

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Privatized space travel?

Bush's plans for a lunar base and landing on Mars are idealistic, not realistic

On Jan. 14, President George W. Bush charged NASA with the task of replacing the space shuttle as well as establishing a lunar base and beginning manned flights to Mars by 2020. While his vision of an astronaut planting the American flag on Martian soil within the next 20 years is an inspiration to all who value scientific learning and achievement, the journey to get there efficiently and successfully requires more than Bush has planned.



MIKE WALTERS

The unfortunate disaster of the space shuttle Columbia last spring demanded a new evaluation of the aging orbiter program, and so far, NASA has no solid design plans for its replacement. There is also the issue of tax dollars; NASA's budget for the next five years is \$86 billion, and Bush wants to add one dollar to that amount each year. Though Bush may know where he wants to go in how many years, the details of this plan don't exist and no one can predict what the costs will be in the end.

As Americans gather their W-2s and take a look at how much of their money the government is going to take from them, the idea of Bush wanting to spend even more of their money doesn't appeal to most. Fortunately, there is a plan that would reduce the amount Americans would pay in taxes and at the same time make the space program more efficient and less costly. It may even make the lunar base a reality in less time than Bush wants.

The simple solution—privatize the space program. When one stops to consider it, the idea of the government holding the keys to all space-related research and technology makes little sense. Ocean exploration is conducted through private companies, and even college students engage in

yearly competitions to design new robotic submarines. Freeing the realm of space technology means making it available to more of the newest and brightest minds of the public, which means faster progress.

The huge amount of paperwork and regulations that the government enforces in all its institutions is an enormous hindrance to anybody going through the system, which is plain to students when they wait in line to get a new driver license. If automobile construction were restricted to government regulation the way the space shuttle is, everyone would still be driving Pintos and El Caminos. Holding technology back by its place in the bureaucracy is senseless and counterproductive. The fact that astronauts still ride 20-year-old spacecrafts into orbit is proof of this.

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Allowing for this sector to be open to competition translates into companies working hard to be the best, most efficient, safe and reliable service to the stars, just as the automobile industry does for the highway. It would form new industries such as space tourism, allowing a honey-moon in space to move from science fiction to reality. No one can deny that there is an interest in this field, though for the decades that humankind has been in space, only one man — Dennis Tito, who traveled with the Russians in 2001 — has ever been to space as a tourist.

The research that goes along with designing space technology would aid other industries in the form of aircraft design, computers and new materials would happen at a faster pace. Companies would be free to allocate funds as they see fit,

paying their workers at competitive rates, funding research and conducting as many experiments and flights as they need without having their budget dictated by congressmen who don't have a clue what their business involves.

Obviously, privatizing the space program would take a multi-billion dollar load off Americans, but eliminating NASA wouldn't



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eliminate the industry—it would enhance and expand it. Companies would immediately form to launch satellites and men into space, conduct research to make newer, cheaper rockets and have space stations and lunar bases built according to the demand, without waiting on a U.S. president to mandate it.

We must end the government's monopoly on space. If Americans want to see men on the moon and Mars, rocketing toward the stars as we have the potential to, we cannot allow the gov-

ernment to hold our dreams down. By privatizing the space program, we would undoubtedly see technology leap forward faster than it ever has before. Americans should see their money paid for space programs not in the form of a check to the IRS, but for a ticket to the moon.

Mike Walters is a senior psychology major.

Jacko's fans prove themselves equally bizarre

The music blared last Friday in Santa Maria, Calif., from a sound truck a few feet away from Michael Jackson as he entertained an estimated crowd of more than 1,000 fans from the hood of a black S.U.V. Fans cheered and chanted words of support and



NICHOLAS DAVIS

endorsement to the pop superstar. Members from the Nation of Islam provided the security and even distributed invitations to attend an after-party retreat at Jackson's Neverland Ranch. The New York Times described the affair as “a remarkable scene that mixed a courtroom appearance with a frenzied street carnival.” The spectacle occurred immediately after Jackson left a court hearing to which he arrived 15 minutes late and pleaded not guilty to nine felony charges.

Jackson's tardiness and flamboyant display, while offensive to the legal system, is hardly a troubling issue. After all, the man is an entertainer. The disturbing matter, however, pertains to the way he applauded

and caroused with a man charged with sexually molesting a child. These individuals showed no respect for the severity of the charges Jackson currently faces. In fact, many have already mentally dismissed the nine felony charges involving seven counts of lewd acts with a child and two counts of administering an intoxicating agent to a child to facilitate abuse. While these individuals have the right to voice their opinions, to adamantly maintain Jackson is innocent without hearing all the details pertaining to the case is sheer foolishness. If one looks at the prior conduct of Jackson as it relates to children, it becomes apparent that these current charges might have some validity to them and must be taken seriously, especially by his fans.

This is not the first time Michael Jackson has been accused of molesting a child. As reported by the World Net Daily, 10 years ago the parents of a 13-year-old boy, Jordan Chandler, accused Michael Jackson

of molesting their son during an overnight stay at Neverland Ranch. Subsequently, the parents dropped the charge after a substantial sum of money, estimated between \$15 to 20 million, was deemed suitable compensation for the violation of their child. As a result, Jackson's controversial behavior has continued.

“(Jackson's) precarious behavior with children must not go unnoticed and unsanctioned simply because the court has yet to rule on the matter.”

In a 2003 interview with British journalist Martin Bashir, Jackson admitted he still sleeps with children

in his bed. According to a Fox News report, later that year, during a “60 Minutes” interview, Jackson responded to a question regarding the acceptability of sleeping in the same bed with children by saying, “If you're going to be a pedophile, if you're going to be Jack the Ripper, if you're going to be a murderer, it's not a good idea.” What, if anything, would transform the practice into a good thing? Clearly the man is reality-impaired, and so are the fans who ignore statements such as this one.

Now some will vehemently proclaim Jackson should be considered innocent until proven guilty, and they are right. But that assertion merely states the obvious. Indeed, the public should refrain from condemning Jackson prior to hearing all of the evidence, but it should not immediately exonerate him either. His precarious behavior with children must not go unnoticed and unsanctioned simply because the court has yet to rule on the matter. Think about it. What would happen to the average citizen who chose to engage in a similar lifestyle with children? They

would be shunned by society. Certain standards must be upheld and the practice of recreationally sleeping with children should not be one of them. Unfortunately, though, Jackson's celebrity status, in the minds of many, justifies a little more leeway. That is, justifying.

Outside the courthouse and at the Neverland shindig, the fans' behavior inadvertently sent a message: Jackson's conduct with children is acceptable and the charge of child molestation is trivial. These people are at the very least, guilty of being naive. Jackson's behavior is hardly acceptable and the charge, carrying a maximum of 20 years, is certainly not trivial. Jackson, for his part, better wise up and respect the severity of the situation. The public should wait on the evidence before deciding to condemn or support him and refrain from trying him merely in the court of public opinion.

Nicholas Davis is a senior political science major.

MAIL CALL

Legacy decision gives all equal chance

In response to Tessa Howington & Ron Layer's Jan. 20 mail call:

I am disgusted at the way some people have reacted to the removal of the legacy admissions policy. Some said that the University has lost its “uniqueness” and that it “makes it harder for legacy students to get admitted.”

Maybe you guys have to actually read what its removal is. It doesn't make it harder for legacies to get in, it just gives every applicant to Texas A&M an equal chance, do you get it? Don't try to berate President Gates because of his decision, I think it was fair, and I don't believe that legacies should be too overconfident that they will be admitted to our school over someone who has probably worked harder.

Mr. Layer, if you think our school's “uniqueness” lies in the legacy admissions policy, then you don't really think Texas A&M is that unique if it's based solely on that. Come on, if an applicant deserves to be at Texas A&M, then they will get in, and I believe our school can do a great job in the coming years without this policy.

For anyone who is angry their child might not get into A&M without these four points, then honestly, they deserve to go somewhere else. If you truly believe in the Aggie Spirit, then the

removal of the policy should not be something that would bother you. There is no reason for the “colorful language” that Ms. Howington threatens to use, it shows no class and that is truly not the Aggie Spirit. Perhaps, she can direct her “colorful language” at me because I am very willing to discuss this issue with her.

Onyinyechi Okoro
Class of 2006

O'Neill can't overshadow Bush's success

In response to Sommer Hamilton's Jan. 20 column:

Bush is doing his job. Citing O'Neill as proof of a corrupt presidential leadership is irresponsible for a journalist. You have taken one man's opinion and presented it as truth. You suggest that the war in Iraq has no merit and that Bush had been planning it from the beginning. Well, you are right that it was on the drawing board before Sept. 11 (no one has denied that). In fact, the situation in Iraq has been on the government's agenda for 12 years. This is called being responsible and prepared. Here is merit for you. We had serious reason to believe that Iraq was developing or about to develop weapons of mass destruction, and although we have not found any, we have found mountains

of the material needed to develop them. It is also a very real possibility that he destroyed them before we invaded. And what about crimes against humanity? He was an evil tyrant who murdered his own people. For decades liberals have fought for “world peace,” and when we finally do something about it, all of a sudden we are trigger-happy. The economy is rising, the deserving people of Iraq are liberated, Bush is running an honest administration, and no book written by a guy who got fired from the White House is going to change my opinion on that.

Sharla Parker
Class of 2003

