

The district should do more to support speech program

In many professions, one of the best skills a person can possess is the ability to communicate effectively. Business, law, politics, and many other fields require verbal and written communication skills. Effective argumentation, participation in a civilized exchange of ideas, and the development of long-term strategies that are both feasible to implement and desirable in their results, are all necessary for effective decision-making.

Speech and debate allows students to develop the public speaking and critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in a variety of areas.

Yet the speech and debate program — both the professional communications classes and the UIL team — faces a number of challenges and is in need of more support from the district to maximize its potential to benefit students.

The largest of these challenges has been the loss of a second full-time coach and teacher. Last year, when the speech and debate team placed first at the Class 6A Re-

gional Meet for the first time in school history, the team was led by two coaches: Elizabeth Waldrop and Zac Calhoun. When Calhoun left Pflugerville to pursue other career opportunities at the end of last year, the district did not replace him. This left Waldrop as the lone speech and debate teacher and coach.

Funding has been another issue. The speech and debate team has seen its budget shrink despite the fact that the program has grown tremendously since Waldrop arrived at PHS nine years ago. This has caused a strain on the limited financial resources that the team has access to. Because of this, the team has not been able to go to as many competitions as in previous years.

The source of these issues can be traced to a piece of legislation known as Texas House Bill 5. Passed in 2013, this bill eliminated professional communications — otherwise known as “the speech class” — as a graduation requirement in Texas public schools. After the passage of H.B. 5, lawmakers

left it up to individual school districts to decide whether to keep professional communications as a graduation requirement. Pflugerville I.S.D. chose not to keep the class as a graduation requirement.

As a result of this decision by the state and the district, PHS has had fewer students enroll in professional communications, the class that introduces students to public speaking and is used by Waldrop as a recruiting tool for her UIL team. Numbers have dwindled so much that Waldrop is now the only professional communications teacher at PHS.

But this is not just about competitive speech and debate. Waldrop places great emphasis on preparing students for their careers and college even if they have no interest in competitive debate. This is why professional communications is so essential. Waldrop compared the choice of whether or not to take professional communication to the choice between broccoli and candy. Many people have a fear of public speaking and will avoid it even though it is good for them to

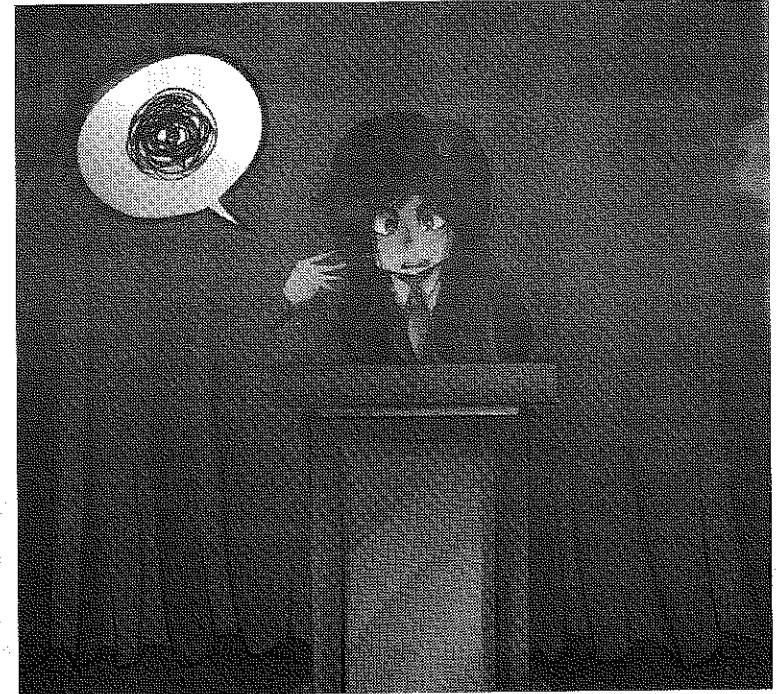
take in the long run.

Students, whether they are part of the debate team or not, are being disadvantaged. But to solve this all, the district needs to reinstate professional communications as a graduation requirement. This, in turn, would help with efforts to hire a second coach.

Though financial resources are limited, the educational value of the speech and debate program justifies the expense. Fundraising

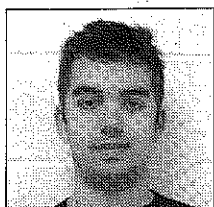
on part of the speech and debate program can help prevent the programs budget from becoming prohibitively high, but is not enough on its own. P.f.I.S.D. needs to think about the long-term benefits of the speech and debate program and how it prepared this future generation, which the students at PHS are a part of, for success in college and in their careers.

-Art by Miranda Bomer



STAFF STANCE

No, the United States does not have a gun problem But the illusion is convincing



PRESTON NIEVES
PROWLER REPORTER

Firearms are an integral part of American culture. The Second Amendment is a treasured liberty, considered a fundamental right.

But it is just as controversial as it is fundamental. Recent

mass shootings have raised questions about whether or not the level of freedom Americans enjoy with firearms is something we want to keep. But the truth is that gun control is really just part of a political agenda.

Anti-gun politicians will have you believe that the United States is a hotbed for violence. Yet surprisingly, the United States is a pretty safe country. According to the FBI, the United States homicide rate is 4.5 per 100,000, below the international average of 5.2 per 100,000, according to the World Bank. Examples of countries with much higher homicide rates than the United States are Russia (9.2 per 100,000), Brazil (25.2 per 100,000), and even Greenland (19.4 per 100,000). On the other hand, Norway, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic, all have gun laws that are less strict than most nations, but enjoy low crime rates.

The same trend is present among U.S. states. According to the Washington Post, out

of the top 10 states with the lowest homicide rate, only two, Hawaii and Massachusetts, have strict gun laws. The top three states with the lowest homicide rates, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Iowa, all have lenient gun laws. Vermont is considered to be one of the most pro-gun states in the country, and all three of these states allow assault weapons and lack restrictions on magazine capacity. The article further revealed that when examining data across all 50 states, there is a correlation between strict gun laws, and more homicide.

Gun sales have soared in recent years, according to Forbes. Yet the United States has seen the lowest amount of violent crime since 1978, according to Time Magazine.

The elephant in the room (at least from a political standpoint) still remains: mass shootings. But the threat they pose is blown out of proportion. The highest estimates place the number of people killed this year in American mass shootings around 462, according to the Dallas Morning News. In comparison to the total number of homicides in the United States, this is quite small. There were 14,196 people killed by homicide in the United States, according to the FBI. That equates to roughly 3 percent of all homicides being committed by mass shooters.

Mass shootings are the exception, not the rule. But even when looking only at mass violence, the data stacks up against gun control.

Although few countries see the number of mass shootings the United States does, equally destructive incidents of mass violence using other weapons are common.

Russia stands as a prime example. Despite having both strict gun laws and a low number of mass shootings, Russia has had several devastating bombings. As of 2014, Russia had at least one major bombing every year since 2009. Most years saw several bombings, and they are usually even more destructive than American mass shootings, with the Moscow metro bombings killing 40 people and injuring 100, and the Domodedovo International airport bombing killing 37 and injuring 173.

Mass stabbings are common in China, a country with even stricter gun laws than Russia. One such incident at the Kunming train station took 29 lives, and injured 130 people. When guns are unavailable, criminals and terrorists will find something else to use.

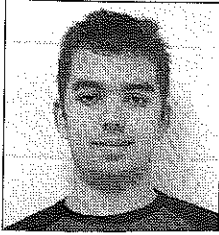
Firearms in the hands of civilians curb violence. All but two mass shootings in America since 1950 have occurred in a place where the general public was prohibited from carrying firearms, according to the National Review. Mass shooters have specifically targeted gun-free zones, often mentioning them in their manifestoes. There have also been numerous instances of people with concealed weapons stopping what could have been a mass shooting.

Mass shootings seem common in the United States because of fear-mongering on the part of anti-gun politicians and media outlets that support them. Mass shootings are sensationalized, perfect pre-prepared speeches are given after they happen, and scapegoating is used to demonize everyday Americans who want to exercise their Second Amendment rights and interest groups such as the NRA who support those beliefs. The situation closely parallels attacks on other constitutional rights. Muslims have been the scapegoats for terrorism and face a country where their religious freedom is in danger, with politicians such as Donald Trump seeking to limit their First Amendment rights to a similar extent as what many want for the Second Amendment.

So, it seems gun control is part of a broader trend. It is not about guns; it is about control. Prominent officials from both parties seek to enact policies that expand the government's power, and suppress groups of people who have ideas different from their own.

The Second Amendment is both fundamental and controversial. But it is only controversial because there are those who wish to disarm the people of the United States, and those who are tricked into believing their lies, subscribing to their agenda, and blindly surrendering their freedom rather than asking why the government would want to take it away.

Why we must return to the moon



PRESTON NIEVES
PROWLER REPORTER

During the mid-20th century, the world marveled at advancements made by the United States and the Soviet Union in the space race. One of the greatest moments of this time took place on July 20 1969; the United States placed the first humans on the moon, and returned them safely to the Earth. But even when this conquest for knowledge and prestige was in full swing, both sides were wary of the possible conquest of space itself.

The outer space treaty seeks to ensure that space exploration benefits all of mankind. A large part of this is limiting territorial claims in space. Article II of the outer space treaty states "Outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means." In other words, no country can claim a celestial body.

But one increasingly aggressive spacefaring nation is worrying. China, whom according to Business Insider on June 16th has been expanding their space program. If China has ambitions on the moon, there is a strong possibility that it could threaten both US national security, and international law.

An October 14th article by BBC highlights how China's construction of artificial Islands in the South China Sea has alarmed both the United States, and China's neighbors. Though they assert that their claims are legitimate, and that their intentions are peaceful, the facts paint a different picture.

Their real aim likely has a lot more to do with the fact that, according to the Diplomat On February 22, the South China Sea is rich in oil and gas. China has claimed nearly the entire South China Sea, threatening freedom of navigation, the idea that anyone can navigate international waters freely.

The principle of freedom of navigation is shockingly similar to the doctrine behind the Outer Space Treaty. International waters are supposed to serve to benefit all of mankind. Yet that is not stopping China from asserting ownership. So what if China tries to claim ownership of celestial bodies. More specifically, what if China takes a shot at sovereignty over the moon?

This scenario is more likely than some give it credit for. For one the moon is Earth's closest neighbor, making it accessible. Additionally according to BBC, the moon is rich in rare resources. China's tendency to ignore international law,

and their current obsession with space exploration, is a dangerous combination.

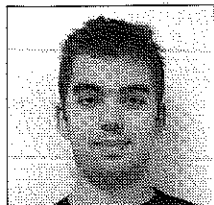
Chinese sovereignty over the moon would be a national security nightmare for the United States. First of all, if the Moon were part of China it would be easier for them to justify the placement of weapons there. This would allow them to control the space around Earth creating a hostile operational environment for the US military around the world. It could also lead to resource shortages and/or more overdependence on China in the West as we outgrow Earth's ability to provide resources, but could not access the moon.

The way we can prevent Chinese ownership of celestial bodies is colonization. Doing so will allow us to prevent China from legitimizing a claim of sovereignty. This is because of the way legal dispute over territory are resolved. According to the Diplomat, ownership of territory is determined by occupation and usage rather than discovery. So, for example, the United States could not use the fact that we put a man on the moon first to counter a Chinese territorial claim. However, if the United States occupies a celestial body first, then if China were to claim that they own it, the United States could respond by asserting that we own it based on occupation and usage. This would force China into a difficult choice. They would either have to reverse their stance, and accept space as a realm for all mankind. Or accept United States territorial claims. If China decided to use military force to try and get us to back down, we would be better prepared to send military forces into space if we have already established colonies. All that we would have to do is militarize, but China would need to build from scratch. Faced with the United States having the capability to gain a head start in a conflict, China would be less likely to try and militarize space.

By putting the United States in a position where we would have an advantage in any space conflict, and where it would be easier to build strong legal arguments supporting American ownership of the moon, we can take away the incentive for China to defer from the status quo, where space is considered to be an international realm.

When dealing with our number one geopolitical rival we need to think outside the box and look into the future. The inevitability of expansion into space means that the day will come when the outer space treaty needs to be enforced against an aggressor. Technological progress will march forward with or without the United States. If we ignore space exploration, our enemies will not follow in our footsteps. Rather, they will race to leave us behind.

Nuclear non-proliferation: A different approach to disarmament



PRESTON NIEVES
PROWLER REPORTER

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a nuclear arms race, amassing incredibly large stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Despite test ban treaties and arms reduction measures, nations are still modernizing their nuclear arsenals and 4,100 of the world's 15,700 existing warheads are operational, according to the Federation of American Scientists. Nuclear disarmament has become a popular idea, but there are flaws in the logic behind our current approach. It is an unrealistic goal in a world where knowledge is spread so easily, and it is not the path to a more peaceful world many make it to be. Rather, the elimination of nuclear stockpiles is a result that may come after a more peaceful world is built.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle for a feasible

disarmament plan is knowledge. Even if we got rid of the weapons themselves, it would be near impossible to make sure that nobody knows how they work or how to make them. One reason for this is that peaceful applications of the atom rely on the same technology as military ones. According to the World Nuclear Association all that separates weapons grade Uranium from reactor grade Uranium is that weapons grade Uranium is more highly enriched, meaning that a nation with nuclear power could easily become a nuclear weapons state.

Additionally, reactor grade material could pose a threat on its own as even low enriched Uranium could be used to make a dirty bomb according to RT News. Since nuclear power is on the rise, with 60 nuclear reactors under construction in 15 countries, according to the World Nuclear Association, this technology will only become more prevalent. Furthermore, any technology is nearly impossible to un-invent in the information age that we live in. Things such as the Internet have made

sharing knowledge easier than ever, and many people seek knowledge for its own sake even if it could be dangerous in the wrong hands.

Many countries want to have nuclear weapons because of security benefits they offer. Nuclear weapons prevent industrial scale conflicts through mutually assured destruction. Since nuclear war would be incredibly destructive, no country dares to attack a nuclear power, and nations are reluctant to escalate conflicts. Nuclear weapons can also offset conventional military disadvantages, allowing weaker, less developed countries, to protect themselves from stronger ones. An example of this was when, according to the Nuclear Treat Initiative, Russia relied heavily on its nuclear deterrent in the early 2000s amidst concerns of conventional military inferiority because of the post-Soviet downsizing of the military.

Countries fear attack from hostile nations and thus want a deterrent to prevent this. For example, according to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, the US and Russia deter-

mine their nuclear doctrine based on one another rather than their individual needs due to left over tensions from the Cold War. If not for the sizable US and Russian arsenals, both countries could reduce their arsenals by a factor of ten. Furthermore, nations relying heavily on their nuclear deterrent due to inferior conventional capabilities are unlikely to sacrifice their ability to protect themselves without reasonable assurance that they would not have to face any threats.

The only way to eliminate nuclear weapons is to eliminate the need for them. Nuclear weapons do not make the world dangerous; rather they are tools that countries use to respond to danger through deterrence. The way to build a more peaceful world is not to rush and get rid of nuclear weapons. Rather, the atmosphere of hostility and mistrust that exists between nations needs to be addressed. Weapons are created because man desires to wage war. Not the other way around.