

EDITORIAL

AMERICA'S TRUE ALLY

It is somewhat unusual for a foreign head of state to give an impromptu speech on a college campus, as British Prime Minister Tony Blair did Sunday at Texas A&M. But to take action against terrorists will require a lot of personal appearances and persuasion, in his home country and America. The U.S. war on terrorism is poised to enter its most difficult stage, a regime change in Iraq. Blair faces strong opposition toward necessary action in Baghdad, from his own Labour Party, Great Britain and the European Union. He has been a courageous and valuable ally thus far, and deserves strong support from the United States government and its people.

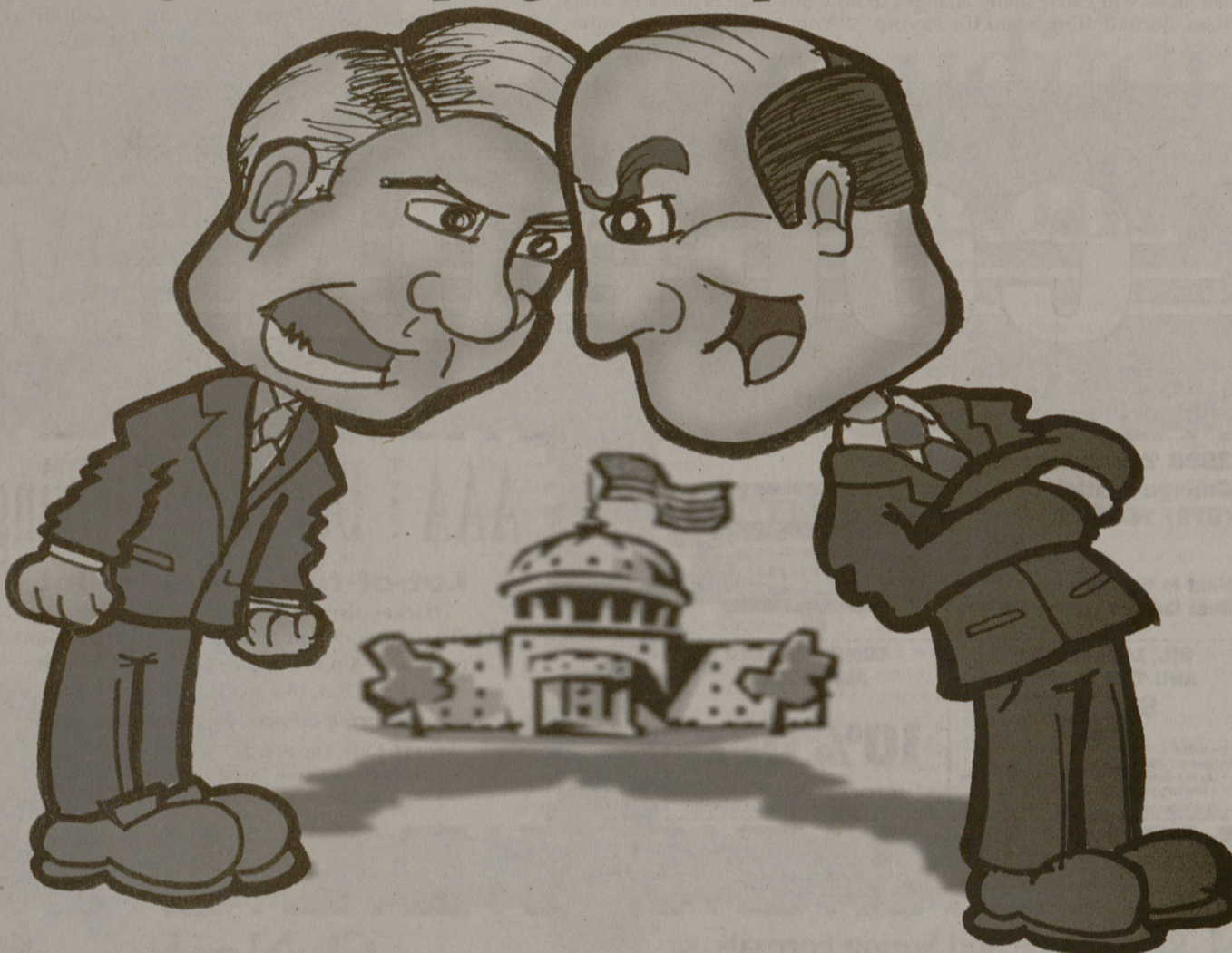
Saddam Hussein needs to go. He has invaded Kuwait and Iran, wreaking havoc in the Arab world. Hussein is a clear threat to political and economic stability in the Middle East, and has a long, bloody record of brutality toward his own people, employing chemical weapons against the Kurdish minority in Iraq. He has fired missiles at Israel. There are credible reports of links between Iraqi intelligence and Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorist network. Even worse, he is actively building weapons of mass destruction. United Nations weapons inspectors have not been in the country in several years. No one knows what he has, but his evil intentions have been clear for a long time.

Unfortunately, the prime minister has found how difficult doing the right thing can be. Protests against removing Hussein are widespread in Britain and across Europe. Blair's own party is making noise against his active and vocal support for America's effort toward global peace and security. Blair should be applauded for standing up to European knee-jerk anti-Americanism. His approval ratings have been in steady decline, but he has held steadfast to doing the right thing. His determination to continue this course of action was made clear during the visit to A&M.

Not all American allies can stomach what is necessary. The United States, having experienced the horrors of terrorism, is moving ahead with what must be done. In his speech, Blair said, "To let Iraq develop weapons of mass destruction is to ignore the lessons of Sept. 11, and we won't allow it." It might be too much to ask for Europe's other leaders to transform sympathy into action. But America has at least one steady friend, and for Hussein, that might be enough.

A political battle

Local negative campaigns have proven entertaining



ADRIAN CALCANELO • THE BATTALION



JONATHAN JONES

This spring has seen several intense, hard-fought political battles. This ends today, at least until the fall. Most students have probably not paid much attention to this election cycle, and even fewer voted in its primaries. But some local races have provided high political theater and good entertainment. Charges and countercharges have flown at high speed and frequency, especially in the Republican primary for U.S. Congress.

Despite its bad reputation, negative campaigning is effective and informative. Very few political ads are unfair personal attacks. Most are issue-based, spreading knowledge about the track record of the opposition in a way beneficial to the other candidate. They sharpen the differences, both personally and professionally, between two similar candidates. And as long as the facts are true, it is good for the democratic process.

The two remaining GOP congressional hopefuls, John Carter and Peter Wareing, do not differ much on policy. Both claim to be conservatives who would fit the district well. The winner of today's runoff is likely to be the next U.S. congressman and hold the seat until scandal or retirement. District 31 is one of the most Republican congressional districts in the state of Texas. Thus the two candidates have gone negative. Wareing stresses his experience in private business. Only one, State District Judge John Carter, has a public service record

ripe for scrutiny. Registered voters were flooded with political mailings, most of which have been sent by Carter. One mailing, "Peter Wareing: Liberal Washington Values ... Not Our Values," mentioned Wareing's contributions to Democrats and his failures to vote in Republican primaries. Another mailing accused Wareing of trying to buy the seat, making an issue of the fact he moved to the district and has not promised to relocate permanently if he loses the runoff. Since the candidates are similar on the issues, experience and character are things voters use to make decisions, and it is only right to examine those. The issues raised in most of the ads speak to these questions, seeking to persuade for one candidate or against another based on prior behavior.

Brad Barton, a previous opponent of Carter and Wareing, ran ads describing Wareing's connection to the biggest investment fiasco in University of Texas history, in which the university lost \$10 million in a failed venture with that Houston-based company. Wareing has television ads that ask, "Why is John Carter running a negative campaign?" But the worst thing that could be said of Barton and Carter's ads is they do not contain any hints of their opponent's side of the story. That is Wareing's job.

There is, of course, another side to the story. Wareing's supporters counter that

he has a strong record of supporting conservatives, especially in terms of political contributions. They also point out he has never faced any criminal proceedings. Both candidates are correct, and the charges and countercharges have generated interest in the race. In fact, there is good reason to believe that negative ads stimulate turnout, according to a study by political scientists Steven Finkel and John Greer. Much more policy information is communicated to voters by ads slamming an opponent's voting history or business dealings than warm, fuzzy ads.

In politics, the straight truth is not easy to determine. Some incidents are highlighted and others swept under the rug. Healthy, energetic exchanges that do not cross the line into personal mudslinging help voters get a full, accurate picture of the candidates. In addition, negative ads are almost always issue based, and only negative in the sense that they recall embarrassing incidents the public has every right to know about. After all, these individuals want to exercise authority and make important, far-reaching decisions on behalf of others. The effort to inform as many people as possible about the negative side of those who want power invested in them by the people is only right.

Jonathan Jones is a senior political science major.

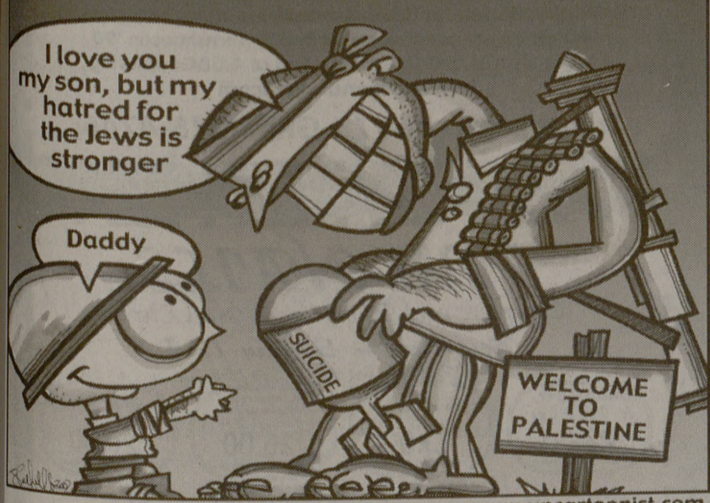
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MAIL CALL

Student behavior embarrassing

I was very disappointed by my fellow students this weekend when I attended the *Dark Side of Oz*. As a part of the Audience Education program, they graciously showed a free viewing, which was very well attended. The behavior at the viewing was atrocious. A well-respected professor gave a brief history about the time period in which the book was written and how it transcended into the film. This was a unique program and provided a chance to see a piece of pop culture in a different light. People acted appalled at the idea of actually learning something

and possibly enlightening their two-dimensional, egotistical lives. During this time, students were yelling, talking and actually cheered when he asked if they wanted to him to stop. Given, it was midnight on a Friday and not a class, but it was a voluntary program. I was incredibly embarrassed by the behavior of my fellow A&S and want to extend an apology to everyone involved who worked so hard to bring us this program. Is it that hard to extend the respect that our professors and peers so rightly deserve? This is college, people. Learn to grow up or shut up.

Courtney Brannon
Class of 2004

Capital justice system fails

It sounds like the plot line for a bad John Grisham novel: A man is charged with sexually assaulting and murdering a 17-year-old boy in Virginia and assigned a public defendant. Following a fairly routine trial, the defendant is found guilty and sentenced to death. It is only after the trial concludes that he learns his attorney represented the victim he is accused of murdering.

On March 27, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that this obvious conflict of interest was not enough to warrant a retrial for Walter Mickens Jr., even though his attorney, Bryan Saunders, never informed him that he was representing the victim in an unrelated assault case at the time of his murder. Throughout the trial, Mickens never realized Saunders had been the victim's attorney.

Such a ruling undermines the integrity of the American justice system, especially when a conflict of interest as blatant as Saunders' is allowed in a capital punishment case, where a man's life is literally at stake. In allowing the conviction to stand, the Supreme Court robbed Mickens of his Sixth Amendment right to an attorney.



RICHARD BRAY

In its ruling, the Supreme Court majority concluded that through the course of the trial, Saunders had done nothing to visibly harm his client's case, and as a result, it allowed the verdict to stand. Despite this, it should have allowed another trial to remove all doubt and ensure Mickens' right to a fair trial.

In a common court case, this might be little more than a waste of taxpayers' money. In all likelihood, Mickens is in fact guilty of the crimes of which he is accused. However, America is highly regarded throughout the world for the manner in which it treats its prisoners and how it determines the guilt or innocence of the accused. In capital punishment cases, it is imperative that the American justice system take every step possible to make certain that all those who are sentenced to death have actually committed the crimes of which they are accused.

No matter what one's stance on capital punishment, virtually all would agree that it is better to err on the side of caution when it comes to doling out death sentences. Recent studies have shown

that many who have been convicted of capital crimes were unjustly executed, and in the 1992 book *In Spite of Innocence: Erroneous Convictions in Capital Cases*, the authors examine more than 400 cases in which there is evidence of the defendant being wrongly convicted of a crime punishable by death. In 1972, when the Supreme Court overturned all the capital punishment cases existing at the time on constitutional grounds, five of those who were on death row later proved themselves innocent.

While mistakes are inevitable, the justice system must take every opportunity to ensure the basic fairness of capital punishment proceedings and prevent such mistakes from becoming a common occurrence. By disallowing Mickens' request for a retrial, the Supreme Court missed an opportunity to send a clear message that mistakes in capital punishment cases will not be tolerated. Instead, it set a lackluster standard for judicial mediocrity.

Richard Bray is a junior journalism major.