

VIEW POINTS

Staff reflections

I grew up in Saudi Arabia, and I am used to wind and sand blowing everywhere. Never before, though, have I been awakened with a start by the feeling of wind hitting my face and sand in my eyes like I have for the past three nights.

one of you. Thank you for letting me be part of your family.

— Mark Passwaters

Friday night was the first time the thought came to me. I did not know any of the twelve. But all the same, I suddenly could not help but wonder: Had I passed any of them on campus on Wednesday?

Did I say "hello"? Did I smile? Was I absorbed in my thoughts? Was I rudely rushing by?

Whether I actually encountered them on their last day seems irrelevant to me. Because what seems powerfully important is that these strangers, whom I never knew, do not feel like strangers now.

Instead, they seem strangely like people I have known my entire life. I only wish I had not seen their names for the first time on a list of the deceased.

Grief has made us acquainted. I wish it had been a handshake instead.

And since they do not seem like strangers in death, I am consumed with the worry that I treated them like strangers in life. All this thinking, all this grieving. It has all made me decide I do not like the word "stranger."

It falls so far short of what they are to me now. My fallen friends have taught me this lesson: Tomorrow, I will brush shoulders with the world.

Will I give it a cold shoulder? Or will I give it a shoulder to lean on?

— Caleb McDaniel

The Eyes of Texas Upon Us

The following editorial appeared in The Daily Texan, the student newspaper of the University of Texas - Austin, on Friday.

Today is not a day for rivalries. Today, there are no Longhorns and there are no Aggies.

There are only the millions across our state and our nation who mourn the loss of 11 students killed in yesterday's Bonfire collapse.

Thursday's events cast a pall across the entire UT campus as word quickly passed from one student to another in silent, sympathetic whispers.

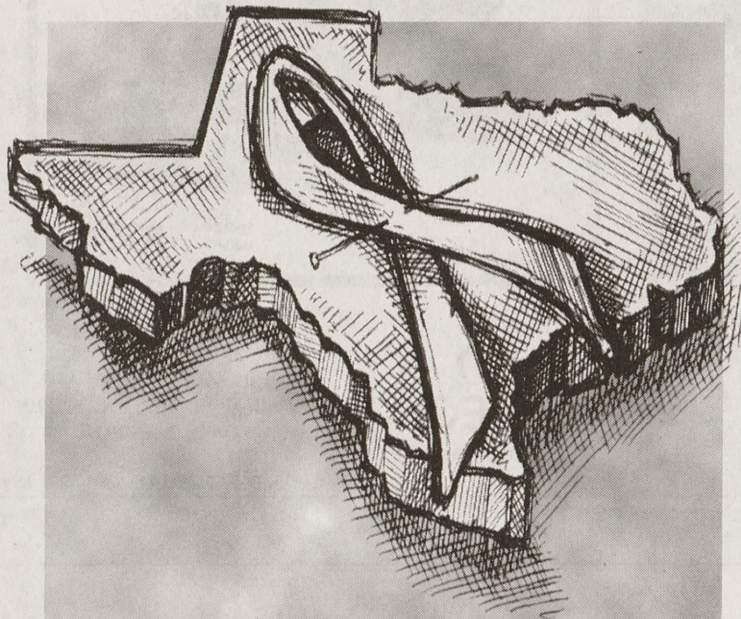
Members of our community stayed glued to their radios and televisions as the day's events unfolded, praying for the victims and their families.

In the face of a human tragedy, a friendly rivalry became completely insignificant. And that is the way it should be.

Let us never forget that our 105-year-old relationship with Texas A&M is, in essence, a shared history. True, we are old rivals, but more importantly, we are old friends.

And to our old friends, we offer these words: The dignity and compassion with which you have conducted yourself in the darkest of hours is an inspiration to us all.

It will never be forgotten, not by the millions who watched across the country as a community became a family, and certainly not by victims' friends and relatives who shall bear the true burden of this tragedy.



ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

Appropriately, the traditional Texas A&M Hex Rally has been replaced with a candlelight vigil; the Tower shall remain dark Monday night in honor of the dead; and flags on our campus will fly at half-staff.

The respect and deference displayed by the University's leadership should continue into the coming weeks.

This is obviously a time for all Texans to come together, regardless of university affiliation. Events like these render the arbitrary labels of "Longhorn" or "Aggie" totally meaningless.

We encourage all students to wear white ribbons — our shared school color — for one week as a demonstration of our support and sympathy for the Texas A&M community.

Student leaders will be distributing these ribbons on the West Mall beginning Monday.

On behalf of the UT student body, the Texan editorial board offers its deepest sympathies and prayers to all Texas A&M students, faculty and staff.

But we do so with the full knowledge that your community will not only heal, but persevere. We shall proudly stand beside you in this time of great tragedy.

The following letter was received from the editorial board at The University Daily, the student newspaper of Texas Tech University.

We are writing to express our sincere condolences to the students, families and friends of the victims in Thursday's Bonfire accident at Texas A&M.

In times of constant rivalry and competition, we want to extend to our fellow college students and friends at A&M the support needed to help them cope with their losses.

Although we cannot begin to imagine the pain and suffering felt by those who lost loved ones, we can only sympathize and offer a caring embrace and a heart-felt "we're thinking of you." When it seems that the only form of connection we have with one another is in the athletic arena, we want to let you know that it goes deeper than that.

Let this incident remind all of us that life is too precious and too short not to make the best of the time we have left. Your friends are looking down on you and are cheering you on to achieve better and go farther than ever before.

The relationship Aggies have with one another is unfathomable to those of us on the outside, but we all kind of felt what it is like to be an Aggie this weekend as we shared your loss.

On behalf of the Texas Tech student body, we give you our Guns Up.

MAIL CALL

The editor has received more than 500 letters since Thursday.

Messages of condolence and grief have come from 18 states and six foreign countries, including Taiwan, Turkey and Venezuela.

A representative sample of these letters follows, but the sheer volume of response made selection difficult.

From Austin ...

It is with deep regret that I write of the sorrow that students across the state and nation feel today.

To the Texas A&M community: You are our friends, our family and most, importantly, our peers. We travel together on a journey of education and walk together on paths of discovery. But Thursday's lesson is still a senseless one, and one that causes more pain than anything else.

Please know that the University of Texas - Austin shares in your grieving and utter shock at the tragedy to your devoted students. The shadow of our rivalry falls shorter than the height of the respect we hold for you.

Your campus has taught us many lessons — on the worth of community, on the importance of integrity, on the significance of honor — all values which we place at the very core of our university's mission. Today, once again, you have taught us the merits of courage.

The students of our university have an admiration for the students of Texas A&M that we do not express as often as we should. The reality is that we must stand united, together, in order to go on, together. And while we may have had glimpses of this reality in the past, today it stares us directly in the face.

Members of the UT community will be wearing white ribbons to help memorialize those students injured and killed in the accident. Although nothing can fully articulate our sympathy, it will serve as a campus-wide gesture of our condolences.

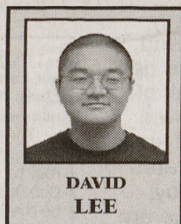
Parisa Fatehi President, Student Government UT - Austin

SEE MAIL CALL ON PAGE 16.

Student Fees at the Supreme Court

Students argue over funding university organizations they do not condone

Currently before the Supreme Court, Board of Regents, University of Wisconsin v. Southworth may prove to be a ground-breaking case of litigation. It has the potential of drastically altering the finances of student organizations at public universities such as Texas A&M.



DAVID LEE

The University of Wisconsin argued last Friday, as reported by CNN, that public universities should be allowed to use mandatory student fees to finance various campus groups, even those with unpopular views, such as those on abortion or gender issues.

The suit was filed in response to the student activity fee at the University of Wisconsin in 1996. It amounted to \$165 per student, raising more than one million dollars campus-wide.

A large group of students, who were against such fees, listed 18 campus groups they did not want their fees supporting. Included were the environmental Greens, Amnesty International, the Campus Women's Center, and the Lesbian, Gay and Sexual Campus Center.

The question of whether students at public universities should be forced to pay mandatory activity fees has been renewed since Board of Regents, University of Wisconsin v. Southworth has reached the United States Supreme Court.



JESSICA CRUTCHER

The case has resulted from three law students at the University of Michigan, self-described as "conservatives and Christians," who want to withhold the \$10 of their semester fees that goes to student activities from 18 liberal student groups.

The groups, who support such beliefs as environmental concerns, women's rights and homosexual rights, are 18 of the 125 assorted student groups on campus.

Currently, the 7th circuit court ruling supports the students' right to not pay the activity fees.

The current appellate ruling sets dangerous precedents.

A public university such as the University of Michigan is meant to be just that — public.

This means that all have rights to their own opinions and lifestyles. The conservative students involved in Southworth seem to desire partial freedom of speech — they want the right to express their beliefs freely, while simultaneously wanting the right to suppress contrasting beliefs.

If these students want to live in an environment that commonly expresses few liberal viewpoints, they should transfer to a private Christian college as quickly as possible.

The most recent case dealing with issues similar to those in Southworth is Rosenberg v. Rector, which dealt with the University of Virginia. It reached the United States Supreme Court in 1995.

In Rosenberg, the Supreme Court found it unconstitutional to exclude a Christian student newspaper from a share of the school's activity funds.

The court stated the government may not discriminate among speakers in a public forum of expression, and a public uni-

versity is obviously a major public forum of expression.

In Southworth, the lower courts were of the opinion that the First Amendment protected students from "compelled speech."

But the issue being addressed in Southworth is not an example of "compelled speech." The students paying the fees are not being forced to support any particular viewpoint.

On the contrary, they are simply supporting the public forum itself by giving both themselves and everyone else the opportunity to express their views.

Currently, 125 student groups are receiving funding from the University of Michigan. The students involved in the lawsuit specifically object to 18 of these groups because of the "blatant political and ideological activism" the groups supposedly express.

Apparently, liberal groups exhibit these traits by simply existing.

But the group of students responsible for the lawsuit are of course innocent of all "blatantly political activism."

If the Michigan students are determined not to pay their activity fees, they should not be forced to.

Student fees are supporting a public forum by giving everyone the right to express their views.

However, in not paying the fees, they give up all right to participate in student government or organizations.

Paying a negligible activity fee to a university is analogous to paying one's taxes. Most rational people do not refuse to pay their taxes because they disagree with some minor part of government operations. Instead, they realize that although they may disagree with minor government functions, most of the money does support the common good.

The disgruntled students should take the same view.

Although they disagree with the platforms of one-sixths of the student organizations, apparently the other five-sixths are (in their opinion) not offensive.

The 18 liberal student groups, which are obviously in the minority, have been courteous enough to not complain about their student fees supporting conservative, Christian groups.

The conservative, Christian majority should grant the liberals the same respect.

Jessica Crutcher is a sophomore journalism major.

By forcing students to fund organizations they do not support, First Amendment rights are abridged.

Obviously, the university did not agree that the students' claims and was in no position to respond to their demands.

"It is important to facilitate the speech of diverse groups," argued Susan Ullman, a Wisconsin assistant attorney general. She pointed out that such funding "furthers the university's educational mission."

Such a rationalization has been used to stifle the disbursement of certain student fees to student organizations at A&M.

It is too bad such an argument is flawed. Granted, the First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech. In this case, it is the speech of the student organizations.

However, that does not mean other students have to be forced into financing speech they do not condone.

Imagine African-American students being forced to pay a student fee that partially funded the activities of a "White Pride" student organization.

How about atheist students being forced to partially fund the activities of a religious student organization? The legal obligation is clear: The Supreme Court must rule its method of financing student organizations as unconstitutional.

Undoubtedly, many of the student organizations across campus would eventually suffer a hit in the pocketbook if the Supreme Court rules in Southworth's favor.

A&M would have to find other sources of funding for student organizations who draw funding from student fees.

The University would have to offer partial fee refunds to objecting students and drastically cut the student organizations' budgets. None of these actions are desirable.

However, by forcing students to fund student organizations they do not support, the students' First Amendment rights are being seriously abridged.

The students have a First Amendment right not to speak, and to be free of the "compelled speech" their financial contributions represent, Jordan Lorence, a lawyer representing University of Wisconsin students who objected to the student fee system, said.

The Univ. of Wisconsin "has a constitutional duty to respect the right of conscience of the students," Lorence said.

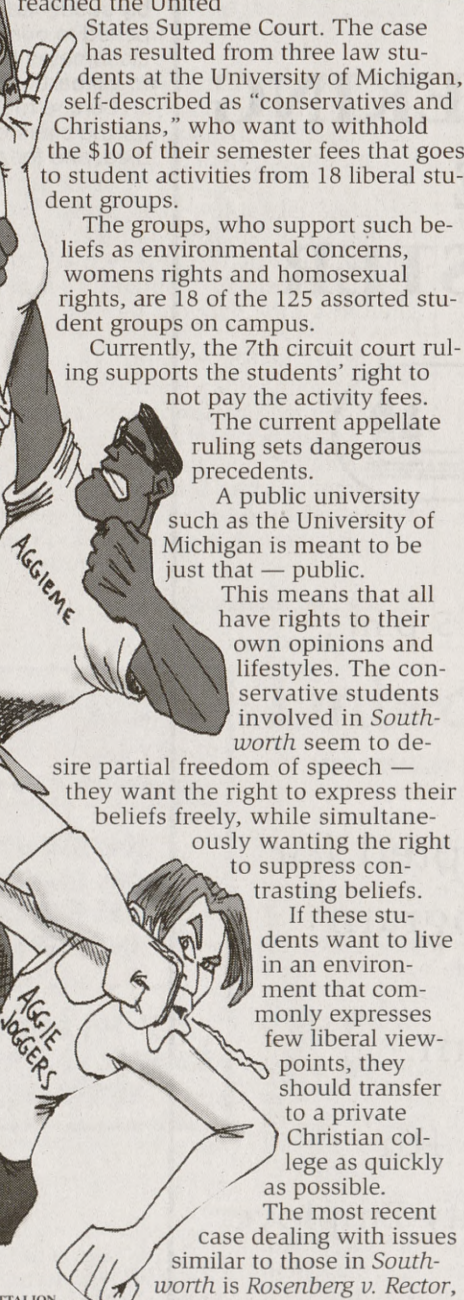
This echoes the opinion of the lower appeals courts.

"If a university cannot discriminate in the disbursement of funds, it is imperative that students not be compelled to fund organizations which engage in political and ideological activities. That is the way to protect the individual's rights," the federal appeals court ruled.

The bottom line is if Joe Aggie has a problem with his student fees funding certain student organizations, he has the right not to pay the fees that would associate himself with their agenda.

As politically incorrect and selfish as that may be, the First Amendment guarantees his right. Hopefully, the Supreme Court will realize this and rule in Southworth's favor.

David Lee is a junior economics major.



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION