

Viewpoint

The Battalion
Texas A&M University

Wednesday
June 29, 1977

Dorm fire policies need review

Fiery tragedies are becoming common in our headlines. And those tragedies could repeat themselves on the Texas A&M University campus.

Sunday 42 people died in a smoke-filled Tennessee jail, most of smoke inhalation, when a teen-age inmate set fire to his padded cell. Four weeks ago a Kentucky dinner-club burned to the ground, killing 158 people.

Early yesterday morning an arsonist set fire to two paper-filled garbage cans in an upstairs bathroom of one of the old Corps dorms on campus. The resulting blaze scorched the inside of the bathroom, but was stopped before it spread because somebody had to go to the bathroom at 4 a.m. and found it in time.

Over 200 students are living in that dorm and most were asleep when the fire was set. Had the

fire spread that firebug could have been a murderer many times over.

Because small fires like this one are set as pranks periodically, without major damage or injury, we slip into secure belief that a major fire couldn't happen here. Don't be too sure.

The older Corps dorms present the most danger. Their stony exteriors are impervious to fire. But there's plenty inside that isn't.

"People say they won't burn," College Station Fire Marshal Harry Davis said. "But once inside a room, fire can engulf beds, furniture and clothes, generating enormous heat, he said."

"It could gut these things out," Davis said. "And you'd have a heck of a time getting out."

The newer dorms on campus have internal fire alarms and stand pipes, which are water outlets in the dorm walls to which firemen can directly

hook their hoses. The pipes save the time and labor of dragging a water-laden fire hose up three flights of stairs to fight a fire.

But the stand pipes in the Corps dorms are either shut off or have had their valve handles removed, rendering them useless to a fireman without a wrench. The handles were removed to keep pranksters from turning the high pressure water valves on. But now its time to reevaluate that decision, to decide if that precaution is worth the danger it could present during a major fire.

University safety officials need to reevaluate the present fire safety equipment and techniques available, to be certain those measures are adequate. Let's be certain the protection we have is the best it can be.

Let's hope it doesn't take a tragedy of our own to tell us we're not protected.

Washington powers ready to accept truce

By DAVID S. BRODER

WASHINGTON — For all the rhetorical volleys rocketing between Capitol Hill and the White House, a relationship is beginning to evolve between President Carter and the Democratic Congress that is less than intolerable to both.

One has to express it in that curiously negative way. It is certainly not the relationship that Carter envisaged in those countless campaign speeches on the President and Congress working together "in harmony for a change."

And equally it is not the relationship that many congressional Democrats, frustrated by the years of veto battles with Presidents Nixon and Ford, hoped would evolve when they had one of their own again in the White House.

The hopes of Carter and the Capitol Hill Democrats depended on a meeting of minds, a mutuality of goals, along the length of Pennsylvania Avenue. That plainly has not occurred.

But what has developed is an unofficial understanding of how far the President and the Congress can extend their conflicting wills. It is a contemporary set of checks and balances, reflecting what is probably the best available truce terms between an independent, assertive Congress, blooded by eight years of combat with the Executive, and a new President whose motto is, "I do not intend to lose."

The limits of the relationship are well-illustrated by what has been happening to the congressional water projects and to the President's energy program.

Carter is coming out quite well in the fight over the dam and reclamation projects. When he first moved to halt con-

struction on 18 of these politically sacred projects, the Senate majority leader told him that he was being "stupid."

The Senate quickly passed a resolution rejecting his position. And the old heads in Washington chortled that Carter and his boys were about to receive a lesson in the realities of pork-barrel politics.

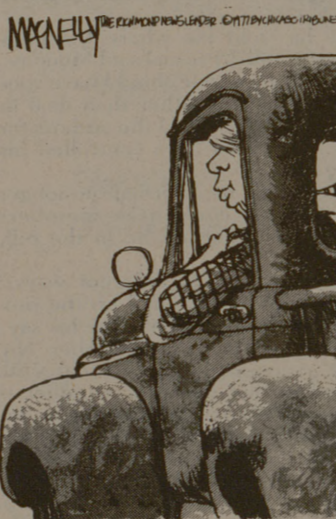
It has not worked out that way. The House of Representatives came within 30 votes of giving Carter a complete victory — close enough to signal the certain effectiveness of a presidential veto, if it came to that. The Senate Appropriations Committee has scrapped half the projects and, as this is written, has acknowledged that the rules of the game have been changed by providing no funds at all for new starts.

In essence, by exploiting the anti-spending sentiments in the general public and local environmental concerns, Carter has demonstrated his ability to intervene successfully in a traditional area of legislative prerogative — the dispensing of public works plums. He has in effect turned the parochial congressional pork barrel into a national issue and broken up the game.

Energy legislation demonstrates the other side of the picture. This is no parochial concern, but a national issue which Carter obviously thought called for a "presidential" solution.

He put what he regards as the best brain in the country — James Schlesinger — to work on the problem and unveiled his proposal last April in a television extravaganza worthy of a coronation.

The belief in the White House was that Congress — with its fragmented committee jurisdictions and flighty attention span



— would gratefully accept the President's design if he could just prepare public opinion for the necessity of some energy program.

Not so. Carter underestimated the expertise and self-confidence that has developed on the congressional committees with energy jurisdictions. When their scrutiny showed gaping holes in the hastily assembled Carter plan, they have not hesitated to rewrite it in bold strokes.

This congressional "intervention" in an area of presidential prerogative brought howls from the White House just as loud as the complaints that issued from Capitol Hill about Carter's "interference" in the water project issue.

British accepting life with expensive energy

By BRYAN SILCOCK

LONDON — Britain already has the kind of expensive energy economy that Americans will face if President Carter's national energy plan becomes reality. Thus there is a constant search here for cheaper sources of power.

Britain consumes about half as much energy per person as the United States does, and not simply because the standard of living here is lower. The answer lies in the fact that energy is so expensive here that people are careful to conserve it.

The most obvious difference between

energy costs in the United States and Britain is the price of gasoline. The cheapest gasoline here is the equivalent of \$1.50 per gallon and higher octane fuels are more expensive. With such prices, heavy taxes on gasoline-guzzling automobiles are unnecessary.

But most British have been pleasantly surprised to discover that higher energy prices, which made conservation imperative, have resulted in real savings without any particular hardships.

The turning point here, as elsewhere in the world, came in late 1973, when the

Arab petroleum producers boosted the price of oil in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war.

The British government, faced with that crisis, took no special steps to curb energy consumption beyond appeals to the population to conserve fuel voluntarily. But the spiralling price of oil alone was enough to persuade people to save energy.

As a consequence, Britain's energy requirements have dropped by an estimated 6 per cent, which could represent a reduction in oil imports of close to \$1 billion.

In contrast to the West Germans and Scandinavians, the British have not gone in for such projects as district heating schemes or plants that combine heat and power production, at least for residences. This may be because the British are too individualistic at home to share energy.

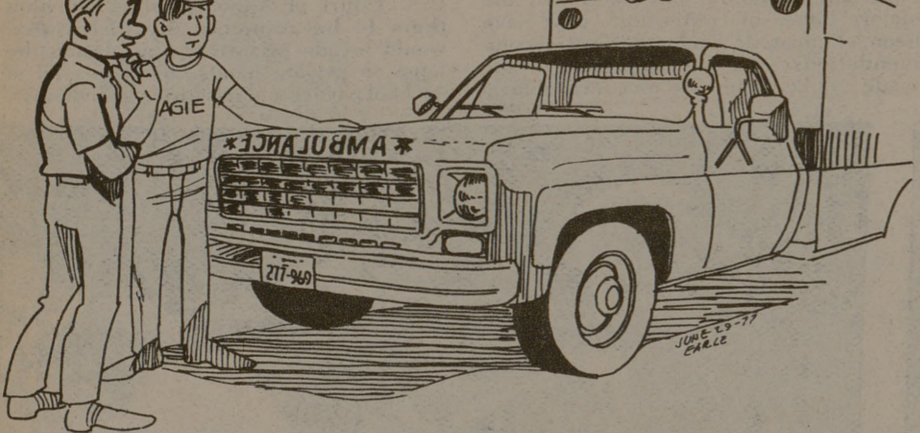
Nor has the energy crisis generated the same enthusiasm here for innovations as it has in the United States and other countries. There are plenty of experiments in Britain with solar energy and wind power, but at best these would not contribute more than 5 per cent of British energy needs by the year 2000.

Given the cloudy skies that hang over Britain much of the year, solar energy is a particularly gloomy prospect.

From a climatic viewpoint, Britain is in a much better position to exploit wind power, but here too the prospects are dim. In order to compete with conventional power stations, wind-driven electrical generators would have to be installed on sites with average wind speeds of 20 miles per hour or better. This would mean covering hillsides with huge windmills — a notion that would certainly arouse widespread esthetic opposition.

by Jim Earle

Slouch



"IT'S EITHER AN AGGIE JOKE, OR IT'S FOR PEOPLE LOOKING IN THEIR REAR-VIEW MIRROR!"

Don't throw away those old laws!

By DICK WEST

Washington — Every now and then some newspaper or magazine will print a roundup of seemingly archaic or extraneous laws that clutter up the statute books of this broad land.

In Sump City, Miss., it's against the law to polish a watermelon within 10 feet of a flagpole. In Small Beer, Wyo., it's against the law for a licensed beautician to shampoo a buffalo.

That sort of thing.

There's a tendency among casual readers to wonder why such ordinances have never been repealed. More to the point, I think, is why they were enacted in the first place.

The latter curiosity arose again a few days ago when a New York judge dismis-

sed all charges against George Willig, the skyscraper alpinist who allegedly scaled one of the 110-story World Trade Center towers last month.

You might think the police would have had some trouble deciding how to book him. But such was not the case. Among

The lighter side

other counts, Willig was charged with unauthorized building climbing.

I was impressed, as I imagine others must have been, that there was a specific law to fit his crime.

No one, I'm sure, would question the wisdom of such controls. Unless there is

an orderly flow of building ascensions, the situation could quickly get out of hand.

In the circumstances, it does not seem duly burdensome to require that a building climber drop by the Bureau of Edifice Escalades and pick up a permit.

Even so, the anti-climbing law reflected more foresight than one might have expected for a city as otherwise imprudent as New York. I would be interested to know how many other municipalities, counties, states or nations have regulatory measures of that nature.

And it would be even more interesting to look up the legislative history and see at what point the need for building-climbing permits first became apparent.

I was talking to a lawyer friend about this and he said it was his understanding that the first such ordinances were

adopted after a hotel elevator operators strike in Chicago in the 1920s.

During the strike, as he recalled, hotel stairs became so crowded that some guests started climbing up and down the outside walls.

This practice was deemed undesirable on two counts: it made it easy for male guests to sneak women past the hotel detective, and departing guests could leave without checking out.

Ergo, there arose a clamor for building climbing restrictions.

Be that as it may, the Willig affair demonstrates why a city or state shouldn't be too hasty about expunging statutes that might seem rather far-fetched.

You never know where building climbers are going to strike next.

Top of the News

Campus

Services reduced for weekend

Services will be reduced at Texas A&M's University Center during the July 4 weekend. The Memorial Student Center main desk will be staffed for the entire weekend and the AggieLand Station post office will be open for mail pickup. The Visitors Information Center in the Rudder Tower and the Arts and Crafts Shop will be open Saturday and Sunday but will close for Monday like all other areas in the center.

Field day held July 7

The fifth annual Texas A&M University Plantation Field Day will be held July 7 in Burleson County. The field day is open to Brazos County farmers and ranchers. The day's events will include discussions on a variety of agricultural topics led by several specialists. A barbecue will close the field day activities. The plantation headquarters is located on Farm Road 50.

State

Bilingual education grants given

Bilingual education grants to support a wide range of summer programs for school personnel and students will total more than \$1.2 million, Texas Education Commissioner M. L. Brockette said yesterday. Seven regional education service centers and 44 school districts serving large Mexican-American students populations were awarded short-term grants, he said.

Adult bookstores must move

Adult book stores and theaters must locate further than 2,000 feet from a school, church or charitable institution according to a city ordinance recently approved by Houston's city council. Mayor Fred Hofheinz said he believes the ordinance is unconstitutional and cast the only dissenting vote. An amendment to the ordinance gives adult book stores 30 days to move.

Manson writings published

Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum plans to publish, in mid-July, several selections written by convicted murderer Charles Manson while in prison. Editor Howard J. Perlstein said the works are not being condemned or condoned but are important as examples of prison writing. Manson is currently serving a life sentence in a California prison for his role in the 1969 Tate-La Bianca murders in Los Angeles.

Hill files motion against Hughes' aid

Texas Attorney Gen. John Hill has filed a motion in Los Angeles asking that former aid to Howard Hughes, Clarence A. Waldron, be compelled to answer questions about Hughes' use of drugs. Recently Waldron and other aides have refused to give any information to lawyers seeking it. Several memos indicate that Hughes took large amounts of valium and codeine. Hill said the type, amount and manner of ingestion and injection of the medications are relevant to determining the physical and mental effects such medication may have had upon him.

Nation

Space shuttle tested

The Space Shuttle "Enterprise," mated to the back of a Boeing 747, took off yesterday on its second manned test flight. Two astronauts rode in the cabin of the space trunk which lifted off 11 minutes early. The flight included a planned 6,000 foot dive from 19,000 feet. A spokesman for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said that if this test went well, a final manned-captive flight would be scheduled for July 8.

Nixon can't have tapes

The United States Supreme Court has ruled that the government has control over former President Richard M. Nixon's White House tapes and documents. Justice William Brennan, in a 56-page opinion said that the law passed does not violate the principle of separation of powers, the presidential privilege of confidentiality or significantly interfere with Nixon's First Amendment rights to freedom of association.

Lawmen indicted for ambush

A county sheriff, his chief deputy and seven other officers of Mobile County, Alabama have been indicted by a federal grand jury for allegedly allowing a prisoner to escape and then killing him in an ambush. Indictments specifically charged Deputy James Sanford with killing Louis Wallace, a prisoner at the Mobile County Jail on Oct. 12, 1976.

World

Pile-up in Brazil

Fourteen persons are dead and at least 110 injured as a result of a 140-vehicle crash on a foggy highway near Sao Paulo, Brazil. Police said a commuter bus slowing to a near stop on the road caused the initial crash. The chain reaction left a four-mile pileup on the Anchieta Highway. The area where the pileup occurred is often blanketed with smoke and smog from nearby oil refineries.

The Battalion

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