

## Jacked

### TS must stop ticketing trifling offenses and focus on rampant campus bike theft



MIKE WALTERS

An anonymous sage once said, "don't steal — the government hates competition." Sadly, theft is a problem even on a campus whose honor code declares that Aggies must not steal or tolerate those who do. Appropriately, students at Texas A&M

are having a hard time tolerating University employees who are doing nothing active to combat the rampant bike theft that occurs on this campus.

From Aug. 1 to Sept. 8, 37 bikes, with a combined value of \$6,405, were reported stolen, according to The Battalion. In an article published in the same paper on Sept. 9, Sgt. H. Allan Barron of the University Police Department said none of the bikes have been recovered.

The criminals who are stealing students' bikes are obviously the ones to blame here. However, it's troubling that so many crimes can occur in such a short amount of time and escape the attention of employees responsible for patrolling the campus. Since bike theft is such a problem, it would seem only proper for Transportation Services employees to make it their priority instead of petty parking violations.

This crime is one that seems to have fallen through the cracks between minor violations that TS is responsible for handling and the major ones that UPD monitors. Officially, TS regulates parked bicycles while UPD regulates moving bicycles, so it would appear that the theft of parked bicycles falls under the authority of TS. It's time that they stop caring so much about who forgot to put their parking tag in their car or ran two minutes over in a 30 minute parking spot and begin doing something to combat bike theft.

Reassigning the priority of TS officers would have benefits for students and the organization. First, it would stop a crime that has cost students thousands of dollars each year. UPD statistics show that during the 2001-2002 school year 289 bikes were stolen and during the 2002-2003 school year 312 bikes were stolen.

An important fact to consider is this is only the number of bikes reported, rather than actually stolen. Given the failure rate of the University in returning bikes to their owners, many Aggies don't bother reporting their loss.

"I don't think it's worth the time or trouble to go and report a bike being stolen, especially with the success rate that the UPD has had in recovering those bikes," said Michael Murphy, a senior sports management major. "I don't think there's much they can do, because it's such an untraceable crime."

A shift in policy for TS should lead to a decrease in this type of crime, which would bolster the faith in TS's ability to resolve important problems on campus. Further, merely the attention to a problem that affects students maybe just the boost in reputation TS needs, as it has been suffering due to widely unpopular parking plans implemented at the start of this school year.

There are, of course, many actions a student can take to avoid becoming a victim of bike theft, such as using case-hardened U-Locks and properly securing the bike frame to a bike rack. In addition, the University offers an engraving of a student's identification number onto the bike itself.

While this tactic may help in recovering a lost bike, it may offer another solution that seems to be overlooked. "Students often lock their bike with a case-hardened lock through the front tire only, but bike thieves can easily slip the front wheel off and take the frame," Baron said.

But it stands to reason that it takes time and effort to rip off a bike in this fashion. TS employees could extend their monitoring of parking lots to include nearby bike racks and question anyone who is exerting a suspicious amount of effort in freeing a bike from its rack. The engraved number can then be compared with the student's ID card to resolve the matter.

There's no denying that parking violations deserve warning or ticketing as per the

agreement all Aggie drivers accept when purchasing their parking passes, but it's time TS realized that there are more important things to worry about than these minor infractions. Instead of taking money away from students with petty fines, they should be working alongside UPD in prevent students from losing even more money over bike theft.

Mike Walters is a senior psychology major.



IVAN FLORES • THE BATTALION

### Joshua Dwyer says America's poor aren't as strapped as many think



JOSHUA DWYER

In a report by the Census Bureau, the number of U.S. citizens living in poverty rose to 35.9 million people in 2003 or 12.5 percent of the population, up from 12.1 percent in 2002. Though this figure doesn't represent the

number of people who were in poverty all year long, it caused many activists, commentators and politicians to lament the apparent fact that poverty is rising and insist the national government should do something about it. A little understanding of who actually lives in poverty will produce a more accurate and less bleak view of the current economic picture in the United States. Most of the 35.9 million people the government considers to be living in poverty are not as bad off as the average American might assume. Moreover, if people had a choice about which country they would like live in if they had to be poor, most would say present day United States.

Without a doubt, there are citizens in the United States who cannot provide the basic essentials for their families. Nearly everyone would consider these individuals poor and in need of assistance. But the number of people who fall into this category is nowhere near the 35.9 million the Census Bureau suggests by its designation of those in poverty.

A study published by a public policy research organization, the Heritage Foundation, found the following information about people living in poverty according to various government reports.

Home ownership among people classified as poor is at 46 percent and the average poor home has three bedrooms, one-and-a-half bathrooms, a garage and a patio or porch. Thirty years ago, 36 percent of U.S. population had air-conditioned housing; today, 76 percent of poor people have air conditioning in their homes.

Average individuals in London, Paris and other European cities have less living space than the average poor American. This is not a comparison of European poor to American poor, but American poor to average Europeans. Only six percent of households considered poor in America are overcrowded.

Nearly three-quarters of poor Americans own a car, while 30 percent own two or more cars.

Ninety-seven percent of poor households have a color television; more than half of the poor households have two or more TVs. These TVs are well equipped: Seventy-eight percent of the poor homes have a VCR or DVD and 62 percent have satellite or cable reception.

The same study found almost no difference between the average consumption of vitamins,

minerals and protein by poor children and middle-class children.

These facts should not be interpreted as diminishing the hardship those actually too poor to meet their needs. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 3.5 percent of all U.S. households at least one person — usually a parent — experienced hunger at least one day in 2002. Even for relatively short periods, the existence of hunger anywhere in the United States should be combated by the rest of the population through charitable contributions, not government programs that create dependence.

Often the people who live in poverty are there because of poor choices they made, arguably when they were younger. The National Center for Policy Analysis, a nonpartisan think tank, found that completing high school, getting any kind of full-time job and getting married all reduce poverty substantially.

The prevalence of single-parent homes beneath the poverty line in the Census report and the 1.3 million children born out of wedlock each year also suggest the need for individuals to make better decisions, including waiting to engage in sexual intercourse until they are married and marrying the parent of their child. Obviously, this isn't the answer for all instances of children in poverty, but the Fragile Family and Child Well Being Study being conducted by Princeton and Columbia Universities seems to suggest that it would drastically reduce the number, according to the Heritage Foundation.

Poor Americans are better off in the United States than any other country because they are not destined to remain poor. Poverty seems to have a high turnover rate with individuals remaining poor for a few months in most cases, according to Census Bureau statistics. Additionally, the abundance of opportunities in the United States provides many in poverty to better their economic situation: Only 2 percent are chronically poor, according to Census reports, and 38 percent of people in the lowest income group move up within three years.

The best way to reduce poverty in the United States is not to institute another grandiose government program like the War on Poverty in the 1960s, nor to expand the abundance of federal welfare programs already in existence. Behavioral changes and reforming welfare to motivate individuals to improve themselves as a condition of receiving benefits will lead to fewer welfare recipients as well as fewer people in poverty. And that should be the goal of any assistance.

Joshua Dwyer is a sophomore political science major.

### John David Blakley wants more benefits for the country's poverty stricken



JOHN DAVID BLAKLEY

Throughout his presidency, former President Reagan told the American people a myth about a welfare queen, who drove a Cadillac and sipped champagne — whose flamboyant lifestyle was subsidized by the American welfare system. The poorest Americans, those who benefited from the welfare system, were not to be pitied but distrusted and labeled as the indolent source of America's problems. Of course, the welfare queen's existence is as factual as the idea that living on welfare provides a glamorous life of riches, champagne and \$50,000 cars.

But a powerful picture of the penniless was painted in the minds of Americans by Reagan's bogus statement. Today, Americans continue to believe people live in poverty due to choice or laziness. According to the Census Bureau, the number of Americans living in poverty increased by 1.3 million last year, while the ranks of the uninsured swelled by 1.4 million. The census pointed out that both groups have increased over the past three years, and children made up more than half of the increases this past year.

The rising numbers are linked to the long slump in the job market, according to The New York Times, and the Bush administration's slow response to a sluggish economy. Job loss and outsourcing concentrated on blue-collar work, as well as taxation favoring the wealthy, has further polarized the economic spectrum. The United States has the most unequal income distribution in the developed world, as the 13,000 richest families in the United States now have almost as much income as the 20 million poorest, according to The Houston Chronicle.

There is much truth within the catchphrase two Americas, which Democratic vice presidential nominee John Edwards uses to describe the results of the United States' income disparity. The Bush administration's lack of knowledge about hardship and poverty shows through every time Vice President Cheney mocks this idea of two Americas — one rich and one poor.

The same insensitive perspective on poverty has been brandished by President Bush since his younger days when he called the New Deal socialist and declared "people are poor because they're lazy," according to one of his professors at Harvard Business School.

The result of this mindset is a lack of action from the administration when it comes to rising

unemployment (37 percent since Bush took office, according to the Labor Bureau), gas prices (11 percent since Bush took office, according to CNN), health care premiums (17 percent last year according to The Times) and college tuition rates (35 percent since Bush took office, according to the College Board) as well as a tax policy that favors the wealthy (8.5 percent of tax cuts for the bottom 60 percent of wage earners, according to Citizens for Tax Justice). Every day life for poor Americans has become increasingly difficult, and the government provides little aid.

Many conservatives blindly look to charities as the solution. However, a recent survey by the Brookings Institute showed that only 15 percent of Americans have confidence in charities, alluding to a lack of accountability and efficiency within such organizations. The study cited cases of "charities taking part in tax shelters used by corporations and wealthy individuals, insiders using charitable assets for their own purposes and donations being spent on private jets and European vacations." Ironically, the solution put forth by the report is more government regulation. The reality that people have this overwhelming suspicion of charities, blended with the haves' and have-mores' reluctance to fund government-run welfare programs, makes it hard to believe that separate, uncoordinated charities can swallow the immense task of aiding 35.9 million Americans living in poverty.

When the choice is between dealing with the haves and have-mores (those making more than \$200,000, according to John Kerry's plan to expand health care coverage), griping about higher taxes or dealing with parents choosing between health care and food for their children, the government should choose the former. When the choice is between another yacht for the wealthiest Americans or health care for American children who lack it, the government should defer to the concerns of its weakest citizens. And when the government has the means to improve the quality of life for Americans who toil daily for minimum wage and still cannot pay the bills, it should act.

Earning one's keep and providing for one's family are arduous undertakings but not back-breaking impossibilities. There is no better measure of a nation's moral worth than the fashion in which it treats the needy. The government should stop pointing fingers and help those truly in need.

John David Blakley is a junior political science major.