

Opinion

Joint prevention effort only solution to orbital litter

Mankind has a funny way of dealing with natural resources. When we find ourselves with an abundance of a resource, we squander it away. Just for fun we shot the buffalo into near-extinction. We pollute and abuse the reserves of nature until we suddenly realize that they're about to run out, then we frantically try to conserve what little remains.



Loren Steffy

Litter is one of our greatest environmental abuses. It should be the easiest to control, but apathy usually supersedes prevention — perhaps because it's easy to say someone else will pick it up, or perhaps because it's hard to believe that one gum wrapper is going to bring about ecological doom for the entire planet. In short, littering is a manifesta-

tion of laziness — it's just too much trouble to look for the nearest trash can.

Now our disregard for litter is being displaced to other areas of the globe — and beyond. Specifically, Earth orbit.

The President's National Commission on Space (NCS) claims there are thousands of objects with millions of pounds of collective mass that have been blasted into a geosynchronous orbit around the Earth. A recent NCS report stated that "the space debris population remains constant at approximately 5,000 pieces large enough to be tracked from Earth." This doesn't account for the thousands of tiny particles that zip around our planet unnoticed.

Space litter represents a grave concern, because unlike litter on Earth, space junk causes direct damage to satellites and other property in orbit. These unwanted chunks travel at speeds of 7,000 to 17,000 mph. Particle collisions often generate shock waves that

break the sound barrier, shattering the objects into millions of smaller pieces, which go on to bombard still other particles and satellites.

Cleaning up our mess in the heavens has so far been cost prohibitive and unnecessary. But the more satellites get damaged by micrometeor impacts, the more scientists realize the need for a giant dust pan in the sky.

The United States is not the only space-faring nation that doesn't keep its orbit tidy. Picking up after ourselves is going to require cooperation from any nation participating in the space race. Recently, the United States and the Soviet Union, the principal perpetrators of celestial clutter, have been testing anti-satellite weaponry, which only adds to the orbital debris.

Many ideas have been proposed for dealing with the problem. Orbital vacuum cleaners are still a long way off, but trash cans in space may not be.

There are two stable zones along the geosynchronous orbit where satellites tend not to drift off course. The proposal most popular with scientists concerned about cleaning up Earth orbit is to round up old satellites and other sizeable pieces of junk and corral it into these two zones.

When the orbital trash dumpsters become full, the junk would be collected and hauled off. After all, a few billion miles away is the largest trash incinerator known to man.

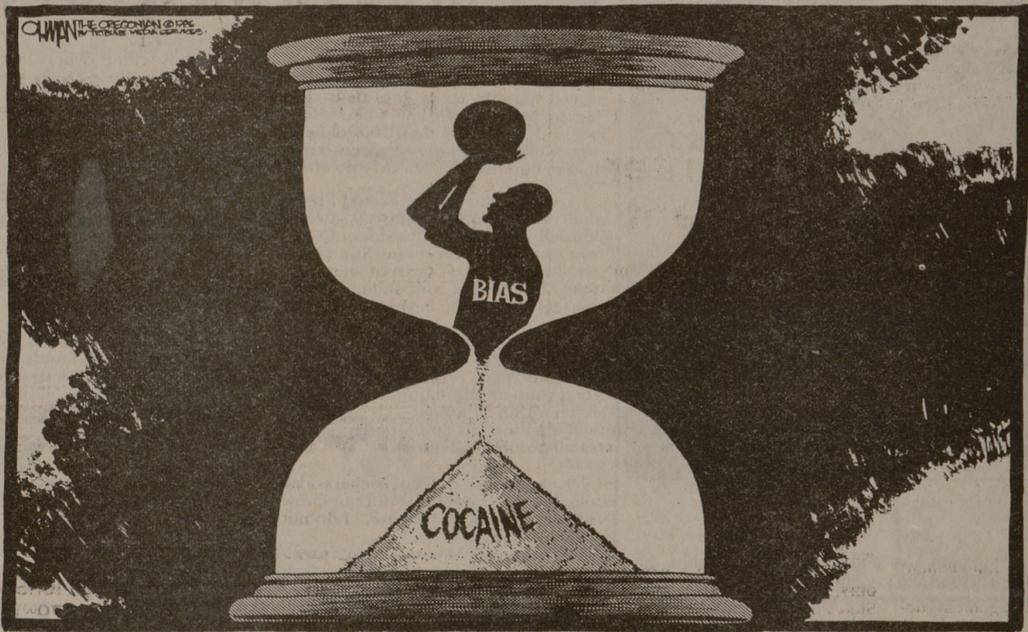
Costs would be relatively low because a retrieving spacecraft would not have to search the entire orbit looking for specific pieces of debris. If the cleanup effort was coordinated on an international scale, nations could take turns retrieving all waste, instead of each country picking up just its own mess. Such an intergalactic sanitation program at first might cost more than the satellites that would be saved. But the long-term results could mean a substantial savings on satellite repair.

Exactly what should be done with space litter after its collected isn't clear yet. But scientists have some time to work out a viable solution before the two zones fill up. With increasing technology and the availability (despite current Challenger setback) of reusable spacecraft, scientists feel certain a solution is not far off.

As with litter on Earth, the only feasible and cost-efficient solution is prevention. If orbital dump sites are established, space-faring nations must assume responsibility for their junk and make a coordinated effort to "pitch in."

Like the irresponsible motorist, space-goers must learn to hold their trash until the nearest convenient receptacle can be found. Just because in space no one can hear you hoot doesn't mean we shouldn't give one.

Loren Steffy is a senior journalism major and the Opinion Page editor of The Battalion.



FOUL.

Without concrete solutions, U.S. will become disillusioned

The president won a noisy moral victory in the House when he turned it around on the question of aid to the Contras. He is helped both as chief foreign-policy maker and as the dominant



William F. Buckley Jr.

figure in domestic policy. But as the Nicaraguan vote assumes importance, so does it invite danger. The polls indicate that the level of enthusiasm for Nicaraguan aid has not increased in the three months during which Reagan turned Congress around on the subject. And the reason for this is plain: We have not charted a course for overthrowing the Sandinista government.

Every single word uttered by Ronald Reagan in his speech before the vote could, as things are going, as well be uttered two years from now. He warned that Nicaragua is, under the Sandinistas,

engaged in totalitarianizing the country. He is correct; and two years from now it will be said of Nicaragua either that the totalitarianization continues, or that it is completed. We do not know what exactly it is that will mark the day when the Sandinistas can say the opposition is gone: The People's Republic of Nicaragua is unified totally behind the Sandinistas. But there is not much that the Contras, plus \$70 million, can do to arrest the trend that now prevails.

There are 3,000 Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua and an estimated \$600 million worth of war-making material sent by the Soviet bloc. The Nicaraguan military is by far the largest in Central America. The forces there, in short, are sufficient to contain, perhaps to overwhelm, the Contras.

It is the unhappy earmark of the century that the technology of suppression exceeds in sophistication the technology of resistance. That technology of suppression isn't merely quantified by assigning a dollar value to the weapons at the disposal of the Sandinista army and police. One needs to add, or rather to multiply, the factor of will. If Somoza had exercised the will-to-power the Sandinistas show, he would never have been overthrown. If Marcos had engaged in full-blooded totalitarian practices, he would be reigning today. Chiang Kai-shek, if he had imitated Mao, would have died in Peking.

There is no way the Contras can overthrow the existing government. And a year from now, what we are most likely to be hearing about is feats of terrorism initiated by the Contras. This Sandinista mayor executed, that grenade bomb that went off under a bus of schoolchildren.

Now, these are not the kind of data designed to generate continuing American enthusiasm for the ideal of enabling a resistance movement to oust the Sandinista government. But President Reagan declines to declare himself further. He has not said that it is distinctly a U.S. responsibility to see to it that the Sandinistas do not succeed in the way that

Castro succeeded in Cuba. To make such a guarantee, he would need to acknowledge that there are circumstances under which we would need to engage our own military directly. But his fear of saying this — because it would antagonize the marginal congressmen — correspondingly aggravates the situation. So long as the United States shrinks from making the whole commitment, the Sandinista government feels relatively secure.

If we cannot affect their strength, can we keep the Sandinistas from becoming stronger? Well, we can blockade their shipping, searching vessels for instruments of aggression. But to do this means protracted engagements with international protocols that provide for freedom of the seas. Although we have announced that we will no longer accept the jurisdiction of the World Court on matters involving our activities against the Sandinistas, we are left justifiably uncomfortable at the prospect of protracted lawlessness under the aegis of what goes by the name of international law.

But even if we stopped the military flow by sea, how are we going to prevent the Cuban air transport fleet from flying into Nicaragua the machinery of aggression? Are we going to shoot down airplanes that take off from Havana, headed for Managua?

We do not, in America, engage in oblique military activity over a prolonged period of time with any stamina. It is inconsistent with the American temper to proceed at a fitful pace. We have, after all, been doing this for five years: It has been just about that long since we turned around on the Sandinistas and acknowledged that they were not at all interested in introducing democracy to Somozaland. And since then, the sun has not set save on a day that sees the Sandinistas stronger than the day before. Never mind their ravaged economy; the power is consolidating. Reagan, to the extent that he holds up the present effort as the high-water mark of our Central American policy, may be riding for a great fall.

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Mail Call

Missing monument

EDITOR:

This is one letter that I hoped I would never have to write, but one that I feel is necessary.

I am the president of Chi Epsilon (XE), the National Honor Society for Civil Engineers. In the fall semester of 1985, after four years of saving money and volunteering hundreds of man hours to prepare a brass symbol of our society, we were able to build a small monument to our University.

It was unveiled at the annual civil engineering department open house and was shown as a model to other universities nationwide at our biannual conclave. Through intensive lobbying at that meeting, we were able to win the support of other universities to move the national headquarters of XE to Texas A&M. Now we have no cause to celebrate the accomplishments of the last several years.

On the night of June 26 someone vandalized the monument. They broke the brass symbol off of the top of its decorative concrete base and stole it.

I don't know why this was done, or who did it. The University Police have begun an investigation into the matter. My hope is that the symbol will be recovered so we can repair or replace the monument as necessary.

If any of you GOOD AGS know anything at all about this situation, any information that could aid the police in their investigation, please contact Richard Galaviz at 845-2345. We don't have sufficient funds in our treasury to offer a reward, but hope that the Aggie Code of Honor will be an incentive.

The symbol is solid brass, about 32 inches high by 14 inches wide and weighs around 70 pounds. In the center of the symbol, the letter X and E are superimposed on one another.

Thank you for your help.

Alan D. Simpson
President Chi Epsilon
Dr. Eugene Marquis
Faculty Advisor Chi Epsilon

Voicing 'petty criticisms'

EDITOR:

Though I do not like having titles attached to my name, you may label me, for convenience, "liberal." And as a "liberal" I have many complaints about the Ray-gun administration, and some of the more recent Supreme Court decisions. In short, I sometimes feel as if I am living in the middle of a "Leave it to Beaver" episode.

Yes, I fear destruction of our "enlightened society": I fear the loss of legal control for the women of our country, I worry that people like Mark Ude, who are unquestionably beyond reproach, will dictate to women under what conditions, if any, a woman may decide to abort her pregnancy, and so make her womb truly the property of society.

I am afraid of the ignorance that inspires our "Supreme" Court to make illegal the sexual habits of one out of every ten Americans. I do not know if Ude has heard, but homosexuality is no longer considered deviant sexual behavior by the psychological community. But of course, this is the same community that often takes certain criminals away from justice — so that people with Ude's mindset are unable to respond, for instance, to murder with murder.

And I am definitely afraid of a society that admires, on one hand, movies like "Dirty Harry" or "Cobra," and all of the violence upon which their childlike themes rely (which Ude equates to the popularity of a "get-tough" attitude towards crime), and on the other hand, denies expressions of sexuality to the point of censoring education of the most basic information in our public schools — as if this would make the very real problems of teenage pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases simply disappear!

But I suppose these are, as Ude would call them, "petty criticisms." Wake up Ude! We are not all conservative, white, pro-military, Christian, homophobic males, who would deny the right of individuality to the world, and you are not living in the midst of a Coca-Cola commercial!

Bill Sparks
English Major

History speaks

EDITOR:

Only a fool would dare contradict a Consensus of Experts:
"Christianity won't get big." (circa 100 AD)
"The sun revolves around the Earth." (circa 1000 AD)
"The Earth is flat." (circa 1491)
"Man will never fly." (circa 1902)
"If we give Hitler the Rhineland, he'll be satisfied." (circa 1936)
"Man will never go to the moon." (circa 1960)
"It will definitely be a Lakers/Celtics rematch in the NBA Finals." (circa 1986).

"SDI is a dangerous fantasy." (circa 1986)

Oh well, who is John Galt?

Adam D. Hatman
Class of '87

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