

## Gene scheme

Completion of human genome mapping could spawn new kind of predictive discrimination

Two groups, the Human Genome Project and Celera, have been competing to finish a map of human genetic sequence. Recently, each group announced it has completed a "working draft" of the human genome, delighting many in the scientific field. When the human genome is completely mapped, it will unlock the door to many questions that have plagued scientists for years — like the question of whether certain diseases are hereditary. Scientists have speculated, but now proof may be found.



BRIENNE PORTER

The proposed bill will prohibit insurance companies from raising premiums for policy holders who are predisposed to an illness. If companies use genetic information to decide policy rates, they will penalize people for simply having the potential to become sick or disabled. Predisposition does not guarantee developing the condition. Many genetic diseases occur only with the right environment. A person can have a genetic defect that often leads to a disease like breast cancer but never develop the disease.

Insurance companies will use the human genome's medical breakthrough to make a profit. By banking on the possibility that someone will get sick because of predictive genetic information, these companies will be punishing people for having a poor genetic makeup. These companies will be treating people unjustly because of something they cannot control.

Insurance companies argue that if customers withhold their genetic information, the companies will take unnecessary risks by insuring people with predispositions for genetic disorders. Yet, this is not a new risk; the companies have been doing this for ages as they insure people with hereditary diseases in their family histories. Complete knowledge of the human genome should not be

squandered on a ploy for insurance companies to save a dollar.

To many groups like the ACLU, this sounds similar to other modern-day discrimination based on gender or ethnicity.

This kind of judgment based on genetic material could take place in the workplace. If potential employees are required to have physical examinations that include reports and details about their genes, employers could use that information as a reason to not hire a person who might develop genetic disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act currently prevents discrimination against people who have a disability but can still perform their jobs. With the information gained by the genome project, employers would be taking discrimination one

step further since the act does not protect Americans with predictive genetic material from discrimination. Without this kind of protection, potential employees might be refused jobs because of a disease they do not yet have and might never get.

Also, future employers do not have a right to know whether an employee might become sick because of a genetic predisposition. It is the same as potential employers asking a woman if she plans to become pregnant. That type of information is a personal matter that should not affect an applicant's chances during the interviewing process.

Furthermore, if insurance companies and potential employers use this genetic information, they will invade people's

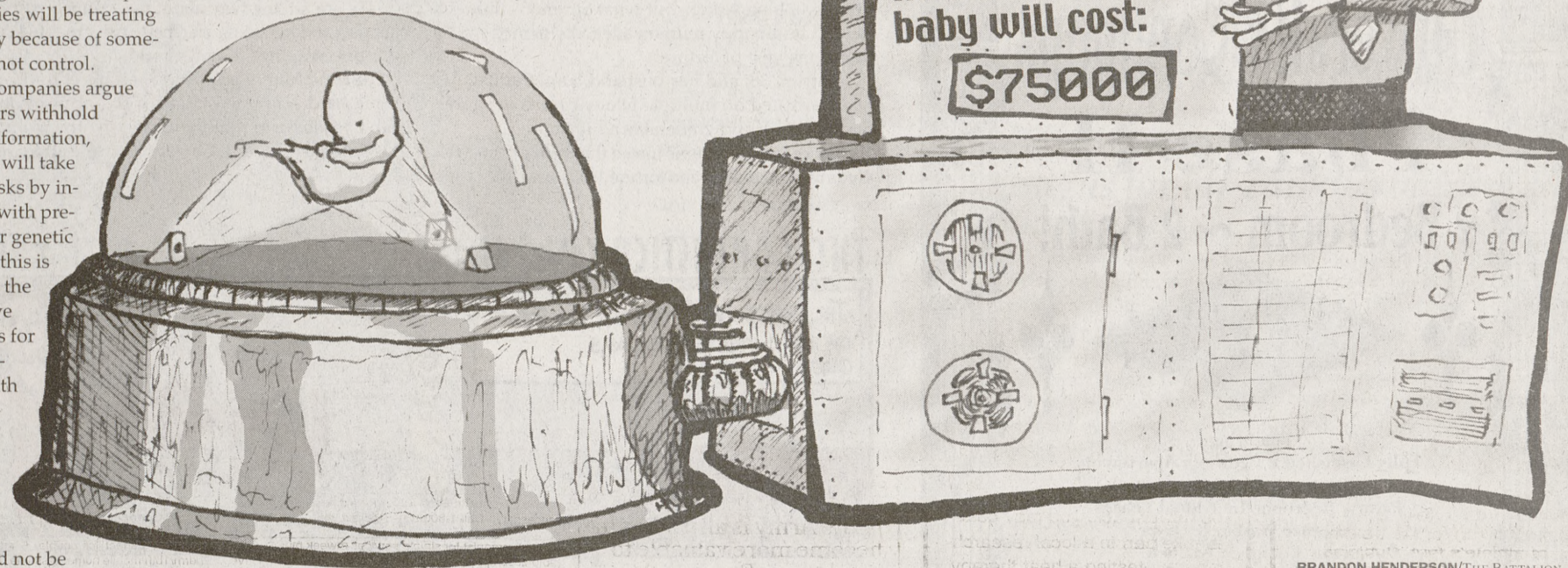
privacy. People's genes are not public knowledge and society does not have the right to know.

The completion of the human genetic code should be celebrated as the scientific breakthrough it is. Americans should not have to fear the possibility of genetic discrimination. The breakthrough can help save lives, but if insurance companies and employers are not prevented from using the information to discriminate against people, the negative effects will outweigh the benefits.

By safeguarding the jobs and privacy of the American people, politicians can help those with the dispositions lessen their chance of

being affected by more than just a disease. The only way to do this is for Congress to pass the proposal and stop the discrimination before it occurs.

Brienne Porter is a sophomore chemical engineering major.



BRANDON HENDERSON/THE BATTALION

## Understanding police brutality

While many viewers watched the news last week, their heart were saddened by a certain 28-second news clip. In Philadelphia, police apprehended a black suspect after a lengthy police chase. The reason this story made "Headline News" and not another mundane episode of "Cops" is because of what happened in those 28 seconds. Many thought it was the Rodney King beating all over again.

The news clip showed officers dragging Thomas Jones from the police car he had recently stolen. Then multiple officers began to kick and beat him. Watching this image — officers surrounding and beating a solitary individual — could not help but evoke memories of the 1991 King beating. King and Jones were both victims, but were they the same type of victim? They both seemed to receive the same treatment from officers. However, that is where the similarities end.

The beating of Rodney King was a one-sided story with a single motivation. This King incident was an unnecessary, pointless assault based on racial prejudice. The Jones case does not fit this criteria because it is more complicated. Thomas Jones led police on a 20-minute chase in a stolen car. Reckless driving sent him crashing into other motorists and onto a sidewalk crowded with funeral mourners, risking the lives of many innocent civilians. He refused initial attempts to be subdued by biting some officers and even shooting another one. He was then shot, but only after he tried to make a second escape in a police car. The controversial 28-second tape was filmed after he was pulled from this second police car.

Two different incidents both met the same end: the beating of the suspect. Yet these situations involve two different individuals, with two distinct records. If people agree that King did not deserve the treatment he received, does that mean that Jones did? No. In the Jones case, the police action did seem excessive. But that does not mean people should be surprised by what happened.

If the police are removed from the scene and one imagines that the people attacking Jones are average citizens, suddenly the situation, no matter how disturbing, becomes more agreeable. Then there are the brave souls of Philadelphia who chased down and apprehended a career criminal who had shot someone, bitten someone, nearly run several people down and stolen two cars. People would not necessarily cheer the fact that several of the police were kicking this man, but the same people would probably be happy if the average citizen had put a stop to this small fraction of America's criminal element.

After all, Jones is not a shining star of society. He is a man with a record of convictions for burglary, theft

and assault whose low points include snatching purses from women and stealing a bike from a 12-year-old child.

For some reason, when the police are placed back into the crime scene, it is suddenly more appalling. The chase and pursuit did not go smoothly; that part is a given. Even top Philadelphia brass admit that. Not all chases go smoothly. Society has the misconception that the police will swoop down like they do on television or the movies and make an effortless, errorless arrest. And if there is one thing most people learned from criminal justice classes, it is that this type of arrest does not happen. In most cases, the criminal influences how smoothly the arrest procedure goes more than the authorities. Had Jones immediately surrendered, the chase never would have occurred. Criminals can be desperate and unpredictable people, and police are human beings. Society cannot expect the police to rid the world of such a complicated problem easily and effortlessly.

People are horrified that the police beat this man when they should probably be stunned that it does not happen more often. Our country holds police to a superhuman standard that says they must take any and all types of abuse and still calmly maintain control of the situation.

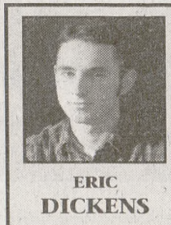
In Jones' situation, people have to remember that an officer was shot, and that Jones had already ignored countless attempts at an orderly arrest. This might help explain the irrational, unnecessary behavior of the police. One should think about how willing they would be to kick an individual who had shot a member of their family or a friend. A policeman's fellow officers are like family and are likely friends as well. That is probably why both black and white officers were involved in the beating — this was not an issue of racial hatred. Rather, it was an issue of police retaliating for the injuries to one of their own. This does not make it right, but easier to comprehend.

The Jones beating is surely a shocking, disturbing half-minute of video. Some would say this is another example of the rising level of police brutality in today's society. Others would say it is the result of the frustration generated by career criminals emboldened by a feeble judicial system. Either way, it should not be considered a case of police brutality on the level of the King beating. Where one was completely wrong, the other was simply unnecessary. In a Utopic world, police would never do anything outside of the proper arrest conduct code. They would never swear, hit, beat, kick or shoot at another person. And in a Utopic world, perhaps suspects would return the favor.

Chris Schafer is a columnist for the Minnesota Daily at the U. of Minnesota.

## Keep the fire from burning Unsanctioned bonfire loses meaning of tradition

Expecting the temporary, or even permanent, removal of Aggie Bonfire, the student group



ERIC DICKENS

Keep the Fire Burning started a petition prior to A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen's announcement about the future of bonfire. Since the May press conference, the group has been busy trying to disprove Bowen's assertion that two years are needed to successfully plan a safe bonfire. The student leaders have taken some positive steps toward planning their bonfire, but even if their project goes smoothly, Keep the Fire Burning will still have made a mockery of the bonfire tradition.

The seven students on the group's board said they plan to make their bonfire smaller than recent bonfires and have contracted a professional engineer to develop safe designs. Furthermore, while the group plans to hold a student-run cut, drinking will not be allowed and private security guards will be in place. For the most part, the group is following Bowen's guidelines for future bonfires, but moving the date up two years.

Keep the Fire Burning may disagree with Bowen's belief that two years are needed for planning future bonfires, but taking that long will ensure the safest future for bonfire. Likewise, in-

stead of consulting a team of professional engineers, University officials and student leaders, the group has put its faith into one engineer. By eliminating additional input, the group is forfeiting valuable opinions.

Bowen said in May that he expects a student-coordinated memorial event to occur in November. Such an event would be the correct way to participate in bonfire in 2000. Having an off-campus bonfire two days before the University of Texas-Austin game undermines the meaning of this memorial event.

One of the biggest gripes many students had with Bowen's decision was the cancellation of student cut. While it is a shame that cut was eliminated, the people who were upset about its removal will gain nothing from an off-campus bonfire cut. Anyone can go into the woods and chop down trees. Cut was special because of dorm rivalries, yells and "grogging pots." Unfortunately, those activities will not be a part of future bonfires, but neither will they be at Keep the Fire Burning's cut.

Those who participate in bonfire say that the tradition is more than burning the stack. However, the events of that night are also important. Bonfire is not just cut, but a yell practice, a band performance and an event drawing several thousand future, current and former students to one place in the heart of Aggie land. Sadly, Keep the Fire Burning's bonfire will have none of these. Its bonfire will be the burning of logs, signaling the end of a lot of hard work, but

this pales in comparison to even a smaller, University-sanctioned bonfire. Considering that both bonfires will be smaller than previous ones, waiting two years for a University bonfire with the Texas Aggie Band, an R.C. Slocum speech and thousands of families and friends gathered on the polo fields is much better than slipping out to some off-campus field to see what a group of renegade students has accomplished.

Above all, the biggest problem with Keep the Fire Burning's bonfire will be the reasoning behind the event. The group's board members are full of rhetoric about their Aggie spirit and love for bonfire, but their motivation comes down to one thing — proving the University wrong. Like other students, the leaders of Keep the Fire Burning disagree with Bowen. However, instead of examining why the moratorium is in place, they consider it a challenge to break, and they blindly forge ahead. This stubborn closed-mindedness kept participants from seeing problems with bonfire before the collapse.

Will Clark, a member of the group's student board, said, "The Aggie spirit and love for bonfire can't be turned off." But every Aggie should know when to be driven by the Aggie spirit and when to listen to reason. No matter what its supporters say, an off-campus bonfire will be motivated by defiance, and defiance has never been what the tradition is about.

### Mail Call

#### Phone-code users deserve punishment

In response to Cayla Carr's Aug. 2 column.

I almost had to do a double take when I read Carr's article on students who misused the state phone system.

The students who used the code to make free long-distance calls should be punished. It does not matter how much they pay in tuition, they stole from the school's pocket for

their own gain. What makes their crime worse is that the students knew what they were doing was wrong. The whole situation reminds me of when I get a parking ticket. I knew quite well that parking in a yellow space was wrong, and when I came back to my car to find a ticket, I am upset that I got caught, but I do not try to play it off by saying, "It did not do that much damage."

Peter Stevens  
Class of '00

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 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 may also be mailed to:

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