

Opinion

The Battalion

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The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

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Price of secrecy

Isn't it about time Texas A&M realizes that as a public institution, it has an obligation to release contract and hiring information to the public? After all, Texans have a right to know where their tax dollars are going, which is why the Texas Open Records Act exists.

Instead, the University has allowed itself to be sued twice in the last month, and rather than release public information to the public, it has decided to fight the public's right to know in court.

USA Today filed suit Dec. 29 for the details of head coach Jackie Sherrill's salary package. The Fort Worth Star-Telegram filed suit Jan. 13 seeking the results of an internal investigation of the football program, and the Dallas Morning News filed an official request under the open records act for the same information.

The open records act states that the salary of public employees and the results of completed investigations are open to public scrutiny. President Frank Vandiver said in September that the internal investigation of the football program for alleged violations of NCAA rules was completed, although the results have not been made public.

The irony of the lawsuits is that the public may end up funding A&M's fight to keep the information from being released to the public, unless the court battles are paid for by private donations to the Athletic Department.

Regent William A. McKenzie has said that he thinks the media are taking advantage of the open records law. But it is the University that is using the law's defects to keep information from the public. Under the law, the University has been able to stall the release of the information by ignoring the newspapers' request. The release can be further delayed by the court process.

But for all its clever stalling, A&M attorneys must realize that compliance with the law is inevitable. The Texas Attorney General's Office has said that A&M must release the information.

Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated so often in the past, the University is determined to fight a no-win lawsuit, wasting money that might otherwise be used more beneficially.

Why should the newspapers — or even the general public — be interested in the internal goings on of a state university? Because, as the open records act points out, government and government agencies are supposed to be the servant of the people, not the masters of them. If the public is truly the master, it has a right to know what its servant is up to.



Solicitors who refuse refuse can be difficult to deal with

Just when you thought it was safe to answer your door again... they're back.



Paula Vogrin

They arrive in College Station apartment complexes by the van load chanting 'Don't take no for an answer!' Their strategy is pre-planned, and their assault is merciless. No mortal apartment dweller is safe from... The Newspaper Subscription Salesmen from Hell.

How many times did this happen to you last week? You're sitting innocently in your apartment, not bothering anyone, when there's a knock at your door. 'Ooh, company!' you think and open the door expecting a familiar face. But to your horror, it's one of Them. There you are, trapped, helpless for ten minutes while the creature expounds on the benefits of subscribing to his newspaper rather than the others.

It's not a pretty sight.

I had that experience EVERY night last week. My apartment complex even has a big sign right at the parking lot entrance — NO SOLICITORS. Do these words mean anything to the newspaper salesmen of this town? Apparently not. What will it take to get these people to leave me alone?

There is nothing more annoying than having a newspaper salesman barge into your apartment as you're taking the first bite of dinner. It is not humanly possible to get rid of these people in less than five minutes. They refuse to let you refuse them. You can tell them you already subscribe to their paper, but then they want a 1,000 word essay on what you like and dislike about it. You can't get them out of the door before your dinner undergoes a hard freeze.

Now I realize these guys are only trying to make an honest living, but if I really wanted a subscription to their paper, I'd tell them the minute they arrived at my door.

If you think it does any good when you already subscribe to a newspaper, you're wrong. They'll try to convince you to drop that subscription and begin taking their paper. If they'll try to persuade you to subscribe to their paper in addition to the one you're already receiving. Once you've paid to receive a newspaper, they sales pitch that will convince me to continue and start another. I'm not because I like the paper, but because I want to see who gets me out of it.

Friday, after the last salesman week was turned away, I started darkening my doorstep ever again. It may be too late to put any of my suggestions into action this semester, but you're interested, keep them in mind for next semester.

• If you suspect a newspaper salesman is knocking on your door, all costs, don't open it. Just tell you're not home. It doesn't matter if there is noise in your apartment (the stereo or TV). Simply ignore the fact that someone is banging on your door. Sooner or later, they'll leave.

• Affix a picture of a newspaper salesman being attacked by a vicious dog to your door. A color photograph of a dog work even better.

• Along those same lines, you can post a quarantine sign and include the name of the most hideous illness you can think of. A note that the illness is highly contagious would emphasize your point.

• If you're hard-hearted and don't possess an ounce of compassion, the door, say 'I don't want your newspaper. Leave me alone!' and slam the door in the solicitor's face. A little harsh, but it works well.

• If you're cruel, try this one. Tell the guy on, tell him you think you're interested but you're not sure. Tell him tell you EVERYTHING about his paper, then say 'Nah, I guess I'm not interested,' and shut the door.

• If you have a neighbor you don't like, tell the solicitor that that neighbor was just telling you how much he'd like to subscribe to whatever newspaper you're selling.

• Divert the attention away from yourself. I did this to my roommate last semester when a magazine salesman came to harass me. Say, 'Oh I think I want to talk to the person who lives here.' Then call your roommate and make your exit by saying 'The salesman was just leaving.' It'll work every time.

Keep in mind that these suggestions are useful in battling more than just newspaper subscription salesmen. A little imagination and modification, they can be used to combat magazine salesmen, kids selling ugly knock-off school fundraisers, and self-appointed missionaries trying to convert you to their religion.

Paula Vogrin is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Truth: is it an outdated concept?

In May, 1960, the Soviets downed a U.S. spy plane over Central Russia. Thinking the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, was dead, President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorized NASA to say that one of its civilian weather planes was missing. Only after the Soviets announced that Powers was a captive and had confessed to piloting a spy plane did Ike fess up. Yes, the U-2 was a spy plane. And, yes, the government had lied.



Richard Cohen

The incident is worth recalling because the revelation that the government had lied was as much a shock as the news of the spy flights. It was "the first time many (Americans) learned their leaders did not always tell the truth," Michael R. Beschloss wrote in his history of the incident. Up to then, a lie uttered by a public official was considered a grave matter.

No more. Now, some public officials seem to think lying is just part of their job. A perfect example is Robert C. McFarlane, the president's former national-security adviser. Through persons who speak for him, he admits he helped concoct a false chronology of the Iran arms sale to make it seem that President Reagan was unaware of the first shipment. Later, having raised his right hand to take an oath before a congressional committee, he fessed up: The president had indeed authorized the first shipment.

Around the time the Iran story was breaking, McFarlane denied at least twice on television that he had taken a Bible inscribed by the president and a cake baked into the shape of a key with him on a trip to Tehran. As I recall, he stared his interviewers in the eye and said, "You know me better than that." Well, we do now. We are reliably informed that both reports are true. There was a Bible; there was a cake, al-

though they may have been brought by Lt. Col. Oliver North, who accompanied McFarlane to Tehran on the same plane.

As for the president, he too has played cute with the truth. Asked repeatedly at a press conference whether a third country — Israel — was involved in shipping arms to Iran, he always said no. Since we now know the president authorized the shipments, we can rule out the possibility that he was ignorant of the facts. With his Bible in Iran, the president presumably felt free to say what was convenient.

More and more, government officials seem to have adopted a lawyer's cutesy distinction between lying and perjury. The first is permitted, indeed sometimes required; the latter, of course, runs the risk of prison. So, it is all right to lie to the people through the press, but not under oath to Congress. That's serious stuff.

Of course, there are times when a

government official has to lie. Then national security adviser John Poindexter is sometimes criticized for denying, on the eve of the Grenada invasion, that such an operation was under way. It's hard to know what else he could have done. And as for Eisenhower, his deception was aimed at the Russians, who were about to meet with him in Geneva. He was trying to protect that summit meeting.

But the casualness to recent lying takes my breath away. Where once lies were extraordinary events and excused only for the highest reasons of state, they are now uttered for sheer convenience sake, often to avoid embarrassment. McFarlane's statements and actions fall into that category. Often they are excused under the rubric of "protecting the presidency," a verbose, highfalutin' phrase that comes down to protecting a particular president from the wrath of the people.

In present-day Washington it seems

almost quaint to lament how frequently lies are told. But honesty is a virtue for its own sake and lying is a symptom that something is awfully wrong. Very often, the lies stem from one big lie, such as the president's insistence that he would not bargain for hostages. And the subsequent lies are really efforts to maintain or implement policies that lack public approval and not, as is often claimed, to ensure national security. It is not just the lies that are insupportable; it is the policy itself.

That is the nub of the Iran affair. The president was doing something he said he would not... and was doing it secretly because he knew Americans would be opposed. From that epic deception stemmed all the others. They differ in purpose and consequence from the lie Ike told about the U-2 affair. He was cheating on the Russians. The Reagan administration officials are cheating on us.

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Mail Call

They're art

EDITOR:

Finally, something to spark a little imagination on campus! Although A&M's art exhibit department frequently brings inspiring art exhibits, too often students never see them. The new sculptures on campus can be seen by everybody.

Modern art stimulates imagination and creativity. It would be fantastic to have a little original thinking stirred at A&M.

Elizabeth Harwell '88

They're not art

EDITOR:

The pieces set up around the Academic Building are nice. They provide a great change in scenery on campus. It is not until someone calls these things "art" that I get angry. They are quaint and they are novel, but they are not art!

If you are interested in seeing some real art, I strongly suggest you run over to Rudder Exhibit Hall to see the exhibit set up there.

Andrew J. Gardner '89

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 classification, address and telephone number of the writer.