

Opinion

Let any group adopt a highway

After being orphaned for more than a month, miles of the state's highways and the trash found on them are once again up for adoption, thanks to an intelligent decision on the part of the state highway commission. Included among the names seen on the big blue signs dotting the road sides will be the Austin Lesbian-Gay Political Caucus, and rightly so.

The state's successful and innovative Adopt-A-Highway program was reinstated Wednesday after a brief but tactless disappearance that couldn't help but look unfair. On June 12, the program was abruptly suspended after the political caucus sought to participate. The highway commission's excuses for doing so seemed legitimate, but its timing was discourteous to the group in question as well as to the other 2,377 organizations involved.

The commission apparently stopped the program to evaluate its policy toward all political action group applicants, not just the lesbian-gay political caucus. Also, it was said to be studying questions of participant liability and the overall cost-effectiveness of the cleanup program.

The result of the closing was a set of new rules, which say groups trying to defeat or promote legislation or political candidates cannot participate. Leave it to bureaucrats to look for problems, just when they seem to have found a nice solution to a dirty situation.

Although its name indicated otherwise, the Austin Lesbian-Gay Political Caucus fits into neither category and was allowed to participate. But it shouldn't make a difference who is walking down our roads picking up unwanted trash. The point is that a once serious litter problem is being solved in a unique and effective way. Anyone interested in contributing should be welcomed, regardless of political affiliation or sexual preference.

In terms of its success, the program has exceeded all the state's original expectations. Locally, 38 groups have pledged their support. There are many areas around the state in which all eligible stretches of road have been taken. The program has had an impact not only on those directly involved, but on the public as a whole, which sees the names of the participating groups almost anywhere they go in Texas.

The new rules are set and probably won't change. So be it. What's important is that Adopt-A-Highway is back and should continue until every Texas mile is litter-free.

— The Battalion Editorial Board

Mail Call

Rotarians help in training of Mexican firemen

EDITOR:

Rotarians are known for their eagerness to lend a helping hand, and thanks to the efforts of two such clubs in Killeen, the helping hand might make the difference between life and death to someone trapped in a burning building.

The Killeen and Killeen Heights Rotary clubs (District 587) and the clubs in their sister district in Mexico (District 413) are taking part in a new program in conjunction with the Brayton Firemen's Training School in College Station, which is conducted each year by the Texas Engineering Extension Service.

This year, for the first time, the clubs co-sponsored 11 firefighters from Mexico who participated in the 21st Annual Spanish Firemen's Training School, which was held July 12-17.

The school teaches Spanish-speaking fire personnel involved in industry and municipalities state-of-the-art fire prevention and suppression techniques.

We couldn't be more pleased that Rotary Clubs have gotten involved. This program has provided a boost to our Spanish school, and we know that in years to come it will be a real addition. Giving firefighting training to those who need it most is what we're all about, and that's precisely the kind of access that Rotary is providing.

The idea originated with Keith Langford, of the Killeen Heights Rotary Club. Langford is the emergency medical coordinator with the city of Killeen and a former associate training specialist with Fire Protection Training.

Others involved in its establishment were Mike Pinson, international training coordinator for District 587 and Ken Feight, both of the Killeen Heights Club.

The Fire Protection Training Division was established in 1930 to train municipal firefighters in the state of Texas and now includes a 60-acre firemen training field and several officers around the state.

Last year 438 fire protection classes were conducted with 23,495 students for a total of 411,300 student hours involving students from around the world.

Thomas Foster
assistant division head
Fire Protection Training

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.

The Battalion

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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.

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Firemen have big boots to fill

Have you ever noticed that at every party there is at least one joker who thinks he or she can run the country better than the President, has the secret to nuclear disarmament, or a fool-proof plan for ending world hunger?

What these buffoons don't realize is that the joke is on them. Everyone listening, those who aren't drunk anyway, know the second string quarterback is always the most popular guy in town when the team is losing. But, if these characters spend some time in someone else's shoes, they may find that they don't have all the answers after all.

Well, with all the firefighters in town the last three weeks, I must have heard every one of "those damn firemen" complaints — everything from lack of parking to an inadequate supply of places to get drunk. So, I decided to take a walk in a firefighter's shoes, or boots actually, to see what it is they really have to do. I figured there has to be more to being a firefighter than drinking the town dry, taking up all the good seats in restaurants, and overflowing the already full parking lots.

And believe me there is. First, to drive a fire truck you have to be related to Dorothy of The Wizard of Oz fame. She was an experienced house flyer. Driving one of those big, red Tonka trucks is like driving a house. Although, unlike Dorothy's house, many of them are air conditioned and have power steering.

So, since I didn't have to shift, I settled behind the wheel and took the "house" for a spin. It was easy to figure out why the windshields of fire trucks are so big. You have to see where you're going the first time — there can be no backing up. Rear view mirrors are useless because, for as far as the eye can see in one of them, you can't find the end of the truck. It seems to go on forever. The reason firefighters always park in the street is because there can be no parallel parking.

Then, they have to get dressed for

work. That photogenic suit that Joe Firefighter wears, the one that looks so good on television, is called bunker gear. And, if you think fire's hot, just try on one of those get-ups.

The rubber boots go up to the top of your legs, the coat goes down past your knees (at least mine did), and the helmet is a complicated contraption in itself. Then, you have gloves, ski-mask type things, and straps and buckles of every sort. The whole outfit is hot, itchy and it stinks.

How they manage to dress themselves is a mystery. But, how they manage to dress themselves before the fire they're going to get totally out of control is one for Agatha Christie.

But, the fires are exciting. There is something about being so close to that much potential danger that is invigorating — once you get past the feeling that your face is melting off that is.

On one of the project fires, the instructor put me on the nozzle of the hose. This is one of, if not the most important position on the line. I felt so important.

Of course, I knew full well by the way the hose was making circular motions as I gripped on to it for dear life, that the real firefighters were in control, not me. It was an enormously comforting thought.

After I tried my hand at a gas fire, then an oil fire, I was ready to move up the fire ladder of success in participatory journalism. It was then that I tried something that made the thought of staying forever tied to my computer in the safe newsroom very appealing — the smoke house.

To experience (as that's the only thing I can call it) this project, I had to add an air tank and a breathing apparatus thing to my already heavy, hot, itchy, smelly, and yes, now wet bunker gear. The smoke house is designed to resemble a house fire. It's dark, smokey, hot and full of obstacles.

The objective of the game was to enter door number one and make your way through the maze, which included going up and down stairs, around fallen ceiling beams and various other things, but I have no idea what they were since

I couldn't see two inches in front of my face. Then if you find door number one you win. The prize is escape.

To complicate matters, when I entered door number one, I had to crawl with my right hand on the wall and my left one checking for obstacles in front of my face. It got pretty tricky about this time. Oh, I almost forgot, while I was getting myself blocked in closets in the dark — I had to concentrate on my breathing. You were told that if I didn't breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth I'd hyperventilate.

Down on the floor, in the darkness and heat, with sore knees and a heavy contraption on my back I started to very light headed as my frustration trying to get out of the closet began to build. It occurred to me that I had forgotten about my carefully practiced breathing technique. In fact, I had forgotten to breathe at all. Now that time has passed it seems so silly that I could forget to breathe.

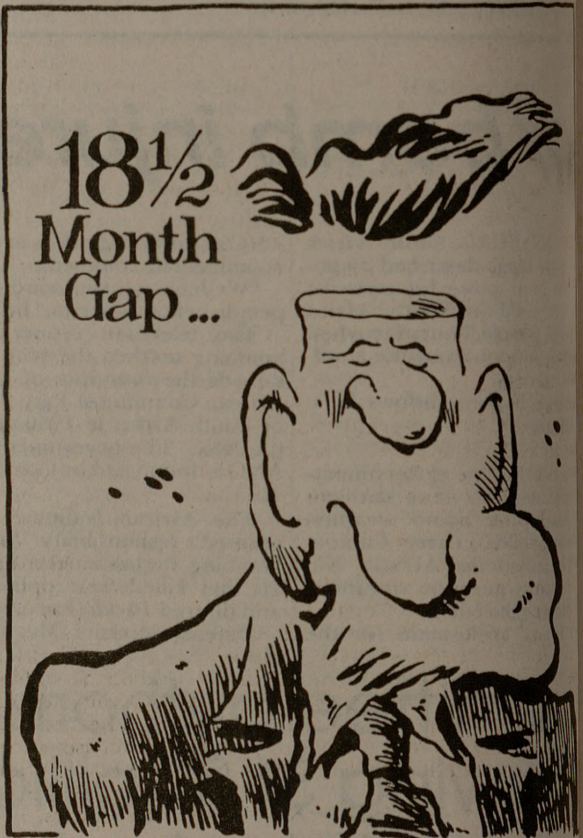
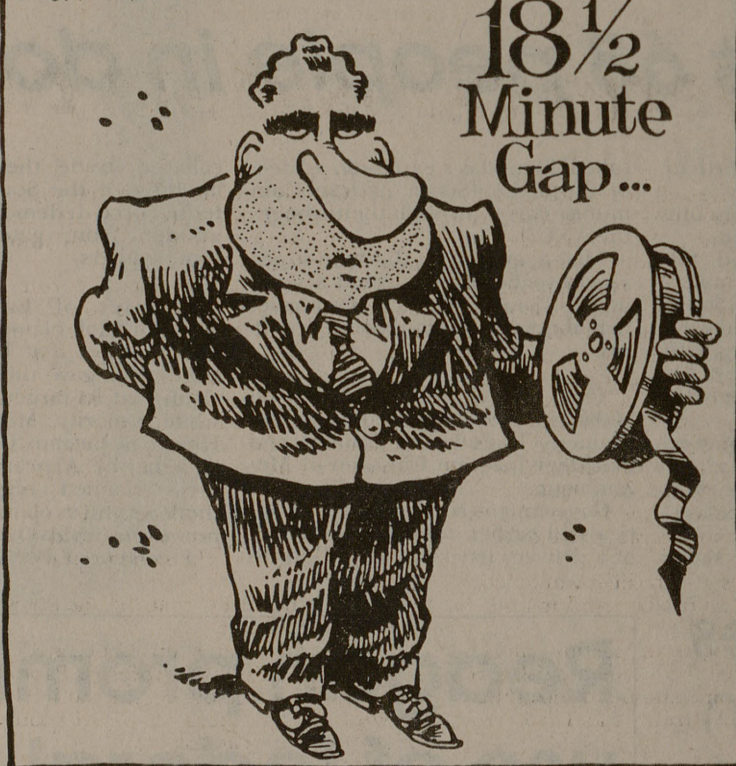
Well, silly or not, I'm just glad I remembered in time and didn't have to be carried out in front of all those firefighters. Although the Fire Protection Training instructor helped me through my whole experience, a junior firefighter, Tim Pfannstiel, called me a "real trooper," and would have been most sympathetic, the rest of them, after they were sure I wasn't hurt, would have loved it.

These men and women must have been given something more from God than I was, because there is no way I could have gotten a small taste of it, would risk my life daily for people whom I didn't know. Firefighters don't just rescue cats from trees and wash their always-clean fire trucks, they risk their lives. You know — dieing. And they do this for everyone, even the people who vote down pay raises for them. And many of these firefighters do this for free.

With all the expensive training, carefully practiced and reviewed techniques, dare-devil spirit and teamwork, it's ironic that the leading cause of death among firefighters in Texas is falling off the truck.

Carolyn Garcia is assistant city editor for *The Battalion*.

MARGULIES
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The wall around the Russians

President Reagan was standing at the Berlin Wall a couple of months ago when he said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."



Lewis Grizzard

On that wall are wreaths in remembrance of people who tried to get over it and were killed as a result of their attempts to embrace the sweet arms of freedom.

A couple of years ago, I spent two weeks in the Soviet Union. I thought that experience would enlighten me as to what it is like to be locked out of the rest of the world.

In some ways, it did.

The only news I could get had been tampered with by the government. Guards went through my luggage and took away a football media guide I was carrying as reading material. They thought it had to do with politics, and I wasn't allowed to bring it into the country.

I couldn't get into my hotel unless I showed a guard my pass. Citizens of the Soviet Union are not allowed inside hotels where tourists are staying.

I was warned not to smile when my picture was taken for my visa. I asked why not.

"The Soviets," I was told, "are suspicious of smiles."

But all that gave me only a brief hint of life from behind a wall, a barbed wire fence, a curtain of iron.

All the time I was in the Soviet Union, I knew I would be leaving soon.

Those millions of other poor souls would have to stay.

Something I tried to get answered during those two weeks is why there aren't more protests by Soviet citizens against the tyranny of the government.

Americans wouldn't stand for such a thing, of course. We would march, riot, and die to remove our shackles. We have done it many times before.

I did manage to come away with a few reasons why people of the Soviet Union continue to take whatever the government wants to dish out for them.

• The Soviet people are patriotic. For centuries they have had to guard against invasions of countless hordes of armies. There remain the markings of German shells on buildings in Leningrad where Soviets held on against the Nazi siege of World War II.

• There is a legacy of oneness and solidarity in numbers that binds the Soviet masses.

• The Soviet people don't compare their lives to others who live in freedom because they know little of what else is beyond the guarded boundaries, and the government wants to keep it that way. How are you to keep 'em down on the farm, etc.?

We constantly tell ourselves how precious our freedom is, but most of us still take it for granted, and I am as guilty as any.

But there is one thing:

I can tell you when the Lufthansa jet from Moscow to Frankfurt lifted its tail off Soviet turf, the group of Americans whom I was travelling broke out into a spontaneous cheer.

Some even cried.
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