

A BURNING QUESTION

The Bonfire Commission recently reported it has reached a reasonable conclusion in its investigation. As the release date for the commission's findings nears, the administration, students and alumni are faced with a question that will have a profound impact on Texas A&M. Two viewpoints are presented here with the intention of initiating discussion before its release.

2000 Bonfire will advance spirit

The term "Aggie family" is often used to describe the feeling of camaraderie on Texas A&M University's campus. But like most families, the Aggie family has its dark secrets, and, unfortunately, activities at Aggie Bonfire account for a number of them.

Bonfire is a source of controversy on this campus, and probably has been since the first one was lit. And when the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapsed, anti-bonfire factions were given their strongest reason to oppose the tradition. Unfortunately, it would be one thing if the collapse was the only reason to ban bonfire. Whispers of fights, drinking, sexual assault and other conduct that conflicts with the Aggie spirit were considered part of the bonfire tradition.

If next year's bonfire is to be built — which it should be — then it goes without saying several changes must be made. The obvious improvements to rules and regulations must be set and followed. If necessary, the very design of the stack can be changed. But to truly grow from the bonfire tragedy, the very meaning of bonfire must be changed. No longer should it stand for the "burning desire to beat t.u.," but should symbolize the spirit that burns inside of all Aggies.

2000 Aggie Bonfire is the perfect opportunity to advance this tradition. Originally it was meant to remind Aggies everywhere of their burning rivalry with University of Texas. However, it grew into more of an event in and of itself. The true meaning of bonfire was lost as it became representative of Aggies' burning desire to drink and party the night before the football game.

It is said that one is known by their rival, meaning the greater rival a person has, the greater that person is. While UT and A&M do each other honor, it is time for bonfire to mean more than that. The collapse was perhaps the greatest tragedy faced by this campus.

Bonfire should represent the overcoming adversity. It should show the spirit that lit the way in the darkest of days of Aggieland. Building next year's bonfire will be the greatest testament to Aggie perseverance.

Some people would argue that as long as the collapse is fresh in the student's minds, the bonfire will continue to be built safely, but it is only a matter of time before the collapse becomes a distant memory. Maybe so on any other campus, but not this one. As rooted in tradition as this school is, it would be impossible for Aggies to let an event that was so traumatic fade into obscurity.

The building of 2000 Aggie Bonfire should unite Aggies the way the collapse of 1999 Aggie Bonfire brought the Aggie family together. This means no more alcohol on the cut and stack sites. No more potty-pots, no more corps-fraternity-dorm fighting, no more hazing, no more sexual assault. Bonfire needs to be built with behavior that portrays the Aggie spirit: unity, devotion to each other and perseverance. No more actions that are painful to other Aggies. The collapse was felt by Aggies all over the world. It is only fitting, that from now on, that all Aggies should be able to share in the pride and spirit of bonfire.

Gig'em, and see you when it burns.

Joe Shumacher is a senior journalism major.



JOE SHUMACHER

Pro Bonfire means ending tradition

As a writer, cadet and die-hard Aggie, this is the most challenging column I have ever chosen to write. The position for ending the tradition of Aggie Bonfire is the hardest case to make because it seems to go against an event that has been an integral part of the Texas A&M experience for 90 years. However, it is time to examine its history and admit that the rift between what bonfire symbolizes and the structure itself has become so wide that it is best not to build it this year. This viewpoint will also be the hardest for all Aggies to consider because it is about sacrifice, listening to your gut feeling and choosing what is right for the long term.

The Pro Bonfire perspective should be to close the book on the tradition. If the tradition is to remain revered, November's collapse should be the final chapter in bonfire history. A&M students, alumni and administration need to realize that by sacrificing bonfire, the positive aspects can be kept, and the negative banished.

This may seem like a blasphemous proposition, but we must uphold the Aggie traditions of honor, integrity, respect for students who have gone before us and doing what is right above all else.

How do the ideals of bonfire and honor conflict? First, because we have to take responsibility for our mistakes. It is irrefutable that we broke the rules set forth to ensure safety. It is a fact that the stack was 59 feet when it fell, as well as that there were students drinking and general disregard for safety. There are countless factors that could have led to the collapse. If we are serious about avoiding accidents in the future, we have to admit what we did wrong and end bonfire.

If bonfire burns in 2000, I have no doubt that it will be flawless. It will be engineered perfectly, cause only minor injuries and possibly be a fitting memorial for the 12 victims of the collapse. But it is only natural that as time progresses the negative aspects of bonfire will return. It is great to have lofty ideals of how bonfire will change forever, but expecting all future bonfire workers to refrain from hazing, drinking and being careless is ludicrous. By continuing the tradition the message given off in the long term would be that of driving on as if nothing ever happened. Rebuilding is the easy choice to make. It is what we've been doing for 90 years. A far greater statement of respect for the fallen is to permanently end the tradition rather than temporarily honor them with a bonfire in their memory.

One of the most memorable stories I was told my freshman year was about an afternoon at cut site "back in the day" when a sophomore in the corps pushed a freshman out of the path of a falling tree. The sophomore gave his life for his friend because he trusted his gut feeling, and he has come to be a symbol of what an Aggie is.

Immediately after the collapse, the gut feeling that most of us had was that bonfire would never burn again. As time has passed, we have begun to forget and ignore that instinct.

It seems that we are trying to replace that original instinct by justifying the continuation by calling it a memorial for the 12 or using the word "tradition" as a crutch to keep it. There are too many variables in the building of the structure. We owe it to future generations of students to end bonfire so that they do not have to go through the pain and grief we have.

Bonfire has two sides — the fire itself and the symbolism of camaraderie, teamwork and leadership attached to it.

Which is more important? If you believe in the symbolic part of it, the right thing to do is put bonfire on the shelf.

There are many possible reasons for the structure's flaws, and ending it is the only way to ensure another accident will not claim more lives. The symbolism attached to bonfire, however, can remain for as long as we believe in it.

For each student and alumnus, bonfire plays a different-sized role in their lives. We all, however, share a heightened version of the human spirit, known as Aggie Spirit which, as interpreted on the wall of the MSC, says "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)."

The time has come, no matter how painful, to act according to what we believe.

Actions speak louder than words. So, Aggies, look inside yourself and lay down that part of you that makes up physical part of bonfire.

Mariano Castillo is a sophomore international studies major.



MARIANO CASTILLO



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY CHAD ADAMS/THE BATTALION

Scales of justice unfairly tipped when judges give party affiliation

The concept of "checks and balances" created by this country's founding fathers is very simple — the judicial, executive and legislative branches of the federal government must maintain a separate and equal balance of power. In particular, the political forces that dominate the executive and legislative branches are to stay out of the courts. This precaution is appropriate because it limits any attempt to sway the law to the advantage of certain people.

Apparently, the state of Texas does not agree with this line of thinking. Unlike their federal counterparts, who are appointed by the President and approved by Congress, all Texas state judges have to campaign within a given district. Many declare a party affiliation — mostly Republican, of course. Just like every other elected official, they must first win their party's primary, then move onto the general election.

What is baffling is that few people see this as a serious undermining of justice. In every top-

level position within Texas including the Texas Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals, the Republican Party reigns. Just like state legislators and the governor, state judges in Texas must worry about appeasing their party, campaign contributors and constituents.

The lingering thought of re-election is always in the back of their minds. The entire concept of "checks and balances" is non-existent at this point because these judges are essentially politicians with gavels. Is this system dangerous? Yes. Should it be changed? Absolutely.

That is why presidents, senators and representatives are elected by the public and federal judges are appointed — in the end, the "sterile" thinking of the courts could trump any of the politically-driven motives of the other two branches. An appointed United States Supreme Court judge does not have to worry about getting fired, upsetting constituents or winning re-election — he or she can impar-

tially focus on the law and decide the cases he or she is presented with accordingly. Without this setup, the mandated integration of schools in *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* and the overturning of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* would have

never taken place. Basically, justice and politics mix as well as water and oil.

A perfect example is Sharon Keller of Austin. As a Republican running for re-election to the Court of Criminal Appeals, Keller made it clear that she likes the conservative attitude the court has had in recent years and wants to kill off any attempts at returning to the time when it was "an activist, liberal court."

"The thing that I think is more important than how I work and my experience ... is that I'm considered the leader of the conservative wing of the court ... I have very strong conservative credentials ... and what's important is the balance of the court," Keller said.

Balance in the court? Keller's statement is extremely hypocritical — how can the highest criminal court in the state be perceived as "balanced" if Keller and her conservative cohorts promote their biased agenda in their rul-

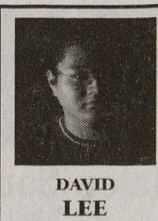
ings? How would their rulings in cases differ in comparison to those of a moderate and impartial court? One can only wonder.

Of course, there are many arguments against this critique. It has been said that even in states that have executive-appointed state judges, there is a bias present because a Republican governor will more than likely appoint all-conservative judges to the state's courts. This thinking could then justify the existing system in Texas bringing about the same results.

This argument is erroneous in that there would be one glaring difference — the appointed judges would essentially owe the executive, who appointed them nothing. Therefore, they have no reason to listen to him or his political agenda — the governor's influence dies the moment the judge is sworn into office. Meanwhile, Texas state judges continue their current course of imbalance in the courts.

One can only hope that eventually the powers-that-be will come to their senses and fix this glaring error.

David Lee is a junior economics and journalism major.



DAVID LEE



JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

Party Want Ads
Is running 5 days, if your ad is \$1,000 or less (plus tax). This rate applies only to non-artisans offering personal services. Guaranteed results or your money back. No charge. If item is not sold, you must call before 1 p.m. or scheduled to end to qualify for insertion at no charge. Made if your ad is canceled.

HELP WANTED
... for carhops & other positions... 512 Harvey Road.

WORK Apply online at www...

Temp Counselors Needed For Massachusetts Positions available... fun loving students at... all individual sports such as... and Pool activities, and special... art, dance, theatre, gymnastics... & radio. Great Salaries, room... 7th-August-16th. Enjoy a great... is to be unforgettable. Make... n.com (Boys): 1-800-753-9113... com (Girls): 1-800-352-3752.

Swim Instructors & Lifeguards... Maria. Must be certified. Dist... Melissa Cullum.

LF COUNSELORS NEEDED FOR THE CAMPS IN MASSACHUSETTS Positions available... fun loving students with specific... GREAT SALARIES, room... 7th-August-16th. Enjoy a great... to be unforgettable. Check out... on line at www.greatcamps...-0737.

... on Northgate hiring code... Apply in person 200-Liv. One... \$12/hr. Apply Tues-Fri, 2p...

... & Cowgirls to guide tourists in the Rocky Mountains. Con... horse operation in North America... 3300 Airport Road. Book... our website at www.somercor... for improvement & manage... commercial web page. Experience... esi@ag-gel.com

... Full/part time. email...

LOST & FOUND
... all tan male, bobtail. SW Pan... needs treatment. Reward \$500.

SCCELLANEOUS
... Okinawan Kobujutsu, North... ring Mantis Kung Fu, Mo... & Tai. Self Defense, Weapons... kungfu.co

MOTORCYCLE
... NitelHawk 700cc. ShaftDrive... OBO. Call 695-1627.

... atana for sale. Good condon... 8240 after 5pm.

... EX-250 Just broke in! 11/20... 695-9678.

... Ninja EX250R, 3K-miles, new... \$2800/mego. Matching helmet \$3...

PETS
... es, Kittens, Cats, Dogs. Men... Animal Shelter- 775-5755.

... in Christmas Eve. Beautiful... Call (979)764-6595.

REAL ESTATE
... room, carpet, large fenced... 500. Alford & Company Real...

ROOMMATES
... \$200/depot, \$200-\$250/mo... 2196.

... in brand new 3brdm/2ba motor... or Jesse.

... e needed end of May. Call... +12bills. 696-3104.

... SAPI 2brdm/2bth new model... ls. Tammi 485-0746.

... ed for house near campus... rent plus utilities. Call 696-69...

... rmer sublease 4brdm/2bth cu... 4bills. Pamela 764-7892.

... soon as possible, for July... FM2818. \$200/mo. +12bills. W... 823-3347.

... mmer only, 2brdm/2bth su... Call 696-6164.

... e needed for summer of 01... Walk-in closet, wid, \$300/m... 128.

... e needed! 3brdm/3bth dupar... 95-1216.

... ed. Summer sublease. 1br... ments. 2brdm/2bth, furnished, p... int, only \$300/mo. 694-2371.

... 3brdm/2bth, \$290/mo+12bil...

... r, 4brdm/3bth house close to... \$285/mo. +14bills. 822-6686.

... r sublease. 3brdm/2bth. Goo... at location, W.D. \$300 +12bil... 694-2225.

... 2brdm/2bth, spacious room... et, \$265/mo. +12bills. Apr 78...

... e- \$273.33 includes rent bil... th01@tamu.edu

SERVICES
... E SCORE GUARANTEED! 517... al instruction. 7764-0080.

... sive Driving. Lots of Fun. Large... neurance discount. M-F 7p... Fri.&Sat. - Fri(6pm-8pm) \$50... 7-2:30pm). Inside Bank... \$25/cash. Lowest price all... Dr., Ste 217. 846-6117. SP... 00177.

... to live? www.housing01.net

TRAVEL
... erts. www.raildeals.com Get... discount offers, rail map &... Pink Palace and more. 1-800-...

TUTORS
... tor- Math, Biology, Chem... istics, Botany and more. Appr... 08.

WEIGHT LOSS
... 0-lbs. in 30 days. 800-571-...

... Up to 30% Off! Free... tion. Credit Cards, Check...

... it to lose weight, try an all... althy way. Free counseling!

ROOM LEASES
... ooms With All Bills... uttle to TAMU & Bill...

The Horizon
... y 979-779-7091