

Opinion

The Battalion

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A taxing ordeal

College students face some of the most sweeping changes of federal tax reform — but students have less information on reform than almost anyone else.

Two days after President Reagan signed the reform measures into law, brokers at E.F. Hutton had copies of the law and a comprehensive summary of the changes. Two months later, students and financial aid officers are still in the dark about the changes the law entails.

The difference is bureaucracy. E.F. Hutton documented the changes as they were proposed, making it simple to send out summaries as soon as the law passed. But while some reform measures took effect immediately, the law still had to pass through the U.S. Department of Education's formidable regulation machine.

Laws dealing with education don't go directly to universities. Instead, the department rewrites the laws into official regulations, which are then passed on to schools.

The problem, A&M director of student financial aid Taft Benson says, is that the Department of Education takes from two to six months to write its regulations. In the meantime, students and their schools can only guess at what reform will do to them.

And guessing is no good when the stakes are this high. University of Southern California Treasurer Dennis F. Dougherty told *Newsweek* that the new rules "just about triple the tax liability of students" and Benson estimates that 2,000 of A&M's 7,000 Guaranteed Student Loan recipients may no longer qualify for the program.

The changes also limit the deductibility of charitable donations to universities and eliminate the deductions for loan interest, scholarships and grants. A related change makes the federal GSL program need-based for the first time.

Texas A&M's Office of Student Financial Aid has received word on only the change in the GSL program — and that notification came weeks after the changes took effect.

High school students are faring no better. Bryan High School senior counselor Peggy White says she's requested information on tax reform but has received none. Worse, she says, her students — and their parents — seem uninformed about legislation that may affect their college careers drastically.

"I've had maybe one student ask out of 600 seniors," she says. "That's not too good."

But what's bad for the students may be good for the financial planners. While university aid officers read magazine accounts of reform changes, financial analysts and consultants examine copies of the law or detailed summary statements. With only profit to gain, they have access to the information desperately needed by college students.

The Department of Education must speed up its ponderous regulation process. Students rarely have the financial resources to wait six months for word on aid program changes, and lack of information could leave some students without any way to pay for school.

Dealing with the department's dawdling may prove an education in itself — but the school of hard knocks is a poor substitute for a diploma.

Lie detector tells about Iran

A modest proposal, Jonathan Swift style: Why not have all the top members of the Reagan administration, including the president, take lie-detector tests to determine who is telling the truth about arms to Iran, cash to the Contras and a foreign policy that would make Rambo look prudent? Surely, nobody but Secretary of State George Shultz could object.



Richard Cohen

Once, Shultz adamantly refused to be polygraphed. That was a year ago when the president, obsessed about leaks to the press, ordered the wiring of government officials to lie-detector machines. Shultz balked, threatened to resign and the president backed down. Reagan took the occasion, though, to endorse such tests, calling them "a limited, though sometimes useful tool." Well, isn't it time to use the "useful tool"?

The first to be wired up should be Attorney General Edwin Meese III. Meese did not object when the president suggested the wholesale polygraphing of the government. Then, the issue was leaked to the press, a so-called national security concern. Whatever it was, it was trivial compared to what has happened recently. Now, the Reagan administration's credibility is in tatters, laws may have been broken and the nation's foreign policy is, we are told, adrift. Take a seat, Ed.

Next on the machine should go White

House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, the man in charge of all things wonderful and nothing awful. If you follow the Meese rule that all suspects are guilty — "If a person is innocent of a crime, then he is not a suspect," he told U.S. News & World Report — Regan's guilt is a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, for the sake of formality, he ought to be wired and asked if he knew what Lt. Col. Oliver North was up to. Did he know that money for American arms was going from Iran to Nicaraguan Contras? Regan says no, but the machine just might say otherwise. Sit down, Don.

As soon as Regan gets up, former National Security Adviser John Poindexter should sit down. He was said by Meese to have known of North's activities in a "general way," but the machine, I am sure, will demand precision. As long as you're into polygraphing, you might as well be into hearsay testimony.

CIA Director William Casey would be next. Here is a man who says one thing one day and another the next. Casey might just send the needle across the room. He said the CIA was not involved in the transfer of funds from Iran to Israel to the Contras, and now he says, well, it just might have been. He also says that the CIA basically was unaware of the entire operation. The polygraphing of Casey will require an industrial-strength machine.

Ollie North? Any man who takes the Fifth Amendment a reported 40 times before the Senate Intelligence Committee is crying out to be polygraphed. If he were a member of a leftist Hollywood union in the 1940s, the president would have condemned him for taking the

Fifth; as it was, Reagan praised North as "a national hero." This hero needs to be wired.

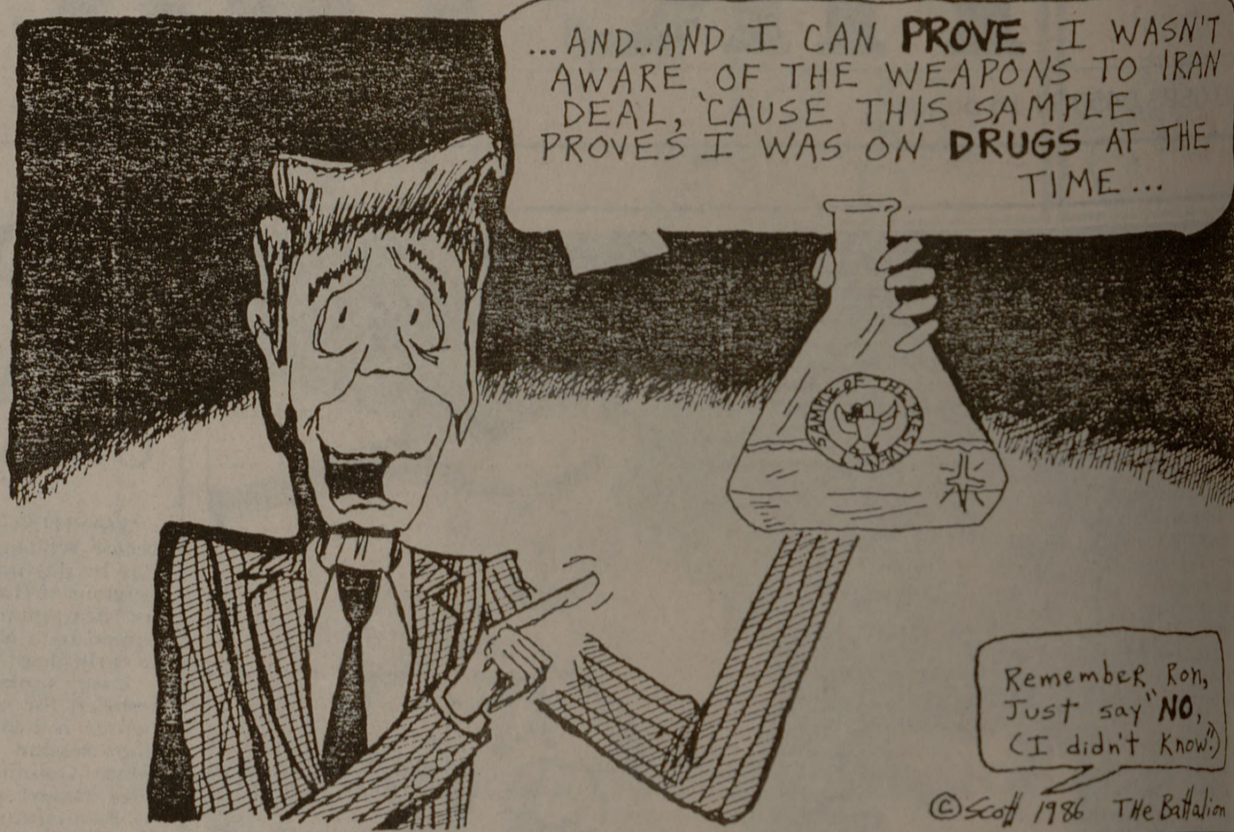
Of course, I write this tongue-in-cheek. The polygraph does not detect lies; it detects stress. A really good liar can fool it. A nervous but truthful person can appear to be a liar. For this reason, the results of lie-detector tests cannot be admitted as evidence in some state and all federal courts. In one study, the machine was wrong 49 percent of the time; in another, the machine was off 55 percent of the time.

But the administration adores the little machines and has used them with abandon. It wired Pentagon employees to determine who leaked information to a *Washington Post* reporter. And on March 11 of last year, the president ordered widespread testing of many federal employees on pain of dismissal. It took Shultz to back the president down. Reagan said his order was misinterpreted, and it was modified — but not his belief in the device.

So now we come to the president. If I can make my proposal a bit less modest, I suggest that polygraphing of Ronald Reagan be done on prime-time television. With Reagan on most of the screen and the needle in the right-hand corner, members of the Senate could ask him questions: Did North tell him he was using Iranian money to fund the Contras? Did Don Regan say anything about it? Did Poindexter ever mention it? How about Casey and Meese? Mr. President, what did you know? When did you know it? And if you didn't know anything, how come?

It's just a modest proposal.

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Health center won't lose an sleep over untimely illnesses

It was the first home football game of the season, and one of the guys I went to the game with got sick.



Jo Streit

He got food poisoning from a fast-food hamburger and spent the entire first half barfing in a bathroom. We left at halftime and carried our friend to the University health center, also known as the quack shack.

Apparently Paul got sick at an inconvenient time.

The clinic was closed. I rang the buzzer located next to the locked door and spoke into the intercom.

"Uh, hello. My friend's sick."

An unconcerned voice questioned back.

"Is this an emergency?"

"Uh, I guess it depends on whether or not you consider someone throwing up all over your door an emergency."

Unfortunately, my response didn't move the voice to let us in. Obviously the person behind the voice didn't have to clean the door.

"I'm sorry, the clinic's closed. Can you wait til Monday?"

The voice must have heard my thoughts.

"If it's an emergency, call an ambulance on the red phone located next to the intercom."

"And say what," I thought. "Hi, I'm

standing here with my sick friend and the doors are locked. Do you have the keys?"

Once again the voice heard me and responded with more helpful advice.

"Why don't you go to an AM/PM clinic."

I finally realized taking my friend to an after-hours clinic was the only feasible solution outside an expensive hospital emergency room.

"Good idea. Where is one?"

"Uh, hold on."

The voice finally came back with directions, which turned out to be wrong, and our self-appointed ambulance raced off in search of medical attention for Paul.

This exchange made me realize that weekends and nights are not a good time to get sick. My friend's illness was inconvenient.

The University used to pay local doctors \$75 each week night to remain on call. Unfortunately, many of the physicians wouldn't come in when needed. These longstanding problems between the health center and the physicians led to the decision to eliminate night and weekend outpatient services.

Formerly, the health center's staff physicians were on call over the weekends on a rotating basis but were not paid anything in addition to their regular salaries. Staff physicians now have guaranteed weekends off without a pay cut.

This attitude of "it's my day off, so you can't be sick" suggests that treatment can only be given when the doctor's schedule permits. The University doctors must be reminded that their job is to serve their patients when they need medical attention.

Students at the University pay for health care through fees and should be guaranteed that someone will treat them, day or night, if they're sick. If the present fees don't cover the costs, then increase them.

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This incident also made me realize that nobody at the health center would have been given primary consideration came in a distant second.

I know many students who are in the health center because the center to convince them that their illness is not or doesn't require treatment.

Another friend of mine had to drive three hours to bring a prescription from their family physician cause when she went to the center, they said there was nothing she could do. They told her she'd have to get over it.

The compassion she received brought tears to my eyes. Of course, she had this special attention only because she was considered a patient of the center's office hours.

But what about people like Paul who get sick during the center's hours? Surely, the center should penalize someone for getting sick at night. It's exactly what happened to Paul. He wasted valuable time waiting with the voice that Paul suffered.

And the clinic would have been found no better than the center's office hours. I made me think back to the time I was in the health center.

The obsession in our society for having everything convenient applied to medicine. The doctor's availability and concern for patients is part of the treatment. Maybe Mom's chicken noodle soup made me feel better. She didn't know I was in the health center. Unfortunately, I don't see any immediate change in the University's care policy.

I just hope the bacteria in my body is only open for illness during the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. through Friday.

Jo Streit is a senior journalist and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

An unbiased opinion?

EDITOR:

In response to a letter accusing *The Battalion* of bias, you made a revealing remark: "Opinions are supposed to be biased, that's why they're opinions."

I don't believe that opinions are "supposed to be" biased. To the contrary, I would hope that a writer's published opinions constitute his best, most constructive, most thoughtful and well-informed assessment of the issue at hand, and that he makes his views known with due regard for reader sensitivity and the power of the written word.

Bias is commonly understood (and usually defined) to mean prejudgment, an attitude which inhibits impartial judgment. Therefore, although opinions are subjective, they need not be biased. It may even happen that two opinions are opposite, yet both are unbiased because both examine the issue fairly.

The *Battalion* Editorial Board does us no favors when it seeks to bias what it perceives as bias in the community with biases of its own. But the paper can perform a great service as informant and commentator when it makes a genuine effort to avoid bias within its own ranks before examining reporting an issue.

Paul Koch
Graduate Student

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial board has the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to preserve the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification and telephone number of the writer.