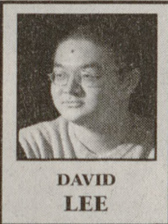


Friday, March 24, 2000

CAMPAIGN IN THE @\$\$

Election campaigns reflect poorly on candidates, show deplorable state of student government

Student government elections are a pain in the neck — period. Hold on a minute — before the powers-that-be at the Student Government Association (SGA) flip their collective lid, hear out the argument.



DAVID LEE

Granted, student leadership positions such as student senator, student body president (SBP), and yell leader are important to the livelihood of all Aggies. Without such positions, the student body would completely lack a voice in the many decisions made at Texas A&M. Accordingly, it is perfectly reasonable for the student body to demand qualified people for these positions.

But the sobering truth is that most students have no idea as to who is qualified for what. Along the same lines, most students are in the dark as to what the exact duties and responsibilities for each position are. Walk up to any Aggie and see if they know who their college's student senator or what SBP candidate Corey Rosenbusch's platforms are. Odds are, they will not have a clue.

Making matters worse, many of the people who fill student government positions become largely "title-driven" in their quest for personal power — many of the candidates this year, including SBP candidate Jeff Schiefelbein, have admitted that such shortcomings are a serious problem within SGA.

So, naturally, a large percentage of the student body feels disenchanting with the ongoing spring election. Just like other Aggie traditions, cursing an unwelcome campaign handout is the norm.

The cause of this problem largely lies in the pompous attitude of SGA and the student candidates. Despite their claims, candidates engage in inefficient and ineffective campaign tactics — then they have the audacity to wonder why no one cares. Students are not shallow enough to vote for a guy simply because he has a catchy phrase or cool T-shirts — nor will they vote for a guy simply because he stands out at Fish Pond all day passing out peppermints. No one cares because no one knows anything "real" about the candidates. If SGA wishes to meet its goal of having a large turnout of informed voters, their atti-

tude must change. More proactive and more informative methods must be employed if SGA wants to awaken the student body from its stupor.

For example, the SGA Website currently boasts a brand-new online voting option. How in the world will this increase voting numbers? If a student is indifferent enough to bypass the numerous voting locations on campus, what makes SGA think that the same student will take the time to vote online? Will students, through some blind leap of faith, take the time out of their busy day to log on and find out why a candidate should be elected as a Northside Student Senator? Simply adding another voting location makes no sense.

SGA and student candidates should not sit on their heels and cling to these foolish hopes. Candidates must have more interaction with the student body. After all, a person cannot reasonably vote for a fellow student they have never seen or met. When was the last time a College of Liberal Arts Student Senator took the time to stand up in his or her classes and briefly talk about campus issues that concern his or her classmates?

Instead of engaging the people they represents in this manner, the student

senators usually sit at their benches by Sbis Hut all day staring at their toenails and wondering why passing students were ignoring their flimsy "Constituency Day" signs.

It must also be said that precious brain cells are being killed by the never-ending deluge of uninformative, "cookie-cutter" campaign flyers. Take a moment to inspect the nearest bulletin board or chalkboard on campus. Is there a single glossy flyer that says anything about the candidate's platform or plan of action? Probably not. In the rare instance that there is a flyer that briefly mentions what the candidate wants to do, there is almost

no follow-up information provided to give the voter an idea of how the candidate is planning to implement his or her ideas. It is like having Al Gore announce that he plans to eradicate inflation as president without giving a single indication as to how he plans on making that impossibility a reality.

The American voters are definitely not that stupid — does the SGA think that the student voters are? Their actions have not indicated otherwise.

These drawbacks eventually feed into the overall problem of student government at Texas A&M. Even if candidates do make ambitious promises with well-thought-out plans of action, the likelihood of anything ever materializing is slim. This is because SGA has an annoying tendency of exaggerating its importance and level of influence on campus. In the continuum of power, the "yipping dog" of SGA sits at the feet of the faculty and administration.

On the SGA Website, SGA Election Commissioner Ashlea Jenkins states that "there is no comparable way to have a direct influence on who makes the decisions regarding the students at Texas A&M than to choose the campus leaders who will be pivotal in making those decisions."

Then answer this, Ms. Jenkins — by not supporting effective campaign methods and by not directly catering to constituents, isn't it obvious that students simply do not care? Apparently, neither SGA nor any of the student candidates this year can see that.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

David Lee is a junior economics and journalism major.

Despite warning, implants unsafe

A panel of advisers to the Food and Drug Administration recently heard more than 13 hours of testimony and debate on a product that can often break, leak and cause medical complications.



MELISSA JOHNSTON

No, it is not a condom — it is the saline breast implant. Currently, these implants are only available because of a government loophole: the FDA was not required to regulate medical devices when saline implants were introduced to the market.

Now the panel is trying to tighten the loophole, but the FDA might as well leave the issue alone, because due to the blurred vision of its advisers, the FDA's sudden interest in saline is accomplishing little to improve implant safety.

The FDA recently came up with a rather novel idea — in order to continue manufacturing their implants, companies must prove the safety of their products. The panel looked at three types of saline implants and determined that two are safe enough to stay on the market. The panel advised that the manufacturers of those brands, Mentor Corp. and McGhan Medical Corp., should be allowed to continue production with the recommendation that women be fully warned of the risks of saline and more investigations on safety should take place. This is a weak standpoint, at best.

Although the panel calls for more safety investigations, it seems to have overlooked a few pertinent facts. Prior to its recent recommendations, the panel looked at studies conducted by the manufacturers of the implants on the effects and possible complications of saline, and they hardly have an unblemished record. Mentor Corp. performed a study on 1,680 of its implant recipients and found that 9.2 percent of saline

implants given to breast cancer survivors ruptured and deflated within three years of implantation. Up to 40 percent of breast cancer survivors who received the implants needed repeat surgeries. Nearly 27 percent of them required surgery to remove the implants altogether. And the panel suggests that this brand of implants is still safe enough for use?

Selling these implants is like selling a computer that crashes 10 percent of the time, a car whose brakes fail once a week or a pregnancy test that is only correct on every 10th try. No one would put up with these results, and no one should have to put up with the panel's recommendations either.

The panel also marginalized the conflicts of opinion in women who had used saline implants in the past. Women who experienced difficulties with their implants addressed members of the panel, even producing implants blackened by fungus and disease to demonstrate the effects that saline had on their bodies.

Though the women pleaded with the panel to ban implant manufacturing, other women vouched for the benefits of saline claiming that it was worth chancing the risks in order to change their appearance, whether for medical or cosmetic reasons. Obviously perceptions of safety vary even among those who have undergone the implantation procedure itself. One would think that conflicts would exist among the panelists as well, but their recommendations appear to be fairly unified — more warnings and more studies will be quite enough.

The panel's recommendations may appear to be in the best interests of women, but underneath their surface, no real substance exists. Instead of warnings the FDA should push for a product that needs little or no warning to begin with. Providing a mediocre product that has even a 9 percent failure rate is unacceptable if

one considers that women have little choice in the matter. What amount of warning is going to persuade a woman who wants her breasts reconstructed after they were destroyed by cancer not to pay for the procedure when she essentially has no other options? And what amount of risk documentation is going to alter the determination of women who feel their chest size is inadequate? Some say the latter is a petty issue based on self-esteem, but regardless of the reason for turning to implants, women deserve to receive safe and effective products and procedures — the FDA is not providing them.

This issue stems from insufficient investigation from the beginning. Though the FDA never officially deemed saline implants to be safe, around 130,000 American women received them last year.

These unregulated implants were and still are the only option women have, due to 1992's moratorium and eventual ban on the silicone version. These 130,000 women were allowed to have questionable material put in their bodies because the FDA never attempted to find anything objectionable about that material in the first place. Hindsight is supposedly 20/20, but the panelists' vision is still rather out of focus.

Does the panel really expect that manufacturers will heed these vague recommendations? Warnings and studies will hold the public at arm's length by giving the appearance of safety, but real safety should be the FDA's bottom line, and unfortunately, it is still out of reach. As long as the FDA continues to hold its bar at this low level, saline implant manufacturers will see no need to jump any higher than they have to — they will still see through blurry lenses while patients trust that their vision is clear.

Melissa Johnston is a senior English major.

Recent gun deal misfires

On March 17, weapons hotshot Smith & Wesson agreed to a deal with the Clinton administration that proved what has seemed somewhat doubtful in recent months — that there are still people in the gun industry with enough common sense and common courtesy to support reasonable firearm regulations.

The nation's largest gun manufacturer bowed to pressure placed on them by the threat of government lawsuits and vowed to voluntarily implement various safety measures.

Smith & Wesson agreed to provide safety locks on its handguns within 60 days and to make them completely child-resistant within a year by aggressively pursuing "smart gun" technology, which would allow only owners to fire their weapons. In an extremely progressive move, the company also stated they will prohibit the sale of their products at gun shows unless all vendors at the events run background checks on buyers.

Finally, they promised not to target young people and criminals with their marketing strategies by advertising guns with features like fingerprint-proof handles.

Hooray for Smith & Wesson. Sort of. The company deserves sincere appreciation for what is a good first step toward solving the protracted battle between gun lobbyists and the White House. At least the company is realizing they have an effect on crime. But do not look for the streets to be strewn with confetti just yet.

It is too soon to justifiably believe that Smith & Wesson's vision will be shared by others in the gun industry, and despite the firm's influence and leverage, more manufacturers will have to lay down their arms before the agreement with the government can mean anything. As long as die-hard gun groups like the National Rifle Association (NRA) have influence, a true breakthrough in gun control will remain a long way off.

In the wake of the decision, gun advocates of every stripe (predictably) distanced themselves from Smith & Wesson's entirely well-intentioned measures.



CALEB MCDANIEL

"We are confident that no other major manufacturers will desert this coordinated effort [against gun control legislation] in favor of their own individual deal," said Robert Delfay of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which is closely allied with the NRA.

The preponderant power of the NRA will show that Delfay's confidence is not entirely unfounded. For every step toward reconciliation made by a single manufacturer, radicals in the NRA will make ten wild allegations about a government conspiracy to increase gun violence to serve political ends.

Therefore, the Smith & Wesson deal must be viewed merely as a primitive move in the gun debate. In order for it to be truly meaningful, two things must be done.

First, the government must not relent in its litigation against other gun manufacturers. The gun industry must be shown that this deal will not appease Americans' anger over the logjamming of much-needed gun safety legislation.

The Clinton administration and its successor must continue to use the White House as a bully pulpit. Just as the progressive Theodore

Roosevelt was not afraid to bring 46 lawsuits against illegal trusts in the early 20th century, progressive politicians must not be afraid to stand up to irresponsible gun makers in the early 21st century.

Secondly, other gun makers must make good faith efforts toward emulating Smith & Wesson's capitulation. And meanwhile, legislators should not take these negotiations as signs that future gun control laws are not needed. Rather, Congress should seize the opportunity to capitalize on growing acceptance for legislation and push serious bills into law.

It is high time that one gun manufacturer moved closer to waving the white flag. Goodness knows it is not being raised in America's streets and schools. But Smith & Wesson have only made one step.

There are still lobbyists who think guns are not responsible for a 6-year-old's shooting. There are still businesses who make weapons custom-designed for crime and highly accident-prone. There are still gun retailers who put profit over principle.

America's endemic problem with guns has hardly been cured just because one company has come to its senses.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

Ending parallel parking on College Main creates even more problems

In response to Brady Creel's Mar. 22 article.

While eliminating parallel parking from Northgate seems like a step in the right direction, it is just another mistake made by the city of College Station. Parallel parking does not pose a safety hazard to bicyclists and pedestrians, but rather parked cars create a physical barrier between the street and the sidewalk. It acts as a buffer protecting people on the sidewalk from traffic. College Station does not have that many pedestrian friendly streets, and the city wants to take away one of our only walkable areas by turning College Main into another Texas Avenue in order to cozy up to businesses.

Also, by eliminating street parking, the city hopes that more cars will park in its future parking garage. I admire the city for being able to create a demand for pay parking when there was

not one in the first place. By removing street parking, College Station is taking away one of the last refuges for pedestrians and propagating the disease of suburban sprawl.

Christian Nilsen
Class of '01

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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