

Running on empty

E-mail campaign to boycott gasoline will not accomplish goal of lowering pump prices

An idea known as "The Great Gas Out" is being spread in the form of a chain e-mail. The unknown originator of this e-mail is apparently incensed because over the last few months gas prices have risen steeply from their two-decade low.



LUKE SAUGIER

The e-mail originated in California where gas prices have gone up more steeply than in other parts of the country due to several refinery accidents resulting in loss of production. The purpose of the message is to encourage people to strike back at the "oil cartels" and send a message where it will be noticed — in the pocketbook. To do this, people are supposed to refrain from buying gas on April 30.

According to the message, "only a few million need to take part for it to make a difference." Unfortunately, the anger of the writer of the e-mail and all the tools who continue to forward it is misdirected.

Hurting the "oil cartels" is a bad idea. The oil industry in the United States employs more than 1.5 million people. Anything that hurts oil companies causes a loss of jobs. While the drop in gas prices may have seemed like a good thing, thousands of people in the oil field services industry became unemployed when the oil companies were forced to stop operations such as exploration and drilling to keep from losing money.

The only thing that would keep gas prices low is a low crude oil price which would maintain thousands of people in a position of unemployment. The "Gas Out" letter states that the "oil cartels" have cut worldwide production by 2 million barrels per day (BOPD) to raise

gas prices. This is not true.

Although the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) stated that they would cut oil production by some 2.1 million BOPD, this was done to raise the price of crude oil to a point where oil companies could continue operations without losing money.

Even if this were not the case, anger over high gas prices is totally unjustified. Americans pay approximately \$1.15 per gallon for gasoline. More than 40 cents of this price is tax imposed by the government. Compared to this, the increase of a few cents per gallon due to higher crude prices is insignificant.

Crude oil is sold at the same price everywhere in the world. Thus, one would expect the price of gasoline to be the same in all areas of the world, but this is not the case; in Europe and Asia gasoline costs between \$3 and \$4 per gallon. Gas prices are high in these countries because only the state-run oil company is allowed to operate there.

As a state-sanctioned monopoly, these companies can set gas prices as high as they want. Their gas prices do not fluctuate because the loss of a few cents per gallon due to higher crude prices means nothing to a company that is making over \$2 per gallon in profit. If the "Gas Out" were to have a profound impact and put the evil American oil cartels out of business, America would likely create its own state oil company. Then our gas prices would join the rest of the world's prices in the \$3 to \$4 range. But don't lose any sleep over this possibility because the "Gas Out" is doomed to failure.

The success of "The Great Gas Out" relies on millions of people hearing about and participating in the plan. Such participation is unlikely. But assuming that everyone in America participated according to the rules laid down in the letter,

which states people can "buy gas the day before and the day after, but not on April 30", it still would not work. It says nothing about not driving on the 30, so the usual amount of gas would be used.

Then, everyone would refill their tank the next day, buying the gas they did not buy the day before. But what if all of America did not drive on that day and used no gasoline?

It still would not affect the oil companies because the owner of the service station buys his gas from the oil company once a week, so the service station owners would be affected, not the oil companies.

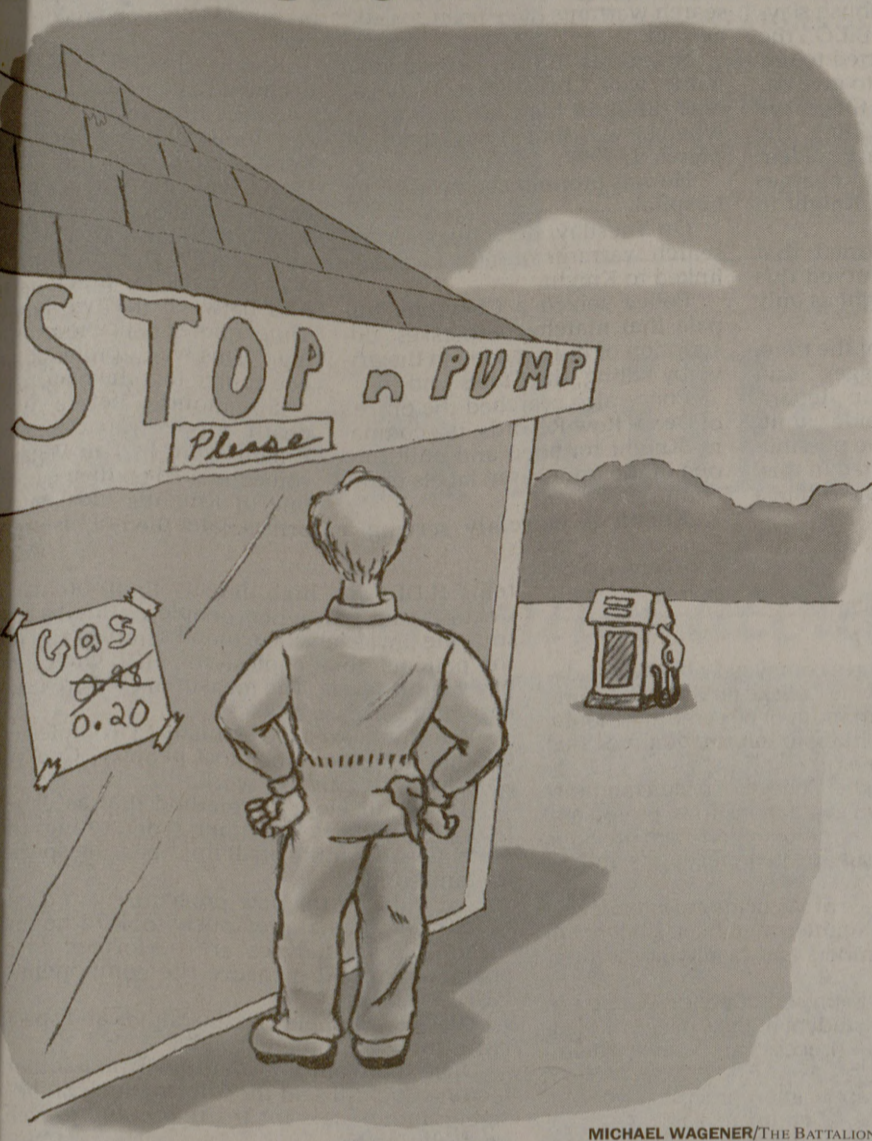
But, assuming that the gas was bought from the oil companies themselves, it still would not work because, according to the CEO of Equilon Corp., oil companies make less than one penny per gallon of gas sold at the pump.

And if, in spite of all this, "The Great Gas Out" were to succeed in hurting the oil companies profits for a day, the spokesperson for Chevron says that companies would merely raise gas prices to make up for the lost profits.

So "The Great Gas Out" will not accomplish anything. What is truly amazing is that there are enough uninformed people who have passed the e-mail along that even major news networks such as ABC are covering it.

According to the Gas Out Website there is even a legislator in California who is trying to pass a resolution to prevent all state-owned vehicles from buying gas on April 30. The people of America need to realize that the major oil companies are not the enemy, and even if they were, there is not a whole lot anyone could do to hurt them.

Luke Saugier is a sophomore petroleum engineering major.



MICHAEL WAGENER/THE BATTALION

A&M graduates need to stay in touch with dreams when faced with worldly pressures

Spring has finally arrived, and that means a large number of fellow Aggies are preparing for graduation and others are registering for the last time. The class of '99 along with some remnants of '98, '97 and maybe '96, is preparing to enter the real world — the real world being anything outside of Aggieland.



BRANDON MULLEN

It may mean entering the work force, trying to find a job in the work force or going to graduate or professional school, but it definitely means a change.

These Aggies will be faced with a new responsibilities and challenges, but they must remember where they came from and how they got there. When fresh graduates begin to tuck under the pressure of the outside world, they should remember the times and things that made them happy while they were at A&M.

With graduation comes a storm of reality that can drown the flame of early adulthood. This is expected, but care must be taken to keep the flame alive. While some of this energy must be transferred to real life by leaving a few glowing embers, graduating seniors can make the transition much easier.

Too many people accept jobs right out of college that they will not enjoy. And the sense of financial security they find in their bubble keeps them from looking for a job they will enjoy.

A commercial currently running on TV ex-

presses this trend. The ad has a number of elementary school children saying what they want to be when they grow up. One says, "I want to work my way up to middle management," another "I want to file papers for the rest of my life." A young girl says "I want to get paid less for the same job," while a little boy says, "I want a brown nose." The commercial ends by telling the viewer to remember what they wanted to be when they were growing up.

But college graduates are pressured from all sides to find the highest paying job right out of college. Some students have parents who do not want the money they spent on an education to go to waste. Others have taken out large loans to pay for their education and have to pay those off.

Still others have worked their way through school and are tired of living on a tight budget and want to have money in the bank. And others have families that they need to start providing for.

These reasons are all important and cannot be easily ignored. But one factor that can be ignored is mass media. There are countless commercials on television today that stress the importance of saving and working towards retirement.

While this is definitely important, people should not be miserable in their 20s, to be happy in their 50s. Because if someone works hard all their life to retire and relax, they may have forgotten how to relax.

Long hours and short weekends do not exactly calm the mind, and they can make people forget what is important in life.

So what are graduating seniors to do?

Should they skip graduation and hitch-hike across America in search of their souls? No. But they should make a list of everything that made them happy while they were here in Aggieland, and they should try to do one thing off this list every week.

These activities do not have to be extravagant or extreme. It does not mean ditching work in the middle of the week to go and float down the Guadalupe River and then bringing one's boss a note from Scott and White that says you were absent for medical reasons.

The activity should be something simple. It could be a picnic in the park, a pick-up game of basketball or a round of golf. It could mean a weekend barbecue with one's neighbors or a margarita.

And if the time or need arises, Aggies should come back to A&M. They can visit their dorm or fraternity house, go to the Dixie Chicken or catch a baseball game. Any of these things will take them back to a simpler time in their life and keep them from losing sight of what is important.

The responsibilities of the real world can be overwhelming and must be dealt with, but sometimes the best way to deal with pressure is to get away from it. And most college students know how to blow off stress. They are able to find the easiest and cheapest ways to have fun and forget about school. Graduating seniors should remember to regress to college life sometimes, and then the real world should not seem so daunting

Brandon Mullen is a senior English and history major.

MAIL CALL

First Amendment should protect all

In response to Lisa Fox's Apr. 20 opinion column.

I share Fox's displeasure, disdain and distaste for hate speech and the "works" of the "negationists." What I do not share is the contention that the first amendment be weakened in order to stop bigoted statements.

Why did the framers of the Constitution make the right to free speech the First Amendment? I expect that they believed that the only way to ensure a democratic and free society was to leave all avenues of debate open. They were terribly concerned about the possibility of a "tyranny of the majority" and by protecting speech — all speech — they hoped to lessen the chances of just such a tyranny arising.

What the First Amendment really does is protect unpopular speech. Popular speech does not need protection. It is the critical, dissenting and different speech that needs the protecting. If the First Amendment is to work it must apply to all speech equally.

Think of the most abhorrent thing that somebody could say. That is what must be protected, for if not, then you might wake up one day to discover that overnight some majority of citizens got together and abridged your freedom of speech. Only in protecting all speech can the First

Amendment continue to be effective.

This means that I can say, "t.u. sucks," or "President Clinton is a baboon," (my apologies to the the readers that happen to be baboons) or "the trilateral commission and the Vatican run the world and staged the Holocaust." Some of those statements might be funny, some offensive and some outright lies, but I can still say them.

Millions of voices were silenced in the holocaust, voices that were not afforded the protection of our Bill of Rights, the cornerstone of which is the First Amendment. The possibility of ugly and disturbing speech being spoken under the first amendment is the price of freedom for all of us, a price that I am willing to pay — and remember, it is your right to disagree with me, that is guaranteed.

Dan Unger
Graduate Student

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Country needs to re-examine policies in light of Colorado shooting

So it has come to this. The recent massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado has added to an already unendurably long list of tragedies at our nation's schools in recent years, leaving more than a dozen people dead and an entire nation wondering why.



CALEB MCDANIEL

The tales of terror coming from the survivors of the attack are almost too horrible to imagine — sadistic killers, traumatized victims, frantic parents, bloody classrooms. They are the stuff of horror films, but there they have become the stuff of high schools.

Something must be done, and the problem can no longer be ignored. These brutal acts of violence cannot be swept

under a rug of indifference anymore, and they are no longer confined to certain sections or populations in the country.

They have occurred in areas as diverse as Colorado and Kentucky and Arkansas, and they have been committed by adolescents as young as 11-years-old.

The problem is one of national proportions, and only a concerted national effort will solve it. Americans cannot wait until even one more child lies dead in a school library. The time to act is now.

First and foremost, it is high time to rethink the Second Amendment and admit that this country has a problem with guns. There is absolutely no excuse for a system of weapons laws so lax that teenagers can walk into a high school armed with military assault rifles or shotguns and open fire on their classmates.

Our children, for whatever reason, are turning from fisticuffs to grenades and pipe bombs. However our Founding Fathers intended us to interpret the right to bear arms, the crisis we face is no longer about forming militias or being able to go hunting on the weekends. This is about teenagers armed to the teeth.

Has the image of a gun-toting, pimply-faced adolescent become so commonplace that we are insensitive to its horrible implications? Growing up has become more than emotionally confusing; it is becoming dangerous.

The common high school conflicts between the in-crowd and the out-crowd are not new to America, but one thing is new — now the out-crowd knows how to make pipe bombs, and some of them are demonstrating a shocking propensity to use them.

So even if the United States will never revoke the right to own weapons, it must

regulate that right more strictly. More rigorous licensing laws, background checks and penalties are needed — whatever it takes to keep a high school dance from turning into a bloodbath. There will be continued controversy over gun control, but the debate needs to be reinvented. The old arguments pale in the face of the horrifying images at places like Columbine High School. The memory of the dead youths should now be in the foreground of every discussion on the subject.

Of course, this is not to suggest that guns are the only cause of these kinds of tragedies. The causes are much deeper. They come from a society of parents who are afraid to say "no" to their kids. They come from a society of entertainers who do not think twice about making a buck off of bloodlust. They come from a society of people who have forgotten about each other in their concern for themselves.

President Clinton, who has been rather short on good things to say in recent memory, was exactly right in his public response to the events at Columbine. He is right that we may never understand why such tragedies occur, and he was right to remind the nation of the words of the apostle Paul — that on this earth, we only see dimly, as in a mirror.

However, perhaps what is most frightening is that we are beginning to see ourselves in the mirror more clearly, and we do not like what we see. We see a society full of ghastly images and guilty consciences, a world with murderous teenagers and murdered refugees. How foolish we would be if, after looking hard at our ugliest reflections as a society, we walked away and did nothing to change them.

Caleb McDaniel is a sophomore history major.