

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY

Dot-Kids Implementation and Efficiency Act is poor substitute for parenting

American parents have become so lazy, pathetic and technologically incompetent that they now need the assistance of the government to help entertain their children in the digital age. This at least seems to be the opinion of the U.S. Congress.



COLLINS EZEANYIM

The House of Representatives and the Senate recently passed a final version of the Dot-Kids Implementation and Efficiency Act. The act will create an Internet subdomain featuring content specifically created for children, according to *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*.

Whereas other Web sites use .com, .org or .edu domains, the child-friendly Web sites the government will oversee will use the .kids.us domain, an extension of the .us domain already in use by the U.S. government.

"The new law will give children their own playground on the Internet and will facilitate the easier browsing and filtering of content that many parents desire," Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., a lead sponsor of the bill said in a statement to *The Washington Post*.

However, the new law will prove to be a useless provision that will not prevent children from accessing inappropriate material on the Internet.

For example, Web sites on the .kids.us domain will only be able to link to other sites with the .kids.us address, according to *The Washington Post*. But if a child wishes to exit from a .kids.us Web site, there's nothing to stop him from simply typing another address into the Internet browser.

Furthermore, the question of what is appropriate for children will inevitably lead to differences of opinion. Congress will be in charge of developing "child-friendly standards," and a company called NeuStar, Inc. will be in charge of enforcing these standards, according to *The Washington Post*.

But as Marilyn Geewax of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* points out, "gay parents in San Francisco may want their children to have access to information that heterosexual parents in rural Alabama might find offensive."

There is no way the government will be able to develop standards that please all parents. The only way to accomplish this task would be to make the content of .kids.us Web sites so watered down and cookie-cutter that children will easily become bored and avoid these Web sites while surfing the Internet.

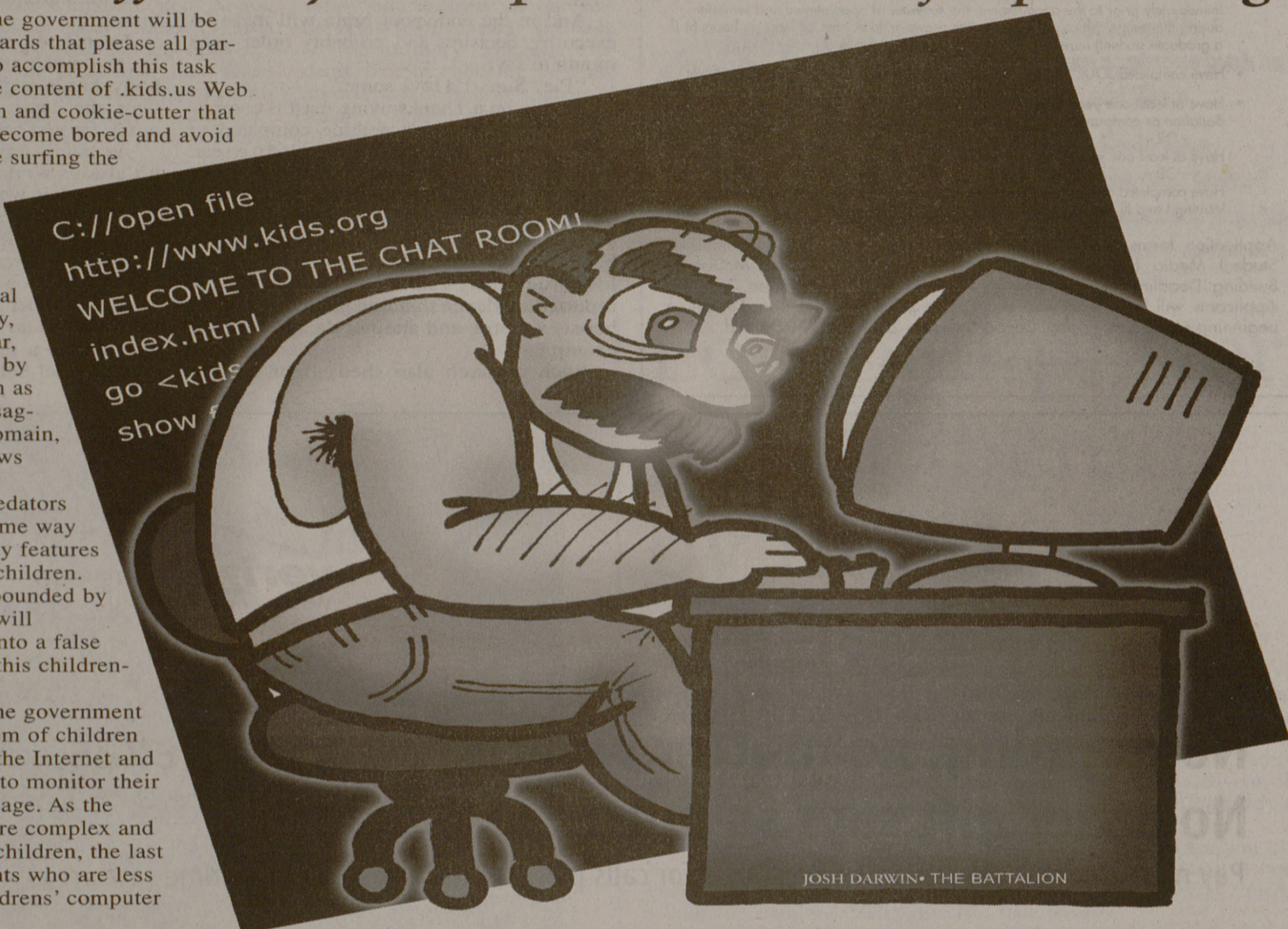
Some critics have also correctly pointed out that a domain specifically for children will attract sexual predators. Supposedly, Congress and NeuStar, Inc. will prevent this by limiting features such as chat and instant messaging on the .kids.us domain, according to Cox News Service.

But tech-savvy predators will probably find some way to crack these security features and access innocent children. The problem is compounded by the fact that parents will inevitably be lulled into a false sense of security by this children-only domain.

Many will think the government has solved the problem of children being victimized on the Internet and that there is no need to monitor their children's Internet usage. As the Internet becomes more complex and dangerous for naive children, the last thing needed is parents who are less attentive to their children's computer habits.

President Bush is expected to sign the bill that will allow .kids.us to be implemented. This development is both surprising and disappointing.

As a Republican, Bush is supposed to understand that there are some problems the government can't fix and should not try to fix. He should be encouraging parents to sit down with their children while exploring the Internet and explain to them how it works and how to use it.



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The notion that the government must create child-friendly content is ridiculous. There are plenty of Web sites with the purpose of educating and entertaining children. Parents must point out how to find and use them.

Of course, parents can't be at the computer all the time. But software already exists that can track where a child has been while surfing the Internet and a parent can review it and discuss with the child what type of sites they consider appropriate.

The government providing more education about how to raise children in the Internet age would be much more helpful than creating Web sites that will probably prove to be unpopular anyway.

Unfortunately, it appears President Bush and Congress are determined to learn this lesson the hard way.

Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major.

MAIL CALL

Elephants do not belong parading around campus

A & M has done it again.

Not only do we want to sacrifice human lives for the sake of tradition and Bonfire, but now we sink to the level of degrading what is possibly the world's greatest animal for the sake of — yes, you guessed it — tradition!

In a day that measured between 35 and 45 degrees Fahrenheit, we made tropical/desert animals parade around campus for hours and do tricks for students' own enjoyment.

What has this University come to?

OK, I understand that having these animals walk around campus does no harm itself, but what kind of asinine idea is this?

Could someone not have exercised some common sense just this once and said "It's too cold, let's not expose these animals to

the elements because they could die?"

This university has shown no compassion, class or empathy for these animals.

Yet, I am not surprised, because if Aggies are still willing to throw a few students on top of a gigantic pile of logs which could possibly fall again, this is no problem.

After all, why should we care about a bunch of elephants, right?

L. Mabel Cortina
Class of 2003

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 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 also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebatt.com. Attachments are not accepted.

Iranian students doing right thing by protesting

On Nov. 7, Iranian professor Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death by hanging. His punishment was to be preceded by eight years in jail, 74 lashes and a 10-year ban from teaching, all due to a speech he made in August encouraging Muslims not to "blindly" follow religious leaders, according to *The New York Times*.

The sentence was handed down by powerful religious leaders who were neither elected nor in the majority, making the punishment absolutely ludicrous. Aghajari was given a death sentence because he voiced an opinion *The New York Times* says a majority of Iranians share.

Not surprisingly, the sentence has resulted in weeks of protesting by Iranian college students, who are outraged that religious leaders would go so far to stifle any political dissent.

Aghajari's sentence is the harshest handed down by the hard-line Iranian judiciary to reform activists pushing for more separation between religion and state. The judiciary continues to defend the punishment despite being ordered by Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, to review the sentence. The punishment given to Aghajari is simply meant to thwart the Iranian Parliament and President Khatami's attempts to push through reforms.

Iranian President Khatami has been urging governmental reforms since 1997, when he was first elected with more than 70 percent of the vote. He has been thwarted at every turn and the Iranian people — especially the younger generations, which make up two-thirds of the population — are running out of patience.

Khatami recently introduced two bills to Parliament that would limit the control of the Council of Guardians, an all-powerful and unelected group headed by Ayatollah Khamenei, according to the *Miami Herald*. *The New York Times* reports the bills would restrict the Council's ability to overturn acts of Parliament and to bar candidates from running for office, as



JENELLE WILSON

well as increasing the president's constitutional control over the courts currently controlled by religious extremists.

The religious leaders are expected to kill the two parliamentary bills, but Khatami and other reformists have threatened to resign if this occurs.

In 1999, similar demonstrations began at Tehran University and quickly spread nationwide after some students were attacked for protesting the closing of a moderate newspaper, *Salam*, according to *The Iranian*.

Police forces and assault gangs, controlled by religious leaders, violently defeated the protests with guns, chains and machetes. Several students died and hundreds were injured. Many student leaders were arrested and sentenced to death, according to the *Chicago Tribune*. Ayatollah Khamenei has threatened to use similar means to halt the current student protests.

Iranian college students are showing remarkable courage by continuing the protests despite government threats. They have been wearing white scarves over their mouths to symbolize the lack of free speech and the intolerance for dissent of hard-line religious leaders. Students have turned Aghajari's sentence, which was meant to stifle opposition and instill fear, into a way to push for greater and more immediate democratic political and social reforms, as well as the release of other unfairly jailed activists.

A majority of the Iranian people are tired of theocratic rule by religious leaders who suppress basic human rights, such as autonomy and free speech.

Aghajari and other activists are putting their lives at risk to push for reforms and students are defending the right to simply have opinions and a mind of their own. They should be commended for the courage they continue to demonstrate.

Jenelle Wilson is a junior political science major.

