

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

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## Bleak future for education

### Sexual orientation is not a basis to segregate students in public high schools

Once an alternative education program within the New York City educational system, the Harvey Milk School will open its doors this fall as a fully-accredited public high school. But the fledgling school is being overshadowed by controversy. Other than sharing similar interests in music, clothes and dating, the students of Harvey Milk will share something else — they will be gay.

According to the New York Post, William Salzman will preside over an "academically rigorous school that will specialize in computer technology, arts and a culinary program." With its new identity as the nation's first accredited public school for homosexuals, Salzman said, "This school will be a model for the country and possibly the world." But does the world want a future for which this school would be a model?

The primary goal of the school is to promote "an opportunity to obtain a secondary education in a safe and supportive environment," according to the Hetrick-Martin Institute, which is the home of the Harvey Milk School. As the Hetrick-Martin Institute reports, homosexuals are taunted in school. They suffer from depression, are more likely to attempt suicide and are regularly the targets of disparaging slurs.

With respect to homosexuality's effect on the psyche of a teenager, the Harvey Milk School would most certainly help lower these statistics, however the cost is considerable.

The school touts itself as an open, accepting environment — exactly what every public school in the nation asserts — yet it focuses specifically on homosexuals as if



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their high school experience is somehow distorted beyond that of what other minority groups face every day. Any child who does not fit the elusive, if not illusionary, model of "popularity" is taunted and teased just like his homosexual peers. High school is such a singular and irrational environment that not even the Harvey Milk School will overcome it.

Whether it is bias or a simple miscalculation, the Harvey Milk School is forgetting that, as a high school, it will be subject to the same environment that engulfs other high schools. Be they public, parochial, single-sex or coed, all high schools are subject to rampant hormones, acne and superficiality.

If, as the homosexual community suggests, gay people are just different only with respect to sexual orientation, there will be just as many taunters at the Harvey Milk School as there are at any other high schools in the nation. Sexual orientation may be off the table, but one can be sure that weight, looks and intelligence will not be.

One's sexuality may not cause depression at the Harvey Milk School, but the isolation and fears that are in every high school student will most certainly be preyed upon by their peers — whether the school claims to offer an accepting environment or not.

While the school will be trying to offer its pseudo-utopian society, it will most certainly face a political fight as well.

There is something troubling about a public school moving forward with this initiative. If the Harvey Milk School was private, the same previously-stated issues would still ring true; however, its public status is what causes one to pause.

The Augusta National Golf Club caused a stir among certain people with its adamant refusal to allow female members. As a private organization, it can let whomever it wants join. The

Harvey Milk School borders on doing much the same, but with money from the public New York City Education Department.

New York city taxpayers have spent more than \$3 million — \$30,000 per student — to renovate a school whose vision and philosophy is as myopic and self-delusional as southern public schools were 50 years ago.

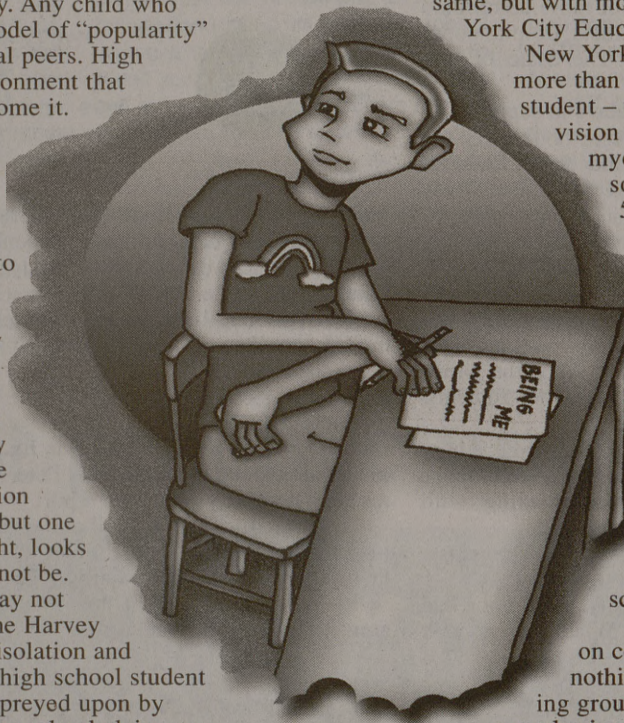
While the Harvey Milk School acknowledges that any student may apply regardless of sexual orientation the school is self-described as one for gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

And with its inaugural year enrolling only 100 students — surely the sexual orientation will play a factor in the school's selection process.

Separating students based on certain characteristics is nothing new. Whether it's isolating groups because of skin color or sexual orientation, it's still segregation and it has no place in the public sector. Unlike Augusta National, the Harvey Milk School has no right to facilitate the isolation of students in New York City.

Exuding ignorance and discrimination, the Harvey Milk School will begin classes this fall. With the intangible costs for society far exceeding the \$3 million price tag, the school presents a bleak future for American education.

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Graphic by Gracie Arenas



## 'Good government' bill is wrong for Texas

### Hurt feelings led to cut funds for an independent state regulatory agency

In a democratic system like that of the United States, separation of power plays a key part in the effective functioning of government and its survival. But here in Texas, the Legislature has forgotten the importance of this concept. It has passed legislation removing the power of independent audits from the state comptroller's office and given this power to the Legislative Budget Board.

This is like asking one hand to watch what the other is doing. In the name of "good government" — the very thing this bill supposedly encourage — the Legislature is doing real harm to Texas. The state is suffering from a severe budget shortfall, but there is no reason why the comptroller's office suffered such drastic cuts. Other state agencies are undergoing staff and funding cuts as well. For example, the State Department of Health will have to cut 240 jobs, as will the Texas Education Agency and Department of Public Safety, according to The Houston Chronicle. These are cuts that will affect services received by



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Texans across the state.

But Senate Bill 22, which passed in the Senate and is currently awaiting approval in the House, will have an even more fundamental impact on the way Texas government functions and on the quality and quantity of services received. The bill provides for the movement of the e-Texas, the arm of the comptroller's office that conducts audits, and school audit divisions, which monitors the finances of school districts, of the office to the control of the Legislative Budget Board.

State Comptroller Carol Keeton Strayhorn told the Chronicle that the school audits had saved \$9.5 billion for taxpayers and \$503 million for school districts just in her tenure as comptroller. Part of conducting such audits is looking over the spending and appropriations habits of the Legislature itself, which is why the idea of transferring such functions to the LBB is absurd.

The LBB will now be asked to watch over state spending as a whole and do school audits on top of its regular work.

The LBB must prepare audits that may not be friendly to the actions of the Legislature. The bill that contained this provision was promoted as a "good government" bill, designed to limit waste and streamline the state bureaucracy. The elimination of an independent watchdog for the Legislature is an act contradictory to that goal.

It appears that the real reason for the provision in the bill has more to do with hurt feelings than good government.

Many believe the attempt to gut the comptroller's office is because some legislators dislike Strayhorn. She accused them of having a "spending party" in the last session and has used her office's power of audit in an independent fashion. Strayhorn herself accused Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst of "shepherding" Bill 22 through the Senate, according to the Chronicle.

But Dewhurst is not alone in his support for the bill. The measure's author, Sen. Rodney Ellis, appears to have his own axe to grind.

In 2001-2002, Ellis was the chairman of the Senate Appropriation Committee, and would be one of those chiefly responsible for Strayhorn's

"spending party" accusation. Ellis is quoted by the Chronicle as saying, "I would say she had more notice than I had back when I was finance chair before she called a press conference to say we're having a party."

Ellis, Dewhurst and others who seem to have grown tired of Strayhorn's grandstanding style and her pesky independent audits look like they have banded together to swat her political mosquito once and for all. Sen. Eddie Lucio of Brownsville told the Chronicle, "They're trying to stop her because she's a powerful state official, and removing these two areas guts the heart and soul of her agency."

This is a case where hurt feelings and displeasure with an auditor not under their control has spurred the Legislature into action — to dispose of the problem by killing the offending agency. Sadly, the cause of good government in Texas will likely suffer from the results of this vengeful "good government" bill.

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## Pentagon's futures market was reprehensible

(U-WIRE) CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Do you happen to have the uncanny ability to predict assassinations of world political leaders? Are you able to prophesize the dates of suicide bomber attacks in the West Bank? Or are you simply enamored by the thought of profiting from the misery of others? If you answered yes to any or all of three questions, you may find this bit of news interesting.

On July 28, the Pentagon reported that they had developed a plan for an online futures market that would allow people to make money off of worldwide political unrest. I wish I was making this up.

Here's how it works: You can tell from recent news that the leader of the country Roonopia, King Kelly Rooney, has incited turmoil amongst his people and is on a one way train to getting himself assassinated. You buy futures contracts for a buck each predicting his demise, and when he is finally killed, the payoff would be something like \$5 per future.

I apologize for the supremely goofy scenario, but this is something very real. The plan was to have 1,000 anonymous traders registered by last Friday. The market that coldly gambles on the lives of leaders and civilians alike was veiled under the professional and governmental sounding name of "Policy Analysis Market." While the Pentagon seemed pretty thrilled by their new futures market, Congress, thankfully, was utterly shocked.

The two outspoken critics of the program, Sens. Byron L. Dorgan, D-N.D., and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., brought this program up on the Senate floor July 28, and expressed disgust and disapproval of gambling on people's lives. A mere day later, members of the Senate of both parties were in an outrage and called for the immediate end of the program.

Though we can all take a collective sigh of relief, there remain the unresolved issues of dealing with the creators of the program and finding who approved the funding for such a reprehensible idea. The Pentagon justified the Policy Analysis Market in stating that

it was the "broadest possible set of new ways to prevent terrorist attacks." Their defense included reminding us that futures trading has been effective in predicting oil prices and movie ticket sales. Maybe I just don't get it, but isn't there a world of difference between making money on predicting box office sales for "Gigli" and profiting off the death of political leaders?

The greatest scrutiny has come over the project's developers: an

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advanced projects unit of the Pentagon called Darpa. You may know Darpa best for their creation of Terrorism Information Awareness, a program created to fight terrorism by going into computer databases to collect information like credit records, medical records and travel records, just to name a few.

A key developer of both the Policy Analysis Market and the Terrorism Information Awareness is retired Rear Admiral John M. Poindexter, a man with an interesting past indeed. His resume highlights include being Reagan's national security adviser, being a part of the Iran-contra scandal (when the Reagan administration funded anti-Communist rebels in Nicaragua with the proceeds of selling weapons to Iran) and being convicted of lying to Congress, which was later overturned.

How much funding has gone towards Darpa you may ask? Well, The New York Times reported that the Bush administration has sought \$8 million through 2005 for the Policy Analysis Market alone. Another New York Times article stated that the terrorism futures market program have already cost taxpayers a nice \$3 million.

OK, so I'm happy that the Senate defeated this program and that Darpa is under close examination, but I'm not satisfied with officials who let these programs become developed without any skepticism. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz stated he only found out about the Policy Analysis Market in recent news reports. He declared, "I share your shock at this kind of program. We'll find out about it, but it is being terminated."

With this big of an uproar it's no surprise that the people over-seeing defense spending are quick to disassociate themselves from the program.

So, where do we go from here? For starters, let's hope that the media coverage and scrutiny of Darpa triggers a similar disgust to the Terrorism Information Awareness. I can't be the only person freaked by a program that seems like it's from a George Orwell novel.

Also, there needs to be a push to remove Adm. Poindexter from his office. What kind of sick person actually thinks that the way to fight terrorism is to have people sinisterly gambling money on the lives of political leaders? Well, we know the answer to that question. Senators Dorgan and Wyden summed it up best, "The American people want the federal government to use its resources enhancing our security, not gambling on it."

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