

# OPINION

## The Smoking Gun

### Texas is justified in tobacco lawsuit

Most Texans know that using tobacco is a dangerous practice. But not all Texans know about the dangerous and illegal practices of the tobacco industry.

**DAN MORALES**  
GUEST COLUMNIST



states will surely follow. Each year, the American people suffer more than \$100 billion in losses because of rising health care expenses, higher insur-

ance premiums and premature deaths caused by smoking. The tobacco industry portrays use of its products as a matter of choice. However, the evidence now shows that the industry systematically targets children with advertisements and promotions to addict them to cigarettes before they are old enough to make adult choices. It is no accident that Joe Camel is as widely known to most kids as Mickey Mouse.

Eighty-two percent of adult smokers began as children, and by the time they were able to make adult choices, it was literally too late. The companies saturate stores near public schools with cigarette promotions, and they continue to resist efforts to ban vending machine sales because they know that is how most kids purchase cigarettes.

The tobacco industry will deny, as it has for decades, that it markets its products to children. The companies will deny they conspired to defraud. But these denials are no longer credible. The purveyors of smoking death now hold a smoking gun. Literally thousands of pages of previously concealed industry information have been made public.

Those documents are powerful evidence. The evidence shows that tobacco companies suppressed research to make safer cigarettes. They suppressed knowledge that nicotine is highly addictive. And they publicly denied that nicotine is addictive when their own records show they know differently.

Tobacco executives swore under oath to Congress that they never manipulated nicotine levels. But we know that one company developed strains of tobacco with double the nicotine yield. The evidence will show that the time has come for these big tobacco companies to pay us back for their ill-gotten gains.

Dan Morales is the Texas Attorney General

### Tobacco industry should face the truth

If desperate people do desperate things, don't be surprised by anything the tobacco industry may do in the near future. If its recent actions are representative of their desperation, we should all be watching our backs (and our lungs).

**ELAINE MEJIA**  
COLUMNIST



genetically engineered strains of tobacco with unnaturally high nicotine levels, then smuggled the seeds to South America, and shipped the product back to the United States for processing. Most startling of all, companies suppressed their own research that would have enabled them to manufacture safer cigarettes.

The war between the tobacco industry and anti-smoking proponents has been heating up in recent weeks. Mounting evidence against the industry has prompted a federal lawsuit by six states (and more on the way).

Texas Attorney General Dan Morales is the target of the most recent Tobacco Institute (the lobbying firm of the major tobacco companies) assault. Last Thursday, on behalf of the state of Texas, Morales filed a federal lawsuit against the tobacco industry. Morales hopes to recover the \$4 billion that Texas taxpayers have spent on Medicaid for persons with tobacco-related illnesses. Morales has said there is sufficient evidence to prove that the tobacco industry has been lying to citizens since the 1950s about the harmful effects of abusing tobacco.

Commissioned by the tobacco industry, Public Opinion Strategies of Alexandria, Va., conducted a survey of 800 Texans. The purpose of the poll was to determine how certain unsubstantiated claims about Morales would affect a possible re-election bid. The results were delivered to Morales in an attempt to remind him of the industry's political clout and to try and convince him that a well-funded candidate could pose a serious threat to a re-election bid. Despite the threat, Morales went ahead with the lawsuit.

According to Morales, "Thousands of pages of previously concealed industry information have been made public." Contained in these documents is evidence suggesting that tobacco companies have kept quiet about knowledge they have proving that nicotine is extremely addictive. Also, tobacco companies

document evidence being used by Texas and the six other states suing the industry on behalf of their citizens. The FDA is set to pass a rule restricting the tobacco industry's advertising aimed at children. Because it is considering the testimonies in its decision, it is required to postpone the rule to hear comments on them. This could push the passage of the rule back until this fall, possibly even after the November elections. President Clinton plans to use the issue in the campaign regardless. The Republican nominee, Bob Dole, opposes the rule.

It is human nature to believe that people are inherently good — that they are "innocent until proven guilty." Enough evidence has been mounted, however, to quit giving tobacco companies the benefit of the doubt. They are not in the taste-pleasing cigarette business; they are in the nicotine-delivery business and they know it. Although smokers are not devoid of all responsibility for their own addictions, they have been victimized by a group of powerful citizens intent on getting rich and staying rich regardless of who suffers. It is time for Americans to turn the tide against these victimizing companies. Smokers should join the fight as well, because they have the most to gain from cigarettes with less nicotine and the most to lose if they continue not to have the choice.

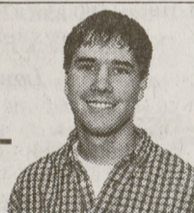
Elaine Mejia is a senior political science major



### Houston we have a problem — no one cares about the shuttle

I came into The Battalion office to write a column on space shuttle apathy. See, I had this theory about how no one cares about the space shuttle program anymore. I sat down with The Dallas Morning News and opened to a story about the recent malfunctioning of its cargo doors. The shuttle almost had to make an emergency landing.

**CHRIS MILLER**  
COLUMNIST



But, sadly, as I contemplated my angle and reviewed the facts of the story, I decided I didn't care at all about what I was writing. It was a labor to press each key on the keyboard as I struggled through writing a column about the space shuttle Atlantis. I really didn't give a poop about the space shuttle. My theory was if no one died or got hurt in the space shuttle, then who cares at all about what

happened to them in space? And that's when it hit me; I was also a victim of space shuttle apathy.

Think about it. Did anyone even know the space shuttle Atlantis was in space until the cargo doors malfunctioned? That is one clear sign of space shuttle apathy.

I remember the days when my family would huddle around the boob tube, feeling our American pride well up in our hearts and burst out of our ears in a spectacle of glorious light every time the space shuttle launch was televised. Tears would run down our faces and my dad would declare the day a holiday. I remember the way he would take me aside on those launch days and say: "Son, don't worry about taking out the trash today. Today we should revel in the fact that we are Americans and that we can

choose whether we want to take out the trash. And son, the space shuttle is a perfect manifestation of that freedom."

Those glory days are over. Today, space shuttle apathy reigns supreme.

#### Did anyone even know the space shuttle Atlantis was in space until the cargo doors malfunctioned?

A clear sign of space shuttle apathy is the way the press reports on the shuttle. On the front page of Sunday's Dallas Morning News, a story was run about Russian life expectancy. You see, Russians are dying younger these days and scientists just don't know why. Now that is one issue I really don't care about. But, after perusing

the paper further, I noticed the story about Atlantis and its cargo doors malfunctioning sitting happily unnoticed on page four. Do you want to know the reason why The Dallas Morning News ran Russian life expectancy on page one and the U.S. space shuttle program story on page four? It's because The Dallas Morning News knows all about space shuttle apathy. The press knows that Americans don't care at all about space shuttles anymore.

Dear reader, if you've even made it to this point in the column, I'll bet you care more about space shuttles than I. I have so much space shuttle apathy, I can't even poke a stick at it. I don't even care enough about it to give this column a witty conclusion.

But that's space shuttle apathy for you.

Chris Miller is a sophomore English major



### MAIL CALL

#### Put up or shut up about candidates

In the past two weeks, I have heard many people complain about certain student body presidential candidates, implying that they have proof of severe (even criminal) misconduct.

To these and others, I would like to say the following: If you really believe what you have to say is important, take a stand. Don't just sit around and do nothing. That accomplishes little.

If, on the other hand, you are just blowing hot air, shut up. I

am tired of hearing you complain.

Jimmy Charney  
Class of '96

#### Columnists should not bash A&M spirit

I am writing in response to H.L. Baxter's column Tuesday. What is so terrible about having school spirit? What is it about the thousands of people who cheer loudly at football games, mug at Midnight Yell and lose their voices at Fish Camp that makes them bad people? Baxter, Aja

Henderson and especially Chris Stidvent seem to have made it their personal mission to bash those who love A&M. Part of their argument may be that they don't feel welcome. Well, if you don't try to incorporate yourself into A&M, you are never going to feel like part of A&M. I also wonder if Stidvent, Baxter or Henderson have ever been enrolled in another university? I have, and as such I can readily justify my enthusiasm for A&M. Remember, all of us came here because we wanted to, and if we wish, we are free to transfer. If one is honestly unhappy here at A&M, then he or she should go somewhere else. Either way you look at it, life is too short or too long to have to deal with a bad situation that can be changed. I am proud to have the opportunity to come here, and I appreciate what this University is giving me — an education and a head start into the real world.

Christopher D. Scheer  
Class of '97