking the life of an unborn child we too are attempting to be like God. To make another comparison, in the same way that in our nation, the power to tax is the power to destroy, God's power to create also gives God the power to take away the life of His creation. We must recognize that it is God's choice when life begins and when it ends. Man must not play the role of God and decide when one should die.

The Effect it Has on Society

I also simply do not understand the argument that legalized abortion has made our country better. The plain truth is that abortion is never positive, it is always negative. Because of the high rate of abortion, the population is beginning to age as a result of a weakening birth rate. When that happens, the work force gets older and less productive and society is reliant on fewer younger individuals to support the growing rate of those who are older and unproductive. In particular, this will have a great effect on social security many years from now. It is not natural that we take the lives of these unborn children. And as a result of this unnatural practice, our society will suffer in the years to come if nothing is done to stop it.

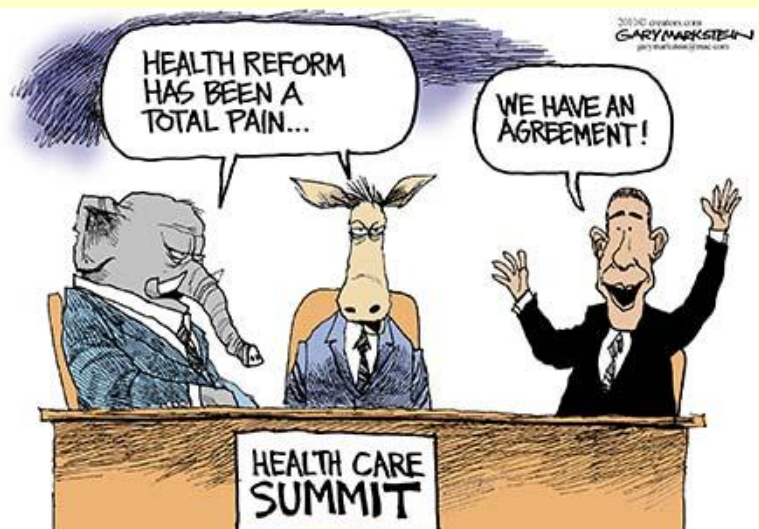
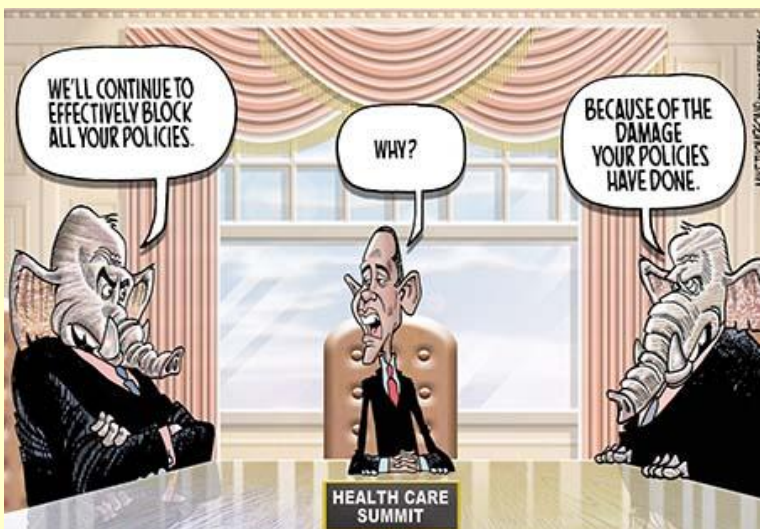
The Selfishness and Illogic of the Pro-Choice Side

Many of the people who are pro-choice have rooted their arguments for abortion in selfishness and illogical thinking. The argument over abortion by the pro-choice side has been clouded by selfishness by people who beg the question, "what if you got your girlfriend pregnant, what would you do?" This statement which is made by many young people who are for abortion is an argument which is rooted in selfishness as they think only about themselves. The pro-choice argument has also been rooted in illogical thinking by suggesting that the unborn baby is simply a glob of tissue. For this reason, I ask, what is that supposed "glob of tissue" if it is not a human? And even if you cannot understand that it is in fact a human, then at least can't we have some respect for what that "glob of tissue" will become, a human being. Another thing that many people suggest is that we should allow abortion until we are able to prove that life does exist within the mother's womb. But I truly cannot understand the logic behind such a thought. If in fact it is our goal to protect life, and if in fact we would ban abortion after proving that life did exist in the womb because life is special for whatever reason, then why is it that we would not ban abortion now until we can prove that human life does not exist in the womb. This above all is immoral and a just a hint of the way that many people think in this nation.

Conclusion

The best way to sum up this argument is that pro-choice is a lie because babies do not choose to die. Most people get an abortion because having a baby is too inconvenient. Abortion has become an immoral protection for those who make bad choices. I ask you, who are we trying to defend here? So many people point to rape and incest as the major justification for abortion. Yet, less than 1% of all abortions are performed due to rape and incest in the United States. I am not trying to suggest that people are actively seeking abortion, but just like every other crime, though one may feel guilty while they are doing it, it still is not right. For all of these reasons, I stand firmly against the practice of abortion. Roe v. Wade, which was a factor of judicial activism by the Supreme Court, has taken away the right of the majority of Americans to stand up against the practice of abortion and outlaw it in their particular states.

And in the same way that the law governs the immoral action of taking a life such as in murder or an accident as a result of drunk driving, the law should also prevent the immoral action of taking the life of an unborn baby, and in such a cruel and indecent way might I add. When will we as a society realize that human life is special? We are not like our pet dog or the plant in the garden. Whether you believe that man has a soul from a religious standpoint, or simply believe that human life is special in some other way, it is our duty to protect this life that we care so much about. I strongly believe that, like many other issues, if people really looked at all sides of the argument and saw the greater picture, there would be far fewer abortions in our nation and our nation would be better for it. We must remember that from the moment of conception to natural death, human life is sacred and must be protected. Let us remember that your mother chose life for you, and that is the reason that you are here today.



U.S.-Taiwan Arms Deal

By: Sean McGuiness
Class of 2011



"China has no income tax, no unemployment and not a single soldier outside its borders."

-Chou En Lai

On Friday, January 29, 2010, the United States announced that it had completed a deal to sell 6.4 billion dollars worth of arms to the Republic of China (ROC), more commonly known as Taiwan. The People's Republic of China (PRC) had vehemently opposed the arms sale, and threatened sanctions if the U.S. went through with the sale.

The arms sale includes 60 Black Hawk helicopters worth \$3.1 billion, 114 advanced Patriot air defense missiles, a pair of Osprey mine-hunting ships, and dozens of advanced communications systems. The U.S. did not include any F-16 fighter jets in the deal, acquiescing slightly to Chinese opposition to the arms sale.

Beijing has taken a number of punitive measures to protest the arms sale. It postponed plans for visits between the U.S. and Chinese (PRC) militaries, and has put off a high level arms control meeting. Beijing is also considering sanctions against U.S. companies that sell arms to Taiwan. China's Defense Ministry said the punitive actions were made "in consideration of the serious harm and impacts on Sino-U.S. military relations" brought about by the arms sale. Beijing has also said that China will make further judgments as appropriate.

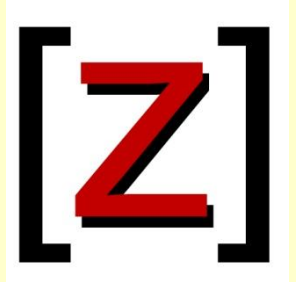
Neither the U.S. nor the People's Republic of China formally recognizes Taiwan as a sovereign nation, and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei called the arms sale "a rude interference in China's internal affairs, severely endangering China's national security" and said China expressed its "strong indignation." The U.S. State Department responded by saying that the arms sales are consistent with Washington's "one China" policy and are a way to guarantee safety and stability across the Taiwan straight. "This is a clear demonstration of the commitment this Administration has to provide Taiwan with defensive weapons it needs and as provided for in the Taiwan Relations Act," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said Friday. China claims Taiwan as a breakaway province of the People's Republic and has threatened to invade if Taiwan ever declares itself an independent nation. The U.S. has promised to defend Taiwan in the event of that happening.

The People's Republic of China doesn't want Taiwan to have the ability to defend itself. It wants Taiwan to be brought back into the fold of mainland China, and the only way for the PRC to do that is by force. However, the ROC is a sovereign nation, whether or not the PRC wants to admit it. They cannot be taken over by force. The U.S. may not formally recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation, but it does treat Taiwan as one.

The U.S. has the right to trade with any nation, and it does not need the permission of any other nation to do so. Taiwan is a sovereign nation, and it deserves to be treated as such. The United States may choose not to formally recognize Taiwan so as to maintain diplomatic ties with the PRC, but that does not change the fact that the U.S. and the ROC are two sovereign nations. Two sovereign nations do not need the permission of a third, uninvolved nation to conduct trade. The PRC can not bully the world into giving it the power of dominion over another sovereign nation. The arms sales should have, and did, proceed over the objections of the PRC.

Obama's First Year: A Summary

By: Quinn Myers
Class of 2012



Barack Obama will always be remembered as America's first African-American President. This is very important to history and civil rights; however, I hope for the sake of our country, that he will be remembered more for his accomplishments as Commander in Chief.

Mr. Obama inherited many different problems when he came to office that threatened the very livelihood of our country. First off, the financial system was at an all time low, and our economic situation was being compared to The Great Depression. Next, our country was in a severe debate over our flawed health care system. The United States was also fighting two wars in the Middle East, neither with any end in sight. These unsettling facts, along with the truth about the torturing at Guantanamo Bay, and numerous other allegations against our government, gave our country a very low approval rating both foreign and domestically. In the face of all of these unsettling problems, Barack Obama was sworn in as the forty-fourth President of the United States in January, 2009.

There are three main problems President Obama has had to deal with in his first year as President: The economy, health care, and our military status in Iraq and Afghanistan. First, the President started with the economy. In February 2009, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was passed, making it the largest stimulus bill in our country's history. The bill for \$787 billion dollars, applies money toward federal tax cuts, expansion of unemployment benefits, and many other areas in need, including domestic spending on education and health care. The bill was very controversial, and no Republicans in the House voted for its passage, while only three Republican senators approved it. This bill, while opposed by the majority of Republicans, was necessary in our economic state, and it is still having a large effect almost a year later. While the stock market has had an incredibly strong rise, the job and housing problems continue to worsen. The health of our economy is necessary to the well being of every American citizen. The coming months are crucial for our Country to get back on track.

Next, we come to health care; which system, currently in place, is severely flawed. As of September 2009, 46.3 million Americans did not have health insurance. This number is staggering. Many people simply cannot afford the premium bills and co pays that go along with a normal health care plan. If you're self-employed, buying health insurance is extremely expensive. If you have a preexisting condition, this usually leads to you being denied by an insurance company.

One of Obama's major campaign promises was to create and pass a health care bill that would put an end to these problems, and help out the average American. According to President Obama, the plan "will provide more security and stability to those who have health insurance. It will provide insurance to those who don't. And it will lower the cost of health care for our families, our businesses, and our government." There has been much criticism of this bill, but it is necessary for our Country. The President has worked extremely hard on this issue, and in late 2009, both the House and the Senate passed different forms of health care bills. A single bill must still be put together from each separate bill and again be voted on. This presents a problem, because the Democrats have just lost the super majority vote, which would have overridden a filibuster. This makes passing the bill much harder, and the current health care bill may not be passed unless certain modifications are added. This has been seen as a victory for Republicans, and a harsh defeat to the Democrats. Obama's next move on this issue will decide whether he will continue to strongly push for healthcare reform, or to back down and focus more on other issues, such as the economy.

Finally, the third main point President Obama has touched upon during his first year as President is the issue of the two wars the United States is currently fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama promised that by August 31, 2010, the United States will end its combat operations in Iraq, having about 90,000 troops leave, and a force of about 40 or 50 thousand troops staying to continue to advise and train Iraqi security forces. This is a significant move in US policy, and a direct change from the policy of The Bush Administration. The Iraq War has been hotly debated since its start in 2002, and many people have agreed and disagreed on whether it is a just war. I think that the fact that we went to war in Iraq was a move not based on human rights or safety, but one of money and downright greed. Over 4,000 American soldiers have died, but perhaps the most shocking figure is that over 100,000 innocent Iraqi civilians have been killed. 100,000 of those lives could have been spared. That is why it is so important that the US withdraws from Iraq. We need to get out not only to save American lives, but to save Iraqi's as well.

*"Under capitalism, man
exploits man. Under
communism it's just the
opposite."*

- John Kenneth Galbraith



This continues to the war in Afghanistan, which is very different from the conflict in Iraq. The United States has occupied Afghanistan for eight years, and the whole time, our country has not had a clear goal.

With the growing threat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda regaining power, in late 2009 President Obama pledged to add 30,000 more troops to the total armed forces count in Afghanistan. These soldiers will support the troops already in the region, and help train and protect the new Afghan government. Obama claims that the troops will start to be withdrawn by July 2011, but the validity of this statement has been hotly debated. I hope that the new troops will help to suppress the Taliban, however, it may be better for our country if we withdrew. The bottom line is that if this war is not stopped soon, it will turn in to a Vietnam-like fiasco. The same goes for Iraq, although we are beginning to see signs of the fighting dying down.

While President Obama has focused strongly on the economy, health care, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he has also passed several smaller pieces of legislature that have had or will soon have an effect on the American people. Some of these smaller accomplishments have included lifting the Bush restrictions on federally funded embryonic stem cell research, signing a law to expand workers rights to sue their employer in cases of pay discrimination, and overturning a ban on immigrants with AIDS coming into the US. All of these laws replace previously outdated ones that no longer make sense. Obama has also appointed the first Latino to the Supreme Court, diminished the role of lobbyists in the White House, and is attempting to establish a strong bond between the United States and the Muslim world. These accomplishments are very important to the well being of our country.

President Barack Obama had accomplished countless things even before he became President. He rose from poverty to become a US senator, and then became the first African American commander in chief. However, if Mr. Obama does not succeed as President, these accomplishments will be forgotten. Obama needs to continue to focus on jobs, and make creating them his number one priority. This doesn't mean that he should forget health care though. Health care reform is essential for the millions of people who cannot get treatment because of the price. President Obama also needs to stand by his pledge to end the Iraq War and his commitment to close Guantanamo Bay. I believe that if Barack Obama stays true to his promises, he will be remembered as a successful leader.



*"Democracy's the worst
form of government
except for all the others."*
- Winston Churchill

Obama's Folly

By: Max Guerrero-Sapone
Class of 2010



It has been just more than a year since Barack Obama was inaugurated President by the people of the United States. Many held high expectations for the first half-black leader of America. Obama's greatest initial promise to his constituents was a system of government-run universal healthcare. It appears that this promise has been forgotten by the Americans' new leader. In the year since his inauguration, Obama's healthcare promise has been beaten to the pulp by all order of conservatives and even some Democrats. Now Americans are stuck with a bill that will only delay real healthcare reform from taking place. This is Obama's folly.

When Obama took office, he planned to work in a bipartisan manner. He proclaimed that he would abandon "politics as usual" for the sake of America's people. Even though the Democrats held a majority in both houses, Obama would not force healthcare through. The result, however, was not what he expected. Conservatives and liberals refused to agree on anything at all. In trying to work with the opposition, Obama was forced to abandon universal healthcare in favor of "health insurance reform" and a "public option". The "public option" would not even have been an option for the majority of Americans, who lie above the threshold of wealth set by the government. This "public option", which was the last bastion of a universal healthcare system in the bill, has been axed too, due to Obama's "bipartisan" style politics. While certain important reforms would be addressed, like employer mandate and pre-existing conditions, real universal healthcare would never be achieved. Now, Americans can hope only to remain in the "status quo" with a few added "comfort reforms".

The new healthcare bill will do little to throw out the "status quo" as Obama calls it. The current bill claims to accomplish ten "landmark reforms". These include "Prohibition of preexisting condition exclusions or other discrimination based on health status, fair insurance coverage, guaranteed availability of coverage, guaranteed renewability of coverage, bringing down the cost of health care coverage, prohibiting discrimination against individual participants and beneficiaries based on health status, ensuring the quality of care, coverage of preventive health services, extension of dependent coverage and finally, no lifetime or annual limits." These reforms would improve the current system to some degree; however, if the United States enacted a true universal healthcare system, none of them would be necessary.

Continuing to leave insurance in the hands of the private sector will only result in profit motive remaining supreme, with or without these reforms. While the bill will improve the current care provided, it will do little to reduce premiums. Without a "public option", there is no way to encourage competition among the various insurance companies. Without competition, however, the purpose of the bill is defeated. Healthcare costs may be cut to some degree, but the money spent enacting this bill will most likely outweigh the benefits. Finally, the bill will not expand coverage to all Americans, the initial goal of the bill. Most remarkable of all, however, is that Obama's current folly is not the first healthcare reform failure.

Most of this crisis could have been averted if Obama had taken a look at history. In 1993, President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary began attempting to implement a system similar to Obama's initial version of universal healthcare. It included programs that would allow those below a certain threshold to pay nothing for healthcare and "alliances" similar to Obama's idea of a healthcare exchange. It did not take long for the bill to be squashed down into nothingness, however. Both Democrats and Republicans offered many different amendments to the bill, which plagued the process with constant changes. Republicans fiercely blocked the bill and as Lawrence O'Donnell in a Huffington Post article said "There are no real filibusters in the Senate anymore. The way you 'filibuster' a bill that you want to kill is offer an endless stream of reasonable sounding amendments that have to be debated and voted on. When the majority leader brings up a two thousand page bill, the minority would normally come up with at least five hundred amendments that could drag out the debate for several months" eventually killing the bill. By September of 1994, the Clinton bill was dead. The same thing is currently happening to the Obama bill.

*"A politician thinks of the
next election - a
statesman of the next
generation."*

- James Freeman
Clarke



Obama was not experienced enough to have been elected President of the United States. He does not understand the political system. Rather than trying to change the political system, Obama should have worked on passing real healthcare reform. Now Americans are left with a bill that will only delay this real healthcare reform. While Americans wait for a real end to the “status quo”, many more will continue to be forlorn by insurance companies. How and when America creates a universal healthcare system is debatable, but there is no question as to whether such a system is necessary. Hopefully, future leaders will learn from Obama’s folly. The American people come first and their welfare should be secured *with or without* bipartisan support.



“The greater the number of laws and enactments, the greater the number of thieves and robbers.”

- Lao Tzu

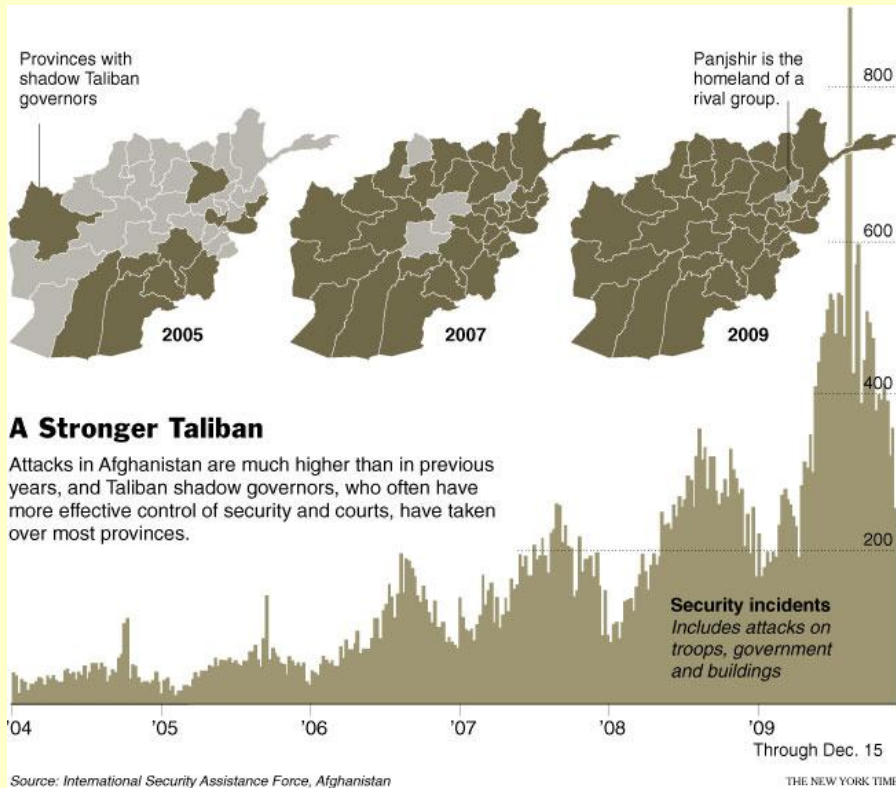


War of Words

By: Henry Burbank
Class of 2012



After being at war for nine years, you'd think that a modern, well-equipped and well-led military force such as NATO could beat a small guerilla force such as the Taliban. Unfortunately this is not the case. If anything, we are losing the war. The Taliban are gradually taking control of more provinces, and as you can see by the graph below, attacks have increased dramatically over the past five years.



To counter this strong Taliban presence, NATO commander General Stanley McChrystal has resorted to “winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.” The Taliban, eager to oust NATO forces and re-establish their Islamic theocracy, are also developing their “public relations” campaign. Last spring, the Taliban came out with a new document which stated the rules of engagement, if you will, of its fighters.

It lists such actions as no cutting out tongues, no beheadings, and complying with the Geneva Convention. Wow, the Taliban is actually becoming civilized; for a guerilla movement that protects the most wanted man in the world.

But there is the brilliance, The Taliban have started to become civilized. They have forbidden attacks on civilians, are trying to disassociate themselves with al-Qaeda, who got them into this mess nine years ago, and are embracing tools such as the Internet and cellular devices to spread their message. These are actions that would not have even been proposed during the past couple years. The Taliban are trying to send a message of “peace” to the civilians to win their hearts and minds. They’re starting to behave more like politicians than fighters.

We have seen this all before in history. From a period beginning in the 1950s to the 1980s, an organization called the Muslim Brotherhood was declared illegal by the Egyptian government. The Brotherhood had advocated imposing Islamic Sharia law, rejecting influence from western powers, and voiced general opposition to the secular Egyptian government under the leadership of Gamal Nasser. In 1954, Nasser was assassinated by a suspected Brotherhood member, although the group has denied any responsibility. In the 70s and 80s, the organization supported the Prime Minister Anwar Sadat, until he agreed to a peace agreement with Israel in 1979 and was assassinated by a non-Brotherhood member in 1981. If you fast forward about twenty years, you’ll see that while the Brotherhood is still illegal in Egypt, 88 of its members were elected to Parliament in 2005, making up 20% of the parliamentary body, making it currently the largest opposition party in Egyptian politics.



The election was said to be a fair and balanced election by the Egyptian government, and today, the Muslim Brotherhood is involved in many humanitarian projects throughout the world. Whether it's raising awareness about the innocent killings in Nigeria or raising money for Haitian relief. Compare that to an organization that many believe was responsible for the assassination of Egypt's Prime Minister in '54.

Now, all of this is interesting, but what does it really have to do with the Taliban? Well, just like the Brotherhood, the Taliban is trying to include its public image. They are very concerned with what people think of them, because scare tactics can only get them so far, especially when there is a large force such as NATO in competition with them. "There is a tremendous change in the Taliban's behavior," said Haji-Khan Muhammad Khan, a tribal elder from Shawalikot, a rural district of Kandahar Province. "They don't behead people or detain those they suspect of spying without an investigation. But sometimes they still make mistakes, people still fear them, but now generally they behave well with people. They had to change because the leadership of the Taliban did not want to lose the support of the grass roots."

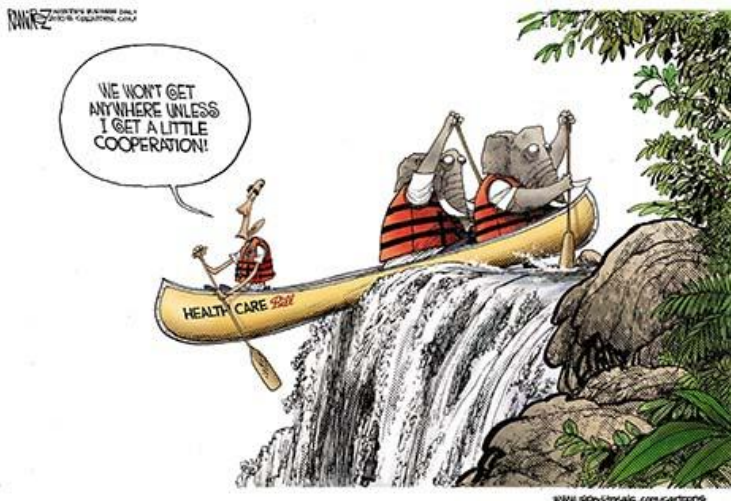
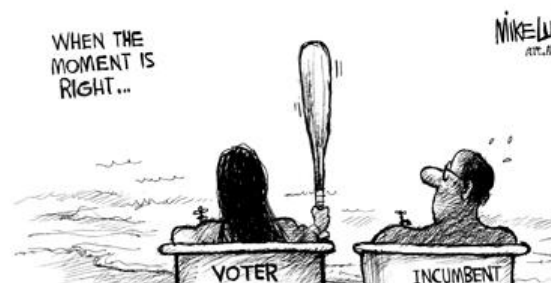
Unfortunately for the Taliban, poll results show that 42% of Afghans blame violence on the Taliban rather than the 36% that believed that it was caused by NATO last year. Also, 82% of Afghans believe that democracy will work in their country, and 75% are satisfied with the recent election outcome with 68% supporting U.S. presence in the country. When it comes to what is happening in Afghanistan presently, the Taliban are in a state of natural selection. They either have to adapt or die. Right now it looks like they are trying to adapt, and who knows, maybe they'll wind up as the main opposition in Parliament in twenty years or so.

*"War is a continuation
of policy by other
means"*

- Carl Von Clausewitz



Political Cartoon Page



Political Awareness Club:

President: Thomas Gaudett '10

Vice President: Matt Juul '10

Zeitgeist Editor: Michael Love '10

Secretary: Henry Burbank '12

Have something to say?

Stop by Mr. Szablewicz's room (B407) every Thursday after school