

THE WEEK...

sexuality is immoral only after prodding from gay supporters, and only using Republican senator John Warner as cover; Barack Obama sidestepping the question three times before saying that he did “not agree with General Pace.” But what do General Pace’s views have to do with military policy? History buffs like to read about tart-tongued military men, but historically they get in trouble (think of Douglas MacArthur and George S. Patton). The military asked for the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy to maintain unit cohesion, which is also the reason for banning adultery. It is Congress’s job to respond to public opinion on morality or the lack thereof. General Pace was right to climb down: “I should have focused more on my support of the [current] policy, and less on my personal moral views.”

■ Three centuries after the English Civil War, T. S. Eliot wrote of John Milton and Charles I, Roundhead poet and beheaded king, that they “Accept the constitution of silence / And are folded in a single party.” The healing process works so much more quickly in American journalism—for certain purposes. *Time* recently put Ronald Reagan (d. 2004) on its cover, dropping a photo-shopped tear over the disarray of today’s conservative

movement. Well, yes, we have our problems, as we freely admit. But spare us the faux commiseration from liberal outlets that hammered the living Reagan as an ideologue and a dunce. We’re too busy trying to address our and the nation’s problems to brood over the past, or *Time*’s newfound appreciation of our past.

■ For several years, the federal budget has included provisions ensuring that taxpayer funds will not be spent supporting abortion and related infringements of the sanctity of human life. We fund family planning overseas, for example, but will not give money to organizations that perform or promote abortions in recipient countries. Nor will the patent office create a property right in cloned human embryos. Federal Medicaid funds cannot be used for abortions (except in the rare cases where pregnancies result from rape or incest or threaten the mother’s life). Congressional Democrats are itching to use taxpayer funding for the kind of social activism that the budget currently precludes. President Bush will surely veto any spending bill that indulges this impulse. For some reason, though, he has not yet announced his intentions. He may as well do so now, and reassure his allies.

■ The faculty senate of the University of Florida voted to deny Jeb Bush—who served as governor of Florida until January—an honorary degree. He is in good company. In 1986—its 350th-anniversary year—Harvard denied Reagan an honorary

The Postcard Solution

WHILE the debate over school vouchers continues to be intense, academics have increasingly produced a consensus in favor of another big educational reform. It is a tribute to how wide this consensus is that the best policy proposal has been put forward by scholars working under the aegis of former Clinton treasury secretary Robert Rubin’s Hamilton Project. Their proposal is, indeed, one of the most laudable I have ever seen.

The federal government has spent billions and billions of dollars providing aid to students attending colleges and universities. But the evidence suggests that existing federal-aid programs are practically worthless.

Susan Dynarski and Judith Scott-Clayton of Harvard have made a decisive case that the main problem is complexity. In order to qualify for federal monies, students must fill out a federal-aid form that, with its 128 questions, is significantly more complex than a tax form. They often find out how much money they will get only after they have decided where to go. Thus the programs needlessly increase families’ uncertainty and anxiety, and fail at their mission of promoting college attendance: Federal aid can’t affect college-attendance decisions if it is doled out after the decisions are made.

Dynarski had earlier studied effective programs, such as one in Georgia. Drawing on that work, Dynarski and Scott-Clayton have developed a massive reform to which no rational being who supports equal opportunity can object. Echoing the cries of conservative tax reformers from bygone days, they would replace the current system with a

simple postcard, which is reproduced below.

This postcard could be plastered on school bulletin boards, and would-be college students could inspect them, figure out how much federal aid they will eventually qualify for, and then adjust their college applications accordingly. The billions spent on student aid would indisputably have a bigger effect. The authors estimate that college attendance might increase as much as 7.4 percent among the grant-eligible population.

To be sure, some of that comes from increasing the level of federal aid, something that may be necessary to make such a massive reform politically viable. But that would be a small price to pay to fix the system. Congressional leaders of both parties should rush to adopt this reform before billions more dollars are wasted.

—KEVIN A. HASSETT

Should this replace 128 questions?

How much federal aid can I get to help pay for college?

If your parents' adjusted gross income is ... then your annual grant is ...

\$0–\$14,999	\$4,050
\$15,000–\$19,999	\$3,700
\$20,000–\$24,999	\$3,300
\$25,000–\$29,999	\$3,000
\$30,000–\$34,999	\$2,400
\$35,000–\$39,999	\$1,800
\$40,000–\$44,999	\$800
\$45,000–\$49,999	\$600
\$50,000–\$74,999	\$450
\$75,000–\$99,999	\$300

■ If you are legally independent from your parents, your aid will be based on your (and your spouse’s) income.

■ Grants will be adjusted for attendance status. For example, if you attend half-time, your grant would be half the amount listed.

... PLUS \$250 for each dependent child other than the student, up to an additional \$1,000.

SOURCE: <http://www1.hamiltonproject.org/views/papers/200702dynarski-scott-clayton.htm>

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