

The Fairfield Prep Political Awareness Society presents:

# Zeitgeist



Spirit of the Times

October 2015

## **The Fairfield Prep Political Awareness Society**

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## **About the Society**

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 possible. The Political Awareness Society 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 perspectives that they can carry with them into the adult world. We meet every Thursday afternoon in Mr. Szablewicz'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.

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**Pope Francis' Message to America:  
An Interview with Thomas Simisky, S.J.**

**MT:** Can you tell me about your visit to see Pope Francis in Washington D.C.?

**TS:** When I travelled to Washington, D.C., I invited a Prep board member and alumnus with me. He picked me up from the Georgetown Jesuit Community, where I was staying, at 4:20 a.m. because the gates opened at 5:00 a.m. We waited in line and, when the gates opened, we were able to get through all the security and run up as far as we could on the Capitol Lawn. Then, we had to wait out there for another five hours because the Pope didn't address Congress until 10:00 a.m. There were big TV screens so that we could watch the address. I thought it was an amazing address. It was very much addressed to our country's situation right now, and it called us to better live out our ideals. The Pope was constantly reminding us that we are a great country founded on great ideals, and we really need to live that out now. These ideals we hear especially in the Declaration of Independence.

We were there for five hours, but the Pope only spoke for about an hour, and a little after 11:00 a.m. he came out on the balcony of the Capitol to address the public. The address was interesting because he was speaking in English, but he was tied to his script because English isn't his first language. But, when he came out to the balcony, his first words were, "Buenos días," and the whole crowd erupted with applause. You could just feel how natural he felt. He loves being around people. Even from where we were, you picked up a sense that he is a man of the people. I think, for him, the real challenge was all the security. The Secret Service and everyone were so worried about his safety that they created a lot of space between him and the people, and his own personal guards kept bringing over babies and children for him to kiss. He would much rather just be completely surrounded by people all the time.

**MT:** Why do you think that the Pope is so popular in the United States and worldwide?

**TS:** I think he is what we need right now. He is a person that is reminding us of the fullness of Christianity and what it means to live out Christian faith. He very much emphasizes Catholic social teaching, which can sometimes be forgotten because the press, newspaper, and some politicians just want to focus on certain issues, and he is reminding us about all of the issues, especially the Church's preferential option for the poor. A lot of people, even non-Christians and people of no faith, respond to him because he's calling on something in all of humanity, and he sees the goodness of humanity, and that resonates. As people of faith from the Judeo-Christian tradition, we know that all humans have been created in God's image, so I think what's resonating is God's image in the people he comes across.

**MT:** What do you think about his emphasis on the value of life?

**TS:** I think his message is so powerful because it's a message of life, and I think that's what the Gospel message is, too. When Jesus was talking, he was constantly preaching about the Kingdom of God, but he also preached about life and choosing life over death. Pope Francis is calling us to live out our lives, and the fullness of humanity is to live out our lives according to faith. What I am excited about right now, especially being at Fairfield Prep, is that what he is talking about really makes it easy to engage with young people because he is talking about issues that young people are interested in, like the environment, life, and caring for the poor. He has created a lot of good will. Now, he has opened the door for more conversations, and we have to be able to welcome people in through that open door, engage with them, and show them the fullness of the Gospel messages.

**MT:** What are your thoughts on his stance on climate change?

**TS:** I think one of the nice things about what he says is that it's always in a larger context, and it's ultimately looking at all people with human dignity. He is also focusing on understanding the brotherhood and sisterhood that we share with all of humanity and God's great love for humanity. When he is talking about relationships, he wants us first to focus on the person and not to get lost in issues, when really the person in front of us is who we should be caring for. The main topic of his encyclical is the environment, but it's really on how our decisions, as humans, that affect the environment really affect the poor. It's really a social justice encyclical, and it's a reminder to us that, with climate change, certain decisions will disproportionately affect the poor. It is important to remember that we really need to take responsibility for our decisions as individuals and as societies, as well.

**MT:** In what ways can American politicians learn from the Pope's Jesuit values?

**TS:** When I was in Washington, there was a great spirit across the city. For the three days that I was there, everybody was happy, and people were treating each other probably better than they normally do. There was really just a good mood throughout the entire city, and you didn't feel the divisiveness and difficulties, just that people wanted to come together because of Pope Francis. I think he is a person that unifies and attracts, and that's something of God. Sin is what divides us and leads to violence and conflict, but God's love is what unifies us.

**MT:** Additionally, in what ways do you hope that the Pope's message will impact our politicians' decisions?

**TS:** I hope they hear his message of focusing on the person and remembering all of Catholic social teaching, especially human dignity, the importance of family, the value of work, and the preferential option for the poor. Hopefully, they are able to keep that bigger picture. Also, with gatherings within the Jesuit community like sending students to Philadelphia to see Pope Francis

or to the Ignatian Teach-In, you can really appreciate that you're a part of this much larger network, this Jesuit network of schools that stretches across the country and across the world. It's a tradition of education that has been around for nearly 500 years, and it is pretty powerful to see yourself as part of that. When being around the Pope, especially, you can tell that he is very humble. Even here at Jesuit schools, when we talk about the Magis and the greater glory of God, it's not just for us, but it's more about focusing on God.

**MT:** How do you hope that the Pope's visit will improve the secular-religious divide in our country?

**TS:** I hope it leads to us looking for what's in common; in our faith, we believe that we are all created in God's image, so there is that sense that we are all created out of love and that God is calling us to greater communion and union with one another. I think if we can stay focused on that, and how we can come together and let go of what divides us, there will be a very positive outcome.

**MT:** Lastly, how do you hope that the Pope's message will affect Prep students and youth around the country?

**TS:** I hope it creates more interest and engagement. Some people think that all religion takes place inside a church, and then it can become irrelevant. Whereas, the Pope's message is, in terms of social justice, that our faith should involve all aspects of our lives, that there is a great connectivity between our faith, our actions, and the effects of our actions on the environment and other people, and that we are responsible for one another.

Damian Chessare '17

## **Money is Not Speech: The Fate of the American Republic**

Super PACs. T.V. ads. Never-ending phone calls. The sensationally ridiculous Fox News and the disgustingly biased CNN. All of these terms remind the average American of the circus that we now call an election. Once the international showcase of democracy, the American election was an opportunity for great men to succeed the Founding Fathers and emulate their brilliance, to stand the ultimate test of the American people. American elections were, most importantly, a free exchange of thoughts and ideas for the advancement of the “American experiment” and the pinnacle of republican democracy. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case, and the definition of the United States as a republic is quickly descending into question.

American politics and elections are controlled by money, not the citizenry. Corporations and trade unions pour exorbitant, uncontrolled amounts of money

into political campaigns, actively searching for and advantageously utilizing every loophole found in our country’s weak campaign finance laws. Through the use of Super PACs, third party organizations, foreign companies, and even governments like those of Saudi Arabia and Israel can spend unlimited amounts of money on candidates who are enslaved to their sponsors' priorities. Wall Street banks and companies, such as Citi Group, fund countless Congressional candidates to advance their agenda of minimal government oversight and maximum corporate profit. These third parties hijack the public voice through expensive political ads, commercials, and propaganda. Furthermore, elected officials in the pockets of interest groups promote hyper-partisanship and are unable to reach common ground.

As a result, the money donated by corporations, unions, and other third party donors mutes the voice of the American people. The wants and needs of the American people are replaced by the self-serving desires of rich organizations. Elections measure the



depth of a candidate's pockets as opposed to that of their character, and it is the dollar, not the vote, that gives the government its authority. American democracy is perverted and undermined by the tyranny of the dollar, and, as long as that influence is unregulated, the American republic morphs into a paradox of its founding and values.

In order for a nation to be a democracy, power must be equally distributed among the voting population. If those who can write the largest checks are able to dictate the course of government, then the will of the people is largely ignored. Big money in politics puts those without fortune or wealthy friends at a large disadvantage, thus making the electoral playing field grossly unequal. As long as corporate bank accounts and trade union treasuries make or break the once free American election, elections are neither truly free nor fair. The influence of these organizations essentially steals "the microphone" from the people and uses it to advance their own agendas at the expense of the people. Unless campaign finance reform is enacted, Congress will continue to be ineffective and out of touch as it fails to

accomplish its sole purpose: representing the people and enacting needed change for the good of the nation.

In 2010, the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision ruled that "money equals free speech," thus unleashing a deluge of third party money in political elections and paving the way for colossal super PACs and campaign expenditures. If money is free speech, then that implies that those with more money are entitled to a larger say in government and more freedom versus those with smaller bank accounts.

One cannot possibly accept that statement after reading this nation's founding documents. How can one justify giving more freedom to select citizens based on their wealth? Does the phrase "all men are created equal" resonate? The U.S. Constitution clearly states that the government can "make no law...abridging the freedom of speech" in Article 1 of the Bill of Rights. Surely, I wonder where the Constitution was when majority opinion justices of the Supreme Court delivered their verdict. The *Citizens United* decision overruled congressional finance reform laws, specifically the McCain-

Feingold Act, and tore down the structure of fair campaign laws. Soon after, Maine Senator Olympia Snowe called the decision a “serious disservice to our country.”

Campaign finance reform is imperative for the longevity and survival of American democracy. Without it, the United States is no longer the republic that the Founders envisioned but instead a gross plutocracy controlled by the rich, robbing the people of their voice and liberty. Money must be controlled in political elections, or else we risk the downfall of the American republic and way of life. Without regulation, elections are neither free nor democratic and are not controlled by the will of the people. As our nation looks to elect new leaders next year in 2016, we must be looking to support those who support democracy and not the intrusion of corporate, trade union, or Wall Street influence into American elections.



Nicholas Duffy '18

### **Bye, Bye, Boehner!**

Speaker of the House John Boehner recently announced that he will be stepping down from his position at the end of October. Boehner's decision to step down did not come as much of a surprise. For the past year or so, he has been under pressure from many far-right Republicans, who wanted more confrontational policies in regard to combatting the Democrats. Most recently, they opposed funding Planned Parenthood, a major women's health provider.

Boehner has served as Speaker of the House since 2010, and he has struggled to manage the Tea Party since the beginning of his tenure. Some believe that he has never truly had any control of these Tea Party Republicans. He has allowed them to complicate several legislative efforts without consequence, one of which includes Immigration Reform in 2013. Although Boehner has announced he will be stepping down on October 30, his expected successor, Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), stated earlier this month that he would not pursue the

speakership. Boehner's resignation has led to a great deal of confusion in the GOP over who the next Speaker will be. It will be a tumultuous next few months for both the Republican Party and the House of Representatives.

Update: As of October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) was elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives.



Chris Iannaccone '16

### **Are There Realistic GOP Candidates?**

The race for the 2016 Republican Presidential nomination has been one of the most competitive and polarizing nomination processes in years. There are currently fifteen

candidates in the national polls, which can be quite overwhelming for both Republican and non-Republican voters following the 2016 election. Therefore, in order to truly understand the Republican presidential nomination, we need to break down the list by sorting the candidates into categories.

First, is the “irrelevant” category, whose members include candidates who have no chance of winning the nomination but refuse to drop out of the race. This category includes: former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, Ohio Governor John Kasich, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, former Governor of New York George Pataki, and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. A number of these candidates are irrelevant because they never gained much support and have not distinguished themselves from other candidates. Others, like Rand Paul and Mike Huckabee, hold strong opinions that simply do not resonate with enough Republicans. For example, Paul’s views on isolationism and small government and Huckabee’s

conservative morals have done more to hurt than help them on the campaign trail.

Within the irrelevant category, there are also candidates who entered the race as top presidential prospects but fell in the polls due to issues in their home state, such as Governors Bobby Jindal and Chris Christie. Jindal's issue was that the Louisiana state budget was hurt by low oil prices, and the state was spending too much. Likewise, Christie's problem was the notorious "Bridgegate Scandal" which ended all chances for Christie being viewed as a bi-partisan candidate.

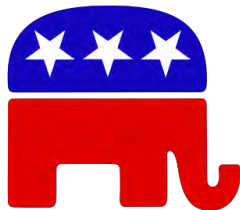
The second category is the "lost middle." This category encompasses candidates who had some momentum in the polls, but whether or not they are serious candidates is still questionable. The two members of this category are Texas Senator Ted Cruz and former Hewlett-Packard (HP) Chairwoman Carly Fiorina. Ted Cruz is in this category because of his support from the Tea Party, but it's doubtful that his popularity in the polls will change because his Tea Party views are unlikely to attract new voters. Similarly, Fiorina is in this category because

she came out of nowhere and grew in popularity because of her performance in the debates. She is also the only woman running and may receive more attention because of this. However, Fiorina's candidacy has received some criticism because of her lack of political experience and the fact that she was fired from HP in 2005.

In the final category are the "contenders." These are the candidates that have a legitimate chance of receiving the Republican nomination. These candidates are former Governor of Florida Jeb Bush, Florida Senator Marco Rubio, neurosurgeon Ben Carson, and real estate developer Donald Trump. First are Bush and Rubio, who were considered to be the frontrunners earlier in the year but have now fallen behind in the polls due to unexpected support for Trump and Carson. This is unusual because they have both won elections in Florida, a politically diverse state. Additionally, both of them hold more moderate positions on issues such as immigration, which could sway non-Republican voters. One reason why they are not leaders in the polls is due their restrained approaches during debates and their lack of

provocative statements, which both Trump and Carson have used.

To their advantages, Carson and Trump are the two most interesting candidates in the race because they are the two most popular candidates even though neither of them have ever held political offices. In addition, both have been involved in numerous controversies, none of which have hurt their popularity. However, in the coming months, their popularity will begin to fall. As voters start to look more at candidates' policy positions and less at the emotional and social appeal that their statements have garnered. This is where candidates that have held political office like Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush will prevail over candidates with less political substance like Trump and Carson.



Ryan Dunn '17

### **Is Jeb Bush America's Best Bet?**

Jeb Bush is the most sensible presidential candidate in the Republican Party. Unlike his fellow Republican candidates and poll frontrunners, Donald Trump and Ben Carson, Bush has established himself as a sound politician and comes from a lineage of former presidents. Although many Americans hold the Bush family name in disdain, I believe that a third Bush in office will help America improve particularly in the areas of economic growth, immigration reform, and opportunities for veterans. John Winthrop, one of the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, mentioned in his sermon entitled "A Model of Christian Charity" that the newly established colony would serve as a "city upon a hill." The question is: How will Jeb Bush restore America to a "city upon a hill?"

First of all, America's tax code is a mess. In 2015, we had seven tax brackets, with the highest being a nearly 40% income tax rate (39.6% to be exact). America was founded on the principle of economic

mobility, and this increasing tax rate is only hindering Americans from trying to "climb up the ladder." Bush's proposed tax reform is essentially trying to emulate Ronald Reagan's Tax Reform Act of 1986. Bush wishes to limit the tax code to three brackets: the highest being a 28% income tax, the middle being at 25%, and the lowest being at 10%. It comes as no surprise that Bush would want to emulate Ronald Reagan's tax policy, as Reagan's tax reform of 1986 was highly successful, raising the national revenue by \$54.9 billion dollars after only one year of enactment. Bush also plans on cutting the corporate tax rate from 36% to 20%, hoping to boost economic competitiveness with China and the rest of the world. This will also help to stop American companies from moving out of the United States because the corporate tax rate is so high.

Although Bush does believe in the outright deportation of undocumented immigrants, he is realistic in the sense that he knows that it is virtually impossible to find all those who are undocumented. This stance gives him a significant advantage over Donald Trump, who has said that he believes

in the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants and the building of a wall on the U.S./Mexico border. Bush proposes a six-step system that will effectively reform the United States immigration system. In my opinion, the most intriguing part of his plan is a proposed switch from the I-9 documentation system to an E-Verification system. This system would help businesses to better understand the eligibility of workers, and it would help enforce infractions by corporate businesses. Given that we are living in the Age of Technology, I believe that a change to an online verification system would be positive because it eliminates any discrepancies in the authenticity of a person's documentation.

In addition, as the great-grandson of a WWI veteran, the grandson of a WWII veteran, and the second cousin of a Vietnam War veteran, I hold the issue of how we treat our veterans very close to the heart. With 22 veterans committing suicide every day in the United States, I see it as crucial to give our veterans the support they rightfully deserve and to treat them with honor. The largest way in which we can honor them is by

making sure that there are plenty of opportunities for veteran employment. Bush plans to create more economic opportunities by allowing GI Bill benefits to be used not only for education tuition but also for veterans running small businesses. This proposal is based on the fact that only 48% of veterans use their GI Bill benefits, and only 52% of veterans complete their fields of study. However, about 9% of all small businesses in America are attributed to self-employed veterans, all of which generating about \$1.2 trillion annually. These figures indicate that veterans are not as concerned about education as they are with being economically stable. Therefore, I believe that Bush is doing the right thing by making this change to GI Bill benefits.

During George H.W. Bush's term as Vice President in 1984, Bruce Springsteen released his most successful album, "Born in the U.S.A.," on which one of the tracks is called "Glory Days." In this song, Springsteen laments about how our so called "glory days" will pass us by. Though I did not live in the 1980s, it seems to me that America was at its best during this decade, with the

Cold War coming to a close, our victory against the Russians in the 1980 Winter Olympics, and the release of one of the most iconic films in cinematic history, Top Gun. It is my concluding opinion that Jeb Bush will return America to its former "glory days."



Mark Sheffer '17

### **The Adult Table: The First Democratic Debate**

After months of a largely frivolous Republican circus dominating political news, many Americans felt a sense of relief while watching the first Democratic debate of the 2016 Presidential election season, which took place in mid-October. The debate, between Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Martin O'Malley, Jim Webb, and Lincoln Chafee, focused on specific policy positions

that showcased the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate and was supported by a backbone of mutual respect. For those despairing about the future of American politics, this debate was proof that it doesn't have to revolve around candidates who pride themselves on knowing nothing about governing a nation.

What was most refreshing was that the candidates on the stage in Las Vegas expressed a wide spectrum of views that, unlike some Republican proposals, were realistic and attainable. While the Republicans argued over fanciful ideas like building fences along U.S. borders and deporting 11 million undocumented immigrants, the Democrats debated issues like the American role in the Syrian Civil War and the improvement of healthcare for undocumented immigrants.

That is not to say the candidates' stances did not differ on issues, diverging particularly on issues such as gun control, national security, and foreign policy. In one of the sharpest moments of the debate, Clinton went after Sanders for voting five times against the "Brady Bill" legislation,

which sought to require federal background checks on all firearm purchases in the U.S. Likewise, Sanders criticized Clinton for her close ties to Wall Street. However, he also pleaded with the media to stop paying so much attention to the issue of Clinton's use of a private email server during her time as Secretary of State. Everyone had the chance to get a few words in, but the dynamic discussion between Sanders and Clinton is what really captivated viewers. Senator Sanders's well-timed quip directed at Clinton, "the American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damn emails," received one of the loudest applause of the night. The debate, though, probably won't change many poll numbers. Hillary Clinton reminded us why she's the front-runner with her ease and fearlessness.

The largest point of agreement was on income inequality, the central theme of the Sanders campaign and a top priority for the other candidates, as well. Sanders said that he would change his tax code to have the top 1 percent pay far more, with the new tax dollars going to education, free college tuition, and healthcare. Clinton would also

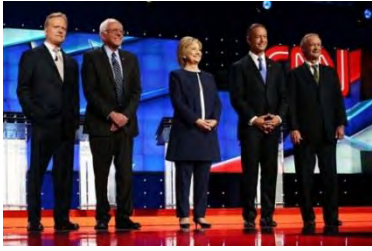


raise taxes, and said she supported reining in “the excesses of capitalism so that it doesn’t run amok.” Although all the candidates agreed on the need to raise the minimum wage, the specifics of their plans differed. Sanders proposed a \$15 minimum wage; Clinton didn’t give a specific number. Regarding unauthorized immigrants, there was agreement that they should be allowed to purchase coverage on the health exchanges, but Clinton, unlike the others, did not support giving them government subsidies. Additionally, there was a sizable divide among the candidates regarding gun laws. Webb has earned an A rating from the National Rifle Association, while Chafee and Martin O’Malley, the former governor of Maryland, have received Fs. Sanders said that he had received a D minus, yet he still had a tough time explaining his vote against the Brady Bill. On foreign affairs, there was disagreement over the role that America should play in the Syrian Civil War and the fight against the Islamic State. Contrary to Sanders and O’Malley, Clinton supports a no-fly zone over Syria. Likewise, on surveillance and security issues, Clinton

defended her support of the Patriot Act, which allowed the NSA to create a vast secret surveillance program, while Sanders opposed the act and stated that he would shut down the program.

In a knee-jerk reaction following the debate, the media almost unanimously declared Hillary Clinton the winner of the first Democratic Presidential debate. In online polls, focus groups, and social media, however, the opinion was quite different. Bernie Sanders surged ahead of the other candidates in online estimations. Declaring a winner of a debate can be a foolish thing; one gaffe or misstep can spell ruin for a candidate, despite previously eloquent replies. Disagreements on the difficult challenges that face America are necessary for creating an equitable and just society. The Democrats have a common aim, and their discussion showed the ability of some candidates to absorb facts and adapt to consequences.

Update: As of October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Jim Webb and Lincoln Chafee have dropped out of the Presidential race.



Jayson Figueroa '17

### **Feel the Bern**

Bernie Sanders was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1941 to two Polish immigrants, Eli Sanders and Dorothy Glassberg. During his time at the University of Chicago in the 1960s, Sanders found himself drawn to the Civil Rights Movement, he went on to lead a sit-in opposing segregation, and even attended Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech" as an organizer of a student activist group. He began his political career in the 1970s by running for the U.S. Senate in Vermont and then for the Governor of Vermont, but it was not until the 1980s that he won his first election to become the Mayor of Burlington, Vermont's largest city. After serving two terms, Sanders went on to serve

in the U.S. Senate and Congress as an Independent. In April 2015, Sanders announced his campaign for president, in which he would be running as a Democrat as opposed to an Independent, as he previously had. By October 2015, his progressive and far-left ideas had generated a great deal of attention. Many consider him to be a threat to the Democratic frontrunner, Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

What sets Sanders apart from many of his fellow candidates is his consistency on his positions. He voted against both the Gulf and Iraq Wars, voted against the ban of same-sex marriage in 1996, and was against the Patriot Act in 2001. Sanders' stances and policies focus more on helping middle class and low-income families; he demonstrates this through supporting easier accessibility to healthcare, education, and jobs. One of the issues many have with his ideas is their Socialistic nature; in response, though, Sanders fully accepts the label of Socialist. Another issue some left-wing voters have with him is his past support of pro-gun laws, to which he responds that he will be sure to regulate gun ownership. Sanders' campaign

has gathered massive crowds and is mostly funded through small donations averaging about \$30. His campaign has not received very much media coverage, so it will be interesting to see how he fares against Clinton's supporters and if he will be able to win the nomination.

If there is one thing that many Americans hate about politics, it is the deceptive nature many politicians possess. Many of these politicians often claim to be acting for the interest of the common American people when, in reality, the only people they are defending are the wealthy donors who give hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars to politicians completely legally. It is in this issue that Sanders secures my support, as he does not receive the kinds of donations that just about every other candidate in the presidential election has received and is publicly against politicians being legally bribed by Super PACs and lobbyists. The role of money in politics is what causes the corruption, lack of care for the common people, and refusal of bipartisan cooperation that we currently see in Washington. By refusing to play the

"political game" in this election and showing that it is the people who truly matter, not the big corporations or rich donors, Bernie Sanders is the most likely of the current candidates to push for the removal of big money in politics.

In his positions on issues, Sanders typically stands with the far-left. In a race with a number of Republicans representing the extreme right, it is no surprise that a candidate like Sanders joined in order to counterbalance his opposition, as his views are much more progressive than those typically seen in the Democrats. Overall, Sanders wants to be tougher on the wealthy class, while giving more opportunities and accessibility to the middle and lower classes through acts such as making education more easily accessible, raising the minimum wage, and lowering prescription drug prices. He also plans to push for racial justice, LGBTQ and women's rights, and better care for veterans. His policies will be met with much opposition, especially if the wealthy class and big businesses still have a hold on our politicians, but they are, in total, geared

toward the betterment of common Americans who are in need of assistance.



Michael Turk '17

### **The Inhumanity of Humanity: Ethics of the Migrant Crisis**

Since 2011, nearly 4.1 million Syrians have fled their war-torn homeland in search of better lives in Europe. However, migrants fleeing to Europe have not only come from Syria. Many have travelled from nations such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Eritrea as well. Some have found safe passage along land routes through Eastern Europe and into the richer nations of Western Europe. Many, however, have attempted to journey across

the perilous Mediterranean Sea, and, in the process, thousands have died.

This crisis cannot be solved in one day or even one month. It could take years to solve the migrant crisis at its roots, but there is much that we can do in the meantime. For now, nations around the world should give aid to those refugees in need of assistance. The United Nations defines a refugee as “someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or holding a political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” This should give a sense of what types of situations many migrants are in. Some European and Middle Eastern countries have already taken action to help these victims of terror and violence. For example, Turkey, a major player in the crisis, has taken in roughly 1.9 million refugees. This, though, is to some extent a result of many migrants pouring into Turkey because of its shared border with Syria.

Additionally, Germany has also been rather sympathetic towards refugees. In recent months, German leaders have criticized other wealthy western European countries, including France and the United Kingdom, for turning away migrants. Many European countries have the financial and geographical resources to take in refugees, yet it is more a matter of their willingness to do so. This is why the world as a whole must change its views of the migrants involved in this crisis.

To be blunt, the ways in which some European nations are treating refugees fleeing the Middle East are inhumane. Many view the migrants as lesser human beings whose presence would “disrupt the culture” of the European countries. On the topic of cultural disruption, Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán stated, “I prefer to call it a competition of cultures.” We have to be sympathetic to the migrants, and in order to truly see what these refugees are going through, we must try to see the world through their eyes. Otherwise, we cannot possibly understand the struggles that they are going through. Even Pope Francis has

commented on this crisis by saying that all Catholic parishes should try to take in one refugee family. Some of these people are fleeing from countries in which civil wars and terrorism are taking place. If we were in that situation, how would we want to be treated?

Instead of assisting the refugees in their search for safety and opportunity, wealthy countries are allowing them to suffer and even die while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands have already died attempting to cross this perilous body of water, many doing so in extremely small boats unfit to travel in such conditions. Some nations, like Hungary, have simply denied refugees passage across their borders. Others, however, some of which include Turkey and Germany, have welcomed migrants with open arms.

In order to begin to resolve this problem, capable, wealthy nations should agree to take in certain numbers of migrants based on how many they are able to handle. This includes the United States, too. However, this does not mean blindly accepting refugees into our country. The wisest thing to do in this situation would be

to attempt to identify these refugees upon arrival. To some extent like the United States' current immigration issue, we should give migrants a safe, legal way into our country so that they do not resort to entering without the proper documentation.

Overall, the current treatment of refugees taking part in the European migrant crisis is truly unethical. Wealthy nations like the United States have a moral obligation to help those with less than themselves, especially in situations involving political refugees. While some nations have taken action already to assist these struggling migrants, many have remained silent. There is so much yet to be done to resolve this global issue, but first we must become more empathetic towards those living with struggles unimaginable to the common American.



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### **The Question of Gun Reformation**

For many years, our country has continuously struggled with the issue of gun laws. As of now, our policies on owning firearms are fairly relaxed. In addition, the United States does not put enough stress on the importance of background checks. Guns are far too easy to purchase. At some gun shows, background checks and firearm license checks are not even required.

Every time that there are instances of gun violence or shootings displayed on the news, a national discussion of gun rights comes up. It's typically discussed for about a week or so and then dismissed, after which politicians act as if nothing has happened. This makes me question whether or not we can trust our government. Our own government, in many cases, is not keeping its own people safe, and this is because it's pretending that gun violence is not a serious issue.

The United States has the most gun violence than any other first-world nation. Over 30,000 people die in the U.S. each year

from the use of firearms. In Europe, the sale of handguns is prohibited, and obtaining a license to shoot a bolt-action rifle is much more difficult than it is in the U.S. A poll conducted by the Brady Campaign shows that one in three Americans know someone who has been shot. What's worse is that gun violence is taking a significant toll on American children, as well.

The United States stands out among other nations. America is still the most powerful nation in the world, and countries should be able to look up to us for this reason. However, with regard to our gun laws, they

cannot. Our laws currently in place pertaining to guns are poor and outdated. On the other hand, many European nations have highly effective gun laws, with bans on the sale of handguns as well as assault rifles. Likewise, the number of shootings is extremely low in most European nations. It is time for the United States to follow the examples of other countries. The longer our government waits to pass reforms, the more people will die each day from gun violence.

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