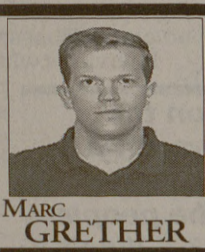


OPINION

Thou shalt not establish religion ...

New legislation violates Constitution by allowing display of Ten Commandments in school

Though the First Amendment of the Constitution strictly prohibits making laws "respecting the establishment of religion," the House of Representatives acts as if its job is to promote Christianity on campuses around the country.



MARC GRETHER

On June 17, the House approved an amendment to the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 1999, which would permit schools to display the Ten Commandments. The amendment, passed by a vote of 248-180, was added to "promote morality and work towards an end of children killing children" according to the amendment's sponsor Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-Al).

Rep. Bob Barr, (R-Ga) went so far as to say that if the Ten Commandments had been displayed in Columbine, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris would never have gone on a shooting rampage.

What utter nonsense. The Ten Commandments have been well known throughout the world for several thousand years, yet this has not kept them from being broken. In the past, even priests and preachers have been caught violating these holy decrees.

Remember Jimmy Swaggart? It is likely that he had the Commandments posted nearby while shutting off to his interludes with a local prostitute.

And given the upbringing of Klebold and Harris in this Christian-dominated country, they were probably aware of the edict not to kill, yet this did not stop them.

Moreover, it is simply not reasonable to assume the mere sight of the Ten Commandments would prevent anyone from breaking them.

Think about how often a speed limit sign makes you slow down.

Moreover, this bill will certainly be found un-

constitutional if passed by the Senate and approved by the President because the bill favors one religious view over others.

In writing for the majority opinion in *Abington School Dist. v. Schempp* (1963), Justice Tom C. Clark notes that in "the relationship between man and religion, the State is firmly committed to a position of neutrality."

But the House's legislation firmly sides with the religions of Christianity and Judaism in their recent bill, violating the neutrality called for by Justice Clark in the decision.

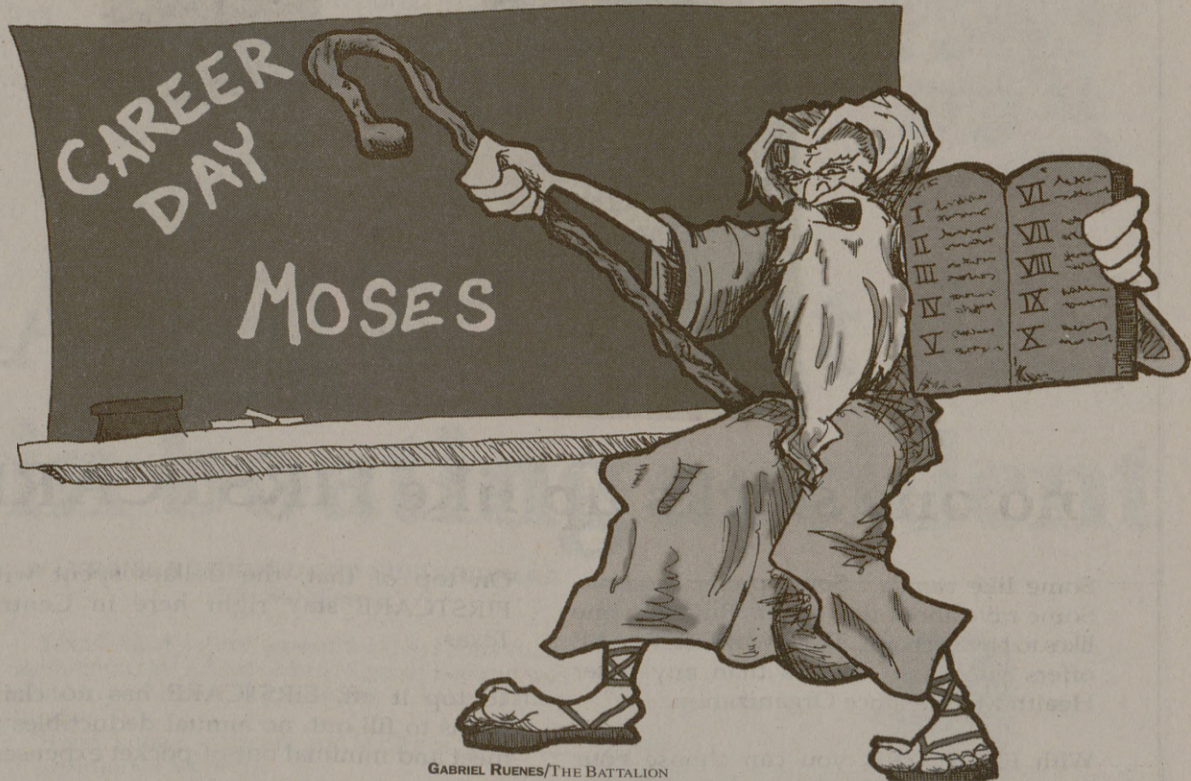
Though Congress often seems to disregard the Constitution in passing bills these days, it should not be unreasonable to hope the bills passed could have some conceivable impact on the problems that are trying to be solved.

The bill could have contained a meaningful statement calling on schools to promote sense or at least sensibility, rather than giving schools the right to use a proselytization tool. The legislation the House has enacted will in no way deter youths bent on breaking the law.

The House could have passed a bill inviting schools to teach the values and ethics found in the Ten Commandments, rather than using the actual text. Few people would be opposed to the principles underlying many of the Commandments, yet the use of the actual Commandments is illegal and unnecessary. Many of the people cheering the passage of this bill would be up in arms if a similar measure had been passed allowing the use of comparable teachings from the Koran. This clear double standard shows the disingenuous use of a religious symbol rather than a teaching tool.

Certainly there is a place for great religious works to be talked about in schools.

Any worthwhile class on world history should teach about the Ten Commandments and other great law codes used by ancient societies, particularly those still in use.



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

However, context must be given when talking about religious works.

America is not a theocracy, nor should it be. In an obvious effort to be seen doing something, the House has passed a flawed bill.

Hopefully someday soon the House will begin to understand its powers have limits, and bad things will happen no matter what is done.

Bad legislation will not prevent problems from happening.

It may not make things worse either, but it will keep things from getting better.

Marc Grether is a graduate student in mathematics.

Estate tax should suffer speedy death

You might proclaim that the taxes in this country are driving you to your grave.



JEFF BECKER

But unfortunately, death will not stop the federal government.

Their taxes will rob even beyond the grave.

The U.S. government places a tax on dying. The estate tax, as it is technically called, can tax an estate's inheritance by up to 55 percent. When a person dies and bequeaths his or her possessions, the Internal Revenue Service will send a representative to assess the value of everything in that estate.

All assets are appraised, whether they be homes, furniture, jewelry, land or even business assets.

Depending on its total value the assessor will levy a fine on that estate anywhere from 37 percent to 55 percent after the first \$625,000. The deceased obviously cannot pay, so the recipients of the estate — usually the children — are left holding the bag.

The government also taxes any personal gift during life of over \$10,000 per year, making the estate tax difficult to get around. Expensive estate lawyers are needed to minimize the oppressive cost incurred by the government.

The estate tax is a sugar-coated term for what should be more appropriately labeled as a death tax.

The death tax is devastating to farmers and family-owned businesses. Children of the deceased are often forced to sell parts of the family farm in order to pay them off. All too often, the farm dies with the farmer. In family-owned

businesses, 70 percent of families abandon the business after just one generation and only 13 percent of them last a third generation. People in this country cannot afford to die.

One of the express reasons for the government's additional revenue was redistribution of wealth.

However, the plan has largely failed because the extremely wealthy can afford the burdensome cost of estate planning to minimize the taxes owed. Smaller businesses, farmers and most Americans cannot.

After 75 years of enforcement, the fee has not accomplished its purpose, and it acts as a barrier to economic advancement for all Americans.

"People in this country cannot afford to die."

The death tax strikes Americans when they are most vulnerable — after the death of a loved one. This reprehensible burden must be eliminated.

And besides the odious stench of robbing from the grave, there are many other valid reasons for eliminating the fee. While destroying businesses and farms, the duty only brings in around 1 percent of federal revenues.

In fact, the duty decreases the amount of revenue taken in by the government by breaking up and destroying tax-paying companies.

Furthermore, there are enormous in-

efficiencies in the collection of the fee, with 65 cents of every dollar brought in used for enforcement.

The death tax is not good for the American economy. It destroys jobs, constricts businesses and punishes people for succeeding. The tax inhibits savings and work and encourages consumption and spending, the opposite of what most economists would desire for a healthy economy.

The death tax amounts to double taxation. It fines revenue and assets collected throughout a lifetime which have already had income taxes and sales taxes paid on them. Such double taxation cannot be tolerated and should make people mad.

Fortunately, many members of Congress feel the same way that the American public should feel about the death tax. In 1997, legislation was passed which will weaken the death tax progressively until 2006. While this is a good first step, the real solution to the problem is to eliminate the death tax altogether.

U.S. Representative Christopher Cox has recently authored a bill called the Family Heritage Preservation Act which will eliminate estate taxes altogether. The bill has gained the support of nearly 200 members of the House.

But many attempts to reform the estate tax have failed in the past. A grassroots effort is required to get the Heritage bill passed.

Everyone should write his or her representative to urge him or her to support this bill.

Death taxes are unfair, infuriating and must be stopped.

Jeff Becker is a sophomore computer engineering major.

EDITORIAL



Editorials appearing in *The Battalion* reflect the views of the editorials board members. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other Battalion staff members, the Texas A&M student body, regents, administration, faculty or staff. Columns, guest columns, cartoons and letters express the opinions of the authors.

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HALLS OF JUSTICE

Current plan for honors hall unfair to other students

The University Honors Program is an important entity on campus, and its efforts to attract high-performing high school students to Texas A&M have enhanced the academic quality of the student body.

However, the program's most recent attempt to make itself more attractive to honors students is being devised at the expense of other Aggies.

Beginning this year, plans will be underway for a new Northside dorm devoted to upperclass honors students.

Through a transitional process, Clements Hall will become the honors hall.

Though the idea of a tight-knit honors community on campus is not inherently wrong, transforming Clements Hall would pursue

unjust means to justified ends.

Cloistering honors Aggies in Clements Halls would promote the Honors Program through preferential treatment of its students.

First, it would take away any opportunity for "regular" students to live in a co-ed hall on Northside.

Moreover, Clements Hall is the only modular hall (besides Lechner) that houses males on Northside, and it is one of only four on the entire campus.

Reserving Clements for honors students would worsen residential options for men.

It is understandable for honors students to want to live near one another, and creating living arrangements for them is certainly

worthwhile. But taking Clements Hall away from Northside "regular" students would be unfair, and it would only engender resentment toward the Program.

Therefore, other alternatives to honors housing must be pursued.

The honors hall could be located on Southside without as seriously depleting the number of co-ed, modular halls.

The Honors Program should also consider the viability of housing honors students together on one floor of several halls.

Surely, honors students can share the wealth. And since residential resources are already limited, to leave Clements Hall alone is the only fair thing to do.

Parking program at Northgate unsafe, economically unsound

As the weekend party site for thousands of Aggies looking to relax after a stressful week of class and work, Northgate is a tradition as rich as Texas A&M University itself.



RYAN GARCIA

The various drinking establishments that comprise Northgate have transcended the mere label of "bars" and have become tourist attractions in their own right. In the past few years, this has become a recognized fact, and the revitalization of Northgate confirmed it as a tourist hot spot.

Nothing indicates this more than the parking dilemma that is now as ingrained in Northgate as the names carved into the tables at the Dixie Chicken. With its emphasis on aesthetics, it is understandable that Northgate's impetus for revitalization was tourism rather than practicality.

Northgate's parking fiasco is the pay lot directly behind the Dixie Chicken and Fitzwilly's.

The ticket system used to pay for parking is impractical. Visitors to Northgate are required to estimate how long they will be on the premises and pay for that amount of time in advance. This set-up requires standing in line outside, usually for at least 15 minutes, as the lone ticket machine toils non-stop and the line grows exponentially long.

Several female students expressed their concerns over standing in line alone, largely outnumbered by inebriated males whose better judgment has long since deserted them. These conditions make females prime targets for unwanted attention and harassment.

"You never know what you are going to have to face," said one female junior English major.

The very idea of pulling intoxicated people away from their good time and forcing them to wait in line together as they grow more and more impatient, not to mention aggressive, should have sent a red light flashing to someone, somewhere.

The only flashing red lights as of now are those of the police as they routinely break up fights re-

sulting from Bubba's eyes and hands finding themselves on someone else's girlfriend in line.

It's best to let these people make their way to the bar where they can have a drink and calm down.

In addition to the compromising positions both sexes are placed in, the pay lot also has a deterrent effect, resulting in numerous Northgate visitors parking illegally in other areas and walking rather than dealing

with the time-intensive pay process. A student crossing University Dr. or Church St. on a weekend night is playing the virtual reality version of Frogger, as drunken drivers relentlessly zoom back and forth.

Even Northgate businesses lose out because of the pay lot situation. Should customers at

Northgate's drinking establishments have too much fun and wind up spending more time

than their original estimate, they must endure the ticket-line wait all over again. Most opt to leave rather than go through this ordeal. If customers were not forced to make the choice, most would remain at Northgate, spending even more money in their zest for a good time than what a parking lot of this size can generate.

The pay lot can by no means accommodate all of Northgate's visitors, and will certainly not solve all of Northgate's dilemmas. However, right now, the Northgate pay lot is only adding problems when it could be a step in the right direction towards reducing them.

Ryan Garcia is a senior journalism major.

