

Opinion

Sematech is not the miracle it appears to be

If you listened to some state officials, you'd think Sematech was a miracle cure for the state's economic ills. The semiconductor research consortium's decision to locate its national headquarters in Austin has been hailed as the biggest event this side of the Second Coming.



Sue Krenek

But under all the hoopla is some bad news for A&M — and some deals that don't seem quite right.

Sematech was put together by 13 American semiconductor firms eager to match Japan's lead in semiconductor technology. Its heavy funding makes it a prime target for states trying to lure clean, high-tech industry.

So all seems reasonable for Texas to go all out trying to snag this prize. The state's hefty incentive package includes about \$10 million so Sematech executives can get discounted mortgages on

homes they buy in Austin. Their children will automatically become Texas residents, which should hit the taxpayers for about \$312,000 in lost out-of-state tuition. Add in \$100,000 to subsidize country club memberships, \$100,000 to help spouses find work and \$40,000 for tickets to sporting events. The pot gets very sweet. And it doesn't stop there.

The bottom line for the state is jobs, about 800 of them. The prospect has Gov. Bill Clements overjoyed. But the ugly truth is that only about half of those jobs will be available for Texans, since about 400 employees will be transferred to fill the slots. Most of those will be on the production line. And when you realize that semiconductor production involves caustic chemicals, the "clean industry" designation can start to wear a bit thin.

State and city officials, however, were seduced by the jobs and the consortium's \$250 million annual budget. They were seduced to the point that they failed to consider such issues as the quality of the jobs that would be made available. The *Texas Observer* pointed out that spending for social issues gets in-

tense budget scrutiny. With Sematech, though, the question wasn't whether to spend on incentives but how much to spend.

And it all sounds pretty reasonable. The jobs and money are desperately needed to prop up Austin's sagging economy. High-tech research is good for state universities. But taxpayers may not want to subsidize this corporate wooing. And that's what the state forgot to consider.

Somehow it seems ironic: The same businesspeople who complain about subsidizing government aid programs for the disadvantaged now want subsidies for themselves. Call it welfare for the wealthy. Or, as the *Observer* did, socialism for the rich — a system where venture capitalists can line up for their share of government funds.

Rep. Ron Wilson of Houston was one of the few legislators who questioned the package. Texas' constitution bars the use of public funds for private purposes. Wilson used that technicality to kill a \$50 million bond package intended to fund the Sematech incentives.

Faced with the fact that what they

were trying to do was unconstitutional, state officials did what they do best: made an end run around the law. And this is where A&M comes in, because state officials decided to take the money from the Permanent University Fund.

The PUF was set up as a reserve fund for A&M and UT. It ensures that both university systems will have adequate funding during budget squeezes such as the one the state's going through now. It is supposed to be permanent and untouchable. And part of UT's share is now going to fund the Sematech incentives.

Clements and other officials assured the university it would be repaid in appropriations during the state's next budget session. The last budget session, for anyone who somehow missed it, was chaos. Universities scraped for funds and lobbied heavily to prevent budget cuts. Current projections are that the next budget will be even tighter, and state schools can look forward to the fact that \$50 million of higher education's shrinking pie already is promised to UT.

The university decided to shell out more money for Sematech, renovating a

building and turning over part of percomputing to the consortium. Executive Vice President Gerhard F. told the *Observer* the spending was justified because of the benefit Sematech will bring to UT's engineering program.

Don't get me wrong: Sematech probably is a good thing for Texas, sidestepping the constitution isn't no matter how pretty the brass ring. In the end, UT can't lose. The hope of having the consortium in Austin is great. The Legislature promises to back most of what the university is spending. It's a great deal — if not for UT.

And the taxpayers got off easy: they didn't have to pay for the incentive package. So who loses: A&M and other state schools that will compete for higher education funds. And in the future, education could suffer as well. Once you dip into the PUF, the money gets easier and easier. And the funds from education to incentives is tempting when you have a large empty research park to fill.

Just like A&M does.

Sue Krenek is a senior journalist and editor of *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

Wake up Ags!

EDITOR:

My letter is in response to Sharla Richards' letter (1/26/88) concerning the "loss" of her friends backpack. Sharla, I am an Aggie from the top of my head to the tips of my toes. I live the Aggie Code of Honor. I do not lie, cheat, or steal, and I do not tolerate those who do. I have lost "friends" due to my belief in this Code of Honor. I stand at football games, attend Silver Taps, go to Muster and behave like a true Aggie should.

Yet, in my four years here, I have seen my fair share of two-percenters. I am referring to those students who do choose to lie, cheat and steal. I have no pity for them, and I am not (as you and your friend are) my car, my apartment, and I take my backpack with me everywhere!

Wake up Ags! Bob Wiatt reports in *The Battalion* at least twice a year that most thefts on campus could have been prevented by locking dorm rooms, using bicycle chains and by not leaving backpacks unattended.

So quit crying "where's our Aggie Honor" and get smart — protect yourself and your belongings. I admit that the Aggie Code of Honor is a bit tainted, but I am not and never will be ashamed to call myself an Aggie!

Tracie Green '88

Some solutions are just too simple

EDITOR:

The proposed solution to the conflict between trains and Aggie commuters — lowering the rail bed — reminds me of the proposal submitted by a city commissioner in a Florida community bisected by an intracoastal waterway.

A drawbridge was located over the city's main street. Opening the drawbridge constantly interrupted traffic. The record indicates the commissioner seriously suggested dredging underneath the bridge so that the water traffic could pass beneath without the bridge having to be opened. It's the old "don't raise the bridge, lower the water" mentality.

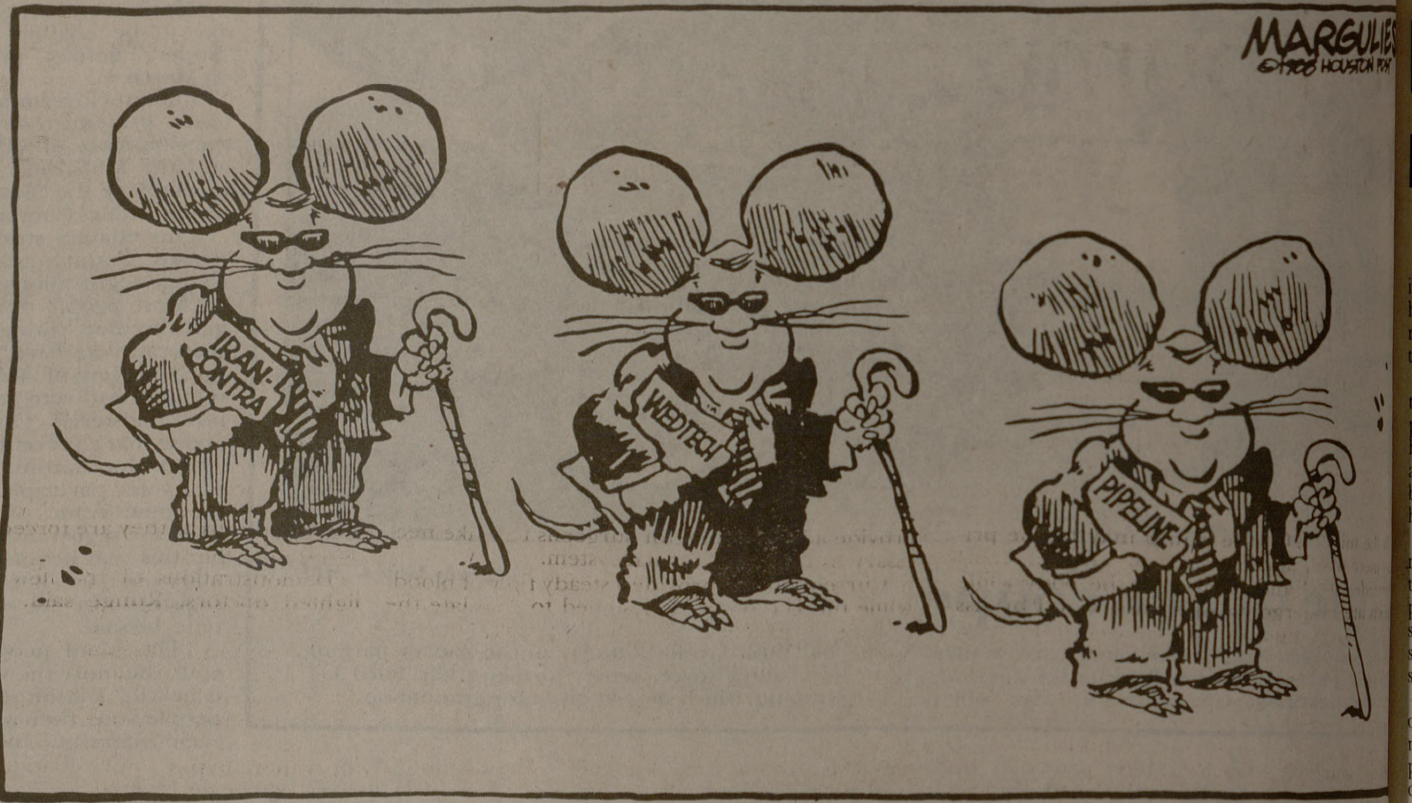
The problem is not the train traffic. It's the lack of imagination in developing alternatives, particularly those that could be offered by local traffic engineers.

A simple solution would be to re-program the Welborn Road traffic lights so that they won't automatically turn flashing red as trains are passing. If the Welborn lights remained green, the north and southbound traffic flow could continue and would clear. Vehicles on the cross streets, which cannot cross Welborn with trains on the track, should be given the green light as soon as the trains pass. And one additional footbridge over the track would handle the foot traffic, which by and large disdains use of the bridge currently in place.

But simple solutions don't appear to be the hallmark in resolving traffic problems in and around the university. Witness the absence of campus or city police to handle the increased traffic on Ireland Street due to the closing of Ross Street. Attempting to cross onto University Drive through both competing pedestrian traffic and a short green light is impossible. An officer directing traffic at peak hours to allow a more equitable flow for a longer green and a separate pedestrian walk signal are apparently solutions that are too simple. Perhaps University Avenue should be lowered?

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Three Blind Meese

Humanism is an enduring philosophy

Robert Dowdy
Guest Columnist

One of the most enduring philosophies in history is humanism. But at the same time, it's also one of the most misunderstood, especially with the rise of religious fundamentalism in this decade.

In recent years there have been claims, backed up by the courts, that secular humanism is a religion. It has its own propositions and goals, but it doesn't contain the dogmas and doctrines of an organized religion. In addition, humanism makes no threats, promises or guarantees about the future. It has its basis in humanity, and so is more realistic than any religion could be.

There are several kinds of humanism including secular, religious, moral, and ethical. But they all agree on basic positions and goals. Humanism is the glorification of human achievements and the conviction that the human race needs an alternative for the future, a future that stresses the infinite value of human creativity and cooperation between different cultures and nations.

According to the Humanist Manifesto, Humanists generally agree on the following propositions and goals.

1. Religion may inspire dedication to

the highest ethical ideals, but it does a disservice to humanity when it places revelation, ritual and God above human needs. Humanism is not atheism but non-theism. It rejects those features of religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their potential.

2. Humans are responsible for what they are or will become. Promises of immortal salvation and threats of eternal damnation distract humans from self-actualization and correcting social injustice. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body. In addition, utopia-seeking religions and ideologies are only obstacles to human progress.

3. Human life has meaning because we develop our own futures.

4. Faith and passion are not substitutes for reason and intelligence. Humanists do not, however, advocate the use of science without emotion.

5. The preciousness and dignity of the individual is a central humanist value.

6. A civilized society should be a tolerant one. Therefore, there should never be laws outlawing abortion, birth control, divorce or any lifestyle an individual chooses.

7. Humanists support the full range of civil liberties which not only includes freedom of speech, the press, religion but also an individual's right to die, euthanasia, and the right to suicide.

8. Bureaucracy should be reduced. People are more important than laws.

9. The separation of church and state and of ideology and state are imperatives.

10. A humane society should justify economic systems by how well it improves the quality of life and how responsive it is to human needs.

11. Discrimination should be eliminated at all levels. Everyone has a right to an education.

12. Humanity must transcend the limits of national sovereignty and create a transnational federal government. Nationalistic pride is what stands in the way of world peace.

13. Cooperative planning on a global scale must be engaged to save our natural resources.

14. It is the moral obligation of developed nations to assist underdeveloped ones in order to eliminate poverty and control population.

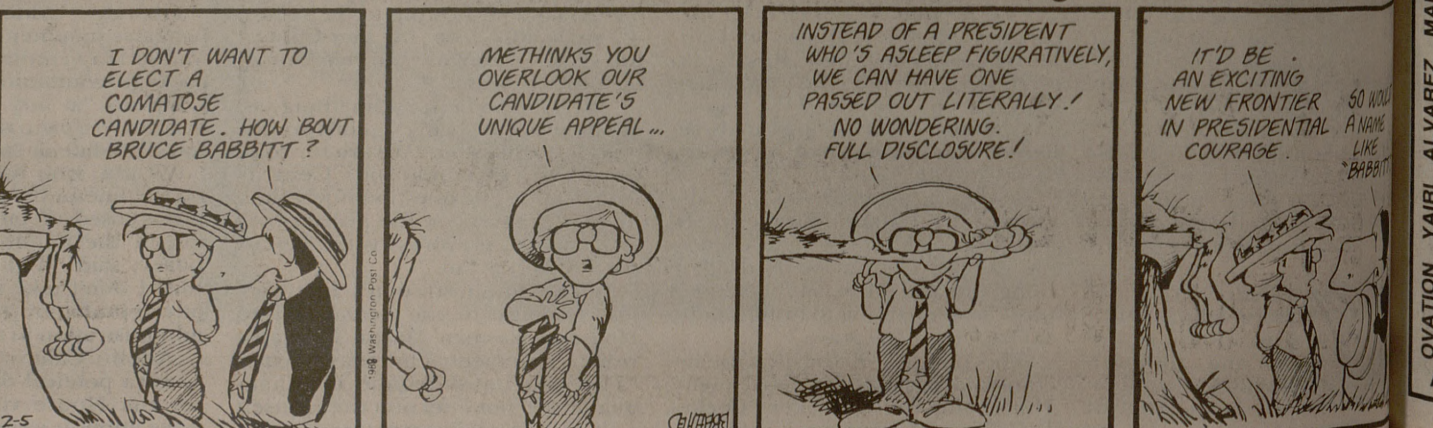
15. Finally, humanists call for full international cooperation in culture, science, the arts and technology and ideological borders.

Humanism confronts the fact that the world is getting smaller every day and that we must learn to live together or we will perish together.

Robert Dowdy is a senior English major.

BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed



The Battalion

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