

OPINION

THE BATTALION

No day off

Break should start Wednesday before Thanksgiving; students could use rest

It is time to get ready for Thanksgiving — time to make that perfect pecan pie and make the best travel plans. Strangely, figuring out travel plans is actually much more difficult than making that perfect pie because Texas A&M does not acknowledge tomorrow, the day before Thanksgiving, as an official school holiday.



MELISSA BEDSOLE

The idea of having school on the day before Thanksgiving seems normal because it has always been that way, but it is not fair and certainly nothing to be thankful for.

When A&M proclaimed the day an official holiday last year, it was an understandable decision.

Looking at the reasoning behind the administration's decision to cancel school that Wednesday, last year was a time of extreme circumstance.

The idea was that the student body needed to be with family and needed to rest because many students were exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Extra precautions were taken so that they could recover and have the opportunity to spend the holiday with their families in peace.

Last year's situation may have been extraordinary, but the exhaustion of the students was not unusual and the extra precautions should become the norm, rather than the exception.

While it may not seem an important part of making academic decisions on this campus, the Texas A&M and University of Texas-Austin game should not be overlooked. If A&M is going to make a big deal about the football game, someone should take into consideration the extra planning it requires.

For many students, Thanksgiving weekend entails an extensive amount of driving in circles between College Station, Austin and their families' homes. Making the students leave one day later makes them more tired on the roads — a strike against the best interest of the health of this student body.

Instead of giving the students an extra day off, these rules force many students to

be on the roads late at night in traffic. Hurriedly driving home and arriving exhausted is common.

To assume that all students are from Houston or Dallas, or even Texas, is inconsiderate to many students. Many families traditional Thanksgiving plans must be altered to work around one day of classes.

The truth of the situation is that students never know whether they will have class and are left in limbo until the week of Thanksgiving, which is too late to buy plane tickets.

To justify having school on that Wednesday by claiming that people working in "the real world" must be at work that day is unfair as well.

Those people are not exhausted from three months of classes with no breaks and, above all, are not preparing for finals that could determine their semester grades.

Worse than having the day be a regular school day is the way that some teachers could take advantage of the opportunity to sabotage students who choose to miss class.

Some students must decide whether to fly day early or stay in town for 50 minutes of class.

This is the difference between spending quality time with family members who are rarely seen and showing up right as the turkey is being carved.

This problem is not exclusive to the A&M campus. UT has school on Wednesday, but Texas Tech does not. Tulane University, a private school in Louisiana, has school that day, but Berry College, a private school in Georgia, does not.

Do Texas Tech or Berry College students need the day off more than Aggies do, or does their administration simply grant them a little extra respect?

And the potential solution to this problem at other schools is the

same as it is here.

Kevin Kasten, a junior at Trinity University, said, "I think we're lucky to even get Thursday and Friday off as holidays."

Whatever the reasoning behind the administration's decision not to make Wednesday an official school holiday, it is not worth the detrimental effect it has on the student body.

Finally, if the reasoning has anything to do with the required amount of school days, students would rather have this day off and give up one dead day that very few people use productively.

Thanksgiving is a national holiday, and the way colleges and universities make it difficult to celebrate is ruining it for many people.

If A&M would consider this an official school holiday, students would not be faced with a decision and the extra stress that accompanies it — that truly would be something to be thankful for.

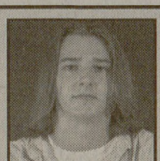


Melissa Bedsole is a junior psychology major.

BRANDON HENDERSON/THE BATTALION

A never-ending debt to society | Felons should be able to vote after serving time

Many people have heard that convicted felons are permanently stripped of their voting rights. That is, they cannot vote in elections for the rest of their lives.



REID BADER

This statement is not totally true. In 41 states, a felon's right to vote is suspended only during his sentence, probation or parole.

However, nine states restrict felons from voting even after they have served their prison term.

To disenfranchise felons permanently — as Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, Virginia and Wyoming do — is wrong.

The states should realize that these restrictions violate felons' civil rights, and make attempts to reverse them.

Committing a felony offense in these states, even if a person does not serve jail time, means that it is

impossible for that person to vote again.

The logic in this is echoed in "Jim Crow" laws to restrict certain elements of the population that the government does not want to vote.

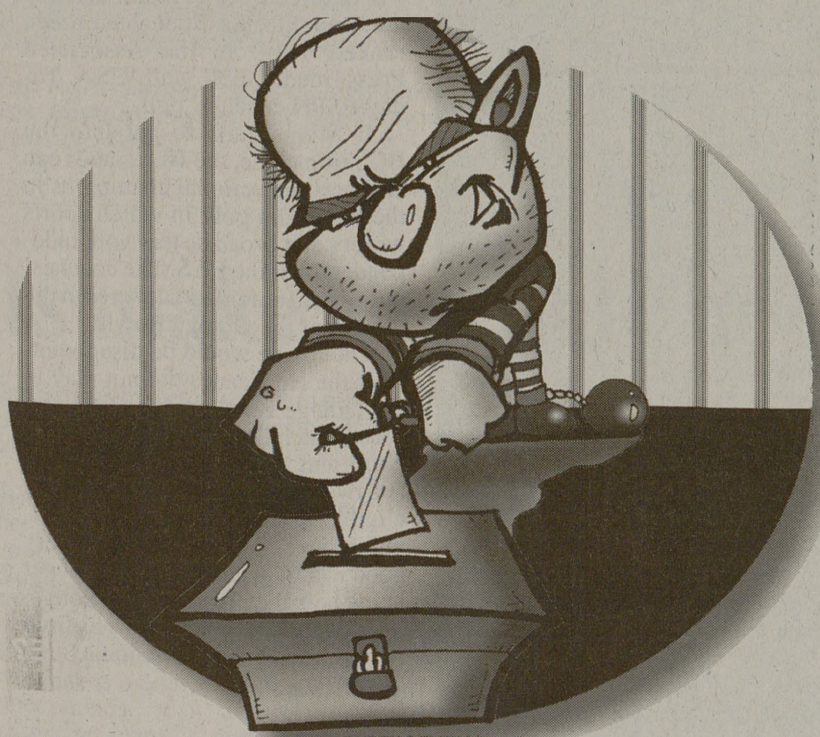
In states such as Texas, only felony prisoners are restricted from voting.

This makes sense. If people choose to ignore the laws by which they are governed and become incarcerated, they should lose the right to choose how they are governed when they are in prison.

Jonathan Silber, a columnist for the Boston Herald, said, "There is no reason, in principle, why a prisoner should not lose the right to vote along with other liberties."

"The right to walk free on the streets is even more fundamental than the right to vote, yet even the briefest jail term revokes the right to walk the streets."

In Alabama, however, the philosophy of "commit the crime, do the time and then some" reigns. Almost 8 percent of adults in Al-



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

abama are ineligible to vote because they have been convicted of felonies.

The right of a state to disenfranchise felons comes from the 1974 U.S. Supreme Court case *Richardson v. Ramirez*.

The Supreme Court said that in the 14th Amendment, a state is not allowed to deny a citizen's right to vote "except for participation in rebellion, or other crime." That "other crime" is taken to mean almost any felony conviction.

March Mauer, assistant director for the Sentencing Project, a prisoner advocacy group, said, "More than 95 percent of the people sentenced to prison will be someday going home, and it is in society's interest that they come back as law-abiding citizens."

"We should be encouraging some sense of responsibility and obligation to the community on their part."

Some incarcerated felons feel they should be able to vote while in jail, as Maine and Vermont allow.

David Fischer, an inmate in a New Hampshire prison, agrees. He filed suit in state court a year ago and won the right to vote. However, the state court threw out the judgment.

"I guess the theory behind inmates being denied the right to vote is that people are afraid how we will vote. They think we will vote for the candidate that will not do the most good. A similar argument was made when women wanted to vote and black people wanted to vote," said Fischer.

Felons' rights vary throughout the country — some states permanently bar prisoners from voting and some states allow felons to vote from jail.

The route to follow is down the middle, a plan that most states have followed — restrict voting while convicted felons are in jail, but allow them to vote once their debts have been paid.

Reid Bader is a junior political science major.



MIKE LOCKBACH

Mail Call

Blood donations down from last year's post-Bonfire rush

Shame on you, Ags. The turnout for blood donations this time last year as a result of the Bonfire tragedy was an incredibly positive and humanitarian reaction.

Thankfully, the student population turned out in force to ensure the reserve was there. Now, a year later, the Red Cross is back to square one with critically low stocks of every type of blood.

There has been a plea to the students of A&M to memorialize their fallen classmates by again donating in force, and that plea has gone unheeded.

The goal of the Association of Former Students was to collect 12,000 units of blood statewide.

As of the third day, approximately 1,270 have been collected on campus.

Where is the spirit for this noble cause? Let us all show the true Aggie spirit by donating blood, not only to help our fellow Aggies, but to help a great organization with a true humanitarian cause.

By starting such a great tradition, we can ensure that the Aggie spirit will live on, not to mention infuse a little maroon blood into all of our fellow Texans.

Josh Bartosh Class of '99

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