

Defeating discrimination

Assault of homosexual man on Northgate mars A&M with an atmosphere of hate

Recently, a former Texas A&M student was attacked on Northgate simply because he was gay. Though the assault was provoked and clearly motivated by hate for people who are or appear to be gay, nobody attempted to assist him. Instead, according to the victim, people actually drove by encouraging such violence, an action reprehensible to anyone with common decency.



JON STEED

Those who listen to or read the news have heard of such attacks taking place around the nation. The most well-known hate crime involving homosexuals occurred in 1998 against a young college student named Matthew Shepard. Shepard was tied to a fence in Laramie, Wyo., pistol-whipped and left for dead in the freezing night. Six days later, he died of injuries resulting from the attack. While the Northgate incident didn't result in death or even any life-threatening injuries, the message of fear and harassment is sent to the gay and lesbian community at A&M is clear: You are not wanted in Aggieland. The attack represents blatant ignorance about not only human rights in general, but also about what it means to be an Aggie and how students attending A&M should treat others. Freshmen attending New Student Conferences are taught in large meetings and forums that Aggieland is a community of respect. The reason so many students choose to go to A&M is because of its reputation as a friendly campus. The actions of the two men who attacked the former student contradict the values and beliefs that make A&M what it is.

According to the FBI, there were more than 1,500 hate crimes committed against homosexuals in the year 2000. While statistics for the last few years are still being reviewed as cases are investigated and channeled through the legal system, this number probably hasn't changed much. But 1,500 hate crimes is 1,500 too many. People seem to think that

these sorts of incidents happen somewhere far away from their community. Yet, the disturbing fact remains that the attack against the gay former student happened at A&M's front door. In a society and democracy that upholds equality, liberty and justice, such attacks must be prevented in the future. Regardless of whether people think homosexuality is moral, every person who values the principles of human rights, such as those championed by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi, must do their part to make sure hate crimes never happen in our community again.

However, some questions still remain. Where were the police when this attack happened? Surely their time would be better spent monitoring the activities taking place on Northgate, where excessive alcohol consumption can lead to bar fights and even hate crimes, than handing out noise citations and MIPs.

Furthermore, why didn't anyone stop and help this person? Instead, people drove by encouraging the aggressors as they attacked the victim. If people stand by and watch such an attack take place and refuse to offer aid or at the very least alert law enforcement, they are aiding and abetting the crime itself.

If people attend A&M partly because of its friendly atmosphere of respect and integrity, they must do their part to make sure that environment remains. Ignoring such incidents not only demolishes the good reputation A&M has as a friendly campus, but it also sends a message to those who would discriminate against others of different sexual orientations that their violent actions are tolerable.

As Aggies, students need to do their part to help A&M keep the amiable tone it has. As Americans, citizens need to speak out against all types of hate crimes and violence. By working with local law enforcement, the owners of bars and restaurants along Northgate and other members of the student body, Aggies across this campus can send a strong message that hate might be tolerated in other parts of the world, whether in Iran or in Wyoming, but that it will not be tolerated on our campus.



Jon Steed is a senior political science major. Graphic by Rylie Deyoe

MAIL CALL

Misrepresentations abound

In response to a Feb. 13 article:

The Feb. 13 Battalion article on SGA's decision to withdraw its co-sponsorship of the Feb. 18 "Compelling Interest" diversity rally contains numerous misrepresentations of the facts.

As members of the planning committee for the rally, we categorically deny the allegation made by a student senator that the Faculty Committee to an Inclusive Campus (FCIC) had a "hidden agenda."

Our goal from the outset was, and still is, to plan and coordinate a broad-based rally in support of diversity.

Our rally is not in opposition to President Gates; indeed, we have worked with the upper administration as we planned the event, and Vice President James Anderson is scheduled to make remarks prior to the unity march at 3 p.m. More than 30 other campus groups and organizations are co-sponsoring the rally.

Please do not allow inaccurate information or false rumors to discourage you from participating in the event. Join the rally and march on Feb. 18, and help show the world that the Texas A&M community is committed to a diverse and welcoming campus environment.

Brenda Bethman, Coordinator of the Women's Center
Harris Berger, Associate Professor of Performance Studies
Joseph Jewell, Assistant Professor of Sociology
Larry Oliver, Professor of English

Religion really unimportant

In response to a Feb. 12 column:

Mr. Sain's article about politicians using religion for personal gain fell short of the whole problem. First, you complain about people who pretend to be religious just to get votes, and then you imply that voters should care about what religion a candidate is. Unfortunately, the only reason candidates do pretend to be more religious is because of people like you who vote for the most religious person regardless of the issues. We live in a society where it is impossible for a non-religious (notice how I didn't say anti-religious; they're not the same) person to get elected. This is very sad. Instead of complaining about politicians pretending to be religious, why don't you tell people to pay attention to the issues so that the candidates don't have to pretend?

There is nothing inherently wrong with a non-religious or non-Christian candidate. Once more for the record: Christianity does not imply morality; morality does not imply Christianity; immorality does not imply non-Christianity; and non-Christianity does not imply immorality.

There is simply no connection between the two. For evidence see Hitler (Christian), or Gandhi (non-Christian). The religion of a candidate should never be considered in an election.

Adam Kemp
Class of 2005

Wohlgemuth a bad choice

When Aggies go to the polls March 9, they should shy away from Arlene Wohlgemuth. Wohlgemuth is no friend to A&M and has voted against students multiple times, voting for the bill to deregulate tuition and the appropriations bill cutting state funding.

Wohlgemuth was ranked twice, in 1997 and 1999, by Texas Monthly Magazine as one of the 10 worst Legislators. They said, "Arlene Wohlgemuth, whose name is enshrined in the legislative hall of infamy as the symbol of wanton, pointless destruction," and "She violated the spirit of civility of the Legislature."

Lastly, Arlene Wohlgemuth wrote the bill that cut over 100,000 low-income children of working parents from the health insurance roles. Rep. Garnet Coleman, D-Houston, asked her, "You cut 130,000 kids off (the health insurance program). Are you proud of that? That we can fund roads and the governor's program, but we can't fund kids' — poor kids' — insurance? Are you embarrassed by that at all?"

"No, not at all," Wohlgemuth answered, according to the San Antonio Express-News.

As a "symbol of wanton destruction," and a fighter against poor children and university students, Aggies should unite against candidate Wohlgemuth.

Robert Edmonson
Class of 2007

Goodbye, Coach Watkins

It's very simple: Any time a team goes 0-9 in conference play, it is time to reevaluate the coach's position. The fact that this campus was in an uproar over Coach Slocum's job last year, yet the cries for Coach Watkins' head are silent is appalling.

If A&M is ever going to achieve Vision 2020, it is going to have to be without Coach Watkins.

Clinton McCoy
Class of 2005

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. No attachments accepted.

Many problems with proposed fee increase

After the \$9 per credit hour tuition increase that went into effect in January, students may have stifled their complaints with the hope that they had seen the end of escalating tuition bills, at least for their time at Texas A&M.

Unfortunately, it may only be the beginning.

On Jan. 27, University President Robert M. Gates announced a proposal to increase tuition in the fall by 21 percent, totaling about \$300 more for a 14-hour semester.

When the motivations and reasoning behind the proposed tuition increase are examined, it seems obvious that faulty logic and ignorant blind-sightedness toward Vision 2020 are at the root of the problem.

The additional tuition funds would mostly be put toward increasing the number of faculty and encouraging diversity, but a large chunk of it will go toward scholarships, the foremost one a "Regent Scholar Program." The program guarantees \$5,000 a year for students who are first generation college students and whose parents make less than \$40,000 annually, according to The Houston Chronicle.

While the scholarship does provide substantial relief for some, it cuts off others who may need scholarships just as badly, granting preference based on factors that one cannot control. Many students who come from middle class families do not qualify for need-based scholarships but still struggle to pay tuition and are now left with few options. The \$2.8 million allotted to Regent Scholar students would better serve the majority by lessening the tuition burden for all.

In his Jan. 27 presentation, Gates stated that the University's main areas of focus would be faculty, students, diversity and space. Closer examination of these admirable goals reveals the money spent on diversity initiatives could be invested in the hiring of faculty.

Diversity, in theory, is not a bad thing. It is the skewed definition that Gates and other administrators have of diversity that creates a problem for the students whose money goes to pay for the recruitment of a designated racial group. True diversity through majors, hometowns, cultures, talents and backgrounds is favorable to all. Racial diversity should be the overflow of that, not the target.



SARA FOLEY

Gates attempted to soften the blow of the increase by pointing out that 70 percent of A&M students receive some form of financial aid. This fact only confirms the dramatic effect the increased tuition would have. If 70 percent of students already need financial aid to pay their tuition and bills, the escalating prices will only worsen the problem. The majority of those who receive financial aid do so in the form of student loans. The tuition increase would add more debt to be paid off, but with interest. The other large group of financial aid recipients is student workers. If administrators expect student workers to pay 21 percent more for tuition, their salaries should increase proportionately.

While it is clear that A&M does have a need to increase the number of tenured faculty members, doing so only to improve A&M's rankings among similar colleges is frivolous. The constant comparison with other large state universities is meaningless unless Gates addresses the needs of A&M students as his utmost priority.

In his Jan. 27 presentation, Gates attempted to justify the increase by comparing tuition prices with A&M's counterparts, but overlooked the fact that the tuition increase will cause current students to pay for improvements to the University while most of them will not directly receive any of the benefits.

Unfortunately for underclassmen, Gates is not done. Had it not been for the students on the Tuition Advisory Council requests, the increase would have been more drastic. An increase for 2005 has already been mentioned.

When Texas legislators chose to deregulate tuition this summer, they simultaneously promised not to slap students with dramatic tuition increases. Unfortunately, the situation is out of their control due to the power given to the Board of Regents, which will vote on the tuition increase March 25-26.

Should the Regents choose to implement the increase, students will not only have been lied to, but will be forced to pay for changes they didn't request.

Sara Foley is a junior journalism major.

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