

Miller should resign

Jury convicts Brazos county sheriff of gambling with dice

Bad news for local doughnut shop owners. Things are not looking good for the Brazos County Sheriff's Department. For those of you so fortunate as to have missed another summer school session in the Bryan-College Station metropolitan area, it seems our sheriff has been caught with his chips down.

According to local news reports, Sheriff Ronnie Miller was arrested when state troopers raided an illegal gambling operation on Wallis Road. He was indicted by a grand jury for two class C misdemeanors and convicted this week of the charge of playing the dice game "craps." Because it was only a misdemeanor, he will not have to resign from office.

For most of us, this does not reflect favorably on our county's chief law enforcement officer. Others might point out it was only a class C misdemeanor (the equivalent of a traffic violation) and a \$100 fine.

For those of you, like myself, who grew up in a rural Texas county, you may be accustomed to electing a sheriff based on his ability to cuss and drink beer. So it's no big deal our sheriff was shooting craps and playing cards with a few of the boys after work. That's all he was doing, right?

Wrong. Take a look at the circumstances surrounding Miller's case. According to reports:

- Miller's attorney did not deny the sheriff was at the residence shooting dice, only that the state's laws are vague as to what constitutes gambling.

- The co-owners of the residence were indicted on felony charges of organized criminal activity. One of the co-owners plea-bargained for a reduced charge of promoting gambling. Miller was the only one charged with a misdemeanor instead of a felony.

- The co-owner who plea-bargained has testified that it was an organized gambling operation, complete with tables, attendants and the whole works. It wasn't just a few of the boys playing cards at the kitchen table.

- A state DPS agent testified a man was posted in the room, in sight of Sheriff Miller, with what was obviously an illegal sawed-off shotgun. In other words, they apparently had an illegally armed bouncer to keep anyone from cutting in on the action.

Miller's defense was based on two technicalities. As noted, on one count he argued that the law is vague about what legally constitutes gambling. His defense had the other charge thrown out because of the prosecutor's error in the indictment in defining the nature of the game Miller played.

The prosecutor mistakenly referred to blackjack as a dice game instead of a card game.

Ironically, the sheriff who talks tough about those criminals who get off on technicalities now has tried to get himself off on one or two. Tough on crime? Hurt me, please.

I don't know that this little operation was connected to some mobster named Vinny from New Jersey. As a matter of fact, I'm almost sure it's not. But you would think that somebody standing there guarding the door with an illegal, sawed-off shotgun might have clued off an experienced law enforcement officer that something wasn't right.

At best, we have one of the most monumental cases of poor judgment and professional ineptitude in all of law enforcement. At worst, our sheriff overlooks local criminal activity.

I've heard some grumbings out there that this was all a partisan setup and an attempt by some to take a shot at Ronnie Miller. I hope not, but knowing Brazos County politics, I wouldn't be surprised.

Ultimately, though, the bottom line remains the same - Sheriff Miller broke the laws he swore to uphold. When he should have been fighting crime, he was patronizing it.

I've also heard complaints about the "undue media attention" surrounding Miller's case. If it were anybody else, they say, no one even would have cared about the trial. Maybe so, but "anybody else" isn't the chief elected law enforcement officer of the county, and "anybody else" didn't take an oath to uphold the law.

Anyone who has held or run for elected office can tell you when you live in a glass house, you don't throw rocks. And you don't throw dice either. Nobody made Ronnie Miller run for sheriff, but when he assumed the powers of office, he also assumed the public scrutiny that goes with it.

Regardless of how you feel about the morals of gambling, it is (in most cases) illegal. And the fact that the sheriff gambled shows a lot more about his character and his respect for the law (or the lack thereof) than it does about his belief in the morals of gambling.

I never felt sorry for Gary Hart either. And interestingly, there are parallels here. Hart's sex life might not have directly affected his capacity to serve as president, but what did it say about his character? If he couldn't keep a commitment to his wife, why should he keep one to his constituents? Judgment? Integrity? You may say a lot of people cheat on their spouses, but he wasn't "a lot of people," he was a candidate for president.

And you might argue a lot of people gamble and break the law, but Ronnie Miller wasn't "a lot of people" either. He was the sheriff of Brazos County and he, like Gary Hart, chose to live in the glass house.

Presumably the local GOP will be more cautious about who it recruits to run on the ticket. There are plenty of fair-weather Republicans out there who would like to take advantage of all those good Ags - the ones who indiscriminately vote a straight party ticket. This time, though, Miller has rendered himself un-re-electable.

Regardless, Miller has betrayed the trust of the people who elected him and he owes them something in return - his resignation.

And for those 15 or so resident PPPs (perpetual political protesters) out there, I applaud you for standing up for what you believe in and trying to stop the injustices of the world. More people should quit whining and start doing something about it. But remember that charity begins at home. You can start by cleaning up the Brazos County Courthouse.



U.S. should build more nuclear plants for electricity production

In recent years, no stronger forum for contention has existed than the one surrounding nuclear energy. This results from an underlying fear many Americans have of the industry.

Sadly, this fear roots in the populace's basic misunderstanding of nuclear power. Since its inception, nuclear power has been associated with life-threatening radiation leaks and zany mutations as seen in 1950s horror movies.

Trust me, ants cannot grow to twenty feet and radiated food really did not give Gilligan the strength of 10 ordinary men. Nuclear energy has proven itself to be the most efficient and cleanest form of power production, despite what thousands of misinformed protesters might have us believe.

Currently, electricity consumption is increasing at an alarming rate. The overall demand for electricity has increased almost 50 percent. Our present electric plants cannot come close to providing the necessary power. Most of our electricity comes from steam-driven turbines. Unfortunately, only 20 percent of these plants use nuclear energy.

Virtually all of the remaining power results from the burning of non-renewable resources such as oil, coal and natural gas. Solar, wind and hydroelectric energy harnessing measures exist, but the sun does not always shine, and the wind does not always blow, and most of our hydroelectric potential has already been realized.

These methods, therefore, need backup systems. We presently have little choice but to rely on oil for transportation purposes. But we do have a choice for electricity. The oil crises of 1973 and 1979

should have warned us about the dangerous situation in which we have placed ourselves. We failed to heed the warnings, as the losses of thousands of Iraqi lives and millions of U.S. dollars testify. I am amazed to see the same people who protested the war, and who are clearing the path for the recent environmental bandwagon, are also the same individuals who have protested or continue to protest nuclear power.

This further adds to a long-held belief of mine that a large number of these people know virtually nothing about certain issues, except what is trendy.

Nuclear energy, and the resulting replacement of fossil fuel-fired plants helps create a cleaner environment worldwide. Nothing is burned. At the end of 1989, nuclear energy facilities produced nearly 20 percent of the world's electricity.

Producing this amount of power with coal would have added almost two billion tons of carbon dioxide (the principle cause of the "greenhouse effect") to the atmosphere. Fossil fuel burning also releases massive amounts of sulfur oxides and nitrogen oxides into the air, causing acid rain which destroys forests and lakes.

The Chernobyl accident raised many questions about the safety of nuclear plants. Research indicates such an accident could never happen here because safety requirements in the United States on nuclear plants are as strict as those placed on anything in our country. The former

executive director of the American Council on Science and Health noted, when referring to nuclear plants, "there has not been one - not one - death or injury to the public from radiation in a quarter century of operation."

But what about nuclear waste, that dreadful radioactive stuff? Won't it turn me green and give my children 57 toes? I am no more fearful of nuclear waste than I am of a drought in the Brazos Valley. Nuclear waste is simply used nuclear fuel rods. After about three years, these rods are placed in temporary storage at the nuclear plant site.

The spent fuel does remain radioactive for quite a while. However, 95 percent of the radioactivity dissipates as heat within six months. In-plant storage has safely handled all of the spent fuel ever produced by our nuclear electric plants.

A total of 17,000 tons of used nuclear fuel has been produced by all commercial nuclear electric plants since the beginning of nuclear powered electricity 30 years ago. In fact, this amount is so small, it could be stacked less than three yards high on top of Kyle Field's playing surface.

In the future, the Department of Energy plans to seal the waste in special canisters which will be placed in absorbent clay deep in the ground in certain geologic formations which have been stable for years.

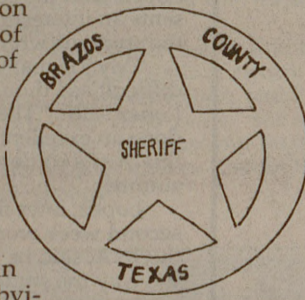
The key to the necessary acceptance of nuclear energy is an informed public, not one which bases its notions and policies on the ideas of a group of mishappen radicals.

The U.S. Council for Energy Awareness is a private, non-profit organization which provides information on nuclear energy and other environmental concerns.

I suggest that anyone skeptical of nuclear power contact them and use facts to form opinions.



Matt McBurnett is a senior electrical engineering major.



Representative Barton proposes law Congressmen should not undergo random drug tests

Random drug testing in America exists almost solely in collegiate and Olympic athletics. Testing in industry only occurs if the company decides to follow the presidential drug programs. Testing in schools almost never happens. However, if Joe Barton has his way, members of Congress and their staffs will have to submit to random drug testing.

"If the lowest-ranking soldier in a Saudi desert must submit to drug testing, shouldn't the member of Congress who sent him there be tested?" Congressman Joe Barton asked Wednesday in a Houston newspaper, as he explained the drug testing program in his own office.

The transportation industries have always been the target of attempts to enforce random drug testing. Unfortunately, some of the workers in those industries have given the public cause for alarm.

Last week, a subway driver crashed his train and fled the scene of the accident. He was found 10 minutes later at his apartment with a blood-alcohol level of 0.10, and a bag of cocaine was found under the driver's seat of the train. The Exxon Valdez ran aground last year while the captain was passed out in his bed. Airplane pilots, train engineers, taxi drivers and many other operators of public transit and freight have been found under the influence of drugs while on the job.

Mandatory random drug testing for transportation workers should have been passed by Congress awhile back. These tests cannot be called an invasion of privacy because workers lives are not private while they are on the job.

The care of hundreds of people on an airplane is about the least private thing I can think of. The American citizen

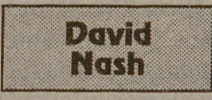
has a right to the safest public transportation possible.

However, random drug testing in other industries or in a citizen's private activities is uncalled for. Congressman Barton's in-house drug testing for his aides is a personal decision by an employer. Barton says he has taken the test three times himself, which is administered by an outside firm. He has introduced a bill into the House which would make random drug testing for Congressmen and their aides mandatory.

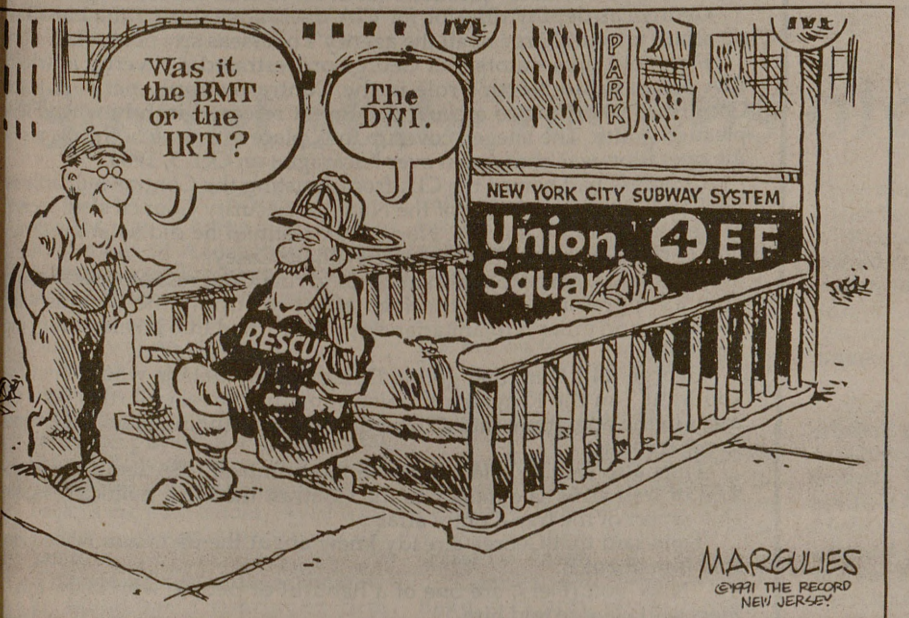
Fortunately, he has only been able to find one co-sponsor, Rep. Benjamin Gilman from New York, a member of the Select House Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control. The other Congressmen have been rather quiet on this bill, and it has been buried in a committee.

The quote from Barton suggests that he thinks the bill would be fair. The lawmakers should follow their own laws. It sounds very simple, but it could be very dangerous for citizens' privacy. The only mandatory drug law on the books is for the military.

Congressmen may decide in the future that if they have to have drug tests, then everyone else should as well. The Supreme Court in session now just might agree random drug tests are necessary for police work. Drug use is a vice like smoking and drinking - done alone it hurts only the user. Drunk drivers should not be allowed to drive, but randomly asking people to urinate in a cup, then arresting them if they have alcohol or drugs in their blood is not the answer. Half of the population of A&M would be in jail by now. Drivers of public transit should be tested on their job, and should be arrested for drunken behavior. But drug and alcohol use is a personal choice. It should only be tested for when that behavior endangers other people.



David Nash



Have an opinion? Express it!
The Battalion is interested in hearing from its readers. All letters to the editor are welcome. Written letters must be signed and include classification, address and daytime phone number for verification purposes. Anonymous letters will not be published. The Battalion reserves the right to edit all letters for length, style and accuracy. There is no guarantee letters will appear. Letters may be brought to 013 Reed McDonald, sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111 or can be faxed to 845-5408.