

## Controversy a local matter

### U.S. Constitution gives South Carolina the right to choose



MARK PASSWATERS

For a long time, the state of South Carolina attempted to do how different it is from any other state. For example, it is the only state that seceded from the Union twice. Another more obvious way the Palmetto State has shown its independent streak is by flying the Confederate battle flag above the statehouse in Columbia.

The debate about whether this flag should be flown over South Carolina state buildings has been brewing for a long time and has increased in intensity in the past few weeks.

In a debate between Republican candidates for president earlier this month, Texas Gov. George W. Bush was asked what he would do to make South Carolina take the flag down.

His answer was simple and correct: "That's not a matter for me to decide," Bush responded. "It's a matter for the people of South Carolina to decide."

Bush's response was not only the politically prudent one, but the only plausible one. The 10th Amendment guarantees any state powers that are not specifically delegated to the federal government. Nowhere in the Constitution does it say the president has the right to force states to remove something that may be in bad taste. If the people of South Carolina do not want this banner to come down, it will not — and people should stop looking to the federal government to make them remove the flag.

One thing is certain, the people of South Carolina should and will have the final say on the matter.

Several organizations, including the NAACP, have taken action against South Carolina for continuing to fly the flag.

Claiming the flag is a symbol of racism and hatred, the NAACP is attempting to organize a boycott of the state. A good portion of South Carolina's economy is based upon conventions and tourism and a successful boycott could cost the state millions of dollars a year.

However, the state has refused to budge. Members of the state government, as well as many of the citizens, have maintained the battle flag is a symbol of their heritage and a memorial to those who fought in defense of the state. They say the battle flag is not a symbol of racism and refuse to consider removing it.

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The arguments of each sides have some merit. While the battle flag was used only by the Confederate Army and not the Confederate government, it is the most visible sign of the rebellion. Its use by other groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, have led many to claim that the flag symbolizes bigotry.

However, it is unfair to label the residents of South Carolina as bigots.

It is also unfair to say they should not be able to remember their dead. The South fought for four years against overwhelming odds and the Confederate soldiers should be remembered for their courage if nothing else.

Most men who served in the Confederate Army did not fight to defend slavery, but because they felt they had to defend their families from invaders. If the people of Germany are able to remember their dead from World War II, then the people of South Carolina should be able to remember their Civil War dead as well.

One major difference between Germany and South Carolina is the federal ban in Germany against displaying the Swastika, or other Nazi material. In the United States, the law is specifically designed so that such decisions are made by the people or by those they elect at the state level.

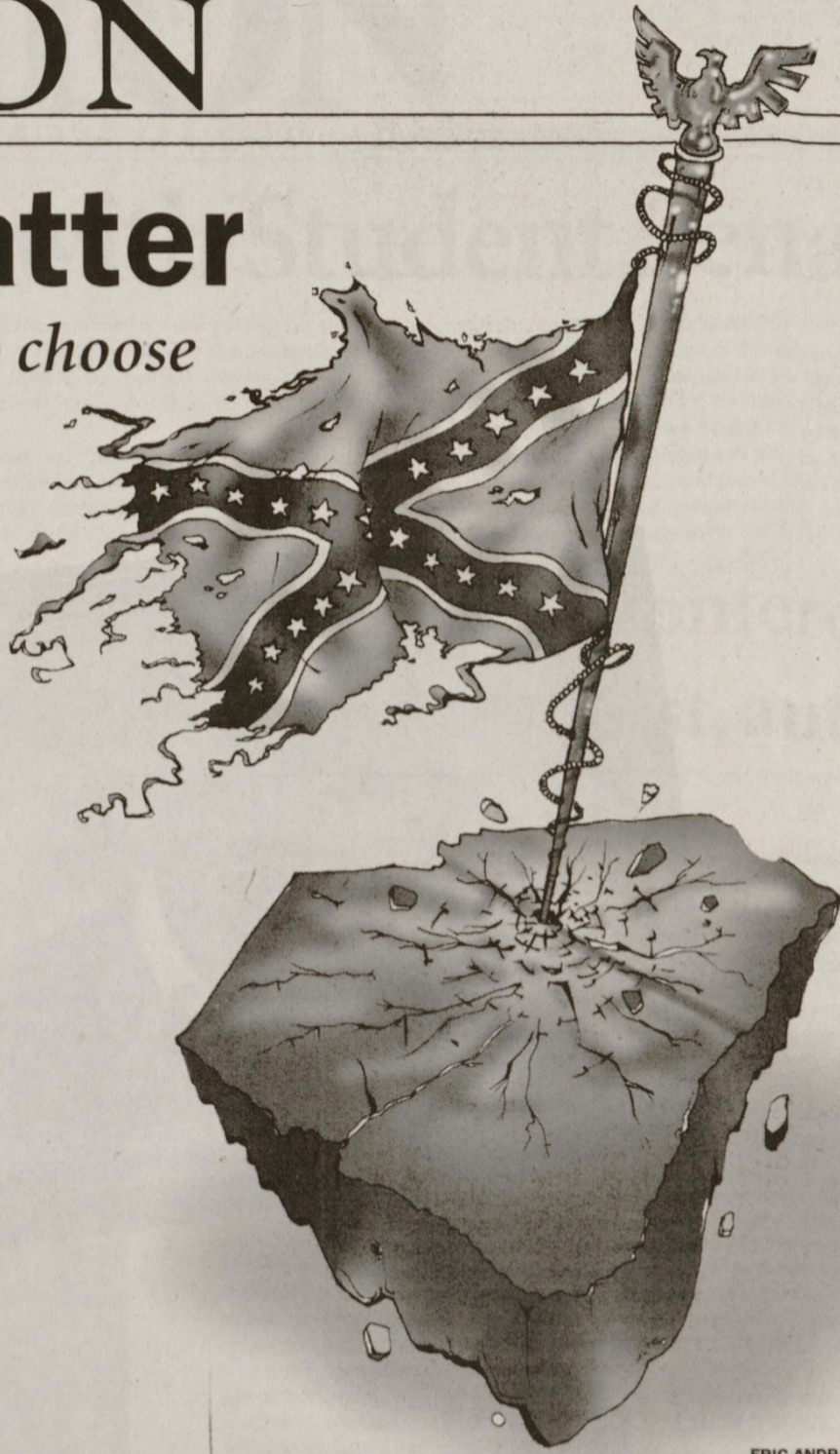
While the Constitution is certainly on South Carolina's side, some supporters of the flag have not exactly helped increase outside support for their viewpoint.

At one rally, a former South Carolina congressman demanded that the "National Association of Retarded People" stop messing with the affairs of his state. When asked if he would like to amend his comments or apologize, the congressman said he would like to apologize to retarded people everywhere for comparing them with the NAACP.

Such acts, along with the knowledge that the flag did not rise up over the Statehouse until the height of the '60s Civil Rights movement, do not improve their standing in the eyes of outsiders.

Simply put, what outsiders think is meaningless. The people of the state of South Carolina are the only ones who can decide whether the Confederate battle flag continues to fly. If they feel a moral or business imperative to make a change, they will. Whatever anyone else says is meaningless, because the U.S. Constitution speaks louder than any of them.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

## Error: Gates' job change does not compute

Microsoft announced a major personnel change last week in naming Steve Ballmer CEO of company operations. Bill Gates may claim a number of reasons for stepping down as CEO last Thursday, but it certainly was not because he chose to relinquish any power.

While the world's richest man claims he would rather play with computers, his company is in court battling the Department of Justice. Steve Ballmer's appointment to the CEO position is no more than a ploy to protect Gates and combat the Microsoft antitrust case.



SUMMER HICKS

Despite the new title of Chief Software Architect, there is no doubt that Gates' direction will remain the deciding factor in all company moves. However, with Ballmer at the head of operations, Microsoft now has a brand new fall guy should negotiations fail with the Department of Justice.

The antitrust case has the software giant on the offensive. At a press conference held at company headquarters, Ballmer said any effort to break up the company was considered "absolutely reckless and irresponsible." Microsoft has so far resolved to resist any form of governmental interference in company affairs. Although some analysts are expecting the announcement of a settlement, this seems unlikely because that Microsoft is a multibillion-dollar business and executives will not give in without a fight.

This personnel change also comes at a strategic moment, following the merger of AmericaOnline and Time Warner. Microsoft will be able to present a new forum for building its case on the antitrust issue and plans for competitive, web-based technology.

Possibly, company executives have decided now is the perfect time to present a new Microsoft image. Gates is the emotional counterpart who leaves his post as CEO to reach technological goals. Ballmer is the ideal manager, rational and clever. A Harvard graduate, he is a respected intellectual who is active and customer focused.

The combination of Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer at the head of Microsoft is an ingenious scheme because their strengths allow for possible domination of the industry. Gates drives the technology side of operations, and Ballmer handles the public aspects.

No one claims to challenge the brainpower of Bill Gates, but his public relations leave something to be desired.

His intense personal interest seems to color his public reactions and statements.

The new CEO represents a different strategy in dealing with the government's allegations of Microsoft's attempt to monopolize the industry.

In the testimony of the Microsoft antitrust case, Ballmer has not made statements about destroying competition or sent incriminating emails.

Make no mistake, Gates remains in control of Microsoft, but Ballmer appears to handle the government and the public in a better manner.

It is no coincidence that the announcement of Steve Ballmer's promotion to CEO comes at a crucial point in the fight with the Department of Justice. Company executives claim this change is simply an evolutionary move.

Considering the merger of AOL/Time Warner and the pending antitrust case — their timing is no less than perfect.

Summer Hicks is a senior English major.



ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

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## Texas public school system fails its students by passing them

The recent Quality Counts 2000 survey, done as part of an Education Week study, showed poor grades for the Texas public school system. Texas received a B+ for standards and accountability, a C for school climate, a C for resources, and a D for improving teacher quality. In other words, the Texas public school system received a C average — a 2.0 grade-point.

The school system's highest grade was for standards and accountability. However, a closer look finds this division dangerously flawed. Students are certainly being held "accountable" for their grades, in the context that they receive the grades they earn, but the standards are not being enforced.

Texas is cited by the Quality Counts Survey as having "clear and specific standards" in English and Math for high school students, but Texas schools should spend less time setting standards and more time enforcing them. In some cases, students are passing, even graduating, without mastering basic skills.

Students should not be allowed to move on to the next grade level until they have mastered the material in their current grade level. Allowing unqualified students to graduate is a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

Standards for science end in middle school, and no grade level has social studies requirements. The school system still seems to have serious problems enforcing what few standards it does have. For example, according to the 1996-1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress tests, only 28 percent of eighth-grade students could read at or above an eighth-grade level.

In addition, only 31 percent could write at an eighth-grade level, 23 percent had an eighth-grade knowledge of science, and a mere 21 percent passed the mathematics section. It is doubtful the students would have performed this poorly if they had properly mastered skills at the previous grade level.

Pop quiz: Do Texas students have to master tenth-grade standards to graduate high school? Answer: No, according to the Quality Counts 2000 survey.

The heart of the problem with standards and accountability in the Texas school system lies in the above question and answer. It is practically impossible to expect high school students to strive to meet certain standards if they are not required to do so. Few students will stay home and study if they do not have to.

Not enforcing scholastic standards helps few and harms many. In 1997, 3.6 percent of high school students dropped out of school. It does not matter how low scholastic standards are, there will always be dropouts. Lowering school standards to convince potential dropouts to stay in school harms those students who truly care about learning.

A high school diploma is worth very little in today's world without a college degree. The diploma's decreasing worth is undoubtedly due in part to the lessening amount of work required to receive it.

Not enforcing high school standards harms college bound students more than anyone. Thousands of students graduate high school every year and move on to their freshman year of college with no idea of how to study or take responsibility for their own actions. Some learn from their mistakes and go on to succeed. Many others become discouraged, pack up their "valuable" high school diplomas and move back home to work at Burger King after a disastrous first semester.

In many cases, this type of situation could have been avoided if students were forced to study and to take responsibility for their actions while in high school. Raising and enforcing standards would undoubtedly increase the number of high school dropouts. On the other hand, the students who graduated would receive a diploma that was actually worth something instead of a worthless piece of paper.

Raising high school standards is not something that can happen overnight, but enforcing the standards the Texas school system currently has would be a giant step in the right direction.



JESSICA CRUTCHER

### Texas Schools part 1 of 3

Public schools set respectable standards, but fail to enforce them

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### EDITORIAL

## THE BATTALION

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## SETTING THE STANDARD

### Bowen follows students' leads by claiming final responsibility '99 Aggie Bonfire

On the morning 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapsed, hundreds of students immediately rushed, pots in hand, to aid their fellow students. School work and personal issues became second priority, driven out by what is known at Texas A&M as Aggie Spirit.

The statement to resign if the Bonfire Commission finds the accident was the result of poor supervision by the university administration is a noble and commendable act. Bowen is continuing the effort of unselfishness the student body showed the

morning of the tragedy.

By stepping up and claiming responsibility for everything that happens at A&M, Bowen is taking the example set by students and raising the bar. Bowen has recognized that his position as head administrator carries the highest degree of responsibility.

In the tragedy's aftermath, A&M and its traditions have received much criticism, which has been constantly rebutted by those who treasure Aggie traditions. Some of this criticism has been aimed at the ad-

ministration, including Bowen

Bowen's statement is admirable because he accepts full responsibility while not falling into the trap of prematurely deciding whether it is right or wrong to continue Bonfire.

Since the morning of Nov. 18, no one has called for Bowen to step down.

His recent announcement to give up his job based on the commission's final report echoes the devotion students showed for one another that day.

As Bowen himself said in *The Eagle* article, "I have to set the standard."