

Generation Y Speaks Out: A Policy Guide • 2002

Public Policy Perspectives Through Service Learning

A Joint Venture of the Michigan Nonprofit Association,
Michigan's Children and the MSU Service-Learning Writing Project

Website: http://www.msu.edu/~atl/GenY_SpeaksOut.

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Generation Y

Speaks Out

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Generation Y



Speaks Out

A Policy Guide • 2002

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American Thought and Language, Michigan State University

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Michigan's Children

Public Policy Perspectives Through Service Learning

A Joint Venture of the Michigan Nonprofit Association, Michigan's Children, and the Michigan State University Service-Learning Writing Project

Public Policy Perspectives Through Service-Learning is a unique partnership between students and faculty of Michigan State University and two nonprofit organizations. The goal of the project is to deliver the authenticated voice of youth through student-authored public policy issue briefs to policymakers and other critical leaders in Michigan.

View the issue briefs in full online at: http://www.msu.edu/~atl/GenY_SpeaksOut.

Produced by:

Michigan Nonprofit Association
Michigan's Children

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[Jerry Lindman, Michigan Nonprofit Association \(MNA\)](#)

The Michigan Nonprofit Association is an association for nonprofits that gives voice and support to the vast array of nonprofit organizations and the constituents they serve throughout the state. MNA's mission is to promote the awareness and effectiveness of Michigan's nonprofit sector, and to advance the cause of volunteerism and philanthropy in the state.

[Shanetta Martin, Michigan's Children](#)

Michigan's Children is a statewide, independent advocacy group. The organization is committed to empowering youth voices and works with policymakers, communities and the public to improve the quality of life for children, youth and families. Opportunities for youth engagement in civic life are provided through the organizations Youth Policy Leadership Program.

Service Learning Writing Project

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Michigan Campus Compact (MCC)

An association of Michigan colleges and universities that have joined a compact that works to instill an ethic of service and civic action in the college students of today. MCC works to educate, support and recognize institutions of higher learning and their individual administrators, staff, faculty and students, who want to be involved in promoting citizenship by encouraging service experiences for students. These experiences lay the foundation for a lifelong ethic of public responsibility and community service. Students learn to reflect critically on the world around them and take an active role in their community by becoming directly involved with social issues and their solutions. MCC is the first organization in the country to include its member presidents, students, faculty, and staff in the development and implementation of service initiatives. This innovative approach to community problem-solving is one of the reasons MCC is an accomplished national leader in the service field.



Michigan Nonprofit Association



A Child Advocacy Organization



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UNIVERSITY



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Foreward

Generation Y Speaks Out: A Policy Guide is the offspring of happy coincidence and hard work. It began in late summer of 2000 as a collaborative experiment between two first-year writing classes at Michigan State University, the university's Service-Learning Center (a division of Student Services), the Michigan Nonprofit Association and Michigan's Children. Nearly a year later, it ended up a one-of-a-kind profile of a generation's civic personality. What happened in between was the gritty spadework of democratic education for citizenship.

That work is the subject of wide ranging discussion among educators and public policymakers nationwide. From the classroom to the boardroom and across the public and private sectors, we hear impassioned calls to renew the democratic spirit and jump-start our anemic body politic. Young people are often singled out as feeling particularly disengaged and alienated from civic participation.

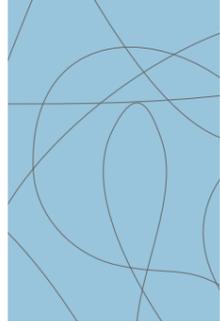
The value of *Generation Y Speaks Out* is that it joins this lofty rhetoric of democratic renewal with the demanding practices of engaged citizenship, active learning, and scholarship in service of the public good. In doing so, this guidebook invites into the great conversation of democracy the public voice of a generation eager to exercise its civic competencies and talents.

Far from balking in the face of such public work, students gladly accepted the challenge to engage in the arts of public argument and deliberation. They rigorously researched social issues ranging from assisted suicide to urban sprawl. They conducted thorough discussions among their peers. Working with their teachers and community partners, students devised a sophisticated format for their public policy issue briefs. They presented their work to legislators and others who help shape public policy. Students revised and edited, edited and revised their briefs until they were satisfied that the work was worthy of attention and public scrutiny. They even wrote the grants that funded *Generation Y Speaks Out*.

I want to thank those people who helped our students build a genuinely public culture full of conversation, argument, and eventually, consensus building. Dr. David Stowe and Dr. Christopher Buck of Michigan State University's Department of American Thought and Language shaped the curriculum, knowledge base, and standards of scholarship underpinning this policy guide. They teamed up with key community partners who greatly enriched the learning community for their students, including Jerry Lindman of the Michigan NonProfit Association and Shanetta Martin of Michigan's Children. Above all, our hats are off to the 40 students who mastered the skills, developed the habits of heart and mind, and acquired the knowledge it takes to produce the publicly engaged scholarship found in the pages that follow.

David D. Cooper

Founder of the Service-Learning Writing Project



Introduction

"It's important to look at these controversial issues from a 20-something perspective. Older generations think we're slackers but this type of project shows we really do care and want to make a difference. Our ultimate goal is to change a law or influence policy in some way, then we'd know that our voice is really being heard."

Matthew Horton

ATL Student, Fall 2000

Michigan State University's Service Learning Writing Project has become a combination of both service and learning throughout the 2000-2001 academic year, in association with two non-profit advocacy organizations: Michigan Nonprofit Association and Michigan's Children. Students in Dr. David Stowe's and Dr. Christopher Buck's sections of "Writing: Public Life in America" (ATL 135) were given the opportunity to write issue briefs, covering concerns of their generation, Generation Y. *Generation Y Speaks Out: A Policy Guide* is the result of hard work and dedication, and is researched and written entirely by MSU students.

The following compilation of issue briefs began as an unknown. The final outcome was a mystery to all partners, yet a vision was in mind. What exactly is an issue brief? What components does it contain? What is the final format? All of these are questions that were asked over and over to make this project's vision a reality. An issue brief is exactly what its name describes - a brief summary of a current issue relevant to society. In this particular case, it is an issue that is of concern to Generation Y. Generation Y is the 18-24 age group into which participating students of this project fall. While the views of this generation have been criticized as either being radical, or not having any views at all, the results may be surprising. These results are the end product of numerous focus groups, surveys, and research of the opinions of students and friends of students at Michigan State University.

As you read this publication, you will notice that the headings are more relaxed and expressive of Generation Y. This book is an authentic Generation Y project. We want this publication to be read. It should be read with seriousness, as members of this generation feel strongly about these issues. We are being open and honest about our feelings and ideas concerning these issues that affect life within present-day society. Throughout *Generation Y Speaks Out: A Public Policy Guide*, you are given the opportunity to see how the newest voters across Michigan feel, and why they feel this way, ranging from personal experiences to passionate concerns.

Matt Horton
MSU Student

Amanda Lindlemulder
MSU Student

Generation Y Perspective

Civil Liberties, Civil Rights & Justice

Affirmative Action

Real Life Scenario

For both of these two high school seniors at the left, University of Michigan was their top choice. Gary and David both were rejected by Michigan's LS&A program. Looking at these two students' records, they should have been an easy admission. Both of them were very close, or in the top 10, at their school.

Gary actually talked to an advisor from Michigan the fall after he had been rejected, and told him what happened. All the man could answer was, "I don't understand why you didn't get in. You're well above the standard requirements. I'm sorry." By this time Gary was happy at his current college, Kalamazoo College, on a swimming scholarship.

David is currently at Michigan State University. He enjoys himself at the school, but wonders why he didn't get in to his first choice. Did the fact that both of these students were Caucasian have anything to do with their rejection? If that isn't the reason, who knows what is?

Impact On My Generation

Affirmative action has imparted a huge impact on Generation Y (e.g. post 1970). Many in this age group have applied to college and have experienced the frustration of being denied admission to their university of choice. Some are thankful and have benefited from the use of racial preferencing. Others like Jennifer Gratz are outraged that candidates of lesser merit received preferential treatment thus denying them the opportunity they rightfully earned.

Tacit student backlash has also become an unforeseen consequence of university affirmative action programs. This hidden backlash manifests itself in the form of an unspoken stigma attached to minority students. Students admitted under the use of racial preferences at universities never seem to be able to lose this stigma. Even those who are accepted without the aid of affirmative action still deal with the generalization that "minority equals affirmative action which equals lower standards" (Eastland, 398).

There seems to be no middle ground in the minds of most students. Either they are for or against the issue of affirmative action in university admissions. Those opponents to affirmative action often stigmatize all minorities, which causes "a racial discord or even a division among the races" (*The State News*, 4). In reaction to this Ashley Bell, journalism freshman at Michigan State, says "the stigmas that have been attached to women and minorities are born from the pseudoscientific beliefs in biological and even cultural inferiority of women and minorities to white males."

As a student at a predominantly white college in the Midwest, Julie Gallhagar raised strong concern regarding the absence of diversity. "Our minority population is less than 1% of the total student body. Even with a small minority population our majority population feels that we have plenty of diversity. Go figure! All in all, the majority of colleges do not represent marginalized groups enough. I do feel that the situation is changing, granted very slowly, and possibly we will be able to eventually see a proper representation of all under represented groups." (Yahoo Bulletin board, *Diversity*, 29 March 2001)

What My Generation Wants

When the pool of applicants far exceeds the number of openings, competition determines the successful candidate. It is important, however, that this competition fairly weigh the full capability, experience and contributing environmental factors, which compose the human potential. While admissions policies differ among schools, most institutions consider the following criteria to varying degrees:

- High school grades
- Standardized test scores
- An applicant's personal background—race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, geography, special talents and extra-curricular activities

In many cases weighting factors are applied to normalize the prospective student data. For example a 3.5 GPA from an urban school as compared to a 3.0 GPA from an inner-city school must be interpreted differently depending on class size, resources available and historical high school candidate success record.

Since the world is not homogeneous it is logical to conclude that some level of diversity in post-secondary education is advantageous and of "compelling interest to the state". The benefits eliminate the potential for isolationism and bring to bear the wealth of talent and potential required to be successful as individuals, as a state and as a nation in the emerging global economy.

It is recommended that our elected representatives:

- Consider legislation that reflects the common good achieved through diversity in university populations and thus provide admissions guidelines which are consistent and defensible.
- This legislation should provide for a clear definition of what constitutes a "compelling interest" and should be narrowly tailored to reflect the value of under represented minority groups as well as other demographic traits.
- Review the University of Michigan admissions policies and procedures with an eye toward defining a statewide standard for entrance to state funded higher education.
- Furthermore, reevaluate the selection criteria specifically with respect to weighting factors, which are applied to ensure equal treatment.

It is suggested that a modified total point system such as that used at Harvard be defined as the unified standard for admittance at stated funded universities and colleges which takes into consideration multiple elements of student capability. The successful implementation of such a system, however, requires a thorough look at the weighting factors applied to each category.

Gary Strickler

- Graduating GPA: 4.2
- ACT score: 29
- Activities: Varsity Soccer, Captain Varsity Swim, Church Youth Group, coaching children to swim
- Level of class difficulty: AP & Honors level classes

David Haine

- Graduating GPA: 4.2
- ACT score: 31
- Level of class difficulty: AP & Honors level classes

Biography

Whitney Williams

Major: General
Management

Biography

Mike Houston

Major: Political
Science - Prelaw

Civil Liberties, Civil Rights & Justice

Racial Profiling on America's Roadways

Real Life Scenario

Terrell Lawson, a 24-year-old African American, stated that he has been pulled over twice in his life. The first time that he was pulled over, the police officer said that the car fit a stolen car profile. Terrell was searched and had to wait around for the officer for over two hours. At the end of that inconvenience the police officer ended up giving Terrell an improper lane change violation. The second time that Terrell was pulled over, he was searched once again and had to wait on the side of the road for about two hours. The difference between this time and the first time that he got pulled over was that the police officer did not try and make an excuse for pulling him over. The officer said that Terrell was speeding and that he needed to call for backup. Terrell said that the officer was very uncooperative, and that he was not allowed to ask any questions. This experience that Terrell has shared with me has really opened my eyes to how racial profiling goes on in our society.

I have also talked to Jeff Pollak, a Caucasian father of two children. He told me that the police have also racially profiled him. He was driving a rental car in Louisiana on business and was pulled over. The police officer spoke using the intercom in his car and told Jeff to get out of the car and put his hands on the trunk. Jeff was very taken back by this and did what he was told to do. As the police officer emerged from his car Jeff noticed that the officer was African American. Jeff thought nothing of it until the officer gave him a reason for pulling him over. "There have been reports of red cars transporting drugs in this area. Can I search your vehicle?" the officer asked. Jeff let him search the vehicle and nothing was found; after about an hour-and-a-half and Jeff was let go.

Impact On My Generation

Impact of Current Legislation: The laws right now do not extend to discriminating on the roadways, so African Americans and other minorities can still be discriminated against without the offender worrying about receiving any punishment. If the officers know that there will be no punishment, there is no reason for them to stop racial profiling.

Impact of proposed legislation: If the studies show that racial profiling is a problem on the roadways, then laws should be passed that make racial profiling illegal and punish those who do it. This will result in less discrimination on the roadways. Generation Y, myself included, would feel a lot safer driving on the roadways. We would not feel as though we could get pulled over just for our skin color. It would also help with the relations between the races because we would not feel as though one race was out to get the other race and benefit at the other's expense.

What My Generation Wants

Input from focus groups: I administered a survey to two different groups on racial profiling. I asked them how they felt about it and what should be done. The two focus groups consisted of males and females of all different races, ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-two. In all, I surveyed thirty-six people. Fifty-six percent of the people felt that it was necessary to make laws concerning racial profiling. Ninety-four percent of the group as a whole stated that they felt that racial profiling was not an acceptable excuse by police to pull motorists over. Aaron Scheidies, a freshman at Michigan State University said, "It is just another form of racism, so we don't need it. If it stays legal to do this, then we will just increase the tension among the different races." Katie Akers, a sophomore at Michigan State University said, "Racial profiling is an extremely wrong practice and should be done away with."

What I recommend: Laws should be passed requiring that studies may be done on all traffic stops. The study would include:

- The race of the motorist
- The age of the motorist
- The type of city the motorist was pulled over in (urban or rural)
- What time of day the motorist was pulled over
- The race of the officer
- Reason the officer pulled the motorist over
- What citation or warning, if any, was issued
- The age of the officer

Costs: The major costs of this proposal would be preparing the study, hiring people to perform the study, and compiling the data. The price that all of this would cost is minute in comparison to how our society would benefit from it.

"I am a Caucasian male, and a freshman at Michigan State University. I have never been discriminated against because of my race, but I feel that racial profiling is a major issue that affects Generation Y as well as other generations. This issue can only get worse if we leave it the way it is. As Americans, we need to stop turning our heads every time a racial subject comes up; we need to face it and learn from it so that it will not happen again."

Mike Houston

Civil Liberties, Civil Rights & Justice

Interracial Dating and Marriage

Real Life Scenario

In 1998, I'd never thought of dating someone other than my race. As years passed by, I understood what love meant. When I was a sophomore in high school, I was attracted to a Caucasian male in my school who is 2 years older than I. I'd fallen for this guy because of his humor and quiriness, his intelligence, his kindness, and his character, things that I was looking for. I knew my parents were extremely liberal, so I went ahead and dated him without worrying about what my parents would think. When I told my parents about it, they didn't have any objection. Instead, they gave me encouragement. They said they can't control who I love, other than to accept no matter what race he is. I was so glad that they encouraged me instead of making negative comments. When I hear stories about how race and cultural difference makes a difference in who you can date, I feel grateful that my parents do not object to whom I date.

However, when I walk on the streets I felt like my face was recognized by a lot of people who hadn't known me before. It seemed like a lot of people cared about a relationship that wasn't their business. People were making assumptions about our relationship such as my not being proud of my own race, or simply just wanting money. Although the assumptions seemed to be negative, we continued our relationship no matter what others thought of us.

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current legislation: The legislation no longer bans interracial marriage. This means, anyone is free to marry outside his or her ethnic/racial group legally.

Impact on proposed legislation: Denying government funding will discourage colleges and universities from imposing policies against interracial dating/marriage.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: Why do people care? If one chooses to date a person of another race, why should society be bothered? Society is simply wasting their time by interfering with the couples relationship. If a couple is in love let them be happy. It is wrong and unethical on their part to make it hard for them. If two people can love each other, what difference does it make as to their roots and color. Here are some responses I received from the focus group.

- Amanda Lindemulder, a MSU student says "skin color shouldn't matter".
- Alex Wang, a recent graduate of MSU says "if two people can love each other, what difference does it make as to their roots and color".
- Aaron Scheidies quoted Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Don't judge a man by the color of his skin; judge him by his character".

What I recommend: Data from the 2000 census show 38,564, or 43 percent, of the 89,091 people who identify themselves as of mixed racial background in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Livingston counties are under 18 years old. Nationally, a total of 2.85 million people under 18 identified themselves in the 2000 census as of more than one race. The estimated number of interracial marriages in the United States has risen from 100,000 to about 1.5 million since 1970. So does this mean that interracial marriage has become a norm?



Biography

Diana Lu

Major: Merchandising
Management

Social Policy

Save the Music Downloading Industry

Biography

Tiffany Shriver

Major: General Management

Real Life Scenario

Adrienne Cleland logs onto the Internet and goes directly to Napster's homepage. As soon as she arrives, a blinking message appears warning her the site might be shut down due to a court ruling. Outraged after reading the memo, Adrienne is now extremely upset. She questions where she will go to find the latest info on new bands, or what the new next best single may be. Adrienne has been a member of Napster a few months now, and as a result has discovered six new groups, purchasing each and every one of their CDs. Adrienne decided to stand up for Napster and wrote to her Congressman voicing her opinion on the matter. Adrienne realized that for the music downloading industry to stay alive, its members would have to openly voice their support.

Impact On My Generation

As of this writing, Judge Patel is still deciding what to rule. Too many appeals and arguments have risen to make a final policy yet. My generation has completely supported companies like Napster, and will continue to advocate on their behalf. Generation Y will try its hardest to keep the service running.

What My Generation Wants

The way music had been distributed this past year, whether by MP3s or through a music service like Napster, will change the way music is heard in the future. Now that the consumers know what is available online, they will not let it go. "Napster is part of my everyday life. I don't know what I would do without it. Napster has given me this place where all my friends and I can go to and exchange our favorite songs," said Annie Schave. I think that all music downloading services should be allowed to continue what they are doing. No statistical data has shown a major decrease in music sales or products. These services have given the unknown names an opportunity to be heard, where as if companies like Napster did not exist, then the band might never catch a break. Napster is the future of the music industry, and it is here to stay.

Concealed Weapons

Biography

Steve Thompson

Major: General Management

Real Life Scenario

A local family goes to a Tigers game at Comerica Park. After watching the baseball game they decide to go grab a bite to eat. When they get back to their vehicle a man approached them and tells the man to give him all of his money and the keys to their car. The father does what the man says and gives him what he asked for. This incident could have another outcome to it. When the family gets back to their vehicle and a man approaches them and asked for all of their money and the keys to the vehicle. The mother or the father pulls out a gun and tells the man to leave and he won't be harmed. The man didn't necessarily have to get shot but the gun scared him away.

Impact On My Generation

Under current Michigan law any person that is 18 years of age can apply for a CCW permit. We are old enough now to be able to carry a concealed weapon. I don't find it acceptable for someone 18 years old to carry a gun unless it is for work purposes. Most people this age don't carry a concealed weapon legally. With the proposed legislation the age will be changed to 21 with more extensive background checks and applicants will have to show their proficiency with firearms. When people want to go out places to have a good time, we would have a much better time knowing that we are protected in case something goes wrong.

What My Generation Wants

Dan Wholihan, a telecommunication senior at Michigan State University, stated that the new concealed carry laws that are in debate would help Michigan. The facts, according to Professor John Lott of the University of Chicago, are that states that have more lax concealed carry laws have less crime. Comparing Texas to Michigan, it makes perfect sense. "Gun-infested" Texas has had a lower murder rate than Michigan the last five years. It must be doing something right, and with the new laws in Michigan, guns are still banned in schools, churches, places that serve alcohol and day care centers. Kevin Greaney, also a student at Michigan State University, thought that the new law will be beneficial because criminals do think twice when planning their next rape or murder, especially when the chances they will be the ones to lose their lives are increased exponentially. The only result from gun control can be found in terrifying police states—Orwellian nightmares like Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Communist China, etc.

Marriage Penalty

Biography

Andrea Redilla

Major: No Preference

Real Life Scenario

Robin Blumner, columnist and editorial writer for Florida's *St. Petersburg Times*, writes that she and her boyfriend have lived together for seven years without benefit of marriage. "We own a house together with rights of survivorship and we are beneficiaries of each other's life insurance. (My parents call him their sin-in-law.) For all intents and purposes, we are married — just without the license. And more importantly, without the tax liability. An accountant figured out that our yearly tax bill would go up by nearly \$1,000 if we said 'I do.' Which means, as to marriage, we don't." ("The Marriage Tax," *The Women's Freedom Newsletter*, Fall 1997, Vol. 4, No 4)

What My Generation Wants

What I recommend: Like most people in Generation Y, I also plan on getting married in the future. In my eyes, marriage is a joyous occasion between two people that love one another. In the government's eyes, marriage is another way to bring more money into the system. Is that really fair to profit off of one's "happiest day"? I strongly recommend the elimination of the marriage penalty.

Costs: It is estimated, by the Congressional Budget Office, that if the elimination of the marriage penalty is successful, this legislation will cost over \$399 billion over the next decade.

Work Ethics

Biography

Michelle Quinn

Major: Zoology

Real Life Scenario

A star high school athlete wakes up in the morning and smells football. Throughout his day he eats, drinks, and breathes the sport. He strives on becoming a better football player by going to practice, lifting weights, and working hard in the off season. At night, the football player dreams about the game. This is what it was like for Aaron Mundale, a Michigan State University student. However, along with his off-season training, Aaron had to get a job in order to pay for his car and things he wanted to do. He didn't have the same enthusiasm about his job that he did when it came to playing football though. He was constantly late, calling in sick, or just slacking. Aaron never wanted to actually work; he just wanted to receive his paycheck at the end of each week. All Aaron wanted to do was to play football. This is how it is with people's work ethics today. It always seems as though everyone would rather be somewhere else, around other people, or doing something else while they are working. There is an old saying, "There is no shame in putting in an honest day's work." Apparently, not too many people have pride in their job as many people did in the past.

Impact On My Generation

With many of my fellow classmates at Michigan State University going into the workplace in the near future, the impact on my generation is tremendous. Since we are the future, we will soon be working in the businesses, schools, political offices, etc. The way Generation Y views work ethics is going to determine the productivity of the nation. If Generation Y has poor work ethics, it could lead to a possible depression, high unemployment rates, or a desperately poor country from welfare and homeless support. However, if Generation Y has strong work ethics, it could lead to great prosperity in the future for the United States, cures for diseases, a low unemployment rate, and even many great technological advancements. The Generation Y can make or break the United States, as will soon be seen as the leaders of tomorrow.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: A research survey was conducted about work ethics from Michigan State University students and friends from back home. After performing the survey, I concluded that most people believe that the work ethics of today have diminished from those of the past. Generation Y feels that people are simply not motivated and have less to strive for. Also, with the advances in technology, people can accomplish more with little effort in a small amount of time. The people from Generation Y feel that giving workers something to work for would make employees reconsider their work ethics.

What I recommend: I believe that peoples' work ethics have diminished for the simple fact of a lack of motivation. If people work hard, they still receive the same amount of money on their paycheck that they would receive if they did a normal amount of work. With a reward system for people who strive to work hard at their job, people would be more motivated while at work.



Media Ethics

Biography

Michelle Quinn

Major: Zoology

Real Life Scenario

The summer of 1996, before I was a freshman in high school, a good friend of mine died. I had known him since I was in second grade. He died in a freak accident involving lightning and it was an extremely traumatic time for all of his friends and family. The morning after his death on the front page of the newspaper, *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, was an article about his death. The article was not only dreadfully exaggerated, but also untruthful. The way they described his death was horrific and disgusting and most people were outraged and offended by the newspaper article. I wonder why the newspaper had been so insensitive and why the media exploits millions of people every year.

Impact On My Generation

This issue is relevant to Generation Y because we are living with the unacceptable standards of the media. The media right now are at the peak of power and we are the only ones who could change the way the media treats the people of this country. This can only be changed by Generation Y because as the future of our society it is our responsibility to make sure that our opinions matter and are heard. With the media as strong as they are, the only opinion that seems heard is that of the media. The fact that the media exploits people, and acts unethically without giving it a second thought is a major problem. If the proposed legislation was to be considered and even passed then I believe that the public could trust that the media is being truthful and honest. Also, the people would not be concerned that their stories would subject them to emotional harm done by the media.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: I conducted Generation Y focus groups about their own thoughts on the media. Many of them agreed that we don't realize the extensive power of the media and that we often think we are making our own decisions but actually are using media to make them for us indirectly. "It is easier for people to make their own decisions when they hear the decisions made by someone else" (Matthew Horton). Members of Generation Y also agreed that the media should be more reliable when it comes to accuracy and truth and be held accountable for their mistakes and admit when they were wrong. There should also be boundaries for the media when it comes to exploiting people and their stories.

What I recommend: My recommendation on this issue is to accept all of the technology of the media, but prohibit media from exploiting people and issues that are emotionally connected to them. I recommend doing by creating laws for journalist to follow and extensive consequences facing them if laws are not abided by. Another thing I want is for the media to state their stories accurately and not worry about the competition of other networks. We want to believe what the media has to say, but sometimes you don't know what to believe if every network or paper is different. So what I recommend is for the government to take action against the media and create some kind law for enforcing media ethics and consequences for not abiding them.



Adoption

Real Life Scenario

Laura Blackman, a Montgomery County, Md., police officer, cared for Cornilous Pixly since he was two weeks old. In 1997 a Maryland judge ruled that the boy should be returned to his 24-year-old mother Latrena Pixly, therefore taking him out of the only home he knew for two years. In 1993, Latrena Pixly was convicted of smothering her six-week-old daughter. The judge maintained his hands were tied. Pixley's murder convictions did not constitute the special circumstances required to determine her parental rights. (US News.com)

Does this court ruling make sense? Cornilous had the chance to be in a loving environment, the only environment he had ever known. Instead, the judge ruled that Cornilous be returned to his biological mother, a convicted murderer. Situations like these are ridiculous and need to be stopped.

Impact On My Generation

This has potential impact on my generation because the laws made today will affect the future. Who knows what will come of my life in the future? Adoption may be in my future, but the process is not something that I would want to deal with. There are too many children without homes and the numbers will continue to grow if the adoption process is not made more available to future parents. When children grow up without parents, or in and out of foster homes, they become disturbed and confused.

- Children who have stable predictable care "can overcome great adversity," says Richard Gelles, director of the Family Violence Research Program at the University of Rhode Island and an architect of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.
- Studies show that out of those in foster care, 15-56% never complete high school or earn a GED.
- The majority hold low skilled jobs; up to 50% spend some time on public assistance.
- Drug use is common.
- Nearly one third of males commit crimes as adults.
- Among the homeless, as many as 39% spent years in foster care as kids.

These statistics (U.S. News, 1998) have an impact on every generation. As long as children are in foster care who never have the chance to feel the unconditional love of parents, then there will be a higher percent of homelessness, welfare, and crime.

Just how states will respond to changes in federal law remains to be seen. Some have written new legislation to overhaul their foster-care systems. Many states face even bigger challenges, because real control over foster-care rests with local agencies, not state officials. Policies not only vary from state to state, but from county to county.

What My Generation Wants

To improve this issue, policy makers need to see what is really best for the children. The emphasis on re-uniting the biological parents with their children should not be the main concern. "Once the parents give their children up, the process of a new family should begin" says Chelsea Walton, a freshman at Michigan State. Most of the children in foster homes right now could already have been adopted at a younger age and living happily with a loving family. However, too much time and money is spent on trying to get the birth parents back on track in hopes that one day they will be able to properly care for their children.

The effects on these children are harsh. Some of these kids spend an impressionable amount of time with one family and then have to go back to another, or they go in and out of foster care until they are 18.

Laws for adoption agencies need to be pushed in favor of the adoptive parents. Matthew Dryja, a sophomore at Eastern Michigan University says "It is not fair for hopeful parents to be led on for any period of time thinking that they are going to soon be parents, and then have their hopes let down because the birth parents change their mind."

What I recommend:

- If parents terminate their roles to their children by means of court order, there should be no way possible for them to regain custody once the child has found a new stable home.
- If children are taken out of their home because of abusive or neglectful parents, then there should only be a six-month waiting period before re-uniting the two ceases to be the number-one priority.
- If adoptive parents at any time put down money towards the gift of a child, and in the end do not receive the child they have been hoping for, money should be given back to the adoptive family.
- After the child has been adopted into a new family, checkups should be given for the first year to make sure that the child is happy and safe.
- Groups like Project Hustle in Texas need to be started and promoted here in Michigan.

Costs: If agencies focus more on placing children in to a new stable home rather than the home of the birth parents, the government will be saving more money than with its current plans. The federal government payment for foster-care, 55% of the total, grew 438% in the past decade to about \$3.8 billion in 1998. A 1993 study estimated that the adoption of 40,700 kids between 1983 and 1987 saved \$1.6 billion in taxpayer dollars.

Biography

Stephanie Dovletian

Major: Communications

Abolish Animal Cosmetic Testing

Real Life Scenario

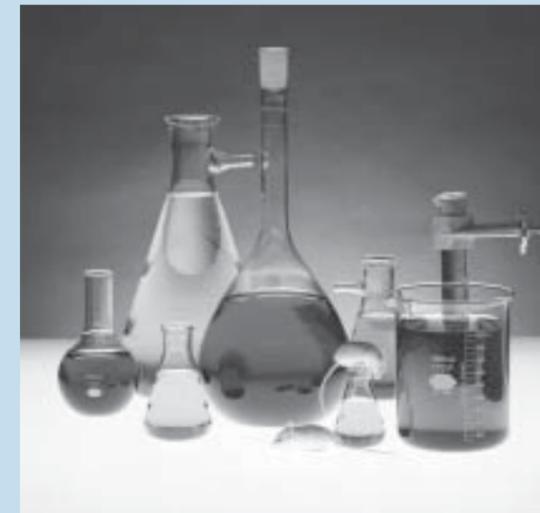
Ten albino rabbits are placed into stocks that allow only their head to protrude, and their eyelids are kept opened by clasps to prevent them from blinking. Rabbits do not have tear ducts like humans possess, hence no tears are formed to wash away foreign irritant substances. "Reactions to the substances include swollen eyelids, inflamed irises, ulceration, bleeding, massive deterioration, and blindness." (PETA website) Often times, the rabbits break their necks in attempt to escape from the painful substances. The rabbits' screams are so loud that they can be heard in the adjacent testing room. The damage done to the rabbits' eyes is recorded at specific intervals over a period of 72 hours. At the end of the test period, all of the surviving animals are killed in order to determine the internal effects of the tested substances. This test is repeated several times to ensure accuracy.

Impact On My Generation

Consumers of Generation Y have become more aware of animal testing and its cruelty. Many customers refuse to buy products that have been tested on animals, and therefore support companies against such testing. However, there are still companies that refuse to stop this inhumane testing, and as a result we consumers protest such companies.

There are a lot of people who refuse animal-tested products. "I refuse to buy any cosmetics that have been tested on animals. There is no need for companies to still administer such cruel tests when alternative tests have shown to be more accurate. I believe animal testing to be morally and ethically wrong," stated a strong supporter of PETA and animal rights, Kelly Roberts, a 19-year-old Michigan State University student.

Lindsay Allegra, a freshman at MSU, commented that "our generation is quite naïve to what animal testing entails. We are not focused enough on what animal testing and cruelty concludes.... We, as the future need to be more aware of our society."



Internet Censorship

Real Life Scenario

An incident within the past two years occurred in Davenport, Iowa when the school system's technology committee was introduced to a new filtering system. This system would filter computers for kindergarten through twelfth grade. The technology team was assigned to evaluate. During its investigation, a student tried to access the *Freedom Forum* and *Student Press Law Center* sites from a school computer to look for legal information about filters. However, they were unable to because the sites were blocked. Another student discovered that the filter not only blocked those sites, but all websites for the NAACP. Even worse, it left the Ku Klux Klan homepage open to be viewed. Other students tried computers throughout the district and discovered that they were all blocked with the same filters. When presented with the research the committee concluded that the filters were beneficial, but were more appropriate in elementary and middle schools rather than high schools. The technology committee stated that at a high school level where the internet can be used for research projects, filters would jeopardize much of the information that was out there. However, the problem remained that not all sites can be blocked, and thus the district decided to leave two computers unfiltered.

Impact On My Generation

Today's generation of people and the many more to come, are and will continue to depend on the internet. For the time being, the problem of filtering out explicit material will continue to be a dilemma. Technology will continue to be a part of our everyday lives and without it society will not function as easily as it does today. The internet functions as a student's most valuable research tool and without it many would be lost. The library is still an excellent source to seek information, but with online databases a student can research topics from the comfort of her or his own home. By restricting access to sites that may contain offensive information, yet are educational resources, we are altering the learning process and restricting students from information they may need to better their education.

What My Generation Wants

The role of the government in censorship of internet-related material should be limited to state and local control. It is my opinion that Internet filters tread extremely close to violating the First Amendment by allowing government control over what one can view online. If we allow this to continue, we will be endorsing the government to have power over the World Wide Web. My recommendation is that state and local governments should be given limited power to prevent children from viewing unnecessary material. Installing software that does not solve the problem could place immense hardships on communities already struggling to meet educational needs. We have yet to find any financial data that presents what type of costs these programs could inflict, and have only briefly seen their shortfalls.

Biography

George Nikopolitis

Major: No Preference

"I can't think of a better example of a classroom-campus-community learning partnership that combines such academic rigor and the potential for wide social impact with the successful development of our students' public voices."

David Cooper, Professor

Childcare Enforcement in the Welfare System

Real Life Scenario

Sarah, a 23-year-old mother of two, lives in poverty. At the age of 16 she became pregnant with her first child. Sarah's parents were not happy about the pregnancy, but continued to let her live with their home. At 18, Sarah became pregnant for the second time. With a two-year-old daughter, and another on the way, her parents were fed up and threw her out of the house. Sarah had no choice but to go on welfare in order to make a living for her and her two daughters. While on welfare, Sarah was able to have a part time job and afford childcare. During the two years on welfare, things were beginning to look up for Sarah and her children. After welfare, however, money became scarce. Too many absences from work lead to Sarah losing her job. Why did she miss so many days of work? "Childcare was just becoming too hard to pay for. Sometimes I would be requested to work nights and I had to decline. With all my absences and excuses, I was no longer needed, and therefore let go."

This story is fictional, yet very real in the world today. Young women like Sarah exist everywhere. If childcare was made available and affordable, Sarah, and women like her, could keep the jobs they have and build a strong healthy life.

Impact on My Generation

In the state of Florida, welfare programs have a two-year span for each person. The purpose for placing a time limit is to put the pressure on. When people know that in two years their funds will be cut off, motivation is high to go out and find a job. Pensacola was one city in Florida who followed this welfare attempt with good results. One reason why the welfare program in Pensacola was so successful was because of the childcare opportunities offered to working parents.

- Half of those on welfare had jobs with benefits by the time two years were up.
- Among those who were not working, half of them received jobs within six months.

What My Generation Wants

The past affects the future. Everything that happens in previous generations can either benefit or cripple the future world. As a member of Generation Y, life alone in the real world is not too far away. Laws that are made today to better welfare will only make it easier for future generations to come. Some Generation Y members do not even have to wait for the future to experience the hardships of life. Many young women today are single mothers needing financial assistance and a hope of a future education and job.

In some of my classes here at Michigan State, I see mothers coming to class with their children because something went wrong with their childcare arrangements. Stacey Lesmeister, a freshman physiology major, states: "I know of many women who continuously have problems with childcare. Much needs to be done about the problems of welfare, and childcare is a great start. Affordable, available, and reliable childcare will take much pressure off parents, and lead to a better economy."

What I Recommend:

- A two-year maximum time for welfare recipients.
- During the two-year time span, recipients will have to check in monthly with their social worker to make sure progress is being made.
- For the two-year period free childcare should be available, with proof that the parents are engaging in constructive work.
- Once the parent has found a job, an affordable price for childcare will be issued.
- Outside of the two years on welfare, government funding will lower the cost of childcare for low-income families.
- Along with cheaper day care, night care will be provided for those who can only find jobs in the night hours.

Biography

Stephanie Dovletian

Major: Communications



Religion Has No Place in Government

Real Life Scenario

During the Holocaust over six million Jews were killed. These innocent men, women, and children were killed because one government decided that they did not believe in the “correct” religion.

Impact On My Generation

Another major problem with the new proposal of “faith-based” programs is the fact that the government will be placing a price on each religion, implying that one belief is more valid than another. The government is a very powerful tool, revealing to the nation as well as to the youths of today that one religion will be receiving more funds than the next will cause much controversy. “I believe that these programs will prove to be more partitioning, mixing church and state can only lead to problematic situations among youth and the rest of society,” says Aaron Hiner, a psychology major at Michigan State University.

What My Generation Wants

I have chosen this subject because I believe it is of utmost importance to the youths of today’s society. My peers and I are the future of this nation. Encouraging more religious separation will only lead to more cultural problems. Although I would like to see solutions to homelessness and drug abuse, funding religious organizations is not the answer. Federal taxes should go toward more pluralistic solutions. I believe government should encourage religion, not endorse it. I ask of you, the lawmakers of the great state of Michigan, to speak out against such wrongs and make a stand for what is right.

Drinking Age

Real Life Scenario

Friday evening had just begun when Byung Soo Kim, a University of Michigan engineering student, met up with a few of his friends to help celebrate his 21st birthday. However, they didn’t have a traditional birthday celebration in mind for this night. Kim was going to courageously drink one shot of whiskey for every year of his life, not an unheard of challenge for reaching this landmark age. In fact, he managed to quickly down the first 20 shots in only ten minutes. Unfortunately, he would never make it to his magic number. Kim stopped breathing that night and was eventually pronounced dead at the University of Michigan Medical Center three days later. He had amazingly registered a blood alcohol level of .39, almost four times the legal limit.

In a prepared written statement, Kim’s parents expressed both their sadness and disappointment. “We would like to emphasize that this does not represent our son’s usual behavior. He did not drink regularly and according to his friends was often the one to take care of friends who had had too much to drink. It is our heartfelt desire that the community can learn a lesson from this tragedy and reach out to those who need help.”

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current legislation: This issue of lowering the drinking age has a huge impact on us because we are the people who are slightly younger than, older than and exactly 18 years old. Not to mention, with alcohol being more readily available, Generation Y will definitely be affected by whatever choices our friends make regarding how to handle their alcohol privileges. The current laws that are in place, and those amendments to them, tend to do a decent job of maintaining a grasp on the underage-drinking dilemma. However, they have yet to demonstrate an overwhelming ability to conquer this problem and develop a successful method for consistently decreasing it. Until that time, legislative actions will have as much, if not less, impact on society as they do right now.

Impact of proposed legislation: It’s tough to say whether or not the proposed legislation will have a successful future ahead of it. This idea of educating people about alcohol is not a new one. Many school-aged children go through a drug resistance program while growing up called D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education). Not to mention that if laws haven’t been obeyed to this point, why would stricter ones expect to see a different result? That’s not to say, however, that these new proposals won’t succeed. For instance, an awareness program exists that doesn’t preach about sobriety, but rather informs people of its effects and consequences. Therefore, Generation Y will grow up with a respect for and understanding of alcohol, rather than a curiosity for or fear of it.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: Based on Generation Y surveys and interviews that were conducted, it seems that the majority of young people are in favor of lowering the drinking age to 18. Not only for the alcoholic implications, but also for the sake of being admitted into otherwise unavailable fun spots, such as clubs and bars. When you look at the entire picture, kids miss out on a whole lot more than just an alcoholic drink. We aren’t necessarily looking for the opportunity to get drunk on our own terms, we’re looking for an opportunity to call our own shots and live fulfilling lives. People can speculate all they want as to what will happen with this new change. However, in the end, nothing will be known for certain until we try it out.

What I recommend: I personally believe that the drinking age should be stay right where it is. I’ve known people who died while being intoxicated, and of course they were all underage. Life is too much fun to be lost at such a young age. Kids are going to keep drinking whether there is an age restriction or not. The difference is that a lot more will do it once it’s legal. In addition, I have come across the underage drinking laws that are enforced heavily in the state of Maryland. I believe that the guidelines and penalties are very well established; therefore it’s attached as an example of what I think would be beneficial.

Costs: Accidents, such as automobile or alcohol poisoning, could result in higher bills for families. Emotional and mental problems could also result from excessive alcohol abuse or use, thus costing a price that can’t be measured in dollars. On the national level, alcohol consumption, abuse and its consequences have been estimated to cost our society \$86 billion each year; \$26 billion more than the cost of Desert Storm.

“This issue is extremely important to me now that I have been in college for a few years and have seen the effects, both good and bad, that underage drinking can have on people. I don’t want to see anyone have his or her life shortened just because of a stupid drink. I want to live past my twenty-first birthday and more importantly, I want my friends to all be there when I do.”

Andrew Copenhaver

Internet Gambling

Real Life Scenario

From the bedroom of his home in California’s Silicon Valley, a man named Fredrick Marino played blackjack all of the time on the internet using his computer. He did so by using credit cards to place bets with offshore gambling companies. Within a few months he had run up more than \$25,000 on his American Express card. Within a year, he had lost his house and his marriage because of his huge gambling debts. Now, Marino is suing, along with other internet gamblers, hoping to wipe away credit card bills by arguing that gambling debts are uncollectible. Lawsuits such as Marino’s have prompted credit card companies to think twice about handling internet gambling transactions. This man has lost his entire life because of internet gambling. It is not likely he will win his case, but even if he does, he has lost much more than he can ever get back.

Impact On My Generation

Internet gambling greatly affects my generation because of the serious results that could come about from it. Our children may be able to gamble even easier than the children can now if this problem is not stopped. It could cost us a lot of money in gambling debts. As our generation gets older and moves closer to having kids, internet gambling will have a larger impact on how we raise our kids. It will become more important to discuss the dangers of gambling and to try to encourage our kids to not gamble.

What My Generation Wants

The one way to protect parents from their kids running up large debts in Internet gambling is to pass legislation to ban the operation of online casinos. There is currently one state that does not allow online gambling sites and the use of them and that is Minnesota. However, this remains a controversial issue in that state. Gambling belongs in casinos where there is regulation and children are kept out. However, on the Internet anyone can gamble on anyone else’s credit card as long as they have access to the number and expiration date. A law should be passed at the state level making the operation and use of internet gambling illegal in the United States.

Elderly Drivers

Real Life Scenarios

The concern of the nation regarding the safety of elderly drivers continues to rise. Stories, like the one reported by *The Detroit Free Press*, of the 96-year-old Detroit man adds fuel to this matter. Members of his family repeatedly tried to convince him to stop driving because he kept crashing into a tree next to the driveway. So, how did he respond? Rather than stop driving, he chopped down the tree. Another story involves an elderly Michigan resident that started out her driver's test by backing up into a building, crashing through a window, and sending three people to the hospital.

There was an award-winning movie that aired a few years back called *Driving Miss Daisy*. It was about a proud elderly lady who could no longer drive. After unsuccessful attempts at public transportation, her son hires her a chauffeur. However, outside of the movies, this isn't a very realistic alternative for elderly drivers that need to retire their licenses. Concerned family members of elderly drivers seem to be very persistent in attempting to get their relatives to hand over their keys, but feel that they are taking away possibly the only freedom that they have left, the freedom to drive.

I will use my great-grandmother as an example of this situation. At the tender age of 80, my family felt that along with her eyesight and hearing, her driver's license must go as well. At first she resisted, arguing that she was fine on the roads. I personally confessed to her that she needed to stop driving, she replied with, "I have never gotten a ticket or into an accident." I then replied with, "but Great-Oma, how many accidents have you caused?" She refused to reply. My family decided to just start making sure that we did everything for her so she wouldn't feel the need to drive anywhere. Eventually, she got the point that she really did need to park her car for good.

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current policy: Nearly all of the members of Generation Y have already acquired a driver's license. This means that most of the members of Generation Y have had the experience of being behind the wheel. 95% of them relived an experience of having a dangerous encounter with an elderly driver. Craig Yeck stated that, "one elderly person just wasn't paying attention and pulled out (in front of him)." Another Generation Y member, Brad Neil, simply stated that, "the elderly just drive too slowly." Billy Ricketts commented on the need for "a better plan to keep the dangerous elderly off of the roads. They think that they are immortal and they think that they own the roads." This, in fact, stresses the point that all motorists, including the elderly, affect Generation Y. Also, many of Generation Y members have grandparents that probably shouldn't be behind the wheel. The concern for them and the fear for their own lives shows the kind of impact that this issue really does have on 'my' generation.

Impact of proposed legislation: Perhaps if the task force continues to monitor elderly drivers and decides that there, indeed, is a need to change, there may be legislation proposed. Maybe this will help to keep the unsafe elderly off of the roads.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: In a question to members of Generation Y, I asked them to state their opinion on what would be a good way in determining when an elderly person should lose their license. Matt Horton gave the suggestion, "when a trained person administering the test feels that they are not capable of passing (a test)." Besides the issue of drivers' tests, 80% of Generation Y felt that the government should have the say at what age a person is to be considered "too old to drive." An average age of 75 was considered the rightful age, according to the survey given. To insure the safety of all motorists, something needs to be done in order to prevent further accidents caused by the elderly. Elissa Estes commented that, "their lifestyle is slow, as is their reaction time and how quickly they can see that the light they went through was actually red."

Overall, Generation Y felt that elderly drivers were definitely a hazard on the roads. Estes commented that, "they (elderly drivers) continually merge at 30mph on the expressway." Generation Y member, Mark Nosek, stated that "elderly drivers, drive too defensively and slow, causing accidents sometimes." Many members of Generation Y feel that as soon as the elderly driver fails a driver's, eye, and hearing test, they should be condemned from getting behind the wheel. Generation Y also feels that these tests should be "annually taken by anyone over the age of 70." This in turn would involve the administration of the government. As of the present, there are really no definite regulations that decide the fate of the driving elderly. However, there is a definite cry for help from Generation Y that wishes to somehow keep these "hazards" off of the roads.

What I recommend: I think that the government should strictly enforce a new law that makes sure that anyone over the age of 70 undergo annual road tests. I think that they should also have their eyesight, hearing, and reflexes tested on a biannual base. I support keeping the elderly, who are experiencing the result of the aging process off of the roads and out of danger's way.

Costs: The costs involved for frequent testing of elderly drivers include the cost of the people giving the road tests and the doctor bills that accumulate from the health examinations.

"I myself have seen the impact of unsafe elderly drivers. I have been stuck behind them going 25 mph on a road with a speed limit of 50 mph. I have been cut off by them on the expressway and have seen many accidents caused by their carelessness. I feel that the need for a change in the system of license revoking is inevitable. Along with my opinion, I know, from my research, I am not the only one that feels this way."

Stacey Bednarski

Biography

Stacey Bednarski

Major: Advertising

Technology

The NASA Budget

Real Life Scenario

Here is a scenario that would not be possible if it were not for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). I wake up in the morning and put my food in the microwave and pour a glass of Tang to go with my breakfast. When the food is ready I take it into the living room where I turn on the satellite television and watch CNN where they are reporting from a country on the other side of the world. Then I put on my Velcro shoes before heading out the door. I go to a university where the level of education has not stopped getting better for the past 45 years because of the nationwide emphasis on math and the sciences at the start of the Space Race. The things that I did this morning would not be possible if it were not for NASA, although, the Tang could probably be easily replaced.

Impact On My Generation

The improvements in the education of our country's youth and the improvements in technology that changed the lives of our parents would not be there for us if we did not have a program like NASA. Opportunities could be lost for our generation if the present advancements did not continue.

What My Generation Wants

The Mars Observer, which failed its mission, cost \$980 million. This cost was spread out over ten years. If we assumed that the federal budget was \$1.43 trillion each year, the Mars Observer was only 0.007% of the budget each year. If there are at least 212 million taxpayers, the Mars Observer only cost each person 46 cents a year or \$4.60 total over the ten year period (Vogel 27). I would like to propose that the NASA program have an educational program that goes into every classroom in the country and educates the younger generations on what NASA does and how important it is to have a program that advances our country like NASA does.

What do these numbers tell us? They tell us that the space program does not cost our government or the taxpayers very much money. It is nothing compared to the astronomical budget that our defense programs get. So, it would make you think that a raise in the budget of the NASA program would not cost our country that much. Would you rather see your money be put towards thousand dollar toilet seats or further understanding of our universe?



Education

Values Education in Public Schools

Real Life Scenarios

As a sophomore in high school, I was a varsity sport athlete and 3.8 student. However, I didn't have very good friends and was discontented with my family. In my junior year, I changed schools and unwittingly took an introductory class in sociology. I learned about myself, about relationships, and why others act the way they do. I learned how I could immediately change my life by altering my perception. I would walk out of the classroom and be able to use the information I had learned just 5 minutes ago. This teacher and class changed my life forever. It brought reason and explanation along with understanding and caring to my life. I saw everything through a new pair of glasses. I could understand how kids join gangs, cults, are depressed, live a way of violence, let their addictions to sex, alcohol, drugs run their lives. If they only could have learned what I had, they might have been able to change themselves and become the way they wish they were. Everyone should have the opportunity to at least experience the subject I did. This one sociology class changed my life forever. It might just do the same for others as well.

Impact On My Generation

- By studying sociology, kids can gain a sense of who they are. Peer pressure won't be as influential because students will have the self discipline and respect to be who they really are.
- Students will learn about those that are different than themselves. They will study gangs, cults, cliques and other groups in society.
- Studying relationships between themselves and the people in their lives.
- The study of other cultures, ways in which we can change our culture and ourselves to become a better society, and celebrating differences instead of perceiving them through hate and disrespect
- Problems such as teen sex, drugs, and materialism would be studied and discussed.
- Hand picked movies and books would be reviewed and discussed to gain a sociological perspective on normal everyday situations.

In conclusion, the subject of sociology cannot solve all of our generation's problems but can help young students understand where they exist, why they exist, and what they can do to help prevent them in the future. To examine ourselves, our peers, and our society should be a priority in our schools. As of now, it is more important to educate kids in fields that might help them produce the next big technological advancement than develop them as mentally, physically, and socially healthy future adults.

"It is not enough that you should understand about applied science in order that your work may increase man's blessings. Concern for man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest of all technological endeavors, concern for the great unsolved problems of the organization of labor and good – in order that the creations of our mind shall be a blessing and not a curse to mankind. Never forget this in the midst of your diagrams and equations."

One of the most brilliant men in the history of our world, one who made historical advances in science and technology alike, wrote this. His name was Albert Einstein. All the science and technology in the world won't mean a thing if we find ourselves as an unhappy, doomed society. Are we headed towards understanding others and ourselves? The subjects of sociology and psychology can help accomplish this, which in turn might help reduce many of the problems and create a bright and improved future.

What My Generation Wants

Education must adjust to the times. That means confronting the most important issues of society and working to resolve them. Policy recommendations are as followed:

- Make Introduction to Sociology and Introduction to Psychology requirements for graduation. These classes should be taken during the sophomore or junior years.
- Make Advanced Sociology available. This would be an optional, deeper class for those who are really interested in sociology.
- Make Advanced Placement (AP) Sociology available. This would allow students with an advanced understanding of sociology to receive college credit while in high school.
- Create a high school preparation course for eighth-grade students. This would help them become aware of the dangers as well as the fun activities in high school. Many kids begin high school without a clue of what it is like. That is extremely dangerous.
- Start with a trial period of one year and take results on the progress of students. Attain student, teacher, and parent feedback upon completion of these classes.

Michigan State University requires students to have 8 credits in Integrated Social Sciences for them to have a better overall educational experience. Also, many high schools have Psychology 1, Psychology 2, and AP Psychology, so it isn't too strange to facilitate more social science. However, they aren't required. If taken, these classes could help cut down the problems kids have in high school.

Hope Scholarships

Biography

Trisha Thayer

Major: Landscape

Architecture

Real Life Scenario

One of my fellow students in high school experienced something that no one that planned on being college-bound would like to experience. She applied and got accepted to two different public state universities. The only problem was that she had no way to pay for either of them. She tried to receive financial aid but soon found out that her parents made too much money for her to qualify. This was after she found out that her parents would not contribute any money for her education. She thought about the option of a student loan but didn't want to be in debt when she was finished with college. She really had no options. If there were HOPE scholarships in Michigan this student would have been able to attend college without any problem.

Impact On My Generation

This issue should be of great importance to people in my generation. It would make all of our lives a lot easier. Those of us who wanted to attend college would not be faced with all of the money stresses that are related to it. The HOPE scholarship would send those of us to college that deserve to go. Yes, many families can already afford the expenses of college life for their son or daughter. But what about the students whose parents will not pay for it so they end up going to a cheaper community college where the education received is sometimes substandard. For students like this it is their chance to be independent and to make their own choices about where their life is going to go without the possible money restraints.

What My Generation Wants

The responsibility of the government for this issue is not really that large. The government would simply need to come up with a constitutional amendment and the citizens of the state of Michigan would have to approve it by their votes. The Michigan lottery already supports education. But the question is where does the money go? They claim to have provided \$616.6 million in the year 2000 alone and a total of \$9.8 billion since 1975 (Lottery Supports Education! 2). In the 1996-1997 school year the Georgia HOPE scholarship program supported roughly 124,000 students with \$159 million in lottery revenues (Dee and Jackson 1). This amount of money is well within Michigan's budget for the money that is already given to the education system from the Michigan State Lottery. If the money is already there why not use it.



Biography

Ryan Rabish

Major: No Preference

Standardized Testing in Public Schools

Biography

Kristin Lobaito

Major: Education

Real Life Scenarios

Standardized testing can prove to be beneficial. A school in Washington had received insufficient scores repeatedly on reading standardized tests. As a direct result, the school adopted a new reading program that has turned around the problem (Foster and Salpeter 4). Standardized tests identified that there was a problem in a certain area, due attention was given, and the problem was corrected.

Standardized testing can also be taking away from or even harming the students' education. I can attest to my education being affected by the state's standardized test. When I was in school, during all the times I was required to take the state's standardized test, the MEAP, my education was put on hold. The teachers put the curriculum on hold while all the classrooms required to take the test crammed and focused on what to know to get through the test to produce the good results. Not to mention the fact that last year in New York, "8,000 students were mistakenly sent to summer school and 3,500 held back because of incorrectly reported scores" (Foster and Salpeter 1). These standardized tests not only hurt many students' education, but also stopped genuine learning to take a measly little test.

Impact On My Generation

Although the benefit of taking the MEAP, a standardized test in Michigan, has shown to be beneficial on the sole basis that if the test has been passed then the student receives money towards a college education. However, standardized tests impact students more negatively than anything else.

The Detroit Free Press reported, "in 1997 students started waivers to skip the test and avoid the risk of having a failure tattooed on their transcripts. The trend continued in 1998; and more than half of the eligible juniors opted out of the test in districts such as Farmington, Northville, and Warren Consolidated" (Van Moorlehem and Walsh-Sarnecki 4).

Basically, standardized tests are weighed so heavily that the results of the tests label both students and the districts. This labeling has negative repercussions on the students more than policy makers realize. These tests are supposed to be monitoring the schools to assure the education of its students. Although, the reality is that if students produce bad results on standardized tests then those test scores haunt them when time comes to pursue a higher education. These scores are then pooled together for a review of the progress or lack of progress for the schools. This tool may be beneficial in some aspects, but it is detrimental for the students.

What My Generation Wants

Moreover, there are other possible alternatives to standardized testing to monitor schools. Perhaps there should be two different types of tests testing for different objectives, one for the knowledge of the individual, and the other for school practices (Eisner 3). This way there is a more rounded perspective on the individuals and perhaps the schools' programs. This would be just an additional test that would be administered around the same time as the original standardized test. Another possibility would be to get rid of these tests totally. I personally think that tests are inaccurate when it comes to measuring potential.

However, I still think that schools should be monitored but just in a different fashion. I think that there should be individuals assigned to each school to monitor the school's progress on a daily basis. This person would send in annual reports on the type of information covered, and progress of both students and teachers in the adaptation to different styles of learning. From there, the reports would be reviewed to assure that there are similarities in information, and that things are running smoothly for both students and teachers. This option would be more expensive for the government to support, but I feel it would be the best option for the purpose at hand—to monitor schools. Michigan presently spends thirteen million a year on MEAP testing on approximately 4,000 schools (Schram). This averages out to be about \$3,300 for testing each school. More importantly, my alternative would focus more on each school and its students and provide more jobs. If society is concerned with the education for the country's future, then what is a few more dollars and more informal reviews?

The real question to all the controversy would be if the good outweighs the bad. Also, could we discover any better alternatives to standardized testing that would be more efficient? It is clear that the concern is for the children and ensuring that they receive their equal education. My generation agrees that schools do need to be monitored, but in the most effective way.



Violence in Public Schools

Real Life Scenarios

Michigan State is truly a diverse university. Students from a variety of social, racial, and economic backgrounds gather here to further their education. After talking with several students, it was clear these young people had more in common than initially apparent. Many had to overcome severe violent disruptions throughout their high school years and desperately fight for their education. Despite their backgrounds, most had similar stories to share. I interviewed a student from an upper middle-class suburb. I asked her several questions about violence in her high school. I was shocked by some of her stories. She told me several accounts of weapons such as knives being found in student's lockers. She missed two days during her senior year because of bomb threats that had been called into the school. Her graphic description of fights that would erupt in the hallways between classes sent an eerie feeling over me. As we were ending the interview the young woman looked me in the eyes and said, "I hope that your voice is heard. Something desperately needs to be changed."

Impact On My Generation

The effect of school violence is broader than actual statistics may suggest. As stated in the "Reason Public Policy Institute" policy brief, "Violence in any setting is a problem. The issue is compounded when it pertains to schools, because violent behavior and actions take away from the educational process." Youth today are often depicted as careless and uninterested in educational values. Though this statement may stand true in some individual cases, it is an extremely unfair generalization.

One Seattle student states, "Some of my classes are really rowdy and it's hard to concentrate." Another student from Chicago talks about some of her classmates, "They just are loud and disrupting to the whole class. The teacher is not able to teach. These are real ignorant people." (Volokh and Snell, 23) Many of these young students have to desperately fight for the quality education they dearly care about and deserve.

Can we really afford to turn our backs on the youth of today? Many try to argue that school violence is not a large problem within our country, yet bright youth such as these really do care about their education. They are the future of our country. Are we willing to gamble on the quality of their education?

What My Generation Wants

In the past, the government has dealt with public school violence by trying to clean up the problem instead of preventing one from occurring. It is more work to continually bail water out of a boat than to fix the leak. Prevention is the key to solving the violence in our nation's public schools. I am not suggesting that the government throw more money at the problem. This is the not answer or the proper solution. There is a significant amount of money already allotted to help solve this issue (though whether the money has been spent wisely is another question). Due to the limitations on government involvement, a joint effort must be formed in order to control school violence.

The government needs to place regulations on all school districts. This would require them to keep more accurate records and report the findings and success of their violence-prevention programs. These records should be annually submitted to the government, so schools can easily conduct database searches on other districts of similar backgrounds and the success of their programs. This will prevent districts from wasting money by setting up previously unsuccessful workshops. It is also important for the government to make it mandatory for all schools to develop violence prevention programs within their curriculum. As an incentive to districts, allocations should be distributed according to the success of the program in relation to their incidents of violence.

It should be up to the school to format the program to fit their specific needs. Whether the emphasis is placed on peer mentorship or an anti-gang program, it would be left to the discretion of the school. Yet all districts would have to submit the same reports at the end of the academic year reviewing the positives and negatives of their program. These reports would later be available for other schools to review.

Biography

Andrea Evans

Major: Interior Design

School Vouchers

Biography

Amanda Lindemulder

Major: Special Education

Visual Impairment

Real Life Scenario

A very close friend of my cousin was an extremely intelligent girl. She was well advanced in math and actually took high school classes when she was still attending junior high. Eventually she had exhausted the math department at her school and had nowhere else to go. The local private school which had a more advanced math program was too expensive for her parents to afford, so she was forced to take classes where she didn't learn much at all. Throughout high school this friend helped my cousin get through her math classes. My cousin was not as "gifted" as her friend and had real trouble getting through her remedial math classes. If this friend wasn't there to help my cousin she would have never gotten as far as she did. Because of the advanced people in the public schools, who don't go to the private schools, many people like my cousin are helped. So what is worse, one girl who isn't challenged enough, or a whole class that might never understand?

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current legislation: The majority of Generation Y has completed their secondary education or is close to completion. Still, Generation Y is greatly affected by the current legislation. Children of the members of Generation Y will either be in the public or private school system. We will have the same problems our parents have now. Our children might not get the education they deserve because we might not be able to afford to send them to private school (if the public school is inadequate).

Impact of proposed legislation: If the proposed bills would have passed or future proposed bills pass, members of Generation Y might be forced to pay higher taxes. Also, future teachers in Generation Y might have trouble finding jobs they want. If the public schools start deteriorating many people would not want to teach in those schools. On the positive side, Generation Y's children could have an opportunity to have a more quality education.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: A focus group consisting of 17 Michigan State University students were asked a series of questions regarding school vouchers. They were asked to give their own personal opinions and speak freely. Many of the participants asked to remain anonymous but all gave their consent to be used in this brief. Also, 15 Generation Y students replied to the same questions over the Internet.

The majority of people polled as members of Generation Y do not want the government to take a role in the school voucher controversy. In their opinion there is nothing wrong with companies sponsoring students but the government should have no role in paying for private education. The government supports the public schools, but private schools should be supported by the citizens who choose to attend them.

When asked, 90% of the people who attended a public schools claimed they were very satisfied with the education they received from their schools and they would not choose to attend their local private schools even if it was free.

What I recommend: As a graduate of a public school and a future teacher, I believe school vouchers are not something that should be adopted by the state of Michigan. I know some students don't have the advantage of going to an excellent school like I did, but school vouchers are not going to help those schools to improve.

The problem that the government should focus on in this situation is the public schools. The MEAP test is given to each student in the public schools, if a certain percent of the students do not perform up to standards, then that public school should be investigated. Whatever needs to be done to make sure the criteria is met for that school should be done.

Costs: This policy change would not cost much at all because it does not change much in the current policy. Taxes that are collected now should cover whatever needs to be done to make sure the public schools are performing as they should.

Maximizing Our Public Schools

Real Life Scenario

Jenny, a student at Michigan State University, attended preschool for two years: the year she turned four as well as the year she became five. She graduated from high school with a 3.8 GPA, and is expected to end her freshman year at college with a cumulative 3.75. Her cousin, Allison, did not attend preschool and graduated from high school with a 2.8 GPA.

A young man from my hometown just wanted to be able to afford a "decent car." In order to do this, he dropped out of high school at the legal age of 16 in order to get a job at the local fast food restaurant. His decent car will last, maybe, 20 years. However, a great education that could have been achieved by staying in school would have given him the ability to succeed in life.

Another teenager dropped out of school when he turned 17 because of his use of drugs. He thought that if he quit going to school, then he could make more money by selling the drugs that had made him so happy. It turns out, however, that after only a year of the drug-dealing life, he was arrested and put in prison. By staying in school, he could have avoided such hard times.

Impact On My Generation

The well-known phrase, "Today's children are our future," is a very true statement. In 50 years, when the young people of today go into retirement, we will all be looking to the children of the future to help assist us with all of our needs. I am sure most people would agree that we want well-balanced Americans to decide issues in our future as we grow weaker and less likely to take care of ourselves. It is more likely that if the children of today are starting to learn the necessary skills to succeed at a young age, then they will only grow stronger from that, and in turn become more well-rounded individuals, and better equipped to help the nation when they are older.

I know many people that were supposed to graduate in my class but did not. A couple of girls got pregnant and had to raise their children on their own. Three guys left school before their senior year even began because they were so concentrated on making money, that they only had eyes for dollar signs instead of their education. One very common reason that people leave school is that they are fed up with the people that are in their classes. This includes both students and teachers. Maybe high school isn't the right place for everyone, but achieving a diploma should be taken more seriously.

What My Generation Wants

One suggestion to the government is to make pre-school mandatory for all children planning to attend public schools. The Michigan law already states that all children must attend school the year that they turn six years old. In many cases, that would mean that children are starting school at age five. While five is a smart age to make kindergarten mandatory, it would be better if youngsters were required to attend pre-school for a couple of hours a day during the year they turn five. This would make children more educationally equal when they start kindergarten, which would account for less disorder among students. Many children have such different backgrounds, that teaching young classes is quite difficult. However, this would make it much easier to instill basic ideas and thought processes in each child's head.

One great idea to help decrease the dropout rate would be to raise the requirement for staying in school from 16 to 18 years of age. This would insure that children couldn't leave school just because they got their license, or wanted to make some quick money. However, there are definite negative effects to this idea. For one, just because someone graduates from high school doesn't mean that he/she learned a great deal by being required to attend every day. If fact, if the student became disruptive enough, he/she could interfere with other student's abilities to learn, and therefore making them want to consider leaving school.

One possible solution to that would be making more alternative educational institutions available to youngsters. The law in Michigan says that for someone to be able to take GED classes at night, he/she must be at least 17 years old. How fair is it, that someone can quit high school when they turn 16, but can't pursue another form of education until they turn 17? Also, there are daytime alternative educational schools that people can attend if they are having problems in their high school. By making more of those institutes available, Michigan would have better educated young adults walking the streets.

Biography

Jaime Nelson

Major: Engineering Arts

Employment of International Students

Real Life Scenario

I see many international students try to get a job in the U.S., but few can. They cannot usually help but return to their countries after graduation. When I see or hear those kinds of situations around me, I feel the fear of getting a job in the U.S. I am concerned about my future when I graduate. Numerous international students, including myself, who are currently studying at MSU, want to experience American workplaces anyhow. However, most of them have doubts about the uncertain job opportunities in the U.S., so they are losing their dreams little by little.

Impact On My Generation

Whether or not the government adds job opportunities, this issue will have significant impact on Generation Y.

Impact of current legislation:

- Jung-Sick Shin, a freshman at MSU, believes that international students will voice their employment problems if the government does not give more job offers to foreign students.
- A junior at MSU says that fewer international students could come to the U.S. in the future if the government does not give more job opportunities to international students.

Impact of proposed legislation:

- Jenny Shrewsbury, a freshman at MSU believes that we will have a more mixed work place in the future.
- MSU freshman Amanda Lindemuldes says that if the government gives more jobs to foreign students, it could mean fewer jobs for the people who live here.
- Michelle Quinn, a freshman student at MSU predicts that we would see more foreign students in this country.
- A sophomore at MSU emphasizes that there would be reduced wages for non-foreign students.
- MSU freshman Yu-Chul Kim, a student from Korea says that if the government gives more job offers and does not regulate employment of international students, everyone would compete for jobs under the same conditions. Hence, everyone would try to be qualified.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus group

Recommendations For:

- Eliminate the regulations of employment for international students (F-1 or F-2) because the restrictions are unfair to international students. They sometimes need a job to support their studying abroad.
- Give international students the same benefits as American students. They live in the same condition in the U.S. as domestic students do, so they should receive equal benefits.
- Regulate the number of jobs offered to international students because most international students want to get experiences of a job in the U.S. even some international students would go back their home countries from their graduations a couple of years later; most of them believe it is a valuable experience.

Recommendations Against:

- Regulate the number of jobs to first allow American students to seek employment, and then allow the foreigners. If the foreigners show great potential, the government should promote them to higher jobs.
- Keep the regulation of employment for international students because domestic students should have the right to get a job before international students do. If foreign students were qualified, they would get a job fairly despite the regulations that exist.

What I recommend: Based on the data, there are a lot of international students in the U.S., who might have a dream to get a job in the U.S. Nevertheless, I think that most international students have the similar kinds of fears about the employment in the U.S. as I do. In order to relieve those fears, I believe the regulations of the employment for international students should be revised.

Biography

Hoi-Kab Kim

Major: Political Science

“This semester has been a pedagogical grand slam. The students are learning so many skills. They’re learning how to write as part of a team; they’re thinking critically and listening to their classmates; and they’re developing a sense of how politics really work”

David Stowe, Professor

Health

Smoking Restrictions on Public College Campuses

Real Life Scenario

Smoking has affected a lot of people on the Michigan State campus. Usually young tobacco users don’t develop lung or mouth cancer until they get older. Many of the effects felt by tobacco among college students are through a family member who has developed cancer from the carcinogens. “My father started smoking when he was 15 years-old, and continued until the day he found out he had lung cancer. By that time he was smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. I didn’t think anything of his smoking before the cancer, I even smoked myself. I started smoking in high school too. He died two years ago, last February,” said an anonymous no-preference major freshman that attends Michigan State University.

Impact On My Generation

The new generations of smokers range from as young as 14 to college students. Cigarette companies purposely recruit teenagers through advertisements such as Joe Camel and The Marlboro Man. A recent bill passed by Congress slows this ‘so-called’ recruiting process by cigarette companies. The consequences for our generation might not happen tomorrow, or in 10 years, but if smoking continues to grow at the current rate hundreds of thousands of people will die from lung cancer, emphysema, or mouth cancer. Globally, smoking-related deaths will rise to 10 million per year by 2030.

The recent tobacco settlement forces four major tobacco companies to pay an estimated \$206 billion through the year 2025. Although appearing to be a major setback for the tobacco companies, 1999 annual revenues only decreased 9%. To compensate for the loss of revenues, tobacco companies raised the price for a pack of cigarettes 15 cents in 1999, and targeted minorities. In December 1999 the largest tobacco company in the world, Philip Morris, launched a \$40 million campaign targeting women. Even though tobacco companies are limited to advertising, cigarette ads in magazines such as *Glamour*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *People and Essence* are very common. Organizations such as the Medical Women’s Association and the National Coalition For Women Against Tobacco have countered the industry’s target on women.

Tobacco companies should not be allowed to advertise in magazines targeting certain groups. Advertisement will increase the number of smokers, which in turn leads to major health problems such as lung cancer and emphysema. Aside from minorities, tobacco companies have targeted minors. The MSA prohibits the advertisement of tobacco related products at most events with a large youth audience. Such bans are at football, hockey, soccer, and basketball sporting games. Most arenas and stadiums also have a ban on advertisements.

A major sporting event that has a tobacco sponsor is NASCAR. The Winston Cup is the major series for NASCAR racing, and has millions of young fans worldwide. Besides the Winston name, a major cigarette brand, being brandished all over racing events, FOX Sports Networks and NBC has signed a multi-billion dollar deal to televise the NASCAR Winston Cup racing. This will provide advertisement the Winston cigarette brand needs to “recruit” the new generation of smokers normally around 11-15 years of age. Early adolescence is the period when young people are most likely to try smoking for the first time. The Liggett Group Inc., one of the five major US tobacco companies, has admitted that the entire tobacco industry conspired to market cigarettes to children as young as 14.

Why should we make it more convenient for these educated students to smoke on our educational grounds? One student group is fighting to curb the smoking habit on campus. Students Taking Action Regarding Tobacco (START) has worked to get rid of many of the ashtrays that are located near building entrances and helped get no-smoking signs posted in these areas.

James Noto, faculty advisor for START, stated “our first choice was to have a smoke-free campus,” he said. “Many people complained about walking through a gauntlet of smoke to get to class.”

According to START, many students said they would support a ban on cigarettes. For example, one student stated, “I, 100 percent, think it stinks... If they want to smoke, take it home. Cigarette smoke has no discrimination — it’s going to seep in and not go away.”

Programs to help students quit their habits are not marketed at dormitories, university education buildings, or sports arenas on campus. “I’ve never even heard of programs that help students quit smoking—they have them here?” asked a well-involved freshmen at Michigan State University, Jill Szoke.

What My Generation Wants

Every year 400,000 people die of tobacco related products. Tobacco has been a major industry in America for centuries and is still strong. The following needs to be done:

- Restrict advertising
- Prohibit sales to minors
- Decrease production

Biography

Lindsay Anderson

Major: General Management

Matthew Gerwin

Major: Engineering

Smoking Restrictions on Public College Campuses (Continued)

The government should limit the amount of tobacco grown to under a billion pounds per year, and decrease that every year. Besides limiting production, the government should limit the amount of packs per week people are allowed to purchase. A screening procedure should also be established to buy cigarettes which might also help reduce the amount of smokers. The screening process should involve a long, expensive process to get a cigarette, so people will consider giving it up altogether. Health concerns, personal effects, and financial effects should be told to the customers in a face-to-face screening situation as well.

- An estimated 70% of smokers (33.2 million) want to quit.
- Only 2.5% (1.2 million) succeed in quitting permanently.
- Only 15% of smokers who saw a physician last year were offered assistance with quitting.

Although there are penalties against selling tobacco products to minors, there need to be penalties against the business owners as well. If penalties were applied to the owners they would monitor who they hire and train more closely. Creating laws for production and sale can control consumption of cigarettes. Compared to other countries, the United States is well below the average price and excise tax on cigarettes. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Portugal have 86% of the price of cigarettes as a tax, while a dozen other countries are at 70% or higher.

- A 10% rise in tobacco prices has resulted in lower overall cigarette consumption by 3% to 5% (2).

Higher prices will result in more smokers deciding to quit and fewer young people choosing to smoke, yet the U.S.'s highest tax on cigarettes is at a mere 41%, and is low as 11% in states such as Kentucky (2). An increase of price for cigarettes has resulted in increasing use of smokeless tobacco products as well. A major state and federal tax increase of \$2.00-\$3.00 should be required for all tobacco products to decrease the number of smokers and tobacco use altogether.

- "Volunteer Group Clean up for Smokers": Cigarette butts would be cleaned up on walkways, along rivers, and roadsides 2-3 times a year. For example, sororities and fraternities on campus have a quota of how many philanthropy acts they have done each year. This could be a great way for sororities and fraternities to promote that smoking is bad, and show the amount of clean-up needed for littering.
- Post signs that state the smoking regulations on campus at all entrances and enclosed areas at dormitories, educational buildings, bus stops, etc.
- The message "Please Don't Litter" should be put on all cigarette packs, which is very common for highly littered items such as soda cans, snack wrappers, and fast food containers.
- Free personal ashtrays should be marketed. They are paper-thin and will easily fit in any pockets. They are foil lined, trap the smell inside, and take up less space in your pocket or purse than a pack of cigarettes. If this is not available, improvise with such things as film containers, metal mint containers, regular tin foil, or anything else that's handy.
- Implement a 1-800 Campus number that people can call to report on someone they saw litter the butt of a cigarette, or get the license plate number of the driver disposing of his/her cigarette butt out the window. For example: 1-800-litterbug is one litter number where you can report a litter of anything including cigarettes.
- Market the programs more effectively at each campus to better tailor cessation programs to students' needs. If the programs were advertised as being available, this could help curb the decrease in the amount of college students that want to quit smoking but don't know how.

RU-486, the Abortion Pill

Real Life Scenario

RU-486, also known as the abortion pill, has been met with controversy and support across the nation, but most recently on college campuses. Michigan State University (MSU) has experienced controversy over the abortion pill. MSU's health facility, Olin Health Center, announced it would not offer RU-486. On the heels of this announcement, the Associated Students of Michigan State University (ASMSU), the student government, reacted, saying they would vote regarding the future of RU-486 on campus.

The argument on campus is over whether or not Olin Health Center would reconsider carrying the abortion pill. ASMSU has challenged Olin, proposing a bill to make RU-486 available at the health center. The proposed bill may not bring the drug to the Michigan State University campus. However, depending on the outcome, it could affect students in several different ways. Take the following real life scenario, which could have two very different endings:

An MSU student has recently found out she is pregnant. She is scared to tell her parents. She does not feel she is ready to have a child, nor does she want a child. She does not think she could not withstand a surgical abortion. However, she just found out that the health center on her college campus now offers RU-486. This seems like the perfect solution for her. No one would even know she was ever pregnant. Her parents would not have to find out, and all she would have to do is walk across campus.

The idea of college age students having access to abortions through simply taking a series of pills does not sound appealing to everyone. Especially when tuition money could be used. Kathy Savard, a no-preference freshman at Michigan State University says, "I do not want my money to pay for anything dealing with RU-486." Savard is referring to the possibility of using tuition money and taxes to help fund the presence of the drug on campus.

While Savard disagrees with RU-486 on campus, Sarah Bedee, a freshman at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio says, "I think that they (RU-486 pills) should be available to the students, but only through the health center."

While money may seem like the major issue for allowing RU-486 on the MSU campus, this is not the case. According to Glynda Moorer, executive director of Olin Health Center, "It's not just an issue of funding, it is also the priorities of the health center." In addition to the drug not being a priority on campus, the facilities available do not meet the requirements of the FDA to provide the drug. These requirements include an ultrasound, surgical privileges, and 24-hour care, none of which Olin currently offers.

Impact On My Generation

RU-486 is a new form of abortion in the United States of America. With this drug entering the country, it could greatly affect Generation Y. Unwanted pregnancies can now be avoided in a less painful way, simply by taking a pill. This could possibly lead to an increased number of abortions. However, it is difficult to tell with the drug still in preliminary stages within the United States.

This is where the two endings of the college girl previously introduced begin to differ. The first scenario could involve the girl receiving RU-486 at her college health center and going through with the abortion. Like previously described, she would not have to tell her parents and the unborn fetus could be aborted.

On the other hand, suppose the girl's college health center does not have RU-486 available. The girl may possibly have to choose whether a surgical abortion is right for her, or if it would be better in her situation to have the child. Both situations must take into effect the future circumstances of abortion. It is difficult to say whether a day or twenty years after aborting a fetus the mother will have regrets.

Without what may seem to be convenient to some, RU-486 on college campuses, could possibly make the choice of aborting a fetus easier, or more difficult for young adults.

What My Generation Wants

The approval of this drug was based on scientific research and was proven to be "safe and effective." Members of Generation Y through focus groups and e-mail surveys, consisting of a total of sixty people, have made the recommendations found to the left.

Other viewpoints: While three recommendations were determined through focus groups and e-mail surveys, many viewpoints were made, appearing in the following quotes.

"Intercourse brings out the pleasure of life. It shows that two humans are willing enough to experience the pleasure of life in themselves, and by creating an offspring." (Steven Zimmerman, Michigan State University freshman)

"It will just cause people to think that it is okay just to randomly have sex because they will be able to eliminate any consequences easily if anything happens." (Tessa Lawrence, Michigan State University sophomore)

"If RU-486 was allowed on campus it would be like a birth control pill, all the girls would be getting pregnant and using RU-486 as their escape route if they became pregnant." (Valorie Hielman, Owens Community College)

Biography

Matthew Horton

Major: Marketing

Date Rape Drugs

Real Life Scenario

The Mountain Dew tasted funny, but she drank it anyways. Minutes later Samantha Reid fell to the ground. Hours later she was dead. Her best friend Melanie Sindone went into a coma after drinking an orange juice and vodka drink also spiked with GHB. Autopsy reports stated that they were poisoned with gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB) which intoxicates victims, then sedates them, making them helpless to sexual assault. This was the well-known case that happened in Grosse Isle, Michigan (*Detroit News*).

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current legislation: I don't think that this legislation will keep people from making GHB, buying it, or using it. If someone is looking for a victim to rape, he will do whatever it takes, and this is an easy way for that person not to get caught, especially since the traces leave after 24 hours and because the victim usually forgets what happens.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: Among 40 Generation Y's, 16 of them men and 24 of them women, almost all of them said to put stricter punishments and harder fines on the criminals who actually went through with using the date-rape drug on someone. Possession of the drug should be considered as the intent of use and should also be treated seriously.

What I recommend: This act does little to nothing to provide prevention of date rape. The law merely creates the illusion of security. Its terms do not address the underlying causes of date rape, nor do they in actuality make women any safer. Stricter punishments should be enforced because no one should go through that type of pain.

I think there has to be more effective steps that can be taken in fighting date rape. The government should spend less time speaking out about the ills of drugs and more time educating on violence against women. All of society needs to focus not only on changing men's attitudes towards women, but also on informing women of the rights they have and the dangers they face.

Costs: It would only cost a little more than the amount already being used to prevent GHB, but would be more effective if an advertising campaign is put into use showing how rapists use the drug to facilitate their crimes.

Biography

Anup Hundiwal

Major: Engineering

Human Cloning in the United States

Real Life Scenario

In 1996, a marvel of modern science occurred in Midlothian, Scotland. Dr. Ian Wilmut did what most scientists believed impossible. He created Dolly, the first mammal to be cloned from an adult. The actual birth of Dolly did not occur until February of 1997, and when the announcement came there was widespread controversy all over the world. Not wanting to be outdone, the United States countered the creation of Dolly with one of their own. They inserted a gene from a jellyfish into the DNA structure of a monkey, effectively turning the monkey's fingernails red. While this doesn't seem like too big of an accomplishment, primates are the closest genetic relatives to human beings. After these acts were announced, the populace became very worried.

Impact On My Generation

The impact of this issue on Generation Y will be profound. Generation Y is the future of this country, as well as the future of the world. We are going to be the scientists struggling with whether or not to clone humans, and we are also going to be the politicians who outlaw it or allow it. It's time Generation Y takes a long hard look at this issue, because as technology gains more advances this issue will become more heatedly debated. It is best that the issue gets addressed and dealt with sooner rather than later so major problems don't arise.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: When I conducted focus groups on this issue I polled close to fifty students, ages ranging from sixteen to twenty-two. All of the students, save one, believed that cloning of human beings should never be allowed. As Patrick Cibula puts it, "No, I believe that there are some things that humans just shouldn't mess with." That seems to echo the feelings of many Generation Y members who feel that cloning takes away the individuality of our society. Generation Y does, however, agree with cloning of human organs. Human organs are not sentient; they do not have a personality of their own. It is not atrocious to grow a human heart out of a tissue sample in order to save someone's life. It is atrocious to create a human being exactly identical to another from a tissue sample.

What I recommend: I feel that the cloning of human beings could prove to be a very useful tool to the people of the world. But the costs outweigh the benefits many times over. The problems associated with cloning could prove so disastrous that our whole way of life could be shattered. I feel it is better to forget this pipe dream and go on with research into more useful things, like finding a cure for cancer and AIDS.



Environment

Oil Drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge

Real Life Scenario

David S. Page, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Bowdoin College said, "Oil spills are very evocative events. At the time of a spill, we can't believe an oiled shoreline will ever get better, because it looks so awful. We do know that because petroleum is a natural product and breaks down naturally in the environment, oiled shorelines do recover and do so quite rapidly. In the Exxon Valdez oil spill, most of the spill zone had recovered within 2-3 years of the oil spill. World experience with far larger oil spills than the Exxon Valdez oil spill (currently #53 in total volume) tells us that long term effects of oil spills do not occur."

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current legislation:

- A sophomore at MSU imagines that if oil drilling were not allowed in the ANWR, we would most likely have a different lifestyle. Things will be more expensive due to research costs for new energy sources.
- Scheidies thinks that if oil drilling is not allowed, we will find a better way to drive cars and run machinery without oil.
- Jennifer Shrewsburg, a freshman at MSU, believes that if oil drilling is not allowed in the ANWR, we could run out of oil and be forced to find a new way of life.

Impact of proposed legislation:

- Scheidies thinks that if oil drilling is allowed, we will destroy another site of beauty in our country.
- Nipa Surati, a sophomore at MSU, stated that if oil drilling were allowed in the ANWR, there would be more jobs available.
- A freshman at MSU says oil prices will go down, but a beautiful region will be destroyed.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups:

Policy Recommendations For:

- Take a lot of precautions because oil drilling in the ANWR affects the environment.
- Allow only part of the ANWR to be drilled and the rest of the ANWR must be left alone, no matter how much oil is in it.

Policy Recommendations Against:

- Explore technology and what we could do if we run out of oil.
- Prohibit oil drilling in such a beautiful place as ANWR.

What I recommend: I believe that oil drilling should be allowed in the ANWR because oil development has many more benefits than keeping the ecology system. These advantages include political security, the stability of international trade, abundant incomes, and the offer of jobs. Even though a small part of ANWR is affected, oil drilling brings plenty of benefits. Therefore, oil drilling has great strengths and should be allowed in ANWR instead of keeping all of ANWR pristine.

Cost: If oil drilling were allowed in the ANWR, the cleaning system for oil drilling should be set up in the ANWR. The costs of cleaning system should be considered.

Biography

Hoi-Kab Kim

Major: Political Science

Environment

Water Pollution

Real Life Scenario

Rivers, lakes, streams, and oceans are some of the most beautiful features of our planet. However, we do not always keep our waters as clean as we should. A good example of how we have mistreated our waters would be the Red Cedar River. This once gorgeous river now contains dangerously high levels of E-coli. "The levels of E-coli are currently at 357 parts per 100 milliliters, more than 200 parts above levels considered safe" (Wright). Although most strains are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this strain produces a powerful toxin and can cause severe illness or even death in smaller animals.

In another story, a large paper plant in the Upper Peninsula was forced to change the PH of their water due to environmental regulations. The town's water plant was not well prepared for this and could not adjust for the changes in PH. Due to the change in PH the entire neighboring town to start receiving awful tasting water. Many of the people in this town started boiling their water or buying bottled water to avoid drinking the tap water. By the time the water plant had made the necessary changes it had cost the town a considerable amount of money. The hardest hit were the people of the town, who not only have to pay for their bottled water but also had to pay taxes for the changes to the plant.

Impact On My Generation

Water is life. It is that simple. If the past generations had been better about how they treated their water, then this might not have been a Generation Y issue. However, our parents and grandparents were not very good about protecting their water. Now this responsibility is going to be passed on to the younger people of America. Gen Y cannot survive if their water is destroyed. Our bodies are around 80 percent water and everyday we lose some of that water and must put more back into our systems. The water also provides us with food in the form of fish and as precipitation that helps crops grow. It is now plain to see that without clean water Generation Y could not survive.

Impact of current legislation: The current legislation has allowed the EPA to clean up numerous large rivers and lakes. This is a great step and Phase Two of this project (which focuses on smaller bodies of water) would, in fact, make the environment almost pollution free over time. This would allow the people of Gen Y to enjoy fishing, swimming, and other water activities. However, this law is not being enforced.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: Generation Y appears to favor stricter regulations on the Clean Water Act. They want to see an America that has a safe water supply for them and for their children. On the other hand a few members would like the government to just stay out of their affairs and allow them to live peacefully.

What I recommend: As a member of Generation Y I would like to see a bill put into affect that would fine cities that are not currently keeping up with the stipulations of the Clean Water Act of 1987. Since fixing the sewage system is already required, this new legislation would just punish those cities that are not putting forth the effort. Another piece of legislation I would like to see is a lower limit on the amount of fertilizer people and operations like golf courses can use. This reduction would reduce polluted run off and would prevent algae from growing in waters where it does not belong.

"I have spent much of my life around the water. I swim in it, I drink it and I fish in it. To let the world's most valuable resource be ruined in front of us would be the greatest shame in the world."

Patrick Cibula

Biography

Patrick Cibula

Major: No Preference



Business and Economy

Minimum Wage

Real Life Scenario

Paul, a freshman in college just arrives at his college of choice and starts his life on his own. With living on his own, he needs to get a job, but he cannot seem to find a job that is hiring above minimum wage. Therefore, he takes a job, knowing that working for \$5.15 an hour isn't going to pay for his car payment, insurance or any other payments he has.

While Paul is in college he also knows that he will not be working a full 40-hour week because of his classes, so he just tries to work as much as he can and still have room for class and studying on the weekends. At the end of his first month at school his first bills come in. He looks at the money he made at his job, and then looks at the bills and thinks to himself,

"How am I going to make this payment?" Paul's minimum wage job has only made him just enough to pay for his car payment and most of his insurance. Knowing that he is a little short with his payments, he asks his parents to help him for this month. They do, but they say it is the first and last time.

So the next day Paul asks his employer for some more hours to work during the week or a little bit of a raise. His employer tells him that he can't give him a raise right now but he can add a few more hours a week for him. Paul starts working more in the week and weekend but then he doesn't have as much time to study. The next month comes around and Paul makes his payments with no problem this time. During this month, Paul has had a test in every one of his classes and has failed them all due to the lack of studying, but he does not connect the failure of the class to working more. He just thinks that the classes are getting harder. As more and more time goes by Paul doesn't seem to be doing too well in his classes at all. The finals of semester one come and go and Paul passes all his exams with a C average, but due to his poor performance on all of the other tests, he is put on academic probation. His parents knowing that his job is interfering with his school work force him to quit his job or reduce the hours, but Paul knows that he can't make his payments if he does this. He knows that his parents will not help him so he just keeps his job and the hours he is getting. At the end of his first full year of college, Paul ends up failing out just because he needs to work to pay for his payments, and minimum wage was not cutting it for him.

Impact On My Generation

Many Generation Y members think the minimum wage should be raised at least to a minimum of \$6.15 an hour. With 10 states now making their own set wages, we would like Michigan to join such states as Rhode Island, Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Vermont, Massachusetts, California, Washington, and Oregon to set our own state minimum wage above what the government believes to be satisfactory for the average worker of today.

With a new minimum wage, one-third of the people that would get an increase in their paycheck would consist of teenagers and over one-half are under the age of twenty-five. With more than 2.2 million Generation Y people would be affected by the increase, would help members of Generation Y a lot in making their payments.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: The information from my focus groups was pretty predictable; an increase in the minimum wage would be most beneficial to them. A Michigan State University freshman stated that, "With work, class, and studying, I have no time to hang out. My work takes up most of my time that I'm not in class. It seems like once I'm out for the day (of class) I got to go to work, and I can barely pay for my bills. After paying my bills, I'm left with minimal revenue, and that limits what I can do."

What I recommend: I recommend that the minimum wage should be raised to somewhere around \$6.00 an hour. An increase in minimum wage would help me and many other students attending college. With a higher minimum wage, school and work wouldn't be as much of a strain on the body and mind as it is now. So many college students get stressed out because of work and school, most cannot handle the pressure. With an increase, students wouldn't have to work as many hours as they do during school, and it would bring more relief to them.

Cost: There would be a heavy cost to this, new minimum wage, but not as much to the government itself. Most of the cost would be borne by employers, and businesses, not the government.

Biography

Kraig Yeck

Major: Civil
Engineering

Sports

Gender Inequality in College Sports

Real Life Scenario

"Pain is nothing compared to what it feels like to quit so, give it everything you've got."

Aaron Scheidies

While in the gym sweating profusely, muscles burning and bones aching, Michigan State University's men's gymnastics team prepared to finish off the season strong. As they practiced on April 24, 2000 a letter was sent from MSU Athletic Director, Clarence Underwood, stating the sport would be dropped at the end of the season due to Title IX. Computer engineering major Jonathan Plante said that this was the last thing he and his seventeen teammates wanted. This day is now named "Black Monday" because it symbolizes the death of varsity men's gymnastics at MSU. Since the deadline for scholarships and signing athletes had already passed, the Board of Trustees reluctantly granted the team one more year of varsity status. "We have a year extension, but we have all been released from our letters of intent," Plante said. The decision has been made, but the student support group, ASMSU, will look into the issue and help in whatever way they can. This move by MSU was a step toward compliance with Title IX, a gender equity law.

MSU uses a method of student population to comply with this law. Researchers predict that the female undergraduate population will rise in the next few years possibly prompting the elimination of more men's sports. Plante feels that the lesser recognized sports such as wrestling, swimming and diving will be the first to go. While this unexpected cut will hurt the eighteen-member gymnastics team, it will also give new hope to up and coming women athletes.

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current legislation: The impact of the implementation of Title IX has been felt around the country since 1972 and is still stirring up talk today. It was meant to give women more opportunities in college athletics and it has for many years, but as we are in a new millennium it is becoming clear that the once successful law is hurting male athletes. Mario Contardi, a student at the University of Miami in Ohio, realized this and filed a lawsuit against the university for reverse discrimination, after men's soccer, tennis, and wrestling were cut in order to comply with Title IX. Judge Sandra Beckwith dismissed the lawsuit against the university. Beckwith did, however, allow the suit's claim that Miami violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, but said she would dismiss that if the university officials show they acted to conform with Title IX. The equal protection clause states that you can only discriminate based on race or gender when you have a very compelling reason. The question is, was this a good enough reason? Three equal opportunity organizations believe it wasn't. The Washington Legal Foundation, The Independent Women's Forum, and the Allied Educational Foundation believe the current standard is wrong and does not take into account interests and abilities.

Impact of proposed legislation: Even though there has been no legislation proposed yet, there is much discussion about the substantial proportionality part of Title IX. U.S. Rep. Dennis Hastert from Illinois and Sen. Phil Gramm from Texas, along with forty-seven other House colleagues think that substantial proportionality creates a gender based preference. They say that Title IX would be more effective and fair if substantial proportionality was done away with.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y Focus Groups: For this issue brief, I conducted a survey of Michigan State University students and student-athletes to obtain their views on the issue of equity in college athletics. One of these students, Matt Mooney quoted, "Regardless of sex, people watch what is exciting to them not what brings in the most money or who's playing."

Another student said, "No matter what you do or change, you can't make people have interest in other events."

One of the members of Michigan State's volleyball teams, Naomi Taylor states, "I realize that women's athletics do not bring in as much revenue as larger men's sports, such as basketball and football, but I think the only way for women's sports to be recognized at the level that men's are, is for them to have the same advantages. Being involved in athletics teaches a person so many valuable lessons, that it would take me an entire paper to touch on only a few, so I believe that each sport should be given a chance."

What I recommend: As an avid sports fan, I think that the NCAA should amend the existing Title IX law so that it states, "Federally funded institutions must provide all sports, men's and women's, with the funding needed for equipment, games, and travel. Any other funding needed by individual sports is not required to be given by the institution." This would allow women's and non-revenue men's sports to continue participation and also allow the institution to decide how it wants to distribute the left over funding.

Costs: In the 1999-2000 year, the Athletic Department at Michigan State spent \$2.8 and \$1.25 million respectively in operating costs for men's and women's sports. My policy recommendation would not cost institutions any more money; it would just call for a redistribution of the money.

Biography

Aaron Scheidies

Major: Kinesiology

Sports Gambling Online

Biography

Mark Nosek

Major: Telecommunications

Real Life Scenario

He always told me when he won. Pretty soon he had me interested in gambling online. My best friend Spence and I were freshmen, attending college at Michigan State University, looking for ways to make money while attending school full-time. We wanted jobs where the workload was light, the pay was good, and the hours somehow fit into our busy schedule.

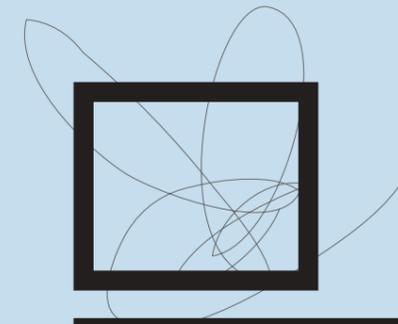
Finding employment was difficult at first but then I found employment at a nearby residence hall. All I had to do was check in students during later hours for security purposes. It was an easy job; the pay was good, and best of all I was allowed to study for my classes while I worked. Meanwhile, my friend Spence did not have such luck finding a good job. He did not like the pay or the hours he was offered to work, so he decided to look into some alternative ways to make money. Spence decided to gamble his money on the Internet, betting on sports games. The way he explained it to me made gambling online sound like it was a great idea.

We both had knowledge in sports and I always thought I knew who would win the big games. But instead of rushing into the gambling idea, I decided to make some practice bets with fake money to see if gambling online would be worthwhile. After a couple of weeks I found out that I was not as accurate at picking the winning teams as I thought I was. I was already down over \$100, I remember being so thankful that they were mock bets. Spence on the other hand was betting his income he made during the summer working construction. He always told me when he won and I rarely heard him say he lost a game. I figured he was doing fine and had it under control.

Soon I noticed that Spence was often angry and had been spending the majority of his day looking up information on the Internet about sports games. I could tell something was wrong and thought that the gambling was affecting him. I asked him about his money situation and if gambling was going well for him. Spence said he was on a "cold streak" and had tapped into his tuition money for next semester. This is when I knew the gambling was a serious problem for Spence. I tried to persuade Spence into getting a job with me and to stop gambling. Spence did not want to work and felt he could make his money back by gambling. Soon he lost most of his savings and was forced to drop out of college after the first semester. He moved back home with his family and worked part-time while going to a community college. He regrets gambling his tuition away and realized that it nearly destroyed his life.

What My Generation Wants

The Interstate Wire Act of 1961 has to be revised, making it legal to gamble online. People are going to gamble online regardless if it's legal in this country or not. People have the option to gamble online if the company is set up in another country. If online gambling were to be legalized, it should be regulated through the government. Profits could be used to fund government programs, lower taxes, or to eliminate poverty. If gambling were to be legalized there would be a need to educate gamblers about the risks. To protect people from losing all of their hard-earned money the government could also limit the amount of money someone is allowed to gamble according to their income.



Generation Y Perspective

Complete Issue Briefs

Political Awareness

The Problem

How to equip Generation Y with the tools needed to make informed recommendations on public policy legislation that affects or will affect them.

Real Life Scenario

Anup Hundiwal, a Michigan State University student, enrolled in an ATL 135 class during his freshman year. Going into the class, he was not aware of what this particular class had in store for him. He was assigned to write three issue briefs and picked Affirmative Action, the date rape drug, and alternative fueling as his issues that Gen Y has serious concerns about. When he chose these, he did not have any extensive knowledge about any of his three issues. All he had was a mere opinion.

Anup received most of information from pro and con web sites of which he had five on each issue. Over the course of the semester, he slowly gained more of a grasp on what his issues were really about. He contacted experts and organizations that specialized in each of his issues. He conducted Gen Y focus groups to determine what his peers thought and what they proposed could and should be done. These focus groups helped Anup find out what his generation really thought on each issue. Anup took all this information and wrote three issue briefs.

His issue briefs were then brought before our class and put under the scrutiny of his classmates to make sure he got the points across that Gen Y stood for. By the end of his semester, he became a very informed person on each of his issues. Anup said he learned the most from his issue brief on Affirmative Action because his original opinion was disproved by his research. When asked if he had any recommendations for next year's class, he answered: "Start early, and make sure to pick a topic that you are actually interested in, which makes the research a lot easier."

Many other college freshmen came to Michigan State University, with heads full of ideas and opinions. Most freshmen did not have an opportunity to become informed citizens, whether it be through school or outside of it. Not because they didn't want to, but because they just weren't exposed to a way through which they could become more involved.

How Did We Get Here

Year by year, the percentage of Americans who vote decreases and the average age of voters increases. This means the younger generations are not voting. Why is this trend the way it is? One reason could be that young people have grown up in a society where politicians are looked upon as crooks and swindlers rather than great leaders as in past eras. Young people mold all politicians into one lump rather than judge them on their individual merits, because they believe that no matter whom they vote for, things will be the same either way. If young people banned this jaded outlook on American politics altogether, they could be a powerful force.

No one believed Jesse Ventura was going to win the governor's race in Minnesota. But he did, thanks to the support of younger voters who were fed up with the he said/she said of the two big parties. Younger generations have the potential to flex their political muscles. But first, they must show the drive to see some results. Since votes win elections and put people in office, who do you think the legislators favor in passing laws? Definitely not the demographics that choose not to vote. This voting trend has yet to change. And so legislators will continue to ignore the voices of those that don't vote.

How to Access Current and Proposed Legislation

I myself was in the same situation as Anup. So, I decided to see how I could become more politically aware. The best source to find out about legislation is to call your representatives and elected officials directly. They represent you and you have a right to know what they are voting on and proposing. I called a local mayor and my state senator and e-mailed my Congressman. I talked to the mayor and senator's secretaries and after a couple of simple questions about my background, I asked for an interview. Everyone on the phone was friendly, patient, and helpful. By the end of my calls, I had set up two interviews. One interview was with State Senator Arthur J. Miller, Jr. and the other with the Mayor of Grosse Pointe City Palmer Heenan. I set off to meet these men with my pen, notebook, and tape recorder ready.

Interview with State Senator Arthur J. Miller, Jr.

I was a little scared to go and meet Mr. Miller because of a fear of people in high positions. He quickly dispelled this myth of mine. He was very down to earth and insightful. I asked him a series of questions about how Gen Y can become more politically aware and what are the best ways to find existing and pending laws. He suggested using the State of Michigan Library, which houses every single law ever passed. Every year the legislature puts out a journal that encompasses all the laws passed in that term.

Sen. Miller said another way to find out is to just call your local representative and ask him or her. He explained: "If everyone would try and reach out to their local representatives and senators, we would have a much more of a pure democracy and our nation would be better off as a whole in that form." They work for you and are responsible for answering to you if you have a question. He also said: "The biggest problem is people are too timid when it comes to letting local leaders know their thoughts. Don't be afraid. If you're not comfortable meeting me, send me a letter or an e-mail and say, 'Senator, I think you are right.' Or 'Senator, I think you are completely wrong.'"

Political Awareness (continued)

I think sometimes when people have different views on an issue than their representative does, it is automatically assumed that they have an ulterior motive. The constituents feel that expressing their thoughts are not going to make a difference. So why bother? But they do not see other side of the coin. Even though representatives spend their work days in Lansing, they still raise their kids and make a home in their home district. By the end of my interview, I came away with a new-found attitude towards my local leaders. We talked about a number of things outside of politics like school, golf, family life, and work. Senator Miller extended me an invitation to come and spend a day with him in the fall when I return to school.

Interview with Carol Weissert, Director of Public Policy at Michigan State University

During my research, I also had an interview with Carol Weissert, Director of the Public Policy Program at Michigan State University. Her job is to run an office of surveyed research, which sends out surveys that focus on Michigan issues four times a year. When I asked her how Gen Y can best make a difference in influencing legislature, she responded: "It is important to focus your attention on one particular issue rather than many issues. Once you have your issue in focus, find out what other states are doing about that issue. And once you see what is working in other states, try and incorporate those ideas in your argument, because states never want to be the first ones to try a new strategy."

In the realm of public policy, she explained to me how nobody is an expert in all fields and that experts are brought in to bring legislators up-to-date on particular issues. Legislators fall into the old adage of "jack of all trades master of none."

Dr. Weissert was a very interesting and informative person who is very involved in state politics. She attends many political press conferences and rallies as an expert in public policy. The day of our interview she had to run off because she was speaking at an engagement for voting reform. She gave me a small tour of the Public Policy Program office and gave me some facts relating to a future in the public policy graduate program at Michigan State University.

Interview with Mayor of Grosse Pointe City Palmer Heenan

I walked into Mr. Heenan's office with two interviews under my belt and definite questions in mind that I needed to ask to get the answers I was looking for. I began with my first question and asked him how Gen Y can be more politically aware. He responded just like my previous two interviews stressing the importance of communicating with and talking to local leaders. He jokingly said: "We don't bite! I love to get to know the members of my community. I know it is unrealistic, but everyone I represent should get to meet myself face to face."

Mayor Heenan also mentioned attending city council meetings. He said: "City Council might be the best way that you, as an individual, can make an immediate impact, because there is no way anyone can refuse to answer a question. You are there, staring at the council and demanding an immediate answer."

Mayor Heenan was a very sweet and kind man. Even though he was the oldest person in my interviews, he was still sharp and knew the answers to my questions. We also talked about other things like the Detroit Tigers and some other recent sports stories. Once again, I felt like I had just met someone who is doing what he loves and that this comes out in his work. I think some people in politics do not necessarily like governing, but enjoy talking and meeting new people every day.

Finding Legislation on the Web

Searching the World Wide Web is also a good way to find out about current and proposed legislation. The best way to find a multitude of sites is to do a search and look for the sites with the most credentials and best reputation. There are many sites on the Internet, but some are much more reliable and truthful than the others. Many sites are just propaganda, using scare tactics and hate to sway your ideas. The best sites are legitimate, long-standing organizations—preferably non-profit organizations that are lobbying and working towards getting laws passed or changed. Organizations can give you a lot of information, because they want to get as many people aware as possible, so that they have more of a backing when influencing legislators.

Probably the best site to find existing and pending legislation is the National Council of State Legislatures web site (www.ncsl.org). There are many tools to use on this massive web site, including the day's current hot issues, a search page, links to each state's legislature, and an index of issues all with many links to articles and legislation. The search engine is probably the most useful tool on this site. You can narrow your search by issue topic, date, and whether it is a just a federal or state issue. Once you submit what information you want to receive, it will bring up a list of articles that discuss your issue from all sides.

Another thing you can do is go to the home pages of other state legislatures, which are linked to the National Council of State Legislatures web site. At each state's site, you can do a search to find what policy you are looking for. It is very important to know what other states are doing on similar issues, so that you can point to a precedent for your proposed policy recommendation, or to see or how you might adapt that law so that it can work in your state.

Many of my classmates had trouble finding information for their issue briefs because they did not know the existing policies. It is very difficult to say you would like to change something when you do not know what the existing legislation is. The process described in this section could have helped Anup and others greatly in finding information on existing laws and policies. I decided to take one of Anup's topics and try for myself. I chose Affirmative Action as my topic to demonstrate the effectiveness of these web sites.

I went to www.ncsl.org and, once there, clicked on the search feature. All I did was type in "Affirmative Action" and click the search button, and the site found 22 entries for me. I selected the first entry, because it looked like the best. The article on Affirmative Action was from the NCSL newsletter. It provided background on the issue, including the origins of Affirmative Action and decisive Supreme Court rulings. The article also displayed a table of arguments for and against Affirmative Action.

Biography

John Szambelan

Major: Engineering

"Democracy requires an educated populace."

Thomas Jefferson

Another feature that Anup would have found useful is that the article described what several states are now doing to try and deal with the issue. Florida, for instance, passed a law in which, if you ranked in the top twenty percent of your graduating class, then you are guaranteed admission to a state university regardless of ACT/SAT scores.

This article also provides up-to-date information on Affirmative Action in the news. It has a paragraph about the court cases of the University of Michigan and its battle with Affirmative Action opponents. At the very bottom of this article, it has links to further information on each state's perspective on the Affirmative Action debate. Anup would have found this site very useful, because it shows positions on both sides of the issue, what other states are doing, and background information that explains how the law came to be and why it is designed in such a manner.

Impact On My Generation

Finding out about current laws should be very important to Generation Y. We are the ones with our whole lives in front of us. This is the world we will be living in. Senior citizens seem to care most about laws, even though they will only be here for a shorter period of time. The younger generations seem to care the least. This is not as it should be, considering that we are going to be the ones carrying the burden for laws passed right now. That doesn't make a lot of sense to me. If we really want things to change, now would be the best time, so that we can get the most out of those changes. Let's not wait until we are not going to see the results of our actions to get our voice across.

In late April, voters in the Lansing School District, by a substantial margin, voted down a proposal for more money that the district desperately needed. Why was this proposal rejected if it was so desperately needed? The older residents in the district went to the polls in larger numbers compared to the younger population. Since the older residents did not want their taxes to go up, they voted the proposal down. Who does this hurt? Obviously our generation, even though most of us do not have children. When we do, I would hope that we would have an effective public school system for our children.

How Can Our Generation Make a Difference?

First and foremost, VOTE. Voting is the best way to show how you feel about an issue or an elected official. The power to vote is an integral part of our great democracy, and it should be taken seriously as the duty of every American. Second, get involved in a political campaign or an organization that is fighting to get legislation passed. Being involved in the process, you can get a better understanding of how public policy is developed and passed. Steve Stanley, a professional lobbyist, says: "Legislators are most influenced by three things: (1) legislation by other states; (2) anecdotes; and (3) organizations." If you care about a particular issue, find out what other states are doing and then try to come up with a proposal that fits and would help your cause. Join other young people who feel the same way you do. It is harder to not hear many than to listen to a single voice. I think Mr. Stanley puts it well when he says: "Care. When one cares, the rest will follow."

What was the outcome of your efforts? Did you win, lose, or get pushed aside? Find out why, and try to tweak your argument to better convince or influence the politicians. Keep trying! Not everyone succeeds his or her first time. Legislators know that if someone really cares about an issue, when that person keeps fighting—even when it looks like he or she is fighting a losing cause.

A great way to become more politically aware is to read the newspaper and watch the local news on a daily basis. New issues come and go every day, and lawmakers might look into any issue that was brought to their attention. In order to be more politically aware, one must know what is going on in the world around in general, before he or she can focus on political aspects. Another way to observe government in action is to attend town hall meetings with local government leaders. In these meetings, one can find out the views of his or her community and get immediate responses to any question one might have. Cities must post when these type of meetings take place, so that as many residents of a community can show up as possible. ■

Resources

I conducted an interview with Dr. Carol Weissert, Director of the Public Policy Program at Michigan State University. I also interviewed State Senator Arthur Miller and the Mayor of Grosse Pointe City, Palmer Heenan. Anup Hundiwal gave me a complete account of his experience doing research and writing his issue briefs. Steve Stanley, a professional lobbyist, visited our class and helped us learn how legislators think and what they look for. Our ATL 135 "Public Life in America" class participated in a project to write issue briefs for a book, which is scheduled to be given to Michigan legislators. Our class was a focus group for many of the issues to be published in the public policy book.

Gun Control

The Problem

The right to bear arms has been upheld by the U.S. Constitution for over 225 years. Yet every year more gun control laws are passed in order to prevent their misuse. Should we continue to pass more laws restricting guns or try to educate people on the safe and correct use of them?

Real Life Scenario

It's about 6:00 in the morning. Everything is pitch black. All is quiet except for one lone man sneaking around quietly. He is trying his best to be unheard. In his hands is a 12-gauge shotgun, fully loaded. He is hot on the trail of his next victim. He hears a rustle and something catches his eye. So he creeps over to see if it's his victim. It is, and the victim sees him too. In a fearful bolt he tries to get away. So the man spins on his heels and fires a quick shot. The pellets fly through the air with deadly accuracy. His unarmed victim never had a chance. Another life is lost. The gun toting man walks over and views his fresh kill. He smiles and inwardly congratulates himself. But wait a second, isn't he worried about the police coming? Shouldn't he be running away from the scene? No because what he has done is perfectly legal. He bends down picks up the corpse and throws it over his shoulder. You must be thinking that this man must be very strong to be able to just throw a dead body over his shoulder and walk off. But the gun wielding man isn't even a man at all. He is a fourteen-year-old boy. I am that boy and I have just shot my very first turkey. This story is just one example of the many safe, practical and legal uses of firearms. Although you might have assumed this was a story of murder it was just the proud story of a young hunter. Now what is so harmful about that? If gun control gets out of hand will my children be able to enjoy the same outdoor sports as I do? This is a question that I personally am worried about. I'm not alone. There are millions of Generation Y hunters that are asking the very same question.

Consider this scenario. "His father is in jail. He, his mother and his brother live with his uncle in a Michigan boarding house alternately described as a flophouse and a crackhouse. His uncle exchanges drugs for stolen guns. His classmates consider him a bully. He tells his father he hates them all, and he was recently suspended for stabbing one of them with a pencil. He's six years old, and he finds a loaded gun in another of the boarding house's rooms. He brings it to school to show it off, and he aims it at a classmate with whom he'd fought the day before. He just wants to scare her. At about 10:30 Tuesday morning, 6-year-old Kayla Rolland was pronounced dead, from a single bullet wound." *Murder in the First Grade* is a real news story reported on March 3rd on the news issues page of about.com. This shows that gun safety is an important issue in Michigan and for Generation Y. When I send my children to school some day I don't want to have to worry about them being shot and killed by a classmate. What can be done to further ensure that no child of Generation Y fall to such a horrible misfortune?

How Did We Get Here

Definitions: Gun control is the issue of what restrictions should be placed on the right of citizens to keep and bear arms. Either the Second Amendment to the constitution should stand untainted by reform or stricter gun laws should be passed in order to save lives and reduce injury. Gun control is not only a Generation Y issue, but a constitutional issue also. Any time there is talk about amending the Constitution of the United States of America people's ears pick up and they take notice. The basic question on this issue is whether existing laws should stand, but be enforced more rigidly. Or, should there be additional laws prohibiting gun availability and making guns safer. Still others ask why should we only be able to do one or the other. They argue that both methods are effective and therefore both should be implemented.

History and relevancy today: The Second Amendment to the Constitution states, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." In today's world the actual idea of bearing arms for militia purposes is a bit outdated. Although militias still exist, they are not the primary means of national defense. Since the Amendment was first put forth to allow law-abiding citizens to protect themselves against attack, this Amendment still retains its purpose. It is widely known today that criminals use firearms to conduct unlawful activity on a regular basis. Therefore, any citizen wishing to defend her life and property against such an attack would need to be suitably equipped to do so. For this reason the issue of gun control holds great importance in our world today. Guns aren't just used in defense either. Firearms can be used for a wide variety of activities ranging from hunting to shooting sports.

What We Think

Do we need additional gun control laws in order to save lives and make America a safer place to live?

Arguments for additional gun control laws:

- The United States has the highest gun mortality rate of 36 industrialized countries researched. (Join Together Online)
- Gunfire injuries in the next few years are projected to pass moving vehicle accidents as the leading cause of traumatic death in the United States.
- Of all homicides in a given year firearm deaths are the highest percentage. (Join Together Online)

Some of Generation Y believes we need additional gun control laws, which could make the United States a safer place for a large number of its citizens. The people who share this viewpoint are not without a suitable reason. Quite obviously not all gun deaths are accidental. Studies show that guns are used in an alarmingly high number of violent crimes. A good example of those in favor of gun control are the participants in the Million Mom March. On May 14th, 2000 Mothers from around the country became stirred to action. Hundreds of thousand of people came together on Mother's Day in our nations capital and seventy other major cities, in order to spur the movement for stronger, more rational gun control. They used many factors to back their outrage toward a lack of gun safety in America today. One fact, which was thrown around by this gathering, was a twelve children per day firearm mortality rate. They also frowned upon the ease at which criminals have access to guns, stating that gun shows were not well regulated and gun owners didn't store their firearms safely either.

Arguments against additional gun control laws:

- In 1997 the US Justice Department found the only 2% of guns used in violent crimes are bought at gun shows. (NCPA, Burnett)
- Forty children die per year from drowning in buckets. (NCPA, Burnett)
- One hundred and fifty children die from fires they started with cigarette lighters. (NCPA, Burnett)
- With 70 million to 80 million gun owners owning 240 million firearms, only 40 children per year die of accidental shootings. (NCPA, Dr. Morgan Reynolds)
- John Lott of Yale and John Whitley of the University of Chicago found that so called "safe storage" (e.g. trigger locks, barrel locks, and gun safes) showed no reduction in suicides or accidental shooting deaths. Rather safe storage laws made firearms inaccessible during a break in situation. (NCPA, Burnett)
- The NRA trains 750,000 gun owners per year in basic gun safety. (NRA)
- Since 1988 the NRA has taught 12 million pre-kindergarten to sixth grade children gun safety. (NRA)

Others from Generation Y don't think additional gun control laws could make the United States safer. They believe some of the proposed laws might actually make guns less safe and reduce their effectiveness in self-defense. Although the advocates for increased gun control have rallied as of late and shown their numbers those who oppose it are also numerous. This mass of gun advocates wasn't formed by mere emotional response either. It was forged in sound reason and with hard facts on gun safety and practicality.

In his editorial, "Million Mom's Marching Miss the Point: Guns Make Us Safe", H. Sterling Burnett points out several facts contrary to those stated earlier. He states, "The most often repeated factually challenged statement uttered at the Million Mom March was that, 'Twelve children die each day in America due to gun violence.' In 1997, 629 children aged 14 or younger died by gunfire – a rate of 1.7 per day. Still unacceptably high, but a number 6 times lower than that claimed by the marching moms."

The National Rifle Association (NRA) is a large pro gun organization. The NRA believes that firearm safety and education is far more effective than further restricting gun availability. This idea goes along with a motto for gun rights.

"Guns don't kill people, people kill people." And it's true without someone there to pull the trigger no harm can be done. Since the "Eddie Eagle Gun Safety Program" was started in 1988 12 million pre-kindergarten to sixth grade children have been taught the, "Stop. Don't touch. Leave the area. Tell an adult," method for dealing with firearms. With these facts showing the effectiveness of education and the inadequacy of before proposed laws, it's a clear decision.

What is Happening

Role of government: The basic role of government is to take advantage of all the data concerning gun control and make an educated decision on the issue. At the federal level legislatures should take into consideration the effectiveness of either or both methods for gun control. The Senate and House of Representatives have the responsibility of creating and passing new laws, which are in the best interest of the largest number of Americans possible. On the state level, government should uphold any federal rulings on gun control but also create their own laws, which are more specifically geared towards our area. Local government will have less say in the matter of gun control but should still enforce all decisions of higher legislative powers.

Current legislation: One of the longer standing gun laws of Michigan is Act 451, the Protection Act of 1994. It was passed on May 24, 1995. This act does several things. It prohibits a person from "hunting or discharging a firearm within 150 yards of an occupied building, dwelling, house, residence, or cabin. Or any barn or other building used in connection with a farm operation, without obtaining the written permission of the owner, renter, or occupant of the property." Act 451 also states, "a person shall not transport or have in possession a firearm in, or upon a vehicle, unless the firearm is unloaded in both barrel and magazine and enclosed in a case, carried in the trunk of a vehicle." (Michigan Compiled Laws)

On December 13, 2000 Michigan passed the Concealed Carry Weapons (CCW) law. This allows county gun boards to issue concealed weapons permits to any person twenty-one years of age and without a criminal or mentally ill record. The legislation does outlaw the carrying of concealed weapons on school grounds, in churches, day care centers, bars, and entertainment venues with seating for 2,500 people or more.

Proposed legislation: Recently on the federal level there has been additional gun control legislation proposed. Senator Diane Feinstein, a Democrat from California, has re-introduced legislation that would require all purchasers of handguns and semi-automatic firearms that accept detachable magazines are licensed and their firearms registered. This piece of legislation is known as The Firearm Licensing and Record of Sale Act, S. 25 and it was re-introduced on January 21, 2001. This bill also requires gun owners be trained in the use of firearms.

In the House of Representatives a bill is now being considered to prohibit civil liability action from being brought upon or continued against importers, distributors or manufactures of firearms or ammunition for damages resulting from the misuse of their products. This bill is known as H.R. 1032 and was introduced by Rep. Bob Barr of Georgia. As of April 1, 2001 this bill has been referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Impact On My Generation

Impact of current legislation: I believe the impact of the Concealed Carry Weapons law will be mostly positive. Now law-abiding citizens are on a level playing field with muggers, robbers, and rapists who use firearms. Not only will the citizens who carry the concealed firearms be at less risk of being attacked, but also those who don't carry a weapon. Because this law does not require one let it be known that they are carrying a concealed weapon—anyone could be. This means that every time a criminal decides to attack a victim there is a greater possibility of that victim being armed. If the thought of being confronted by a woman wielding a 9mm pistol doesn't detour rapists and thieves, I don't know what will. It isn't just women who stand to gain from this law, it's everyone.

The Protection Act is a very good piece of legislation and has a positive impact. It prevents hunting accidents from happening. No hunter wants to be accidentally shot by a gun that is not properly stored in a vehicle. Also I don't know any hunter that should be hunting or shooting a firearm in close proximity to an occupied building. It is just too much of a safety hazard to be doing so.

Impact of proposed legislation: The impact of Senator Feinstein's bill could be beneficial but at what costs. Most states already require that all handguns be registered. Requiring all purchasers of handguns or semi-automatic firearms to be licensed and their weapons be registered is a different thing all together. Semi-automatic firearms that accept a detachable magazine includes at least half of the hunting rifles being sold today. That is a staggering number of firearms to register and even more people to license. The idea to require this is a sound one, but the application of this idea should be further thought out. The impact of this on Generation Y could be seen as good or bad. On one hand this would require all purchasers who fall into this category to be licensed. Being licensed can mean many things and in this case would require safety training. The cost of the training is unknown and might have to be paid for by the gun purchaser. This would add even more cost to the already expensive process of buying a firearm. Yet on the flip side it would also mean that all these purchasers would have the proper safety instruction prior to being sold their gun. This is a step forward in educating everyone about the safe handling of firearms.

The impact of H.R. 1032 on Generation Y will be somewhat insubstantial. The purpose of this bill is to protect the firearm companies from civil lawsuits concerning the misuse of their products. If this law doesn't pass, companies could be hit hard by civil lawsuits. This may mean factories being closed and jobs lost. Many of these jobs could be those of Generation Y's parents or in time Generation Y itself. I personally would never want to lose my job because someone misused the product I spent my time or money to produce.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: "My dad owns a gun for hunting," says Chrissy Bouchev but, "I have never been injured or know an one close to me that has been injured by a gun." Chrissy is currently attending Central Michigan University. She goes on to add this concerning the alarming number of gun related deaths. "It is evident from the recent happenings that something must be done to decrease deaths by firearms." Joe Paisley is a freshman at Ferris State University. He is also a gun owner. When asked if extreme gun control measures needed to be taken he answered, "No, people just need to be safer." Steve Schunk, a freshman at Michigan State University and an avid hunter/gun owner, agreed with Joe in saying, "Guns don't kill people, people kill people." This is a true statement, guns sure don't point and fire themselves. "Maybe more emphasis should be placed on gun education," is how Steve answered the question on how to cut gun-related deaths. Carlie Loesel, a freshman at the University of Michigan, had this to say about gun safety. "[Firearm] safety measures are only effective if the owner uses them consistently." By this she means to say if you have a gunlock use it all the time. Don't just have one and think you're safer than you would be without it. You have to use it too.

What I recommend: It is my belief that more can be done to save lives by educating people about firearms than by restricting their availability. I personally am a safe owner and operator of firearms because I had the correct instruction and education about guns at a young age. If we continue to promote gun education Generation Y and many more to come will be positively affected by the lessons we will all learn. Everyone needs to know the danger of misusing guns. I hope that some day when I have children it will be part of the curriculum at schools to teach safety of all kinds, especially firearm safety. I will teach my kids the potential danger of guns, but I want to know that all their classmates also know the severity of playing with them.

Costs: The NRA has already instituted a nationwide gun safety educational program. This program has been funded and run by them for thirteen years now. They have gone into schools and taught over 12 million kindergarten to sixth grade students the danger in handling guns. This has, to my best knowledge, cost the government nothing. The government need only commend the NRA for its ambition.

Further steps to educate all children and young Americans in firearm safety may cost the government some amount of money, but we have already seen the costs of non-education. You can not put a price on someone's life. ■

Resources

Non-Profit Organizations

For Additional Gun Control

- Join Together Online, <http://www.jointogether.org/gv/>
- NCPA, <http://www.ncpa.org/bothside/krt/krt052500a.html>
- Murder in the First Grade, www.crime.about.com/newsissues/crime/library/blfiles/blfirstgrade.htm
- The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, www.gunfree.org

Non-Profit Organizations

Against Additional Gun Control

- National Rifle Association, www.nra.org/
- Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms, www.ccrdba.org
- NCPA, Burnett <http://www.ncpa.org/oped/sterling/may00.html>
- NCPA, Dr. Reynolds <http://www.ncpa.org/oped/morgan/mor51599.html>

Other Sources of Information

- Politics1.com, www.politics1.com/issues.htm
- Public Agenda Online, www.publicagenda.org/
- Thomas legislative information on the internet, thomas.loc.gov/
- Senator Gary Peters' home page, www.state.mi.us/senate/dem/sd14/up5-28-99.html
- Michigan Compiled Laws website, www.michiganlegislature.org/law

Focus Groups

- Issues Survey (35 Gen Y's polled), Steve Forsberg

Urban Sprawl

The Problem

Urban sprawl is moving people out of cultural urban areas into the suburbs at an alarming rate.

Real Life Scenario

It is hard for me (and most people my age) to come up with an inspiring story about an urban area that we once enjoyed. This is because the urban area closest to us, Detroit, was long gone before we were born. The overall status of cities and metropolitan areas in Michigan have been in decline for so long that we have never even seen a decent looking Detroit. I have never lived in a city. I don't know what it's like to be within walking distance of all of the things one needs, I don't know about all of the cultural experiences that a city has to offer, and worst of all I don't know what it's like to not be dependent on a car. This country cannot continue to deprive children of experiences that they need to become well-rounded individuals by trapping them in the suburbs.

How Did We Get Here

In the last fifty years, there has been an ongoing trend for people to move out of the major cities and into the suburbs or the countryside. This trend does not affect all Americans, though. It mainly affects middle to upper middle class citizens. The city is thought to be an unwelcoming and dark place that persons can only venture into for a few hours a day to perform their tasks (work). People no longer feel comfortable living and raising their children in cities. The name assigned to this trend is urban sprawl. It is exactly what it sounds like. The boundaries of the city are increasing with every progressing year. When the boundaries of the city increase, so do the natural resources that are used by its inhabitants. Urban sprawl puts a large emphasis on the use of automobiles. People who live thirty miles away from a city cannot and do not take public transportation. This increases use of gas and air pollution generated from cars. There are many examples of cities around the country where this is a bigger problem than in Michigan. The city of Chicago's population has increased four percent from 1970 to 1990 but the area that the city now takes up is forty-six percent larger than it was in 1970 (O'Meara 3). Statistics like this show that urban sprawl is not a trend that we can ignore and many citizens around the world are not silent about this problem. The people of Portland, Oregon are some of these people. They took a stand against developing new highways that would have sprawled the city to unthinkable boundaries. Compared to Chicago, Portland's population has grown fifty percent since 1975, but the area that the city takes up has only risen by two percent (O'Meara 3). This shows the tremendous impact such citizens and government officials can make.

Now the question is, what can we in Michigan do to stop this trend before it expands any further? There are many important issues that would help to lessen and/or stop urban sprawl. The biggest reason that people move out of cities is because they do not feel safe. If there were a larger emphasis on community relations to help keep the neighborhoods safe, people would feel safer. Also the general shape that downtown areas are in is declining and if we don't do anything to change this they will continue to deteriorate. They will soon be beyond any hope of repair. The people of the community cannot do this alone. The government needs to enact local land use policies for all urban areas. It seems that environmentalists are always focusing on the conservation of natural areas but the conservation of our cities is just as important.

What We Think

Arguments against stopping urban sprawl:

There are many different arguments that could be made for or against urban sprawl. One of the major arguments against it is there seems there is just not enough room for people to live in the central cities. With the development of industrial and commercial establishments downtown, it seems that space is just disappearing. Single family housing is nearly impossible to find in most downtown areas. This is because builders do not build single family houses downtown. There simply isn't enough consumer demand for it. Although there are many new developments in the central city, there are also many old sites that are not being used or are simply abandoned. These sites should be renovated into sustainable housing.

Arguments for stopping Urban Sprawl:

Financial: There are so many benefits to stopping urban sprawl that the arguments against it really have no weight. The amount of money it would save taxpayers alone should be enough reason for it to be a top priority. There was a study done at Rutgers University that showed that if cities in New Jersey were built to be more compact and less sprawling it would save state taxpayers \$1.3 billion dollars in infrastructure costs over the next twenty years (O'Meara 5). These infrastructure costs consist of new roads, sewer systems, water lines, and city services that must be carried over a larger area (O'Meara 5).

Urban Sprawl (continued)

Conservation: There are also all the environmental topics that range from agricultural preservation to ozone depletion. When people move out of cities where do they move? The suburbs or the countryside. These are really both the same things because in Michigan the suburbs were once agricultural and forest land a century ago. When residences invade these lands they are no longer natural areas; they are now just a plot of land with a house sitting on it. They no longer have any significance to the natural landscape of the area. It seems impossible but soon there will be no natural areas left to sustain the local wildlife.

Environmental: There is also the topic of cars and their impact on ozone depletion. Everyone knows that the exhaust expelled from cars is not good for the environment. So what do we as American citizens do about this? We move further away from our jobs and we buy bigger cars. It seems like people are missing the point. If everyone would just live ten miles closer to their job they would at least be doing something to help the environment. This is not the case people keep moving further and further away and that is why urban sprawl needs to be put to an end.

What is Happening

Only when a city reaches a point of degradation that is so low that it is almost too late to do anything, do government officials finally realize that they have a problem on their hands. The government's current role in stopping urban sprawl is only seen when citizens take the initiative to do something first. This issue cannot continue to be only a community issue; it needs to be addressed at a city and/or state level. Until the government gets serious about urban sprawl, nothing will be done because community involvement is simply not enough.

Impact On My Generation

Every environmental issue has a tremendous impact on my generation. This is because we will be alive for much longer than the people who are in power now. We could possibly live to see the impact that our country's actions have had on the overall well-being of the world. Generation Y is probably one of the first to be taught about environmental issues in school. I believe that we have a greater overall concern for the world than any generation before. Many may argue with this but we have the knowledge and the resources to actually accomplish something. The issue of urban sprawl is extremely important for generation Y to be aware of because many of us do not know what it is like to live in cities, to take public transportation, and to be in walking distance of everything that we need. We never had the chance to experience the culture and the atmosphere that a city has to offer because our parents and their parents thought it was a place too dangerous to raise children.

What My Generation Wants

To improve the issue of urban sprawl, policy makers would have to enact firm laws supporting zoning and land use regulations. This may be a problem because some people believe that the government already has too much control over its citizens. Any type of government, whether local, state, or national, would need a great amount of support from the residents that live in that area. That is why it is important to inform residents of the seriousness of this problem. I'm sure many people are unaware of the seriousness that this issue deserves. Once people know that what they are doing will help the environment and the economy in the long run, I believe that many would be supportive. So the question is: supportive of what? Residents would have to be supportive of neighborhood clean-up projects, building restoration, urban land planning, public transportation systems, and government regulations on where they can and cannot live.

Another incentive that residents and companies may be able to receive would be tax relief that would be limited to a certain amount of time. There are areas that already exist like this for businesses. They are called enterprise zones. The companies located within degrading urban areas do not have to pay taxes. This could also be applied to residential housing. This act would give the long process of restoration a jump-start by filling the neighborhoods with people instead of abandoned buildings.

Initially this project would cost quite a bit of money, but it would secure our cities to survive through another few hundred years, not to mention our planet. In the long run, the restorations of cities—the cultural centers where people can live, learn, and interact together—would help the environment as well as the lives of many of the residents. ■

Resources

- Non-Profit Organizations For Stopping Urban Sprawl**
- Neighborhoods First Program of Detroit, MI
 - Detroit Summer of Detroit, MI
 - The Urban Land Institute
- Non-Profit Organizations Against Stopping Urban Sprawl**
- None Found

- Other Sources of Information**
- Boggs, Grace Lee. "Environment, Place and Movement Building". Our Place on Earth (SSC 290). Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. 29 Mar. 2001
 - Burby, Raymond J., Peter J. May and Emil E. Malizia, Journal of the American Planning Association 66:2 (Spring 2000).
 - O'Meara, Molly. World Watch 11:5 (September/October 1998).
 - Sanchez, Thomas W. Journal of the American Planning Association 65:3 (Summer 1999).
 - Shen, Quing. Journal of the American Planning Association 66:1 (Winter 2000).
 - Stephenson, Bruce R. Journal of the American Planning Association 65:3 (Summer 1999).

Biography

Trisha Thayer

Major: Landscape Architecture

"How can cities generate enough mixture among uses—enough diversity—throughout enough of their territories, to sustain their own civilization? Cities deteriorate when their layout stifles social interaction: when trivial errands require isolating car commutes; when the rich wall themselves off from the poor; and when public spaces, no longer shared by different classes of people, are so devalued that the interiors of buildings matter more than the exteriors. Such fragmentation has eroded the social capital of other cities, which have ceased to be more than the sum of their parts."

Jane Jacobs (O'Meara 2)

If my generation can address the issues portrayed in this quote then we can conquer urban sprawl.

Marriage, Divorce, and the Youth of America

The Problem

Recent social trends depict a rapidly growing number of Americans are making impulsive decisions involving marriage. The “quick hitch” has become increasingly more appealing, which has led to rising divorce rates across America. Innocent children are inadvertently becoming victims due to brash decisions made by adults. The government needs to place tougher restrictions on couples seeking both marriage and divorce. These regulations in return will help protect youth across the country who are deeply affected socially, economically, and emotionally by impetuous marriage and divorce.

Real Life Scenarios

At a university such as Michigan State, it is not difficult to find students that have been gravely impacted by impulsive marriage and divorce. These young Americans are part of the masses and many are more than willing to share their painful stories. Most of the students that I interviewed shared accounts of broken homes and strained family relationships. Though one student in particular told a deeply personal story that struck a nerve.

This student, who wishes to remain anonymous, told me painfully personal details of his family life and his strained relationship with his parents. His mother and father were married at a young age. The young man’s mother had become pregnant and marriage seemed like the only option. The couple received little support from their parents, so they were forced to elope. These two teenagers were quickly faced with the brutal realities of the real world. From the start their marriage was extremely rocky. This young man’s childhood was filled with memories of constant screaming and violent fights. When he was twelve, his parents finally divorced and he became the object of a messy custody battle. His youth was spent being passed between parents. The student continued to describe how the divorce impacted his social life at school. He spent most of middle and high school in and out of the principal’s office as a permanent fixture in the disciplinary system. He continued by making a statement that I will never soon forget. “Divorce changed the course of my life. I truly believe that it has permanently altered who I am and who I will become.”

How Did We Get Here

The nation’s divorce rate has rapidly increased over the past decades and has surged past all other countries in the world. Today, less time is devoted to children and the importance of family values. The transition to a fast paced corporate society has indirectly caused increasing divorce rates throughout our country. This growing social problem has directly impacted the youth of America. Many other recent cultural trends can help explain this overwhelming increase of divorce. These contributing factors include:

- The shift from the traditional family—the male is the breadwinner and the female is a stay-at-home mom, in charge of domestic duties—to two working parents.
- The feminist movement.
- The corporate world’s increasing competitive nature to excel and our country’s desire to be economic leaders.
- The breakdown in communication due to the fast pace of society.

In order to find a solution to this increasing social problem, it is important to research all aspects of the issue. It is imperative that we look at this social dilemma beyond the realm of divorce. Though divorce may seem responsible, what is directly contributing to the disruption of a strong family relationship of many youth across America? This issue can be traced back to the initial union of marriage. Society has grown accustomed to frantically cleaning up our social problems instead of working to prevent them. It is important for the government to review our policies for both marriage and divorce. The United States must revise our current system of marriage licenses in order to curb the increasing rate of divorce.

What We Think

- The U.S. has the world’s highest divorce rate, which is twice as high as the next highest country (Sweden) and over 50 times higher than other countries.
- In some states such as Illinois, there are at least 70,000 children raised by a relative without a parent present (Extension Connection, 2).
- Nationally, about four million children live with grandparents or other relatives as the result of broken families.
- The absence of a parent during the growth process of a child can lead to many social problems, which includes regression, aggression, and irritability.
- 75% of children in divorced homes live below the poverty level (Arkansas House passes Covenant Marriage legislation, 1).

Marriage, Divorce and the Youth of America (continued)

Effects of Divorce

Divorce has many lasting effects on the children involved. The list below is taken from “The Effects of Divorce on Children”, by Robert Hughes Jr., of the Department of Family Relations and Human Development at Ohio State University. It carefully breaks down and explains the areas in which children of divorced families are most effected.

1. **Parental loss** — divorce often results in the loss of a parent for the children. With this loss children also lose the knowledge, skills and resources (emotional, financial, etc.) of that parent.
2. **Economic loss** — another result of divorce is that children living in single parent families are less likely to have as many economic resources as the children living in intact families.
3. **More life stress** — divorce often results in many changes in children’s living situations such as changing schools, child care, homes, etc. Children often also have to make adjustments to changes in relationships with friends and extended family members. These changes create a more stressful environment for children.
4. **Poor parental adjustment** — generally how children fare in families is due in part to the mental health of the parents, this is likely to be true for children in divorced families as well.
5. **Lack of parental competence** — much of what happens to children in general is related to the skill of parents in helping them develop. The competence of parents following divorce is likely to have considerable influence on how the children are doing.
6. **Exposure to interparental conflict** — conflict is frequently part of families and may be especially common in families that have undergone divorce. The degree to which children are exposed to conflict may have substantial effects on children’s well being.

Case Study

Studies have shown that young boys are more negatively effected by divorce than girls. “Boys are particularly more difficult for mothers to handle following a divorce,” states Debbie McClean, University of Illinois Extension educator of Family Life. Many times parents underestimate the ability for a 2 and 3-year old to understand what is happening within the family. This underestimation often leads to neglect in explaining the complicated situation to the children. Children often internalize that they are somehow responsible for the fighting between their parents, which can later lead to many social problems for the child.

The Opposing Side

Some statistics support our changing society and increasing divorce rate is anything but a social concern. While many people across the nation view divorce as an extremely negative event, others see many positive aspects. It has allowed women to escape from abusive relationships, as well as the removal of children from hostile and potentially damaging environments. In fact, most studies show more similarities than differences between children from intact and broken homes. The majority of children from divorced families do not require any type of professional help (Hughes, 1). Studies from the University of Illinois state, “Although divorce can be devastating at the time, research has shown 10 years after the divorce, children who were preschool age at the time of divorce seem to have no memories of the pre-divorced family. They were not preoccupied with the reasons for divorce and few had clear ideas of why the divorce occurred.” Most divorces result in two parents who love their children unconditionally, despite a split from their spouse (Extension Connection, 2).

Divorce has caused society to question our deeply rooted sense of morals and values. It is hard to weigh all of the pros and cons of the issue. The solution to this social dilemma is not a simple one, either. This issue brings forth many complex questions. How many and what types of government restrictions need to be placed on marriage and divorce? At what point is it more detrimental to children to be trapped in between feuding parents? Questions such as these are not easy to answer. Though it is clear that the government needs to take a more proactive role on a federal, state and local level.

What is Happening

Legal grounds for divorce: On a local level, Michigan has a relatively relaxed view of divorce. Our state holds a “no-fault” policy. Michigan law states that a breakdown of the marriage relationship to the extent that the objects of matrimony have been destroyed and there remains no reasonable likelihood that the marriage can be preserved, is legal grounds for divorce.

Residency requirements of the state:

In Michigan, prior to filing for divorce one of the spouses must fulfill a series of requirements. Including the following:

- Must have been a resident in Michigan for 180 days
- A resident of the county where the divorce was filed for 10 days if the defendant was born in or is a citizen of a foreign country and there are minor children in the marriage that are at risk of being taken out of the country by the defendant.

Additional Procedures:

- There are mandatory official approved and simplified forms available for all phases of the divorce process.
- The Michigan Friend of the Court Bureau is to supply each party in a divorce case with a pamphlet discussing the court procedures, the rights and responsibilities of the parties, the availability of mediation, human services, and joint custody.
- Mediation and counseling requirements are voluntary. These services are available in all situations involving custody and visitation of children. (Information taken from HowtoGetADivorce.com)

Biography

Andrea Evans

Major: Interior Design

Government's Role

The Government has placed few restrictions on divorce. Yet some states across the nation are trying to set stricter laws and a precedent for the rest of the country. States such as Arkansas are passing bills (HB2039) that will hopefully help reduce the increasing divorce rate. Though it has been a struggle for proponents of bills like this one because some representatives feel that the state has no business involving itself in the preservation of marriages. Yet our country and our nation's representatives must realize the increasing importance of bills such as this one (Arkansas House Legislation).

Impact on My Generation

The children of my generation have increasingly become the products of broken marriages. The lack of a traditional family setting for the youth of today has become disruptive to their social development. Children are the future of our nation. It is imperative to repair and prevent these broken relationships between parent and child due to divorce. I believe that if our nation learns to curb our divorce rate, other social problems will also begin to decline. Studies show that children from intact homes on average receive more attention and parental guidance than children from broken homes. It is this guidance and emotional support that children of today desperately need in order to ensure the future of our country tomorrow.

What My Generation Wants

My generation feels that it is extremely important for the government to place tougher restrictions on the availability of granting marriage licenses and divorces nation wide. This issue has been taken too lightly in recent years. Society now views divorce as second nature. Couples seek divorce as a quick solution for their relationship problems. Americans have developed a "We will deal with it later attitude." More needs to be done in order to eliminate adults from hastily making decisions about marriage and divorce. The United States need to adopt a policy that is consistent on the national level. This policy should be based on HB 2039, which was recently passed by the Arkansas House of Representatives. The bill allows couples to enter a "covenant marriage" a concept aimed at curbing divorce. The following are provisions stated under HB 2039, which needs to be further revised and seriously considered for adoption by all states across the nation.

- Couples agree that "only when there has been a complete and total breach of the marital covenant commitment may a party seek a declaration that the marriage is no longer legally recognized."
- Prerequisites for signing the contract are premarital counseling, which involves discussing the obligations in covenant marriage and signing an affidavit that they understand the grounds that would govern dissolving the marriage under the covenant marriage arrangement.
- Couples may enter into a covenant marriage by declaring their intent to do so on their marriage license application and executing a declaration of intent to do so under the terms specified in HB2039. The contract states that, before seeking a divorce, the couple, if they experience difficulties, commit themselves "to take all reasonable efforts to preserve our marriage, including marital counseling."
- Those who have signed a covenant marriage may be granted a divorce within the usual 30- day period only upon proof of adultery, commission of a felony that led to imprisonment or the death penalty, or in the case of physical or sexual abuse of the spouse seeking the divorce or a child of one of the spouses.
- Divorce could also be granted if the spouses have been separated for a period of two years without reconciliation, if there are no children produced by the marriage. A waiting period of two and a half years is required if there are children.

Revisions of HB 2039: Though I feel that HB 2039 is an excellent proposal, more needs to be done by the government in order to be proactive about this growing social problem. The bill needs to include more restrictions about the availability of marriage licenses. Further additions about the amount of time a couple must wait before being granted a marriage license are necessary. This will limit adults from eloping and hastily making decisions about marriage, which many times later end in divorce. Premarital classes should be minimum of four months.

Cost: Government cost would lay in aiding those who can not financially afford premarital counseling. Applicants would have to apply for aid and include a financial history of the couple. To reduce government funding, counseling could be set up through college master programs as volunteer and work force opportunities for those in lower income brackets. ■

Resources

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Other Internet References Cited
 http://lists.his.com/smartmarriages/msg01353.html
 http://www.divorcereform.org/soc.html
 http://howtogetadivorce.com

Organizations
 Americans for Divorce Reform
 2111 Wilson Blvd., Suite 550
 Arlington, Virginia 22201-3057
 (703) 528-6700
 divorcereform@usa.net

Prison Reform

Biography

Ryan Rabish

Major: No Preference

The Problem

The penitentiaries in the state of Michigan are not accomplishing what they are constructed to do. That is, they don't amend the convict's behavior and return them to society as a better citizen so they don't repeat their mistakes. Also, the tax dollars spent on these correctional institutions are not being used efficiently. This creates opportunities for new future programs and better solutions to emerge that will bring Michigan's reforming institutions to an era of respectability.

Real Life Scenario

A prisoner in Arizona speaks to young kids at local schools about drugs and the prison life. He's a convicted drug smuggler. When he talks about the consequences of drug use, the kids definitely listen. You can hear a pin drop as he speaks. He's not a squeaky clean policeman or psychologist. He goes in to these assemblies as himself—long hair in a pony tail, heroin tracks on both arms, looking a bit like Charles Manson, actually—and he has genuine impact. He speaks to kids on their own level and shows them the truth by opening up his own life to their scrutiny.

Another prisoner is scared to death. He will have spent 22.5 years of his life in prison before he gets out. When he does, he wants to be a drug and alcohol counselor to kids.

A man sits in his dark room, rotting away as other jail mates join him. He is serving a life sentence and longs to regain the sense of value his life once had. He has no opportunity, no options, just to do his time in jail until the day he dies. He wants to help and make a difference. He will never have the chance.

How Did We Get Here

Something desperately needs to change concerning prisons in Michigan as well as the rest of our country. Insanity is often described as continuing to do the similar things and assuming different results. Endless statistics exemplify that our prisons are an underachieving and often failing aspect of government tax money.

People who break the laws of our society are sent to prison for three basic reasons:

- They go to jail as punishment for the wrong they did.
- They are put away from the society to protect innocent people from being hurt by them again.
- They are given time to consider the wrong they did, learn from their mistakes, and receive treatment to help them make better choices when they are allowed to rejoin society.

The solution behind reason three is not accomplishing much. Examples of major problems in this institution are:

- Minor criminal offenders (ex. shoplifters) are often physically or sexually abused and return to society with new emotional problems
- Prisoners learn from other criminals about how to become better criminals and they come back to society with better ideas and skills
- Most prisoners are no longer seen or treated as members of the human race. They don't learn anything, they just serve time and lose all hope. Everyday for them is meaningless. In addition, many develop such a hate for the world they disrupt others in prison even. As one inmate serving a life term at East Jersey State Prison puts it, "You create Spartan conditions, you're gonna get gladiators."
- Prisoners often network with other prisoners and plan to do crime together when they get out of jail.
- Prison's are terribly overcrowded and building more probably won't settle the issue. A famous quote is "Building more prisons to address crime is like building more graveyards to address a fatal disease". Robert Gangi, Executive Director of the Correctional Association of New York

What We Think

- The United States currently incarcerates the largest percentage of our population of any country on earth at a staggering total of 2 million people
- The cost to support one prisoner in jail for a year is approximately \$15,370. That is below average state prisons, and far below the overall federal average of \$21,350.
- The State of Oregon had a "College in Prison" program a few years ago. 200 inmates graduated from college. Out of that 200, forty committed a new offense after their release. That is 20% recidivism compared to 64% in the general inmate population. The government of Oregon cut that program to save money!
- In a Virginia study of 3,000 inmates, 20% of the inmates who participated in education programs recidivated, compared with 49% recidivism among those inmates who did not participate.
- On December 31, 1999, State prisons were operating at between 1% and 17% above capacity, while Federal prisons were operating at 32% above capacity.

What is Happening

One non-profit agency believes in unconditional respect for inmates as people. "If you want people to behave responsibly, and treat you with respect, then you have to treat other people that way." Also, their trends for correct policy are:

- Correctional workers have a responsibility to insure that inmates are returned to the community no more angry or hostile than when they were committed.
- Inmates are entitled to a safe and humane environment while in prison.
- You must believe in a man's capacity to change his behavior.
- Normalize the environment to the extent possible by providing programs, amenities, and services. The denial of such must be related to maintaining order and security rather than punishment.
- Most inmates will respond favorably to a clean and aesthetically pleasing physical environment and will not vandalize or destroy it.

Policy Recommendations

1. Develop classes that teach criminals why they turned to a life of deviance, educate and motivate them to use the right behavior, and treat them as people so they don't lose hope in their struggles.
 - Many studies show that educated inmates are less likely to return to prison. By strengthening prison education, classes will reduce recidivism (return to prison) and save taxpayers money.
 - Because it reduces recidivism, classes will help to reduce state expenditures on prisons in the future, thus making valuable state funds available for other important budget items such as higher education, public transportation and other important priorities.
 - Classes will help transform inmates from being a drain on society's resources to being productive, tax-paying citizens, after parole.
2. Make a series of social classes that separate the prisoners.
 - Reward those who conform by making their living situation better by giving them special privileges for their behavior.
 - Further punish those with repeated deviant behavior. However, allow them the opportunity to advance at all times.
3. Create labor projects that allow prisoners to work and help pay for the food, shelter, clothes, and other facilities that are provided to them. In South Dakota, Governor Bill Janklow developed projects that put inmates to work. Every day 900 prison inmates leave their cells and go to work. It's a program Janklow believes in and says saves the state money. This program is experiencing great success. Examples are:
 - Building houses and daycare centers to transport to small towns. Inmates do laundry at state hospitals, office work at the capitol, and ground-keeping at state office buildings.
 - The largest project called for inmates to wire all South Dakota schools for interconnectivity and Internet access. The state spent \$15 million on what would have been a \$100 million project, and will do it in two years.
4. Create mentoring opportunities for criminals to make a difference to younger kids. Some of these prisoners do recover and want to make a difference yet don't have the opportunity. By letting these prisoners influence others to flee from a life of crime, kids will respond better by seeing an actual real life situation compared to some statistic. Also, the prisoner will be used in a more beneficial fashion rather than rotting in a dark cell alone.
5. Instead of locking up drug users on first or second time offenses, we should facilitate special programs to help them recover from this addiction and way of life.
6. Distribute a copy of The New Testament every so often. Many lives have changed after receiving this holy book. Many prisons encourage the creation and nurture of churches within prisons, and they do this through the use of the Bible. However, don't limit the spiritual opportunity to Christianity alone. Have opportunities to practice Islam, Buddhism, Muslim, and others that can instill the type of life change the prisoners need.
 - "We have seen the rehabilitation of prisoners and the benefit to their families in a way that is far more effective than the government's reform system," writes Mandianike, the Executive Director of one of these agencies. "With the power of God which comes through the Bible we are convinced that so much more can be done."
 - G.A. Dzapasi was a witch doctor before he ended up in prison. Thanks to the Bible and the ministry of the PFZ he is now a fully-trained pastor. "But it was one day, when I was there in prison, after the PFZ members had visited me and shared the Word of God, that I was saved," he writes.

Impact on My Generation

With many figures suggesting that our generation has more gangs, drugs, crime, and other acts punishable through prison sentences, we need to make sure we are using our prisons efficiently and are moving in the right direction. Also, that our tax money is spent appropriately. Many of the changes mentioned above would have a major impact of my generation:

- Economically, it would create more jobs, i.e. teachers, counselors, etc.
- Less government spending on the prisoners in jail; they'd help pay for themselves
- Projected less return of convicts, correction- not detainment
- More use out of human life, not just rotting away, useful, meaningful lives
- Can distinguish good from the bad inmates easier
- More cooperation from prisoners and more motivation to be a good prisoner

Until prison staff are trained more effectively to prevent rape and respond sympathetically to victims, they will continue to release angry men and women who are criminal time-bombs. Taxpayers are paying lots of money for rehabilitation, not to have people suffering in jails. ■

Resources

<http://users.owt.com/cjhawk/>
http://www.prisoneducation.net/reasons_new.html#Reason
<http://www.beaconschool.org/~styson/issue.html>
http://news.mpr.org/features/199810/06_hetlandc_prison-m/index.shtml
http://www.biblesociety.org/wr_330/330_17.htm
<http://www.starlight-pub.com/BlueSky/TaskForces/ReformTaskForce.html>
 NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
 PO BOX 2310
 National Capitol Station
 Washington, DC 20013-2310
 202-789-2126

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 PO. Box 2736
 Kalamazoo, MI 49003-2736
 616-383-0028
 Email: "mailto:kayperry@aol.com"
 THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CONSORTIUM
 c/o The National Council for Social Concern
 Montague Chambers
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 London SE1 9DA
 Tel: 020 7403 0977
 Fax: 020 7403 0799
 email: mailto:gemma@socialconcern.org.uk

Random Drug Screening

The Problem

Random drug screening is an invasion of privacy as well as an ethical issue that should be reconsidered.

Real Life Scenario

There are many cases that show an invasion of privacy to a person through random drug screenings. One example that shows this is the court case Middlebrooks vs. Wayne County. This court case, decided on November 9th, 1992, showed how random drug screenings are an invasion of privacy. Middlebrooks was a temporary employee for six months who applied for a permanent position as a General Service Worker. Middlebrooks was required to submit a urine sample, which when received, tested positive for cocaine and opiates. A second test was given and this time came up negative for cocaine and opiates, but proved positive for quinine, which is a drug that is used to mask cocaine in drug tests. Middlebrooks was not given the job due to his first drug test, so he brought the case to court. The court found that the procedure Middlebrooks was an invasion of privacy and was an invasion of his Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure. This invasion of privacy is simply keeping hard working Americans away from jobs, when they could be helping to improve the economy, and maybe even helping the people that do use drugs, get off drugs so they won't have to be scared to be forced to take random drug screenings.

How Did We Get Here

Drug screening was established in the U.S. in the 1970s as an attempt to stop the spread of drug abuse in the U.S. military forces. Starting in 1986 all Federal government employees were required to participate in random drug screening. By 1994 random drug screening was extended to all workers in industries regulated by the Federal government. An estimated 50 to 75 percent of large US companies have adopted random drug screening programs.

Random drug screening is the process of taking a person's urine, blood, hair, or nail sample and testing the sample for certain drugs. Although blood is the best specimen for monitoring drugs, but it was too impractical, so urine sampling was adopted due to its quick results and how it is less invasive. The urine sample was made a law as being the only acceptable specimen for drug screening in 1988. The drugs that are screened for are marijuana, cocaine, PCP, opiates, and amphetamines. There are many reasons why random drug screening is a controversial issue. Among them is the problem of it being an invasion of privacy and the high cost. There is also the major decline in positive drug results from screening.

What We Think

When drug screening was started in the 1970s there was a prevalence of drug use estimated to be 47%, whereas in 1986 the rate had declined to 22%, and it has also declined steadily each year to 2.5% after six years and is at less than 1% today. In 1987 a national testing laboratory, SmithKline Beechman, found that 18.1% of all workers tested positive for drug use. But by 1997 this number had dropped all the way to only 5.4%. This consistent decrease in drug users is reason enough to stop the random drug screening and allow freedom of the individual.

Oddly, as the number of employees that use drugs decreases, the number of expensive tests increases. In 1987 the number of drug tests given by SmithKline Beechman was 300,000. In 1998 this number skyrocketed to 5.5 billion. It does not seem intelligent to waste all this money on drug tests when the number of employee drug users has been steadily declining since the late 70's. Each drug can affect each person differently; most drugs stay in the system for 2-4 days. For chronic users the drugs can be detected much later than just the 2-4 days, sometimes up to 14 days.

Another problem that is caused by random drug screening is the cost issue. Drug tests cost in the range of \$50-60, including the collection of the sample, laboratory analysis, the cost of a medical review officer, and the communications of the results to the employer. The president of Northcoast chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, John Hartman, states a very important point: "drug testing doesn't indicate on-the-job intoxication, but past use." He also says that if you "smoke a joint over the weekend, you can fail the test." He simply means that it is not right for the workplace to decide what a person does on the weekend. The drugs are not proven to show work that isn't as productive due to the use of some drugs.

What is Happening

What is happening right now with regards to the government controlling or monitoring random drug screening is that the government is allowing it. Starting in 1994, drug screening has been extended to all workers regulated by the federal government. Now, the number of companies that have embraced the drug screening process is at 50-70%. There are no guidelines or criteria for giving drug tests at the workplace. The most common drug screening process that has been adopted is the pre-employment program. Courts have consistently upheld the legality of requiring a pre-employment drug test as a condition for employment. Another drug test plan is the post-hiring plan. In this the employer must provide guidelines if the employee's drug results come back positive. The last form of drug testing is the post employment plan. This can include random drug screening for employees under suspicion or for employees that are required to give drug tests for certain industries.

Oscar Wilde wrote:

"The vilest deeds, like poison
 will bloom well in prison air."

"It is only what is good in man,
 That wastes and withers there."

Impact On My Generation

This topic of random drug screening has a great effect on my generation because it is my generation that is now starting to go into the workplace and to take the place of the past generations. We as a young generation are now completing college and moving into the workplace. The problem with this is that if drug screening is kept as a law, then many of these young adults that are straight out of college could have problems getting a job due to their college experiences. Another reason why random drug screening should be abolished is due to the fact that most all drugs do not stay in a person's system for an extended period of time. Most drugs are completely out of the system in a period of 2-4 days. This means that if an individual decides to have a fun weekend, then they can be punished for something that will not even affect them at the workplace.

Policy Recommendations

I believe that random drug screening is a system that is an invasion of a person's privacy and an ethical issue, but can be made less intrusive if certain guidelines are instituted for all industries. The policies that I recommend are as follows:

- A written company policy and procedure.
- Drug testing should only be implied for the use of necessity. The necessity may include safety for the individual, the company, or the other employees.
- Employees that may be needed to take drug tests should be informed in advance.
- Written consent by the employee when he/she receives the job position.
- All tests should be done legally without tampering, and should follow all requirements.
- Simply because there is a positive test result, the employee should not be fired. He or she should be allowed to have a second test if desired and then they can have check-up drug screening at any period of time during employment.
- Treatment can and should be available if desired.
- All results will stay with the employer, the employee, and the physician; results will not be given to the authorities.

If these guidelines are followed, I believe that drug screening will be much more accepted by society, thus making the tests less intrusive and more acceptable ethically. ■

Resources

- Earth Erowid, "US Supreme Court Strikes Down Hospital Practice of Giving Drug Test Results To Police Without Patient Consent." Crystal M. Ferguson vs. City of Charleston.
- Les Rosen, Reprint of Newsletter for the Marin HR Forum, reprinted in August 1999.
- "Drug Screening in the USA – 1994" <http://www.jr2.ox.ac.uk/bandolier/band5/b5-3.html>
- Drug - Alcohol Testing, March 1996
- Melanie Payne, "Drug Screening Is Called An 'Everlasting Cat and Mouse Game'", Akron Beacon-Journal, December 21, 1998.

Assisted Suicide

The People

People who are terminally ill are living in pain. There has to be a way to help people who are suffering. Should assisted suicide be legalized?

Real Life Scenario

In January 1999, my grandmother had blocked arteries in her stomach. She could not eat anything without having horrible stomach pains. She had surgery in April to open those arteries. Then, around July 1999, my grandmother was diagnosed with lung cancer. Her cancer was too close to her heart for doctors to even think about operating. By December 1999, her health had deteriorated. She was in so much pain that she was put on morphine and on a respirator for her breathing. The morphine numbed everything except the pain. They inserted a catheter when she was put on the morphine because the doctors knew that she was not going to be able to get up. My mother stayed with my grandma every day and every night. My grandmother was in such pain that she did not even recognize some of her own children. It is so hard to explain to someone why his or her own mother does not recognize them. She was a human vegetable.

How Did We Get Here

Definitions: "Suicide" means the act or instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally, especially by a person of discretion and of sound mind. "Assisted" means to give support or aid. Assisted suicide would be someone giving support or aid to a person who wants to voluntarily and intentionally take his or her own life. "Terminally ill" means having an incurable or irreversible condition that has a high probability of causing death within a relatively short time with or without treatment.

History and relevance today: People today have heard of Kevorkian. Dr. Jack Kevorkian graduated from the University of Michigan, specializing in pathology in 1952. He got the nickname, "Doctor Death," in 1956 by publishing an article, "The Fundus Oculi and Determination of Death." The article talked about his attempt to photograph the eyes of his dying patients. He was asked to leave his residency at the University of Michigan.

In the 1980's he started publishing a number of articles about "physician consulting" for "death counseling." On June 4, 1990, Kevorkian helped Janet Adkins commit suicide. He was forbidden from aiding in any suicides on June 8. The murder charges brought against Kevorkian in the death of Adkins were dropped on December 12, 1990. On November 20, 1991, the State Board of Medicine revoked Kevorkian's license to practice.

Kevorkian went on to assist others in dying. March 14, 1998 marks the 100th assisted suicide for Kevorkian. CBS "60 Minutes" aired video footage on November 22, 1998 of Thomas Youk getting a lethal injection from Kevorkian. By November 24, 1998 Kevorkian was charged with first-degree murder (which charge was later dropped). But on April 13, 1999, Kevorkian was convicted of second-degree murder. Yet Kevorkian received the Civil Activist Award from the Gleitsman Foundation on March 15, 2000. The Gleitsman Foundation is a non-profit organization that "recognizes and encourages leadership in social activism worldwide." The Civil Activist Award honors those who challenge social injustice.

The E-Force (Ethical Force Program), along with the American Medical Association, made a mission to "improve health care by fostering the ethical behavior of all participants." They came up with three mission goals:

- To identify and promote ethical expectations for all participants in health care;
- To develop valid and reliable measures of achievement of ethical expectations and;
- To encourage the widespread adoption and use of these expectations and measures.

The E-Force has received much support from other groups and professionals such as researchers, ethicists, and union members for its view that "quality in ethics is at the heart of quality in health care."

What We Think

Should assisted suicide be legalized?

Arguments for assisted suicide: Why should a very ill person not have the right to choose whether he or she lives or dies? Many people all over the world are gravely ill and dying. Do they really have to suffer for the rest of their lives, whether that is for a year or maybe even for five years? Generation Y has to think about this because our parents one day may be in this situation—barely clinging to life. Are we going to want to watch our parents suffer for that last part of their lives?

Family members are sometimes asked if they want to remove the plug for life support. This means that the patient cannot live without life support. Isn't "pulling the plug" assisted suicide?

There are two major organizations that promote assisted suicide. Compassion in Dying and the Right to Die Society are for the "improved care and expanded options at life's end." In 1997, this organization started a challenge involving two states, Washington and New York, about the laws they have prohibiting assisted death. They argued all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court did not agree in June 1997, but did start a national debate on the issue. Compassion in Dying has affiliates in Oregon, New York, Washington, California and Alaska.

Biography

Jenny Shrewsburg

Major: Preveterinary

Dr. Timothy Quill, of the University of Rochester in New York, is trying to find an alternative for the dying patient. Dr. Quill has admitted that he himself has helped patients die (CNN June 27, 1997). He saw them suffering and wanted to relieve their pain. The Right to Die Society supports assisted suicide. It is an organization that is internationally “fighting for a person’s right to die.” There are thirty-three Right to Die Society affiliates worldwide and they meet every two years to discuss news.

Persons have a right to assisted suicide if:

- They have been diagnosed with a progressive illness like lung cancer, AIDS, Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, and multiple sclerosis.
- The pain of some of these illnesses never goes away, even if these patients are on numerous medications.
- They suffer from terminal illnesses and do not want to diminish their assets by incurring large medical costs as they approach death. They would rather die sooner, and pass on their assets to their beneficiaries.
- “Respect for Autonomy”: This means a competent person should have the right to choose death.
- “Justice”: It requires that we “treat like cases alike.”

Arguments against assisted suicide: If a person is dying but has not yet, it must be for a reason. Why else would God keep you on earth and make you suffer? Perhaps you are helping people around you grow as people or maybe even teaching people. Generation Y has to decide whether it should try to take God’s job away from Him. The “No Constitutional Right to Physician-Assisted Suicide” published on July 14, 1997, states that, in two closely related cases, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that physician-assisted suicide is unconstitutional. However, legislators could be given the right to make this an option.

The International Anti-Euthanasia Task Force (IAETF) addresses the issue of assisted suicide and euthanasia from a “public policy perspective.” The IAETF’s main goal is to influence the debate on assisted suicide and euthanasia and to make sure that the patient’s right to receive proper care will be enforced instead of a lethal injection or poison given by a doctor.

- In Michigan, conviction of assisted suicide is a five-year felony.
- “Passive vs. Active Distinction”: There is a difference between letting someone die and killing them.
- “Potential for abuse”: People could say they have pain and can’t live with it and try to use assisted suicide and a way out.
- “Professional Integrity”: “Historical ethical traditions of medicine are opposed of taking lives.”
- “Fallibility of Profession”: Doctors may make mistakes in diagnosis.

What is Happening

Role of the government: On November 8, 1994, the people of Oregon passed Measure 16. This is known as the Death with Dignity Act, giving people the right to physician suicide. It is the first assisted suicide law passed in U.S. At least 43 patients have ended their lives since the passing of the Death with Dignity Act. Congress is trying to pass HR 2260, “Pain Relief Promotion Act of 1999.” This will continue the education about the terminally ill, but will not allow the “intentional” suicide of patients. This bill has not been passed yet.

In Canada, it is not illegal to commit suicide or attempt suicide, but it is illegal to assist in suicide according to Section 241 of the Criminal Code. It is yet to be decided if assisted suicide is going to be legalized there.

Current legislation: Assisted suicide is illegal in all states except Oregon. The issue is currently being discussed in Canada.

Proposed legislation: Assisted suicide should be legalized in all states. People should have the right to decide whether they want to live or die.

Impact On My Generation

My grandmother died on February 14, 2000, Valentine’s Day. Watching my grandmother live in so much pain and not being able to do anything about it made me think about assisted suicide. If assisted suicide was an option, I do not know if she would have chosen the procedure or not. But I do know that, had she chosen assisted suicide, I would not have blamed her. It was hard enough on me to see the pain she was in. I cannot imagine what it must have felt like.

Generation Y is growing up. We will soon move out on our own and live our own lives. Sometime in the future, our parents are going to get older, too. Generation Y needs to think about what it wants and how we are going to feel if we are put into that situation—a situation in which we have to watch a loved one become terminally ill.

Is our generation going to be able to handle watching our parents suffer? Or are we going to want assisted suicide so our parents have a right to decide when it is time to pass? If Generation Y wants assisted suicide, then we need to propose some guidelines as to what should be legal and what is illegal. On the other hand, if we are totally against it, then we need to try to stop people from doing it and deal with the consequences when our parents get older.

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: Patrick Cibula states: “I believe that assisted suicide should be used only on terminally ill patients and only after they have been checked to be mentally stable. They should also not be given this option for sometime after diagnosis to prevent it from being depression induced.” Tim Shrewsbury speaks firmly: “I think assisted suicide is a legitimate choice for people who are crippled, dying of cancer, etc., because it prevents them from suffering.”

“We have laws against cruel and unusual punishment, and dying slowly of cancer is cruel and unusual. If a person is faced with this situation, and they want to die, let them die.” Some other students had different feelings and ideas about assisted suicide. S.P. said: “Call me Catholic, but I’m not in favor of it. The good Lord will take you when He’s ready. Until then, you’re serving some kind of purpose for Him.” Joe Evans strongly states, “I’m totally against it. I think it’s an easy way out, and also a selfish way to solve a problem. The people have no idea how badly it affects family and friends.”

What I recommend: Assisted suicide should be legalized in terminally ill cases. The patients who request assisted suicide should go through a psychological test to make sure they are of sound body and sound mind. Also, the patient should have the same diagnoses by two different doctors.

I think it should be an option because some pain is just too unbearable for people to handle. I also believe that the state does not have the right to make someone live if they cannot even take care of themselves. We should follow Oregon and help the terminally ill who want help.

Costs: The costs involved would depend upon what form of assisted suicide people can choose. If we just had lethal injections, then we would have to buy the drugs and needles for the injections. ■

Resources

Non-Profit Organizations For

COMPASSION IN DYING Federation
PMB 415
6312 SW Capitol Hwy
Portland, Oregon 97201
Tel: (503) 221-9556
Fax: (503) 228-9160
info@compassionindying.org
Dying With Dignity 55
Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 705
Toronto, Ontario M4P 1G8 Canada
Tel: (416) 486-3998
(800) 495-6156
Fax: (416) 489-9010
E-mail: dwdca@web.net

Non-Profit Organizations Against
International Task Force on Euthanasia and
Assisted Suicide
P.O. Box 760
Steubenville, OH 43952
740-282-3810
Copyright 1996 - 2001 IAETF
info@internationaltaskforce.org

Focus Groups

- Focus group by email on Monday, January 29, 2001. The ratio was 11 females to 11 males ages 16-21.
- Focus group on Wednesday, January 31, 2001. The ratio was 6 females to 15 males ages 18-22.

Other Sources of Information

- The World Book Dictionary, vol. 1 (A-K) and vol. 2 (L-Z).
- CNN news reports about Assisted-suicide advocates trying new tack.
- Twisted trial: Dr. Jack Kevorkian Spins the Jury March 30th, 1999 (<http://law.about.com/newissues/law/library/weekly/aa033099.htm>).
- (http://justicetalking.org/season_one_shows/doctor_assisted_suicide.html) has a debate that you can listen to about physician aid dying.
- (<http://www.fansoffieger.com/chronology.htm>)

Death Tax

The Problem

The United States of America currently has an inheritance tax of 55 percent on inheritances of \$675,000 or more. Should this tax be eliminated?

Real Life Scenario

"I'm sorry but your mother is dead," says the doctor as he consoles the victim's daughter. "We tried everything we could, but she was too weak to continue fighting. I have never seen anyone try so hard to conquer this horrible disease." This phrase is something I will never forget. It plays in my head like a broken record, yet at times I think I am just dreaming. Being the only child of a single parent, I was left all of the inheritance. After many long days of paperwork, I was informed that the government would be taxing almost half of my mother's hard earned money.

How Did We Get Here

Definition: The Estate Tax is levied on all assets one has accumulated during one's life, including one's home, savings, stocks and bonds, bank accounts, land, family heirlooms, jewelry, furniture, and on every asset in any business one owns, whether or not such a business has the cash available to pay the death tax. The estate tax was a combination of three taxes in 1981. The Internal Revenue Code levies taxes on transfers of property at death (estate tax), during life (gift tax), and to grandchildren or other descendants (generation-skipping transfer tax).

History and Relevance Today

About two-thirds of the states have a pick-up tax law. A state can enjoy participation in the federal estate tax by taking part of the federal tax levy. These states claim to have no inheritance tax but really they take part of the amount that is calculated as federal estate tax. The following states participate in the pick-up tax: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

The other states, including Michigan impose a death tax, either in the form of an inheritance tax or an estate tax. An inheritance tax is a tax on the assets received by a person. An estate tax is a tax on the assets of the decedent. The maximum tax in the state of Michigan is 17 percent.

What is Happening

During President George W. Bush's campaign, he promised to abolish the death tax. Conservatives have spearheaded the effort to have the tax repealed, claiming that it is nothing more than an unfair tax on death.

What We Think: Research and Discussion

Arguments for maintaining the status quo

- Repealing the tax would subtract 2 percent of the federal tax revenue, which would have to be made up elsewhere.
- Within the 2 percent that is collected by the federal revenue, only 6.5 percent of those are farmers or small business owners. The majority of 18 billion dollars collected annually by the estate tax is drawn from the pockets of the extremely wealthy.

Arguments against maintaining the status quo

- Estate tax rates are higher than any other tax rate. For example, the estate tax ranges from 37 percent to 55 percent. The lowest estate tax rate is almost as much as the highest income tax rate of 39.6 percent. More importantly, the estate tax is imposed on earnings and assets that have already been subject to taxation by income, social security, federal, and state taxes.
- With Americans living longer than ever before, we need to encourage society to invest for a comfortable future. Instead, the estate tax discourages individual to save, knowing the higher one's assets at the time of death, the more the government takes through taxation.
- It is financially cheaper to sell small family-owned businesses before death rather than pass it down to the next generation. Small businesses can't compete, when taxation of up to 55 percent is levied upon the death of the owner.
- Small businesses employ almost 60 percent of the American workforce and create thousands of new jobs each year. Therefore, instead of expansion of businesses or creation of new jobs, the owner fears the later effects of estate tax.
- The estate tax has a negative effect on decision making for family-owned businesses. Money is diverted away from growth of the business and spent on insurance, attorneys, and financial experts. The government makes 65 cents on every dollar raised on enforcement and collection, and businesses spend thousands of dollars on estate tax preparation.
- Less than 2 percent of the government's revenue is generated from the death tax.

Death Tax (continued)

Existing and Proposed Policy

Proposed changes in law/policy: The No Death Tax Organization supports numerous bills that have been introduced to end the estate tax, phase it out, or create tax shelters, including: outright repeal; a 5-year, 7-year or 10-year phase-out; reductions in the tax rate; elimination of the family business carve-out; inflationary and other increases in credits; increases in the annual gift exclusion; credits for certain charitable contributions; reductions in income taxes and marriage penalties; and increased credits for exempt small farmers and small businesses.

Costs: By repealing the estate tax, 2 percent of the federal tax revenue would be lost. During the 2000 Fiscal Year, the federal budget was \$2.025 trillion. If the estate and gift tax, which represents 2 percent of the total revenue, were repealed, than 29 billion dollars would have to come from a different source.

Impact On My Generation

I personally have been affected by the death tax. In January of 2001, I lost my mother to cancer. Being the only survivor of her immediate family, I inherited the house, banking accounts, retirement funds, stocks, etc. All of these "hand-me-downs" have been taxed. I'm left with one rhetorical question: Who is suffering now, a teenager trying to live a normal life or the government who just inherited thousands of dollars off of my passing loved one?

What My Generation Wants

Input from Generation Y focus groups: After speaking to small portions of Generation Y on numerous occasions about this highly debated issue, there is still no 100 percent certainty on either side. Many believe this tax to be a burden economically and emotionally. As Steve, a student attending Michigan State University said, "The government shouldn't be so greedy. Having to deal with losing a loved one is hard enough without them (government) having a hand in your pocket." The estate tax is unfair because all of the money it raises has been taxed at least once, and sometimes two or three times, through income taxes, penalty taxes on savings and investments, and the countless other taxes on Americans. Proponents of the estate tax believe that one should vote in favor of the elimination based on "moral" grounds. They feel that it is morally wrong to demand death duties. They also argue that it breaks up large concentrations of wealth. They want to encourage the children of the rich to earn their own way through life, instead of inheriting it from mommy and daddy. Why, the reasoning goes, should we have to pay a tax again after we die?

However, others feel that the death tax is necessary. When asked, "Do you feel that the government should be allowed to tax you for money that your loved one has left you behind?" Andrew Copenhaver, a sophomore attending Michigan State University, replied, "Sure, it's still money for government programs. Plus, if you don't think it's fair, then tell your loved one that you don't want it (their inheritance) written off to you."

What I Recommend

After personally being affected by the estate tax, I believe this tax should be eliminated. Being a single female household, my mother worked long hard hours planning for a secure financial future. In the end, her sweat produced money has been taken away from the one person who was her world, me. Is that really fair? ■

Resources

Non-Profit Organizations For Maintaining the Status Quo
No Sites Found

Non-Profit Organizations Against Maintaining the Status Quo
No Death Tax Organization
General Email: <http://www.nodeathtax.org>

Americans Against Unfair Family Taxation (AAUFT)
General Email: <http://www.estatetax.org>

Other Sources of Information
National Center for Public Policy (NCPA)
General Email: <http://www.ncpa.org>
Newspaper Association of America (NAA)
General Email: <http://www.naa.org>

The Concord Coalition
General Email: <http://www.concordcoalition.org>

Focus Groups
Small Focus Groups
Michigan State University classroom
Males 12 Females 4

Surveys Sent Through E-mail
Males 12 Females 12

Biography

Andrea Redilla

Major: No Preference

Curriculum Summary

Generation Y Speaks Out: A Policy Guide was conceived and written collaboratively by some 40 students in two sections of a course called Writing: Public Life in America. This course is one of several tracks offered by the Department of American Thought and Language (ATL), which teaches first-year writing to the great majority of undergraduates at Michigan State University. There are dozens of sections offered by ATL each semester on all aspects of American society, culture and technology; only six involve service learning and focus on public life in America. ATL 135 is a joint endeavor of MSU's College of Arts & Letters the Service Learning Center, and the Writing Center. Working through the Service Learning Writing Project, students in the course develop into more effective writers at the university and more thoughtful citizens better equipped to meet the challenges and requirements of civic life.

Service learning is an educational strategy where, through experiential learning tied to the curriculum, students apply knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and wise judgment, to address genuine community needs. In ATL 135, readings, writing assignments, discussions, public forums, and actual public service placements confront students with basic questions about the struggle for a revitalized public sphere.

What does it mean, for example, to be a member of the communities in which we live and work—school and classroom, workplace, place of worship, neighborhood, or nation? What does it mean to be a citizen in a democracy? How well do traditions of American citizenship serve the complex demands and increased diversity of civic life in America? What is the relationship between civil rights and civic responsibilities? What are the major challenges to democratic citizenship today? How are the media—magazines, newspapers, TV, the Internet—vital to effective citizenship? What does “service” mean and what does it have to do with democratic citizenship?

Like all ATL courses, Writing: Public Life in America follows a seminar and workshop model emphasizing the development of independent thinking as well as collaborative learning processes. Assignments for class preparation and daily discussion, analysis, evaluation, and critique of readings stress constant refinement and routine practice of varied writing activities, including outlining, paragraphing, peer-editing, essay and report writing and revision, leading class discussion, drafting discussion questions, developing group proposals and conducting group research. Our overall objective is to strengthen the following critical competencies:

- Critical Reading: identifying central ideas, issues, and problems of a text; synthesizing and reconstructing an argument; determining relevant information.
- Critical Thinking: evaluating hypotheses or conclusions; distinguishing between fact and opinion; formulating appropriate questions; incorporating others' opinions and perspectives.
- Critical Writing: defining audience; generating and organizing ideas; drafting, revising, and editing for standard usage; using and documenting sources; researching library materials.

Of particular interest for the two sections of ATL 135 that produced *Generation Y Speaks Out* was finding ways to involve students in helping brainstorm the biggest decisions we faced in developing the policy guide. We didn't want to simply give our students directions on what to write; we wanted them to collaborate in thinking through the best format, the most authentic vehicle for presenting the information. As a kind of pilot project, several students worked on issue briefs during the fall 2000 semester. In January 2001, the lead instructors, David Stowe and Christopher Buck, met with project coordinators Jerry Lindman, director for nonprofit outreach for the Michigan Nonprofit Association, and Shanetta Martin, assistant for policy and organizational outreach for Michigan's Children to develop a strategy for the spring 2001 semester. Our goal was to devise an effective format for our issue briefs, one that would be both useful for lawmakers and policymakers in Michigan and authentic to the voice of our mostly 18-year students.

The January blueprint was refined dynamically during the course of the semester, as students and instructors workshopped drafts of issue briefs in classroom sessions joined at various times by Lindman, Martin, and Steve Stanley, educational consultant and former multi-client lobbyist. Students chose two or three issue briefs to write based on their personal interest as well as on peer feedback generated in focus groups. This is the format that emerged toward the end of the semester, as students worked preliminary drafts into their final briefs.

Curriculum Summary (continued)

The Problem

Identify the problem you will address in your issue brief.

Real Life Scenarios

Anecdotes: Use real life experiences to describe/highlight your issue.

How Did We Get Here: Background

1. Define the topic and sub-topics on the issue.
2. Place the issue into historical context (i.e. how is the issue relevant today).
3. Identify recent trends on the issue.

What We Think: Research and Discussion

1. Is there a controversy over the issue and what are the opposing and supporting arguments on the issue?
2. Discuss each subtopic under the issue if any.
3. What questions or concerns does the issue raise?
4. What is the responsibility of the government to the issue? What is the role of federal, state and local government on the issue? How has government handled the issue in the past?

What is Happening: Policy Trends

What is the status of this issue in government now? Is their existing or proposed legislative bills on your issue?

Impact on My Generation

How is this issue relevant to young people?

What My Generation Wants: Policy Recommendations

(proposals for changes in law or government funding)

1. What do you think policy makers (e.g. legislators, the governor, congress, etc) should do to improve on the issue? Please consider and state possible cost implications to any policy recommendations.

Where I Got This Information: Resources

Identify a non-profit organization that deals with your issue and list their contact information. Please identify other additional sources of information.

About Me: Biographical Information

Please include a brief biographical description of yourself in two sentences or less.

You might want to include your name, age, hometown, etc.

Note: Instructors may suggest appropriate subheadings or subtitles as necessary.

As the semester progressed, we became increasingly aware of a need to avoid producing generic issue briefs of the sort one could already find in any number of places, especially with the Internet. How to give these briefs the distinctive signature of youth, of the generation they were supposed to represent? We decided to include two sections, “Real Life Scenarios” and “What My Generation Wants: Policy Recommendations,” that would specifically express the viewpoint of Gen Y.

Edited by:

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American Thought and Language, Michigan State University
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Shanetta L. Martin
Michigan's Children

