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Opinion

Reflections on a fading tradition

The challenge of 'doing the right thing'

By Dr. Brian Cole

Monday's decision not to have Bonfire 2002 represents a sad day in the life of Texas A&M and Aggies everywhere. It is particularly difficult for those of us who have known and loved Texas A&M for virtually all of our lives. I know the significance of Bonfire and the special place it holds in the lives of Aggies and this institution. Thus, it was increasingly difficult to come to the realization that Bonfire 2002 could not be a Bonfire that would contribute to the Aggie spirit in the same ways that it has in years past.

As the final data and information from our safety firm, potential insurance companies and remaining unresolved and unresolvable issues came together, it became clear to me that we would not be able to have a Bonfire that would guarantee that "we could take care of our people" and that it was "the right thing to do."

While I do not presume to speak on behalf of the planning committee, I wanted the Aggie community to know the heart and mind of one who was absolutely committed to finding a viable solution that preserved the greatness of Aggie Bonfire and the special spirit it engendered while ensuring that all of our current and future Aggies were able to participate in an injury-free environment. Unfortunately, it became clear to me that these important considerations were mutually exclusive. Given the preponderance of the information and analysis we have studied in the past year and a half, I must side with taking care of our people.

It was increasingly difficult to come to the realization that Bonfire 2002 could not be a Bonfire that would contribute to the Aggie spirit in the same ways that it has in years past.

It is important for the student body to know that the students on the planning committee were awesome. They challenged, advised, provided incredible insight and kept us student-centered throughout the process. The leadership they contributed continually reminded us of why Texas A&M and its students are so special. It was indeed an honor for me to serve with them and you should know that they represented the student body in an uncompromising and highly professional manner. I wish to thank them and the other members of the planning committee for their very hard work and dedication on behalf of the student body, former students and institution.

The spirit of Aggieland has been throughout the ages a source of strength and perseverance that has enabled Aggies to overcome great obstacles and challenges. It is my prayer that this difficult time will call Aggies to find ways in the future that can build on the greatness of Bonfire and foster those qualities in a new tradition that provides for the welfare of our people and continues to build leaders of character.

Brian Cole is facilitator for Bonfire 2002 Planning Committee.

Now is the time to focus on the future

By Luke Cheatham

My thoughts on Bowen's decision are pointless. His track record proves he will not waiver. T

Instead of looking at Bowen's decision, the student body should focus its energy toward answering the only real question remaining, "Where do we go from here?" Everyone must now make a choice. The option of riding the fence is gone. I do not hold anything against the administration;

The student body should focus its energy toward answering the only real question remaining, "Where do we go from here?"

they have made their call. The students must make theirs.

Our only choice is to make a choice. What will we decide? Do we go off campus? Do we allow our tradition to die? Or do we continue to sit and wait and hope for the chance that the next president will change things? Change is inevitable, and we need to act responsibly and do what we know is the right thing as Aggies.

I believe the waiting game has to end. We have waited, and what has been gained? The Class of 2003 will be the only class left that

united through Bonfire.

Let it die? I used to think this was the answer. I thought the tradition would be best left unchanged, remaining in the memories of those who loved it without being altered beyond recognition. But my thoughts have changed over the past two years.

I look at the freshmen and sophomores. I see their desire to experience our beloved tradition. I want that for them.

My freshman year, I was chosen to be a crew chief. I did not truly attain this status because I did not lead anyone out to a fire. But, one idea remained instilled in me from that leadership position: the upperclassmen have a responsibility to those beneath them.

Does that mean we should go off campus? I am not sure. But I will support whatever the leadership of this University decides to do.

However, by leadership, I do not mean the administration or the elected student government. I am speaking of the true leaders of this University: those in the halls, those in the Corps and those who reside outside campus walls.

If these students can come to a unified decision to answer "Where do we go from here?" then I will be the first to stand up and whoop.

Luke Cheatham is a junior Northside resident.

The collapse of a great tradition

By Schuyler Houser

I remember vividly Nov. 18, 1999 — the collapse of a great tradition. Over the last two years, I frequently have relived that day, but never as intensely as Monday. Again, we lost Bonfire.

The Bonfire Steering Committee worked for two years to make Bonfire 2002 a success. We fought time, the legal environment, money and above all, we fought to make Bonfire forever safe, eliminating the possibility of another tragedy. In the end, it became impossible to win. The reality is that the detailed plan could not overcome the facts presented yesterday, facts that left no room for approval. At the outset, I had no doubt that the answer would be affirmative, and at the finish it became disappointingly apparent that there was no choice. I wish that the constraints Dr. Bowen outlined Monday could have been overcome, because I have no doubt what his answer then would have been.

Several reasons were cited for not continuing Bonfire. None of these is a lack of student support. The overwhelming support for Bonfire from the student body makes this decision all the more difficult to bear.

Twelve thousand students were passionate enough to speak for this tradition, and I am very proud of that.

Bonfire is a powerful memory for those of us who knew it, and an empty wish for those who did not. I find peace, however, knowing that Texas A&M was here before Bonfire and will remain after Bonfire. We have not relinquished our spirit in other times of great challenge. Our generation must not fail to preserve the Aggie spirit now.

As I see it, we have two choices. We can lament the fall of A&M, refuse to face facts and cause no change. Or, we can hold our heads high, be brave enough to look the truth in the face, and carry the Aggie spirit we know and understand forward to those ahead of us. As with the passing of great heroes and the last of any great event, the people at the end determine which convictions remain and in what form. We, as students, will decide what we are truly left with and where we go from here.

Schuyler Houser is Texas A&M Student Body President.

CHAD MALLAM & GUY ROGERS • THE BATTALION

Campus unity above all after decision

By Joe Dickerson

As I listened to Dr. Bowen speak, I did not know what to think. Should I be upset, or should I just be relieved that at least an answer had finally come? I was not sure, but as Bowen was uttering those words that crushed so many Aggies, floods of memories came back to me.

The fall of my fish year was consumed by Bonfire. I can vividly recall the drive out to load. The times out there were unique to say the least. It was not easy, and not always fun, but in the back of my mind I knew that I was a part of something larger than myself. And now looking back on those times, an eerie feeling arose knowing that no one would ever experience that again.

Along with those memories, other images surfaced as well. Images of a fallen stack and an emergency room at 3 a.m. entered my mind, and as hard as I tried to push those visions back down, I could not.

Those images brought forth pain, so you see, at that moment while Dr. Bowen was speaking, my mind was caught in a stalemate. I wanted others to experience Bonfire, and I wanted to see that fire burn before the t.u. game. But I also did not want anyone to experience that pain that fell on A&M in 1999.

Now, with the initial shock of the announcement over and my senses regained, I realize what we must do. It may not be popular to say, but we must move on. Texas A&M was not defined by Bonfire, and I believe that no singular event can or ever will be the defining trait of

A&M. Bonfire was an amazing tradition, and it may return someday, but it is sad to say that in the legal environment that we live in today, there is no place for the liability it imposes.

I had the privilege of serving on the Bonfire Steering Committee and I witnessed the amazing odds stacked against A&M. Some may say we did not try hard enough, but I know in my heart that is entirely untrue. There is no university in the nation that would have used the time and resources Texas A&M did to pursue the possibility of Bonfire 2002.

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I sincerely hope this issue does not divide the A&M community. Bonfire was a unifying event at A&M and I hope it does not evolve into a divisive one. I love Texas A&M with all my heart, and I wish that we could start building stack next year. I wish that we could have cut, load, unload and everything else surrounding Bonfire, but for now, we will just have to wait. A&M will survive and we will move on. What the future holds, we do not know, but this event will not dampen the Aggie spirit.

Joe Dickerson is Corps Commander.