

## Uncivil liberties

Law enforcement agencies are abusing Patriot Act to investigate domestic crimes

On Oct. 26, 2001, President George W. Bush signed the USA PATRIOT Act into effect, altering the measures available to law enforcement agencies to investigate terrorist threats in regards to the safety of the United States. At the time, however, civil liberties groups had concerns that some of the vague language and far-reaching aspects of the law could put American citizens' rights at risk by the government abusing new powers given to it.



JENELLE WILSON

It seems those civil liberties groups were right. Federal agencies have been using the Patriot Act to investigate American citizens with no connection to terrorist activity, according to Newsweek. While the agencies' activities have been legal, they pervert the original purpose of the law and the bipartisan spirit in which it was passed.

The Patriot Act's full name is "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism." The law was passed six weeks after the worst day in many Americans' lives, a day in which 3,000 innocent lives were ripped away by terrorists. The act was meant to prevent 9-11 from happening again.

Congress did not intend for it to be used in the ways government agencies are currently using it.

According to Newsweek, the sections of the Patriot Act pertaining to money-laundering essentially allow the government to investigate the financial records of anyone it has suspicions about. All law enforcement agencies have to do is submit a suspect's name to the U.S. Treasury Department, which orders all American financial institutions to search for the suspect's name. If there is a "hit," that is, if that person has accounts

with a particular institution, the suspect's financial records can then be subpoenaed.

Newsweek found that this year, law enforcement agencies used the money-laundering provisions to investigate 962 people, resulting in 6,397 hits. Of these hits, however, more than two-thirds had nothing to do with terrorist activity.

Treasury Department records examined by Newsweek show that the Internal Revenue Service, the U.S. Postal Service, the Secret Service and the Agriculture

Department have used the act to investigate tax fraud, postal fraud, counterfeiting and the not so dangerous or frightening crime of food stamp fraud.

Abuse of public assistance programs in no way falls into the category of activities meant to be investigated under the Patriot Act.

Law enforcement officials already have procedures to investigate these types of crimes; they don't need an anti-terrorism law to do it.

One of the more humorous examples of an abuse of the Patriot Act happened in Las Vegas — "Operation G-String." FBI agents believed that Michael Galardi, a strip club owner in the city, was bribing city officials. To prove it, the FBI needed the officials' financial records.

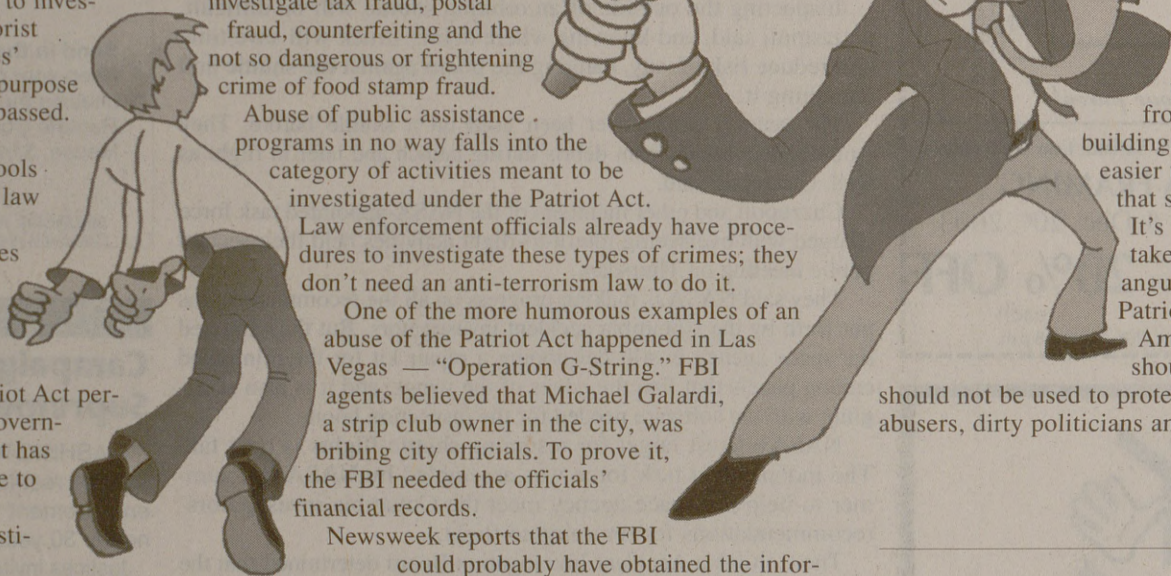
Newsweek reports that the FBI could probably have obtained the information without using the Patriot Act, but

only if it had more evidence that a person was conducting business at a particular bank. Instead of doing that extra work, the FBI requested the Treasury Department to conduct its nationwide search, allowing the evidence to come to it. The bribery evidence was found, and the city officials were indicted.

The ends in these cases do not justify the means. The United States has a long history of protecting the rights of suspected criminals. The Constitution guarantees these rights. The government cannot use a law relaxing legal procedures to protect Americans from the likes of Osama bin Laden and his cronies to go after ordinary American citizens.

Law enforcement agencies are using a law passed out of grief and pain, meant to prevent terrorists from flying other planes into office buildings or worse, to make their jobs a little easier through bypassing legal procedures that should be guaranteed to Americans.

It's unacceptable, irresponsible and it's takes advantage of the shock and anguish Americans felt after 9-11. The Patriot Act was intended to protect Americans from terrorist threats, and it should be limited to that purpose. It should not be used to protect Americans from food stamp abusers, dirty politicians and greedy strip club operators.



MAHESH NEELAKANTAN • THE BATTALION

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major.

## AIDS remains a health problem for U.S. and world

The world is threatened by an evil forgotten by many in the United States. In regions such as southern Africa and southeastern Asia, the fatalities from this war number in the tens of thousands every year, and the numbers are still rising. The war being lost is the fight against the HIV virus and AIDS.



HAYDEN MIGL

As people around the globe observed World AIDS Day on Dec. 1, health officials everywhere said the disease is showing "no sign of abating" and the world is "losing the battle against HIV infection and AIDS." But according to The Washington Post, the United States has a "growing apathy" about the HIV epidemic even though it has killed more than 500,000 Americans. The United States must reclaim its leadership role in this prolonged battle along with the support of the entire international community in an effort to eradicate the disease. This support needs to not only come in the form of money but in an increased awareness and a greater push to educate those most affected in developing countries.

President George W. Bush has acknowledged

how deadly the HIV/AIDS virus is and has said the United States is completely behind efforts to eradicate the virus, according to USA Today. Bush promised community leaders during a visit to various African countries this past summer that they "will not face this enemy alone" and has backed up his words with a \$15 billion package to be distributed over five years in the most affected areas. Most of this money would go to African countries such as Zambia, where about one in every five adults has the HIV virus, or Botswana, where the average life expectancy for most of the population is less than 40.

But Bush has already reneged on the \$3 billion allotment that was supposed to be sent in 2004, and has instead only agreed to send \$2 billion in aid, according to msnbc.com. If the United States is supposed to take the lead in the war on HIV/AIDS, the administration must not go back on any of its promises and should grant the original amount.

One of the most useful remedies is also one

"The United States may not place HIV/AIDS at the top of its list of threats, but it is still a problem in the nation and a very real threat to American interests abroad."

of the simplest. Many inhabitants of developing countries hit the hardest by the HIV/AIDS epidemic have no knowledge of the deadliness of the disease. Their ignorance results in a number of children being infected by sick mothers, an impending explosion in the number of orphans and the loss of an entire generation of adults. AIDS' potential to wreak havoc in large-populated countries such as China and India is finally being recognized by their leaders, but they may be too late.

The discrimination and persecution experienced by those infected in southern Africa should be shameful to the rest of the world, yet it usually only prompts indifference. In those countries, infected women are thrown out of their houses and any children born to infected women are almost sure to have the HIV virus as well because only about two percent of Africans who need drugs receive them. Instead of showing a little compassion to people who have basically been given a death sentence, society shows an increasing apathy. This has got to change.

The United States may not place HIV/AIDS at the top of its list of threats, but it is still a problem in the nation and a threat to American interests abroad. The number of people infected with HIV reached a record 5 million people during 2003, and the number of deaths caused by complications from AIDS reached 3 million. Although Americans may be aware of how HIV is transmitted, their awareness of the international community's problems is limited.

Americans have shown a resolve to overthrow tyranny in countries led by ruthless dictators and authoritarian regimes which abuse their people, but it is now time to focus on the deadliest killer on the planet today. Bush has taken the right steps in promising an aid package, but he needs to follow through. He also needs to encourage more rigorous medical research to combat the virus and change the perceptions of people who believe AIDS is now only a problem in Africa. The world, and especially those infected, cannot tolerate any more hesitation, inaction or indifference when it comes to this deadly virus.

Hayden Migl is a freshman political science major.

### MAIL CALL

#### Aggie hopes dashed by lack of celebration

Let me start off by saying I'm not ungrateful, I'm just sorely disappointed. Along with 600 other Aggies, Dec. 11 is a huge day: the day that we join the legions of Aggies with the coveted Aggie Ring. I remember stories of my friends going to campus at 5 a.m. to be the first in line to get their ring pickup ticket at 7 a.m., and then going back later in the day to get their ring, have their picture taken and enjoy the festivities around them.

However, that was not the case. I know that Dec. 11 is a dead day, meaning no Battalion, but why did we not get the same treatment as past Aggies: The page-long congratulatory message that I could cut out and put in my scrapbook, the balloons lining the walk to the Association and the food and fun stands outside? I was saddened by the fact that I walked up to see only a few balloons inside with some Association people smiling.

When I asked someone why we didn't get the normal ring day festivities, I was told it was because only 600 people were getting rings. So because I have a late pickup date, I'm not considered to be as special as those who ordered before and after me?

Lainey Hoekstra  
Class of 2004

#### Blacks not only victims of slavery in history

In response to Collins Ezeanyim's Dec. 8 column:

Mr. Ezeanyim is correct. Los Angeles County is doing for the cause of diversity what the YCT is going for the conservative viewpoint here at Texas A&M: making a mockery of it. While I am in agreement with being sensitive towards others, I don't see why the Los Angeles County officials are implying that African Americans have been history's only victims of slavery. The Jews were slaves in Egypt, Native Americans were slaves to victorious tribes, vanquished Europeans were slaves to the Romans and most recently, Americans of all races were enslaved by the Japanese Empire.

Joseph Ferguson  
Class of 2004

#### Deaths do not have to be public to matter

In response to Jonathan Steed's Dec. 8 column:

Yes, war involves casualties. No matter what has been said by any organization that will always remain

true. You believe that we who support the war are denying the truth of the number. One of my good friends who happens to be in the military mentioned that there are more people who die in California every year than we (from all methods including accident to hostilities) have lost in Iraq. Does this mean that those deaths mean any less? No.

I come from a community that has experienced firsthand national tragedies. NASA and the families of the astronauts have dealt with losses that should and are mourned by the nation. They die for what they believe is something worth dying for, just like the soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The families of both Challenger and Columbia requested that, if anything, a very small memorial be in place. Are these losses diminished or forgotten from lack of ostentatious displays? The losses of the soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan will be mourned and honored in a fashion suitable to their sacrifice.

Sarah Biggerstaff  
Class of 2003

#### Pictures kept society from forgetting

Pictures speak a thousand words. If Americans never see a flag-draped casket returning home from

Iraq, it is easy to forget what is happening right now. These images can serve as a constant reminder that we need to pray for and support the courageous men and women who are sacrificing their lives for a heroic cause and for their families.

However, I found it interesting that Mr. Steed's article so readily attacked the Bush administration's decision to not show the return of the fallen soldiers. His opinion is rather inconsistent. Steed, along with other staunch pro-abortion advocates, is always among the first to cry foul when someone attempts to show the reality of another

American tragedy: abortion.

Steed claimed that, "Americans who supported the war must buck up and see firsthand what is really happening in Iraq." He has a good point, but I challenge him to practice what he preaches. Most people who advocate the dismembering of an unborn child refuse to view the reality of the procedure and the horrendous images of what it truly is. Why? Simple. It's much easier to sheepishly stand behind slogans than to, as Steed's article proclaimed, "accept the consequences" of the truth.

Amber Matchen  
Class of 2000



MIKE WIKOICH  
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