

EDITORIAL

SAFETY FIRST FOR SPRING BREAK

Each year, in the week following spring break, *The Battalion's* news reporters all too often have the unenviable task to cover at least one story about an A&M student's death during the vacation. Most of these deaths are due to traffic accidents, but a wide variety of accidents have occurred in previous years, making it painfully obvious to our community that while spring break can, and should, be a festive occasion, students must protect both themselves and their friends during spring break.

The Battalion urges all students, whether they are visiting the beaches of south Florida or relaxing around the Bryan-College Station area, to be aware of their safety. Students should take advantage of the free time spring break offers, but we hope that all Aggies will take care and return safely to Aggieland.

THE BATTALION

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The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebatt.com

Ashes to ashes . . .

Crematoriums need government regulation



ANDI BACA

Americans were shocked to hear that more than 200 bodies were found in Nobel, Ga., at the Tri-State Crematorium hidden in garages, tool sheds and septic tanks. CNN confirmed that the operator, Ray Marsh, was arrested and charged with theft by deception. Friends and families were devastated by the realization that they did not receive their loved one's ashes. This instance is clearly a result of the lack of regulations and laws regulating crematoriums.

The popularity of cremations has grown considerably over the years. According to *USA Today*, the number of cremations performed grew from 5,000 to 400,000 in a decade. Cremations are more affordable than the average funeral and burial costs, and provide families a personal way to say good-bye, whether through spreading the ashes or burying them in a special place. The sentimental value of a deceased's ashes is immeasurable, however that feeling is not the same if someone questions the contents of their urn.

Crematoriums do not have the right to offer a service to the public and not follow through. Instances like this are not limited to what happened in Georgia. *USA Today* reported several cases in which families received concrete dust and potting soil instead of their family member's ashes.

There is an obvious need to regulate crematoriums. *USA Today* said only 23 states enforce crematorium licensing. In states without any type of regulation, anyone can operate a crematorium. States that have laws do little to enforce them and offer few consequences to perpetrators, so crematoriums have no incentive to abide by the laws. Several states require Environmental Protection Agency emissions regulation, but that is also ineffectively regulated. Crematoriums such as Tri-State, that deal with funeral homes rather than the public, are under even less regulation according to *USA Today*.

It seems the cremation business would be a self-regulating industry governed by the morals of its operators. Ray Marsh proved America wrong twice by selling wood chips and potting soil as human ashes and by disrespectfully leaving bodies strewn across his property. The news would have been easier to accept if Marsh had cremated or buried the bodies. *USA Today* reported that Tri-State charged \$200-\$1,500 for a cremation that would have only cost them \$25 to complete. Marsh would not have lost much money if he had cremated the bodies. His actions could have been changed by a law regulating crematoriums. Laws need to be created

and enforced to fill the void of immorality that people believe accompany this type of job. States simply need to enforce laws to give people a conscience.

Since the exposure of the Tri-State Crematorium, states have been working to impose reform. *USA Today* said Georgia proposed a law that would not allow crematorium operators to work without a license or state inspection. Georgia is also trying to widen the definition of what is considered mistreating the dead to include abandoning or throwing away a body intended for burial or cremation. According to *USA Today*, Florida and California are the only states that require crematorium

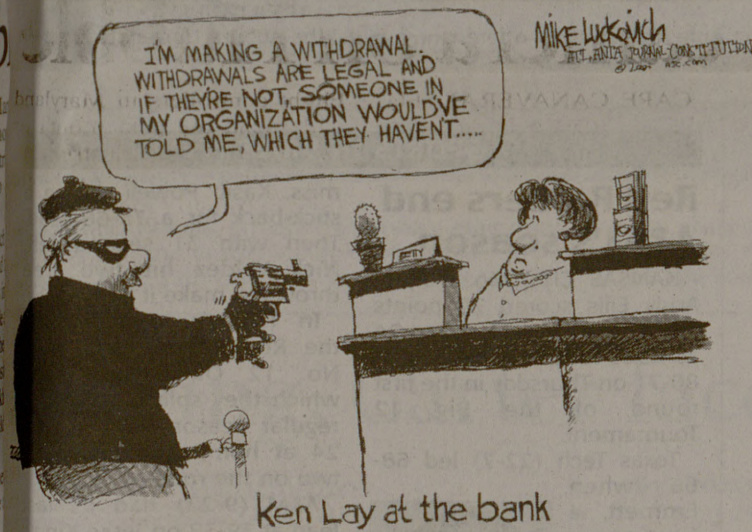
inspections. California also requires crematorium operators pass training programs. Other states are looking into tough regulations to avoid a Tri-State repeat.

It is disturbing that it took such a horrific event like what happened in Georgia to make it known that there should be regulations in the cremation business. Many families must deal with grief from re-opened wounds they thought had been closed. It is shocking to imagine that we need laws to protect those who have died and ensure they receive an honorable end.

Andi Baca is a senior journalism major.



RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION



Ken Lay at the bank

MAIL CALL

Jensen is a patriot

In response to a March 6 mail call:

Embedded in Jonathan Apgar's ignorant fulmination are the very reasons that America needs more people like Robert Jensen. Jensen's analysis offers a strong dose of fact to Apgar's benighted daydreaming.

Our government capriciously violates international law, has sponsored genocide in East Timor, Israeli-occupied territories and Vietnam (Nixon wanted to nuke Vietnam) among others, and leaves 40 million of its own citizens without medical insurance. We may not have public executions, but we hold more executions than all but four countries. A just military action?

In 1999, U.S. forces deliberately bombed a radio station in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, (claiming it spread propaganda and was therefore a military target) that was adjacent to a children's theater and a few minutes' walk from my father's old high school. Among the dead were hairdressers and cameramen. How just.

If Apgar thinks otherwise, his dispute on these issues is with reality, not Jensen. Jensen's poignant and informed analysis helps Americans decide how to make their government better; you cannot improve something without criticizing it first. Jensen has weathered plenty of ungrounded accusations like this

for providing this valuable service. In that sense, he's a true patriot.

Dimitrije Kostic graduate student

Informational behavior reasonable

In response to a March 7 mail call:

I do agree that some people don't have social manners, but it is not fair to be hard on the students who appear ill-prepared for informational meetings.

First of all, some students attend informational meetings right after lab, work and class, including physical education classes. It is not easy for them to change into something other than sandals, jeans, T-shirts and sweatshirts. As an engineering student, I do not hold a great deal of value to what is worn to an informational session. I believe that your interview is the important way to impress with your professionalism.

Secondly, recruiters were once college students themselves and know that food, especially free food, is good. That is why they provide it. I have no problem wolfing down three or four pieces of pizza because I am a starving animal and most of the time there is food left over.

Lindsay Clem Class of 2002

Office of Misinformation

The Bush administration's handling of the war on terrorism, while commendable thus far, narrowly avoided its first half-witted turn. In an effort to teach offending foreign nations some good old-fashioned American values, the Pentagon spent last month promoting its new Office of Strategic Influence, a group created with the sole intention of lying to other countries. The nostril-burning smell of hypocrisy is once again in the air.

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the new office would have placed false information with foreign news organizations. In theory, this would throw foolhardy nations off the U.S. scent, and they would be pawns for Americans to do with as they please.

These are the kind of stale ideas released for public consumption when old men run the country. In the six months since the terrorist attacks, the best thing the Pentagon can come up with is an official, coat-and-tie office of lying. This is truly a shame.

There are endless reasons why this is a horrendous idea, and the Pentagon did the right thing by "closing" the office and continuing the misinformation campaign covertly. The cat, however, is technically out of the bag. The existence of this office should never have been disclosed to the media, at home or abroad, because that clearly defeats the purpose of placing false information.

Global opinion of America, the very thing Rumsfeld claimed would benefit the most from the new office, has begun to suffer. Militant Muslims, who already consider America drunk on its own corruption and excess, surely regarded this as fuel for the fire.

But the toes of America's foes were not the only ones getting stepped on. The brief existence of this office disgusted friendly and unfriendly nations alike. Rumsfeld and his Pentagon cronies should have stuck merrily to dropping their propaganda leaflets over the mountains of Afghanistan.

Believe it or not, Rumsfeld, when America repeatedly starts deceiving other nations with misinformation, it is only a matter of time before these nations start dismissing everything America tells them as a lie. This is the exact opposite of what the United



GEORGE DEUTSCH

States should be trying to achieve in its much-ballyhooed war on terrorism. America has forever asserted its position as the world's moral watchdog, and it was dangerously close to devaluing this same position.

It already has been established that there is no need for this office. In all fairness, America has been lying to foreign nations for years without the aid of any official group, and this is where Rumsfeld and the Pentagon erred unforgivably.

The simple fact that the Pentagon alerted the news media to its plans, even though it was only here in the United States, totally defeated the original intent of the office. With the United States being the global news leader, this country would be naive to think other countries had no knowledge of this misinformation campaign. Did the Pentagon, supposedly composed of some of the greatest minds in this country, not think this through?

The last thing America needs is to give its blessing to any organization founded on deception and misinformation. How long would it have been before those outward lies turned inward? Face it: lying begets lying, and deceit begets deceit. Do not be fooled, the U.S. government is not above lying to its own people if it is considered to be in the people's "best interests."

There are benefits to legitimate tactical deception, but the Pentagon should have known better than to announce its plans for rampant lying to the story-starved U.S. media. America has irreversibly shot itself in the foot. Even at the announcement of the closing of the office, Rumsfeld was still ensuring supporters that "We will do those things . . . just in different offices." Sure, go ahead and reveal our military strategy to them, Rumsfeld.

America supposedly fights terrorism, communism and all the other social evils of the world to reach some utopian ideal of how this planet should be. It was foolish for America to announce the arrival of an office founded on lying and deception, because this corrupts the entire process. It is good that the Office of Strategic Influence has been closed, but the country's best move would have been never to open it.

George Deutsch is a junior journalism major.