

A natural disaster

University repairs must stop unnecessary destruction



JAMES FRANCIS
Opinion Editor
Junior English
major

students can balance two summer terms consisting of 14 hours, a full-time job to support their residence hall payments and still find time to eat at least once a day, spend time with a significant other and have a little bit of fun on the weekends, the University can hire enough workers to pave a street.

As far as cutting down trees, A&M seems to have its schedule of important improvements turned upside-down. I wouldn't be surprised, with all of the ongoing activities, if A&M decided to remove a floor or two from the O & M Building because it blocks the view of the sun from President Bowen's window.

It used to be said that A&M had one of the most beautiful and well-kept campuses in Texas and across the nation. The trees and bushes were overflowing with green leaves and blooming flowers, design and placement of campus buildings were admired for their originality and department divisions by polar directions were appropriate in their creations. When students and faculty peer out of windows now, however, they are bombarded with visions of orange cones, scattered debris and rubble and an Eiffel Tower-sized crane blinking its red eye among the nighttime stars.

A&M's construction has continued to develop as each semester comes to an end and another begins. The sad thing is that no one can remember when it all started — I know I can't and probably don't want to find out when it did.

People should come to realize that we are going to be surrounded by this mess for a long time. On the other hand, A&M should make an attempt to ensure that we won't be victims of this destructive construction derby until the day we get a real mascot that knows how to bark and won't collapse in an episode of violent shaking and spasmodic whimpering. As we all know, this may be a long wait, indeed.

Although the concern over cutting down a few trees might seem trivial, this "small" issue expands into a bigger picture. Here's the sad scenario:

In the spring, I sat on a bench outside Blocker and took a break to study and relax. I looked up into the overhanging leaves and marveled at a caterpillar I knew would one day transform into a rainbow of wings on a tiny butterfly. Today I walk around campus and see the same insect, only in a mechanical form. CATERPILLARS are everywhere on this campus, and they are becoming an ever-growing eyesore to everyone. This is definitely not the type of "natural habitat" I want to see sprouting up like brush fire.

A&M must put an end to the senseless construction on this campus. Every project the University starts should be completed before beginning work on another. But most importantly, nature's trees which provide more oxygen to the atmosphere and a place for students to congregate for relaxation from the stresses of college life should not be cut down.



GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber

There once were a few trees with millions of branches. Their leaves would provide shelter for people and animals like looking for a place to escape the summer heat rays. Birds would flutter to small twigs and enjoy a brief respite from a hard day's journey of finding food for their young. Squirrels would scurry up the trees' trunks to partake in an afternoon snack of nuts and other goods found on the ground. Smokers and non-smokers would gather on the benches under the trees, rest in the shade and make conversation about things going on in their lives.

These trees were givers, natural creations that only existed to provide help to individuals seeking solace from the rain, beautify the A&M campus and give others something more artistic to admire than brick, concrete and asphalt.

Yesterday these trees were cut down, anchored to the bottom of their trunks, and now nothing is left to remind us that it was there — except the empty benches that someone will sit on because of the unrelenting sun. People also do not want to take a break outside and have dust particles from construction fly into their eyes, mouths and all over their clothing.

This time, the University and its ever-growing construction has gone too far. Its top priority should be to complete one obstacle before starting another. And the University certainly should not cut down trees that neither harmed nor hindered anyone in any way.

Officials said the trees were obscuring the Blocker Building's name and causing problems with the roof. Other reasons stated for removing the trees were that the roots had become too large and were beginning to push the concrete upward, and the trees had grown too close together.

So far, I don't see any viable justifications for destroying these trees. Although I do not consider myself a tree-hugger or nature fanatic, I do enjoy seeing splices of greenery intermixed with the grand-scale architecture of this University. What I do not enjoy, and am sure others agree, is being put into another situation of inconveniences.

Let's face the truth: Ross Street will never reopen, and people will have to continue to pour around the lane which was once two-way. The construction on Texas Avenue nearby should be entitled, *2001: An A&M Repair Odyssey*, and the Sterling C. Evans Library expansion project won't be completed until "Yee haw!" replaces "Whoop!" as the well-known A&M yell, or some innocent passerby becomes injured by a loose-cinder block.

Surely the University has the money to finish its innumerable projects of mass destruction and construction — just think about those summer fee statements that drain every ounce of money from students each session. And A&M also has the time to oversee the completion of these projects. If

Electoral college should be abolished



CHRIS BROOKS
Columnist,
Senior physics
major

to say about electing the president. Traditionally, the manner in which the legislatures have chosen to appoint the electors is the "presidential election." But nothing requires this.

In the beginning, most states appointed the electors, a practice that did not die out until the latter part of the 1800s. This system was put into place because a few educated rich men thought that the average person was too stupid to vote.

The electoral college system is a horrible remnant from an age of intellectual elitism, but the worst part is the abuse it allows. Under the right alignment of conditions, a president could be elected with only 22 percent of the popular vote. According to the National Archives and Records Administration, there have been three elections in this nation's history where the winner of the presidency received fewer popular votes than his opponent.

These presidents cannot in any way reflect the will of the people. They probably felt even less a tie to the American people than the rest of the men who have held the office. No president will feel truly bound to the people that he or she is meant to serve until the citizens directly elect their president.

Another abuse that is all too real and potentially very danger-

ous is that most of the electors are not required to act as the people of their state have indicated — or even as they have agreed. Only 24 states require electors to vote as pledged. Time and again, electors have taken advantage of this fact. In 1796, the first contested election, a Pennsylvania elector pledged to Adams voted for Jefferson. Why? In his own words (with the spelling of the old days), "What, do I chuse Samuel Miles to determine for me whether John Adams or Thomas Jefferson shall be President? No! I chuse him to act, not to think!" — no ego there.

The election of 1876 was decided 185 to 184. If an elector had not voted as pledged, Samuel Tilden would have been the 19th president instead of Rutherford B. Hayes. Electors have continued disregarding their pledges (and the wishes of the people of their states) into this century.

According to Avagara Productions, located on the Internet at <http://www.avagara.com>, Henry Irwin, a Republican-pledged elector from Oklahoma, tried to convince the other 218 Republican electors to vote for Robert Byrd, a conservative from Virginia, because he "could not stomach" Nixon, and because he believed the founders of this country did not intend for the "indigent, the non-property owners" to have a

say in the presidential election; only Irwin actually betrayed the Republican ticket.

In 1988, Margaret Leach, a Democratic elector from West Virginia, in an effort to bring to light the weakness of the electoral college system, tried to convince her fellow Democratic electors to vote for Lloyd Bentsen as president and Michael Dukakis as vice president — this is exactly what she did. Certainly most of the electors vote as they pledge, but the majority of them do not have to. If they wanted to, they could all elect Tom Cruise as the next president of the United States.

The solution to this mayhem is simple. House Joint Resolution 43 calls for an amendment to the Constitution so that the president is the person who receives at least 50 percent of the popular vote. If no one receives a majority, there is a runoff between the two candidates who received the most votes — what a democratic idea.

The electoral college system is an outdated attempt at keeping the people from controlling their own government. It is time for it to be eliminated. Some people disagree, but they're wrong. People should take to the streets, march on Washington or at the very least, write or call a couple of Congressmen and tell them that it is time to replace the electoral college system with democracy.

Advertising does not force people to smoke cigarettes



GENERAL FRANKLIN
Columnist,
Senior history
major

tionable limitations it places on free speech by banning further use of certain characters such as Joe Camel in cigarette advertising.

It is ludicrous to believe that the removal of cartoon characters in advertising will diminish juvenile smoking. In keeping with the motif of anti-responsibility, the states are absolving parents and themselves from culpability of increased juvenile smoking. Children primarily smoke out of peer pressure and experimentation.

The best way to diminish juvenile smoking is to promote awareness about the filth and dangers of smoking. Unfortunately, this seems unlikely, because people like Mississippi attorney general Michael Moore believe the government needs to protect us from our own lapses in judgment and personal responsibility.

It seems unfortunate that smokers do not possess the courage and strength to admit their own complicity in whatever negative consequences may arise from their smoking.

Additionally, the states have minimal legal standing, since smokers pose only a minor burden on the health care system. Because of their lower mortality rate and life expectancy, smokers save the state in pension and nursing home expenditures. Finally, smokers subsidize their own health care to a certain extent by a multitude of excise taxes levied on cigarettes.

Before we all applaud the death of the tobacco company, we must clear the smoke on why they eagerly agreed to this settlement. This settlement threatens to undermine efforts to reduce smoking, because a prosperous industry translates into a hefty settlement. Quite frankly, it is disturbing how children in underdeveloped countries will succumb to and even die from lung cancer, to subsidize the habits of those unwilling to accept responsibility for their own actions.

Also, while the settlement attempts to narrow the scope of domestic markets, it has no bearing on foreign markets as tobacco companies look to recover losses overseas. The enormous potential for nearly two billion people in Asia "lighting up" is the motivation behind the industry's willingness to relinquish its American markets. It would seem the cigarettes are "greener on the other side."

Specifically, the settlement makes industry payments tax deductible as taxpayers will unwittingly pay a whopping 35 percent of the billion dollar agreement.

The outlook seems frightening for the American public and the rest of the world, as we attempt to scapegoat our responsibilities through the court and the legislature. Regardless of how problems are initialized, it is ultimately the smoker's chief responsibility to deal with addiction.

The settlement, or pay-off, ironically pleases tobacco advocates, since they have a vested interest in the industry and hope of seeing unprecedented growth for a big pay day. This will come at the expense of someone else's illness and suffering. So, for the sake of those smokers before you, have another puff. Somebody has to pay. Even more people must die so others might live and wheeze comfortably next to the oxygen tank.

American and anti-smoking advocates take alert. The proposed multi-billion dollar settlement with tobacco is not only an affront to personal responsibility, but it is suspicious and dubious because collection of the fund depends on future prosperity of the tobacco industry. In essence, officials must addict another generation of smokers to guarantee infirmed smokers any of the \$360 billion settlement.

Recently, the tobacco industry averted legal Armageddon by agreeing to a \$360 billion settlement with 40 states seeking compensation for smoking-related health care expenditures.

It seems illegal, if not extortion-related, for a consortium of power-greedy attorneys general to manhandle the tobacco industry, a legal and publicly sanitized business.

The settlement wrongly assumes that smokers are "helpless individuals" who in spite of the known dangers, are coerced unwillingly by cunning advertising. This view by lawmakers is puzzling since it shifts accountability from those who endanger themselves, smokers, to those who provide the product. If this agreement stands, perhaps Smith & Wesson should be held accountable for all gunshot fatalities in which their weapons were used. The logical extension of this would be to sue McDonald's for damages after developing a stomach ulcer from years of eating Big Macs.

If smokers are inclined to participate in conduct harmful to their health, they should accept the consequences regardless of the harm and severity. The states and their legal vipers seem to dismiss this, since they obviously believe people lack the free will and common sense to avoid poisoning themselves.

Perhaps Joe Camel has a subliminal effect, forcing reluctant smokers to light up in spite of the choking, hacking, coughing and wheezing associated with smoking.

It seems totally wrong for the states to blame the tobacco industry for the expense of providing health care to smokers.

The states had many avenues at their disposal for dealing with upward health costs, not the least being to impose stiff taxes on cigarettes.

Furthermore, heavy taxation of cigarettes would have the twin benefits of lowering the potential burden on public health care while providing extra revenue through those who continue to smoke. Another alternative, in perhaps a futile attempt to resuscitate personal responsibility, would be to deny public health to those who willingly abuse themselves by smoking. It seems more appropriate for smokers to pay for their own cancerous future, instead of allowing their vice to drain funding away from more pressing matters of public health.

It is absolutely unfair for smokers and non-smokers alike to subsidize a dangerous habit of individuals too weak to suppress the urge.

Yet another flaw in the ill-fated agreement is the ques-