

THE BATTALION
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EDITORIAL

LET US DECIDE

The Texas Legislature should let citizens decide fate of concealed handgun law

Last week the Texas Senate passed a measure that would allow citizens to carry concealed handguns. The bill will now advance to the House for consideration.

The Legislature should use a popular referendum to determine the fate of the carry concealed handguns bill. This sensitive issue can only be resolved fairly by allowing each citizen to make the decision.

Citizens carrying guns could easily take the law into their own hands, which would only increase the amount of violence that already exists in Texas.

Advocates of such a measure claim that increased crime is a driving factor behind the legislation. Yet the crime rate in every major category in Texas decreased.

A "right-to-carry" law would send the wrong message to Texas children. It would convey the message that it is acceptable to be violent. It says that the answer to crime and violence is an increase in guns.

A right-to-carry law would not reduce the amount of crime within the state. Violence would more than likely

increase with more accidental and unnecessary shootings.

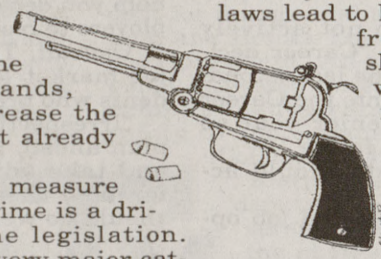
The speedy passage of the concealed handgun bill by the Texas Senate is disconcerting. There is no research that shows that allowing citizens to carry concealed weapons will decrease crime. In fact, much of the research conducted shows otherwise.

A study conducted at the University of Maryland found that right-to-carry laws lead to higher numbers of deaths from firearms. The state should eliminate concealed weapons instead of allowing them.

The bottom line of this issue is that citizens should be allowed to vote by referendum concerning any law that would legalize

concealed handguns. A recent poll reflects that 51 percent of the Texas citizens would support such a law, while another poll showed that 51 percent would not.

The Legislature should With such a divided opinion on such a crucial issue, it only seems fitting that the Legislature would allow the people to decide for themselves.



Students need protection from theft
Bookstores should implement system that monitors purchases

It's becoming an ever growing problem on campus — the theft of books and identification cards.

I have been the victim of at least four stolen books, and I am aware of many other students who have had books stolen.

Just last week, someone stole a book from my roommate and a buddy down the hallway. Lucky for my roommate, he had put his name in an inconspicuous place inside his book.

With this information, he called the local bookstores to see if his book had been sold back. After calling nearly every bookstore, his efforts finally paid off.

The Texas A&M Bookstore had bought the book back earlier that morning. They were even good enough to give the book back.

However, this was only the beginning. Policy at the Texas A&M Bookstore requires that anyone selling a book must present an I.D. card and telephone number.

The employee who helped us find the stolen book was able to track down my other buddy's books — which had been sold back only minutes before by the same person.

Things were getting more interesting by the second. Soon we would have the name of the person who stole the books.

But here's where our luck began to run out. It turned out that the I.D. card the person used to sell the books was stolen; the thief had used someone

else's name, I.D. and phone number to sell the books.

This, for all practical purposes, ended our hopes of catching the thief. All we could do was hope that he might use the I.D. card again and get caught.



ZACH HALL COLUMNIST

I need not explain how expensive books are the first time you buy them, much less if you have to purchase more books to replace stolen ones.

Something must be done to prevent these corrupt few from profiting off the misfortunes of others. Students aren't the only ones who lose when our books are stolen. Bookstores also lose money when they return stolen books to their rightful owners — as was the case with my two friends.

If your I.D. card is stolen you can call a 24-hour a day hotline — 862-4884 — and have it canceled.

The I.D. cards work similar to credit cards; when a stolen card is swiped through the scanning machine, such as those used for Aggie bucks, the employee can see that it has been lost or stolen. The holder of that card can then be apprehended.

However, in the case of buying back books, there is no way to tell if the book has been stolen.

To prevent stolen books from being sold back to bookstores, a new system of selling and buying books should be implemented.

Let's hope that local bookstores will realize the problem and care enough

about students to agree that they should implement a new or improved policy on buying and selling books.

One such idea might include using one's I.D. card as a means to buy and then sell back books. The card would be scanned when purchasing a book and a serial code corresponding to the book to be bought would be registered on the I.D. card.

Only the person holding that I.D. card could sell the book back. This system would be similar to many public library checkout systems.

Books could still be bought at one bookstore and sold back to another. All bookstores would have access to the computer system that would hold the information needed to buy a book from a student. This would be similar to the procedure for using Aggie bucks anywhere on campus.

You might ask, "What happens when I want to sell a book to my friend and he wants to sell the book back later?"

The system could be set up to allow students to access the system and transfer the books serial numbers from one student's account to another.

Any solution is going to require some thought, research and programming by the University and cooperation from local bookstores.

Nevertheless, the end result will be very beneficial to students and bookstores, and it will be a positive step in preventing the theft of books and I.D. cards.

Zach Hall is junior mechanical engineering

MAIL CALL

Spirit of Aggieland can be found in friendships

After being accepted to Texas A&M the admissions office sent me a poster inscribed with The Spirit of Aggieland. The song claims that "there's a spirit that can ne'er be told... it's the spirit of Aggieland."

Four years ago I entered A&M knowing little of this spirit. Later, as I experienced Aggie traditions, I thought I had discovered the soul of A&M. I was wrong!

On March 16, my best friends, Joel and Gina Johnson, died in a traffic accident. Unfortunately, it took the death of these graduating Texas Aggies to make me realize what the real spirit of Aggieland is all about.

It's not the great traditions or the prestigious diplomas that give life to A&M, it is the friendships. The Spirit of A&M lies within the intangible bonds we make with other Aggies.

So from now on when someone asks you what makes A&M so great, tell them first about your friendships. I know I will.

Chris Forthman Electrical Engineering '95

A&M too often courts "pseudo-Aggies"

A few years ago A&M changed the name of a street to George Bush Blvd. Then we were honored by Bush bringing his voluminous library (one-term president's worth) to dear ole Aggieland.

I don't understand why A&M didn't send George packing for Connecticut or Houston, but I've learned to live with it.

I thought A&M had gone too far on that, but it really disappointed me with the Phil Gramm circus on the steps of the Administration Building. I saw RVs, BQs, and all sorts of cadets at this most important of occasions. Ms. Rev must have been busy!

Gramm has reluctantly pointed out that he used the same tactics as Bill Clinton to not go to Vietnam. However, he points out that his economical talents would have been wasted in the basement of the Pentagon. Come now Phil — I bet they would've let you gone into the infantry, if that would have made serving worth your time.

The only difference I see between Phil and Bill on this matter is that Bill had the conviction of his beliefs to say he thought the Vietnam War was a bad idea, while Phil gave new meaning to "don't ask, don't tell, and maybe no one will notice I'm not serving."

I've noticed Gramm only having two convictions through the years. First, to

keep his rear out of the military (be it the Pentagon or Vietnam) and secondly to keep his rear in Washington (be it Democratic or Republican).

I feel that he is hiding in the bosom of A&M so that no one will question his patriotism, hoping that most people will overlook his interracial marriage.

I don't have a problem with either of these situations and in fact agree with some of your views.

My problem is with the way A&M is peddling its birthright by courting every pseudo-Aggie wannabe that comes down the pike. We don't need this — A&M can proudly stand on its own.

I'm afraid to know what A&M's plans are to honor the one term Governor Bush — Perhaps the George W. Bush branch of The Texas A&M Savings and Loan.

So I ask myself "Where is Clayton Williams when we need him?" He's probably out somewhere enjoying the weather. So I ask, "What have George or Bill ever done for A&M?"

Come on A&M, get your head out.

Dwight L. Phillips Class of '76

Guns don't kill people, people kill people

In Kyle Littlefield's March 20 column, he falls into the same trap as many anti-gun advocates. He believes that "People don't kill people, guns kill people."

I have spent 23 years around guns, and never have they killed anyone. These devices that "propel a small piece of metal with such force that it can rip through human flesh and bone" that the NRA and the Texas Senate have overlooked, are powerless to act without human interference.

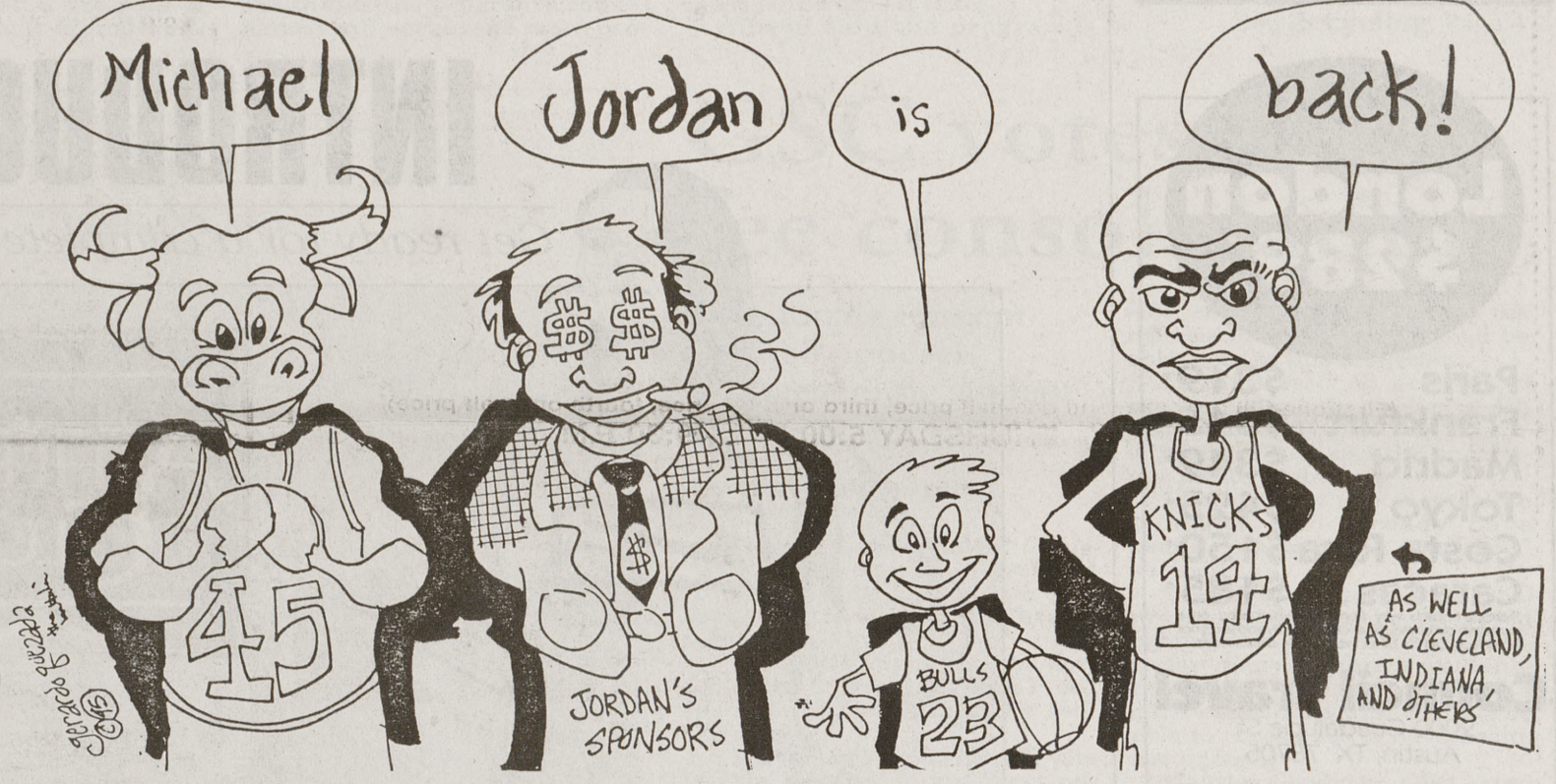
Littlefield and so many others are trying to villianize guns as the culprit of the increased violence, instead of the people committing the violence. They don't understand that it is just as easy to rob a convenience store with a carrot in your coat pocket as a gun, and it is just as easy to kill someone with a baseball bat or a rock as with a gun. Should we outlaw bats, rocks and ropes since these can be lethal weapons? No.

If someone had been carrying a gun in the massacres at the Luby's and McDonald's restaurants, he or she could have put a stop to the killing. If one human life is saved by someone carrying a gun, it is worth it.

One final fallacy in Littlefield's column was his comment about Dirty Harry fantasies. Dirty Harry didn't use a Glock. He preferred .44 Magnums.

Trey Morton Class of '93

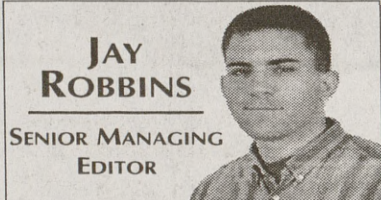
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Daily reminders of freedom
Calendar provides new perspectives of First Amendment

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

— The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution



JAY ROBBINS SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR

Last January I got a free daily calendar which followed an unlikely theme: the First Amendment. Each day's page includes the date, the First Amendment and a quote from some famous, infamous or unknown individual who at some point happened to talk about freedom or the press, or maybe both.

This compilation of 365 thoughts has become an important part of my everyday ritual. I look forward to turning the new day's page and seeing the "quote of the day."

Yesterday the calendar quoted former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney: "Even politicians who feel the lash of the media from time to time understand that, in great democracies, that is part of the price you pay to maintain a vigilant, effective and functioning democracy."

Today, 18th century English essayist Samuel Johnson contends, "A newswriter is a man without virtue, who lies at home for his own profit."

That's quite a switch. Food for thought, at any rate. Supreme Court justices, biblical prophets, editors, poets, presidents and other pundits voice their opinions and observations as I flip through the year day by day. They take turns slamming the Left or the Right, criticizing the news media or singing its praises, questioning widely varied philosophies or commenting on the world.

Jan. 1 started out with James Baldwin: "[F]reedom is the fire which burns away illusion." The comment struck hard when I recalled the eye-opening discussion of morality, race and sexuality in Baldwin's Another Country.

That novel seemed to burn away many of my immature 18-year-old misconceptions. And my high school library, in all its "freedom," didn't have a copy — probably because Baldwin had the audacity to actually discuss right and wrong, racism and — whisper the words — GAY people. Baldwin's Book probably gave me the first clue I noticed that not everyone views freedom as simply "the ability to do what I want."

Well, it can't do any harm. The important thing is that the people who compiled the calendar, who said and wrote things published in it and who read it are all thinking about the meaning of freedom. The conscious effort to define and understand that most precious asset of society is essential to preserving and ensuring it.

A survey of newspaper editors by the Associated Press ranked the O.J. Simpson case as the top news story of 1994. A Times Mirror Center survey of newspaper readers listed the topic third, after the Southern California earthquake and the early 1994 blizzards in the Northeast.

What the hell? The Simpson case is a tragedy that left two children motherless and damaged or altered dozens of lives. But, it will hardly affect the whether Joe Aggie can find a job, or Jane Aggie still has the right to an abortion. Will their kids get to pray in school when they go off to kindergarten?

Politicians and activists change our lives every day and we pay almost no heed. Most of the time it doesn't matter what they do. Budget shortfalls, health care crises, trade deficits and concentrations of power in corrupt "establishments" remain to plague us, despite much publicized efforts by different presidents and political parties.

But, with my trusty First Amendment calendar by my

The conscious effort to define and understand freedom — that most precious asset of society — is essential to preserving and ensuring it.

side, I notice the movements to eliminate affirmative action, to cut funding for artistic programs because of their content. Various people out in the great, cruel world want to lower my taxes, raise my interest rates, keep children from learning about sex in school and amend the U.S. Constitution for at least a dozen minor reasons.

People cannot know how such ideas and proposals will alter or limit freedom if they don't know what freedom means to individuals, to America and to the world.

The only way to uncover the basic notion of freedom is to probe its depths in thought and practice.

My favorite calendar line so far comes from Feb 18: "We must be free not because we claim freedom, but because we practice it."

— William Faulkner

Think about it.

Jay Robbins is a senior political science and English major