

## Local abortion debate is ridiculous

Sometimes it is difficult to sort out the truth when two small children are fighting. Did Johnny pull Sally's hair or did Sally kick little Johnny in the knee first? In such situations, it is usually better to not concern oneself with such details and chastise them both for their poor behavior. In Bryan-College Station, both pro-choice and pro-life advocates are the proverbial Johnny and Sally. It does not matter who kicked who first or who pulled whose hair. Both groups have embarrassed themselves through their incessant arguing and their downward spiral of immature behavior and constant, unconstructive fighting.



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However, debate between these groups is good for the community. Both sides have well-reasoned arguments to explain their position, and both care deeply about the abortion issue. By creating a dialogue and developing and executing programs which inform community members about women's issues, pro-choice advocates and pro-life advocates have made Bryan-College Station a more knowledgeable city.

The problem comes when these groups step outside the bounds of intelligent debate and turn to name-calling, lying and vandalism to emphasize their points.

On the morning of March 28, pro-life advocates who had organized a prayer session outside the Planned Parenthood building discovered two to three pounds of roofing nails, according to an estimate from the Bryan Police Department, placed in the parking lot where coalition members frequently parked. On March 22, similar tactics had been used to flatten the tires of coalition members. It is unlikely that Planned Parenthood members were the ones who committed these acts, however.

In the aftermath of the March 28 incident, stories were run in both *The Eagle* and *The Battalion*, as well as on local television station KBTX. These stories provided the Coalition for Life with the perfect opportunity to espouse their views to the public while appearing to be the good guys. In effect, if members of Planned Parenthood had placed the nails in the parking lot the coalition members use for their prayer sessions, it would have accomplished nothing more than to provide their ideological opponents with free advertising.

More likely, the nails were placed there by an independent individual or two who was so fervently opposed to the coalition's prayer sessions they committed the acts without giving serious consideration to their consequences.

After all, the prayer sessions outside Planned Parenthood can be extremely intimidating to those who wish to use the services provided.

Even when the people praying do not speak to those entering the Planned Parenthood building, the presence of all those eyes can be a frightening experience, especially for a young woman who would prefer to maintain her privacy. It is easy to understand why individuals, even bystanders, would be frustrated by such a form of intimidation masked behind a cloak of righteousness. However, by committing an act of vandalism, the perpetrators did nothing to help their cause and actually worsened it.

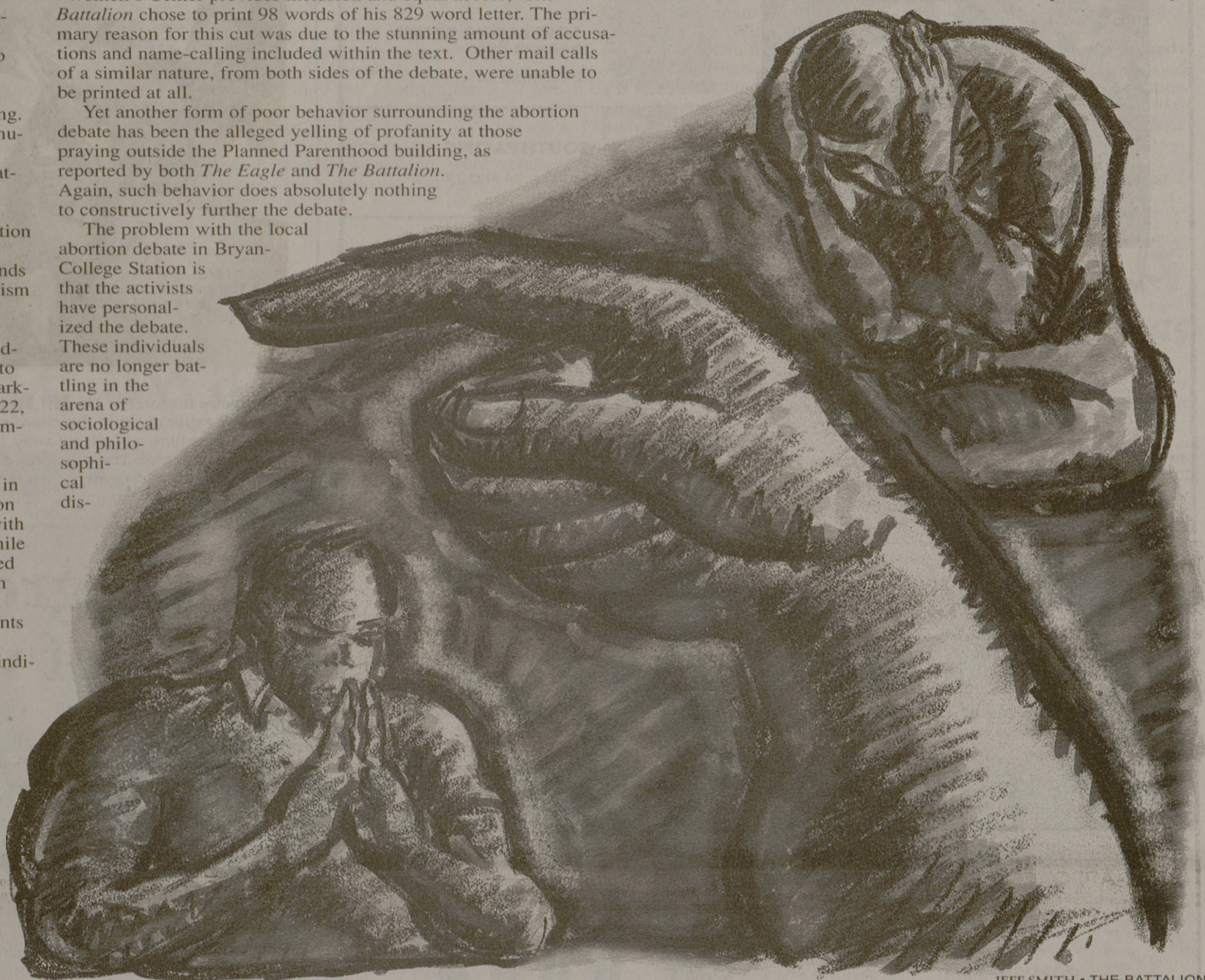
The use of nails is not the only way in which abortion debaters have been petty. In the aftermath of these incidents, as well as Christy Ruth's June 5 column, "Coalition for Life needs new strategy," letters have been sent to *Battalion* mail call flinging accusations that could not be published due to the libelous material held within. For example, in Dr. Larson Powell's June 13 mail call, "Women's Center provides inclusion and equal access," *The Battalion* chose to print 98 words of his 829 word letter. The primary reason for this cut was due to the stunning amount of accusations and name-calling included within the text. Other mail calls of a similar nature, from both sides of the debate, were unable to be printed at all.

Yet another form of poor behavior surrounding the abortion debate has been the alleged yelling of profanity at those praying outside the Planned Parenthood building, as reported by both *The Eagle* and *The Battalion*. Again, such behavior does absolutely nothing to constructively further the debate.

The problem with the local abortion debate in Bryan-College Station is that the activists have personalized the debate. These individuals are no longer battling in the arena of sociological and philosophical dis-

cussion, but instead have taken their debate into the realm of lies and vandalism. For these activists to save face, they must learn to better focus upon their goals and not upon those who disagree with them. Eventually, Sally and Johnny will have to grow up.

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JEFF SMITH • THE BATTALION

## Four-day school week would hurt students

"No school on Friday!" That is the cry heard in over 100 rural American communities in response to gutted education budgets. While some students might like the idea of three-day weekends, they are ultimately being cheated by the very system that is supposed to prepare them for their futures.



CHRISTY RUTH

From South Dakota to Louisiana, school districts nationwide are feeling the pinch of insufficient funding, thanks to sharp reductions in education spending. While proponents of the shortened week cite better attendance and less time lost to such extracurricular activities as teacher training and doctor appointments, critics fear the worst.

The first problem with this program is that supporters assume that elementary age children will be attentive for classes that last an hour and a half. Additionally, despite these lengthened class periods, time is still lost. Sure, teachers may be more wary of wasting time, but that does not amount to much when dealing with children whose attention spans have been stretched to the breaking point.

Experts in the field of education research at the Century Foundation, a liberal-leaning Washington research organization, emphasize the regressive nature of the plan, setting the longer school weeks in Asia and Europe as the basis for mandating higher standards. The concerns of the Century Foundation do not just encompass the present advantages and disadvantages of the shortened week program, rather they focus on the impact such a system will have on America's future.

As a country that proudly claims to be the "leader of the free world," it would be a travesty for America to let education fall by the wayside. All hope for future leadership in this nation cannot be invested in private school children. As long as the United States is democratic, the government is only as strong as it's weakest, most uneducated voting constituency. The strong American economy depends on the minds of its educated and innovative citizens.

Some believe that America would still reign

superior over the global economy in spite of a weak education system as long as domestic commodities maintained a high demand overseas and American business held a strong presence in the stock market. This sort of thinking fails to focus

on the long-term effects of having a poorly educated population, such as an economy plagued by fragmentation. Domestic self-sufficiency would dwindle, and the crisis that America has with the Middle East over oil would spread into other facets of the economy, thus giving other nations political power over America because of their abilities to produce what America cannot.

Technology, for instance, has long been hailed as the wave of the future, and America has been the forerunner in the race for improvement. Japan, however, continually takes American innovations and improves them drastically. Japan has battled with U.S. producers in the automobile, computer and electronic appliance industries with some measure of success. While this failure on behalf of America to keep up is certainly not sinking the economy, it is not favorable.

While the government continues to expand the defense budget, it is ignoring education at the expense of its own future. The Air Force can have all the money in the world to build fighter planes, but that money serves no purpose when there are no workers with engineering skills to design the crafts. The cuts in the education budget demonstrate what little the government has in the ability of educated citizens to keep a nation strong.

Friday classes are a tragic casualty of reduced spending that send a strong message to the nation's future leaders: education is not important. Working parents who rely on their children being at school during the day will lose more money, while personnel costs, which make up 80 percent of a typical district's expenses, stay exactly the same. The amount of money that this plan will save cannot possibly justify the amount of damage it will inflict.

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## Public humiliation is legitimate punishment

Long gone are the days of public stonings, hangings or heads rolling after the fateful drop of the guillotine.

However, State District Judge Henry Poe is promoting his own form of publicly shameful punishment for those who choose to deviate from the laws that govern our social existence. Only Poe's punishment is more reminiscent of Nathaniel Hawthorne's shameful Scarlet Letter, in which his infamous adulterous character was forced to wear an A on her breast for the remainder of her life. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, as part of Poe's probation terms, he often makes probationers march a specific number of times a year wearing signs that tell the public what he or she was convicted of.

As a result of legislation that Poe helped write, he has sentenced several hundred probationers to sign carrying. Although many find the practice futile and harsh, the judge has retrieved an important element from our social punishment history that has been abandoned, and he has implemented it successfully in modern society while still maintaining a keen modern perspective on the prisoner's right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment.

The principle behind sign carrying is relatively simple. Most people do not enjoy being publicly humiliated; therefore, a criminal will feel the public scorn for the act that he or she committed. Ideally, they will more fully accept responsibility and will feel remorse. In addition, public citizens who view the fate of the fallen man may be deterred from committing the same crime.

When a person views a probationer wearing a sign stating that he or she murdered a man, they are reminded that criminals do get caught, they do go to jail and they do reap the consequences of their actions for years to come.

Also, according to the *Chronicle*, another reason society has turned to public shame is because of its frustration with the ineffectiveness of prisons to punish and rehabilitate. It is easy for the public to believe criminals are receiving short sentences in prisons fully equipped with televisions, weight rooms and the opportunity to refine their criminal behavior skills. The astounding number of repeat offend-



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ers who do not seem the slightest bit effected by the threat of returning to prison solidifies Americans' lack of faith in the prison system. Therefore, even though studies do not show that public shame better rehabilitates

or punishes criminals than prison, it allows society to have the much-needed satisfaction in visually knowing they have adequately punished criminals. Society wants its moral attitude toward crime expressed and public shame does that, Dan Kahan, a Yale University law professor, told the *Chronicle*.

It cannot be expected that all criminals will have a more adequate punishment and rehabilitation as a result of Poe's shame punishment. To assume this would imply that every criminal has the same acute human emotions of guilt and humiliation as the rest of the population and, if this were the case, there would be a significantly lower number of crimes. However, it is very plausible that for some probationers, the public display of humiliation will help them take responsibility for their actions and think twice about committing a crime again. For example, the *Chronicle* depicts the story of Michael Hubacek, a 23 year-old who pleaded no contest to intoxicated manslaughter charges and now claims the sign carrying has helped him atone for his mistakes and help others avoid similar ones. If shame punishment has this effect on even a few individuals, it will benefit our society.

Although public shame punishment may seem digressive and cruel, it must be remembered that when an individual commits an act of criminal behavior, they are not respecting their community and therefore should expect to receive a sub-par level of respect from their community. Whether as a means of deterrence, punishment or atonement, judges should not be dissuaded to implement this practice in their probation terms and should encourage others to do the same.

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