

Opinion

The Battalion

(USPS 045 360)

Member of
Texas Press Association
Southwest Journalism Conference

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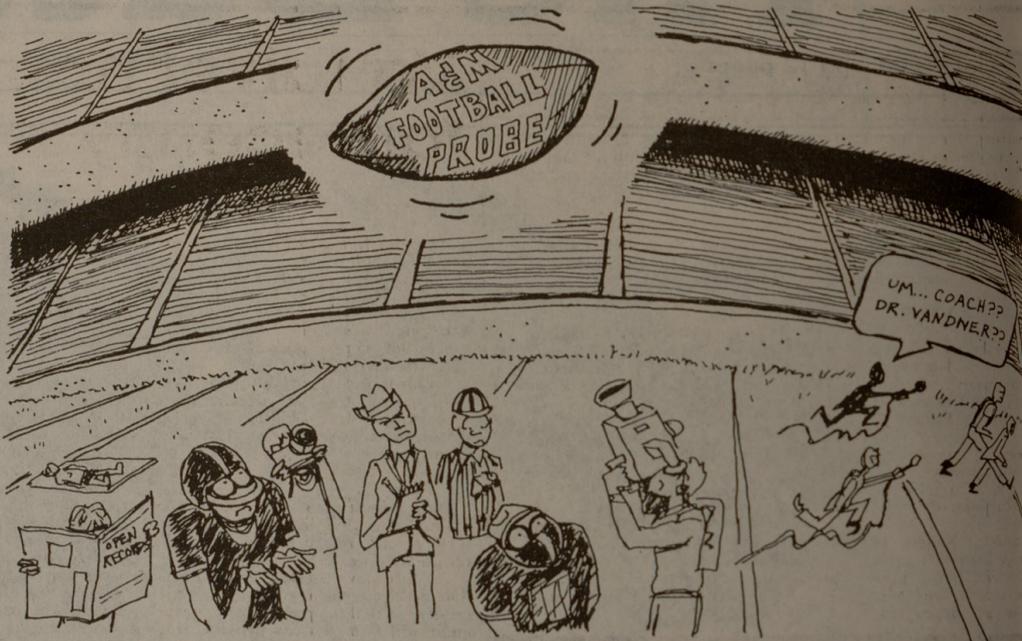
The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods.

Mail subscriptions are \$17.44 per semester, \$34.62 per school year and \$36.44 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, Department of Journalism, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4111.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Battalion*, Department of Journalism, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-4111.



It takes guts

"The bottom line is that Texans want a balanced budget without raiding school funds, selling off our lands at a loss and shifting education funds on to the backs of local taxpayers," said State Democratic Chairman Bob Slagle.

Though it's unclear whether Slagle intended his remark to be taken seriously, it's probably a quite accurate reflection of the average Texan's mindset.

Gov. Bill Clements has challenged his critics to publicly admit they want a \$5.8 billion tax hike to patch up the state deficit. Though his critics are extremely outspoken about Clements' plan to tap higher education, health and welfare spending, it's doubtful they will respond positively to the challenge.

Republican or Democrat, they are all politicians, and they are all elected by popular vote. It is a rare politician indeed who will set aside personal political ambitions and call for unpopular, yet necessary, measures.

Because taxes are so unpopular, being associated with a tax increase is perhaps the greatest fear of politicians. Clements won his position by adamantly denouncing tax increases during his campaign — yet two weeks into his term he did what was necessary and extended a tax initiated by Mark White's.

But Clements was so afraid of the effect of his decision that he immediately announced at his State of the State address that the tax was not his, but Mark White's.

Instead of doing what is necessary for Texas, the Legislature is following the unknown orders of the majority, and, rather than raising taxes or instituting a state income tax, it's threatening the future of our state by slashing education even more. Most Texans simply don't understand that such a quick-fix maneuver will effectively shape Texas' future into a state of paralysis.

Instead of responding to Clements' tax challenge, critics will continue to sit on their hands and lend sympathetic ears to the public's cry for a balanced budget, with no cuts in state programs and absolutely no tax increases.

If Texas is to patch up its budget problems and sever its oil-well noose, everyone will have to pay — not just the minorities.

Preaching morality to kids won't stop impending AIDS epidemic

Back when I was a legislative reporter and abortion was a red-hot issue, I discovered something by talking to people on both sides of the controversy. For some of them, abortion was not the real issue at all. Sex was, and abortion was just another way of arguing about it. Maybe that is no longer the case with abortion, but that hardly matters now. AIDS has taken its place.



Richard Cohen

Of course, there is no debate about AIDS itself. It is simply a deadly disease. But because it is often transmitted sexually, the debate has centered around what to do about it. Should TV net-

works air commercials for condoms? Should children have sex education as early as the third or fourth grade or — since most states don't have sex education at all — should they institute it?

Despite the threat it poses, AIDS has become just another vehicle for arguing about sexual morality. It follows hard on the debate over teen-age pregnancy, in which the real problem is not that it were almost besides the point. For some, the issue is sexual freedom; for others, it is conventional values. The plight of teen-age girls becomes almost incidental.

With abortion, there was not the slightest doubt in my mind that it was inextricably linked to the sexual-freedom movement. Before the pill and other contraceptive methods, abortion was seen by some as a way out of the dilemma posed by unwanted pregnancies. To these people, it mattered very much that the same forces that opposed abortion also opposed the selling of contraceptive devices and — not incidentally — were energetic bluenoses. What was being discussed, then, was not just a momentary theological or moral issue but rather a way of life. This was a cultural clash, pure and simple.

By conviction (and politics), Surgeon General C. Everett Koop should be on the conservative side of the AIDS argument. (He is a staunch abortion opponent.) His problem is that his convictions are now corrupted by knowledge. For protection from AIDS, he advocates condoms and he wants the TV networks to advertise them. For the same reason, he advocates early sex education. For his troubles he has been lectured on morality and values by, among others, Secretary of Education William Bennett. Having just announced that graduation rates fell, Bennett somehow thinks the schools can do for values what they cannot do for math and reading.

The problem is that we can ill-afford the old debate. Abortion and teen-age pregnancy are not trivial matters, but they are almost inconsequential com-

pared to the threat posed by AIDS kills, and it has been doing so at an alarming rate. And yet people who value as women who wanted abortion and who have the same refrain from usually active teen-agers now think have the answer for AIDS. For values are still the solution.

Clearly, if this sex-saturated suddenly turns Puritan, the great rate will fall and the threat of would abate. But until that blue comes over the mountain, we still to deal with AIDS.

There is nothing wrong with ing values, but there is something plain silly about thinking that ing of morality will deflect an epi- experts say is just over the horizon that, we certainly will need sex- tion, condom advertising and knows what else. The immediate lemma, after all, is not how to in- lues, but what to do about AIDS? don't hold your breath — teen- abandon "Dallas" for the writer Secretary Bennett.

As with abortion and teen-age nancy, the debate over AIDS is ducted by people who choose to use symbolic terms. Those who use word "values" as if the word is rhetorical condom are precise people least at risk. Bennett, for no teenager who feels compelled to ually experiment or who believes activity is in consonance with the style of his or her peer group and others seek to hold the popu- most at risk — sexually active people — to conventional sexual- sent. With AIDS, the consequences norance is hardly bliss.

Koop, who's hardly a hippie agrees. For him, AIDS is no more or not just — a symbol of a socie- the way of Sodom and Gomorrah- horrific disease. As surgeon gen- wants to do something immedi- save lives. With due respect to who disagree with him, Koop's Saving lives is the highest value.

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Farmers Write!

Financial aid doesn't always come through

Recently, President Reagan, in his State of the Union address, noted that the federal government was going to tighten the belt on federal student financial aid over the forthcoming fiscal year. He claims that these cuts will have no detrimental effect upon the collegiate educational system of this country.

Gov. Bill Clements, in his state of the state address, indicated that the Legislature will, for the first time, attempt to offset this state's deficit by tapping the Permanent University Fund, a fund which has been constitutionally guaranteed from such uses.

The nation's Secretary of Education, William Bennett, has even supported financial aid cuts by claiming that colleges are unproductive because nearly one-half of all college students drop out of school before receiving their degrees.

And, closer to home, our own Director of Student Financial Aid, Taft E. Benson, made the statement in a recent *Farmers Write* column that "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."

When will the end come to all the misconceptions, half-truths, and outright lies which are being perpetrated by those in a position to control financial aid for the college students of this country? Surely no person who has even the slightest comprehension of the English language could profess a belief in President Reagan's contradictory remarks. Moreover, what entity has suddenly given the legislative authority of this state the right to twist

Brian A. Koontz
Guest Columnist

and deform the Texas Constitution according to their whim? Furthermore, how could the secretary of education justify punishing those students who choose to remain in school and receive their degrees by denying them financial aid?

Students who have had the opportunity to see (or, God forbid, to complete) the financial aid form might have noticed certain key concepts of the form which will ensure that the majority of the students in this country will never be able to receive federally-supported financial aid. For instance, a key question of the form asks if the applicant has spent or will spend more than six weeks during the summer months of the current year and the previous year in their parents' residence, regardless of whether or not the applicant paid room and board. If so, applicants are required to submit not only a copy of their most recent tax return, but a copy of their parents' form as well.

Even if applicants have spent their entire college careers supporting themselves, a shot at financial aid can be forever ruined by living with their parents.

This magical form, which, in effect, automatically weeds out students whose parents fit in the middle-income bracket, requests a \$7 processing fee, which can be waived if students demonstrate a financial need. Of course, the financial aid form is primarily designed to determine this.

All in all, the form is a way to guarantee that only minorities (through special federal and state scholarships) and those below the poverty line receive financial aid. If you are white, your parents make \$30,000 per year, and if they are currently sending two of your siblings to institutions of

higher learning, that is not bad. You say that you are not claimed as a dependent on your parents' income tax? Too bad again, since any type of familial contact can make your attempts at receiving federal financial aid null and void.

If the federal government is so intent on helping the students of this country, why does it prevent us from deducting educational expenses from our gross incomes? Why is it that executives can wine and dine their secretaries, yet college students cannot even write off their tuition? To make matters even more tortuous, scholarships and grants are due to be taxed by the government this year; their claim is that the typical college student is an irresponsible spendthrift who splurges his or her financial aid on cars, stereos and (God forbid again) rent and food.

As long as the only people college students have to look up to are puppets such as Gov. Bill Clements and Taft E. Benson — who gladly propagate the federal government's view on financial aid and the education-restrictive actions and policies of President Reagan and Secretary Bennett — the majority of college students in this country will continue to struggle for what should be available equally and non-prejudicially to all — a quality education.

Brian A. Koontz is a safety engineering graduate student

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 must include the major, classification, address and telephone number of the writer. Only the author's name, major and classification will be printed.



Mail Call

Students With Children

EDITOR:

I am writing in response to the Feb. 11 letter to the editor from Charles Bruce Jones. He was wondering if there are any other single parents on campus and, if so, why they haven't formed an organization.

I'd like to let Charles and the other student-parents on campus know there is an organization forming called Students With Children. The organization is for all students raising a family — not just those like Charles who are single. Students With Children has had an organizational meeting, the constitution was drafted and officers elected. It is currently in the process of being officially recognized by the University. Some of the purposes of the group are to share interests and concerns and to provide outings for the children and parents. We hope to form a babysitting co-op to give members an occasional break from the constant demands of parenting.

If Charles or other students are interested in joining Students With Children, they should contact the Student Activities Office. It may be a little time before Students With Children is listed as a recognized organization, but keep trying! We are here to provide support and share ideas.

Rachel Kennedy

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.