

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 11 • Tuesday, April 15, 2003

EDITORIAL

CONFLICTED BOARD

Ethical integrity questioned

Editorial independence is essential for a newspaper to adequately serve its readers. The student journalists who work at The Battalion value their obligation to hold accountable those who serve students. However, the presence of high-profile student leaders on the Student Media Board creates a potential conflict of interest and compromises the independence of The Battalion.

Each semester the Board nominates the editor in chief of The Battalion and the provost approves the nominees, and can also remove the editor. The student body president nominates three students to serve on the Board, which consists of eight voting members that also includes faculty and staff members. In the past, student body presidents have appointed themselves, members of the Student Government Association executive council, the Memorial Student Center council president or other student leaders. As officers in large student organizations, these students are hardly neutral participants, and it is not hard to imagine them using their positions on the Board to influence news coverage of their organizations.

Even if these student leaders can set aside their organizational interests, the appearance of a conflict of interest will compromise The Battalion's news reporting. Editors should be able to carry out their duty as the campus watchdog without having to worry about retribution from student leaders on the Media Board for critical or controversial articles.

Student representation on the Board is crucial to effective editorial leadership at The Battalion, but the presence of high-profile student leaders makes the newspaper subject to undue political pressure from student government.

The Student Media Board will meet tomorrow to consider a proposal that would prohibit officers of the executive councils of organizations such as the MSC, SGA, Corps of Cadets and the Interfraternity Council, from serving as student representatives on the media board. The Board must approve this resolution to ensure that The Battalion continues providing students fair and fearless news reporting. Students deserve nothing less than a fiercely independent student newspaper.

THE BATTALION

EDITORIAL BOARD

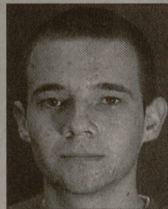
<i>Editor in Chief</i>	BRANDIE LIFFICK	<i>Asst. News</i>	MELISSA SULLIVAN
<i>Managing Editor</i>	SOMMER BUNCE	<i>Member</i>	SARA FOLEY
<i>Opinion Editor</i>	BRIANNE PORTER	<i>Member</i>	MATT MADDOX
<i>News Editor</i>	ROLANDO GARCIA		

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

Patriotic displays

Police chief was wrong in banning flag bandannas

Earlier this month the San Francisco police chief banned numerous SWAT team members from wearing bandannas as helmet liners to keep themselves cool while patrolling war protests. The reason for this unnecessary, bureaucratic decision was that depictions of the American flag were on the bandannas. Not only was the chief wrong in banning the bandannas, he wasted taxpayers' money and unnecessarily caused dissent among his officers and distracted them from completing their duties.



MATT RIGNEY

Throughout the war with Iraq, numerous groups have protested either for or against the conflict and the ideals on which it is based, but disagreement has not been limited to the big cities. Even College Station has seen its share of protests. Most of these protests have occurred without incident, but some have turned dangerous, which is why many cities, such as San Francisco, assign SWAT team members as peace keepers.

According to the Chattanooga, Tenn. police department, SWAT officers around the country are equipped with a Kevlar helmet, eye wear, a radio headset, boots, camouflage, an equipment vest, a belt and thigh holster, a gas mask, raingear and gloves.

With all of this gear, officers tend to get hot quickly. San Francisco SWAT members told the San Francisco Examiner they use bandannas to keep their heads cool while on duty. There is nothing wrong with this practice; if the officers are more comfortable, then they will do a better job protecting the lives of the protesters.

The fact that the bandannas bore a depiction of the stars and stripes might make some think that they would offend the peace protesters. This, however, is not the case.

"(The bandanna) doesn't impact the work of Direct Action to Stop the War one bit," said protest organizer Alyse Hogue.

Patriotic helmet liners do not intimidate peace protesters; they live in America. If the bandannas affected the anti-war groups at all, it should be a form of encouragement because the flag represents their right to protest the government, a right that many



around the world do not enjoy.

Others may argue that the bandannas introduce a degree of non-uniformity to the police attire. San Francisco Police Chief Alex Fagan told the Examiner that a uniform method of supporting the United States has been issued to officers of the Bay Area. "A stars and stripes military-style ribbon was developed and issued for wear on the uniform, directly under the officer's badge," he told the Examiner. They "lend a professional appearance for officers wishing to display a symbol of patriotism."

This solution does not address the problem the chief is seeking to resolve because officers choose whether to wear the ribbons, so not every man or woman brandishes it. This non-uniformity is the exact problem that Fagan attempted to avoid by banning the bandannas.

In fact, bandannas offer more uniformity than the ribbons because the bandannas

only become visible when the officers remove their helmets.

Not only do these bandannas serve an important purpose for the officers who wear them, they do not offend anyone. The police chief has only wasted taxpayer money by using department time to hold interviews and write up press releases over an issue that should not have been addressed by police management. Police Chief Fagan should repeal the prohibition on bandannas and quickly let the issue become history. This would restore the rights of the officers and end the squander of taxpayer money.

Matt Rigney is a sophomore journalism major. Graphic by Frank Chance.

Journalism department included in Vision 2020

In response to an April 9 front page article:

I would like to know how the leaders of Texas A&M can justify Vision 2020 if the Journalism department is allowed to fall through the cracks. It is a shame that the department has not been allowed to grow and prosper. As a proud member of the class of 2001 and a graduate of the journalism department, I am not surprised that Journalism is being threatened again. After all, it was obvious to me, as a student, that A&M officials care more about other departments than my own. I still remember the stark contrast between the glorious business building and the basement of the journalism building where I spent most of my time.

Several days ago, the local news reported that University President Robert M. Gates had stated that he had not received a memo describing the situation of the journalism department. President Gates, I would hope that you would be more informed about a subject so serious as that of the demise of a department. Please don't take away such a precious degree. I would also direct this plea to the dean of Liberal Arts. If you have any doubt as to the importance of a communications degree just turn on your television and watch the coverage of this war.

People who are passionate about the art of communication are risking their lives to bring us the truth. How can you allow our great school to lose a degree that has such potential to impact our nation with people like this?

For Texas A&M to be considered a top ten school you must provide students with a well-rounded education. If you allow journalism to disappear from Texas A&M it will break my heart, because in my eyes I will be losing my alma mater. I would not financially support Texas A&M if it allowed this loss.

Also, there cannot be an excuse that there is not enough money. There should be plenty of money. It just has to be used correctly and not on frivolous things. I did notice that the Board of Regents was having renovations done to their office. Since you have asked the faculty of Texas A&M to give part of their paychecks to Texas A&M in order to help with budget cuts, could you please make sure that it used responsibly? Maybe the Board of Regents could share offices with students who work everyday in the basement of Reed McDonald. I'm sure they'd be glad to share with you.

Jennifer Armstrong
Class of 2001

Past administrations share part of the blame

In response to an April 10 mail call:

Is Mr. Franklin arguing that we shouldn't have gone into Iraq because if we can't eliminate all evil then we shouldn't try to end any at all?

"Where was your voice the last ten years?" Perhaps you should be posing this question to Bill Clinton. It was his administration that sat idly by while those atrocities took place. I'm proud that President Bush has the courage to look evil in the eye and fight it. I would like to remind Mr. Franklin that Operation Iraqi Freedom is just that, one operation in the larger War on Terrorism.

Kyle Pennington
Class of 2003

In response to an April 10 mail call:

You claim the only reason the United States is in Iraq is to liberate its people and to take its oil. This is the same pathetic attempt for a platform of protest that has been heard since hostilities began.

The fact is we are not in Iraq solely to liberate its people. We are there because Saddam Hussein poses a real threat to the American people. Iraq,

after completely disregarding countless U.N. resolutions, possesses weapons of mass destruction and provides a safe harbor for terrorists such as Al-Qaida.

To use the examples you provided including Haiti, Somalia, Rwanda and the Balkans, where is the threat to America? That's right, there isn't one. In addition, the U.S. government has proclaimed that Iraq's oil is the property of the Iraqi people and we will protect it for them.

To all anti-war protestors, look at the faces of the Iraqi people and tell me that what we are doing is wrong. Know that with this invasion we have destroyed one of the safe harbors and supporters for terrorism against us.

Jared Patterson
Class of 2005

Public opinion is part of democracy

In response to Sara Foley's April 10 column:

Ms. Foley's assertion that "public opinion should not dictate the actions of the president or the military," implies very dangerous results if carried out in full. One must bear in mind that political participation does not stop at the voting booth.

The idea behind representation is that elected officials remain accountable to their constituents, and it is through the exercise of free speech and assembly - including protests or rallies, letter-writing and even opinion polls - that responsible citizens hope to balance the voice of the elected with that of the electorate. To act under Ms. Foley's above assumption is to relegate any semblance of democratic power to a wholly unrepresentative body of unaccountable officials and lobbyists. This includes the entire spectrum of opinion, and applies to all topics, not simply the more prominent events that capture the public's attention.

Furthermore, in stating that "it is the public's job to...support the actions of a military that protects their freedoms," Ms. Foley seems to forget that both

those for and against the war are exercising such "freedoms." The public has no single "job," but as individuals we do have rights that were established after no small struggle, and these cannot be conveniently denied to suit some particular situation.

I will agree with one point, that "it is not necessary to add in more relief packages or to institute more propaganda to convince the American public of the need for this war." Unlike the dubious "food droppings" in Afghanistan, aid should be seen as much more than a tool for public relations. Therefore, it is not necessary to provide aid as a means of propaganda, but it is necessary to provide aid as a means of helping the vast majority of Iraqis who have been innocent bystanders in this conflict. The situation is already proving to be much more than aid agencies can handle, and waiting for the as-yet undetermined end to the war only serves to add to the arduous prospect of rebuilding a country from a legacy of oppression in the settling smoke of a potentially fragile peace.

Adam Splittek
Class of 2005

Unplanned consequences

In response to an April 9 mail call:

I want to apologize to Matt Shomer for placing his name in my mail call last Wednesday. No matter how I felt about the sale of a ring singling you out was wrong and I'm sorry. Seeing that someone is selling their Aggie ring on eBay is upsetting enough but it was the way your friend was going about it, trying to not only sell a piece of jewelry, but the Aggie Network and Family that we have all worked hard for and cherish very much is what truly upset me. I personally did not want to see something that has been a part of my family heritage for generations along with so many others tainted by one very selfish Aggie and that was the sole purpose of my letter, but I should have been more respectful of your privacy not to place your name in the letter. I am sorry for what I did and I hope that you will accept my heartfelt apologies.

The Aggie Ring is not special because it is a ring; it is special because it is Aggie. I hope that no one will ever forget that.

Hayley Henderson
Class of 2005



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