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Guestworker impasse shows need for reform

Congress must modernize immigration

For the second year in a row, a computer failure has caused a farmworker shortage in the West.

This renews legitimate complaints that the government's system for approving guestworker visas is unnecessarily complex.

A hardware glitch prevented the State Department from processing visas for H-2A guestworkers on the Mexican border for nine days, preventing workers already hired by fruit and vegetable growers from entering the United States and delaying the picking of perishable crops.

According to the State Department, a hardware failure in its Consular Consolidated Database left it unable to process visas or passports at embassies and consulates worldwide.

The problem left thousands of foreign workers with jobs waiting in the United States, but who had not yet had their visas issued, stuck in Mexico. And it left growers in the U.S. scrambling to try, largely unsuccessfully, to arrange their legal crossing.

"We cannot bypass the legal requirements necessary to screen visa applicants before we issue visas for travel," the State Department said. "Security measures prevent consular officers from printing a passport, report of birth abroad or visa until the case completes the required national security checks,

While many employers offered to pay worker expenses as they waited in Mexico, many workers could not afford to wait and returned home.

Dan Fazio, director of the Washington Farm Labor Association in Olympia, is more than a little frustrated. A similar glitch last year caused delays in getting legal workers into the fields and orchards of the West.

She made the pageant

Dana Phillips has gone the extra mile

With a new Miss Oregon beginning her reign, it's time to say goodbye and thanks to its most significant winner.

The North Coast should thank Dana Phillips, who is stepping down as executive director of the annual scholarship program, a post she has held since 1986.

Her dedication to the program over more than three decades has been exemplary. Scores of young women have gained confidence and earned an astonishing \$2 million for college scholarships while competing in the program.

Phillips won't be bowing out entirely. At 65, she plans to work through the Oregon Scholarship Foundation to increase the monetary awards given to contestants.

The program highlights tomorrow's leaders who represent the best of America. Katie Harman, the only Miss Oregon to win the Miss America crown, significantly

helped the nation in its healing in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

While fitness, poise and talent count, contestants promote a platform that enhances awareness of key social issues. The annual event focuses statewide attention on Seaside, whose merchants are among its foremost longtime supporters. But the entire North Coast economy benefits from the influx of visitors during pageant week every summer.

Now new leaders taking over the program, April Robinson, Nichole (Mead) Lahner and Stephanie (Steers) West. We wish them well. All are former Miss Oregon titleholders, which will give them inside expertise to continue the high standards of the program. We note with some wry amusement that it will take three people to replace the dynamic Phillips.

'He's Jesus Christ,' healing the sick

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

IN THE NUBA MOUNTAINS, Sudan — If you subscribe to the caricature of devout religious believers as mostly sanctimonious hypocrites, the kind who rake in cash and care about human life only when it is unborn, come visit the doctor here.

Dr. Tom Catena, 51, a Catholic missionary from Amsterdam, N.Y., is the only doctor at the 435-bed Mother of Mercy Hospital nestled in the Nuba Mountains in the far south of Sudan. For that matter, he's the only doctor permanently based in the Nuba Mountains for a population of more than half a million people.

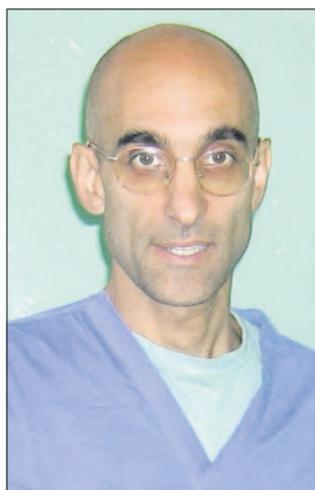
Just about every day, the Sudanese government drops bombs or shells on civilians in the Nuba Mountains, part of a scorched-earth strategy to defeat an armed rebellion here. The United States and other major powers have averted their eyes, so it is left to "Dr. Tom," as he is universally known here, to pry out shrapnel from women's flesh and amputate limbs of children, even as he also delivers babies and removes appendixes.

He does all this off the electrical grid, without running water, a telephone or so much as an X-ray machine — while under constant threat of bombing, for Sudan has dropped 11 bombs on his hospital grounds. The first time, Dr. Tom sheltered, terrified, in a newly dug pit for an outhouse, but the hospital is now surrounded by foxholes in which patients and the staff crouch when military aircraft approach.

"We're in a place where the government is not trying to help us," he says. "It's trying to kill us."

Given the shortage of resources, Dr. Tom relies disproportionately on makeshift treatments from decades ago.

"This is a Civil War-era treatment," he said, pointing to a man with a broken leg, which he was treating with a meth-



Dr. Tom Catena

od known as Buck's traction, using a bag of sand as a weight.

"Sometimes these actually work," Dr. Tom said. "You use what you have."

Pope Francis seems to be revitalizing the Vatican and focusing on the needy, and I have a dream — OK, an implausible one — that he'll journey to this Catholic hospital in the Nuba Mountains as a way of galvanizing opposition to the evil of Sudan's bombings.

One reason I'm so impressed by Dr. Tom is that most of the world, including world leaders and humanitarians, have pretty much abandoned the people of the Nuba Mountains. President Barack Obama and other global leaders have been too silent about the reign of terror here, too reluctant to pressure Sudan to ease it.

That's the context in which Dr. Tom stands out for his principled commitment. Dr. Tom has worked in the Nuba Mountains for eight years, living in the hospital and remaining on call 24/7 (the only exception: when he's unconscious with malaria, once a year or so).

Dr. Tom acknowledges missing pretzels and ice cream, and, more seriously, a family. He parted from his serious girlfriend when he moved to

Africa, and this is not the best place to date (although hospital staff members are plotting to introduce him to eligible Nuban women as a strategy to keep him from ever leaving).

For his risks and sacrifices, Dr. Tom earns \$350 a month — with no retirement plan or regular health insurance. (For those who want to support his work, I've posted how to help on my blog at <http://nyti.ms/1NqLXP6>.)

He is driven, he says, by his Catholic faith. "I've been given benefits from the day I was born," he says. "A loving family. A great education. So I see it as an obligation, as a Christian and as a human being, to help."

There also are many, many secular aid workers doing heroic work. But the people I've encountered over the years in the most impossible places — like Nuba, where anyone reasonable has fled — are disproportionately unreasonable because of their faith.

I've often criticized the Vatican's hostility to condoms, even as a tool to fight AIDS, and we shouldn't tolerate religious bigotry against gays (which the latest Supreme Court ruling may chip away at). But we also shouldn't tolerate another kind of narrow-mindedness, irreligious bigotry against people of faith. Diversity is a virtue, in faith as well as race.

Certainly the Nubans (who include Muslims and Christians alike) seem to revere Dr. Tom.

He is driven, he says, by his Catholic faith.

"People in the Nuba Mountains will never forget his name," said Lt. Col. Aburass Albino Kuku of the rebel military force. "People are praying that he never dies."

A Muslim paramount chief named Hussein Nalukuri Cuppi offered an even more unusual tribute.

"He's Jesus Christ," he said.

Er, pardon?

The chief explained that Jesus healed the sick, made the blind see and helped the lame walk — and that is what Dr. Tom does every day.

You needn't be a conservative Catholic or evangelical Christian to celebrate that kind of selflessness. Just human.

Gay conservatism, straight liberation

By ROSS DOUTHAT
New York Times News Service

Before there was a national debate about same-sex marriage, there was a debate within the gay community about whether it was a worthwhile goal to chase at all.

This debate was tactical (since the cause once seemed quixotic) but also philosophical.

One current of thought saw the institution of marriage as inherently oppressive, patriarchal or heteronormative, better rejected or radically transformed than simply joined.

This liberationist perspective endured in academia, but mostly lost the political argument. Gay couples wanted the chance for normalcy, straight Americans were surprisingly receptive, and so a conservative case for same-sex marriage — the argument that marriage is essential to human dignity and flourishing — became the public case for gay equality.

And now that case rings from every paragraph of Anthony Kennedy's marriage ruling, from the first lines to the "no union is more profound than marriage" peroration.

But in one of the ironies in which the arc of history specializes, while the conservative case for same-sex marriage triumphed in politics, the liberationist case against marriage's centrality to human flourishing was winning in the wider culture.

You would not know this from Kennedy's opinion, which is relentlessly upbeat about how "new insights have strengthened, not weakened" marriage, bringing "new dimensions of freedom" to society.

But the central "new dimension of freedom" being claimed by straight America is a freedom from marriage — from the institution as traditionally un-

derstood, and from wedlock and family, period.

The traditional understanding, which rested on sex difference, procreation, and real permanence, went into crisis in the 1960s and 1970s. But in the 1990s, when *The Atlantic* informed readers that "Dan Quayle Was Right" about unwed motherhood and today's Democratic front-runner fretted about the costs of no-fault divorce, there were reasons to think that a kind of neotraditionalism might still have purchase in America.

Not so today. Since the '90s, approval of divorce, premarital sex, and out-of-wedlock childbearing have climbed steadily, and the belief that children are "very important" to marriage has collapsed. Kennedy's ruling argues that the right to marry is essential, in part, because the institution "safeguards children and families." But the changing cultural attitudes that justify his jurisprudence increasingly treat this safeguard as inessential, a potentially nice but hardly necessary thing.

And the same is true of marriage itself. America is not quite so "advanced" as certain European societies, but our marriage rate is at historic lows, with the millennial generation, the vanguard of support for same-sex marriage, leading the retreat. Millennials may agree with Kennedy's ruling, but they're making his view of marriage as "a keystone of the nation's social order" look antique. In their views and (lack of) vows, they're taking a more relaxed perspective, in which wedlock is malleable and optional, one way among many to love, live, rear kids — or not.

In this sense, the gay rights movement has won twice over. Its conservative wing won the right to normalcy for gay couples, while rapid cultural change has made the definition of normalcy



Ross Douthat

less binding than the gay left once feared.

In vain, social conservatives have argued that this combination isn't a coincidence, that support for same-sex marriage and the decline of straight marital norms exist in a kind of feedback loop, that an idea can have conservative consequences for one community and revolutionary implications overall.

This argument was ruled out, irrationally, as irrational, but it probably wouldn't have mattered if the courts were willing to consider it. Too many Americans clearly just like the more relaxed view of marriage's importance, and the fact that this relaxation makes room for our gay friends and neighbors is only part of its appeal. Straight America has its own reasons for seeking liberation from the old rules, its own hopes of joy and happiness to chase.

Unfortunately I see little evidence that people are actually happier in the emerging dispensation, or that their children are better off, or that the cause of social justice is well-served, or that declining marriage rates and thinning family trees (plus legal pressure on religious communities that are exceptions to this rule) promise anything save greater loneliness for the majority, and stagnation overall.

The case for same-sex marriage has been pressed in the name of the future. But the vision of marriage and family that made its victory possible is deeply present-oriented, rejecting not only lessons of a long human past but also many of the moral claims that inspire adults to privilege the interests of their children, or indeed to bring children into existence at all.

Perhaps, with same-sex marriage an accomplished fact, there will be cultural space to consider these lessons and claims anew. Perhaps.

But seeing little such space, and little recognition that anything might have been lost along the road we've taken to this ruling, in the name of the past and the future I respectfully dissent.

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