

'Robin Hood' challenged

The Texas Constitution guarantees all citizens an equal opportunity to receive a proper education. This guarantee is what led to the Texas Supreme Court decision in the Edgewood ISD v. Kirby case in 1989, and eventually to the implementation of Senate Bill 7, also known as the "Robin Hood" law, in 1993, according to the Center for Public Policy Priorities. The Robin Hood law allows the state to redistribute property tax revenues from wealthy school districts to poor ones.

The Robin Hood law has been challenged in the court system several times since its implementation, and has always been upheld, according to The Associated Press. Now it is being challenged by a coalition of wealthy school districts that claim the law violates the state constitution by creating a statewide property tax, an argument that has been struck down in the past.

While the state school funding formula is far from perfect and has caused budgetary problems for some wealthy school districts, it has worked for millions of Texas children, giving them educational resources ranging from computers to up-to-date textbooks, and should be kept in place until the legislature finds a better alternative.

According to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, the law states that districts are classified as wealthy if the value of their tax rolls divided by the number of students enrolled is greater than \$305,000. Any operating revenue that surpasses this threshold is recaptured by the state and redistributed to property-poor districts. The Austin American-Statesman reports that 118 districts are considered rich and, therefore, must transfer approximately \$970 million to the other 916 districts that teach nearly 90 percent of the students in the state. This money makes up a mere 4 percent of the total \$25.8 billion spent on education each year.



JENELLE WILSON

This system has caused some of the wealthy districts to cut back on extracurricular opportunities and to charge students certain "activity fees." The frustration of wealthy districts forced to cut programs is understandable; however, the programs that are eliminated are programs that poorer districts could never have dreamed of having in the first place.

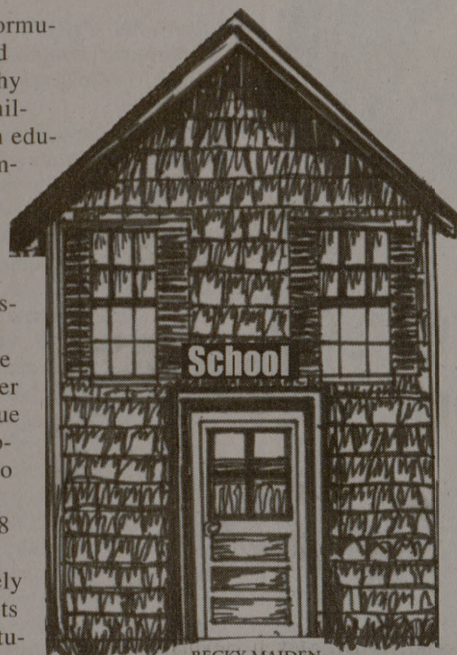
The real problem with state funding of education is that there is not enough. The state must come up with more ways to raise money for education instead of relying solely on property taxes, which have gone through the roof. Until that happens, this program is the only hope for many poor Texas schools.

The Robin Hood plan is not necessarily the best way to fund education; there may be better ways out there. However, another plan must be decided on before the

current one is ousted.

It may be flawed, but at least it's a system. Getting rid of Robin Hood without a clear alternative is simply dangerous.

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major.



BECKY MAIDEN THE BATTALION



EDITORIAL

REC FEE FRIVOLOUS

No need for fee hike in economic crisis

Students, former students, and others connected to Texas A&M are commonly referred to as the Aggie family. In times of economic hardship, even the largest of families must remember to live within their means. However, while households around the state are becoming more frugal in these tough times, administrators have demanded a spending spree with the Aggie family picking up the tab.

The Department of Recreational Sports is pushing for an untimely and unnecessary fee increase. Wednesday and Thursday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at campus polling locations and at vote.tamu.edu, students may vote on whether to approve a new \$10 per semester fee hike. A&M administrators have taken it for granted for too long that students can bear the cost of every new upgrade, enlargement, expansion or modification they desire.

The proposed fee increase would complement the Student Recreation Center's current \$5 million budget surplus and would go toward expansion of the weight room and Penberthy facilities. Also proposed is a wage increase for student employees and the addition of a full-time coordinator to handle risk-management. Another \$10 fee increase is slated for 2006.

While the Rec Center is a nicety for students who use it, the financial viability of educational programs and students should not be jeopardized just to expand an existing facility. Maintenance and upkeep are genuine uses of fee money, but neither are at stake without this increase. Every student should exercise his power to be heard by casting a ballot and saying no to frivolous fee increases.

THE BATTALION

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor in Chief	BRANDIE LIEFFICK	Asst. News	MELISSA SULLIVAN
Managing Editor	SOMMER BUNCE	Member	ROLANDO GARCIA
Opinion Editor	GEORGE DEUTSCH	Member	MATT MADDOX
News Editor	SARAH WALCH	Member	BRIANNE PORTER

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebatt.com. No attachments.

Interest in Middle Eastern oil decreasing

Facing a potential war, the United States should look to Russia for alternatives

The recently climbing gas prices may only be foreshadowing the extreme stress a possible war with Iraq could put on the economy, and, in particular, oil prices. Right now the rise in gas prices is attributed to war panic, and a strike by oil producers in Venezuela, the world's fifth leading exporter of oil. However, should conflict become intense in Iraq and the surrounding region, it would most likely restrain oil shipments, a problem since almost a fourth of oil imported to the United States in 2001 originated from the Middle East, according to the Energy Information Administration's Web site.

Despite the obvious pressure on Iraq and the surrounding Persian Gulf region due to a possible war, the United States continues to import the majority of its oil from such sources. What is needed is not peaceful relations with neighboring countries, cooperation with Iraqi oil companies, or a decrease in United States oil consumption, although that wouldn't hurt. The United States needs to dramatically decrease its invested inter-



SARA FOLEY

est in Middle Eastern nations' oil supplies and focus on alternative oil sources. Russia, which is the world's second largest oil producer, only delivers a small fraction of its oil to the United States.

The reason behind this is certainly not a lack of demand, but complications transporting oil to the United States from Russia, according to the Energy Information Administration's Web site.

By supporting the Russian oil effort, Americans will not only be lowering the prices they are paying for gas, but they will be refusing to support the economies of countries who are our enemies.

As of now, Russia utilizes a number of long distance pipes to transport oil from Russia to various countries in Western Europe. The problem is

that Russia has no straightforward way to ship oil to the United States. However, a deepwater oil terminal at Murmansk has been suggested that would enable Russian oil to reach the United States.

"By supporting the Russian oil effort, Americans will not only be lowering the prices they are paying for gas, but they will be refusing to support the economies of countries who are our enemies."

Furthermore, if the United States did engage in a closer business relationship with Russia, it would not only benefit Americans, but Russia as well. Russia's oil industry, which has been struggling to catch up to technological advances that occurred before the fall of the Soviet Union, has made recent strides in producing and refining oil,

but there are still more advancements to be made, according to Peter Valko, associate professor of petroleum engineering.

"Russia exports more than it used to because of capital investment, and since the fall of the Soviet Union, exports have been steadily increasing. Before trade can increase with the United States, you need political stability in Russia," Valko said.

To build this political stability, financial investments must be made in Russia, as well as other countries that are secondary oil sources for the United States. Nigeria, South America, and Mexico all have multitudes of oil reserves not being pumped to their capacity because the United State's oil needs are already being met by the Middle East. By making plans now to invest in Russian oil as well as other global sources, the United States will protect itself from possible problems that could arise due to conflict with Iraq.

Sara Foley is a sophomore journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Political disasters leave Bush vulnerable at polls

In response to Nathan Rogers' Feb. 24 column:

In the immediate days following 9/11, our nation came together in a spirit of unity to defeat terrorism. But shortly after, George W. Bush opened his mouth and continued his divisive, partisan rhetoric for his own political gain.

As his current plummeting public approval rating suggests, President Bush is out of touch with American priorities and values and is making himself more vulnerable to a Democratic victory in 2004.

President Bush has failed to give economic relief to the working families of America. He has failed to provide states with the necessary

resources to adequately fund homeland security. He has failed to protect our environment from his friends who wish to pollute it.

He has failed to present us with a consistent foreign policy toward all nations who support terrorism, not just Iraq. He has also failed to support women's and minority rights, allowing radical religious zealots to determine the future of equal opportunity.

In short, President Bush's actions speak louder than his grammatically incorrect words. We Democrats have many qualified candidates who represent the true face of America, and who fight for ordinary Americans, not just for corporate executives and religious fundamentalists.

Jonathan Steed
President, Aggie Democrats
Class of 2004

Column portrayed Lowry Mays poorly

In response to Collins Ezeanyim's Feb. 24 column:

Although I agree that Clear Channel Communications is developing a monopoly, I do not agree with the way Lowry Mays was portrayed.

Aggies do not hiss other Aggies, or has The Battalion forgotten this long-standing Aggie tradition of respect? Lowry Mays is a former student of this university, graduating in 1957 with a degree in Petroleum Engineering.

Not only has he served on the Board of Regents, but he has received many awards from this university including the Distinguished Alumni Award. He is also the benefactor of the Lowry Mays College of Business.

Mr. Mays is an outstanding Aggie, something not mentioned by this article. Even amid the controversy created

by his company, please remember that he is an Aggie first.

John Boehm
Class of 2005

Urging countries to side with war inhumane

In response to a Feb. 24 page 1 article:

I am appalled to learn from the article "Officials urge countries to side with U.S." that the U.S. has resorted to holding hostage the citizens of Angola, Guinea, and Cameroon to secure their governments' vote for the upcoming U.N. resolution authorizing war with Iraq.

It is one thing to present a convincing case for war, but threats only strengthen the perception in many countries that the U.S. is a bully.

I can only speculate what our officials

mean by "paying a heavy price" for not supporting the U.N. resolution, but I hope it does not include withholding humanitarian or other foreign aids to these countries.

How can we present ourselves as a just and compassionate nation, the sole superpower no less, if we potentially jeopardize the survival of deprived people in third world countries in order to gain their support for a cause that will cost more lives?

Kenny Kwong
Class of 2001

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebatt.com. Attachments are not accepted.