

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 5B • Thursday, January 29, 2004

Feeling the freeze

Burden of senior citizen tax freeze should not be put on shoulders of others

It seems contradictory that at a campus known for its friendliness, the surrounding community would be working against those who define it. The battle between permanent College Station residents and Texas A&M students turns over a new leaf this year as Brazos County seeks to enact a property tax freeze for elderly and disabled residents.



SARA FOLEY

While it is commendable to ease the financial burden of those on a fixed income, the proposal brought by the Texas Legislature does more harm than good to both sides. Not only could Brazos County residents be paying an increased rate to make up for those whose rates do not increase if the proposition goes underway, but even those it applies to will eventually be hurt by it.

The implications of this tax freeze a few years down the road are disconcerting. The freeze would only postpone the payment of the taxes, requiring that they be paid when the resident relocates or be paid by relatives in the event of the resident's death, except with an 8 percent compounded annual interest rate, according to The Eagle.

Already, elderly and disabled Brazos County residents receive \$75,000 worth of property tax exemptions, an addendum that raised Brazos County's tax rate by 2.44 cents, according to The Eagle. This additional freeze would be neither beneficial nor productive, but instead is the local government's way of making money off a wary community left with no options and an unsuspecting retirement community who wrongly believes they are getting a break.

While this piece of legislation might be beneficial for other counties in Texas, where there is enough excess income of homeowners to swallow the costs

that can't be paid by the elderly, Brazos County would only suffer from the enactment of this plan. The penalty would fall upon the community, made up of mostly college students who may want to buy property instead of lease it, but cannot afford excess bills this legislation would create.

Students who do own property are already paying increased rates for those in the community who often make it clear that college students are not always welcome tenants. However, students' voices are drowned out by local city and county officials because of the lack of student activism in local politics. The tax freeze, which will possibly appear on the November ballot, could easily pass due to the lack of students registered to vote.

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In the event the bill does pass in Brazos County, Judge Randy Sims told The Eagle that the current exemption for elderly and disabled residents might have to be decreased. The other option to counteract the loss of revenue would be to raise property taxes overall, something that would not only hurt property-owning college students, but could potentially affect leasing prices as well.

College students dealing with rising tuition bills aren't the only ones to lose. Despite recurrent community aims to retain college students to improve the economy, the tax freeze and probable tax increases will only be one more factor that draws them to bigger cities and better paying jobs.

The elderly residents of Brazos County may innocently believe that the frozen tax rate would be favorable and deserved, but in actuality what is deserved is reasonable and just treatment towards all residents.

Sara Foley is a junior journalism major. Graphic by Ivan Flores



MAIL CALL

Edwards not without his flaws A blow to the First Amendment

In response to John David Blakley's Jan. 28 column:

I am writing to respond to Blakley's comments on Chet Edwards. Since I am originally from Waco, I am very familiar and well-versed with Edwards' record.

To begin, Edwards is nothing more than a liberal, not a moderate. Edwards voted in step with former President Clinton, supporting a liberal agenda, thanks to a highly liberal, gerrymandered district that existed prior to redistricting.

Edwards champions himself as pro-military and pro-Fort Hood, but what congressman in his or her right mind would not try to champion the largest, military base in the United States if it were in his own district.

Edwards voted against tax cuts, thinking that he can spend your money in Washington better than you and I can here in Texas. Edwards has contributed to our deficits by his sponsorship of pork barrel projects that he frequently brings back to Waco, while lining the pockets of area businessmen who faithfully support him.

He opposed school vouchers, but his kids attend private schools. I guess he doesn't want minorities to have the same privilege to get a better education than his kids get.

Edwards may be an Aggie, but so have been many others that might have different political and ethical values than that differ from me and other Aggies.

The congressman is only trying to pander to Aggies because they are in his district, not because they might possibly share values with him.

I hope that Aggies and constituents of this new district will see through this facade of a political act and protect us from Congressman Edwards keeping his seat in the House of Representatives.

A. Brannon Kroll
Class of 2001

CBS is simply wrong for refusing to air commercials sponsored by groups like MoveOn.org and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Have they forgotten about that little clause of the First Amendment guaranteeing free speech to all Americans? Or have they just been co-opted by the Bush administration's policy?

Let's not forget there was just a bill passed tailored to large corporate media outlets like CBS and Fox. And, not surprisingly, we will see an ad sponsored by the White House.

CBS gives as its reason that it will not show "controversial" advertisement, yet it has shown equally-controversial ads linking drug traffic to terrorism.

Furthermore, there is nothing controversial about MoveOn's ad, which cites the fact that the Bush administration has created a \$1 trillion deficit, a number actually proven low by the Congressional Budget Office's numbers released Jan. 26.

If you are incensed by this affront to the liberties guaranteed by our Constitution, please contact CBS and let them know. And sign the petition at MoveOn.org. This is about more than an ad; it's about free speech.

Andrew Prihoda
Class of 2004

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

'Robin Hood' plan needs replacement

Last year, the Texas Legislature decided it would do away with the "Robin Hood" plan for funding Texas public schools. However, it failed to create a replacement plan due to partisan bickering and posturing. It appears that this failure may force Gov. Rick Perry to call a special session of the Legislature this year to deal with this problem of school funding. Texas taxpayers and students deserve a workable plan to replace Robin Hood, but the way things are looking, more of the strife that dominated the Legislature in the past year is still to come, and little will likely be done.



DAVID SHOEMAKER

Last year, legislative special sessions were the rage, with two being called to deal with redistricting. But in the fuss, important fiscal issues such as school finance were neglected. The only thing that was a priority in this area was to abolish the old plan, which was done by passing a law that would eventually repeal the current Robin Hood plan.

This seems odd, however, when compared to the vocal tendencies of the state's top politicians on other matters. The only major elected official who even ventured to propose a plan was Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst. He told the Amarillo Globe News he wished to end local school taxes and replace them with a lower state property tax and increased taxes of services such as "alcohol or insurance." But other state leaders are relatively quiet on the issue.

House Speaker Tom Craddick, apparently eager to leave his mark on the state and redraw its congressional boundaries, did not even bring Dewhurst's plan up for a vote in the House, according to The Houston Chronicle. He has been relatively quiet on the issue, as has the usually-vociferous state Comptroller Carol Keeton-Strayhorn. Legislative Democrats

have also been relatively quiet, except to complain about the repeal of the old plan.

Although Perry has comments about the issue of public schools in Texas, they rarely have to do with funding. He recently appointed a new state education commissioner, Shirley Neely. She was formerly with Galena Park ISD and, in a Houston Chronicle column, she said, "We must never, ever accept failure, mediocrity, the status quo or excuses (in the schools)." She needs to send that message to her boss, Perry, about funding for those schools.

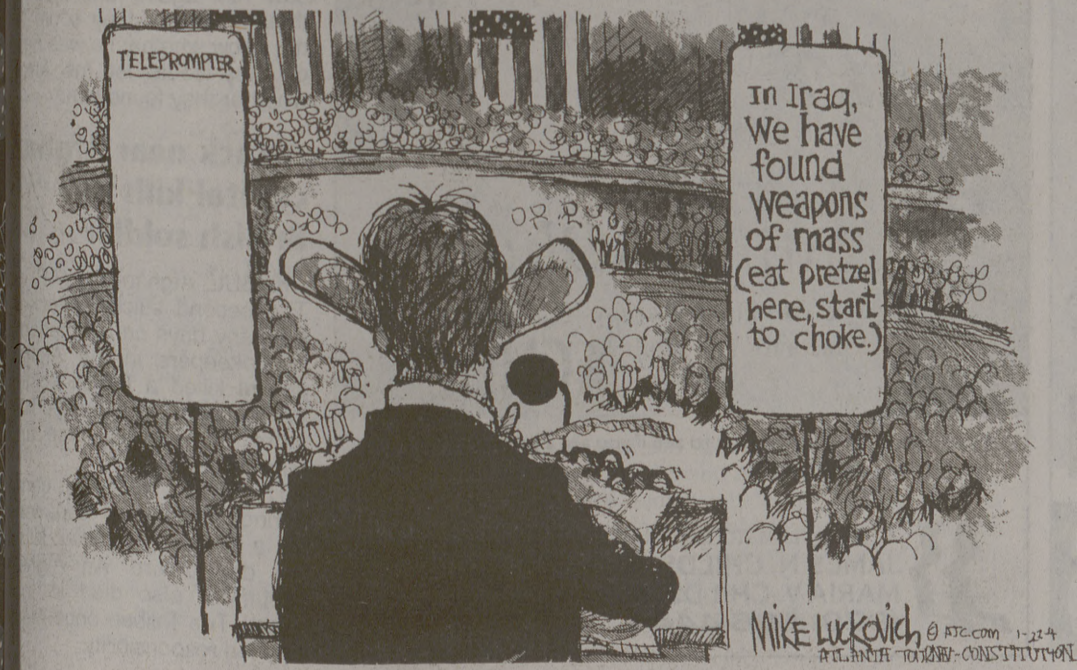
But the appointment of Neely is just part of Perry's recent kick on "educational excellence." In an article in The Chronicle, Perry proposed three cash incentives for achievement. In total, he proposed \$500 million in incentives, according to the article. The governor made no mention of where that money will come from.

Perry also opposed discussing new taxes in the article. But he cannot keep his head in the sand forever. Texas school districts have already begun to mobilize on a lawsuit over school funding, however. Although Perry wants to fund the schools at acceptable levels, this seems in conflict with his desire of excellence.

At least this time, unlike the last battle over the issue in 1993, the Legislature is not operating under the threat of a court order. It has the time to make a proper plan that should see the schools for the long run. Although Dewhurst's plan may not be perfect, it at least recognizes the fact that the state will have to raise more money somehow to pay for schools. Perry, Craddick and the Democrats should drop the election shtick and own up to the fact that the state faces a serious funding problem in its schools, and the only way to fix it may be to restructure state taxes. Texas' future may depend on it.

“Texas taxpayers and students deserve a workable plan to replace Robin Hood, but the way things are looking, more of the strife that dominated the legislature in the past year is still to come.”

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.



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