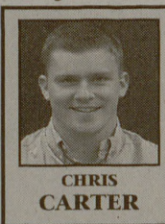


A time to speak

Aggies for Life billboards spark debate between conflicting student beliefs

Beginning Feb. 12 and running through Feb. 15, Aggies for Life, a student organization, will sponsor a graphically explicit display at Rudder Fountain illustrating the group's opposition to abortion. The exhibit, measuring 17 feet 6 inches tall by 30 feet wide, contains large, full-color pictures of aborted fetuses and women with mutilated breasts, among other graphic images.



CHRIS CARTER

The display, titled "Justice for All," contains four sides, with one of the sides containing a "plasma screen" continually airing an embryostropy, or a video camera inserted into the womb of a woman to examine the fetus. The other three sides contain pictures and captions of reproductive health issues, accompanied by gruesome graphic depictions of aborted fetuses, some of them measuring more than six feet tall. The display will require approximately 5,500 square feet in the Rudder Fountain area, according to the concessions permit filed by Aggies for Life with the Texas A&M University.

The Texas A&M Visitor's Center, where many prospective students and guests of the University gain their first experience of A&M, faces Rudder Fountain only a few yards away.

Aggies for Life has proven through its actions over the past few years that it is an extremist organization that will stop at nothing for attention. The group routinely positions "sandwich boards" displaying offensively graphic pictures of aborted fetuses around campus, and members wear shirts with pride (as displayed on the Aggies for Life Website) containing numbers representing "babies" aborted at Brazos Valley Planned Parenthood.

Now Aggies for Life is sponsoring the "Justice for All" display. The setup has visited 19 other campuses and met with much protest.

Though Aggies for Life has the right to this display and is protected by the Constitution, the only attention this display will attract is that of hostility and animosity toward the pro-life movement.

Two weeks ago, the display met a great deal of resistance at Louisiana State University, where some students stuck hundreds of coat hangers in the ground in an attempt to depict the horrors of illegal abortions they think likely if abortion were banned.

The debate about the display is not whether abortion should be legal. It is not even if this display should be allowed by the University. The real debate is if Aggies for Life truly is committed to its mission of "opening the minds of fellow Aggies," or if its real motivation is fueling the fire of animosity toward their organization.

This display, along with the group's sandwich boards and T-shirts, may address an issue that Aggies for Life thinks is worth exposure. However, why would any organization continually pit itself against decency to illustrate its stand, only reaping the negative effects of pub-

lic opinion? Instead, the group should find a less offensive means of disseminating its opinions, therefore greatly broadening the scope of its audience. The billboards, are in poor taste and poor judgement, and they are likely to garner more enemies than true followers.

Aggies for Life is not just labeling itself as an extremist group, its actions reflect negatively on the entire pro-life movement. This display, among Aggies for Life's other actions, only further stigmatizes admitted pro-life advocates and the wild activist stereotype.

On one of the displays, a phrase reads, "Do you favor killing a child for the sins of her father?" Above this phrase is a 6-foot color picture of a dismembered fetus, aborted after 10 weeks of pregnancy.

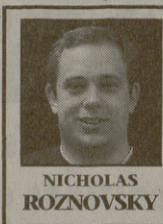
With this in mind, Aggies for Life must be asked the same question: "Do you favor killing a movement (through negative public relations and exposure) because of the sins of the extreme few?"

Chris Carter is a senior speech communications major.

Next week, a student organization called Aggies for Life plans to erect large displays near Rudder Fountain to advocate its stance against abortion. Like many of the group's smaller sandwich boards around campus, the displays will feature graphic images of aborted fetuses. The group's plan has already drawn fire from a number of critics who think the displays should not be allowed on campus.

Even though it will become so for some, the issue of abortion is not the key element in this debate. Although the issue intensifies the emotions that separate the two camps, the heart of the matter is the right of student organizations to freely advocate their views on campus. While the tactics used by Aggies for Life may seem distasteful or irresponsible by some, they fall well within the umbrella of protected free speech. The displays should be allowed to stand near Rudder Fountain as planned.

As one of the designated "free speech areas" on campus, the walkway between Rudder Tower and the Memorial Student Center (MSC) is a center of activity for various student groups. Students living in temporary shacks, showing off their modified automobiles and preaching to the masses as they walk to class are all allowed to use the area on a regular



NICHOLAS ROZNOVSKY

basis to espouse their beliefs and interests. The University cannot deny that same right to a particular group based on the disapproval of others.

"I disapprove of what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it," wrote Voltaire.

The right to freely express one's views is an integral part of American citizenship. Throughout its history, America has survived Nazi parades, Ku Klux Klan rallies, and protesters burning their flags and draft cards. Protecting free speech has been painful at times for this nation, but it has been and continues to be the only acceptable course of action.

Neither Americans nor Aggies can decide which groups get to have their say and which do not. By infringing upon the rights of some citizens, the rights of all are placed in jeopardy. Reasoning and free will are the tools that should be used to counter opponents, not suppression and censorship.

There is little doubt that the displays will offend many students next week, but the right to express one's views cannot be abridged to prevent offending others. By their very nature, differing viewpoints confound, shock and sometimes anger those who are exposed to them. Like ideas and words, pictures cannot be excised from society because they displease certain portions of the population.

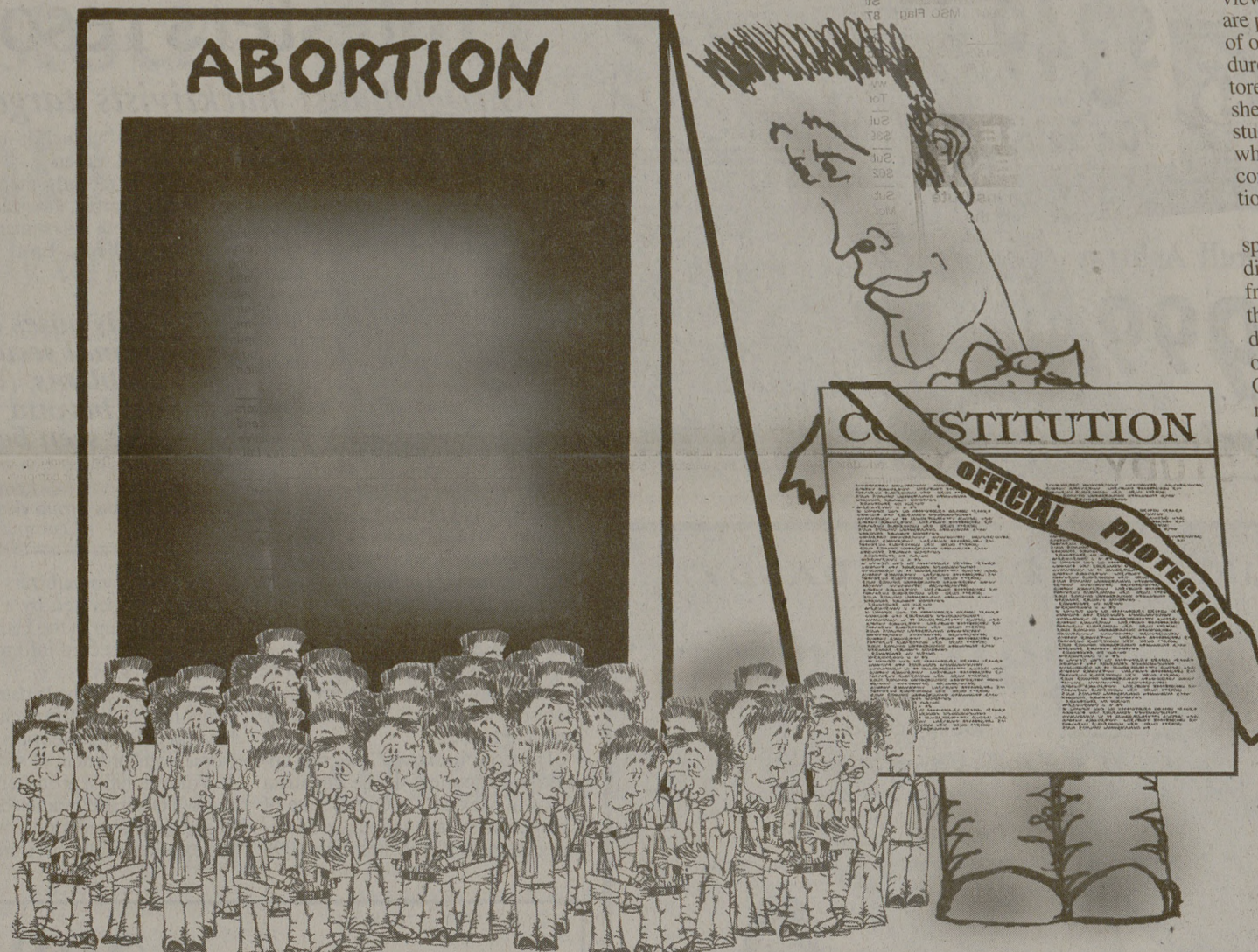
The images in question may be viewed as obscene by some, but they are presented as factual representations of one consequence of a medical procedure. As long as the photos are not doctored or staged, it would be wrong to shelter the public from them. As adults, students can determine for themselves whether those facts lead to a logical conclusion or are just attempts to sensationalize the issue.

By the same protection of free speech that enables Aggies for Life to display its materials, students will be free to form their own opinions about the group and its methods. Some students will choose to simply look the other way as they walk by the MSC. Others will no doubt choose to protest near the displays, also under the protective umbrella of the free speech area. Either way, they will be able to show their opposition to the group and their displays in a manner they choose.

Feedback is also an important part of free speech. As the group making a statement, Aggies for Life will bear full responsibility for the displays and be subject to the full brunt of opposition toward them. Such are the costs of participating in a truly public forum.

Next week will pass, and the abortion issue will continue to divide Aggies. It is important that the right allowing them to express their views openly and freely is protected. No group, on any side of any issue, should ever be silenced. In doing so, people are not protected from objectionable materials; they are prevented from reaching an informed decision.

Nicholas Roznovsky is a senior political science major.



KATIE EASTERLING/THE BATTALION

Mail Call

School vouchers: bad idea, not realistic, workable for needy students

In Response to Brienne Porter's February 8 column.

In your article you discuss the need for school vouchers in our educational system. In my opinion, school vouchers are not only a bad idea, but are detrimental to increasing the effectiveness of public education.

The idea in itself is great: giving poor children the chance to attend private schools that offer better education.

The problem lies in the logistics. The government just does not have the resources to provide all children who meet the "voucher criteria" with money to attend private schooling.

Some students would qualify, but most would not, meaning that a vast majority would be left out in the cold. Secondly, by allocating money for private schools, you take money from public schools, which is needed to equip all those students left out of the voucher system. With less money, how can these institutions improve?

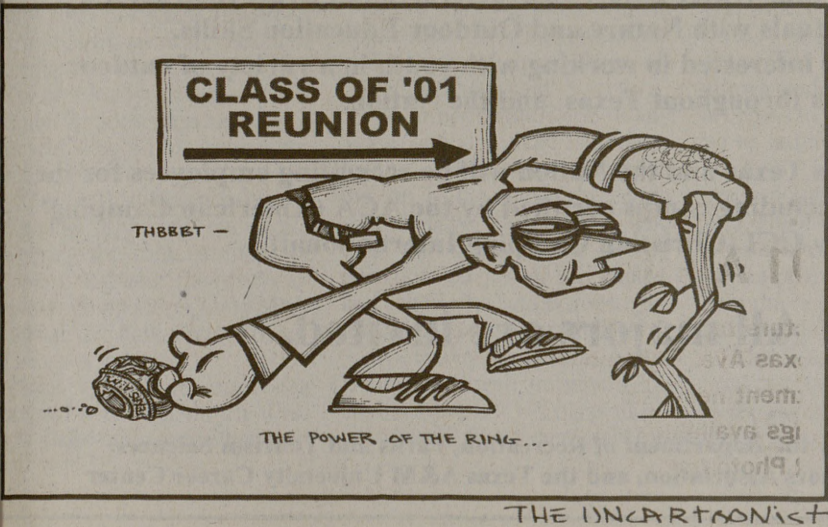
If our motto in America is truly going to be that "every student can learn" then we need to equip our public schools with the ability to provide that educa-

tion. Should changes be made to schools that score low on standardized tests? Yes. But, should that change be in removal of federal dollars from public education to private education? Absolutely not. We need to focus our attention on improving the entire public education system, not on helping a few limited students.

As a Congresswoman remarked to Michael Douglas in *The American President*, "The day we give in to school vouchers is the day we give up on public education." I don't think as a country we are ready to do that.

Mark Merrell
Class of '02

CARTOON OF THE DAY



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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College Station, TX
77843-1111

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EDITORIAL

THE BATTALION

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PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

Effectiveness of Aggies for Life display questionable

Next week, pro-life student group Aggies for Life plans to sponsor a display, supporting its beliefs. The planned display, which will feature full-color, enlarged photographs of aborted fetuses, has already been the topic of much discussion.

However, the question is not whether abortion is right or wrong, because everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion. Instead, Aggies for Life should re-evaluate its method of disseminating its argument against abortion.

Aggies for Life is to be commended for the strength of its members' beliefs. It is admirable to see a group of students celebrate their right to free speech in such an obvious manner, especially on a campus with a history of apathy toward major social issues. The members of Aggies for Life should not stop fighting for their beliefs — however, they should consider other ways of promoting their cause.

The use of scare tactics seldom convinces those who prefer to be persuaded with logic and reason. Resorting to emotion, as opposed to logic, often makes strong arguments look weak and ill conceived. Although the informational material

on the displays should remain intact, graphic photographs will do little to sway observers who are not already pro-life.

On the contrary, people often use the presence of brutal images as an excuse to ignore a potentially offensive message. Students should not be given this opportunity to ignore information that could be relevant.

For each pro-life student who already agrees with the message Aggies for Life promotes, there will be another borderline student who could be easily swayed either direction. Forcing these students to look at offensive images will not necessarily cause them to become pro-life — it could just as easily have the opposite effect.

When dealing with an issue as emotional as abortion, the mind can be a more powerful tool than visual tools could ever be.

Aggies for Life should respect the student body's intelligence enough to present it with rational, undramatized facts about abortion. Students are surely capable of making their decisions based on what they feel is right, without the help of mentally-disturbing graphics.