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Distinguished economist next in Bryan Series

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Next week, Robert Reich will speak for the Bryan Series on the defining challenge of our time. Most Guilford students, and most Americans, probably cannot identify that challenge.

“When does inequality become such a problem for the country that the middle class no longer has enough purchasing

power to get the economy out of first gear?” asked Reich in a video message he sent to Guilford about his upcoming talk.

“A problem large enough that our democracy is basically taken over by big money, leaving the rest of us without much of a voice? Are we in danger of reaching that point, and, if so, what do we do about it?”

Reich is an economist with a knack for making economics come alive. Both during

and after his time as secretary of labor for the Clinton administration, Reich vocally denounced the growing inequality between the rich and the poor as the cause of the country’s current state. Others, including the current president, have acknowledged this inequality as our defining challenge.

“(Reich) has become quite a champion for this whole matter of income inequality,” said Associate Vice President of Communications and Marketing Ty Buckner, one of the people overseeing the Bryan Series. “We committed to bringing him well over a year ago, but knew that the topic would be timely, even now. It’s a problem that’s not going away, certainly not very quickly.”

Reich has wanted to come to Guilford for years.

“I’ve admired its Quaker and liberal arts tradition, (its) ethic of preparing men and women for constructive action dedicated to the betterment of the world,” said Reich in a phone interview with *The Guilfordian*.

Admission to the lecture is free for Guilford students. Many students jumped at the chance to learn more about Reich’s work and his approach to the topic.

“I look forward to hearing Reich talk about how income inequality undermines democracy, one of the most foundational aspect of our country,” said sophomore Devon Murphy-Anderson in an email interview.

Others know less about Reich, but still expect to learn from his talk.

“No matter what people’s beliefs are, it’s good to be open,” said first-year Dani Gottbrecht. “If he has ideas on improving the economy, or America as a whole, I’m very open to hearing them.”

Associate Professor of Political

Science Ken Gilmore is writing a book about inequality for a class he teaches. Each semester, Gilmore shows his class “Inequality for All,” Reich’s documentary about the implications of what happens when income and opportunity exist for Americans in unequal portions.

“(Reich’s message) ties in with the ethos of (Guilford),” said Gilmore. “Why does a college exist if not to give people the opportunity for success?”

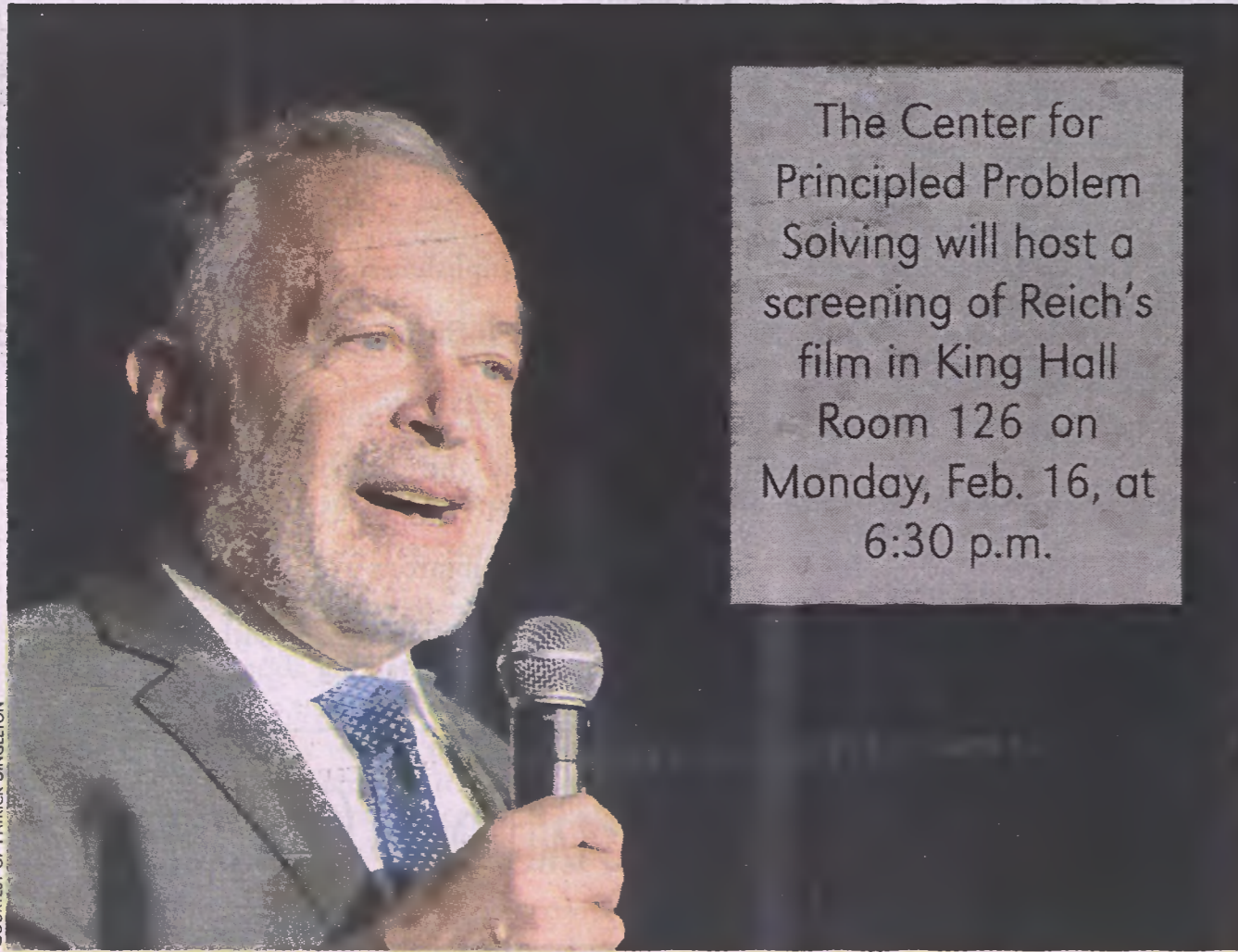
Reich currently teaches as a professor at University of California, Berkeley. He was voted one of the most effective cabinet members of the twentieth century when he served under Bill Clinton. He has often appeared on *The Daily Show*, NPR and many other programs. His movie, “Inequality for All,” is on Netflix, iTunes and DVD.

The Bryan Series focuses on finding distinguished speakers such as Reich to visit Guilford, so that community members can learn from them.

“We look for different factors,” said Associate Director of the Bryan Series Suzanne Ingram. “They need to provide a good message and be substantive. (He) has a message for the world, pretty much.”

The lecture will take place at 7:30 p.m., Feb. 17, at Greensboro Coliseum Complex. Tickets for students are free, but all student tickets available ahead of time are sold out. A limited number will be available at the door. Reich will also be part of a student discussion on campus at 4 p.m. the day of the event for students who have signed up.

In anticipation of his visit, Chair and Professor of Economics Bob Williams will give a talk about inequality on Sunday, 3:30 p.m., and the Center for Principled Problem Solving will screen his movie.



Robert Reich will address the issue of inequality in the U.S. during his Bryan Series talk on Feb. 17.

SALAITA

Content, venue of Salaita’s visit started conversations

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“The basics are that instructors and students won’t face recrimination, administrative recrimination or state recrimination for articulating positions that others find unlikeable for whatever reason or for performing unorthodox research that maybe shakes up the status quo a little bit,” said Salaita in his lecture.

According to Salaita, colleges need to be a safe place to push the envelope, but corporate interest and wealthy donors are gaining heavier influence over university governance.

“We don’t want boards of directors who exist traditionally to oversee the business end, not the academic end, of the university to interject themselves in hiring and firing positions,” said Salaita.

“Very few of them come from academic backgrounds in the first place. The majority of them come from the corporate world.”

One of the interferences Salaita referred to in his speech was Guilford’s own decision to move the lecture from the original location in Bryan Jr. Auditorium, located in Frank Family Science Center.

Guilford received a request from a member of the Frank family to hold the event in a different building out of respect for their parents, who are Jewish.

“I feel a little disappointed that the venue was moved,” said Samir Hazboun ’14. “The message I got from that movement was that if you have a lot of money, you are more valuable than someone who doesn’t have a lot of money.”

President Jane Fernandes disputes the claims that there was pressure on the College to move the talk.

“The donor did not put me under any pressure,” said Fernandes. “It would be different if they had been demanding or threatening, but that was not the case.”

Fernandes adds that she would never cave to pressure from a donor about what is taught at Guilford. She affirms she made the decision to move the event only after consulting with the event organizers to check the possibility of finding a new venue to ensure the event could still take place as planned.

“If they wanted to move it, if they didn’t want to have it there, I had no issue with it,” said senior Josh Weil. “I have absolutely no problem with the fact that this family stood up for what they believe in, just like (Salaita) stood up for what he believes in.”

Weil supports the idea of academic freedom, but wonders at what point someone’s freedom of speech limits others’ ability to learn in a comfortable environment: a problem that, Weil asserts, Guilford struggles with.

“This is not a place that I feel is friendly towards Jews,”



On Feb. 3, Steven Salaita addressed Guilford College in the library’s Carnegie room after the Frank family asked his talk be moved.

said Weil. “This is not a place that (fosters) open dialogue. It takes Jewish voices and makes them feel like they can’t give their opinion.”

Others disagree with Weil’s assertion that Guilford’s atmosphere disadvantages Jewish students.

“You have Students for Justice in Palestine and Palestinian students talking about real facts, talking about the apartheid in Palestine,” said junior Walid Mosarsaa. “(You) have backlash against them and people calling them anti-Semitic, left and right, based on people feeling uncomfortable with the political reality of the situation. And that just shows you the dynamics of power here at Guilford.”

For a college population like Guilford’s with personal interest in both sides of the matter, creating open dialogue is especially important.

“In the area of comfort and discomfort, that’s a discourse we hear on campus quite a bit,” said Max Carter, director of the Friends Center and adjunct professor of religious studies. “Talk about Israel/Palestine and the position of some speakers we have here, we are told, makes some students uncomfortable, makes them feel emotionally unsafe. That is a diversionary tactic.”

“It takes attention away from the core issue – how do we address a conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people?”

“What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist” – Salman Rushdie

Guilford: Do we want our donor’s money if they go against our core values?

Before Salaita’s talk began, members from Students for Justice in Palestine placed quotes and some of Salaita’s tweets on the walls of Frank in protest of the event’s building change.