

Opinion

Government should not regulate religious practices

There's a small, unassuming Texas cactus found only along the lower Rio Grande River that's caused five years of unnecessary legal turmoil for a particular church in Arizona.



Sondra Pickard

Its white blossom is eventually replaced by a tuft of white down, resembling a radish in size and shape, which can be sliced and dried into a so-called "button." When eaten, this button produces what has been described as "a distinctive sensation of spiritual exaltation," and chewing the plant "allows one to increase feelings beyond an ordinary level."

Needless to say, it's not your ordinary

cactus. In fact, it's more often referred to as a drug, not a plant.

Because of its hallucinogenic attributes, state and federal laws prohibit its use with one exception.

Indians belonging to the Native American Church of North America have been legally using it during religious rites since October of 1978. The Indians' ancestors celebrated the plant for its ability to put them in touch with spirits. Only certified members of the present-day group, which consists of 36 tribes representing about 250,000 Indians, can purchase the plant legally, and the government intends to keep it that way.

Peyote is the plant's name, and the Peyote Way Church of God has been trying to convince the government that it, too, should be allowed to obtain and use the plant for religious purposes. Made up primarily of non-Indians, Peyote Way members reside in a

commune in Arizona. In 1982, three of its members were arrested in Richardson for possession of peyote, after which the church's founder filed suit, questioning the constitutionality of the law.

Intending to prove the new church is a sham, federal attorneys are on a quest to deny it access to the plant.

The sham, however, is not the church. Who's to judge whether a particular religion, be it old or new, is legitimate? Certainly not the government, which, if memory serves correct, should separate itself from such minglings. The courts will determine the church's legitimacy, and will then decide what it can and cannot do during religious services — that's the sham.

The existing law was passed as a joint resolution of Congress, marking a major turning point in government attitudes toward Indian religion. In the

past, most attitudes were marked by interference in native religions.

Interference is the key word. Just as it once interfered with the NAC's use of peyote, the law is now interfering with another group's religious practices.

The government certainly should not deprive the Indians of a practice so deeply engrained in their culture, but at the same time, allowing it to be borrowed by another can do nothing to harm it.

According to an Austin attorney representing the state, what's most at stake is the limited supply of the Texas cactus, which could possibly be threatened if demand for it increased. But a threatened peyote supply is not a sound reason to limit its use to only one interested party.

If Texas becomes peyote-depleted, either the rituals will have to stop or the churches will have to find a new supply — Mexico, perhaps, where the peyote

plant is abundant.

Throughout Western history, many groups have discovered the mind-altering properties of drugs and have then incorporated them into their religious practices. Since 1960, the use of drugs for religious purposes has been one argument in the battle to make the use of "psychedelic" drug groups

But despite legal pressures and unanimous court decisions against psychedelic use, drug-oriented churches remain and probably will for some time. To exclude the NAC from drug laws while including all others is meddling in something, namely religion, that should be beyond our government's reach.

Sondra Pickard is a senior journalism major and editor of *The Battalion*.

School fees benefit A&M, not student

Now that the second summer session of 1987 is here, the appearance of the dreaded maroon and white fee slip has come and gone.



Doug Driskell

Guest Columnist

During four years of attendance at Texas A&M, I have never questioned the various fees I pay each semester. A quick glance at the "amount due" column and then the painful writing of a check is usually all I ever did.

But walking from the Pavilion the other day with a fresh copy of my fee slip in hand, I looked at the itemization of my fees.

Item number one was tuition. Mine came to a whopping \$240 for six hours. This seemed rather high for just a second summer session, especially since I am an in-state tuition payer.

This could not be right. I deduced that this total included the first session's tuition fee. Why not just give me the present total instead of the past added to the present?

The student service fee was next, and it was no small number. This fee was only second to the infamous building use fee.

No matter how much I pondered the student service fee, I could not come up with an explanation for it. I consulted the Summer Class Schedule booklet.

On page 14, the following explanation was given: "All students pay this fee at the rate of \$5.20 per semester credit hour . . . It covers medical services and services provided by the Memorial Student Center. It entitles the student to receive *The Battalion* newspaper, reduced admission to many MSC programs and services of the student legal advisor, student counseling service, student activities and intramural-recreational sports."

Whew! Just \$5.20 per semester credit hour, just \$61, but how many services do I use?

What medical services are provided by the MSC? I thought the health center fee took care of medical services.

What other services does the MSC provide for me? Well, there is the check cashing service. Am I actually paying a student to cash my check or am I paying for money lost on the "good ags" who write bad checks?

There's the MSC bowling alley. Am I paying for bowling alley maintenance? I don't bowl. When I do bowl I like to sip from some alcohol to deaden the pain I get from rolling all my shots into the gutter. It does not even serve alcohol.

The MSC also provides a bookstore. I hope it doesn't get any of my fee money. The prices there are already too high.

Now, since I am a journalist, I am glad that *The Battalion* gets some of this money. Yes, it is a small newspaper, but I think it is safe to say many students use it — either for informative reasons or just to line a birdcage.

As for the "reduced admission to many MSC programs," I must ask, what programs?

I called the MSC programs office and found it is having a summer dinner theater on July 8, 9 and 10 and on Aug. 5, 6, 7 and 8. The two plays are *Wally's Cafe* and *Saving Grace*. The ticket prices are \$17 for students and \$20 for non-students. These prices are for the small plate. So, I am getting a three dollar discount to this event. Is this really a discount though?

If I have already paid \$61 for this fee, I am entitled to \$61 back in some form. I am pretty sure I will not have time to attend this event because I work to pay these fees. Even if I were to go every time, I would still save \$24 which is not even close to \$61.

It is good we have theater groups performing at the MSC, but why at dinner and why must I pay even though I will not attend? Are these fees a sort of insurance I pay just in case I need a cultural fix?

The health center is another example. Why not charge patients \$15 for the first visit and then nothing there on. At least it will give them a choice.

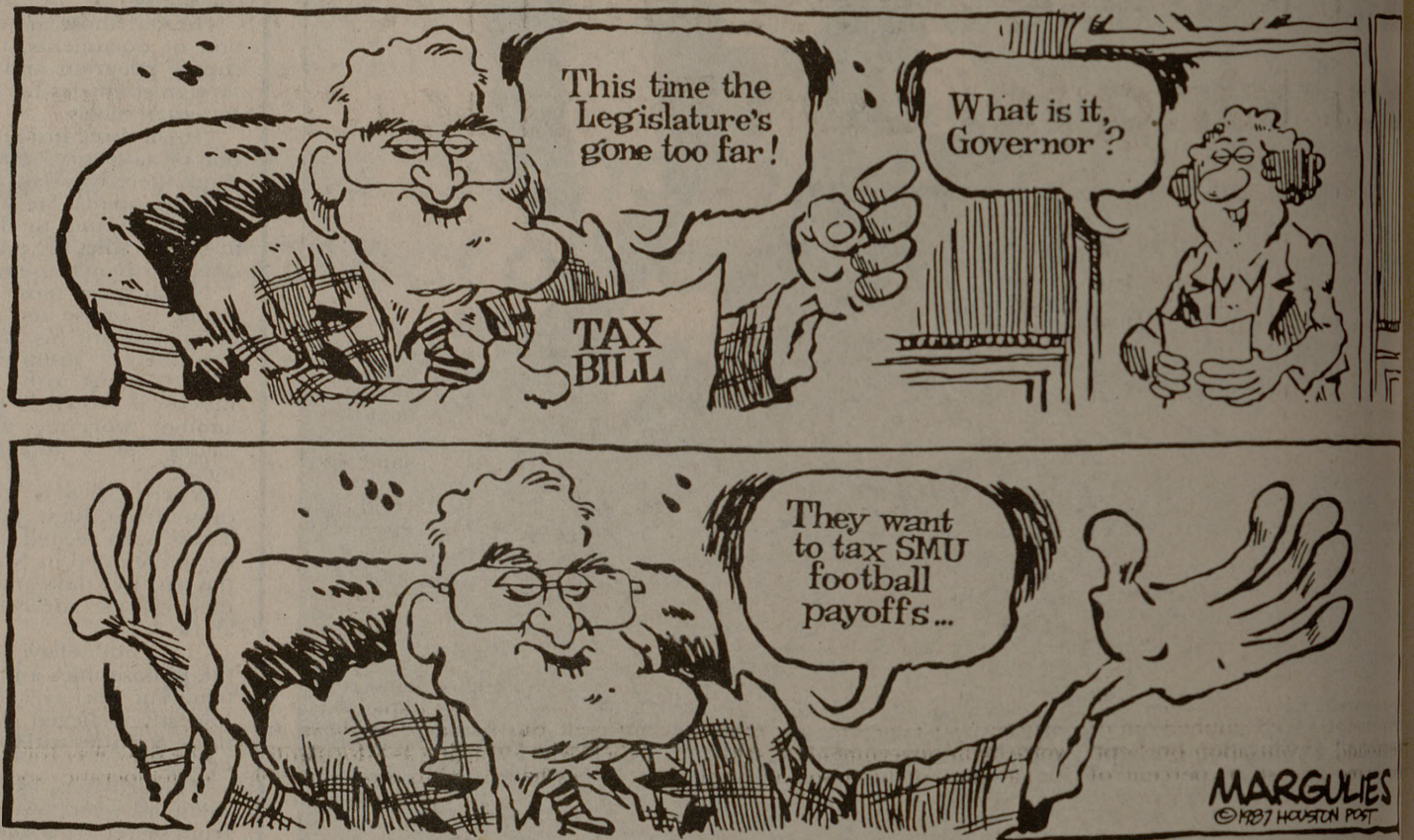
A choice is what we won't get this fall. Every student will be charged a computer access fee of \$3 per semester hour. This means if you take a history class you get charged \$9. If you take a physical education class you pay for the use of a computer. Every hour at the University will cost an extra \$3 dollars.

I think I am getting the big picture. If the University needs more money, it makes more fees. These fees are not to provide benefits to me, but they are just a device to collect more money for the operation of the University.

How about a worthwhile fee like a "bribery fee." This fee will entitle every student to get rid of two parking tickets. All they would have to do is show their paid fee slip.

But wait a minute. What if a person never gets a ticket? Then that person will gripe and another column will be written and another justification will have to be made.

Doug Driskell is a senior journalism major and a guest columnist for *The Battalion*.



It's all a matter of taste

One of the hardest things about traveling in a foreign country, besides not being able to understand the graffiti on the restroom walls, is learning to eat certain native foods.



Lewis Grizzard

I was offered "head of young cow" in France once.

I declined, stating an aversion to eating anything with its ears and nose still in place.

In the Soviet Union, I was served something that was blue. I never did find out what it was, but I have a rule not to eat anything that is blue.

I was aboard the French sailing yacht, *Le Flute Enchante*, recently, and we had anchored in a small Aegean cove for swimming and skiing.

I watched a man swim out of the water on the nearby shore with a rather frightened-looking creature he had just rendered lifeless with a spear gun.

"What's that?" I asked our skipper, Jean Pierre.

"Octopus," he said.

I had seen pictures of octopus (since I have no earthly idea how to spell the plural of octopus, and don't feel like trying to find out, we'll just stick to octopus to mean one or several).

But here I was only a few feet from one. It was pink. I looked like a bowl of jello somebody had taken one of those garden weasels to.

The man who speared the octopus then proceeded to bang his catch over the rocks.

"Why is he doing that?" I asked Jean Pierre. "It looks pretty much already dead to me."

"He's tenderizing the meat for cooking," the skipper answered. "They've been doing it here that way for many many years."

I added octopus to my list of things never to eat. It did not look that appetizing, and I don't want to eat anything you've got to bang over the rocks for an hour or so to get the toughness out.

Besides, you remember all those movies they made out of Jules Verne's books about octopus and other sea monsters ate entire ships? I can't see how anything that would attack a ship could be very good to eat.

That evening, we pulled into a tiny port

and the Americans who were traveling together decided to take the French crew to dinner.

Jean Pierre did the ordering. I had no idea what he said to the waiter, but he brought out enough food to keep a small army marching for several days.

I picked out the fish, the salad, the crust and the bread. There was also a fried substance with an outstanding crust and delicious white meat inside. Shrimp, I figured. After we had finished eating and the wine bottles were mostly empty, Jean Pierre asked me, "So, how did you like the octopus?"

That's what the fried stuff was, octopus and I had eaten it. I congratulated myself learning to enjoy a new delicacy and fanned myself as quite a man of the world when it came to food.

"This is definitely *haute cuisine*," said another American at the table.

Wanting to show my newly discovered ability to be at home at any table in the world, I replied, "That's *haute cuisine*," blow on it a little before you put it in your mouth."

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