

Holidays wrap up giving spirit

Christmas miracles are only a shopping trip away

Every year, on the day after Thanksgiving, my mother and I wake up early, bolster our courage with breakfast at our favorite bagel shop and attack the malls.

ELIZABETH PRESTON

Columnist



and chose our ornaments with care. I picked a 4-year-old girl named Joann, and my mom chose to help a senior citizen. Jesse was 75 years old, and all she asked for was a blanket, a warm-up suit and a sweater. Joann needed shoes, underwear and a coat, but she also wanted a Barbie.

It began when, out of pure desperation near the end of last year's trip, we found ourselves in a store we never shop in. At the door was a Christmas tree filled with paper toy soldiers with writing on them. Curious, we decided to investigate further. It turns out that each ornament had a description of a child or an elderly person and a few gifts they needed or would enjoy. We were excited by the idea, but we weren't sure of the details.

We found a helpful salesclerk who knew about the project, and she filled us in. The particular tree we were looking at was sponsored by the Salvation Army. However, there are trees like this one sponsored by various charitable organizations in almost every mall during this season.

Customers were encouraged to pick an ornament off of the tree and buy one, some or all of the gifts listed. The gifts did not have to be from the store with the tree, or even from the mall we were in. People could just buy the presents where they could find them and then bring them back to the original store.

Then they wrap the gifts and deliver them to the needy children and adults in time for Christmas.

After shopping for roughly 10 hours, my mother and I were feeling quite worn out, but this idea gave us new energy. We each picked an ornament off of the tree, and then we spent two hours going to several stores in search of gifts. Some of the requests were heartbreaking in their simplicity, and others were just toys that any normal child would wish for from Santa Claus.

Last year, Mom's little girl received a dress and a nightgown with lace on it. I bought mine a large doll with different outfits, among other more useful items. We are never able to buy everything on the lists, but we usually only leave one wish unanswered.

This year we went to that store first thing in the morning,

Then, I began to feel guilty. Why was I buying presents for my family and friends when there are children without shoes and coats? Why do I have a wonderful family to share an exquisite Thanksgiving meal with when some people need hugs desperately? These are dangerous questions, because they have no satisfactory answers.

Guilt is an important emotion, one that propels us to apologize when we act insensitively, or encourages us to finish projects that we start. It also has the ability to paralyze.

If we start to feel guilty, and think about the sheer numbers involved with the homeless population in our country, it becomes harder to help.

No one person, or even a family, can make a difference that will show up in the official Census Bureau statistics, or that will end all suffering.

The overwhelming guilt and the feeling that we cannot single-handedly change the world, allows us to dismiss the problem. Instead of telling ourselves that helping one person is better than ignoring the problem, we tell ourselves that nothing we do will make a large enough difference.

The truth is, we probably won't change the world. But an extra 30 dollars or a few hours of volunteer work goes a long way in one needy person's life.

Don't throw your budgets and lists of presents to the wind and charge gifts for homeless people wildly. And don't sit in your warm living rooms with your loving families and ignore the less fortunate.

Find a happy medium where you can take care of your families and help some needy people. And think of Joann and Jesse on Christmas morning. I hope they are safe.

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EDITORIAL

WHOSE WELFARE?

Republican agenda forgets those in need

The Republican's plan to reform welfare is pulling the rug right out from under the feet of those who truly are in need of such services.

The proposed plan under the new Republican Congress calls for a set annual limit on welfare spending including programs such as food stamps, school lunches and aid to the elderly and disabled.

While there is a definite need for welfare reform, this is not the answer. Perhaps governmental spending could be cut in the areas of defense spending and congressional pensions or perhaps there could be more focus on job training. Whatever the solution the answer is not in taking away government welfare programs.

First and foremost, the children, elderly and disabled will suffer from this new proposal. These individuals often cannot help the position they are in and are in desperate need of help. By cutting back on welfare and similar programs, their victimization will continue. Hunger and poverty will continue to plague the nation.

The Republicans need to consider what effect this plan will have in the future. Setting limits on welfare spending neglects to consider how the system would provide for a dramatic increase in eligible welfare recipients in the case of a natural or economic disaster.

One positive part of this reform is the fact that it would give power to the states to assess their own needs. This would help to cut back on red-tape and government bureaucracy.

However, there needs to be some involvement from the federal government in setting general guidelines for the states to abide by.

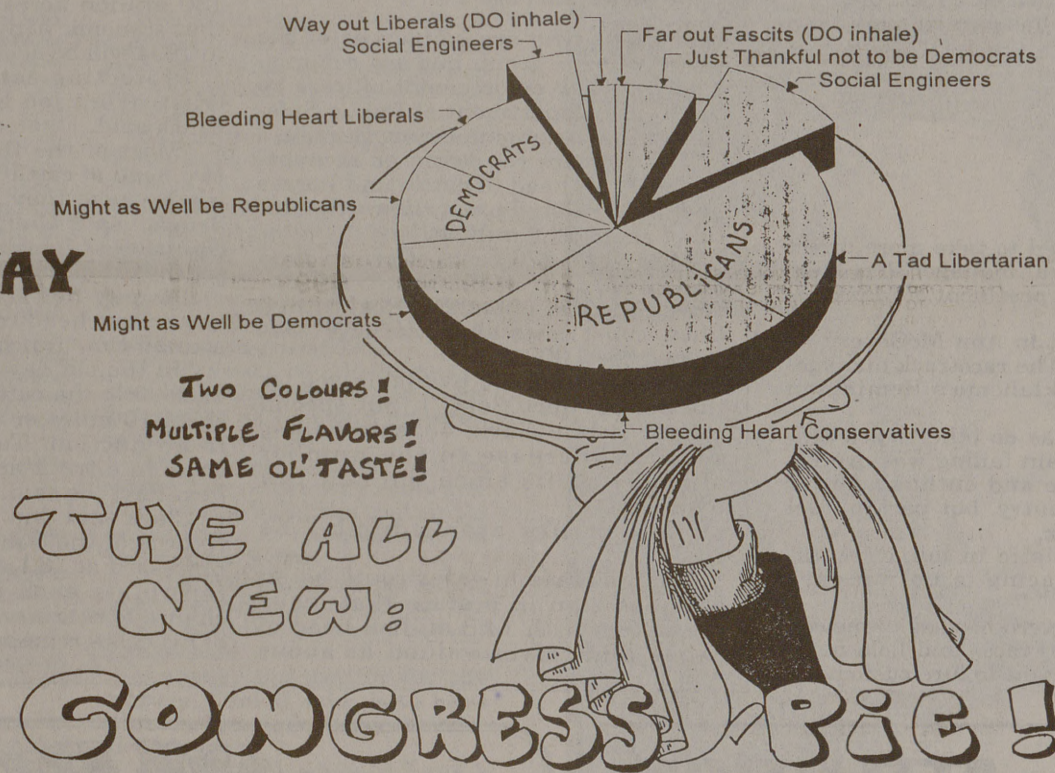
The welfare program has become a serious problem in recent years. It is fair to say that some people who benefit from it don't deserve it and there is a need for some reorganization. But these new reforms should not hurt those who are in need of governmental assistance.

The plan proposed by the Republicans may help control those who abuse the system, but will also abuse those who truly need it.



THE BELTWAY

CAFÉ



MAIL CALL

No walk is the only acceptable kind of walk

This letter is in response to the editorial in The Battalion on Nov. 23. The writers of this editorial want an "all or nothing" policy regarding walks so they can make travel plans.

In my understanding, Texas A&M is a University, not a high school. Walks are great when they happen.

But when professors start catering to every event that students can rationalize meriting a walk, valuable class time is lost.

Professors are pressed for time to finish all the material on the syllabus as it is.

The only acceptable University policy is that walks are unacceptable. Any other policy reflects negatively on the University's attitude toward academics, and toward the value of our money.

I paid for classes, not for walks. If you want to get home faster, skip a class, but don't expect a University-approved walk.

That wastes my money and time that should be spent in the classroom.

Sherry LaBelle
Class of '97

Food and clothing drive helps needy flood victims

For the past week, the Student Government Association has been col-

lecting food, clothing and supplies for the flood victims in southeast Texas.

The drive ended on Wednesday, Nov. 23. On behalf of the Student Government Association and myself, I would like to thank everybody that donated food and clothing.

The drive was quite successful and will help many families in southeast Texas.

Just because the drive is over doesn't mean that you can't keep sending supplies to the disaster-stricken area.

Nor does it mean that these people don't need supplies anymore.

Times are still hard in southeast Texas and government funding is slow in getting to these people.

With the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays close at hand, supplies are even greater in need.

The holidays should also increase our desire to give.

Isn't that what these holidays are about, giving?

The people in southeast Texas are members of our families, they are fellow Texans, they are fellow Aggies and they are people in need.

Therefore, I ask you to get into the spirit of the holidays, get into the spirit of being an Aggie and get into the spirit of helping other people in need.

One of the greatest feelings in the world is to know that you are making a difference in another person's life.

Help the flood victims in southeast Texas by donating supplies.

Gig 'Em!
Pat Troy
Class of '98

Co-head of Flood Relief

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Address letters to: The Battalion - Mail Call 013 Reed McDonald Texas A&M University College Station, TX 77843-1111 Fax: (409) 845-2647

Prayers, politics and Republicans

Religious Right gains momentum, seeks to dominate Republican agenda

Watch what you wish for ... you might actually get it. Earlier this month, voters wished for a change. On Nov. 8 they got it.

There have been all sorts of explanations for the outcomes of the 1994 election. "This is clearly a vote against the Democrats." "This is a continuation of the same desire for change that elected Clinton in 1992." "This vote wasn't about partisanship, it was a vote of anti-incumbency."

Regardless of what the message was, two things were made apparently clear on Nov. 8:

1. Plain and simple, the Democrats got slaughtered.
2. The Republican party, particularly the Religious Right faction, has continued to gain voter support over the past few years.

The rising popularity of this Christian political movement can be attributed to the perception that America's moral are rapidly decaying.

Well, the perfect remedy to this problem would be to elect legislators whose goals include advancing the Christian agenda, right? After all, anything done in the name of God and religion has to be good, right? Well, not really.

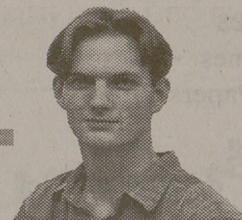
Yeah, yeah. I know what you're thinking: "Uh, oh. Here we go again. Another liberal, communist, satanic Battalion columnist. He's attacking religion. Burn him at the stake!" Hold your horses. This isn't an attack on religion. It's an examination of the larger role that religion is beginning to play in our political system.

The Religious Right's agenda is already being brought to the forefront. The most notable issue being that of school prayer. The Right is pushing for a designated time during the day to allow student or faculty lead prayer in public schools. Don't get this confused with a silent time for reflection: it's not.

Allowing this to pass would be horri-

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Assistant Opinion Editor



ble. After all, we weren't all cut with the same cookie cutter, and neither were our religions. The moment that schools start espousing a certain religion, many students are going to start feeling alienated or start to question their own religions. Surely if the schools are spouting Christian prayers every morning, there must be something wrong with every other religion.

I have always been taught that prayer is a very personal thing, not to be recited in unison at the same time each day of the week. This school prayer thing would turn prayer into a ritualistic meaningless chant, much like the Pledge

We weren't all cut with the same cookie cutter. Neither were our religions.

of Allegiance has become. Not only are some bad issues on the agenda of the Religious Right, but there are also a few bad apples leading the movement.

Pat Robertson, a one-time presidential candidate and major force behind the Religious Right, is a prime example of someone that doesn't need to play an intricate part in shaping our country's legislation. Although he leads many people in their religious endeavors each week, it doesn't make him a good political leader. In fact, some of his views don't seem to be "religious" at all. Take, for instance, his

observation of the recent support for the Equal Rights Amendment:

"This is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."

Whew! Them's fightin' words. Earth to Pat. Sounds like someone has completely missed the entire idea of this issue.

Scars the dickens out of me that he is leading the pack of the Religious Right.

What people need to understand is that even if both houses of Congress and the White House were run by the most moral people in the country, it still wouldn't affect the morality of the citizens. That comes from the home and the family, not from government.

The Republicans, after 40 years of complaining, will now have a chance to try to remedy all the moral woes of the country. I sincerely wish them the best of luck in doing it.

However, the plans that I have seen so far from leave much to be desired. Being able to carry a concealed handgun around town isn't going to solve any crime problems. Taking children away from welfare mothers and putting them in orphanages is far from strengthening family values. And Jesse Helms making threatening comments toward the President certainly doesn't solve any social or economic problems.

Ahhh, but just when you thought the political system was looking kind of dreary, out comes a shining star. Good ol' Ross Perot has decided that if the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade passes during this lame-duck session of Congress, he will do what is necessary to form a true third political party.

Maybe then we should worry about praying.

Sterling Hayman is a junior political science major