

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

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## Workin' on the railroad

### Proposed plan for railroad tracks will benefit citizens and students of B-CS



DAVID SHOEMAKER

Alignment 1 made no improvement to the current situation. Alignment 6-1 was opposed by the City of Bryan because it could damage the quality of life along Highway 47. The 10-2 plan was problematic because it crossed the flood plain of the Brazos River, requiring long bridges to meet requirements of federal law, according to Carter & Burgess.

Alignment 12-2 involves tracks looping to the west of Bryan and FM 2818 and rejoining existing lines to the north of town. This plan would take the tracks out of downtown Bryan, but would leave them where they are in College Station. But the plan did not leave College Station residents and A&M students high and dry. As part of the plan, underpasses such as the one at University Drive would be built at 16 locations, 11 of them at existing railroad crossings, including Holleman, Rock Prairie and Villa Maria.

This would greatly improve traffic patterns and decrease safety risks for A&M students as well as the community at large. Students would no longer have to wait on the bus at Old Main while a train crawls by at 25 mph. Trains would no longer cause traffic jams at George Bush and Wellborn. But one of the best features of the plan is that Old Main and Joe Routt would be given underpasses. Although the study has been a long time in coming, it seems that the results will be finally worth it.

This may mean construction headaches such as the one that occurred during the construction of the Pedestrian Passageway at Joe Routt, but it will be well worth it in the long run for the University and the area. The University, its partners in the MPO and transportation department have done well for the students and the citizens in the area with this plan.

With the anticipated arrival of the finished study from the MPO's consultants, hopefully the plans will move into the final design stages so work can begin soon. The Bryan-College Station area has suffered too long from rail related congestion and safety issues.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.



CHRIS GRIFFIN • THE BATTALION

## Gaining suffrage... again

### Attack on Prairie View A&M students uses voting as an excuse to promote racism

A racially-prejudiced official accomplished precisely the thing he sought to prevent when he incited political activism among students at Prairie View A&M by trying to suppress their right to vote.

In a letter run in The Waller Times, Waller County District Attorney Oliver Kitzman threatened to prosecute the University if it allowed students who were not permanent residents of the county to vote in local elections. Kitzman contends that since students comprise

a large percentage of the voting population, their votes are able to skew election results at the expense of permanent residents.

Students living in a community have every right to take an active role in their community by choosing to vote, as significant decisions and issues have no less impact on their lives than on any other resident. Furthermore, it seems that a district attorney should be able to recognize the value of college students as educated voters.

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott re-affirmed the students' right to vote as "a fundamental right in this state and in this country. College students cannot be targeted for discriminatory residency requirements, and nothing prevents them from voting where they attend school." The only catch is that students must claim Waller County as their residence, just as Texas A&M students who wish to vote locally must designate College Station.

However, as Prairie View student Ashley McDonald told The Los Angeles Times, "Students at other Texas colleges aren't ever questioned on whether they're qualified to register, but they are at Prairie View. It's just not right."

Clearly residency is not the real issue.



LINDSAY ORMAN

The truth of the matter is that Kitzman is threatening students' voting rights on a racial basis disguised as geography issue. Coincidentally, Prairie View is a historically black university in a town that is 58 percent white and only 29 percent black. The implication of Kitzman's argument is clear: He fears black students will dilute or even overrule the white vote.

Kitzman has a history of trying to advance his personal agenda of racism and discrimination through political action in a predominately-white county notorious for confederate activity and intolerance, according to University Wire. In the 1970s, when Kitzman previously served as district attorney, the Waller County voter registrar mandated a residency questionnaire for students, but not for non-students. A federal lawsuit followed, as well as a federal court order in 1978 banning the registrar from differentiating students from non-students in voting requirements.

Though students' rights may have been upheld in several rulings, Kitzman continues to exert an intimidating presence which necessitates active resistance.

With the support of the NAACP, four students have filed a lawsuit out of fear of prosecution, regardless of what the attorney general has ruled if they register to vote. No person should be subjected to this fear; it is contrary to everything that American ideals of democracy proclaim.

"It's a situation very reminiscent of the 1960s that unfortunately we're having to deal with in 2004," Executive Director of the Houston chapter of the NAACP Yolanda Smith told The Los Angeles Times.

Prairie View students have made it clear that they are willing

to fight courageously for their constitutionally-guaranteed right to vote.

Not only did students organize a protest rally and seven-mile march on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, they also planned a mass voter registration drive and are working to get an on-campus early voting site.

"What Kitzman did was energize Prairie View students," said Prairie View Student Body President Hendrik Maison. "People are more interested than they have been in a long time. I can honestly say that students are really looking forward to voting."

Kitzman has brought his continued lack of integrity and his disregard for democracy to national attention, and now it is the job of the nation to hold him accountable.

As fellow Aggies in the A&M system, as Texans who wish to fight stereotypes of ignorance and racial prejudice and as Americans committed to the ideas of justice and democracy, A&M students must not remain silent on such an important issue not only of students' rights, but also of civil rights.

In any event, the plight of the Prairie View students should remind all students that the right and responsibility to vote should be exercised conscientiously and thoughtfully and not be taken for granted.

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major.

### MAIL CALL

#### YCT is avoiding facts on students' race

In response to a Feb. 17 mail call:

Why does it surprise me that the Young Conservatives of Texas have resorted to shrill name-calling in retreat from an actual debate of the issues? Isn't this what conservatives complain the Democrats are doing to President George W. Bush?

The fact of the matter is undergraduate demographics starkly contrast those of Texas and the United States as a whole. Based on the Fall 2003 enrollment profile, Texas A&M had 22.6 percent White, 2.4 percent Black, and 3.1 percent Asian undergraduates. According to the 2000 Census, Texas and the United States have

71.2 percent and 75.1 percent whites, 11.5 percent and 12.3 percent blacks, and 3.6 percent and 3.6 percent Asians respectively. Proportionately, whites are over-represented, and blacks are under-represented. It is worthwhile to debate whether demographics should be matched, what diversity means and its merit as a goal. Name-calling is not a worthwhile, intellectually honest debate.

The Young Conservatives' mail call purported to be about the FCIC. Its hidden agenda was to promote YCT and its scholarship. I applaud the race-neutral economic encouragement of a scholarship, but I strongly disapprove of the tactics and intellectual dishonesty of the mail call.

Colin Gibson Class of 2002

#### Everyone has a right to protest his beliefs

In response to a Feb. 18 mail call:

The first widely held view of Texas A&M is the primary picture of A&M students outside of The University. The second picture that Joseph Abel refers to is a mostly untrue view of Aggies. We are labeled as intolerant and "sick" because of the rash actions of a few.

I do not accept homosexuality as a genetic hindrance. I accept the fact that people have alternative lifestyles, and that there is nothing I can do about what people do privately. However, it is my opinion to hold on whether I agree with homosexual conduct. Such rallies as straight pride are the celebration of a portion of the population upholding

their beliefs of heterosexuality. For you to decide that you can agree with one side of an issue but not let the other voice its opinion is intolerant.

Again, it is regrettable that a few individuals felt it was necessary to attack someone for his sexual-orientation.

But to label Aggies as universally intolerant and in need of a "cure for their sickness" says a lot for your tolerance.

Michael Gorney Class of 2003

