

EDITORIAL

Forests for sale

Strip mining public land a shame

Last week the Bush administration unveiled a new policy toward strip mining on public lands.

According to a new Interior Department plan scheduled to be implemented shortly after election day, coal companies will be given authority to mine coal lying beneath 40 million acres of national parks and protected lands.

In order to prevent the strip mining, the government would have to buy the mineral rights from the original owners of the land.

The current debate centers on the cost involved in allowing the coal interests access to the land.

The Interior Department estimates the value of the coal to be \$11 million, while the cost for the government to buy the mineral rights to prevent mining in the parks would be in the hundreds of millions.

The government argues that though mining interests commit public relations suicide by considering strip mining the parks, the mere threat of such mining mandates that the government fork over the big money for the mineral rights in order to prevent strip mining on the land. This dilemma results from a

loophole in the original federal strip mining bill passed 16 years ago.

That law prohibits mining in national parks and forests except to those who hold a "valid existing right" to the land.

Unfortunately Congress never bothered to define who actually has a "valid existing right."

Until that right is specifically defined, this debate will continue costing taxpayers money in court proceedings which decide existing rights.

Until that right is specifically defined, this debate will continue costing the country acres of protected lands as the government forfeits the land to the mining interests — which will undoubtedly result if this policy is implemented.

Unfortunately, the "environmental" president is more concerned with protecting the profits of the mining interests than protecting these national forests.

Unfortunately, the "energy" president is less concerned with finding new, cleaner-burning fuel sources than with preventing strip mining for coal.

Unfortunately for us, that is.

Women true political outsiders

Female candidates offer us better representation

Perhaps you've heard it's the "Year of the Woman." As far as I can tell, all that moniker means is that a lot (relatively) of women are running for political office this year, and some are likely to win. OK, and ...? I'm not sure what to make of this so-called phenomenon. The feminist and the skeptic in me are at war over whether or not electing women will improve our political prospects.



SHAWN RALSTON
Columnist

Will a woman, by virtue of gender, be a better public servant than a man? There, I've already given myself away by choosing the words "public servant" over the word "politician." My prejudices are in full view: I do hold to the belief that women are, on the whole, better elected officials than men — Lena Guerrero notwithstanding.

Having said that, I am obligated to defend it. But first I have to disassociate myself from the Marilyn Quayle "essential nature of woman" crowd — those who believe that a woman's essential nature makes her want to bake cookies rather than develop a career outside the home. I don't think women have an "essential nature," as a matter of fact I find that idea pretty darn ...er, um... Victorian. At least Victorian is the only descriptive I can use in this paper. Personally, I think it's my essential nature to lie on the couch all day drinking beer and eating marshmallows — probably not what Mrs. Quayle had in mind.

In reality, most women are working to pay the bills, married or single. Not to mention the fact that most women probably think it's no sin to find cookie-baking as a vocation more than just a little bit dull. What does Mrs. Quayle know anyway? She married Vice President Quayle after all.

So, if it's not a woman's "nature" which makes her a better candidate, what is it? In my opinion, it has to do with women's position in our society, indeed, in the world.

A United Nations report indicates that women do the majority of work, manual or otherwise, being done in the world, and that they earn only a tiny fraction of the wages and wealth.

Much of American political discontent stems from people feeling like their interests are not being represented ... and they're not. Take a look at Congressional Weekly, and you'll quickly see whose interests are being represented. I won't even mention George Herbert Walker Blueblood's ties.

Having established women as outsider candidates more likely to be receptive to their constituents' needs, I have to mention the exceptions. Women politicians may be just as mercenary as men. Margaret Thatcher and Jeanne Kirkpatrick come to mind. Also, if I disallow women's "essential nature," I can't very well suggest that all men are lousy politicians driven solely by self interest; it's just that so few of them have proven to be anything to the contrary lately.

Perhaps it's a pipe dream to present women, and minority candidates as well, as political saviors. The money it takes to get to Washington, or to any capital for that matter makes a candidate overly beholden to more than the people who elected him or her. However, what type of candidate would be more likely to limit contributions and reform the electoral process? I know one thing for sure: it's not going to be the old boys who have been there for 20 years. It's time to remind those old boys — and the corporate interests that pay for their free rides — that this is still a democracy.

What women candidates can do and have done is to provide more appropriate and responsive representation for each segment of our population. However, I hope for even more from women candidates. I hope they don't slip into politics as usual. I hope women can bring much needed reform to our electoral process. I hope, perhaps beyond hope, that they and other outsider candidates can rejuvenate American democracy.

Ralston is a graduate student in English

In the face of harsh budget cuts, A&M fiddles while Rome burns

It started Sept. 22, 1992. The headline read, "\$5 billion state deficit threatens further cuts, University prepares." The article went on to say, "Future options for University cutbacks include:

- * tuition increases
- * reductions in or elimination of student activities and services
- * eliminations in new program development
- * reductions in library support
- * eliminations in student employment...

Oct. 1 headline: "Student Senate approves agenda." They propose: 1) an on-campus day care system for children of A&M faculty and staff; 2) the installation of electric door openers for handicapped students; 3) the completion of repairs on a sidewalk located near the Kleberg Building; and 4) awnings over all campus bus stops.

Oct. 5 headline: "Business administration to relocate its faculties." The story read, "The College of Business Administration and Graduate School of Business... will be located on the west campus ... on Agronomy Road. The four-story, 190,000 square foot building is expected to cost \$23.5 million." Don't forget that most large construction projects usually end with a higher price tag than initially projected, and that this building comes unfurnished. So let's say it's going to cost closer to \$30 million.

Have I missed something here? Since when do the Student Senate proposals and the new \$23.5 million building constitute spending cuts? Are all these items to be donated? I think not! Are the students once again going to be the victims of a higher education system that clearly has a disincentive to save, resulting in continually increasing budgets? I think so!

Families are on limited budgets. When money is tight, families have little choice but to forego luxuries and concentrate on necessities. There is no feasible way for most families to increase income in the short-term in order to offset losses.

Unfortunately, universities are in such a position that any budget overruns can be easily distributed among the students through a tuition increase, much like a tax increase.

The new building, the electric

doors, the awnings, etc., are not necessities. We have done without them up until now, and it wouldn't hurt us to do without them a little longer. Convenience has a price: when you can't afford it, you do without it.

I know how to use an umbrella. Crowded classes and old buildings don't bother me. Faculty and staff members can find an outside day-care center, and people can find a way to go around a shoddy sidewalk. Not only is this cheaper than what is being proposed, it's also not that darned inconvenient. Before we begin concentrating on "new conveniences," let's fix "old necessities."

Of all the complaints about this campus, there is one that towers above the rest: the library. We have a first-rate university with a third-rate library system. People constantly complain about the numerous amounts of outdated material.

Not only does it make research difficult and absolutely frustrating, but aged material doesn't cut it in today's world where up-to-the-minute information is not only available, but also necessary.

The \$23.5 million for the new building and the funding required to complete the programs suggested by the Student Senate could drastically improve our dilapidated library. A tenth of that would do wonders and would be much more appreciated than the wasteful conveniences that the University now seeks.

Companies across the world are restructuring. They are down-sizing, improving quality, productivity, and cost effectiveness. They are living examples that efficiency is much more beneficial than wastefulness.

Universities need to take this approach because their collective burden on tax and tuition payers is becoming increasingly painful.

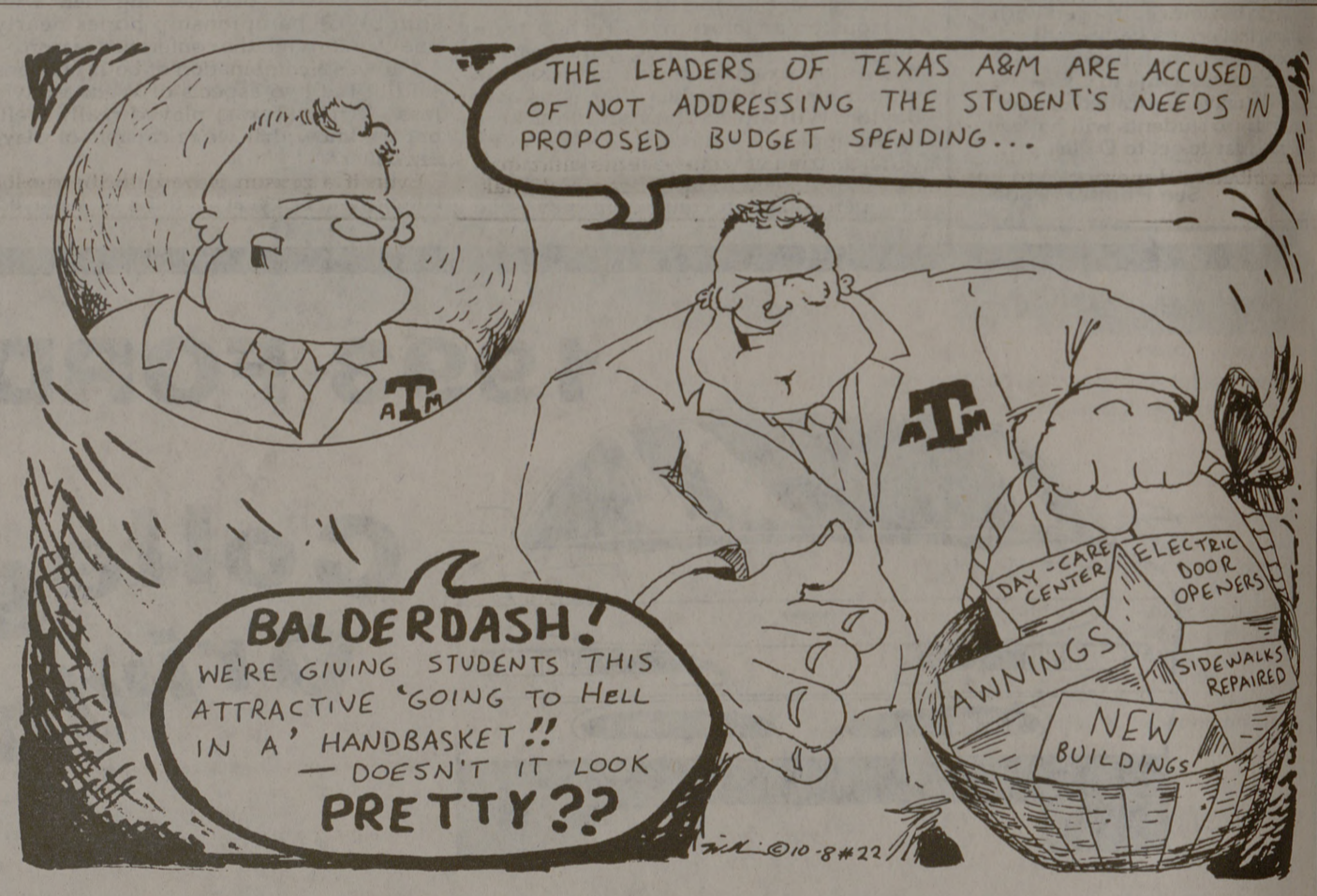
Are there special interests involved in the construction of this new building? Or is A&M's administration really lacking that much common sense? Who knows?

But here's what will probably happen. Come next year, when this new building is standing nice and pretty, when there are electric doors on every building, when you will see little kids running to their new day-care center, and when there are nice little maroon awnings over all the bus stops, you'll get your tuition and fee slip in the mail, and there will be this new line on it that reads: Another Unjustifiable Fee. I can't wait!

Magill is a junior marketing and management major

GUEST COLUMN

JEFF MAGILL



MAIL CALL

Battalion was wrong; coed dorms bad idea

We are writing in response to the editorial written on Oct. 2 favoring the Commons turning coed.

Yes, there is a definite demand for more coed housing on this campus, and yes, converting two of the Commons halls would provide many more coed spaces.

However, there are many more factors that need to be considered.

The most important is security. With 470-plus residents and four doors in the Commons-style hall, as opposed to only 250-plus residents and two doors in the coed modular halls, being able to discern who the actual residents of the hall are is virtually impossible.

Sexual assault is a major concern of residents already, and we feel that these incidents would only increase if the Commons were to turn coed. It also places a lot more responsibility on the resident advisors, having to keep track of both male and female residents in a

hall that size.

Secondly, one of the reasons the Commons halls were proposed to turn coed is that a cheaper alternative would be available to those who can't afford a modular.

However, the Commons rent is only \$20 less per semester than the modulars, so this really is not a viable alternative for those many students who can only afford balcony-style or cheaper.

Thirdly, concerning the retention rate ... why is it important to retain residents in the Commons?

Yes, these halls are predominantly freshman halls, but so what? Most freshmen desire to live around other freshmen.

The main reasons that residents move out of the Commons is to either move off-campus or move into a modular, regardless if it is coed or not.

Another fact to note is that during the polling of the Krueger vote, residents who would consider staying in Krueger a second year very adamantly said that they would not if it turned coed.

So we feel that turning the Commons coed is not a determining factor of the retention rate.

When considering an issue like this one, all factors need to be thoroughly looked into.

We hope the editorial staff will remember this in the future.

Dionna Deardorff
Jessica Lesser
Class of '95

Mystery meat cause for food privatization

I have been casually following your recent stories about Texas A&M officials not allowing private food services (such as McDonald's and Pizza Hut) on campus. Casually, that is, until I got food poisoning from the MSC Cafeteria three days ago. About an hour after eating some mystery beef (stroganoff), I became violently ill, and stayed that way. The next day, the doctor informed me that I had gotten food poisoning.

The MSC Cafeteria is supposed to be the best place on campus to eat? I don't think so. I do think it's time we had a few choices concerning what we can eat on this campus, however. Personally, I would be overjoyed paying \$1.89 for a Big Mac rather than \$3.50 for a Huddleballoo Burger. I realize that letting private food companies on campus will cut down on University profits, but it would undoubtedly increase food quality and service. A little competition might put Food Services on their toes, avoiding problems like the one I experienced. Maybe A&M officials have just had their hand in the cookie jar for so long that they've forgotten what food service is all about.

Tim Downing
Class of '92

The Battalion on Sept. 10 reported that Texas A&M was accepting privatization proposals — Editor.

Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the opinion page staff and editor in chief only. They do not represent, in any way, the opinions of reporters, staff, or editors of other sections of the newspaper. Columns, guest columns, and Mail Call items express the opinions of the authors only. The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows in the Mail Call section. Letters must be 300 words or less and include author's name, Social Security number, class, and phone number. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters should be addressed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call
013 Reed McDonald / Mail stop 1111
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843