

**A&M budget issue in resignation**

**Local journalists decry secrecy**

By SCOTT PENDLETON  
Battalion Staff

Public officials should not "govern in secrecy," former Eagle editor Paul LaRocque said in an interview Monday.

LaRocque and Martin Sebastian, former anchorman of KBTX-TV (Channel 3), had criticized secrecy in public affairs when they appeared last week on KAMU-TV's Focus program.

LaRocque said during the program that an incident arising from an attempt to obtain information led to his resignation in late May as the Eagle's editor. He is now the editorial page editor of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

He would not comment earlier in the summer on his resignation except to say it was "a disagreement over policy."

LaRocque said that administrative officials of Texas A&M University had refused to show an Eagle reporter the 1978-79 University budget proposal before the Board of Regents had acted on it.

Administrative assistant Steve Pringle said Monday that President Miller considered the proposal to be merely a recommendation for the Board of Regents. Miller did not think the proposal was public information until the regents had acted on it, Pringle said.

LaRocque disagreed. "In this case, the University budget is a public expenditure and the public has a right to know what's in it before it is given final approval by the Board of Regents," LaRocque said Monday.

"The public should have information that is public. Public officials are just that."

"They should serve the public whether they are university officials or community officials. They should remember this and not try to govern in secrecy," LaRocque said.

He said he wanted to attempt to obtain the information under the Texas Open Records Act by getting an attorney general's opinion.

But LaRocque said that Texas

A&M President Jarvis Miller talked with W.S. Pearson, the Eagle's publisher, about the University's reasons for withholding the proposal.

Pearson then told LaRocque to drop the matter, LaRocque said. LaRocque then resigned, he said, because he felt he could not continue to work for The Eagle if it would mean making exceptions to his news policy.

In other cases, LaRocque said, The Eagle had followed the course that seemed right under the law. LaRocque did not believe that The Eagle should have backed off in this case either, he said.

LaRocque said that the case was the culmination of a series of disagreements between him and Pearson about policy matters dealing with decisions like special sections and news coverage.

Pearson said Monday he couldn't remember his exact conversation

with Miller and would not comment on LaRocque's statements, except to say that the matter was "in-house business."

During the KAMU interview, Martin Sebastian supported LaRocque's contention that public officials should make public business available to the media.

"They're carrying on as a public entity and they should provide us with all the information we desire," he said.

Sebastian, who will be working for a television station in Des Moines, said that some public officials exclude the press from what should be public meetings and don't release documents that are public record.

Referring to the press as "the public's watchdog," Sebastian said that "if we are excluded, then they (the public) are excluded."

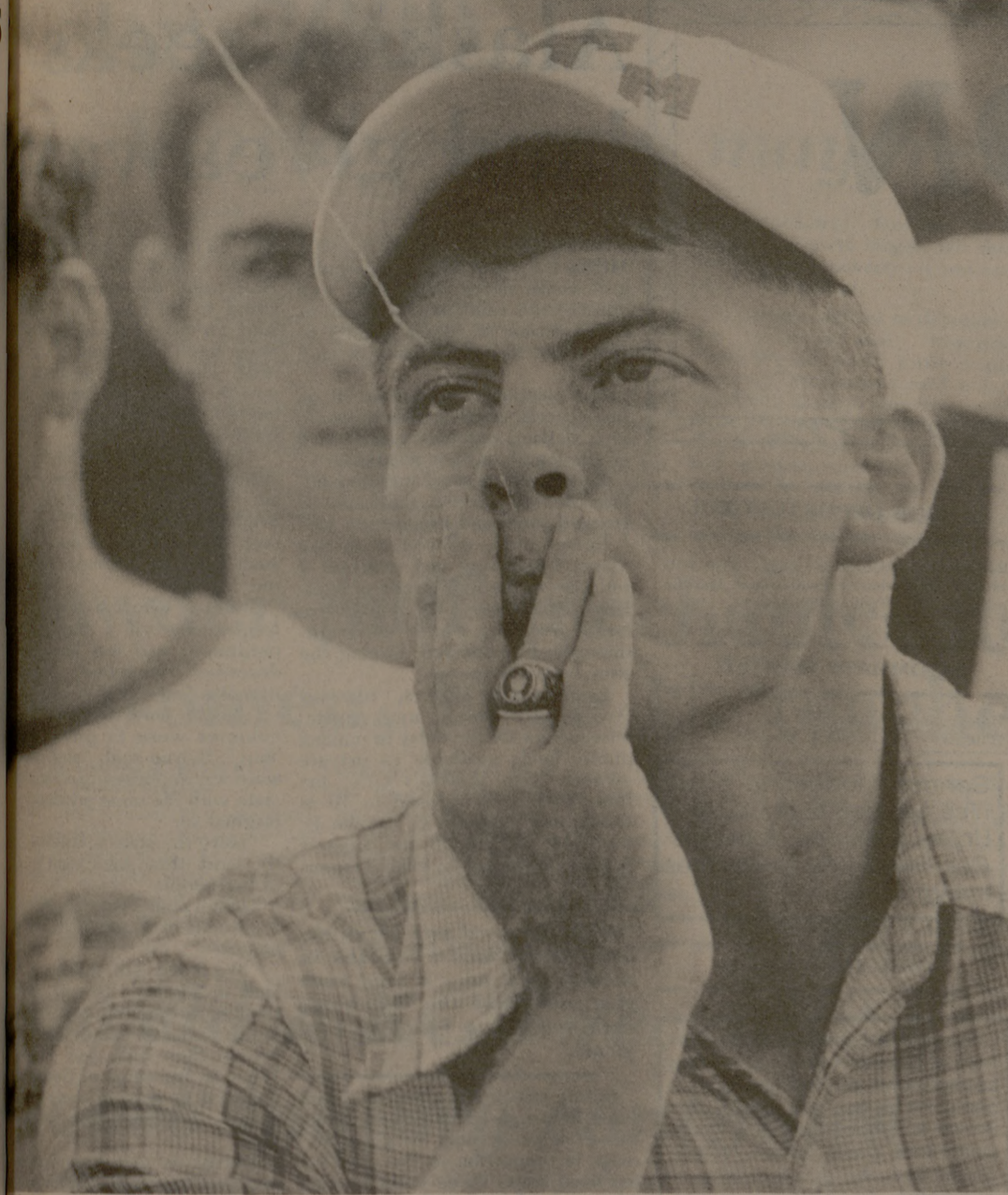
During the KAMU interview, Sebastian also commented on the

media's responsibility to report all the news. For instance, TV stations hate to use stories with no visual impact, he said. Yet they must do so since some people rely entirely on TV for news. The station must even carry stories it missed the day before, Sebastian said.

He and LaRocque agreed that competition among the media to get a story first improves the quality of news gathering and reporting.

Both men identified areas where the local news media could do better work. LaRocque mentioned the need for more explanation of the news. He recommended more articles in a series and more investigations.

Sebastian said that media audiences like "self-help" news that informs them on topics of personal interest. But he pointed out the difficulty of reporting "what they want and what they need" in a brief TV newscast.



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Battalion photo by Paige Beasley

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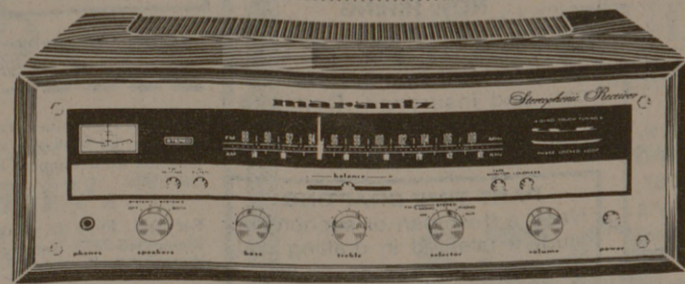
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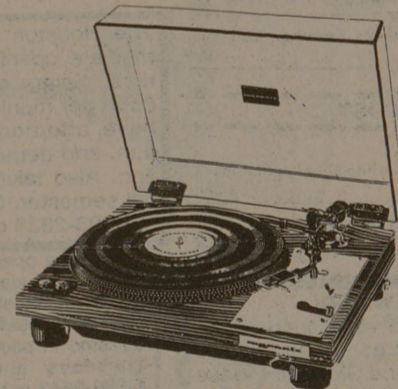
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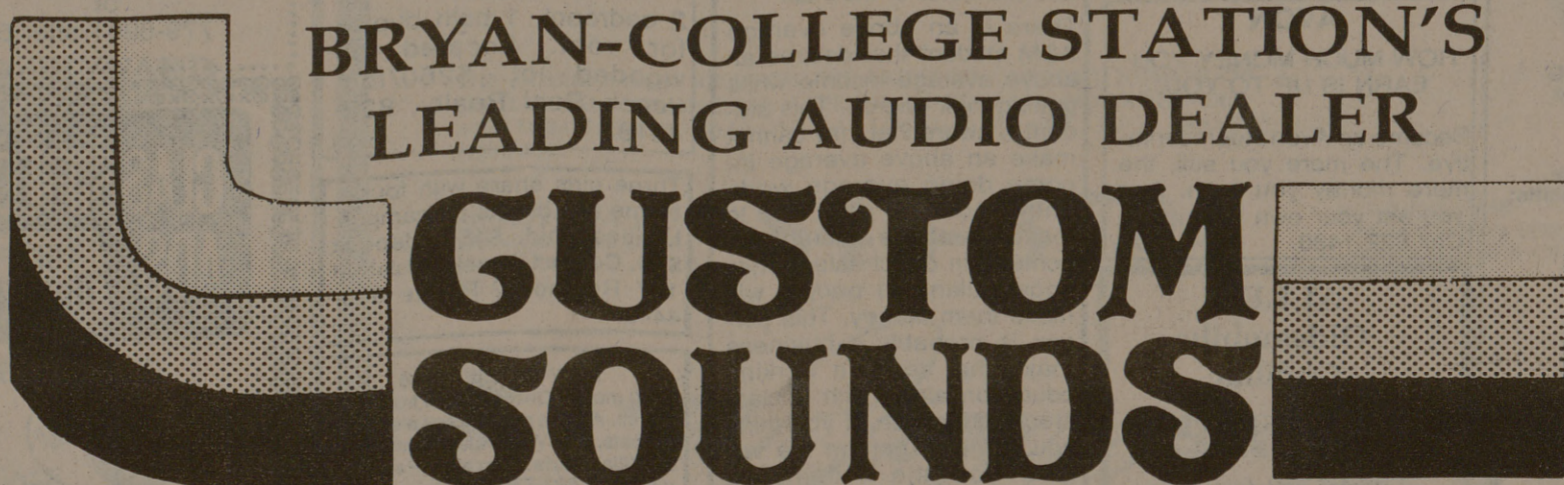


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