

## Building a better America

Politics without principle harmful to future of country, ability to work together

This country was founded on the notion of liberty, but it has become a nation of labels.



CALEB MCDANIEL

With few exceptions, America's leaders are either Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, and the political structures are built on party platforms that collapse at the drop of an approval rating.

But as the new millennium dawns, nothing could be more destructive to our collective destiny than the continued placement of party politics above sound principles.

An obsession with who is right and left will always obscure who is right and wrong.

Therefore, it ought to concern the thoughtful citizen that this country relies on a donkey and an elephant to govern.

On the backs of an ass and a pachyderm, the two major parties have built social visions equally insufficient to solve social problems.

The visions are not wholly wrong, but they are not wholly right either.

Yet politics continues to revolve around them as if they were the only possible choices. The extreme polarity of conservatism and liberalism has parted the political spectrum like the Red Sea, and very few are brave enough to step out onto the dry ground.

One step at a time, however, can deliver the nation safely on the shores of a Promised Land. To get there, the goal should be to get away from the partisanship and return to principles. The challenge is to strike a balance between justice and mercy, compassion

and independence, rights and responsibilities. The mission is to meet in the middle.

Of course, politicians often pretend to give attention to this mission. They greet even trivial bipartisan efforts as if they were herculean achievements.

Ultimately, though, bipartisanship is not enough; what is needed is non-partisanship.

As political activist Jim Wallis has put it, if we want to move to common ground, we must move to higher ground. A philosophy is needed that transcends the old categories of conservative and liberal, for only a meaningful merger between Republican and Democratic principles will revitalize American politics.

On its own, the Republican creed of personal responsibility neglects the collective responsibilities of the entire community. Likewise, the Democratic commitment to social justice and equality cannot singlehandedly protect individual rights.

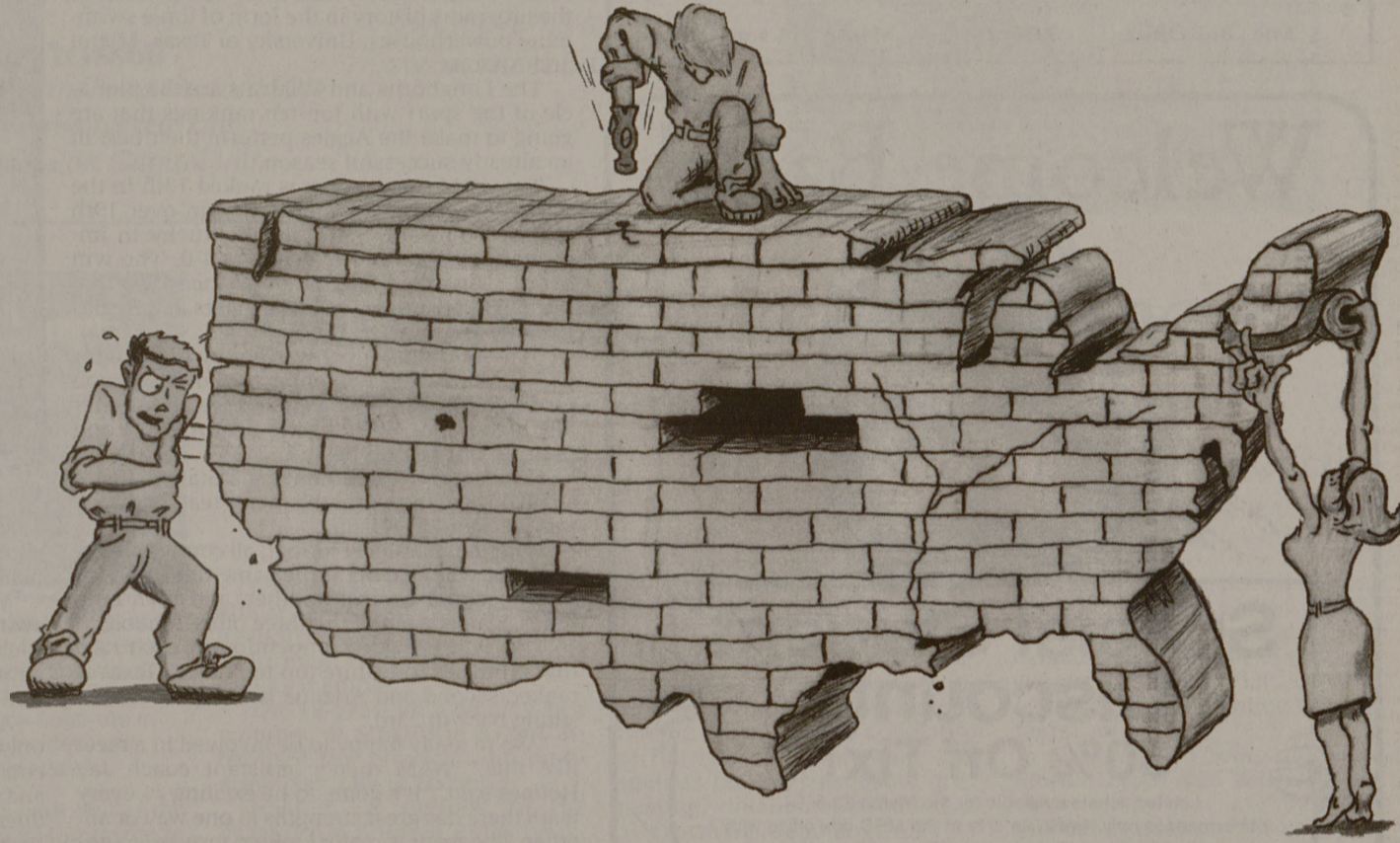
But together, personal responsibility and social justice can bring their combined power to bear on national problems.

Welfare reformers can recognize the genuine need of the country's poor without making them too dependent on society.

Affirmative action proponents can consider merit and minorities without making one the mortal enemy of the other.

Education advocates can find ways to give more personal choice to parents without abandoning public schools to bankruptcy and mediocrity.

In the end, what is needed in this country is not more Democrats and Republicans, but Americans called to a higher vision. A vision combining the



MICHAEL WAGNER/THE BATTALION

principles of both left and right. A vision incorporating the spirit of liberty with the better angels of our nature.

If, however, politics continue to speed to the edges of ideology and away from common sense, dark days are ahead. No less a man than Gandhi called "politics without principle" the

first social sin, and no less a president than Abraham Lincoln reminded us that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Therefore, in an exciting age of genetic engineering, the unique task of this generation will be to cross-breed hee-hawing Democrats with trunk-

honking Republicans, for the truth really lies in the principles at the center of the political spectrum and not in the far outreaches of the left and right.

Caleb McDaniel is a sophomore history major.

## Clinton's budget surplus investment plan needs reconsideration

Didn't our beloved Commander in Chief promise the American people just three years ago that the era of big government was over? Clinton must think since the American people have forgiven him for lying to a grand jury, they will also forgive him for trying to resurrect bloated, intrusive government (and of course, he is probably right).



BRENDAN GUY

But, the fact remains Clinton's new social security plan, announced in his State of the Union address which calls for massive new spending to keep social security solvent and will try to help pay for it by investing government funds into the stock market, is a far bigger crime against the American people than anything Ken Starr is obsessing about.

It probably would be possible to forgive Clinton for salivating over the \$4 trillion budget surplus expected over the next 15 years. Of course, he is ignoring the fact the current surplus exists, not because the government is finally maintaining some sort of fiscal discipline, but because of an unusually long economic boom, which means when the boom disappears, so does the budget surplus. But why get

into small details? After all, maybe the economy will never go into another recession.

It might even be possible to forgive Clinton for wanting to pour 62 percent (\$2.7 trillion) of this phantom surplus into Social Security. During the middle of the Great Depression, Social Security was actually a good idea. It was a way to alleviate poverty among the elderly while boosting the consumer spending so needed to pull the country out of the depression. Unfortunately Clinton, like most Democrats, has trouble realizing a program that was a good idea in the 1930s might not be a good idea today.

Social Security is of course government paternalism at its worst, with the government assuming that most Americans are too stupid to plan for their own retirements.

And throwing more money into a program that already eats up nearly a third of the nation's budget every year seems like a questionable idea, especially when the program is financed through regressive taxation which falls far more heavily on the poor than on the rich. Still, Social Security is extremely popular with the voters, and since the first rule of democratic government is to do what is popular whether it is a good idea or not, Clinton can hardly be blamed for deciding to use this potential surplus

on Social Security instead of something that might actually be productive.

What Clinton cannot be forgiven for is the decision to invest 25 percent (around \$700 billion) of the money earmarked for Social Security in the stock market. The Clinton plan threatens to politicize the stock market, and give the government dangerous levels of influence over private companies. It is even possible the government could end up being the majority shareholder in any number of companies, putting those companies under the direct control of the federal government. An economy based on government domination failed in the former Soviet Union, there is no reason to believe it would succeed in the United States. Even if the government does not end up dominating the stock market, having government funds invested in it would be an open invitation for cronyism and corruption on an unprecedented scale.

The irony is Clinton rejected a Republican plan to enable people to choose how to invest their own social security funds, claiming it would be too risky. So it is too risky for private individuals to decide what to do with their own money, but not too risky for the government to do so? Given how efficiently the government spends most of its money does any-

one really want to see what will happen if it starts playing in the stock market?

If Clinton was just planning on throwing more money into the bottomless pit of social security, it would be acceptable. It would mean continuing an already extremely expensive program of questionable value while using up funds that could go for tax relief, paying off the national debt or improving other government programs, but other than that it would be acceptable.

Unfortunately, by attempting to put government money into the stock market, Clinton is attempting something far more ambitious and dangerous than the typical government blundering of mismanagement and excessive spending. He is threatening to establish government control over a vital segment of the American economy whose outstanding performance has come largely from being free of government domination.

The booming American economy is the main reason Bill Clinton is still President of the United States, so he should show his gratitude to the economy by leaving it alone.

Brendan Guy is a senior history and political science major

## Bush needs to finish state duties before looking to Oval Office

Governor George W. Bush, 46th Governor of the State of Texas, is considering a run for the Presidency of the United States of America. It is a noble aspiration.



JASON STARCH

Does this give anyone else pause to think? Should this concern Texans? It should raise the eyebrow of any patriotic citizen.

Now in his second term as fearless leader of the Lone Star State, Bush is absorbing life at a somewhat slower pace. He is coming off one of this country's greatest landslide victories in decades with the 1998 reelection and subsequent return to Austin.

Yet one question looms on the not too distant horizon: Will he stay? Does one of the most popular and successful governors in Texas history deserve the White House?

The answer is an unequivocal, "Absolutely!"

But now is not the time. It may sound crazy, but Texans did not vote for G. W. so he could run off to Washington. Texans voted for him so he could continue to strengthen this state.

Our local economy is in solid shape, and he has improved the lot of school children with his campaign to teach reading to all children by the third grade. And believe it or not, the man has kept his promises, good or bad, to those who have asked for his word of support.

He is a family man, he is a conservative leader and he believes in strong local government. He

has served in the military, founded his own business and successfully managed other businesses. These are all attributes which enable a presidential candidate to compete and succeed; they are attributes which belong in the White House.

But Bush has a contract with Texans first. When Governor Bush established his campaign a few years back, he told Texans that he was committed to the growth, development, and protection of the Texas way of life.

His words were believed, and the votes were cast. If he leaves halfway through his term, is he honoring his part of the deal? It does not reflect well on his judgment if he leaves one job undone to start another.

People should finish what they start. It is not enough to begin a good work if a person never completes it.

Okay, the opportunity to be presidency would allow Bush to serve all people of the United States and not just Texans. But the course is not yet complete, and early withdrawals do not get a grade. One does not just Q-drop the office of Governor of the Great State of Texas just because somebody else's house has an oval office.

So, in spite of the ever-present need for integrity in Washington again, Bush should reconsider the responsibility he has been given by the consent of the governed. He should finish her, before he tries to lead at the next level.

In the words of Aristotle, "Well begun is half done."

Jason Starch is a junior rangeland economy major.

### MAIL CALL

#### Conference leaders reply to coverage

The ignorance and blind denunciation that some people on campus exhibit regarding the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference (SBSLC) is both disheartening and infuriating. After receiving numerous e-mails and personal testimonies applauding the success of SBSLC '99, the Executive Staff would like to publicly dispel the myths that have been maliciously and erroneously circulated about the conference.

First and most importantly, it must be said that the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference was in no way affiliated with the parties that occurred during the weekend of the Conference. Those parties were hosted by other organizations and were attended largely by their own members, not by conference participants. This is evidenced by the fact that SBSLC's Friday and Saturday entertainment events attracted a Rudder Auditorium-packed crowd of participants. Furthermore, there have never been any "riots" during SBSLC weekend. Although last year's party attendees were angry, the idea that there were riots is a blatant exaggeration of the truth; the chaos that resulted at the party this year was instigated by police officers' overzealous reaction to an overzealous crowd.

Secondly, the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference is not "directly correlated with anarchy." Anarchy is defined as the absence of gov-

ernment, and this is hardly a word that describes SBSLC. From April to January, the conference staff actively organizes workshops, solicits corporate sponsorships, arranges on-campus and off-campus transportation, contracts entertainment, secures hotel reservations for participants, coordinates banquets and major speakers, and corresponds with various schools in order to register over 1,000 students and advisors yearly! In the interim, we select the next year's staff, reserve locations for future events, and tie up loose ends from the past year's conference. The only appropriate word for SBSLC in this respect is ORGANIZED!

Finally, Texas A&M University does not financially support the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference. SBSLC is entirely funded by registering participants, generous sponsors, and revenue from conference events. We have students and advisors from over ten states of the Union, including Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Year after year, we have to turn people away because so many of them know how valuable our conference is. We execute first in the name of the Department of Multicultural Services and then, in the name of Texas A&M University, we are the largest student-run organization in the nation all by ourselves.

In conclusion, should the significance of all workshops, guest speakers, and career fair companies that we

showcased be nullified because of a few parties that were not even endorsed by the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference? Should our conference cease, despite the fact that we contribute thousands of dollars to the local and university economies as well as Texas A&M's reputation as a top-rate university? To *The Battalion* and its readers, we, the Executive Staff, ask, were you there for the Conference? We hosted workshops on such topics as personal finance and diversity in the workplace ... were you there? We had exceptional career and vendor forums, boasting over 25 companies and 20 businesses ... were you there? We invited the world renowned Dr. Dennis P Kimbro, free and open to the public ... were you there?

We presented the hip-hop jazz group, Jazz Poet's Society...were you there? It is amazing that a newspaper can cover a party in the middle of the night and label the article "SBSLC" but can not, in broad daylight, report on such a wonderful event as ours, legitimately. Will you continue to denigrate the reputation we have worked eleven years to create based on unfounded and ill-supported notions? We, the staff of SBSLC '99 implore you to examine yourselves before your criticize our work. We challenge you to become a positive part of SBSLC 2000. Challenge yourselves for the new millennium. We did.

Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference 1999, Executive Staff