

letters

Bills...

His Eminence Seyd Mahmoud Taleghani, Muslim Scholar, prominent Iranian leader died of heart failure at the age of 75, on Sept. 10, 1979.

He was the head of Revolutionary Council of Iran, and also he was an elected member of parliament for approval of new constitution of Iran. We can say that he had a special place in the heart of every Iranian.



During his life he fought for human rights, freedom and justice. In his fight for freedom, he was facing an oppressive regime for more than 50 years.

Atallah Taleghani continued his struggle against the regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, too. He was imprisoned again and again, and more than one-third of his life was spent in jail.

He is one of the pioneers of the Islamic Renaissance. In his fight for freedom and justice, he believed in Islam, not only as a religion, but also as an ideology and a base for the freedom of oppressed people.

He was a distinguished writer and speaker and by his teachings, he illuminated the road of freedom and justice, which is not going to be diminished even after his death. And he almost reached his goal.

Iranian Muslim Student Association

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What extra-curricular activities were they involved in? How did they do in their personal interviews? What did their teachers think of them? What social and economic handicaps did they overcome to get where they are?

Depending on the answers to these questions, one applicant might be admitted while another with an identical test score might be rejected.

If the Gibbons bill is cotton candy, the other proposal—introduced by Reps. Ted Weiss (D/L-N.Y.), Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.) and George Miller (D-Calif.)—is legislative hoarhound: strong, bitter stuff that doesn't cure anything.

Like the recently enacted New York law, the Weiss bill would make it possible for test-takers to obtain copies of the test, complete with their own answer sheets and the official correct answers. And to what end?

"The interests of the students must be protected," Chisholm replies. She acknowledges that the bill she co-sponsors "would have no impact on test content or on cultural bias," but believes it could "be a vehicle for beginning a comprehensive dialogue on standardized testing."

Such a dialogue could be useful, but it is hard to see the contribution to be made by a law requiring disclosure of tests and answers, since such a breach of test security would mean the scrapping of a test after a single administration.

"The indications are that, over a period of years, certain test-takers tend to be weak in certain subject areas, but they don't know which areas," Chisholm explained, "and not knowing could affect their future. Why conceal it?"

The test-makers have a ready answer: The construction of standardized tests is a long and sophisticated process whose cost is justified by the fact that a particular test can be used for a number of years. But once a test is made public, it can no longer be used. As a result, new tests would have to be generated at least once a year.

Sponsors of the legislation clearly believe that the public release of tests and answers could help to spotlight culturally biased test items. In fact, the opposite might be truer.

"Question development is an exceedingly painstaking, 18-to-24-month process, with many checkpoints for assessing the accuracy and relevance of each item, involving repeated trials with students and reviews by... faculty," John A.D. Cooper, president of the Association of American Medical Colleges, has pointed out.

"Questions are discarded or modified if they fail to meet necessary standards. All are pretested (for culture bias among other things) in one administration of the

exam before they are counted in any examination score." This pretesting and validation would largely be eliminated by the disclosure requirement of the Weiss bill, he believes.

Test-makers insist, as well, that the necessity of making new tests every year would inevitably drive up the cost of the tests. Chisholm is unmoved.

"People's lives are more important than cost," she says. "Of course it will cost a little bit more, but we have to come up with tools to give (unsuccessful test-takers) a second and third chance, to prepare them for the exams."

But since publication of any particular test would lead to its immediate retirement, the corrected exams would be helpful only in the same generalized way as the test study guides already available.

Indeed, as Diane Ravitch of Teachers College, Columbia University, had pointed out, the major benefit of test-answer publication would accrue not to those who fail the tests but to those who sell test-taking assistance.

"It will create a bonanza for private tutoring services, which would have actual tests as teaching tools, not just their own inventions," she said. "This will increase the advantage of those who can afford to pay for coaching."

And, she might have added, it won't do anything at all for those the legislation is intended to help.

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