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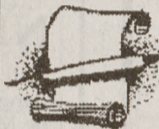
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100 years at Texas A&M

EDITORIAL

Referendum shot down  
Richards silences handgun issue

With the end of the regular session of the 1993 state Legislature, there are still a few things left to sort out. One of these is the debate over whether Texans should have the right to carry concealed handguns.

The latest attempt to allow concealed handguns is a bill to put a handgun referendum on the Nov. 2 ballot.

This bill is necessary because such a referendum would allow the people to decide for themselves if they need to carry handguns. However, it appears that the governor would rather make this decision herself.

The first try at a concealed handgun bill passed in the House but died in the Senate after Richards promised to veto it.

After a failed resurrection of the bill, the legislators then tried to ascertain the opinion of their constituents through a referendum. But the governor, in a desperate attempt not to be outdone, has decided to deny Texans the right to express their opinions.

Richards has promised to veto the handgun referendum bill even though it is completely non-binding

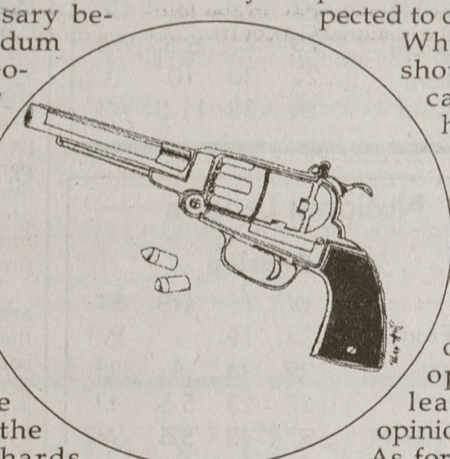
and considerably weaker than the earlier proposals. Her view is that allowing Texans to carry handguns would be a step toward increasing violence.

The governor called the referendum a tax-supported poll for handgun interests and said any such poll ought to be conducted and paid for by the private sector. The poll is expected to cost about \$60,000.

Whether Texans should be allowed to carry concealed handguns is still debatable. But if the issue is large enough to occupy so much of the Legislature's time, then perhaps the people ought to have the opportunity to at least express their opinion.

As for the \$60,000 price tag, that's a relatively small part of the money the state spends all the time. If they don't spend the money to measure public opinion on a topic that has become an important issue, then they will probably spend it on something a lot less constructive.

The handgun referendum warrants a place on the Nov. 2 ballot. The citizens of Texas deserve the chance to let their voices be heard.



Summer's for playing catch-up  
Four-year college degree quickly fading into past

Hot time, summer in the city... college in the summer can sure be well, a real drag, to put it mildly. Think of it: While you sweat buckets under the College Station steam canopy, your friends are frolicking on beaches, or lounging poolside with all the other scantily clad summer bums who chose to enjoy the good life instead of trudging through summer school.

Why'd you do it? Are you insane? What would keep you in this lake of fire when you could be debauching your body somewhere with your buddies? You must be anxious to graduate. Either that, or you've been sniffing the wrong kind of glue.

Actually, there are thousands of you who made the same decision to attend summer school. More than 16,000 students enrolled for this first summer session here at A&M. That's more than one-third of the students who were here in the spring or fall semesters.

Most of you stayed around just so you could graduate on schedule. What happened? How did you fall so far behind that you have to stick around and pay penance over the summer?

Faculty advisers say many students use summer as a time for catching up. They say students use the summer time to take classes they failed to take before — or simply failed. But what about the thousands of students who took the classes they needed, and passed them? Where did they fail?

Only at the task of being over-achievers. The average course load is just under 14 hours per semester. Students who take more than 14 hours sometimes live to regret it — if they live at all.

Some such students I contacted were found muttering quietly in a corner. They had little to say but offered some advice. I think their exact words were, "It's crazy. Don't do it," and, "Be afraid. Be very afraid."

Yes, loading semester hours like a stack of pancakes has left many students feeling rooty, tooty, not fresh, but fruity.

Yet, with most degree plans, students must take — and pass — at least 16 hours per semester if they plan to graduate in the four years traditionally allotted.

So many times I have heard people quietly classify them-



ROBERT VASQUEZ  
Columnist

As if it were some affliction suffered by a select group of people who soon would be applying for minority status. The fact is the students who graduate in four years or fewer are the freak exceptions. Nearly two-thirds of the students who graduate do so after four years of intense labor. Not before. (Editorial Note: If Vasquez appears to be envious of those students who excel, it is only because he is academically impaired.) Students who graduate in fewer than four years are those who took excessive amounts of classes each semester simply so they could graduate in a timely manner and move to some expensive home to make a better life and lots, and lots of money.

While such goals/achievements are truly honorable, we mortals who stick around for an extra year or two... or three... should not feel delinquent.

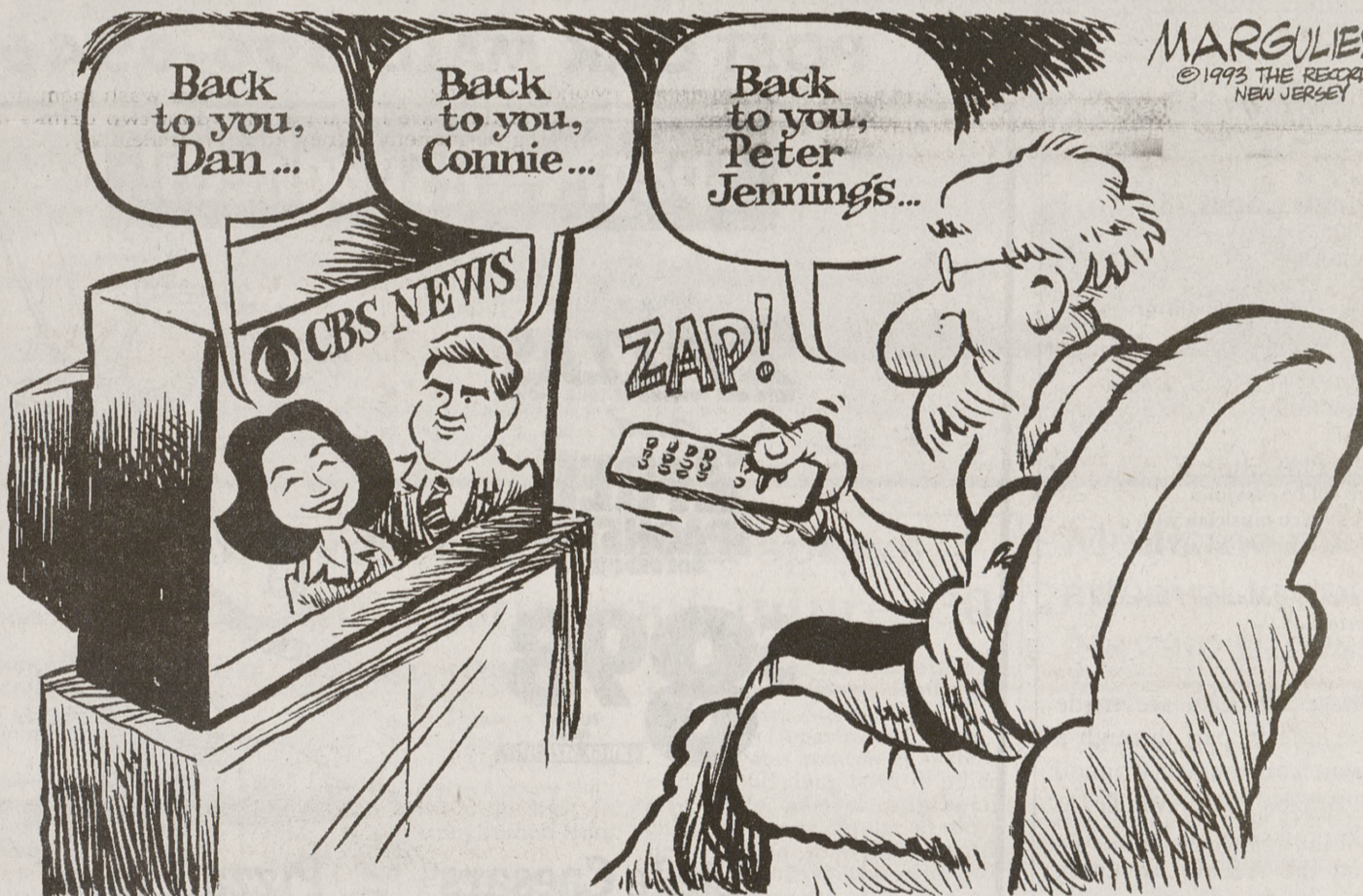
The four year college term, says one faculty adviser, comes from a time when students averaged much heavier course loads. Twenty years ago students averaged between 16 and 20 hours as compared to the current average load which is between 12 and 14 hours.

The reasons for the decrease in the average number of hours taken range from matters of choice to necessity. Students now have the opportunity to participate in a vast number of activities commonly called "the other education." From football to underwater basket weaving, students can choose from a number of extracurricular activities which were not available to students of previous generations. While these outside activities may slow students in the race towards graduation, many advisers suggest they are as equally important in the student's development as academics.

Other students must work while attending school. Again, this outside activity may postpone graduation, but often it is what makes graduation possible. Increasingly, employers are seeking students who worked their way through college, paying more attention to their perseverance rather than the amount of time taken to graduate.

Students shouldn't fret if they take a little extra time to graduate. As one retired executive told me, enjoy the time you have in college. Make the most of it. You only have a few short years here. You'll spend the rest of your life out of school, in the real world. Don't rush it.

Vasquez is a senior journalism major.



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NEW JERSEY

COLLEGE STATION, TX  
JUNE 2  
MAIL CALL  
1993

Dickerson column misinterprets article

Columnist Matthew Dickerson in *The Battalion* dated May 31 seriously distorts and misrepresents what appeared in my article titled "College Station's 38% Poverty Rate: High Rank (2nd in U.S.), Low Profile" that appeared in the April/May *Touchstone*.

As paraphrased by Dickerson, I supposedly wrote that "... poverty rates are affected not by College Station's high percentage of typically low income students..." In my *Touchstone* article I made no such claim.

A point I made in *The Touchstone* article was that since College Station was the only university city in the five worst poverty rate cities with population over

50,000, then most likely there were other causes in addition to a large student population.

The claim that the high poverty rate is only because of College Station's high student population is probably incorrect because no other university city of similar size and with a similar or possibly even higher percentage student population rated in the five worst poverty rate cities.

In fact, there are at least five other university cities of similar size that (by an admittedly rough measure) had a larger percentage of students than College Station; yet, there were only four university cities total in the 25 worst poverty rate cities. Of these university cities only College Station was among the worst five.

Hence, poverty in College Station is probably much more widespread than

our city and university officials are admitting.

I think that *Battalion* columnists such as Mr. Dickerson should at the least bother to first read what's written in *The Touchstone* and to accurately report what's there before criticizing its contents.

Danny Yeager  
Professor of Chemistry

Hunting bill to open season on state parks

A common belief is that animal rights and environmentalism don't mix, because animal rightists have to be opposed to hunting, even when it is necessary to preserve ecosystem integrity.

I think this is a false dichotomy, and environmental groups' support of a bill currently before the Texas state Legislature can be used to illustrate my point.

S.B. 179 would permit hunting in Texas state parks, whenever hunting would be permitted outside the parks, whereas current law permits the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to authorize hunts in state parks on an ad hoc ba-

sis, whenever hunting is shown to be "biologically necessary."

Animal rights groups, predictably, are opposing the bill, but so are the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society, environmental groups which have taken great pains in recent years to distance themselves from animal rights groups. But I think that the Sierra Club's position on S.B. 179 can be fully endorsed by an animal rightist.

According to its *State Capitol Report*, "The Sierra Club is opposed to any bill that will shift the burden of proof from no hunting in state parks unless 'biologically necessary,' to hunting is allowed unless proven harmful to the area's resources."

How could an animal rightist endorse the Sierra Club's position?

In a nutshell (albeit an excruciatingly small one), my argument is this: if hunting's being "biologically necessary" means that it is necessary to safeguard the integrity of an ecosystem, then respect for future generations of animals requires us to cull some current individuals whenever this is "biologically necessary," that is, whenever it would be permitted in state parks under current state law.

In the case of S.B. 179, environmentalists and animal rights activists can join hands; only someone intent upon opening the state's most heavily used recre-

ation areas to biologically unnecessary hunting would support S.B. 179. At public hearings, only two people registered support for the bill, whereas opponents produced over 1200 signatures of park visitors (20% of them hunters) in opposition to it.

Nevertheless, the bill is sailing through the state legislature. It passed the Senate April 7 and the House Agriculture and Wildlife Committee approved it unanimously on April 15. As the bill will be set for a vote in the House shortly, calls to state representatives are critical at this juncture.

Gary Varner  
Assistant Professor of Philosophy

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