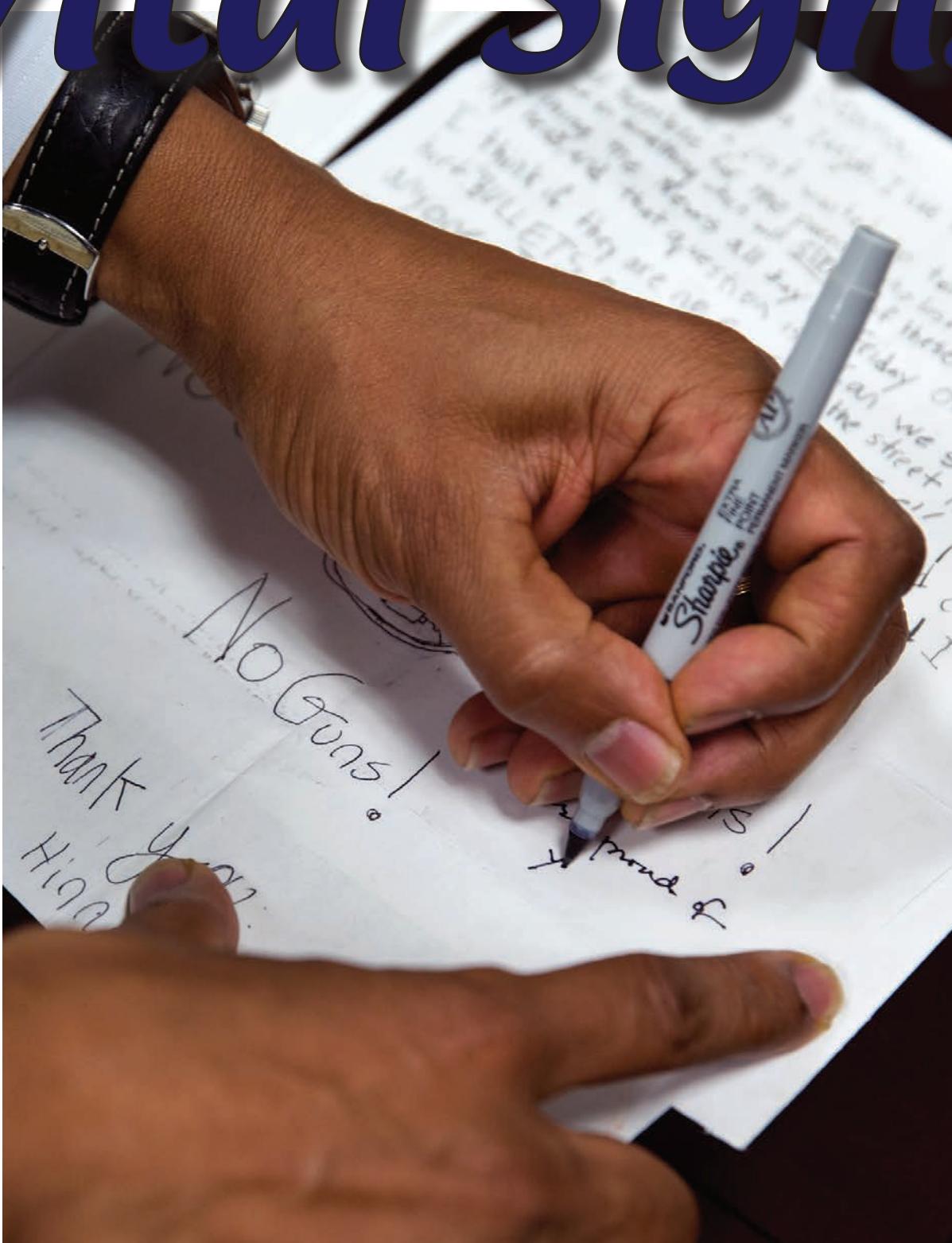


Vital Signs



PETE SOUZA/THE WHITE HOUSE

Will the Newtown Tragedy Bring Gun Control?

FISCAL CLIFF • NORTH KOREA'S MISSILES • INCOME INEQUALITY • ROBOTIC ARMS



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EDITORIAL

Horror in Connecticut

Gun control and mental illness take the spotlight after the Newtown shootings.

BY ELLEN CAHILL

On January 3, 2013, students from Sandy Hook Elementary School were able to return to classes in a restored building seven miles away from the site where Adam Lanza killed 20 first-grade children and six adults in Newtown, Connecticut. After the events that transpired on December 14th, 2012, the lives of the survivors will never be the same. The utter devastation and terror caused by the Newtown shooting has opened up an impassioned debate about the issues of gun control and the treatment of the mentally ill. In the aftermath of such a horrible event, it is imperative that the government takes action on the issues of gun control and the mentally ill to protect American citizens from further horrific tragedies like this one.

Adam Lanza, 20, first shot his mother multiple times and then drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School with four weapons and a substantial amount of ammunition, which he used to gun down twenty children and six adults. Two days after the attack, on December 16, President Obama declared that there was “no excuse for in-



action” in response to the shootings. New legislation and protection for our citizens is necessary to prevent attacks like these from occurring within our own borders. It is clear that the tragedy was, in the words of Cerberus Capital Management, “a watershed event that has raised the national debate on gun control to an unprecedented level.”

Immediately following the shooting, many Republicans, Democrats and gun control advocates wanted a change. Those in favor of stricter gun control legislation

were “optimistic that, perhaps this time, something concrete and lasting would be enacted,” as the *New York Times* reported. As states began to propose stricter laws, even the National Rifle Association admitted they were reconsidering their position in order to make sure “this never happens again.”

When it announced its official response to Newton, however, the NRA condemned proposals for further gun control and stressed instead “the immediate protection of all of our schoolchildren” by placing armed guards in schools, “fixing our broken mental health system, and certain prosecution of every criminal with a gun.” Recent polls have also indicated that 40 percent of gun-owning Americans are still resistant to any changes to what they see as their Second Amendment rights. Ohio Governor John Kasich even announced a new bill that would allow people to keep guns in their cars and make it simpler to carry weapons and renew gun licenses.

Despite resistance from gun advocates, gun control must be made stricter so that

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On the Cover: President Obama writes a response to a child's letter concerning the Newtown shootings.

we can prevent terrible shootings like that in Newtown in the future. So far, President Obama has claimed he will make gun control a “central issue” during his second term. In a statement after Newtown Obama explained that “this time, the words need to lead to action. I will use all the powers of this office to help advance efforts aimed at preventing more tragedies like this.” Since then a special task force headed by Vice President Joe Biden has developed a plan that includes universal background checks before purchasing a gun, a revival of the assault weapons ban, and a ban on the kind of ammunition clips used by Lanza. Some states have indicated they will attempt to control the sale of guns by requiring both a background check and annual permit to purchase ammunition. It is absurd that, as state senator Kevin de León said, “if you want to cut down a Christmas tree in California you have to secure a permit at a cost of \$10. Yet anyone who walks into any gun store in California can buy all the ammunition they want.”

Though some feel that new legislation will not deter violent crimes, it is important to remember that with the current laws in place, there is a saddeningly strong possibility of future shootings. The Second Amendment right to bear arms must be protected, but our citizens must be secure and safe first.

While the gun control debate has been raging across newspaper columns and comment sections, there has also been a focus on the role of mental illness in mass shoot-

ings. Former classmates thought of Adam Lanza as “a loner who was intelligent, but quiet and socially awkward.” Many doctors have asserted that it is important to keep guns away from those with mental illness in order to bring homicides like these to a halt. Robert Levy of the Cato Institute has argued that “to reduce the risk of multi-victim violence, we would be better advised to focus on early detection and treatment of mental illness” than on tighter gun control laws. Proposals like this oversimplify reality, however. Mental illness is a risk factor for violence, but studies from the National Institute of Mental Health found that the prevalence of violence among people with mental illness was still only sixteen percent, compared to seven percent among those without mental illness. Moreover, people who abuse alcohol are more than seven times as likely as those who do not abuse substances to become violent.

Jeffrey Swanson of Duke University has summed up the difficulties of the situation concisely: “Can we readily predict violence? No is the short answer.” Those with mental illnesses may commit violent acts, but normal people in the “grip of all too ordinary human aggression” perform the vast majority of homicides. But still, laws prohibiting the mentally ill from obtaining guns are worthwhile, despite the fact that at present, most perpetrators have not been deterred by existing legislation. Adam Lanza was prohibited from obtaining a gun, but that did not stop him from getting his hands

on his mother’s collection of arms. Overall, it is most important to invest time in screening and treatment with regards to mental illness. But we must also remember that violence can come out in too many groups of people to single out the mentally ill as the only ones who must be restricted.

The United States must have programs to aid the mentally ill and their families. Heather Tillman of Milwaukee has a son who threatens to kill himself and his parents. For now, her son has been placed in a structured intensive care facility and she and her family feel much safer. She fears however, that her son will always be capable of violence, and she has “come to the realization that he could and will hurt someone someday.” The most unsettling fact in this context is that states have continued to cut mental health spending from 2009 to 2012 and few people can afford to pay for psychiatric care. The Newtown shootings have allowed us as a country to recognize the declining help available for the mentally ill. Many mental health groups have written letters to President Obama requesting the resources we as a country need to prevent another shooting.

Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy has appointed a 15-member committee to examine and change state policies in relation to gun safety, screening for mental illness and controlling gun violence, but many lawmakers offer radically different proposals. In the wake of this tragedy, it is important to think about how we, as a nation, can protect our citizens from violence. Stricter gun control and reform of mental health care will both help in this mission, but there is always a degree of uncertainty when it comes to spontaneous violent acts. Even if stricter gun laws are enacted, the consequences in relation to crime will not be immediate. Only time will tell how much action the country as a whole takes in order to deter such devastating violence.

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Soldiers of the Connecticut National Guard's 143rd MP Co, currently stationed in Afghanistan, say a prayer for the families and the community of Newtown, CT.



(Above) President Barack Obama talks with Speaker of the House John Boehner during the debt ceiling negotiations of 2011.

A few issues have been resolved, but major budget controversies still remain.

BY TANAY GUPTA

Keeping a nation's finances in check can certainly be a daunting task. It is critical that the flow of money coming in is roughly equal over time to that which is going out, and sacrifices must be made to ensure this. Too often, countries do not take appropriate measures early enough. Nations like Greece and Spain have demonstrated what can happen when a government fails to generate sufficient revenue. Their citizens reaped many benefits in past years, but now must suffer the consequences in the form of strict austerity measures. America is on the precipice of following in their footsteps as its own national debt continues to rise above the \$16.39 trillion debt ceiling. This huge amassed debt has led much attention to be focused on the "fiscal cliff." This term was created to demonstrate the possible consequences of the seven trillion dollars in lost Bush-era tax reductions and mandatory spending cuts that would have threatened the national economy had the politicians been unable to derive a solution by the end of 2012. By the time the ball dropped in New York City, however, little had been decided upon in Washington, and votes for a compromise bill only started trickling in on the morning of January 2, 2013. Using its ever-present ability to procrastinate, the government pushed back key discussions over spending cuts, though it was able to reach a partial deal on taxes. As the time to make real budget decisions nears, the nation's politicians need to put their pride and factionalism aside to come together before America becomes plagued with the same riots and pressure that Greece faced last year.

The ominous events of September 11, 2001 led Former President Bush into two wars, weakening America's fiscal standing. Bush contributed to the fiscal cliff in two ways: the first is the international wars he waged, but failed to fund, in the Middle East to fight the terrorists he believed committed the atrocities of 9/11; the second is the Bush Tax Cuts that lowered income taxes for all individuals. The cuts reduced the tax rate on in-

dividuals earning \$400,000 by five percent, down to 35%. The combination of these two actions stained the national budget with red. By the end of 2008, the country had run up an additional \$5 trillion debt and was on the verge of a recession. Three years later, as talk began over what to do about the looming debt, the "fiscal cliff" was invented to motivate both sides to come to an agreement by the end of 2012. The dilemma facing Washington just a few months ago was whether to either extend the tax breaks yet again or to find a solution that would restore the taxes to their pre-Bush levels. And because America must pay interest on the debt it owes, it would become increasingly difficult to pay back the escalating debt without worsening the already feeble economy.

The major topics on the table for the cliff discussions before December 31 were the national public debt approaching the debt ceiling, the soon to be expiring cuts on taxes, and federal spending, which was slated to be cut because of the notorious "sequester" agreement signed in August 2011. The debt ceiling is the maximum public debt that the US Government can incur. During the summer of 2010, Congress raised the ceiling to \$16.4 trillion, which was reached in December 2012. Using "extraordinary measures" – an emergency allowance of \$200 billion – the Treasury could continue its regular function until about mid-February 2013. In other words, from its current level of \$16.45 trillion, the US debt would peak at \$16.6 trillion dollars before the government "shut down" through default. Of course, politicians would not even consider this as a possibility because of the extremely severe global repercussions that would ensue. The President insisted on raising the debt ceiling to avoid "negotiating through crisis again and again." However, the cost of raising the ceiling without reducing the deficit would be around \$1 trillion for all of 2013 and about \$1.8 trillion for 2014.

As far as taxes are concerned, five tax measures were set to expire at the end of 2012: the 2001/2003 Bush Tax Cuts, 2009 Stimulus, Payroll Tax Holiday of 2010, Alternative Minimum Tax and Extenders. Had President Obama extended all of these

provisions for another year, they would cost another half trillion dollars. The Democrats have been in favor of increasing taxes on the wealthy, while Republicans, like John Boehner, the Speaker for the House of Representatives, have urged the President to make spending cuts and to not raise taxes. In January's partial compromise, only the Bush Tax Cuts were extended. In fact, for individuals earning under \$400,000 these cuts were made permanent. For those making more than that threshold, the marginal rate was returned to 39.6%. Another win for the Democrats was in the permanent rate on Capital Gains & Dividends, the source of great wealth for many in the upper class. The Capital Gains tax rate for incomes above \$400,000 went back to 20% and the rate of 15% for incomes below that level was made permanent, as reported by the *Western Free Press*. While the tax issue thus was solved mostly in the favor of tax-hungry Democrats, spending cuts, the other items on the table during December's fiscal cliff, came out differently.

The January 2013 deal postponed sequester, an automatic, across-the-board spending cut in both defense and domestic discretionary programs. Sequestration was pushed back from the last debt-ceiling debate in August 2011 to December 2012 and now, finally, while discussed in March 2013. The only main spending cuts-related issue resolved was the Unemployment Insurance extension for the long-term unemployed, which has been continued one more year. The *Center on Budget and Protection Priorities*' Richard Kogan says that as per the Budget Control Act of 2011, sequestration will occur if "Congress fails to enact Joint Select Committee proposals achieving at least \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction over the next ten years." The time for proposals to start coming forward is fast approaching. Social Security, Medicare and Defense are the three key areas relevant to spending cuts. There will likely be a 9% reduction in defense spending and 8% reduction in domestic spending if the 1.2 trillion dollar target is to be reached.

The large political divide between Republicans and Democrats has made negotiations so difficult that, even after several months of talk, little has been actually accomplished. The Republicans stood firm that there should be lower taxes across the board—of course including the richest families of the country—and spending cuts in social welfare programs such as Medicare. In an interview with NBC, President Obama said that Republicans' only key theme is "making sure that tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans are protected." And, to some extent, they succeeded in that goal. Without raising taxes on more members of society who can certainly afford to pay them, the federal deficit will go nowhere; meanwhile, the United States' reputation abroad will be tainted.

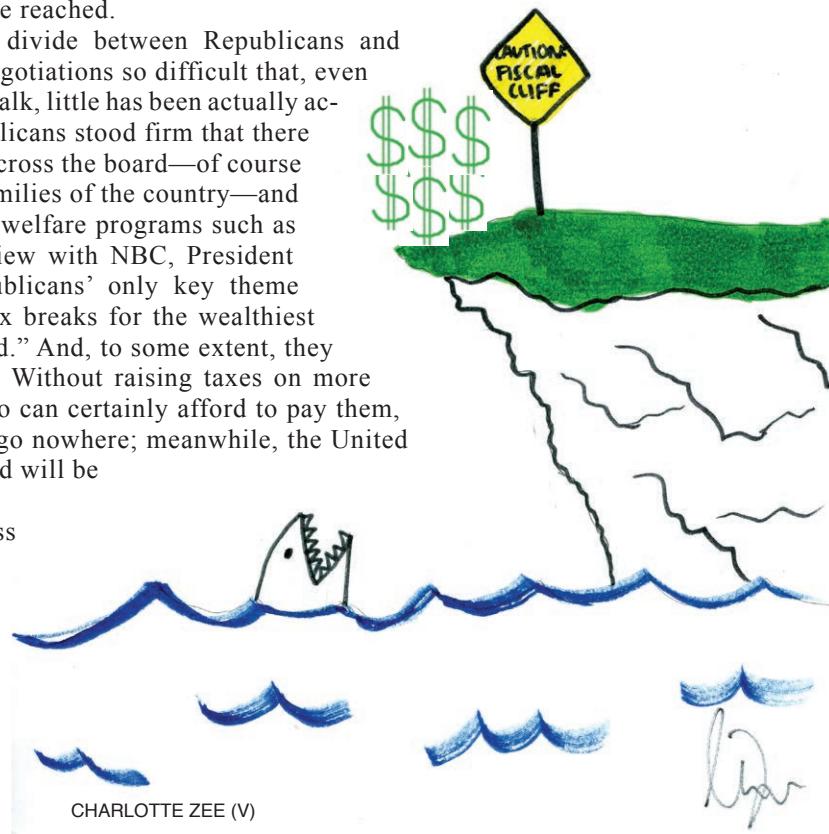
News agencies across the world are left to laugh at the American government's incompetence as the two sides grapple without coming to any meaningful conclusion. The *China Daily* says, "The 112th Congress

is being seen as the least effective in decades." They dub American politicians "hapless slackers." India's *Economic Times* echoes the same message: "Nobody does dysfunction better than the US Congress." The most important result of the last round of debates is perhaps that the critical showdown over sequestration, or "billions of dollars in across-the-board spending cuts," was only delayed a few weeks, when the Left and Right Wings would have to face off again.

Even though there has been a fair amount of criticism, American politicians need to be credited for clearing at least something off the table. Had America gone "over the cliff," taxes for all income levels would have skyrocketed and the mandatory spending cuts determined in 2011 would involuntarily occur. The Congressional Budget Office speculated in 2012 that had these two negative effects on the economy occurred, "the combined effect could dampen economic growth by 0.5%, possibly tipping the U.S. economy back into a recession and driving unemployment back over 9%." As some notable ground has been covered in regards to taxes, the key word will now be compromise.

If the nation is to save its reputation, and preserve financial health and stability for the world, Republicans and Democrats need to cooperate. *Fortune*'s Geoff Clovin says that the country has been successful in its overall fiscal history because it consistently adopted a "policy so relentlessly bipartisan that it attract[ed] strong, stable support from both sides." In fact, that was the idea behind the super committee designed in August 2011. They eventually failed to come to a consensus, but showed the potential for compromise in a scenario in which both sides were partly discontented. Perhaps if there were discussions that were completely closed to the public -- much like the Constitutional Convention of 1787 -- ideas could be freely expressed and negotiated upon without external influence. Congress also needs to stop artificially creating short-term crises such as the debt ceiling fight. Even if talks extend for a long period of time, there needs to be a final solution so that, as President Obama said, we can stop "negotiating through crisis again and again."

The fragile economies in Europe forebode an ominous future for America if its government officials cannot appropriately handle the country's spending. The fiscal cliff of December 2012 presented an opportunity to resolve pending issues on taxes and national spending, but only a few tax increases, and no spending cuts, were decided upon. Politicians will get another chance to show their competence before sequestration must be addressed in February 2012 and the Treasury hits the debt ceiling. Some things can't be controlled in the



world, like foreign economies. But other factors can be. America needs to do its part to prosper so that it can bring other nations toward stability. Politicians must show their tactfulness and ability to solve major issues in the country right now. In the end, anyone can govern if everyone is in full support of that person's ideas. It is when others oppose your ideas and you can either convince them that yours are the best for the nation, or can reach a fair compromise, that something has re-

ally been accomplished.

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Using Robotics To Give Injured Veterans A Helping Hand

Research into the loss of limbs sheds light on the prospect of robotic arms.

BY KUNAL NABAR

After more than a decade of fighting, the war in Afghanistan has taken the lives of over 2,000 US soldiers. It is less well known that over 1,500 Americans have lost limbs on Afghan battlefields, and many others have become disabled due to traumatic brain injury. Because so many American veterans have had to return from battle with severe disabilities, the Department of Defense is sponsoring new research to help these struggling men and women. The goal is to allow both veterans and civilians who are disabled due to amputation, traumatic injuries or disease to undergo brain surgery, thereby enabling them to regain functionality and return to their normal lives.

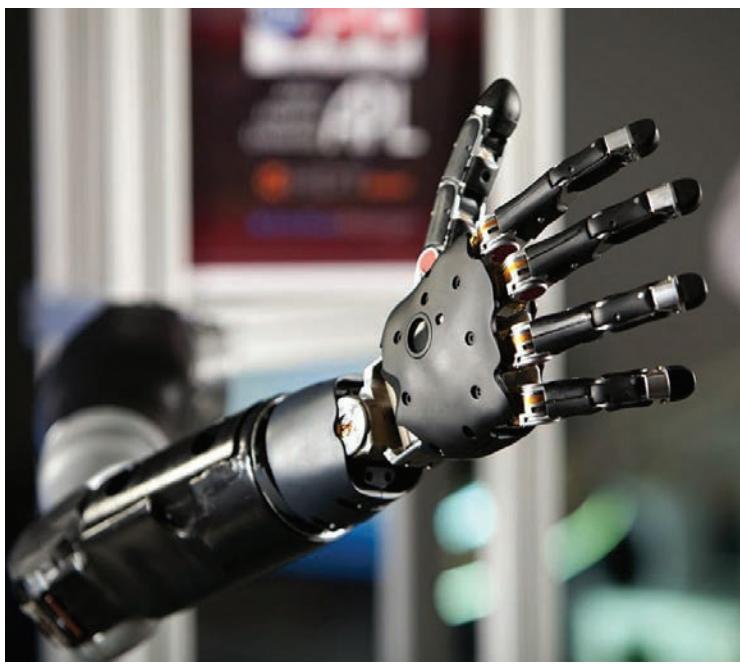
The potential of brain-based therapies first became clear with the case of Scott Mackler, a husband, father, and neuroscientist who was suddenly diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. A skilled mara-

thon runner and athlete, Scott began to lose connection to every muscle in his body. However, today he still leads an active life even though his body has betrayed him. Through a brain computer interface, or BCI, Mackler can communicate with the outside world. The system allows Mackler to take his thoughts and make them into words one letter at a time. All the letters continually flash on a screen, while Mackler thinks about which letter he wants to select. Once the computer flashes over the correct letter, electrodes connected to his head read the brain's reaction to recognition and know which let-



RICHARD GREENHILL/WIKIMEDIA

"The robotic arm is very similar to a normal arm: it has the same size and weight, contains all the batteries and computers for normal functionality, and is just as strong."



DARPA AND JHU/APL

The prosthetic arm, designed by the John Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory (JHU/APL) and funded by the U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

ter he selected. Some observers postulate that this system is similar to reading someone's mind. In reality this interface system is not nearly that effective, because at a pace of about 20 seconds per letter, it requires a large amount of time for Scott to form each of his sentences letter by letter.

Dr. Andrew Schwartz is working on a system to more closely monitor brain waves in order to help human beings regain functionality after the loss of a limb. Schwartz began his research in 2008 on monkeys. He placed electrode arrays on the cerebral cortex, the outer layer of the brain, and in other areas that control motor functions. Schwartz monitored the movements of a monkey and determined the corresponding brain signals. Through this process, he was able to have a monkey control a robotic arm using only its mind. At the time, Schwartz said that he would like to see this applied to humans within the next 5 years.

At the same time, Dr. Geoffrey Ling, a neurologist and retired Army Colonel, is in charge of a Department of Defense project focused on a similar initiative. After seeing the wounded in tours to Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003 and 2005, respectively, Ling requested a result from his team within 5 years. Although many in his team were skeptical of the success of such an ambitious goal, Ling said, "that's quite alright, because it's in our insanity that things happen." A multimillion dollar robotic arm has been developed by Michael McLoughlin at Johns Hopkins Applied Physics lab and is the most sophisticated robotic appendage ever developed. The robotic arm is very similar to a normal arm: it has the same size and weight, contains all the batteries and computers for normal functionality, and is just as strong.

In early 2012, the arm was finally ready for human testing. The issue was selecting the correct candidate. Jan Scheurmann, a Pittsburgh native and quadriplegic, underwent risky surgery to have electrode arrays wired to her brain, and then connected through her

skull to two computer connections called pedestals. After a lot of training, Jan is now able to move her arm around exactly like a normal arm. Ling, the project manager, believes that the true promise of this breakthrough technology lies in the chance for patients to have expectations for restoration, not rehabilitation, of functionality in their daily lives. He adds, "we are tool users, and our arms and our legs are just tools for our brains. So we give another tool to our brain, [and] we adapt that tool to do the things we want to do." Although this project will first move toward helping paralyzed victims, it also works toward helping amputees. The project has also found ways to help people without brain surgery. Dr. Albert Chi is a doctor at Johns Hopkins who helped Johnny Matheny, an amputee who lost his arm to cancer. Dr. Chi developed a system that allowed Matheny to control his arm by using the nerve endings in his amputated arm. Furthermore, Chi also installed a partial sense of touch in Matheny's robotic arm, so Matheny can distinguish between soft and hard objects using his arm.

Some critics of the project believe that the integration of people and technology in such an intimate setting may pose ethical dangers. It is understandable that the combination of man and robot can lead some to envision a cyborg from an early 90's sci-fi film. But I believe that it is important to look at Dr. Ling's approach to the subject. The brain is in fact a tool user, and our arms, legs, hands, and feet are all just tools of our brain. In addition, this breakthrough, which is funded by the Department of Defense, can restore hope to hundreds of veterans who gave their limbs serving their country, as well as to many others who have lost the use of their appendages through disease. This is a good way for the national government to give back to its veterans and to serve the American people.

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One small nibble, one giant bite: Jan Scheurmann, who has quadriplegia, brings a chocolate bar to her mouth using a robot arm she is guiding with her thoughts. Researcher Elke Brown, M.D., watches in the background.



ILYA HAYKINSON/WIKIMEDIA

Will President Obama Deliver on His Climate Change Promises?

By MELANIE NARATIL

In his recent inaugural address, President Obama renewed his commitment to climate policy. He promised, “We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that failure to do so would betray our children and future generations.” These words echo his previous statement at the United Nations Summit on Climate Control in September 2009 at which he stated that if we fail to meet the challenge of climate change “we risk consigning future generations to an irreversible catastrophe.” This concern for the welfare of future generations led the Obama administration and the U.S. Congress to support clean energy solutions and begin developing policies to attack climate change during Obama’s first term. However, a polarized Congress had produced limited results by 2012, and may impede further progress on these issues during his second term.



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Construction site along the route of the Keystone Pipeline project – North Dakota.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed into law in February 2009, allowed for an investment of over \$90 billion in clean energy technologies. In May 2009, Obama made a commitment to the development of the first-ever joint fuel economy and carbon dioxide tailpipe emission standards for cars and light-duty trucks, which have improved fuel efficiency an average of 4.3 percent annually. In October 2009, an Executive Order requiring federal agencies to set and meet strict greenhouse gas reduction targets by 2020 was put in place. Common household appliances have to meet more aggressive efficiency standards as well. The outer continental shelf has also been opened to renewable energy production.

In February 2009, the President indicated that, together with Congress, he would enact new legislation concerning energy and climate change to create a mandatory economy-wide cap on emissions. Emission reductions would begin in 2012 and become stricter every year after so that, by 2050, greenhouse gases would be approximately 83% below their 2005 levels. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act in June 2009 to help reach this goal. It included new investments in clean energy technologies needed to transform to a low-carbon economy and create skilled green jobs to produce future economic growth. More controversially, the bill would have established a nationwide “cap and trade” system to limit future greenhouse gas emissions. The inability of the Senate to agree on implementing “cap and trade” caused the bill to die there.

Through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the U.S. has been cooperating with other countries to establish a global climate agreement. In April 2009, President Obama initiated the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate to unite 17 developed and developing economies producing 80% of global emissions to promote clean energy technologies. These countries’ leaders met in July 2009 to help reach an agreement on an improved climate regime and to facilitate clean energy technology deployment.

In December 2009 in Copenhagen, a five-year \$350 million Climate Renewables and Deployment Initiative was announced by the U.S. and its partners. As part of the Copenhagen Accord, a GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions reduction target in the range of 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and approximately 83 percent below

2005 levels by 2050 was proposed, aligning with U.S. legislation. In Copenhagen, the U.S. agreed to increase climate assistance in developing countries. However, the international community failed to come together on establishing a global treaty to control emissions that would replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

President Obama announced a new Partnership on Clean Energy and Climate of the Americas in June 2009 to encourage clean energy technologies throughout the Western Hemisphere. At the 2009 Group of Twenty (G-20) summit in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Obama and other leaders agreed to phase out fossil fuel subsidies.

As Obama enters his second term, he may be able to tighten environmental regulations concerning fuel-efficient vehicles and clean energy, but a gridlocked Congress may inhibit the progress of his global warming agenda. Scientists are increasingly concerned about the effects of global warming. In the November 2012 issue of the journal *Science*, climate researcher Thomas Stocker warned that every year of delay in mitigating the effects of warming makes it increasingly difficult to avoid seriously disrupting the planet. Also in November, the World Bank released a report that called for global action on climate change. Even

public opinion supports action on climate change. About 75 percent of independents, 93 percent of Democrats, and 52 percent of Republicans believe that global warming should be a medium or greater priority for Obama and Congress.

Unfortunately, some representatives in Congress disagree with the scientific data that the climate is changing and that greenhouse gas emissions are a major issue. Republican Joe Barton told the Dallas Morning News, "I'm not going to bet the U.S. economy or the Texas economy on a theory that is not proven. Climate has always been changing." The prevalence of such opinions may get in the way of approving climate legislation.

The disbanding of Obama's green dream team concerns environmentalists. Lisa Jackson, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Ken Salazar, the interior secretary, recently announced their departures. US Energy Secretary, Steven Chu, has recently announced his departure as well. Carol Browner, who was Obama's climate and energy adviser, left in 2010 and has not been replaced. Proponents of climate control would like to see strong environmental advocates in the cabinet, especially since conservative Republicans have targeted the EPA for funding cuts.

Although Obama has promised to initiate a national conversation regarding climate change, he has yet to devote an entire speech to this topic or attempt to build a national movement for cutting emissions. Congress failed to pass a climate law, but Obama could take further action to reduce emissions by encouraging the EPA to set new standards

on existing power plants, which produce 40% of American's emissions. Rules established by the EPA during Obama's first term make it nearly impossible to construct new coal-fired plants, but further steps need to be taken to clean up or phase out old coal-fired power plants.

Obama will soon have to make a decision about approving the Keystone XL pipeline. The project would transport about 830,000 barrels of crude oil a day from the Alberta, Canada tar sands to refineries on the Texas Gulf coast. This is only about one-third of the 2.3 million barrels of oil Canada already sends us and a very small portion of the 19 million barrels the U.S. uses daily. Republican supporters of

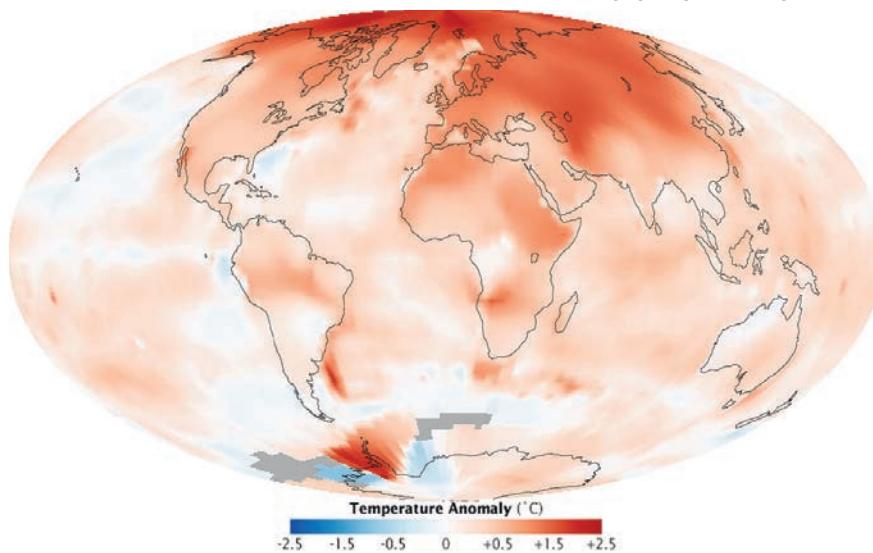
the pipeline say it will help achieve energy independence and create thousands of jobs. Environmentalists focus on the pipeline's dirty oil and production of heat-trapping gases that will contribute to global warming. Obama has a tough decision to make in terms of job creation versus the environmental impact of oil transport.

The Obama administration recognizes the severity of the threat from climate change and has taken action to reduce the harmful emissions that contribute to global warming, but must accomplish much more to ensure a positive future for our planet. We can only hope that our polarized Congress and a starker view

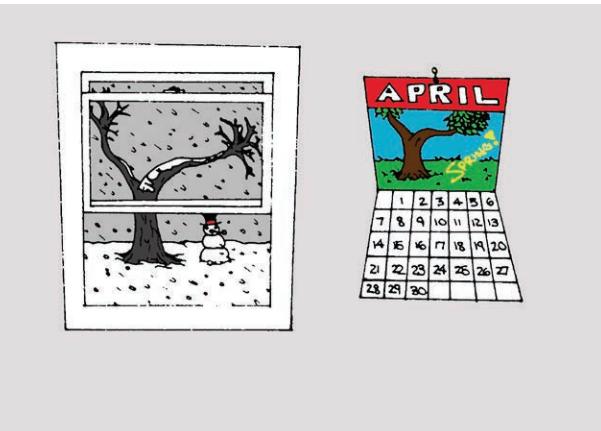
of the limits of the presidency in his second term will not combine to neutralize President Obama's commitment to attack the causes of climate change.

Sources: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/140010.pdf>; <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/20/obamas-climate-change-pro>; <http://insideclimatenews.org/todaysnews/20130122/how-serious-obama-about-climate-change-5-decisions-watch>; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2012/11/07/obama-finally-talks-climate-change-but-what-will-he-do-about-it>; <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/19/obamas-second-term-options-on-the-environment>; <http://www.mensjournal.com/expert-advice/obama-and-the-environment-what-he-can-do-20130118>

DAVID ROCKOFF (IV)



The notable 2.5 degree change from the mid-twentieth century to 2010 in the northern parts of the northern hemisphere result in significant weather changes for the entire globe.



Are the Rich Getting Richer, and the Poor Getting Poorer?

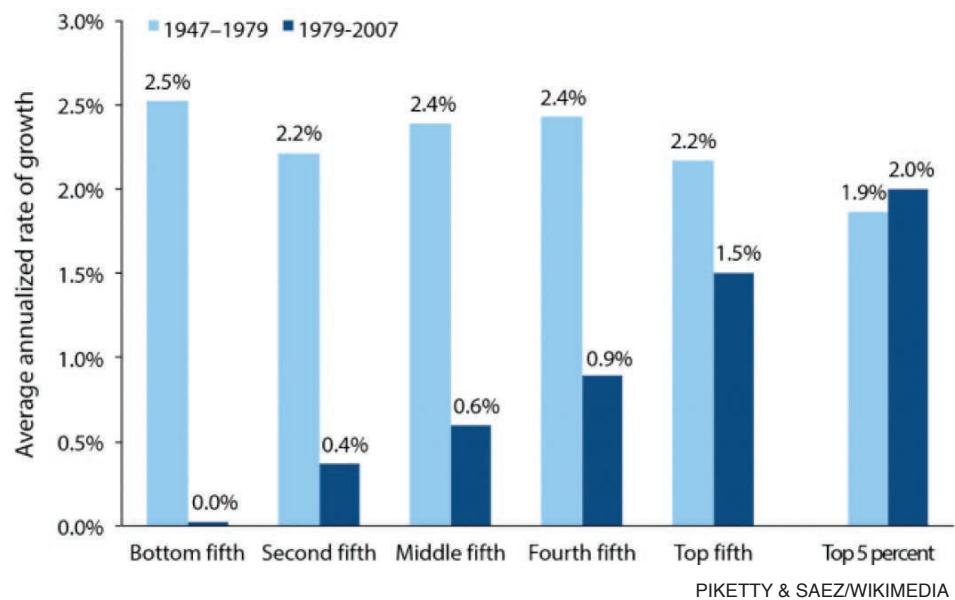
Can a country in which the top one percent of households owns more than a third of its wealth really be called a democracy?

BY PETER SHIM

In the last several years, we have seen a heated debate over the extent and significance of the income inequality that persists in the United States. In fact, as demonstrated by Occupy Wall Street, people have developed strong positions on the issue without necessarily being in command of the basic facts.

When we quantify the current levels of income inequality, we find that they are at their highest levels since 1928. The income of the top 1% of households constitutes 23.5% of the national income. From 1975 to 2007 the top 1% has seen its income rise six times faster than the middle 60% and 15 times faster than the bottom 20%. When one considers wealth rather than income, the top 1% has more than the bottom 90%. It is also important to note that the bottom 90% of America is in the top 1% of the world. While there is little dispute about the basic data, conservatives and liberals form greatly differing ideas about its causes and its implications.

The liberal perspective is that income disparities threaten democratic ideals. Simply put, their main argument is that money equals power, and in a democratic society, political speech. For instance, corporations, organizations, and wealthy individuals can donate extraordinary amounts of money to Political Action Committees, or "PACs." Through this system, PACs have created a direct highway between money and candidate access. Liberals claim that the impacts are twofold. The first is the real distortion of political representation by a flood of money supporting private interests. For example, a recent American Political Science Association report notes that the votes of U.S. senators far more closely correspond with the policy views of rich constituents than with those of less-privileged constituents. The preferences of constituents in the bottom fifth of the income distribution were found to have little or no effect on the votes of their senators. Recently retired Supreme Court Justice Paul



In the last generation, the annual income growth for the top five percent has dramatically outpaced that of the bottom 60%.

Stevens has argued that the findings above demonstrate that what is "at stake... is the public's faith [in the legitimacy of government]... A democracy cannot function effectively when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold." Indeed, roughly 76% of Americans support the notion that "the government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves." Thus, most liberals argue that because wealth inequality leads to a distortion of political representation while also promoting decreased societal approval of our political system, income inequality inherently threatens democratic ideals.

Furthermore, liberals claim that income inequalities significantly harm the economy. Professor of economics at Columbia University Joseph Stiglitz discusses this in his article, "Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%." Professor Stiglitz claims that inequality denies upward economic mobility to the poor. Since more and more money is necessary to become "rich," a lack of resources to start out with severely limits financial opportunity. Stiglitz and his allies

claim that this trend works out in practice in the form of stagnant or declining incomes for most citizens in America; ultimately, a third of Americans raised in the middle class will fall out of it by the time they are adults due to this. Furthermore, Professor Stiglitz claims that inequality undermines national economic performance, since talented people now enter fields of employment that promise higher earnings like finance, rather than those that are beneficial to economic growth, like innovation. Finally, liberals point out that income inequalities are so dangerous because they are self-reinforcing. George Packer writes in *Foreign Affairs* that "the more wealth accumulates in a few hands at the top, the more influence and favor the well-connected rich acquire... That, in turn, frees them up to amass more money, until cause and effect become impossible to distinguish." Essentially, liberals claim that all the problems associated with income inequality, including the poor and middle class getting poorer and fewer people seeking jobs, will only get worse if the current degree of in-



CHARLOTTEZEE(V)

come disparity is allowed to continue.

The conservative perspective is that income disparities are necessary for economic improvement. Businessman Edward Conard depicts this perspective in his controversial book, *Why Everything You've Been Told about the Economy Is Wrong*. Mr. Conard claims that the 99% benefit from the prosperity of the 1%. This happens because the super-rich spend the majority of their income on investments that make life better for everyone. For example, Mr. Conard uses the examples of a soda can's bent top; an invention the rich invested in, but saves a lot of money for the public: "[The invention] saves a fraction of a penny on every can. There are a lot of soda cans in the world. That means the economy can produce more cans with the same amount of resources. It makes every American who buys a soda can a little bit richer because their paychecks buy more." Without the super-rich investing in it, innovations like this would, in theory, be impossible. The vast majority of economists, both Democratic and Republican, agree with this premise. In fact, according to The Center for Economy and Policy Research, the current calculation of how much society earns per dollar earned by an investor is at a 10:1 ratio, meaning that society earns ten times the amount that the investor earns. Essentially, though rich investors take a larger slice, they significantly contribute to making the "American Pie" larger.

Conservatives also claim that income disparities do not threaten democratic ideals because they do not undermine the very tenets our country was founded upon, and what the Constitution guarantees to every individual. They state that access to liberty does not change from person to person because the government does not favor the rich when it comes to basic rights. Every citizen over the voting age is allowed to vote, and since America is a representative democracy, political power lies in voting for the representative. Their baseline is that though a rich person may be able to advertise and spread ideas more, ultimately, the decision comes down to the individual voter. Thus they conclude that since each citizen has equal voting power, money does not control

political power, which is the essence of liberty. Conservatives also claim that since everyone is the beneficiary of the Bill of Rights, having more money does not affect liberty. Conservatives further claim that since money cannot buy happiness, a lack of money does not challenge the freedom to pursue it. Finally, using the fact that the U.S. spends far more on healthcare than Japan or Switzerland but those countries' citizens live on average four years longer than the average U.S. citizen, they claim that there is very little correlation between money and life expectancy. They conclude that since money does not influence life expectancy on a worldwide scale, there is little reason to believe that money influences lives differently for people in America.

It is quite clear that both sides have legitimate concerns. However, the question remains as to how it all balances out. The liberals have justifiable anxieties for democratic ideals and the discontent of the people. Yet at the same time, it's true that competition itself is a democratic ideal, and the reason democracy in America works as well as it does is because it aspires to be a meritocracy: its citizens have to try hard to achieve their goals. People work at different jobs, which mean that the amount of work and skill per job varies. Some jobs are harder than others, and it does not seem fair for someone who puts much more effort into his work be paid as much as someone who does not. Closing the income gap might require a job and money guarantee, which would unfortunately mean that people would not have to work as hard. Taking away an incentive for putting in effort and striving to reach one's po-

tential is a dangerous proposition, since competition and effort-based rewards are what fuel innovation. The nation's industries simply cannot be held together by charity and guarantees, and the government and the economy would very likely stagnate.

On the other hand, the liberals have legitimate counters against income inequalities being financially beneficial. Though the conservative side presents clear arguments on why the super-rich can actually help the economy by investments, not all of the money of the wealthy may go into productive investment. Furthermore, as the rich get wealthier, they are more reluctant to spend money for social purposes; after all, the rich don't need to rely on the government, leading to an under-investment in education, healthcare and infrastructure. Moreover, as more people are dropping out of the middle class and the general situation is worse for the majority of Americans, it may not matter that the "American Pie" is getting larger, only that ordinary citizens are getting smaller portions of it. Finally, all these problems are going to worsen in a positive feedback loop, the richer a person becomes, the more money he has to make himself richer, making the financial benefits to society negligible in the short term.

It's clear that there is no winning side. Both perspectives have well-founded opinions that have many impacts. What is clear however is that extreme situations are not favorable. 100% equality among all the citizens of the country would threaten the democratic ideal of meritocracy, and thereby threaten the country's strength by dampening innovation. On the other hand, an extreme form of inequality would lead to a great economic imbalance and dependence on the rich, ultimately decreasing some aspects of innovation while threatening the democratic ideal of popular rule. Therefore, the question is not whether income inequalities are good or bad, it is simply what the right balance of inequality is.

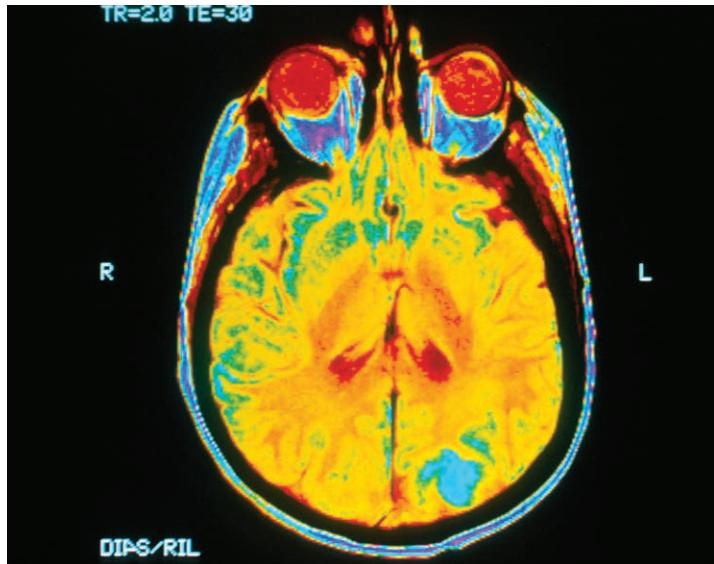
100% equality among all the citizens of the country would threaten the democratic ideal of meritocracy, and thereby threaten the country's strength by dampening innovation.

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Inside the Minds of Mass-Shooters

After Newtown, new debates emerge about links between mental illness and violence.

NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE/ WIKIMEDIA



Do structural differences in the brain predispose certain individuals to committing atrocities?

BY REBECCA GEVER

Just one day after the devastating Sandy Hook tragedy in which Adam Lanza shot twenty children and six adults in Newtown, Connecticut, Liza Long wrote a post entitled “I am Adam Lanza’s Mother” on her blog. In the post she described the behavior of her thirteen-year-old son, who exhibits many characteristics similar to Adam Lanza, James Holmes (who committed the Aurora, Colorado, movie theater shooting in July 2012), and Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris (the shooters in the Columbine High School massacre). One of the most surprising results of her confession has been how many people have responded with stories of their own about family members who psychologically resemble Ms. Long’s son. As more and more people come forward with anxieties parallel to those of Liza Long, the question arises as to what our society should or even can do to reduce the potential for violence in the category of bright, but disturbed young men of whom Adam Lanza is the latest representative.

In “I am Adam Lanza’s Mother,” Long writes about how her son threatened her with a knife when she asked him to return some library books and how her two younger sons have a well-rehearsed plan for when their brother gets into one of his “fits.” She has put him on different medications and tried a variety of other methods to help him, but the main problem is that there is no clear-cut description and no definitive treatment for what he and the many others like him are going through. A number of the parents on Ms. Long’s blog recounted how their children used to threaten them but have grown out of that phase with age. Others have confessed that their child still scares them and that they live in constant fear that he will hurt people. Some comments have been from doctors or educators suggesting

particular medications or clinical therapies, or in one case even an “exorcism.” With these horrific tragedies apparently occurring more and more frequently, the stigma towards mental illness is worsening; some are blaming the entire problem on failures in mental health care in the United States and are demanding change, while others are more concerned with pushing these people away rather than learning more about their conditions.

Last May, *New York Times Magazine* published an article called “Can You Call a 9-Year-Old a Psychopath?” by Jennifer Kahn. Kahn describes how she met a family in Florida with a nine-year-old son named Michael, who can switch from being harsh and violent to obedient and loving in a moment. Michael’s tantrums are much worse than those of an average child, and he is calculating and manipulative. His mother, Anne, has “always said that Michael will grow up to be either a Nobel Prize winner or a serial killer.” Michael attended a summer program this past year run by Dan Waschbusch, who specializes in evaluating the behavior of children like him. The result was a frightening diagnosis: Michael may be a psychopath. According to Kahn, around 1% of the general population are psychopaths, but it is very difficult to give this label to young children. For one thing, children’s psyches are still developing, which makes it a challenge to distinguish between true psychopathy, childhood narcissism, and “acting out.” Also, psychopathy is the kind of diagnosis that may do more harm than good; some believe there is no cure for it, and there will certainly be horrible social repercussions for the rest of the diagnosed person’s life. The result of this uncertainty has been the creation of a new psychological category, known as “callous-unemotional.” These children are cold and unsympathetic, and still may grow up to become psychopaths. Callous-unemotional (also known as C.U.) is also hard to diagnose, but it is a less restrictive and conclusive designation. In fact, many doctors believe that most of the children diagnosed with C.U. will outgrow it and that psychopathy itself may be treatable.

There are currently three thousand six hundred and forty-five comments on Ms. Long’s post and for every few posts written by people sending their love and support, there is one calling Long a cruel mother or her son a horrible person. Only a doctor can diagnose Long’s son as suffering from C.U. or a different mental illness, but part of what can be taken from this episode is that there are many misconceptions about mental illness. President Obama’s plan to limit gun use in this country is definitely a step in the right direction in order to prevent more tragedies like the one at Newtown from occurring. That said, the American population must also learn more about C.U. and psychopathy in order to get people the help they need.

Sources: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/13/magazine/can-you-call-a-9-year-old-a-psychopath.html>; <http://thebluerreview.org/i-am-adam-lanzas-mother>.



What Are You Really Eating?

Food mislabeling deceives American consumers and endangers their health.

BY GAURAV GUPTA

When someone goes to a restaurant and orders veal, he or she expects to eat veal. Normally, this seems like a foregone conclusion, but recently there have been cases where restaurants did not truthfully serve what was on the menu. In a growing and disturbing trend, restaurants and caterers are increasingly mislabeling their foods either accidentally or as part of a deliberate effort to deceive the customer. While mislabeling occurs in foods beside fish, fish is by far the most common food that restaurants tend to identify falsely. Regardless of whether it is done knowingly or inadvertently, food mislabeling is fraudulent to customers and potentially dangerous, and therefore must be stopped.

The most common reason for food mislabeling is genuine confusion. This sort of mislabeling is most common in fish, largely because, according to the New York Times, “there are so many fish in the sea and such limited knowledge among diners.” With more than 28,000 species of fish currently roaming the seas and thousands more yet to be discovered, the sheer variety of fish species makes it hard for fisherman and fish-farmers to know what species of fish they encounter with absolute certainty. In a sense, there must be room for mercy when considering mislabeled food that results from a genuine mistake on the part of those who provide fish to restaurants and supermarkets.

Another source of innocent error is the likelihood that many restaurant owners are oblivious to willful mislabeling by fisherman and fish farmers. For example, Fisherman and fish-farmers trying to make some extra money have oftentimes lied to restaurants and stores about the fish the latter are receiving. Very often, fishermen deliver cheaper fish (due to increased availability) in order to market their rarer and tastier counterparts at a premium. Most recently, the organization Oceania headed a study entitled “Widespread Seafood Fraud Found in New York City.” Using genetic testing, the group found tilapia and tilefish posing as red snapper. Farmed salmon was being sold as wild. Esoclar, which can also legally be called oil fish, was disguised as white tuna, an unofficial nickname for albacore tuna.” However, according to the study, this was not necessarily the fault of restaurants and supermarkets. Karen Karp, a food industry consultant notes that “there are many chefs unintentionally propagating this phenomena [sic.]” While there may be cases, as stated before, where the fisherman and fish-farmers may also be oblivious to their mislabeling, there is also circumstantial evidence that they intentionally deceive restaurants and consumers. The Boston Globe conducted a five-month study where it was found that “Massachusetts consumers routinely paid for more expensive fish and got cheaper substitutes.”

In addition to fishermen, restaurants and grocery stores can also participate in the fraud. By substituting cheaper fish for rare and expensive varieties, restaurants and supermarkets can make large profits. According to the New York

Times and the organization Arizona Health Matters, researchers were able to discern that “nearly 40 percent of the seafood from 81 grocery stores and restaurants was not what the establishment claimed it was... every one of 16 sushi bars investigated sold the researchers mislabeled fish.”

The FDA can play a role in preventing food mislabeling. Part of the reason for the widespread occurrence of food mislabeling is because enforcement has not reached the local level at restaurants and grocery stores. According to the New York Times, “the FDA only this year began testing genetic sequencing equipment in an effort to target wholesalers. And while the Federal Trade Commission takes on false advertising claims as it relates to food, the focus is usually on health claims.” Researchers in Ontario at the University of Guelph have compiled a database called the AMNH Consortium for the Bar Code of Life with information about different species of fish, which was recently approved by the FDA. However, it has become quite clear that if state and federal

FDA/WIKIMEDIA

officials want to stop further cases of food fraud, the FDA needs to increase its efforts to oversee food labeling.

However, regardless of governmental regulations and sanitation crackdowns, the best way to combat food mislabeling fraud is to be informed. As the old proverb goes, “to be forewarned is to be forearmed.” Just as it applies in almost every situation, it applies here as well. Knowledge is the consumer’s bulwark against mislabeling fraud. With the advanced technology we have today, people seem to overlook the simplicity and effectiveness of the classic GoogleTM search. For example, [someone observes that] if “a restaurant claims to have fresh Maine diver scallops in July, it helps to know that the tightly regulated bivalves can be harvested only from December to March, and on the whole are rarely taken

from the sea by actual divers. Fresh wild Alaska salmon is rarely on plates in January.” Fraudulent restaurants and grocery stores only get away with it by capitalizing on customer ignorance. So, to prevent being scammed out of your precious dollar, doing five minutes of preliminary research before dining is one of the best ways to prevent being cheated.

Food mislabeling is a problem that has been steadily on the rise, and without proper countermeasures, it will continue to worsen. Overall, proper education is the first and most critical step in trying to prevent fraud. Both restaurants and consumers need to inform themselves about what they are buying. No matter what expensive and laborious policies organizations like the FDA and the USDA undertake to prevent mislabeling fraud, the cheapest and most effective alternative by far is spending three minutes to run a quick search on the AMNH Consortium for the Bar Code of Life. Because staying informed pays off.

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An FDA microbiologist working in a biosafety laboratory tests for high risk pathogens in food.

Space Program or Missile Threat?

North Korea's missile test causes anxiety in the international community.

BY PRADYUTH MAGANTI

The worldwide reaction to North Korea's controversial missile program has been apprehension. Many questions are going through people's minds: are they going to stop at a successful satellite launch, or do they want to go further? What will North Korea do with its weapons of mass destruction? Is this launch for legitimate reasons, or is North Korea just trying to provoke the rest of the world?

People around the world suspect a hidden agenda behind North Korea's persistence in launching a satellite into space. The satellite it has launched into orbit travels on a "carrier rocket" to space. The launching of a satellite into orbit is the precursor to attaining the means of delivering weapons of mass destruction via long distance rockets and missiles such as an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). While today's rocket carries a satellite headed into space, future missiles may have the capability to hold a nuclear warhead and target any destination in the world.

Some argue that achieving the feat of producing an ICBM and weapons of mass destruction propels a nation onto the list of world powers. Until now, only well developed countries with technological resources and financial capabilities have had the ability to launch ICBM's. It is believed that around 10 countries possess nuclear weapons and only seven of them have the ability to successfully launch an ICBM. The North Korean regime, despite the poverty and repression that it inflicts on its people, appears to be aiming for the status of a major military power.

The United Nations has forbidden North Korea from engaging in any missile or nuclear weapons testing because of widespread fear they would use technologies developed by such testing to attack rival countries. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 states that North Korea must "not conduct any further nuclear test or launch of a ballistic missile". This resolution was created in 2006 to ensure that North Korea would never be able to possess weapons of mass destruction. Members of the UN continue not to trust North

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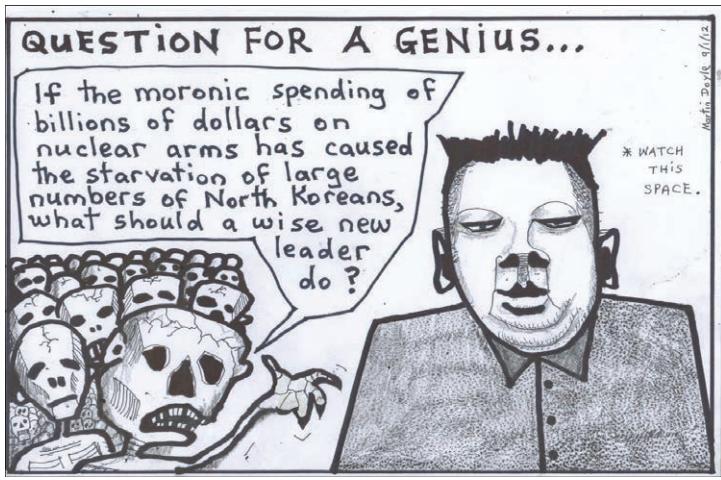
North Korean Unha-3 rocket launch in December 2012

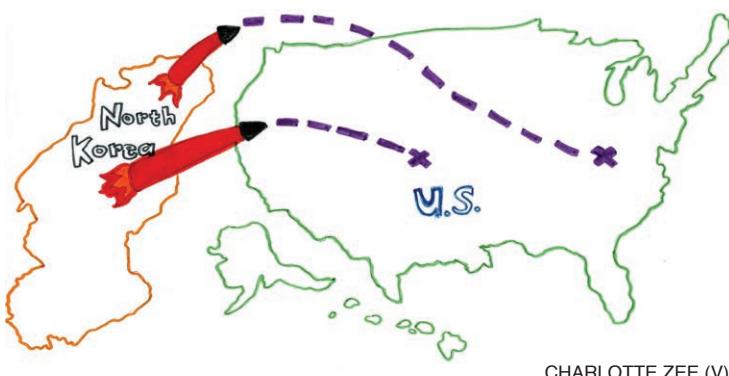
Korea and its missile program because of the chance that it could strike the United States or Europe with long-range rockets.

The U.S. and the rest of the world have limited options when it comes to reacting to North Korea's research into missiles and weapons. Resolution 1718 does not state that the UN can use military power to enforce its policy. Despite the UN's sanctions, North Korea still tests and launches rockets citing "exploratory" reasons. At present, other nations have not intervened, since they do not wish to risk a conflict with the most militarized nation on earth in an encounter that has the potential of escalating into a global war.

North Korea's previous failures at launching rockets into space or attempting to get satellites into orbit are well documented. They attempted to launch a satellite, Kwangmyōngsōng-1, in 1998 for "space exploration." Officials claimed the launch was successful, but countries around the world have stated it was a failure because nothing was ever tracked that went from the launch site to outer space. In 2009, Kwangmyōngsōng-2 was a failure despite North Korea again telling the world that it was in orbit.

Most notably, a launch was attempted and failed in April 2012. Kim Jong-Un, the "supreme leader of North Korea" hyped up the event with fireworks as well as televising the festivities. The country spent approximately one billion dollars on the whole ordeal as it also





CHARLOTTE ZEE (V)

marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of his grandfather, Kim Il Sung, the founder of North Korea. However, the launch failed within 90 seconds and the rocket did not even ignite the first stage. This was one of the first times when North Korea has admitted a missile failure.

North Korea finally hit the mark when Kwangmyöngsöng-3 was launched into orbit in December 2012. The rocket that carried the satellite, Unha-3, had three stages similar to an offensive ballistic missile. Typically, launching a rocket is quite difficult because all the stages need to work at top proficiency immediately succeeding each other. South Korean sources say that the rocket has a range of up to 6,300 miles, which means it has the potential of hitting the United States with a payload of 225 to 275 pounds, the approximate weight

of a nuclear warhead. All the signs indicate that this recent success is what the world has been worried about.

Creating the capability to launch a rocket into space has come at an enormous expense to the North Korean people. While the successful satellite launch may move North Korea to the forefront of the international stage, the nation ranks last in the world in the Transparency International index on corruption. The vast majority of North Koreans are dependent on meager government welfare benefits. Two-thirds of North Korea's people subsist on government rations, and six million North Koreans are malnourished, nearly 25% of the total population.

Clearly, this country has far more pressing needs than creating a missile program. Nevertheless, North Korea has pressed ahead, while leaders around the world are struggling to decide what it is trying to prove with its aggressive pursuit of advanced weapons technology.

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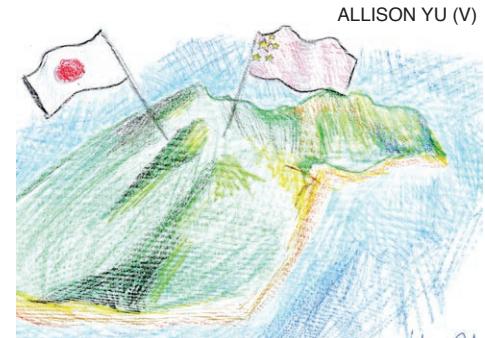
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In China, some demonstrations were so severe that the government was forced to turn out riot police and paramilitary forces to quell the escalating situation and to protect the Japanese consulate. According to Justin McCurry from the British newspaper *The Guardian*, there has recently been a large-scale Chinese boycott of Japanese goods. With China as the world's second largest economy behind the US, and Japan ranked third, the *Guardian's* economics editor has warned of the possibility of a global recession thanks in part to Japan's loss of exports to China. In short, the hyperemotional responses to the dispute by Chinese and

Japanese patriots are now having much larger implications for the entire world.

As a counterpoint to this perilous state of affairs, there are potential solutions to the dispute other than all-out conflict. In January 2013, China filed its maritime claims in the East and South China Seas in international court where, thanks to the United Nation's inefficiency, its case will most likely be heard in about 30 years. And while the present Chinese administration has made moves that appear to be escalating the situation, it is possible that its symbiotic relationship with the United States could help soothe tensions. A meaningful portion of the Chinese ruling elite either attended a university in the U.S. or will be sending their children to this country for their education. Even the General Secretary of China's Communist Party Xi Jinping, has a daughter attending Harvard University. The Chinese economy is reliant on exports to and business ventures with the United States, and a big part of the American economy is dependent upon imports from China. It's true that U.S. politicians win points with voters through "Yellow Peril" rhetoric, but the two countries interconnectedness makes a direct confrontation seem unlikely. With new leadership navigating China's and Japan's domestic and international affairs and with global prosperity hanging



in the balance, it remains to be seen whether a diplomatic outcome can be achieved and bring us into, as Winston Churchill called it, "broad, sunlit uplands," or whether emotion will trump reason and send us spiraling into global recession and conflict.

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Regional Conflict, Global Peril: The Senkaku Islands Dispute

Debate over the Senkaku Islands' ownership adds strain to global relations.

BY HUNTER STIRES

Nationalism can be a very powerful and dangerous force in international relations. From the clash of Athens and Sparta in the Peloponnesian War to Nazi Germany's perverse notions of Aryan superiority, extreme forms of patriotic fervor have consistently threatened world peace and have plunged countless nations into the darkness of total war.

At present, the world watches as the militaries of China and Japan play a potentially devastating game of provocation and response in the East China Sea. The possible entanglement of the United States in their dispute is further raising the stakes. An undisputed superpower with the world's largest economy and a military far more powerful than any other, the U.S. could very easily be dragged into the conflict as a result of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the U.S. and Japan. The cause of the commotion is a group of five small islands and three rock formations known collectively as "Senkaku" by the Japanese and "Diaoyu" by the Chinese. Located roughly two hundred nautical miles east of the Chinese mainland, the islands were repatriated to Japan by the U.S. in 1971 but have been claimed with vigor by China ever since.

The Senkaku Islands debate is but another in a long string of international disputes over uninhabited islands in the Pacific. In the 1960s, China and Vietnam clashed with words and warships over the Paracel Islands, in the South China Sea. The land is disputed among the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Vietnam. In the 1970s, China, Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines fought a series of naval battles over the Spratly Islands, a group to the west of the Philippines. Both of these conflicts continue to this day and in each case, the par-

ties to each dispute have expended a surprising amount of resources in their respective bids to gain sovereignty over the islands. Besides sending warships and military aircraft to demonstrate their willingness and ability to defend their claims by force, the nations involved have built elaborate monuments on the islands they occupy: lookout towers, radio stations, airstrips, artificial harbors, and even entire towns, replete with houses and government buildings, all meant to convey their definitive ownership. More recently, China has angered several of its neighbors by including its maritime territorial claims on Chinese passports. Therefore, when other nations' immigration authorities stamp the documents, they are effectively acknowledging China's sovereignty over the region.

This raises the question, though: *Why? Who would go to all that trouble for a few uninhabited specks in the middle of nowhere?* The answer lies in oil. According to several recent geological surveys, the areas around the Paracels, Spratlys, and Senkakus/Diaoyus contain a vast amount of oil, natural gas, and other valuable resources. Establishing ownership of even one island would, under international law, grant the possessor exclusive economic rights to all the natural resources in and under the surrounding seas for 200 miles in any direction.

At its best, the art of diplomacy allows for reasonable people who disagree to resolve their differences through discussion and compromise. However, in this case, an agreement of any kind has become much more difficult to achieve, not only because of the significant economic value of the disputed region, but because of the deep, emotional claim each country's citizenry has attached to sovereignty over these contested islands. Since the Japanese government formally purchased several of the islands from a private owner in September 2012, protests and counter-protests have erupted on both sides of the East China Sea.

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Chinese demonstrators in Hong Kong protest Japanese control over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands.



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