

# Opinion

## R.I.P. the mud lot

A true friend of Aggieland has passed away. The mud lot, at Nagle and Church streets, is no longer with us. The lot will be remembered by many Aggies as the only free, unlimited-time parking area within walking distance of campus.

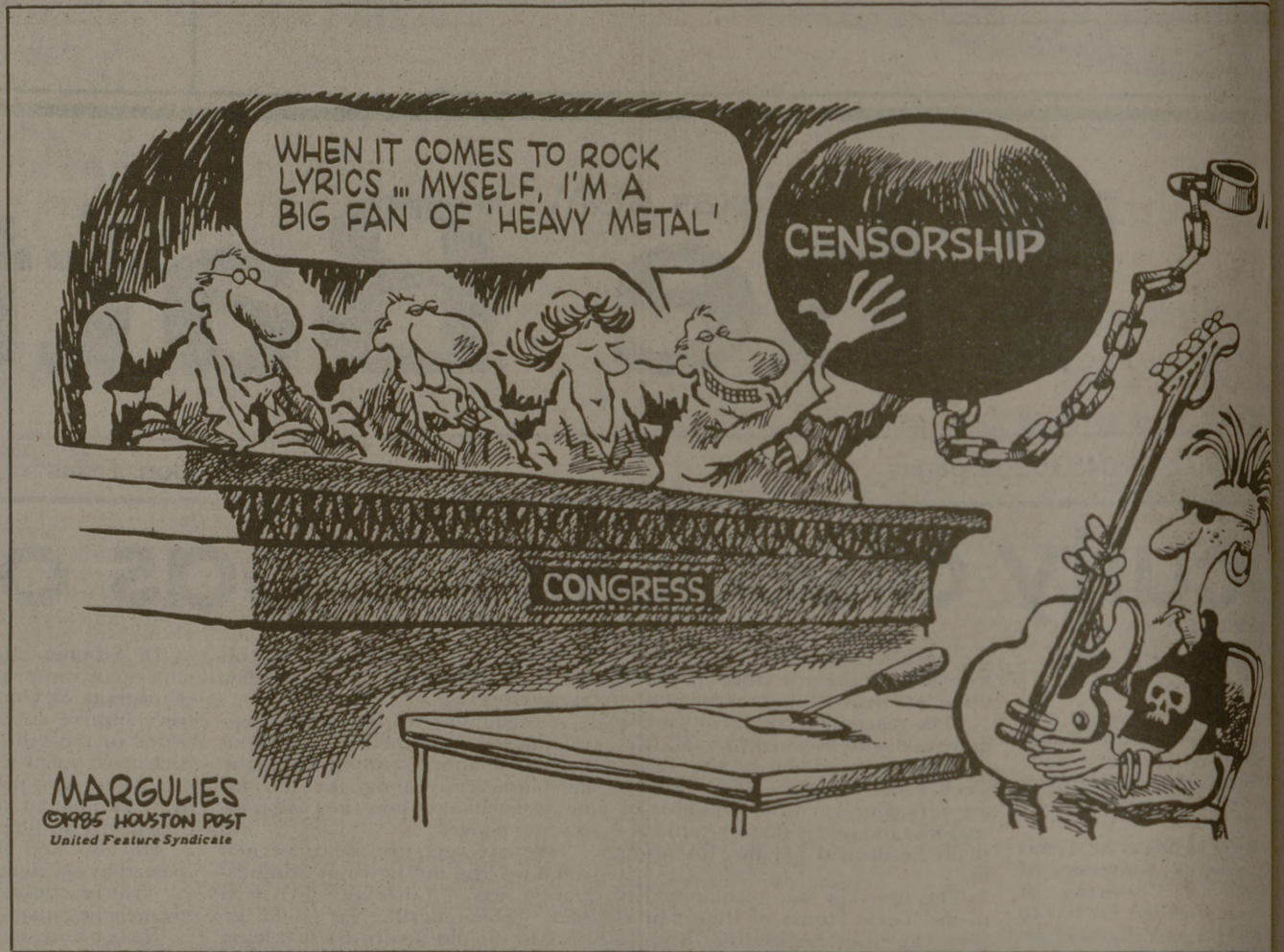
In happier times, the infamous lot was the Circle Drive-In. Night after joyous night, Aggies would go to the lot to watch their favorite flicks. Then, the Circle closed and the lot fell into a state of disrepair. The old movie screen burned and the wooden fence around the lot's perimeter collapsed.

Gradually, Aggies began to use the lot for parking. The owners were nice enough not to charge a fee for its use. For the past several years, A&M students enjoyed the benefits of the area, taking them for granted.

Now we once again are reminded how quickly parking areas can be taken from us. The lot has been leased by Skipper Harris who posted a sign saying all cars on the lot would be towed as of Tuesday. Harris plans to level the lot and spread gravel on its surface. Students will have to pay \$1 per day to park in the unmudged lot.

But no amount of gravel can replace the swamp-like memories the mud lot gave us. This shelter from parking tickets and the rising costs of parking stickers will always have a special place in the hearts of Aggies.

The Battalion Editorial Board



# Mexico City quake Parrot was first clue that another tremor was coming

As the chartered Lear jet flew into Mexico City Thursday evening, I peered through a window at the sprawling city below and marveled that 18 million people could live in one place.

**Mike Cochran**  
AP Correspondent

That's more than the entire population of Texas.

I was surrounded by a team of Fort Worth Star-Telegram reporters and photographers who were taking notes and shooting aerial pictures in the final half hour or so before nightfall.

We were wondering also where the devastation was that we'd heard about, for it was certainly not visible as we descended into the Mexico City airport.

We soon found out.

I had chased hurricanes down the Texas coast and into Louisiana and covered tornadoes in Lubbock, Wichita Falls and other Texas cities. I'd seen floods and plane crashes and reported on mass murders and a presidential assassination.

But nothing prepared me for an earthquake, particularly a disaster of this magnitude in a foreign city with a foreign language and a foreign lifestyle.

The next day, the American ambassador would say the death count could reach 20,000. That's about four times as many people who live in the West Texas town of Stamford where I grew up.

Commandeering a taxi and driver, I accompanied Jack Tinsley and Gayle Reaves of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram on a tour of the central business district, the oldest and hardest hit part of the city.

Among our first stops was an insurance building, where a rescue team was searching through the rubble for the bodies of two women feared trapped when the structure collapsed.

A young man in a military uniform said in halting English that four or five persons died on an upper floor.

It got worse.

At what once had been a hotel, smoke

wafted from the debris and a uniformed man with a mask over his mouth said 20 persons had been pulled out but that an estimated 115 people remained inside.

Perhaps he exaggerated, but I knew for certain that nobody still in that building could survive.

I saw the grand old Regis Hotel, once among the finest in Mexico, as it slowly burned to the ground. Firemen could do nothing but attempt to contain the blaze.

Flames within the dying landmark cast an orange glow at glassless windows and created an image not unlike a giant Halloween pumpkin.

"It was a symbol of Mexico because it was so old," said a man who identified himself as a coin dealer whose shop was nearby.

Pointing to where a hotel wall had collapsed on a theater and restaurant, he said sadly:

"This was a very important corner in Mexico."

I watched scores of volunteers attempting to free four or five employees of a television station, where at least 19 reportedly died.

"They are still alive," a young medical student explained. "We can hear their shouts and screams from the building."

A nearby television tower had fallen on a school building, crushing it, but the death toll was believed to be minimal.

At a temporary morgue, bodies of victims, stripped of their clothing and identified by numbers, lay side by side on the blood-stained concrete floors of a government building.

Sacks of ice had been placed on the torsos of the victims, which included men, women and small children. The grim operation seemed terribly impersonal, except when friends or family identified a loved one.

A surgeon who had come to the morgue in search of a relative said a number of his medical colleagues had been killed and injured when the Mexican equivalent of a doctors' building collapsed near his hospital.

At least 10 died, 30 were rescued and perhaps 50 or 60 were unaccounted for, he said.

"The (medical) people who could have helped have been killed or injured," he said solemnly.

As the night wore on, I was struck by two recurring thoughts. First, the earthquake inflicted incredible damage on hundreds of buildings, yet spared other structures that sat side by side, across the street or around the corner.

It reminded me of the selective destruction of the Wichita Falls, Texas, tornado in 1979, although magnified many times over.

*The parrot probably provided the first clue, squawking and fluttering about its cage hysterically.*

*A silly bird.*

*We laughed and ignored him, and our host in the penthouse apartment mixed a fresh round of drinks . . . Within moments, we would experience first hand the terror we had attempted to describe through the words of others.*

Secondly, despite the great loss of life and property, and the widespread suffering, life outside the stricken areas went on in something close to normal.

Until a governmental ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages was imposed Friday night, bars and restaurants did a booming business. To some extent, it was almost festive, as if the people of Mexico City were celebrating life in the face of death.

At the Camino Real and El Presidente Chapultepec hotels, two of the city's finest, bars and restaurants overflowed with people, and the sound of music drowned out the wail of sirens across town.

Mexican residents strolled along the

main thoroughfares such as Paseo de la Reforma or huddled in such favorite gathering spots as Chapultepec Park.

By contrast, there was no gaiety to be found in Lubbock and Wichita Falls after disasters there, although both cities pale in size to the Mexican capital.

Long after midnight Thursday, I caught a taxi to the El Presidente Chapultepec Hotel, where The Associated Press had set up makeshift headquarters on the 27th floor. Our office on Paseo de la Reforma was heavily damaged and the building sealed off.

The earthquake had wrecked the Mexican communications system as well, and the problem facing the AP and other news organizations was getting their stories, photographs and television film out of the country.

At one point, I stumbled across a Texan working in Mexico for Bankers Trust of New York, which had what may have been the only long distance telephone line in town. He made it available to the AP, which reduced the need for shuttle plane flights in and out of Texas.

By late Friday, I was more than a little exhausted and by all means responsive to Eloy Aguilar's invitation to join him at his apartment for a drink, even if it meant walking up nine flights of stairs.

After all, the worst surely was over.

Only the parrot knew otherwise.

The parrot probably provided the first clue, squawking and fluttering about its cage hysterically.

A silly bird.

We laughed and ignored him, and our host in the penthouse apartment mixed a fresh round of drinks.

A New York colleague named Jules Loh and I were taking a nighttime break from coverage of the killer earthquake that had crippled the Mexican capital 36 hours earlier.

Within moments, we would experience first hand the terror we had attempted to describe through the words of others.

We had climbed nine flights of stairs

to the apartment of Eloy Aguilar, Associated Press bureau chief in Mexico City, and his wife Venie was now describing the chilling events of Thursday morning earthquake.

It was not her first, but it had been her scariest.

Outside, the night lights of the stricken city glowed through a haze of smoke and smog, and the sounds of police and ambulance sirens filtered upward from the streets below.

Not long after the parrot's outcry, leaves on the indoor plants began to move as though caressed by some phantom breeze.

At 7:37 p.m. Mexico City time, a second earthquake hit.

The apartment building began to sway and shake and the floor trembled beneath us. The Aguilars knew at once what was happening and as Eloy started to the telephone, Venie told Jules and me to take cover under a doorway.

An instant later, the lights went out. In the dark, I crawled across the floor, certain the building would break apart at any moment. I wondered if it would collapse or explode or merely topple.

As I groped toward a doorway leading to the kitchen, I thought fleetingly of my family back in Fort Worth, and realized I was an awful long way from home.

I was struck by the utter helplessness of the situation. There was no place to go and nothing to do. This was surely a strange way to die.

My life did not flash before my eyes like it was supposed to. Instead, my mind's eye could see only the crumbling smoking buildings of central Mexico City and the awesome death and destruction I had observed since arriving here 24 hours earlier.

Now I was no longer an observer; I was a participant.

And I was terrified.

**Mike Cochran, an AP correspondent for 25 years, has covered tornadoes, floods, hurricanes and other disasters.**

# Democrats, labor — an unhappy marriage

With the bitter memory of the 1984 election still fresh in the minds of many in the room, the sign behind the podium had special meaning: "Politics Is Union Business."

**Donald M. Rothberg**  
AP News Analyst

It was meant as a rallying cry, an appeal to union members to ignore critics of labor's political involvement and an effort to get them revved up for the 1986 campaign.

But it also was a symbol of the current tension between Democratic Party politicians and labor.

The occasion was the legislative conference of the Service Employees Inter-

national Union and the delegates heard from House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. and freshman Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa.

Harkin was scornful of those who advise the Democratic Party that it must change direction in order to attract support in the age of Ronald Reagan.

"You don't win the hearts and minds of the American people by telling them you've lost yours and would they please point you in the right direction," he said.

O'Neill described labor and the Democratic Party as "enmeshed and enjoined."

But the drubbing the Democratic

ticket took in the 1984 presidential election strained that relationship.

With its early endorsement of Walter F. Mondale, labor played a key role in getting him the Democratic presidential nomination. Unfortunately for Mondale, labor's role in his campaign gave ammunition to those who wanted to tag him as the candidate of special interests.

The new Democratic Party chairman, Paul G. Kirk Jr., has urged labor to back off its 1984 strategy of delivering a primary endorsement to a presidential candidate, a request that got a cool reception from AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland.

Service Employees Union President John J. Sweeney delivered an even tougher response.

Sweeney looked back at the 1984 debacle in which Mondale carried only his home state of Minnesota and the District of Columbia and said: "If we learned anything from the campaign, it was that never again should we give our endorsement, our money and our people without demanding a role in running the campaign or without demanding that the candidate run on worker issues."

At the moment, the relationship between labor and the Democratic Party looks like one of those tempestuous marriages in which the partners can't seem to live with each other or without each other.

**Donald M. Rothberg is the chief political writer of The Associated Press.**

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