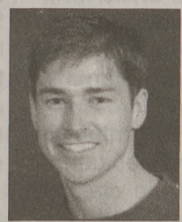


Protecting the innocent

The Unborn Victims of Violence Act does not threaten the Pro-choice cause

With the stroke of a pen, President Bush evoked emotions of approval and condemnation among the polarized party members of Congress by signing into law the Unborn Victims of Violence Act. As a result, an assault on a pregnant woman now levies two charges: one of assaulting the woman and the other of assaulting a fetus.



NICHOLAS DAVIS

The necessity of this legislation remains questionable since assault laws already exist, and many states have initiated statutes similar to this one. Nevertheless, the law doesn't deserve condemnation.

The objective here is to increase punishment of psychopaths who assault women. The new law requires no proof that the offender knew the woman was pregnant or whether they intended to harm the fetus. Therefore such attackers always face the risk of a double assault/murder charge. Furthermore, the law sends a symbolic message that the federal government, not just a random state, seeks extensive retribution on assaulters of pregnant women.

Does anything sound controversial yet? No. And there is nothing controversial about it.

Violent criminals must be punished harshly. If they direct their assaults on pregnant women, the punishment should be more extensive. This doesn't imply that the value of a pregnant woman is worth more than another individual. It simply means that an assault on a pregnant woman inadvertently harms the unborn child whose well-being unquestionably lies contingent on the mother's. Moreover, why would anyone be reluctant to incarcerate these sick perpetrators for a longer period of time?

Unfortunately, the reason for the opposition revolves solely around one element, which is probably making someone's blood boil over right now — abortion.

Two recent comments reported by The New York Times illustrate the main concerns. Kate Michelman, president of NARAL Pro-choice America, said, "The president's allies are taking advantage of this issue to further their campaign to oppose a woman's right to choose." Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) prophesied that federal statutes saying life begins at conception may ultimately lead to a court finding that abortion, even in the first trimester, is equivalent to murder.

Let's cut to the chase. Does the new law infringe on a woman's right to choose? No. The legislative language specifically bars prosecution of "any person for conduct relating to an

abortion for which the consent of the pregnant woman has been obtained." Moreover, the law bars prosecution of "any woman with respect to her unborn child." Translation: neither performance of abortions by doctors nor a woman's conduct during pregnancy are grounds for violation of this law.

However, some gray area resides around the law's applicability from the time of conception and the defining of fetuses as people.

Basically, the real fear here is that by granting rights to fetuses the taboo question of "When does life begin?" may be answered by the courts.

This concern is unfounded since the law refrains from specifically defining when life begins. Furthermore, if the court truly wanted to answer that question, it would have done so long ago.

Many people have grown tired of the clichéd argument that a fetus isn't alive. People subscribing to this view simply wish to remove culpability from their actions. Nevertheless, it is not the place of the state or any individual to tell a woman what she must do with her body. She should have complete jurisdiction over it. Meaning, if she decides to terminate the life inside her via medical procedures, fine, that's her decision, and the state and everyone else should back off. But don't try to condemn future legislation involving unborn children by beguiling others into believing that fetuses aren't alive.

Obviously, radical Republicans will use this bill as a means to undermine abortion, but several important elements must not be forgotten. The bill specifically exonerates performers and participants of abortions from facing criminal charges, and no time table on life is presented. Thus no abortion backlash is possible. Furthermore, if subsequent legislation arises specifically threatening "a woman's right to choose," don't pass it.

Abortion proponents should take a sedative and wait to unleash the fury on legislation that truly thwarts their cause. This bill is not one of them. Instead, it contains only positive attributes that serve to further protect our loved ones at their most vulnerable of times.

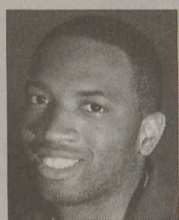


Nicholas Davis is a senior political science major. Graphic by Ivan Flores.

A free press, eventually

Coalition forces right in shutting down Iraqi paper that incited violence against soldiers

The most ridiculous claim made during the war in Iraq by some conservatives is that somehow the U.S. media are complicitous in any harm that comes to any American troops. Conservatives argue that negative news coverage aids and abets terrorists and gives them motivation to attack coalition forces.



COLLINS EZEANYIM

Conservatives don't realize how good they have it. In Iraq, there are newspapers and articles that invite violence against American soldiers. In fact, one such newspaper, Al Hawsa, was forcibly shut down by U.S. soldiers for this very reason, according to CNN. Although such an action might seem antithetical to the coalition's mission to bring democracy to Iraq, shutting down the newspaper was the proper thing to do.

Those who criticize the shutdown will probably argue that it is a blatant act of hypocrisy. After all, the main job of the coalition now, knowing there are no weapons of mass destruction to be found, is to ensure Iraqi citizens will eventually know true freedom under a just constitution. A free press is essential to any democratic society. However, there are some things to

consider in evaluating why the shutdown of Al Hawsa was justified.

First, it should be noted that Iraq is not operating under its interim constitution yet. Therefore, the Iraqi people do not yet have an explicit right to the freedom of press.

Unfortunately, this situation might exist for some time. President Bush's administration has set an unrealistic date of June 30 as the time to transfer Iraqi sovereignty. But this might very well change considering the growing violence in Iraq, including the despicable attacks on four American citizens in Fallujah last week.

Another thing to consider is that the shutdown is not permanent. The newspaper will be closed at least 60 days, Alaa-eldin Elsadr, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition, told Knight Ridder News Service, but it will be allowed to reopen.

The newspaper was run by Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, according to CNN. Elsadr claimed Al Hawsa published articles blaming

terrorists' attacks on Americans. Specifically, according to the Knight Ridder article, Elsadr said a Feb. 26 article proclaimed a suicide bombing that killed 53 was actually the result of a rocket fired by an American Apache helicopter.

A substantial number of newspapers have sprouted up since the ousting of Saddam Hussein last year, and most have operated without incident. A couple of Iraqi newspapers must learn the difference between material that is simply offensive and that which incites violence. Purposely printing false information that casts the coalition as the origin of terrorist acts is wrong and calls for decisive action. Despite what the president declared last May, the United States is currently engaging in war in Iraq and protecting its soldiers should be its number one priority.

Once Iraq has been sufficiently stabilized and made sovereign and once U.S. and other coalition forces have made a successful exit, Iraqi newspapers can be allowed to print anything

they wish that conforms to their constitution.

The current situation, however, calls for the occasional trampling of free speech and free press rights. This is unfortunate, but such is the nature of war.

Another thing critics of the decision should consider is the events that transpired after the newspaper was shut down. As many as 3,000 Iraqis gathered to protest the closure. According to Knight Ridder, U.S. forces did not interfere in the demonstration. American troops realized that the right to protest is essential to freedom of speech, and they allowed Iraqis to exercise this right.

The incident with Al Hawsa should make all Americans thankful that the press is in this country is both free and responsible. Maybe several years from now, the Iraqis will be able to say the same thing about the safety of Americans.

Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major.

"A couple of Iraqi newspapers must learn the difference between material that is simply offensive and that which incites violence."

MAIL CALL

Losing candidates endorse Hildebrand

As candidates who made a bid for Student Body President, we would like to thank the student body for voting with such enthusiasm and for providing us with the unique opportunity of running for this position. We are now pleased to offer Jack Hildebrand our support for SBP in the run-off elections this Wednesday and Thursday.

Hildebrand received very strong support in the first round of Student Body President elections, a clear testament that his message of accountability, openness and advocacy resonated with students. His campaign was a class act, and his platform is something on which Aggies can hang their hopes, dreams and wishes for a Texas A&M of tomorrow.

We back Hildebrand because he is committed to representing all Aggies, not just those for whom a voice would be convenient. Hildebrand is behold-

ing to nobody but those whom he represents, and he takes pride in being their peer. We are confident he will move SGA toward an efficient and humble forum capable of hearing and heeding students' needs.

In total, we believe Hildebrand is the right candidate to lead Texas A&M students. And lead he will with character, sincerity and a deep love for Aggieland. For those reasons and so many more, we pledge to Hildebrand our vote in the upcoming runoffs and ask all students to do the same.

Narietha Carter 2004
Andy Herreth 2004

Aggie killed serving deserves recognition

It's been five days since an Aggie, 1st Lt. Doyle M. Hufstedler, Class of 2001, was killed by an improvised explosive device in Habbaniyah,

Iraq, and there has still been no recognition of the event by his own school's newspaper. There have been articles about dorm damage, rap concerts, student elections and Aggie fashion but still not a word about a man who gave his life in service of his country. I don't know if it is from lack of effort, lack of information, or just a lack of caring, but whatever the reason is your newspaper has failed to tell the rest of the Aggie community about this man's sacrifice. I think it is about time that The Battalion did its job and pay respects to one of our fallen soldiers.

Mark Fargason
Class of 2005

Noise level in the SCC prohibits studying

Of all the places to study, the Student Computing Center seems to be the best. There are plenty of com-

puters, couches and tables for studying. The only problem is the people. It is almost impossible to study during the peak hours because there is always a phone ringing, a couple arguing, someone playing music loudly through speakers they brought with them or someone tapping a pen non-stop for hours upon hours.

It's not that I think it should be totally silent, or even close, but when the noise level inside is higher than the noise level on the steps in front of the

building, something isn't right. If I wanted to study in a noise-ridden environment, I'd just put on some comfortable clothes and study by Highway 6. Is there no more common courtesy left? If anybody has suggestions of a better place to study, maybe you could let a few of us know your secret.

Robert Arndt
Class of 2007

