

Fate of Aggie Bucks on hold until ruling by Texas Attorney General

State AG to decide if University debit card system violates banking regulations

By Gretchen Perrenot
THE BATTALION

Texas Attorney General Dan Morales has yet to make a ruling on whether A&M can continue its Aggie Bucks system.

The debit card banking system is under review to determine if it violates banking regulations. If the system is continued, A&M may expand the system, allowing off-campus businesses to accept Aggie Bucks.

Ward Tisdale, a spokesman for the Attorney General's Office, said the case is pending before the Attorney General.

"It is impossible to predict when a decision will be made," he said.

Several off-campus bookstore owners

want the system to be expanded to allow them to accept Aggie Bucks and have met with Morales and University officials to discuss the matter.

Texas Aggie Bookstore owner John Raney said the Attorney General said the ruling will probably take months rather than years.

Dr. Jerry Gaston, interim vice president for finance and administration, said he does not know what the decision will be, but he expects the Aggie Bucks system to continue in the foreseeable future.

"Students like Aggie Bucks," Gaston said, "and we want to do whatever we can to continue them."

Raney said his and other bookstore owners' interests are centered around the exclusivity of A&M's contract with Barnes and Noble Bookstores, Inc.

Currently, Barnes and Noble has a

contract with A&M until 2005 to be the only bookstore to accept Aggie Bucks.

Gaston said all contracts have a provision to be modified and the matter must be discussed with Barnes and Noble.

Allowing the off-campus bookstores to use Aggie Bucks will also depend on the outcome of the Attorney General's decision, he said.

The Aggie Bucks system came under review after concerns that universities with debit card systems profit from the interest earned from the money the students put into their accounts and may be violating banking regulations.

In a letter sent to Morales last April, Texas Banking Commissioner Catherine Ghiglieri asked the Attorney General to decide if the debit card systems used at some state universities should be regulated.

Three state universities, Texas A&M University, Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas Tech University, have established debit card systems.



Morales



Amy Browning/The Battalion

Being taken for a ride

Nikki, a springer spaniel, takes time out from her hectic schedule to relax and watch the traffic with her owner outside of G. Rollie White on Wednesday afternoon.

Unintended experiment, study questions safety of controversial AIDS vaccine

Patient still healthy after exposure to weakened version

BOSTON (AP) — One man's HIV infection over a decade ago is giving scientists their first evidence of the safety of an AIDS vaccine that has been considered too dangerous for some.

In a kind of unintended natural experiment, the man caught a genetically weakened form of the AIDS virus. It is virtually identical to the weakened virus used in the experimental vaccine, which works well on monkeys.

Typically people fall ill within 10 years of contracting HIV. But this man, now 44, appears to be perfectly healthy at least 12 years after getting infected.

About 5 percent of HIV-infected people show no signs of immune system damage more than a decade after catching the virus. Understanding the factors that keep them healthy is a major goal of AIDS research.

The study is the first to show that long-term HIV survival clearly may result from catching a crippled

version of the virus.

Certainly, one healthy patient does not prove safety. And it also does not demonstrate whether the vaccine wards off other HIV infections, although the researchers said it may have kept the man, a hemophiliac, from getting more lethal forms of the virus from his clotting material, which was produced before it was routinely screened for HIV.

Recently, doctors discovered that the man's virus was crippled by a mutation in one of its nine genes. By coincidence, this mutation is identical to the one deliberately engineered into an experimental vaccine for SIV, the monkey form of the AIDS virus.

Scientists showed two years ago that giving monkeys this weakened form of the virus protects them from catching the lethal variety, despite deliberate exposure. Yet it does not

make the monkeys sick.

The case of the man who was inadvertently vaccinated was described in Thursday's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine by researchers from the New England Regional Primate Research Center and the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

The search for a human AIDS vaccine has been disappointing. Giving dead fragments of the virus does not appear to stimulate the body enough to ward off infection. Yet giving a weakened but live virus — called an attenuated vaccine — is considered too risky because of the chance it will cause the disease it is intended to prevent.

Dr. Ronald C. Desrosiers of the primate center said many scientists agree that a live attenuated AIDS vaccine is likely to be the most effective at prevent-

ing infection.

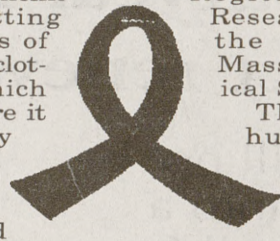
"But the big concern is safety, safety, safety, safety," he said. "This guy is doing fine. This is evidence of sorts that it can be safe."

In an accompanying editorial in the journal, Dr. David Baltimore of Massachusetts Institute of Technology wrote that "continued study of an attenuated vaccine is reasonable."

He noted that a still-unpublished study, conducted by Dr. Ruth Ruprecht of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, found that the crippled virus caused AIDS when given to baby monkeys.

Because infants' immune defenses are immature, a virus that is harmless to grownups may be lethal to them. Her study raises the possibility that mothers who get an attenuated vaccine might pass the AIDS virus to their babies.

Dr. John Sullivan of the University of Massachusetts said he thinks researchers should try to test such a vaccine.



POLICE BEAT

The following incidents were reported to the University Police Department between Jan. 13 and 17:

Disorderly Conduct

Between Parking Area 2 & 3: North side of Walton Hall - Three individuals received citations for urinating in public.

Misdemeanor Theft

West side of Commons - A black 21-speed Baci bicycle was stolen.
Dunn Hall - A red Nishiki Back Roads 15-speed bicycle was stolen.
McInnis Hall - A green 15-speed Murray bicycle was stolen.
The Pavilion - A black Huffy 10-speed mountain bicycle was stolen.
Schuhmacher Hall - A red 10-speed Sterling Mega 650 mountain bicycle was stolen.

Minor in Possession of Alcoholic Beverage / Criminal Trespass

Two individuals were issued citations

Arson

Dormitory 4 - A security officer on foot patrol observed a student set fire to a napkin in a trash can on the first floor of Dormitory 4. An individual following the student reached in the trash container and extinguished the napkin.

Driving While Intoxicated

Parking Area 40 - An intoxicated motorist was arrested and incarcerated at the Brazos County Jail.

Burglary of Habitation

Spence Hall - A Texas Instrument calculator was stolen from the victim's third floor room.
Spence Hall - A Texas A&M University residence hall telephone and a Bell South answering machine were stolen from the victim's third floor room.

CORRECTION:

In a Page One article Tuesday, The Battalion incorrectly reported that Highway 60 would be a shortcut to Highway 21. Instead, Highway 47 is being formed as a shortcut between Highway 60 and

Highway 21. Also, the \$11 million allocated to the Bryan branch of the Texas Department of Transportation is for farm road maintenance for the ten counties in the Bryan District.

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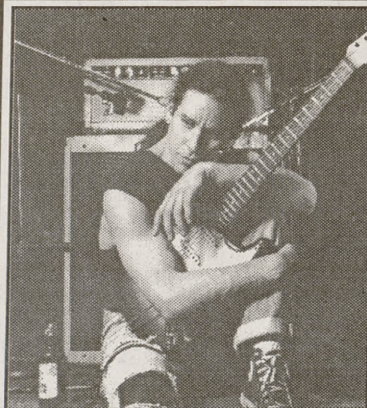
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Responses may be turned into Reed McDonald 012. Please include your name, class, major, and hometown.

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