

Freedom: a value for all or none Gay bashing ultimately undermines liberty for all

When I came to Texas A&M in 1984, Bible in hand, I became involved with a movement to keep homosexuals from forming a university-recognized organization. In my efforts at this task, I put into motion a series of events that nearly culminated in a riot, and finally realized something about freedom.



MATT DICKERSON
Columnist

The embryonic homosexual student group, the Gay Student Services Organization, or GSSO, now goes by Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Aggies. The favored method of opposing GSSO was petitioning A&M for a student referendum, though that was not successful. "Business" was brisk. I would stand out in front of Sbis as hordes of students would stand in a line and sign the petition on my back.

In any event, the University refused to recognize the GSSO, even going to court in a vain fight to stave off recognition. In an incredible stroke of luck, I and others heard that another group, SWAMP (the acronym, I am told, never stood for any one thing), was going to stage a sit-in on the MSC grass protesting A&M's refusal to recognize GSSO.

SWAMP's name was a satirical take off on OASIS, a fundamentalist or evangelical student group I was in that has changed its name a number of times. It was also known as Great Commission Students, and now goes by A&M Christian Fellowship.

I went from dorm to dorm asking everyone to show up at the MSC, interlock arms and "keep SWAMP and the gays off the grass." When the day arrived, there was a near riot. Opposition to SWAMP and GSSO was fierce, and the MSC was virtually encircled with enraged students. Police in riot gear and police vans had to be called in. Not a pretty sight.

That so many students emphasize trivialities at A&M has not changed. Witness the teeth-grashing furor over students refusing to behave properly by wearing hats in the MSC. Or the woman who received death threats for ques-

tioning the primacy of the Cadet Corps. Both incidents occurred within the last semester, and border on the surreal.

The main opposition to the GSSO came from evangelical and fundamentalist groups on campus — no surprise. The level of indoctrination in some of these groups stupefies; both Great Commission and a group called Maranatha, whose members were also active in opposing GSSO recognition, are widely recognized as cults by cult researchers. Homosexuality is regularly demonized as the ultimate perversion.

A delectable irony: Great Commission (under a different name) itself fought for recognition at Iowa State University, a case that went to the Supreme Court. Apparently, too many people want freedom exclusively for themselves.

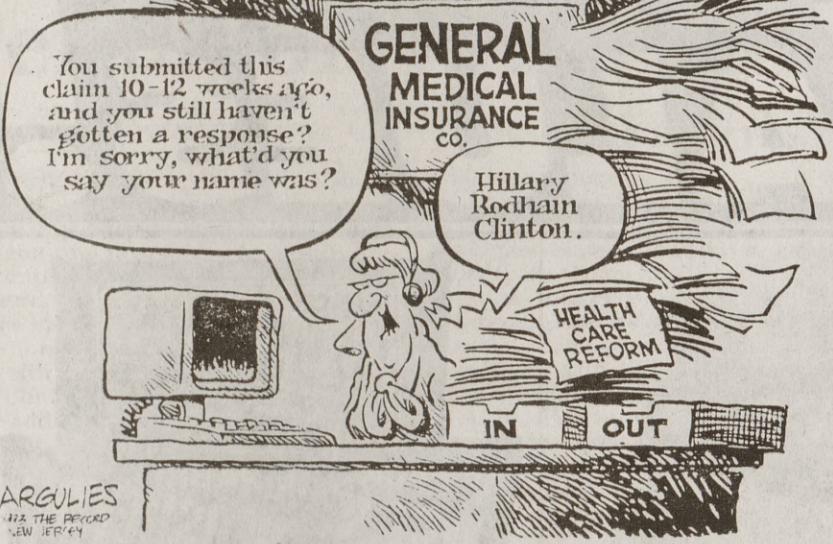
I cannot casually dismiss my actions over the MSC incident. My fear-mongering was irresponsible; the incident could well have erupted into violence. I deeply regret my actions in this whole episode, as well as my efforts to block GSSO recognition.

Since this time, I have obviously changed. Knowing and having gay acquaintances was instrumental to my finally accepting gay people. In fact, a couple of the people in the fundamentalist group I was in turned out to be gay, and I had roomed with one of them. I now feel comfortable with gay people, and hope to see them enjoy the many freedoms that so many of us take for granted, like marriage.

Perhaps, before I was truly capable of knowing gay people, I had to jettison the petty notion that fundamentalists just happened to be in sole possession of The Truth. It is unfortunate that fundamentalists do not exercise their prodigious talents at divining evil within themselves; hence, fundamentalism ultimately blinds itself with its own rigid forefinger.

If I learned anything during my years as a gay-basher, it is that freedom is a seamless garment: an attack on the freedom of my neighbor is an attack on my own freedom. To invite the State to dictate "heterosexual sex" is to invite the State to dictate sexual mores — to everyone.

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100 years at Texas A&M

EDITORIAL

John B. Connally 1917-1993

Terrible and tragic can only describe Tuesday, the day former Texas governor John B. Connally, Jr., 76, died from a fatal bout of pneumonia and complications of pulmonary fibrosis, the scarring of the lung tissue.

Although Connally is well known for that fateful day, Nov. 22, 1963, when he almost died with John F. Kennedy, it is Connally's accomplishments, bravery and duty to the state of Texas and the United States that can never be overlooked.

Connally survived the bullet that ripped through his right lung and fractured his wrist to become a three-term Texas governor.

As a leader, Connally influenced many people.

"John Connally was a man of courage, great leadership qualities, a powerful personality," Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen said. "He was persuasive in his point of view and my friend."

Born on Feb. 27, 1917 in Floresville, Texas, Connally was raised working on the farm his father rented.

After his fair share of farm work, Connally went to the University of Texas at the early age of 16.

Eventually Connally became stu-

dent body president, dean of his legal fraternity, president of his law class, and chairman of the board of student publications that directed U.T.'s student newspaper, The Daily Texan.

After earning his law degree in 1941 at U.T., Connally went on active duty in the U.S. Navy.

He was awarded the Legion of Merit for his conduct aboard the aircraft carrier USS Bennington and the Bronze Star for bravery as a fighter-plane director aboard the aircraft carrier USS Essex.

After leaving the navy in 1946, Connally went on to establish a new radio station, KVET, in Austin.

But, the navy would again be a part of Connally's life. Fifteen years later, he was appointed Secretary of the Navy by President Kennedy.

The next year, Connally won the election for Texas governor.

Within ten years, he would serve as the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury for President Richard Nixon.

Sen. Phil Gramm said, "At every major milestone of contemporary Texas, John Connally was there, standing tall, leading, making a difference, making history."

Texas will certainly feel his absence.



Connally



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NEW JERSEY

Replace Koldus? You'd sooner find a needle in a haystack

The following is an open letter to the Search Advisory Committee for the Vice President of Student Services.

Yours is a daunting task. Hey gang, face it: you ain't gonna replace "Koldus." Search high and low, day and night; good luck. Personally, I give you folks better odds on finding the Holy Grail than finding a soul who is more dedicated to and who better personifies what Texas A&M is all about than Dr. John Koldus. It seems that Dr. Koldus has stepped down, in what for he and Mary Dell is a most timely fashion, hopefully to pursue more leisurely and personal activities. Having done so, he now leaves a significant void in the Spirit of Aggie-land.

Now before you begin thinking that I was paid to write this or that I am just an old sycophantic student leader type

with starry eyes, let me assure you I am not quite ready to nominate Koldus for sainthood, although that is not out of the question. However, in the candidate rating criteria outlined in the search for the new vice president of Student Services, odds are that there will probably not be a category described as "attention to individual students above and beyond the call of duty."

A&M is no doubt one of the most challenging and rewarding environments to administer to the needs of a student body in. Koldus has nevertheless balanced the "big picture" aspects of dealing with discipline problems, budget cuts and overall student life concerns with the challenge of truly working to enhance the educational experience of all students attending Texas A&M University.

Most importantly, in what could be a far removed, upper administration position, he took the time to pay attention to the one-on-one aspect of caring about those individuals who either sought out or were fortunate enough to be directed across his path. Koldus never was one of those ivory tower kinda guys.

As Texas A&M once again comes to grips with the changing dynamics of

demographics, politics and finances, it is more important than ever to select a person that is capable of dealing evenhandedly with those involved in the emerging factions that are influencing student life on this campus. With the ideological specters of multiculturalism, conservative fundamentalism, political correctness, gender biasism and all of those other isms pervading academia today, it is not unforeseeable that A&M might fall into the paralyzing morass that is currently engulfing other institutions of higher education in the United States.

Come on, if one of the great debates on campus is about a few folks wearing their damn hats in the MSC, I gotta wonder what is going on here. Texas A&M is different. We must believe that, otherwise why would so many young people from diverse backgrounds choose to come to this place that not so long ago was forsaken by many a hardy settler. Hey, last I heard this school was started as the result of a bet in a card game or something like that.

Now stay with me on this. Could it be that students attend Texas A&M to receive instruction in an academic discipline and hopefully an education? Perish the thought. OK, OK, I know

that is not always the reason, but surely they don't all come here because we can now Beat-the-Hell Outta' t.u. in football.

It simply seems that the greatness of Texas A&M is often overlooked. Believe it or not, this place, in spite of all of its critics, is a melting pot of sorts. The overriding tradition of being an Aggie, regardless of its origin or A&M's past, is one of crucial importance for the future of this institution. Forget the Highway 6 b.s.; there is room at A&M for everybody. As simple as it seems, the trick is for everybody to agree to be Aggies first and then whatever the hell else they wanna be second.

Many times the vice president for Student Services is called on to be the Muse that can perform this magical feat of bringing everyone together under an umbrella of "Aggieness." The next vice president for Student Services need not be magical, however, if she or he possesses the qualities of fairness, empathy and dedication — that should suffice.

I really and truly have no candidate to tout or ax to grind; I offer only the musing of what Dr. John Koldus has meant to Texas A&M and how important a role his successor might play.

My only hope is that the graduates of the year 2000 and beyond still hold the same fondness for A&M as those of the previous century.

Okay, I lied — as a member of a recently formed untoward group of A&M Former Students, I am pushing hard for a One Eyed, One Horned, Flying Purple People Eater for the new vice president of Student Services ... not!

Hays is a graduate of Texas A&M, Class of '88, and was Student Body President for 1988-89.

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