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Abortion Rights on the Ballot, Again

Once again this year, opponents of women's reproductive rights have managed to get initiatives aimed at ending or limiting abortion rights on ballots — in South Dakota, Colorado and California. These measures, which violate women's privacy and threaten their health, have implications far beyond those states. If voters approve them, they will become a weapon in the right-wing campaign to overturn Roe v. Wade.

The South Dakota initiative is a near twin of the sweeping abortion ban handily rejected by South Dakota voters just two years ago. To make the ban seem less harsh, its backers have included language purporting to make exceptions for incest, rape or the life and health of the mother. But no one should be fooled. The exceptions were drafted to make it nearly impossible to get an abortion, even during the first trimester of pregnancy.

The measure is clearly unconstitutional under existing Supreme Court rulings, and that's just the point. The underlying agenda is to provide a vehicle for challenging Roe v. Wade, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion.

The Colorado ballot proposal attacks Roe v. Wade by a different route. Known as Amendment 48, this preposterous measure would redefine the term "person" in the state's Constitution to include fertilized human eggs — in effect bestowing on fertilized eggs, prior to implantation in the womb and pregnancy, the same legal rights and protections that apply to people once they are born.

The amendment, which has split anti-abortion groups, carries broad implications, ranging from harmful to downright ridiculous. Potentially, it could ban widely used forms of contraception, curtail medical research involving embryos, criminalize necessary medical care and shutter fertility clinics. A damaged fertilized egg might be eligible for monetary damages.

Noting the "legal nightmare" the amendment would create, and its potential to endanger the health of women, Gov. Bill Ritter, a self-described "pro-life" Democrat, has joined the opposition to Amendment 48.

In California, meanwhile, abortion opponents have put the issue of parental notification on the ballot for the third time in four years. The proponents of Proposition 4 say mandating notification is necessary to safeguard underage girls. But most 15-year-olds who find themselves pregnant instinctively turn to a parent for support and guidance. Far from protecting vulnerable teens, Proposition 4 would make it difficult for young women caught in abusive situations to obtain an abortion without notifying their parents, even in cases where the father or stepfather caused the pregnancy.

If approved, Proposition 4 would inevitably drive some to attempt a self-induced abortion or to seek the procedure later in pregnancy. California voters were right to reject this damaging approach on the first two attempts. They should do so again.

Help for Haiti

This year has been especially cruel to Haiti, with four back-to-back storms that killed hundreds of people, uprooted tens of thousands more and obliterated houses, roads and crops. A far richer country would have been left reeling; Haiti is as poor as poor gets in this half of the globe. Those who have seen the damage say it is hard to convey the new depths of misery there.

The Bush administration promised Haiti \$10 million in emergency aid and Congress has since authorized \$100 million for relief and reconstruction. The United Nations has issued a global appeal for another \$100 million. We have no doubt that Haiti will need much more.

There is something the United States can do immediately to help Haitians help themselves. It is to grant "temporary protected status" to undocumented Haitians in the United States, so they can live and work legally as their country struggles back from its latest catastrophe.

This is the same protection that has been given for years, in 18-month increments, to tens of thousands of Nicaraguans, Hondurans, Salvadorans and others whose countries have been afflicted by war, earthquakes and hurricanes.

While the Bush administration has temporarily stopped deporting Haitians since Hurricane Ike last month, it has not been willing to go the next step of officially granting temporary protected status to the undocumented Haitians living here.

New and Unnecessary

With the Bush administration, no bad idea ever dies. So it should be no surprise that the Pentagon and the Department of Energy have released a new policy paper — pitched to the next president — arguing the case for a new nuclear warhead.

Nearly two decades after this country stopped building nuclear weapons, it should not get back into the business.

As the paper signed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman acknowledges, the current stockpile remains "safe, secure and reliable."

Any decision to build a new weapon would feed already deep suspicions about America's judgment and motives and further undercut efforts to contain the dangerous nuclear ambitions of North Korea, Iran and other wannabes.

The administration's pitch sounds seductive. The proposed Reliable Replacement Warhead (how's that for branding?) is supposed to be sturdy, reliable, secure from terrorists and not really new, just improved. And, oh yes, it's supposed to contain fewer toxic materials.

Officials also claim that if they get the new warheads, the government probably won't have to keep as

Haiti's president, René Préval, and members of Congress have urged the administration to change its mind. We urge the same.

There is very little that is consistent in the United States' immigration policies toward its nearest neighbors, except that the rawest deal usually goes to the Haitians. Cubans who make it to dry land here are allowed to stay; those intercepted at sea are not. Hondurans and Nicaraguans who fled Hurricane Mitch 10 years ago have seen their temporary protected status renewed, as have Salvadorans uprooted by earthquakes in 2001.

Haiti, meanwhile, more than meets the conditions that immigration law requires for its citizens here to receive temporary protected status, including ongoing armed conflict and a dire natural or environmental disaster that leaves a country unable to handle the safe return of its migrants.

If Haiti is ever going to find the road to recovery after decades of dictatorship, upheaval and decay, it will take more than post-hurricane shipments of food and water. Haiti desperately needs money, trade, investment and infrastructure repairs.

It also needs the support of Haitians in the United States, who send home more than \$1 billion a year. What it does not need, especially right now, is a forced influx of homeless, jobless deportees.

many backup warheads in the stockpile to hedge against technical failure — although nobody is making any promises. Officials also insist there will be no need to test the new warheads — computers can model it all.

The United States has not tested a nuclear weapon since 1992, one of the few arms controls taboos President Bush hasn't broken. But Mr. Bush also rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, so any promises about not testing the R.R.W. have always been suspect.

The Pentagon became concerned about "aging" warheads only after it could not persuade Congress to finance a new "bunker buster" weapon to go after deeply buried targets. The nation's nuclear weapons labs have long been lobbying for a new challenge to lure a new generation of nuclear scientists. But nuclear weapons cannot be a jobs project.

Congress has wisely delayed financing a new warhead at least until a blue-ribbon study on nuclear weapons policy — led by two former defense secretaries, William Perry and James Schlesinger — is completed in December. Neither presidential candidate has categorically ruled out a new weapon. They both should.

If the existing stockpile is "safe, secure and reliable," there is no reason to build a new nuclear weapon.

The F.D.A. and Engineered Food

To the Editor:

Re "Coming to a Plate Near You" (editorial, Oct. 4):

We agree with you that the Food and Drug Administration's proposed regulation of genetically engineered animals is more rigorous than its regulation of genetically engineered crops or cloned animals. Unfortunately, however, the F.D.A. will not be as rigorous as it needs to be.

The agency may assess environmental impact, but it is not required to prohibit an animal that causes environmental damage.

Although the F.D.A. says it will protect the animal's health, we note that it approved the sale of milk and meat from cloned animals even though the data show that more than 50 percent of cow clones are born with an abnormality known as large offspring syndrome, which adversely affects their health.

Perhaps more important, the F.D.A. proposal has one glaring defect: there is no requirement to label food that comes from genetically engineered animals. Surveys clearly show that the vast majority of Americans want genetically engineered animals to be labeled as such. By not requiring labeling, the F.D.A. will take away a consumer's right to know and right to choose what she eats.

MICHAEL HANSEN
Senior Scientist, Consumers Union
Yonkers, Oct. 6, 2008

To the Editor:

The Food and Drug Administration's proposed policy is inconsistent and unwise. The introduction of a gene into an animal is not the same as the administration of a drug, and the F.D.A. has not previously required pre-market reviews of food or non-food animals that contain genes from disparate sources, such as the beafalo (a cow-bison combination) or mule (a horse-donkey genetic hybrid).

A better approach would be that taken for food products by the F.D.A.'s Center for Food Safety and Nutrition, which requires a pre-marketing safety review only for certain high-risk ingredients. These include any food additive that becomes a component of or otherwise affects the characteristics of a food if it is "not generally recognized as safe (GRAS)" by qualified experts for its intended use."

Traditionally, the combination of two GRAS substances is also GRAS. Similarly, because adding a GRAS gene to a GRAS organism is likely to yield a GRAS outcome, an F.D.A. pre-marketing review would not be necessary for many animals with a newly introduced gene.

HENRY I. MILLER
Stanford, Calif., Oct. 5, 2008
The writer, a doctor and fellow at the Hoover Institution, was an official at the F.D.A. from 1979 to 1994.

Afghan Women's Progress

To the Editor:

Re "In Poverty and Strife, Women Test Limits" (news article, Oct. 6):

The fact that women are making significant progress in some parts of Afghanistan is good news that confirms our own experience in the country.

The province of Bamian will benefit from women taking on new roles as breadwinners, peacekeepers and government leaders; indeed, the area's relative stability indicates that it already has. In many other areas the change is far less visible and comes in small but significant steps, with women learning skills and finding opportunities to support their families.

But we cannot let these encouraging developments overshadow the life-threatening dearth of health care, education and basic human rights for the majority of Afghan women. Stabilizing Afghanistan must include teaching women how to read and write, develop sources of income and become more active in public life.

Bamian shows that change is possible, even in the most challenging environments.

SWEETA NOORI
Afghanistan Country Director
Women for Women International
Washington, Oct. 8, 2008

ONLINE: MORE LETTERS

On the ballot in November, a California proposition to prevent cruelty to animals. Also: Don't end a Latin course.

nytimes.com/opinion

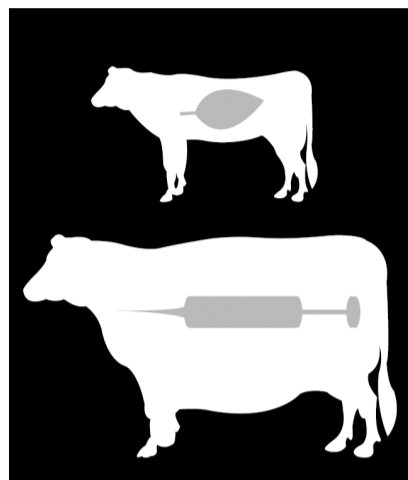
To the Editor:

What is especially troubling about the Food and Drug Administration's decision to consider commercializing genetically modified animals is that consumers currently have no way of knowing which products sold in stores are, or contain, genetically modified organisms.

If the F.D.A. is going to introduce genetically engineered fish and beef into supermarkets, then transparency must extend to labeling. Regardless of whether the agency determines that the new organisms are safe, we have a right to the information that will enable us to choose whether we want to buy them.

ALISSA A. HAMILTON
Toronto, Oct. 5, 2008

The writer is a food and society policy fellow at the Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute.



NATHAN TAVEL

To the Editor:

Your editorial identifies two major problems with the Food and Drug Administration's proposed regulation of genetically engineered animals: a totally secret process and the inability to address potential environmental issues.

Unfortunately, conducting public meetings and consulting with experts from other agencies cannot fix the fundamental flaws in the law that the F.D.A. is applying to regulate those products. Congress needs to step in and eliminate the current secrecy requirements, so the safety data submitted to the agency and the F.D.A.'s analysis would be provided to the public to review and comment on.

Also, Congress should give the F.D.A. (and other agencies) the legal authority to assess and address any environmental concerns engineered animals might pose. Only with Congressional help will the federal government be able to establish an open and comprehensive regulatory system for engineered animals.

GREGORY JAFFE
Washington, Oct. 6, 2008
The writer is director of the Biotechnology Project, Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Cutting Off Birth Control

To the Editor:

Re "Can This Be Pro-Life?," by Nicholas D. Kristof (column, Oct. 9):

Access to family planning is essential to the right to health. The decision by the United States Agency for International Development to cut off birth control supplies creates an unnecessary and cruel double standard for women in wealthy countries and those in the poorest countries.

The new policy will increase maternal deaths, jeopardize the reproductive health of women and deny both women and men the decision of when or whether to have a child. The agency must reverse this course if it truly wants to save the lives of families in the developing world.

HELEN POTTS
Cambridge, Mass., Oct. 9, 2008
The writer is chief program officer for health programs, Physicians for Human Rights.

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Editorial Observer / MAURA J. CASEY

Digging Out Roots of Cheating in High School

Surveys show that cheating in school — plagiarism, forbidden collaboration on assignments, copying homework and cheating on exams — has soared since researchers first measured the phenomenon on a broad scale at 99 colleges in the mid-1960s.

The percentage of students who copied from another student during tests grew from 26 percent in 1963 to 52 percent in 1993, and the use of crib notes during exams went from 6 percent to 27 percent, according to a study conducted by Dr. Donald McCabe of Rutgers. By the mid-1990s, only a small minority said they had never cheated, meaning that cheating had become part of the acceptable status quo.

Dr. McCabe's later national survey of

25,000 high school students from 2001 to 2008 yielded equally depressing results: more than 90 percent said they had cheated in one way or another.

Dr. Jason Stephens of the University of Connecticut has now embarked on a three-year pilot program to reduce cheating. His premise is that honesty and integrity are not only values but habits — habits that can be encouraged in school settings, with positive benefits later in life.

The program seeks to enlist students and teachers in six high schools in promoting a culture of honesty. Schools will be asked to consider honor codes, and, since peer pressure is vitally important, students will be invited to help shape policies and strategies to discourage

How many students cheat? A survey says almost all.

cheating. Two schools are suburban and wealthy, two are middle class, two are urban and poor. One school from each pair will work to end the cheating epidemic, and the other will serve as the control group.

The challenge is daunting. Students of both genders and every demographic group cheat even though they know it is wrong, a mind-set Dr. Stephens de-

scribes as "a corrosive force" — especially when it is acquired in the early years of moral development.

The fact that so many students cheat doesn't make them intrinsically bad, he says: "It's not a case of the bad seed. It's more like bad soil."

The biggest determinant is not the values that students are exposed to at home, but peer norms at school. Students are under pressure to achieve high grade-point averages, which helps them rationalize their behavior. And the schools themselves are complicit, because they reward high grades more than the process of learning — while too often turning a blind eye to the cheating.

But there's hope. The 1993 study

suggested that cheating dropped in schools that encouraged a culture of integrity — either by formally instituting an honor code or by stressing at every turn the importance of honesty and integrity.

A follow-up study showed that dishonest business behavior was lowest among employees who had attended schools with an honor code and whose workplaces encouraged ethical behavior.

If the effort shows results, Dr. Stephens plans to enlist more schools in the hope that eventually a standardized program will be adopted throughout the state. If that happens, both students and society as a whole will profit.