

I am shocked by Pat Conroy's article in the July/August TAE ("Better than Georgetown-Oxford-Yale"). Although I have no love for our current President, I do not see any relationship between his behavior (good or bad) and his education at Georgetown or any other institution of higher learning. I might also remind the southern gentleman who had the temerity to write such nonsense that the President is a product of that same southern culture that he finds so superior.

Salvatore A. Pace, M.D.  
Trumbull, Connecticut

As he tries to get the word out about the Naval Academy's problems, Admiral Van Orden seems to be experiencing a phenomenon I call the "Pink Box Syndrome" ("Is the Naval Academy Off Course?" July/August). The term originates from an event that occurred more than 20 years ago when the Washington press corps decided to document how well women were fitting into the Brigade of Midshipmen after their first year at Annapolis. When the cameras showed up to cover the women running the famed obstacle course, they were met by an irate admiral who told them to go home and reschedule.

Why? The course had been modified the year before to contain two versions of itself—one for the men, one for the women. The latter included boxes the women could step on to climb onto elevated shelves, a shorter wall to scale, a lower hurdle to jump, etc. On the night before the photo-op, a team of my fellow midshipmen took it upon themselves to point out each of these different obstacles—by spray painting them fluorescent pink. Later that week, the obstacles were repainted drab green and the press was invited back.

During my stay at the Naval Academy, James Webb was made a pariah of the institution for penning an honest article on the drawbacks of the newly co-ed Academy. As punishment his book *A Sense of Honor* was banned from the Midshipman Bookstore with the dubious explanation that there was "insufficient room to store it." Every attempt to paint the box pink, i.e., to tell the truth about the effects of allowing women into the service academies, is met with similar reactions: anger, denial, and cover-up.

What used to be an institution designed to prepare midshipmen "mentally, morally, and physically to become professional officers" has become a feel-good training ground that seeks to control midshipmen politically, psychologically and socially so they will spout the latest P.C. psychobabble, which they dare not question for fear of the wrath of the Tailhook Career Destroyers. The result is the production of such spineless officers as Commandant Roughead, who see capitulation as their only way up. The new Naval Academy breeds his type while ignoring and scorning men like James Webb and Admiral Van Orden. It has become a creator of graduates with goals but no souls. God help our military. A Commander in Chief without a soul is an embarrassing travesty—but a fighting force without a soul is an invitation to disaster.

Bob Perry, USNA '81  
West Chester, Ohio

David Smith suggests that America's military academies switch to the British model, where academies are one-year finishing schools for persons who've already been graduated from civilian colleges ("The British Approach," July/August). I worry about a further decline in our cul-

ture if we wait until our finest young people spend four years cheating, drinking, having sex, and being taught in the farthest-left institutions in our country—our colleges and universities—before going to a military academy. Better to have at least one national institution that takes our finest youth direct from high school and gives them four years of instruction in manners, neatness, discipline, honesty, responsibility, integrity—in other words, civilized character. The nation badly needs their graduates.

Richard Parvin  
via Compuserve

As a West Point graduate, Viet Nam veteran (Rangers and Special Forces), and father of an MIT geek (albeit not a "typical" one), I must take issue with Bill Kauffman's statement that West Point's entrance exam physical requirements are "beyond the ability of your typical MIT geek" ("West Point Story," July/August). MIT students in the ROTC program take the same physical fitness exam as students at any other school, and MIT has a more than satisfactory physical education program. In any event, my son certainly has had no trouble keeping up with his West Point friends and contemporaries as they soldiered together in Albania and Kosovo. Beat Navy!

Julian M. Olejniczak, USMA '61  
Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York

It is suggested throughout the July/August BIRD'S EYE that the young people of America are exclusively to blame for their selfish, decadent ways. In fact, they are simply copying their parents—the baby boomers—as well as older retired Ameri-

cans. The baby boomer generation has been short-sighted, materialistic, and selfish, which has translated into apathy among their neglected children.

True, the younger generation has problems, but military education is not the complete answer. Young people need the older generations to demonstrate real virtues, so they can see there is a reason to make a future for America instead of thinking only of themselves. Remember that most of these young people are the "latch-key" kids of the 1980s who grew up seeing that they were less important than their parents' jobs.

Deborah Renkey

White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico

I was quite underwhelmed by the July/August TAE on service academies. The consistent omission of the Air Force Academy (AFA) was quite an insult. West Point, The Citadel, and VMI are fine institutions but certainly not the only service academies. I can't understand the slight, especially when *including* the AFA in the issue would have enhanced your arguments. AFA admittees exceed the scores of their counterparts at West Point and the Naval Academy and have been doing so for years. The AFA's honor code is identical to West Point's, yet the AFA attracts more applicants than each of the other three schools. There is a great and good-spirited rivalry among the three major academies, but to leave the AFA almost totally out of your magazine seems to go beyond any plausible attempt at good-natured rivalry; it is quite an oversight.

Warren P. Edris,

USAF 71

#### The editors reply:

*There are actually five U.S. service academies: Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine. To avoid stretching our reporting resources too thinly, we decided to concentrate our efforts on the two oldest academies. We believe our reports from these two institutions illustrate the general trends at all the academies. No slight was intended to the other academies.*

In the July/August 1999 issue, Dr. William C. Waters finds it ironic that no one complains that food, shelter, and

clothing "are unfairly rationed," yet people do worry about rationing of medical care. As evidence of the alleged irony, he notes that medical care is "not as critical as...food or shelter," and then goes on to compare how long one can survive without food to how long one can survive without medical care. But the examples of "unfair rationing" he gives in the previous paragraph involve eating "caviar and lobster every day," living "in Bill Gates' house," and wearing "Ralph Lauren garments to dig in the garden." This is not rationing that is critical for survival. Is he seriously equating these with heart surgery or cancer treatments? Rationing of medical care is of more concern because being unable to afford heart surgery or a caesarean makes the difference between life and death, unlike the frivolous examples of luxurious food, shelter, and clothing he gives.

In fact, the small amount of money needed for food, shelter, and clothing is already rationed by the government via welfare. Reasonable people do not get upset about being deprived of unnecessary luxuries because of their income, and reasonable providers of those luxuries do not feel guilty telling people they can't have an unnecessary luxury because they can't afford it. I would like to believe that Dr. Waters would feel more discomfort in telling me that my wife must die because I can't afford to pay him the cost of saving her life, than he would feel telling me I can't "wear Ralph Lauren garments to dig in the garden" because I can't afford it.

The other major flaw in this sort of free-market treatment of medical care is that the doctor seems to assume medical care is fun; that, if they aren't paying for it themselves, patients will help themselves to as much as possible, as if they were loading up at a smorgasboard.

I agree with most of the policy changes he advocates. It would be better to take at least non-catastrophic health care out of the hands of government and employers and place it in the hands of individuals. But that won't have substantially affect the true difficulty about the choices that are arising: As medical technology creates more and more expensive options for saving or prolonging life. To know that you or a loved one will die because of lack of

money is unpleasant, whether the decision is being made by an individual, an employer, or the government.

One free-market reform I didn't see mentioned would probably do more to lower the cost of medical care than any of the author's proposals: Relieve the artificial shortage of doctors by removing the many unnecessary requirements for entering medical school.

Ralph deLaubenfels

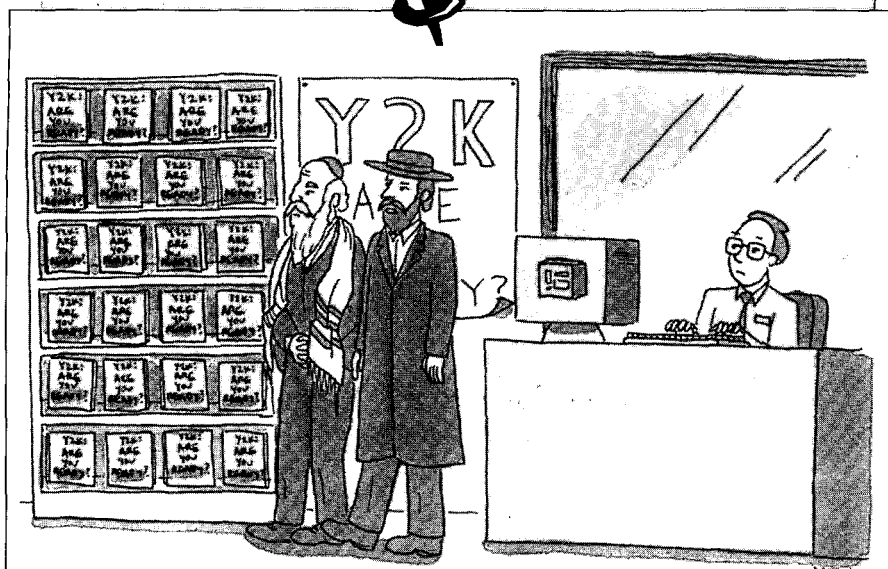
Ohio University

The authors of the health care trilogy (July/August) adequately describe the system's problems but fall short on solutions. In "The Grand Disguise: Why Medical Expenses Are out of Control," Dr. Waters does an excellent job of explaining how disconnecting patients from their health care expenses causes prices to rise. He does a fair job of discussing how our income tax code causes the problem. But instead of giving a solution, he says, "If we sit down once again at a clean drawing board, we can create a sound new arrangement for buying medical care." Wrong: Washington central planners caused the problems in the first place.

The title of John Hood's article, "A Longer-term Alternative: Save Medicare with Savings," goes to the heart of the problem: Retirees do not have adequate savings. Hood suggests redirecting some of the Medicare taxes into savings accounts, though he worries whether government should control how people spend these savings. There must be a better way to encourage saving without Washington control—and there is. Most government revenues come from our income taxes; these are front-loaded and thus discourage savings. A consumption tax is back-loaded and pro-savings because people get all their pay and can then save tax-free. Discarding the income tax in favor of a consumption tax does not affect government spending, but it does affect incentives. Without income tax breaks for employer-paid health care, people will more likely choose individually paid health care. A tax system that encourages saving will ensure that people will have less need for government-based retirement programs.

Bert Loftman, M.D.

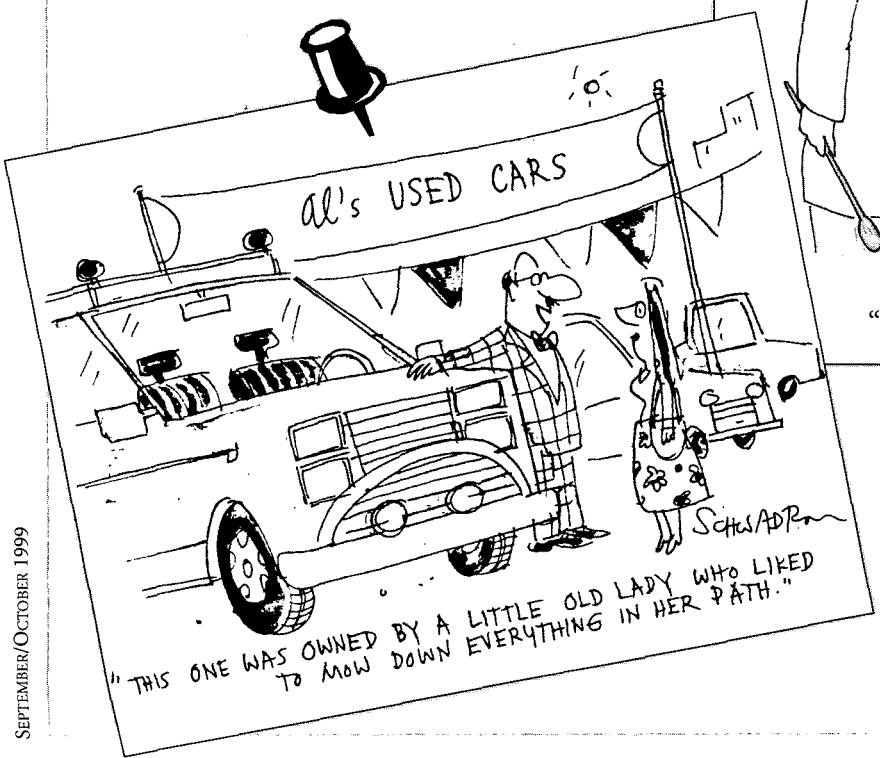
Atlanta, Georgia



"We didn't have any problems when the year 2000 rolled around."



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