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BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

■ In my opinion

Fight for reproductive rights



JENNIFER MCBRIDE
QUASHING DISSIDENT

When the United States guarantees rights for some but denies rights to others based on the mere lucky chance of their being born on U.S. soil, the hypocrisy breeds an emotion deeper than hatred. Rights should not be conditional on a person popping out of a womb in the proper place at the proper time.

One particularly heinous double standard is the Bush administration's continued enforcement of the Mexico City policy, more popularly known as the "global gag rule." First implemented by President Reagan, the global gag rule is the Republicans' attempt to force their morality on the issue of abortion onto other nations.

We already have laws against federal money going to fund actual abortions or information about abortions (thank you very much, Jesse Helms). The global gag rule offers one more slap against women. Not only does the United States Agency for International Development not fund family planning, it also doesn't fund non-governmental organizations that talk about family planning. Bush's executive order forbids funding NGOs that encourage "a foreign government to legalize or make available abortion ... (or) to continue the legality of abortion."

The chill on free speech and free practice has been extensive. The United States is the largest contributor abroad, especially in the area of reproductive planning where USAID funds 40 percent of total donations. In other words, the Bush administration is paying for more condoms than even its amorous French counterparts. Unfortunately, the direct result of the gag rule has been slashes in the budgets and services of anyone providing reproductive aid, meaning endless obstructions for women who seek abortions.

Contraceptive care is also affected by the gag rule, because not only do NGOs

lose funding if they refuse to give up the right to discuss family planning, they also lose their supplies of U.S.-donated condoms and birth control; 16 countries have lost all their contraceptive supplies, resulting in unplanned births and the spread of AIDS.

The irony is that we have no idea whether the global gag rule has been successful in reducing abortions because NGOs are so afraid to lose their funding that they've stopped collecting information about the subject altogether. In the few nations where accurate logs are kept, as in Peru, the number of abortions has actually increased since the global gag rule was implemented.

Lack of reliable, unbiased information hinders governments that are run by mostly upper-class men who don't face consequences first hand. Support of anachronistic policies means that the United States is complicit in the deaths of thousands. At least one-third of abortions are illicit, and those 20 million abortions are very unsafe. Every seven minutes a woman dies because of a hazardous operation. When women are not killed by their choices, they are jailed for them. That the United States silences those who would speak out against this injustice is a travesty.

The global gag rule also furthers elitism. Rich women will always be able to seek family-planning services either by traveling to other nations or navigating legal loopholes with beives of hired private advice. The people who have suffered most under the

global gag rule are the women who are already marginalized. Rural women are most likely to die in childbirth, and rural women make up the majority of the 78,000 women dying worldwide every year because of unsafe abortions.

Decriminalizing abortion would also stop the arrest of doctors in areas where doctors are needed most. When a physician is not allowed to practice medicine because he or she chose to give an abortion, one more doctor working to prevent the spread of malaria, AIDS and other diseases is lost.

For these reasons, nearly 70 percent of Americans say they support US-AID-funded family-planning efforts, but President Bush continues to fly in the face of rational thought to satisfy his right-wing constituents.

The true injustice is that such a law could not exist in America. When previous Republican administrations tried to ban all federal funding to U.S. organizations who used their own private funds to advocate for political issues, the Supreme Court stepped in to safeguard the First Amendment. Unfortunately, the same yardstick is not applied abroad, and freedom of speech is curtailed in places where honesty is needed most. The only way to fully integrate women into political systems that have historically repressed them is to set up conditions in which they can share their stories and their experiences freely. Without NGOs to create safe zones, these narratives go unheard, and women continue to suffer in silence. Above all, rich politicians spit on them and us from their pretty ivory towers, upholding abusive policies through their ignorance and malice.

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■ Editorial

Prioritize environment to prevent more damage

Fluctuations in the global temperature are normal. Over time, the Earth has passed through ice ages and warmer periods in a normal progression, but the rapidly accelerated global-warming trend of recent years is no natural trend.

Last week scientists at the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science announced they had found striking similarities between the observations recorded at sea and the predicted indicators of global warming developed by climatologists.

"The debate is over, at least for rational people," said Tim Barnett, a research marine physicist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, Calif. and the study's co-author. "And for those who insist that the uncertainties remain too great, their argument is no longer tenable. We've nailed it."

This is not some abstract threat to cute sea mammals and big chunks of ice. Other scientists at the conference showed warming could stifle cleansing summer winds across parts of the northern United States during the next 50 years and worsen air pollution.

Further warming of the atmosphere, as is happening now, would block cold fronts that bring cool, clean air from Canada. The process would allow stagnant air and ozone pollution to build up over cities in the Northeast and Midwest.

"If this model is correct, global warming would cause an increase in difficult days for those affected by ozone pollution, such as people suffering with respiratory illnesses like asthma and those doing physical labor or exercising outdoors," said Loretta Mickley of Harvard University's Division of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

In the words of Barnett: "The debate is no longer, 'Is there a global warming signal?' The question is, what are we going to do about it?"

The future of the planet depends on the public policy of this nation, and the Bush administration's inaction and readiness to ignore scientific findings have been disturbingly sweeping.

Bill Holbrook, spokesman for the White House Council on Environmental Quality, summed up President Bush's priorities succinctly after hearing the news from the symposium.

"Our position has been the same for a long time," he said. "The science of global climate change is uncertain."

Last week, 141 nations signed the U.N. Kyoto Protocol, which is aimed at cutting the production of gas emissions that fuel global warming. The United States, which produces the most pollution of any country, was noticeably absent from the treaty.

This country can no longer afford to stiff-arm environmental policy. We must demand that elected officials make the future of our planet a priority. We won't need to worry about Social Security reform or education policy when our children can't breathe fresh air. We need to look at the big picture: Put the earth first.

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