

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 13 • Tuesday, December 9, 2003

## Money: It's a hit

### U.S. Treasury Department wastes what it pitches by advertising the \$20 bill

Last month, the U.S. Treasury Department's Bureau of Engraving and Printing issued a new \$20 bill. The new notes feature a colored background along with a new watermark and security thread in an attempt to thwart counterfeiters.



MIDHAT FAROOQI

Curiously, the debut of this redesigned currency was accompanied by a huge marketing campaign — at a reported cost of \$32 million. The money paid for such excesses as media events, print ads, an interactive Web site and even TV commercials. The entire effort is quite useless: There is no need to sell money.

If they haven't seen the Web site, most Aggies have probably seen the TV ads by now. In one of the commercials, a man with glasses withdraws some money from an ATM. The upbeat background music suggests that this is an ordinary event and, indeed, the machine gives him a stack of new \$20 bills. The man pauses and raises one bill in the air to further study it. An announcer says, "You can see right away that things are different" as a smile of satisfaction appears on the man's face. "We've added color," the announcer says, "and changed the portrait." Next, the announcer assures us that this \$20 bill, like the old one, is still worth \$20. He then concludes with the new money's slogan: "Safer, smarter, more secure."

The second ad has Mr. Glasses buying some CDs and receiving the new \$20 bill in change.

As the announcer talks about details such as the "embedded security thread," the guy does an elaborate and unbelievable series of special-effects-aided tricks with the bill, spinning it on his finger and so forth. The man leaves, and the woman behind him steps up to the register and eagerly asks, "Can I get a new \$20?"

While the campaign seems as though it wants to sell money, it really seeks to notify everyone that a change in currency is taking place. The government is saying that, "The new bill has some color and new design elements to discourage counterfeiters, but it's real, so don't panic." Such announcements are not unprecedented: The introduction of the Euro a few years ago was accompanied by an "awareness" campaign, too.

However, it is not government's responsibility to build immediate awareness among the cash-handling public. That job belongs to the media. Bureau officials claim the ad campaign was needed to prevent confusion for cashiers, foreign businesses and programming of domestic vending machines. But allowing journalists to report on the new changes would have been equally effective and virtually cost-free.

Tom Schatz, president of Citizens Against Government Waste, said he feels Bureau officials overestimated the amount of confusion the revised \$20 bill would cause. "Either the government thinks Americans are not sufficiently intelligent to believe that a bill with Andrew Jackson's picture, the words 'Federal Reserve Note,' the signature of the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and the number 20 on it is a \$20 bill, or Washington just has far

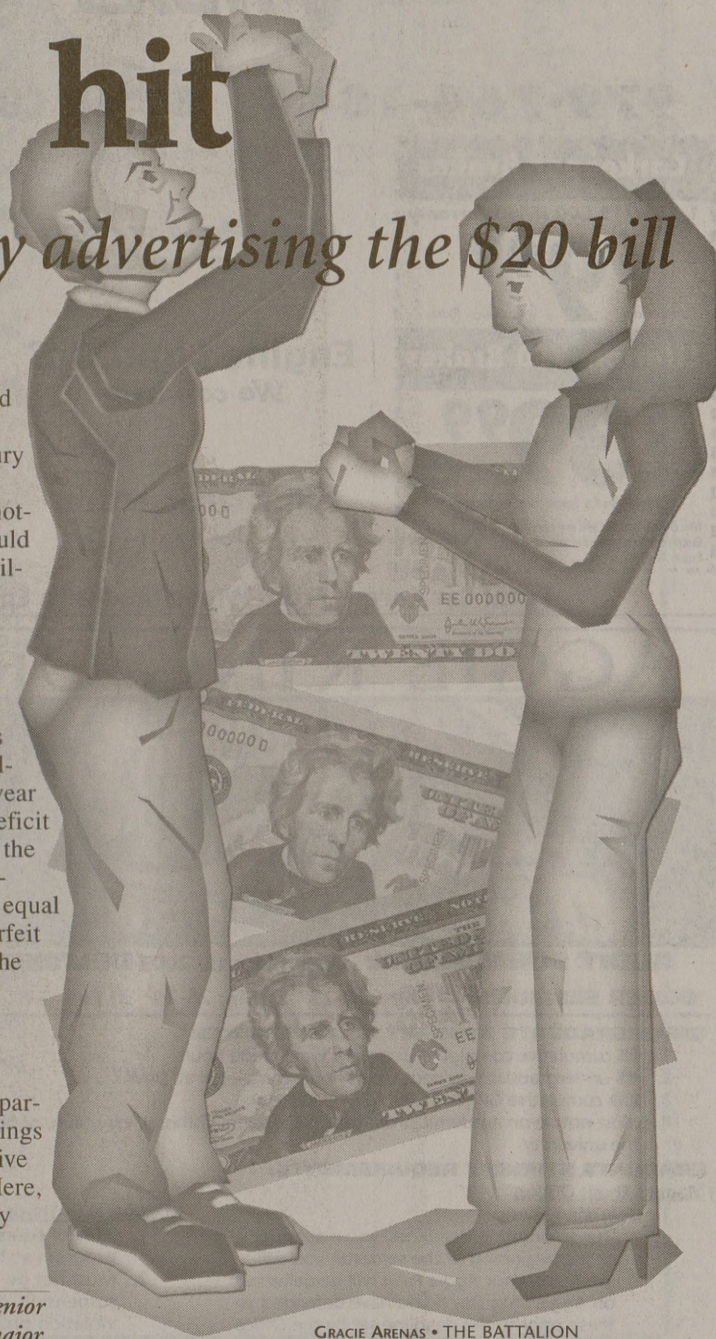
too much money to spend," he said.

New designs for the \$50 and \$100 notes are scheduled for 2004 and 2005, and the Treasury department plans to spend an additional \$21 million in promoting them. Bureau officials should learn from their current \$32 million mistake and get rid of the flamboyant introductions planned for the \$50 and \$100 bills.

Such needless expenditures are just what Uncle Sam needs to avoid with a record \$374 billion deficit in the 2003 fiscal year and a projected \$480 billion deficit in 2004. Interestingly enough, the \$32 million cost of the government's current ad campaign is equal to 74 percent of all the counterfeit money that was circulated in the United States in 2002.

The bottom line is that Americans don't really have a choice in whether to use the money. Anyone who wants to participate in buying or selling things is going to have a clear incentive for accepting the new notes. Here, at last, is one product that truly sells itself.

Midhat Farooqi is a senior genetics major.



GRACIE ARENAS • THE BATTALION

## Students' political apathy hurts A&M, perpetuates stigma

If you are standing up right now, perhaps on the perpetually crowded Wehner Express, or heading to your biology class in Heldenfels, take a moment to sit down and relax. You'll need to after you read this next sentence. Texas A&M is not a conservative school. There, it's been said. And if you haven't yet scoffed, thrown the newspaper down, huffed and kept walking, feel free to read the next few paragraphs and find out why.



MICHAEL WARD

A&M may not be all that conservative and, for that matter, it's not very liberal either. It is, however, what Residence Hall Association President Chris Mahaffey mentioned a few weeks ago in his Forum column: apathetic.

Case in point: One of the largest protests on this campus in the last five years occurred last month. The Young Conservatives of Texas organized a satirical bake sale supposedly to facilitate dialogue on the issues of diversity and the installation of the new vice president and associate provost for institutional assessment and diversity, Dr. James Anderson.

Given his lukewarm reception, he's in for a rude awakening if he believes, as The Eagle quoted him, that "students (at A&M) are not apathetic about their political views."

This protest, centered around the key issue on campus — diversity — brought out .045 percent of the student population. It seems as though apathy wraps around this campus like a thick blanket on a cold day. Perhaps only a ritual effigy burning of University of Texas football coach Mack Brown and University of Oklahoma football coach Bob Stoops in the Academic Plaza (a viable tradition to replace Aggie Bonfire?) would have brought out more students.

There is no sense of proportion on this campus. A minute fraction of the A&M populace protests affirmative action and

suddenly A&M is, once again, too conservative. Never mind that most of those who attended the bake sale were voicing criticism, not support.

Similarly, last week disparaging remarks were made to prospective students. The ignorance was met with little sympathy as University President Robert M. Gates and various student leaders lambasted the slurs and the assault on an otherwise welcoming community.

Yet, a sense of the conservative majority hits A&M students. If a handful of conservatives band together for a cause — whatever it may be — the opposition points to it and says "See, A&M is so backwards." In reality, the dissension, as well as the rest of A&M, should be thankful that 10 students got together for a cause in the first place. That's what's backwards at this school, not the conservative ideas. As it is, the unfettered action of a vocal minority, the YCT, perpetuates the conservative myth because of the inaction and silence of the rest of the campus.

Those who have castigated A&M's "conservatism" have offered little, if anything, in opposition. One finds that the changing rhetoric from the young right it is met with what amounts to chirping crickets from the young left. However, added together — the noise and the silence — the political activism on this campus, in general, is pathetically low compared to other schools.

For instance, while the University of California at Berkeley boasts 156 various political student organizations, according to the Berkeley student organization Web site, A&M offers a paltry 18. And though the school is stereotyped as liberal as A&M

is conservative, the republican movement at Berkeley is 10 times larger than A&M's. And, for that matter, so is the democratic faction — suggesting just how politically disinterested A&M students are.

With 10,000 fewer students than A&M, UC-Berkeley manages to engage more than 10 times the number of students in various political activities than A&M does — a discrepancy that is mirrored around the country at peer institutions. Driven by indifference toward the status quo at A&M, much of the blame rests on the shoulders of its students.

But not all of it.

The lack of faculty engagement with students, reflected in surveys such as the Princeton Review and the horrendous student/teacher ratio on this campus, facilitates a stagnant student intelligentsia — a population both wanting for encouragement and enthusiasm and simply wanting to get a degree and get out. With such an abundance of resources, both mental and financial, there is no reason that A&M's student body should rest in the doldrums of activism. But it does.

Call it what you want: indifference, apathy or inaction. The life of this school is withering away.

Tens of thousands of maroon zombies float from one overcrowded seminar to the next; the degree has become the focus, rather than the path to earning it. As activism slowly dies on this campus, those who are to be held responsible are the only ones who can revive it — the administration, the faculty and the students.

*"There is no sense of proportion on this campus. A minute fraction of the A&M populace protests affirmative action and suddenly A&M is, once again, too conservative"*

Michael Ward is a senior history major.

### MAIL CALL

#### New parking plan is just a money-making scheme

In response to Natalie Younts' Dec. 8 article:

I am confused how Mr. Weis's plan works. Everything looks great on paper, and I'm sure it will accomplish everything he claims. The problem is that I'm not sure how this will benefit the students and faculty.

Let's give Mr. Weis the benefit of the doubt and say that his overselling technique will not prevent people from having spots. Will this plan improve convenience?

The reduction of 30-minute areas and the implementation of assigned lots would mean a drop in vehicle access to certain parts of campus for those who do not have permits for that area. Also, some of my peers with current red lot permits don't leave their spots for fear of losing the front row spot they currently have. I purchased a garage spot to avoid this problem. This rationale rules out convenience as a reason. What about the price of the permits? Weis stated last month there was a chance of an increase in price once his plan was implemented. Everything that I have seen concerning this idea seems very speculative, and I do not see it as anything more than a way to bring more money to the University.

Kevin Thompson  
Class of 2006

#### Selling numbers annoys students trying to study

I am a student who lives on campus. Recently I have been getting five to seven phone calls a day from telemarketers trying to sell me things. I was told that Texas A&M had sold the phone numbers to these companies for additional money. I think that is disgusting. Because the school needed more money I have to deal with these people calling me about a credit card when I am trying to study. Something needs to be done to stop this.

Kevin Metter  
Class of 2007

#### Gays deserve the same civil protection

In response to Matt Rigney's Dec. 5 column:

It is time that monogamous homosexual couples receive the same protections as heterosexual couples have.

One of the main reasons for anti-gay sentiment is the belief that homosexuals are necessarily morally deviant. And yet, in the name of that prejudice, conservatives wish to punish precisely those gays who are seeking to live

the conservative ideal of marriage and family. By excluding homosexuals from full participation in American society, we entrench the very deviancy for which we blame them.

Robert Garmong  
Department of Philosophy

#### Being homosexual is not as simple as a choice

People choose to be gay the same as we choose our own race. I'm sure gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people choose to be discriminated against, made fun of and at times even assaulted. They did not choose the way that they feel; all they can do is to accept it and live their lives to the fullest, just like everyone else. Do you expect them to suppress their feelings to please you? Do you believe they should just live their life as a lie? I have spoken to many gay people, and they did not choose to be gay. Some in fact have stated that if it were up to them they would rather be straight, but they know that that is not who they are and it would be false to live their life as a lie. It is their life, not yours, and whether you like that or not, everyone deserves the right to marry the person they choose to love.

Michael Lisoski  
Class of 2003

#### A loving home is the same, regardless of orientation

In response to a Dec. 8 mail call:

So a loving relationship between two consenting people should be banned, while the rape (if it's non-consensual, it's rape) of an animal should be condoned?

Let's not forget, marriage was invented as an economic and political event first, and a sacred one second. Dowries and bride prices were paid, family alliances were cemented and tax breaks were given. It wasn't until later that the "marriage as a sacred union" and even love were brought into the picture. Not only that, but many marriages don't even happen in religious establishments, such as a common law marriage, and these people still get the tax benefits and knowledge that they are joined until death or divorce part them. I say let anyone, gay or straight, marry whomever they wish. Give them the same rights and benefits as any other couple. Let them adopt children and give them a stable, safe place to grow up. I don't think consensual, responsible love is wrong. If you enrich someone else's life by providing them support, understanding, trust, and wisdom, and they return the favor, I think that's right.

Lauren Salinas  
Class of 2006