

Zeitgeist



Spirit of the Times

February 2014

Editor-in-Chief: Christopher Specht '15

Leaders of Political Awareness Society

Presidents: James Mangan '15 and Wit Geffs '14

About the Club

In a matter of years, our generation will be the status quo. We will be running the businesses and casting the votes and contributing to the culture that will serve to identify our country for decades to come. As such, it is our duty to cultivate a devotion to political curiosity and vigilance so that we can shape this future in the most well informed manner we possibly can. The Political Awareness Club is a part of that cultivation, providing an environment for students to discuss and debate what is going on in the world and develop their own unique perspective they can carry with them into the adult world. We meet on Thursday afternoons in Mr. Szabs's room (B407). All are welcome to attend.

Note: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and are in no way intended to reflect those of Fairfield Prep as an institution.

In this issue:

Page 4- **Let's Talk Guns** by Christopher Specht '15

Page 6- **The Case for Raising the Minimum Wage** by James Mangan '15

Page 9- **Has Freedom of Speech Been Taken Too Far?** by Wit Geffs '15

Page 11- **Am I Charlie?** by Mark Sheffer '17

Page 13- **Jeb Bush 2016** by Tom Wiig '15

Page 15- **Renewable Energy: Making the Switch** by Michael Turk '17

Page 17- **Cuba: Reconnecting with the Reclusive State** by William Stone '15

Page 18- **Why Gas Prices are Dropping** by Sam Day '15

Page 20- **Is Bloomberg Running a Nanny State?** by Ciaran O'Reilly

Let's Talk Guns Christopher Specht '15

Guns, guns, guns; they seem to be everywhere. Gun laws are all the news will talk about, and there are plenty of passionate arguments from both sides. With an issue as important to our country as our policy on firearms, let's and focus on what really matters: saving lives. For a moment, let's put aside the hysteria that surrounds this topic and focus on what will actually work. Though many fervently support stricter restrictions, gun control is not the ideal or practical path for America because it cannot work in this country, and it will not only fail to prevent mass shootings, but it will also worsen their consequences.

Supporters of gun control are correct in saying firearm laws *could* work in other countries, and it's hard to ignore the success of countries such as Australia, which passed strict gun

control legislation after a 1996 mass shooting in Port Arthur, Tasmania. Since the laws were passed, gun related homicides dropped 59 percent, and gun related suicides dropped 65 percent.

However, Australia is markedly different from America because of its relatively isolated location. Australia's success is, at least in part, due to the ease with which Australia can stop the flow of arms into the country. For example, whereas America would have to worry about smuggling from both large domestic gangs and powerful Latin American cartels, the much smaller and weaker crime syndicates from Papua New Guinea are Australia's largest threat. With regard to gun policy, comparing Australia to America is both unfair and unrealistic.

It would be more prudent to predict the success of American gun laws by studying Mexico, America's

neighbor to the South. Mexico is close in proximity, fought a war of independence against a European power, and even has a version of the Second Amendment in its Constitution. One crucial difference, though, is that Mexican laws make it nearly impossible for its citizens from obtaining guns. Another is that annually, over 11,000 Mexican citizens die in gun related homicides because the country's gun control laws do little to stop the Mexican cartels from obtaining firearms. American gangs similarly obtain and use illegal firearms for their crimes, so how would stricter domestic gun laws produce a different result than in Mexico? The truth is that gun control won't work in America because when guns are outlawed, only the outlaws will have guns.

Gun control advocates also believe that tougher legislation would prevent mass shootings in America, but

this is also untrue. Let's examine the shooting in Newtown two years ago. The shooting took place in an elementary school, where guns are prohibited. As such, the only person armed at the time of the shooting was Adam Lanza, the shooter. The prohibition of guns did not protect the people in Sandy Hook, but rather left them defenseless against Lanza. If there were armed personnel in the school, they would be able to reduce the number of deaths and apprehend the shooter. Similar gun prohibitions left law-abiding citizens defenseless in mass shootings all over America, such as in Aurora, Colorado or on the campus of Virginia Tech. Gun prohibitions have both clearly failed to prevent mass shootings and worsened their impacts by leaving victims defenseless, so how could we expect to see anything different if we implement such prohibitions on a

larger scale? The end result would be the same: disaster.

With cartels, gangs, mass shooters, and other dangers threatening the country, America is faced with a choice. What are we to do about guns? Fortunately, analyzing the impact of gun laws in America and countries like it yield a simple answer. The government cannot possibly stop *all* arms trafficking or *all* mass shooters, but it can impact the people's ability to defend themselves and apprehend criminals. We must allow the people to have guns. Think of it this way; if a violent criminal threatened you with a knife, what would be your best course of action? Would you rather brandish your gun, or would you call the police, wait for them to bring their guns, and try to plead for your life for ten minutes? I thought so.

The Case for Raising the Minimum Wage **James Mangan '15**

It used to be in the United States that high school kids and young people looking to make a couple extra bucks on the side were the primary holders of minimum wage jobs. Today, the average age of a minimum wage earner is now 35 years old. These minimum wage jobs are no longer just throwaway gigs that substitute an allowance: they are how families earn money. At this time more than ever, it is especially important that we provide hard-working Americans with relief from financial distress by increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. It is time we give these workers the economic justice they deserve and help our own economy as well.

The White House asserts "raising the federal minimum wage would not only benefit more than 28 million

workers across the country, but 19 million workers from all types of households would see a direct increase in their wages.” A grand total of 47 million American workers would benefit in one way or another from an increase in the minimum wage. These people are not “freeloaders” who sit around all day waiting for a check, as some people would like to characterize recipients of government aid, but 47 million people who go to work day in and day out to earn a living, and they certainly earn every penny they make. These workers are not the only ones who would benefit: their families would reap the benefits too. In fact, 19% of children age 18 and under in the United States depend on a parent earning the minimum wage. These workers and their families deserve economic justice.

It’s also not as if the business community opposes a reasonable bump

in the minimum wage. There are some people who voice concerns over laying off workers and how there might be negative effects of raising the minimum wage on our growing but fragile economy. While some of these concerns are legitimate, there seems to be a growing consensus in the business community that raising the minimum wage would have a positive effect on business. According to the United States Department of Labor, “A June 2014 survey found that more than 3 out of 5 small business owners support increasing the minimum wage to \$10.10. Small business owners believe that a higher minimum wage would benefit business in important ways: 58% say raising the minimum wage would increase consumer purchasing power. 56% say raising the minimum wage would help the economy.” Small businesses and mom-and-pop stores are

the backbone of our economy. By putting more money into the hands of 47 million Americans, it is clear that small businesses would prosper, and a sizable majority of small business owners would tend to agree with this assertion. Now maybe some of these business owners are just altruistic, but for the most part they're in business to make money, and they aren't stupid. They see that an increase in the minimum wage will help their business and our economy. This is not just the right thing to do: it is the most economically prudent choice as well.

For far too long in this country the wealthiest among us have been stepping on the backs of the poorest among us. The wealth has almost entirely been redistributed to them, and they use dubious business practices to nickel and dime the American worker. Our politicians cater to the wealthiest

1% who finances their campaigns but they cannot ignore the voices of 47 million Americans who demand fairer wages to benefit themselves and their families. The time has undoubtedly come to recognize hard working Americans who very rarely get a place at the table. For years while inflation has increased, the minimum wage has remained stagnant and these workers have suffered in silence. No one is "giving" them anything; they are simply claiming what they are owed. This is not merely the right thing to do. Raising the minimum wage will have a beneficial impact on our stagnant economy. Raise the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour. Raise it tomorrow. It's about time 47 million Americans get the wages they deserve.

**Has Freedom of Speech Been Taken Too Far?
Wit Geffs '15**

Since the terrorist attack in Paris, the issue of freedom of speech has been a hotly debated topic. What does freedom of speech truly mean? Should religions have a say in what can be said about their religious figures? Does the safety of the public outweigh the people's right to free press?

There are no straight answers to those questions. Nearly all modern governments, including our own, have a very clear separation of church and state, so threats to national security that have religious origins are very hard to debate. The fact is clear that the writers of Charlie Hebdo were antagonizing an entire faith. After an unsuccessful terrorist attack on the same building in 2012 the editor of the magazine said, "I am not afraid of retaliation. I have no kid, no wife, no car, and no credit. It surely is a bit pompous, but I'd rather die on my feet, than live on my knees".

The last line of this quote has become the main sentence in the peaceful protests in Paris over the last few weeks.

This attack was in no way justified by any religious beliefs or any reason anyone could possibly think of. Terrorism is by far the worst way to deliver any message. Major Muslim groups located in Paris and all over the world have denounced these men who did this horrible crime and have prayed for the families of the deceased. The one thing western media needs to wrap their head around is how much this simple act of depicting a prophet instantly offends 1.2 billion people. Islam is one of the most demanding religions. It requires full belief and dedication to the faith. The majority of these 1.2 billion Muslims live every second of their lives through their religion. A true Muslim is as loyal to Islam as the pope is to Catholicism. So when a newspaper

blatantly offends such a sacred figure, is it really the morally right thing to do to support acts like this? Yes, freedom of speech is important, but there are lines that legally cannot be crossed? In the United States, it is illegal to verbally threaten the president's life; it is illegal to incite panic. Many other countries have very similar laws. Freedom of the press in respect to the betterment of humanity should be protected at all costs. Charlie Hebdo was not bettering humanity; they were making a few people laugh, but in reality, they were hate mongering. They were releasing these hate filled magazines against a mostly peaceful religion in hopes to provoke a response, and sadly they got one.

Religion cannot be toyed with so lightly. Because of the separation of church and state, no major government can ever pass a law that prohibits such a

thing as illustrating a prophet. So the burden falls upon the people to learn from the mistakes of others. Hate mongering is a cruel thing that in the past has led to such events as the Holocaust and Japanese internment camps. We cannot blame the entirety of Islam for this attack. In reality, it's a few radicals who acted irrationally and preformed a terrible act. The proportion of radical Muslims to peaceful ones is comparable to the proportion of peaceful Christians to members of the KKK. The attacks on Charlie Hebdo were wrong and horrendous acts; no one can argue against that. It is up to us to make sure nothing like that ever happens again. How? I don't have all the answers, but what I do know is that religious tolerance and respect is a good start.

Am I Charlie?
Mark Sheffer '17

Before we don our "Je Suis Charlie" t-shirts and post the phrase on Twitter, let's ask ourselves this question, "Would a publication like Charlie Hebdo be allowed to operate in the United States?" If the answer is "no," are we Americans really "Charlie"?

First, we must answer the question of what does it mean to be "Charlie?" in this case, Charlie was an obscure weekly French magazine that satirized and mocked everything from the pope to French President Francois Hollande to Muhammad. Clearly, the newspaper was an "equal opportunity offender", as many people found its content offensive. Special editions such as one in which the Prophet Muhammad was supposedly a guest editor and one with illustrations depicting the Pope and

a Swiss guard embracing each other are just a few examples from their raunchy retinue. Figuratively, "Charlie" has come to symbolize the inalienable right to say and write what you want. This is a right that actually exists under law to varying degrees around the world. It has become a rallying cry for millions in the streets of Paris, including Muslims, celebrities and politicians.

When do you cross the line between exercising your freedom of speech and breaking the rules of common decency? There is no doubt that the men and women who died at the Charlie Hebdo attack should be celebrated as martyrs of free speech, they died for what they said, even though what they said was not particularly heroic or admirable. Thankfully, social rules are a bit more bendable than the law. Charlie Hebdo was always acting within the legal limit

set in France. Free societies must save room for satirists and mockery.

Freedom of expression is not simply a legal matter, it also involves the social contracts that we have with one another. How tolerant are we really about those whose opinions we find offensive or different? Or whose donations to politicians we find offensive? Or affiliations with groups whose positions anger us? Not very.

The increasing polarization of news sources and political ideologies breaks down the foundation of freedom of speech. Freedom of speech doesn't just involve saying what you want to say when you want to say it, it also involves tolerating views that you find wrong-headed, uninformed or offensive like Charlie. In repressive societies like North Korea, freedom of expression is the biggest threat to the government. That is why these nations carefully

monitor and control the media, particularly social media. Conversely, the Arab Spring was, in part, the result of the ability of educated youth to express their aspirations for themselves and their nations.

In many cases, Americans call on their fellow citizens to support boycotts, firings, and expulsions of those whose expressions offend them. How different is taking away someone's ability to make a living because of their views than passing laws to prohibit the expression in the first place? These actions clearly can have a chilling effect on the free expression of opinions, particularly in a digital society where internet "shaming" has become a common and quite effective. Sony backed down to threats from North Korea upon the release of *The Interview*. Hollywood, known for

voicing its opinion on everything from fracking to football, stayed largely silent.

The acts of the terrorists in Paris were clearly indefensible and we should fight against these kinds of acts wherever we find them. But this tragedy should also cause us to reflect on our own levels of tolerance for journalism, art or commentary that make us uncomfortable. In the end, it seems unlikely Charlie Hebdo would have been able to exist in America today – commercially or even legally. A free press is essential to a free society, and we must fight for it as well.

Jeb Bush 2016
Tom Wiig '15

With Jeb Bush “actively considering the possibility of running for the oval office”(quote), is it possible that we may see another Bush in the White House?

Another question stands – would America want another Bush?

Both George H.W. and George W. weren't viewed very highly by the population while they were in office. America hasn't quite forgotten about the Great Recession that saw the presidential approval rating (of W.) fall to the lowest levels since Nixon's Watergate scandal. In fact, both saw approval ratings in the low-30s and high-20s in the latter years of their time in office. It's possible that the Bush label may not be one with a good connotation.

Speaking of labels, let's talk parties. Jeb does have a slight advantage in this category, with the 2014 midterm elections showing discontent with Democrats in Washington. Obama's approval rating isn't anything too impressive, as stagnant wages and negative views on the economy continue to plague his years in office. As long as

the Republicans don't make any major mistakes and things remain relatively the same, the GOP could have a slight advantage with the people in the next election. With Obama's average ratings and slight but noticeably increasing approval for the second Bush's presidency, Jeb may be allowed to have some hope for the next election.

We can't even be sure the Republicans want him. Jeb Bush takes on a more liberal standpoint on some issues than the GOP calls for. Jeb also found himself criticizing the Republican Party multiple times for its strict adherence to ideology and claims that the modern GOP wouldn't endorse candidates like his own father or even Reagan. As a supporter of the Common Core and immigration reform, he already causes quite a bit of conflict with the Republican Party. Furthermore, his tax, spending, and green policies aren't as

conservative as the right seems to want. Jeb may have to do some work to get right wing activists to support him in 2016.

However, I think Jeb could have a strong showing. Having the Bush name might be better than no name, despite the unpopularity of his brother and father. Americans tend to be more comfortable with people they know, and Jeb would be no exception. With a political dynasty grander than any other family's in recent American history, Bush has become a household name.

Furthermore, Jeb's track record as Florida Governor is notable, with success in increasing reading scores of fourth grade students at a rate over four times the national average from 1998 to 2005. His "A+ Plan for Education" helped hold schools accountable for slipups in their achievement on the state level, resulting in much better

achievement for Florida on the national level. He successfully spent \$8bn on restoring the Everglades in a 50-50 partnership with the federal government. He also set aside one million acres of land for conservation efforts as well. Jeb's center-of-the-road policies could be what a deeply divided and gridlocked Washington needs.

Renewable Energy: Making the Switch
Michael Turk '17

In some countries, renewable energy is cheaper than fossil fuels. It also creates three times more jobs than fossil fuels. In addition, renewable sources of energy like hydropower, wind and solar do not directly emit any greenhouse gases. All of these statistics are promising, yet the United States still won't commit to making the switch from fossil fuel to renewable energy.

However, it is not only the U.S. that won't commit. Roughly 80% of the

world obtains energy from fossil fuels. If more people knew the outstanding benefits of renewable energy and the poor effects fossil fuels have on public and environmental health, then they would probably commit to renewable energy.

In the past several years, the U.S. has seen modest improvements in its attempt to switch to renewable energy. According the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, "In 2000, non-hydro renewables accounted for 3.5 percent of total energy consumed in the U.S.; in 2010, that number was only up to 5.8 percent. At that rate, by 2100, only a quarter of the energy we consume will be renewables." That means that we could continue using fossil fuels for some time at the rate we are going, which could have serious effects on the environment.

Fossil fuel emissions are the main cause of climate change, which will only become worse if we do not fix the problem at hand. Drilling for fossil fuels is a very dangerous game, especially when done in fragile environments. Today, five years after the massive BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, clean up efforts are still going on. In a situation like that, even though oil may not be visible on the surface, the environmental effects last for many years. In 2012, big oil companies starting to drill in the Arctic Ocean, a very fragile environment that would be impossible to clean up after an oil spill. When working with renewable energy, there is not even a possibility of an environmental disaster as destructive as the BP oil spill. If the United States ever decides to make the switch to renewable energy, it could already be too late for the environment.

There are many substantial benefits to switching to renewable energy. For one, switching to renewable energy would improve the quality of environmental health, slowing climate change. It produces close to no carbon emissions, as opposed to fossil fuels, which produce 57% of the carbon emissions worldwide, according to the EPA. Although fossil fuels have been around for a while, renewable energy has the potential to last for much longer. Unlike fossil fuels, renewable energies are inexhaustible, which means that they will never run out. In addition, making the switch to renewable energy would produce many jobs. While the fossil fuel industry relies heavily on technology, the renewable energy industry is more labor-intensive and would require three times more workers than fossil fuels, creating many new jobs. Lastly, renewable energy prices have steadily

dropped in recent years and will likely remain relatively stable in the future, whereas fossil fuel prices have fluctuated.

According to a 2013 Gallup Poll, 74% of all Americans think that the U.S. should put more emphasis on producing renewable energy. Even though most Americans are pro-renewable energy, there are some who still won't commit. The majority of those who don't favor renewable energy belong to the Republican Party. While only 47% of all Americans are pro-fossil fuels, 67% of Republicans want to keep drilling. This difference of opinion is partially because of the substantial funding Republicans receive every year from Big Oil companies. According to the New York Times, the Oil and Gas Industry gave 87% of its campaign contributions to Republicans. In addition, many of the

largest oil-producing states in the U.S. are dominantly Republican.

If we work together as a nation and voice our opinions, then we could begin to consider the possibility of a renewable energy-powered future.

Renewable energy is the best possible future for this country because of its outstanding benefits and the clear and present dangers of fossil fuels.

Cuba: Reconnecting with the Reclusive State **William Stone '15**

For decades, the United States and Cuba have maintained their severed diplomatic ties in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs debacle. However, on December 17, 2014 President Obama and President Raul Castro announced plans to restore diplomatic relations with each other. As a part of "normalizing" relations between both countries, embassies will be established-or rather- reestablished in

Havana and Washington DC. Many hail the Obama administration's efforts and see this as a first step on the long road to "normal" relations.

Unfortunately, there are many who cannot see this deal as a good thing and decry it as too little too late. They vehemently bellow for the release of American prisoners and the lessening of draconian law enforcement in Cuba. These folk fail to see the long and winding road as it really is, and are impatient and unwilling to take the time and the decorum necessary to see it through to the end. Tensions are still high between the two countries, and it will take careful and delicate political maneuvering to completely heal the wounds between the US and Cuba.

On January 12th, 2015 Cuba released 53 prisoners as part of their agreement with the Obama administration, silencing many who

believed President Obama demanded too little of Castro. As communication and diplomacy become easier between the US and Cuba, America can begin to apply more diplomatic pressure to coerce or encourage President Castro to deal with his blatant disregard of human rights. Such schemes require a certain finesse and clout that the USA currently lacks with communist Cuba, and only through extending normalized relations will the USA ever be able to help bring an end to the tyrannical nature of Raul Castro's presidency.

Why Gas Prices are Dropping Sam Day '15

Any motorist could tell you that the price of gas, be it regular, premium, or even diesel, is on the decline, but few people know why. A lot of what is contributing to the dropping of prices is the crude oil that gas companies so desperately rely on. It is fairly simple, as

the price of oil goes down, the companies can spend less on the oil and thus charge less for the gas to turn the same profit.

But the question is why? The answer is also a simple economics concept; supply and demand. Within many modern countries, there is a movement for more fuel efficient cars which obviously lowers consumption of fuel and thus lowers the demand. When countries begin to buy less oil, the countries selling it have to make changes to compensate for the lowered rate of consumption. To do so, they are lowering prices to make it more appealing to the countries buying the oil. This leads to lower prices in those countries.

Supply and demand is not the only economic idea responsible for lowering gas prices; the free market is helping as well. The countries selling the oil are

seeing more competition than ever before. Oil production has doubled in the last six years which not only lowers US demand for international oil, but in doing so; the supplying countries need to find a new market. Most supplying countries are looking to extremely competitive Asian markets, forcing them to lower their prices.

As oil prices begin to fall below \$50 a barrel, economists predict an even bigger drop, under \$40 a barrel, to come in 2015. This all sounds like good news to the average American, but some news outlets are claiming it causes more harm than help to the U.S. economy. This is a ridiculous point to make. Putting more money in Americans' pockets to spend elsewhere is never a bad thing. The only supporting argument for this, which is not a horrible argument, just a short-sighted one, is that most estimates point to about 0.6% - 1.0% of U.S. GDP

growth since the financial crisis came from the explosion in U.S. shale gas. Other than that, there is no evidence than low oil prices are hurting the American economy. Money in the pocket of the consumer, which accounts for about 70% of our GDP, to spend on other things is great for an economy. An Oxford research paper found that America would see a 0.5% growth in GDP if oil stays at \$40 a barrel versus \$84 a barrel.

Is Bloomberg Running a Nanny State? Ciaran O'Reilly '16

Around this time last year, New York City took a stab at reducing smoking and became the first major city in the US to implement a law raising the tobacco buying age to 21. The law was passed by Mike Bloomberg, who previously attempted to limit consumption of sugary drinks. The law will cost the state tens of millions in tax revenue per year and further empower

the black market. The goal of the project is to disable smokers from forming an addiction at their most vulnerable age. What it's doing is treating adults like children.

The age of 18 means adulthood in this country. It is the legal age to vote and to join the military. Mike Bloomberg is doing everything he can to turn New York City into the definition of a nanny state, and it should not be tolerated. This is a free country; the government should avert making decisions for citizens on matters of their personal behaviors. Bloomberg has commenced his mission of raising health standards in an extreme fashion, which will more than likely be less effective than Public Service Announcements or New York Smokers' Quit line.

The black market in New York City deals nearly half of all cigarettes

sold (48%). Since the first age restrictions were put in place, this is how adolescents bought their cigarettes. These cigarettes are shipped from out of state and sold at a lower price than in the stores because they're exempt from taxes. With the new law in place, there is another three years' worth of young smokers taking the money that would've otherwise been spent on regulated, taxed cigarettes and using it to feed the black market.

Smokers as well as young non-smokers of New York City generally disapprove of the law. It is least popular

amongst younger smokers. Numerous NYU students were asked their opinion on the matter. 9 out of 10 predicted the results will not prompt any major changes in stopping young people from smoking, as they all started smoking years before they legally could. Many concluded that cigarettes will continue to promise rebellion and independence to teens, and therefore the black market will gain customers. This law is over controlling and should be revoked. It is not right that an eighteen year old can fight for their country and get turned away trying to buy a pack of smokes.