

EDITORIAL

SUPPORT FOR MORALES

When the next governor of Texas is sworn in next January, he and the state legislature will immediately begin a hectic four-month session in which they will have to address pressing needs for funding for education and health care while coping with the largest budget shortfall in more than a decade.

This is no time for on-the-job training — Texas needs a governor who can hit the ground running with an aggressive policy agenda and the leadership skills to enact it. That is why *The Battalion* recommends voters in the March 12 Democratic primary cast their votes in the gubernatorial race for Dan Morales.

Morales, a former state legislator and two-term Texas attorney general, brings to the table a record of accomplishment in public service unmatched by any of his opponents. As attorney general, he initiated the state's lawsuit against tobacco companies resulting in a \$17 billion verdict that is now helping to provide health insurance to needy Texas children.

Both Morales and his opponent, Tony Sanchez, say improving public education will be their top priority, but only Morales has displayed the political fortitude to make his rhetoric a reality. The state is facing a \$5 billion shortfall, and unlike Sanchez, Morales has not ruled out a tax increase. The simple truth is that as the economy is mired in recession, the state's needs are outpacing its dwindling revenue, and students are feeling the budget crunch in a big way as universities impose substantial fee hikes to cover gaps in state funding.

Instead of posturing and pandering to voters, Morales has pledged to invest the resources necessary to make Texas schools the best in the nation.

Morales is also committed to expanding access to higher education without employing divisive and discriminatory practices like affirmative action. Morales wants to broaden opportunities and financial aid to all deserving and needy Texas youth, regardless of race.

The Battalion is confident Morales' wealth of experience as a public servant and his record of fiscal responsibility and standing up to special interests will make him a fine governor.

Early voting is underway and the winner of the primary will be Republican Gov. Rick Perry.

Dealt a bad hand

Lawsuit against Psychic Miss Cleo is pushed



GEORGE DEUTSCH

An automated message begins, "Miss Cleo had a dream about you, and she wants you to call her back." Consumers may hear this up to 10 times a day and countless times in the few weeks after only one call to the now infamous Jamaican psychic Miss Cleo.

Deceptive practices like this, along with a laundry list of other complaints, have the Federal Trade Commission finally breaking Cleo's crystal ball. With the agency getting more than 2,000 complaints in the past 18 months, legal action of some kind is overdue.

So the FTC, along with nine states, is suing cony Cleo while also trying to shut down her parent companies, Access Resource Services Inc. and Psychic Readers Network. These businesses are essentially nothing more than a step away from organized crime.

Howard Beales, the FTC's director of consumer protection, concluded that, "It's a mystery ... why Miss Cleo and her employers haven't seen this coming." The only mystery is how these people are not in jail.

For those who have not had the luxury of seeing a Cleo commercial, the woman presents herself as a Jamaican shaman with insight into love, finance and personal happiness. "It's all in the cards," she says. "The cards never lie."

In real life, though, this shaman is a woman named Youree Dell Harris who probably could not find Jamaica on a map. Her psychic ability is about as authentic as her thick Jamaican accent.

Harris' television spots offer free psychic readings on calling a toll-free number. But after dialing the number, consumers are instructed to call a 900 number charging \$5 a minute, easily making one conversation as expensive as a lengthy session of phone sex. The "free" portion of the call is the first three minutes, a time when the caller is almost certainly on hold.

What makes matters worse is that the people who call Miss Cleo are generally down on their luck and misled about the accuracy and expense of the service. So those who are getting ripped off the worst — college students, low-income single adults and children, are the ones who can afford it the least. A great many of these poor souls take this psychic advice to heart.

Consider the case of Leonard Vickers, whose daughter Malaika made a \$289 phone call thinking the service was free.



FRANK CHANCE • THE BATTALION

This is understandable, because the service is advertised as free. During the course of the phone call she revealed that she was 12, but the conversation was allowed to continue. In this instance the service prayed on a naive child.

Even the average "psychic friends" call is \$60, and many of Harris' critics have finally started speaking out. Rapper Ja Rule has a skit on his latest album in which a Cleo-sounding character, Leo, tells a caller, "The charge is \$50 a minute. You're going to hold on for 15 minutes. Are you cool with that?"

Interestingly enough, Cleo's psychic readers do not read tarot cards as promised in the commercials. Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth revealed the telephone psychics are taught only to read scripts. While it is

true that the psychic "information" is no more accurate coming from tarot cards than a script, consumers are misled into thinking they are paying for an actual tarot reading.

Sadly, Miss Harris and her psychics make their living by exploiting the misfortune of others. Make no mistake about it, Harris is a greed-driven woman with a criminal occupation. It is time that she and her network are shut down and their victims financially compensated.

When asked for comment about the charges, an attorney for the psychic network, Sean Moynihan, said, "If the FTC had only bothered to call, we would have explained." Surely, even he can see the irony in that statement.

George Deutsch is a junior journalism major.

THE BATTALION

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MAIL CALL

Reactions about Vagina Monologues

response to Jay Herndon's Mail Call on Feb. 26:

Kate McCarthy
Class of 2002

One of the directors for *Vagina Monologues* I feel compelled to provide clarification about the monologue referred to by Jay Herndon in his Mail Call. I agree with Herndon's statement that rape is the most vile crime that can be committed by a man or woman.

However, the woman was not raped by a lesbian at the age of 16 as he stated. She was raped by a male of her father's at the age of 16. Her experience with a man at age 16 is consensual and is the catalyst that enables her to regain control over her life. Her experience is the key to learning to love and take care of herself.

The monologue, "The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could," is a portrayal of one woman's sexual experience, as are all the monologues. They are not done for shock value, but to show the lives of women who have become empowered because they have learned to love them-

selves. Come and see the play or read the book to understand the stories of these women and others like them.

Herndon stated that the character in "The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could" was 13. She was 16. He also quoted the character as saying that her experience was a "good rape." The word rape is never used in the piece.

Herndon has obviously not read the piece or made an attempt to speak with anyone involved in the play. This has been the case a lot recently. The Student Senate passed its resolution condemning V-day without visiting the festival or speaking with anyone involved in V-day. Truth should be important to anyone trying to present their point of view.

If Herndon had read the play he would have realized that it parallels his views that rape is a "vile crime." Seek the truth and your arguments might have a leg to stand on.

Esther Robards-Forbes
Class of 2005

Political reform at free speech expense

If one listens closely, the faint sound of tearing paper can be heard. That sound emanates from Capitol Hill, where a physically small but fundamentally mammoth section of the Bill of Rights may soon be torn out.

The Campaign Finance Reform Bill now making its way through the House of Representatives is a wolf in sheep's clothing aiming to clean up politics at the expense of free speech.

While it is rare that both sides of the political aisle agree on something, both Democrats and Republicans have found time to slander Enron officials for political gain. While proof has yet to surface showing that the millions of dollars donated by Enron to both parties bought them anything from the current administration, Democrats and Republican Sen. John McCain have rushed to pass legislation that rids money from the halls of congress. Not surprisingly, the proposed legislation fails to address the accounting practices at fault in Enron, and instead attacks the First Amendment.

The McCain-Feingold Senate Bill and the Shays-Meehan House Bill, as they are called, outlaw television and radio "issue ads" by non-profit groups and special interests within 60 days of an election. They also restrict the money donated to parties but increase the amount that can go to individual candidates.

The so-called "special interests" targeted by the House bill are made up of "little guys" from across the political spectrum, the same "little guys" who got burned in the Enron collapse. When a group of like-minded people want to pool their funds to either run ads or contribute to a political party, they become branded as a special interest corrupting the government. From the National Rifle Association to the Sierra Club, from the Christian Coalition to the Teamsters Union, all special interests are made up of little guys.

The bills imply that money from groups or companies is the source of corruption in Washington. That is false. It is already illegal for corporations to donate directly to federal candidates, and has been since 1907. Money is an abstract and inanimate object. Corrupt politicians are the source of corruption in politics. By passing this bill, Congress admits its own weakness in the face of a bribe.

When Bill Clinton and running mate Al Gore violated current campaign finance law, nothing was done. Soliciting funds at Buddhist temples and from the vice president's office were



MATTHEW MADDOX

excused. What can be concluded from today's congressional outcry is that the interests of the American Association of Retired Persons are more subversive to American national security than those of communist Chinese nationals. Enforcing current laws would eliminate corruption, something the new legislation cannot do.

The United States Supreme Court has declared this form of censorship unconstitutional. The 1976 *Buckley v. Valeo* case upheld the principle that money spent on political speech is essentially free speech itself. The Supreme Court also specified that "too much money" in politics is not an acceptable justification for restricting campaign financing.

If Shays-Meehan becomes law, neither power nor money will leave politics, just the public voice. It will actually increase the ferocity with which politicians seek funds. Once the people are out, another entity will fill the void. Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, warned, "If we limit the power of people to spend their money, we strengthen the power of people who exert influence in other ways." The network media are next in line for that power, and are estimated to be 90 percent aligned with the Democratic Party. During the 60 days prior to an election, media outlets can do their own campaign ads through TV interviews that support candidates and spin the facts.

The bills protect incumbents, who have free mailing privileges, at the expense of challengers. Since incumbents are already in the news, the public will always hear about them. Hypocritically, the bill specifies that it will not affect candidates of this year's election, so congress has exempted itself from its own law. This campaign finance reform will do nothing more than further secure elected seats for independently wealthy, entrenched candidates who have connections to Washington and the media.

In the short run, Shays-Meehan may be to the advantage of one party or the other, but in the end it will be a detriment to all. Congress must trust the American people to be intelligent enough to sort through the ads presented and judge for themselves. Congress draws its power from the consent of the governed. The minute people's constitutional right to criticize is removed, American democracy stands on shaky ground.

Matthew Maddox is a sophomore business administration.