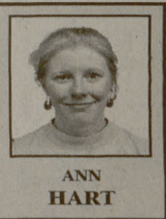


Closet skeletons

Allegations of past drug use against Bush not relevant to his pursuit for presidency

Candidates must be willing to subject themselves to criticism of past actions



ANN HART

public servant, perhaps one should ask what kinds of service he has given to his country, his state and community. Voters want to know about what he has given back to the community, not about what (or whom) he did.

Fiscal responsibility is also relevant: On how many credit cards does he carry a balance? What kinds of gifts did he give to government officials when he was in business?

The current cultural milieu is centered on entertainment. Consequently, news has been redefined as that which sells papers rather than those things that an informed people need to know.

When election time comes around, the media will move in like sharks smelling blood.

Unfortunately, they don't deliver meat, but old, picked bones.

It is time for the electorate to demand relevant information and insist that dirt be confined to supermarket tabloids.

Whatever possible bearing past drug use could have on Bush's qualifications as a presidential candidate, it was not important when he ran for governor.

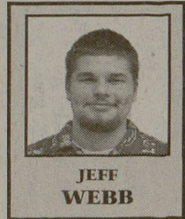
Never forget that Adolf Hitler was a non-smoking, teetotaling vegetarian. Purity of lifestyle does

not necessarily qualify one for public service, and it is important to stress that the focus here is on past drug use.

If he is on drugs now, that is news, and it is important. Otherwise, it should be a freebie.

Anyone who has never done anything wrong is welcome to cast the first stone.

Ann Hart is a senior English major.



JEFF WEBB

The Republican Party's overwhelming zeal for uncovering an officeholder's past transgressions has turned bad on them faster than year-old milk.

However, just because

investigating a candidate's past would be inconvenient now is no reason for them to stop.

In fact, the Republican Party watchdogs were on the right track all along.

Texas Gov. George W. Bush, the likely GOP choice for the ballot in the 2000 presidential campaign,

now finds himself under the same kind of scrutiny President Bill Clinton endured during his terms in office.

But this kind of pre-emptive check of a candidate's history should be conducted in public in order to prevent the kind of embarrassing situations that can taint a presidential term.

Once all the facts come out about a candidate's past, then the people will decide with their votes whether he or she has enough merit to be considered for the office of president.

Questions have surfaced concerning Bush's alleged past drug use, which friends have hinted at and he avoids discussing.

He skirts the question, saying if there was anything to the claim, the said use was at least a generation ago.

Now Republicans are waving the flag of personal privacy for Bush after they made every effort to uncover all of the dark secrets in the Clintons' closets.

This hypocrisy concerning a candidate's privacy hurts the country by withholding possible past illegal actions from the voters.

This charge differs from being wild in high school and going out drinking after the big game.

Drug use is a serious offense, and the people of the United States, Bush's possible constituents, have a right to know about this part of his life, if the allegations are true.

Other government offices have endured and even benefited from personal background checks.

A prospective U.S. Supreme Court Justice faces a virtual inquisition before his or her nomination can be approved.

Presidential candidates should be subject to the same public scrutiny. After all, the people who interpret the Constitution should not be held to a higher standard of scrutiny than the person who is charged with carrying out those laws.

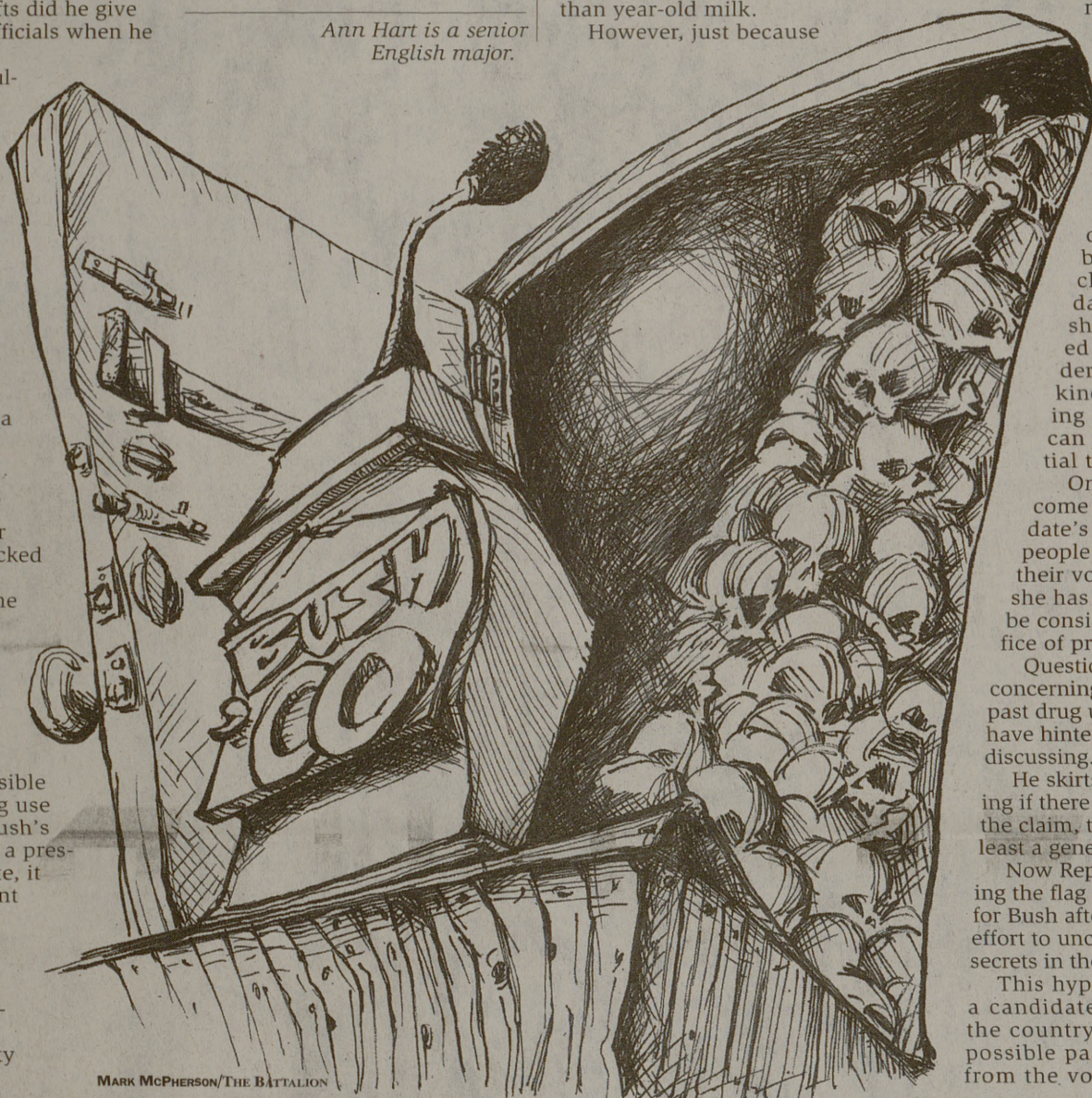
Currently, though, the only public background check for a president seems to occur after he has been elected.

Perfection is not what anyone is looking for out of a candidate. The president should be in touch with society. The American people are supposed to be in control.

But people need assurances that behind the white-toothed smile and perfect hair, there is a law-abiding citizen who might have a few parking or speeding tickets but no history of illegal drug use.

Everyone has their menacing skeletons hanging in the dark corners of the closet, but those with the ones that resemble museum exhibits should settle for city council runs instead.

Jeff Webb is a senior journalism major.



MARK MCPHERSON/THE BATTALION

Jasper trial gives Bryan community chance for self-reflection

While students and faculty are working through their first week of classes, the Russell Brewer is facing the week of a murder trial as the accused.



BEVERLY MIRELES

Jury selection for the trial officially starts Tuesday, but controversy about the trial began months ago.

Brewer is one of three men indicted in the gruesome murder of James Byrd and is facing the death penalty if convicted. Brewer's trial follows seven months after the trial of the first defendant, John William King, which took place in Jasper, the backdrop of the trial and the incessant media coverage that followed.

Now it is Brewer's turn to face a jury, because the likelihood of the second trial mimicking the first is high, the second trial has been moved to Bryan.

made out of the fear of juror partiality due to the aggressive coverage of the first trial.

For many weeks it was debated if Bryan should be the host of the new murder trial. Many people were against it, but now that the decision has been made, Bryan has the most to gain from the murder trial.

It seems strange to characterize a murder trial as beneficial, especially when considering the nature of the crime. Not only was James Byrd Jr. murdered, he was tortured in a way reminiscent of past Texas lynchings, his body dragged for miles toward the formerly segregated cemetery.

More than a year has passed since his death, and it is just as shocking now to note the details of the murder as it was then. From the trail of blood his body left behind the truck to how prosecutors in the first trial proved Byrd was

alive when the dragging began — by citing the bone damage in his elbows, showing he was frantically trying to hold himself up from the road surface until he was overcome by the overwhelming trauma, the crime was horrific.

Hearing such details makes people flinch with disgust, condemning the indicted without even considering their side of the story. That is why the trial had to be moved from Jasper. The residents were too close to the crime and too ready to make racial amends, no matter the cost.

Justice is hard enough to get when jurors are impartial; it is impossible when the jurors are biased.

If Brewer had remained in Jasper along with all of the media circus surrounding him, then any conviction coming out of Jasper would be tainted.

Also, by moving the trial to Bryan,

there is a better chance that the media will not hound the residents or present so much fevered coverage.

The security issue will also be less pressing in Bryan. "The only thing we have to draw on is the first trial, and it went very smoothly in the security aspect," Bryan Sheriff Chris Kerr said. "There is no reason we should expect any difference."

Judicially, it is best that Bryan is now the site of the murder trial instead of Jasper. No city wants to be picked as the new site for a racially charged murder trial, but in the case of heavy media coverage, it is a necessity if fairness is to be achieved.

The effects of Brewer's trial in Bryan will run deeper than the verdict itself. Brewer's trial has the chance to make people re-evaluate the nature of race relations here in Bryan, and hopefully on the A&M campus.

Bryan is a racially diverse community, and it is not unheard of for people to make derogatory remarks toward the community. Bryan has been unfairly

characterized as "the ghetto" by some A&M students, largely due to the black population.

This is something that should be explored. Racism on college campuses is dangerous, not only because of the diverse, young group it involves, but because racists tend to get even more adamant about bigotry as life progresses.

When young adults choose racism as their new dogma, by the time they are middle-aged, the chances for them to act out unfairly against another race are even more viable.

The trial will proceed, whether residents of Bryan want it or not. But due to its presence, everyone has the chance to rethink the generalizations that often supersede race relations. There is always the possibility that if people review the way they treat each other enough, then a tragedy like the James Byrd dragging death might not happen again.

Beverly Mireles is a junior microbiology major.

Current students have vested interest in supporting Vision 2020

Texas A&M University has always been committed to improving its quality.

GUEST COLUMN

The Vision 2020 project, commenced over the past 18 months, is an example of the University's desire to continually improve what offers its students and the people of Texas.

Vision 2020 aimed high — it set project participants to consider what the University must do to be widely considered as among the nation's top 10 public institutions by the year 2020, while still maintaining its distinctiveness.

It is good as we know we are, but also know that reality and our vision do not yet place us in the group of top 10 schools nationally.

From June 1998 to June 1999, nearly 260 dedicated faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students, former students and friends of the University gave their time, energy and creative abilities to discussing the rightness of this ambition for A&M and suggesting ways the ambition might be realized.

The resulting report was published last June and can be found on the Vision 2020 Website, accessible by hyperlink from the University homepage.

Why should a current A&M student care about a vision of the University not expected to be fully realized for 20 years?

President Ray Bowen has said the degree he received in 1958 had great value then, but is even more valuable today because of the increase in the quality and

reputation of A&M since he first slipped on his Aggie ring.

That kind of increase in quality is not always the case with large universities. Complacency and indifference about the core issues of quality will undermine developing excellence.

The intent of Vision 2020 is to make sure that we continue to improve, so that what a student acquires here, manifested in a simple way through the degree he or she receives, will appreciate, rather than depreciate, in value.

The only way to do that is to improve the whole University — to make it a better institution and to increase the real and perceived quality of the enterprise to a wider audience.

The prestige of a university is increased through long-term stewardship of academic quality.

In the end, the way we serve our students — past, present and future — is by improving the quality of the degree that we offer. The only way to do that is with honest self-assessment that results in positive change.

Students who want to improve their academic performance must evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and concentrate on improving those areas where they are weak and perhaps get even better in areas where they are strong.

An institution that wants to prosper and return great value to

its students and its state must do the same.

Vision 2020, as well as earlier planning efforts that resulted in positive change, have demonstrated A&M is willing and able to chart a course of positive change and achieve it. The role of current students in achieving Vision 2020 is to work hard at being outstanding students.

A significant part of an institution's excellence is the quality of its students and their achievements both before and after graduation. During the Vision 2020 process, former students, many of them highly successful in their chosen ca-

reers, were an integral part of helping us see ourselves as the world sees us and helping determine the direction we must go to achieve greater excellence.

Twenty years from now when I am retired, I fully expect to read in the Texas Aggie that the University is embarking on another long-range planning process aimed at continuing its culture of excellence.

I also expect to see that many students, who are now just beginning to discover and build their own futures, will be involved in helping the University plan for a yet brighter future.

That is what makes us Texas Aggies.

Walter Wendler directed the Vision 2020 project.

