

EDITORIAL

WRONG ANSWER

Bill will not help students

Recently, Rep. Howard McKeon, R-Calif., introduced a bill into Congress promising to curb the rising costs of college education. The Affordability in Higher Education Act of 2003 proposes to hold who is responsible for significantly rising tuition costs accountable to parents and students, but it misplaces the blame for tuition increases on institutes of higher learning.

The law would create a "College Affordability Index," which will be made available to the public through a user-friendly Web site. The index will compare tuition increases to inflation rates over a three-year period. The universities whose tuition increased at greater than two times the rate of inflation would lose access to Title IV programs, including Perkins Loans and Work-Study. Pell Grants, Direct Loans and Stafford Loans would be exempt under the bill.

One might wonder how taking financial aid money away from universities is supposed to help students afford a college education, especially since most universities are not responsible for determining the cost of higher education.

In only 14 states does a university campus determine its tuition costs; the remaining 36 states' university costs are determined by governors or legislatures. It makes little sense to sanction universities for tuition costs when they may not have any control over the increases. To do so would only hurt students more.

States have a responsibility to provide adequate funding for public universities, but the percentage of state funding going to higher education consistently fell throughout the 1990s. Now, in a time of state budgetary shortfalls, this funding has decreased further. If the federal government wants to hold someone responsible for rising tuition costs, it should not be the universities. It should be the states that have shown little creativity when it comes to funding educational institutions.

THE BATTALION

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MAIL CALL

Student deserved recognition

In response to an Oct. 27 article:

I must say that, after reading the long feature article about the tragic passing of Levi Windle, I was a little disappointed to see that the original story about the also tragic passing of Cheng-Hsien Chiang was only allotted a tiny space at the bottom of the front page. I felt it was a bit unfair to give Chiang such a small article at the bottom of the page.

However, I was pleasantly surprised the next day to see a longer article about this fellow Aggie, which let us all know just a little bit more about this young man and who he was.

Thank you for the second article, which will appropriately serve to inform Aggies of Chiang's unfortunate passing, and to remind us to keep his family in our prayers, as we are all hopefully doing for the family of Levi Windle.

Mike Sullivan
Class of 2004

Communism not a threat to U.S.

In response to an Oct. 29 mail call:

If you seriously believe that the communists are still a threat to the free world, it is time to watch the news.

China has undergone many reforms over the past decade to modernize its society. It is not the same China that President Nixon visited in the 1970s. Slowly but surely, China has begun to open its doors to new democratic ideals. It is far from being a democratic country, but it is nowhere near the communist monster you make it out to be. Socialism is fading from the spectrum. Secondly, a demo-

cratic nation does not guarantee success by any means. Even though Russia had an awakening, its economy has seen little if any success since its shift to democracy. The army is poorly equipped, and the government is having trouble keeping its budget.

If we are ever to have space colonization, its going to take the expertise of people from all over the world.

Greg Rivera
Class of 2007

Board must listen to student wishes

I am appalled by the letter I received under my door from the Department of Residence Life, which was meant to deter any student from joining Student Bonfire. I would have to say that the majority of students at A&M would love to see Bonfire burn again. We have to start out with a step in the right direction to getting Bonfire back on campus, and bonfire off campus is the place to start. While the University may look down upon this action, nine of the 12 families that lost a child in the Bonfire of 1999 came out last year and supported off-campus bonfire. This support should show the A&M Board of Regents and the departments of this University that the tradition of Bonfire is worth pursuing in any fashion necessary.

In the future I would appreciate consideration from the Residence Life in the matter of telling me and the rest of the student body the events that we shall participate in. Regardless of the location of the bonfire project, the University should respect and stand behind any student decision to bring about positive change and unity to this campus.

Karl Moellering
Class of 2006

Terror in the skies

College student protested security, deserves mercy

On Nov. 19, 2001, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was formed in response to the 9-11 attacks. President George W. Bush proclaimed that the measure "should give all Americans greater confidence when they fly," according to The Houston Chronicle, but not everything that should happen actually does.

Fast forward to Oct. 20 and the charging of Nathaniel Heatwole, a 20-year-old college student, who in a self proclaimed act of civil disobedience, smuggled box cutters and other prohibited items onto airliners.

Heatwole could face up to 10 years in prison for his Ghandi-like political criticism because the members of the TSA are embarrassed that after two years of work, they have accomplished virtually nothing. Although Heatwole's actions were illegal, they pointed out a huge flaw in the system, and he should receive no jail time.

If Heatwole had not pointed out this flaw in airline security, it could have been exposed by real enemies of the United States. Beginning Feb. 7, he managed to smuggle box cutters, matches, bleach, modeling clay and even a knife past security agents at two major airports, according to The Dallas Morning News.

It is common knowledge that the 9-11 hijackers used box cutters to usurp control of the planes that crashed into two New England cities. Not only did the TSA allow this to happen again, but Heatwole proved that ingredients used to make a bomb could be smuggled onboard as well. Any rational American would rather Heatwole expose this gaping hole in airline security than an al-Qaida operative.

One college student smuggling some items onto jets a few times does not mean a huge flaw exists in airline security, right? Wrong. Michael Boyd, president of Boyd Group Consulting, which advises airports on security, said current safety measures, such as



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strengthening cockpit doors, have not actually increased safety. "It will just be another piece of wreckage when the bomb goes off," Boyd said.

The Houston Chronicle outlined other times security has been breached. In four separate instances in 2002, different individuals brought knives, box cutters, razors, pepper spray and loaded pistols on commercial airline planes. These are just the instances in which the contraband was either found or reported. The amount of unreported objects that have invariably been taken on airliners is chilling to comprehend.

The magnitude of Heatwole's message should now be clear. Why did Heatwole convey this message? Was it a hoax or a pointless frat boy stunt? These acts were "an act of civil disobedience with the aim of improving public safety for the air traveling public," Heatwole told the FBI.

Many times throughout history, people have performed acts of civil disobedience to change how society views issues. Rosa Parks sat in the front of the bus when blacks were not allowed, and people would chain themselves together to protest restaurants that served only whites. Many of these protesters went to jail; although, everyone today would agree that these people were pioneers in the movement to bring equality to the races. Heatwole's actions fall into the same class as the civil rights protests of the 1960s.

Many would argue that Heatwole's protest "was not a public service. It was a very foolish and dangerous course of action," as U.S. Attorney Thomas DiBiagio put it. Followers of DiBiagio's ideology might push for a stringent or even the maximum punishment.

As much as these people might regret the embarrassing light that Heatwole shone on the TSA, it was neither dangerous nor foolish.

Federal officials "determined this individual did not pose an imminent threat to national security," a federal law enforcement official told The Associated Press.

Heatwole must have known that he would be punished for his political protest, and he cared enough about the safety of the nation to sacrifice his freedom so this issue would be brought to the public's attention. He accomplished this with flying colors, and the least the government could do is have mercy on him.

Matt Rigney is a junior journalism major.



SETH FREEMAN • THE BATTALION

Game promotes negative stereotypes

The controversial GhettoPoly board game promises "playas" the experience of "buying stolen properties, pimpin' hoers, building crack houses and projects, paying protection fees and getting car jacked," according to the product's Web site. Consequently, it has been removed from the shelves of Urban Outfitters stores and blocked from sales on Yahoo! and eBay sites in response to an onslaught of marches and protests decrying the game for perpetuating negative black stereotypes. The game is undeniably racist and "demeaning, repugnant and reprehensible, to say the least," as Kweisi Mfume, president of the NAACP, explains in The New York Times.



LINDSAY ORMAN

However — as many critics have been quick to point out — the game is a relatively inconsequential symptom of a much larger problem: America is set on glorifying a culture of deviance, violence and ignorance.

The celebration of "gangsta" culture runs rampant in rap music. GhettoPoly creator David Chang accurately reflects symbols of hip-hop culture as propagated by superstars in the images and themes he selects for his game, right down to GhettoPoly man — a black thug in a bandana and dark glasses, toting a marijuana joint, an Uzi and a bottle of malt liquor, according to the Chicago Sun-Times.

Quite disturbingly, this heavily caricatured figure in all of his offensively exaggerated manifestations of "gangsta" style might be the artist's persona behind any number of popular rap songs.

A few examples: Rapper 50 Cent's Web

site opens with a gunshot noise followed by a picture of him pointing a gun at the viewer from the computer screen. Lyrics to songs such as his hit "P.I.M.P." exalt a sleazy, flashy lifestyle that degrades women and promotes violence: "Yeah, in Hollywood they say there's no b'ness like show b'ness/ In the hood they say, there's no b'ness like hoe b'ness ya know."

Other songs, such as rap superstar Nelly's "Country Grammar," turn deadly assaults such as drive-by shootings into subjects of celebratory rhyme. With a "street-sweeper, baby, cocked ready to let it go," the occasion of violence is not complete without a joint: "Light it up and take a puff/ Pass it to me now."

Nelly's song champions violence and drug use as part of thug life, while Nelly himself defends his new Pimp Juice energy drink as a legitimate product for athletes, comparable to Gatorade, according to the Christian Science Monitor.

However, the Rev. Paul Scott, founder of the Messianic Afrikan Nation, calls attention to the regressive nature of its implications on the progress of the black community: "Four hundred years ago, black women were being sold into slavery, and now someone wants to come out with a drink selling women."

Although selling the drink is not the same as selling women into slavery, Scott makes his point. One must join him in wondering why hip-hop culture icons seem to be striving to marginalize urban black men and women whom they claim to represent. As Leonard Moore, head of African-American studies at Louisiana State University, more succinctly puts it, "When it's a fad to celebrate black misery and poverty, something is wrong."

By infusing glamour into actions that are unmistakably criminal — being a pimp or a prostitute, beating women,

killing other men, doing drugs — rap music does a tremendous disservice to inner-city children who grow up thinking they should conform to, rather than combat, these stereotypes.

In a speech last summer, Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League, warned that many young black men associate manhood with the ability to injure or damage another man, according to The Times. No kidding. This is the image of black manhood that tasteless rap continues to successfully encourage.

Even at Texas A&M, the uproar in January over a "ghetto" party planned by a residence hall combines the relevancy and problematic nature in discerning what is offensive and inappropriate. Complications arise because of mixed messages. On one hand, black rappers celebrate "gangsta" life. On the other, a game manufactured by a Taiwanese man that does the basically the same thing is protested and hated.

Rather than defending the game, the party or the stereotype on those grounds, it is time to realize that to solve the larger problem of violence, ignorance and prejudice, all of these negative images must be denounced, regardless of the color of their authors.

The Black Eyed Peas may have the first hip-hop song to effectively capture this message: "Negative images is the main criteria/ Infecting the young minds faster than bacteria/ Kids act like what they see in the cinema/ Yo, whatever happened to the values of humanity/ Whatever happened to the fairness in equality/ Instead in spreading love we spreading animosity."

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major.