

Proposed amendment vital to Texas schools

The November elections are important to Texans for more than the highly publicized presidential reasons. Texans will vote on a proposed constitutional amendment on funding of state-supported universities and colleges.

The amendment would benefit schools that share in the Permanent University Fund — the Texas A&M and the University of Texas systems — as well as the 26 state universities that aren't part of those two systems.

The vote is especially crucial for future plans at Prairie View A&M University, the predominately black university in the Texas A&M System. If the amendment passes, Prairie View A&M will receive \$6 million a year for 10 years from the University of Texas's two-thirds share of the profits from the constitutionally endowed PUF, in addition to greater access to the Texas A&M System's share of the PUF.

The amendment doesn't neglect the 26 state universities that aren't part of the two major university systems. It

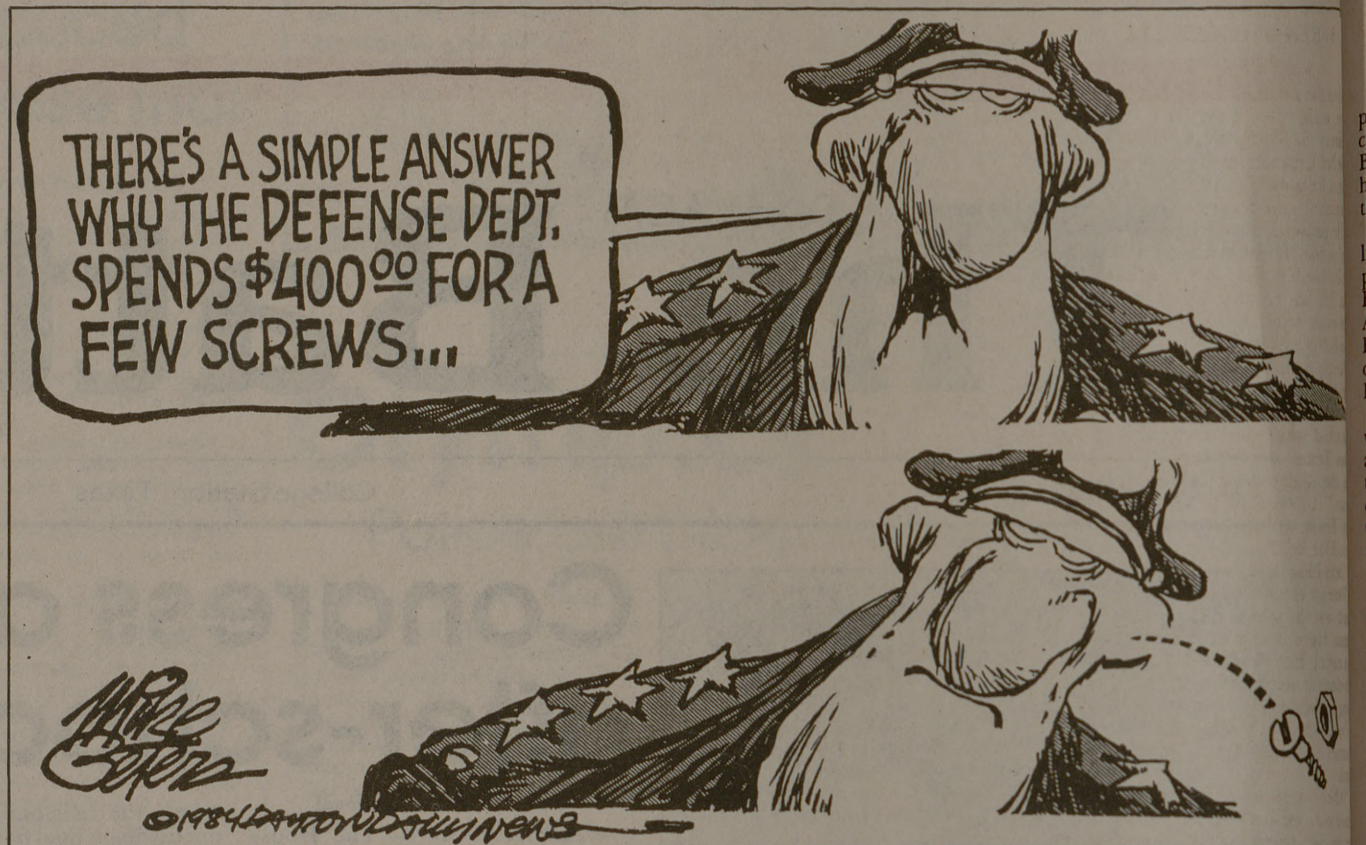
would create a \$100 million annual fund for use by those schools.

Tuesday the Texas A&M System Board of Regents formally endorsed the proposed amendment. Administrators in the System support the measure wholeheartedly. The Chancellor's Student Advisory Board — made up of students from System schools — and other student groups also support the amendment. A number of groups are planning or have begun educational campaigns on the issue.

Administrators at the Texas A&M and UT systems and at the other state schools worked long and hard to come up with a more equitable plan for sharing state funds. The proposed amendment is their answer to the problem.

It's the best answer. But don't leave all the work for university administrators. Tell your friends and family about the amendment — before the election. Higher education in Texas depends on it.

— The Battalion Editorial Board



Determining the value of an American life

By JIM ANDERSON
Columnist for
United Press International

WASHINGTON — H.L. Mencken once wrote an essay translating into numbers the romance and folklore of popular American literature and journalism.

It was based on the question, "How many people could an American whip?" He deduced from the literature and newspapers of the times, including the sports pages, that one American (white, naturally, and male) could whip three Englishmen. But, according to the literature, it was assumed that one Englishman could whip three Frenchmen.

One Frenchman, or other (white) European, according to Mencken's analysis, could whip 16 Chinamen, and one Chinaman could probably handle X Abyssinians, any one of whom could whip Y Zulu tribesman.

And so it went, almost indefinitely. By geometric progression, Mencken was able to deduce that one American — according to the popular literature of the time — could easily whip 14,000 primitive tribesmen.

Don Shanor, a former United Press International staffer and now a professor of journalism at Columbia University, once took the same idea and translated it into current journalistic terms: "One American is worth..."

Struck by the number of times he had seen tiny stories with the headline, "59 Perish in Mexico Bus Crash" squeezed in at the end of long, dramatic stories about the death of one American, he came to the conclusion that the Mencken formula can be applied to current American journalism.

The death of one American, in terms of column inches in American newspapers, he discovered, is equal to the demise of several thousand Tanza-

nians. Of course the timeliness of the report has a bearing, as does the drama surrounding it.

New evidence has come to hand that the formula still works. There is even a corollary: In terms of editorial interest, the death of one of "our" Chinese, when reported in a timely fashion, is worth the death of approximately 280,000 of "their" Chinese.

One day a few weeks ago, not a terrifically busy news day, two stories on the UPI wires illustrate the point:

One story dealt with a mine explosion in Taiwan, where about 124 miners were trapped underground. Another reported new and meticulously accurate census figures from the Peoples Republic of China that revealed for the first time that at least 16 million people — and perhaps as many as 27 million — died in the catastrophic upheavals that resulted from Mao Tse-tung's ambitious but ill-conceived

plan to drag his country into 20th century, the "Great Leap Forward."

According to the daily sampling of newspapers by UPI bureaus around the country, about 65 per cent of the country's newspapers carried the Taiwan story, but only about 20 per cent carried any mention of the "Great Leap" catastrophe, as reported by either of the major wire services.

The Taiwan story had drama, immediacy and was the sort of tragedy that could easily be visualized by a newspaper reader — or editor. The census story was about an event that occurred some 25 years ago and the drama had to be inferred from the enormous death toll figures.

But, even taking into account those journalistic values, it is interesting to note that 80 per cent of the nation's newspapers are not interested enough in a major human disaster to devote even 2 inches of space to tell their

readers about it as a matter of record.

The magnitude of the "Great Leap" death toll would be roughly equivalent, after all, to the state population of New York or California being eliminated in mass starvation. The death toll in the "Great Leap" aftermath was three to five times as great, numerically, as the Holocaust in which 6 million Jews perished at the hands of the Nazis.

The only recent example of such human catastrophe being ignored in the forced starvation of the Ukraine by Stalin in the mid-1930s, in which the Soviet Union's wheat belt was turned into a starvation chamber for political reasons.

That, too, was mainly ignored by the American press, even when it came to light later, suggesting that the Mencken formula one Ukrainian is about equal to one Mainland Chinese.

Reagan still running against Washington, big government

By NORMAN D. SADLER
Columnist for
United Press International

WASHINGTON — After almost four years in the White House, Ronald Reagan — the self-proclaimed outsider, leader of a conservative revolt against the trend of government over the last 40 years — is still running against Washington.

Listening to his campaign speeches, a Rip Van Winkle awakening from four years of peaceful slumber might never realize Reagan had become part of the same "big government" establishment he ran against as an outsider in 1976 and 1980.

This is not 1980. But the passage of four years has done little to alter the Reagan campaign battle cry. He remains a self-described voice of rationality, pitted against the vested interests and veteran politicians of Washington.

His targets are still "the liberals" in Congress and Jimmy Carter, the latter presented in the form of Walter Mondale. It's an "us vs. them" theme that strikes at the Democrats, but hits Republicans as well.

Reagan lashes out at "those in Washington" who oppose his proposal for tuition tax credit, as if to gaze at the political debate from afar and to see only Democrats on the opposite side. He belittles "those born-again budget balancers" in Congress, but neglects to mention Republican anxiety over the huge deficits that have accumulated during his first term.

Reagan, whose "Teflon-coated" image is a frustration to Democrats, is able to mock the political environment he has called home for the last 3 1/2 years.

During a campaign trip to Iowa in February, he told a crowd of cheering supporters that coming to Des Moines

from Washington was "a little like landing in the real world after an extended visit to the Twilight Zone."

In Texas, he attacked "the smart sayers and seers" and "grasping politicians and indifferent bureaucrats" in Washington. Borrowing a phrase from George Wallace, he blamed years of "liberal leniency and pseudo-intellectual apologies" for a "crisis of crime in America."

For Reagan, this anti-Washington theme is one that plays well in the heartland.

At a Fourth of July celebration in Alabama, where he stirred passions by waxing patriotic about men and women in uniform and the struggle between totalitarianism and democracy, Reagan said he has felt that "if we just slipped out — we in government — and closed the doors, turned the key and disappeared for a while, it would take you a long time to miss us."

No word on what would happen to the millions of people, in Alabama and elsewhere, whose livelihoods depend on government outlays for guns and butter.

The refrain is not a new one for Reagan, who for years has regarded government — especially the federal government — as the antithesis of a society devoted to individual liberty.

His view of official Washington and residents of its political fraternity is a throwback to the "time for choosing" speech he delivered in support of Barry Goldwater at the 1964 Republican National Convention, which completed his transition from show business to conservative politics.

"Two contrary philosophies divide us in this land of ours," Reagan said.

"Either we believe in our traditional system of individual liberty, or we abandon the American revolution and confess that an intellectual elite in a far distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan for ourselves."

And as he looks ahead to the possibility of four more years in that "far distant capital," Reagan may be reminded of what he told a group of concrete industry representatives in 1971, while still governor of California.

"I just returned from a trip to Washington, D.C.," he said, "and to say it's a great place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there."

Even someone with such die-hard principles as Reagan is entitled to change his mind.

Cracking down on drunk canoeists

By DICK WEST
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United Press International

WASHINGTON — President Reagan has signed legislation intended to raise the nation's legal drinking age to 21.

I don't doubt predictions that the new law, which restricts highway construction money to non-complying states, will help cut down on the amount of drunken driving by teenagers.

Let us hope it also reduces the amount of drunken boating. The Coast Guard estimates that about half of the fatal boating accidents last year were alcohol-related. As yet, however, there has been no move to raise the legal sailing age.

One approach might be to restrict rivers and harbors appropriations for states that fail to beef up — or maybe bourbon up — breath tests.

To date, only five states require skippers suspected of being intoxicated to take breath tests. Possibly Congress will lend them a

hand by making the new buoy network more sophisticated.

You don't have to spend any time on boats to be aware of the old buoy network. Anyone who goes down to the sea in any type of conveyance has seen buoys bobbing about in the harbor, usually indicating the course of a channel or some underwater obstruction, such as a submerged sailor.

Now, from the Coast Guard, comes word that these marine markers are being modernized.

Some will have solar-powered directional systems. Some will be equipped with new radar signalling devices. Some will house improved weather instruments.

In addition to outfitting buoys with up-to-date navigational aids, perhaps the government also could install a few solar-powered breath analyzers. I can see it all now.

A patrol boat, sirens ablare, steers alongside a craft that has been weaving in the waves.

"Pull over to that buoy," commands an authoritarian voice over a bullhorn.

For that matter, the helmsman wouldn't have to be listing to port otherwise handling the tiller in a cautious manner.

Skippers might be cruising perfectly sober when all of a sudden they find them caught up in a boat traffic check. Each passing craft would stop and its pilot invited to blow a portable buoy.

I'm not just talking about skippers of yachts, barges, scows, ferries, fishing boats and other motorized vessels. I'm also talking about canoeists, punters, kayakers and others who propel and guide with oars.

Nothing can mar the pleasure of cooling summer's dip in an old stream quite as quickly and as thoroughly as a couple of drunken canoeists.

Sure breath-analyzing buoys may be of some inconvenience to speedboat operators and other boatmen in a hurry. But I say that is a small price to pay for getting drunken canoeists off the waterways.

The Battalion
USPS 045 360

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