

You snooze, you lose

Voter turnout results from lack of free time, society's general laziness, not political apathy

Voter turnout in the United States is, admittedly, pitiful. The percentage of eligible voters who care to cast their ballots has sometimes dwindled even below 40 percent during this decade. Representative democracy has become heavy on the representatives and light on the democracy.



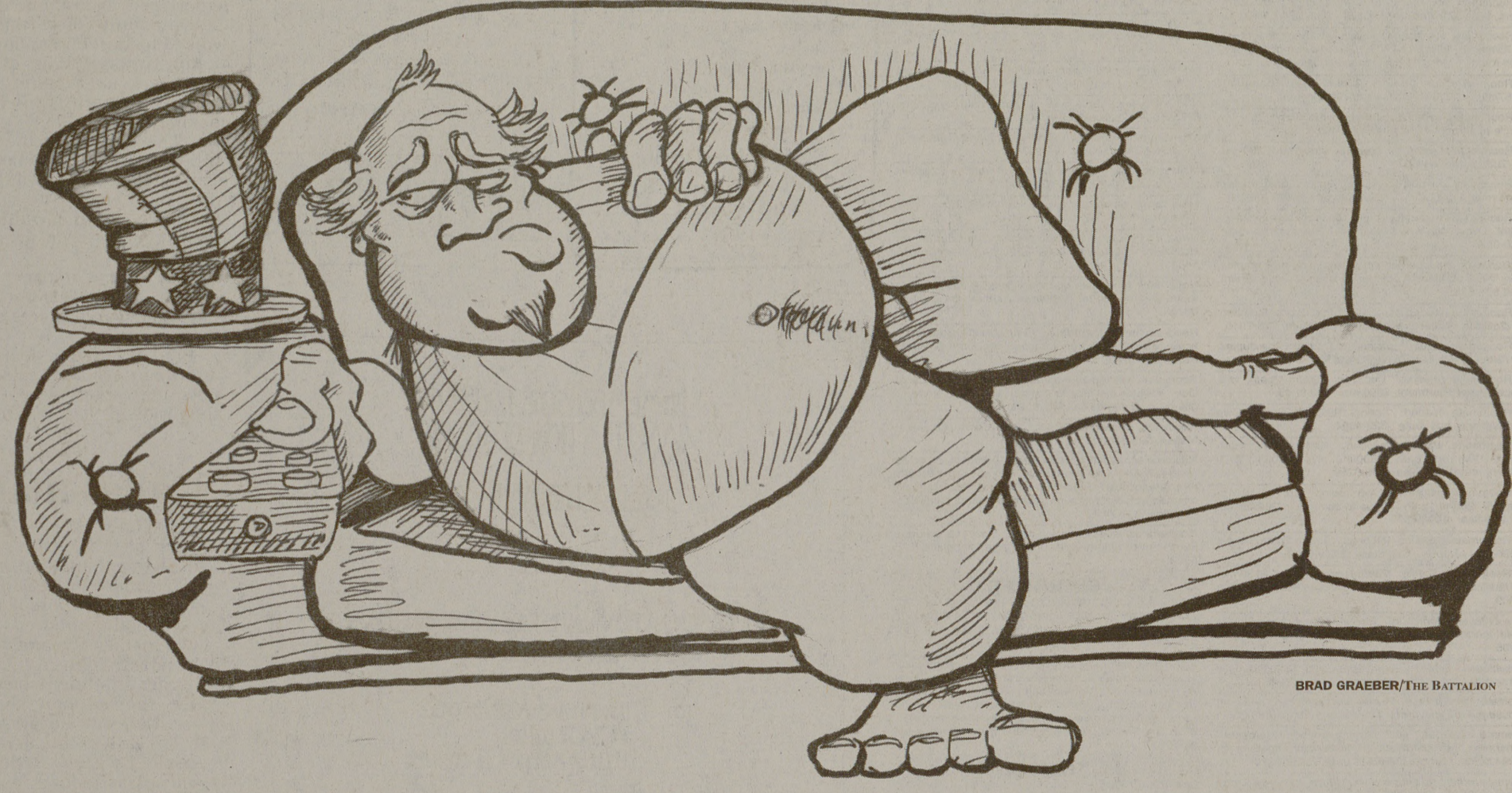
CALEB McDANIEL

However, before political pundits decried the apparent apathy of the voting public, other reasons for low participation in the polls ought to be considered. It is likely simple laziness lies at the root of America's turnout travesties. Couch-dwelling voters are not indifferent to the course of politics — they are just lazy as all get out.

In large part, this is due to the bureaucratic complexity of the U.S. voter-registration process. As Texas A&M political science professor Norman R. Luttbeg points out in his book, *Comparing the States and Communities*, "We have the most restrictive registration procedures of any democracy. To vote we must register to do so before the registration rolls close, typically 30 days prior to the election." Many voters who are interested in voting are simply not interested in registering, and the hassle of running two errands to cast one ballot keeps many fast-paced Americans from bothering with the entire ordeal.

In many democracies, registration is much easier. In Canada, for instance, registrars go door-to-door before elections to remind eligible voters to register. One study suggests a system imitating the Canadian example could boost American voter turnout by 14 percent.

So before non-voting citizens are cynically dubbed apathetic, measures should be considered that would make registration easier. Many voters do not lack the resolve to exercise their right to vote; they simply lack the motivation to fulfill their duty to register. Measures like the Motor Voter Law, which allows people to register when they renew their driver's licenses, have successfully boosted the number of registered voters. Motor voter programs and registra-



BRAD GRAEBER/THE BATTALION

tion by mail have not been defeated by apathetic voters but by partisan politicians scared of political disadvantage.

Even those laws that have increased voter registration have failed to increase voter turnout, suggesting that registration is not the only thorn in voters' sides.

It is possible — perhaps even probable — this can be explained by voter laziness. Tracking down the correct precinct to cast a ballot can be as much of an odyssey as the search for the holy grail. Moreover, the sheer volume of primaries and local elections

might exhaust the endurance of the average Joe or Jane.

As Luttbeg writes, "Inasmuch as most of us live under many governmental jurisdictions — a city council, a school board, a county, a state and a nation, we can expect every four years to be asked to vote for as many as 100 officials in probably four elections and four more primaries. Citizens of many other democracies have three officials representing them — a member of parliament, a city council member, and a mayor. Is exhaustion, impatience or possibly uncertainty

about who is in charge at the root of lower U.S. participation?"

Good question. At the very least, a plausible suggestion.

It is hard to say which is worse: voters who do not vote because they are disillusioned by government, or voters who do not vote because they will not get off their rear ends. However, before cynical "realists" conclude low turnout is a function of low political interest, serious consideration should be given to other explanations.

It is possible — just possible — voters

care very much about who is elected and who is not. They believe in democratic ideals and are not averse to placing trust in the hands of government officials. But they are forever overwhelmed by the monolith of red tape standing between them and the ballot box.

Turnout will not be encouraged by singing dirgeful tunes about political apathy — it will be encouraged by cutting the tape.

Caleb McDaniel is a sophomore history major.

MAIL CALL

Television show benefits teens

In response to Elizabeth Strait's Nov. 13 column:

I would first like to comment on Elizabeth Strait's assertion that "The Real World" portrays young people negatively and puts an irreversible stigma on our generation. I am confused because I seem to remember a season in which a house was literally changed by a roommate with AIDS. The immediate outcome was unfortunate but the overall difference his testimony made was immense. Do you know how many teens sit down everyday and faithfully watch every episode? And can you imagine what sort of difference that could possibly have made in their lives?

Sure "The Real World" cast members have their share of problems. Everyone does. Maybe by viewing anti-social personalities we begin to examine our own relationships and become more aware of the world around us.

I also seem to recall the most recent season in which a very angry, self-destructive young man found a way to channel that anger through more positive interactions. The column depicted our generation as a perfect place. In her own way, Strait stereotyped America's teens. In fact, "The Real World" may be one of the best shows for teens when there seems like there is no one out there having the same identity crisis.

It is time for us to clear our fixation on idealistic and fictitious broadcasts that people view as entertainment and stop denouncing those which on the outside seem superficial but in fact may have very positive influences.

Amanda R. Prime
Class of '01

Corps leadership must take action

Why does it seem like every time you open *The Battalion* you read yet another article reporting on the recurring follies of the Corps of Cadets? What is endemic to this organi-

zation that causes its membership to commit pointless, harmful acts including hazing, and now, illicit homosexual activities.

Virtually every semester there is some sort of scandal involving this organization. So many of these incidents are so far from the basic tenets of what the Corps was originally founded upon, and continues to espouse, that one really has to look at the leadership of the Corps for answers.

It is the responsibility of the Commandant and his staff leadership to be accountable for the shortcomings of the Corps. These people are career military officers and are specifically tasked with producing future military officers, as well as leaders for state and nation.

If bad things continually occur within the Corps of Cadets, then one would imagine the leadership would change the way it operates in an attempt to fix what is broken within the Corps.

Having spent four years in the Corps of Cadets, I can safely say the Corps leadership philosophy is almost totally reactive and unresponsive, almost to the point of being useless.

If things are to change for the better within the Corps of Cadets then the leadership must get involved in the day-to-day operation of the Corps.

If they do not decide to be leaders instead of crises managers, then they mock everything the Corps is supposed to stand for and are doing a great disservice to every person who has ever set foot on campus.

Jeffrey K. Brackenridge
Class of '99

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:
The Battalion - Mail Call
013 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111
Campus Mail: 1111
Fax: (409) 845-2647

Students must remember risks of alcohol use

A typical Aggie's weekend might include at least some form of alcohol use.



LISA FOOX

However, if one considers all the reasons for drinking and all the arguments against alcohol use, it seems wiser to abstain from drinking to the point of intoxication.

Perhaps one of the best reasons for avoiding alcohol is personal safety. Unfortunately, what many people do not realize is drinking is a depressant which removes the body's natural inhibitions. When this happens, a quiet person is more likely to be loud and outgoing. It is not unheard of for people who are drinking to go home with someone they do not know and wake up someplace completely unfamiliar.

It is all part of the college ex-

perience, right? Wrong. This scenario is dangerous. Students must realize if someone is drunk enough to forget who they are with, they might be drunk enough to end up in a dangerous situation — maybe even getting hurt or raped. More frighteningly, the person might not remember the event once the alcohol wears off.

Further, as junior English major Mandi Hennig said, "I don't drink, not just because of religious reasons, but I just don't see the point."

Frankly, there is no point to drinking. In American society, a large percentage of people use alcohol as a crutch or a safety net. They think with a beer in their sweaty palms, nothing can go wrong. They think that girl or boy will finally notice them, that group of people will finally be nice to them.

But there is a name for dependence on alcohol to function socially. It is called alcoholism.

Now this does not refer to those people who go out and have a beer over dinner. That is a matter of taste (and perhaps poor taste). The sickening, stomach-lurching, bitter flavor of beer is apparently something of an acquired taste.

The occasional drink to unwind or the social drink is considered acceptable — as long as it does not grow into something more.

However, when someone drinks every time he or she goes out, it only indicates one thing — a lack of maturity.

The first year of college life, many freshmen seek out opportunities to get drunk. But that phase is a sign of a youthful approach to life and one that indicates inexperience. Senior Corps commander Kelly Garrity said she used to go out and drink when she was younger. But then one day, "Maturity just struck me," and now she hardly ever drinks.

That is what growing up is all about, recognizing the crutch that

alcohol is and avoiding a dependence on it.

Alcohol use is an insidious thing. While it is OK to go out to dinner and have a beer or a glass of wine (within the law, of course), it is treading on thin ice.

One beer might not lead to two, which might not lead to three beers, but it very well might. And that is a slippery slope that is leading social drinkers ever closer to the edge of alcoholism.

A 1993 study by Southern Illinois University shows more college-aged students are affected by alcohol abuse than any other age sector of society.

Once alcohol abuse begins, it is difficult to stop.

So if Joe Aggie is drinking to feel relaxed or comfortable or to get drunk, he should find another way. It is too dangerous to toy around with that one glass of beer.

Lisa Foox is a senior journalism major.

Republican chair Watts promises new party successes

Forget the hype about Newt Gingrich's departure from the House of Representatives. It is OK if you have never heard of the new speaker, Bob Livingston. The real news in the Republican House is the new chair of the Republican Conference, J.C. Watts.



DAVE JOHNSTON

Watts, a representative from Oklahoma, is the kind of public servant this nation longs for. He is honest, bold and charismatic. Watts belongs in Washington because he possesses traits not normally found in the capitol city.

Watts is certainly unique. He is the only black Republican in the House, he is the only black representative who is not a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and he is the only politician who is not afraid of the media.

Addressing a group of reporters, Watts once said he did not care what they wrote. He said he had a life before he went to Congress and he was not afraid to return to that life.

This brand of frank confidence is rare inside the beltway. This is why Watts is a valuable asset to his party — and the nation.

Fortunately, the Republicans have recognized Watts' value and have quickly promoted him to prominent party positions. Last year, during his second term in Congress, Watts was selected to deliver the Republican response to Clinton's State of the Union address. Now as he begins his third term, Watts is the fourth-ranking member of the Republican leadership.

Make no mistake, Watts is not a figurehead who is awarded visibility in order to court minority support. He is a strong leader with conservative values. Watts promotes family values,

personal empowerment and small government.

As younger generations become more involved in politics, they are not content with stuffy political leaders who cannot communicate a useful message. Young voters are not afraid of something new. They will elect professional wrestlers as governors. Watts is able to meet the expectations of these voters without compromising his message.

Too often the Republican party has applied the Barry Goldwater theory of politics — "We have good ideas, we're old and wise, vote for us." Unfortunately, that strategy does not woo voters and does not persuade powerful decisionmakers.

Watts employs the same methods that put Ronald Reagan in the White House. Both politicians will be remembered for strong visions and the powerful personas that shared that vision with the public. Watts is not just an effective

politician, but an upstanding individual who Americans can proudly support.

While late-night comedians joke about the vices exhibited by national legislators, Watts appears unable to garner any negative press. He is a wholesome Baptist minister with integrity.

In a Dallas speech last year, Watts said, "My most important title is not 'honorable,' or 'Congressman,' but 'dad,' and 'husband.'"

Indeed, those are his most important roles, but the Republicans should be thankful he has accepted a new role as conference chair.

Other officials may bear greater responsibility or more prestige, but Watts bears the greatest potential. He has already risen from football player to the number four Republican representative. There is no telling how much further he can go.

Dave Johnston is a senior mathematics major.