

Opinion

W-4 form makes good kitty litter

I attempted to fill out the IRS' new Form W-4 the other day.

At first I thought it wouldn't be so bad. I read and understood the first line: Why Must I Complete a New Form W-4? That was as far as I got. I recognized, and was even familiar with, most of the words on the form. I'd just never seen them put together in such a mind-boggling way before.

I am known for my procrastination skills, but when it comes to doing my taxes, I usually get the form completed early. Perhaps it's the idea of a refund or just not wanting to have the thing hanging over my head. More than likely, it's because I'm used to working on day-to-day deadlines, and the idea of having several months to finish the forms makes me uncomfortable.

For whatever reason, I decided to be a good little taxpayer and fill out the forms before the last minute. But before I even got to my taxes, I had to confront the W-4.

I gave it a good try. I filled out my name, address, Social Security number and marital status without too much trouble. When I got to the blank for allowances, the trouble started. My marital status changed in May, which meant I had to compute all sorts of bizarre things.

I wound my way through the algebraic labyrinth, becoming hopelessly entangled in a web of allowances, exemptions and worksheets. I watched my *Battalion* colleagues complete their forms in a matter of minutes, and I had expected to do the same. But I couldn't get around the parenthetical instructions — things like "See Step 4 on page 2" and "See page 4 for line R instructions and tables to figure the amount to enter on this line."

Since I fall under the category of Married Filing Joint Returns, the dreaded Table A on page 4 was the major hurdle I had to cross. Before you can even begin to use the table, you must go



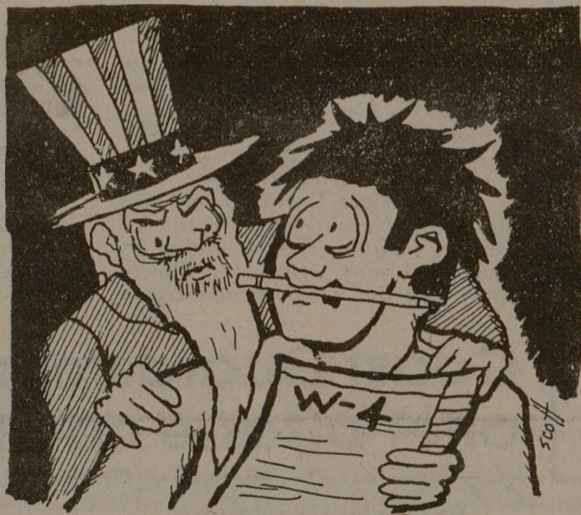
Loren Steffy

through 10 steps, multiplying, subtracting and working with numbers that seem to come from nowhere.

I must admit that all in all the new improved Form W-4 wasn't as bad as I expected. The writing style is the same incomprehensible Taxspeak we're used to on other IRS forms, and it's condensed to only four pages, meaning confusion occurs much faster. Still, it's not like the good old days of tax exemption, either. I remember when the most complicated blank on the W-4 was figuring out how many exemptions to claim.

After nearly two hours of computing, calculating and cussing, I managed to fill out the form — three times, each time a different way that generated a different answer. I had the haunting feeling that all the possible answers I had come up with were wrong.

I finally gave up on the form, threw it down on the desk in disgust and went to bed. I should mention at this point that we had run out of cat food the day before. That night, my cat, furious with me for trying to substitute Cheerios for his regular Kitty Krumpies, entered my office looking for something to destroy in revenge. While I slept, the vicious jungle beast tore the IRS Form W-4 into

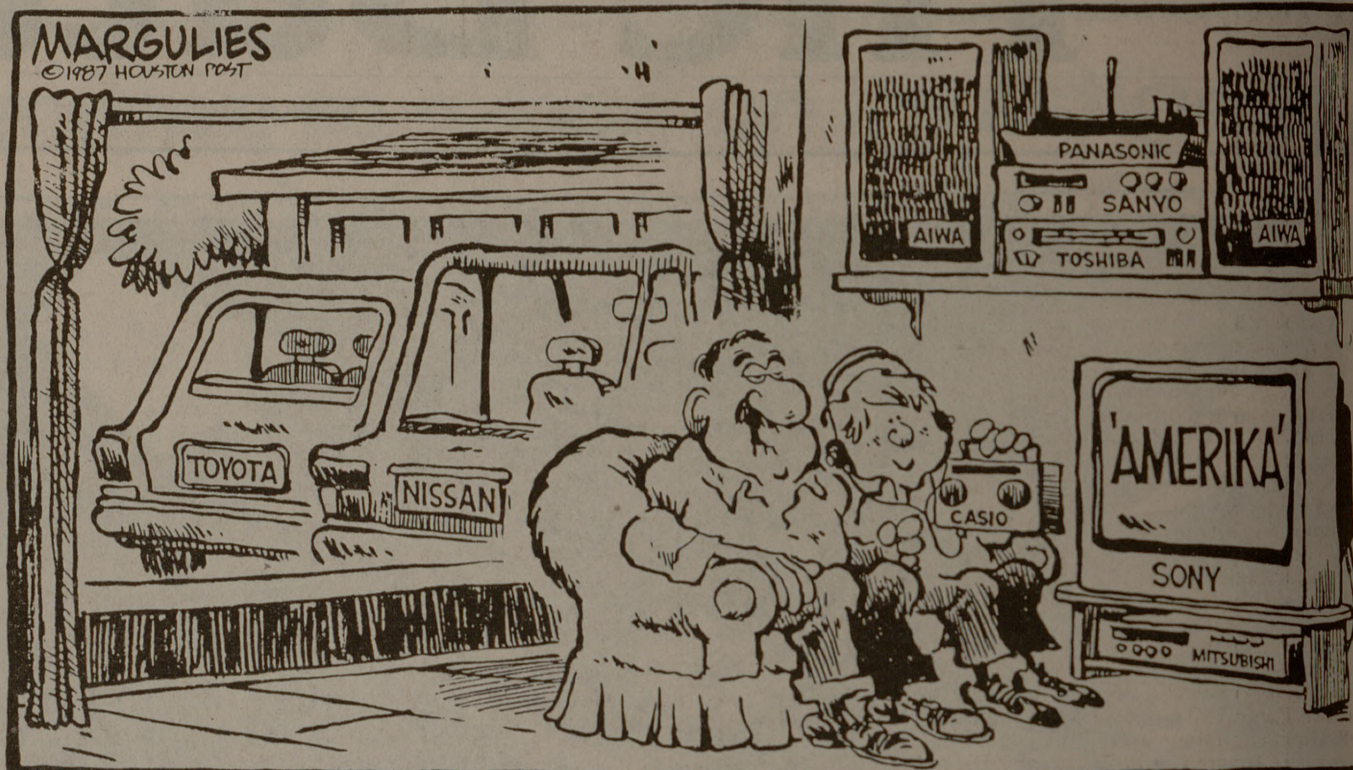


bite-sized slivers of paper, and, deciding they tasted even worse than Cheerios, spit them out one by one.

In the morning, I found the aftermath of this hideous act of destruction, and I couldn't help but smile. It was the most intelligent and merciful thing that cat had ever done.

If my cat worked for the IRS, all our lives would be a lot simpler.

Loren Steffy is a journalism graduate and editor for The Battalion.



"Remember, son... this series about a foreign takeover is purely fictional..."

What does the SAT really measure?

Greetings from Brown University. We are a group of concerned students who would like to share with Texas A&M undergraduates a referendum that we are sponsoring at Brown.

Michael Spalter
Guest Columnist

Our purpose in having the Brown student body vote on the resolution: "The College Admission office should no longer require prospective Brown students to submit SAT scores" is to determine whether this was a pressing issue within the Brown community. We believe from the initial response of our undergraduates that this is indeed a timely issue.

A&M, as you know, is considered a selective college. The SAT, according to many, is an important factor only at selective colleges. We don't believe the test is an important factor anywhere.

Many questions can be raised about the SAT. We believe the time has come when high school seniors across this country should stop having to pay to take a test which indicates the socioeconomic position of the students' parents rather than the students' ability to work.

Why do minorities do worse on the test than their educational disadvantages can account for? How substantive can the test be if some coaching companies regularly improve scores more than 150 points? How genuine are the scores if so many people are known to cheat on such poorly proctored exams? How can Educational Testing Services

(ETS), which makes the SAT, be trusted to monitor its own performance when this, their most profitable test, accounts for much of their revenue?

The SAT is not objective; it is not a valid or reliable standard. Great as it might be to have such a touchstone, this test is not one. As David Owen writes in his devastating book, *None of the Above*, "There is nothing genuinely objective about a test like the SAT; it is written, compiled, keyed, and interpreted by highly subjective human beings."

The principle difference between it (the SAT) and a test that can't be graded by a machine is that it (the SAT) leaves no room for more than one correct answer."

ETS does not have a monopoly on knowledge, though we are measured by its researchers' judgments. Needless to say, many who think creatively or who split hairs do not do well on such a test, though they do well in school.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which helped the College Board create ETS, has brought to public attention in a report soon to be published that most colleges need not require their students take the SAT, because most colleges no

longer admit selectively. If they are going to let everyone in anyway, why should they require their applicants to spend time and money on a test they don't need?

This means that Brown, as well as a few other colleges who do have competitive admissions, are the only ones who benefit from the program at all. If we get little use out of the SAT, why should we worry about jeopardizing its place in the testing market? When the influential Carnegie Foundation's report comes, many colleges that don't need the SAT actually drop it, the cost of the test will climb, and we will more urgently ask, "Why not us, too?"

As students at Brown, we are concerned about the SAT being used on our campus. Questions of bias, inaccuracy and practicality lead us to push for an evaluation of the SAT on our campus. The time has arrived for us, the undergraduates of selective colleges to question the entire testing industry in this country. Perhaps, this is an issue students at A&M would like to raise and question.

Michael Spalter is a senior at Brown University and founder of Students Against Testing.

Mail Call

Censored

EDITOR:

I just finished reading an article in the February issue of *OMNI* entitled "Science and Censorship." But upon reading the article, I discovered the title and the topic are complete opposites. The title is "Scientists against Censorship," and the article is about how certain people want to keep certain facts away from school children. If that is not censorship, I want to know what is.

More specifically, the article is yet another in a long string of repetitive mumbo jumbo in which the bigoted, atheistic authors are suppressing the scientific evidence of the creationist and labeling the evidence as "religious" to justify their censorship.

The creationists are making some giant strides in science and they are discovering some evidence that is bound to change science as we know it. It has the evolutionists so worried that they are willing to take the fight into the Supreme Court to keep their findings from being well known.

If you require a ton of bricks to hit you on the head before you realize something, then the flood of anti-creationism articles should tell you something. There is some evidence that the evolutionists don't want to get out. If the creationists are so dangerous, don't you think it would be wise to know what they are really saying, get it straight from the horse's mouth, not crooked from the jack-ass' mouth.

Kenneth Brobst '90

Sex at A&M

EDITOR:

This letter is in response to Rob Huff's comments about the *At Ease* article on "Smart Sex." There is one thing you ought to consider, Huff — not everyone has the same beliefs and values as you. The fact that Texas A&M is a sexually active campus tends to point out that not all students believe their future marriages will be destroyed due to guilt from premarital sex. Also, it is wrong to accuse *The Battalion* of encouraging sexual activity by publishing sexual health awareness articles. If college-age students' beliefs are not strong enough not to be influenced by news articles, they have more serious problems to worry about than their relationships with God.

Alex Maloy '90

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.

They must be flying high

The day the Challenger exploded, just over a year ago, I was involved in what now is known as a "near-miss" aboard a commercial airliner.

I was flying to Melbourne, Fla., on my way to Cape Canaveral to cover the Challenger story.

As my flight, a Delta DC-9, with news personnel from all over the country, flew directly over the launch pad from which the Challenger had lifted off, barely four hours earlier, I said to a colleague next to me:

"As nervous as flying makes me, I guess the chance of a commercial air crash is fairly unlikely this close to the Cape and this soon after the Challenger."

I often say things like that when I fly.



Lewis Grizzard

Somebody told me it was called "positive rationalization."

We were on final approach into the Melbourne airport. We were at perhaps 600 feet. I glanced to my left out the window and to my horror, I saw a small aircraft coming directly at me.

Later, the person sitting next to me told me I had said, "Oh my God!"

The Delta pilot swerved violently to the right to avoid a collision with the single-engine plane. A subsequent FAA investigation indicated the student pilot of the small plane had been in error and that the two planes had missed each other by only 100 feet.

Oh, my God.

Airplanes are showing an alarming tendency to run into one another or nearly miss running into one another lately.

Still, there are all the figures and all the arguments regarding how safe flying is despite the recent increases in collisions and near-misses.

But that doesn't make me any less nervous when I'm landing in a jet and I know there are student pilots and private pilots who may or may not be very good at flying an airplane, and who knows what else might be out there with which my plane could collide.

Add that to the fact the air traffic controllers are said to be short on numbers and, in some cases, experience, and the Greyhound starts looking better and better.

I will never forget the photo I saw some years ago in a private pilot's office. It showed a single-engine plane that had crashed into a tree. Said the immortal words across the photograph: "Aviation in itself is inherently safe, but in many ways, it can be less forgiving of human error than the sea."

Statistics. You can have them, especially after I read the following, a National Transportation Safety Board report in *Aviation News* concerning a 1986 crash of a private plane in Nevada which killed a man and a woman:

"... Investigators said lab tests showed the pilot's blood alcohol level was 0.18... and the level of the female passenger was 0.14. In most states, drivers are considered intoxicated at a level of 0.10

"... Local authorities removed the bodies from the wreckage. Investigators said local police reported that, as evidenced by the positions of the bodies and certain injuries to the pilot, the passenger was performing an act of oral sex at the moment of impact."

Oh, my God.

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The Battalion

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