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Indictments may only be the beginning

Latest embarrassment stresses need to clean out temple

Last Friday, a grand jury indicted two staff members assigned to the Board of Regents on felony charges for tampering with official documents for the purpose of covering up alcohol purchases by the Board with state money.



ROY L. CLAY
Columnist

Vickie Running, the Board's secretary, and Sasha Walters, the Board's administrative assistant, are accused of altering expense accounts in order to disguise the purchase of alcohol under the headings of soft drinks, food, cups and ice and altering records again when information was sought concerning the purchases under the Texas Open Records Act.

The indictments are a result of ongoing Texas Ranger investigations of the Board of Regents' use of state funds to buy alcohol and other acts of alleged misconduct by officials throughout the Texas A&M System. However, the indictments could only be a side note to future charges against school officials, says Brazos County District Attorney Bill Turner. "Today's [Feb. 24] action should not be taken as a conclusion of the investigation by the Texas Rangers and the FBI," Turner said. "Both agencies anticipate that further presentations will be made to the grand jury."

But Ross Margraves, chairman of the Board of Regents, denied that the two women did anything wrong. "They were only handling things the way

they had been handled prior to them," he said during a press conference. "This is a matter that has been around for years. Not that it makes it right, but it was not a conspiracy to evade the law."

Margraves' statement is very disturbing on several counts. First, in the event that the allegations are correct, then the two women did indeed knowingly evade the law by falsifying government records and later, changing records again to hide the purchases from the citizens of this state. If they did indeed commit these crimes, then whether or not they acted alone is a critical issue.

It seems unlikely that these two staff members would alter official records of their own volition, if indeed they did. Margraves, himself under investigation for misconduct, did not deny the allegations. By acknowledging to the press that "this is a matter that has been around for years," it would seem that at least the Board chairman was aware of these actions and may even have allowed them to continue.

Buying alcohol with state funds is a crime. The Board is within its rights to buy alcohol with gift money from institutional development funds, yet the Board allegedly chose to pay for the alcohol with taxpayers money. If funding for something like alcoholic beverages was consistently misappropriated by the Board, then how hard would it be for them to misappropriate funds on an even larger scale? Would someone who misuses state funds have any qualms about abusing the millions that students pour into this university every year?

The investigations on the part of the Texas Rangers and the FBI give us reason to believe that some regents and other officials at Texas

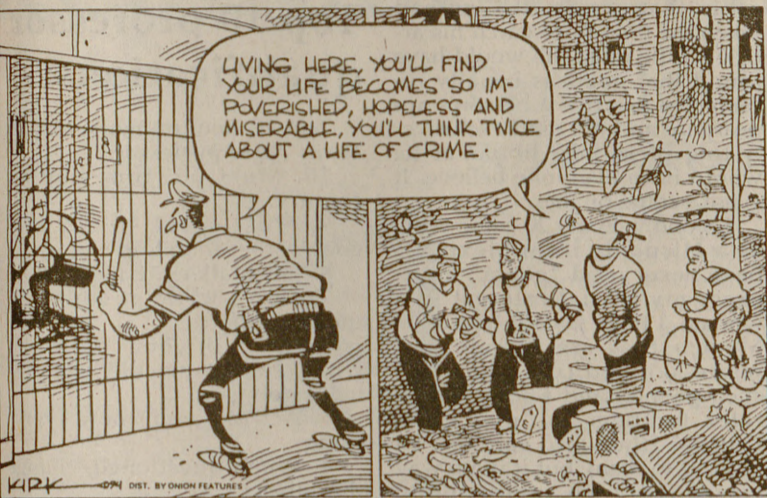
A&M may have been operating beyond any reasonable restraint for some time.

But this doesn't throw a shadow across all A&M officials. Individual regents have shown a genuine concern for students and the image of the University. A few regents like Allison Leland Brisco, T. Michael O'Connor and M. Guadalupe L. Rangel consistently voice their concerns for the students when discussing policies — not always a popular position. A student attending a Board of Regents meeting overheard a foul comment directed towards Rangel by another official at the University because of Rangel's students-first stance on a certain issue.

These indictments may only be the tip of the misconduct iceberg. The abuse of power at Texas A&M appears to be wide-spread. It is imperative for A&M to redefine the limitations of power for certain official positions and set checks and balances on these offices. Even if the allegations are not true and the investigations turn up nothing more, this institution can no longer be run in the same "good old boy" manner of outdated southern politics. The reputation of this school is directly related to its integrity, which has suffered several heavy blows already.

It is important for students to be involved in this redefinition. As lifetime members of Texas A&M, students have an obligation to protect this institution from dishonor and voice their protest concerning any possible illegal acts, even if the offenders come from within. Don't allow others to engage in any dubious activity which will ultimately reflect on you and your education.

Roy L. Clay is a senior history major



EDITORIAL

Coping with crime

Safety-consciousness the key

Violence has forced communities all over the United States to undertake more safety precautions than ever before. The flyers recently circulated by the A&M Police Department are an important move in the battle against crime.

Similar actions have been taken in the past, but in the summer of 1992, University officials removed sketches of a rape suspect before future Aggies and their parents poured into town for New Student Conferences. Security and safety should come first for students.

We should make ourselves aware of the presence of crime, here on campus and elsewhere. Although many students come to A&M from large cities where crime is more commonplace, a smaller town is no longer a safe place to let down your guard.

Area high schools are no longer free from gang rivalry and are faced with installing metal detectors to serve as a deterrent against violence in the schools. St. Mary's Catholic Church, right across the street from campus, has been forced to lock its doors at night for the first time in the church's history

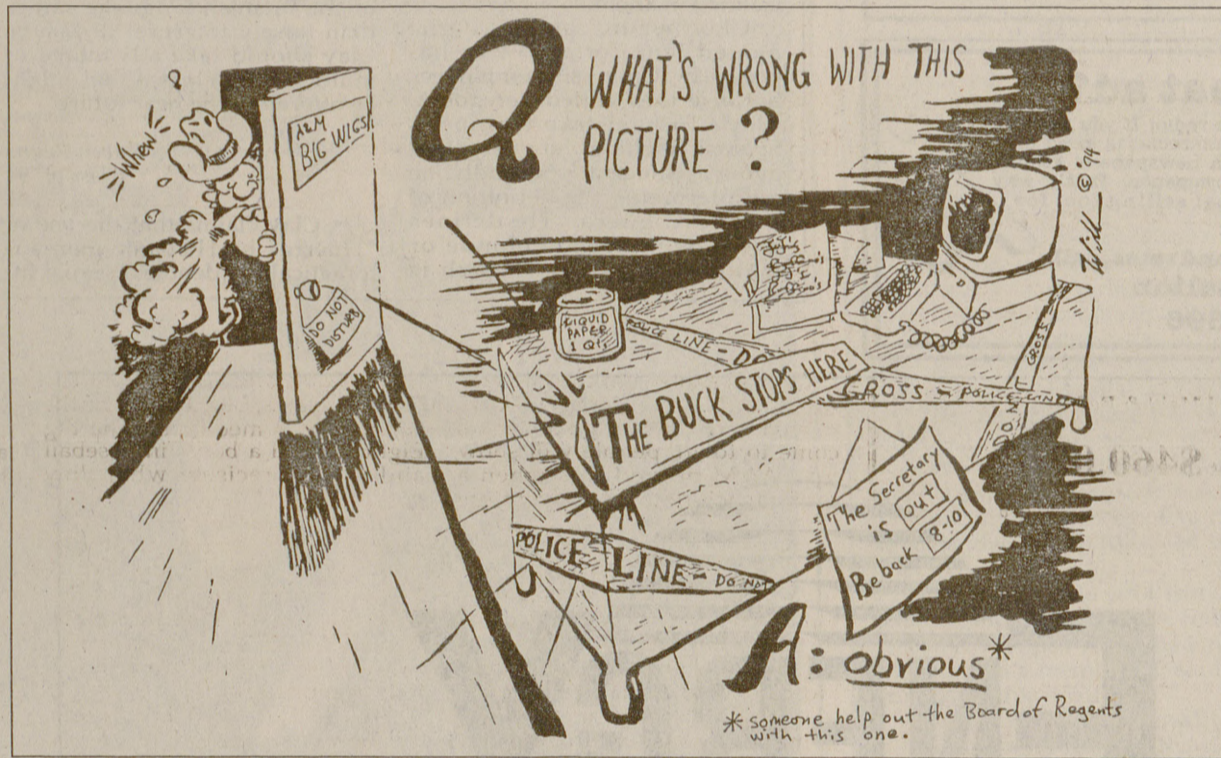
because of increased theft and concern about the safety of parishioners who visited the building late at night.

It also seems that there have been more fights at local bars and clubs. Criminal acts committed on campus by area youths is also on the rise. We should not build a wall between A&M and the city, but Aggies must be made aware of the violence.

Recent flyers inform students of an incident in which a female was abducted at knife-point near the Northside Post Office. The flyers urge everyone not to walk alone on campus, especially at night. These criminal acts could involve anyone.

The attention given to this incident demonstrates that the police are concerned about student safety. But, of course, students must be conscious of their own security.

The warning flyers should stay up, and in fact more need to be made in future cases of violent crime. It is much better to have a reputation for being a safety-conscious school than to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that bad things don't happen in our backyard.



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Silver Taps: contemplations on a ceremony of life and death

We went to honor the dead. A few hundred strangers, in silence punctuated by the tapping of spurs on the gravel pavement, walked towards the square engulfed in darkness. Darkness — a symbol of the end or a cohesive bond to provide strength to the ones present.

Stars shone down on the silhouettes of figures standing at ease with their chins down. A solitary sob, a few sniffles, a few coughs, the night made cold by the occasion. I found myself thinking about the whole affair: life, death and whether I understood what was happening. I wondered if the solitary weepers felt warmth in their hearts from all the memories of the departed or if the physical manifestation of the cold of the night was more overpowering.

The column walked towards the center with a heavy pounding of the ground, with each step taken in unison. I could not see their maneuvers with the rifles; I could not hear the commands issued by their leader. I was not too sure about what was happening. I dare to speculate. Was it a desire to honor the dead? Maybe it was a desire to honor the completion of a life. Was it death itself that we were acknowledging for its victory? Or maybe it was the concept of eternal afterlife to which we were saluting. I did not know what we were doing there.

I also did not know what relevance those maneuvers held. Speculating again, I would venture to suggest that maybe we humans have a need to associate the expression of emotions and feelings with ceremony. An action is easier to relate to, belong to, or share with than a raw emotion with varying degrees of truth.

Each individual there had an emotion — some relevant, others totally irrelevant to the occasion. But since we had a ceremony, it bound us together into a representative emotion that made a statement.

Their elbows went up, and their fingertips touched their brows. I saw the flashes, and the thunder of the guns shocked me. I waited expectantly for the

DILAWAR S. GREWAL
Guest columnist

Even though we gather here to mourn and honor the deceased, it is really life that we have gathered here to acknowledge in this ceremony.

next round and still managed to get startled each time. Between the silence and the startling explosions, I heard the flapping of the birds' wings, and my mind raced to figure out what was happening.

I wondered if the purpose of firing those guns was to jolt us into the realization that this was the end of life — it was death, the end. Or perhaps it was to startle the birds so that we might hear their wings take to flight from their perches, just as if the eternally free soul were escaping from its temporary perch — this body.

Before I could dwell further on my contemplations, the sound of the buglers' last song, the Silver Taps, the last post wafted to my ears. A soothing, mournful expression of sorrow. A concession for those left behind. A gentle acknowledgment of the selfishness of sorrow. A gentle, supportive persuasion to move on.

From far away the jarring roar of an automobile clashed with the buglers' mournful serenade. I cringed inside and felt a momentary reflex of anger. Then the rational part of me remembered that for all others, life goes on. It reminded me that life is a passage, a movement. Even though we gather here to mourn and honor the deceased, it is really life, the movement, the passing that we have gathered here to acknowledge in this ceremony.

As for each one of the hundreds gathered here, who knows what significance this holds for them. Perhaps they came here to revere life, or remember someone, or remind themselves of what it is all about; or celebrate a passage or mourn it. Maybe they just came here to be in a ceremony that they needed to be a part of.

Silence befalls the place once again, and we turn around to leave. I say a little prayer in my heart for the ones I never knew and think to myself how appropriate silence is. What words would really measure up against life or death.

For Chai-Lai Wang, remembered by her friends in Physics, and in the memory of all those we never even knew.

Dilawar S. Grewal is a graduate mechanical engineering student

COLLEGE STATION, TX
 March 2
 1994
MAIL CALL

Students weary of negative headlines:

- Are we really supposed to believe that two secretaries are responsible for altering state records on their own? This is just another example of a sacrificial lamb at Texas A&M. Did these secretaries really think that highly of their "upstanding" superiors to allegedly break the law for them? Let's hope these two secretaries talk and set the record straight as to what is really going on. We can only hope that the Texas Rangers will not stop until they find all who may be responsible.

ing on. We can only hope that the Texas Rangers will not stop until they find all who may be responsible.

Greg Porter
Class of '93

- First, it was the football scandal, where players were paid by an athletic booster for work not performed. Next, it was rumored that Board of Regents Chairman Ross Margraves personally profited from the privatization of the A&M Bookstore. The "reassignment" of three Food Service workers has also

stirred up controversy around the state. Shortly after, a professor at A&M was investigated on the validity of his research on how to turn mercury into gold. Next, the Board of Regents allegedly bought alcohol with state funds. Now, Vickie Running, Board of Regents secretary, and Sasha Walters, Board of Regents administrative assistant, have allegedly altered state vouchers disguising the alcohol purchases as "food and soft drinks for the Board of Regents."

How do you think that all this looks to the outside world? Not too good. In headlines from Dallas to Houston, A&M has been embarrassed on several occasions. I think that it is high time that the faculty, staff, boosters and regents realize that they too represent Texas A&M University. Questionable situations such as those mentioned above embarrass and degrade A&M and must not be tolerated. Ags, it's

time for us to stand up and let these people that run our university know that we are not going to let them take the reputation that so many people before us have worked so hard to establish and drag it through the headlines. After all, Aggies do not lie, cheat or steal — or tolerate those who do. Sound familiar?

Brad Russell
Class of '97

Focus on Thailand

In response to the article "High and Dry in a Foreign Land" (Feb. 18), I would like to make the following clarification.

Thailand is not a police state. It has a representative, democratically elected government. The military organizations of the Kingdom of Thailand are presently

subordinate to the Prime Minister of the Thai government. It is separated from the police who are in charge with law enforcement, just as in the United States. There are laws in Thailand with respect to drug use and sale, just as in the United States.

Tourists who intend to visit foreign countries to escape the laws of their own country, particularly concerning alcohol and drug consumption, are well-advised to see if the laws of their destination countries are even harsher than the U. S. For example, it is possible to receive capital punishment in Singapore for possession or use of drugs.

Perhaps casual drug users and alcohol bashes should not travel beyond their home country and take their chances, or leave these bad habits at home when they travel.

Phisit Likitsupin
Class of '92
Thai Student Association President