

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 9 • Tuesday, March 25, 2003

## EDITORIAL

### A CLEAR CHOICE

Cheatham best represents students' interests

With a crowded field of candidates jockeying to be student body president, students must sort through a torrent of campaign flyers and similar-sounding platforms before casting their ballots. Luke Cheatham, with his willingness to take action and his constructive advocacy on students' behalf, stands above the rest.

Student government has often disappointed in its representation of students, and a glance at the other candidates underscores why. The four candidates with extensive experience in student government have said that students voted against fee increases in the February referendum because they were not adequately informed. Students deserve a representative who will keep the student body informed, voice concerns to University leaders and not serve simply as administrators' liaison to students.

Although lacking in student government experience, Cheatham has a proven leadership record with results. Unity Project's off-campus bonfire was a controversial undertaking, but Cheatham persevered to put on a successful event focused on safety, inclusion and student participation. Cheatham will bring such energetic leadership to student government.

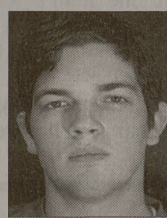
Cheatham said he will reinvigorate diversity initiatives by ending the separatist attitude that isolates ethnic groups from each other and will renew an aborted attempt by student government to provide a student response to Vision 2020. Cheatham, who will continue living in Walton Hall next year, will be accessible to students in a way other candidates cannot be. Cheatham voted against the fee increases and said that before students are saddled with tuition or fee hikes, the University should first demonstrate that it has improved efficiency and cut expenses.

Student government has little real power, and can only serve as a representative for students, but even this role is often neglected. Cheatham's advocacy will be a more accurate reflection of students' views and will, in the long run, be more effective than the lackluster representation of the past. Administrators cannot consider students' views unless student leaders present it to them.

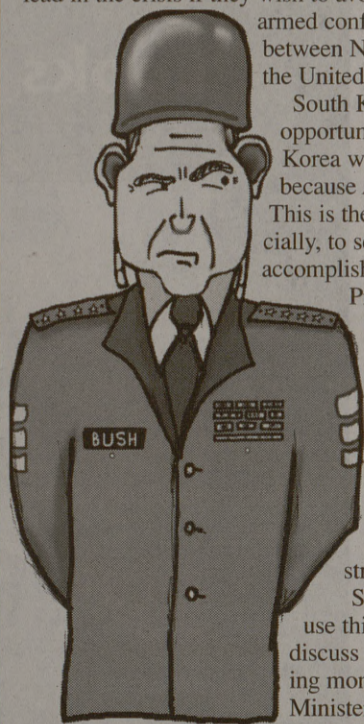
## Seeking peace?

Japan, South Korea should initiate talks with Jong Il

With the ongoing war in Iraq, the Bush Administration is preoccupied with winning the war and organizing peace. This will leave precious little time to deal with other foreign policy issues, particularly those involving North Korea. American allies in the Far East, primarily Japan and South Korea, need to take the lead in the crisis if they wish to avoid a later armed confrontation between North Korea and the United States.



DAVID SHOEMAKER

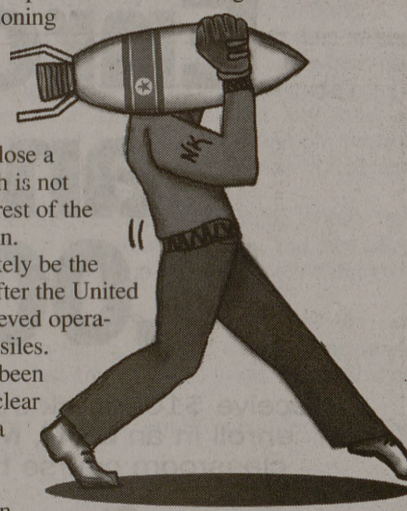


South Korea and Japan now have an opportunity to conduct talks with North Korea without much U.S. pressure because America's attention is diverted. This is the chance, for South Korea especially, to see what they might be able to accomplish with talks. South Korea's new President Roh Moo-hyun is in a position to serve as mediator between the United States and North Korea, as Roh's relationship with North Korea is stronger than in the past. Both nations' diplomats must realize military arrogance won't go unchallenged now with the "Bush Doctrine" of preemptive strike. Just ask Iraq.

South Korea and Japan need to use this time to talk to North Korea and discuss what they should do in the coming months. If Roh or Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi were to meet with North Korea's Kim Jong Il, the leaders could share ideas on how to reach a peaceful agreement with the United States. President George W. Bush would benefit from knowing these countries' expectations if he decides to have discussions with North Korea.

If North Korea is simply bargaining for respect and food to feed its starving, for example, Washington might be more inclined to actually negotiate, assuming North Korea would give up some of its weapons programs. That is a point South Korea and the Japanese need to press through talks — that if North Korea is looking for help, Washington might be pressured into helping, assuming North Korea offers to do something the United States considers positive first. But if North Korea continues seeking through weapons of mass destruction to dominate the Korean peninsula, all nations involved must realize the depth of the crisis.

If the South Koreans and Japanese choose to pursue a dialogue, they need to express to North Korea the threat it poses to the United States, South Korea and the rest of the world. According to an article from BBC.COM, the Japanese have begun diplomatic maneuvers to make this point clear, as relations are already strained between North Korea and Japan. In 1999, North Korea agreed to a Japanese request for a moratorium on long range missile tests after one was fired directly over Japan, which, according to the article, led to an agreement where the Japanese would aid North Korea if it stopped its aggression. But after two short-range missile tests by North Korea in the past month and rumors that a long-range missile test would occur soon, the Japanese are threatening to abandon the pact. In considering abandoning the agreement, called the Pyongyang Declaration, government spokesman Yasuo Fukuda stated, "Once we abrogate it, we lose a forum for dialogue," which is not what the Japanese, or the rest of the world, want to have happen.



The Japanese would likely be the most threatened country after the United States if North Korea achieved operational nuclear ballistic missiles. Though Japan has clearly been telling North Korea its nuclear and missile programs are a threat to the world, South Korea needs to stress this harder as well. If both countries increase diplomatic pressure on North Korea, perhaps they can push the country into some kind of agreement to limit weapons programs for increased monetary aid. If nothing else, Japan and South Korea serve as a counterbalance to a harder American line while the United States is focusing most of its attention on the crisis in Iraq.

If South Korea and Japan take the lead now in engaging North Korea, they could possibly come up with an agreement and present it to the United States, allowing Washington to keep its focus on the Middle East and allowing them to first address their own concerns. These conditions might encourage North Korea to accept an agreement where they give up something without losing much face. In any case, if the South Koreans and the Japanese wish to pursue a dialogue with North Korea to achieve a peaceful settlement, now is the time.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major. Graphic by Radhika Thirunarayanan.

## THE BATTALION

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## Columnist supported racial stereotypes

Article in Vanity Fair was racially insensitive even though attempting satire

An article in last month's issue of Vanity Fair magazine argued that many Hispanics and Latinos across the United States and incited Texas A&M's Committee for the Awareness of Mexican-American Culture to host a two-day program in response to it earlier this month. CAMAC concluded its program with a panel that addressed the negative images of Latinos in the media, how these stereotypes are created and how to deal with them. The article in question was in poor taste and only furthered stereotypes of Hispanics.



LAUREL FRANCK

In the issue, columnist Dame Edna Everage replied to a reader's letter asking her opinion of the Spanish language and its use in the real world.

The Sacramento Bee reported that her response included the statement, "Forget Spanish... As for everyone's speaking it, what waddle! Who speaks it that you are really desperate to talk to? The help? Your leaf blower?"

According to whiteprivilege.com, an anti-racist resource, an apology issued by the editors of Conde Nast Publications stated,

"Dame Edna Everage is a fictitious character created and portrayed by the Australian entertainer and author Barry Humphries. Edna is a caricature of a certain type of small-minded, socially ambitious, vaguely upper-class person... Our intent, in short, was to mock the very ethnic stereotypes that some have accused us of reinforcing."

The apology goes on to say, "We are asking those who feel offended by this piece to forgive us for our insensitivity. We also ask them to consider the context — the fact that these statements were meant to be read ironically — and to take into account the fact that it was never, ever our goal to disparage or insult any ethnic group."

While Dame Edna may be an imaginary person and her advice was meant to be taken satirically and not at face value, as The Bee puts it, "The point is, intentionally or not, Dame Edna snubbed the nation's huge Spanish-speaking population — and they aren't laughing."

Those familiar with Dame Edna may have understood the true intentions of the article as a satire against racial stereotypes, but obviously, they are not the majority of readers. The

formal apology says her advice is not meant to be taken seriously, but it was easily misconstrued by a number of people who took offense, including A&M's CAMAC. Issac Faz, co-founder of Vida Social, a network for young professional Latinos in Dallas, told The Dallas Morning News, "I think you can be funny about race and things in general. But when I got to the bottom of the article... and they were being very specific, that's when I got offended. You don't want to reinforce stereotypes."

Many people continue to hold negative stereotypes of other cultures, religions and races based on ignorance. While Dame Edna may have been attempting to show the ridiculousness of these attitudes, the article unwittingly projected them to millions of readers. According to muybueno.net, "Satire is a deadly weapon. In the hands of the semi-skilled, it has a tendency to misfire. And when that happens, there's often a lot of damage. That's what the editors of Vanity Fair magazine discovered..."

Satire, irony and sarcasm are literary techniques that are often difficult to implement so that their purpose is clear to readers. Many people just do not get it and quickly take offense. As muybueno.net states, "Successful

satire is aimed at powerful individuals or social attitudes. It is understood by its audience for what it is and its literary merit. Vanity Fair's item failed on all three counts: It was hurtful, bound to be misunderstood, and, obviously, lacked literary value."

If Vanity Fair and its writers want to help erase racism and stereotypes, it should go about it in a different way. Articles featuring a variety of cultures and the influential figures who are a part of them would be a positive way to inform readers about the colorful and diverse world in which we live, and how all different cultures make great contributions to it. Humor and satire are obviously not successful methods for ridding people's minds of racism, as they often backfire when they are misunderstood.

Journalists must be extremely careful in choosing the way in which they write about such touchy topics. The apology from Vanity Fair is a start, but such situations need to be prevented from occurring in the first place.

Laurel Franck is a sophomore English major.

## MAIL CALL

### Candidates' platforms disregard administration

I am deeply concerned about some of the comments that candidates have been making about the administration and faculty at Texas A&M. Students are not the only Aggies in Aggieland.

A&M would not be where it is today if it were not for the outstanding job that the administration and faculty have done. We should be thanking the administration, the professors, the maintenance staff, the custodial staff, UPD, PTTS, and all other people who are associated with the upkeep and management of Texas A&M. They deserve much more respect than they are getting from some students and candidates. We cannot be so naive as to think that we as students are the only people who make this school. Candidates, how do you expect to get

anything worthwhile done if you are too busy butting heads with administration, rather than working with them to further not only the students of A&M but all Aggies?

James Cleland  
Class of 2004

### Troops, elected officials deserve more respect

In response to Jonny Havens' March 20 column:

Mr. Havens, you were correct that Bonfire brought all groups on campus together to show the Aggie Spirit. Some of your subsequent points, however, misjudged the reality of what it will take to restore this tradition to campus, and the qualifications and motives of some of those who seek to do so.

Contrary to what you wrote Thursday,

working with the administration is not a small and insignificant step. It is the only way that Bonfire will return to campus. Most Aggies realize that the football team, yell leaders, Reveille, and the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band are an integral part of the Bonfire tradition. They will appear only at a University-sanctioned Bonfire.

You were equally incorrect when you maintained that students working to restore the tradition have neither experience nor an understanding of the tradition. Both of the co-chairs as well as several other board members of the Bonfire Coalition were extensively involved in Bonfire. Our officers have been or are members of the Corps of Cadets, Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity and Walton Hall, just to name a few. They worked diligently in the construction of Texas Aggie Bonfire and have passed their knowledge, stories and camaraderie on to other members. We

will also stage educational events throughout the semester to keep Bonfire alive!

By quoting an attorney who represents plaintiffs in litigation related to the 1999 tragedy, you misrepresented the legal realities that Dr. Gates faced when he decided to postpone a decision on the future of Bonfire. Trial lawyers frequently make self-serving public statements. Our president acted on legal advice from attorneys who do not try their cases in the court of public opinion, those who work for the Texas A&M System and the State of Texas.

Finally, announcing Nov. 18 as Bonfire Remembrance Day was not a political diversion. It was one of our five goals for this academic year. That designation gives proper respect to those lost, injured and emotionally scarred on Nov. 18, 1999. It was important and necessary.

Although we're all disappointed that

Aggie Bonfire will not return to campus in 2003, most Aggies realize that Dr. Gates represents the best hope for restoring this great tradition. He deserves our support.

Ryan Kirkpatrick, Class of 1999  
Bonfire Coalition Co-Chair  
Marc Barringer, Class of 1992  
Bonfire Coalition Co-Chair

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