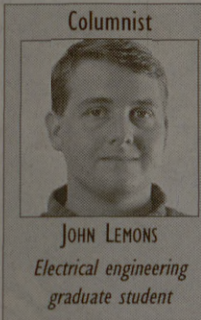


Burnin' down the House

Flag-burning issue smokescreens real problems facing United States

There was a time when constitutional amendments granted the right to vote to whole classes of people and guaranteed the right to practice one's own religion. Those days, however, are over.

A week ago, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a proposed amendment to the Constitution that prohibits desecration of the United States flag. The amendment awaits consideration by the Senate, but creating an amendment to protect the "Stars and Stripes" is silly and pointless. This move to mandate respect for the flag is a manifestation of America's tendency to be distracted from truly important issues emotionally charged sacred cows.



JOHN LEMONS
Electrical engineering graduate student

dared to drink a whole bottle of 107-proof schnapps, elicited little public reaction. Somehow, America feels a burning flag ranks as a higher priority than these terrible events.

Aggies have their own flag-burning issue — traditions. Many students seem willing to defend Texas A&M and its traditions with their lives.

If an individual refused to remove his cap in the MSC, he would probably be chastised by fellow students. If that individual piddled on the MSC grass, he would probably be roughly escorted off the grounds. And if that individual were to blaspheme Bonfire, he would probably receive a swift kick to the head.

Violating the unwritten and sacred traditions of A&M is the easiest means by which to anger the student body. There are, however, real problems at A&M that are overshadowed by concepts such as good and bad bull.

Curtis Childers, the student body president, said some of A&M's biggest problems are a lack of diversity, disunity between campus groups and students who are unwilling to voice their concerns.

"I think it's [these problems] largely due to the climate of A&M," Childers said. "All it takes is making students aware [of these problems] and they care."

Issues such as race relations and alcohol abuse by students go largely unnoticed by students. These are the issues that harm A&M. Childers said he feels traditions are A&M's greatest strength but that they can also be the University's greatest hindrance.

"I think the traditions exist for Aggies," Childers said. "Aggies don't exist for traditions."

While flag burning is a despicable action that stinks more of a temper tantrum than a political statement, it does not merit a constitutional amendment. The flag is a symbol of the ideals that make the United States great — ideals like freedom, liberty, integrity and patriotism, which no flame can destroy.

Traditions are the spice that makes A&M special and unique, but they should not dominate student's lives.

The actions of petty individuals are not an excuse to ignore the issues which are vital to this nation and this school. The time has come for America to put its priorities in order.



GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber

Protecting the flag is not a new concept. After the Supreme Court struck down state laws banning flag burning in 1989, Congress passed a federal law which banned the action. The Supreme Court subsequently invalidated the federal law in 1990. Later that year, a constitutional amendment prohibiting flag desecration failed to receive Senate confirmation.

Obviously, flag burning ranks highly in American lawmakers' list of priorities, but the United States does not have a flag-burning problem. Flag burnings are rare. The last notable nationally publicized burn-occurred in 1984 when Gregory Johnson burned a flag at the Republican National Convention in Dallas. America's patriotic morale is not threatened by the radicals who find it necessary to express themselves through this childish arson.

Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-N.Y., voted against the proposed amendment.

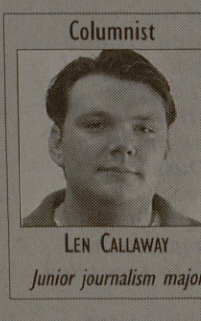
"People are not jumping out from behind parked cars clutching burning flags," Ackerman said. "And if a person burns a flag, America is not under siege and we are not threatened."

It is too bad the glare of a burning flag blinds lawmakers from addressing the issues that really threaten the nation. Issues such as the divorce rate, the disintegration of the family and the effect of an aging population on the Social Security system are the problems that have the potential to destroy the United States. America seems intent on obsessing on this irrelevant issue while ignoring tragedies and injustices occurring in today's society.

When Melissa Drexler gave birth to her baby at her home in Aberdeen, N.J., and then killed the child, there was not an angry public outcry. The death of Elizabeth Sackville, who died of alcohol poisoning after being

Fred Thompson shows promise for 2000 election

As the political summer in Washington heats up and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs takes a deeper look at campaign corruption in the 1996 elections, committee chair Fred Thompson is making quite a buzz.



LEN CALLAWAY
Junior journalism major

A senator and actor from Tennessee and newcomer to the rank and file of "Old Guard" GOP leaders, Thompson has been a welcome addition to an all too liberal Washington establishment.

Thompson has a good track record and seems to be a genuinely honest man who keeps his tasks in mind and is always working toward progressive achievement.

Many are touting him as the new Republican hopeful for the country's highest office in 2000.

It is no secret that the Republican party leadership is hoping that this summer's hearings will expose a corrupt and degenerated White House, thereby ruining Clinton and Gore's political reputations and aspirations for the future. Clinton is destined to resume life in the private sector in a few short years, but Gore still wants to fulfill his boyhood dream of becoming president.

If Thompson were to manage this efficiently, he could win the support of many influential Republi-

cans and help boost his own career by a tremendous amount.

One might do well to realize that a portion of the population does not now and will never care what Bill Clinton or the DNC has done or is supposed to have done. To a certain extent, this president and his regime are immune from discord among the American citizenry.

One might recall Senator Alfonse D'Amato and his crucial role in the Whitewater hearings. What one might not realize is that positions such as his in the Whitewater hearings are awarded on a "test" basis. These assignments are tests to see how a potential new member of leadership will handle themselves.

Because of his overzealous attitude, D'Amato's actions were labeled a witchhunt by liberals, and he lost popularity and approval in his home state and on the national front.

Thompson will need to present an image of fairness and non-partisanship to escape the wrath of the liberal political media. If he is able to escape this summer's hearings unscathed he could be in prime position to begin some early campaigning for the 2000 election.

Thompson has a reputation for being honest and many have said that he truly has progress on his mind in his activities as a senator.

Thompson held a press conference at one point during the past few months because a majority of the questions he was having to answer dealt more with his intentions toward the Presidency than with the hearings being conducted. Actions like these show a willingness to put personal advancement aside and do what is best at the time for the American public.

Many parallels have been drawn between former President Reagan and the affable Thompson. Both have had other career opportunities in the acting community; Thompson has been in 18 films including *Die Hard 2*, *No Way Out*, *In the Line of Fire*, and *The Hunt for Red October*.

However, despite the considerable amount of time that both have spent in Hollywood neither have made lasting ties to Hollywood or have been considered "in" with the Hollywood political scene.

Critics have said that Thompson's acting ability makes him more likeable to a certain degree by the American public. It has even been said that he has the ability to speak to a camera and make the viewer feel as if he were speaking directly to them. No doubt this is a skill that could prove to be helpful,

much like the presidential "fire side chats" of days gone past.

Unlike Clinton and Gore, who have dreamt of the Oval Office since high school, Thompson has been coerced by constituents into running for all of the offices he has held.

Some have wondered whether Thompson will exhibit his resistance to run in the way that Colin Powell did by simply not being willing to endure a run for the White House.

Thompson has been coached and influenced by the legendary Howard Baker and was even appointed to his 1973 minority counsel position in the Senate Watergate Committee by Baker. Baker remains one of Thompson's most ardent supporters.

Baker is also largely responsible for the careers of such other Republican leaders as former Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander and current Tennessee Governor Don Sundquist.

There are a lot of questions that have to be answered about the new Republican golden boy. This summer's Senate hearings will certainly lend itself to the task of deciding what Thompson is really all about.

All signs point to a long and prosperous political career, but only time and the summer's political climate will tell.



MIKE LUCKOVICH
ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 1997



MAIL CALL

Intelligence tolerance sparks student debate

In response to Kristina Buffin's June 17 column:

First, people do think about the differences between intelligence versus a lack of such. For example, the book *The Bell Curve* proves people have studied this intensively. I am not endorsing this book but merely using it as an example. Secondly, tolerance is not equivalent with intelligence. Adolf Hitler was a very intelligent man, and his rise to power evinces this most incredibly.

However, he was lacking in tolerance, and thus his value system was skewed from what we consider the norm. The author seems to fixate on the issue of hate, and my question for her is, "Do you have a problem with people of low intelligence or those who hate?" I think

these are two completely different subjects, and as such, ought not be confused. Finally, I think Buffin's suggestion of restricting breeding to the "intelligentsia" is not very intelligent in itself.

As evidenced by the failed attempts at ratifying sterilization laws against lower-intelligence breeding between the years 1907 and 1917, this idea, while it may be amusing to some is one which should not be taken lightly.

We ought never encourage the restriction of the constitutional rights of others based on our own personal moral values. After all, what goes around comes around, and I would not want my rights nor the rights of any other law-abiding citizen, for whatever reasons, to be taken away.

Michael West
Graduate Student

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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013 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111
Fax: (409) 845-2647
E-mail: Batt@tamvm1.tamu.edu