

EDITORIAL

COMING CLEAN

Administration must consider student input in decision-making process

Recently, Texas A&M's Council on Built Environment announced its decision to close Hotard Hall and use it as offices as part of the Faculty Reinvestment Plan. Pressure from students, however, motivated University President Robert M. Gates to postpone those plans for a year. Although this represents a temporary victory for the interests of students on campus, it does not address the deeply-flawed process that brought the A&M administration and the students to this juncture.

That process was one where administrators made decisions affecting the current and future students of A&M without asking for input from students or any other stakeholders. Making a decision to close any residence hall should not be taken lightly and should not be made without consulting the residents and presenting evidence to support the University's recommendation. Administrators should remember that a dorm is a home for students and that, for many, it is not simply a place to sleep at night.

In the case of Hotard, it was a dorm with the highest retention rate on campus, a place with strong traditions and a sense of unity. It was a place that, for better or worse, symbolized the things that make A&M unique.

The University's frantic scrambling after the decision was announced indicated that even the administration was aware of its poor decision-making process. The University's attempts to provide the residents who would have been displaced with first-priority housing was only an attempt to buy their silence in a proceeding that was undeniably mishandled.

The CBE's decision-making process was never accountable to those affected by their decision, much less visible to the rest of the campus. The process by which the CBE decided Hotard was the best choice for closure has yet to be explained. The CBE never explained if the closure was the most cost-effective option, or meant to keep as many staff members on campus as possible, or any one of many other possible reasons.

The University should learn from this embarrassing episode and change its process for the future. From now on, A&M should allow all affected constituencies to have input into any such decisions and should hold open meetings and provide documentation to any interested persons. Gates has taken steps toward this by holding open tuition forums and a student has been appointed to the CBE, but more must be done. The administration cannot continue to make important decisions in relative secrecy.

THE BATTALION

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MAIL CALL

Some 'ready for sex before marriage'

In response to Matt Younger's March 11 column:

The Houston Chronicle recently reported a study that seems to have been ignored in writing your essay. It turns out the same percentage of people who make an oath of celibacy until marriage get STDs as those who do not make such an oath.

The reason for this is pretty obvious: you cannot prepare for something and ignore it at the same time. Things happen, relationships change, and not surprisingly, some people are ready for sex before marriage.

I think when we look at the statistics involved, it would be better to prepare for the worse and hope for the best. It's not in the government's best interests to blind students to all options of sex education, both from moral and health-based arguments. In the end, I bet the kids who have STDs wished someone had handed them a condom beforehand.

Kevin Reilly
Class 2006

Stop napping in the MSC Flag Room

In response to a March 10 mail call:

I felt it necessary to write in about what is going on in the MSC Flag Room.

People are taking naps. I am trying to play Moonlight Sonata or Claire de Lune and somebody has the nerve to start snoring in the corner.

Now don't get me wrong. I love sleeping and do enjoy the occasional cat naps or even benefit from power naps, but please stop sleeping during my "classical noise." There are plenty of other places downstairs where you can sleep instead of attempting to serenade us with your snoring while I play the piano. Yes, Chuckie, I'm mocking you. Gig 'em Ags.

Nick Foreman
Class of 2004

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Goodbye, Dick

Bush should drop Cheney for his 2004 reelection bid

President Bush better prepare for a long, hard election year. His credibility has suffered several blows recently, and his running mate isn't helping to balance out the problem.

Vice President Dick Cheney no longer appears to provide an air of wisdom to the Bush administration because several controversial elements have transformed him into a liability that the president must cut loose, or he may be found guilty by association.

Consider the weapons of mass destruction dilemma. Clearly, it has been beaten into the ground, but it still delivers a powerful credibility punch to the president. However, too much blame is ascribed directly to Bush because of a spillover effect caused by Cheney's rhetoric.

Arguably, out of all the staunch supporters for unilaterally going to war with Iraq, Cheney beat the war drum the loudest, never missing an opportunity to chime in on the dangers Saddam Hussein posed. Consider this quote, "There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction and that he will use them against our friends, against our allies and against us."

As a result, these allegations have become a source of political ammunition against the Bush administration.

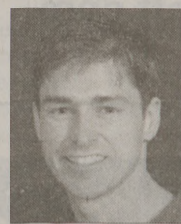
Another problem plaguing Cheney pertains to the Energy Task Force meetings he conducted with elites from the oil industry, an industry near and dear to Cheney's heart. The catch is, these energy meetings transpired behind closed doors and the records regarding the discussions remain undisclosed.

Rightly, this has elevated concerns and marshaled enough attention to thrust the issue into the U.S. Supreme Court for a ruling on disclosure.

Now one would assume that Supreme Court justices should strive to remain impartial and avoid carousing with individuals directly involved in cases, right?

But when you are Dick Cheney, second in command, no one tells you who you can or can't associate with, even if it is a judge preparing to make a critical decision regarding politically-sensitive matters. Thus, in Cheney's world, it's OK to take one of the justices, Antonin Scalia, duck hunting in Louisiana just prior to the court's decision.

Is anyone else disturbed by this? Looming even larger over Cheney is his Halliburton connections. Halliburton is an enormous engineering company that Cheney headed for five years before Bush selected him for the vice president slot. However, some ties are hard to sever. Cheney still receives \$180,000 in deferred



NICHOLAS DAVIS

compensation from the company yearly. But what looks suspicious is that while Cheney was out ranting and raving over WMDs, Halliburton stood to benefit immensely from the war.

The United States hired Halliburton to supply oil to the military in Iraq and even provided the company with some attractive rebuilding contracts without having to compete against other companies.

Lately, though, reports of pricing errors are surfacing and Halliburton is under investigation for overcharging the U.S. government by some \$61 million.

Another dilemma is the grand jury investigation regarding the blown cover of CIA operative Valerie Plame with some allegations connecting the leak to Cheney.

Even if these examples are disregarded, Cheney's sketchy health status still remains.

Cheney suffered heart attacks in the following years: 1978, 1984, 1988, 2000, and in 2001 he twice checked himself

into a hospital for chest pains.

Perhaps a few years of rest are long overdue.

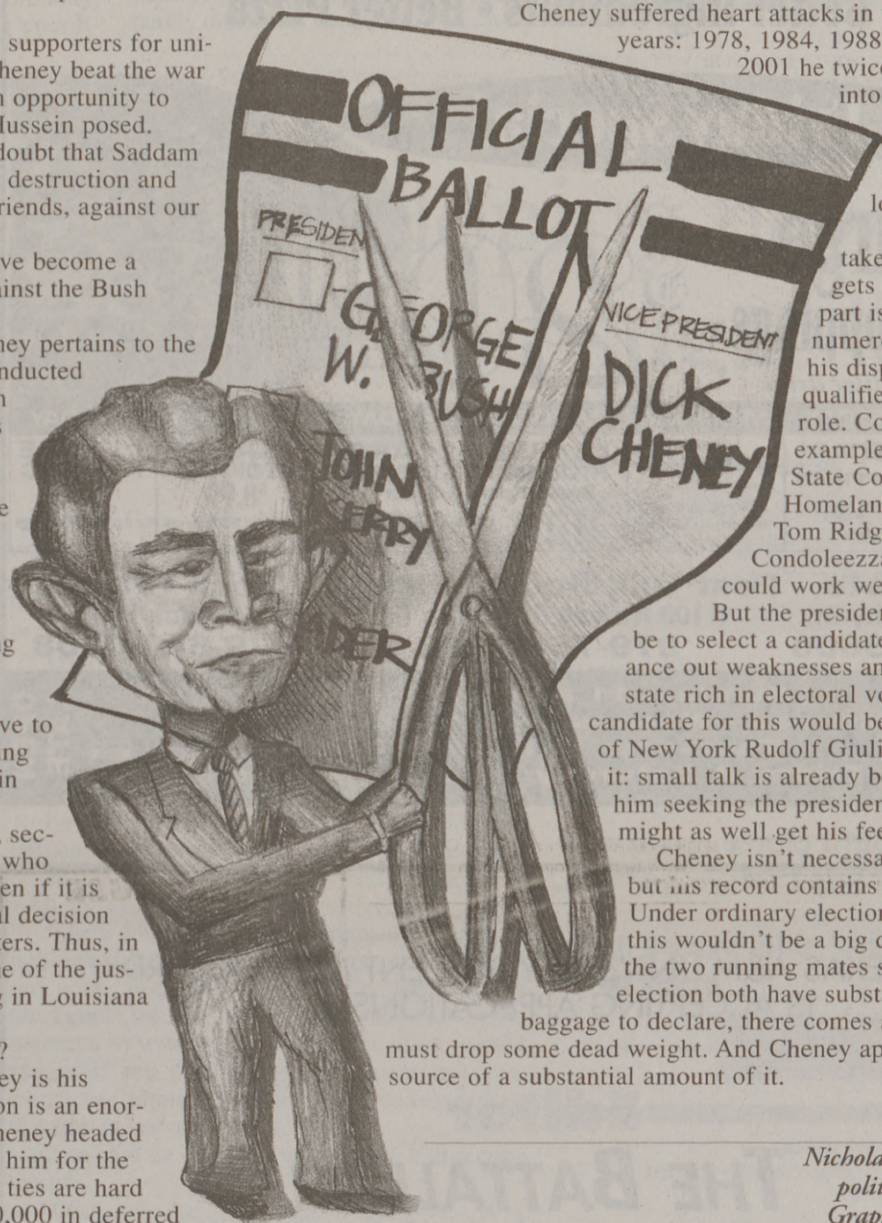
So who should take over if Cheney gets the boot? This part is easy. Bush has numerous individuals at his disposal capable and qualified to assume the role. Consider these examples: Secretary of State Colin Powell, Homeland Security Head Tom Ridge, or perhaps, Condoleezza Rice. These could work well.

But the president's goal should be to select a candidate who can balance out weaknesses and appeal to a state rich in electoral votes. The best candidate for this would be former mayor of New York Rudolf Giuliani. Think about it: small talk is already being made about him seeking the presidency in 2008. He might as well get his feet wet.

Cheney isn't necessarily a bad guy, but his record contains a few blemishes.

Under ordinary election circumstances this wouldn't be a big deal, but when the two running mates striving for reelection both have substantial credibility baggage to declare, there comes a time when you must drop some dead weight. And Cheney appears to be the source of a substantial amount of it.

Nicholas Davis is a senior political science major. Graphic by Rylie Deyoe



Catholic dogma in danger?

California ruling violates the First Amendment

Shortly after being elected president, Thomas Jefferson, in a note to a group of Connecticut Baptists, wrote that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution has created "a wall of separation between church and state."

The true meaning of the First Amendment and this "wall of separation" has been a subject of heated debate ever since its adoption into the Constitution. In recent times, this has been interpreted by teachers, school boards and the courts to mean that religion is a taboo subject not to be discussed in school, that Christmas trees, Menorahs and nativity scenes are not allowed on government property, including public schools, and that the Ten Commandments cannot be present in court houses.

Christians are often accused of opposing this part of the First Amendment and wanting the government to endorse Christianity or even make it a state religion. The vast majority of Christians, however, recognize that if the government exerts too much control over a religion, it is the church that will be corrupted and fail.

A recent example of the government's intrusion into religion occurred in California on March 1, 2004. CNN.com reported that the state's Supreme Court voted 6-1 to force Catholic Charities to provide birth control coverage to its employees, despite the fact that the Catholic church's dogma has, for centuries, considered artificial contraception to be a mortal sin. The ruling is capable of affecting the policies of Catholic hospitals and other church-based organizations across California.

The issue is not birth control, but

whether the courts have the right to force a religious-based charity to go against its own teachings. It does not. If today Catholic Charities is forced to provide birth control coverage, it is quite possible that tomorrow the courts will force coverage of abortions on health plans.

This is a blatant violation of the First Amendment, which says that, in addition to having no law establishing religion, there should also be no law "prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The court's ruling essentially says that this part of the First Amendment can be ignored, or possibly even "negotiated," when it is convenient and popular to do so.

The precedent has been set for increased government involvement in religion and increased restrictions on the right to worship freely. Churches and believers must be aware and cautious. It is a blessing to be in America, a country where religious freedoms are much greater than other countries'. But this freedom and liberty must be protected at all costs lest those in power try to steal it away.

Due to the continued opposition to abortion, contraception and homosexuality, the Catholic church is often accused of "forcing its morality" on others. Despite the fact that the church also teaches free will and redemption, these issues are rarely preached from the pulpit and many Catholics ignore the church's teachings (indicating that it is apparently doing a poor job of "forcing" its morality on people), this unjustifiable accusation is still made.

However, to the many faithful Catholics in America and the rest of the world, the courts, and organizations such as Planned Parenthood that, according to Zenit.org,

have pushed for contraception mandate laws, are the ones pushing their morality (or lack thereof) upon the Catholic church. This is exactly the reason for the First Amendment: to protect American churches from these kinds of activities and rulings.

The justification for the court's ruling is that since Catholic Charities employs non-Catholic workers and provides help and counsel to people regardless of their religious beliefs, they are not qualified for a religious exemption. Herein lies the problem. Those who support the California court's ruling also fight against laws that allow faith-based organizations to hire only those who follow their doctrines. This places Catholic charities and similar organizations in a catch-22 that restricts the free exercise of their religious beliefs.

Again, similar organizations around the country should pay attention to current legislations and court cases and be prepared to fight for their liberty.

Furthermore, anyone who works for a faith-based organization should realize and accept that he might not get the same coverage on his health plan due to the organization's religious beliefs. Someone working for a Catholic-based organization should not expect contraception coverage just like someone working for a Jehovah's Witness-based organization should not expect coverage for blood transfusions. If this is a problem, then work should be pursued elsewhere.

Religious freedom is perhaps our greatest freedom and it must be protected at all costs, but always through kindness, understanding and non-violence.

Cody Sain is a junior philosophy major.



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