

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Coventry should accept challenge

Student body president should debate merit of off-campus bonfire with the Unity Project

At the Sept. 26 Student Senate meeting, Unity Project spokesman Luke Cheatham challenged Student Body President Zac Coventry to an off-campus debate concerning an off-campus bonfire. However, Coventry has refused such a debate. For Coventry to avoid discussing an issue of such importance to the student body is to shirk the responsibility of his leadership position.



RICHARD BRAY

Since Bonfire collapsed in 1999, Texas A&M students have wondered about the future of A&M's most beloved tradition. Various organizations have been created with the intention of bringing Bonfire back in some form, and former Student Body President Schuyler Houser created the Fall Activities Council to fill the void left by Bonfire's demise. These organizations are indicative of the interest students have in bringing Bonfire back. The issue is certainly controversial on campus and, as a result of this controversy, public discussion about Bonfire should be one of Coventry's goals.

By refusing the Unity Project's request for an on-campus debate, Coventry deprives the student body of an opportunity to hear leaders on both sides of the issue voice the reasoning behind their positions. Many current A&M students were not present when Bonfire collapsed and do not fully understand the issue. A debate can help these students come closer to understanding both Coventry and Cheatham's positions.

Coventry said he refused to debate the issue because the Unity Project is not a University-recognized organization. As an A&M student body representative, Coventry does not see a need to debate the merits of an organization that exists outside of the University's realm.

However, this view ignores how important this matter is to A&M students. Although the Unity Project is not associated with the University, its goals revolve around A&M and its great strength — tradition.

Regardless of whether the Unity Project is officially recognized by the University, it is an organization composed of Aggies that is associated with A&M due to both its membership and its goals. To ignore that association in the public's eye is a failure to understand that the issues the Unity Project brings up and the issues that would be discussed in a debate



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are issues which will have an impact on the University in the years to come.

Two of the four Student Government Association (SGA) goals outlined by Coventry in his State of the University speech were active communication and increasing SGA's presence at A&M. Accepting Cheatham's request would be a step towards meeting both these objectives. Not only would Coventry be communicating with the students on an important issue, but he and the SGA would increase their presence on campus in the process. SGA and Coventry stand to gain from a debate with the

Unity Project.

It is Coventry's responsibility as student body president to address the concerns of the students he represents. In refusing to respond to the issues, he is ignoring the interests of the students and failing to adequately perform his duties. If Coventry truly wants to be a representative of the students, he should accept the Unity Project's challenge for a public debate.

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Zimbabwe a victim to racial reparations

Violent seizure of land from white farmers is destroying nation's economy

The international community stands by as ethnic cleansing under the guise of reparations takes place per the orders of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe. You won't read



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this in an American newspaper or hear it from the United Nations. The world has turned a deaf ear to the cries of suffering from Southern Africa, both white and black.

Mugabe came to power in 1981 as the first and only black Zimbabwean president after the end of white apartheid. Since that time, he has molded the once prosperous democracy into a communist dictatorship. His most recent abuses of power include using the military to intimidate opponents and at away from the polls, expatriating the media for his own use, and forcing members of the independent judicial branch to quit. Zimbabwe, once the breadbasket and tourist mecca of Southern Africa, now faces the starvation of more than 6 million of its people, according to Refugees International.

As Zimbabwe's problems emanating from nepotism and mismanagement have grown, so has the Zimbabwean people's disapproval of Mugabe. In 2000, as his popularity reached an

all-time low, according to iafrica.com, Mugabe turned on the same scapegoats he had used his previous two decades in power: whites. In an attempt to deflect personal responsibility for the country's woes, Mugabe claimed white ownership of commercial farms in Zimbabwe were to blame. He called for reparations in the form of farm seizures from whites to be given to the country's poor, black citizens.

Despite the defeat of a constitutional amendment to allow such action, Mugabe instituted the confiscations through brute force. Reuters reports that armed young militants, under the direction of Mugabe, have repeatedly stormed farm property.

The latest figures from the South African newspaper, the *Sunday Independent*, show only 400 white farmers remain in Zimbabwe versus 4,500 just two years ago. The effects of the attacks are not limited to Zimbabwe. The violence against farmers has been spreading to nearby South Africa and Namibia.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum says that Mugabe thugs have left hundreds dead, thousands beaten and raped, hundreds of thousands jobless and millions on the brink of star-

vation. The ugly proof can be viewed at www.africancrisis.org/Photos.asp.

Ironically, the named beneficiaries of the land program are hurt the most. As commercial farms are destroyed, thousands of local black laborers who live and work there lose their homes and livelihoods. In a continent already stricken by AIDS, Zimbabwe's lack of agricultural production has placed the price of food beyond the reach of most. Food aid given by international organizations and other countries to help the starving has been intercepted by the Zimbabwe government, according to the Associated Press. Similar to Somalia in 1993, food is being withheld as a weapon against political opponents of Mugabe.

Those who believe "the end justifies the means" should know even those causing the violence are unhappy. ZWNNews.com says the majority of confiscated lands have gone to wealthy political allies of Mugabe. This has angered many of Mugabe's followers, who believed they had terrorized for their own benefit, according to allafrica.com.

Neck-deep in civil rights violations, Mugabe has received international acclaim rather than criticism. Participants in the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development

gave a deafening applause after President Mugabe defended his "land reform" program.

The African Descendants World Conference Against Racism this month in Barbados issued this statement: "Be it resolved that we applaud and support the courage and foresight of President Mugabe for embarking upon the land reform program."

That is not surprising coming from a group that on the same day expelled all non-blacks from its conference hall. U.S. Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, forbidden to enter Britain for inciting racial hatred, counts himself as a Mugabe enthusiast. The Zimbabwe Independent also lists the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America as supporters.

While it is not the job of the U.S. military to "nation-build," if there ever was a use for the United Nations, the situation in Zimbabwe is it. Mugabe is a despot in the tradition of Stalin, Pol Pot and Pinochet. The world and the media must wake up and recognize tyrants of all stripes.

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Students should intern as economy lags

Internships help students obtain jobs as unemployment rate increases across the country

Employers report that they expect to hire 3.6 percent fewer college graduates this year, according to a study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). "Last



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year's college grads experienced a difficult time in their job search, and it looks like this year will also be challenging," said Marilyn Mackes on the NACE Web site. "The class of 2003 is going to face a lot of competition for jobs."

Employers' sentiments reflect the current bleak state of the economy. The national unemployment rate in September was 5.6 percent, the highest it's been in nearly a decade, according to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics. Texas' unemployment rate was even higher than the national average at 6.1 percent.

As a result of these dismal numbers, Aggies and other college students must realize that they desperately need an edge over the competition if they hope to get jobs upon graduating. To do this, students need to find internships in their fields.

Internships give a competitive edge to job-seekers after graduation because many employers look for candidates with rele-

vant work experience. *The Internship Bible*, a resource guide put out yearly by The Princeton Review, reports a study conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education.

In the study, more than 4,000 employers were asked, "When you consider hiring a new non-supervisory or production worker, how important were the following in your decision to hire?" With a list of 11 choices, prior work experience, which can be provided through internships, was cited as the third most important characteristic to have, ahead of such qualities as years of completed schooling, test scores, grades and reputation of applicant's school. The only traits ranked higher than previous work experience were applicant's attitude and communication skills.

Additionally, internships have other benefits that can increase job potential. For example, internships enhance students' skills and facilitate networking contacts. Ramon Johnston, a junior forestry major, spent his summer working as an intern in Washington, D.C. "I learned more in three months than I have in all my classes combined, because I got so much hands-on experience," he said.

Johnston spent one day in D.C. at a job fair for interns. "I got

three job offers for when I graduate, just because I was doing an internship," he said.

According to *The Internship Bible*, many companies hire a large percent of their interns to permanent positions once they have finished schooling. For example, Chevron and accounting firm Ernst & Young report that 50 percent of new hires each year are former interns. Hewlett-Packard reports nearly 70 percent of their interns are offered permanent employment.

If an internship is unpaid and students can afford to go without pay, they should take the position nonetheless. Many non-paid internships could provide more benefits than paid ones in the long run. This is because employers will often offer unique opportunities to unpaid employees as "payment." Furthermore, it is much more difficult to obtain a paid internship than an unpaid one.

Since an internship will increase the chance of getting a job later, one should not pass up an unpaid internship if that is what is offered. The benefits to this will outweigh the costs.

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