

EDITORIAL

ELECT THE MSC PRESIDENT

Today and tomorrow, students will be able to vote on a variety of offices and a pair of referendums. One of these is a non-binding resolution to have the Memorial Student Center president be an elected office. Students should vote in favor of this measure. It is meant to make the MSC more accountable to the student body and even its own members.

Negative events in recent years, such as those surrounding Josh Rowan and Chris Duke, have been unfortunate, and they have harmed the reputation of the MSC and its openness. The MSC president and Council also oversee a large budget and receive student service fees.

The current process, where a committee appoints the president, does not give average students a voice. The position does not require any skills beyond those required to be a good leader in any organization — hard work, integrity, an ability to make tough decisions and a willingness to listen and learn. The MSC Council would have to agree to any election process and would set eligibility requirements, allowing them to make sure candidates have a working knowledge of the MSC as well. By electing the MSC president, accountability and transparency issues could be addressed for MSC members and the student body as a whole.

This resolution presents an opportunity for the MSC to move toward greater openness to students while shaping that force to help it achieve its own ends. The MSC Council would be well advised to cooperate with other bodies on campus, administrators and the average student to move forward in adopting this resolution if it passes.

THE BATTALION

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor in Chief	ELIZABETH WEBB	Opinion Asst.	MATT RIGNEY
Managing Editor	KENDRA KINGSLEY	Member	CHRIS LIVELY
Opinion Editor	GEORGE DEUTSCH	Member	COLLINS EZEANYIM
Metro Editor	MELISSA SULLIVAN	Member	DAVID SHOEMAKER

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

MAIL CALL

The solution to racism is not to ignore it

In response to Matt Maddox's March 30 column:

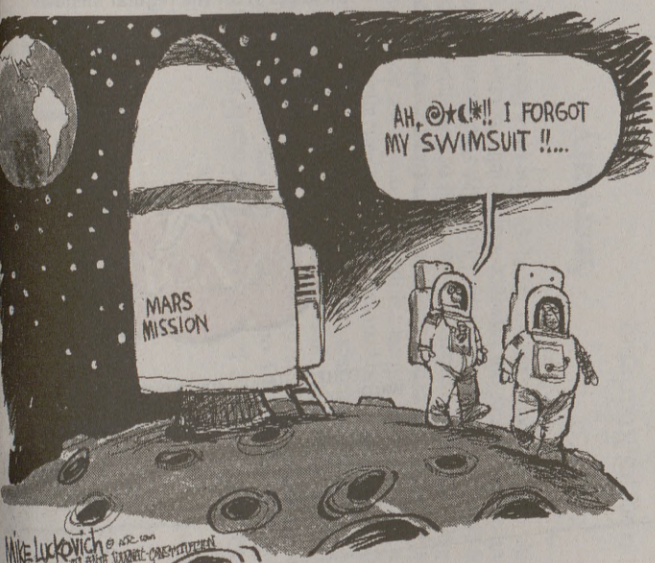
If Abraham Lincoln had ignored slavery in the 1860s, would slavery have just disappeared? If Lyndon B. Johnson had ignored civil rights violations and not pushed the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s, would those civil rights violations have just disappeared? If our society today chooses to ignore current racism and its devastating legacy, will racism just disappear? The answer to the last question, like the first two, is "No!"

Matt Maddox, though, believes that the solution to racism is to ignore it. I guess that's an easy position to take when you're not on the receiving end of it. I have trouble ignoring that the percentage of African- and Hispanic-Americans in poverty is three times that of whites. I have trouble ignoring that a job applicant with a traditionally white name has a 50 percent higher chance of being called in for an interview than one with a traditionally black name. All Aggies should have trouble ignoring the fact that African-Americans make up 12.3 percent of the college-aged population in Texas, but only 2.3 percent of A&M, and that Hispanic-Americans make up 40 percent of the college-aged population in Texas, but only 8.2 percent of A&M.

Matt Maddox also feels that he is being slighted by affirmative action, so he calls it racism. He ignores that fact that racism is a system designed to advance the majority at the expense of the entire minority, while affirmative action is a system designed to bring the minority up at the expense of no one. For example, if A&M increased its African-American population by 50 percent, while keeping its total enrollment the same, the white population would decline by less than 1 percent.

In addition to the need to address current and past racism, we need to improve our diversity efforts to create a more global community at A&M, something that we can all benefit from. So much of our education takes place outside of the classroom, and there is so much we can learn from those of different backgrounds. I find it hard to believe that some of us would sacrifice all of this for false cries of "reverse-discrimination," especially when we are just considering actively recruiting minority students, not even race-based admissions.

Nick Anthis
Class of 2005
Texas Aggie Democrats president



Tough on terror?

Clarke's claims, unanswered questions haunt Bush

Neal Boortz, Texas A&M Class of 1967, said he thinks President George W. Bush is the best man to handle the war on terror and argues this point almost every day on his national syndicated talk radio show. Most Americans agree with him. A recent Associated Press poll showed that 58 percent of Americans trust Bush to protect the country as opposed to only 35 percent who trust Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass.

But what Boortz and other Bush supporters may not realize is that the president has made several major mistakes with regard to the war on terror. An appraisal of Bush's action before and after Sept. 11 reveals that he is actually weak on the terror issue.

It is impossible to talk about Bush and terrorism without mentioning former counterterrorism Chief of the National Security Council for the Bush White House Richard Clarke. Clarke caused a firestorm of media coverage last week with the release of his book, "Against All Enemies." Clarke makes some disturbing charges against the Bush administration, including the charge that the administration ignored the al-Qaida threat that was supposedly made months before Sept. 11 because it was obsessed with taking out Saddam Hussein. Former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill also stated that Bush sought to attack Iraq from his first days in office.

Clarke was a holdover from the Clinton administration, and it is clear from the congressional Sept. 11 commission

hearings last week that during that time period, mistakes were made regarding how aggressively Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network were pursued. However, the Bush administration also did not treat al-Qaida with the seriousness it deserved. Clarke said that when he tried to warn Bush officials about al-Qaida in April 2001, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said, "Who cares about a little terrorist in Afghanistan?" according to Newsweek. While the Bush administration made mistakes before the Sept. 11 attacks, it was afterward when its actions truly became disturbing. For example, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has admitted to Newsweek's Jim Lehrer that he said Afghanistan didn't offer "decent targets for bombing" shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks. Clarke alleges that Rumsfeld added, "We should do Iraq." Clarke also claimed that Bush sought evidence of an Iraq-al-Qaida connection, even though

it was apparent there was none. A major component of the war on terror involves discovering the holes in U.S. intelligence that allowed the Sept. 11 attacks to occur so that any future mistakes may be avoided. This is the job of the congressional Sept. 11 commission. But Bush and his administration have been hindering the progress of the commission from its beginning. In fact, the Sept. 11 investigation panel's review was delayed for months because it had to battle Bush

officials for access to documents and witnesses, according to The Associated Press.

This is outrageous, but it is not surprising that Bush would want to avoid answering tough questions from the commission. One of those questions would almost certainly be why his White House granted flying privileges to about 140 Saudi nationals in the days after Sept. 11 — a time when all private air travel was grounded. According to a Washington Times story, about two dozen of these were members of the bin Laden family, and they were allowed to leave the country with practically no interviews by the FBI. An all-out effort to pursue bin Laden, which has only started recently, was delayed because military resources were tied up in Iraq, according to Paul Krugman of The New York Times.

Most Americans would agree that public officials must treat the war on terror with the utmost seriousness. Boortz and many of his listeners certainly do.

But one week ago at the annual Radio and Television News Correspondents Association, Bush made fun of the inability to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, showing pictures of himself looking behind White House furniture and joking, "Those weapons of mass destruction have got to be somewhere... nope, no weapons over there... maybe under here?" This is completely reprehensible from a president whose biggest mistake in the war on terror was spending the nation's most valuable resource — American blood — while he hunted phantom weapons in Iraq.

Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major. Graphic by Chris Griffin



Despite threats, students must vote against fee referendum

Traditions will continue without increased fees

It is campaign season again and, as usual, everyone is out with big promises and questionable claims to ensure victory. But the campaign to get the student service fee increase passed is rife with implied threats and confusion. Signs around campus imply that traditions will end if the fee referendum fails.

But if students look at the Student Service Fee Advisory Board's recommendation online at <http://ssfab.tamu.edu/recommendations.htm>, they can see where the money is going. And they can see for themselves that there is no need for the fee to go above the cap, or for the aggressive and misleading campaign in favor of the fee increase.

That marketing campaign has included ads in The Battalion, stickers exhorting others to vote "yes" and signs around campus. All of this marketing takes money. The question is, whose money is it?

The cards on the backs of the signs say they are the responsibility of MSC Marketing. That would lead one to think that MSC Marketing had purchased the signs with its own funds. But at the fee forum on Friday, Memorial Student Center President Elizabeth Dacus claimed that the campaign was funded by its supporters personally, and no funds from the student service fee were used. It is unlikely, however, that supporters of the fee referendum purchased ads in The Battalion and stickers on their own. But that money had to come from somewhere.

If the money came from outside the MSC, then the organization should not attribute materials it purchases and uses to the MSC. If one looks at the concession permit on any of the signs around campus, he will see it is permitted by the MSC. If those signs are paid for from personal funds, then they, as well, should not be attributed to the MSC.

But it is not just who has been paying for the campaign that is a problem, but also what is being said. Signs ask if students want traditions such as the Aggie Band and Muster to continue, and then advise to back the fee increase if they do. Although those backing the increase, especially those in the MSC, claim this is not blackmail, when you look at the numbers, it basically is.

In the fee recommendations made by the SSFAB, \$27,000 extra will go the Aggie Band, \$5,000 to CARPOOL and \$15,000 for Choral Activities such as the Singing Cadets. But by far the largest appropriation will go to the MSC, for \$178,812. In fact, of the total recommended increase for all areas of \$620,818, the MSC

gets 28 percent, or about a third of that. Within this amount, only \$35,662, or 5 percent, of the total SSFAB recommendation will go to salaries there.

The remaining \$143,150, or 23 percent of the entire recommendation, will go toward programming at the MSC. Most notably, \$90,000 (or 14 percent of the total recommendation) will go to Aggie Nights. That basically amounts to a \$2 per student subsidy. If only other departments had the luxury. In fact, most of the other groups recommended to get an increase will have to spend it all on structural improvements or staff compensation.

If continued levels of funding for activities such as Muster are in question, why did the SSFAB recommend funding for things such as Aggie Nights when faced with serious payroll concerns? It seems as if the SSFAB decided that there was no need to try to meet its needs while staying under the cap and avoiding a referendum.

And even if the referendum fails and cuts are made, administrators will have the final say. The Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs will make the final approval of the submitted budgets, and the Office of the President will have to approve them afterward.

Although the administration usually follows the recommendation submitted to it, it seems unlikely that the administration will allow deep cuts to be made to programs that support key Aggie traditions. And the criteria for evaluation at that level have likely not even been determined yet. This is because the budgeting process will not be finished until May or June. So to predict that major traditions will suffer if the increase fails is somewhat misleading.

Although it may be a possibility, ask yourself if administrators wish to do something that will directly antagonize students and alumni. The greater likelihood is that other programs may be cut or curtailed. If this happens, it should be done with objective criteria and explained openly to the student body. But when times are tough, priorities must be established, and that which is most valuable must be preserved. Thus despite the inflammatory claims of the supporters of the fee increase, Aggie traditions will continue. Students should weigh carefully the options before them on this matter and vote for what they feel is right, not for what they are afraid of.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.

“Signs ask if students want traditions such as the Aggie Band and Muster to continue, and then say to back the fee increase if they do. Although those backing the increase, especially those in the MSC, claim this is not blackmail, when you look at the numbers, it basically is.”