

## **The Rest of the World Rates Us, But Who Cares?**

In a yearly ritual the United States Department of State issues a global report card called the "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." To a variety of other organizations we say how other countries are doing in connection with human rights, democracy, and other important public policy areas.

If the rest of the world rated us, we might find ourselves somewhat red-faced.

Only recently, China gave the United States a very bad report card. While it rankles us to be criticized by any other nation, let alone a totalitarian regime ruled by bureaucrats, looking in the mirror every once in awhile may reveal a few blemishes.

1. Domestic Security. The United States sees 31,000 Americans killed and 75,000 wounded by firearms each year, which means that more than 80 people are shot dead each day. The number of inmates in the United States jumped from 320,000 in 1980 to 2,000,000 in 2000, a hike of six times. Obviously, throwing people in jail has not done much to reduce crime. Yet, every major city in the United States reports a drop in crime to the FBI.

2. Freedom in Democracy. The presidential and congressional elections last year cost nearly \$4 billion. Ask any voter, however, and they would tell you that campaigns are full of false information, outright lies, and distorted facts. Our elections are more about coming up with a slogan or creating a false image than about the Republican form of government that our Founding Fathers fought so hard for.

3. Economic Rights. The top 10 percent of the country are prospering, while the bottom 90 percent slip. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2004 the number of Americans in poverty has been climbing for three years. It rose by 1.3 million in the year 2003 to 35.9 million. More and more Americans have to work two and three jobs just to get by, and our trade deficit is so out of control that our very way of life is threatened.

4. Discrimination. Are we really a country free of discrimination? The rates of illness, accident and murder among black people is twice that of white. The rate of being affected by AIDS is ten times higher for blacks than for whites. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the

United States registered 29,000 complaints in 2003 of racial bias in the workplace. In spite of our growing heterogeneity, misunderstandings and gaps between black and white, Hispanic, and established communities and other forms of racism and anti-Semitism seem to be on the rise, even on college campuses, supposedly the bastion of American liberalism.

5. Women and Children. According to FBI crime statistics, in 2003 United States witnessed over 93,000 cases of rape. Every two minutes one woman was sexually assaulted, and every six minutes one woman was raped in the United States. Children are consistent victims of sex crimes. Every year about 400,000 children in the United States were forced to engage in prostitution or other sexual dealings on the streets. Unfortunately, even our clergy has been involved in these scandals. The courts are flooded with cases of domestic abuse, domestic violence, divorce, and custody disputes. Our families are tattered, ruined and torn, and neither the rhetoric of the right nor the left has done anything to make much of a difference. Fortunately, rates of teenage pregnancy and drug use appear to be on the decline, but that is only because of the aging population.

6. Health. The United States is one of the least healthy of the 16 industrialized nations. Our cost of medical care is the highest among industrialized countries, while our longevity is close to the bottom. At the same time, we know that preventable medical errors are the equivalent of two Asian Tsunamis every year! According to the New England Journal of Medicine, 55 percent of doctors do not practice accepted standards of care, and pharmaceutical companies engage in a public ripoff, which would not be acceptable in any third world country, let alone the greatest democracy on the planet! We are ruled by a conglomerate of wealthy and powerful business interests, which buy the politicians and control public opinion. Nobody with the genuine consumer orientation has a chance to get elected to dogcatcher, and certainly would not have the money to be heard by the voting audience.

Perhaps it is time we start rating ourselves, while we are rating and grading the rest of the world. Our own record on human rights and treatment of our own citizens is dismal. While the Chinese certainly have no right to be throwing stones at us, we need to ask why our politicians are more interested in feeding a comatose woman in Florida whose husband wishes to follow her desires rather than feeding the millions of hungry children in this country. Congress and the President are willing to stay late to involve federal government in a local court matter, while ignoring the collapsing Medicare program and permitting our job resources to be exported abroad.

It is the sad truth, as the Founders of this country understood, that people sometimes respond only to disasters and fail to keep an eye on day to day matters, if they are able to slip by. Sooner or later unacceptable trade deficits, reckless spending, and neglect of our own people will catch up to us.

Unfortunately, we will pass our obligation to solve these problems on to our children and grandchildren.

Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire  
Rieders Travis Law Firm  
161 West Third Street  
Williamsport, PA 17701  
(570) 323-8711  
[crieders@riederstravis.com](mailto:crieders@riederstravis.com)