

The Battalion Editorial Board

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The following opinions are a consensus of The Battalion opinion staff and senior editors.

Cleaned out

Lawyers take money meant for environment

In the effort to clean up toxic waste sites, lawyers were the only ones who really cleaned up.

Twelve years ago, Congress enacted a law called Superfund that empowered the Environmental Protection Agency to extract the costs of cleaning up major pollution sites from the businesses that caused the pollution. However, a new study found that 90 percent of the money paid by insurers on Superfund claims has gone to litigation costs instead of cleanup costs.

Superfund was created to extend liability to any individual or company that contributed waste to a dumping area or polluted site. The system was designed to force the polluters to pay the costs of cleaning up dangerously polluted areas rather than use government funds for the job.

However, since the Superfund places blame, the system is considered "liability based," which means lawyers will be involved. Since most Superfund sites cost as much as \$30 million to clean up, court fights over who pays are practically unavoidable. Such lawsuits between government, alleged polluters, insurers and policyholders are incredibly expensive. They require enormous amounts of detective work necessary to recreate events that can span decades. To further complicate the suits, contracts must be interpreted in the process, and contract laws vary between states.

The extra litigation is a waste of manpower and prolongs cleanup of

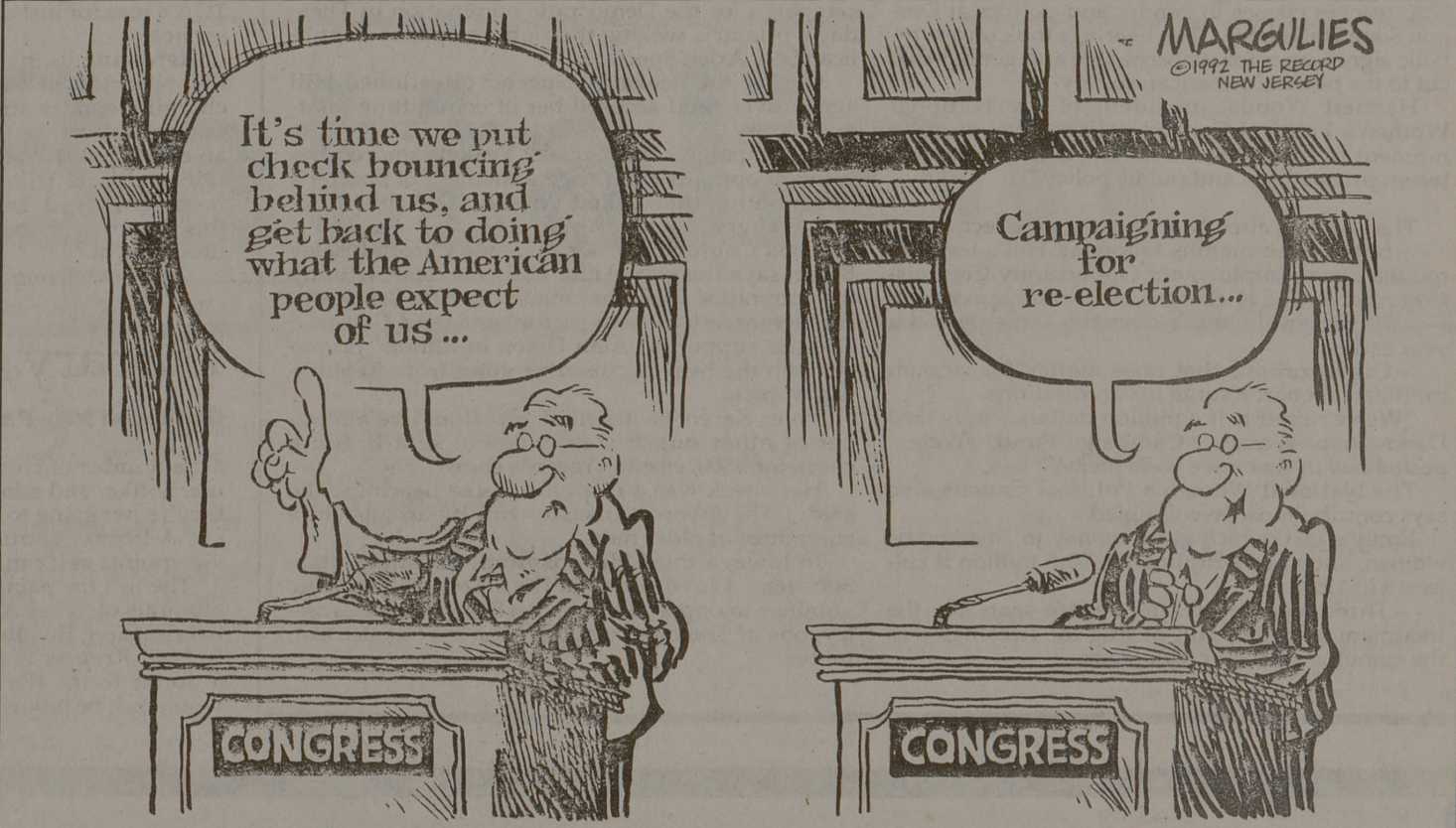
the most toxic areas of the country. Only 84 of the 1,245 sites targeted under Superfund have been actually cleaned up.

The study released last week by the Rand Institute for Civil Justice indicates that insurance companies spent about \$1.3 billion on Superfund claims between 1986 and 1989. About \$1 billion of that went to pay lawyers. The research indicates the litigation costs could pay for the cleanup of 40 polluted sites.

The EPA continues to voice support for the liability system. EPA officials suggest the system is just coming into its own and cites the record-high \$1.4 billion the agency received from offending polluters last year as proof. Unfortunately, the total cost of Superfund-related cleanup is estimated to be at least \$60 to \$90 billion, and many estimates are far higher. The EPA's data seems to run against its conclusions.

The Superfund law is up for reauthorization in 1994. At that time, Congress may change the law's focus if it so chooses. Congress must take the liability out of the system. The law is inhibiting the cleanup of the most toxic sites in our country by placing the process in the hands of lawyers.

Earth Day was celebrated just last week. Congress and the EPA should begin to worry about who is running the restoration of the environment. Requiring more and more litigation is not the answer to our concerns.



Wasted money

Politicians spend too much on their too lengthy campaigns

While the government is busy trying to rebuild its reputation after its congressmen were caught with their hands in the cookie jar of hot checks, the American public is busy preparing itself for another round of mud-slinging and negative campaigning as the election year progresses.

The negative nature of presidential and congressional campaigns has been around for quite some time, but it was especially prevalent in the 1988

presidential election between George Bush and Michael Dukakis. In the summer of 1988, Bush realized that he was behind in the polls and took on a negative campaign strategy.

Does this ring any bells for those of you who paid slight attention to the political arena four years ago? It should. And for those of you who are remembering the 1988 election with extreme disgust and are glad to be rid of this political garbage, don't get too happy too soon. We can expect the 1992 election to be just as bad, if not worse.

Negative campaigning will be found most often in media advertisements, especially television ads just as it has been in the past. Although candidates always buy some ads which show themselves and their platforms on issues in a favorable light, they are increasingly buying negative air time because these negative ads actually seem to work just as well or even better than positive ads. For example, in 1988, 60

percent of voters were upset with the fact that Bush waged a dirty campaign, but due to his victory, one can assume that many of these people must have voted for Bush anyway.

A candidate's goal is to win the election, therefore he or she will do what they know works best in order to achieve this goal. Since voters' actions seem to contradict their words, candidates are able to use negative advertising techniques in their campaigning to get the results they want. Candidates are also able to employ negative campaigning because of their seemingly endless supply of campaign funds.

Campaign financing issues have comprised a field of inquiry since the very first presidential election, and have risen tremendously in the last few decades with the increasing reliance on television for advertising, and with the swelling costs associated with campaigns. In the 1920s, and again in the 1970s, political corruption caused the government to pass legislation to try to reform campaigns, but these laws alone have not been enough to solve the problems of campaign financing.

The most noticeable fact is that public officials have wasted far too much money on campaigns. This is because they are given too much money to work with initially. Having this excess amount of money is what allows candidates to spend millions of dollars on mud-slinging at their opponents. If voters want to decrease the amount of time they have to spend watching presidential nominees call each other bad names, they must lobby their legislators to put limits on campaign spending.

Although Congress has limited the amount of money each individual may contribute to a candidate's campaign, citizens have found many loopholes in which to pour additional

campaign funds. The worst of these is the "soft money" loophole in which voters who want to surpass the maximum contribution amount give funds directly to a candidate's party. These funds are then used indirectly for things such as voter registration, election polls and local party functions.

Supposedly, these "indirect" funds do not benefit individual candidates, but this is not actually the case. Soft money can be viewed as dirty money given by a nation's wealthiest people whose goal is to sway candidates into voting the way they want on issues, resulting in tainted government officials and unfair treatment of voters. There are many more loopholes available for individuals and interest groups to saturate with extra campaign money.

These sources of funds, in addition to candidates' personal resources, need to be watched more closely by the government only if we want to make a change in the current situation. But we do have a choice. If we want to continue to be irritated by immature name-calling in the middle of Monday Night Football in the Fall, then we should sit idle and do nothing. Similarly, if we want to be overrun by meaningless candidate accusations and charges while not being informed of important issues, then we should remain as we are and not say a word. But, if we as citizens wish to have a voice in government and keep a check on the actions and words of candidates, we must become involved and actively direct the government to take badly needed steps in the direction of campaign reform in order to put an end to negative campaigning.

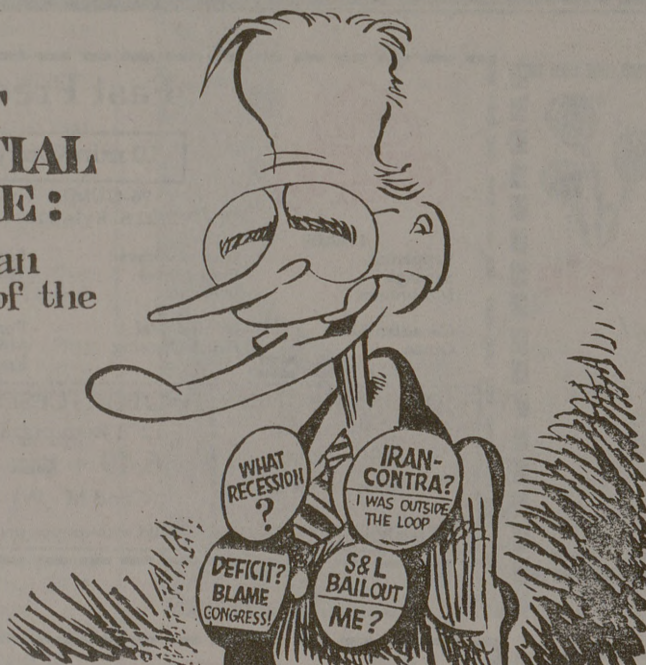
Saddler is a sophomore psychology major



Lori Saddler

NEWEST PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE:

A wealthy Texan who's not part of the mess in Washington



Mail Call

Editor's note: The number listed for Dimitri Filippov in Student Locator is incorrect. The number belongs to two women.

PTTS stops bicycles, too

Watch out Ags, the University police are out for cash. With all of the funding being taken away from various programs recently, Porky has decided not to be a victim of the hatchet. Last week I got a ticket for "Disregard of Stop Sign" on my bicycle.

I understand that a bicyclist could cause a problem at a busy intersection with cars and pedestrians, but when I got mine there was no one walking near me and no other vehicles but the police car, which I had seen and thought nothing of, at the side of the corner in the bike lane. To make a 90-degree turn I obviously was not going fast. Porky must have gotten up on the wrong side of his pen and been bored out of his mind to feel the need to pull over a bicycle. I'm sure he snorted with delight in getting to play with the siren and light on his brand new Chevrolet that was essential in tracking down my speeding bicycle.

Maybe they can use my \$70 to buy some chains for those naughty prisoners. I am being

pretty rough, but it is due to my anger in the ridiculousness of this situation. I do respect the police, but I ask them to use better sense of judgment.

Will this lead to a course in defensive pedaling? My advice is to haul if you see the lights behind you.

Brian Smits
Class of '95

PTTS space helps students

I would like to express my gratitude to the PTTS for their concern for our campus. In case you have not been over to pay a ticket recently, (fat chance of that), they have moved to a new location in the Student Services Building (appropriate since they are a service to the students.) The new office is much larger and the expanded receptionist staff can more effectively handle the crowds of ticket holders. This expansion should be able to handle the PTTS's ever expanding market for at least another six months. (I am afraid another expansion will be necessary after that.) This expansion is the best thing since bicycle cops.

I am sure that I speak for the entire campus when I express my thanks to the PTTS for the fine

work they have done in making Texas A&M a better school. It must be a rewarding job.

Todd Blackmon
Class of '95

Piece of 'art' blights campus

If you are walking by the Engineering Physics Building you might notice the University's newest piece of modern art. This of course being a very loose definition of art. A scientific definition would call it a twisted piece of once-shiny-now-scratched metal.

Then, you might overhear an estimation of the cost to tear up a sidewalk, build a concrete base, erect the piece, and landscape the area. This projected estimation is close to \$180,000 and the actual cost will definitely exceed that projection.

Regardless, next time you walk by this selection of art feel proud that your school can erect these pieces. Forget your worries about the state of our school library which always needs funding. Forget all these monetary concerns, and just appreciate the beauty of this expensive work of art. I doubt it.

Charles Elliot
Class of '93

Have an opinion? Express it!

The Battalion is interested in hearing from its readers.

All letters are welcome.

Letters must be signed and must include classification, address and a daytime phone number for verification purposes. They should be 250 words or less. Anonymous letters will not be published.

The Battalion reserves the right to edit all letters for length, style and accuracy. There is no guarantee the letters will appear. Letters may be brought to 013 Reed McDonald, sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111 or can be faxed to 845-2647.