

The construction begins

Is the West Campus garage beneficial to all ...

After years of debate and discussion, construction is set to begin on the West Campus parking garage. The never-ending process of campus enhancement at Texas A&M will continue despite some concerns the garage will be an inconvenience to students. In reality, the parking garage is a necessary improvement that should be welcomed. It will better serve those traveling to the growing complex of buildings on West Campus by providing covered parking and safer access to the area.



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lot worse. Getting around A&M is not nearly as difficult as it is at some other campuses. We are fortunate to have the room to expand in the first place. Some schools, including the University of Texas, are completely locked in with no way to expand. It is far better to have to take a different route because of growth and improvement than to feel claustrophobic when going to class.

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spaces will more than triple. Students who might complain about the lack of available parking should consider how well they have it here compared to other campuses. And now, more spaces are on the way. Two years of taking another route or parking somewhere else is a small price to pay. Parking garages will last a lot longer than the memory of an inconvenience.

The West Campus parking garage also will make it easier on alumni who attend football games. Many of them now will be able to park in a covered area very close to Kyle Field. The criticism that the garage is being built only for football season is misguided. The school should strive to keep wealthy alumni happy. Yes, their support often benefits athletics first, but why is that a bad thing? Alumni should be well taken care of. Often, it is their dollars that help to refurbish buildings, build new ones, provide scholarships and assist in research. Many of them want the garage, and it will benefit the students after a temporary inconvenience. The administration should take steps to ensure that students can use the garage for both contract and day parking, similar to the other garages around campus. More spaces, a safer environment and a greater amount of covered parking is what students and alumni understandably want. But it cannot be had without paying a price.

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The West Campus parking garage will better serve the students who wish to park in the area. One will no longer have to maneuver around potholes filled with filthy rainwater to fight for a spot under the blistering sun. An underground tunnel can be taken instead of crossing a busy, five-lane street. Parking also will be more plentiful. Currently, there are about 1,000 parking spaces occupying the area where the garage will be located. After construction is complete, the amount of available parking

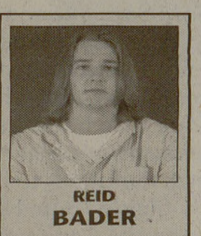
Two weeks ago, the A&M System Board of Regents awarded the \$40 million garage construction contract to J.T. Vaughn Construction Co. of Houston. With construction to begin this fall, the garage will occupy the parking area north of the Student Recreation Center. The six-story building will feature at least 3,190 spaces, providing easy passage to three frequented facilities: the Rec Center, Kyle Field and Reed Arena. Construction also will include a pedestrian walkway connecting both main and West campuses through an underground tunnel below Wellborn Road. The archway that currently stretches above the road will be removed because it does not meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Tony Heger, director of the A&M System Facilities Administration Division, said the approximately two-year long construction is arranged to cause as little trouble for students as possible. According to a news story last Monday in *The Battalion*, Heger said the construction team "has been doing great work with the medical center in Houston where he has been working in tight, cramped quarters but in such a way as to allow the functioning of the medical center to continue unimpeded."

For students, construction of the West Campus parking garage will be a temporary nuisance. In the end, the finished product will be worth it. Unfortunately, Wellborn will have one lane closed at a time. Also, John Kimbrough Boulevard from Wellborn to Olsen Boulevard will be shut down as improvements are made. Such closures cannot be avoided when working on such a large project, and it could have been a

Or an inefficient bother to students traveling to class?

On Aug. 1, the Parking, Traffic and Transportation Services (PTTS) announced that preparations for the new West Campus parking garage were underway. Any student can attest that finding a place to park on campus is next to impossible, so a new parking garage sounds like an excellent solution. However, the University should realize that the solution to the parking problem is not as simple as building a new garage.



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The most adverse and immediate effect of the garage, albeit temporary, is the construction itself. As a result of the construction, Joe Routt Boulevard will be closed from Wellborn Road to Clark Street, and John Kimbrough Boulevard will be closed from Wellborn Road to Olsen Boulevard. The convenience of being able to drive on Wellborn and go to the Recreation Center on John Kimbrough or go down Joe Routt to check their mail at the Memorial Student Center will be lost.

Some students will be concerned that traffic that usually goes down those roads will back up. They need not worry, because the parking garage is being constructed on Parking Area 56, where there are over 900 parking spots for students. That means that these 900 spots will disappear during construction — which means much less traffic to clog up these particular roads. Instead, parking space seekers will back up traffic elsewhere.

The timing of construction is illogical. Why would construction for a parking garage start during the fall, when school is starting, and more notably, football season is beginning? During any football game this season, nearly 4,000 people will have to find a spot to park further away.

The defense that although people may be parking further away, they will have the luxury of riding new buses is no solace to the situation. The fact remains that students, alumni and visitors will not be fighting for spots closer to their

class or football game but further away and having to ride a bus to get there.

And what happens after the lot is constructed? Under student body president Laurie Nickel, the Student Senate passed the West Campus

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parking garage bill. It stated, "Commuter permit holders will be temporarily affected adversely through the loss of current spaces, the placement of the garage is not consistent with the general trend of westward expansion and the location appears to primarily benefit special

events, rather than academic expansion."

Those issues are true now, just as they were true then. The location of the garage seems to be constructed with the football game visitor in mind. This is even made more apparent since the new pedestrian crossing of Wellborn is being constructed at the same time.

Not to be misconstrued, the need for more parking during football games and other special events is a great problem for the University and its students. But the issue remains that once the garage is built it will be filled immediately, and there will still be students fighting for a space.

What Texas A&M needs is a detailed, all-encompassing plan that can truly resolve the parking problem it has, rather than a quick fix such as a parking garage that might cause more trouble than it is actually worth.

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Sexual safety, not abstinence, must be taught

(U-WIRE) — There are times when ignorance isn't exactly bliss: When a professor calls on you in class and you have no idea what the answer is. When you don't read the weather report and you find yourself stranded in a blizzard. When what you don't know can, in fact, hurt you.

When it comes to sex education, what you don't know can do more than hurt you — it can kill you. In the era of AIDS, ignorance about sex can be deadly, and young people are often the ones who are dying. Here are some scary statistics: HIV infection is increasing more rapidly among young people than any other age group, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*. One in four new HIV infections in the United States occurs in people younger than 22.

In times such as these, "abstinence-only" programs — through which teenagers are told virtually nothing about sex beyond "don't do it" — are not going to cut it.

Sex education, or the lack thereof, has become an issue again with the news that the Bush administration is "scaling back efforts to promote family planning and contraception while aggressively promoting 'abstinence-only' programs" (*Administration Promoting Abstinence*, *The Washington Post*, July 30).

Refusing to provide young people with sex education — basic knowledge about what they can do to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies — is patently irresponsible.

Keeping teenagers ignorant about how to protect themselves if they have sex is like sending a soldier into war with a blindfold on and nothing but a butter knife for self-defense.

Conservatives are concerned that putting teenagers through sex education somehow encourages them to have sex. They believe that putting teenagers through a program where abstinence is the only option will prevent them from having sex.

As nice as that may sound, the fact is that most teenagers have sex, regardless of what they are told about it. The 1995 National Survey of Family Growth found that more than half of teenagers ages 15 to 19 were sexually active — specifically, 51 percent of females and 56 percent of males. Two-thirds of all teenagers are sexually active by the time they are 18, and there is nothing, really, that parents can do to stop them, short of building dungeons in their basements (no one get any ideas, now).

So if teenagers do have sex, the best we can do is to encourage them to postpone becoming sexually active until they're ready, and provide them with information they need to keep themselves free of STD infection and unwanted pregnancies.

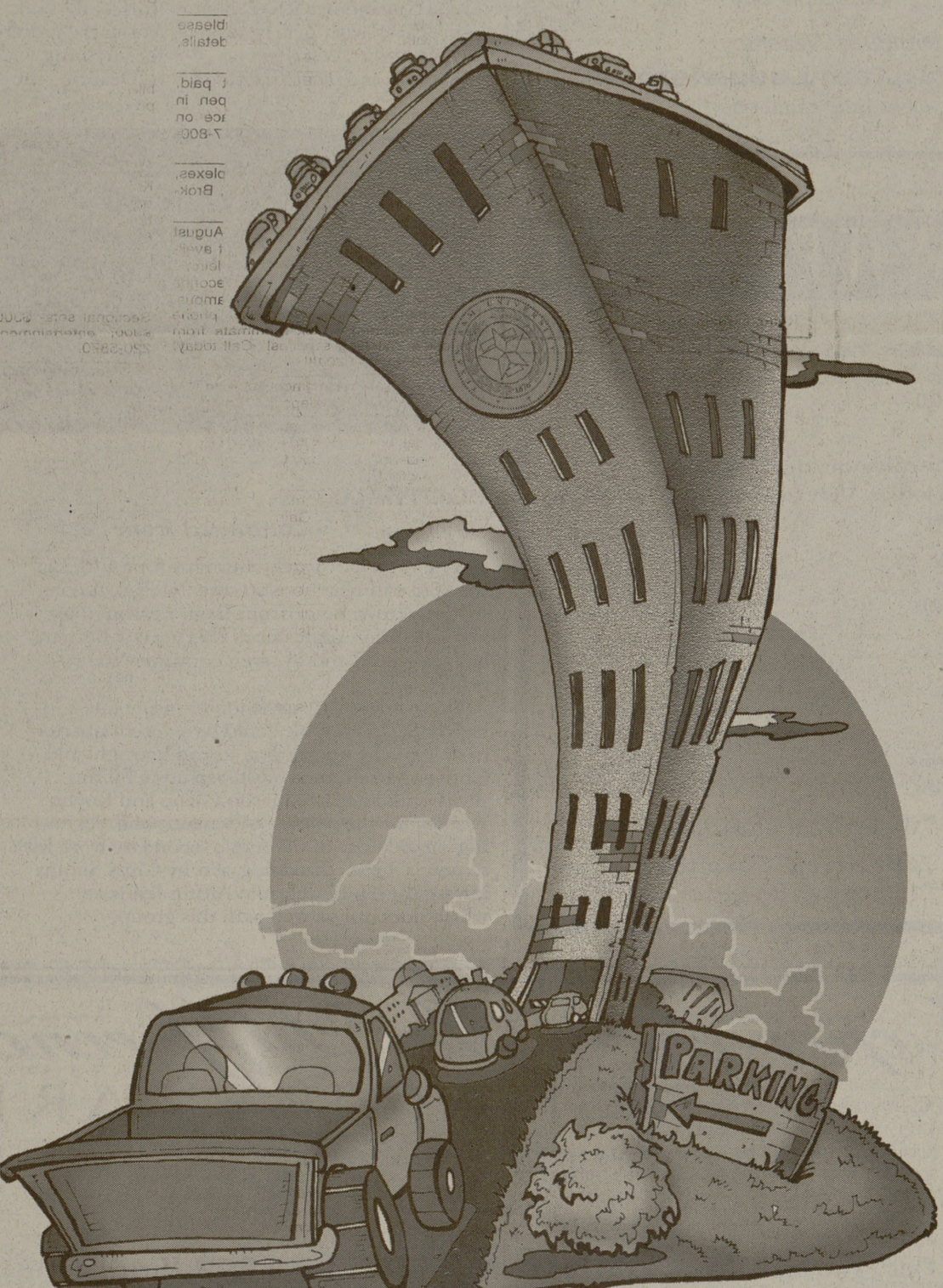
We must face the reality that most teenagers will have sex no matter what we tell them. We can all moan about how terrible it is that teenagers are sexually active before they really know what they're doing. We shouldn't, however, act as if not telling teenagers anything about sex will prevent them from having it. That's just not the way it works.

There is proof that abstinence-only education is less effective than sex education when it comes to preventing one obvious consequence of teenage sexual activity: teenage pregnancy. Research shows that recent sharp declines in teenage pregnancy rates among sexually active teenagers are due more to teens' use of contraceptives than a newfound devotion to abstinence. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute's 1994 report entitled "Sex and America's Teenagers," only 20 percent of the decline in the pregnancy rate was due to decreased sexual activity, while 80 percent was the result of the more effective use of contraceptives.

Even with the progress that has been made, teen pregnancy rates are far higher in the United States than in other developed countries, according to the AGI report. U.S. rates are twice as high as those in England and Canada, and nine times as high as those in Japan or the Netherlands. The age at which young people become sexually active in the United States and those countries is similar, so looking at the sex education policies in the other countries can point to what causes the pregnancy rates in the United States to be higher.

It probably isn't a coincidence that policies in England, Canada and the Netherlands favor sex education, openness about sex and access to contraception. If the United States continues in the direction of encouraging sex education and giving young people access to contraceptives, the rates of teen pregnancy and AIDS infection may decrease further. Abstinence-only education is more about morality than it is about reality and it simply won't get the job done.

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