

Manhattan High School for Girls

VIEWS ON THE NEWS



Spring 2019

EDITION III

Views on the News

Selected Student Responses
from the Lexington Weekly Blog
of Manhattan High School for Girls

Spring 2019

Message from the Principal

Literacy is the greatest intellectual skill we can give children. As they emerge from the familiar smallness of their simple nests and enter the largeness of our chaotic multicultural world, they need to make meaning. And the meaning must be their own. Though we can provide a scaffold and a framework, we cannot script the meaning for them. Without literacy skills, children never develop into wholesome adults with individual identities and distinct voices.

I am forever indebted to Mrs. Jackie Rosensweig for leading our MHS News Blog. Our girls are engaging with our textured world and they are encouraged to think and speak up. We want them to have opinions and to support those opinions. With respect and responsibility.

Our school community gathers every weekend to read the same news articles curated by Mrs. Rosensweig and the student Editors and they are building terrific skills, so valuable to their growth and development. Thank you to our History teachers, Mrs. Badrian, Mrs. Szenberg and Ms. Licht, for helping us learn how to cultivate our minds and learn to make meaning and express meaning in a meaningful way.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Estee Friedman-Stefansky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Mrs. Estee Friedman-Stefansky
Principal
General Studies

Foreword

The students of MHS went to school in 2018-2019 against a backdrop of a dynamic, volatile world, featuring:

....Anti-Semitism on the rise in America and abroad. Britain struggling with its exit from the European Union. The 116th Congress processing the ambiguous conclusions of the Mueller report and increasing its investigations of President Trump. Technology making continued strides amid increasing distrust of the giant tech companies that control dangerous amounts of information. Simmering debate about America's role in global military conflicts, global trade, global climate policy and global migration. Populism and nationalism finding continued success in global elections....

Many of this year's biggest stories developed slowly, not in big breaking-news headlines. The big picture of the year's global news trends emerges better with the focus of hindsight.

It also emerges clearly in this collection of the most insightful commentary of our MHS students, whose thoughtful comments on the Lexington Weekly current events blog have lent a range of thoughtful, knowledgeable, and reasonable perspectives. These insights focus discussion beyond the bare facts of the news and delve deeply into the news' relevance to our lives, as from people growing up in a dynamic world.

The Lexington Weekly blog is an enjoyable feature of the MHS community, in which students engage meaningfully with current events and with each other, learn to express their opinions solicitously, and become informed about world events in a safe, private corner of the Internet, our virtual kitchen table for news conversations. This year's blog was edited by the devoted and capable Etta Feuer, Hanna Gerber, and Mia Lubetski.

I hope you enjoy this collection of the finest comments on the blog from this past year, finding relevance and Comments have been edited for readability and occasionally for length.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Jackie Rosensweig
Lexington Weekly Faculty Editor

Manhattan High School Awards

*Awards are based on all of students' comments that were
nominated for inclusion in this publication, many
of which did not make the final editor's cut.*

First Place Award

Tamar Spoerri

Honorable Mentions

Bruria Schwartz

Grade 9

Tova Schwartz

Grade 10

Sara Nordlicht

Grade 11

Lea Book

Grade 12

THE (ROBOT) DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW

Automation is replacing skilled humans with trained robots in many low-skill fields, but with improvements in artificial intelligence, we may soon see robot doctors that are more accurate at diagnosis than human doctors, or more precise than human surgeons. Students pondered if they accepted this report's conclusions, and if they welcomed or feared the repercussions.

Ariella Bennett, Grade 10

When performing life or death surgeries, a super-precise robot is definitely a suitable option, simply because it is far more precise than an ordinary doctor, or even a world-class surgeon. However, there are just some factors about having a human doctor that cannot just be replaced by a robot: for example, before undergoing a surgery, it is comforting to the patient to have somewhat of a relationship with their doctor. There is definitely a future possibility of having robots as doctor, but although this can happen, I think that robots should not replace doctors or surgeons in its entirety.

Avigael Hammer, Grade 9

I found the article interesting and timely, as when I was in Israel last month, I sat in on a business meeting between my father and a representative from a company that developed a similar robot. While A.I. in this case came as an alternative to misdiagnosis or bias by doctors, the one currently developed in Israel is intended to streamline and reduce the wait and number of visits to the emergency room. No matter the intent, I think this is brilliant. At present, each time a patient visits a doctor,

he/she must give their medical history. A doctor counts on the patient's memory or charts. Sometimes information is not shared as the patient deems it unrelated or unimportant. This robot will keep a patient's entire medical history. I see the impact on the medical profession as a positive one. A.I. will support doctors not eliminate them. This can save doctors time from requiring different tests on patients which can prolong an illness and a diagnosis.

Lea Book, Grade 12

When I first read this article, I thought robot doctors would be a bad idea. Then I read the questions and thinking about how robot doctors differ from robot truck drivers, I realized that they would be more efficient. Robot doctors will be better at diagnosing issues, they are faster, they probably won't receive complaints about misdiagnosis or malpractice, so it's better for the practice, and robots are probably cheaper for the company. Yet, doctors also need good bedside manner, the humans need their jobs, and I would feel better in an examination room with a human who can empathize with my pain. (Please don't

say that we can create robots with emotions. No.) I think in order to have the efficiency of robot doctors but still have non-sentient technology, we should just have human doctors with technology that can detect an error in diagnosis, prescription, etc. and the human won't have to lose his job.

Dina Rothman, Grade 10

I find the news both alarming and welcoming. It would be alarming because if,

chas veshalom, a person is sick and would need an operation, he would not want a robot doing the procedure. However, if a person has a more minor sickness and needed only a simple examination, a robot may have a beneficial role. For example, if a person does not feel well and needs a doctor to check his ears or throat, then a robot could check him and prescribe medication. It would be faster and more efficient.

THE DIGITAL GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR: IT'S NOT WHAT WE EXPECTED

In a sort of reversal from the old conventional wisdom, researchers are noticing that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to spend time using technology than children from privileged homes. This finding coincides with studies today finding excessive screen time to be detrimental to children's development.

Musia Kirschenbaum, Grade 10

I think that the fact that wealthy children spend less time on a screen makes a lot of sense. In contrast to poor families, wealthy parents can afford to provide endless entertainment for their children instead of leaving them with a device to entertain themselves. Wealthy children have babysitters to watch and entertain them while their parents are away so they are never left alone and bored. Another reason poor children may be more likely to spend more time of technology is because when they are looking at a screen, they can tune out the rest of the world. They don't have to hear what is going on while their parents are stressed out and struggling to provide for their families, making a screen a sanctuary from their unstable lives.

A NEW TRANSPORT MODE ARRIVES: THE HYPERLOOP

If you haven't read much about the Hyperloop, you should look it up right this second. It has potential to be the biggest game-changer in transportation since the airplane, and it really could be built and operational in the next ten years or so. Some of our students were lapping this up; others were skeptical.

Ahuva Mermelstein, Grade 11

Some potential disadvantages of hyperloop is its extremely high speed and the fact that it's individual pods. Firstly, due to the speed, not only will people be more likely to get motion sickness, but if the pod has to make a sudden stop or turn, it will be a lot more difficult. Just like on the German Autobahn (a highway that has no speed limit), although there aren't many accidents, whenever they do occur they are almost always fatal. The question is if people would be willing to risk this in people's everyday lives traveling to work. Also, the high speeds may be a source of attraction for many and rather than only be used for transport, teens and young adults may use the hyperloop as a form

of pleasure and fun. Imagine the subway being filled not only with people traveling to work but also the many individuals who want a fun ride experience at a cheap price. One major disadvantage to the hyperloop would be if it gets used as an attraction and not only for one of its primary purposes of transporting people to work more efficiently. Furthermore, with regard to the individual pods, if they travel at such high speeds, the size of the pods will likely have to be pretty small on the hyperloop. If so, then people will be waiting much longer to get in a "car" as only few people fit in each pod. Therefore, the ability for hyperloop to become the new main mode for transport is relatively slim.

CHINA HAS LANDED ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Jenny Rapp, Grade 10

I think that though space exploration may help us advance scientifically and have a greater understanding of the world around us, government money could be spent in better ways. There are many people who are starving or in desperate need of medical treatment and in the short term those would definitely seem to be more pressing concerns than broader

scientific knowledge. However, in the long term it is important that the United States remain a world power and if space exploration is what we need to retain that power then maybe it is worth it. I think in the short term space exploration is not a good place to direct tax dollars, but in the long term we do need to keep ahead of China and Russia to remain a step ahead of them in terms of weapons, science, and power in general.

Chani Shulman, Grade 11

I thought it was interesting that the government said this launch was “part of an ambitious goal to establish China as one of the world’s space powers, rivaling the United States.” In Ms. Gottlieb’s Historia class, we learned that when the Islamic Caliphate fragmented into twenty different states (each with their own king), wars between the states ensued. Regardless of the ongoing wars, culture (particularly poetry) flourished at that time. Ms. Gottlieb explained that they still invested in the creation of art because it was very important to the government. The art was the propaganda that would help create an illusion of superiority, thereby intimidating the other states. Perhaps this is what China is hoping to accomplish in establishing themselves as “one of the world’s space powers”. The more successful missions they have to their name, the greater their country appears.

WHAT IF YOU'RE BETTER OFF WITH A DOCTOR WHO LOOKS LIKE YOU?

Medical schools should accept only qualified applicants and not focus on “diversity” for its own sake, right? Maybe wrong. Research shows that some demographics, including women and black men, have better health outcomes when treated by doctors who match their identity.

Shira Zelefsky, Grade 11

I think that although medical schools and hospital's residency programs should evaluate applicants according to their merits they should still make sure that they accept a diverse group of students. No one race or gender is inherently better at any field and therefore application programs should make a stronger effort to accept a more diverse range of applicants, especially if there are many studies in favor of having a diverse community of doctors.

Malka Hirsch, Grade 10

I find this article very compelling. While the research methodologies were not outlined very clearly, I can definitely see how this can be an issue. Subconscious bias is pervasive and doctors and teachers may likely be treating their patients and students in ways they themselves aren't conscious of. I would definitely be interested in further studies on this subject to see how, through bias education we can improve health treatment standards for minorities nationwide.

NEWS FLASH: GLOBAL DISEASE IS IN SIGNIFICANT DECLINE

Headline news often misses big stories that take place slowly and gradually. One such important story is the incredible strides that have been made in global health since 2000. Childhood deaths from preventable diseases are dramatically down. Should global health be America's priority?

Yael Weinberg, Grade 11

I do not think that a large portion of the budget of the United States government should go to curing global health problems. Instead, it is a very nice mission for wealthy philanthropists

such as the Gates Foundation and wealthy individuals like Warren Buffett to give an amount of their wealth to these causes. The United States government should be focusing more and giving more money to curing problems within our own country and leaving global health to the philanthropists

Sara Nordlicht, Grade 11

Donations towards global health efforts should be a priority in wealthier countries' budgets. If the government is willing to spend money and troops on fighting other country's wars, Kal Vachomer, they ought to invest in world health, which undoubtedly is saving lives.

The health threats posed by the Western lifestyle are well worth the trade-off. If infant mortality is down, these children are able to grow up and to live. Even if this lifestyle is unhealthy in nature, it is far more healthy than not having a chance at life in the first place. The benefits of vaccinations and antibiotics far outweigh the detriments of a Western lifestyle.

FOOTBALL IS EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

Studies linking professional football with significant risks of causing brain decay are rapidly changing Americans' attitudes toward the sport. These studies are raising questions about whether football is safe at any age, and in what quantity of play. They are also raising the indirect question of how we should balance risk and benefit in sports more generally.

Avigael Hammer, Grade 9

Over the course of eighteen years, the medical profession has studied the long-term effects of concussions and most recently, the impact of sports injuries to the brain on players' health. The research is new, but it is quite alarming. Some of the data shows that children under the age of twelve who sustain such injuries and continue to play football are in danger of getting CTE, which causes lifelong changes and damage to the brain. While the NFL has made some changes, it is far from enough. It is the obligation of football leagues to support this research and protect their athletes. Research should include whether or not children under twelve should play football, creation of more protective gear and funding to support athletes who have sustained injuries resulting in lifestyle changes. If the research continues

to focus on long term injuries and the relationship to children, I believe, in time, middle and possibly high schools will re-evaluate their sports programs. Obviously, this will have a great impact on the future of high school, college and professional football.

Pearlie Goldstein, Grade 9

While there is a lot of research coming out that playing football can lead to brain damage and very possibly that all sports cause brain damage, what are people going to do: ban all sports? Deciding to play football or any sport is a choice that a player makes and they are entitled to make those choices. Being a journalist in Afghanistan is a potentially life-endangering career, but it is always up to the person to make the decisions that will make them happy in life and they put themselves in that position willingly. Additionally, the NFL is responding to this research by making active choices in making the game safer. Therefore, people should still play sports and remember that life will never be perfectly safe.

REACTIONS TO THE ATTACK IN PITTSBURGH

Following the shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, in late October 2018, students pondered whether to conclude that anti-Semitism was on the rise in America in a marked way, and if so, what its causes were.

Avigail P. Deutsch, Grade 12

[Anti-Defamation League Director Jonathan] Greenblatt's claim that antisemitism is becoming normalized because of the internet is true, and very scary. When people are exposed, even subtly, to certain ideas at a constant rate, they come to think of it as normal and as okay, and might come to adapt these ideas too. At the same time, constant exposure to certain ideas make it seem a lot larger. It could be that constant exposure to antisemitism online makes it seem a lot more rampant than it is. That being said, Americans must be cautious and recognize this as a threat to liberty and freedom. And as Jews, we must recognize this as a threat to ourselves, and strengthen ourselves to take the warnings that Hashem is sending us. Because at the end of the day, we will always be hated, so we might as well be the strongest and greatest we can be so they have a reason to be afraid, to be jealous, and hate.

PIPE BOMB ATTACKS: A REFLECTION OF POLITICALLY VIOLENT TIMES?

In the fall, students considered if today's politically polarized environment is more violent than America's political climate in the past.

Chedva Levine, Grade 11

Tensions are definitely on the rise in the US in an increasingly politicized environment, but that doesn't mean that all the partisanship is new. As horrific as the pipe bombs are, attacks on politicians from radical members of the opposite party are nothing new. Every president has assassination attempts, and these are no exception. ...Depolarization is not such a hard task. The core of the issue, all the hatred emanating from every angle, is the perception of the representatives of other ideologies as inhumane, and coming from another planet. Mostly, it's up to us to familiarize ourselves with views of the other side and try to understand where their coming from.

Lea Book, Grade 12

I think that individuals are angry. Individuals are hateful. The KKK's comprised of angry, hateful people, who do angry, hateful things. The Nazis were people who did hateful things. Kennedy's killer, terrorists, the Florida shooter, 9/11, the Boston marathon bombing... these varied acts of violence happened at various times in history. I don't think that the present political tension has anything to do with the violence. We had political tension, we will have political tension. Our means of violence has changed to be more violent because of technology, not because of increasing tensions. Just like guns don't kill people; people kill people, political tension doesn't create violence, a person becomes violent.

ANTI-SEMITISM ON DISPLAY IN CONGRESS, ALONG WITH PRO-JEWISH DEFENSE

The new term in Congress has brought new faces such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar. These figures, and Omar in particular, have been the subject of controversies over comments taken by many to be anti-Semitic.

Chedva Levine, Grade 11

It's a fine line to draw between over-labeling actions as anti-Semitic and defending the rights and status of our nation as Jews. Throughout the centuries Jews have been mistreated for different reasons and anti-Israel activists often harbor anti-Semitic views as well. Due to the complexity of the topic, more knowledge is required before discerning whether comments like Omar's are anti-Semitic. If other information is known that supports this, than full blown dissent is justified. If not, a little bit of caution may be wise.

Esther Guelfguat, Grade 12

If I was a member of leadership in American government, I would attempt to show Omar how false her remarks are. I don't think that stripping her of committee assignments or doing any other forceful action will make the situation better. On the contrary, it will only arouse more hateful feelings and will validate her idea that Jews control the world.

A NEW IDEA IN GUN CONTROL: LOOK FOR THE CREDIT CARD PURCHASES

Mass Shootings show no sign of declining in America nowadays. One possible method for identifying shooters before they begin their rampages is to identify individuals who abruptly purchase thousands of dollars of weapons and ammunition in a very short period of time. Should law enforcement follow credit card purchases?

Tziporah Pinczower, Grade 9

Gun laws have troubled America for a long time but have become a very controversial topic ever since Sandy Hook. Many believe that we must tighten gun laws, and the article above is one of many ways that people have come up with to prevent shootings. Those who oppose this bring the fourth amendment as proof that this is unconstitutional, "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized." The key part which many are missing is the word "unreasonable", and to me, saving lives seems like a very reasonable cause.

Sara Nordlicht, Grade 11

While I don't know how effective such a move would be, I do think credit card companies ought to be screening for suspicious purchasing of weapons, and reporting any suspicions they have to the government. As the article mentions, credit card companies and banks already do screen for suspiciously expensive purchases that may indicate a stolen credit card, as well as to detect other illegal activities, so this wouldn't be that different. Generally, much screening of innocent citizens takes place in other forums, including security at airports, as well as the fact that "backpacks and other large containers are subject to random search by the police" in subway stations across NYC. True, such screening may prove a nuisance to innocent customers, but the lives potentially saved are well worth the minor inconveniences. I don't think a suspicious purchase is warrant for arrest, but it certainly warrants some fact and background checking, to prevent future crime and violence.

Tzophie Ulano, Grade 12

A lot people who are buying guns to commit crimes are buying them from weapons dealers, and they are most likely paying in cash. I think the credit card checking can maybe prevent

some dangerous activity but definitely not all. Especially if shooters catch wind of this idea, they are unlikely to be caught buying guns with their credit cards.

BELGIUM SHECHITAH BAN GOES INTO EFFECT

Students evaluated whether Belgium's ban of Shechitah and other forms of ritual slaughter was motivated by anti-Semitism or something else.

Golda Schuster, Grade 9

I don't think that the law was passed because of anti-Semitism because the law isn't only against the Jews. The Muslims living in Northern Belgium are restricted by the same law and according to their religion they can't either eat meat that was slaughtered improperly. It may have been passed as an anti-religion law but it wasn't targeting the Jews specifically.

Tamar Spoerri, Grade 11

Rosie Katz made a strong point here. Even if it wasn't an intended effect of the law, and even though Belgian Jews can still import meat, the emotional consequences of banning ritual slaughter are significant. It doesn't matter that any practical effect is unlikely. Jews have always been wary of governments, so negative--though not malicious--signals like this one will naturally aggravate dormant mistrust. Keeping this in mind, it becomes easier to understand why one would view recent legislation as indicative of a larger trend of increasing anti-semitism in Europe. Still, I'm inclined to see it differently. Animal welfare has been gaining more publicity as of late, so the law doesn't signify any (conscious) anti-semitism, "just" carelessness to consider the implications of legislation for minority groups. Sure, you can frame it as if the Belgian parliament now values animals more than Jews and Muslims, but ignoring the nuance in this issue is misguided.

Zahava Giloni, Grade 11

This act of Anti-Semitism is setting the precedent for tolerance of future Anti-semitic acts. This is outwardly preventing Jews from performing religious rituals that have been practiced throughout history. However, this law should be viewed with the understanding that is also targeted against Muslims and perhaps is less directly against Jews than we think. Therefore, further investigation would be necessary to conclude either way.

Hindi Medalie, Grade 12

I agree with what many people have commented regarding whether religion and anti-semitism was a factor in this legislation. I agree that the intent wasn't to enact such legislation to target the Jews or there could have been a multitude of other laws that would be far more effective in crippling the Jewish community. However, then not taking into account the repercussions it would have on the Jewish community highlights that there is a lack of sensitivity towards Jews and their tradition. Therefore, Rabbi Goldschmidt's statement makes sense because this legislation highlights that the Belgian government does not care for its Jewish population and therefore it is appropriate to worry about what could come next if they're not thinking about the people they're hurting.

TRAFFIC DEATHS IN NEW YORK DROP TO 200, A RECORD LOW

Students considered whether they were willing to give Bill de Blasio credit for his traffic safety initiative in light of record low traffic deaths in the city. They also wondered how many traffic restrictions are the right amount, if it's nearly impossible to prevent all traffic deaths unless one were to ban all car traffic altogether.

Essie Abittan, Grade 11

I think that Vision Zero has definitely done something. However, I think the biggest cause of accidents is phones. Whether someone is crossing the street or they are in the car it can cause a lot of damage. On the street the person is not paying attention. In the car they are also not paying attention but if they let's are upset about something that the person on the phone said they may become blinded and cause an accident. Although De Blasio is helping he should definitely crack down on phone use somehow.

Faigy Eisen, Grade 11

I think vision zero proved itself to be a worthy project but, without degrading the value of their goal, to save more lives, I don't think the work done so far should be considered baby steps because that means they are planning to do so much more than what has been done so far. Although it's amazing that the project was able to lower the death and injury rates in NYC by a lot, we still have to ensure that we allow the citizens to drive when they want and not to overly limit their abilities. Cars and getting around the city are also vital to the city's function.

Alicia Russo, Grade 11

I believe that everyone has to be willing to sacrifice something for the greater good. In this case, people must be willing to sit in their cars for a few more minutes a day in order to save pedestrian lives. Every one of us benefits from this change as we are all pedestrians at one point in time. Given that I travel for a good portion of my day, when I first looked at the bigger obstacle that this idea produced I was quite annoyed and did not think it was a good idea. However, once giving the idea more thought I realized that this change can help affect my life as well. We don't really think about the consequences of things until we see how they can connect to us. Therefore I believe that more traffic is definitely a fair price to save more

lives. However, there is a limit to the amount of traffic that can be increased. Additionally, I believe that Mayor De Blasio does deserve credit for the drop in MVC casualties with his Vision Zero Program. Any decrease in loss of life is considered a success and thus, I applaud Mayor De Blasio for his victory.

WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH STATE REGULATION OF YESHIVA CURRICULA?

In an important discussion, students tried to wrap their heads around the facts of Albany's interference into Yeshiva curricula. Then they wondered how much state regulation of curricula they would support in general.

Tova Schwartz, Grade 10

I agree that the government should base the way they deal with private schools' education based on the way the students do on standardized testing. They will be forced to prepare their students for the test. This solves the government's and yeshivas' problems. The yeshivas will need to prepare the students well for these tests, and will therefore give the students a good education, which solves the government's problem. The government won't need to step in and give yeshivos a minimum number of hours for secular studies, which is what the yeshivos want. Therefore, everyone will be satisfied.

Rivka Lax, Grade 12

There is no justification for the state education system, which provides a free public education for all residents, as it is funded by their property taxes, to not reimburse STEM teachers in private schools. Yeshiva students should be at least as competent in reading, math and science as are public schools. In my opinion, the state should be permitted to ensure that performance on standardized tests is comparable to public school students, once they fund their STEM teachers. As long as the schools performance is comparable on standardized testing as public schools, no additional intervention should be permitted by state or city officials.

THE 2018 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

On the eve of the election, students pondered what midterm elections are, why the stakes are so large, what might happen as a result of Democratic or Republican victories, and offered their predictions of the outcomes—sometimes with uncanny precision.

Chedvah Lamm, Grade 12

Midterm Elections of 2018 are at a historic high point of election interest. While midterm elections are always a significant determinant of the next two years of a presidency, this year's elections will be pivotal in the ability for Trump to be successful in passing laws and actually have power. If he is successful he the Republicans keep the majorities it will allow Trump to continue to make laws, pass bills, and remain a powerful president. If he loses it is likely many of his hopes to continue to make changes will be severely limited. Because everyone is very strongly opinionated about the current president whether for or against this fascination has caused there to be a much higher percentage of voters that it has been in decades. From the mobs chasing politicians, protests against Kavanaugh, and the undetermined bombs being sent to candidates' homes and offices, our country is in desperate times and the big divide between the two parties is quite large. This extremely close race and constant ups and downs creates a lot of unknowns about the future of the congress for the next two years. As an 18-year-old about to vote for the first time, it is crucial to stay informed about the current politics and know who it is I plan to vote for.

Bruria Schwartz, Grade 9

Midterms elections are usually seen as a test of the president's popularity. In almost every midterm election cycle, the part in power usually loses a lot of seats, in both the house and the senate. However, the changing demographic of once Republican stronghold states such as Texas, the fact that a lot of the senate Democrats are up for re-election are in states Trump won, Bob Menezes's indictment in New Jersey, as well as the Shelby County V. Holder Supreme Court case in 2013 (which enabled voter suppression), can all lead to the likely scenario where Democrats will take back the house, but Republicans can very possibly gain senate seats.

NEW CONGRESS CONVENES: NEW FACES, OLD-FASHIONED GRIDLOCK

The new session of Congress after the Midterms convened in the middle of a government shutdown. The months that have followed it have featured a constant battle between the President and the Democratic-ruled House of Representatives, whose committees are investigating many alleged wrongdoings. Students pondered the government shut down and the new diverse profile of Congress.

Rivka Sabel, Grade 12

Maharam Mirottenberg refused to let the Jews pay a high ransom to free him after he was taken captive, out of fear that others would follow suit and constantly kidnap rabbis to receive a lot of money from the Jews who would pay anything to redeem them. So too, I believe that negotiations must to reopen the government must be made with caution as to not set a precedent that a president can shut down the government whenever they want money that is being refused to them. I hope that Trump can come to an agreement because the government shut down has costed a lot of money and a lot of jobs. I think that until now Trump has just pushed for a wall but Trump must seriously sit down and calculate the true costs and benefits of the wall so something productive can be done.

Noa Garfinkel, Grade 12

I do believe that it is quite important that the current Congress has more women, minorities, and young people than ever before. Our government is meant to represent its people, and if people do not see anyone they can relate to in government, they will feel distant from the government. And if the job of those in congress is to make laws, and those laws almost always effect the citizens of this country, then it follows logically that the people making the laws should have a connection with those whom the laws will effect. An old white man might not take into consideration what will affect a young minority woman. Our government is meant to be dynamic, not stuck in the past. It should reflect its times and above all, its people.

Gitty Boshnack, Grade 12

I think it is laudable that we have so many minorities in Congress. Firstly, it shows that we as a people are accepting of others and we have moved away from segregation and racism. Diversity contributes more varied opinions which can lead to more varied solutions. Having

a diverse Congress shows that more and more of the population is being represented which is a good thing like James Madison says in Federalist 10 when the minority's view is represented it prevents the majority from becoming tyrannical.

Tziporah Pinczower, Grade 9

Diversity as we all know can have a very positive effect, although too much diversity may cause confusion. I do not believe that we can predict the efficiency, or lack of it due to the number of women, minorities or young people. We refer to racism as defining one based on skin color, religion, party and so on. If we judge them negatively everyone would pounce on us as racists, but judging them even positively is racist because we are not allowing them to prove themselves and we are basing them solely off of their skin color, religion or party.

REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS AGREE: CONGRESS WILL PASS PRISON REFORM LAW

Prison reform laws will decrease some of the suggested sentences for various felonies, especially those related to possession of illegal substances. Students considered the benefits and detriments of jail to a safe, functioning society.

Chani Shulman, Grade 11

Nechama Mandel makes an interesting point that some criminal offenders seek jail sentences for security, stability, and a roof over their heads; however, even the best jails don't hold a candle to the comforts of a home. That being said, I can understand why a homeless person would purposely commit crime. In fact, one fifth of homeless people commit crimes to make their way under a roof and into a bed. Even though life in prison is definitely a life limited, perhaps Jake Trapper of CNN is right when he posits that "the American people, honestly, want security over freedom." I don't believe that this problem should curtail improved prison conditions. Although, this motive for committing crime should be taken into consideration when bringing a homeless person to court.

Bruria Schwartz, Grade 9

During George H.W. Bush's presidency, he waged a war on drugs. As part of his war on drugs he introduced new sentencing guidelines, including mandatory minimums and three

strikes laws. These laws disproportionately affected the black and Hispanic communities. As part of these new laws, the minimum for possession of 8 ounces-1 pound of marijuana in New York State is 4 years. 4 years for a substance that has been decriminalized in many states. These laws were also mostly invoked against minority communities giving the perpetrator a non-proportional sentence to the crime and resulting in an influx of prisoners in our justice systems. Additionally, these laws also created “3 strikes and you’re out” programs, which were also mainly used against minority communities. While we need prison for an organized society, no one needs 4 years of their life lost for possession of cannabis. I think that the First Step Act will ensure that law enforcement prosecute serious crimes instead of wasting resources prosecuting low lever drug offenses, thereby making our society a safer and fairer one for all its inhabitants.

SHOULD SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLDS VOTE?

After one small town has granted sixteen-year-olds the right to vote (in local elections only), we wondered whether young people should be voting or not.

Shira Zelefsky, Grade 11

I think that although teenagers may feel they know enough, many teenagers may not be getting the full picture. Most teens get their news from social media networks. While these sites may make teenagers aware of the current issues, they can often portray an overdramatized or biased story, which is something traditional news sources avoid. However I do think teenagers are more knowledgeable in the emotional and social aspects of different current events.

Sarah Dan, Grade 10

I think that, generally speaking, minors are typically immature and tactless, and giving them the liberty to impact something that defines and shapes the country, would be irrational and unsafe, because many minors don't realize or understand how much their vote could mean to everyone else. Furthermore, even though there are many people who are young with intelligence and understanding, they lack the required experience they might need in order to give a proper vote.

A LOOK AT THE START OF THE 2020 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

We examined why there are so many Democratic candidates, why the primary election is getting so much buzz and interest so early, and what the possible implications of two dozen candidates might be on the course of the primary.

Ayala Hoch, Grade 9

The large number of candidates can actually have a large impact on who garners the actual Democratic nomination. When Trump ran against a large number of candidates of similar number, it gave more power to the base of voters who are the most conservative. So Trump espoused views to pander to that base and grabbed the nomination. The centrist vote was split amongst the larger number of candidates. In a similar vein, many of the current Democratic candidates are now espousing very progressive views to play to the Democratic base that tends to be more liberal. As a result, we may see an extremely liberal candidate espousing very progressive views. That will set up a general election pitting candidates at the extremes of their parties and disenfranchising centrist voters.

Cherri Citron, Grade 9

As we saw in the 2016 election, an overload of Democratic candidates may actually hurt the Democrats. In 2016, many of those who initially supported Bernie Sanders

didn't vote in the presidential election, or even turned to supporting Donald Trump. If the Democrats cannot unify behind a single candidate, it may harm them greatly. On the other hand, Republicans seem to have only one option. It is highly unlikely that there will be any successful opposition to President Trump from within his own party. While Trump is definitely the Republican's best hope of winning, there is also a chance that his candidacy could end up driving more moderate Republicans to the Democratic party. I think the best chance of a Democratic candidate winning the 2020 election would to nominate a candidate with more moderate policies, who could attract voters from across the aisle, and hopefully unify this country.

Rena Kesler, Grade 11

Because there is a large pool of democratic candidates who may share some of the same views, the most proficient and convincing orator will probably be the one to win the primary. We see this from the primaries in 2016 how the most convincing orator won even though other candidates may have been more qualified.

SO, WHAT IS THE DEAL WITH THE “GREEN NEW DEAL?”

Climate change is emerging as one of the greatest threats of our time, but nonetheless, scholars are divided about which policies we can afford to try to combat it, and whether they are likely to work at all. Students weighed in on this potential massive project.

Shira Zelefsky, Grade 11

While there are many aspects of the Green New Deal that I find to be a bit too extreme, in principle, I agree with many aspects of the Green New Deal. While I believe that measures should be taken to lower the emissions of greenhouse gasses, the complete uprooting of the coal and natural gas industry in only ten years seems somewhat dangerously destabilizing to the economy. Additionally while replacing air travel with an equally fast, cross country railway is a great alternative to airplanes — which emit a lot of greenhouse gases into the environment — but obviously can't completely replace all air travel, because this would make cross continental travel nearly impossible.

Bruria Schwartz, Grade 9

The Green New Deal is certainly an ambitious plan to combat the devastating effects of climate change. However, what most people are mistaken about is that this plan is not a bill, it's a suggested plan, with no consequences for failing to comply with it. While some parts of the bill are

not practical (if we ban airplanes how do we get to Hawaii? High speed rail?), its intentions are good, as ever since the United States left the Paris Climate Agreement, we have had no plan about how to reduce our carbon emissions and halt the rate of climate change.

Hindi Medalie, Grade 12

After taking AP Environmental Science last year I do feel passionate about our planet and the risk of carbon emissions. With this said, policy or any economic system does not work unless there are benefits. The issue with this deal as well as many other proposed plans is there is no economic incentive. The proposals from many progressive thinkers include technology that is astronomically expensive. Even something as simple as solar power costs far more than burning coal for electricity in the average home. Until that changes people won't make radical change unless they can afford to and until it happens in mass scales no effective change will be seen in the environment. The only answer is economic incentive.

CAN AN ART MUSEUM EVER THROW AWAY ART?

As several museums, including the Brooklyn Museum and the MoMA, consider their staggering collections that they don't have room to display, they are sometimes opting to deaccession their works. If art is priceless, how can museums give it up? Can a work of art that had once been seen as valuable be demoted to "not worth it"?

Chavi Golding, Grade 10

Art has, and always will be, something that influences the society by great measures. Art shares experiences, teaches values, and creates opinions for the time and place. Furthermore, people are able to remember and understand an era by looking back at that specific time's artwork. Therefore, an art work's value does not necessarily depend on the price given by a museum, rather by how it is accepted and translated by the society.

Tamar Spoerri, Grade 11

The quality of a work is generally assessed by its originality, personal voice, technique, and overall ability to create something (e.g., an emotion, a new perspective) within the viewer. But museums don't just value art that is good quality. They value art that will effectively fulfill their goals: to educate and entertain the public of today, and to preserve art for the public of the future. To that end, museums should value art that is either typical or exceptional. Everything in between is not as interesting. Typical art is a piece that is a perfect example of the genre to which it belongs, efficiently eliminating the need to illustrate the genre with several works. Exceptional art is a piece that makes no sense in the context in which it was created, and that makes it all the more striking. Typical art is a piece that communicates a message especially relevant today, or a piece that is well-known, making it important to viewers because of its relatability. Exceptional art is a piece that goes against contemporary ideas, or showcases an uncommon voice, provoking reactions from the viewers and broadening their worldview. The perception of a work can change over time, but as long it remains very typical or very exceptional to curators, it will continue to be valued.

Sara Nordlicht, Grade 11

The museums aren't "throwing out the artwork"; they are merely selling it, often to another,

smaller museum. As has been written about before on Lex Weekly, the museums have real struggles to stay open and at the same time keep admission costs down (recall that the Met had to begin charging admission to most visitors). Selling little-appreciated or little-viewed pieces to a museum in which such pieces are more rare, can help both institutions thrive and can give the seller museum much-needed funds. I am glad to hear that deaccession exists.

THE ETHICS OF UNCONTACTED NATIVE TRIBES

After a Christian missionary was killed trying to visit the remote, uncontacted tribes of Sentinel Island in India, students pondered whether it is cruel or kind for the Indian government to legally ban people from making contact with the hostile remote tribe that lives there.

Nechoma Flohr, Grade 12

I do not believe it is paternalistic of the Indian government not to expose the Sentinelese people to modern society. Quite on the contrary; it is paternalistic to assume that we live a better, more enlightened life because of technology, health care, etc. They seem to be living perfectly fine without interference from the outside world, and who are we to say that they would be better off for our meddling?

MUST FRANCE RETURN ANTIQUITIES FROM ITS FORMER COLONIES?

French museums contain troves of priceless historical artifacts made in African lands that were once French colonies. In France, these materials are well-kept in world-class museums where thousands of visitors can see and appreciate the works, and learn about African cultures. However, some are lobbying to return the artifacts to the lands where they originated. Students pondered the merits of both sides of this story.

Lea Book, Grade 12

I think that the museums should return antiques to their country of origin. If someone wants to learn about a different culture, they can go to that country and learn. They can open a book and learn. They can go online and learn (even though the internet is not an ideal place to find information). If I want to learn about, let's say, Cuba, I can find other ways than by holding their artifacts hostage, practically. Just like France says, if they want their artifacts back, they have a right to them. I think that France did take something from them, they didn't want the French there at all, they want their stuff back, and France should give it back. Think of Jewish history. The Purim story where Achashveirosh was wearing the clothes of the Kohen Gadol to the parties-should we not have asked for them back because they took it when they ruled us?

MANY ARRESTED IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS SCANDAL

In the wake of the massive college admissions fraud scandal, students examined whether the crimes of bribery for college acceptance were particularly any different from the legal means by which families with wealth and privilege can influence schools to accept their children.

Meira Notkin, Grade 10

I think making large donations to prestigious universities in the hopes of giving your child a higher chance of being admitted is different than bribing admission officers or faking credentials to guarantee your children a spot. Bribing admissions officials and faking official documents in order to enhance your child's appeal and skill-set is definitely illegal and immoral. But while large donations may put lesser-privileged children at a disadvantage, the reality is that some universities need money and if a parent is offering a million dollars just to accept one student, then making this deal will help university pay professor, build new buildings, or just enhance the overall quality of the learning experience. Therefore while it is unfair to prioritize wealthy students, we must take into consideration how much these universities will lose if wealthy students stop making large donations. Because of this, I don't think universities will ever be a true meritocracy. Life just doesn't work that way. Over-privileged children will be prioritized for wealth, under-privileged children will be prioritized for affirmative-action, Americans will be prioritized over international students, and children of university alumni will be prioritized for legacy, and so on. But

these children have at least some merit, and are not getting in to prestigious universities by faking it

MOMA RENOVATION IS OUT TO REDEFINE ART ITSELF, AGAIN

The MoMA is closing in Summer 2019 for another renovation, and hopes to include many more works by women, non-Europeans and people of color in its new permanent collections. Students wondered whether this shift to affirmative-action art would dilute the quality of the art, or enhance its ability to be maximally expressive of the greatest possible range of expressions.

Adina Hoffman, Grade 9

The problem here is that now the MOMA has joined the ranks of the politically correct. It is one thing to say that women and minorities should be included. Of course, they should. But the MOMA is apologizing for not emphasizing the work of women and minorities. Why should it? Think of the quote another way. "Our museum is going to emphasize the works of white men." We would be justifiably offended and the speaker would be roasted in the press. And they should be. But why is it acceptable to say we are going to emphasize the works of women or minorities or whatever group is the favorite of the week? The reader should finish the quote in this article as the effect will be. That is, "to the exclusion of men." Discrimination is horrible, no matter who it is done to.

A MAJOR DEFEAT FOR DEMOCRACY: BRAZIL'S BOLSONARO ELECTED PRESIDENT

Is the new president of Brazil part of a global populist trend? Why is populism spreading?

Jenny Rapp, Grade 10

I believe part of the reason there is a decrease in support for democracy is because we don't trust the general public. Unlike previous generations who were known for their work ethic or nationalism, the current generation is known for laziness and disrespect. We just don't trust ourselves to make good decisions so we put that power into the hands of other supposedly smart and educated officials. I believe this is one of many reasons for the decrease in support for democracy.

VENEZUELA NEW LEADER: VIOLENT COUP OR EMBRACE OF DEMOCRACY?

In Venezuela, strongman Maduro has been overtaken by the opposition leader Juan Guaido. Students debated whether this revolutionary rebel was, in fact, a legitimate ruler.

Cherri Citron, Grade 9

Maduro is notorious for silencing his opposition and rigging elections. Guaido should be considered the proper and Democratic leader of Venezuela because he has truly earned the support of the people. Despite this, he still requires support from Venezuela's military, which is loyal to Maduro. International condemnation was a good first step in challenging Maduro's rule, but I am hesitant about supporting foreign military intervention. Based on America's history of intervention in countries in turmoil, especially in that region, it would be hard to definitely say that we would be acting out the best interest of the people of Venezuela, and I think that is what is most important in this situation.

Naomi Hymowitz, Grade 9

I believe, based on the information provided in the article, that Juan Guaidó is a courageous patriot of Venezuela that would be supported by Venezuelan people even more now that he dared to challenge Nicolás Maduro who so far has done enough to be unequivocally called a dictator. Juan Guaidó, on the contrary, acted based on the existing Venezuelan Constitution and the current law, on the one hand, and on the indisputable facts of multiple violations by Nicolás Maduro of the Venezuelan Constitution and the law, save for committing blatant crimes against Venezuelans, on the other. Therefore, I believe, Juan Guaidó must be recognized by the world as exactly who he is: an interim acting president who assumed his interim presidency for the only purpose of restoring democracy in the country. Of course, should he succeed in organizing free democratic elections in Venezuela, he is very likely to run and win the presidential office, and then, no doubt, he will be recognized by the world as the new, democratically elected, president of Venezuela. Until that happens, other world democracies should support and help Juan Guaidó in all lawful diplomatic ways these countries can afford while he should 'simply' survive, create and strengthen his ties with other democracies, and use that newly acquired legitimacy and world recognition to attract and retain as much of the army and other law enforcement units as he can, as he will not be able to force a dictator down only with popular support and good will. Good luck, Acting President Juan Guaidó!

OPINION: WITHDRAWAL FROM SYRIA IS A MISTAKE

President Trump abruptly called for an end to American involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Students considered the upsides and downsides of this approach and read a National Review article opposing the move.

Tova Schwartz, Grade 10

I agree that the withdrawal was done at the wrong time and in the wrong way. Trump had a multi-national military coalition in Syria, and as the article said, none of them were consulted. I think this was wrong because there was an opportunity to ask, but Trump ignored it and decided on the withdrawal anyway. Furthermore, as the article mentioned, the Kurdish-dominated militias were fighting alongside America, and did most of the

fighting and dying. By withdrawing, Trump is leaving the Kurdish-dominated militias, who had loyally been allies with America, to “be crushed between two hostile forces.” This will most likely leave a bad reputation on America; they start a war, bring in allies, and leave their partners to die when they decide they’re finished. I think that as mentioned in the article, America should negotiate an arrangement.

CHINA IS PERSECUTING UIGHUR MUSLIMS

In light of China’s treatment of Uighurs, we wondered why the West doesn’t do more to exert pressure on China, and we wondered why the global Muslim community was not more visibly involved in confronting China’s actions.

Ahuva Mermelstein, Grade 11

I think that the Muslim world has reacted to quietly to China’s actions for a fear of what China could do and also possibly because they differ with this Muslim sect. As part of what the author interprets with regard to economic motivations, this very possibly could be a factor for the Muslim world remaining silent because Muslim countries would definitely not want to potentially lose such a valuable trading partner. If they fight back, even if only verbally, China may feel threatened and cut off ties with these countries. With regard to different Muslim sects, throughout the years, Muslims have fought with one another as their religious views varied. In my Historia class this year, we recently learned that from the year 711 CE, when Muslims conquered Spain, to 1492 CE, where the last Muslims were persecuted in the Spanish Inquisition along with Jews, there were many conflicts and wars which usually were between Muslim

counterparts. The Muslim world has possibly been remaining silent with regard to China’s actions to the Uighurs because these people follow Sunni Islam and others may not agree with that interpretation of religion. Furthermore, if the Muslim world stands up for these Uighurs people, they could possibly onset conflicts within the Muslim world as other sects have varying opinions.

Ayli Tavakoly, Grade 11

I think that the Muslim world is responding quietly since they dread losing China’s economic interest. China is the “top trading partner of 20 of the 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation,” and if the Muslims start revolting it can trigger them economically and break off any trade that China does with them. One of the most important aspects of a country is its economy and the Muslims want to maintain their economy

by staying silent. Similarly, I don't think America should get too involved in this matter and upset China. China benefits our economy as well and we shouldn't break our relationship to defend Muslim minorities. I recently read an article on "The Diplomat"

which stated, "America and China need each other. China and the United States simply cannot afford to be adversarial". This proves that the US should not break its relationship with China to defend a minority.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION RECOGNIZES ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

In light of President Trump's historic move of the American Embassy to Jerusalem, students pondered how to weigh conflicting aspects of the president's record.

Elona Ryba, Grade 11

The way many Jewish Americans feel about President Donald Trump could easily be simplified to saying: that he's a great choice for Israel, but not necessarily the best for America. From moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem to recognizing the Golan Heights as part of Israel, there is no denying that Trump has contributed and done a lot of good for Israel as a state. Saying that he has done nothing for America would definitely be an uneducated and false statement. However it would be correct to say that he did not fulfill all the promises of his campaign such as allowing Congress to allow health insurance across state lines, or building his infamous wall. To conclude, Trump has been a very good president for the welfare

of Israel, and that is where many of the American Jews support him.

Rivka Notkin, Grade 10

Even those who do not like Trump or his political views must admit that he has been very beneficial towards the Jews. He pardoned Rubashkin, moved the embassy to Jerusalem, and has focused on helping Israel politically. Some may disagree on his motivations. Is he acting this way out the kindness of his heart, because his children are Jewish, or because he wants the support Jewish Americans? Even if they disagree politically, American Jews can all have one reason to like Trump. Trump's treatment of Israel might be the only safe political topic to talk about at the Shabbos meal.

