

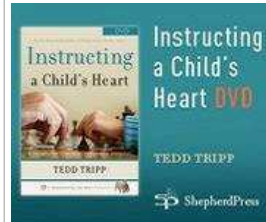


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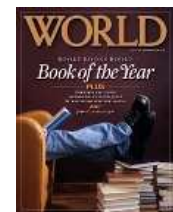
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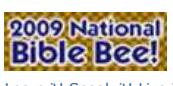
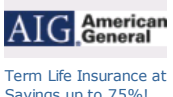


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DEPARTMENTS | "2009 Books Issue" July 04, 2009

The Buzz

NEED-TO-KNOW NEWS

Tiller clinic closed

The family of murdered late-term abortionist George Tiller announced the fate of the abortion center Tiller operated in Wichita, Kan., for more than 30 years: "Permanently closed," effective immediately. The announcement came nine days after a gunman killed Tiller in the lobby of Reformation Lutheran Church. Police arrested Scott Roeder, 51, in the May 31 shooting. Authorities charged Roeder with first-degree murder and aggravated assault.



ASSOCIATED PRESS/PHOTO BY CHARLIE RIEDEL

Tiller, 67, was one of only a handful of abortionists in the country known to perform abortions after the fifth month of pregnancy. Pro-life groups condemned Tiller's murder, but hailed the center's closing: Operation Rescue president Troy Newman called it "a bittersweet moment." But at least one abortionist vowed to continue: Leroy Carhart worked in Tiller's center on a rotating basis and said he would begin performing late-term abortions in his own Nebraska abortion center. Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning told local media that Carhart's plans "disgusted" and "saddened" him: "I mean, this guy is one sick individual."

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Days earlier, Carhart said Tiller's murder should be treated as a hate crime. "This is the equivalent of Martin Luther King being assassinated," he told *The Washington Times*. "This is the equivalent of Pearl Harbor, the sinking of the Lusitania, and any other major historic event where we've tolerated the intolerable for too long."

Alveda King, the pro-life niece of Martin Luther King, called the comparison "offensive beyond belief."

Not thawed yet

While Hezbollah went down to defeat in Lebanon last month, and Iranian extremists were facing angry reformists in Tehran, former President Jimmy Carter was in Gaza to meet with Hamas leaders. While there he announced he would call on President Obama to take the organization off the U.S. list of terrorist-sponsoring groups. (Israel and the European Union also classify Hamas as a terrorist organization.) Carter denounced Israel's economic embargo of Gaza and told reporters that to break the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate "first of all Hamas has to be accepted by the international community as a legitimate player in the future, and that

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is what I am trying to do today."

Carter, 84, traveled to the region as a private citizen but is the most prominent U.S. figure to meet with the Hamas government that took over Gaza two years ago. Hamas would favor the creation of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders—which includes sharing Jerusalem sovereignty with Israel—and has said it will never recognize Israel but only enter a truce.

In a June 14 speech Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the first time embraced Palestinian statehood but said the state must be completely demilitarized and not control its own airspace. He also rejected direct negotiations with Hamas.

Answering violence with censorship

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder called for new hate crimes legislation to combat "violence masquerading as political activism" following the Tiller murder in Kansas, the Holocaust Museum shooting June 10, and the shooting death of a U.S. soldier by a Muslim outside a recruiting station in Arkansas, also last month. "Over the last several weeks, we have witnessed brazen acts of violence committed in places that many would have considered unthinkable," Holder told the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs June 16. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks white supremacists, says the number of hate groups in the United States has risen 54 percent since 2000, fueled by opposition to Hispanic immigration and the election of the nation's first black president, reports the Associated Press.

Republicans have opposed Democrats' efforts to expand hate crimes laws, saying current laws already provide for effective punishment and prosecution of violent crime. Law enforcers oppose expanding hate crimes laws, too, because they can make it tougher to track violent haters. It is free speech, after all, traced via email and phone records and other communication, that makes it possible to track those who may be plotting real harm.

It's official

The World Health Organization (WHO) formally declared June 11 that swine flu has reached a pandemic level. Considered the first global flu epidemic in 41 years, swine flu is responsible for more than 28,770 cases in 74 countries and has claimed the lives of 144 people. WHO classified the pandemic as currently "moderate in severity" and urged drug manufacturers to speed up production of a swine flu vaccine. It may be several months, however, before large quantities of the vaccine are available.

Winds of change

Organic yogurt maker Stonyfield Farm has put its dairy cows on a diet. The company began an experiment at 15 Vermont farms to cut not fat but methane—estimated to be 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas—from the "emissions" of its belching, gas-passing bovines. By replacing traditional corn and soy with a more expensive feed mix of alfalfa and flaxseed, one farm measured an 18 percent methane reduction.

Not much, when you think about it. But livestock are getting more scrutiny from climate change activists, who point out that a cow can release 200 to 400 pounds of methane a year. Worried the EPA might leverage the Clean Air Act to regulate cattle farms as sources of pollution, the U.S. Cattlemen's Association earlier this month warned that fines or lawsuits could run many farmers out of business.

Leaving Guantanamo

Federal marshals whisked Guantanamo Bay detainee Ahmed Ghailani out of Cuba June 9 and jetted him to New York where he made a brief appearance in a Manhattan courtroom for his arraignment on charges related to a pair of U.S. embassy bombings in 1998. Authorities allege that Ghailani, who pled not guilty to the charges, helped buy a truck and assemble explosives before the attacks in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As the first Gitmo detainee to stand trial on American soil, Ghailani will serve as a test case for President Obama's plan to try other detainees in the United States with the intent of eventually shuttering the infamous prison.

In Bermuda hundreds of protesters called for Premier Ewart Brown to step down over Guantanamo. The leader allowed four of Guantanamo's infamous Chinese Uighur detainees to be settled on the Atlantic island.

Rules of the road

In a move to rein in a "culture of irresponsibility" in the financial sector, President Obama announced new proposals for increased financial regulations. The plan represents perhaps the broadest change made to financial regulation since the Depression-induced passage of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1933, which set many of the rules for banking that are still in place today.

"We do not want to stifle innovation," the president said, "but I'm convinced that by setting out clear rules of the road and ensuring transparency and fair dealings, we will actually promote a more vibrant market."



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The plan expands the power of government arms like the Federal Reserve and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. The Federal Reserve will be given stronger oversight of firms that are "too big to fail," and will have authority to manage capital crises at these firms, in theory to prevent taxpayer bailouts.

But the administration's 85-page proposal must pass Congress and will face hurdles there, where lawmakers question the Fed's role in allowing the runaway finance crisis last year. Critics also point out that the president made no mention in his new plan of Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac, the government-sponsored home mortgage giants that Cato Institute analyst Mark Calabria calls "the single largest source of liquidity for the subprime market during its height." Calabria noted in an online post June 17, "Any reform plan that leaves out Fannie and Freddie does not merit being taken seriously."

Wall Street reacted too with stock markets taking a quick downturn upon the president's announcement of more curbs ahead. "It feels pretty aggressive. It's very much this move to control and reduce people's ability to take risk," said Trent Hudson, an investments analyst in New York. "That to me is pretty scary. The reason that there's growth is that people take risk."

Riotous champs

Kobe Bryant and his Lakers teammates were busy hoisting their NBA championship trophy in Orlando June 14, but fans on the other side of the country set to hoisting police cars. Hundreds of rowdy celebrants stormed the streets of Los Angeles, setting fires and looting businesses. Eight members of the LAPD suffered injuries in the fracas as fans chucked everything from rocks to bottles to roadside flares.

Police declared the melee an unlawful assembly but it continued for several more hours, damaging 12 squad cars, a sheriff's vehicle, and six Metro buses. The LAPD placed about 25 people under arrest.

Law enforcement officials anticipated a repeat of the rioting in 2000 when the Lakers won a championship for the first time in 12 years. But fresh memories of the Lakers' three consecutive championships this decade may have mitigated the fervor. The Lakers have now captured 15 NBA titles, just two shy of the league-leading Boston Celtics.

Lazy days of summer

Americans may work hardest but they take summer school vacation more seriously than most, according *The Economist*, the Brit-based newsweekly.

SCHOOL YEAR ON AVERAGE

South Korea: 220 days

East Asia average: 200+ days

Germany: 200 days

Europe average: 195 days

U.S.: 180 days

Over the course of a 12-year education, 15 extra days in the school year adds up to one more year of schooling.

Taliban

As Taliban forces in Pakistan have sought back-door exits from government-led offensives that have chased them from Swat valley, hardship has spread to more remote, landlocked areas of Pakistan. In Chitral, residents face a prolonged military curfew that has cut off the valley from food and medicine. Road blockades also have kept out supplies in an area where heavy winter rains and snowstorms destroyed crops. Residents demanded C-130 supply flights be allowed into the northwest tribal regions ahead of a planned Pakistan military strike this month to continue to force out Taliban forces.

In nearby Lower Dir, the Taliban set fire to three schools June 16. According to a private TV channel, the schools—Government Girls' High School in Sangolai, Government Girls' High School in Chinar Kot, and Government Middle School in Sherkhanai—were all targeted for destruction by the radical Islamic militants. Pakistani news sources report that the Taliban destroyed at least 10 schools in one week in an ongoing effort to prevent the education of women.

Gay marriage penumbra

New Hampshire became the sixth state to allow same-sex marriage after a protracted battle over the bill's provisions to protect religious freedoms. Those provisions mean religious organizations under the law do not have to "provide services, accommodations, advantages, facilities, goods, or privileges" to an individual if it is related to the "solemnization of a marriage, the celebration of a marriage, or the promotion of marriage" that violates their religious beliefs.

A battle over adoptions by same-sex couples across the Atlantic highlights the need for such

provisions.

Catholic Care, a British adoption agency, lost its case to refuse adoption services to same-sex couples. The U.K.'s Equality Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation but makes an exception for persons acting "in pursuance of a charitable instrument." Catholic Care, which has never provided adoption services to same-sex couples, tried to change its stated purpose to fit under that exception, but the Charity Tribunal ruled that it could not change the language. Catholic Care's chief executive Mark Wiggin told the Charity Tribunal that refusing adoption services to same-sex couples "is a principle that we would like to stand on," and that if it proved impossible, "then we will close our adoption agency." Catholic Care is the oldest established adoption agency in its area, placing children with families since 1926.

Defending the defense

Obama administration lawyers recently filed a brief on behalf of the Justice Department (in the case of *Smelt v. United States*) that defends the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which forbids the federal recognition of same-sex marriage and allows states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages from other states. Congress passed the legislation in 1996.

President Barack Obama called the law "abhorrent" during his campaign to become a U.S. senator—and gay activists accuse him of softening his position. A DOJ spokesman issued a statement saying that "the Justice Department is defending the law on the books in court."

John Berry, director of the Office of Personnel Management and the highest-ranking Obama appointee who is openly gay, recently told the LGBT news site Advocate that the administration is moving forward to repeal both the "don't ask don't tell" policy for the military and DOMA. However, the administration will face resistance in Congress to repeal either. "[The president] has to enforce the laws that have been enacted appropriately and that he has inherited," Berry said. "He's doing his job."

Unfair competition

President Barack Obama faced down a tough crowd in delivering a speech on health care to an assembly of the American Medical Association in Chicago June 15—while pro- and anti-gay-marriage advocates rallied outside. With plenty of applause lines, he appeared to win over many in the skeptical medical bunch, offering enough rhetorical sugar to make the medicine of sweeping reform go down. He'll need at least as much sweetener to convince the broader American public on the merits of his plan to expand government control in the massive health care industry, which makes up nearly 20 percent of the national economy.

Obama sought to alleviate fears over the ills of socialized medicine with talk of added competition and customer choice: "No matter how we reform health care, we will keep this promise to the American people: If you like your doctor, you will be able to keep your doctor, period. If you like your health care plan, you will be able to keep your health care plan, period." But such assurances offer little comfort to privatization advocates who say Obama's plan will disrupt the free market. As Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said, "There's a lot of us that feel that the government is an unfair competitor."

In his speech, Obama insisted that the public option would "put affordable health care within reach for millions of Americans," and that the only impact on private plans would be lower prices. He argued that the low rates of Medicare would not carry over into the public plan because of reforms in reimbursements. Of that, AMA President Nancy Nielsen is unconvinced: "We're not sure that the government is very good at running a health plan."

Policy analysts at the conservative Heritage Foundation worry that Obama's aim to nationalize much of the industry signals the demise of federalism as states lose flexibility in their administration of Medicaid and SCHIP. The attempt to expand Medicaid, they said in a briefing paper, "is neither new, nor innovative, nor reform," and should be replaced with a policy to move customers into private insurance plans through tax credits, premium assistance, and vouchers.

D.C. march

Washington, D.C., election officials said "no" to a referendum—similar to Proposition 8 in California—defining marriage between a man and woman, removing another obstacle to the recognition of same-sex marriage in the nation's capital. The election officials' ruling said a referendum would "strip same-sex couples of the rights and responsibilities of marriage that they were afforded by virtue of entering into valid marriages elsewhere." In May the city council voted almost unanimously to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states, sparking a battle at both local and congressional levels. Some council members said they are paving the way for the district eventually to legalize same-sex marriage.

Local straw polls on the issue don't clarify which way the district would have voted in a referendum. Bishop Harry Jackson, a pastor in a church right outside of the district, led the push for a referendum, and following the election board's decision promised to try to defeat

the council's action in court.

New York snarl

The battle in New York over same-sex marriage took weird turns when two Democrats—Hiram Monserrate and Pedro Espada Jr.—upset the Democrats' 32-30 majority in the state Senate by defecting to the GOP. The next day Duane Motley, executive director of New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms, celebrated the revolt as "a big boulder in the path of the same-sex marriage bill." But Espada, the newly elected president of the Senate, used same-sex marriage legislation as a bargaining chip to get more Democrats to join his side. In a June 12 email to supporters, Brian Brown of the National Organization for Marriage said, "The situation now is so fluid, so confused and so chaotic that it simply isn't clear whether we are headed for a vote on gay marriage." Monserrate then rejoined the Democrats, leaving the Senate evenly divided and the fate of same-sex marriage undecided. So far, 29 senators number among the bill's detractors, while 20 have stated their support. No Republicans have come forward to support the bill, while six Democrats have stated their opposition.

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