

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Total Republican control scary for some

Many worried about Republicans dominating White House, Senate and House



BRIENNE PORTER

In a historical feat during this year's mid-term elections, the President's party gained House seats and control of the Senate. While

many people would prefer to have an undivided Capitol to reduce gridlock and accomplish goals, Republican control of the House, Senate and the White House is worrisome for many. Social programs and civil liberties will be at stake with Republican control.

Fifty-one percent of Americans say more will get done in Washington. Fifty-two percent are at least somewhat concerned, and 28 percent are very concerned that the GOP will move the country in too conservative a direction, according to a *Newsweek* poll.

Republican control spells trouble for issues such as abortion rights, environmental protection and social security reforms along with powers for the Homeland Security Office. "By winning control of the Senate and expanding their House majority, congressional Republicans are positioned to push their agenda of new tax cuts, market-based health care reforms and appointments of anti-abortion, conservative judges," said the *The Washington Post*. Some of the first things the new Senate will address in January are presidential nominations for federal judges. When Democrats had control of the Senate and approved nominations, many found problems with the nominees. These problems included conservative stances on abortion and privacy issues. For these reasons, President Bush was not able to place the judges he wanted on the bench. "The president's judicial nominees, stalled by Senate Democrats who controlled the committees that could block their consideration, are expected to move quickly to approval by a Senate soon to be controlled by Republicans," said *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. While many people do not see the problem

with the President's judicial nominations, people who guard their privacy and individual rights are trying to find a way to prevent this conservative take over of federal judges. Federal

judges are appointed to life terms and are often the source of Supreme Court nominees. With federal judges in position to make crucial decisions about government powers and controversial issues, many Democrats and liberals are wondering if they will lose many rights, including that of abortion.

Another issue expected to come before Congress is the opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil drilling.

Environmentalists across the United States are fearing the destruction of a national treasure for the goal of gaining more oil and decreasing America's dependence on foreign oil, mainly Middle Eastern. In a *Telegraph* (London) article, Senate energy committee member and Republican Dan Woodruff, said "Opening ANWR was a top priority for President Bush and obviously you'll have a leadership much more interested in pursuing that." While it is an admirable goal to decrease America's dependency on Middle Eastern oil, especially with increasing tensions with Iraq, protection of the Wildlife Refuge that is home to the arctic fox, caribou and snowy owl must come first. The environment is fragile and any oil exploration could destroy it. With Republican control of the House and now the Senate, Americans can expect to see ecological concerns pushed to the wayside in the name of money and independence.

Also on the Bush agenda are welfare reforms and tax cuts. Tax cuts are usually a welcomed addition, though that is not the case when the federal government is now facing a deficit. The government does not need to create tax cuts, but

instead curb government spending until the deficit is under control.

"President Bush vowed to combat rising budget deficits through a combination of spending curbs and tax breaks to stimulate growth, putting government departments on notice for potentially painful belt-tightening next year," according to Reuters news service. Yet, President Bush's economic plan seems very similar to Reagan-era tax cuts, where it was supply side economics to stimulate

growth. Reagan's plan did not work and the United States went further into recession. America does not need the same type of economic plan. It needs something to bring the bull back to the market and this plan does not incur hope into the hearts of many.

Republican control of the federal government is worrisome and

downright scary. Anyone who is a lover of freedom and the environment, be forewarned the next two years are going to be an uphill battle. Liberals and Democrats everywhere need to remain watchful of the government now that they are in a distinct minority.

Brienne Porter is a senior political science major.



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Smoking not R-rated

In a report issued last month, U.S. Public Interest Research Groups (U.S. PIRG) declared cigarette smoking too adult for PG-13 movies, asking the Motion Picture Association of America to now give films depicting smoking an R rating. The group says smoking in PG-13 movies equates to tobacco companies advertising to children, a violation of a 1998 multi-state tobacco settlement.

U.S. PIRG's study, however, relies heavily on faulty logic, as cigarette use does not necessarily constitute product advertisement and not all PG-13 films are inherently aimed at children. The argument fails to adequately link smoking in motion pictures with increased tobacco use in young people or consider smoking shown on television.

For a group clearly biased against tobacco companies to say a child is likely to commit an act, in this case smoking, just because he witnesses it in a movie is illogical and only exposes the group's agenda. PG-13 films often feature violence, sex and vulgar language, but the report failed to address these issues, instead claiming that smoking would be the only thing children pick up.

When someone leaves a movie theater, they alone decide whether they will smoke, shoot someone or behave inappropriately. People don't just blindly mimic everything they see and hear in films with absolutely no control over their own actions, whether they are children or not.

PG-13 films are also not exclusively marketed toward children. Such an assumption is insane. If any rating could be said to be for children it would be G, but even that rating doesn't exclude any other age group. This year's popular horror movie *The Ring*, which was marketed toward adults, was rated PG-13, and there was considerably more to get upset about than tobacco use. So, as box office success indicates, PG-13 movies are marketed toward adult audiences, not just children.



GEORGE DEUTSCH

U.S. PIRG's report attacks films such as the Will Smith failure, *Wild Wild West*, which the group says featured an inappropriate four minutes of tobacco use. Forget the fact that the film is, as the title might suggest, about the American West and historical accuracy might dictate the use of tobacco. If U.S. PIRG had its way, characters in films like this would be able to carry guns and shoot others under a PG-13 rating, but not smoke cigarettes. If this sounds unreasonable, even stupid, it should.

The report, found online at uspirg.org, lists many useless facts such as this but fails to list any that actually tie smoking in PG-13 films with an increase in youth smoking. That is because no such statistics exist, and in fact, any link between movie smoking and underage smoking would be questionable at best.

U.S. PIRG boldly asserts motion picture producers and big tobacco companies are in some way colluding to get the young to smoke, but fails to produce any evidence supporting its claim. Unfortunately, this is the type of hasty action and ill-supported claims people have come to expect from watchdog organizations such as this.

People can still be seen smoking on cable and network television, but U.S. PIRG's report makes no mention of effects TV smoking might have on children. Children cannot be immune to television smoking but susceptible to movie smoking, or vice versa. U.S. PIRG can not simply blame movie makers for youth smoking and fail to make a similar case against television, as such an argument is weak and ill-structured.

The fact remains that if people want to smoke, they will, regardless of their age or the ratings of the movies they watch. Needless indictments of the tobacco and entertainment industries will not significantly alter youth smoking patterns. People's decisions are their own to make, and new and unnecessary regulation will not change that.

George Deutsch is a senior journalism major.

Bonfire: three years later

It is 2:42 a.m. right now. I am out at the Polo Fields, and I am shivering. I'm not sure if it's because of the temperature, or because suddenly I've gone back in time three years to this moment. On Nov. 18, 1999, Aggie Bonfire collapsed on this very spot, killing 12 Aggies, injuring 27, and wounding the hearts of hundreds of thousands.

To those of us who worked at cut and stack, and anyone who saw the imposing Bonfire construction, the collapse was unimaginable. For me, it was incomprehensible that it would fall like that — so quickly and so deadly.

The hard work, sounds and sweat that would normally take place here during Bonfire push has been replaced by a reverent silence. I can faintly hear the bell at Albritton Tower, and its stately "dong."

My class was the last to build and burn a Bonfire as students, and the Class of 2003 the last to work on one. Underclassmen at A&M would benefit themselves and future classes by learning about Aggie Bonfire traditions, because their collective actions and decisions will write the next page in the tradition's history. All Aggies should take a moment on this third observance of the tragedy and examine Bonfire in a historical perspective.

In the past three years, some students have taken up a mission to rebuild the tradition through various means, while others have pressed to let it go. The Bonfire Coalition for Students has become a recognized organization and seeks to work through the system; the Unity Project has successfully organized an off-campus stack that stays true to many bonfire traditions; others say better to do away with the tradition than for a modified version, and so forth.

What will future generations of Aggies say of the decisions we are making today regarding the tradition of Aggie Bonfire? The actions of current students will speak volumes about our values to future generations. This is what our Aggie pride is built on — the legacy that past Aggie leaders, when faced with tremendous decisions, made the right choice when it counted.

Lawrence Sullivan Ross did the right thing by fighting to keep A&M open. E. King Gill did the right thing by suiting up to play. Gen. James Earl Rudder did the right thing by transforming the A&M College into the A&M University. There are



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meaningful messages behind these acts that define what being an Aggie is. This Aggie Lore is one of the strongest facets of the Aggie Spirit, and a reason why so many of us chose to get an education here.

For us today looking back, these decisions set examples of the type of leaders we wish to become. In this sense, the historical perspective of Bonfire is as important as ever.

There is a real powerful message in several stories surrounding the history of Bonfire. Among the most notable is that Aggie Bonfire did not burn in 1963 because of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Bonfire, a symbol so strong and a tradition so proud to so many students at A&M, was undone — taken apart log by log — because it was the noble thing to do. That story should send shivers down your spine. Only Aggies would have the strength and conviction to put aside their most revered tradition for such a tragedy.

A student 50 years from now would read about the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse and how it did not burn on campus for three years, among a student body divided. What happens next?

Students must accept the debate over the future of Bonfire seriously and believe firmly in their stance.

There are valid points to positions to bring back Bonfire and to put it on the shelf. To put aside our treasured Bonfire forever because of the loss of the 12 would be a world-class statement on how Aggies place their own over a material tradition. Equally compelling is the message of perseverance and love of traditions that would be displayed if students successfully bring back Bonfire.

So much has happened in the last 1,095 days. I open my eyes as Albritton chimes for the 12th time, and memories rush through my veins. With my thumb and index finger I pinch the top of my nose, right between the eyes.

Nov. 18, 1999 was one of the darkest days A&M has seen. How we pick ourselves up and drive on will be the next chapter of Aggie Lore.

I don't have the answer to what the right future for Bonfire is. But remembering the lives of Miranda Adams, Christopher Breen, Michael Ebanks, Jeremy Frampton, Jamie Hand, Christopher Heard, Tim Kerlee, Lucas Kimmel, Bryan McClain, Chad Powell, Jerry Self and Scott West is the right thing to do today.

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Mariano Castillo is a senior international studies and journalism major.