

FORUM

THE BATTALION

Page 4B • Thursday, March 4, 2004

The road ahead

Many issues that affect students' lives remain unresolved this semester

As the spring semester approaches the halfway point, questions and evaluations of the year begin.

This past weekend, nearly 600 delegates from 106 schools and 37 states converged at Texas A&M for the Conference On Student Government Associations, one of the largest student-run conferences in the nation. After visiting with other student body presidents, I left with a sense of gratitude for what we have in terms of student involvement and representation at our University.

A list of our accomplishments will soon be available on the Web site, <http://sga.tamu.edu>, but more importantly, we as a student body must look at the critical issues that will face us the rest of our time at A&M.

1.) Traditions: For the remainder of the semester, saying "Howdy," attending Muster, Silver Taps and Parents' Weekend are absolute musts. Being a part of the Twelfth Man at the remaining sporting events is also important. A critical part of this is creating a welcoming environment for all students.

2.) Faculty Search Processes: While students will sit on few search committees, it is vital that they play a role in the hiring of faculty. More than 400 faculty are to be hired in the next four years, which could drastically alter faculty attitudes toward student involvement, traditions, classroom teaching and individual student relationships. It is imperative that students approach department heads about being a part of breakfasts or lunches during candidates' visits to campus.

3.) Vice President of Student Affairs: The search committee will announce dates to meet potential candidates.

4.) Built Environment: As evidenced with Hotard and Cain Halls, there are decisions being made now about the future of the campus. Reviewing the Campus Master Plan displayed



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on the first floor of Rudder Tower and viewing the reallocation documents on its Web site will give ideas of buildings that could be constructed or modified in the future. The future of Leggett Hall is one issue that may arise.

5.) Student Service Fee: It is important to know the details of the issues students vote on when a referendum occurs during the student body elections.

6.) Diversity and Recruitment: We must assess the perceptions and realities of A&M's receptiveness and welcoming of the most qualified high school students from across the state and continue conversations on how this can best be accomplished. We must convince Texas that A&M is the best place to get a higher education and that we welcome the most qualified students into our learning community.

7.) Bonfire Memorial Dedication: On Nov. 18, we will dedicate what will be a permanent place on the campus landscape to remember the students who etched a place on the landscape of so many hearts.

8.) Parking: If we don't reassess parking, there's no assurance that we wouldn't lose spots to newly hired faculty. Please talk to Residence Hall Association or Student Senate representatives to learn more.

9.) Communication: We are an empowered student body, but we still have tremendous room for improvement in communicating and acting on issues of importance. The student body must pay attention to issues that affect the University's future, not just pay attention when something affects us directly.

I invite you to send me an e-mail at sbp@tamu.edu with your concerns and suggestions about any topic as we approach the home stretch of what has been an outstanding year.

Matt Josefy is student body president.

A worthwhile debate

Gay marriage discussions are needed

Last month, a Texas A&M graduate student and his partner walked into the Brazos County courthouse to request a marriage license. They were kindly refused but are not alone. Incidents such as this, with many being successful, have been occurring across the United States, and it is leading the country into a debate of historic significance. Some A&M students have claimed to be tired of the constant mentioning of same-sex marriage; yet the reality is, this debate has only begun.

Regardless of your current views, we as students and citizens must be willing to openly and thoroughly discuss this issue.

As a married student, the issue hits close to home. My wife and I have been married for more than a year, and we have enjoyed our time together, along with the rights and responsibilities that accompany our union. We have personally engaged in the ability to make medical decisions for one another, the opportunity to have an equal share in jointly held property and the legal right to take a leave of absence from work to care for the other when a serious illness occurs. These are only three instances from more than 1,000 federal rights and responsibilities for which my wife and I are now automatically eligible, simply by signing our marriage license.

When my wife and I decided to get married, having children was a shared goal. We also wanted to have a religious marriage ceremony. Many consider these as prerequisites for marriage, but we were never able to locate either on our marriage license. Furthermore, Chapter 2, Section 2.205 (a) of the Texas Family Code expressly prevents any religious discrimination by the person who conducts a marriage cere-



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mony. Subchapter E of the same code outlines a procedure for us to become legally married in Texas without a formal marriage ceremony. Citizens are fortunate that the state of Texas cannot legally discriminate against them if they do not want children, or if one possesses a different or perhaps no religious beliefs at all.

In the end, this is a legal debate with an obvious religious component. Those students who choose to be disengaged from the debate or use personal religious beliefs as their sole argument are committing the greatest sin of all. They are using God as a political tool to further their own religious beliefs. Traditional social conservatism adamantly opposes govern-

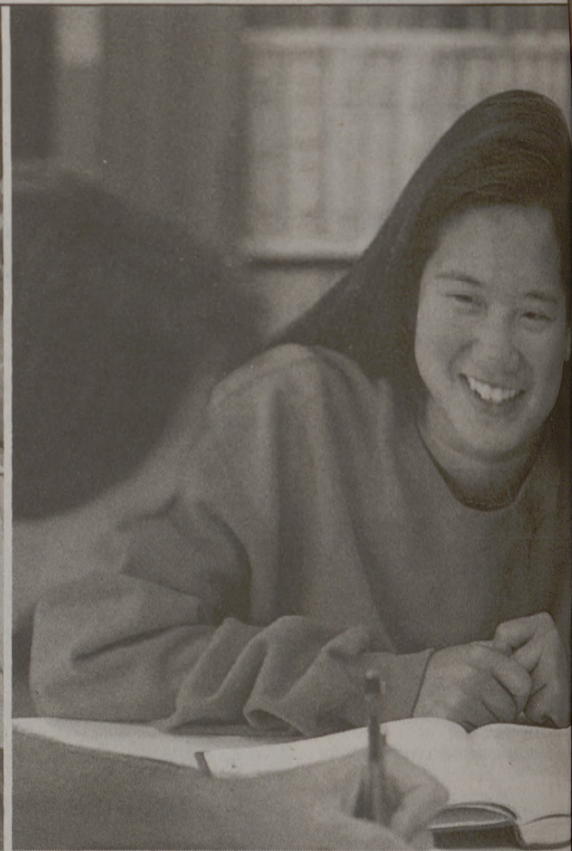
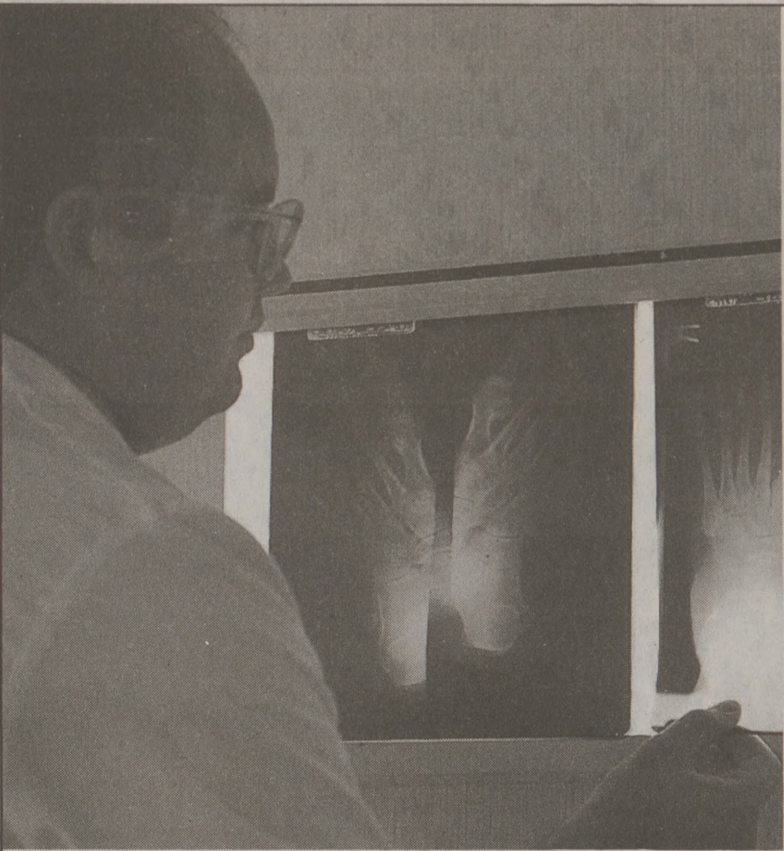
“Those students who choose to be disengaged from the debate or use personal religious beliefs as their sole argument are committing the greatest sin of all.”

ment intervention on the topic of same-sex marriage. A common sentiment is for the government to restrict same-sex marriage while maintaining strong opposition to government involvement. Replacing the term 'same-sex' with 'interracial' forms an equivalent sentiment that reminds us of a recent past.

There is no doubt that same-sex marriage is controversial, but it is a discussion that we must all be willing to take part in. As students,

we have chosen A&M as a path of education for learning and growth which should take us beyond the boundaries of our previous experiences and expectations. Your very participation toward the outcome of this issue could affect the future lives and well-being of a family member or another Aggie. We must also be cognizant that this is the United States. If we were anywhere else in the world where church and state officials are not separate, this column and your responses to it might not even be allowed.

Josh Peschel is president of the Graduate Student Council.



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