

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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AIDS epidemic still unaddressed

Bush has yet to act on his State of the Union promise to fight AIDS globally

The number of AIDS cases skyrockets globally, although President Bush continues to talk up his grand AIDS initiative. He has failed to act on past promises of addressing AIDS, yet he is already making new ones, which will just as likely be neglected. Lives might have been saved and suffering ameliorated had he acted to combat the global epidemic with a course of aggressive action as he promised the American public months ago.



LINDSAY ORMAN

In his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush said he would contribute \$15 billion over the next five years as part of an international effort to prevent new AIDS infections, provide anti-retroviral treatment and care for infected individuals and orphans. On the one-year anniversary of that pledge, "not a dollar has been released, and not a single pill has reached the hands of a person with HIV in developing countries because of the president's AIDS record of efficiency and effectiveness — a grave error on Bush's part."

In donations to the Global Fund, the United States plays a particularly pivotal role, as other countries base their contributions proportionately. Currently, the United States contributes less than any other G8 country based on Gross Domestic Product, according to Africa News, which amounts to a "prescription for disaster for millions of sick and dying people," in the words of John Iverson of Health GAP.

Reports indicate that Bush will again request less than the allowed \$3 billion for the next fiscal year beginning in July, according to LRP Publications. Withholding the apportioned funds is characteristic of the ineffectiveness of Bush's disappointing AIDS initiative, which pours more funding into promoting abstinence-only education than into providing treatment and realistically dealing with prevention by distributing condoms.

Bush needs to cooperate with the Global Fund rather than build a separate, unilateral program if he aims to improve the condition of AIDS victims and curtail the global epidemic. His current plan has been utterly futile: "After an entire year, less than 1 percent of the two million people he promised in his 2003 address would receive AIDS treatment are actually receiving it," Global AIDS Alliance President Paul Zeitz told LRP. This is a painful fact that cannot continue to go unnoticed.

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major.
Graphic by Rylie Deyoe

"The need to follow through on such pledges is imperative. If current, inadequate levels of funding are maintained, the global AIDS epidemic will plateau for another 30 to 40 years."

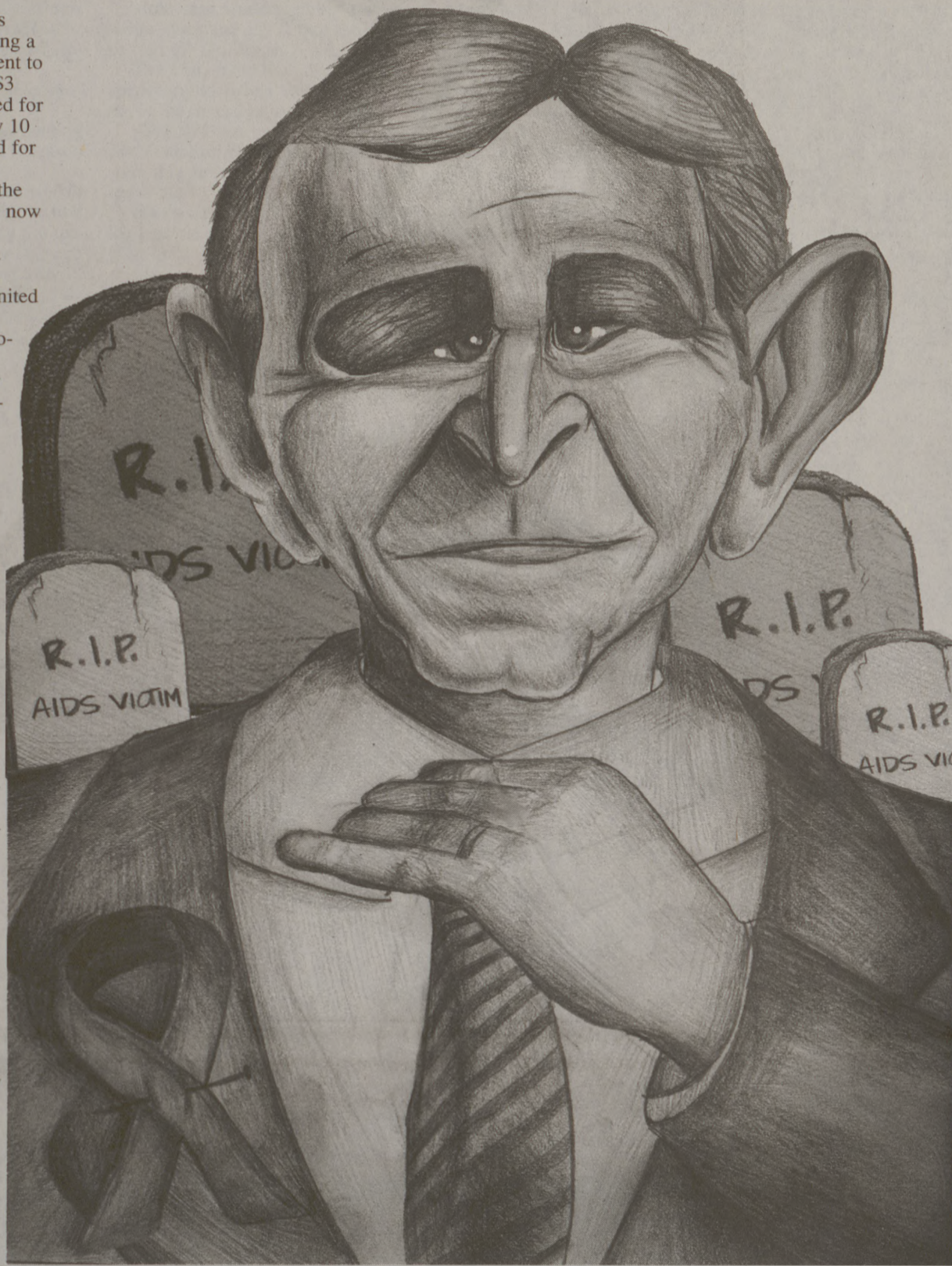
Allison Dinsmore of Health Global Access Project told Africa News. The only visible results of the president's plan are the three million people who have lost their lives to AIDS since he vowed to help them.

The need to follow through on such pledges is imperative. If current, inadequate levels of funding are maintained, the global AIDS epidemic will plateau for another 30 to 40 years, at which point the number of cases worldwide may be as many as a billion, according to Africa News.

Only with election year pressure necessitating action has Bush recently appointed Randall Tobias as global AIDS coordinator. The first round of grants, about \$350 million, is scheduled to be released soon.

However, this revival of Bush's AIDS initiative serves purposes of bureaucracy more aptly than charity.

Instead of granting money to African groups, Tobias will distribute much of it to American contractors at the discretion of each country's American ambassador, as reported in The New York Times. Not only will this system result in higher costs for the same services, as American contractors are more expensive, but it is also conducive to discrepancies between the ambassadors' agendas and each country's needs. Furthermore, Bush continues to request less



MAIL CALL

Remembering Christopher Lawler

We would like to begin by apologizing to all in the Aggie family for the tragic event that occurred last Sunday evening.

For the many of you who did not know Chris, let us tell you that he was a very bright, compassionate, loving and caring young man. He was not just a Saint, but he loved and respected his friends and most of the things that it has to offer.

We have been following the concerns and comments of the readers and would like to let them know that we have not been offended by anything that has been reported and displayed by The Battalion or that has been written in the mail call, but do realize that each individual's needs are unique at a time like this.

We need to let this pass while remembering that there will most certainly be times in all of our lives when we will feel overwhelmed, but please realize the finality of life and the remaining pain for those left behind by the short-sighted decision of taking one's own life.

We would like to close by asking for your forgiveness and prayers for Chris as he was always very proud to be a part of the Aggie family.

Terry and Pam Lawler, parents of Christopher Anthony Lawler

Baseball should bring Aggies together

In response to a Feb. 19 mail call:

After reading Thursday's mail call, I couldn't believe Christy Chan's comments about the Diamond Darlings. She didn't drive all the way up from Corpus Christi to see the Diamond Darlings, why didn't she just walk past them and not take a poster? It is amazing how a four-hour drive and a

great weekend of baseball could be ruined by a poster with a group of girls who all share Ms. Chan's love of baseball.

Every day, people write in to mail call to complain about everything under the sun. While some of the topics such as race factors in admissions, use of student funds and political opinions are certainly worthwhile topics to debate about, baseball should be something that brings us all together. Aggie baseball is something that people should come out and enjoy and use the time at the ballpark to forget about complaining about the trivial things in life. Why this person wasted her time to complain about an organization that does more work per person than any other organization on campus is beyond me.

As an officer for the A&M Iron Spikes, I have had the chance to see the Diamond Darlings dedication to the baseball program first hand. These girls spend so much of their time helping to promote the baseball team that they often don't even get the chance to watch the game. To attack an organization that is one of the hardest working on campus is laughable, and I hope that Ms. Chan's letter hasn't misled any others into looking at the Diamond Darlings in a negative way.

Cale Vennum
Class of 2005
Iron Spikes Liaison

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: mail-call@thebattalion.net

Proposed 'morality clause' should stick to specifics

The chatter over the water cooler is dying down, parents' outrage has subsided and the shock of Superbowl XXXVIII's half-time show has faded. Everyone has moved on and returned to pre-"wardrobe malfunction" life. Everyone except Harris County Commissioner Steve Radack.

Radack is determined to prevent a similar debacle from ever happening again in a county-owned building by adding a "morality clause" to all entertainers' contracts. The buildings that would be affected by this clause include Reliant Stadium, Reliant Center and the Astrodome.

Although county officials have every right to limit which acts may perform in the county's buildings and what the acts can consist of, they must be careful to be specific in the wording of the clause and be consistent in the policy's enforcement so as to not violate the performers' First Amendment rights.

First of all, the county has the right to place restrictions on what can and cannot be done in its buildings, including musical performances. Although some might object that any restrictions would violate the First Amendment, they would most likely not be quick to object to the county refusing to allow a musical group that promotes racial violence to perform in one of its buildings.

So the issue at hand is not the fact that Radack wishes to limit performers' shows, but how far the county can go to do this.

The Houston Chronicle reported that the behavior that Radack wishes to restrict includes suggestive lyrics,



CODY SAIN

suggestive dance moves, nudity and abuse of the U.S. flag. These extremely vague terms must be more clearly defined should a morality clause be written.

Who defines what "suggestive lyrics" are? Does this mean profanity? Sexual innuendos? Any potentially offensive words? Some might feel offended by Everclear's light-hearted, nostalgic references to drugs and phone sex in "Learning How to Smile," while others might be morally unscathed by the sounds of Eminem screaming at, beating and murdering his wife in "Kim." There must be a clear definition of what suggestive lyrics are; otherwise, it is inevitable that performers will be targeted unequally.

"County officials ... must be careful to be specific in the wording of the clause and be consistent in the policy's enforcement so as to not violate the performers' First Amendment rights."

Similar problems arise with "suggestive dance moves." Society has moved far beyond the days when Elvis' hip movements were considered obscene. Today it is difficult to judge what kind of dancing, if any, the public finds offensive. The county would

do best to focus on limiting the extreme, such as dance moves that imitate sexual activity.

As for nudity, although the sight of someone's bare bottom is less offensive to most people than full frontal nudity, there is nothing wrong with a complete ban on nudity. Most of the time, any sort of nudity exists solely for shock or excitement purposes and does not contribute to the performance as a whole.

Finally, it is best that the county does not include anything about flags. In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court case of Texas v. Johnson ruled that flag burning is protected by the First Amendment. In United States v. Eichman, the Supreme Court struck down the Flag Protection Act of 1989, which sought to eliminate all forms of "contempt" for the flag, including "publicly mutilating, defacing, defiling, burning or trampling" it.

Although some forms of abuse of the U.S. flag are utterly tasteless and unnecessary (such as Kid Rock's American flag poncho). The county does not have the right to limit that sort of behavior. This will always be the case unless Congress passes a constitutional amendment to "protect" the flag, something that has been tried many times but luckily has failed.

Frankly, a morality clause is not a bad idea, as no freedoms are absolute. Radack must ensure that the wording of the clause is made clear and explicit and that the county realizes its limit.

Cody Sain is a junior philosophy major.