

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Unraveling Chet Edwards

Students should vote fellow Aggie Edwards to represent them in District 17

While most Texas Democrats are still cursing House Majority Leader Tom Delay and company for unjustly redrawing district lines,

Congressman Chet Edwards, a primary Republican target for ousting, has put the ordeal behind him. Now serving his 14th year in Congress, Edwards is more interested in dealing with issues that affect his current district, as well as looking ahead to additional concerns held by the newly created District 17, of which Texas A&M and Brazos County will be a major component. Edwards announced on Jan. 15 that he will run for the District 17 seat, and in November of this year, A&M students should seize the opportunity to elect not only a former Aggie, but a congressman who has proven his dedication to central Texas and the United States.

Edwards' current district includes Fort Hood, home to 42,000 soldiers and the largest active-duty U.S. Army post in the United States. He said he is saddened that he will not get the opportunity to represent Fort Hood after this term, but considering his Congressional



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record regarding troops and veterans, all may be assured that Edwards will continue to give military needs more than mere lip service. He recently received the National Security Leadership Award from the American Security Council and was named Legislator of the Year by the Association of the U.S. Army, an award Edwards said he is especially proud of.

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One does not have to dig too deep to find out why such honors have been presented to Edwards. In the Nov. 8 Democratic Response to the President's Weekly Address, Edwards called for increased funding for V.A. hospitals and improved healthcare for injured troops returning from Iraq. He also brought attention to the Bush administration's proposal to cut \$1.5 billion in military construction funds for housing and healthcare for troops and their families, which would deny daily necessities to those who are dedicating their lives to their country.

Edwards has also earned a seat on the House Appropriations Committee, which recently set out the appropriations bill for 2004. One particular feature of the bill is emblematic of Edwards' dedication to the people of his district. He managed to add \$6.9 million to the legislation for transportation, education, water and community development in central Texas.

“Improving our roads and transportation system and protecting our quality of water,” Edwards said, “are crucial infrastructure investments to ensure our economic growth and quality of life in central Texas.”

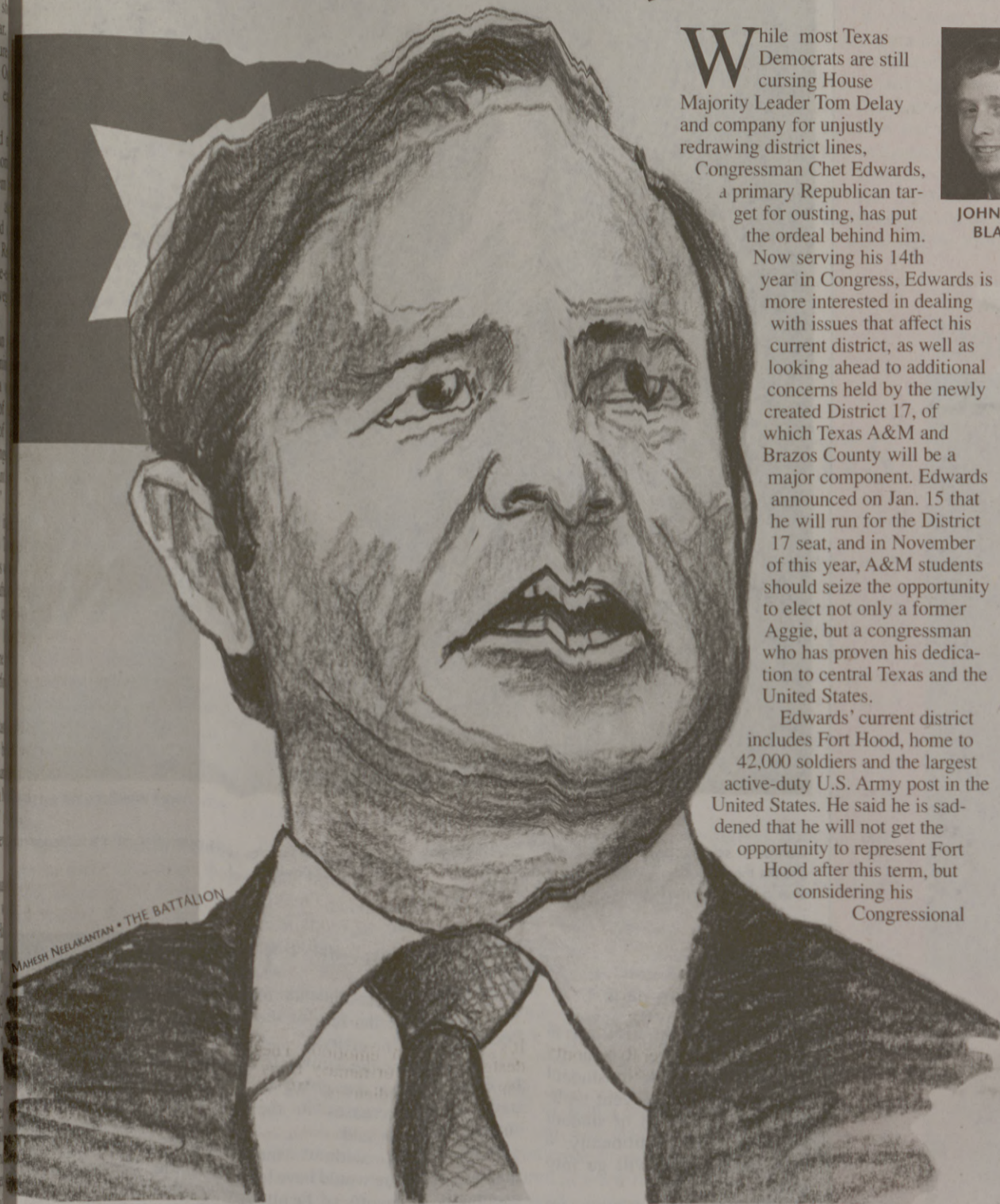
When in Washington, D.C., congressional leaders too often forget about those back home. But Edwards' track record has proven that he will not fall into such a trap. This conviction should be the goal of any elected representative, and Brazos County deserves such dedication.

Healthcare is also among Edwards' chief concerns. Last month, he introduced the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Reduction Act into Congress. The bill will allow Medicare to negotiate with drug companies, resulting in lower drug prices for seniors.

Though most fail to realize the consequences of a huge national debt, its effects are felt in every community through increases in the cost of buying a home and building a business. Fiscal irresponsibility leads to future generations — including the student presently in college — having to pay off debt. As a sponsor of a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution, Edwards knows that fiscal responsibility, not reckless spending, helps Americans today and down the road. Edwards has said the failure of an administration to be fiscally conservative and the resulting rising debt, is analogous to the government charging huge expenses on the next generation's credit card.

When Brazos County decides who it wants representing its interests, it should not come down to politics and partisanship. What will matter is experience, a track record that shows genuine and heartfelt concern for constituents at home and dedication to the United States and those who serve in its armed forces. With these attributes in Edwards' corner, any candidate running against the congressman will be in for quite a race.

John David Blakley is a sophomore political science major.



Performance-based pay not ideal for teachers

There has been much debate recently over whether or not teachers' salaries should be partially based on their students' progress in standardized tests. Many teachers are rightfully outraged by the idea that their incomes may be affected by standardized test scores and children's opinions of their classes. Currently, teacher salaries are based on experience and education. Though it may seem natural to base salary increase on the performance of a given teacher, student grades may not be directly related to their teacher's ability. This could hurt certain teachers more than others — regardless of their teaching ability — by giving an insufficient raise to some of them, and more than what is deserved to others. “You have to be convinced that you can, in fact, measure the progress that students make in a year, and that you can fairly tie it to the teacher,” said Michael Allen of the Education Commission. One of the main problems with the argument Allen presents and the proposal for teacher salary increase is whether the progress of the students really be measured accurately and effectively by the standardized tests now in place. While it may seem that standardized tests are efficient and a practical means for knowledge comparison, they are not particularly standardized from state to state, nor are they fair for students from lower income areas and schools. If this new pay scale is indeed going to be set in place, the school districts and their locations need to be taken into account when the teachers are being observed and the final scores are being calculated.



LAUREN ESPOSITO

If the teacher is in a lower income area, the test scores of their students may not, historically speaking, be as high as the scores of those students residing in more affluent school districts. One cannot help but wonder if the teachers who took on a challenge by trying to bring quality education to a poorer area are going to be penalized for doing so. If teachers' pay is based on student performance, this scenario seems feasible. If that is the case, teachers will not want to work in these specific regions, knowing that their pay will be significantly less than it would be in other areas. It will then become even harder to staff these districts, which only hurts the children in these areas in the end. The National Education Association, the country's largest teachers' union, does not support tying teacher pay to student scores, said Tom Blanford, associate director for teacher quality. Such a plan could ignore the kind of performance that doesn't show up in test scores, such as a teacher who prevents a child from dropping out or one who inspires excellence in poetry. With the teachers' increase in pay being primarily based on test scores, it would give them no reason to interact with the students in any other way than to just cram basic material into their heads in preparation for a standardized test. This is not the type of education that is helpful for children in schools now and in the future. The teacher who is able to reach the child, and unlock his or her imagination or a dream is more worthy of a pay raise than one who can make students retain point-specific information.

On the other side of the argument is the idea that many other professions are in the same boat as teachers, and their pay is based solely on their performance. “Lawyers do it, engineers do it, business people do it,” said Louis Gerstner Jr., the Teaching Commission chairman. “All professional people ultimately come up with methodology to judge the difference between great performance and mediocre performance. Just because it's hard doesn't mean we can't do it.” Although Gerstner makes a point for pay-based performance, judging such performance and the pay that would accompany it would be subjective and arbitrary. According to the Teacher Quality Bulletin, a survey done by Public Agenda found that 51 percent of parents want teachers in their district to receive monetary rewards if their students consistently perform well on the tests. Would the parents also want the teachers' pay to be docked if their students did not perform on a standardized test at a level that they chose? It comes down to the fact that if the students put forth a sufficient amount of effort, their teachers would receive a raise at the end of the year because, in theory, the students will then do well on their standardized test and demonstrate the ability of the teachers at their school. But even if the students do score well, and the teacher is able to get a raise, there really is much more to rating a “quality” teacher than a few standardized test scores, and that should be taken into consideration.

Lauren Esposito is a senior English major.

MAIL CALL

Visitors send thanks to 'good Samaritans'

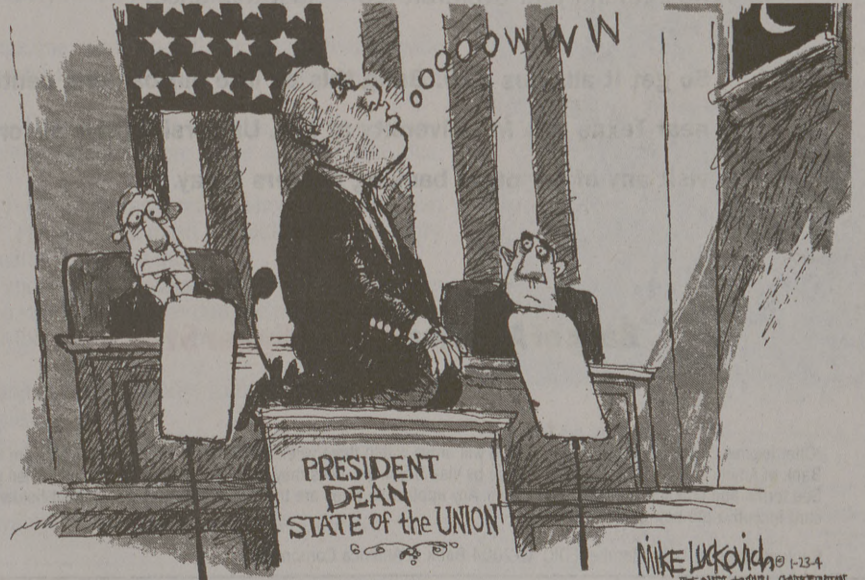
On Dec. 5, at 5:30 p.m., I, along with my wife, Rose Marie J. Nagle, were passing through College Station. I am a native Texan, and I have been doing research on the Nagle genealogy. I wanted to visit Nagle Hall, which was named in honor of my grandfather's brother, James Nagle, who I believe was Dean of Men at Texas A&M in the early 20th Century — affectionately known as “Uncle Jimmy.” Thanks are in order for three proud Texas Aggies who witnessed Mrs. Nagle's fall when she broke two bones in her left arm and were extremely helpful in directing her to Beutel Health Center, where, unfortunately, she wasn't able to receive medical treatment. We were given directions to an off-campus emergency care center, which we were unable to find. We would like to thank the other good Samaritan whom we asked for directions at a red light. She asked, “Follow me” and took us to the front door of the emergency room at St. Joseph Hospital. Due to Mrs. Nagle's intense pain, we were remiss in getting names and phone numbers of those good Samaritans. If you were one of these people, please call us collect at (505) 352-2419.

John F. Nagle II & Rose Marie J. Nagle

Humane treatment not priority for Saddam

In response to Sommer Hamilton's Jan. 26 column: Ms. Hamilton grossly misrepresents America's position in Iraq by implying that, only now that we have captured Saddam, does the Bush administration have a “fresh incentive” to return control of Iraq to the Iraqis. Our intentions in Iraq have been clear from the beginning, and they included the establishment of a free and democratic Iraq. It would appear that it is the world community, represented by the U.N., that now has an incentive to disallow freedom and democracy in Iraq. Claudia Roth's statement is understandable, but this “top human rights official” fails to realize a major difference between Saddam's behavior and that which he will receive from the newly-free Iraqis. Namely, a trial, which I believe he failed to grant to the thousands he slaughtered over the years. While it is certainly within their prerogative to do so, it is not required of nations to grant humane sentences to the inhumane.

J. Stephen Addcox Class of 2005



MIKE LUKOVICH