

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

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## THE FUTURE OF EPHEDRINE

As the FDA threatens harsher restrictions, students must work to save supplement

Those familiar with ephedrine have likely heard the many exaggerated claims about the herb's supposed risks. After all, the media, bolstered by highly questionable Food and Drug Administration studies and professional athlete deaths, rarely report anything positive about the herb. Ephedrine's weight loss and energy-boosting benefits — benefits the FDA even recognizes on its Web site, [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) — are seemingly ignored. The FDA is currently accepting public comment on the supplement before making a federal push to support new restrictions on ephedra-containing products," according to its Web site.

As The Washington Times reports, these restrictions are the first steps toward a nationwide ban, something no freedom-loving American wants to see. As March comes to a close, students and others face their last chance to voice to the FDA their desires to have unrestricted access to herbs and dietary supplements that may benefit their health.

The ephedrine debate was recently ignited by the untimely death of Baltimore Orioles pitcher Steve Bechler last month. Bechler's death is indeed sad, but even more upsetting is how a legal supplement, ephedrine, was labeled his killer by the media, an assertion that simply isn't true. Yes, Bechler had been taking ephedrine, but as The Washington Times reported earlier this month, "other factors could have been instrumental in Bechler's death, such as he was overweight, had an enlarged heart, had... high blood pressure, and was diagnosed two years ago with an



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abnormal liver." Bechler, who was 250 lbs., died of a heat-stroke according to medical examiners. Sure, ephedrine might have stimulated his metabolism, but there is no conclusive proof that it killed him. Almost all "ephedrine deaths" have similar circumstances surrounding them.

Unfortunately for consumers, the FDA is using catastrophic events such as this to turn the tide of public opinion against the herb. After Bechler's death, the administration cited a questionable RAND Corporation study, known as the Rand report, before reopening a proposed rule affecting the sale of ephedrine entitled "Dietary Supplements Containing Ephedrine Alkaloids," according to the FDA Web site. Health-minded students concerned with their access to legal dietary supplements must voice their opinions about this rule so that it never becomes federal law, as it would almost surely result in a ban on ephedrine.

As The Washington Times reports, the rule would, among other things, require "that every bottle containing ephedra list death, heart attacks and strokes as potential side effects." And though it would not ban ephedrine outright, the FDA has not been shy about admitting this is its goal. This ruling would come as a blow not only to the dietary supplement industry, but to the civil liberties of all Americans who enjoy their consumer freedoms.

The media has thus far failed miserably to report on ephedrine with any sort of balance or fairness, so here are the facts. Since ephedrine first gained com-



mon use in Sudafed and other health products, it has only been linked to 100 deaths, according to the FDA. Only in two of these supposed ephedrine deaths were "no other contributing factors identified." Furthermore, RAND admitted in its February report that it cannot prove ephedrine has caused any adverse events, even recognizing that its own case studies "are a weak form of scientific evidence," according to the FDA site.

FDA Commissioner of Food and Drugs Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D., even admits that "the overall evidence suggests that serious adverse events from ephedra appear to be infrequent... (and) it may be possible to use ephedra safely." How can anyone trust the FDA's criticisms of ephedrine when the FDA isn't even sure of what it's reporting? The fact remains that there is simply not enough damning evidence against ephedrine to justify

further restricting it.

Americans treasure their personal freedoms, but the FDA is doing its best to infringe upon them. Students and others must voice their disapproval of these proposed restrictions to the FDA, or it will only further limit Americans' access to legitimate dietary supplements.

George Deutsch is a senior journalism major. Graphic by Frank Chance.

## Gay awareness, but at what cost?

Conoley's diversity initiatives flawed

Gay Awareness Week, which begins today, is a student and former student pay rolled mockery of responsible education and open discussion. Disregarding the health, psychological and moral implications of unequivocally promoting homosexual behavior on impressionable students, Texas A&M departments have gone further than ever before in sponsoring such activities and harassing those that would stand in their way. Those administrators behind the persecution of Christian faculty should be reprimanded by A&M.

This year, the relatively benign requests for "tolerance" and "acceptance" by the A&M homosexual community have been replaced with demands for "promotion" and "celebration" of the homosexual lifestyle. On Feb. 4, the Faculty Advisory Committee to Dr. Jane Conoley, dean of the College of Education and Human Development, drafted a statement calling for the "celebration and promotion of all forms of human diversity, including sexual orientation and domestic partnerships."

Conoley then invited faculty input. In response, a group of professors in the Department of Health and Kinesiology submitted a letter to the FAC objecting to the statement based on their religious convictions and their obligation to look out for the welfare of their students. "We do not hold ourselves up as people without sin or moral fault. But Christian love neither demands of us nor permits us to celebrate and promote a sinful lifestyle. To do so would be to compromise our moral convictions and deny our faith." Sexual orientation is not a federally protected class, and homosexual "marriages" are not recognized in Texas.

Conoley responded in an e-mail by mocking the Christian belief of "loving the sinner while hating to sin" as an "empty, rhetorical gesture at best, and a cover for persecution at worst." She in particular ridiculed Dr. Steve Crouse, a professor in the Department of Health and Kinesiology, as being inexperienced and for employing his religious beliefs in his professional life, comparing the Christian faculty's objections to promoting homosexuality to racism. She ended her response by claiming that the Christian faculty "misinterprets" the Bible. Interestingly, Conoley might get the chance to spread her religious intolerance to a wider audience. Conoley has been named as one of two finalists in the search for A&M's next provost. Conoley must not be given this power. Dr. Patrick Slattery, a member of the FAC and

a professor with sexually explicit material on his Web site — [www.coe.tamu.edu/~pslattery/](http://www.coe.tamu.edu/~pslattery/) — attacked signatories of the HLKN letter. "I propose that the professors who signed this statement be censured. I also would like to propose that Steve Crouse be immediately fired from his position as an assistant dean of the College of Education. His hatred is an insult...there is no place for bigots in our leadership." Apparently, the tolerance policy is a courtesy extended to those who engage in sexually deviant behavior, but not principled Christians. Coming from someone who plays fast and loose with the First Amendment for its protection of protest, it appears hypocritical of Slattery to want to quiet the Christian faculty.

This is not the first time the feigned innocence of the campus gay movement has been lost. Last October a representative of the University's Gender Issues Education Services department wore a shirt that read, "Every time a Republican dies, a queer angel gets their wings." A "Day of Silence" included in the festivities is meant to represent the harassment suffered by the gay community. This theorized oppression of homosexuals appears to be a charade when contrasted with the threats of firing leveled against Christian faculty.

In a Feb. 26 e-mail to staff and faculty, Conoley stated the official CEHD operating policy in regards to homosexuals. "Their minority status gives them special access to protection and support because as a group they are subjected to unjust harassment and insensitive and inhumane treatment. They also suffer from pre-judgment as a group of people and so decisions of promotion, tenure, other resource issues made about them deserve heightened scrutiny." This is little more than an unsubstantiated charge of discrimination against members of the College of Education used to justify a policy of discrimination in favor of homosexuals — a guideline that is legally dubious.

Gay Awareness Week will conclude with a display of the AIDS quilt to remind students of those killed by AIDS. However, the true tragedy represented by the AIDS quilt is the deaths of students resulting from poor choices and, in some cases, homosexual encounters. Aggies must demand that their money not be spent on programs that student dollars have no business promoting, and that may harm their fellow classmates. University officials should stand behind their Christian faculty, and keep individuals who would belittle the religious beliefs of a majority of students and instructors out of critical University positions.

Matthew Maddox is a senior management major.

Conoley's efforts should be praised

Today marks the first day of the annual Gay Awareness Week, and this year the event is not without controversy. Gay Awareness Week was created to educate and foster open and honest discussion about issues concerning the status of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons here on Texas A&M's campus. Leading the way in raising the level of acceptance and tolerance on the campus is Dr. Jane Conoley, dean of the College of Education and candidate for the position of executive vice president and provost. Conoley has suffered backlash from other faculty and students when she authored a statement in which she urged the "celebration and promotion of all forms of human diversity, including sexual orientation and domestic partnerships." Conoley needs to be praised for her continued work to reduce the level of intolerance of alternative sexual orientations here on the campus.

Many people who oppose this statement use their Christian beliefs to mask their prejudice and intolerance for homosexuality. While it is their right to believe that alternative sexual orientations are wrong, it is not their right to persecute, discriminate against or, in extreme cases, harm individuals who do believe in these lifestyles.

America is the land of liberty. It is the right of every American, whether gay or straight, to live his life as he chooses. It is not right to condemn those on either side of the argument. Many people get lost in the argument of who is right, and forget that it is not about who is right, but about the effort to promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity on the A&M campus.

In Conoley's e-mail to the faculty and staff, she writes that she is aware her statements will make members of the community uncomfortable, but that she is working with other University leaders to create an environment that is welcoming and accepting to all. Conoley needs to be praised for her desire to make the A&M campus tolerant of everyone.

It is ridiculous for people to believe that by promoting acceptance and tolerance of all lifestyles students will be led down the path

of homosexuality. People do not choose their sexuality. Homosexuality is more than sex; it is about love and affection for a member of the same sex.

According to the memo sent to the College of Education from the faculty members of the Department of Health and Kinesiology, members of the HLKN faculty believe that "the current draft of the FAC Statement on Tolerance stands in contrast to these state of Texas statutes by stating that we will 'celebrate and promote human diversity in all its forms,' including (as one would infer from the current draft statement) any form of sexual orientation, including homosexuality. In light of these clear statements of the Texas Legal Code, we urge FAC members to consider the repercussions and negative consequences of this draft statement." It is true that sexual activity between consenting gay adults in

Texas is currently illegal. Yet, this fact does not restrict the College of Education from adopting an open and tolerance-based policy that includes sexual orientation. The only thing illegal is the act of sexual intercourse; the lifestyle and the feelings are not illegal.

Other people believe that homosexuality is a disease that needs to be cured. This belief shows a lack of understanding of the situation. People do not wake up one morning

and decide that they are going to be gay. It is a lifelong realization, and is often compounded by feelings of self-hatred. This self-hatred is developed by continually having people preach to them that their feelings are morally wrong. It is the job of the University to insure an open and welcoming environment for all who are here, no matter what their sexual orientation is.

The University needs more people like Dr. Conoley. She is working to break down barriers that prevent A&M from becoming a truly welcoming environment for all who are here. While some faculty members will continue to resist being tolerant to all lifestyles, others in the community will remember that America is a land of freedom, and included in that freedom is the right to not be discriminated against for having a different sexual orientation.

Brianne Porter is a senior political science major.

### Agreement

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