

Opinion

The Battalion

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Avoiding conflict

The decision by the Texas attorney general that a proposed agreement between Granada Development Co., partially owned by Board of Regents Chairman David Eller, and Texas A&M constitutes a conflict of interest comes as no surprise. Although the potential for a conflict certainly exists, the University should not have needed Jim Mattox's opinion to realize that, based on appearances alone, the deal could be detrimental to all involved.

Under the arrangement, the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station would work with GDC on research and development projects. Under the proposal, GDC would fund the projects and in return receive exclusive marketing and sales license of the products. The University would receive royalties, which haven't been agreed upon.

Mattox is right in finding a conflict of interest in the deal. To those unfamiliar with the University, GDC or the details of the transaction — particularly other companies — Eller could appear to be using his influence as a regent to win the contract for his company.

As ridiculous as it may seem to those directly involved, the University should not put itself in a position where interests could be perceived as conflicting.

While the agreement may seem too good to pass up, the University later may have to sacrifice more than it's bargaining for. If the GDC-A&M transaction appears to be the result of Eller's dual interests, other corporations may question the University's integrity in the future and be leery of making contracts.

Eller still seems confused by the ruling. GDC and the University have engaged in other transactions in the past, but Eller needs to realize that with the regent's chairmanship comes a responsibility to avoid even apparent conflicts of interest.

We are not questioning Eller's sincerity, devotion or contributions to A&M. Nor are we implying that the GDC-TAES agreement was tainted with self-interest. But, in cases like this, appearances can not only be deceiving but be far more devastating than an actual conflict of interest. As we said when the board first presented the case to the attorney general, it is best to void even the appearance of impropriety.

That A&M sought the attorney general's opinion shows it gave the matter due concern. But, while Eller's relationship with the University probably had nothing to do with GDC's involvement in the deal, the University cannot overlook the potential for a conflict.

Going through with the deal now — especially after hearing Mattox's opinion — would show bad ethical judgement on A&M's part. Despite the prospective benefits of the deal, the ends do not justify the means.

A school the size of A&M can't afford to risk the effects on its image because it ignored the ethical backlash from an apparent conflict of interest.

Vietnam: we were digging our own grave

The following column is the second of a two-part series. The first column appeared in Wednesday's edition.

I remember one evening when my mother was mending my sister's shirt. My mother was crying. When I asked why, she told me that she wished God would bring peace to our country. I had heard the other kids from my town talk about peace before. They said that peace was a horrible thing because school would be longer, and ghosts of the unjustly dead would crawl up each night to scare people, especially younger kids like me. I was 11 years old.

Gong Thanh
Guest Columnist

I didn't understand why my own mother prayed for peace. But when the Viet Cong declared that they had brought peace to South Vietnam, I realized that those kids were wrong. There were no dead "ghosts;" rather, there were live "ghosts" — the Viet Cong. These "ghosts" didn't just scare the people — they killed. They killed people with a slow, painful death. For instance, they walked into my uncle's house with a piece of paper and said, "the government would like to borrow your house permanently to use as an office . . . and to honor your volunteering, we'll give you a 24-hour notice for moving." My uncle refused to move. That night he went out to buy coffee and never returned.

The next morning when the "government" returned, not only did they "borrow" the house, but everything in it. My uncle's two sons — one was 15 and the other was one year older — were drafted and sent to fight the Cambodians the same day. My uncle's wife left her home with her two daughters, who

then suddenly disappeared like their daddy. One of the wealthiest ladies in town, my uncle's wife, had to wander from street to street searching for her lost husband, her adolescent daughters and her two sons. Loneliness so overwhelmed her that she began to lose her sanity. She sang, she danced, she cried, and she laughed in the street, in the flea market, at twilight, at noon, and at midnight. On she went, calling her daughters, her sons, and her husband in those silent nights like a ghost crying, lulling her family to sleep. Silence answered her calls.

There was no such thing as an insanity institution in my hometown, or in any other town for that matter. If there were one, probably hundreds, thousands and thousands of people like my uncle's wife would be committed for the same reason.

For that reason, the people who lived next to my uncle's house were frightened. They were led to believe that if they gave their properties, including their business building, then the government wouldn't have to "borrow" their home. Three days after they offered the government everything they had worked for so many years, the government came back for their home. Tan, the oldest son in that family, was so mad that he hit a member of the government and tore up the paper. They arrested Tan. Because there was a demonstration of the people to release Tan, the government said they would hold a "people's court." On the following Saturday they took Tan out to the would-be "people's court" and made Tan dig a hole. They then tied Tan up and waited for the townfolk to come. The crowd grew larger, hoping they could support Tan and his family. The announcement

was made that the "people's court" would begin. A member of the government walked slowly toward Tan, raised pistol to Tan's head and pulled the trigger. Tan fell into the hole he had dug.

I have come to America, the dream land, where I thought I would pick up the pieces of my life and go on, where I thought I would turn over a new leaf and be happy about the future. I was wrong. Every day, something I see brings a sudden sadness, a sudden dark memory that slowly and painfully unfolds.

Yesterday, I went to a city park. Walking by the pond, I saw a little boy with his paper boat. He placed it on the pond and pushed it out. He was jumping up and down and laughing to see his boat slowly drifting. His brother held some rocks and started throwing them at the boat. One of his rocks hit right in the center of the boat. The rock slowly sank, pulling the paper boat with it. The little boy started to cry — crying loud and long.

I remember crying when I saw a sinking boat. But it wasn't a paper boat. It was a fishing boat with hundreds of people on it off the coast of Pulau Bidong — a refugee camp, a small island in West Malaysia where many boats had sunk. The island was small, but there were about 54,000 people — no utilities, not enough food, not enough water. One day, there was a boat packed with people heading toward the island.

The people on the island gathered together on the beach waving, yelling, and making signs for the boat to come in. But the Malaysian officers started shooting toward the sky, hoping the small boat would turn away. The people shouted louder, "Come in, come in," but the sounds of gunfire were louder than

but a flat, barren plain.

During the "Eternal Dreamtime," several supernatural beings arose from their underground sleep and began roaming the plain.

The places from where the beings arose became caves and water holes. Most of the beings began to spread out across the plain and became the ancestors of various plants and animals that later produced human offspring.

One of the beings, a rainbow snake that could change into a human, used to visit all the different tribes and was a unifying symbol of the creation, since he made the country's largest water hole with his tail. After creation, all of the beings went back to sleep or turned themselves into sacred trees or rock formations.

The beings still had the power to send rain, or they had signs that helped predict the future.

According to a Mesopotamian legend dating to about 3,000 B.C., the world was created when the Great Hero, Marduk, killed the Great Dragon of the Deep, Tiamat. Marduk split Tiamat in half, like an oyster, one half becoming the heavens and the other half becoming the Earth.

Another Mesopotamian legend says that the Earth was created by a god who bundled a bunch of reeds together and spread the earth over them.

The Egyptians have legends that a hermaphroditic creator-god, Atum,

rose out of the waters and stood on a lotus flower that rose from the ocean. One version of the legend states that Atum gave birth to Shu and Tefenet by masturbation.

Another version states that Atum coughed up Shu and Tefenet.

Shu separated the sky from the earth giving birth to the sky god, Nut, and the earth god, Geb. Nut and Geb gave birth to the other gods, Osiris, Seth, Isis and Nephthys, who went on to create man and animals.

One legend from the Memphis region of Egypt states that the earth grew out of a lotus flower that rose from the ocean. Man arrived when Khnum, the animal god, began making people on his potter's wheel.

According to the Hindu religion, the world and universe is merely the dream of a great god. Each century (god's time, not ours), the god wakes up for a short while and then goes back to sleep. When he begins to dream again, a new world and universe is created.

Japanese myths state that the world was a great muddy river and that a great bird flapped its wings and separated the lands from the water. Fiji Islands have a legend that says land was scooped out of the bottom of the ocean and piled up into various islands.

Chinese myths state that there was a great egg that contained the god P'an Ku. One day P'an Ku hatched out of the egg and began to make the world with a hammer and chisel.

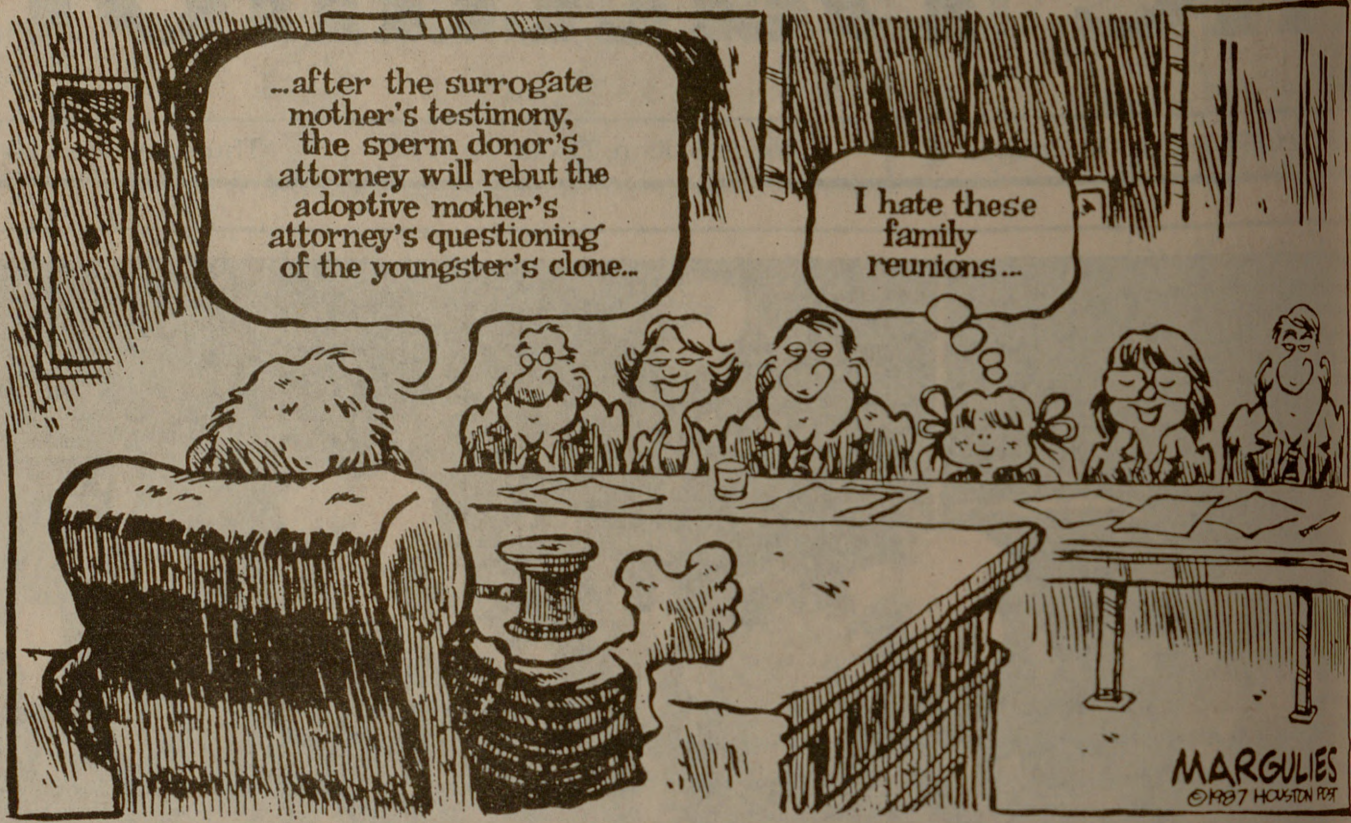
According to philosopher-writer Douglas Adams, the world was created by a race of mice looking for the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything. A great computer called "Deep Thought" was built to solve the problem and after 7.5 million years it gave its answer as 42. The mice had to build another bigger and better computer to help them to fully understand the question. That computer is the Earth.

If textbooks are to give every "theory" of creation, they would have to include each of these and hundreds more. Those who claim that they want the Judeo-Christian creation story taught as an alternative to evolutionary theory are hoping only to force their religious beliefs upon young, impressionable school children. That's just what they claim to be the great secular-humanist threat — forcing beliefs on the young.

There is a difference between religious belief and scientific evidence. Evolutionary theory is based on the laws of nature as best known and tested by science and is not some abstract belief that can be explained or proven.

There are a lot of unanswered questions in evolutionary theory, but so much of the puzzle is complete that it is easy to guess at the size of the missing pieces. But religion — all religion — is based on one great, unanswered question. Religion is a puzzle that can be solved only by the heart and not by the head.

Karl Pallmeyer is a journalism graduate and a columnist for The Battalion.



Creating the ultimate textbook



Karl Pallmeyer

Certain religious groups have been claiming that school textbooks on science are incomplete and misleading because they don't mention creationism as a viable explanation for the existence of the universe. The religious groups say that evolutionary theory is just that — a theory — and other "theories" ought to be taught as well.

The religious groups say they want both sides of the creation story printed and taught in schools.

The only problem is that those religious groups don't realize that there are more than two sides to the story.

There are other religions, some even older than Judeo-Christian beliefs. Several Central Asian pastoral tribes, including the Yakuts, Tartars, Altains and Burhats, once held the belief that the world was created by a god of the sky.

This god created the world, which was filled with water, by dredging up earth from the bottom of the ocean. People and animals appeared on the land soon after its creation.

The Australian Aborigines believe that at one time the earth was nothing

but a flat, barren plain. During the "Eternal Dreamtime," several supernatural beings arose from their underground sleep and began roaming the plain. The places from where the beings arose became caves and water holes. Most of the beings began to spread out across the plain and became the ancestors of various plants and animals that later produced human offspring. One of the beings, a rainbow snake that could change into a human, used to visit all the different tribes and was a unifying symbol of the creation, since he made the country's largest water hole with his tail. After creation, all of the beings went back to sleep or turned themselves into sacred trees or rock formations. The beings still had the power to send rain, or they had signs that helped predict the future. According to a Mesopotamian legend dating to about 3,000 B.C., the world was created when the Great Hero, Marduk, killed the Great Dragon of the Deep, Tiamat. Marduk split Tiamat in half, like an oyster, one half becoming the heavens and the other half becoming the Earth. Another Mesopotamian legend says that the Earth was created by a god who bundled a bunch of reeds together and spread the earth over them. The Egyptians have legends that a hermaphroditic creator-god, Atum,

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