

Beyond a shadow of doubt

America's backup government is causing more harm for country than good



FRANK CHANCE • THE BATTALION



COLLINS EZEANYIM

As the nation entered chaos on Sept. 11, the Bush administration secretly deployed a "shadow government," a system of government managers working secretly outside the nation's capital. This was done to ensure that vital government resources were still available, no matter how disastrous the catastrophe became. Last fall, when Americans had no idea where the next terrorist threat would come from, this was a good idea. Half a year later, however, this shadow government is still in place and has generated controversy as to whether its expense, or even its existence, is justified.

The Bush administration should have plans to properly deal with the effects of a catastrophic attack on Washington. In fact, many departments have had these plans since the beginning of the nuclear age. But this shadow government, known internally as COG for "continuity of government," has many obstacles to overcome before it proves to be effective.

Where the shadow government might result in overkill is the number of bureaucrats stationed around the clock in secret government bunkers. It makes sense for some representatives to be there; for example, agents from the Department of Agriculture would be responsible for many vital functions during a catastrophe. According to *The Washington Post*, these functions include ensuring that farm production and food processing are continued and providing emergency provisions to farmers. The representation of other agencies, such as the IRS and the Department of Education, are not as justified.

Moreover, there seems to be poor planning on the part of the Bush administration in that only the executive branch of the government is fully represented in the COG plans. It is obvious that the executive branch will be looked to for leadership in a time of crisis. But all components of the constitutional government would be needed to ensure the continuation of American democracy.

According to *The Washington Post*, both

Congress and the judiciary have continuity plans, but they take the practical approach and do not maintain 24-hour fortified facilities.

The maintenance of a 24-hour government presence in secret bunkers inevitably leads to debate about cost. Currently, with the war on terror and the recession occurring concurrently, the cost to run the main government is very high, and maintaining a perpetual shadow government can become very costly.

A solution to this might come from the new government agency created by the Bush administration, the Office of Homeland Security. Recently, Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge announced a homeland security advisory system that assigns colors to certain levels of threat conditions, for example, green corresponds to a low risk of terrorist attacks and red means a severe threat.

Instead of keeping government employees in secret bunkers around the clock, the agents should only be deployed if Ridge and his office assess a red threat condition. This would ease the tax burden, and the government would still be prepared in a devastating attack.

Another controversy erupted when important congressional leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Democratic Leader Rep. Richard Gephardt claimed they were never told about the bunker government. Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia, who as president pro tempore is fourth in the line of presidential succession, said he learned of the shadow government only after reading about it in newspapers. Obviously, the Bush administration should have used some tact in alerting congressional leaders of its COG plans.

A continuity of government plan is absolutely necessary, especially in a time when the United States is no longer safe from any kind of terrorist attack. A shadow government operating during times of crises is better than having no government at all. But the Bush administration has made a misstep in its implementation of the shadow government and further corrections need to be made.

Collins Ezeanyim is a junior physics major.

MAIL CALL

Biased perception

Response to Jonathan Jones' March 22 column:

I am not an Arab or a Muslim, M. Though my degree of outrage at this e frustration is unmatched! The author with the Muslim world to be lies that "bigotry, fanaticism, more important and plain ignorance." This article is full of the same support off-

First off, as an American citizen, born in Pakistan, I would like to state my utter condemnation of the September 11th terrorists attacks. These attacks, such as any other terrorist acts, are not representative of the culture, religion, nor the countries from which the attackers come from. If they were, then the United States needs to admit that our country's culture is based on the ideals of people such as Timothy McVeigh.

I do agree that the United States does try to protect democracy. Protecting your beliefs is essential to the American way of life. But displacing your own beliefs onto others is not the intent of the "American way." Democracy may be right for us, but it is not necessarily right for the entire world.

Jones says "when McDonald's golden arches rise over Kabul, the Afghans will be clearly on the road to recovery." I doubt the Afghan people would ever trade their way such as a "Big Mac." We were founded on freedom, but why do we continue to enter into the business of other countries. Our main reason: oil. The Middle East's oil supply was our number one concern for Desert Storm. Furthermore, the United States never really cared to help Pakistan until Pakistan was forced to help the United States in the war against Afghanistan.

If Pakistan decided not to help the US, it would have been considered a terrorist country. We always have our own personal agenda whenever we help another country. For this reason, I do not think of America as a great protector of democracy, but as a great protector if its own interests.

Amjad Ladak
Class of 2001

A healthier way of life

Genetic screening is beneficial to parents



DHARMARAJ INDURTHY

According to the Feb. 27 issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, a medical triumph has occurred: the child of a woman afflicted with early-onset Alzheimer's was successfully genetically screened. This new medical advance raises questions about "designer babies" and a possible new era of eugenics. The only conclusion is that government cannot legally deny individuals the ability to use genetic methods on eggs and embryos to suit individual tastes.

In this particular process, doctors harvested eggs from the mother, screened them to eliminate diseased specimens and implanted those that were clean. This is only the latest success story of genetic screening. These technologies enable children to avoid a future of debilitating or fatal disease. However, such successes prompt fears for the future. The movie *Gattaca*, for example, portrays an uncomfortable future where genes determine a person's place in society.

Regulatory lines are meaningful only when based on principle, but screening fatal illness versus superficial traits is just a matter of degrees. Non-fatal illnesses still may negatively impact the quality of individual life, and fatal illnesses have enabled people to demonstrate enormous virtue. Furthermore, as Dr. Stephen Lewis asserts in his paper, "Approaching the problem of defining 'health' and 'disease' from the perspectives of evolutionary psychology and

Darwinian medicine," the basic medical definitions of disease and health are woefully imprecise. There is intrinsic ambiguity here that defies having both permissions and prohibitions.

After all, disease and illness come in a continuous spectrum. From Huntington's disease and Alzheimer's disease, to obesity and autism, to birthmarks and baldness, it is not trivial to find substantive distinctions. Can government deny an Alzheimer's afflicted individual the chance for a healthy child? What about someone who struggled with morbid obesity and does not want that for his or her

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offspring? What of the bald man who wants only to spare his son the trifling affliction? Besides, the U.S. government lacks rigorous ethic. Unlike suicide or drug use, genetic screening is too controversial an issue to make legal judgments on moral basis. Ultimately, this is an all-or-nothing issue in principle.

The Supreme Court has made clear that a fetus is not considered a person; it has no human value. Instead, it is more like property. The same must be presumed for embryos and eggs. If people are free to abort fetuses, certainly, they should be able to modify or screen other organic property. Government would need compelling grounds to deny such practices, but none exist beyond fanciful imaginings of a *Gattaca*-like future.

Objections have been raised about privacy issues and discrimination. Government could keep tabs on genetic information, or doctors could reveal genetic information to third parties. If employers could acquire such information, they might discriminate against prospective employees with predispositions to disease. Such possibilities, however, are extensions of existing problems. Combating them means careful regulation. Moreover, these are individual decisions, and taking such risks should be an individual discretion.

What about "designer babies"? What about a future of rich families investing in genetically fit progeny? Is not a genetically driven world the inevitable end of making genetic screening available? Even if the consequences appear ugly, the freedom of people to screen offspring cannot be denied. If parents want to manipulate their reproductive property so that they might receive a child conformed to their vision, government must allow it. It is not the fault of such a family that others might discriminate against the unmodified or that societal disparities might ensue.

Perhaps "designer babies" are the future. If the technology exists, it must be made available. Individuals have the right to provide the best future for their offspring, and if that means manipulating organic property, they cannot be denied. In a world where mankind has subdued nature, created weapons of mass destruction and strived to maximize his convenience, it is a little late to be challenging man's right to play God.

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