

THE BATTALION

Established in 1893

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EDITORIAL

PLAYING POLITICS

Wilson should not attempt to end all affirmative action programs.

Last week, California governor and Republican presidential candidate Pete Wilson signed an executive order eliminating all affirmative action programs not mandated by federal or state law.

Unfortunately, good politics does not always mean good policy. Gov. Wilson's blatant attempt to score political points has come at the expense of many beneficial and even necessary affirmative action programs.

The order applies only to previously issued executive orders, but it will have a large impact in certain areas.

It eliminates about 150 advisory boards that offer guidance to state agencies on affirmative action and hiring goals.

It also will greatly impact several hundred million dollars worth of contracts in the Department of Transportation, since the order reduces the amount of project contract money set aside for minority- and woman-owned businesses from 20 percent to 10 percent.

In an open letter to Californians released at the same time, Wilson encouraged residents to pass the California Civil Rights Initiative, a November 1996 ballot proposal that would eliminate affirmative action programs in state jobs and higher education enrollment. He has also requested that governing boards at state colleges and universities follow his lead when dealing with admissions.

Gov. Wilson is sending a negative message - that all affirmative action programs lack merit. This notion is untrue. Although affirmative action has made progress in reducing discriminatory hiring practices towards women and mi-

norities, discrimination still exists. In many cases, affirmative action programs allow historically disadvantaged groups to compete on an equal basis with white males.

Diversity especially is important in educational institutions. State colleges and universities should seek to represent as many sections of American society as possible. The need for these types of programs still exists, even at Texas A&M University. The representation of minority faculty members and students at A&M is far below where it should be.

Gov. Wilson's hypocrisy on the issue of affirmative action has reduced his credibility on the subject. As mayor of San Diego, he supported several affirmative action programs. At the signing ceremony of the executive order, he sat in front of a group of exclusively female and minority firefighters, although his statement mentioned moving "toward a colorblind society."

Presidential politics have obviously entered the picture, as his press office issued a statement trumpeting Gov. Wilson as "the nation's first governor to roll back affirmative action programs."

Hopefully, Gov. Wilson's actions will not encourage other political leaders to exploit the complex and sensitive issue of affirmative action for political gain.

The lack of good judgment and hypocrisy Gov. Wilson has displayed do not serve Californians well, and are traits that certainly should not be spread to other states and institutions.

Christian "contract" not family-based

Poor old Christianity, it sure is lying down with some strange bedfellows these days. A few weeks ago, Ralph Reed and his 1.6-million-member Christian Coalition unveiled the "Christian" sequel to the Republican Party's Contract With America.



CHRIS STIDVENT
COLUMNIST

Their new set of suggestions is titled the "Contract With the American Family." But I have had a little trouble determining just what exactly is family-oriented about this new package, other than its title. For one, I've always been a little suspicious of the right-wing fundamentalist definition of exactly what constitutes a family.

Under one provision of the earlier Republican Contract, specifically the Personal Responsibility Act, more than \$60 billion in governmental spending on poor women and children would be gutted from the federal budget over the next five years. This would be accomplished mostly through the elimination of such programs as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps, the Jobs Program, as well as others whose aim is to guarantee child nutrition, protection and welfare.

These programs would all be lumped into block grants given by the federal government to the individual states. The states would be under no obligation to spend the money in the same manner in which it was originally being spent, and some predict that the net result of all of this tinkering would be the elimination of government aid to 6.1 million children and their families. So, maybe the right-wingers responsible for this little gem might want to modify the name of their new contract to read "Contract With the Financially Inde-

pendent American Family." Because poor families sure as hell aren't going to be any better off under this "pro-family" union of politics and religion.

But wait, the concerned reader might pause, even if the Republican contract is apparently targeting the dependent poor, where is the link between it and Reed's Christian Coalition?

Well, other than the more than \$1 million that the Coalition donated to the Republican party's efforts to get the contract passed, not much.

And, in return for this generous outburst of Christian charity, the conscientious observer might have noticed such Republican party honchos as Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole vociferously condoning the Christian Coalition's own little contract. The Christian right is starting to swing some formidable weight within the confines of the Republican party, and it's a safe bet that the right people have sat up and taken notice.

So, just what does this new "Contract With the American Family" set out to change? Well, for one, it seeks the elimination of such programs as the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Service programs created under Clinton a few years ago. Boy, those Christian Coalition guys sure must be pretty sharp.

I hadn't even thought about looking for Satan and his anti-family denizens on Sesame Street, in the local community symphony or in the programs designed to improve our country through skilled, volunteer labor.

The main point of the Contract is that it

proposes a possible constitutional amendment designed to allow the expression of "voluntary" religious sentiments in our public schools.

This means that students would be able to pray before football games, observe a moment of silence sometime during the day and place religious symbols and artifacts in prominent places throughout the school.

My gosh, for a group of people that seem to have no trouble remembering and applying the Second Amendment of the Constitution to the benefit and protection of us all, these guys still can't seem to get a grip on that pesky "separation of church and state" thing.

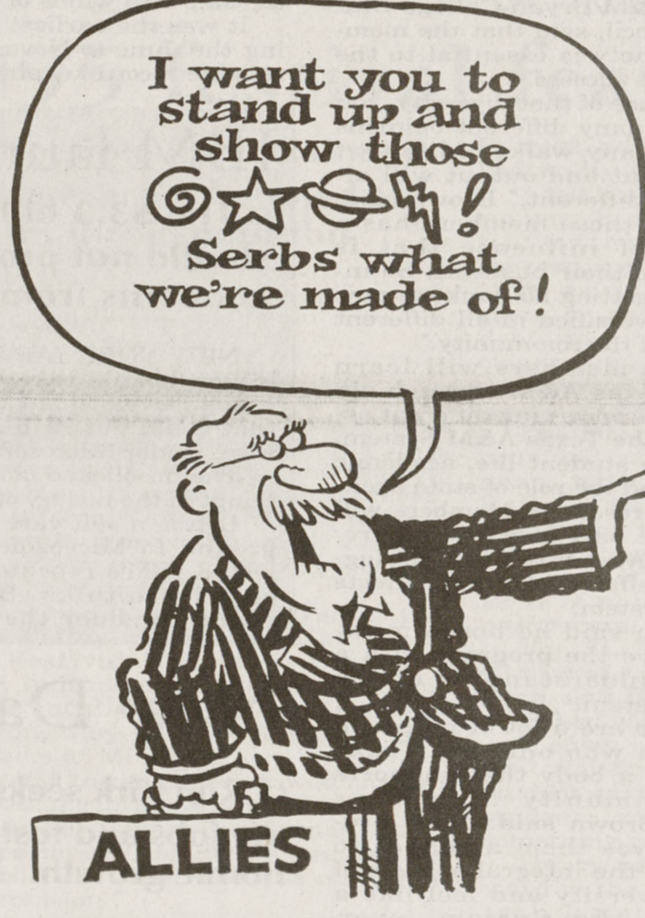
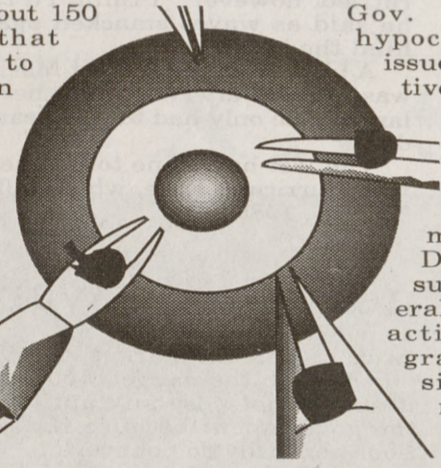
If you hang a picture of Jesus on the wall and then tell everybody that religions other than Christianity are still acceptable, it isn't that far of a leap to figuring out which religion is not only acceptable, but preferred.

Christianity may be the predominant religion represented in our public schools, but it certainly isn't the only one. "Voluntary" moments of prayer only serve to differentiate between the religious and the non-religious.

Maybe some of our public school students could use this generously provided prayer time to their benefit each morning if all of the pieces of the Coalition's and the Republican Contracts are enacted.

If the government won't feed, house and clothe a poor child, there doesn't seem to be any harm in appealing to a higher power. The Republicans and the Christian Coalition may not be listening to the poor. Maybe God will.

Chris Stidvent is a senior philosophy major



Childhood advice still applies to college students: "Look before you cross"

Texas A&M often seems like a world unto itself. Here, the rules of the "real" world don't seem to apply.

This manifests itself in many ways, from students who survive off of ranch dressing and soda pop to ones who sleep until noon and stay awake until three in the morning.

One particular way that we all participate in thumbing our noses at the general rules of society is when we cross the street. Students on campus generally act as if cars do not even exist.

Usually the most a student does before crossing a busy street is to hold the book that they are reading a little higher so they do not trip while stepping down the curb.

This becomes a problem when students begin ignoring crosswalks, walking out from behind bushes without looking and generally making it impos-



ELIZABETH PRESTON
COLUMNIST

sible for drivers to even guess where they will pop out of.

I am a part of this problem. My policy is to pretend that I am not crossing the street, so I don't have to stop what I am doing.

I don't deign to look at the cars I walk in front of - this campus is for pedestrians (I righteously declare in my head).

Motorists have come to understand these rules, and they tend to drive very slowly when on campus. Usually,

Today, a cyclist was quickly wheeling out of between the old and new parts of the Chemistry building and crossing the street to Halbouty. Following the usual college rules of street crossing - crosswalk? what is a crosswalk? - he sped into the street.

The problem was that he was about two feet away from a little old man in a huge, old car, and that the cyclist was

speeding out from between two buildings. The motorist slammed on his brakes and the car squealed to a halt.

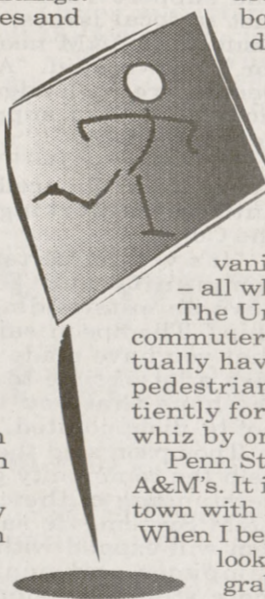
The cyclist barely looked twice as he sped on his way. The driver was a little more shaken.

He stepped out of his car and shook his head in dismay and awe at the audacity of the student cyclist, all the while holding his hand over his heart.

Those of us who were watching shook our heads in wonder and murmured to each other about the need for paying more attention while crossing the street.

It was by the skin of his teeth that the cyclist did not end up in an accident or worse.

The campus is still saddened by the thought of Trevor Shockley, an A&M student who was involved in a bicycle/bus accident last semester. While it has not been



decided whose fault that was, both probably could have been driving more defensively.

This cannot just be explained away as a college campus problem. I spent endless hours at the University of Houston while my mom was finishing her dissertation.

I have also been to Pennsylvania State University three times - all while school was in session. The University of Houston is a commuter school, so the cars there actually have the right of way over the pedestrians. Students must wait patiently for several minutes as cars whiz by on the many campus streets.

Penn State has a campus much like A&M's. It is located in a small, college town with approximately 40,000 students. When I began to cross the street without looking or hesitating, my friend grabbed my elbow and pulled me out of the way of the oncoming

traffic. I was even at a crosswalk.

She explained to me - in language that she would normally reserve for a particularly dense 3-year-old - that in Pennsylvania they look before crossing the street. Sheepishly, I began to follow her lead.

It is a great part of Texas A&M that the drivers on campus have learned to act with caution and drive very slowly.

Unfortunately, this does not stop all accidents.

Students will continue to be injured until they realize that they are not invincible.

If Robert Fulgham, the author of *All I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, is right and we all did learn everything we needed to know in kindergarten then a lot of us have forgotten one of the most important lessons.

Look both ways before you cross the street. Your life could depend on it.

Elizabeth Preston is a senior English major

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News offices are in 013 Reed McDonald Building.
NEWSROOM HOURS:

Sunday, 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.
Monday - Thursday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Newsroom phone: 845-3313; Fax: 845-2647
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The Battalion (USPS 045-360) is published daily, Monday through Friday during the fall and spring semesters and Monday through Thursday during the summer sessions (except University holidays and exam periods), at Texas A&M University. Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77840.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 230 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.