

Budget burns lifetime legacy

Government just keeps spending and spending ...

Stanley S. Newburg died at age 81. At age 2, in 1906, he and his family fled the persecution of Jews in his native Austria and came to the United States. Here, he peddled fruit with his father on the Lower East Side of New York. He later attended Suffolk Law School in Boston, and then went on to found General Aluminum Corp., a \$2.8 million window and door company. He married a woman with three children from a previous marriage. Upon his death he left most of his fortune to the United States government.

"It is my expression of deep gratitude for the privilege of residing and living in this kind of government — notwithstanding many of its inequities," he wrote in his will.

A true life personification of the Horatio Alger stories, Mr. Newburg spent his life striving to achieve professional success in the land of opportunity. He worked diligently to earn an education and develop his business into a profitable manufacturer, where he remained chief executive until his death on March 14, 1986. He never retired to play golf, travel the world or simply relax and enjoy his wealth.

When he died, his estate included \$5.6 million in cash, General Aluminum and \$350,000 in real estate. His stepchildren contested the will on the basis of frivolity and recently reached a settlement out of court.

Because the will did not specify exactly where the money should be used, it was forwarded to the Bureau of Public Debt in Washington and will be used to cover general government expenses. The inheritance will support our national budget for less than two full minutes. Not even 120 seconds of our \$1.5 trillion budget for 1994 will be paid for by 81 years of struggle, hard work and eventual success.

The magnitude of government spending in the United States is amazing. While politicians like to talk about decreasing the national deficit, they don't like to discuss what that actually means. Each year we spend more money than we collect. In The Budget Message of the President, President Clinton boasts

about his plan to reduce the national deficit to a mere 2.5 percent, or \$176 billion dollars.

"In contrast to past budgets, which lacked credibility, we made sure to use cautious estimates and we shot straight with the American people," he concludes.

Shot straight? According to Dr. Thomas Saving, Distinguished Professor and Director in the Department of Economics, the deficit seems falsely low because of current negative interest rates and off-budget items, expenses that are not incorporated into the budget. How many Americans realize that even as the deficit may be decreasing, the national debt is growing rapidly? Besides, to brag about overspending such an amount in one year is ludicrous. With such a plan, it would take 31,429 donations like Newburg's to break even for the year.

The problem is not just this year. Our national debt or the sum of all our deficits plus interest is estimated to be \$3.5 trillion, roughly 56 percent of our current Gross Domestic Product. If every person in the United States was to help pay off the debt, it would cost each of us \$14,000.

So, is our country about to go bankrupt?

"No," says Saving. "It's not going to happen."

This is not the first time that we have accumulated a large national debt. Right now our debt is roughly three times our national income. After World War II, the ratio was five to one. Borrowing is nothing new. After the war, 70 percent of the budget was financed with borrowed money. During the Civil War, the north borrowed 90 percent of its income.

The distinguishing factor today is that we are in a time of peace and an easy economic solution is not evident. After each war, we won and gained resources. Had we not won, the victors would have inherited our debt. The way out of this situation now will be painful. Either drastic increases in taxes or damaging cuts in expenses would be necessary to balance the budget.

As taxpayers, we need to pay attention to government spending. Bills are pushed through Congress with only special interest support. We don't have the time to oppose each additional expenditure. But, somehow we must make the time. Term limits or a line item veto could help. Or even just organized taxpayer involvement. The debt is not going to bankrupt us. But it is not going away.

Melissa Megliola is a senior industrial engineering major

MELISSA
MEGLIOLA
Columnist



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SHOULD COUPLES KNOW IF THEIR FUTURE CHILDREN COULD HAVE GENETIC FLAWS?

No — During World War II, the Nazis were very interested in eugenics — controlling hereditary factors in order to create a superior species. Their goal was to eradicate genetic "deficiencies" and isolate a superhuman Aryan race.

Today the idea of altering genetic make-up is a hot topic. U.S. News & World Report dedicated a cover story to "Tinkering with Destiny" a few months ago. While it's not likely that the United States government will ever attempt to alter its citizens' genes, the same cannot be said for over-worried parents.

Already, the demand for genetic counselors is increasing. These counselors can administer a variety of tests to screen parents for such mutant genes as the ones that cause cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, Lou Gehrig's disease and a

dozen others. Soon there will be tests for diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and certain cancers. Genetic counselors advise future parents on the likelihood that they carry these genes and may pass them to offspring.

There is no doubt that knowing they don't carry certain mutant genes is a comfort to parents. When people find out they do carry one, however, problems arise. Many are prepared only to hear that their children will be OK, and finding out otherwise can have drastic consequences.

For those whose children are as yet unborn, these consequences can mean either choosing not to have children at all or choosing to abort a current pregnancy.

The ethics of screening fetuses for possible abortion is questionable at best. Parents want what they consider to be best for their children, and often will

LYNN
BOOHER
Columnist



stop at nothing to get it. Now that they have the option of screening their future kids for defects, but one must wonder where the screening will stop.

It is only a matter of time before parental demand will inspire geneticists to discover other tests for "defects" like obesity, shyness, short height and even the "wrong" eye color.

This parental eugenics has already manifested itself in New York, according to the U.S. News & World Report article. Four of Rabbi Josef Ekstein's 10 children were stricken with Tay-Sachs disease, a disorder that caused them to gradually lose muscle control and eventually die in childhood, blind and paralyzed.

The Rabbi founded Dor Yeshorim, a program to screen children of the New York community for the disease, and then encouraged those who were discovered to have the disease not to have children of their own.

Now Dor Yeshorim's efforts have evolved to include screening cystic fibrosis and Gaucher's disease, two illnesses that can often be treated, unlike Tay-Sachs. Young adults found to carry these genes are also encouraged not to have children.

The efforts of Rabbi Ekstein's program could coerce many parents into preventing healthy offspring from being born, all in an effort to create a defect-free generation.

By taking genetic screening into their own hands, parents are playing a dangerous game. If screening isn't carefully controlled, the nightmare of eugenics could become a reality.

Lynn Booher is a junior English and psychology major

Yes — At what price knowledge? Time and time again, I have had to grapple with the decision of whether to know about something unpleasant. We all have.

Sometimes it's as simple as opening that envelope from A&M's admissions office or finding your social security number on a posted list of grades. But sometimes it's a matter of life or death.

In the last few years, geneticists have uncovered and are continuing to uncover detailed information on what makes a person an individual. This means that not only can a scientist determine what eye color your offspring is likely to have, but also their chances of developing a slow, painful, deadly disease. This sounds like a great medical accomplishment at first, but is an ethicist's nightmare.

There are many problems associated with "knowing" so much formerly undetected information. We have to determine if knowledge is worth the pain of knowing.

First, let's assume the knowledge that you DON'T have the gene for a deadly disease would be a load off your mind. What pain can come from knowing you carry a cancer gene? Remember, you don't need to have the disease, you just know you have a good chance of passing it on to your offspring.

What if your spouse has the same "bad" gene and significantly increases your future offspring's odds of having ... leukemia? A deadly, incurable disease. Now some serious decisions have to be made by prospective parents.

Oftentimes, determining that both parents have the same "bad" gene only increases chances of passing it on; there is almost no "sure thing." But, as a parent, do you take the chance? If you risk it, and beat the odds, a normal healthy child may be

FRANK
STANFORD
Columnist



born. If the gene emerges, your child will live a short life of suffering and then die — a child whose death you could have prevented by choosing to adopt a child who's already in the world.

This possibility and others have always been considered as "chance" or from a "higher purpose" perspective. In fact, insurance companies can accurately figure the odds of certain diseases such that they can carry everyone. But if a person is known to carry a deadly gene, insurance companies could drop them from coverage. Can we blame them? And if through genetic testing you discover your offspring are at high risk, but you chance it anyway, aren't you to blame? The child pays the price before it's even born.

And, even if there are things we "aren't supposed to know," then how can we now know them? If genetic testing can lessen or even theoretically eliminate entire strains of deadly diseases, why shouldn't we try? The results would be fewer and fewer young deaths with each passing generation and probably higher adoption rates.

Remember, choosing not to check your posted grade or college admissions reply doesn't in any way change the outcome. Good news or bad, it's better to know.

Frank Stanford is a philosophy graduate student.

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Texas A&M will not tolerate racism

"To fulfill its missions as an institution of higher learning, Texas A&M encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality, diversity, pluralism and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation and world."

— Texas A&M University Statement on Harassment and Discrimination

The recent events on our campus involving racially offensive music played at the Bonfire site and racial/offensive fliers distributed by members of the College Republicans are clearly inconsistent with the University's values.

Such actions create barriers for equality of opportunity and fragment our campus community.

Racial incidents such as these are not uncommon on college campuses across the country, including Texas A&M University. We can no longer hide behind the notion that such incidents are isolated.

While some incidents such as these are expressions of opinion that are protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, they will not be condoned by Texas A&M because they work against the goal of unity and respect we strive for as an institution of higher learning. I can assure you that when racially motivated incidents do violate University policy, we will immediately follow up to ensure that appropriate actions and sanctions result.

These two incidents are symptoms of larger issues that institutions like Texas A&M are firmly committed to addressing through ongoing dialogue, education and action.

We accept the challenge! Racism exists at Texas A&M University. We all have a responsibility to confront and challenge ignorance, intolerance and insensitivity by individuals or groups when it occurs. The leadership of the Bonfire Com-

J. MALON
SOUTHERLAND
Guest
Columnist

mittee and the College Republicans are to be commended for positive responses after the incidents. Proactive measures are being taken by their leadership and by the leadership of several minority student organizations to prevent future occurrences and to make the Texas A&M campus climate one that is welcoming for everyone.

During a recent meeting with members of many of the University's minority student organizations, a plan for the future was presented to me to address issues of campus climate, education and other concerns. A number of very positive suggestions and strategies were offered in the meeting. Such requests are welcome and reasonable for inclusion in the dialogue and processes of the University at every level.

My office will be following up with the student leaders attending the forum as well as the general student body as plans develop.

It is our collective responsibility as a community to challenge our own attitudes and behaviors about people who are "different" than we are. As we move toward the future, let's rethink what the implications are for Texas A&M. Our enrollment, staffing, programs and climate will need to be open and inclusive.

Texas A&M University cannot solve all of society's problems, but as an institution of higher education, we have a responsibility to uphold the highest ideals of access and equity.

There is no race greater than the human race and I challenge and encourage us to explore and appreciate the value of diversity in bringing us together as a community.

Dr. J. Malon Southerland is Vice President for Student Affairs at Texas A&M University

