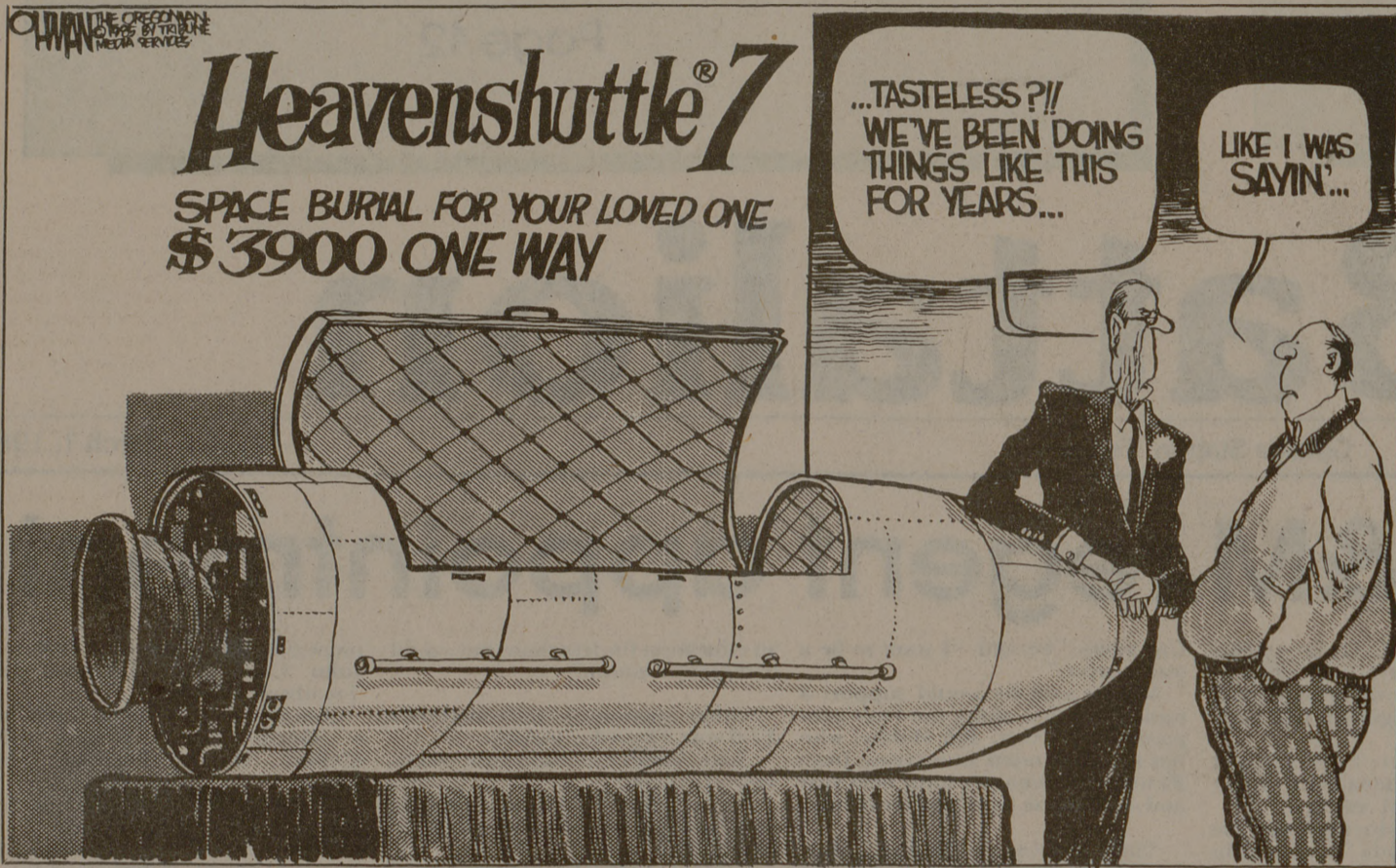


OPINION



Space burial, when done properly, can be expensive

By ART BUCHWALD
Columnist for The Los Angeles Times Syndicate

Attention, earthlings. It won't be long before you can "bury" your loved ones in outer space. Deke Slayton, a former astronaut, is working in tandem with a consortium of companies that will orbit the ashes of a deceased person 1,900 miles above the earth. Funeral services should begin in late 1986.

The Department of Transportation has enthusiastically approved the plan and said "it represents a creative response to the president's initiative to encourage the commercial use of space."

As I understand it, the remains of your Uncle Sidney will be compressed by a secret process in a special two-inch tall, lipstick-shaped titanium capsule, which will then be placed into a 300-pound shiny sphere, along with the ashes of 10,330 of the recently departed. The sphere will be launched into the heavens where it's guaranteed to remain in orbit for at least 63 million years, or you get your money back.

While Mr. Slayton's consortium will provide the rocket and the capsule, they prefer to leave actual sales and arrange

ments to funeral directors and undertakers around the country.

This might lead to some problems.

"Please have a chair."

"Thank you. I would like to cremate my Uncle Sidney and put him in celestial orbit."

"You're in luck. We have a launch in one month, and we can reserve a place for him."

"Wonderful. I noticed in your advertisement that the price for the service was \$3,900."

"That's the base cost just to get him up there. Did you love your Uncle Sidney?"

"Very much."

"Then I wouldn't advise you to put his ashes in the standard titanium capsule."

"Why not?"

"I'm not supposed to tell you this, but although the containers are advertised to last for 65 million years, some of them fall apart after 30 million. You wouldn't want your uncle's ashes all over the sky, would you?"

"I guess not."

"Then I'd recommend this upgraded 'From Here to Eternity' model. Notice the outside is twice as strong as titanium,

and the inside is lined with French satin."

"How much is it?"

"It's only \$900 more, but if you insist on the cheap, tacky one, I'm sure your uncle would understand."

"No no. I'll take the 'From Here to Eternity' capsule. Will that do it?"

"There is the placement of the ash container in the sphere. I assume you would want your Uncle Sidney as close to the skin as possible, facing toward the earth."

"Certainly."

"Then there is a premium charge of \$600, to guarantee his ashes won't be thrown in the middle with all the economy class passengers. Will you want to bid a fond adieu to your loved one as he is launched into space?"

"Of course."

"We can give you a package tour to Cape Canaveral with complimentary breakfast before liftoff, at a group rate of \$1,500 per person."

"Sending Uncle Sidney up into orbit is costing me more than I planned on."

"But it's worth it. Every time you look up to the heavens, you will see your Uncle Sidney and know he is smiling down on you because you booked him first class."

Education secretary not getting degree

WASHINGTON — Stanley McCaffrey, a cop in the ranks of the thought police, saw his duty and did not flinch. McCaffrey, president of California's University of the Pacific, saw what William Bennett said and withdrew an invitation for Bennett to receive an honorary degree. "We simply cannot honor a person holding these views."



George Will

I know little about the University of the Pacific, but I will wager that it resembles most universities and therefore is broad-minded about the expression, and even the teaching, of the view that America is racist, sexist, imperialist, militarist, etc. So what did Bennett, the new secretary of education, say that caused McCaffrey, he of tender sensibilities, to recoil and become the toast of the faculty club?

Among other things, Bennett said that for budgetary reasons subsidies to middle-class students should be cut. Specifically, families with incomes above \$32,500 should not be eligible for federally guaranteed loans (that would mean they would have to pay perhaps 12 rather than 8 percent interest).

There are many Americans — including, I suspect, McCaffrey — in whom the flame of thought flickers so weakly that they only feel vital and engaged with history when they are indignant. America's indignation industry makes neither shoes nor butter nor poetry. Rather, it makes mandatory blandness by practicing moral intimidation. Its intimidation works on people who can be intimidated by the denial of the honor, such as it is, of a degree from the hands of the likes of McCaffrey.

Blandness in public utterance is encouraged by television journalism which, because of the tyranny of the clock, specializes in what are known, in televisionspeak, as "sound bites." It defines, and distorts, individuals with brief, telegenic "bites." A nation that knows nothing of Secretary Bennett got its first glimpse of him in a "sound bite." He was saying that for some students the cut in subsidies might mean having to forgo a stereo or car or spring vacation at the beach.

A typical viewer probably got this glimpse on television at dinner time. The baby was crying and so was the Cuisinart, the phone was ringing and so was the viewer's head because Billy, 14, had his cassette player blasting out Madonna's "Like A Virgin." It was all background music for the 15-second sound bite that introduced Bennett to the nation.

Sound bites are more than adequate to present all the thoughts of some people. But Bennett is not one of them. He is the only member of the President's Cabinet who has spent his life taking serious ideas seriously. That is what makes him dangerous to the academic division of the indignation industry.

Bennett says that there can be a "right" for every student to attend the university of his or her choice. Anyone who disagrees with that has a peculiar understanding of the allocation of public goods, especially goods such as university admissions that are valued in part because of the various forms of status they can confer.

Bennett says (well, he said it once, he probably will not say it again because departures from blandness cause too much turmoil) this:

He can imagine not being dismayed if his son someday wants the money saved for university tuition to be used instead to start a business.

Bennett is not expressing a philistine preference for money over mind, he is expressing dismay that so many universities serve the mind poorly. This point, which he has been making forcefully for three years as head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has been missed by persons eager to strike a pose of indignation. Which brings us back to McCaffrey, who has disinvented Bennett. Why? "Because I find your views to be directly contrary to those held by me and our University of the Pacific."

The aid plan Bennett defends will preserve all aid for the least affluent students who, without aid, could not go to any college. It would make less expensive public institutions better able to compete with private institutions, such as the University of the Pacific, for middle-class students. The aid plan is debatable. But dishonorable?

The hysterical condemnation of Bennett illustrates the moral exhibitionism of people like McCaffrey. It also reveals that the academic lobby — like, say, the tobacco lobby, but with more moral pretenses — has become an organized appetite. Bennett has interrupted its concentration on the social pork barrel by raising disturbing questions about academic purposes and competence.

McCaffrey's approach to controversy is not new. "Why should we bother to reply to Kautsky?" Lenin asked. "He would reply to us, and we would have to reply to his reply. There's no end to that. It will be quite enough for us to announce that Kautsky is a traitor to the working class, and everyone will understand everything." McCaffrey should know that everyone understands him.

George Will is a columnist for the Washington Post.

LETTERS:

University wrong in Zentgraf case

EDITOR:

To Aggies everywhere: Isn't it about time to acknowledge that the University is wrong in the Zentgraf case?

Even if, through some quirk of fate or law, the University can successfully appeal the decision, Zentgraf's position is basically correct: It's illegal for a state institution, funded by state money, to keep people from participating in its organizations because they're female.

And the sooner we all wake up and realize that, the better off we'll be.

We'll be better off because we'll be deciding who gets into the Ross Volunteers, the Aggie Band, the color guards, not some federal judge's quotas. If the Ross Volunteers were smart, they'd induct a woman as soon as possible. If they don't, they might have to later, and the resistance to that involuntary change will be far worse.

We'll be better off because recruiters visiting our campus will quit concerning themselves with questions about women in the band. Instead, they'll have time to concentrate on job candidates and their qualifications.

We'll be better off because we'll present a far more tolerant, enlightened, educated image to the rest of the world.

We'll be better off because firms considering gifts to the University can ask questions about the A&M's merits, not its embarrassments.

And we'll be better off because we'll stop spending valuable time, energy and money on the frivolous defense of a

principle that is inconsistent with the intent of our laws.

I'm a former cadet, as steeped in Aggie tradition and lore as anyone else, and it pains me just as much to write this as it does many of you to read it. I don't like the idea of women in the band or the RVs. But when we allow our desires to take precedence over reason and law, we allow prejudice to rule our actions.

I'm also a realist. I'm enough of a realist to know that sex-integrated units do work at the service academies and in the services. I'm enough of a realist to know that the real issue at A&M isn't practicality, or even whether women would look right marching on Kyle Field; it's tradition. We say women in the band won't work because we don't want it to work, not because there's any inherent barrier that keeps it from working. And I'm enough of a realist to know that even if the University wins the battle, it will lose the war of image at a time when A&M is trying so hard to present itself as an enlightened, first-class institution.

A&M didn't go to hell when the Corps became voluntary. A&M didn't go to hell when women entered the Corps. Nor did A&M go to hell when (gasp) women started wearing boots.

It's pretty safe to assume that A&M

won't go to hell when women march on Kyle Field with the Aggie Band. Inevitably, they will.

Dillard Stone, Jr. '80

Pageant contestants didn't fake results

EDITOR:

Dear Editor and Ms. Catherine Campbell:

This letter is in response to your article of February 25, 1985, "Delusions of Illusions." At first when I noticed the pictures of pageant preparations in The Battalion, I was pleased that a production that takes many hours of work would receive its much deserved publicity; however, after reading the article, I was somewhat surprised.

According to the article, "with the exception of two women, eighteen contestants padded the upper portion of their bathing suits for the swimsuit competition" not to mention the use of "tanning gels, tanning centers, falsies, body-binding tape and false fingernails." While I will not claim that some of this does not go on, its use is not to produce a fake or "perfect" figure.

Many of the girls, in order to prevent a washed-out look under the bright lights, did use tanning gels and some even attended tanning centers; yet are these twenty to be singled out? I am sure if you were to call most tanning centers in Bryan-College Station, you would find them booked until spring break. It is also suggested by pageant officials that pads be worn beneath the swimsuit bustline in order to conceal reactions

caused by changes in temperature. Taping of the legs and waistline, which you pointed out, are rarely used (and in this pageant were not used at all). In rebuttal to the taping of the bustline, this gives the girls a support beneath swimsuits and strapless gowns that many feminine undergarments give women each day.

MSC Hospitality proudly sponsored this fantastic production with the help of a seventeen member pageant staff (all students) and the support of local businesses and organizations including the Singing Cadets and the Aggieband Orchestra, which made this year's Miss Texas A&M Scholarship Pageant one to remember!

Through this production, hundreds of individuals spent an entertaining evening watching twenty-one talented women, who possess beauty in both physical appearance and personality, compete for more than two thousand dollars in scholarship awards and a chance to represent the university they each are proud to be a part of. Each one participating in and working on this production has grown in a personal education by gaining self-confidence through a job well done.

Ms. Campbell, next time you are allowed to be behind the scenes of an important event which entertains and educates, I hope you will think about its advantages not only to those involved but to those viewing before writing your many words of wisdom.

Tammy Moss
A proud contestant in both the 1984 and 1985 Miss TAMU Scholarship Pageants

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Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the Editorial Board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.
The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Communications.

Letters Policy
Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the address and telephone number of the writer.
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