

OPINION

Battalion

After Washington

Popularity of former presidents reveals deep public cynicism



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ton with considerable monetary gifts. Moreover, aware of the responsibility their immense renown entails, the former president and his wife have raised money for a variety of charitable causes.

Because of these kinds of efforts, the public generally smiles more favorably on a president after he leaves office than when he was still in the hot seat. After the 75-year-old Bush dove out of an airplane onto the Texas A&M University campus earlier this month, the national media took advantage of the opportunity to report that most polls show Bush enjoying more public favor in his old age than he did in the Oval Office.

Carter has experienced the same explosion of post-presidency popularity, and any nineteenth-century historian will readily confirm that John Quincy Adams' experience was similar.

Apparently, Americans historically believe former presidents are great improvements on their former executive selves.

However, this widespread belief reveals more about the public than it does about past presidents. Adams, Carter and Bush did not become magically good people the morning after the inauguration of their successors. If they are noble now, they were probably noble — or at least well-intentioned — during their terms.

The difference between former and present presidents is not mainly in the president.

Rather, the difference is in the public's perception of the presidency.

Because political culture is often saturated with cynicism, every move a president makes is unchari-



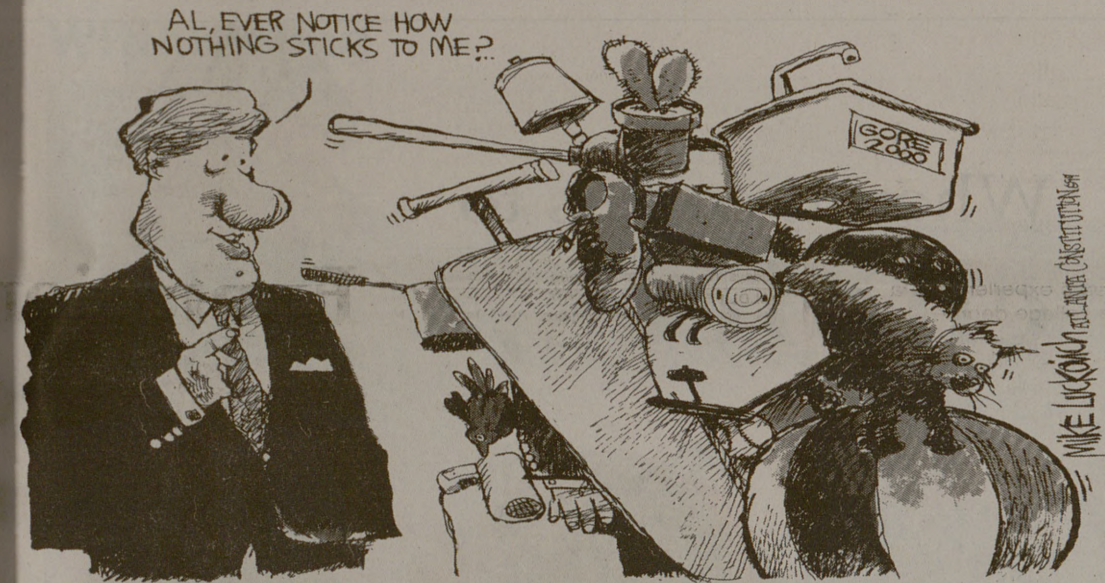
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tably interpreted by pundits and the public. If a president were to support a charity while in office, his gesture would immediately be viewed as an engineered grasp for political gain. Presidents are perceived as puppets of the polls.

It is unfortunate that presidents must wait until after their presidency to earn the good faith of their constituents. The actions of Bush and others should restore the declining public faith that presidents are

human beings, after all. And, with some quite notable exceptions, they are usually admirable public servants. In contrast to what Martin Van Buren's aide thought in *Amistad*, the truly pitiable thing is the public's growing belief that nothing is so pathetic as a current president.

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MIKE LUCKOWY/THE BATTALION

Benefits of prison privatization outweigh alleged disadvantages

Private prisons are a growing sector of the U.S. economy. With incarceration rates on the rise in this country, corporations such as the Correction Corporation of America (CCA) stand to profit from all the criminals being put behind bars. These companies are state-contracted, and they privately own and operate some of the facilities housing America's felons.



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Many question the government's decision to dole out its authority and responsibility to house those guilty of serious crimes to private companies trying to make a profit.

This question is especially relevant to Texans, because Texas houses the most criminals in private prisons of all the states, at around 30,000.

The benefits of prison privatization far outweigh any of its supposed disadvantages.

Opponents claim private prisons do not have the same level of security that public prisons have and that prisoners are more likely to escape, citing an incident at a CCA-run prison where six inmates were able to cut a hole in a fence and escape.

Security is always going to be the biggest issue at any prison, public or private.

However, there are going to be occasional security breaches, as Texas residents found out with the recent escape of an inmate from the high-security Huntsville prison, which is a public prison.

One cannot base a reputation on one incident.

Just because there was an escape at a prison does not mean the people there do not care about security.

Private prisons want to make a profit, and it would be very self-destructive for them not to care about security, because if they did not they obviously would not be allowed to operate for long.

Caring about both profits and security does not create a conflict of interest.

In a recent *Washington Post* article, U.S. Representative Ted Strickland stated private prisons have "potentially corrupting effects on public policy."

He further said prison corporations like the CCA could become powerful lobbyists in Congress for long-term and mandatory sentencing in order to maximize profits.

But this complaint is unfounded. Most people would like nothing more than to see violent criminals go to jail for longer periods of time. In the last two decades, the incarceration rate in the United States has tripled, and the violent crime rate has fallen. Most people would like this trend to continue.

Strickland also suggests that since private prisons control good conduct reports, they may have the tendency to give bad reports in order to keep the prisoners in jail as long as possible, again, to maximize profits. Someone who is in for a 50-year sentence may actually serve the full term.

Stating that prisoners may actually go full-term in private prisons cannot possibly be used as an argument against their existence.

One of the biggest complaints about the prison system today is that people are getting out early who should not be out on the streets.

Private prisons must be liable for many of the aspects of operation in a prison, such as fair treatment and proper staff-to-inmate ratios. The state must be able to use the valuable tool of oversight in the implementation and operation of private prisons, in order to prevent being charged with violations that the prison corporation should be responsible for.

The main argument in favor of private prisons centers around money. The corrections corporations bid on prospects for the facilities, and the state government has the final say on when, where, and by whom these are built. Obviously, the corporation with the lowest bid would win.

This can be much cheaper than building a public prison. If a single prison can be built for less, then more prisons can be built for the same amount of money.

Also, in most private prisons the cost per prisoner is lower, which creates lower maintenance costs.

Overcrowding is the single biggest problem in the prison industry today. Over the past 30 years, prisoners' rights groups have brought numerous suits concerning unconstitutional conditions in prisons.

In 12 states, the entire state prison system either is or has been under court order concerning overcrowding.

To solve overcrowding, private prisons are a better alternative to early release programs.

A large percentage of the crime committed in this country is perpetrated by people who have already served hard time. The doctrine of rehabilitation for the most part has failed, and another alternative to the overcrowding problem must be evaluated. Potentially dangerous criminals cannot be dumped back on the street.

Private prisons are a good way to save taxpayers money and will help keep dangerous people away from the public.

In a time when the U.S. prison population exceeds 1 million people, the bottom line must be considered. Private prisons will help to ease overcrowding, help keep violent offenders off the streets for longer, and they will be able to do it for less money.

The benefits are obvious, and the corrections industry should be allowed to grow and ease the public prison system's back-breaking load.

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Lack of strong evidence linking HIV to AIDS needs attention

The well-informed and the ignorant have one thing in common — the ability to feel very strongly about issues due to their respective bodies of knowledge.

But pity the moderately informed, because for them, it is hard to conclude anything in this age of contradicting opinions and theories.

A good example of dissension in the intellectual links is the available information about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). When talking about AIDS, one encounters three supposedly indisputable facts. First, AIDS is caused by the HIV. Second, HIV is spread through body fluids, typically by way of blood transfusions, sexual intimacy resulting in the contact with fluids such as semen and by contaminated needles. And third, AIDS-related HIV will ultimately cause death, whether it be two years or twenty.

What is rarely found in the research is that all of these premises are based on a hypothesis that has not yet been proven.

It is strange to think that after billions of dollars and millions of hours have been dedicated to the fight against HIV/AIDS, society is exactly where it started — clueless, and lacking any sort of solution. The theory that HIV is relatively harmless and completely unrelated to AIDS belongs to Peter Duesberg, a well-known molecular biologist. In the late 1980s, he was the first to discover and map the genetic sequence of a retrovirus, a type of virus that just integrate its own RNA with the host's DNA.

In several papers, the first of which appeared in the journal, *Cancer Research*, Duesberg stated no additional research clearly proves the link between HIV and AIDS. He also says AIDS is almost certainly a result of repeated exposure to drugs that raise levels of chemical toxicity in the blood.

The theory sounds absolutely ridiculous. In fact, it is almost insulting to think one scientist could discover what hundreds of thousands of other scientists have overlooked. However, the strangeness of his surmise does not make it wrong.

If anything, it should motivate researchers to



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conclusively prove or disprove Duesberg's claims. That they have yet to conclusively establish the link between HIV/AIDS does not bode well for the scientists already announcing they are well on the way to finding a cure. If Duesberg is right, then what have the other scientists remedied?

AIDS research is now a celebrity cause with million-dollar fundraisers and renowned spokespersons. In fact, HIV/AIDS research is a billion dollar industry. Many governments, the United States included, have whole administrations dedicated to the search for HIV's cure. To the government, the public and the majority of scientists involved in HIV/AIDS research, Duesberg's findings are an anathema. They challenge the foundation of years of scientific research.

Duesberg has been called everything from a homophobe to a mad scientist, and his contribution to research has been all but disregarded.

Scientifically speaking, something is amiss when a scientist's call for academic honesty in research circles goes largely unheeded.

If anything, Duesberg should be a prominent voice in HIV/AIDS research.

One does not have to look very far to see how dissenters have the ability to encourage discovery, not impede it. When the scientific community disowns a theory they cannot disprove, it shows that the scientists themselves have forgotten that hypotheses are merely suppositions, not natural laws.

Whether HIV causes AIDS or is only an innocuous retrovirus, one thing is certain — not only is more research needed, but a healthy dose of scientific doubt would go a long way. If HIV does cause AIDS, then perhaps the world is well on its way to curing a disease that plagues over 33 million people worldwide.

However, if Duesberg is right, then HIV-caused AIDS is a misdiagnosis, and sufferers have been unforgivably misled.

With the considerable amount of time and money being thrown into research, scientists and the public alike should keep in mind that being misinformed on such a grand scale is not only offensive, it is futile.

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