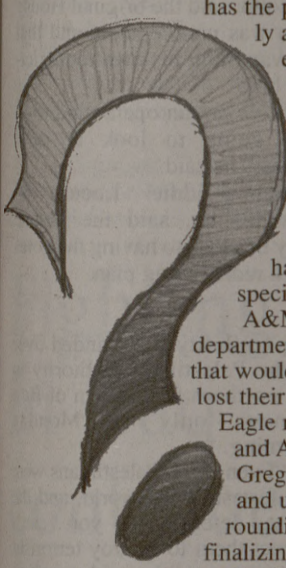


BUDGET CUT ACCOUNTABILITY

As departments are lost and some lose jobs, A&M silent on budget specifics

The effect of the government-mandated budget cuts, which will balance a \$9.9 billion state budget deficit, have spread across every department and facet of the Texas A&M System. The intensive and complicated process of planning where money can be saved is one of high public interest and



has the possibility of dramatically affecting the community. Already, eight people have felt the effects of the budget shortfall, with the possibility of more people losing their jobs if funding is cut again. But neither these eight people nor the A&M community had any forewarning that these jobs and departments would be lost, as the public has been kept in the dark about the specifics of the budget cutting process. A&M refuses to release details about how departments have been cutting back, details that would have benefited the eight who just lost their jobs. The Bryan-College Station Eagle requested copies of these documents, and A&M appealed to Attorney General Greg Abbott, claiming that the information and unnecessarily increased attention surrounding it would make the process of finalizing the budget too complicated, according to The Eagle.

But A&M is a public institution, and if viewed as a state agency, it should be open to public scrutiny and input. The Texas Public Information Act should guarantee access to budget documents and encourage input from interested and affected parties. Abbott failed to realize that a small amount of sensationalism could be sacrificed to better serve the community and produce a fair, agreed-upon budget.

A&M's general counsel Delmer Cain told The Eagle that the publication of the budget plans could possibly cause "unnecessary concern" and "complicate the process." But the process is already complicated. Without input from students, faculty and staff about which programs and positions are expendable, more damage could be done than necessary. Public input is necessary to ensure that the ways in which the budget deficit is being dealt with is in the best



SARA FOLEY

interest of everyone.

The concern to keep the documents shielded until finalized jeopardizes the fairness of the budget. Although employees who may not lose their jobs could, in fact, worry needlessly — one reason cited by

A&M for not releasing the documents — they would also be prepared and able to look for another place of employment.

Eight employees felt the blow of the budget cuts June 26 when A&M eliminated three departments and saved an estimated \$450,000, according to The Eagle. Although the names of all those laid off were not released, it is clear that they would have preferred fair warning that the loss of their jobs was a possibility, if not expected. If funding is again reduced, others could lose their jobs. They should not be kept in the dark about the decision-making process. A&M employees, college students and the B-CS community deserve to be aware of job cuts before the ax drops.

In a press release on Feb. 7, University President Robert M. Gates assured the community that "deans, vice presidents, the faculty senate and students all will have a voice in the process." Five months later, the voices of all of these groups are muted by budget planning where details are still unknown. While each department head has dealt with the budget cuts individually, a larger picture needs to be drawn, not only for the lower-rung faculty and staff, but also for the students that this will affect. Gates said in the same release: "As planning moves forward and decisions are made, we will communicate them to you."

What little communication has been present has been one-sided. Instead, the University acts while everyone else stands by, watching the budget slice through departments and programs without a voice from the people.



Sara Foley is a junior journalism major. Graphic by Angelique Ford.

Appeals court sluggish in Tulia 13 debacle

Inaction forced Texas Legislature to free the 13 wrongly imprisoned people

Earlier this month, 13 people from the West Texas town of Tulia who were wrongly imprisoned on false drug charges were finally set free. But the process that led to their release was long and tortuous, literally requiring an act of the state Legislature to secure the temporary freedom of the defendants, known as the "Tulia 13."



DAVID SHOEMAKER

This, however, shouldn't have been the case, as the State Court of Criminal Appeals should have acted more quickly in dealing with the cases of these individuals. Due to the obscure nature of the cases, some background is in order. According to articles from The Houston Chronicle, in 1999, a man named Tom Coleman was hired by an anti-drug task force based in Amarillo and sent to Tulia to catch drug offenders in the area. Once

there, he went undercover and supplied information that led to the arrest of 46 people and the conviction of 38, most of whom were black, based on his testimony alone. Only afterwards was it discovered that Coleman lied under oath in the cases and about his record as a private investigator.

Local District Attorney Terry McEachern was aware of Coleman's past problems, but failed to disclose them to the defense counsel in any of the cases. This, combined with Coleman's perjury, led Judge Ron Chapman to hold evidentiary hearings in which prosecutors admitted new trials should be granted to the defendants.

However, according to the Chronicle, the Court of Criminal Appeals didn't respond to Chapman's recommendation. Thus,

the final 13 defendants in jail, the Tulia 13, languished until State Sen. John Whitmire, D-TX, authored legislation allowing them to be released without bond. The Court of Criminal Appeals should be ashamed of its sluggishness on the matter, especially when peoples' lives were involved.

The Court of Appeals' behavior in the case has been embarrassing, even negligent, yet they have done nothing to correct it. If it had not been for the work of Chapman in holding the hearings that proved Coleman's testimony to be false and the tireless representation of the 13 by their defense attorney Jeff Blackburn, the cases might have never made it to the Court of Appeals at all.

The court, while it may have a heavy workload, must prioritize cases in some fashion, with cases such as Tulia up near the top of the docket. Cases in which individuals

are serving time in prison after being wrongly convicted are among the most urgent kind the court could hear, where someone's most basic rights to freedom are obviously being violated. This is especially true in a case such as this, where a District Court in Dallas already recommended new trials, and the convictions were all based on Coleman's false testimony.

What is even more pathetic is that the state Legislature, which meets once every two years, was faced with serious problems in many areas. Yet, they managed to pass a law freeing the Tulia 13. Yes, the Legislature managed to take more decisive action than the Texas appeals court system on something as important as freeing wrongfully accused defendants.

Something is wrong with the Texas appeals courts. In fact, State Sen. Rodney Ellis, in an article from

the Chronicle, called for "help to address a broken system." Any court system in which the legislative branch can address problems more quickly has serious problems, especially in a case like this.

This makes one wonder how many other important cases like that of the Tulia 13 are languishing on the Court of Criminal Appeals' docket. Even one is too many in matters such as these. The court should be ashamed of its behavior and should seek to remedy it by hearing the Tulia defendants' appeal as soon as possible, as the 13 are currently only free on bail. The court's duty to the state and to the defendants of Tulia demands it.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.

MAIL CALL

Gates' neo e-mail a poor effort at defending affirmative action

In response to the June 28, 2003, statement President Robert M. Gates sent on Neo system:

This University should be attracting all students of high quality on the basis of their merits and not the basis of their skin. It is a sorry excuse for recruiting when a system rewards the minorities and punishes the majority.

There is no way that Gates can convince me that any form of minority-based recruitment, monetary or otherwise, is fair and equitable to the students of Texas A&M. Only by recruiting the best students can we ever hope to achieve the goals of Vision 2020.

"Last Monday's Supreme Court decisions involving the University of Michigan appear to level the playing field with other universities throughout the country, enhancing our ability to attract high quality minority students," Dr. Gates says in his e-mail.

To me, this sentence says Dr. Gates wants to encourage anybody with dark skin to apply because the University will give them a scholarship. This is unfair, though maybe I misunderstand Dr. Gates' intentions.

Simply stated, the best students make the best university. A diverse university does not

make the best university.

Jason Harp
Class of 2005

Conservatives compassionate despite hating affirmative action

In regards to affirmative action and racism, racism will continue to be an issue as long as people make it an issue. Republicans and other conservatives simply do not care about what your race is. Rather, it is often those left-leaning people who tend to make an issue out of race. The rest of us do not care.

Also, conservatives are not out to destroy blacks, homosexuals and other minorities, they do not go to white pride rallies, and they are not waging a "war on women." The idea that any of this is true is a paranoid delusion. Wake up and face reality.

Cody Sain
Class of 2006

Success of equestrian team is being overlooked

Dallas Shipp, in his article about Title IX, states that the Athletic Department is "forced" to have

varsity teams for women, such as the equestrian team, because the football team takes up so many scholarships.

I support our football team wholeheartedly and would love to see a men's soccer team, but I think we owe a lot more support to the equestrian team. This is a former club team that had no athletic funding for years. It has now been an NCAA sport for only a few years and this year, our ladies won their second consecutive national championship! Those ladies are representing A&M the way we hope all of our athletic teams will. Gig 'em girls and keep up the good work.

Dallas, keep fighting for your soccer team, but make sure you don't unintentionally knock a winning organization.

Andy Garner
Class of 1998

Curse of the Bambino a reality for Boston Red Sox fans

I would like to point out the inaccuracy of Jeff Allen's linkage between Johnny Sain and the Curse of the Bambino.

Johnny Sain pitched for the Boston Braves, now the Atlanta Braves, in 1942 and from 1946 to 1951, amassing four 20-win seasons in his tenure with the Braves, which was interrupted,

like so many ballplayers of that era, by World War II.

The Curse of the Bambino is also taken quite literally by Red Sox fans. Babe Ruth said the team would never win another championship after he was dealt to the Yankees for cash. In that time, the Yankees have captured 38 pennants and 26 World Championships. The Red Sox have been to four World Series, losing each one in seven games since Ruth was traded before the 1920 season.

As a life long Red Sox fan, it should be noted that before the Sox retired Carlton Fisk's No. 27 and rearranged the order of the retired numbers to numerical order, the right field facade proudly displayed 9-4-1-8, September 4, 1918 was also the day before the start of the 1918 World Series, the last one won by the Red Sox, who ironically defeated the Chicago Cubs.

Another note, the best pitcher in the 1986 World Series, the last time the Red Sox had the chance to play in one, Bruce Hurst was statistically the best pitcher for Boston, rearranging the letters in his name ... one gets B. Ruth Curse. Until the Rangers can actually come up with something better, I do not believe any curse rests on their franchise that is comparable to the Curse of the Bambino in Beantown.

Ed McDonald
Graduate Student