Florida's new law too harsh

Invasive law requires mothers to reveal personal information prior to adoption

LAUREL FRANCK

A law passed in Florida is being labeled a modern-day scarlet letter and has met with national outrage and debate. The law requires a woman who doesn't know the identity of her child's birth father, and wants to place the child up for adoption through a private agency, to purchase ads in newspapers in the cities where the child may have been conceived, according to abcnews.com.

The ads must include the woman's full name, height, weight and coloring, the names or descriptions of every possible father, and the dates and places of the sexual encounters that might have produced the child, according to the *Miami Herald*. The ads are required to run once a week for four weeks and the father may come forward at any point to stop adoption proceedings.

This law is absurd for numerous reasons, the most important being it is a violation of the woman's state and federal rights to privacy.

Supporters of the law say its goal is to provide fathers with every opportunity to take responsibility for their children and prevent painful custody battles that can break up adoptive families, according to abcnews.com. However, approximately 8,000 adoptions take place in Florida every year and only a handful have been challenged because a birth father stepped forward too late, according to abcnews.com. While these cases have often been highly publicized, they are not the norm. Even the law's chief supporter, state Senator Walter "Skip" Campbell Jr., D-Broward County, acknowledged the law is a "well-intentioned" reform that has had "significant unintended consequences," according to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

This law is an utter invasion of privacy and blatantly disregards a woman's right to confidentiality. Nothing is gained by making women divulge potentially embarrassing, intimate details about their sex lives and possibly be subjected to public humiliation and ridicule. As David Bundy, president of the Children's Home Society of Florida, said, "We do have a concern about the level of information that is required ... there are ways you could get proper notice to birth fathers without going into the specificity and detail that's required in the current statute."

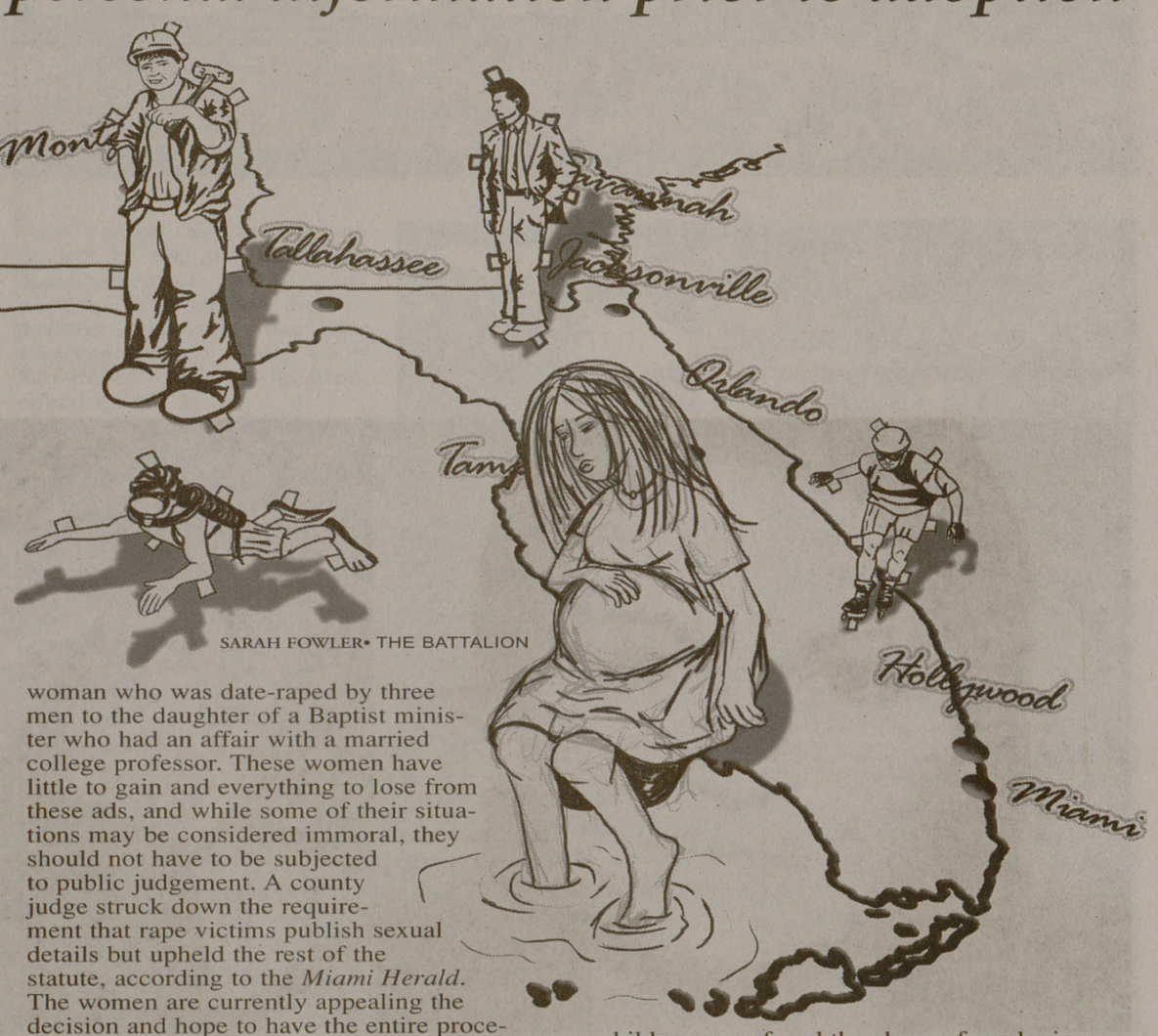
One less invasive method would be the formation of a paternity registry, which, as reported by abcnews.com, is favored by many adoption proponents and already used by 30 states. Paternity registries give men an opportunity to enter a database of potential fathers that is checked before adoptions are finalized, and if a match is made, the men are contacted and given a chance to stop the adoption. This is much more favorable to all parties involved and would protect their privacy and identities.

Some critics fear the current legislation actually hurts families by deterring single mothers from seeking loving adoptive families and could also encourage more abortions or abandoned babies after birth, according to abcnews.com.

As Bob Tuke, president of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, said, "It's anti-parent, anti-adoption, anti-family, and most profoundly anti-child." Jeanne Tate, an adoption attorney and executive vice president of the Florida Adoption Agency, said the law "has had a chilling effect on adoptions — it has turned girls to abortion," reports *Florida Today*. Approximately 37.5 percent of children in Florida are born to single mothers, and 12.9 percent to teenagers, reports *Florida Today*, and as 18-year-old Melissa Colleran said, "I didn't want to be humiliated in the newspaper. If you've seen the ads, they are not discreet at all."

The ads are not only humiliating to the women, but to the potential fathers as well. As Charlotte H. Danciu, a Boca Raton lawyer who specializes in adoptions and has gone to court to challenge the law, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "This is such an intrusion of a woman's privacy and the privacy of the men who were involved with her ... And the men named in the newspaper may not even be the father."

A teenager from St. Lucie and five other mothers filed suit in Palm Beach County, claiming the law invades their privacy, according to the *Miami Herald*. The clients ranged from a woman who was date-raped by three men to the daughter of a Baptist minister who had an affair with a married college professor. These women have little to gain and everything to lose from these ads, and while some of their situations may be considered immoral, they should not have to be subjected to public judgement. A county judge struck down the requirement that rape victims publish sexual details but upheld the rest of the statute, according to the *Miami Herald*. The women are currently appealing the decision and hope to have the entire procedure revoked.



SARAH FOWLER• THE BATTALION

The Florida legislature will not reconvene until March 2003, and arizonarepublic.com reports the Florida Bar is drafting new legislation to offer lawmakers at that time. If courts have not struck down the law by then, Florida lawmakers need to do away with it as quickly as possible when they meet again, before more children are refused the chance for a loving adoptive family and more birth parents are humiliated and embarrassed.

Laurel Franck is a junior English major.

MAIL CALL

Player's death, UT game end bad week

So we ran out of time. Big deal. I, for one, am not ashamed of our Ags in the least.

Let's not forget that these men lost a very dear friend a mere four days before the game. Brandon was a member of their family ... of our family, Ags.

We all feel his loss deeply, but none more so than his teammates. The fact that they could go out there and play with so much heart and bravery before they'd even had the closure of a funeral is truly amazing, and I've never been more proud to call myself an Aggie than I was watching them march off the field with heads held high on Friday.

Games come and go, even rivalry games; but once lives are lost, they can never be replaced. Let's have a little focus here, and remember what really counts in the long run.

So let the Longhorns have their last hurrah. They've had a good season (Except for that pesky OU game ... gee, those Sooners are so hard to beat ... oh wait. ....), but their messiah is gone. We've got Reggie, Dustin, the Wrecking Crew, and what's being called "one of the best recruiting classes in the nation" stepping up to the plate, not to mention the home field advantage next But for now, I commend our team for fighting through a tough, emotional game.

Way to go, boys. I'm proud of you, no matter what the score.

Stacy Reeves
Class of 2006

I was sitting in the t.u. student section with three of my Aggie friends during the game on Friday. Wearing our Maroon Out T-shirts in a sea of burnt orange, we knew we were going to be ridiculed. However, we never could have imagined how the t.u. students were going to treat us. Every time the Longhorns scored, the t.u. students would turn to the four of us and begin cussing and flipping us off. The low point of the game occurred when I turned around to see which t-sip was yelling at me and I read what was on his shirt.

On his shirt were the following words, "What is better than four dead Aggies? A fifth!" After reading those words, I honestly can't remember what came out of my mouth. I think I said something about having some respect, totally shocked by the shirt, especially after the tragedy that happened to our football team this past week.

Turning around and seeing that shirt capped off the worst experience I have ever had at a college football game. I can deal with the Longhorns beating the Aggies, but when t-sips curse at me, throw obscene gestures at my face, and wish there were more dead Aggies, it is painfully obvious there is something wrong with texas university.

During my four years at A&M, we have lost to t.u. three times. However, at the end of the day, I am still able to stand tall and proudly say that I am a Fightin' Texas Aggie.

Michael Shawn Kelly II
Class of 2003

Restructuring of INS desperately needed

MARIANO CASTILLO

The aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks revealed glaring incompetence within the ranks of Immigration & Naturalization Services (INS). In one of the most highlighted instances, the INS issued visas posthumously to two Sept. 11 hijackers. Therefore, it is no surprise that the restructuring of the INS is among the most controversial priorities of the recently passed Homeland Security Bill.

Recent events along the Mexican border, most notably calls for militias to take arms against illegal immigrants, demonstrate the urgency to make the INS more efficient. Despite critics' warnings that splitting the INS into two bodies, as the Homeland Security Bill proposes, will create an even more dysfunctional bureaucracy, the restructuring process is a welcome initiative. Proper planning for the new organizations, one dedicated to immigration services and one dedicated to immigration law enforcement, will benefit border security issues and immigrants' rights.

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By creating a body with the sole purpose of immigration law enforcement, the issue of illegal border crossings can be handled by trained federal agents, rather than the growing number of vigilantes in Arizona and Texas. Moreover, federal agents and local governments should take advantage of the momentum of the INS restructuring to reaffirm their commitment to keep citizens from taking the law into their own hands.

This is especially sensitive in places such as Cochise County, Ariz., where last month – under the headline "Enough is Enough!" – the county's newspaper spearheaded the creation of a vigilante group to combat illegal immigration, as reported by *The Arizona Daily Star*.

Illegal immigration is an issue best dealt with by trained professionals. Through border patrol, the inability of the INS to manage illegal crossings has resulted in resentment against ranchers and driven immigrants to take more dangerous and deadly routes to the United States.

By focusing only on law enforcement set by the Department of Homeland Security, more resources can be allocated to police the border safely. The timing of U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Tony Garza's announcement that the White House will resume its push to grant amnesty to illegal immigrants is not coincidental. President Bush has long been a proponent of granting amnesty, though not citizenship, to illegal immigrants. High-level talks between Bush and Mexico's president Vicente Fox were cut short because of the terrorist attacks in September 2001. Such a comprehensive amnesty package, coupled with INS restructuring, will go a long way to improve relations and make the border economy more efficient.

A good restructuring process should unravel the contradictions Americans hold regarding immigration. Politically, most officials push for more stringent security along the border, while at the same time wanting to profit from low-wage labor provided by immigrants – legal or not.

The Washington Post last week succinctly described this trend: "Americans like to celebrate, in the abstract, their history as a nation of immigrants. Yet the tone of the political discussion is often broadly anti-immigration."

This kind of hypocrisy in America can be addressed in a social, economic and political context with the INS restructure as a catalyst, but it will take more than Bush's signature on the Homeland Security Bill. It will take a strong effort by leaders in the White House, federal border agents and the Mexican government.

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