

## Gruesome cases

### States must not wait for worst scenarios to pass adequate adoption legislation

On Oct. 24, Raymond and Vanessa Jackson of New Jersey were arrested for child abuse after a neighbor found one of their adopted children scrounging for food in trash cans in the middle of the night two weeks before. The boy, Bruce Jackson, 19, was only 4 feet tall and weighed 45 pounds. New Jersey officials also removed three other boys from the household; the youngest is 9 years old. None of the boys weighed more than 50 pounds.



JENELLE WILSON

It is unfortunate that it takes a gruesome case — one that will undoubtedly stereotype decent adoptive parents — to bring badly needed attention to the U.S. foster care system. While there have been attempts to rectify the system in the past few years, these attempts have amounted to little more than quick fixes. With almost 300,000 children entering the foster care system each year, more must be done to ensure these children are properly cared for or adopted into homes adequately prepared to provide for them.

If a state deems itself to be better suited to provide care for children, it must prove it. These children deserve better than to be put in state care that is only marginally better than the situation they were in before, which means states must come up with long-term solutions for solving the financial and personnel problems plaguing the foster care system.

Bruce Jackson was removed from his biological family in 1991 because he was being

starved; his situation did not improve with his new family. According to investigators, the four boys were the only children in the house who were being systematically starved. Their diets consisted of pancake batter, peanut butter and breakfast cereal; they had also been locked out of the kitchen. Investigators believe they ate wallboard and insulation. The boys also had lice, rotting teeth and had not seen a doctor for at least five years.

In 1997, Congress passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which was meant to encourage adoptions in the United States. According to The Desert Sun, states that finalize more adoptions than in previous years receive cash bonuses from the federal government. States are given \$4,000 for every child adopted; this amount is increased to \$6,000 if the child is deemed to have special needs.

This measure has increased the number of

adoptions in the United States (they have almost doubled) and the process has been made faster (the average time for adoptions was down to five months in 2001), which is generally good for children in foster care.

However, according to The New York Times, some officials worry the cash incentives have made the bonuses more important than the child's best interests, and the decreased time frame prohibits states from fully investigating potential parents.

Another concern with the measure is that it does not limit the number of children families can adopt, which could leave children being placed in overcrowded homes with families that may not be able to properly care for them. This concern is highly relevant in the Jackson case.

The Jackson family consisted of 11 children: four biological, six adopted and one foster child. Bruce was the second child

adopted by the Jacksons; his adoption was finalized in December 1995. The other three boys followed in the next two years, and another girl was adopted in 2000. The Jackson family was in the process of adopting a seventh child when Bruce was found going through trash cans, according to The New York Times.

The Jacksons were receiving more than \$30,000 a year from the state to care for the adopted children, according to the Courier-Post Online. Despite this money, the family was \$9,000 behind in rent, and the electricity had been turned off from June 18 to Oct. 6. One has to wonder how a family that could not financially care for its children was being considered to adopt more.

Remarkably, the Division of Youth and Family Services visited the home 38 times in the past two years and it even passed an inspection in June; the official who inspected the home, and who has since resigned, called it a "nurturing, stable environment." One has to wonder just how low New Jersey's standards are.

Changes to the foster care system are usually made in response to public failures, such as the Jackson case. Undoubtedly, new legislation will be passed; in fact, some has already been introduced. However, encouraging adoptions and promoting child safety deserves better than these emergency fixes, which can lead to even more problems, particularly in New Jersey.

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major.



GRACIE ARENAS • THE BATTALION

## Ban on abortion procedure violates women's rights

On April 25, 2004, thousands around America will merge in Washington D.C. to rally for something that hangs in serious jeopardy: women's reproductive rights. Many abortion rights activists feel that 2004 may be the last opportunity Americans have to repel the vicious attack on women's health choices by the radical religious right. With the Senate's passage of the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003, which bans the procedure known as intact dilation and extraction, people across the United States are beginning to wake up and realize that a woman's right to choose when and where to start a family is something that cannot be taken for granted.



JONATHAN STEED

President George W. Bush and his Republican rubber-stamp Congress have not only waged war on Iraq, but also on American women and their basic rights. The right for an individual woman to control her body is something religious fundamentalists have never supported, and if they get their way, will abolish in the near future. According to The Nation, the recent ban on late term abortions is the first federal ban on an abortion method since the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision, which granted women a constitutional right to have an abortion.

The issue of late term abortions has itself been distorted with half-truths and falsehoods. Most of the anti-abortion propaganda floating around about late term abortions refers to them as "partial birth" abortions. Yet this term itself is not medically accurate. Partial birth abortions are not mentioned in any medical textbooks. The term is nothing more than political jargon aimed at

making the procedure seem cruel and deserving of a ban. The anti-abortion movement has been effective in misleading the public on issues such as the late term abortion procedure.

Late term abortions make up a small percentage of the overall abortion procedures practiced in the United States. They are often done when medical information about the fetus or its affect on the mother's health becomes fully realized. Expectant mothers whose fetuses have physical deformities are often left with no other option than the late term abortion. The pain and possible damage to the mother due to this type of circumstance would be enough of a reason, to many women, to terminate the pregnancy early rather than go through with childbirth. However, the new law would make this type of medical procedure illegal, even in cases where the mother's health could be in jeopardy.

The battle between abortion rights supporters and anti-abortion activists has grown over the past 20 years and has led to the latest ban. People around the United States, especially women, need to realize their rights to decide when to bring children into this world are being jeopardized to the point that many abortion rights activists are afraid abortion could be made illegal soon.

The current apathy over the issue, where the right to reproductive freedom is simply taken for granted by many young college women, is apparent in political control in Washington. America now has the most anti-abortion Congress and White House since Roe vs. Wade was decided in 1973. According to C-Span, the Senate vote in favor of the ban was 64-34, which is

hardly along party lines. Nearly one-third of Senate Democrats, including Minority Leader Thomas Daschle, D-South Dakota, voted for the measure.

This represents a group of people who lack the courage to stand up for their convictions, fearing instead of possible political retribution. They failed to be the true opposition party in this vote and instead helped to pass it.

The truth about the new ban on late term abortions is that it is nothing more than control over women's choices. Whether legal or illegal, abortions will always happen. If they are made illegal by the government, women will merely turn to desperate means of having an abortion, much like they did before Roe vs. Wade.

If women cannot seek a safe and legal abortion in a clinic with trained, certified staff, they may seek one in back alleys or with the help of a coat hanger. That is the blunt reality of the issue.

Next year's elections may very well determine the future of women's reproductive rights. When entering the voting booth, Americans should ask themselves if they want to return to the days of the coat hanger or back alley abortions. The latest ban on late term abortions is nothing more than the beginning of major setbacks for women in controlling their own bodies. Americans must wake up and understand the real threat posed by anti-abortion legislation. Liberty demands freedom of choice.

Jonathan Steed is a senior political science major.

“Whether illegal or not, abortions will always happen.”

### MAIL CALL

#### Policy used to increase conservation support

In response to Justin Hill's Oct. 28 article:

There is legal hunting and then there is poaching. The distinction must be drawn. The Safari Club, which he was generous enough to list, is a group that has funded conservation projects in several countries. Zimbabwe, a country that has received a grant from the Safari Club, has begun using its policy in the management of the elephant population. The policy which was mentioned in the article, but never explained, is to generate funds for conservation through the payment of fees by hunters. These funds will then be distributed to law enforcement for the prevention of poaching and to the people living in the area, tying the locals to this worthy cause and creating a more receptive atmosphere for the program through community involvement.

This also provides an incentive to the local inhabitants to prevent poaching and conserve the wildlife as a resource. This has increased the elephant population significantly

in Zimbabwe, a result that has not been seen in countries without such a conservation management policy.

Mark Warner  
Shane Gupton  
Class of 2007

#### Kennedy award protest is ridiculous

In response to an Oct. 28 article:

While certainly within their rights, I find it pointless and stupid for the Young Conservatives of Texas to protest the Bush Award for Public Service going to Sen. Edward Kennedy. It is true that Kennedy would undoubtedly have philosophical disagreements with a majority of the Texas A&M population, but he is not receiving a "Best Aggie Value Personifier" award, rather a commendation for his contributions to public service. Having spent multiple terms in the Senate and consistently fighting for what he values, I do not deny that he is qualified for such an award.

Secondly, the final say on the award came from former President George H.W. Bush, a man with far

more political experience, knowledge and, it would seem, more class than the members of YCT. If a conservative and Rep. — not to mention world leader — such as Bush can concede that Kennedy is worthy of such an award, who are the Young Conservatives to argue with such a conclusion? It seems inane for YCT, whose Web site touts that they value the "freedom of the individual," to concern themselves with how an individual such as George H.W. Bush distributes his award.

Jonathan Shilling  
Class of 2005

#### Arguments against Kennedy petty

I take great issue with the comments the Young Conservatives of Texas made in regards to the selection of Sen. Edward Kennedy as a recipient of the Bush Award for Excellence in Public Service.

I understand if the YCT has a problem with Kennedy's record, but why bring up his alleged alcoholism, especially when two of the paramours in modern conser-

vatism are an admitted gambler and an admitted drug addict? Bringing up the "drinking problem" and deriding Kennedy from dissenting against the current administration is petty and spurious to Kennedy's years of service to his constituency.

As stated in the article, the senator is receiving the award in recognition of his consistent stand in his 41 years in the Senate. Why does the YCT consider themselves a better judge of public service than former President Bush — a decorated war hero, former congressman, former ambassador, former CIA director and former president? For those of you not old enough to remember, Bush as a president was a coalition builder and knew the value of diplomacy and leadership. To blatantly disregard his judgment in recognizing other public servants is disrespectful and condescending to one of the greatest public servants alive today.

Brian Olivari  
Class of 1997

#### Attendance at football games disappointing

I was reading Bill Byrne's weekly update online and was sad, but not

totally shocked, to see that senior pulls for tickets this week were lower than they have been for any other game except for the one before school started. Although our team has not had the best year, I would still expect more from the Twelfth Man.

I was at the game this past weekend and the empty seats on the student side were very noticeable and disappointing. It was also the quietest Kyle Field has ever been that I can remember. While I don't miss standing up the whole game, I do miss the feelings of excitement and the camaraderie 80,000-plus fans yelling at the top of their lungs and waving their white towels could induce in me.

I hope that all current students will cherish their time at A&M and realize that whether it is football, basketball or otherwise, their time is short and having the accessibility as well as sports passes is something that doesn't last forever.

Don't let the Twelfth Man spirit and the home field advantage of Kyle Field die just because we aren't winning every game.

Erika Spector  
Class of 2001