

Opinion

Have a seat

Student elections at Texas A&M never have attracted much participation or even notice from the students. But this year student apathy has spread to those who run for office as well as those who vote. If the current trend continues, Student Government may degenerate into a handful of people serving their resumes rather than the student body.

Last year 4,324 students voted, and only 1,799 cast ballots in the runoff for student body president. This year voter turnout seems to be the least of Student Government's worries. Not only are students ignoring the polls, they're disregarding vacancies on the ballot as well.

Thirty-five Student Senate seats have not been filed for. Only six seats out of 77 are being contested. The class councils, too, are struck by student apathy. Three of five seats for the Class of '89 are uncontested as are all five for the Class of '88 and four of five for the Class of '87.

This is a significant increase from the almost 20 unfiled Senate seats last year. The vacancies can be filled in the fall, if enough concerned students decide to apply. Then the Internal Affairs Committee selects the best applicants for each vacant position.

This procedure fills the empty seats, but it doesn't give the students a chance to choose their representatives. Uncontested races also may fail to provide accurate representation. Students frequently complain that Student Government doesn't do anything for students, but now students aren't doing anything for Student Government either.

The cycle continues to spiral downward. The only way to stop the plunge is for the potential of Student Government to be realized, which can't happen if no one runs for office.

The Battalion Editorial Board

Mail Call

Incessant bickering

EDITOR:

It really bugs me that there is all this incessant and petty bickering between the Corps of Cadets and the non-uniformed students (I hate the term non-regs). There should not be any difference between the two factions. What a person wears, be it a uniform or other organizational regalia, should not extract them from the rest of the University. Texas A&M itself is the organization we all belong to and represent. Sure the Corps was here first, but the Indians can tell you it doesn't mean a thing.

Why is the Corps singled out in many Battalion articles? We get more frontal assaults on us than anyone else, including the GSS. Is it because we have a lot of jerks in the Corps? Sure we have our share of them, but so does every other organization. No organization is made up of Albert Schweitzers, so we all have our faults. It must be the uniforms. You see us in them everyday; it makes us more visible.

Let me tell you by personal experience that it is no fun to be singled out because of a uniform. I went through this attitude for five years, both at home and abroad, while serving in the Navy. All I am asking is to not judge the many by the actions of the few. So lets give each other a break and drop these barriers between us. I mean, look at it this way. If we all got along real well, The Battalion may go out of business.

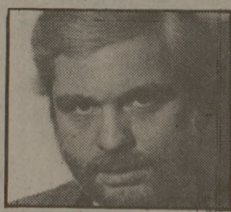
Devan Breedlove
Class of '88

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.



Reporting on proof, not rumors

I know a senator who's a womanizer. I know at least four who are drunks. I know a governor who beats his wife and I know several politicians — not to mention administration officials — who are gay. Would you like to know their names



Richard Cohen

Well, I'm not going to tell you. In the first place, I'm not so sure it's any of your business. And in the second place — and more to the point — I really don't "know" the things I think I know. I merely have heard rumors. Washington, after all, is a company town.

But for some reason, the rules have been suspended for Rep. Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.). At least three times recently he has been asked whether he has ever been a homosexual or had a homosexual experience. *Newsweek* has posed the question. *Vanity Fair*, too. And just recently, the question was put to Kemp on the "Today" show where he was asked to "categorically" deny that he had ever had a homosexual experience. He did so — "categorically."

Each time Kemp says no. No — he is not a homosexual. No — he has not had a homosexual experience. Each time, in effect, he has been forced to respond to a rumor for which there is no proof — not even an accuser. All by himself, Kemp has become victim of a new kind of journalistic excess — sexual McCarthyism. In a manner reminiscent of the late Joe McCarthy, he is asked to deny

that he is now or ever has been a homosexual. Journalism has had prouder moments.

The rumor about Kemp stems from an incident that occurred during Ronald Reagan's first term as California governor. Kemp, a young GOP zealot (he is now an older zealot) and quarterback of the Buffalo Bills, was a part-time Reagan aide and the co-owner of a vacation lodge. The other owner of the lodge, another Reagan aide, used the lodge for homosexual parties. There has never been any evidence that the lodge was anything other than what Kemp said it was — a real-estate investment he never even visited. Nevertheless, the rumor persists.

For any politician, a rumor of homosexuality would be both troubling and damaging. But for Kemp, it could be curtains. His core constituency includes the pathologically conservative. For most Americans, homosexuality remains a taboo, but for Kemp's people — their intolerance fanned by a gaggle of Bible-thumping bigots — it represents a kind of sexual communism. It's beyond the pale, beyond comprehension and, of course, beyond tolerance. Maybe Kemp is learning the hard way the price of intolerance.

If there were any proof that Kemp is a homosexual, bisexual or once had been any of those things, then maybe it would be worth reporting — maybe. For some people, it would raise serious questions of character and they would look elsewhere for a candidate to support. (George Bush, can you categorically deny that, even once, even at camp...?) For others, it would raise questions

about hypocrisy — character, again, suppose. For still others, it would simply raise questions. What does it mean? After all, when it comes to sex, it's hard to say what matters. John Kennedy appears to have been a womanizer, but it's not clear that it affected his presidency. Richard Nixon, on the other hand, appears to have never cheated on his wife — just the American people.

But in Kemp's case, the fact remains that there is no proof that he is anything other than a red-blooded American heterosexual — a husband and father of four children and a tax bill. All the more is rumor — the same sort of rumor that says senator so and so is a drunk, that certain governor beats his wife or that member of the Reagan administration is gay. Merely to ask the question is to spread the rumor. The "Today" show interviewer, for instance, knew damn well what Kemp's answer would be and would have fallen out of her chair if Kemp had answered in the affirmative. She could just as well have asked him if he beat his wife.

The rules of journalism — if you concede there are such things — are changing. The White House press corps that looked the other way for John Kennedy would not similarly oblige a president nowadays. That's good. It is the obligation of the press to give the public the facts so it can make its own decision about character. But the key word is facts — not rumors. A lot has changed in journalism, but there is one standard still worth keeping: If you have the proof, write it. If not, shut up.

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

Welfare another nail in the coffin of the poor

We're in a mess right now, and if we don't change our tune in a hurry more people will suffer. No, I don't mean Nicaragua or Libya, but the plight of America's black youth mired in the ghettos of our cities' backyards.



Cynthia Gay

Let's take the average black male teen-ager. He has a 50-50 chance of growing up without a father and most likely he's numbered among the jobless. If he takes a quick look out his window, he'll probably see drug pushers, prostitutes, permanently unemployed and kids skipping school to dribble basketballs, chasing their dream of escape.

He then closes his window to quiet the baby crying in a back room, who has a 44 percent chance of depending on an unwed mother and a 25 percent chance that mom is a teen-ager.

Since she's at home, she tells the young man at the window not to worry; she's caring for the child. She has pragmatically reasoned that she's better off financially not working a minimum-wage job earning \$535 a month when she can collect at least \$380 from welfare, \$110 from food stamps and between \$100 and \$200 in rental subsidies on government housing. She can draw from 17 different federal programs, and she's even encouraged to overlap her benefits from Aid to Families with Dependent Children, welfare and Social

Security.

As a 16-year-old high school dropout, she's not a welfare cheat. She's but one of thousands of black women in poverty who are hanging on to short-term security from the federal government. By remaining single and jobless, she can collect more money plus care for her baby. But she'll probably have more babies, collect more handouts and further the current trends that point to the year 2000 recording 70 percent of black children being born out of wedlock.

Her oldest son will turn 16 and try to find a job. But what employer will hire him when minimum wage stands at \$3.35 an hour, topped by Social Security and taxes that make all American workers worth at least \$4 an hour? As an unskilled teen-ager, he just won't cut the mustard in today's economy where more than 1.1 million black males are unemployed or are no longer looking for jobs.

He may receive a high school diploma, but it's worthless since the federal government's pushed his public school more to graduate him than to teach him. Whether he's 15 or 50, if he can't find a job, there's always the broken life of the streets. Crime is just one step away. Of the 462,442 people in federal or state prisons in 1984, 46 percent were blacks, although blacks are just 12.1 percent of the U.S. population.

We have been digging deeper graves for America's poor with each federal dollar we hand out — latest count, \$11 billion distributed annually in welfare programs alone.

In his book *Losing Ground*, social sci-

entist Charles Murray notes that throughout the '70s we knew that the ghetto was growing, but we blamed racial prejudice and the system for the blacks' sad state. We just pumped more money in and turned our heads.

On the other hand, from 1950 to 1968, government aid was a trickle and poverty rates dropped, with only free enterprise's incentives to push them down.

It wasn't until the federal government took it upon itself to fine tune the economy and end poverty that the events took a drastic change for the worse. Although some prosperous breezes intermittently boosted the U.S. economy in the '70s, those who depended on welfare never felt a whiff.

It's a case of misplaced incentives, Murray says. When social workers realized that drawing welfare drew degradation along with it, they worked to end the stigma. Consequently, a welfare check became a right instead of a short-term crutch. Mommas stopped eyeballing their sons with stern reminders like "If you don't work, you don't eat," and started saying "If they're handing it out, you may as well get your share."

We have refused to treat the black poor as individual Americans, responsible for their personal successes and failures. White guilt over past injustice has resulted in an even greater injustice that makes the climb out of the ghetto almost impossible.

"If I were poor or handicapped in this country, I would beg government not to help me," says Dr. Walter E. Williams, a black economist at George Ma-

son University. He adds that we are a nation of immigrants — Jews, Poles, Irish, Italians, Japanese, Chinese — who came here poor, uneducated and knew the pain of prejudice. But they fit into society's mainstream without government programs. Blacks and Hispanics have received the largest amount government aid, and they remain persistently in poverty, he says.

The problem doesn't evaporate when the minority group extends itself to the middle class. Murray states that in an effort to create equal outcome instead of equal opportunity, the government saddles some of the black middle class with higher salaries at first. In the long run, these blacks often receive lower salaries because they bypassed some of the training foundation that most get.

While the middle class loses its taxes, the impoverished are losing their jobs, their families, their education, their personal safety and their self respect.

Charity definitely has its place. As the people responsible for 80 percent of all giving in the world, Americans can best handle the needy through private funds at the local level.

The *Houston Chronicle* reported that the city's financial crunch will probably force a cutback in social services. Mayor Kathy Whitmire told the city council that property taxes just couldn't be raised any higher. Wouldn't it be better if we cut back gradually on a national level before there is no other alternative?

Benjamin Franklin learned that lesson over 200 years ago. He wrote a friend:

"I have long been of your opinion that your legal provision for the poor (England) is a very great evil. We have followed your example, and begun now to see our error, and I hope, shall reform it."

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