

TECH TALK

The right stuff

NASA attempts revival by sending Glenn back to space



One terrible day in 1986, seven people, including civilian teacher Christa McAuliffe, lost their lives in a violent explosion only 73 seconds after the Challenger space shuttle left earth. On that chilling January day, with the disturbing images of the fiery accident replaying over and over in everyone's minds, the space program died with them.



BEVERLY MIRELES
columnist

Twelve years later, NASA has a chance to revive itself. In a move that is somewhat controversial, the first man to orbit the earth, American hero John Glenn, is being allowed to fly on one more mission back into the ultimate void, space.

Finally, John Glenn gets the trip denied to him so long ago by John F. Kennedy, who thought he was too much of a national treasure to risk sending into space again.

The 76-year-old Ohio senator will take part in medical experiments looking for parallels between the aging process on earth and the physical effects astronauts suffer while in orbit.

Some political naysayers, however, have charged that Glenn, 15 years beyond NASA's grounding age for astronauts, is being allowed up in space not for the greater purpose of science, but as a reward for backing Clinton during last summer's Congressional fund-raising hearings.

And while that may be partially true (though nothing has been officially charged), the political pundits are missing the bigger picture.

Putting Glenn back into space is a sign most of the tragedy that shook NASA to its knees after the Challenger accident has, with time, finally dissipated.

An even greater sign of NASA's increased stability was announced only a few days after it was reported Glenn was put back on the astronaut roster.

Barbara Morgan, a 46-year-old elementary teacher from Idaho, was selected as a candidate for possible duty on future shuttle missions. More than a decade ago, Morgan was chosen as the runner-up to Christa McAuliffe in the "Teacher-in-Space" competition held by NASA in the mid '80s.

Though the idea of sending another teacher back into space will unnerve and upset some, NASA is going ahead with her training, taking every possible precaution — insisting, in fact, Morgan become a fully trained mission specialist.

NASA has also expressed some interest in sending other civilians into space. In future missions, an emphasis will be put on biologists and geologists.

Every step taken by the space program is tentative, of course. It might be another decade before the programs that were in high gear during the eighties, such as the "journalist-in-space" program or similar projects, will be proposed again seriously. Safety of the astronauts is the highest priority of all for the space program. The memories caused by the Challenger mission assures hesitancy on NASA's part.

Some images keep, as a permanent reminder of loss. The sight of the Challenger shuttle launching from Cape Canaveral, exploding and then falling back to earth, like some heinous Roman candle, is one of those images. With the help of Glenn and Morgan, perhaps that image will be replaced by the one of two more Americans, braving the perils of space flight for the greater good of human exploration.

Beverly Mireles is a freshman microbiology major.

TECH TALK

Research important for future of homosexuals

Reports published Tuesday say lesbianism may have biological origins. Researchers at the University of Texas found differences between the inner ears of lesbian and heterosexual women.



MANDY CATER
columnist

The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences could have powerful implications for the gay community. If biological origins for homosexuality can be determined, the choice-or-genetics debate could take a new direction.

Associated Press reported "200 adults were examined in four groups: homosexual men and women and heterosexual men and women." The test measured the echo-like sound the cochlea makes in response to clicking noises.

The report states women have a more sensitive amplifier and are capable of detecting softer sounds than are men. The homosexual women sampled had responses "significantly weaker than those of straight women."

What that jargon means, basically, is the study yielded significant differences for homosexual and heterosexual women.

Dennis McFadden, lead author in the research said, "Their auditory centers have been masculinized and the presumption is that so have the sites in the brain that direct sexual preference."

Other researchers in the field are apparently taking the results seriously as well. Dr. Michael Bailey of Northwestern University said the data "may be consistent with the biological origin of lesbianism."

Of course, the experiment must now be readministered. And until the results can be replicated it will not be considered valid.

However, when one considers these data in conjunction with earlier research, it is difficult to ignore the possibilities. One study found two parts of the male brain are different in gay men. Others have found gene differences between homosexual and heterosexual men.

So, consider for a moment, what it means if the present study is replicated. There would be compelling support for the argument homosexuality is a biological issue, not one of choice.

The issue of gay rights would be forced to be examined in a completely different light. Gay individuals would have scientific arguments against discrimination by sexual orientation. Perhaps, the tired, uneducated stereotypes of the sex-hungry, perverted gay would finally be silenced.

If this study holds in the future, or if others like it are shown to be valid, homosexuals may finally be able to silence the masses of vicious hate-mongers who defame and attack them. Perhaps they will finally be allowed to live their lives in peace and without the shame social stigmas have attached to their community.

However, science cannot erase idiocy and any such results would not be delivered to a perfect society.

Rather than seeing studies such as this one as a triumph for gay rights, it is quite possible the effects could be just as troublesome for homosexuals. If compelling evidence arises suggesting homosexuality is indeed biological, there is the chance many will see it as isolating the cause of the disease.

If, in fact a gene is determined to influence sexual orientation, there is the likelihood anti-gay crusaders will be sent on another tirade — this time to find the "cure" for the "disorder" they so loathe.

Although this possibility could be years down the road, it is an important issue to consider.

This research is powerful and could be an important first step for homosexuals and those who advocate their fight. However, they must be ready to continue their battles and be prepared for the next wave of hate that ignorant, intolerant fanatics will undoubtedly bring.

Mandy Cater is a senior psychology major.

PERSPECTIVES

Winfrey case displays freedom of speech win

'Free speech not only lives. It rocks.'

This proclamation made by Oprah Winfrey following her story over a group of Texas gentlemen in a \$11 million lawsuit was probably the most important message she has lived in her entire career.

It must be admitted that all her candid conversations with the likes of Madonna and a cast of "Friends" have given my life meaning time and again. Yet when Oprah chose to shed her Hollywood attitude in exchange for a voice for this great country and all it stands for, a new respect could be found for her and her work.

Freedom of speech is one of the principles that led to the founding of our country.

People left countries in which they felt trapped. They wanted to find comfort and be able to live their lives, find their voices and, more importantly, use their voices.

Freedom of speech, which is a right guaranteed us by the First Amendment of the Constitution, is something many nations do not have, many people die for, and all people must strive for every day in order to ensure it is upheld and not violated.



MICKEY SALOMA
columnist

This Constitutional right is something that should not be taken lightly. In fact, more people should feel free to voice their opinions more often. Whether it be voting in the next election or writing Mail Call to *The Battalion*, it is every individual's duty to take full advantage of this right.

Two of Texas A&M's sources of media are *The Battalion* and the AggieLand. With every page, one is contributing some sort of opinion.

A few years back, controversy arose when the AggieLand printed a picture of two females holding hands.

People were outraged once they found out A&M had homosexual students. Whether or not you agree this picture should have been printed in the school's yearbook, you can not deny the editor's right to express the issue of homosexuality on campus.

Furthermore, *The Battalion's* cornerstone is arguably the opinion section. The average reader glances at the front page, reads the comics, and looks to the back page to see if any opinion columnist has decided to take a stab at this University.

While some people could care less about somebody's opinion on the rise of "girl power" when paralleled to the women's suffrage movement in the Middle East, many people do care when it comes to somebody taking a shot at something they hold dear such as Aggie Bonfire. The point is whether you agree with a column, it is the writer's right to

express his or her thoughts.

Admittedly, censorship has its time and place. However, censorship should only be permitted when it comes to children.

Children are exposed to a gross amount of sex and violent crime on television each day, and it is a parent's job (not the government's job) to make sure that their children are not affected by it.

After World War II, some sort of Neo-Nazi hate rally was prohibited by a town council in Illinois and the judge reprimanded the town council.

The judge said that the town council was acting the part of the Nazi, by violating these citizens' rights to express their views.

Opinions are like anuses- everybody has one. While some people's opinions may sound like they are coming out of their anus, their right to express that opinion should not be denied.

I don't advocate all forms of free speech. Flag burning and other hate fueled opinions are in my opinion wrong.

I won't take away their right to express themselves, yet I find comfort in knowing that these people, who use free speech to advocate any form of hatred, make themselves look like morons and their cause even less worthwhile.

Find your voice and use it. It's a great right to take advantage of.

Mickey Saloma is a senior journalism major.



MAIL CALL

Faxes sent to paper and as fair for print

I would like to comment on the March 2 article in *The Battalion* regarding the indictment of Texas A&M professor Dhiraj Pradhan and alleged death threat against him. The article states that Pradhan believes the death

threat was a response to several of his quotes printed in the *Bryan-College Station Eagle*, and that these quotes were taken out of context from private faxes he had sent to colleagues.

I must say for the record that Pradhan's quotes were not taken out of context and that the faxes were in no way private. He has sent us numerous faxes and e-mail messages and at no time asked that any remain confidential. We treat faxes voluntarily sent to us the same way we would treat a phone call or interview. Our sources know they are dealing with a newspaper and a reporter. To cry foul when their quotes appear in print is disingenuous to say the least.

Finally, it would have been appropriate for *The Battalion* re-

porter to contact us for our side of this story rather than allow your readers to mistakenly assume that our journalistic practices and ethics are somehow flawed.

Joe Michael Feist
Managing Editor
The Bryan-College Station Eagle

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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