

Aggie friendship — touchy issue

I wish the Board of Regents would make up its mind.

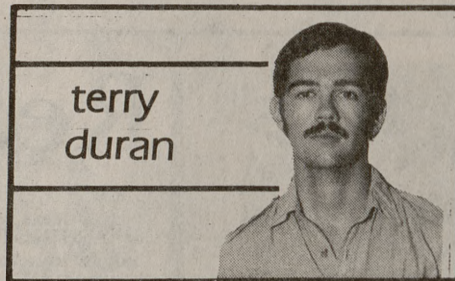
The Regents have got to decide whether they want the best of everything for Texas A&M and the System — as they have avowed, repeatedly — or whether they just want to play favorites.

During Monday's portion of their three-day meeting, the regents seesawed dangerously on the brink of a serious ethical dilemma. Regents Royce Wisenbaker and William McKenzie wanted to reject a firm recommended as the most qualified by System planning staff to award a hefty contract to a better friend of Aggieland.

The contract in question was for design of the \$21.5 million engineering/physics building scheduled to be completed in 1986. The design fee comes to \$980,000 — no small potatoes.

In a briefing to the Regents, System planning chief Wesley E. Peel put it like this: *all other things being equal* — criteria including technical competence and the quality of prior work done both for the System and other customers — design work would be awarded to the firm with the most Aggie connections: Aggie-owned, lots of Texas A&M grads employed there and a history of financial contributions to the University.

But, that's supposed to be after a thorough weeding-out process based on technical criteria to whittle the number of interested firms from over 100 to three.



terry duran

Those top three would be the ones brought before the Regents, in order of precedence.

Regents Planning and Building Committee Chairman H.C. Bell praised the procedure as "taking the politics out" of the system: before the present procedure was instituted in 1979, firms lobbied individual regents.

But when the design contract for the engineering/physics building came up, Wisenbaker wanted to give it to Preston Geren Associates of Fort Worth — fourth on the planning staff's list and therefore not even on the list presented to the board.

Wisenbaker extolled Geren's virtues: he had been instrumental in the design and construction of Cain Hall and the library, he was a past president of the Aggie Club, and other Aggie support.

"I'm telling you," Wisenbaker told Peel, "Preston Geren's grandfather was a great architect, his father was a great

architect, and Preston Geren is a architect. He opens up his purse and gives us money."

Sorry — I didn't know financial contributions were any indication of technical expertise.

Wisenbaker and McKenzie argued and tugged at the other Regents. Regent Norman Moser faced up to the issue: "I don't think Preston Geren formed all those valuable services by the expectation of any favors," he told the mavericks.

Regents Chairman H.R. "Bum" called the move "a bad mistake, a piece of action" — and the effort to step back the bounds of due process was there, squashed.

Even so, System Chancellor Hansen was left with a directive to judgment in applying "some extra consideration" to those felt to be friends of Aggieland.

Got all that straight? Good. Now about it, carefully.

If a state or federal government body did something like that, it would be called favoritism, nepotism or something uglier: corruption.

The Regents didn't really step on the line. They didn't actually award a contract due to non-technical factors — they really thought about it for a while.

Some of the individual regents, each other how terrible that almost was.

Let's hope a word to the wise is heeded.



Reagan holds steady on economic course

by Helen Thomas
United Press International

WASHINGTON — President Reagan plans to stay the course with his current economic policies, but that does not mean his aides are not worried about the fall elections.

A White House official indicated that the worst thing for Reagan would be to become "Carteresque" and to appear undecided, as Jimmy Carter's opponents liked to perceive him.

The official in effect said it would hurt Reagan's image as a true believer in Reaganomics if he suddenly decided it was not working with 9.5 million unemployed and workers, from blue collar to top corporation executives worried about their jobs all over the country.

The president has proved stalwart and unflexible. Despite the pleas of the housing industry he refused to give a helping hand with a bailout for mortgages. While he quotes Calvin Coolidge that the "business of America is business," he also believes in sink or swim, survival of the fittest when it comes to free enterprise.

He believes the government shackles business and without restraints the U.S. economy would be soaring. But it is not. Something is wrong. His top aides admit it but they say nothing will be done until after the election.

"We are obviously concerned about the economy," said White House counselor Edwin Meese. "We think it will pick up this year. There are some favorable signs."

"At the same time, we're in a pretty serious situation," he added. "We'll have to see the impact of the tax cuts."

Chief of staff James Baker concedes that the White House is conducting a wide ranging review of economic policies, but says Reagan does not intend to announce any changes in those policies before the election.

He believes there is too little time before the election to effect a turnaround even with new approaches, and feels it would be politically damaging for

Reagan to seem to waver to the financial community and the voters.

But Baker indicates that after the election, there will be some "adjustments" if the economy does not pick up.

Reagan's aides also believe the president has money in the bank because polls show the majority of people, even among the unemployed, do not blame him. Reagan has hammered away at one theme that he expects to hit even more forcefully on the hustings this fall. The theme is that he inherited all the economic ills and that he needs more time to straighten out the country.

According to his aides, the polls show people are willing to give him more time. But they do admit that since July 1, Reagan must take some of the credit or demerits for what happens to the economy. It is his show now.

From time to time, there are signals that the Treasury Department is making a study of the role of the Federal Reserve Board. Much is made of the fact that it is an independent agency. But there are also advocates who would like to put it under the Treasury. Former Treasury Secretary John Connally for one has thought it might not be a bad idea.

As for the elections, unemployment could hurt candidates who run on Reagan's program. But the president has other irons in the fire to keep his political image up front. The public launching of the campaign for an amendment requiring a balanced budget put him four square against the red ink spenders.

He also is taking credit for a cost of living increase in the Social Security checks that he tried to block several times.

In addition, he is leaning toward a "flat tax" rate that he finds tempting and may be politically saleable as well.

In short, the economy is in the doldrums and there is no longer any hope at the White House for a bright new prosperous world by fall, but Reagan has other irons in the fire that he believes will save the day for the Republicans.



Have a nice day — anyway

by Art Buchwald

The trouble with most people is that they never seem to leave well enough alone. The other day I said to H. Boyer Royal:

"Have a nice day."

"Are you asking me a question?" he wanted to know.

"No, I'm telling you."

"What business of yours is it what kind of day I have?"

"It really isn't any of my business. As a matter of fact, I really don't care what your day is like. I was trying to say goodbye to you in a friendly fashion."

"Then why didn't you just say, 'Time is like a fashionable host, that slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, and with his arms outstretch'd as he would fly, grasps in the comer; welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing.'"

"I don't know why I didn't say that," I told him. "It never occurred to me."

"People always tell you to have a nice day, but they never tell you how to have one."

"I imagine they assume that each person should know how to do it. A nice day to somebody may not necessarily be a nice day to another. The farmer may want it to rain; a lady who just bought a new bathing suit may want the sun to shine. Having your kid away from home could be a nice day for some people, while others will settle for a parking place in town. When you tell someone to have a nice day, you're not responsible for how it turns out."

"Has it ever occurred to you," Royal said, "that when you tell someone to have a nice day you might be putting a curse on him?"

"I don't believe it has. Would you care to explain yourself?"

"Well, until you said it to me I wasn't giving any thought to what kind of day I was going to have. I was going to take it as it came. But now that you've planted the idea in my head, I'm going to keep thinking about it. When I return to my office

I'll worry that Rosalie Caplan hasn't returned my call. I'll stew that Ann Bodner in personnel is working on a new 'reduction in force' for the company. I'll wonder how much traffic I'll have to fight to get home. And when I get to the front door I'll be nervous about what mood my wife is in. I know the odds of having a nice day are stacked against me, but until you wished me one, I was able to ignore it. People should not say to anyone 'Have a nice day,' when they don't know what that person is up against. It's like putting the evil eye on them."

"I believe you're reading too much into my goodbye," I told him. "When someone says, 'Have a nice day,' he is only wishing you good luck."

"Then why doesn't he say, 'May the road rise up to meet you and may the wind be always at your back, and may you get to heaven before the devil knows you're there?'"

"Because most people are in a hurry, and that takes too long to say, unless you're leaving an Irish bar. Why are you making such an issue of a simple thing like this?"

"I guess it's a question of sincerity. Everyone tells you to have a nice day. How many people do you know care if you do or not?"

"Royal, you're a cynic."

"I am not. I know a department store and they train their employees to say 'Have a nice day' to everybody."

"Well, wouldn't you rather have them say that than tell you what's really on their minds?"

"No, I think people should level with you. They should tell you what's on their minds. How can you know whom to trust when even the people who work in the post office tell you to have a nice day?"

"Well, Royal, I'm sure you realize that when I wished you a nice day, I meant from the bottom of my heart."

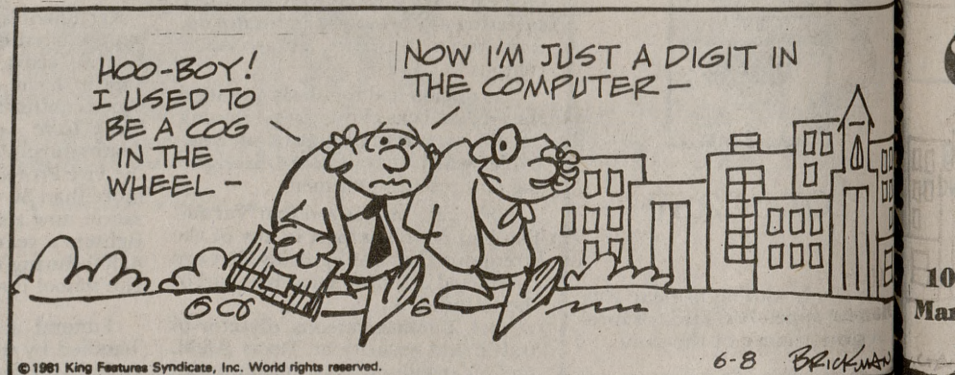
"How can I be sure you weren't just trying to get rid of me?"

"Because I never say it to somebody unless I truly like and admire them, you don't want to have a nice day that's right with me, too."

"There you go," Royal cried. "You're putting the evil eye on me again."

the small society

by Brickman



The Battalion

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