

Percentage plans fail

History's list of failed government policies is a mile long. Rome had lead plumbing, Portugal refused to back Christopher Columbus, Neville Chamberlain appeased Hitler, the Soviets attempted Communism and the Environmental Protection Agency created a 55 mph speed limit in Houston. Just last week, the list grew. Reports released by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) state that percentage admissions programs at colleges are another failed policy with students suffering the loss. Texas, California and Florida universities cannot get rid of them soon enough.

In those three states, percentage programs were instituted after affirmative action in education became illegal. Texas' version guarantees applicants admission to public state universities if they graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school class. Percentage programs have a disparate impact or use neutral factors to discriminate. Much in the way poll taxes were intended to disenfranchise blacks and poor whites, percentage programs are intended to block qualified students at competitive high schools in favor of top 10 percent students from uncompetitive schools. The Texas Legislature approved the plan after alarmists claimed the Hopwood ruling would drastically reduce the number of minorities in higher education. According to the USCCR, the alarmists are wrong and the program they helped create is ineffective.

The USCCR's reports criticizing percentage plans sound like what conservatives have been saying all along. Despite this, the leader of the USCCR is liberal Mary Frances Berry, whose recent obstructionist tactics have proved her ideology. According to a White House letter, after President Bush appointed conservative Peter Kirsanow to fill a seat on the commission, Berry informed White House counsel Al Gonzales it would take armed federal marshals to install the appointee. Berry's staff, in violation of rules, then issued a USCCR report entitled, "Beyond Percentage Plans: The Challenge of Equal Opportunity in Higher Education." The conclusion of the report is that percentage programs are failing at their intent of raising non-Asian minority enrollment rates and affirmative action is needed to boost those statistics. For perhaps the first time, a die-hard supporter of racial preferences has criticized percentage programs.

This criticism comes shortly after Texas A&M considered enlarging its automatic admissions through the "Top 20 Percent Plan," a program that would have created easier admissions requirements for students at 253 "diverse" high schools. The program, which was scrapped last year when questions of its legality arose, is no longer being considered by the University, according to Dr. Frank Ashley, Director of Admissions.

Since the Texas Automatic Admissions program was enacted, uncertainty has become a common fear of A&M applicants. A&M's admissions are now so swamped and inefficient that many qualified applicants are placed on waiting lists for up to six months. Ashley said many high school counselors now instruct their students not to bother applying unless they are in the automatically admitted range of their class.

The primary problem with the program is that it places university applicants in competition with their high school classmates for admission instead of the entire college applicant pool. This means there is no uniform standard for admitting a student, since high schools vary drastically as to how competitive their curriculums and students are. An added side effect of the policy is the 100 percent emphasis on a student's grades rather than on being well-rounded in the areas of academics, leadership, and service. This encourages high school students to inflate their grades through easier class loads and to abstain from extra-curricular activities. Children are thus penalized for learning in a competitive environment.

Commissioners Abigail Thernstrom, Jennifer Braceras, Peter Kirsanow and Russell Redenbaugh issued a statement disagreeing with the report's recommendations for affirmative action, but agreed percentage programs don't work. "Neither racial double-standards nor X-percent plans solve the tragic problem of non-Asian minority students entering college unlikely to succeed," said Thernstrom. "National Assessment for Educational Progress data for 8th-graders in Texas are available. In the year 2000, 60 percent of black students, 41 percent of Hispanic youngsters and 17 percent of whites tested 'Below Basic' in math," Thernstrom explained. "Only better K-12 education can level the playing field. X-percent plans, like preferential admissions, are an ineffective effort at damage control."

The solution for the three states currently using percentage programs is simple. There should be no automatic admissions of any kind. Applicants should be evaluated on a range of academically relevant criteria. This will yield a class of students far more diverse in their interests and backgrounds than under the current system, without the pretense of racism. The K-12 education system produces such poor math scores and those parents who allow their children to slip through the cracks must be fixed. A&M should stop passing the buck of social engineering and demand only the most prepared students, regardless of race, become Aggies.



MATT MADDOX

Matt Maddox is a junior management major.

DRIVING THE DIVINE

'What Would Jesus Drive?' campaign disrespects Christ

In today's world, where an activist group exists for just about anything one can imagine, the new "What Would Jesus Drive?" campaign should come as no surprise. It was merely a matter of time before a group got together and came up with an idea as extreme as this one.



MARK WOOD

The group comprises representatives from a variety of Jewish and Christian organizations and is sponsored by the Pennsylvania-based Evangelical Environmental Network, according to foxnews.com. The group uses a spin-off of the popular "What Would Jesus Do?" movement, which makes items such as bracelets and shirts with the letters WWJD on them.

According to foxnews.com, the group met with executives and top officials at Ford Motor Co., General Motors Corp. and the United Auto Workers, petitioning them to start producing vehicles that are kinder to God's creations and to urge the faithful to buy them. The "What Would Jesus Drive?" campaign specifically opposes the popular sport utility vehicle, which it says pollutes the earth and causes global warming.

According to the ad campaign, Jesus would not drive one of these vehicles. Rather, he would choose a small, fuel-efficient ride. The group's commercial, which according to abcnews.com will run in Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and North Carolina, says, "Too many of the cars, trucks and SUVs that are made, that we choose to drive, are polluting our air. And endangering our health, especially the health of our children."

This campaign is full of controversy in the religious world, and many religious leaders are surprisedly taking to it. One proponent of this notion is the Rev. Jim Ball. In an interview with "Good Morning America," Ball said, "When you look at the impact of transportation on human health and on global warming and Jesus was the great physician of body and soul. The most basic teaching of Jesus is to love your neighbor like yourself. How can you do that when you are filling your neighbor's lungs with pollution?"

On the other side of the issue is Rev. Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcasting Network. Also in an interview with "Good Morning America," Robertson said, "I think the concept of linking Jesus to an anti-SUV campaign borders on blasphemy, and I regard it as a joke."

The Rev. Robertson is correct. The idea Jesus would have a preference on what vehicle he drove is outlandish. How can one even begin to associate Jesus with a car made by humans? This group is taking advantage of Jesus' name to push its own agenda.

In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Ball said, "Jesus wants his followers to drive the least-polluting, most efficient vehicle that truly meets their needs."

He'd definitely be in favor of us taking public transportation."

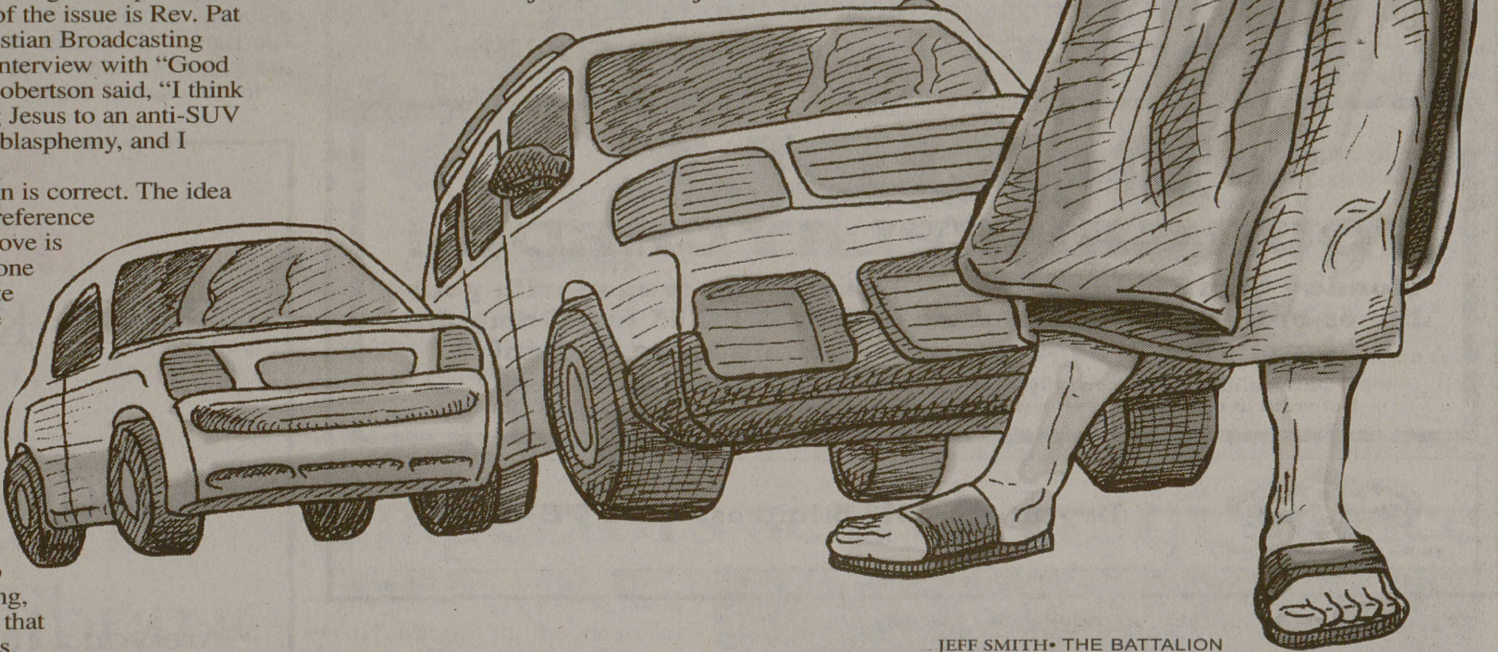
When you get down to it, every car pollutes the earth — even the Prius, the high gas mileage Toyota hybrid Ball and his associates drive. The only way not to pollute the Earth would be to walk, ride a horse or ride a bike. This is, of course, illogical, just as this activist group's argument is.

Jesus commands people to take care of his creations and car makers should strive to make the most fuel-efficient car they can, but one should not try to correlate Jesus with things of this earth. To take this campaign seriously would open a huge can of worms, for if people are to decide what kind of car Jesus would drive they must ask themselves a whole lot more than that.

What other kind of products would Jesus not buy? Certainly nothing that is made at a factory or is a product that uses parts made in a factory, which sends numerous pollutants into the air. Or maybe there should be a group against clothes, because check out the tags. Most of the garments people wear are made in a country where child labor is accepted or are made in some sort of a sweatshop. Or maybe a coalition against computers should be made saying Jesus wouldn't agree with these because, as of now, computers cannot be recycled.

No coalition or activist group should ever associate Jesus' name with the preference for a particular worldly possession. Such a correlation is not only the antithesis of Christianity, but blasphemous and in poor taste.

Mark Wood is a senior journalism major.



JEFF SMITH • THE BATTALION

MAIL CALL

Slocum's career at A&M remembered

When I heard the news today of Coach Slocum's dismissal, it made me glad that I am graduating in a few weeks. I don't really know how I would feel as a student if we had a different coach.

R.C. has been reveled as the winningest coach in school history, and I think it is wrong to dispose of him after one bad season. It's not his fault that injuries on the team have been rampant, or that we

happen to be competing in the most difficult conference in football today.

If it is necessary to fire a coach after turning in one particularly bad conference record, then I guess we should fire our basketball coach just about every year.

But what's done is done, and I want to wish Coach Slocum luck on any future ventures. In fact, maybe he should just move up the road to Waco, take his next recruiting class with him, and show us all what we know he can do.

Thanks for the last 30 years, R.C.,

I know we all will miss seeing you on the sideline.

Daniel C. Griffith
Class of 2002

I was disgusted to hear about the firing of Texas A&M University head football coach R.C. Slocum on Monday.

I think we've heard it all before, but it's worth repeating again: Slocum is the winningest coach in Texas A&M history, second winningest active coach of the past decade, faster to 100 victories than any active head coach, eighth best 13 season start among all coaches, 11 bowl games in 13 seasons, 29-game conference unbeaten streak (1991-1995), respected by his peers in the college ranks and the NFL, et cetera, et cetera.

But what has he done for us lately? A&M has been on the downturn, and it's only getting worse.

Look, do I need to repeat that last paragraph again? A man with those credentials deserves a chance to turn things around. What about that idea called loyalty?

Besides, he's been recruiting well; we all watched the Oklahoma game. There's some man named Reggie McNeal and word on the street says

he's going to be good.

But for now, Slocum has been fired, so there's no use hoping otherwise. But the way in which it was done was tactless. It makes me sick to my stomach to know that he was not even allowed to finish the season.

Texas A&M is not Baylor, and thank God for that, so why are we acting like them? Was our starting quarterback struggling with substance abuse? No, but it sounds like the people that made this decision were.

When I heard the rumors that Slocum was going to be fired, I said, "No way, not at Texas A&M. A&M is different from other schools." And then, when I found out it was true, it floored me. And to think all of this happened before the end of the season.

Now I know that everything those Aggies say about loyalty, honor and brotherhood is a lie.

Walter Chen
Class of 2004

I just wanted to submit a headline suggestion for tomorrow's issue: Yay, we fired R.C. Slocum!

Lindi Horton
Class of 2002



NIKE LUKRICH