

Current Controversy

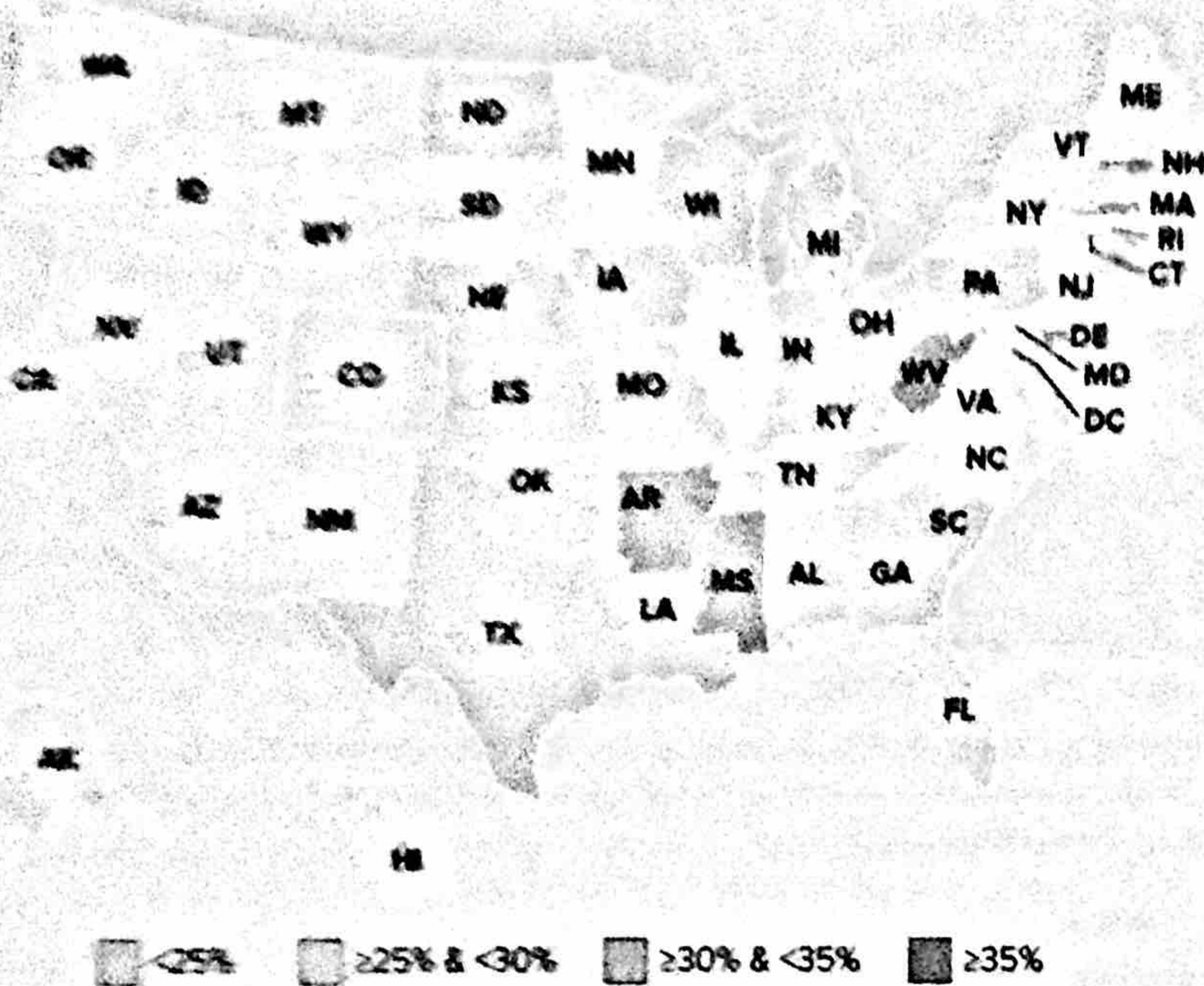
Too Fat to Fly: Civil Liberties or Civil Rights?

A recent study in 2010 revealed a concerning fact that may have a much deeper meaning for our society than it would

first appear. Kevin Smith, the director of the Bruce Willis movie *Crash Out* as well as *Clerk* and *Chasing Amy*, was thrown off a Southwest Airlines flight for being too fat. He had actually booked and paid for two seats on a later flight but moved as a standby passenger to an earlier

flight that had only one available seat. The airline has a policy that requires travelers to be able to fit safely and comfortably in one seat. It uses the armrest test that requires customers who cannot lower both armrests to buy an extra seat. After he had taken his seat, Smith was told he was a safety risk because the cramped conditions could jeopardize a quick exit from the plane in case of an emergency.

2014 Adult Obesity Rates



Obesity is clearly an American health problem that spans the nation.
 Source: *The State of Obesity*. A Project of the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, September 2015.

On his Twitter account, Smith wrote: "I broke no regulation, offered no safety risk (what, was I gonna roll on a fellow passenger?). I was wrongly ejected from the flight." He later tweeted, "The @ Southwest Air Line. How it works, you're publicly shamed into a slimmer figure. Crying the weight off has never been easier."

Other airlines such as Continental, Air France, and United have similar policies. United invoked its policy in 2008 after receiving complaints from seven hundred passengers whose seatmates did not fit into a single seat. Mark Sweeting, a frequent flier from Portland, Oregon, expresses what he and passengers like him experience: "I fly coast to coast several times a year, and I cannot tell you how many times I have been pinned in by a morbidly obese human."

The Right to Die

Longer life expectancies, and modern medicine's ability to prolong the life of terminally ill or comatose patients, have increased Americans' concern with issues regarding the right to die. The Court has ruled that individuals have a constitutional right to die that is derived from their constitutional right to privacy.¹²⁰ The problem occurs when patients have not made clear their wishes in a living will. In such situations, family members may disagree as to the patient's wishes, and in the most unusual of situations, politicians may get involved for a variety of altruistic and self-serving reasons. Such was the case in 2005 of Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman who had been in a vegetative state for over a decade when her husband went to court to have her feeding tube removed. Her parents opposed this decision and asked for custody. Before doctors eventually removed the feeding tube, the Florida state legislature, the Florida governor, Congress, and the president of the United States all attempted to intervene in this most private family issue.

Although the Court defends the right to die, it has not given its approval to assisted suicide. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Washington v. Glucksberg* (1997) that no right to assisted suicide exists in the Constitution. Michigan physician Jack Kevorkian brought sympathetic national attention to the issue by helping terminally ill patients kill