

## To err is human ...

Politicians, like the average citizen, should be forgiven for making mistakes, changing views

I don't know. I'm not sure. I never notice how most politicians avoid making either of these statements: "I'm the black ..."



DAVID LEE

Whether it be abortion, health care reform or the situation in Kosovo, politicians today have been forced into becoming now-it-all, rendering opinions that seem to be informed on every issue. Granted, this is how it should be. Politicians have the power to make laws in response to the issues, they are expected to be well informed. However, politicians are still human beings. It is amazing how people jump at the chance to criticize a politician if he or she is unsure about an issue from time to time.

How can a politician be expected to have an immediate opinion on every single issue? Furthermore, how can a politician be expected to stick to one position on a given issue for his or her entire lifetime?

Human beings are by nature indecisive; they readily changing their minds all the time. Whether people are contemplating the morality of abortion or deciding on what to order for lunch, people waffle on their opinions and decisions on a daily basis. Why should politicians be any different? Instead, politicians are forced to choosing sides right off the bat. Is it so wrong for a politician to stay neutral on an issue until they reach a final opinion? It defies logic.

This problem is exemplified in the plight of Gov. George W. Bush in regard to his campaign for the upcoming Republican presidential nomination. He may be the early front runner but as CNN Interactive (www.cnn.com) affectionately puts it, "Bush has adopted the Austin equivalent of the Rose Garden strategy: focus on Texas and avoid tricky national and international issues."

Such a strategy comes at a price, however, as Bush has become the whipping boy for many political pundits who label him a weak and indecisive candidate. Al Hunt, a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* calls Bush's vague statements on Kosovo "a model of obfuscation" and "tentative, tardy and indecisive."

Homosexuals have blasted Bush for his indifference on the subject of extending hate crime laws to protect gays.

Social conservatives claim Bush's vague anti-abortion stand is too soft even though Bush promises he would back a constitutional amendment to outlaw most abortions if more voters supported it. However, he makes it clear that "America is not ready to ban abortions."

Gary Bauer, a competitor for the Republican presidential nomination, criticizes this indecisive stand on abortion, "As leaders, our role must be to help shape public opinion, not



MICHAEL WAGENER/THE BATTALION

simply react to it."

In the midst of all this criticism, no one has bothered to ask the most obvious of questions. Could it be that Bush has not made up his mind? Is that so ridiculous a possibility?

Just because a politician has not made a concrete stand on a few issues does not necessarily

mean he is indecisive or weak. The average voter does not make a snap judgment on the issues; he or she has the right to ponder what their stand is all the way up to election day.

Why should politicians be robbed of that courtesy? Bush has never had to contemplate a large number of these issues in

his short political career at the state level, therefore it is unrealistic to expect him to have a concrete stand on all of them.

Of course he is not going to make a stand on something he is not sure of. Such a course of action would be foolish and dangerous. Yes, once crunch time arrives in 2000, Bush will

have to suck it up and deliver his stand on all of these issues. He owes every voter in America that much.

But until then, give the man a break and let him make up his mind.

David Lee is a sophomore general studies major.

## Effects of Jesus, Christianity positive for humanity, world

While Aggies will always battle the never-ending issue of tolerance, it is an indisputable fact that Christianity continues to change the world. As our calendars mark the turn of the new millennium, people are reminded that time itself is measured by the birth of Jesus Christ. Both believers and non-believers alike have been greatly changed by the impact and teachings Christ made almost 2000 years ago.

According to Newsweek, nearly one-third of the world's population claims to be Christian. This proves Jesus Christ's largest contribution has been Christianity itself.

Based on the very foundation of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ provided opportunity to receive eternal life in heaven. Christians believe the only way to heaven is through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17).

The belief that God became man to show the world how to live and then died for man to offer a cleansing of sin and the joy of eternal life became a welcomed new doctrine to conquer death.

Notre Dame theologian John Dunne said, "The idea is the Christian goes with Christ through death to everlasting life. Death becomes an event, like birth, that is lived through."

As the second most important commandment, Jesus also taught his followers to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:29-31). In the New Testament, Jesus is constantly in contact with the less fortunate of society.

Newsweek recently reported on the influence this commandment has had throughout the centuries and found during Roman times Christian compassion was shown to orphans, widows and the elderly. When Saint Lawrence was reportedly ordered by Roman authorities to reveal the church's treasures, he showed them the hungry and sick.

The same work can be seen in modern times through the life of Mother Teresa. It is also evident in both the Christian and secular world through thousands of charities and programs geared at caring and providing for the less fortunate.



CHRISTINA BARROWS

Jesus Christ's teachings on violence have also had a heavy influence on the world. Jesus counseled men to be peacemakers and "turn the other cheek" rather than strike back (Matthew 5:39). Newsweek reported that during the Roman time period after Christ's death there was an immediate reduction in barbaric deaths following the spread of the gospels.

This does not, however, mean things are where they should be as many wars are waged in Jesus' name. Still, people seem to recognize Christ's influence in this area as shown in Newsweek's recent poll which found the majority of people polled believe if there had never been a Jesus there would be more war, less charity and less happiness.

Christianity has also, sometimes to its own misfortune, changed laws. The "religious right," as it came to be known during the 1980 election, has prayerfully tried to seek reform. But conservative Christians have become increasingly discouraged as issues such as abortion and drugs continue to be largely unchanged by politics.

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Conservative Christian Cal Thomas explained in Newsweek that true believers are beginning to sense "that the kingdom of this world, which regularly demands compromise, cannot be reconciled to a kingdom not of this world that allows for no compromise."

For example, the Christian leaders that enforced Prohibition had the good intentions of combating alcoholism and drunkenness. Unfortunately, it effectively helped organized crime and created a much greater problem than the one it began fighting.

Thomas says the lesson from Prohibition is "by and large, the Christian mission should be to change hearts, not laws." Christian-based laws will have little benefit on society until people stop compromising their values.

But to a true believer in Christ, gaining of these moralistic ideals means very little. Christianity is about knowing Jesus more and everything is counted as a loss to the surpassing love of Christ (Phillipians 3:8).

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## Military personnel should heed orders, take all vaccinations

The threat of biological warfare is greater today than ever before. Currently, at least 10 countries the United States considers adversaries have the ability to produce biological weapons, and that is a startling fact in light of today's combat scenarios.

At the same time, there is a growing number of American military personnel refusing to take the anthrax vaccine and other vaccines before deployment to the trouble spots around the globe. The concern that the health threat of the vaccine is greater than the federal government has acknowledged is the justification some of these service members claim. Are they justified in refusing the order? No way.

Airman First Class Jeffery Bettendorf, United States Air Force, is one of a small but vocal number (now around 200) of military members who say that the inoculations are unsafe and unlawful.

They say the military has no right to force service members to take shots of a vaccine that could, Bettendorf claims, potentially cause cancer or other health problems in the future. Bettendorf even went on ABC's 20/20 to talk about the order he refused. How ridiculous.

Bettendorf's argument is that the anthrax vaccine has not been properly tested and that the manufacturer of the vaccine, recently criticized by the Food and Drug Administration for violations of safety and sterility standards, cannot guarantee the vaccine's effectiveness.

The FDA's report played a big part in Bettendorf's argument. But the report dealt with safety standards of production of the vaccine, not the effectiveness of the vaccine to prevent infection. Bettendorf was demoted, slapped with 45 days extra duty and was discharged under "other than honorable conditions."

Good riddance. The federal government, acting on years of data supplied by the Center for Disease Control and independent research, claims that the vaccine is safe for service members, and the only potential hazard is the possibility of allergic reactions in some people, much like allergies to penicillin.

Any service member with an ounce of common sense understands the need for the vaccine shot. Anthrax, the vaccine for which these service members are refusing, is a terrible and deadly threat when employed as a biological weapon. It is a spore that occurs mainly around livestock, but has serious repercussions when it infects humans. It enters the lungs and produces toxins that cause hemorrhaging of the lungs and other organs.

Anthrax has been developed as an aerial delivery



JASON STARCH

weapon, either by missiles, artillery shells, or aircraft spray. The worst part is, it is impossible to tell that a person has been exposed until the signs of infection begin to show up. In fact, the Army has been using the Anthrax vaccine since the 1970's in conjunction with deployments of special forces units with no apparent ill effects.

The Defense Department will, of course, continue to deal with concerns over health issues like Agent Orange and Gulf War Syndrome, but no evidence supports any link between the Anthrax virus and illnesses stemming from overseas deployments. It is a serious threat, and so the Defense Department has taken a firm stand on the requirement for vaccination.

That stand is justified. We do not need service members dying from a disease that could have been avoided if they had followed orders. Dead warriors cannot defend America.

When I was deployed to Africa and the Middle East, fellow Marines and I received a myriad of shots including the Anthrax vaccine. There was no choice. Many thousands of military members have received the vaccinations and are in perfect health. Besides, the oath taken by service members requires them to obey the orders of the President and the officers appointed over them: if the order is to get the shots, then they are obligated to do so.

The military does not exist to provide a career and benefits for its employees. Its purpose is the defense of the United States, which requires a high level of sacrifice, including the possibility of dying in its defense.

Of course, it is understandable that these people are concerned about Anthrax. Anyone who steps into harm's way considers all the potential threats. But once a volunteer signs on the dotted line, they are committed to obeying the orders they are given.

So once again we approach the paradox of military service. The military is here to defend democracy, not practice it. The Department of Defense is not going to handicap itself by infecting service members with any vaccine that has not been tested and approved for use.

It would be shooting itself in the foot, and America need not be reminded of the consequences of an ineffective military. Countries all around the globe remind us daily what a weak military yields for quality of life.

So, we take the shots, and in doing so we make the U.S. fighting forces all the more capable of completing the tasks America demands.

Silly Bettendorf, vaccines are for warriors. Go home, little boy, and leave defense to the unselfish.

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