

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Echo Taps is not only for Corps



Have you ever walked past the quad late one evening and happened to hear a special version of "Taps" playing? What you're hearing is an aspect of an important, yet not well-known, Aggie tradition called Echo Taps.

Many, if not most, non-regs do not know about this special ceremony, but many would attend if they were made aware.

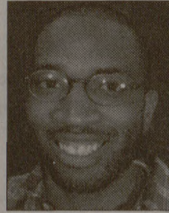
Burke Wilson of Corps Public Relations said that Echo Taps is held whenever a current member of the Corps of Cadets dies. It is also held during times of tragedy. Wilson said that Echo Taps was held after the Columbia explosion on Feb. 1 and after Bonfire fell on Nov. 18, 1999.

During Echo Taps, which like Silver Taps, begins at 10:30 p.m., two buglers will play "Taps," and one bugler will play a phrase of "Taps." During the pauses in the song, the other bugler will echo the same phrase. So, as Wilson said, at Echo Taps, "Taps" is played once — but in essence it is played twice. Wilson said that non-regs are always invited to attend the Echo Taps ceremony.

However, Ryan Schiffner, a senior cadet in the Corps, said he usually does not see non-regs attend Echo Taps.

Some Aggies might wonder why a reverent ceremony such as Echo Taps is not promoted more, especially if non-reg students are allowed to attend. But as Wilson explains, Echo Taps is an impromptu ceremony. If a cadet were to pass away on a Sunday, the Echo Taps to be held in his honor would occur the next day.

It's not reasonable to expect the Corps to get the word out on a specific Echo Taps ceremony. Schiffner said the Echo Taps for Sept. 11 and the Bonfire collapse occurred the nights of the respective tragedies. Time frames such as these allow little to no time for promotion of the Echo Taps ceremony.



COLLINS EZEANYIM

Still, the Corps could more than adequately alert the A&M community about the existence of Echo Taps with a minimum amount of effort. For example, the official Corps Web site, aggiecorps.org, has a section where it explains some Aggie traditions, including traditions specifically related to the Corps such as Corps Trip, March to the Brazos and Final Review, but Echo Taps is not mentioned. Even a couple of paragraphs on the Web site about this tradition would do wonders in spreading the word to Aggies.

Wilson and Schiffner did not know why Echo Taps was not promoted more in Corps literature. Perhaps the Corps does not publicize Echo Taps as much because it takes place so rarely. Wilson said that the only time Echo Taps takes place for certain is Jan. 28, to memorialize the 1986 Challenger explosion. The reason it always takes place is because the Corps outfit Squadron 17 is named after the Challenger crew, Wilson said. This is in contrast to events such as Silver Taps, which as Aggies know takes place the first Tuesday a month, and Muster, which occurs every April 21.

Schiffner said during his four years at A&M, less than 10 Echo Taps ceremonies have taken place.

Still, Echo Taps should become known to non-regs because it could satisfy the need among the student body to memorialize those who are not necessarily members of the Aggie family. For example, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics at A&M planned a special ceremony to memorialize the Columbia crew that was to take place before the Silver Taps on Feb. 4. Many who attended this ceremony probably would have attended the Echo Taps ceremony in memoriam to the Columbia crew that took place Feb. 3.

Echo Taps is a special ceremony and everyone at this University should be proud it occurs on our campus. If the student body is made aware of it, Echo Taps can become another vaunted Aggie tradition while remaining a reverent way to memorialize and honor lives lost.

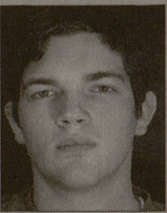
Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major. Graphic by Becky Maiden.

Public school funding needs real solution

Ten years ago, the Texas Legislature, in response to the Edgewood v. Kirby court case, passed the Robin Hood school funding plan. Meant to equalize funding, the plan took funds from richer school districts and redistributed them to poorer ones. But the plan has failed, both in equalizing the funding per student between districts and in increasing the financial security of school districts.

Now, under House Bill 604, the plan is going to be scrapped. This has led to a scramble to find a replacement system by the next regular session. Last week, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst proposed a new plan involving an expansion of the sales tax and possibly a statewide property tax. But Dewhurst's actions still may not be the best solution, and may actually be a re-tread of the old system.

The new plan would still share some of the same failings of Robin Hood. Under the Dewhurst proposal, according to the Houston



DAVID SHOEMAKER

Chronicle, the state cap on property taxes would be cut from the current \$1.50 per \$100 dollars of value to \$.75 per \$100. Taxing some services that currently are exempt from the sales tax would offset the loss from property tax revenues.

If that fails to bring in enough revenue, which seems likely, the possibility of a hike in the overall sales tax rate would be enacted, which would make it susceptible to fluctuations in the state economy. In good economic times, more revenue will be brought in, but in poor ones, there will be a shortfall such as the one being faced right now.

Similar to the current Robin Hood plan, the real problem is that the plan is seeking to find new ways to divide the same funds instead of finding new sources. In one of the options to the main plan, according to the Chronicle, the state would use a statewide property tax and abolish the local tax. This would require a constitutional amendment, which would have to be approved by voters, further complicating the process.

Another issue that has not been brought up is the ability of the Texas citizens to bear more sales taxes. As part of the Dewhurst proposal, according to the Chronicle, some low-income Texans would

be exempt from sales taxes. Holders of Lone Star cards would pay a lower tax rate on purchases. While this addresses the question of the ability of Texans to shoulder these taxes, it still doesn't answer the question of if the expanded taxes will generate meaningful revenue.

Despite its flaws and rough spots, Dewhurst deserves commendation for even creating such a proposal. The rest of the state leadership, especially Perry and Craddick, has been pathetically vague on the subject. In the Chronicle, Craddick simply stated that "we need to redo the whole tax structure" for school funding. Such empty comments do nothing to help reform the system.

The real problem facing public schools in the state is that fact they do not have a large enough source of consistent funding. This will not be alleviated no matter how much the same funds are collected or distributed.

The real solution looks to be a trust fund of some sort, modeled after the Permanent University Fund, which provides money to certain state universities. A trust fund could be used to take the place of property taxes in the

future, or part of the state's contribution from sales tax revenues.

Although a full fund could not be established under the state's current financial condition, a stopgap could be improvised from part of the state's billion dollar "rainy day" fund. While the governor is opposed to using this money, in light of the current circumstances, this is not just a rainy day, but a full-scale flood of funding problems.

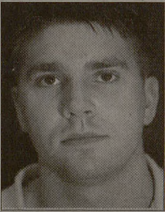
As long as state leaders keep thinking in terms of solving the problem by contributions from general state funds and redistributive policies, they will never be able to create a lasting solution for school funding. Although Dewhurst's plan does not establish stable funding, he deserves credit for making an attempt when other state leaders took a cop out. Perhaps his proposal will lead to a superior, more permanent plan. Texas and its public school students should not have to suffer through any more half-baked stopgap solutions from Austin.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.

Daschle's faith is questionable

According to Sen. Tom Daschle's bishop, Daschle (D-SD) is no longer Catholic enough to be considered Catholic. A piece written by J. Bottum of "The Weekly Standard" broke the story that Bishop Robert Carlson of the Sioux Falls diocese of South Dakota has asked Daschle, in private correspondence, to refrain from using his Catholic identity in his political campaigns or congressional biography. Carlson and Daschle have commented on the story but refuse to deny Carlson's actions. Thus, one is left to wonder whether a bishop can and should take such action against a parishioner, and, subsequently, why Daschle is a target.

The conflict between Daschle and Carlson has been brewing for many years. Various news sources followed the story as Daschle and Carlson publicly debated a "partial-birth" abortion bill six years ago. More recently, according to Sioux Falls newspaper the Argus Leader, Carlson gave a homily to his congregation that condemned those who would vote for a politician "simply because they might put a few dollars in our pockets or help our state in a special way because of their political position." He argued that supporting any politician, such as Daschle, who upheld abortion rights, was wrong. Thus, one can discern that Daschle's political stance has been troublesome for the Sioux Falls diocese.



MIKE WARD

It is no secret that the Catholic Church has become one of the harshest critics of abortion. Similarly, it is no secret that Tom Daschle is one of the staunchest advocates of "choice." No one could deny Daschle's congressional voting record on the matter — he regularly and publicly states his defense of a woman's "right to choose." Yet Catholic moral teaching, regardless of what the fringe group Catholics for Free Choice purports, has been steadfast in its condemnation of abortion. This begs the question, how can Daschle identify himself with a religion that overwhelmingly denounces that which he enthusiastically supports?

Obviously there is room for Catholics to disagree on certain issues. For instance, Daschle, similar to many Catholics including Pope John Paul II, was opposed to military action in Iraq and other Catholics supported the war. Some Catholics wish to see the day when priests can marry; others will forever fight that. Disagreements over these and similar issues are healthy and necessary. However, there are certain issues that are simply too essential with which to disagree — abortion is one of these. Catholic voters should feel just as uncomfortable with voting for Daschle as Daschle should feel identifying himself as Catholic.

"I have been a Catholic all my life, and I will remain one," Daschle responded to the Standard article. However, Bishop Carlson believes otherwise, and, while stating in reaction to the Standard piece that he would never "break off pastoral relations with anyone," he did not retract his supposed statement to

Daschle. Carlson is merely "cleaning house," asking that parishioners remain in-step with serious issues within the Church or refrain from using their faith for political ends. His efforts should be praised and echoed in parishes throughout the country.

Religion has always been a factor in politics. The vast majority of senators and congressmen affiliate themselves with some type of religion. But when a political issue crosses secular boundaries, religious leaders, such as Carlson, must take action to support the integrity of their congregation.

Daschle is far from the only Catholic supporter of "choice" in Washington D.C. He is joined by at least six other senators including John Kerry and Ted Kennedy. It is most surprising that religious leaders in the heavily Catholic state of Massachusetts have not already made public statements in opposition to both of these senators. Carlson seems to be the pioneer in this sort of action.

Decisions have consequences. Daschle's decision to support a "woman's right to choose" inevitably isolates him from a significant portion of Catholic morality. Thus it would seem that Daschle may feel more comfortable in a denomination more open to his philosophy, and Carlson's letter seems to have politely suggested as much.

Mike Ward is a senior history major.

MAIL CALL

Speech areas limit expression

Despite an article in Monday's edition of The Battalion, many Aggies may not be aware that A&M has three free speech areas. To use these areas, a permit must be applied for and granted. Additionally, during an activity, the permit holder may be asked to leave by University officials for misrepresenting the intent of the activity.

The presence of free speech areas implies that the rest of campus is not a free speech area and that idea should be abhorrent to this student body. As Aggies, we entrust A&M to educate us to become good citizens but how can we learn of freedom from an institution that denies it to us?

Tyler Hickle
Class of 2004

Unborn fetuses are each unique

In response to an April 25 mail call:

The pro-life movement questions solely whether the unborn is part of the mother's body. The unborn's unique DNA and often different blood type and gender expose the only true claim as that of the umbilical cord.

Few pro-choice advocates would support post-birth pre-placental delivery abortion, though, showing that the true claim is one based solely on location, appearance, level of development and degree of dependency.

When have these criteria ever been used to eradicate life and not been called ethnic cleansing? Fifty percent of all abortions end the lives of very little girls, and abortion can never be safe for them.

Jacob Minor
Class of 2002