

EDITORIAL

BONFIRE FUNDS OFFERED TOO LATE Lawsuits already underway

Texas A&M University officials recently created a 50-year trust fund to help cover the long-term health care expenses of students injured in the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse. This fund will be established using close to \$500,000 in private money and \$250,000 from the Association of Former Students' Bonfire Relief Fund. Money left over at the end of the trust fund's life will be transferred to an endowed scholarship fund in memory of the 12 students killed.

But some family members of the deceased are crying foul, and rightfully so. Such a fund should have been set up two years ago. Since the collapse, several injured Aggies have struggled to pay medical expenses. The report into the tragedy found the university partially responsible, and A&M should not have delayed its effort to ensure none of the injured are forced to struggle just to meet their basic needs.

The reason for the delay is the advice of A&M attorneys in response to a lawsuit, the first of several, alleging that university administrators shared responsibility. A&M President

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Dr. Ray Bowen said, "Once the lawsuits were filed, (the lawyers) became more active in the decisions because these decisions can impact litigation."

The creation of the trust fund is a positive, and necessary, move for the families of the injured. But it is also too little, too late. Sean Breen, the brother of Christopher Breen, one of the 12 Aggies killed in the Bonfire collapse, told *The Battalion* the trust fund "is a step in the right direction, but the University has many more steps to take because they took so many steps in the wrong direction for the first two years."

Texas A&M has taken too long to formally establish a means to compensate for medical expenses, and all because of the fear of litigation. Now that partial responsibility has been established, the trust fund is a positive step. Unfortunately for the families of the injured, especially those who have struggled to pay expensive medical bills, it is also too little, too late.

Not a political issue

Enron investigation should focus on employees

In the wake of Enron's collapse late last year, there has been much ado about nothing over Enron's political contributions.



THOMAS CAMPBELL

For years Enron and its employees were top political contributors to a large number of campaigns. Enron's money was received by many candidates including both presidential candidates and seven of the nine Texas Supreme Court justices. Enron's political influence seems far reaching, but that influence did nothing to prevent its collapse.

The investigations of Enron's possible wrongdoing should concentrate on auditing firm Arthur Andersen LLP and Enron's top executives, not on political contributions. The real victims are those who lost their retirement funds and 401k

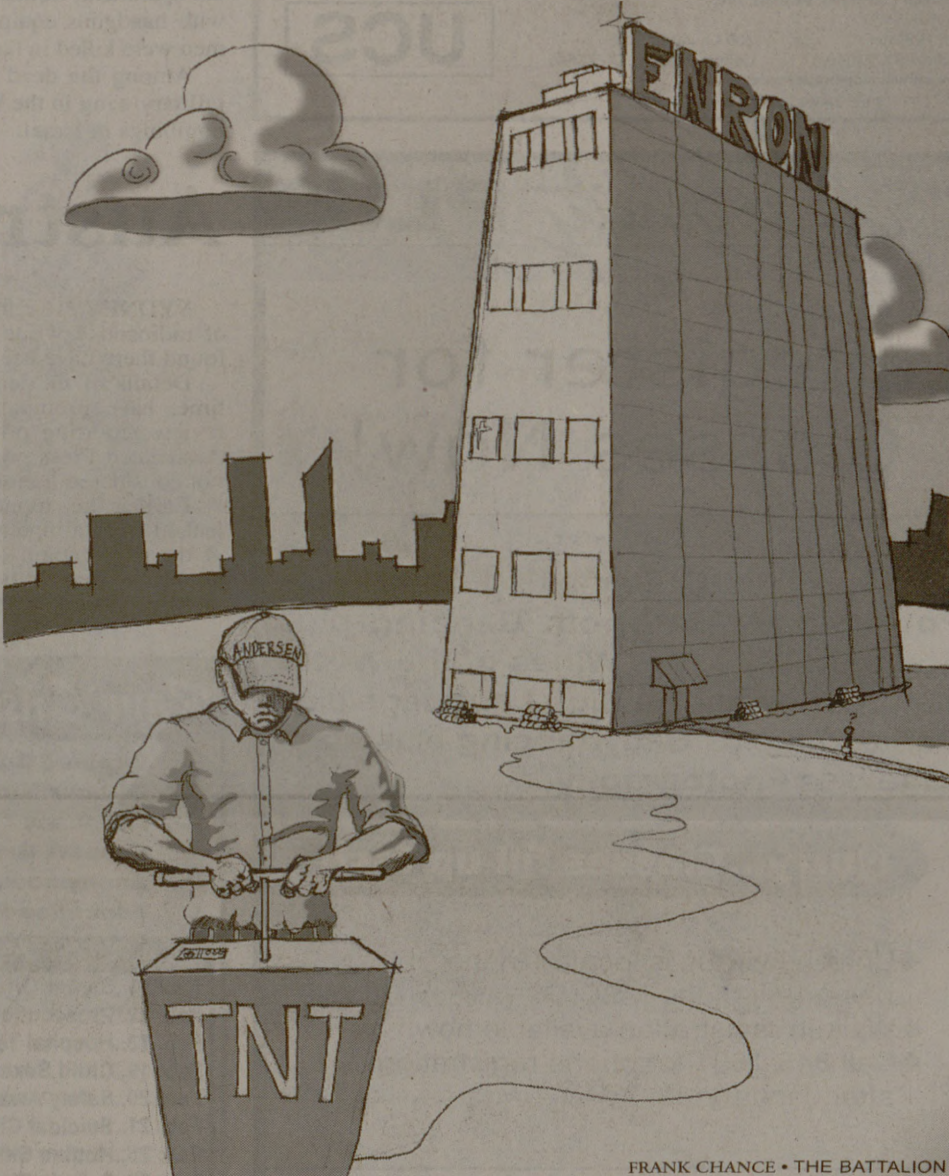
a heavy burden on the Houston economy. These people need to be taken care of before the investigative eye is turned toward politicians.

Today's media often looks toward the sensational story rather than the one of immediate importance, looking to break the next public scandal. The story now is if there were wrongdoings between Enron Chief Executive Officer Kenneth Lay and the politicians who accepted money from Enron. Instead, the people who have lost

their money should be the focus.

Enron's collapse from the seventh largest company in America into bankruptcy is a debacle on the grandest of scales. It has affected thousands and will continue to for some time. Those people need to be taken care of before the investigation continues to look for political improprieties.

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plans because of the stock's drop from more than \$80 a share in February to 67 cents on Jan. 10, the last day it was traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

According to the Federal Election Commission, Enron gave money to both Democrats and Republicans, concentrating on commerce and energy committees. These politicians had no way of knowing Enron's business practices or hidden debt. If the stockholders and the company employees did not realize what was happening within their own company, the Senate and House of Representatives had no way of knowing.

Because of the appearance of impropriety, Enron could have been involved with illegal campaign contributions. If that is the case, then it will come out in time. Right now, the committees looking into Enron's collapse need to concentrate on the more than 4,000 people who are jobless and may go bankrupt themselves, because they were not allowed to pull their money out of the company's 401k when the stock dropped. Houston already had a job market flooded with Continental's and Compaq's recent layoffs, so these 4,000 men and women looking for jobs to feed their families are

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CARTOON OF THE DAY

Dear God, I would like to pray to end abortion



THE UN-CARTOONIST ©

Life, liberty and the pursuit of tattoo removal?

After petitioning the Justice Department for funds, Senator Lois Capps (D-Cal) has expanded the "Liberty Tattoo



MATTHEW MADDOX

Removal Program" of San Luis Obispo County. The program will operate in part on \$50,000 in federal monies that every U.S. taxpayer pays. This is a sad use for the word "Liberty" and shows just how out of control the idea of entitlement has gone.

The free service will be aimed at the unemployed and former gang members. The procedure uses a laser to break up the ink within the skin until it is dissolvable by the body. Eligible persons must have tattoos that "inter-

fere with their daily lives" and must promise not to get any other tattoos. In addition, applicants must complete 16 hours of community service, a punishment usually reserved for convicted law breakers, not people who have exercised their right to free speech in getting a tattoo. Senator Capps justifies the federal spending by stating that persons with tattoos are often discriminated against in job hiring and promoting situations. She may be right.

Many employers will not hire applicants to positions that interact with their customers if the applicant has visible tattoos. Even worse, people are gawked at, even ridiculed for their sometimes offensive body art. Studies have also shown who men prefer to hire women with larger breasts, and discriminate against those that do not possess them. Should women with small breasts be entitled to free breast enlargement to better their chances of being

hired? Taxpayers should not foot the bill when John Q. Ex-thug decides the flaming swastika on his elbow was a mistake.

Once he has taken on the responsibility to pay for a tattoo, he has taken on the responsibility to pay for the consequences, whether they are social or financial. Former gang members should not have the most visible reminder of their violent past erased by the government. Recovering hardened criminals need permanent reminders, not just memories as to what their lives had been like with crime.

The idea of tattoo removal at taxpayer expense has been exported beyond California to numerous U.S. cities and even to Canada. Last summer, Manitoba's (Canada) Attorney General Gord Mackintosh refused to introduce such a program in his jurisdiction. "We're not going to prioritize cosmetic surgery at taxpayer

expense," Mackintosh said. "Why should the public pay to remove a tattoo the person paid to put on? I have a real problem with that, in general."

Dressing up the name of the program with the term "Liberty" is one of the greatest misnomers of all time. It is enough to make the Founding Fathers and every soldier that has died since then spin in their graves. These programs need to be curtailed before any reason that makes one person different from another that causes social discomfort is changed to the "norm" by the federal government. It is logical to say that if this trend continues, there will be federal programs for subsidizing plastic surgery, hair styling, even wardrobe changes.

Some wise advice to those considering potentially offensive tattoos — stick with temporaries.

Matthew Maddox is a sophomore business administration major.

More Mideast courses should be offered at A&M to broaden students views

With a student enrollment of around 45,000 students, Texas A&M University seems to embody all the components of a world-class university, with students from across the United States and around the world. Ranked as the fifth largest university in the United States according to the Office of University Relations, it is ironic that one of the areas in which A&M is greatly lacking is diversity, as seen in the variety of classes, or rather,



RUBY LEE

the lack thereof.

With the classes offered in history, sociology, international studies and religious studies, it is hard to find a class

about the Middle East. While there are some classes on eastern religions, there are far more on Christianity and the Bible. According to the Religious Identity Survey of 2001, Islam is the third largest organized religion in the United States. This should spark ini-

tiative by the administration to expand mideastern religious courses.

As a result of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, student interest in the Middle East has increased dramatically, shown by requests for classes covering those areas. However, students must be content with individual research if they wish to learn more about these foreign places — as those few courses cannot accommodate all interested students.

Students are going to feel the repercussions of world events in a way that no previous generation has.

For students to be adequately prepared to enter such a world, it is imperative for them to have a basic knowledge of the history and culture of different countries.

Texas A&M must make an effort to expand the curriculum for a varied course selection. To compete with graduates from across the nation, A&M students need to obtain more from their college education than the ability to recite the dates of the Civil War. To reach Vision 2020, A&M will have to expand, especially in the

area of liberal arts.

How can A&M be ranked in the top 10 public schools if the majority of the history and sociology courses are important only to Texans? A lot has already been accomplished, but more needs to come. Vision 2020 requires the praise of the United States, and not just Texas. To achieve this, it is necessary for A&M to start paying attention to the rest of the world.

Ruby Lee is a sophomore computer science major.