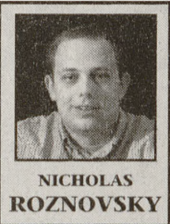


Monday, April 3, 2000

## This lane closed

### Texas ban on Internet car buying makes no sense



NICHOLAS ROZNOVSKY

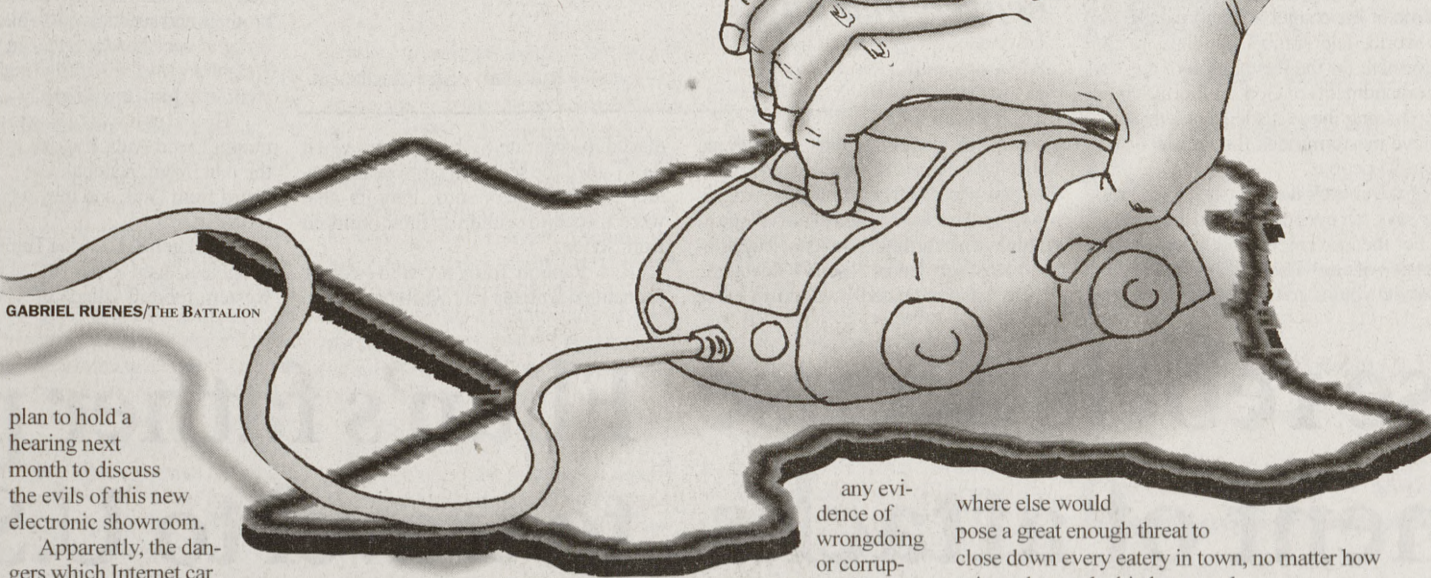
They have no morals. They have no name. The words honesty and decency have no meaning to them. They prey on the weak-filled and the easily influenced. If they could, they would rob their poor little blue-haired grandmothers of every cent they have. And now they are stalking the Internet, looking for a new group of unsuspecting victims into which they can sink their greedy fangs.

This is what the state of Texas thinks about used car dealers.

Traditionally the butt of jokes and the subject of business ethics investigations, used car dealers were denied a lane on the information superhighway earlier this month by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The Houston-area section of the Ford Motor company's "Ford Pre-owned Showroom" was closed down by TxDOT officials pending review of the Website, the way it operates and what it means for people buying cars in Texas.

Although looking for cars on the Internet is legal in the state, Ford's new Website has been shut down because it signaled the next step in automotive e-commerce — the actual purchasing of vehicles over the Internet. For the first time, a car company is attempting to do away with the salesman entirely and actually let people buy a car without going to a dealership to sign the papers. It was too big of a deal for the TxDOT to swallow.

According to the TxDOT Motor Vehicles Division (Enforcement Section), Texans are not allowed to buy cars over the Internet. Ford has been allowed to continue testing its Website in several other metropolitan areas, including New York and San Francisco, while officials in Texas



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

plan to hold a hearing next month to discuss the evils of this new electronic showroom.

Apparently, the dangers which Internet car sales pose in Houston are not a problem in New York or California. The actual truth is that the state of Texas has jumped the gun and prematurely shut down a legitimate business outlet.

TxDOT's Motor Vehicles Division is primarily concerned with enforcing the state's lemon laws and ensuring automotive transactions within the state are carried out both legally and honestly. By taking it upon themselves to shut down Ford's Internet operation, they have refused to wait for

any evidence of wrongdoing or corruption on the part of the company. Apparently, the possibility for such dishonesty is sufficient evidence to justify closing down a business which has done nothing wrong.

It is good thing the TxDOT people do not work for the local health inspector's office, otherwise we would have to wait for every contagious disease and pest to be eradicated by humankind before a single restaurant in town could open up. For them, the fact these dangers might exist some-

where else would pose a great enough threat to close down every eatery in town, no matter how spic-and-span the kitchen may be.

The state of Texas is right about one thing — there is risk in buying a car over the Internet. There is also a risk involved in buying stocks, mortgaging a home or making vacation reservations, yet Texans are still allowed to conduct these transactions using a computer and a modem.

Risk is an inherent part of capitalism. It is why some succeed and others fall behind. The state should stop unscrupulous businesses from swin-

dling unsuspecting citizens, but it should not coddle its citizens and deny them convenient methods of conducting perfectly legal transactions. The possibility of misuse and abuse by a few is not sufficient reason to keep Internet transactions out of the hands of the public.

If humanity is truly adept at one thing, it is finding ways to misuse and abuse the legitimate workings of society. At the same time, it is unacceptable to deny the average citizen a commodity because someday someone might turn it to their advantage. The rights and privileges of the innocent should not be superceded by the possibility of criminal activity. That is why society has laws and tools with which to enforce them.

For a rancher in Van Horn, perhaps the risks of shopping over the Internet are outweighed by the convenience of not having to drive 140 miles to El Paso to look at a car. Just like anyone purchasing a video or book from Amazon.com, he is buying something sight unseen. Unlike them, he is also protected by an extensive collection of lemon laws designed to protect the car buyers of Texas.

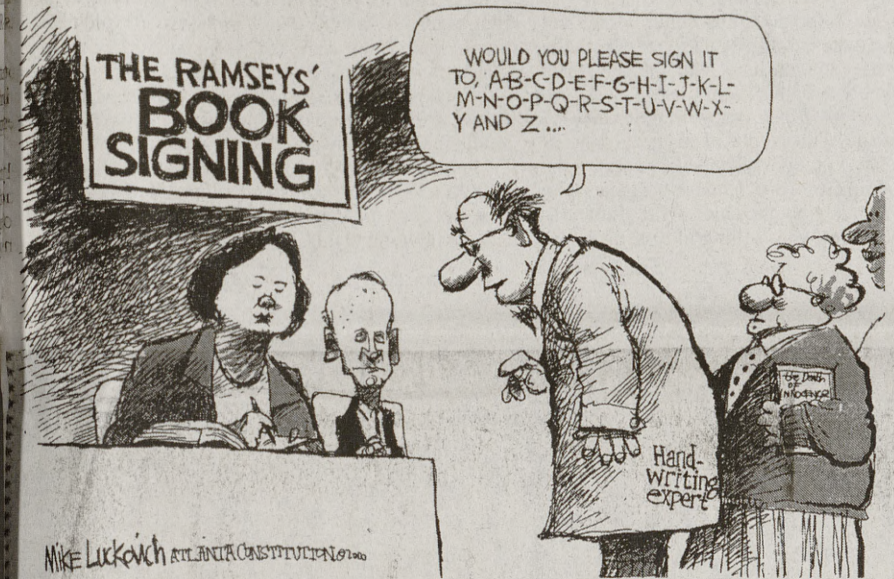
If the dealer is honest in his dealings with the customer, the customer has nothing to fear. If the dealer is dishonest, the prospect of legal action is just as real as if the customer had signed the lease on the dealership lot itself. Duplicitous and deception are just as criminal when displayed on a computer screen as they are when they are achieved through spoken words. When fraud occurs in the realm of Internet automotive sales, the state will still be able to punish those responsible just like any other fraudulent car dealer.

If the state of Texas wants to stop Internet car sales, they should wait until they have good reason to do so. If people want to buy cars without seeing them first, that is their business. It only becomes the state's business when illegal activities surround the transaction.

Until then, it should be up to the citizens of Texas to decide if they should buy cars online or not.

Nicholas Roznovsky is a junior political science major.

## Ring policy unfair to transfer students



MIKE LUCKOVICH/ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

## Students underestimate importance of sleep

Once again a week designed to bring enlightenment has been overlooked by the nation. National Sleep Awareness Week has passed America by. The powers that be at the National Sleep Foundation designated the days and doled out information about the benefits of sleep and how to sleep correctly. Statistics showed the nation to be full of bad sleepers.

As with most awareness weeks, National Sleep Awareness Week generated very little actual knowledge-turning-to-action by most Americans.

However, National Sleep Awareness Week should have caught America's attention — and changes should have been made to the many sleep-deprived lifestyles throughout the nation.

Forty percent of adults claimed to be so sleepy their daily duties are impaired, according to the National Sleep Foundation's poll.

Americans claim to be in the Information Age — the nation has more knowledge than ever, with abundant resources to use new information. Unfortunately, the knowledge will do them little good without proper sleep. And they continue to ignore information urging them to stop in bed.

Instead, people stay up late watching mindless television shows and surfing the Web. Or they drink caffeine and alcohol in the evenings, two substances proven to impair restful sleep.

A sleep debt forms when someone does not get enough sleep. Losing one hour a night for eight nights in a row means the brain acts as though it has pulled an all-nighter. The math is easy — the body's reaction is not.

Most Americans are walking around with huge sleep debts that occasional naps and a few extra hours on Saturdays barely dent, according to USA Today.

These debts are dangerous — causing longer reaction times and an increased risk of traffic accidents.

Even though these dangers are brought to Americans' attention through such venues as newspapers, Oprah Winfrey's television show

and National Sleep Awareness Week, few people pay attention.

Sleeping too little causes people to lose motor skills, similar to the effects of alcohol. Most Aggies drink zero to three drinks per week according to the Department of Student Life. But add in all the sleep-deprived students, and there is a major problem.

College students are not free from this abounding criticism of American's sleep patterns. They average about six hours a night, when they should be getting nine to nine and a half hours a night, according to a survey by James Maas, professor of psychology at Cornell University.

College students also vary their bedtime an average of 90 minutes on weeknights and two hours on weekends. This confuses the body and causes sleep to be even more unproductive.

Add to that college students' caffeine and alcohol intakes, and they have what can only be called terrible sleep habits.

"In the simplest terms, a large sleep debt makes you stupid," said William Dement, a sleep researcher from Stanford.

Sleep debts have proven to cause people to make more math errors — not good for those engineering classes.

Another scary reason Americans should be tucked in at night is that sleep deprivation increases the aging process, fostering obesity, memory loss, high blood pressure and diabetes. Perhaps string-bikini-clad Spring Breakers should take heed before their thighs start expanding from exhaustion.

Yet another sad fact of sleep deprivation — it puts people in bad moods and causes more emotional distance between family and friends. Just sleeping a few more hours per night could turn America into a cheerful, happy place rather than its constant state of PMS.

Working the body into regular sleep patterns should be a goal of all Americans. American citizens need to take advantage of the best thing they can do for their bodies — sleep. The benefits are boundless.

Good night, sleep tight.



JILL RILEY

Jill Riley is a senior journalism major.

There are many benefits to being a senior at Texas A&M — registering before underclassmen, whooping at the first home game at Kyle Field, wearing senior boots and most of all, wearing the Aggie ring. Well, for most seniors, that is.

The standing requirements that must be fulfilled before a student can even think about walking into the Ring Office to order a ring are 95 credit hours or 60 credit hours in-residence for transfer students. For most students, this prerequisite seems a mere trifle, a stumbling block until the end of their junior year when they can march over to the Clayton Williams Alumni Center and place their order. However, many transfer students are being cheated out of this time honored tradition because of the in-residence requirement.

Students who fail to meet the requirements of the Ring Office until their last semester are missing out on the many experiences that being a senior at A&M entails. If a student cannot order their ring until after their degree is posted on the Student Information Management System, they will always regret the fact they were not deemed "worthy" to receive the treasured Aggie heirloom until after it was too late to enjoy it.

Post-graduation Aggie ring recipients must daily deal with the dishonor that being a senior with a naked ring finger brings. When asked what class they belong to, students must shamefacedly answer that they are seniors, but they still do not have their A&M rings.

Some seniors miss out on the joyous day that begins with huddling outside the Alumni building at 6 a.m. waiting for the doors to open in order to pick up their ring. These unfortunate students stand under the giant Aggie ring at Ring Dance for pictures and make sure their right hand is strategically out of sight. Several Aggie transfers never experience the mingled emotions of excitement and anxiety that come with meeting friends at Northgate for the annual Ring-Dunk-Puke-a-Thon. The slighted Aggie seniors hide their ringless hands in the folds of their gowns while they walk across the stage at graduation.

The Association of Former Students needs to take a second look at the ring order requirements for transfer students. They must realize there are often extenuating circumstances surrounding students making it dif-



SUMMER HICKS

Many transfer students are being cheated out of this time honored tradition because of the in-residence requirement.

difficult to fulfill the 60 hour requirement before graduation. Some transfer students entered A&M later in their college careers because they had trouble getting their grades high enough for admission. Others had to take classes in their hometowns during the summer to save rent money. Still, other students were forced to take classes at Blinn because A&M did not offer the course they needed during the semester their schedule required. All of these situations point to the fact that not all Aggies have the option of entering A&M their freshman year and completing all hours in residence.

The Ring Office needs to form a system of appeal to cater to these Aggies that are missing out on a great tradition because of a simple technicality. The administration must make it possible for transfer students to order their rings before graduation, even if only at the beginning of their last semester. The important thing is to guarantee these equally deserving students the opportunity to wear their Aggie ring for the most important events during their senior year.

From the day A&M students step on campus as new fish, they begin ticking off the days from a mental calendar until they can order their senior ring. Many students take on extra classes in each semester course load, attempting to reach the requirements as soon as possible.

However, as transfer students, many Aggies are forced to wait until three to four months after graduation to pick up their Aggie ring and this is not right.

The A&M Ring Office must be flexible enough to make exceptions for these seniors that are as worthy to receive their rings as any other student on this campus.

If a student began their University career at another institution for any reason and then transferred to A&M, does that make them less of an Aggie? Do they not deserve to enjoy the privilege of proudly wearing an Aggie ring before they graduate?

An injustice is occurring every semester on this campus. The Ring Office is showing favor for seniors who began their college careers at A&M. As for the Aggie transfer students, until changes are made to the Aggie ring requirements, they will be considered the stepchildren of Aggieland.

Summer Hicks is a senior English major.

## MAIL CALL

### Big Event should focus on needy families

Last Saturday I attended Big Event for the first time with the intentions of improving the community and helping those who are less fortunate than I.

We arrived at the assigned location to find a nice house with a pool in the backyard and were met by an able bodied, middle-aged couple. For the rest of the day, we cleaned their gardens, raked leaves, dug up and moved trees, and laid rock for the couple. While we were working, the couple's sixteen-year old son walked out to his truck, jokingly asked if we would wash it, then went back inside and watched television. The couple's eight-year old son was also present the entire time riding his bike around the neighborhood.

The couple did help us a bit during our work, but mainly just sat back and watched. While there were only five of us at the house working, the couple also made remarks about how last year 12 students showed up and painted the inside of their house. I have no problem with doing community service and helping those in need, but last Saturday I did nothing more than free landscaping work. The job we did could have easily been done in a day and a half by those living at the resi-

dence while they spent quality time together as a family. I think Big Event is a great idea, it just seems to me that there are hundreds in the B-CS area who were much more needy than the couple we worked for.

Jason Miksovsky  
Class of '02

### Students responsible for keeping records

In response to Maureen Kane's March 29 article.

Regarding your article, "Advisers garner student criticism", I have a few comments that I would like to make. First of all, as an adviser in the Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction, I stress to my students that they, ultimately, have the responsibility of meeting program requirements. It is very important that a student obtain a catalog for their specific degree program and carefully read through their curriculum. I recommend that each student keep a careful tally of each course taken and record the grade at the end of the semester. Each semester, students should meet with their advisor and compare records — I have found that this alone will eliminate many potential problems that could delay a student from grad-

uating on time. To summarize, I urge students to take responsibility for their progress. One may be able to get by in college by saying "no one ever told me" but after graduation, that line of reasoning will not evoke much sympathy from employers, creditors, government agencies and others in the "real world".

As an adviser, I desire to see my students succeed — it is a delight and pleasure to see them don their gowns and walk across that stage in May or December. I firmly believe that they have fewer stronger allies than the advisors on this campus, and I hope that they will always feel welcome to use this valuable resource available to them.

Jason Poole  
Class of '94

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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