

FIVE EASY PIECES

BRIEFINGS ON

- The US role in the Middle East
- Mass surveillance of phone records
 - Income inequality
 - Legalized assisted suicide
 - Genetically modified food

By

EXPERTS IN THE



Fall, 2014

FIVE EASY PIECES

Previews by experts in the Yale undergraduate class of 1962
of issues in the fall, 2014, debates presented on
Intelligence Squared U.S.

The short articles anthologized here (scroll down), by experts from the Yale undergraduate class of 1962, are “pre-game” previews of public issues that the authors thought might come up in the debates mounted in the fall of 2014 by the nonprofit organization Intelligence Squared U.S.

Bob Rosenkranz, another member of the class, founded Intelligence Squared U.S. in 2006. To date, the organization has presented nearly 100 debates on provocative topics and other controversies. The effort has drawn approving comments like “Pointed political debate minus all the shouting” (The New York Times) and “Always intelligent and provocative, as well as disciplined and civil” (The Wall Street Journal). The debates feature often-peppery but always mutually respectful dialogues between two teams of experts with opposing views. Conducted before a live audience in New York City, the debates were carried by live video streaming at [our website](#) and at [Intelligence Squared U.S.](#) They are broadcast by many public radio stations, reaching an audience of several hundred thousand. Al Chambers, another classmate, arranged with Rosenkranz to make the final debates of 2014 viewable on the class website, [www.Yale62.org](#), in hopes of giving classmates common ground and provoking online conversations on the site’s comment section.

After the first debate, Chambers borrowed the idea of “pre-game previews” from sports TV and commissioned classmates with knowledge of each debate issue to do the five, quick, preparatory briefings you will find here. The authors responded enthusiastically, as classmates usually have when asked to share their views, drawing on their lifelong experience to produce thoughtful mini-essays. Indeed, a few debate-viewers found these previews as or more comprehensive than the debates themselves — and shorter.

In a special note for Yale ’62 classmates, below, Bob Rosenkranz reflects on the impact the I-squared debates have had so far. Your additions to the dialogue started in these classmate comments and in the debates, your comments on the views expressed in Rosenkranz’s end-of-the-season commentary for us, and your thoughts about the entire debate process, are, as always, most welcome. [Click here](#) to leave your comments about this issue.

— Chris Cory
Yale ’62 Corresponding Secretary
chris@christophercory.com

Please scroll down for more.

DEBATE RESULTS: A Message from Bob Rosenkranz

Extreme partisanship has made it impossible for Congress to address any of the critical challenges our country faces. Indeed it has become increasingly difficult to have a public dialogue about important issues that shows respect for differing viewpoints, and seeks sensible accommodation and pragmatic solutions. What passes for public discourse on television both reflects and aggravates the problem: often offering a toxic brew of ideological rhetoric and uninformative sound bites.

Yale will always be number one in my philanthropic pantheon, but the Intelligence Squared initiative has been a source of enormous personal satisfaction. I feel we have succeeded in creating a public space where opposing sides can discuss the issues of the day in a format where facts and analysis trump emotion and ideology.

I have found the appetite for what we have done extraordinarily encouraging. Millions listen to the debates on NPR and subscribe to the podcast; millions more are interacting with us online; and our content has become a valuable resource to educational institutions nationwide, from high schools to universities. Our audience is open minded and eager to hear both sides of the argument. Nearly 40% vote differently before and after the debates: and even those who don't change their mind leave feeling that the opposing side has intellectually respectable arguments.

I am particularly gratified by the educational impact the debates have had. We have created a series of Constitutional Law debates in partnership with the National Constitution Center and have had live debates at a wide range of academic venues, including NYU, Rockefeller University, Columbia University and Harvard Law School. Some 30,000 students and faculty with .edu addresses have engaged with our website in the past year. Increasingly, our debates and the research material we post are being used in secondary schools. There seems to be a growing awareness, exemplified by the Common Core educational standards, that to be successful in college and in life students need more than knowledge; they need skills in researching, speaking persuasively, thinking on their feet, marshalling facts to support arguments and responding effectively to opposing viewpoints. For all of the above, debate is a critical piece. As a former scholarship student, I am proud that Intelligence Squared is helping the next generation acquire these skills free of cost.

— Bob Rosenkranz

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PROPOSITION: FLEXING AMERICA'S MUSCLES IN THE MIDDLE EAST WILL MAKE THINGS WORSE



TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30
NEW YORK, NY

Flexing America's Muscles In The Middle East Will Make Things Worse



FOR
Aaron David Miller
V.P. for New Initiatives, Wilson Center & Fmr. U.S. Mideast Negotiator



AGAINST
Michael Doran
Sr. Fellow, Brookings Institution & Fmr. Senior Director, National Security Council



AGAINST
Bret Stephens
Deputy Editor, Editorial Page, *The Wall Street Journal*



FOR
Paul Pillar
Sr. Fellow, Georgetown's Center for Security Studies & Fmr. National Intelligence Officer



Y'62 PREVIEW by Steve Buck

1. Context

Saddam's Iraq was a brutal dictatorship. It was based on the tenets of the "Ba'ath" (Arabic for Renaissance) party, founded by a Muslim and a Christian who agreed to a secular, highly nationalistic ideology. This produced the most nationalistic of the eight Arab countries I served in, as well as a highly professional and proud army and a large, technocratic middle class. In the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's Shi'a supplied the majority of the Iraqi army that defeated Iran. Saddam's Iraq was adamantly opposed to Islamist extremism and al-Qaeda. It was the worst place in the world for al-Qaeda.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent U.S. actions produced:

- The destruction of a largely technocratic middle class
- The destruction of Iraq's professional army
- Ending a secular ideology and hyping religious affiliation
- In a country where Sunni and Shi'a mixed and married, a mini-civil war pitting Sunni against Shi'a

- A Prime Minister from a militantly Shi'a exile group, ad-Da'wa, who had spent decades as an exile in Tehran
- Disillusioned Sunnis who had been promised participation in government during the U.S. surge but got nothing
- A power vacuum in Iraq's Sunni areas, leaving the field open to the Islamic State (IS), formerly called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

2. Questions

-- The U.S. spent trillions and committed tens of thousands of soldiers and advisors over 11 years to build an Iraqi army. Elements of that army fled at the sight of the Islamic State (IS) in the Mosul region. How can reduced U.S. money and fewer trainers produce a better result?

-- Will using Iraq's Shi'a militia reinforce Sunni support for the Islamic State?

-- Will arming and relying on Kurdish militia perhaps lead to Kurdish land grabs and further fighting?

-- Bin Laden advocated challenging the U.S. to draw it into a losing struggle. Are IS beheadings doing just this?

-- Iraq's new Prime Minister, Haidar al-Abadi, comes from the same Da'wa exile group as his predecessor and has more reason to hate Sunnis, as Saddam had two of his brothers killed. What reason is there to believe that he will make any real effort to court Sunnis for an inclusive government?

-- The U.S. is in effect declaring war. Except for World War II, the U.S. has not done very well in the wars it has waged since then. What are the reasons to believe that we will do better now, particularly after already spending trillions and losing 4,000 killed and tens of thousands wounded?

-- Joint Chiefs Chairman Dempsey and other senior military figures have indicated that there might be a need for boots on the ground. Will this and Congress's authorization for funding Syrian rebels and its implied approval of our military re-involvement in Iraq lead to further mission creep?

-- Senior U.S. officials put the number of foreigners fighting for IS in the thousands. Is U.S. involvement likely to add to recruits who see the intervention as a "crusade" against Islam and provide support for IS's call for a caliphate, which would potentially return the whole Islamic world to being controlled by presumed successors to the prophet? The last Caliphate was the Ottoman Empire, which was dissolved by Kemal Attaturk in 1923.

-- Syria: Bashar al-Assad may well be in office longer than Obama. In going after IS in Syria, we are in effect on the same side as Assad. How will/should this play out?

-- Alliances of convenience change rapidly in the Middle East. U. S. policy has often seemed to be in response to the moment, rather than long term. If the "coalition" of Middle East "partners" frays, will/should the U.S. "stay the course?"

-- The U.S. and Iran have similar interests in fighting IS. Is this a good thing? Bad thing? How should we handle this?

-- The Arab world is already unstable enough. Is it a good thing having Arab air forces joining in the bombing?

3. The Big Question

Americans love to have winners and losers. While talking about a large coalition, the discussion among the talking heads is about "our" "winning" a war. The focus is all about us, not about a little-understood "them." A majority of Americans now support the bombing of Syria but have no idea where it is located.

Nearly 30 years ago when I was Deputy Chief of Mission in Iraq, my Ambassador liked to say "In Iraq there are no good solutions, only least bad solutions." Could it be that there are unlikely to be any real winners as war continues in Iraq and Syria? Our invasion in 2003 led to tens of thousands dead, millions displaced, a country and society dismantled and destroyed.

The Intelligence Squared debate may produce a winner and strong opinions. Perhaps rather than a debate, don't we need a conversation?

[Comments? You're invited to make them here.](#)

Please scroll down for more.

OUR SECURITY VS. OUR PRIVACY



DEBATE DETAILS

Tuesday, October 07
Philadelphia, PA

FOR
Alex Abdo
Staff Attorney, ACLU
Speech, Privacy and
Technology Project

AGAINST
Stewart Baker
Fmr. Assistant Secretary,
Homeland Security & Fmr.
General Counsel, NSA

AGAINST
John Yoo
Professor of Law, UC
Berkeley & Fmr. Justice
Department Lawyer

FOR
Elizabeth Wydra
Chief Counsel,
Constitutional
Accountability Center



Y'62 PREVIEW by Bob Connery

The debate subject, "Mass Collection of U.S. Phone Records," is not theoretical; it is currently happening.

Every call of every person in the United States is being "tapped" — recorded in some fashion and turned over to the National Security Agency (NSA) by America's telecommunications companies.

Mass collection of phone records (MCPR) is conducted under secret court orders to those companies. They are under "gag" orders not to reveal the existence of the orders or their compliance. That has been going on for at least seven and perhaps 13 years.

These phone records include every call made to doctors, lawyers, political and social associates, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals, pharmacies, porn sites, whistleblower hotlines, Alcoholics Anonymous, pastors, priests and rabbis, ex-girlfriends and ex-boyfriends, other women and men, shelters for victims of domestic violence and HIV clinics, to suggest only a few sensitive categories of personal information. The government may examine that data for up to three layers of associated calls.

Context

We the People, every one of us, have Constitutional rights. Many have fought and died for them. They form the core of our national being and what distinguishes us from other nations. All branches of our governments are pledged to defend those rights. However, the task of enforcing those rights has primarily fallen on the independent courts of the nation (so-called Article III courts under the Constitution that provide due process). Citizens of the U.S. necessarily rely on those courts to curb and balance the power of the Executive Branch (recall Watergate) and the Congress (think Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee).

It is in this context that the debate's proposition, "**Mass Collection of U.S. Phone Records Violates the Fourth Amendment**," should be considered.

Questions the debate should address

- a. Does the term "phone records" include data recorded over telephone lines and wirelessly from not just telephones, but cell phones, computers and other wireless devices, and does it include emails, videos and documents contained in those telecommunications?
- b. Does the data base of "phone records" created by the telecommunications companies under court order and delivered to the NSA contain the *contents* of the telecommunications, or is that content available and accessible to the NSA, and others, based on the "metadata" (numbers of the caller and receiver, the time and duration of the call)?
- c. Are the secret court orders requiring telecommunications companies illegal "general warrants," as proscribed in the language of the Fourth Amendment, because they collect phone data from every resident of the United States?
- d. Are the secret court orders illegal warrants because they fail to specify "persons, places, things or effects" to be produced, but instead "search and seize" those records in an overly broad "dragnet"?
- e. Does the MCRP intrude on the "reasonable expectation of privacy" of U.S. citizens established by the Supreme Court under not only the Fourth Amendment, but under the right against self-incrimination (the Fifth Amendment), the right to Free Speech (First Amendment), and the Ninth Amendment (reserving all rights not specified in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights to the people)? It is worth mentioning that this same right of privacy is the basis for decisions in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) (a woman's right to choose abortion), and for *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), where a Connecticut statute prohibiting any person from using "any drug, medicinal article or instrument for the purpose of preventing conception" was ruled unconstitutional.
- f. Was the government required to show "probable cause" "supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the person or thing to be seized," as the Fourth Amendment puts it, as a condition of obtaining the MCRP secret court order? Another secret court order allows NSA to search the MCPR data base when a "designated approving official" of the NSA determines that "there are facts giving rise to a reasonable, articulable suspicion (RAS) of association with a foreign

terrorist organization." Is RAS different than probable cause?

g. Given the government's position that the great bulk of the phone records produced are not suspected of providing information relevant to ongoing foreign terrorist investigations affecting national security, is the dragnet of virtually all U.S. phone records necessary to protect national security? And is there reason to believe there is a suspicion that we are all the subject of "reasonable articulable suspicion?"

The Big Question.

The elephant in the room is whether national security interests or concerns presented by foreign terrorist threats require citizens of the United States to sacrifice their Fourth Amendment, First, Fifth, Fourteenth, Ninth and other Bill of Rights protections of privacy. There is no doubt that the threat of foreign terrorism is a real and serious concern.

The national security interest in protection of our citizens must be weighed against their rights contained in the Bill of Rights. Both need to be weighed carefully and proportionally. I believe that the weighing needs to be done outside the Executive Branch (in the secret court on the top floor of the Department of Justice), and that citizens and those who champion the rights of our citizens need to be heard in public debate on the issue. The Congress, the Supreme Court, the Executive Branch, and the people all need to be included in the discussion and resolution.

The jury is out on whether our tripartite Constitutional system of checks and balances can keep pace not just with foreign terrorism, but with the problems presented by the facile, mass, invasive powers of modern technology used to invade the right of privacy of American citizens. The flagrant intrusions on the right of privacy presented by MCPR, and the likely related uses and abuses of the data obtained, are, in my humble opinion, of a kind that a desperate executive branch might undertake in the face of a clear, comprehensive and present threat to our rights and the security of nation. At this point, the danger presented domestically by a relatively limited number of foreign terrorists present in the United States would seem to fall far short of the value of the significant, daily, continuing invasion of the right of privacy of hundreds of millions of American citizens.

Surely there are legal methods of identifying and monitoring the potential foreign terrorists in the country and taking necessary action. In any case, some risk of national security seems required, and worth the price.

In view of the Supreme Court's 1972 decision that the Fourth Amendment does not permit warrantless surveillance in intelligence investigations of domestic security threats, *US. v. U.S. District Court (Keith)*, and the questions raised above, it is very difficult to conclude that mass collection of phone records is not a violation of the Fourth Amendment. At the very least, MCPR is a subject that richly deserves debate and attention from a somnolent American citizenry.

EDITOR'S NOTE - Bob Connery is a nationally-recognized lawyer from Denver who over the last 40 years has appeared in many trial and appellate federal and state cases throughout the United States,

including several civil rights and environmental cases that have gone to the U.S. Supreme Court. He is not an "expert" on the Fourth Amendment and has no involvement in litigation on the subject.

[You're invited to make comments here.](#)

Please scroll down for more.

DOES INCOME INEQUALITY PINCH OUR DREAMS, TOO?



DEBATE DETAILS

Wednesday, October 22
New York, NY

	<p>FOR Elise Gould Senior Economist and Dir. of Health Policy Research, Economy Policy Institute</p>		<p>AGAINST Edward Conard Visiting Scholar, AEI & Former Partner, Bain Capital</p>
	<p>AGAINST Scott Winship Fellow, Manhattan Institute</p>		<p>FOR Nick Hanauer Entrepreneur & Venture Capitalist</p>

To Improve Income Inequality Raise The Tide



Y'62 PREVIEW by Arthur Laffer

"Some of you in the Yale Class of 1962 may actually think income inequality is a 'problem' worthy of government redress (i.e., Piketty in Capital). To you, I just sigh and wonder what's to happen to the world if the very best and the brightest, as you are, are so misguided."

We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to Bob Rosenkranz, Y '62, for sponsoring the Intelligence Squared debates on seminal issues of public policy. I personally have participated in two and loved the interchange.

The upcoming debate on income inequality portends to be a barn-burner. I can't think of any issue more ubiquitously controversial. The words "income inequality" by themselves have been elevated to political code-word. As you might imagine, I personally think the issue is a red herring providing political cover for real issues.

Just for starters, I would prefer inequality over less inequality if reducing inequality entailed everyone (high and low incomes) earning less. I would also prefer less inequality if it were achieved by everyone's income increasing but low income earners' incomes rising by more than high income earners' incomes. Income inequality isn't the correct issue; raising all incomes is. And in this regard, I would prefer every American to be better off individually and collectively. To quote our commencement speaker, President Kennedy, "No American is ever made better off by pulling a fellow American down, and every American is made better off if any one of us is made better off. A rising tide raises all boats."

Secondly, even though I recognize jealousy, envy and covetousness as innate human emotions, I believe them to be lowly characteristics unworthy of encouragement in a civilized, educated society. The mere fact that we engage in a debate on the role of government and income inequality only serves to energize the worst demons of our nature. A debate on the pros and cons of income or wealth inequality is akin to debating the pros and cons of various skin colors, levels of intelligence, degrees of attractiveness, telling the truth, or sexual practices. It's wrong. Those who are wealthy are presumed *prima facie* to be unworthy of that wealth while those who are poor are seen as star-crossed.

My view of the issue matches President Theodore Roosevelt's description of his "Square Deal," favoring neither capital nor labor, rich nor poor. "If the cards do not come to any man, or if they do come and he has not the power to play them, that is his affair. All I need is that there be no crookedness in the dealing."

My third point is that in practice, the debate on inequality often boils down to torrents of contradictory data, each side picking and choosing the facts they wish to use. In any debate wishing to move the ball forward, income data should be after-tax, adjusted for numbers of people (tax returns and family sizes aren't all the same), after government benefits, after employer-provided benefits, adjusted for where people live (i.e., the cost of living), and inclusive of changes in wealth. Income data are notoriously misleading. For example, Warren Buffet in 2010 reported income (AGI) of approximately \$40 million on his tax return, and yet his wealth increased by \$10 billion during the year (Forbes) and he gave away almost \$2 billion tax-free to the 501(c)3's of his friends and children. In other words, Warren Buffet's income exceeded \$12 billion and yet was reported in the Statistics of Income of the United States as \$40 million (see Buffett's August 14, 2011 op-ed in The New York Times).

Mobility of specific individuals from one income group to another over time is also crucial to any serious discussion.

And, as a final point, I'd like to point out that some of you in the Yale Class of 1962 may actually think income inequality is a "problem" worthy of government redress (i.e., Piketty in *Capital*). To you, I just sigh and wonder what's to happen to the world if the very best and the brightest, as you are, are so misguided.

"With total income redistribution... everyone's income will be zero."

Government policies to reduce income inequality invariably take income from those who have more and give income to those who have less, supposedly making those who have less better off, which they desperately need while making those who have more worse off, but they can afford it. But now, let me introduce some economics.

Whenever governments take from those who have more, those takings reduce those people's incentives to work, leading them to produce less. Likewise, by giving to those who have less, governments provide those people with an alternative source of income other than working, causing them also to work less. The theorem is as simple as it is non-partisan. Any income redistribution reduces total income, and total income redistribution reduces total income to zero.

To see this clearly, imagine a policy of total income redistribution, whereby everyone who makes above the average income is taxed 100% of the excess and everyone who makes below the average income is subsidized up to the average income. I will stipulate today, counselor, that if done completely and without exception, everyone will have the same after-tax, after-subsidy income - and it will be zero.

Good luck, debaters. Thank you, Bob, and Boola Boola to my fellow classmates.

[You're invited to make comments here.](#)

Please scroll down for more.

LEGALIZE ASSISTED SUICIDE?



DEBATE DETAILS

Thursday, November 13
New York, NY

 <p>FOR PETER SINGER Philosopher & Professor of Bioethics, Princeton University</p>	 <p>AGAINST Dr. Daniel Sulmasy Prof. of Medicine and Ethics, University of Chicago & Member, Presidential Bioethics Commission</p>
 <p>AGAINST Baroness Iora Finlay President, British Medical Association & Member, House of Lords</p>	 <p>FOR ANDREW SOLOMON Author, Far From the Tree & Prof. of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University</p>



Y'62 PREVIEW by Robert Lefevre, M.D.

Many debate topics generate profound cerebral interest, often with accompanying passionate, and even visceral, gut-tightening responses. In the long run, however, regardless of the outcome, after the dust settles, there's often little personal impact. Not so with the upcoming "Intelligence Squared" debate on "legalized assisted suicide."

This debate is current to events that recently played out in Oregon, specifically concerning Brittany Maynard, the 29-year-old woman with terminal brain cancer who died November 3. The debate has implications for every person as he or she considers personal health care directives, or acts as a designated attorney for health care. It touches on a topic that is deeply personal to all of us, more so every day.

Is this a debate about the ethics of assisted suicide at the academic level, or about the right and freedom you as an individual have to choose how you want to live? When life fails to meet your standards or is too painful do you have the right to choose how you die?

While making rounds with Baron and Zach, my therapy dogs (my retirement job), I visited a person in the emergency department who said, "You know, we do not come with an expiration date." So there is not only "the how" of assisted suicide but "the when." Timing can present its own dilemma. In the discussions Brittany had with interviewers and on video, this was a very important issue.

Death with dignity has always been a key goal of hospice care. I was privileged to have been a founding medical director of a hospice at the dawn of the movement in the early 1980s. I firmly believe that hospice and palliative care doctors, nurses, social workers and chaplains (the team) have the resources, medications and skills to help patients and families through the end game the vast majority of the time.



Brittany Maynard

However, a question arises. In spite of the best of care, what if a person is still experiencing intractable suffering? Suffering comes in many forms: Loss of control, pain, and feelings of being a burden to others. In Brittany's case, intractable seizures and severe headaches.

A key medical principle is "primum non nocere." First, do no harm. If we cannot control the suffering aren't we doing harm? Is assisted suicide a potential option in this scenario?

Given the choice and the means to end one's life, the data from Oregon show that very few people elect this route. In wondering why, I am reminded of my days as a resident on one of the surgical services at the Cleveland Clinic. One of the surgeons gave all his patients admitted to the hospital a bottle of pain pills to be left at the bedside. Yes, a bit radical and of course impossible in this day and age, but guess what?! The patients did not have to fight the nurses for pain medication. They also took less total pain medication. Brittany in her video clearly elucidated the calming effect of having the medication she needed. Being able to be in control leads to less stress.

A question to consider in this debate is "Who is in control?" Is there a chance that those representing the medical profession under the guise of "our job is to cure not kill," do not want to give up their control?

A key hospice and palliative focus is on patient values. Thus another question is: For a person making a decision in accordance with their personal value system that includes assisted suicide, should we not honor this decision?

How society deals with these issues may have a profound personal effect on what medical help you can or cannot count on when you go to "cash in your chips." When you go to "buy the farm," will the deed be free and clear or come with a lot of conditions?

Tune in!

Will the focus be on the latest events in Oregon? Brittany wanted to be public in her decision and actions. Will her videos help or hinder her cause in the long run?

Should each state decide? Brittany had to move from California to Oregon.

Will you have a choice in your end-of-life care? How much choice do you want? If assisted suicide is not an option, are the reasons valid?

Does the data from current experience really validate the "slippery slope" theory stating that people with non-terminal diseases such as depression will seek assisted suicide?

For the few with intractable suffering and pain who need "terminal sedation," would not termination be better?

You might want to check out the Frontline documentary "The Suicide Plan," (August 22, 2014) and many other You Tube offerings before you watch the debate.

Finally, I believe we are using the wrong terminology. "Assist in dying" or AID may more closely describe what is occurring and it certainly might be a less charged phrase than assisted suicide.

The winner in this life and death debate has the potential to be you.

[You're invited to make comments here.](#)

Please scroll down for more.

SHOULD WE GENETICALLY MODIFY FOOD?

Plenty to Chew On



DEBATE DETAILS

Wednesday, December 03
New York, NY

 <p>FOR Robert Fraley Executive VP & Chief Technology Officer, Monsanto</p>	 <p>AGAINST Charles Benbrook Research Professor, Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources</p>
 <p>AGAINST Margaret Mellon Science Policy Consultant & Fmr. Senior Scientist, Union of Concerned Scientists</p>	 <p>FOR Alison Van Eenennaam Genomics and Biotechnology Researcher, UC Davis</p>



Y'62 PREVIEW by Jonathan Ater

I live in Oregon, where we have just voted on Measure 92, which would require labeling of most foods containing genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. Three weeks after the election, the vote count finally was completed. The measure was defeated by 809 votes- 50.03% to 49.97%. There will be an automatic recount.

This has been by far the most expensive ballot measure in Oregon history. Together, the two sides spent at least \$29 million to influence about 1.5 million voters, about \$19 per voter. Almost all of this money came from non-Oregonians. Oregon is just a battleground in a still-developing larger national referendum. The proponents - mostly wealthy individuals - spent about \$8 million. The opponents - mostly large food and biotech companies - spent about \$21 million. These are large sums, but even they represent only a fraction of the human energy and money being spent on GMO politics.

Also in November, Colorado voters rejected an almost identical ballot measure by a 2-1 margin. In earlier years, voters in Washington and California rejected similar ballot measures requiring GMO labeling - in each case also after hugely expensive political campaigns.

The closeness of the Oregon vote is either an outlier or a bellwether. Despite those "no" votes it is possible that public opinion about GMO foods is changing, as it has with other issues like gay marriage and legalization of marijuana.

Indeed, folks concerned with beating back genetically modified organisms have achieved some notable victories in the last few months:

- The Vermont legislature has approved a GMO-labeling measure to take effect in 2016.
- Voters in Maui voted on Election Day to ban the use of GMO crops in Maui, pending further testing. (Monsanto spent \$8 million to oppose the measure and has now filed suit to block implementation.).
- By a 60 percent margin, voters in Humboldt County, California voted on Election Day to ban outright the production of GMO crops.
- Monsanto since the election agreed to pay more than \$2.5 million to settle claims made by Oregon wheat farmers whose fields were contaminated by an experimental GMO variety, causing Asian buyers to reject the crop.

From my perspective as a concerned citizen who has just weathered an onslaught of Measure 92 campaign advertising, I am still confused about the pros and cons of GMOs. In Oregon, the issues were framed as "right to know" vs. "food will cost more." These concepts oversimplify and likely distort the questions which ought to be part of society's public policy discussion. The matter is far from clear and public opinion not only divided, but likely uninformed.

What in the world is this expensive political fight all about? It is good that the Intelligence Squared Debate on December 3 will address some of the important questions, such as:

- Many reputable organizations, such as Consumers Union and the Union of Concerned Scientists, advocate labeling of GMO foods. More than 60 countries, including Japan, Australia, Russia, and the entire European Union, regulate GMOs, by banning or limiting them, or by some kind of labeling requirement. What is the basis for this strong opposition to GMOs? What is the "it" that consumers should know?
- Is this debate about food safety or agricultural policy or both?
- What do we really mean by the term "genetic modification"? Consider that Luther Burbank - generally revered by Americans - developed more than 800 strains and varieties of plants, including the Russet Burbank potato, now the world's most widely used potato in food processing. How and why is Burbank's work different from the recent announcement by the JR Simplot Company in Idaho that it has received USDA approval for a genetically modified potato which has been altered so that frying produces less of a chemical called acrylamide, which is suspected of causing cancer in people?
- How can we know what food products are safe? Is it possible that GMOs are inherently unsafe, or is this a case-by-case analysis? What about other food additives, such as

preservatives? How about the use of antibiotics in animals? What should consumers "know" about any of these things?

- If the issue is about the impact of GMOs on native plants, or about the increased use of pesticides, why is consumer labeling the appropriate response?
- Assuming that people have a "right to know" what they are eating, what is relevant knowledge? What is the risk of too much disclosure? Should labels read like a prospectus? How many of us read the labels that come with the drugs we take?
- Should labeling and farming regulation be addressed as a national issue, rather than state by state? Should Congress pass a bill preempting state regulation? Would federal preemption foreclose public discussion? Would it be contrary to our national history of states serving as laboratories for social change?
- Can and should food safety be tested and regulated in advance, similar to the regulation of pharmaceuticals?
- What are the potential unintended consequences of introducing GMOs into the food supply? How many times in our history have we heard that something is benign, only to discover that it is dangerous: DDT, tobacco, Thalidomide, Agent Orange?
- What about the environmental issues related to pesticide use and pollution? What happens as nature evolves and adapts in response to the introduction of GMO crops and animals? What if GMOs invade and even destroy indigenous plants and animals? How would we deal with new generations of pests, which adapt to GMO crops or become resistant to pesticides? How is any of this different from evolution and extinction as natural processes?
- Modern agriculture now has the capacity to feed the world - although our economic and distribution systems do not achieve the potential. Is industrial farming good or bad for the planet? Is it sustainable over time? Should we revert to local and organic farming practices across the planet? How would that function in an increasingly urban world?
- How will humans develop and produce crops and animals which can survive climate change? How do we promote innovation? Are GMOs part of the solution or part of the problem?

Thanks to our classmate, Bob Rosenkranz, for sponsoring this Intelligence Squared US debate on such an important issue. [Tune in here](#) at any time to comment on Jonathan's preview and to watch the replay. The comments area is still open for your thoughts.

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