

What are its courses and inescapable consequences? Is it a philosophy? Is there a philosophy of indifference conceivable? Can one possibly view indifference as a virtue? Is it necessary at times to practice it simply to keep one's sanity, live normally, enjoy a fine meal and a glass of wine, as the world around us experiences harrowing upheavals?

Of course, indifference can be tempting—more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person's pain and despair. Yet, for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbors are of no consequence. And, therefore, their lives are meaningless. Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest. Indifference reduces the other to an abstraction.

Over there, behind the black gates of Auschwitz, the most tragic of all prisoners were the "Muselmanner," as they were called. Wrapped in their torn blankets, they would sit or lie on the ground, staring vacantly into space, unaware of who or where they were, strangers to their surroundings. They no longer felt pain, hunger, thirst. They feared nothing. They felt nothing. They were dead and did not know it.

Rooted in our tradition, some of us felt that to be abandoned by humanity then was not the ultimate. We felt that to be abandoned by God was worse than to be punished by Him. Better an unjust God than an indifferent one. For us to be ignored by God was harsher punishment than to be a victim of His anger. Man can live far from God—not outside God. God is wherever we are. Even in suffering? Even in suffering.

In a way, to be indifferent to that suffering is what makes the human being inhuman. Indifference, after all, is more dangerous than anger and hatred. Anger can at times be creative. One writes a great poem, a great symphony, have done something special for the sake of humanity because one is angry at the injustice that one witnesses. But indifference is never creative. Even hatred at times may elicit a response. You fight it. You denounce it. You disarm it. Indifference elicits no response. Indifference is not a response.

Indifference is not a beginning, it is an end. And, therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for its benefits the aggressor—never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees—not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own.

Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment. And this is one of the most important lessons of this outgoing century's wide-ranging experiments in good and evil.

In the place that I come from society was composed of three simple categories: the killers, the victims, and the bystanders. During the darkest of times, inside the ghettos and death camps—and I'm glad that Mrs. Clinton mentioned that we are now commemorating that event, that period, that we are now in the Days of Remembrance—but then, we felt abandoned, forgotten. All of us did.

And our only miserable consolation was that we believed that Auschwitz and Treblinka were closely guarded secrets; that the leaders of the free world did not know what was going on behind those black gates and barbed wire; that they had no knowledge of the war against the Jews that Hitler's armies and their accomplices waged as part of the war against the Allies.

If they knew, we thought, surely those leaders would have moved heaven and earth

to intervene. They would have spoken out with great outrage and conviction. They would have bombed the railways leading to Birkenau, just the railways, just once.

And now we knew, we learned, we discovered that the Pentagon knew, the State Department knew. And the illustrious occupant of the White House then, who was a great leader—and I say it with some anguish and pain, because, today is exactly 54 years marking his death—Franklin Delano Roosevelt denied on April the 12th, 1945, so he is very much present to me and to us.

No doubt, he was a great leader. He mobilized the American people and the world, going into battle, brining hundreds and thousands of valiant and brave soldiers in America to fight fascism, to fight dictatorship, to fight Hitler. And so many of the young people fell in battle. And, nevertheless, his image in Jewish history—I must say it—his image in Jewish history is flawed.

The depressing tale of the St. Louis is a case in point. Sixty years ago, its human cargo—maybe 1,000 Jews—was turned back to Nazi Germany. And that happened after the Kristallnacht, after the first state sponsored pogrom, with hundreds of Jewish shops destroyed, synagogues burned, thousands of people put in concentration camps. And that ship, which was already on the shores of the United States, was sent back.

I don't understand. Roosevelt was a good man, with a heart. He understood those who needed help. Why didn't he allow these refugees to disembark? A thousand people—in America, a great country, the greatest democracy, the most generous of all new nations in modern history. What happened? I don't understand. Why the indifference, on the highest level, to the suffering of the victims?

But then, there were human beings who were sensitive to our tragedy. Those non-Jews, those Christians, that we called the "Righteous Gentiles," whose selfless acts of heroism saved the honor of their faith. Why were they so few? Why was there a greater effort to save SS murderers after the war than to save their victims during the war?

Why did some of America's largest corporations continue to do business with Hitler's Germany until 1942? It has been suggested, and it was documented, that the Wehrmacht could not have conducted its invasion of France without oil obtained from American sources. How is one to explain their indifference?

And yet, my friends, good things have also happened on this traumatic century: the defeat of Nazism, the collapse of communism, the rebirth of Israel on its ancestral soil, the demise of apartheid, Israel's peace treaty with Egypt, the peace accord in Ireland. And let us remember the meeting, filled with drama and emotion, between Rabin and Arafat that you, Mr. President, convened in this very place. I was here and I will never forget it.

And then, of course, the joint decision of the United States and NATO to intervene in Kosovo and save those victims, those refugees, those who were uprooted by a man whom I believe that because of his crimes, should be charged with crimes against humanity. But this time, the world was not silent. This time, we do respond. This time, we intervene.

Does it mean that we have learned from the past? Does it mean that society has changed? Has the human being become less indifferent and more human? Have we really learned from our experiences? Are we less insensitive to the plight of victims of ethnic cleansing and other forms of injustices in places near and far? Is today's justified intervention in Kosovo, led by you, Mr. President, a lasting warning that never

again will the deportation, the terrorization of children and their parents be allowed anywhere in the world? Will it discourage other dictators in other lands to do the same?

What about the children? Oh, we see them on television, we read about them in the papers, and we do so with a broken heart. Their fate is always the most tragic, inevitably. When adults wage war, children perish. We see their faces, their eyes. Do we hear their pleas? Do we feel their pain, their agony? Every minute one of them dies of disease, violence, famine. Some of them—so many of them—could be saved.

And so, once again, I think of the young Jewish boy from the Carpathian Mountains. He has accompanied the old man I have become throughout these years of quest and struggle. And together we walk towards the new millennium, carried by profound fear and extraordinary hope. (Applause.)

I conclude on that.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

**HON. BOB SCHAFFER**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 15, 1999

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, if it isn't broken, don't fix it. If it works, don't break it.

I'm referring to the Social Security debate. Currently, some in Congress are looking at proposals to prevent the program's anticipated bankruptcy 32 years from now. In order to buy the system a couple more years of financial solvency, some of our colleagues are considering levying a new tax on state and local government employees who are currently covered by their own pension plans. They want to force newly-hired state and local government employees who would otherwise enjoy independent pension and disability programs with good returns to participate in Social Security which offers neither security nor a good investment opportunity.

If that isn't bad enough, by mandating new state and local employees into Social Security, they will short-circuit state and local programs by shutting down the capital stream necessary to maintain current benefit levels. Mandating Social Security will, in essence, break what isn't broken while failing to fix what is.

Mr. Speaker, 5 million state and local employees and 2 million retirees are covered by alternative plans. In Ohio, Colorado, California, Massachusetts, Nevada, Maine, Alaska, and Louisiana, over half of all state employees are covered by their own plans. In Texas and Illinois over 1 million employees are covered under state and local plans. Every state is impacted because about 75 percent of all public safety employees are not covered under Social Security. In Colorado there are more than 200,000 state, education, and local government employees who are outside of the federal retirement system.

These state and local disability and pension systems were developed because the original Social Security Act of 1937 excluded state and local governments from Social Security coverage. This was to avoid raising a possible Constitutional question of whether the federal government could tax state and local governments. Congress later amended the law to make state and local government employee participation in Social Security voluntary in 1950. In 1983, those already participating in

Social Security were required to remain in the federal systems.

In the absence of Social Security, Colorado state and local employees developed public retirement plans which have been able to provide solid, secure benefits at a reasonable cost. The plans earn better investment returns, through private sector investments, than are available through the current pay-as-you-go Social Security system. With a diversified investment fund, the state's largest plan has earned an average annual investment return of over 11 percent during the last 25 years.

Furthermore, the plans are designed to meet the specific needs of public employees. Fire fighter pension plans, for example, are designed to take into account early retirement ages, high rates of disability and the need for extensive health care characteristic of this profession.

The one-size-fits-all approach of universal Social Security coverage would provide inadequate flexibility for safety workers' needs. Mandatory coverage will have additional consequences. Even on a new-hire basis, mandatory coverage will reduce the capital stream necessary for investment. In many plans around the country this will cause benefit cut-backs including reduced credit for future service, cuts in retiree health care coverage and cost of living adjustments.

Further, mandatory coverage represents a new tax and an unfunded federal mandate on states which would require state and local tax increases or a reduction in services for taxpayers. Health benefits for retirees would also be affected in many states.

Mr. Speaker, private sector workers would also be affected. Most states do not receive any income tax revenue from Social Security payments and the lost state revenue resulting from mandatory coverage would likely be made up from increased state taxes or budget cuts.

In Colorado, the public pension systems will be seriously compromised because most of the funding of benefit comes from investment income which would be severely cut by the transfer of significant contributions to Social Security. State retirement funds support Colorado's economy and the nation unlike Social Security funds which simply support other government programs. Reduced state pension investment means reduced Colorado capital investment. A decline in contributions translates into less investment in Colorado-based companies and real estate. Furthermore, when Colorado retirees receive fewer benefits they will pay fewer state income taxes.

The potential loss of revenue to the state is significant, but the loss of retirement contributions and security for Colorado state and local workers is even more troubling. Our state's Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) anticipates an end to plan improvements for current participants and retirees. New hires would receive a combined Social Security and PERA benefit that would be slightly less than three-fourths of the current PERA benefit.

To put it plainly, under mandatory Social Security state and local workers will lose out. New hires will lose the opportunity to participate in financially strong, high-earning retirement plans and they will be forced to partake in an inefficient system and receive far less or possibly nothing at all. Those already participating in state and local government retire-

ment plans will experience a reduction in benefits when new hire funds are redirected to Social Security. In order to make contributions to both pension and Social Security plans, state and local governments will have to raise taxes or reduce services, in which case, everyone loses.

Mr. Speaker, the only advantage Congress would realize in this scheme would be to buy two extra years for Social Security.

Over the past year, I led the Colorado delegation to protect state and local government pension and disability plans. Letters I wrote expressing our united opposition to mandatory Social Security have reached your desk. Do not disregard them or underestimate our resolve.

Congress must preserve the freedom of states, school districts, and local governments to maintain plans which best meet their needs, independent of Social Security. Social Security can and must be fixed without destroying plans upon which our constituents depend for their retirement.

Mr. Speaker, if it works, don't break it.

#### WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

SPEECH OF

#### HON. JUANITA MILLENDER-McDONALD

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 24, 1999*

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the numerous women of achievement in this country during Women's History Month. I believe true leadership has no gender, race, age or religion. It consists of dedication, perseverance, hard work, compassion, wisdom and a commanding vision for the future.

Tonight I would like to honor two women in particular who have mastered all of these traits despite being faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. As both the Vice Chair of the Women's Caucus and an active member of the Congressional Black Caucus, I have worked with my colleagues to present two awards to Helen Thomas and Dorothy Height during Women's History Month. Since it is important to document the remarkable work of women of such achievement Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with you their stories.

Helen Thomas has been the White House bureau chief of United Press International (UPI) since 1974. Over the past several decades, Helen has covered eight presidents. She is the first female UPI White House bureau chief. Prior to that, over the span of 50 years, she has been given what she called "the big plum" job of getting doughnuts for reporters in 1942. She went on to cover exclusively "female" subjects for UPI's radio wire, which was called United Press at the time. However, her big break came when she served as the only print journalist accompanying President Nixon when he made his historic trip to China in 1972. Thus was the rise of Helen Thomas.

Helen is considered tough and incisive with a keen ability to pierce through issues to find the meaning of events. She is also considered warm, open, passionate and opinionated. She has been a self-described women's libber since the day she was born and initiated the campaign to open the doors of the National

Press Club to women, which finally occurred when Nikita Krushchev spoke at the Club in 1959—although it took another 12 years before women were admitted. In the mid-seventies, she became the National Press Club's first female officer; the first female member of the 90-year old Grid Iron Club, Washington's most exclusive press organization, and in 1993 was elected its president; and the first female officer of the White House Correspondents Association. She has received numerous awards for her work in journalism and in 1992, UPI established an internship program in her honor to be awarded annually to a female journalism student.

At the proud age of 78, she continues to jump from behind bushes near the White House jogging track to fire questions at President Clinton during his morning run. And Helen is still known for jumping over banquet tables to get to a phone before her competitors. At White House press conferences, she is inevitably the first correspondent to be called on by the President and the last to close with her signature statement, "Thank you, Mr. President."

It is with great honor that the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues bestows the Women's Leadership Award to a woman of integrity, grit and boundless energy. She serves as a tremendous role model for millions of women in America.

An equally important role model for this country is Dorothy Height. Despite reaching the ripe age of 87 years old, Dr. Height is still considered one of the nation's most influential and effective women's leader. She has her master's degree in social work, and has been awarded 23 honorary degrees from various universities, including Harvard University. Some of her most impressive achievements include her leadership of the YWCA, National Council of Negro Women and the Center for Racial Justice.

During a tragic time of civil unrest, she was the first Black and first woman named to deal with the Harlem Riots of 1935 and sat at the table with President Johnson during the civil rights movement to develop meaningful civil rights legislation. Dr. Height served as a vocal and extremely effective leader in the civil rights movement to address lynching, desegregate the armed forces, reform the criminal justice system and free access to public accommodations. She also was the national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority from 1947 to 1956.

Today, Dr. Height is still viewed as a dynamic orator who contributes invaluable intellectual insight to national discussions on race relations, the role of women and a range of civil rights issues. She has traveled the world to study other cultures and developed a critical understanding of the role of women in Africa, Asia, India and Latin America. She has become a living legacy throughout this country and abroad.

I am so honored to join my colleague BARBARA LEE in bestowing an award on Dr. Height for her unyielding determination to never give up, her enthusiastic, can-do approach to solving some of the nation's most complex problems, and her astute understanding of the world that can be created through equality of opportunity for all of humanity.