

Editorial & Comment



Our opinion

14th Amendment is too important to be repealed

The Founding Fathers intentionally made it difficult to change the U.S. Constitution. Proposed amendments require approval by two-thirds of both the House and Senate and their adoption requires ratification by three-fourths of the states. Thus, the Constitution is rarely amended, only 27 times since 1789.

Nonetheless, a growing group of influential Republican lawmakers, GOP Senate whip Jon Kyl of Arizona and Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, to name two, are saying the 14th Amendment should be repealed or rewritten. The idea was given greater credence last week when Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said, "that's something we clearly need to look at."

The 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868 to clean up some of the legal mess left by the Civil War. The amendment has five sections, some of them now archaic — the federal government was not responsible for debts incurred by the Confederacy in the course of the Civil War and former slaveholders would not be compensated for the emancipation of their slaves.

It is Section 1 that preoccupies some Republicans. That section states that "all people born or naturalized in the United States" are citizens of the United States. The section also guarantees to all people "the equal protection of the laws."

Constitutional historian Richard Beeman writes in his newly issued Penguin Guide to the Constitution: "Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching amendment to the Constitution, the Fourteenth Amendment is viewed by many scholars and jurists as the provision of the Constitution that has brought the principles enunciated in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence into the realm of constitutional law."

In other words, equality, life, liberty, property and pursuit of happiness were now constitutionally protected rights.

Repealing the right to equal protection of the laws does not seem like particularly smart politics, but the proponents of repeal are after the clause that makes all people born in the U.S. citizens of the United States. Absent that protection we can deport the U.S.-born children of illegal immigrants along with their parents.

There are anecdotal tales of rings that, for a large fee, bring pregnant women to the U.S. so their

YouthBuild programs change lives

I believe that most people will agree with me when I say that San Angelo is a great place to raise a family. Over the past five years, however, I have witnessed some negative trends involving our city's young people.

In 2008, more than 22 percent of San Angelo's children lived in families with incomes below the official federal poverty threshold. In 2007, the pregnancy rate for teens was 25.5 pregnancies per 1,000 women between the ages of 13-17. In 2007, the arrest rate of children between the ages of 10-17 for a violent act increased by 66 percent from 2005. In 2008, more than 25 percent of the San Angelo Independent School District's dropouts were economically disadvantaged students.

Alarmed by these statistics, I agreed to chair the Concho Valley YouthBuild Advisory Board. CVYB, a subsidiary of Rebuilding Together San Angelo, is a nonprofit full-time youth and community development program that will help neighborhoods attain the resources to strengthen their capacity to build and manage housing for their residents, educate and inspire their youth, prevent crime, create leadership for the future, and generally take responsibility for their neighborhoods.

To do this, CVYB will provide education, counseling and construction job skills to our unemployed young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who have not completed their high school education and may have had experience with foster care, the juvenile justice system, welfare and homelessness.



LAURENCE F. JONES
GUEST
COLUMNIST

The program's multidisciplinary approach will merge academic coursework with hands-on construction and housing rehabilitation. CVYB will show young people how to build new homes for people in need and new lives for themselves. Interestingly, many of the homes that they will build or renovate will be in their own neighborhoods.

A viable CVYB will help all of us. The program's strong emphasis on education, community service and leadership development will enhance each participant's economic self-sufficiency and self-esteem by providing them with opportunities for meaningful work and service to our local communities.

CVYB will help low-income individuals and families by expanding the supply of permanent affordable housing in their neighborhoods. CVYB will also enhance our local economy. The Concho Valley Workforce Development Board, for example, estimates that the program will directly lead to 39 new jobs and a direct economic effect of more than \$1.1 million on our local communities by the end of its second year of operation.

I am optimistic that CVYB will expand the capacity of San Angelo to advance our community's

YOUTHBUILD DEMOGRAPHICS

GENERAL

There are now 273 YouthBuild programs in 45 states, Washington, DC, and the Virgin Islands. 92,000 YouthBuild students have built 19,000 units of affordable, increasingly green, housing units since 1994.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

Male	72%
Female	28%

Race

African American	49%
White	22%
Latino	21%
Native American	3%
Asian American	2%
Other	2%

Statistics

Adjudicated	41%
Convicted of a felony	13%
On public assistance at entrance	24%
In public housing at entrance	12%
Are Parents	21%
Average age (in years) at entrance	19.0
Without GED/diploma at entrance	92%
Average reading level (grade) at entrance	7.4

OUTCOMES

Attendance	78%
Completed program	64%
Placement of Completers in jobs or further education	69%
Average wage after program	\$9.09
Received GED or diploma (of those needing either)	53%

Number of students: 17,326 (2005-2009)

Source: YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network. Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding. (<http://www.youthbuild.org>)

quality of life. Plenty of studies show that strong families, engagement in school, encouraging friends and a safe environment make a difference for youth. Community actions and collaborations, not just individuals and agencies, create these qualities of life and spread them throughout the community.

As a community, however, we must work together to transform common perceptions of at-risk youth from social burdens to untapped resources by showing our strong support and interest in CVYB, financially and otherwise. For example, we can pro-

mote in-school dialogues and use other community venues to learn about the needs of local at-risk and out-of-school youth.

Together we can spread the word about the critical need for, and benefits of, alternative education programs such as CVYB. We must work to strengthen local partnerships that seek to refocus our attention on our young people and continue to make San Angelo a great place to raise a family.

Laurence F. Jones is a political science professor at Angelo State University and project director of the Community Development Initiatives.