



Taking sides:

Parental leave: a good bill or a political smokescreen?



STACY FEDUCIA
Columnist

Last week House Democrats attempted to force President Bush's hand on his pet issue of family values by forwarding the family leave bill to his desk, though supporters failed to muster the necessary votes to override his impending veto.

Despite the ominous cloud of politics that tarnishes the luster of this issue, the family leave bill provides American workers with the opportunity to personally care for loved ones without the fear of losing their jobs.

The bill requires private businesses of 50 employees or more to allow workers up to 12 weeks' unpaid leave in order to care for newborns, newly-adopted children, newly-placed foster children, and seriously ill relatives. The forward-thinking, though hotly-debated issue of family leave arrives at the intersection of the two most publicized issues of the presidential campaign: the economy and family values.

Economically speaking, the family leave program protects the jobs of those workers who might have been forced to quit in similar circumstances, possibly adding yet another name to the monolithic government assistance rolls. When compared to similar programs in other industrialized countries — some of which required mandatory paid leave, often in excess of three months — the House family leave bill eases the financial burden on business and industry, suffering from recessionary blues.

While opponents of the bill decry it as being "a death sentence to small businesses," the family leave bill actually affects only five percent of all employers. In addition, bipartisan proponents cite that family leave enjoys the support of up to 70% of the population.

At a time when the American family buckles under the weight of burgeoning health care costs, the opportunity to care for the sick and the young in the comforts of the home offers a sliver of hope and definite relief to those who cannot afford private nurses and country club doctors.

At a time when most working families shudder at the exorbitant costs and the paltry availability of good day care, family leave provides a modest salve by allowing mothers and fathers modest time to care for their own — at their own expense.

At a time when the American infant mortality rate shames the United States in the face of other modern, industrialized countries, family leave allows mothers at least a modicum of time to take care of themselves and their newborn children.

At a time when the American public grows weary of blame-laying allegations and mudslinging campaigns; when voters roll their eyes at political statements and press releases; when our confidence in the institutions which are supposedly of the people, by the people and for the people dwindles into oblivion, it is high time the politicos put politics aside and did something for American workers and American families. Family leave, family values? Maybe so.

Feducia is a senior English and history major

A peculiar habit — or disease? — of mind, perceiving some need or good of society, jumps to the conclusion that the State, via legislative fiat, calls them into existence. A recent example is the parental leave bill, just pinched off by the House in a fit of family values pique.

Parental leave is certainly a valuable and costly benefit. The argument is whether or not this benefit ought to be mandated by the State, and whether or not someone is entitled to such benefits at someone else's expense. It is not about whether parental leave is a desirable end per se.

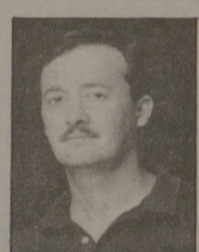
Indeed, parental leave is already offered in the labor market. Some 90% of corporations surveyed offered some kind of maternity leave. The two-thirds taking this leave had guaranteed reinstatement rights. A study of firms with 100+ employees found that 36% of full-time workers had parental leave access, which averaged 19 weeks. Some 75% of firms with 20+ employees have some form of family benefits. The market is a complex of wages and benefits negotiated between employer and employee: some 40% of employee compensation consists of benefits (hence a drop in wages and de rigueur hand wringing on the part of naifs).

Flexible, voluntary programs work better in the competitive atmosphere and narrow profit margins of U.S. markets. The most obvious effect of the bill would be less choice in available benefits and/or lower wages as firms reallocate costs to cover the bill's mandate. Some firms could raise prices, passing costs to consumers; marginal firms would fail. It would act as a barrier to smaller firms, as expanding employment to the point that they fall under the statute would be costly. It increases the cost of creating jobs. That the Western industrial world has similar laws is less than persuasive. The Western industrial world had almost no net job gains during the 1980's, in contrast to the United States.

Women would be more costly to employ (women are 10 times more likely to take leave than men), making it profitable to discriminate against them to the extent that it is legally possible. The long-term unemployment (12+ months) rate for women in the over-vaunted European Community is running at 53% (!) of all unemployed females, compared to 3.7% in the United States.

Finally, it is vindictively regressive, a sucker punch to the working-poor: a higher percentage of poor workers' income goes toward necessities. Most are incapable of taking unpaid leave. So, in the name of progress, Biff and Muffy can tool around in the Lexus with their new bundle, bonding and all that.

Simply demonstrating that parental leave is a good thing, an end, is no argument for the means by which it is to be obtained. The State cannot create, ex nihilo, these goods. Goods — benefits — are costly. A litany of the legislated benefits of, say, Italy, without any analysis of the tradeoffs is gross naivete.



MATTHEW DICKERSON
Columnist

Dickerson is a sophomore economics major

MAIL CALL

Some say it was midnight hell

My intense pride in what A&M stands for and in its remarkable student body has never faltered — until last Friday night.

Words cannot adequately express the shock, dismay and outrage I felt as I watched Aggies viciously attacking one another in the middle of Kyle Field. I stood, appalled and very embarrassed, among parents, incoming students, and visitors — all gaining their first impression of "Aggie Spirit." How do you convincingly explain that this is not commonplace or even remotely typical of A&M?

While I recognize that it is the responsibility of Corps units to guard the field, it is also their responsibility to do so in a mature, non-violent, humane manner. The over-aggressive response of some members served only to reinforce the provoking behavior of the offenders, while simultaneously enraging on-lookers, many of whom rushed to join the multitude already fighting on the field. No behavior warrants the violent, uncontrolled response of some of the Corps members and others. A Corps member who can not effectively deal with such a situation by leading the accosted student off the field (instead of losing their temper) should not be in any position of power. No "knightly gentleman" would ever act in the disgraceful manner displayed by some members of the Corps of Cadets Friday night.

Similarly, any student who cannot successfully perform the very simple task of respecting Kyle Field and those who guard it should remain in the stands where they belong. Yell Practice is not a showcase for those seeking attention or thrills. Yell Practice is one of the oldest, most unique traditions of Aggieland and Kyle Field is a memorial to those who died in World War I. Not only is it extremely inappropriate and disrespectful to gallivant across the field, it also exhibits immaturity and lack of character. Those individuals who did so need to get on with the business of learning what being an Aggie is all about. Being an Aggie includes respecting A&M traditions, behaving in a civilized manner, developing a strong sense of integrity, and treating others with the utmost respect. I certainly and fervently hope that the fiasco of Friday night is not repeated.

Susan May
Class of '92

We converged on Kyle Field at midnight Friday to lift up Aggie football and be lifted and inspired ourselves. Instead, as we entered the stadium we were not at all inspired or lifted up, but rather, torn down and dejected. We witnessed the violation of a memorial to World War I veterans by those who ran across Kyle Field as though it were a common playground. We witnessed the violation of our traditions by a small clique that stood in front of us with hats on, joking back and forth, while the true Twelfth Man practiced yells for the game. We witnessed the violation of Aggie brotherhood as our student leaders were belittled by the very people who should support them. We witnessed the violation of an individual's integrity as a drunk student

brought a girl to tears by yelling at her during the Spirit of Aggieland.

We refuse to accept what we saw Friday as the fate of Texas A&M and its traditions. We refuse to sit by and let the friendliest campus in the nation turn into just another place to go to class. The traditions and pride in A&M are what attracts so many to our university and we feel it is our obligation and duty to preserve the uniqueness and rich traditions for many future generations to love and enjoy. We simply ask if you are not here to get everything out of A&M, and give everything back, then please do not keep us from enjoying all the traditions and living the spirit of Aggieland every day of our lives.

Mark Stickney
Class of '93
accompanied by four signatures

Tradition and honor will see its undoing through a blind eye. Midnight yell practice on Friday was an atrocity. Strong Aggie tradition dedicates Kyle Field as a memorial to honor past generations of deceased Aggies. Running across the field is viewed as disrespectful to Aggie tradition. Many people ran across the field preceding yell practice with the intent of provoking members of the Corps into a chase; members of the Corps feel it is their duty to protect A&M traditions. Most of these "disrespectful" people were caught and dog-piled by hordes of Corps persons. However, instead of escorting the offenders off the field, members of the Corps repeatedly punched and kicked their victims. Attempting to walk off the field after being "punished," several individuals were tackled and pummeled again. One individual was staggering severely after suffering two attacks, while several others had trouble standing up after being pulverized into the ground. Some of the offenders tried to fight back and the situation worsened. Corps members stuck together. I watched one Corps member repeatedly strike a crouching individual in the face while another Corps member landed a blow to the side of the victim's head with his army boot.

As for the deceased Aggies being honored, I don't think they would feel any honor nor condone the behavior of those Corps members taking such violent actions. The disgrace of such practices goes against the fundamental directive and reason for the existence of the Corps of Cadets. Aggies fight to protect their country. They don't fight fellow Aggies. The traditions of Texas A&M are for the living, not the dead. Let us keep the spirit of Aggieland alive with honor before it's taken away in disgrace.

Jim Dobberful
Class of '93

The behavior of some members of the Corps of Cadets at Friday's midnight yell practice was beyond despicable, it was downright sickening. The Corps is an otherwise fine institution at A&M, commanding deserved respect all over the world. But that respect was tainted Friday by the actions of a few cadets spurred on by the crowd (not all of the crowd) and a warped sense of tradition. Now I think tradition has an important place here, so I realize that those people shouldn't have been out on the playing field. I also realize that it is the Corps' job to take them off of it — but there is something wrong with the mindset that encourages a C. T. to beat the daylight out of a fellow Aggie just because he (or she) flouts a tradition. Not all the cadets were doing this, of course; some were merely tackling people, then helping them off the field in what looked like a spirit of camaraderie. Others, however, were involved in blatant acts of violence which

had nothing whatsoever to do with respect for tradition, but rather with the idea that one's actions are excused by the mob. I mean, Ags, we need our priorities straight. Did it ever occur to any one of these people that no tradition is worth assaulting someone over? And please spare me the "sacredness of Kyle Field" speech. I agree that some things are truly sacred (the MSC, for instance), but a football field is not one of them. At least not to the point of hospitalizing another human being over it. In the interest of their own integrity, the Corps of Cadets should not hide these thugs under the guise of solidarity, but should bring them forward to face the assault charges they deserve.

Yuri Horner
Graduate student

National health care is no cure

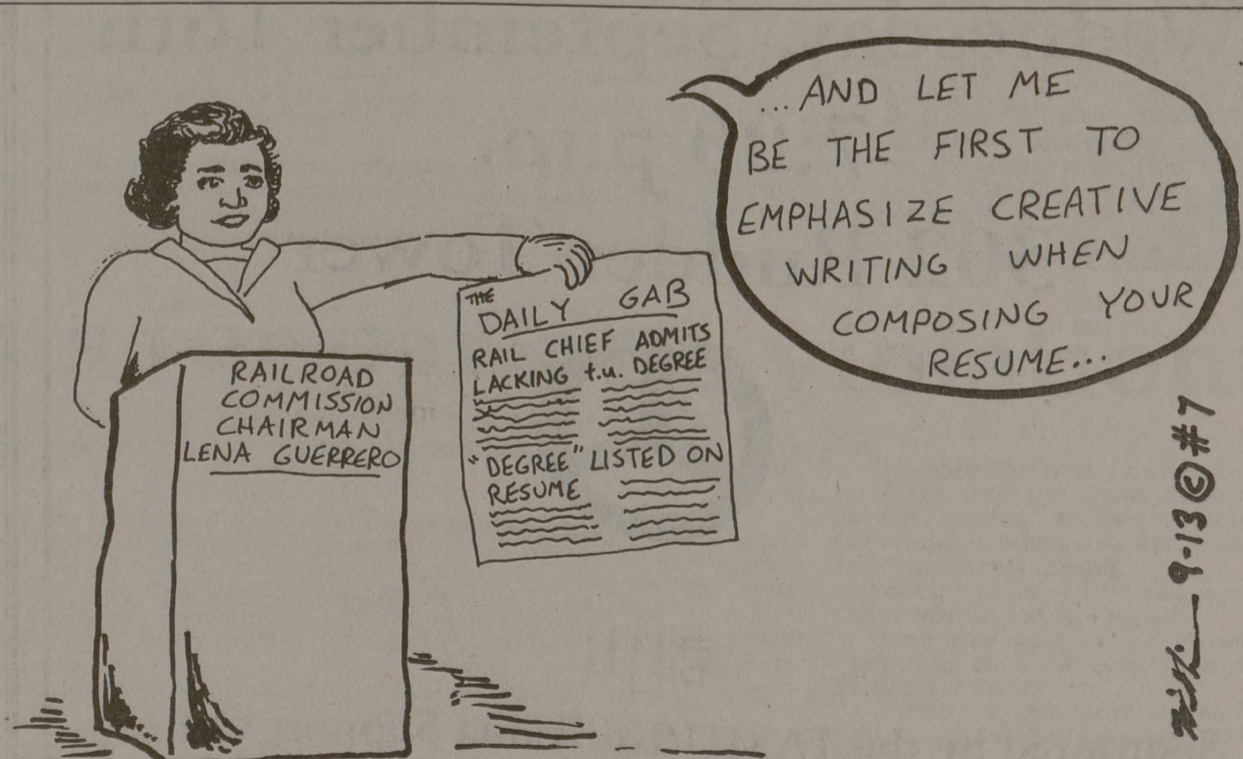
Mrs. Ralston gave us a beautiful picture of how the world should be in her column on health care. She claims that health care is a right, just like education, in this country. Unfortunately, we live in the real world, and not a fairy tale Utopia. She says that government should take on the responsibility of providing this health care. However, we all know how poorly our government runs the education system, not to mention our postal service and other inefficient and ineffective services. We cannot allow our government to run something as important as health care given this kind of track record. While socialized medicine can be made to sound good, it is not a realistic solution to the high cost of health care. To be certain, we have all seen socialized medicine at its best in the Quack Shack. Do we really want all of our doctor's office experiences to be like that?

Bruce Milbrath
Class of '93

Mrs. Ralston questions whether basic health care is a right. No man has the right to medical care by the simple principle that no man has the right to enslave another man for any purpose. If he cannot pay for what he needs, then he must depend on the charity of others. By demanding that the government develop a national health care plan, proponents of the idea depend on taxation for funding. They proclaim that altruistic service to the needy is man's duty, i.e., that it is the responsibility of every man to struggle and work to produce benefits for anyone but himself.

The governmental control of medical finances necessitates the enslavement of doctors. But proponents of national health care claim that the government would never attempt to control the doctors or their methods. With the example of Medicare and Medicaid in mind, let us see what has happened since their inception in 1965. The patients covered by these programs now no longer had to pay attention to cost. In 1952, medical expenditures in the United States were 4.3% of GNP; as of 1985 they were about 11% and still rising. The programs are moving toward bankruptcy. The government, in an effort to do something, decided to keep the programs but impose rigid controls on them. A set fee is now paid to hospitals depending only on the diagnosis. To stay financially sound, the hospital now needs to provide less services, and everyone under the program begins to suffer. Without more money from the government (from your earnings), the situation will continue to deteriorate.

Steve Hale
Class of '93



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