

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 9 • Monday, March 17, 2003

## ELIMINATING VOTER APATHY

### As campaign week begins, students should not neglect voting responsibilities

It has begun. Even reading this newspaper, you have already been hit with it. Campaign week is here and students are being mauled by smiling campaigners passing out flyers, candy and platform cards. There are shirts and sandwich boards all over campus and Bryan-College Station touting candidates' names and slogans, attempting to catch eyes and win votes.



KELLN ZIMMER

Let's all pay attention this year. In the student body elections last year, voter turnout was 9,479, down from the previous year's 10,307 votes, according to an April 1, 2002 article in *The Battalion*. This is a dismal number, considering Texas A&M enrollment constantly sits higher than 40,000. This year's official 12th class day tabulations, according to the Feb. 4 Battalion, set A&M's official enrollment at 42,184. Considering this figure, less than 24 percent of the student body votes in the largest, most important campus election of the year.

Sadly, the 6,116 votes cast in the fee referendum that took place on Feb. 26 and 27 were a record high for that type of ballot.

Astonishingly, only 7 percent of the total enrollment of this campus casting a vote is considered a record.

This voter turnout shows a compelling lack of concern on behalf of the A&M student body in the political process as it pertains to this campus. In a student body election, most candidates have Web sites, representatives to speak with, or the candidates will make time to speak with students. The voting process is relatively accessible and easy to take part in. Campus elections are important for the functioning of a university, but only if the students take them seriously.

This year's fee referendum turnout shows that the tide is turning and more, though not enough, students are paying attention to events around them. Students have an obligation to

educate themselves and to take note of the candidates they feel will serve and provide leadership in the upcoming year.

The March 6 Battalion quoted A&M President Robert M. Gates as saying student fees

will not be increased because he said he feels student interest was represented by negative votes in the fee referendum. Someone is listening, and when students take part in the voting process, it does matter.

A&M students should take a stand when voting in the student body president, yell leader student senate and class officer elections.

By seriously considering candidates, holding them to their platforms and questioning them on issues they will face in the next year, candidates too are held to a higher standard. It should not be easy to win an election on a

campus as large as A&M's, but if a candidate only needs about 8 percent of the votes to achieve a majority, the task is not as daunting as it could be.

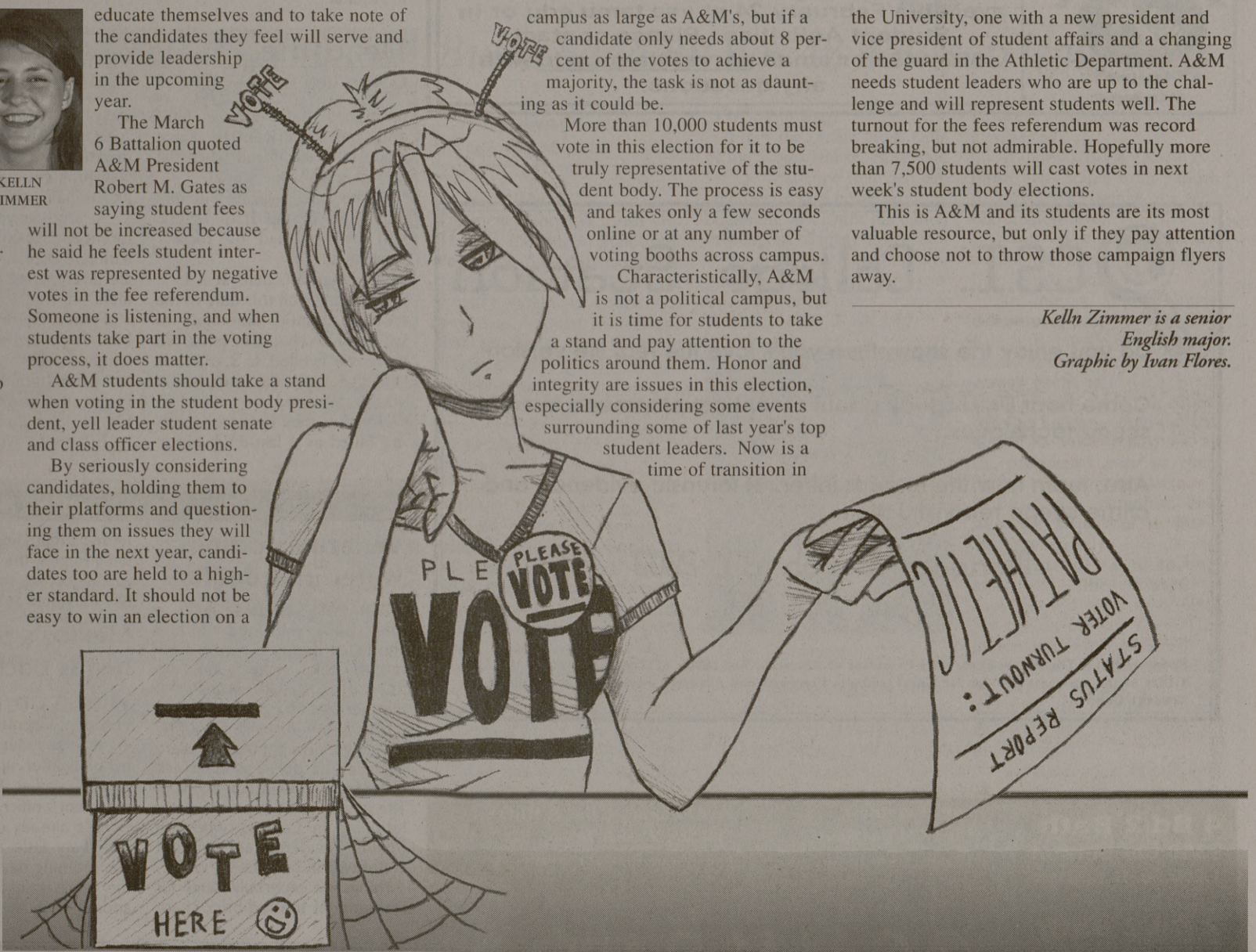
More than 10,000 students must vote in this election for it to be truly representative of the student body. The process is easy and takes only a few seconds online or at any number of voting booths across campus.

Characteristically, A&M is not a political campus, but it is time for students to take a stand and pay attention to the politics around them. Honor and integrity are issues in this election, especially considering some events surrounding some of last year's top student leaders. Now is a time of transition in

the University, one with a new president and vice president of student affairs and a changing of the guard in the Athletic Department. A&M needs student leaders who are up to the challenge and will represent students well. The turnout for the fees referendum was record breaking, but not admirable. Hopefully more than 7,500 students will cast votes in next week's student body elections.

This is A&M and its students are its most valuable resource, but only if they pay attention and choose not to throw those campaign flyers away.

Kelln Zimmer is a senior English major. Graphic by Ivan Flores.



#### MAIL CALL

### Ashcroft's attack on pipe dealers ridiculous

In response to George Deutsch's March 7 column:

At a time when America was under high alert for terrorism, Attorney General John Ashcroft was on a marijuana jihad, squandering Department of Justice resources on a nationwide hunt for bongos.

With marijuana decriminalization on the horizon in neighboring Canada, the United States may soon be one of the few Western countries that uses its criminal justice system to punish otherwise law-abiding citizens who prefer marijuana to martinis.

Ashcroft's reefer madness is best exemplified by the federal government's paramilitary raids on voter-approved medical marijuana providers in California.

The very same attorney general who claims illicit drug use funds terrorism is forcing cancer and AIDS patients into the hands of street dealers. Apparently, marijuana prohibition is more important than protecting the country from terrorism.

Students who want to help end the intergenerational culture war otherwise known as the war on some drugs should contact Students for Sensible Drug Policy at [www.ssdp.org](http://www.ssdp.org). Thank you for your consideration.

Robert Sharpe  
MPA Program Officer  
Drug Policy Alliance

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](mailto:mailcall@thebatt.com). Attachments are not accepted.

## Conspiring to throw napkins

### Food Services treated Sbisa diners like criminals

While Food Services' usual efforts to eliminate the practice of throwing wadded paper napkins, or "Sbisa balls," may meet with objection from some, its actions on Feb. 25 in response to a student-planned Sbisa ball fight were deplorable.

According to numerous posts on the Hobbes forum, [hobbes.resnet.tamu.edu/forums](http://hobbes.resnet.tamu.edu/forums), several students used the forum to schedule and announce a Sbisa ball fight involving approximately 800 Sbisa balls.

Food Services caught wind of the planned Sbisa ball fight, however, so little fun was to be had by Sbisa's patrons and the planners of the fight that night. While the efforts of Food Services prevented any large quantity of Sbisa balls from flying in the dining hall that Tuesday evening, those entering Sbisa likely noticed a few things out of the ordinary.

Two uniformed University Police Department (UPD) officers were present, standing and watching over the patrons, along with several Food Services employees. Assistant Director of Food Services Cindy Zawieja said she asked the police officers to be present because she felt the situation in Sbisa might be out of control that evening.

While Food Services should provide a safe dining experience, the idea that police officers are necessary to control the throwing of paper napkins is laughable. UPD has far more important things to do than stopping tossed napkins. For example, according to the UPD police blotter, an attempted kidnapping at knife-point took place in the Read Building the very night of the planned Sbisa ball fight.

Some students involved in the planning of the Sbisa ball fight are being disciplined for their involvement. Senior computer science major Matt Heard, who admits he was involved in the planning, said the fight was meant to bring tradition and fun to the Sbisa dining



NICHOLAS NEUMANN

experience.

Heard said he was confronted by University officials before entering Sbisa for dinner that Tuesday evening, and that he has received a letter from Student Conflict Resolution Services for his role in the planning.

In addition to the absurdity of having cops present and dragging through SCRS for conspiracy to throw napkins, Food Services acted inappropriately by treating all of its paying customers like criminals.

**"While Food Services should provide a safe dining experience, the idea that police officers are necessary to control the throwing of paper napkins is laughable. UPD has far more important things to do than stopping tossed napkins."**

Michael Frink, a sophomore mechanical engineering major present that evening, said Food Services employees were confiscating napkins from customers, including himself. Frink said the employees took napkins away from those who had taken what Food Services deemed was too many.

"I had like five or six napkins," Frink said. "I was told (by the employee) that napkins cost a lot. One employee was taking them off (customers' trays) and throwing them in the trash can."

Food Services' treating of its customers like children and criminals that night was impolite and offensive. Zawieja justified Food Services' actions by saying that she couldn't understand why students would want to damage

Sbisa property.

But freshman meteorology major Jason Hernandez said the Sbisa employees scared him more than the prospect of being hit by flying Sbisa balls.

Hernandez added that he was shocked by the actions and presence of the UPD officers.

"If you were to go to a restaurant and employees there were to treat you in a similar manner, they would be out of business," he said.

Additionally, Frink said he saw one employee walk up to a student juggling Sbisa balls and stare at him. Others were also being visibly monitored. Clearly, students felt uncomfortable.

Food Services, the organization that manages and operates on-campus dining facilities, can do as it wants in an attempt to eradicate traditions in Sbisa; but its treatment of customers as criminals on the evening of Feb. 25 is absolutely not acceptable.

Students should not allow themselves to be treated as children and deviants by Food Services employees. They should patronize dining establishments that actually treat them as the customers they are, and be reluctant to purchase meal plans for next semester. Those residence halls that usually gather for dorm dinner at Sbisa should still go to dinner together, but choose to eat at one of the dining establishments on Northgate. When Sbisa is empty for a few days in a row, or the number of meal plans purchased next semester falls below the expected number, perhaps Food Services will then take notice of patron discontentment.

A&M President Robert M. Gates should not let the actions of Food Services go unnoticed or without reprimand. Zawieja said "dining in Sbisa is like a regular restaurant and everyone should mind their manners." This "everyone" should include Food Services' many workers.

Nicholas Neumann is a graduate computer science major.

