

# Opinion

## The Battalion

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### Editorial Policy

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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## Not a prayer

The high court can't seem to keep itself from swinging its mighty gavel in the face of American morality.

After two lower federal courts struck down a New Jersey law allowing a minute of silence in public schools for "quiet and private contemplation or introspection," U.S. Supreme Court justices have said they will consider the constitutionality of that law. But, according to the Constitution, there's not much to consider.

The Constitution specifically says that state and church are separate entities. Certainly the debate will center around the exact purpose of the minute of silence in the classroom. The obvious way around the Constitution is to clearly the minute of silence is for personal purposes and not necessarily prayer — a tactic the supporters of the stricken law are now using.

Rev. Carl McIntire, pastor of the Bible Presbyterian Church in Collingswood, N.J., spoke God's truth when he told *USA Today*, "This will ultimately lead to a constitutional amendment to allow school prayer."

McIntire followed his proclamation with rhetoric about problems teenagers face with drugs and sex, and he claimed the reason for the problems is that the Ten Commandments can't be put up on school walls — thus keeping students from praying.

Until now, the issue of school prayer had been laid to rest. The constitutionality of the issue hasn't changed, but the thinking of the U.S. Supreme Court has. If the Supreme Court's new ultra-conservative thinking successfully changes the Constitution, the separation of public education and personal beliefs doesn't have a prayer.



## Buying contraceptives should be as acceptable as sex

When I was 16, one of my friends got his girlfriend pregnant. The girl was 15 and too afraid to tell anyone about her problem. She waited until the middle of her second trimester — about five months — to have an abortion. My friend told me that he and his



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girlfriend had never used contraceptives because they were too embarrassed to buy them. They opted instead to play the odds. The girl's parents, who were ardently moral people, never found out about their daughter's traumatic experience.  
When I was 19, the same thing happened to another friend. He, too, bowed to senseless social tension and refused to make a purchase that, depending on your beliefs, could have saved a life or at least a great deal of mental and physical anguish.

About 4,200 abortions are performed each day in America, more than 1.5 million annually.

I am not going to get caught up in a futile discussion about the morality of sex and adolescents, abortion or premarital sex. However, I do have a theory about the high number of abortions — which are tragic no matter what your stance on the issue.

The number of abortions would be less than half of what it is now if buying contraceptives wasn't so embarrassing. In a country so hypocritically preoccupied with morality and wholesomeness, social pressure effectively keeps common sense from common man.

Unfortunately, minority groups claiming responsibility for the upkeep of American moral standards mistake the embarrassment of buying contraceptives as an effective deterrent of what they believe is immoral sexual activity. But the embarrassment, which weighs most heavily on conscientious adolescents, has yet to prevent anything but the purchase of the products.

Touting abstinence as a viable solution to the fear of becoming pregnant, the moral minority breeds distress into the hearts of young people who might otherwise make a responsible decision to protect themselves.

It was disheartening to read in the Jan. 31 issue of the *Houston Chronicle* that conservative groups successfully

are maintaining the shroud of cast over condoms specifically contraceptives generally. Apparently opponents of change have the major networks and most stations that advertising condoms is a bad taste.

However, most of these same regularly advertise tampons, sanitary liners, sanitary napkins, bladder control products, support and air programs that border on parody, all in the name of good taste of these stations also have begun advertising contraceptive products — condoms — with no qualms about taste. For the life of me, I can't see their distinction, especially when the surgeon general has recommended sexually transmitted diseases to prevent the spread of AIDS.

TV is the most powerful medium in America. It dictates such norms of ion, lifestyles and, to some extent, social values. If any medium can violate the intimidation people (teenagers) feel about buying contraceptives, TV can.

But the people who are ever taken about the personal values of neighbors believe that contraceptive commercials will single-handedly down the morals of our society. Foolishly mistake social tension for reality.

They mistakenly believe that advertising will send a message of stance to the young of America — such ads will encourage children to engage in sexual activities. Planned Parenthood puts the average age for sexual activity at 16.

The kids already are having sex; they need to know that it's all right to protect themselves. Once the stigma is gone, the morality of it all can be decided intelligently and individual like adults.

Mike Sullivan is a senior journalism major and the Opinion Page editor of *The Battalion*.

## Farmers Write!

### Solving the mystery of financial aid at A&M

A recent issue of *The Battalion* carried a "Wal-do" cartoon implying that qualifying for financial aid — particularly a student loan — was something of a mystery. The big question asked by the cartoon character was "I wonder how they decide who can get a loan?"

**Taft E. Benson**  
Guest Columnist

Thousands of similar questions from students, parents, and some University faculty and staff members are received by phone and in person by the Financial Aid Department regularly.

The recent passage of the Reauthorization Act and Tax Reform Act have generated new questions regarding financial aid and scholarships. A combination of federal laws and regulations through the U.S. Department of Education, state regulations, institutional policies, scholarship donor selection criteria and Internal Revenue Service tax laws can indeed cast an aura of mystery over student financial aid.

The purpose of student financial aid and need-based scholarships is to help students obtain adequate funds to meet the cost of higher education, regardless of family financial circumstances. The primary financial responsibility for meeting this cost rests with the student and family. Need-based funds provided through financial aid are provided only after the student and family's resources have been considered.

At Texas A&M, the staff of the Student Financial Aid Department is committed to carrying out that responsibility in the most friendly, helpful, efficient and responsible manner. In fact, we realize that without the students who need our help, there would be no need for us to be on campus. We provide some form of short- or long-term financial help to some 16,000 students in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. We provide advice and information to another 10,000 students and parents annually. Funds provided to students total more than \$50 million annually.

Students are fortunate to have fine organizations, individuals, private business and industry and, yes, federal and state governments to provide this help.

As stewards of a major portion of this financial support, it is our responsibility to see that these funds are used wisely to help the maximum number of students today, tomorrow and in

the future. We also are committed to efficiency and fairness in administering the combinations of programs available to help students.

Although most of the 16,000 students follow necessary rules, regulations and procedures and receive funds in a timely and efficient manner, some have problems obtaining help. Sometimes these problems appear mysterious and unfair.

Long-term loans are need-based and must be applied for through the Uniform Methodology Need Analysis System. These loans, including Guaranteed Student Loans, are a part of a federal program and are governed by the rules, regulations and laws of Congress and the Education Department. Banks and insurance companies cannot make a federally subsidized loan (low interest and payable after graduation) unless the Financial Aid Office certifies that students are eligible.

Students are classified as independent or dependent. If students are considered independent, only their own income and assets are considered. If students are considered dependent, their parents' income and assets are considered as well.

A copy of the prior year's tax return is the most commonly used and reliable source of data to verify information submitted for both students and parents. Students often are surprised when financial aid awards are revised, resulting in loss of funds. Federal regulations, state regulations, University policy and donor requirements prohibit overawards. Overawards are funds provided through the University that exceed the student's demonstrated need and/or the cost of education.

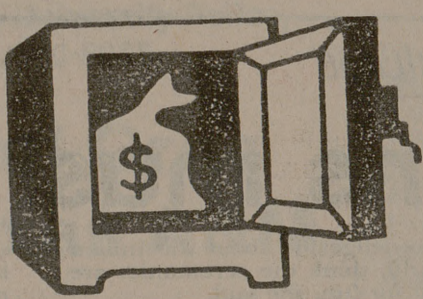
Because of limited funds and the large number of students needing financial assistance, it would be irresponsible for funds to be provided to some students beyond their need while others go without help.

The most frequent cause of these overawards and revisions are University scholarships, fellowships and assistantships awarded after financial

aid offers are made and disbursed; employment on campus started after financial aid packages are made and disbursed; and outside scholarships awarded after financial aid packages are made.

Another surprise for some students is that their grades and hours earned affect their financial aid. Federal regulations require recipients of federal funds to maintain satisfactory academic progress. That generally means a 2.0 grade-point ratio and completion of 24 hours per year for undergraduates and a 3.0 GPR and completion of 18 hours per year for graduate students. Loss of aid results when students do not meet these standards after a semester of probation.

Recent passage of the Tax Reform Act has created another mystery in the minds of students. This Tax Reform Act of 1986 makes scholarships, fellowships and grants taxable. It allows degree candidates to exclude required tuition and related expenses. The University will report the total award on a Form 1099, and the student will be responsible for justifying and documenting the allowable expenses to be excluded. Scholarships, grants and fellowship awards made before Aug. 16, 1986 are not taxable regardless of when they are disbursed.



A step-by-step guide sheet is included in each financial aid application obtained from the Financial Aid Department to help students understand the process.

I hope these comments will clear up some of the mystery that prompted the cartoon recently run in *The Battalion*.

Taft E. Benson is the director of student financial aid at Texas A&M.

Columns submitted for *Farmers Write* should be between 700 and 850 words. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit for grammar, style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each column must be signed and include the major, classification, address and telephone number of the writer. Only the author's name, major and classification will be printed.

## Mail Call

### Join the Army

EDITOR:  
In response to the column written by Jo Streit, I would like to offer her and any other graduating journalism major an excellent position. This position offers a competitive salary, great opportunities for advancement, locations worldwide, excellent medical benefits and a career field specifically oriented toward journalism and public relations. Being a graduate of Texas A&M (a noted military school) is a definite plus in this organization. With some reservations, this offer is also cordially extended to Karl Pfallmeier.  
For details please call 1-800-USA-ARMY. Be all that you can be.  
Maj. Robert L. Welo, Graduate Student

### Fresh air

EDITOR:  
I would like to congratulate *The Battalion's* Opinion Page Editor and colleague, Karl Pfallmeier, on their attempts to breathe some life into this campus. It seems the only time anyone responds to anything is either to complain or to disagree, whether it is abolishing the Corps, art at A&M (I never knew there were so many qualified art critics here), or people wanting to sacrifice their bodies by running across Kyle Field during midnight volleyball practice. The Opinion Page is for opinions, and if everyone agrees that *The Battalion* is a unique place, what's wrong with someone trying to be unique?  
By the way — as Dick Cavett says, "What is a hamburger, chopped steak?"  
Jeff Miller '89

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.