

## EDITORIAL

### OFFENSIVE PARADE YCT protest in bad taste

Americans are entitled to freedom of speech and expression. States are prohibited by the Constitution from regulating the content of speech that is offensive, hostile and demeaning. However, while the Constitution protects what may be considered hate speech, it does not prevent others from criticizing clear abuses of the right to free expression.

The Young Conservatives of Texas' anti-gay demonstration last Wednesday fell into this category of abusive, hostile and bigoted speech. Although YCT officials contend that the demonstrations were not meant to insult gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students, it is hard to see how "Satan is a flamer" could be taken as anything other than a direct attack on this group of Aggies. If the Young Conservatives was strictly concerned with Gender Issues Education Services funding events during Coming Out Week, as it claims, one must wonder how "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" is supposed to advertise a funding complaint.

As a recognized student organization at an institute of higher learning, YCT is welcome to engage the student body in debate over the use of student fees in a mature and civilized manner, but this is not what happened last week. Instead of respecting the student body's ability to talk about this issue rationally, YCT reverted to name-calling to get its opinion across.

Tacking blatantly offensive banners to vehicles and parading them around campus — just days before the fifth anniversary of the death of Matthew Shepard, who was strapped to a fence, beaten into a coma and left to die allegedly because he was gay — is neither a mature nor respectable way to express beliefs and deserves to be denounced by Texas A&M student leaders.

## THE BATTALION

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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@thebattalion.net

### MAIL CALL

#### Demonstrations showed outdated thinking

In response to Sarah Szuminski's Oct. 9 article:

Call it what you want, the YCT anti-gay rally is simply another way to advertise to potential students that they are not welcome at Texas A&M and to ostracize homosexuals who are already enrolled there. Now that I'm out in the rest of the world and a working professional, I was shocked to read The Battalion's headline "YCT protest coming out week." It is so obvious to those not immersed in that isolated world that is College Station, how outdated and unrepresentative this thinking is.

Texas A&M is supposed to be a university of progressive ideas and acceptance of fellow students. You don't have to advertise that you accept homosexuals but to maliciously target one group and decide to focus all of your hostilities on them is sick. You don't speak for all conservatives and certainly don't represent the student body.

Jana Rodriguez  
Class of 1997

#### YCT protest was against religious principles

In response to a Oct. 13 mail call:

Ms. Davis made the comment that what TAMU had done was "a slap in the face of Christians." Ms. Davis needs to know that neither she nor any member of her organization has the right to speak for any Christian other than themselves.

The YCT is ostensibly a secular organization, yet it bases its freely distributed opinions on religious principles. Texas A&M is a state-supported school, and

as such, is under no obligation whatsoever to create its policies and base its decisions on religious principles. Indeed, A&M has a duty not to promote any religious agenda, Christian or otherwise.

I am a lifelong Christian. I have been an active member of a Christian church most of my life. I have served my church as an elder for several years. I happen to disagree with the stand that Ms. Davis and the YCT have taken against homosexuality. The Bible is very clear in stating that we are to love our neighbor and that God's grace is available to anyone, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation or station in life. The actions and words of the YCT reflect anything but a loving attitude toward one's neighbor.

Bill Robbins  
Class of 1981

#### Inaccurate facts in diversity article

In response to Esther Robards-Forbes Oct. 13 article:

I'd like to clarify a statement that was attributed to me in the "VP of diversity ready to fill role" article where I was stated as being a part of "the selection committee" that chose Dr. Anderson, when in fact I was solely a part of the student leaders committee which had the opportunity to interview each candidate for the Vice President of diversity position. The student leader committee's suggestions and concerns regarding the candidates were then relayed to Dr. Gates.

Although the student body is being the most affected by this new office position, it is apparent that we as the committee formed by student leaders are not to be referred to as "the selection committee."

Julio Jana  
International Student Association President

## Cruel and unusual

### Chemicals used to execute inmates are inhumane

Perhaps opponents of animal testing would take a perverse pleasure in the irony that animals are being treated more humanely than people when it comes to killing them. While it is a crime in Tennessee to use the chemical pancuronium bromide in pet euthanasia, the same chemical is currently used in Tennessee and nearly 30 other states — including Texas — in the execution of death row inmates.

A drug too inhumane to be used on animals should not be used on humans, no matter how terrible their crime.

Opponents suggest that pancuronium bromide — marketed as Pavulon — creates a chemical tomb that leaves the prisoner paralyzed. In the words of Tennessee judge Ellen Hobbs Lyle, it serves "no legitimate purpose" in the execution, other than allowing the "subject (to give) all the appearances of a serene expiration when actually (he) is feeling and perceiving the excruciatingly painful ordeal of death by lethal injection," according to The New York Times.

The appeal of convicted killer Abu-Ali Abdur Rahman is what brings the constitutionality of execution aided by Pavulon into question, as its use allegedly violates the Ninth Amendment's guarantee against cruel and unusual punishment.

However, Lyle upheld Pavulon's constitutionality because of its widespread use and the "less than remote chance that the condemned will be subjected to unnecessary physical pain or psychological suffering," as reported in The Times.

This logic, however, fails to concede the truth that in the remote cases where the prior anesthesia was administered in a small or insufficient dose, the effect produced by Pavulon would indeed be cruel and unusual — the prisoner will consciously be aware of pain but in a paralyzed state.

Dr. Mark Heath, a Columbia University anesthesiologist, cites the execution of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh as a prime example. He claims that witness reports of McVeigh's eyes tearing up are evidence that he was at least semi-conscious when the heart-stopping, lung-closing chemicals began to take their insufferable effect, as reported by the Tennessee.

Additionally, the argument that the chemical is justified because it is so widely used is ludicrous. Smoking is probably more widespread than Pavulon use. The Tennessee attorney general might so eagerly proclaim the innocuous nature of cigarettes based on such a disjuncture of logic.

No valid reason exists for the continued use of pancuronium bromide in executions.



LINDSAY ORMAN

Lyle declared that the chemical became part of Tennessee's execution protocol "out of ignorance and by just copying what other states do," according to The Associated Press — a confession that does not speak highly of the criminal justice departments in Tennessee or any of the other states using similar procedures. Peer pressure hardly cuts it as an excuse for any adolescent, let alone a state justice system. The argument that all the other states are doing it could easily be refuted by every mother's battle cry: "If all of your friends jumped off a bridge, would you?"

One must wonder how such an egregious breach of public trust — the horrible misjudgment of a potentially tortuous, supposedly humane euthanasia procedure — could be possible in such a scientifically advanced society. Someone obviously realized the threat of suffering caused by pancuronium bromide when used in animals because

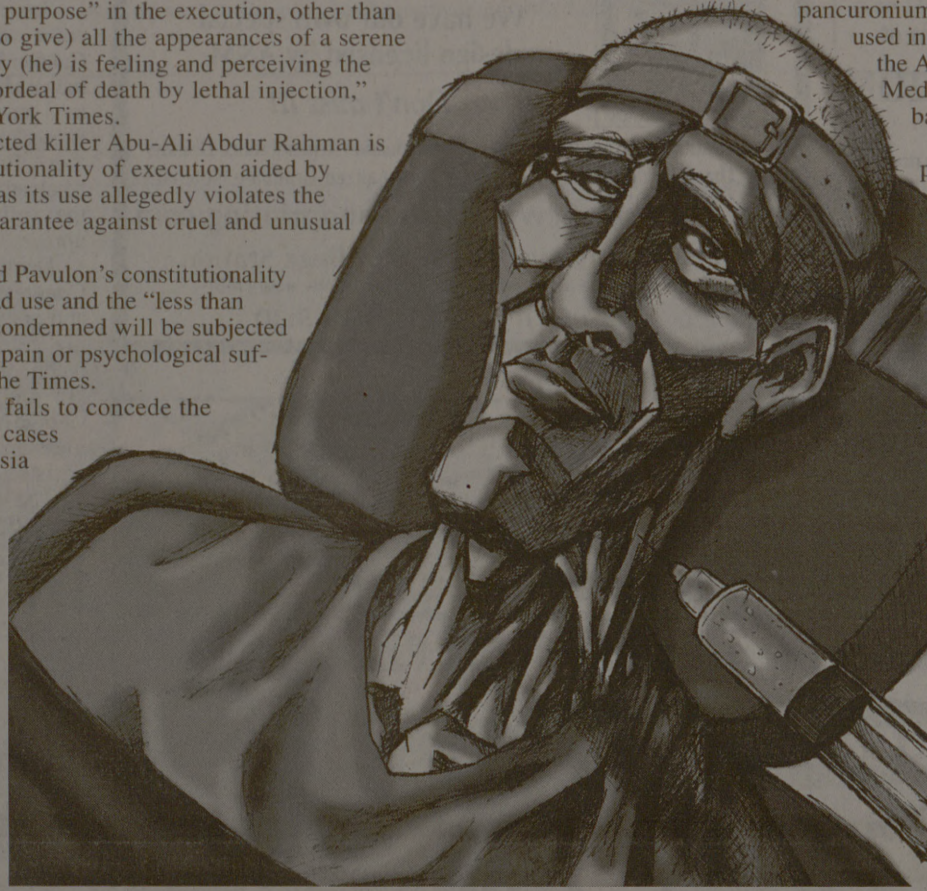
the American Veterinary Medical Association banned its use.

Abdur Rahman protests his sentence with the complaint that by using Pavulon, "They're saying I'm less than an animal." With his horrendous crime — binding a couple with duct tape and repeatedly plunging a butcher knife into their flesh — he seems to fit the bill.

Nonetheless, despite the amount of suffering one may feel such a moral derelict deserves, pancuronium bromide must no longer be used in executions.

Effective alternatives exist that eliminate the superfluous pancuronium bromide from the death recipe, including the method of choice in animal euthanasia — one dose of sodium pentobarbital. Additionally, Dr. Sherwin B. Nuland, a professor of medicine at Yale and author of "How We Die," avers in The Times that simply omitting pancuronium bromide from the lethal-injection chemical triumvirate would leave the prisoner just as dead, only with a more pleasant final breath.

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major.



TONY PIEDRA • THE BATTALION

## Emotions clouding RU-486 debate

### Availability of drug should rely only on medical facts

On Sept. 17, Holly Patterson, an 18-year-old from Livermore, Calif., died after taking mifepristone, also known as RU-486 or the abortion pill, a week before her death.



LAUREN ESPOSITO

Abortion opponents are already debating the safety of the drug that is thought to have contributed to her death. According to CBS News, her father learned from an attending physician that she died from septic shock, which is currently being attributed to a complication that led to an infection after a medical abortion using the pill. The coroner's report has yet to determine if that is what caused her death.

While there has been an outcry from both the anti-abortion and abortion rights sides regarding the legitimacy of the drug, the actual chemical interaction with the patient has not been shown as dangerous. Although many social issues surround the use of this drug, those should not come into play in determining the drug's safety. The only issue that needs to be examined is the overall effectiveness and quality of the drug, and how safe it really is for the consumer.

More than one million people worldwide have used RU-486 since its development in the 1980s. Many groups have argued since its inception that the RU-486 pill is unsafe for women. However, the rate of death is much greater for women who go through with the child-birthing process, according to ReligiousTolerance.org. Statistically,

there is one death in 200,000 RU-486 abortions, one death in 200,000 surgical abortions, one death in 14,300 child-birthing pregnancies and one death in 3,000 illegal abortions.

The FDA approved RU-486 because it was considered safe for the general population. Major testing and trials have been conducted in 20 other countries, including France, Britain and Germany. Each of these countries has concluded the drug is safe for use in medical abortions. Patterson's is only the third death attributed to mifepristone since the FDA approved it for the United States in 2000. The FDA, however, is unsure whether the deaths were directly related to the drug.

While any death related to a specific drug is unfortunate, it is not altogether uncommon. The arguments now being made on the safety of the drug are due to the moral opponents of the drug, not the chemical ones. That is not the issue here though.

If RU-486 is unsafe for consumption, there must be scientific evidence to prove it. The disagreement over the morality of abortion should not color the safety of the drug.

Until there is some definitive proof that RU-486 is dangerous, it should remain on the market.

What needs to be evaluated in addition to RU-486's possible role is the medical attention Patterson received when she went to the hospital for severe cramps and bleeding. Did the doctors know that she had taken RU-486, and if so, did they follow the proper procedures in examining her?

What the question regarding RU-486 truly comes down to is the quality of the

drug: is it safe for human consumption? This is not a case of values, beliefs or ethics; nor is this a case of rights and choices. This is a case of the effectiveness of a drug, and whether the medical advantages of the drug outweigh the possible disadvantages.

There are no qualms with aspirin being sold over the counter and being taken without medical supervision, but, according to Eric Schaffchair of the National Abortion Federation, "aspirin causes more deaths than RU-486." If this is the case, why are there no outcries from consumers about this drug being freely sold over the counter?

The fact that there is no opposition to the drug does not come from chemical factors, but from moral ones; aspirin does not purposefully prevent a pregnancy or any other medical condition that has the opportunity for moral debate, it is just a temporary reliever of physical pain.

If the drug is unsafe for consumption, and there is scientific data to back the statement up, it should be taken off of the market. The chemical components and physical interactions should be fully considered. But if the argument for taking this specific drug off the market is just a battle between two social groups, both claiming to have the correct moral answers, this is not a question at all: The drug should stay on the market as an option for those who want to take it.

Lauren Esposito is a senior English major.