

EDITORIAL

MEET THE BATT

Newspaper promotes change

The Battalion has been a vital institution to the Texas A&M community since 1893, dating it as one of the oldest Aggie traditions. But like any tradition, in order to thrive this newspaper must be willing, ready and able to change. As the Fall 2003 semester commences, closing the gap in October on 110 years of service, the duty of The Battalion to its campus readers has only become clearer, necessitating a new mission forged from the old.

This semester, we seek to connect with the student body by using new methods to engage the reader. We have invited six student leaders to submit issue-oriented opinion columns to The Battalion every Friday for a new Forum page. This will grant student leaders a space to discuss the pros and cons of issues in the news and issues of importance to the student body they serve, which will provide student leaders with a direct link to their constituents. The Forum page will also have more space for mail call, creating more room for reader feedback.

The newspaper must also become more accessible to the campus in order to uncover the student body's needs and expectations. To address that, The Battalion will host two Meet the Batt sessions in the Memorial Student Center's Forsyth Center Galleries. The first session will be held today from 2 to 4 p.m., and again on Wednesday, Nov. 5.

If you can't make it to Meet the Batt, please contact us with your suggestions and hopes for changes within the newspaper. The only way this newspaper can respond to student needs is if we are aware of them. Please call us at 845-3313, drop by and see us at 014 Reed McDonald Building or e-mail editor@thebattalion.net with suggestions. To submit mail call, please send your 200-word letter to mailcall@thebattalion.net.

THE BATTALION

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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@thebattalion.net

MAIL CALL

Constitutional abuse of power

In response to John David Blakley's Sept. 1 column:

The United States' Constitution has been misinterpreted for years, most recently by the state of Alabama and again by Blakley in his Sept. 1 column. He states that the decision to move the statue was appropriately made by the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on the basis of separation of church and state. The Constitution says nothing about separation of church and state. The First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..."

Liberal judges, such as the ones in Alabama abuse their power, misinterpreting the Constitution and the intent of our founding fathers. Another interesting note: take a trip to the Supreme Court of the United States' building and you will find a painting of Moses holding none other than the Ten Commandments.

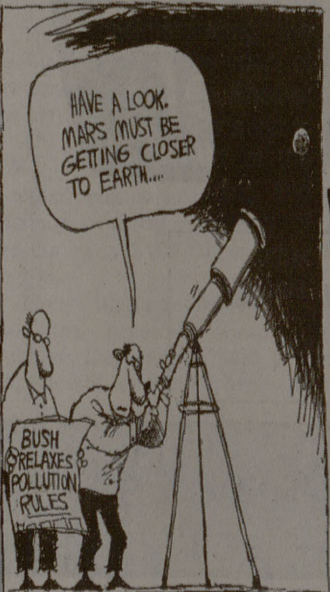
Mark Wood
Class of 2003

Bus Ops changes hurt students

I am a former student who is a little upset about some of the things that Transit Services is doing now. I worked at Bus Ops for three years and helped pass the \$50 Transportation Fee to ensure that the service would be good for students and faculty. At the time, we promised more service, better buses and more frequency. Yet now that they are in a budget short-fall, they are taking it out on the employees and its customers — students — by cutting back service on Friday and canceling all weekend service, citing budget problems. However, they are able to install bike racks to run on the Fish Camp route. They can cut back service and driver's pay, but can add bike racks?

This is just an illusion of trying to "help" students get to campus. Transit Services needs a reality check and go back and make due on promises it made two years ago to get the initial Transportation Fee passed.

Eric Webb
Class of 2002



Democracy at work

California recall process is not the circus it appears

By now the editorial cartoon featuring the Disney character Goofy on the state seal of California has spread around the country faster than the Sobig.f bug. To many it must epitomize the circus — er, recall process — that is currently underway in the Golden state. However, let us not look at California as a fool's utopia, rather let us watch real, modern democracy happen and let us learn from it.



MICHAEL WARD

Perhaps one finds humor in the fact that the gubernatorial candidates in California range from an aging quasi-funny comedian to a porn star (and, necessarily, a porn hustler) to a former child actor. While the serious candidates are the ones rightly receiving the most coverage, the oddities, by their very presence, have colored the recall process plaid. Thus, California involuntarily presents a lecture on the foibles of modern democracy.



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If they had just done away with the first provision, the 65 signatures and \$3,500 and stuck with the second, the book-length ballot that will appear in October and much of the subsequent criticism from the nation would have been avoided. It was an understandable mistake but one which hardly discredits the entire recall process.

But it is not the logistics of recalling a governor or obtaining a spot on the ballot that has stirred the political elite. Instead, it is the very notion that the masses — average Californians — hold at their whim the power to unseat a governor. The haughty perch from which they sit, be it Sacramento or Washington, D.C., has suddenly become less stable — something they both fear and cannot fathom.

Ordinary citizens have suddenly realized that politicians serve at their pleasure; they do not serve at the politicians'. A recall is not only reasonable but vital to democratic government. If 900,000 people think removing Davis is a good idea, then it should be put it to a vote across the entire state. Such a transfer of power from the oligarchic regime — what representative government has largely become — to full-fledged democracy is far too vulgar for many elites. This political snobbery is an epidemic from which California, fortunately, has been quarantined — at least for a while.

Ironically, this snobbery has come from the right. The small-framed conservative giant, George Will, called the process "plebiscitary cynicism" in a recent Washington Post column while a San Diego Union Tribune Op-Ed piece succinctly summed up the bipartisan opposition: "Davis has committed no crime, has not been accused by any law enforcement agency of committing any crime, is physically and mentally capable of serving out his term, and just eight months ago was re-elected in a free and open election."

A recall brings the power back to the most local entity — the people themselves. In the same way that a grand jury does not judge one's guilt or innocence but rather it determines the necessity of a trial, 900,000 Californians have decided not to judge Gov. Davis's guilt but rather allow the nearly seven million other Californians

who voted in the 2002 election to judge Davis's guilt or innocence for themselves.

Granted, the San Diego Union Tribune piece accurately points out that Gov. Davis has indeed committed no criminal act. If he's guilty of commanding little respect from the majority of Californians in October, then he rightly should be removed.

The process is far from a joke and even farther from being a circus.



Given a vast array of candidates, Californians have whittled down the choices, according to the most recent L.A. Times poll, to just a handful — Bustamante, Schwarzenegger, McClintock, Ueberroth and Simon. Gary Coleman and Company failed to place.

Choice and freedom breeds power, something which Californians have shown themselves to be very capable of handling even in front to upturned noses of many politicians and talking-heads.

California gets picked on enough as it is. Granted, given its unabashed liberal leanings, most of it is justified. However, this time the state should be exemplified rather than mocked. One supposes that few of the critics of the recall outside of California could say whether their state had a recall process at all. The recall is not "plebiscitary cynicism;" it is not about Gov. Davis or California. It's about democracy, and it's about bringing back power to the people.

Michael Ward is a senior history major.

An obligation to a former ally

In mid August, the United States decided to take military action in war-torn Liberia, and the results were significant. By the time the last 150 of approximately 250 U.S. troops in and out of Liberia departed, the infamous former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor had met the terms of his exile, a peace accord had been signed and a new potential leader, Charles Gyude Bryant, had been selected.



DAVID SHACKELFORD

This is good progress, but during the time the United States spent in thinking over its level of intervention, hundreds of thousands of Liberians lost their lives. Fourteen years of civil war were declared over after 11 days of U.S. ground troop presence. Since the United States had the power to put a check on the conflict all along, the delay to act was illogical and unacceptable. Moreover, if Liberia's situation didn't command priority, its history as a U.S. ally should have.

Liberia has a long history with the United States. The country was founded by freed slaves in 1821. Liberia declared war on Germany in World War I upon United States' appeal when they had

no intention of stepping in on their own accord, and during World War II Liberia hosted a major military base. The United States used Liberia as an outpost to monitor communist activity in Africa during the Cold War. The deciding vote to form the state of Israel was cast by Liberia, again because of U.S. importunity.

But the United States did not prove to be a reciprocal partner. Near the end of the Cold War the United States became a factor in the events leading to Liberia's destabilization. In the mid-1980s, the Reagan administration promoted Samuel Doe, Charles Taylor's predecessor, who is described as "an illiterate thug" in an Aug. 18 The New Republic article. By favoring certain tribes over others, Doe stirred up ethnic differences that would escalate into civil conflict. The stage was set for Charles Taylor and his rebel forces, who in 1989 tore a bloody trail toward Liberia's capital of Monrovia.

The future was bleak for the old U.S. ally and the United States was partly to blame for helping Taylor gain power.

Aware of the advancing threat, neighboring countries assembled a peacekeeping force in 1990 under the United Nations to maintain a cease-

fire and ensure democratic elections. More than half of the force was made up of underpaid Nigerian soldiers, who began looting and selling drugs and munitions to rebel factions. As their stay continued, they committed human rights violations escalating to murder and torture.

"The future was bleak for the old U.S. ally and the United States stood partly to blame for helping Taylor gain power."

A U.S. effort to send military advisors could have, at the least, prevented much of the violence and corruption, but Washington kept its distance.

Now, under a similar U.N. policy, a predominantly Nigerian peacekeeping force is present in Liberia once again. Naturally, there is little confidence among the people that this second round of West African presence will see more benefit than detriment.

The international community lobbied for U.S. military assistance. The Bush administration answered with a slim \$10 million and several ships

anchored just off Liberia's coast. Similar to 1990s policy, the Bush administration sat on its hands and refused to commit troops or advisers.

In addition, the United States once again worked against the United Nations. After the United Nations indicted Charles Taylor for war crimes, the administration ordered his exile instead of supporting his delivery before a U.N. Special Court in Sierra Leone. The administration said the United States would not step up militarily or monetarily until Taylor left Liberia. This decree made no sense.

Instead of hastening his exile, the United States gave Taylor more reason to stay. In July, Bush was quoted by The New York Times as saying, "We're deeply concerned that the condition of the Liberian people is getting worse and worse." Though compassionate, these words would not have been needed if the United States had not taken years to provide vital help to a country that deserved it. The United States should embrace its role as Liberia's defender.

David Shackelford is a senior journalism major.