

# VIEWPOINT

THE BATTALION  
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

THURSDAY  
SEPTEMBER 4, 1980

## Slouch

By Jim Earle

## Staff Notebook

Headline-seeking stops cater to journalists' appetites

By LIZ NEWLIN

Battalion Staff

This news isn't fit to print: Jim Nugent, a member of the powerful Texas Railroad Commission, visited Easterwood Airport for less than half an hour Wednesday morning.

Then he flew on to Huntsville, Conroe, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Orange and spent the night in Houston.

Most news organizations in those towns probably will carry the "news" of Nugent's kick-off campaign sprint across the Lone Star State. And the story will probably reach an even larger audience through the wire services.

Nugent is running against Republican H.J. "Doc" Blanchard for a seat on the Railroad Commission, which controls the trucking industry and oil and natural gas production in Texas. In a United Press International story from Austin elsewhere in this newspaper, Nugent said his election is "vital" to protect Texas from "energy-greedy Northeasterners."

Notice of his visit to College Station appears on this opinion page because his ploy was a media event. It was an appearance staged solely to capture news time and space. The story on page 7 describes the beginning of his campaign,

which is news. But his appearance here was not.

And to put it on the front page — where he and his press secretary would like it — is offensive. Frankly, I want some real-live campaigning before I'll write a real-live campaign story.

"Real-live campaigning" should be more than this: flying into the airport, reading a canned three-page statement, passing out a flattering, soft-focus mug shot, answering a few reporters' questions and shaking hands with local officials.

But Nugent and his staff should not be totally blamed for producing the news that's not fit to print.

We in the media, after all, are the ones who treat such media events as legitimate news. And we do it all the time, especially in an election year when visibility is valuable and generally available to an incumbent. As an illustration, check to see how many reports of this "news" mention that fewer than a dozen people were at the airport to see Nugent here or at any of his other stops. Chances are that few will.

Reporters are sometimes embarrassed to say only a handful came to an event they put in the paper.

But often they're not embarrassed enough,

and lots of sorry reporting results.

It happens this way: We journalists say that if an important (read office-holding) says it, especially if he says it at a convenient time and place, then it should become news. For a reporter, such a media event is easy to cover and write. For an editor, it is easy to for and usually provides a good "picture" opportunity.

We journalists know about these traps. During the national conventions, for instance, the networks constantly refused to be "trapped" by the parties into broadcasting form speeches. Instead, in an ironic twist, interviewed and re-interviewed delegates Duluth who said nothing about anything.

In trying to avoid the trap, the broadcast often avoided the story, which was, for a convenient place (on the podium).

The Nugent case, however, was a conventional non-story. And our front page should be served for news, not media events.

One Texas A&M official praised this method of campaigning — the flying kick-stop at airports — as the most efficient. If it works, it didn't.



"This is a typical case of a severe withdrawal from the registration process."

## Carter needs to answer questions on first term

By DAVID S. BRODER

WASHINGTON — The general-election campaign is now officially under way and the White House is still waiting to be won. Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter each plainly has it in his power to win or lose the prize in the next nine weeks, and while John Anderson's chances seem marginal, the doubts about the other two contenders are great enough so that even the unlikely is not impossible.

Journalists cover the campaigns as they unfold — not as they would like them to be. Substance or symbolism, delusions or realities, the press amplifies whatever it gets. But as journalists, we also ask questions and, at times, those questions can help steer the debate in a useful direction.

It is in that spirit that I tried, on one of the last quiet, non-traveling nights that I will have for a while, to put down on paper some of the questions I would like to hear the candidates address this fall. They tended to be personal, rather than policy, questions because ultimately we are electing a man, not a manifesto, to fill the presidency.

To start with the incumbent, I would like to know what Jimmy Carter really thinks of his first term. His answer would let us guess how much better — it any — he might be in a second term.

Does he think it bad luck or mismanagement that has caused real living standards to decline so sharply during the last 3½ years? Has he sorted out whose economic advice he can rely on?

Does he believe, as he says, that our alliances have never been stronger, or has he learned something he can now articulate about alliance management?

What would he do differently about organizing the White House, working with Congress, motivating the bureaucracy — or does he see no problems in those areas?

Does his appeal for public trust extend to a reciprocal trust on his part? Does he know that the voters would welcome a serious self-assessment of his first-term performance, rather than a whitewash?

As for his Republican challenger, I would love to hear Ronald Reagan talk calmly and quietly, in his own words, about which parts of the vast agglomeration of current federal responsibilities and policies — domestic and foreign — he feels comfortable in continuing, and which he really feels cry out for a change. And, assuming there are many things he would like to change, I would like to know which are his highest personal priorities, for no President will do more than start on his "wish list" in four years.

Equally, I would like to know how Reagan, at age 70, expects to summon the personal energy and willpower to move that mountain of inertia called Congress, the bureaucracy and the interest groups. Does he really think he can do it by the power of his own voice? Or has he thought seriously about ways of mobilizing a new coalition committed to the kind of change he presumably wished to bring?

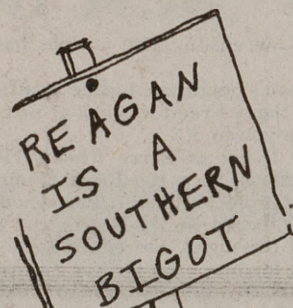
How does he think the world has changed since 1945, and what do those changes (the Soviet-Chinese split, the emergence of the Third World) imply for American foreign policy?

And if we are, as he proposes, to rely much more on private firms and market forces for growth, jobs and productivity, at what point — if any — should the government intervene in the market — and to what end?

As for John Anderson, the basic question in my mind is what he really brings to the campaign beside conviction. He asks to be viewed seriously as a potential President, and not just as a spoiler. Where is the evidence in his past record in Congress or the political campaign that he has the capacity to rally people around his leadership?

How does he foresee his relationship with a Congress where he was always part of a minority within a minority? After he had propounded his policies, how would he expect to build support for them inside and outside the government?

Those are my questions, and you will have your own. Whether any of us get straight answers, the next two months will tell.



## Cloak-and-dagger cola operation

By DICK WEST

United Press International

WASHINGTON — It was reported the other day that the Coca-Cola Co. had filed suit to stop a Pennsylvania hotel from "passing off" other kinds of colas as Cokes.

This case sounds like it might have been the work of a soft drink secret agent.

I used to know one of Coca-Cola's undercover operators and envied him mightily. He had what I still regard as the most glamorous, exciting and fascinating job I ever heard tell of.

His assignment was to travel about the country ordering Cokes in establishments where soft drinks were sold. Then he surreptitiously collected specimens of whatever he was served and sent them back to the home office for analysis.

If the boys in the lab determined a sample was something other than pure Coke, the company would have a basic for legal action, if it came to that, to stop the deception and protect its trademark.

My friend specialized in collecting specimens in bar rooms. Or at least that was the only aspect of his job he talked about when I was around.

His modus operandi, he once confided, was to belly up to a bar and order a shot of hooch with Coke on the side. When the bartender wasn't looking, he would whip out a small syringe and suction off a portion of the chaser.

For a time, I was told, Coke agents customarily tossed down the hard stuff so as to avoid suspicion. But legal complications arose.

Coke agents occasionally had to give evidence in court and attorneys advised that if the defense could prove they had been drinking on the job it might discredit their testimony. So my friend became a two-syringe drinker.

With one syringe he would suck up enough cola for testing against the secret Coke formula. With the other syringe he could drain the shot

glass, thus being in a position to swear under oath that no liquor had touched his lips.

Once back in his hotel room, my friend would empty the booze syringe into a bottle that already contained various brands of spirits from other parts of the country. He even gave his own private label — "Old Syringe."

Many's the evening I have spent sipping "Old Syringe" and listening spellbound as he recounted his adventures. After a few hours his thrall it was tough going back to the wacky world I then, as now, inhabited.

As to whether Coca-Cola still employs secret agents who stock their liquor cabinets in this manner, I cannot say. But if ever you attend a private party at which the host serves flavored scotch laced with bourbon that has a tequila after-taste, you'll know it's the thing.

## Warped

By Scott McCullar



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