

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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LIES BEHIND THE CURTAIN

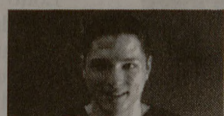
'Truth' anti-tobacco campaign misleads consumers about industry practices

By now, almost everyone has been unfortunate enough to have witnessed a "truth" anti-tobacco commercial. Among other things, the ads feature young people ranting in front of "truth's" orange curtain about the ills of the imaginary group "big tobacco" and tobacco casualties piled high in the streets in front of an unspecified tobacco company's headquarters. But, to simply dismiss the "truth" campaign as childish and a waste of money would be letting it off too easily.

In sharp contrast to the presumptuous name the group has given itself, "truth" misinforms. It lies about and generalizes tobacco company practices, disseminating misleading information to discredit a legitimate industry. The real truth is out there, but it is not behind the orange curtain.

"Truth" wants people to believe that the major tobacco companies it lumps together under the menacing title big tobacco are oblivious to the health issues surrounding tobacco use and are adamantly opposed to smoking prevention. The 50-plus TV, print and Internet ads that "truth" puts out say as much. In reality, "truth" itself receives millions of dollars in funding from tobacco companies as a part of 1998's Master Settlement Agreement, in which tobacco companies were found partially liable for smoking-related health issues.

So, tobacco companies in fact are funding tobacco prevention and education efforts, if in no other way than in the form of "truth." And though "truth" doesn't deny its Master Settlement Agreement funding, it refuses to credit tobacco companies for the millions they've spent encouraging tobacco prevention. This is, at



GEORGE DEUTSCH

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the very least, misleading on "truth's" part.

Consider that of "truth's" many ridiculous commercials, only about 5 percent refer to tobacco industry standards and practices since 1990. The tobacco company policies

"truth" criticizes in its campaign are outdated and not representative of today's tobacco industry. Most of "truth's" ads criticize documents and business practices from the 1980s, 70s, 60s and even 50s. How can the current tobacco industry be held accountable for

grievances from more than 50 years ago? Simply put, it cannot.

However, the generalized and poorly constructed indictment of the tobacco industry doesn't end there. "Truth" takes issue with the unsavory practices of big tobacco, but it never actually explains why big tobacco is. "Truth's" Web site, www.thetruth.com, even admits that "It's not even so much about smoking. It's about an industry. ..."

Well, if millions of dollars are being spent defaming an industry, people should know who the major players in the industry are and what offenses each company has committed. "Truth" gives no such information in its ads or on its Web site. Instead, it takes obscure tobacco industry documents and outdated practices and manipulates the facts so that it seems as if all tobacco companies operate this way. This is unacceptable from a group that supposedly prides itself on candor and honesty.

In reality, tobacco companies aren't trying to mislead anybody; they admit they're trying to sell cigarettes. They do not brainwash people into lik-



ing their products. Besides, smokers themselves cannot be left out of the equation, as they choose to smoke. A needless indictment of the tobacco industry will not change this. Peoples' decisions are their own to make.

The big tobacco companies that "truth" so openly demonizes have long been taking steps to educate the public about the risks of smoking. In just one example, Altria — formerly Philip Morris — has spent 2003 distancing itself from

past industry practices by encouraging people to quit smoking in its advertisements and offering valuable smoking prevention links on its Web site. In reality, there is only one group that openly lies about the tobacco industry: "truth."

George Deutsch is a senior journalism major. Graphic by Gracie Arenas

Partisan agenda pushing special session

Gov. Perry using dirty politics, breaking precedent to focus on redistricting

Gov. Rick Perry, an Aggie, has apparently forgotten about the Aggie Code of Honor that he pledged many years ago while a student at Texas A&M. He might still be sound in his pledge to not lie or steal, although this is dubious in the world of politics, but Perry may have forgotten about his oath to not cheat. He has decided that precedent does not matter, budget deficits are trivial and the purpose of elected representatives can be changed to fit his agenda. In the last legislative session, Perry backed a Tom Delay sponsored redistricting plan to bring a new Republican majority to Rep. Delay's House of Representatives. Redistricting is done every 10 years with the census, but this time around, Perry is showing he is willing to break precedent and resort to any trick — in this case a special session — to push his purely political agenda.

The tactic that Delay and his puppet Perry are employing to push this redistricting bill through the Texas Legislature has set an ugly precedent in Texas politics. Tim Storey, a redistricting analyst for the National Conference of State Legislatures, said, "People who study this area can't find any case in the last 100 years of mid-decade redistricting without a court order," according to the Washington Post.

In a dirty power grab, much like a kid in a candy store, Perry sees this first Republican domination in Texas government in



JUSTIN HILL

recent memory as an open door to use whatever means possible to change the Texas political system to fit his personal political agenda.

Do Texans want the governor to call a special session at a cost of more than \$1 million every time Texas switches parties? Former Texas Govs. Preston Smith and Dolph Briscoe weighed in on

Perry's use of redistricting for purely partisan purposes in The Houston Chronicle. Both expressed grave concerns regarding Perry's redistricting plan and pointed out that the time to redistrict was in 2000-2001. Gov. Ann Richards was the last to call a special session, but the topic was education, a topic that is beneficial to all and not purely partisan politics.

Texas is in dire need of leadership and direction, and elected officials have decided that political positioning is more important than underfunded colleges and universities, soaring homeowners' and health insurance, the poor performance of public education and the rights of disabled Texans. The money allocated to redistricting purposes could be used to provide more children in Texas with health insurance or save the jobs of the 40 people that A&M President Robert M. Gates has said will have to be let go. The uninsured children and the employees of Texas who are losing their jobs are probably not feeling the benefits of Perry's underhanded fiscal irresponsibility.

While Texas faces massive budget shortfalls and A&M is

forced to lay off employees and cut departments, Perry has found it beneficial to spend \$1.7 million on this first special session, according to the Austin American-Statesman. Perry is using \$1.7 million in taxpayer money to invalidate a court ordered redistricting plan, break precedent and push a political agenda that is considered confusing by most Texans — none of which has any effect on alleviating Texan's woes.

This special session may not signal the end of Perry's dirty politics. In The Houston Chronicle, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst said Perry had said he would call another special session if the redistricting plan did not go through this session. What could A&M or the public school system do with the \$3.4 million that Perry might use fleecing Texans?

A&M had to take a cut of roughly \$3 million in funding due to the budget crunch, and if Perry decides to call another special session, he is telling Aggies where his allegiance lies — in the pockets of Washington, D.C., power brokers. The Republican stranglehold and Perry's political career could be a fleeting whim in Texas history if this is the type of leadership Texans can expect to receive.

Justin Hill is a junior management major.

MAIL CALL

Graduate pay increases should be based on merit

In response to a July 21 mail call:

Regarding the physics graduate students' mail call, "Insurance Problems Hit Graduate Students Hard," I wish to address a few points.

Graduate students with a non-working spouse and children may be affected the most by the new insurance premium increase. However, typifying this scenario in the general sense is misleading. Statistics from the A&M human resources department estimate that 8 percent or less of the graduate student body who receive insurance fall into this category.

Monthly graduate stipends across the entire University average roughly \$1,000 after taxes. Interestingly, the monthly stipend level for a physics graduate student is approximately \$1,750 with tuition and fees often fully reimbursed the first year. Stipend levels as well as tuition reimbursement within the University are extremely variable and are determined at the departmental level, not by upper-level University

administration. The statement, "international students...are not allowed to seek any supplemental employment," is not accurate. Any graduate student may request that his work hours be increased to 30-hours per week during the summer through an approval process within the Office of Graduate Studies.

Suggestions that tuition remission is provided to parents and/or married students for only those simple facts are not congruent with fair labor practices. Pay increases should be based on merit, not simply the number of dependents. I say that comfortably as a married student myself.

It is true that the quality of life for graduate students at Texas A&M is in question. Last Thursday, I charged the Graduate Student Council's Executive Committee to create a comprehensive quality of life assessment for all graduate students at A&M. The report will compare A&M graduate programs with their counterparts in similar universities across Texas and with the top public institutions listed in Vision 2020. Factors such as stipend amount, tuition levels, and insurance costs will be adjusted for costs of

living and compared. I expect this report to be completed sometime in the fall semester. Until we possess quantitative evidence to support the general statements often made, we are only blindly guessing at solutions. Information is our greatest asset.

Joshua M. Peschel
Class of 1998
President, Graduate Student Council

Aggies must make views known to administration

If the journalism department at Texas A&M is eliminated, as recommended by Liberal Arts Dean Charles Johnson, it would be a great loss to the University, its students, and the country at large. A&M is a rare bastion of relative conservatism in the world of academia and, as such, no doubt contributes greatly to a balanced world view as reported by the media, a world view that it bears mentioning is in need of balancing.

As a former student of this great Texas University, I find it disgraceful that my alma mater would discontinue a valuable program in the name of "fiscal

necessity." I do not accept that the A&M system is so hard-pressed as to require this draconian measure.

Should I be mistaken about the degree of the school's financial distress, I would submit that there are undoubtedly better methods of budget trimming than eliminating educational programs.

I urge all Aggies of good conscience to make their views known to the

administration of our school on this matter. Recent years have seen far too many changes in long-standing traditions at A&M and in this case, as in others, the administration is in error if it thinks it is taking the optimal course of action.

Marc Moore
Class of 1988



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