

THE BATTALION

## Confusion in Oklahoma

### Legislators need to clarify the law concerning abortions and minors



BRIENNE PORTER

Oklahoma is the new battleground for abortion rights. The fight is over abortions involving minors. A law effective on June 4 states that a minor must have parental consent to have an abortion. It states the clinic will be held liable for any medical treatment after an abortion is performed on a minor who did not have parental consent. The law is one sentence and lists no exemptions. It does not allow for a judge to grant exemptions for independent minors, those with health problems or other such conditions. The law also does not state what parental notification is. This law is vague and should be considered unconstitutional.

According to the Associated Press, "At least 35 states have passed laws that mandate some form of parental or guardian consent or notification." Many other states have passed similar laws, but those laws have clarifications where the Oklahoma law is found lacking. Without these clarifications, many clinics do not know what their legal liability is for those minors who say they have told their parents, but are not accompanied by a parent.

In an Associated Press article, Sherri Finik, reproductive Services community relations director, said, "We feel like we have to insist on that [turning away minors who are not accompanied by a parent] now because of the liability this law places us in."

The clinic should not have to decide if a parent has properly notified her parent. That is not the job of the clinic, and the law should be

stated so that it leaves no doubt. A clinic is there to provide a service. It is not there to read between the lines of unclear state laws. The law should be rewritten clearly to state what parental notification is and what exemptions come with a judge's approval.

First, there should be a definition of parental consent. This could be as simple as a consent form like the ones school children have signed to participate in a field trip. With the form, the clinic could keep it on file, so that if there is a legal challenge, the clinic could not be found liable.

Critics argue that it would be easy for a minor to forge a parent's signature. While this could happen, there should be some form of trust. If a woman is determined to go through with the abortion, then she will find a way around any kind of mandatory consent. In Illinois, a bill suggested "a minor who notified her parent could get an abortion 48 hours later, even if the parent objected," according to the Associated Press.

Other types of parental notification that have been suggested in other states include notifying in person, by phone or by certified mail. The only one of these types of notification or consent that is close to being foolproof is the notification by certified mail. Yet, any determined person can find a way to fool the system.

Second, there should be exemptions listed. Exemptions that should be included are medical emergencies that put the minor's health at risk, if the minor has been declared independent of their parents and minors with problems such as communicable diseases or those who are seeking drug or alcohol abuse treatment. A



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A judge should be allowed to make judgments if the minor requests a judge's decision in place of notifying her parents. The law as it stands now cannot be held as legal because it lacks vital parts and leaves everyone involved scratching their heads

in confusion. With a clearly stated law, the legislators will know that the minors of Oklahoma will find it more difficult to have a legal abortion.

Brienne Porter is a junior political science major.

## Answers needed in the Explorer tire safety issue



J.J. TREVINO

Americans trust that their lives are safe in vehicles they get to work, a picturesque vacation spot or on a surely scenic drive through each day. However, for owners of the popular Ford Explorer, assurance of the vehicle's safety was quickly shattered amid reports that a problem in the vehicle or faulty tires possibly may be linked to 203 deaths and more than 100 injuries.

During the continuing congressional hearings and bitter-laced courtroom trials involving the Ford Motor Company and Bridgestone/Firestone Inc., answers calm the nervousness of Explorers and pinpoint exactly what has caused the vehicle to result in alarming tragedies seem far-fetched. Despite Ford Co. undertaking a massive recall of over 13 million

Firestone tires that are equipped on their vehicles, the Firestone corporation continues to insist the tires are safe and Ford is replacing them to divert attention away from the Explorer's safety problems, according to a CNN report.

Brigstone/Firestone representatives said the problems in their tires were immediately addressed and investigated, but they vigorously claim that Explorers have continued to be built heavier, which they say also can lead to tire failure. However, analyses on both the vehicle and tires, that were conducted by both companies, stop short of blaming themselves for the cause of the accidents.

Billy Tauzin, a member of the congressional subcommittee looking into the matter, said the independent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will provide a better analysis very soon. "NHTSA needs to come up with reasonable standards and clear up the confusion very quickly," he said.

However, with no one accepting responsibility for the accidents, and this analysis not coming soon enough, public consumers who own these vehicles suffer and continue to drive these vehicles without the assurance of their safety.

Although contradicting Firestone's promises that their tires are safe, these potentially serious flaws apparently went unnoticed for some time. Six former employees of the Firestone tire plant in Decatur, Ill. have either testified or are about to testify in accident lawsuits that they repeatedly complained of quality-control problems and questionable production practices, according to a story in the *Washington Post*. "I do not think any more lives should be lost," said a former employee.

Although Firestone has dismissed the allegations as coming from disgruntled former employees, the corporation has failed to realize that these individuals, whose families have been torn apart, have valid

claims and, more importantly, deserve answers.

Attorneys for a Florida couple that were killed in an Explorer accident are outraged at this childish finger pointing and recently filed a \$1 billion lawsuit against Firestone. "They are doing this to the little people. We need to send a message to corporate America that you cannot place profits over the safety of people," said attorney Willie Gary.

Hundreds, however, unfortunately are feeling the terror and pain that these tragedies are causing families to experience. In 1993, while driving home from San Antonio, my uncle and aunt were killed after the Explorer they were driving rolled over several times, sadly resulting in both of their young children to continue life without their parents.

What seems to be even more troubling is that Congressional investigators say some tires Ford uses to replace Firestone tires have higher failure rates of tread separation.

"Ford is going to replace these recalled tires with tires that have a worse claim history than the tires coming off the Explorer," Tauzin said.

Additionally, since the surfacing of this possible flaw, Ford Co. recently announced that it has severed its nearly century-old business relationship with the Bridgestone/Firestone Corporation, which is the No. 2 tire manufacturer in America.

With Explorer drivers still unclear about the safety of their vehicle, whoever is responsible for these defects should admit their fault and pay the price. The grave injustice that is evolving at the hands of these large corporations needs quickly solutions serious safety concerns.

J.J. Trevino is a senior journalism major.

### Mail Call

#### Uncartoonist unpopular with Corps members

In response to the Cartoon of the Day on June 25 and 26.

I find the recent works of The Uncartoonist to be very rude and distinctly non-Aggie. In the words of another student, his work is a poor attempt at humor and very "not cool."

PTTS already deals with many complaints regarding ticketing and parking lots. Insulting comics such as his will only widen the already vast gap between PTTS and the student body.

The Corps is an institution that founded this University and should be respected as such.

These cartoons lack any humor and are over generalizations of diverse institutions that deserve far more respect and honor.

David Wells  
Class of '98

In response to the Cartoon of the Day on June 26.

I was disappointed to see the Cartoon of the Day in Tuesday's *Battalion*. The depiction by The Uncartoonist of a young man in a Corps

uniform, with grossly misshapened teeth and the caption "Brains not Included" is hurtful and unfair. It is a cruel slap in the face to every former student and every young man or woman who goes through four years of extra work to be a member of the fine Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M University. I am very proud of our Corps and very proud of our student newspaper, but this cartoon was out of line.

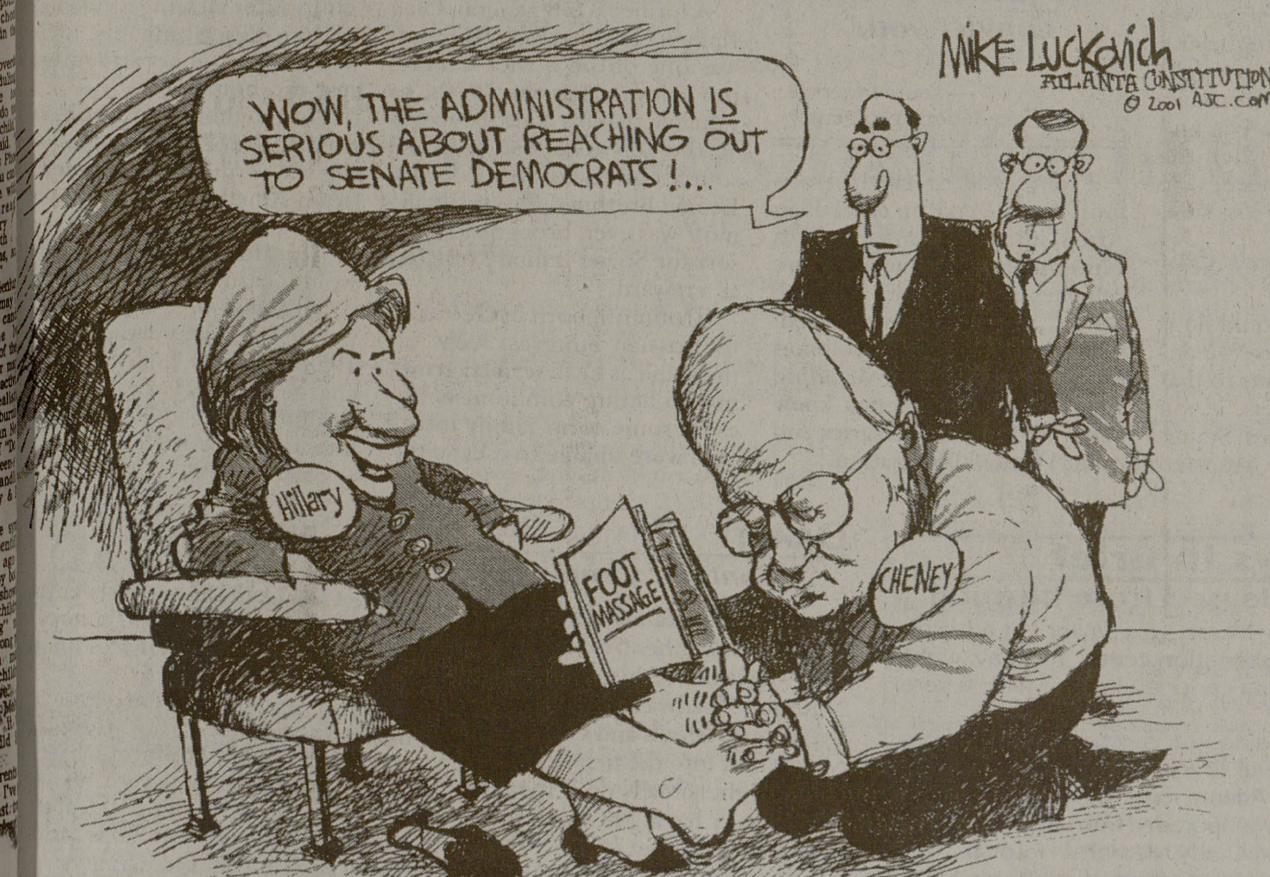
Dr. Stephen McDaniel  
Professor of Marketing

The *Battalion* encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

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