

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Not ready yet World not prepared for female U.S. president

History was made this year in Congress. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) became the highest-ranking woman in U.S. politics when she was elected house minority whip. Since then, the thought of a woman president has been on the mind of many Americans. The June 2 issue of Parade magazine suggested it is only a matter of time before a woman becomes America's commander in chief.

As preparation for the 2004 presidential election begins, a new initiative is presented. According to Parade magazine, an organization known as The White House Project plans to promote women as political candidates in the 2004 campaign. Parade reported that since the 1960s, voters who say they would vote for a woman president have increased from 45 percent to 75 percent.

That being said, the vulnerable state of this country would only be more vulnerable if a woman candidate made it on the ballot in 2004. The United States is currently in turmoil, and to bring a woman to power would prove even more disastrous. Not only would she be faced with a cynical opposing party, but she would also have to defend her status abroad.

The International Women's Democracy Center reported that of the 119 heads of government, only 11 are women. Many countries including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates still do not have universal suffrage for women. Countries such as Afghanistan gave women the right to vote in 1967. Iraq did the same in 1984.

Many of these countries have been accused of harboring terrorists and since Sept. 11, have been threats to American freedom. If a woman took office in 2004, she would likely face criticism from foreign leaders and would not be given the respect she demands as a leader of the most powerful nation in the world. A man is



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needed in 2004, not because a woman cannot handle the position, but because the rest of the world will not allow her to.

Parade reported that the presidential race in 2004 will focus on issues of security and defense against terrorism. Post Sept. 11, women came out from behind the scenes and proved their competency. Many women politicians took initiative and made strides in the war against terrorism. Parade reported that women leaders have served important post-9/11 positions. Condoleezza Rice, President George W. Bush's national security adviser, has proposed policies. Christine Whitman, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, has overseen efforts to combat bioterrorism. Pelosi has even served on foreign policy, defense and intelligence committees.

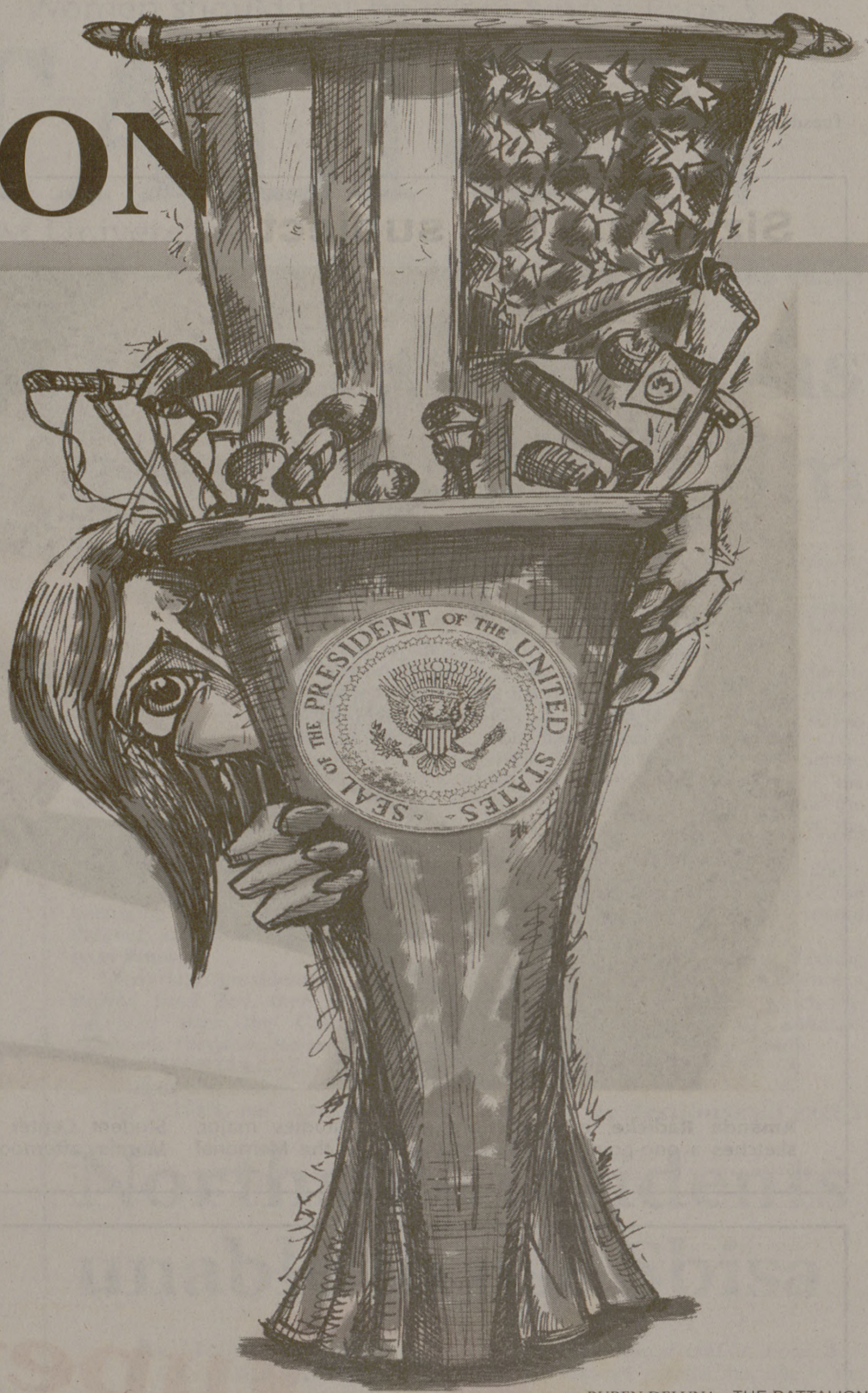
According to the International Women's Democracy Center, the America's are second only to Nordic countries in the number of women in parliament. This statistic shows that women are a significant part of the backbone of the United States and this number will only increase. Women have the leadership and intelligence needed to run the country one day, but for now are more productive behind the scenes.

The Top of the Ticket campaign proposed by The White House Project is a step in the right direction. However, 2004 is still too soon for a woman to take the spotlight.

With the record number of women in the political arena rising steadily, the hope will not diminish after 2004 and perhaps in the next decade, society will graciously welcome a woman president.

In the meantime, women can only continue to prove their abilities by holding key government positions.

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RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

Poor attorneys hurt capital defendants

The Constitution grants each United States citizen the right to a fair and impartial trial. Unfortunately, the exact definition of a fair and impartial trial is somewhat vague.

A case that exemplifies this is *Cockrell v. Burdine*. In 1984, Calvin Burdine reportedly admitted to the Houston police that he stabbed W.T. Wise to death (although Burdine now claims his innocence). Joe Cannon, the Houston court appointee who represented Burdine, seemed to have passed the case off as open and shut due to Burdine's outright confession, and was reported to have slept during the trial for up to 10 minute intervals, according to CNN.

Burdine's case has created a great deal of controversy in the federal and state court systems about what exactly the definition of an adequate lawyer is. Lawyers representing the state of Texas stood behind their court appointee and insisted that Cannon's lack of concentration was not enough to deem the trial unfair. Ultimately, Texas took their appeal directly to the Supreme Court.

On June 3 the Supreme Court rejected the appeal altogether, tossing the case and its dealings directly back into Texas' lap. Perhaps simply side-stepping the case was the best way for



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the Supreme Court to deal with a serious problem that belongs mostly to Texas.

In Texas, the defendants facing a potential death penalty who cannot afford to hire their own legal representation are assigned an attorney by a district judge. Even theoretically, this system has several potential flaws. According to the American Bar Association (ABA), judges that preside in 32 of the 38 states that exercise the use of the death penalty are elected, and are therefore highly susceptible to the influence of political pressure. Lawyers are dependent on judges to receive an appointment, giving lawyers who need work strong incentive to behave a certain way in order to win the favor of a judge. In addition, Houston court appointed lawyers are often so grossly underpaid that finding competent lawyers who will work for this little becomes nearly impossible. *The Houston Chronicle* recently cited well-known defense attorney Mike Ramsey as saying that he, and many other qualified Houston lawyers do not accept court appointments simply because they cannot afford to do so.

These difficulties make it a difficult decision for the Supreme Court. Upholding the findings of the first trial might seem to condone such poor court behavior, but granting Burdine a new trial could possibly absolve a convicted murder-

er from his punishment. Regardless of who decides how to deal with this case, the fact remains: a man who confessed to a brutal murder is still alive today after 18 years of being on death row due solely to the personal activities of his court appointed lawyer.

Texas is not alone in facing this problem. Oklahoma, the state with the most executions per capita, also struggles with insufficient funding and other shortcomings in their capital punishment system. The Death Penalty Institute of Oklahoma (DPIO), a non-profit organization that seeks to provide the public with information regarding capital punishment, maintains a website listing many instances in which attorneys appointed to serve in capital cases acted insufficiently on behalf of their clients. The state of Oklahoma entrusted one man's life to a lawyer who had never before defended a criminal case; another man's attorney chose not to call any witnesses to testify, nor did he make any opening or closing statements on behalf of his client in the fight for his life. Both of the above defendants were executed.

There are perhaps as many problems in Texas' current capital punishment system as there are proposed solutions. Some think that the county commissioners should be given the power to decide whether to sustain the status quo and let the judges continue to appoint attorneys, or modify the system. Creating a public

defender's office is also a long-standing, popular idea. Some have proposed that only a predetermined list of approved lawyers should be able to serve in capital cases. The American Civil Liberties Union and several other interest groups, in conjunction with the ABA, have gone as far as to advocate a national moratorium on executions until the system is reformed.

The ABA has declared that no state offers adequate legal representation in capital cases, according to its standards. Although the extent and type of change necessary is widely disputed, it is clear that the current system desperately needs renovation of some sort. And though it may be true that hiring talented attorneys in criminal cases requires bigger bucks than the state has available, surely Texas can find the resources to ensure the poor at least get representation that is not woefully inadequate; sleeping when one has been appointed to defend a man's life is simply not acceptable.

The right to a fair trial is paramount in maintaining the structure of American society. The mere possibility that innocent people are being legally executed in America is intolerable. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

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Airport security still flawed

It has now been six months since Sept. 11, and the airline industry is still struggling to work the kinks out of its intense security system. On May 29, 1st Lt. Greg Miller, a combat medic and a Purple Heart recipient from College Station, learned this the hard way when security personnel at San Francisco International Airport refused to allow him on board with wire cutters.

While serving in Kandahar in April, Miller was shot in the jaw, severing nerves and leaving him without feeling in his mouth. His jaw was wired shut in Germany, and the doctor there provided him with a pair of wire clippers with a one inch, rounded blade to cut the wires in case he became sick and needed to open his jaw to avoid choking.

Miller previously had the wire cutters inspected at Easterwood Airport, where personnel tagged the cutters with a security code that identified the wire cutters as a non-prohibited item. However, when Miller wanted to fly back home from San Francisco, he was told the tag useless in preventing security personnel from confiscating the cutters. As a result, Miller flew back to College Station without anything to open his jaw if he became sick.

The cause of problems such as this are two-pronged. First, airline security personnel must have a uniform policy regarding restricted items and must have the capabilities to make exceptions which all airports will acknowledge. Airline personnel must also be willing to carry items, such as Miller's, which present obvious exceptions to safety regulations. The problem would have been averted had the wire cutters been kept in the cockpit or with another airline employee on the flight.

Secondly, and most importantly, the public must be aware of how tight airline security is right now. Individuals cannot bring the



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same items on board a plane now that they might have been able to carry on a flight last summer. As a result, when packing for their flight, individuals should make arrangements for items which are questionable. As San Francisco airport spokesman Mike McCarron said, Miller's problems may have been averted had he presented a doctor's note. Calling ahead to both the Easterwood and the San Francisco airports would have been a good idea as well.

While airport security should have had the common sense to recognize that Miller needed the wire clippers for medical reasons, it is better that they erred on the side of caution. It is certainly preferable that Miller had difficulty getting on his flight rather than have an individual fool security personnel with a dangerous item that seems to have an equally legitimate use.

Although six months have passed since the airline industry was forced to tighten its policies, the system still needs work in order to prevent embarrassing instances such as Miller's. The only way airline security can work more smoothly is if security personnel and customers both recognize items which may present safety hazards well before the flight is scheduled to depart and make proper arrangements to ensure customer satisfaction and safety. This can only occur if passengers take the time to provide security personnel with ample warning and if security personnel create a uniform policy which provides reasonable solutions for exceptions such as 1st Lt. Miller's.

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MAIL CALL

Cross burning is an act of violence

In response to Luke Alsobrook's June 6 mail call:

I was disappointed to read Luke Alsobrook's mail call yesterday endorsing cross burning. He says on one hand that he detests cross burning, but then also says he thinks it should be made legal in all 50 states. He asserts that he is a Christian and cross burning personally pains him, yet I was always taught that standing up and promoting love and tolerance was a Christian value.

Alsobrook uses the First Amendment to justify his warped view. The First Amendment does guarantee free speech without government interference; however, burning a cross in someone's front yard or on his or her property, in my opinion, is not an expression of someone's beliefs.

Alsobrook stresses a bigot's constitutional right to burn a cross, but what about a victim's rights? It is an assault against their constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Could it be that minorities

are typically the victims of this assault and that Alsobrook does not concern himself with their freedoms?

Alsobrook says he knows "people demonstrate their opinions on everything from politics to religion in different ways." His statement grossly trivializes burning a cross. It is more than just "two sticks of wood nailed together." It is a vicious symbol of hate and intimidation.

Alsobrook says a cross being burned in no way guarantees violence. That is absurd. Obviously, Alsobrook does not have a clear concept of what a cross burning in his front yard would mean. It would mean he is now a mark of whatever group put it there and they know where he lives.

Perhaps if Alsobrook was on the receiving end of racial slurs or bigotry he would feel differently about endorsing a historically hate-filled act.

Alsobrook insults everyone who has fallen victim to this outrageous demonstration of ignorance.

Joseph Pleasant
Class of 2003