

# OPINION

THURSDAY  
August 8, 1996

Page 5

## Tax issue cuts both ways

In a 45-minute speech on Monday, Bob Dole revealed a scheme to cut taxes by an estimated \$548 billion across six years.



JEREMY VALDEZ  
COLUMNIST

The eagle has landed. Actually, Dole used to be more of a hawk — a deficit hawk. That's the term used to describe people who would go to great pains to reduce the federal budget deficit.

But that's all in Dole's past. Now he promises that, if elected, he would work to cut personal income taxes for all Americans by 15 percent.

Dole's new supply-side stance asserts that by cutting taxes, Americans will have more income to spend, and the increased economic activity will pay for the tax cut.

Whether that is true will probably never be found out, since Dole still trails Clinton by 20 points in the polls. But Dole's change of heart is probably motivated more by politics than rock-solid economic theory.

In order to remind Americans he is still a candidate, Dole needs something other than his age to distinguish himself from Clinton.

It is likely that Dole is resurrecting Reaganomics because he needs an argument where his voice still sounds fresh.

Lately, most of Dole's campaign speeches begin something like this: "Bob Dole has been out on the front lines working for (insert issue here) for the past 120 years."

By highlighting his longevity in Washington *ad nauseam*, he has left many voters asking why, if he has been working for so long, is there still a scarcity of tort reform, fiscal conservatism, family values, free pony rides, etc.?

Republicans can rush to Dole's defense by saying it is the evil Democrats that have kept Dole and others of his ilk from working their legislative magic.

The problem is, Dole doesn't have to convince Republicans to vote for him in November. Instead, he needs to woo undecided voters and disgruntled Clinton supporters.

But the awesome cunning of Clinton's new swing to the right is that he has betrayed only the special interests that would never consider supporting Dole.

Homosexuals, for example, might be miffed at Clinton for helping to exclude them from the marriage pool, but most of them would sooner go straight than vote for Dole.

Contrast this with Dole's public embrace of the tobacco lobby. He has unnecessarily fended an interest group that some Americans blame for the deaths of family members.

Dole would have collected tobacco money and votes even if he had a no-smoking sign tattooed on his back. The only thing that tobacco lobbyists hate more than fresh air is the Clinton administration that has hammered the industry's death-peddling incessantly.

Clinton extends his lead by mainstreaming his positions in the areas where Dole could have accused him of liberal extremism.

So now that Clinton is a Republican, and a more likable one than Dole, the aging former senator is forced to go for broke.

Economists on both sides of the political spectrum will no doubt argue whether or not supply-side economics would break the nation's economy. But Dole's new budget centerpiece spotlights other interesting questions.

Would Dole dramatically abandon his previous budgetary philosophy if his campaign were in better shape? Does Dole truly agree with the plan he announced on Monday? Would he be in such trouble if Clinton wasn't such an excellent political chameleon? Probably not.

Jeremy Valdez is a Class of '96 chemical engineering major

## Prison privatization lets crooks care for crooks

It is easy to accept anything you hear without really bothering to think about it.



HEATHER PACE  
COLUMNIST

When I first heard about the privatization of jails, I thought it was a great idea.

Obviously, so did a lot of other people.

It seemed to make sense — take the bureaucracy out of the prison system (i.e. the government), and voilà — inexpensive, well-run jails.

Anyone who compares the U.S. Postal Service, the butt of countless jokes, with the United Parcel Service would come to the conclusion that the private sector manages businesses better than the public.

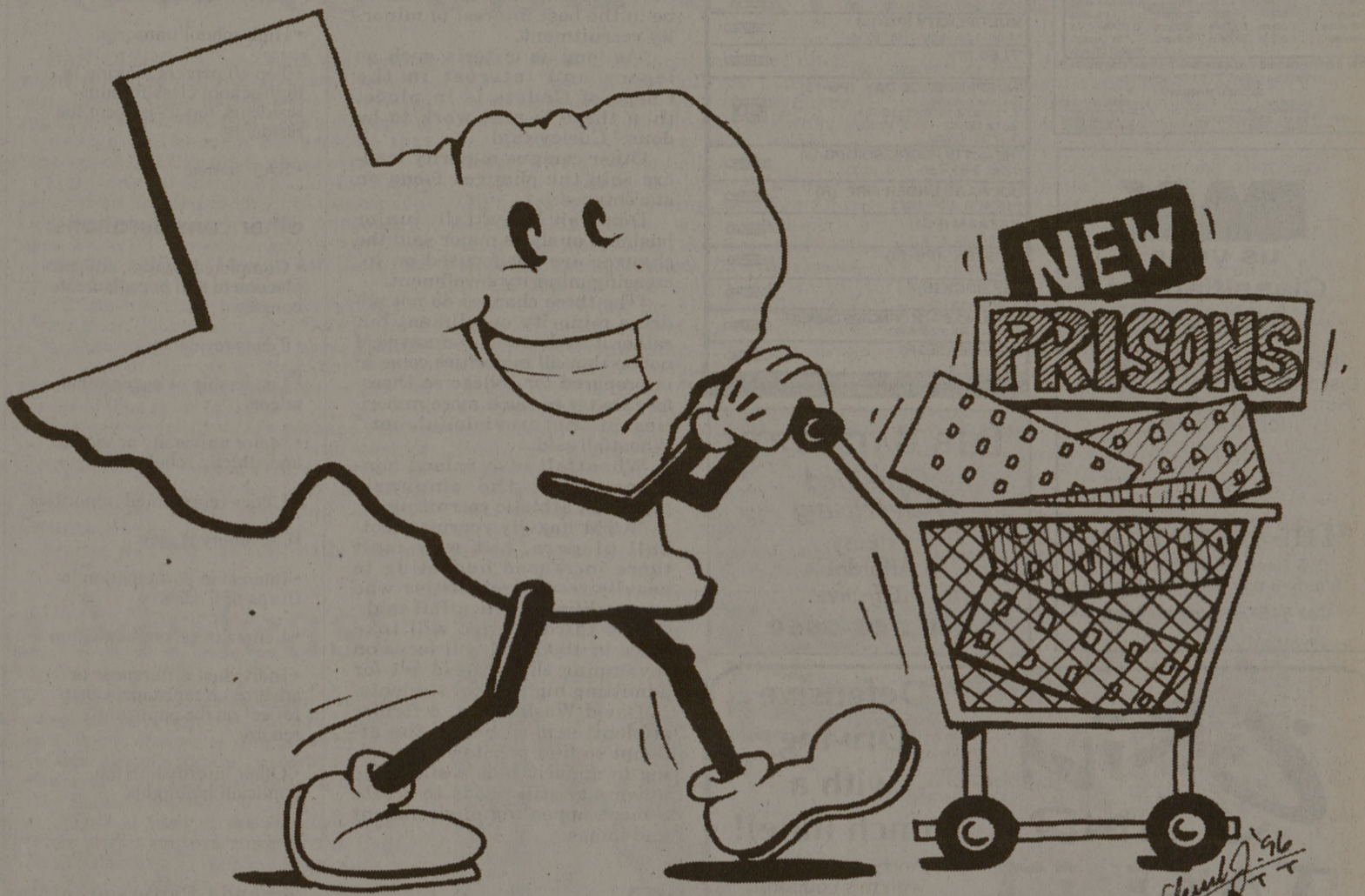
However, comparing jails and post offices isn't exactly fair because prisons are in the business of holding people.

Prison management inevitably leads to a conflict of interests when it comes to cutting corners on the care of humans.

It isn't that I disapprove of horrible jail conditions as a result of companies trying to save money. What bothers me is the fact that the more people private companies have in their jails, the happier they are. As crime goes up, they build and manage even more jails.

While jails managed by the government are concerned with keeping people out of their cells once they have served their time, how much money would private companies spend on deterrence and rehabilitation?

The privatization of jails is not a new concept. For a long time, the prison system has relied on the private sector for everything from hamburgers to basketballs. However, the national trend in the late '80s and early '90s has been to allow companies to manage all aspects of the prisons from ground breaking to day-to-day operations.



So who do these companies report to? Right back to the same people who gave them their contracts in the first place.

When the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's (TDCJ) budget skyrocketed from \$700 million in 1990 to \$2.2 billion in 1995, prison building and management became big business.

A massive prison build-up was attracting people eager to make a quick buck at the expense of the taxpayer.

Officials of TDCJ were besieged by contract offers and

money on the side to help convince them of the worthiness of these contracts.

Even the Texas Prison Oversight Board, consisting of nine unpaid citizens, wanted its fair share of the profits. The board's chairman, Allan Polunsky, pushed the TDCJ into canceling existing contracts in order to hire his former roommate.

Although the prison system might have been overcrowded, it was practically empty after the TDCJ finished its shopping spree — despite being full of

useful toys like greaseless mousetraps.

There were now 146,000 prison beds for 129,000 inmates and eight brand-new prisons that had not yet opened their doors.

The jails that were open weren't running very well either, thanks to the antics of the private companies contracted for the job.

From understaffing prisons to overcharging inmates' phone calls, the companies had no need to legitimize their actions because no one really cared.

Politicians were ecstatic because by building more prisons, it looked like they were "getting tough on crime."

The Prison Oversight Board and officials of TDCJ were happy because of all the profits they were pulling in on the side.

However, society should not be content with the easy answers; it is time we concentrate on reducing crime, not just housing it.

Heather Pace is a Class of '99 English major

## Martian lifeforms highlight NASA's desperate situation

Long ago, on a planet right next door, there was life.

The stunning news was unveiled Tuesday after a team of scientists from Johnson Space Center and Stanford University found evidence of life in a meteorite from Mars.

But just as soon as they revealed the titillating discovery, they diminished it by describing the "life."

They hadn't found strange little men with bulging eyes and misshapen heads. They hadn't found skeletons of ostrich-like creatures with opposable thumbs and a highly advanced civilization. They hadn't even found superintelligent moss.

"These are extremely small, single-celled structures that somewhat resemble bacteria on Earth," NASA administrator Dan Goldin said.

All this fuss over bacteria. Of all the things that come to mind when someone mentions life on other planets, bacteria are about the least interesting — and most common. I grow bacteria constantly without even trying.

If the scientists at NASA want bacteria on Mars, all they need to do is build a bathroom there and watch the life begin.

If the bacteria were alive now, it might be a different story. But they've been dead for three or four billion years. Certain chemicals found in the meteorite — produced at the time of the poor bacteria's untimely deaths — are the only clues the scientists have to base their assumptions on.

Admittedly, this discovery is something the folks at Johnson Space Center and Stanford should be proud of. The attention it's getting within the scientific community is understandable and justified. But the overinflated media publicity is not.

The "major" discoveries NASA cranks out are a lot like scandals involving President Clinton. We've become so accustomed to their happening every day that we just don't care anymore.

The last really big one was when NASA announced they might have discovered some planet that might be orbiting a star billions and billions of light



SHANNON HALBROOK  
COLUMNIST

years away.

I haven't heard much about that one for a while.

My apathy is extended by all my expectations about aliens from movies, TV shows, abductees, etc. If they had found an alien corpse identical to the tentacled aliens in *Independence Day*, then my curiosity would be piqued.

Maybe NASA feels it has to prove its relevance. It's facing some pretty serious risks with all the budget-cutting going on in Washington. The space agency has planned a mission to Mars in 1997 to collect soil samples, but by then the agency's astronomical budget and bureaucracy may make it pretty unpopular among the general public.

A manned flight to Mars might be exciting, but officials have said that won't happen before 2018.

What the dwindling space agency should do to stir up excitement over this find is somehow resurrect the Martian bacteria and let it loose.

**Maybe NASA feels it has to prove its relevance. It's facing some pretty serious risks with all the budget-cutting going on in Washington.**

"We have troubling news, news that could potentially mean the end of all humankind," they would say at the press conference. "The famed Martian bacteria was accidentally released this afternoon into the open air by a clumsy janitor who knocked over the display case."

Imaginations would run wild. Mass hysteria would be rampant. People would rush to hospitals with strange coughs and unexplained rashes. Puny earthbound doctors would scratch their heads uselessly. The only people who could alleviate the panic would be the suddenly popular researchers at NASA.

But until they do that, the space agency's credibility will slowly deteriorate. Unless NASA does something bigger to bring itself more prestige, it may eventually be reduced to a bacteria-sized association of overexcited scientists.

Shannon Halbrook is a Class of '98 English major

### THE BATTALION

Established in 1893

Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the editorials board. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other Battalion staff members, the Texas A&M student body, regents, administration, faculty or staff. Columns, guest columns, cartoons and letters express the opinions of the authors. Contact the opinion editor for information on submitting guest columns.

### Editorials Board

- Stacy Stanton  
Editor in Chief
- Dave Winder  
Managing Editor
- Jason Brown  
Opinion Editor
- David Taylor  
City Editor

## EDITORIAL

### FENCE STRADDLING

The University's admissions policy changes show little commitment to diversity.

The Hopwood ruling derailed Texas A&M's attempts to diversify the University. Unfortunately, Executive Vice President and Provost Ronald G. Douglas' changes in the admissions process, to be implemented in 1997, do little to get the train back on track.

In fact, the changes are more insulting than they are productive, because Douglas appears to be content with the notion that the University needs to accept lower qualified applicants to attract minorities.

The most egregious change is in expanding the Provisional Admission Program. All students in the top quarter of their high school class with an 820 on the SAT will be eligible, although not all will be accepted.

The other major change is to request parental educational background in the application for admission. Even though the parents of minorities are more likely not to have received higher education than the parents of Anglos, this is a weak attempt to encourage diversity.

Douglas' memo to the University says all the right things about coordinating scholarship and financial aid awards and involving current students in recruitment efforts. Douglas also writes that this is only a start, and the University will have more information in a few months to make more changes in the policy.

Still, there is little to indicate a true commitment to diversity, especially in the long run. A true commitment would involve a more rigorous effort to recruit highly qualified minorities while making the community a more positive environment for minorities. Yet Douglas barely addresses either and offers no specifics on expanding resources to reach top-notch minorities.

For example, the woefully underfunded (yet committed and hard-working) Department of Multicultural Services could play a larger role in recruitment and retention. But with its meager financial resources, it is barely capable of covering the costs of its present programs.

The University also has an image problem. In all recruitment efforts, from speaking engagements to printed material, the University should keep potential minority applicants in mind.

Perhaps most frustrating is the University's refusal to make waves. The President's Achievement Award was a primary attraction for highly qualified minorities, but the University no longer limits it to minority applicants to comply with Hopwood.

So why not violate Hopwood by keeping minority status as a criterion for the scholarship?

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear Hopwood because the UT Law School admissions policies were extreme and no longer used. It clearly showed interest in looking at the issue of affirmative action in universities, just a more relevant example, Texas A&M could provide the example.

By reinstating the PAA's eligibility requirements, A&M would show much more of a commitment to diversity than a provisional student program ever could, it would continue to attract high-achieving minorities, and it would help settle the issue of affirmative action in universities.

Simply talking about a commitment to diversity won't do anything to attract minorities, especially the intelligent ones the University should be looking for.