

Opinion

This is a test, this is only a test

About 205,000 teachers and administrators are registered to take the Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers (TECAT) today, according to the Texas Education Agency. Many say the test is unfair because entire careers hinge on one exam. Others say the test isn't comprehensive enough, that the questions it asks are too basic. Actually, it is neither.

The TECAT is being lauded as a competency test to raise the quality of teaching in the public school system, thereby raising the quality of education throughout the state. But the TECAT has little to do with competency — at best, it is an assessment of basic knowledge.

TECAT measures such skills as an educator's basic writing ability, use of an index or a table of contents and recognition sentence fragments and basic grammatical and spelling errors.

But the test does not measure a teacher's ability to perform in front of the classroom. It doesn't determine how effectively an educator can relay information to students. It doesn't account for an instructor's ability to inspire students with enthusiasm and the desire to learn, yet these are important qualities for teachers.

The TECAT examines the teacher's basic knowledge, which is important. Teachers shouldn't be allowed into the classroom if they don't have a working knowledge of the subject matter. But teaching is more than just knowing the facts. Effective teaching is a skill, and like other skills, it can't be accurately measured by a standardized test.

This doesn't mean the TECAT is useless. It represents a vital concern for education that has been absent from the public school system for too long. But we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking the TECAT will give us more competent teachers. It will only weed out the weak ones, who, lacking the basic skills, shouldn't have been allowed in the classroom in the first place.

The Battalion Editorial Board



A new chapter for history books: the Laxalt Era of inflated rhetoric

Queen Victoria so much represented her time that it came to be called the Victorian Era. For different reasons, the same was true of Napoleon and, in Russia, Stalin. Let me propose a man who better than anyone else represents our time: Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.). We live (if you can call it living) in the Laxalt Era.



Richard Cohen

Only in an era of inflated rhetoric (freedom fighters, moral equals of the Founding Fathers), could Laxalt be praised as a great statesman for advising Ferdinand Marcos to step down. At the time, the Philippines' army was in revolt, several hundred thousand people were in the streets, the world had just witnessed the stealing of an election and the Catholic church had asked its nuns to interpose themselves between mutinous army officers and Marcos' tanks.

What did Laxalt do under such circumstances? Did he suggest to Marcos that he shoot a few nuns to restore order? He did no such thing. He told Marcos what was clear to every television viewer: It was all over, Ferdi. Laxalt's good judgment takes your breath away. Laxalt lends his name to our era because he is the personification of the school of thought that says the United States really had a choice in the Philippines, that it moved early and decisively and that — here comes the really smart part — that all the lessons learned in Manila can and ought to be applied to Managua. The two have so much in common. Not only do both cities begin with the letter "M," but most of the people living in them are small (by American standards) and darker-skinned. It's time to move. Wagons, ho!

Historians will note that in the Laxalt Era this is what passed for logic. Secre-

tary of State George Shultz, for instance, was quick to apply the lessons of Manila to the situation in Managua. He just couldn't quite say what those lessons are. The opposition in the Philippines, led by the remarkable Corason Aquino, was popularly based and — as anyone with a TV set could see — numerous. It was supported by elements of the military, especially reformist-minded officers, and by the all-important Catholic church.

The situation in Nicaragua is far different. By the testimony of the numerous administration spokesmen, the so-called contra movement is going nowhere. Without American aid — covert, overt, lethal, non-lethal — it would wither in no time. Even with a minimum of \$100 million in U.S. aid, that still might happen. The Nicaraguan military by and large still supports the Sandinista regime; the church is critical but not in open rebellion and the nation is not ending a second decade of an authoritarian regime, but just beginning its first.

The Laxalt Era would hardly be worth the name if it did not also have a doctrine. It is this: Establish an alternative evil to the regime you are opposing and then ask people to choose. In Angola, the doctrine compels the United States to ally itself with Joseph Savimbi's UNITA movement which itself is both identified with, and behold to, a racist regime in South Africa. In Nicaragua, the administration has worked the same magic. It has cleverly asked Nicaraguans to choose between an oppressive and incompetent regime on the one hand and the legendary Yankee interventionist on the other. Some have chosen the Sandinistas; some the contras. Most, it seems, have made no choice at all.

Even in the Laxalt Era, to think that Nicaragua can follow where the Philippines has gone takes some imagination. At no time were Filipinos asked to choose between their indigenous regime, as loathsome as it might be, and a foreign power. Mrs. Aquino, unlike the contras, was not on the American dole and her movement was not created at

CIA headquarters. The United States clearly backed her electoral insurgency. But it could be argued that she is in office today despite — not on account — the long-term policies of the Reagan administration which backed Marcos most to the last minute. Only when ity tapped like woodpeckers on heads of senior administration officials was the policy reversed.

History does not necessarily subscribe to Commentary, the neo-conservative magazine and its fancy foreign-policy doctrines. What works in one country may not work in another. There is a difference between assisting a revolution in one country and fomenting counterrevolution in another.

Laxalt would be wise not to sit by phone. The lessons of Manila don't necessarily apply to Managua. Maybe the of Vietnam do.

Richard Cohen is a columnist for the Washington Post Writers Group.

Mail Call

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.

Extension of American humanism

EDITOR:

I read your feature article in At Ease about the Peace Corps program with interest. I come from a foreign country (Niger) where Peace Corps programs are conducted. I personally met some of these brave young minds in search of new boundaries and broader experiences.

It is really amazing to see how they can easily fit in the social life and speak the local languages. It sets an example of Americans quite different from that perpetrated by the media. This example gives a human dimension to the American giant in the spectrum of nations. The Peace Corps program is an extension of American humanism hand to help those in need. It is a historical responsibility for America as a premier world power.

At the same time, as several former volunteers pointed out, the Peace Corps experience gives young Americans a chance to open their eyes to other cultures which have a lot to offer, to broaden their outlook, to understand and visualize international events and finally to discern between the false and the correct information broadcasts.

Happy birthday to Peace Corps and many happy returns!

Ibrahim Amadou

'The Right Stuff' buried beneath bureaucracy

"The Right Stuff" — No one's expecting such stalwartly promised success from NASA these days. Instead of mixing more men and millions of dollars under its magician's hat of bureaucracy, NASA must pull out of its past — right now.



Cynthia Gay

The heroic mist that anointed our astronauts with America's awe began fading away long before Challenger blew up the shuttle panacea for space flight.

To keep us dimly cognizant of its busywork in recent years, NASA has pushed "We Deliver" slogans on us, implying train-like simplicity and filled our school children's minds with starchy suggestions that they throw away their Flash Gordon comic books and study chemistry and calculus and computers. Science would see them in space one day, NASA promised.

While the American school child has lived at the forefront of NASA's public

relations effort in recent years, most of us stopped pondering these space missions a while back.

Challenger got our attention all right, but it took losing one-fourth of the U.S. shuttle fleet and, more importantly, seven lives. So now we've exchanged apathy for worry. Worry that it's costing too much, and that "flawed decision-making processes" may be everyday snafus at NASA. We worry that it might happen again.

If the world's rotation had somehow skipped past Jan. 28, or if that disastrous day's temperatures had been 20 degrees warmer, would NASA be in the nation's hot seat today? We'd probably be a little bored with school-teacher-in-space stories, wondering when NASA would get around to inviting us, Joe janitors and gas station mechanics, to see the moon for a weekend.

Granted, NASA needs an administrative cleanup and a possible service job on its solid-fuel rocket boosters, but the space agency should not have waited for a 13-member presidential firing squad to find dust under the shuttle rug. Can such painfulstated shots like those aimed by commission head William Rog-

ers satisfy the public? No common sense, no sound judgement, Rogers accused. And nowhere to turn.

So now we read on our front pages that NASA employees are walking the halls with their heads down, and the Johnson Space Center has hired a psychologist to pep rally sagging morale. Considering that during his first days on the job 1,050 NASA workers were laid off at the Kennedy Space Center, this psychologist has an almost insurmountable task.

Furthermore, boosted morale has traditionally marched hand-in-hand with success and solid fuel booster rockets. Rather than spending more money sticking band-aids on emotional wounds, better to root out the source of NASA's problem. Depression's fog will rise into space as more changes and adjustments are made up top.

Lately we've endured the press criticizing Congress for criticizing the president for putting his own commission in charge of criticism. All these public-image piranhas must get in their shots at the shuttle, or forever hold their pout. It seems our congressmen's sensors have bleeped back to Capitol Hill that

Americans are torn by a two-pronged feeling — a lingering sympathy for the families of the seven who died and a fidgety intolerance with NASA.

In the wake of political paranoia, NASA is now delaying the next shuttle launch. Twelve, maybe 18 months later Americans won't be so hungry for tangible results, right? NASA shouldn't count on it. Gramm-Rudman budget cuts will have burned deeper in our consciousness and pocketbooks by then. As a result, taxpayers may look askance at the typically hyped dregs of NASA news.

The space agency publicly says to expect perfect launches, flying journalists and, last but not least, the first Indonesian woman should be up there soon. In other words, forget real results and step right up to be taken in It's called manned space flight, but all this public relations passenger emphasis, dragging on in Challenger's aftermath, is merely monkeying around — more costly and distracting than the first furry creatures that were launched from earth two decades ago.

Being a bureaucracy, NASA forgets from time to time that it must prove a

worthwhile profit, be it dollars or scientific breakthroughs — as long as something Americans can sink their teeth into and then send more money. But as a bureaucracy, NASA is stifled by paperwork and paper managers, heavy with regulation and empty-handed of enthusiasm.

Moreover, neither Morton Thiokol Inc. or Rockwell Corp. should shoulder the burdensome blame. They produced. Then they warned. Free enterprise came through in the clutch, but NASA officials just couldn't switch gears. Then again, flexibility never graced the hallmark of bureaucracy.

"The fact of the matter is, it isn't clear who is running the agency," said Joe Allen, a former astronaut who now works for Space Industries Inc. He's smart, he's switching. He knows the surer profit is where the bread is best buttered.

Taking this and many hints like it, the federal government should trade NASA, in its glutton of bureaucracy, for a streamlined corporate existence — feeding off its own funds to the satisfaction of America and her taxpayers.

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