

COMMENTARY

Tuesday, May 27, 2003

Editorial

Abortion argument develops new twist

Laci Peterson and her unborn son are dead. Nothing can bring them back. Nothing can take away the pain of those who loved them. However, the tragedy has ended up adding more fuel to the fire in the debate over whether a fetus is a child.

In light of the deaths of Peterson and her unborn child, sponsors for the Unborn Victims of Violence Act have renamed it "Laci and Conner's Law." The act would make the murder or injury of an unborn fetus a separate offense from the murder of a pregnant mother, according to reports on the Web site for the National Right to Life. Laci Peterson's family has endorsed the bill, according to The Associated Press.

The bill's supporters say the act is not to be used as an "anti-abortion" measure. In fact, it explicitly exempts abortions. Nonetheless, abortion rights activists are afraid this act will open the door to eventually overturning *Roe v. Wade*, as they say it is one step closer to legally classifying a fetus as an individual with its own rights. The bill has made it through the U.S. House of Representatives twice but failed to reach the Senate floor because of strong opposition from abortion rights supporters.

Some individual states currently have laws with higher penalties for injuring or murdering a pregnant woman. Oregon is not one of them.

In recent weeks, the Emerald reported on the anti-abortion group Survivors and the pictures they displayed on campus. Understandably, many people wrote in to comment on the legality and morality of abortion. While we don't necessarily want to continue that trend, it is important that people know and argue about this issue.

So call your federal elected officials, write us letters about the act, and argue with friends. Where does the line begin of an individual life with its own integral human rights, and where does the life of the mother, with her rights and control of her body, end? Will adding additional penalties to those already in place for murder deter anyone? How can we, as a society, reconcile the gruesome fate of this act's namesakes with individual rights for all?

The choice is yours.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words.

Eradicating hope

Putumayo, Colombia. Spring is in the air, but the farmer's field is barren. The new pepper vines he had planted are dead. He is a civilian casualty of Plan Colombia, America's newest "war" on drugs. Few Americans know their helicopters and pesticides have wiped him out. Fewer still have witnessed the devastation themselves. Annalise Romoser is one.

Colombia is thousands of miles away from Oregon, but the two worlds are rarely far apart in Romoser's heart. She grew up in Eugene, the daughter of a teacher and a labor organizer. She attended the University of Oregon, graduating in 2001 with a degree in Spanish and international studies.

After graduation, working for human rights was a natural step. She first worked for Americans for Indian Opportunity, a nonprofit advocacy group in New Mexico. Direct aid groups did not interest her much. Instead, she said, she wanted to effect "sustained change" in policy.

So Romoser joined Witness for Peace, which is active in Mexico, Cuba and Nicaragua. But what attracted her was the chance to work with the group in Colombia, where she had lived for six months before starting college. Witness For Peace organizes two-week educational tours through Colombia. Almost 400 visitors, from students to Congressional staff, have gone in the past two years. They witness what no drug czar has ever seen. They visit places where members of the U.S. Embassy cannot go.

That's because Colombia is in the midst of a four-decade civil conflict. There are guerillas on the extreme left, paramilitary groups on the far right. Both groups are fueled by cocaine money. The Colombian peasant is often caught in the crossfire. Literally.

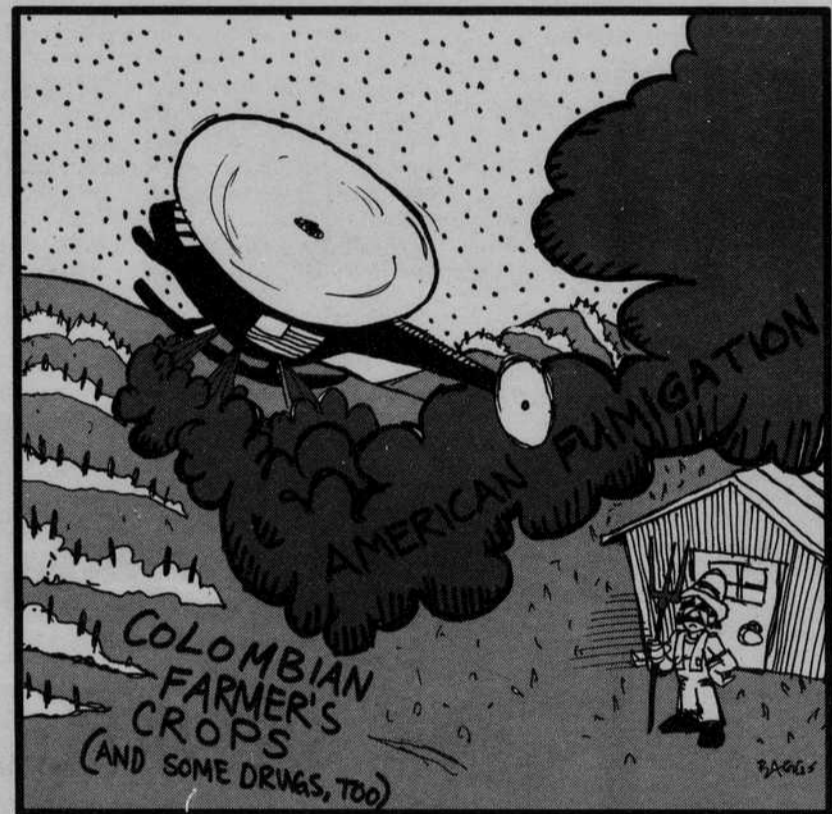
These subsistence farmers are not the bad guys. Threatened by war and poverty, they grow what they can. Often it's the coca leaf that buys peace from the men with guns. Yet they, not their drug-dealing landlords, are the primary target of our military might.

Is aerial fumigation effective? Well, yes and no. Sure, it wipes out food crops and can kill livestock. It displaces hundreds of farmers, adding to the country's one million internal refugees.

"But coca plants grow like weeds," Romoser said. She showed me two photographs of a field. She took the first soon after aerial spraying. The second photo, taken a month later, showed stalks of bright green. Manual eradication is



Philip
Huang
A different light



Steve Baggs Emerald

preferable, she says.

Witness for Peace also opposes aid to Colombia's military because of their terrible record, including torture and other human rights violations. Not all the units receiving military aid have been "vetted" by the State Department, Romoser points out.

Not all U.S. aid is the search-and-destroy kind. Plan Colombia tries to promote agricultural alternatives to coca. Witness For Peace also advocates on behalf peasants who grow "legitimate" crops. The pepper farmer was one. He had traveled all the way to Bolivia to buy pepper plants. Those plants were destroyed with weapons from the same country that encouraged him to buy them.

Witness for Peace strives to achieve another goal: promoting democracy. Romoser works with labor leaders, who are often targets of right-wing violence. Plan Colombia offers them bulletproof vehicles, vests and armed guards. But such aid is bogged in bureaucracy, and when accepted, often makes them a more prominent target. One labor activist Romoser knew was killed while waiting to receive American protection.

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our society expects its young to achieve the American dream through thrift, caution and ambition.

But Annalise Romoser seems to embody the opposite values — those of generosity, courage, and love of truth. Her example defies expectations. Yet her work in Colombia will make it possible for others someday to hope and dream like we do. People in Colombia also wish to live in liberty and happiness, free from want and terror.

Romoser is a realist. She has no illusions that our policies, or the civil war, will end tomorrow. The knowledge gained, the injustices witnessed, the goodwill created — they will bear fruit a generation from now.

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado wrote: "Caminante no hay camino, el camino se hace el andar." It means, "Traveler, there is no path, the path is made by walking." In other words, forget the road less traveled. There are no roads, only travelers. And in our American journey, we can inspire either hope or fear in our neighbors to the south. I like the choice Romoser has made.

What would she say to students at her alma mater, I ask?

"Come, see, learn," she said. "And have an experience that changes your life."

Contact the columnist at philiphuang@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Online poll

Each week, the Emerald publishes the previous week's poll results and the coming week's poll question. Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

Last week: Should a fetus be recognized as an entity separate from its mother for legal reasons?

Results: 90 total votes

Yes — 44.4 percent, or 40 votes

No — 52.2 percent, or 47 votes

What is this about? — 1.1 percent, or 1 vote

Leave me alone! — 2.2 percent, or 2 votes

This week: Have you experienced harassment on the University of Oregon campus?

Choices: Yes, because of my sexual orientation; Yes, because of my ethnicity; Yes, because of my gender; Yes, because of my age; Yes, other; No; Leave me alone!

CORRECTION

The cutline for the photo accompanying Friday's story "On a peaceful mission" should have identified University volunteer research associate Jette Foss as Frank Stahl's partner.

The Emerald regrets the error.

Letter to the editor

Lawmakers and media spread harmful, incomplete information

The only people more uneducated than our school children lately seem to be our lawmakers and our media. As Eugene continues to be a national leader in research, educational and social welfare issues are being ignored.

We have growing evidence that increasing class size, closing schools and eliminating social services is costly and damaging to a society. Where are these studies in our media and policy making?

As our institutions instead focus on unproved theories of security and well-being, including tax cuts for the rich, military buildup and usurping retirement benefits, it's more than our conscience that's lost.

Collective intellect is also missing. Our increasing knowledge of the benefits of drug treatment along with educating, stimulating and nourishing children is now futile. Newspapers and television underreport this information and lawmakers refuse to abide by it.

So what's the use of proving the benefits of nutritious meals on learning or tobacco education? Let's instead make counterproductive policy with unethical, "neutral" reporting about it by leaving out the proven damage it will cause.

Mike Meyers
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