

Terrorists could win

No, the terrorists may not win the war, but they could win the fight anyway, because they will have jeopardized the future of public education and the futures of our young people. Across the country, fiscal conditions have worsened in almost every state, and the future outlook does not show improvement.

Prior to Sept. 11, state budget surpluses enabled governors and state legislators to start offering teachers better pay and students better education and facilities. Now the economy is much worse and attention and money are being diverted to the war against terrorism. Every state has been striving to save school reform funding, but more than half the states must consider cuts in spending that endanger K-12 budgets and programs created to help students meet new state standards. States that have cut education budgets include: Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina. According to Marion Canedo, Buffalo Schools Superintendent, "The highest price is paid in our educational programs in our urban cities because they are the most dependent on state aid. How can we meet state or federal standards if we don't have teachers in the classroom?"

Across the country, teachers lack supplies and computer equipment. Many schools are just beginning to improve technology, including phone lines and computers. Ninety percent of all classrooms do not have a telephone, and many schools are unable to install computers and phone lines due to aging buildings and the danger of asbestos. Without funds, these plans will be put

aside. In some areas, school construction, after-school programs, special education, school lunches, and even early childhood education are in danger. Despite growing attempts to expand elementary school to a pre-kindergarten year, many states do not yet offer part-day or full-day kindergarten. States are postponing plans to reduce class size, increase professional development programs, and give teachers raises. Field trips and reading programs are also endangered. California faces a serious teacher shortage and probably will have to continue employing uncertified teachers. Clearly, vocational education, libraries, and summer school programs stand very little chance.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Plan** a program with a school official, such as a superintendent, principal, or school board member as a speaker. See www.stateline.org for articles on education and other issues in your state. For articles on kindergarten and early childhood education, see the site of the Foundation For Child Development, www.ffcd.org/aboutfcd.htm.

■ **Discuss** with your members how to implement or continue the

"Adopt-A-Shelf" campaign at a time when school libraries are among the last programs to be funded. If you need more information and ideas for this project, call the National Office at 800.51.WAORT, ext. 221.

■ **Research** ideas for a book fair in your community. Get input from members and explore what other communities have done. Ask your members to approach bookstores, county or city departments of education, and other charitable organizations. The idea would be to promote giving books to children, and perhaps having book sales, reviews, and author signings. You could even hold a Jewish Book Fair.



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WOMEN'S AMERICAN



quORTerly briefing: issues and trends

- Haya Varon, Community Chair
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Renewed push for school prayer

Since Sept. 11, school prayer advocates are pushing a host of new initiatives to promote prayer, or at least a moment of silence, during the public school day. Efforts range from proposed state laws in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Florida to measures in individual cities and school districts. Prayer supporters appear to be in the majority, with most favoring religion in public places after the terrorist attacks. President Bush called for a national day of prayer, and "God Bless America" has popped up on signs outside businesses, in store windows, and on school marquees.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Contact** your local and federal representatives to voice your opinion. For background information, read WAO's Public Policy Resolution on Church and State Issues, available at www.waort.org/about_top.html, and print it in your chapter bulletin.

Teen pregnancy rate remains high

Despite decreases in teenage pregnancy over the last ten years, the United States has a significantly higher rate of teen pregnancy than other developed countries. Compared to Sweden, France, Canada and Great Britain, the U.S. has a higher pregnancy rate and lower number of abortions. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute (ATI), the high U.S. rate is a result of less contraceptive use by sexually active teenagers. Conditions of social and economic disadvantage are strong predictors of early childbearing in all five countries.

However, at all socioeconomic levels, U.S. teenagers have a lower level of contraceptive use and higher level of childbearing than teens in the other countries.

Government commitment to social welfare and equality for all members of society provides greater support for an individual's well-being in other countries than in the U.S. This becomes clear when we see that one-fifth of U.S. women of reproductive age have no health insurance. The public services that are available tend to carry the stigma of being for the poor, and their coverage and scope vary greatly.

Education and employment assistance help young people become established as adults. In the U.S., training and assistance programs are remedial and reach smaller numbers, and are directed at those unable to find work on their own. This approach offers greater freedom of choice, but does not help those who are less knowledgeable about opportunities for education and work. Youths in other countries find more assistance and support through vocational education and training and unemployment benefits.

Surprisingly, openness and supportive attitudes about sexuality in other countries have not led to greater sexual activity or risk-taking. Countries other than the U.S. give clearer and more consistent messages about appropriate sexual behavior, and focus on the quality of relationships and the exercise of personal responsibility. In the U.S., we are more concerned that close relationships may lead to intercourse, and contraception may not be discussed for fear of encouraging sexual activity. There is also a lack of health insurance and programs that supply contraceptive services to teenagers.

The Guttman report concludes that where young people receive social support, full information and positive messages about sexuality and relationships, and have easy access to health services, they have lower rates of pregnancy, abortion, and STDs.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ **Invite** a social worker who counsels adolescents to discuss changes he or she thinks should be made to community and national policies. For further information, look up www.teenpregnancy.org and a California web site, www.letsgetreal.org.

■ **Read** the report from the Alan Guttmacher Institute at www.agi-usa.org, and discuss its implications with regard to WAO's Resolution on Democratic Values, available on our web site at www.waort.org/about_top.html, and ORT's mission of educating young people for the world of work.

Philly's push to privatization

If all proceeds as Gov. Mark Schweiker of Pennsylvania has proposed, Philadelphia schools will be taken over by a private firm, Edison Schools, Inc. In announcing the plan, the governor said, "Bold strokes are needed in a school system with a \$216 million budget deficit, chronic teacher shortages, and crumbling buildings."

Edison will receive about \$40 million per year to manage the district. The company will also run 45 of the 60 worst-performing schools, with the 15 others managed by private companies in consultation with community groups. While school takeovers are not new, according to Michael Kirs, a

Stanford University education professor, "The use of a profit-making private company is unprecedented for this scale and scope of effort." Eighteen states have seized control of 40 districts, and cities, including Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Hartford, have tried private management with mixed results. States have generally been able to control budget deficits and renovate buildings. Experiments with privatization have also yielded little success in educational improvements.

The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers opposes the takeover and privatization, as do many parents and taxpayers. PFT President Ted Kirsch states, "The plan barely addresses the key issue – inequitable funding that has sabotaged our schools' chances for success." According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, as the takeover continued, protesters took to the streets.

✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ Follow the activities of Edison Schools, Inc. A company running so many schools ought to be accountable to the public as well as to parents. Find out if Edison runs any schools in your community.

■ Discuss with your members the problems facing school districts everywhere. Ask a member

reminder

This is the last issue *quORTerly briefing* that will be mailed as a hard copy. The newsletter has been available on our web site at www.waort.org/newsletters.html, and beginning with the Spring 2002 issue, it will be available exclusively on the web.

to keep track of the "Philadelphia Problem," and give short reports at regular meetings. Go to the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' site, www.pft.org, to get the teachers' viewpoint. See <http://inq.philly.com> for news from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Bush's education bill approved

After five months of negotiations and a stalemate, President Bush's education bill, the "Leave No Child Behind Act," has passed



both the House (381-41) and the Senate (87-10). The most far-reaching education legislation since the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, it authorizes a 20 percent increase in Title I funds, much of which will go to low-income students in poorly-performing schools.

Beginning next fall, children in over 3,000 failing schools around the country will be eligible to receive federal funds for private tutoring, summer school, and other programs. These supplemental services may be offered by private companies, nonprofit organizations, and religious institutions. Students in an additional 6,729 low-achieving schools will have the right to transfer to more successful public schools. One controversial issue noticeably absent from the bill is school vouchers, which would allow students to

attend private or parochial schools at taxpayer expense.

The legislation mandates annual standardized tests in math and reading for third through eighth graders, beginning in the 2005-2006 school year. For the first time, states will administer a single test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. States will be required to report each child's performance to parents and provide the federal government and the public with comparative breakdowns of test results by school, race and level of poverty.

The bill also provides increased funds for teacher training and technology, creates initiatives to retain quality teachers, adds literacy and after-school programs, and reforms bilingual education. At press time, President Bush was scheduled to sign the bill into law in early January.

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Additional editing by Amy Fiedel

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✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO

■ Invite a local educator to speak, and ask him/her about the tests and how your schools will fare.

In support of Afghan women

One of the main focuses of the Committee on the Status of Women and affiliated groups is support for Afghan women. It is interesting to note that the women of Afghanistan had the right to vote before their U.S. counterparts, and they had enjoyed the privileges of education and being part of the professional world in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have denied women basic human rights and all but cut off their societal existence. Now many have been uprooted from their homes and put into camps where food, clothing, and warmth are lacking.

Panelists at meetings representing Afghan women are working for the promotion and protection of women's rights in their country. When the Taliban falls, women want to be assured representation in the rebuilding of their nation. Their goal is to participate in significant numbers in decision-making bodies to ensure that the ideals of democracy and freedom prevail over the forces of extremism and repression. One spokeswoman ended one of the sessions with the words, "Hope is a gift we can give to one another."



Educating for Life

QuORTerly Feedback

QuORTerly Briefing is carefully compiled and researched to raise awareness of advocacy issues that reflect WAO's Public Policy Resolutions. How do you use it? Do you discuss the topics at your meetings?

If you follow up on the "✓WHAT YOUR CHAPTER CAN DO" suggestions, what results have you gotten?

Please e-mail responses to:
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Here's how we've used *quORTerly briefing*:
