

# Technology advances military, not handicapped

Dear Edward Roberts: The other night I heard you interviewed on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" on the subject of technological breakthroughs for the handicapped. It turned out that you have been paralyzed from the neck down since you got polio at the age of 14 and now you want a device that would let you write with the aid of a computer. It costs \$20,000.



**Richard Cohen**

What was amazing to me, Roberts, is that you mentioned this device almost in passing — it and mechanized wheelchairs and that sort of thing. The program was not about the lack of money for these devices, but just about the devices themselves and how important they are to the handicapped. The writing device could enrich your life. Too bad you don't have the money for it.

I listened, Roberts, and I got mad. Not at you, mind you, but at us. I could not believe you were

so mild-mannered. I would have been angry. I would have wondered about a nation that could spend \$4 billion for MX missiles, \$8.2 billion for B1 bombers and \$4.7 billion for Trident submarines and missiles and could not, under any program, come up with \$20,000 to enrich a single life. There's something wrong here, Roberts, something awfully wrong.

Of course, you're not alone. There's no money for a lot of worthwhile things. There is less money for food stamps, welfare, college aid and even drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers. There's no money to save some poor farmer's farm and nothing to train unemployed steelworkers. Not a cent for Legal Services, mass-transit subsidies and the Job Corps. It seems that the wealth of the country is going into the military and the debt payment. Since 1982, the administration has spent over \$1 trillion for the Pentagon.

Oh, Roberts, it's morning again in America. Don't you know it? Can you lift your head to see the sun? On the program, you mentioned what a difference the mechanized wheelchair had made to you: "All of a sudden, I could turn and see who had come in the door." Until that moment, I

could not imagine such disability and how something as seemingly prosaic as a mechanized wheelchair could make such a difference. Turn around Roberts and see the sun.

You know Roberts that if you talk this way people will think you're some sort of bleeding heart. Compassion is out — like calling women Ms. It's as if compassion was trendy or something and now the nation (knock on wood) has found itself and returned to old, basic values. Denmark would give you your writing device. Maybe some other countries would, too. Not here. We're back to basics here. Want a missile, you can have a missile. Want to make a life for yourself, too bad.

There's something terribly wrong here, Roberts. Every time I pick up the paper, I'm told that the economy is booming. Inflation is down and the gross national product is up and the dollar is as high as the proverbial kite. Corporations are reporting record profits and everyone is having what used to be called a good year. The president says that everything is as good as it could be — could not, in fact, be better — and yet we have to tighten our belts. Austerity, austerity. There is much we cannot

afford. Your writing device, unfortunately, is one of those things. Tough luck, Roberts.

And to tell you the truth, Roberts, I'm doing pretty well myself. My income goes up and my tax rate goes down and I could really afford to pay more taxes, only no one asks for it. I think I'm supposed to save my money so that others can invest it or I'm supposed to spend it to keep the economy cooking. I'm not sure which, so I'm doing both. What a patriot I am — me and all the people like me. Through taxes we could keep you in prosthetic devices for the rest of your life — no sweat. But for some reason, we won't. Blame it on the deficit.

Roberts, this is some sort of cruel joke. The richest nation in the world cannot afford the most meager of social programs. We waste people and lives, but gag at the thought of doing the same with a dollar. By lowering taxes and giving the Pentagon what it wants, we've created a false fiscal crisis. There could be money for you, Roberts, but the president has made sure that there isn't.

It's a cold morning, this administration has given you, Roberts. You can't even write a letter of protest.

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## Letters

### Political beliefs

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If one wishes to wield his political power, he should do so through the proper channels that our government provides, and failing in that they should take advantage of the opportunity of free speech as I am doing now. (Although I wonder how long freedom of speech will exist in this country, since my friends were not allowed to exercise this right).

I hope the attackers' fellow conservatives would be as outraged as I was to learn of these nihilistic tactics.

Furthermore I urge anyone, whether conservative or liberal, who meets with this kind of abuse to get the names or descriptions of their attackers and report the incident to the police and press charges.

Don't be bullied into submission by those

persons too ignorant to even perceive the principles our country upholds.

Cynthia Munger  
senior  
theater

### American consumers pay for 'nationalized medicine'

Merely comparing one flawed system with another is no way to justify the American Medical system. Nobody, least of all myself, would claim that the British National Health Service is perfect by any means, lacking as it so clearly does sufficient funding or sensible labor union practices. Since the subject of the NHS was mentioned, however, I should point out that this system brought you the bodyscanner (computer-aided tomography), test tube babies

and led the way in the development of prostheses and other bioengineering feats. Sweden is developing the world's first bionic arm that uses nerves to activate arm functions. Clearly, therefore, the technology is not lacking purely due to a different method of financing — only money and management skills.

As far as heart transplants are concerned, to my knowledge few patients have been under 55. We should not get bogged down, however, with detailed specifics of two systems. There are more than two alternative solutions.

One question I am often asked is: who will pay for "nationalized medicine?" My answer is a question also: who is paying for your system? The answer to both questions is the same: "You are." In the first case, through taxes, and in the second, via insurance companies. The difference is that insurance companies make a profit, while the government, supposedly, does not. Who ever

heard of an insurance company being short of money? Thus, by tolerating these intermediaries you, as health care consumers are paying not only for your health care, but also for the salesmen, overheads and profits of the insurance companies and the voluminous paperwork that this generates. Notice that all this does not mean that doctors have to stop earning the fabulous salaries that they are so notorious for (viewed through European eyes, where few doctors earn more than \$80,000). If nothing else was changed than the method of collecting your money, the effect would save the undisclosed proportion of your money swallowed up by the insurance companies, and secondly make equal health care available to all.

Richard Andrews-Koryta  
graduate student  
mechanical engineering

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