

## Flag Room faux pas



SARA FOLEY

removal of traditions and the reduction of the things that make A&M special. The modifications of the Flag Room might seem insignificant, but it is only another piece of the puzzle that makes up the deteriora-

tion of A&M traditions and spirit. The Flag Room should reflect its purpose, which is the social aspect of students' lives. Besides the addition of the study tables, partitions will divide ar-

reas surrounding the globes into separated areas and the furniture in there now will be replaced.

Though some of the renovations will bring about positive changes, such as improved acoustics and brighter lighting in the main hallway, the expense of the project outweighs the little good that is done by it. Sherry Wine, associate director for the University Center Complex, said the renovations will cost \$750,000, money that could be well spent in other areas that need improvement.

When students' money is being spent, one has to wonder if the money is being spent in the best interest of the students. During the developmental phases of the renovation plans, some student input was sought, but not necessarily from the most reliable of sources. Steve Hodge, director of Special Events Facilities, said the MSC Council was consulted to generate ideas from students about possible improvements. Although those who serve on the MSC Council undoubtedly spend much of their time in the MSC, it is usually upstairs within the walls of the MSC Student Programs Office and not in the Flag Room. Furthermore, to allow those on MSC Council to be the only student voice in the decision making process is alarming since these positions are not even elected ones, and thus it they are not representative of the student body as a whole.

The plans are now being carried out and, despite any student objections, will be completed by the beginning of the fall 2004 semester. Unfortunately for the incoming Class of 2008, they will likely never know what the Flag Room once was or was intended to be.



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It is known as the "living room of campus," and is one of the few places every student on campus has seen. Early on Saturday mornings before football games, Oldags congregate to read the paper or socialize with old friends. During a typical day, students fill the room talking, sleeping or waiting to meet friends for lunch. During finals, students crowd the couches throughout the night, taking naps between study sessions.

But the days of idly passing the time in the MSC Flag Room will soon be a thing of the past. Plans are now underway for renovations that will transform the place that is well known to be loud and counterproductive into nothing more than a well-furnished library.

The plans for renovation of the Flag Room, which include removing the benches that border the room and replacing them with large study tables, lamps and hook-ups for laptops, might have begun with good intentions, but have resulted in the perversion of the purpose of the room.

The last thing this campus needs is another library, study carrel or place specified for study. Even in the MSC, steps away from the Flag Room, the hotel lobby lounge offers many of the same amenities in the form of places to plug in laptops and large study tables. It is also usually empty. Any student now can confirm that any productive studying that does take place in the Flag Room is done during hours that it is virtually unoccupied. The addition of study tables is superfluous and unwarranted.

Perhaps more disconcerting than the addition of unnecessary study areas is that the study spaces will be interjected into an area that is supposed to be for socialization and relaxation. When examining campus politics it is clear that the administration seeks the

## Dems should fight for Texas voter support

By John Pruett  
THE DAILY TEXAN

(U-WIRE) AUSTIN— Extending from the South to the West Coast, the entire Sunbelt region of the United States has gained prominence in presidential campaigns thanks to its sharp rise in population and corresponding electoral votes. Meanwhile, population in the Democratic Northeast and Midwest has either stagnated or decreased.

Three states, California, Texas and Florida, stand out in importance. While California remains largely Democratic and Florida is equally split, the new Republicans have come to dominate Texas, and in recent years, many Democrats have simply written off Texas in national elections. The radical shift in Texas over the past 15 years has less to do with party politics and more to do with the underlying demographic. What was previously considered the Southern Democratic Party has virtually disappeared since the civil rights era. Many Texas conservatives abandoned the Democratic Party to avoid increasing inner-city and minority representation in favor of the more suburban, business-friendly Republican Party.

By 2002, the new Republican Party dominated all branches of government. However, for remaining Democrats, the game should not end there. In his new book, "Cronies," Austin writer Robert Bryce argues that Texas has fast become the most powerful state in the nation. The current Bush administration houses a laundry list of notable Texans: Special Advisor Karl Rove, Commerce Secretary Don Evans, Secretary of Education Rod Paige, Vice President Dick Cheney and others.

Only two presidential candidates since 1924, Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, have been able to win the general election without winning Texas. The state's population explosion added several new seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Also, officeholders such as House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, hold

positions of tremendous influence. Bryce points to the preponderance of the Texas economy. The state's oil executives possess enormous amounts of personal and corporate wealth and exert leadership on a global scale.

The state reaps economic advantages from trade with Mexico and the steady stream of cheap, immigrant labor. Also, the war in Iraq disproportionately benefited large Texas firms, including oil services company Halliburton and defense contractors such as Bell Helicopter. Although Bryce's observations are not new and other authors have studied Texas' rise to national power, their importance cannot be overemphasized. Perhaps that is why Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., deemed it necessary to speak at last month's Texas Democratic Convention in Houston (the largest in at least four years).

Texas is simply too powerful to be ignored by Democrats. However, Bush has an edge. According to a report last month by Texans for Public Justice, Texas has the largest number of contributors to Bush's Pioneer program (Florida came in second). The Pioneers, who include Texans such as UT Board of Regents Chairman James Huffines and former regent Tom Loeffler, raise enormous sums for Bush's re-election campaign.

In all likelihood, Kerry and Edwards will not win Texas, much less the entire Sunbelt, in the November elections. But if Democrats begin to mobilize voters and contest state elections now, then perhaps in the future, Texas will become a new battleground for national elections. To achieve this outcome, Democrats must become a voice for disenfranchised middle-class and minority voters. Issues such as health care and public education are especially suited for building a Democratic base. Any national victory must include playing to what Rove referred to as the "Superstate."

John Pruett is a columnist at the University of Texas-Austin

### MAIL CALL

#### Kerry is not unpatriotic

In response to Mike Walters' July 12 column:

Mike Walters' column uses an all too common device, simply labeling anything dissenting as unpatriotic.

Kerry's meetings with the Provisional Revolutionary Government were misguided but were mainly to ask for a return of POWs it appears. Kerry should not be confused with those few in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War who plotted to assassinate senate members. He voted against such an idea and left the organization afterwards.

Kerry's connections with the anti-war movement are mostly praiseworthy. It was certainly patriotic to oppose things such as the My Lai incident. The movement helped end a conflict that many contend was wrongly fought with vague anti-Communist notions. The Vietnam War didn't benefit the American public, drained funds from social programs, helped destroy both South and North Vietnam, and helped kill

50,000 American soldiers with little to show.

Withdrawal was the intelligent option.

There have been also other benefits of the movement, most notably lowering the voting age to 18, thus allowing a large deal of the student population here to voice their opinions. The Vietnam War was not somehow lost by those who disagreed with it back in America, nor is the war in Iraq stalling due to those who do not support it. Disagreeing with America does not make one an enemy.

Daniel Rachal  
Class of 2006

#### Local restaurant shirt offensive

In my three years at A&M, I have been generally impressed with the positive relationship between A&M students and surrounding businesses. But I was shocked last Thursday by New York Subs in Northgate.

When I entered New York Subs, I was greeted by a young man wearing a shirt with a

thoroughly offensive drawing. It was a drawing of an elephant mounting a donkey, and based on the subject matter on the back of the shirt, this drawing implies the rape of the donkey. There is NOTHING humorous about rape.

The back of the shirt was almost as offensive, with the line "F— John Kerry" printed across the back. I can hardly imagine a more offensive way to alienate local progressives.

I was informed that the owner had made these shirts for his employees. I informed the owner that the continued use of these shirts would lose him a great deal of business, but he said he thought this would increase his business. A business must be a responsible member of its community.

This is an attempt to profit by alienating an entire demographic of the population. In addition, the general subject matter of the shirts, particularly the portrayal of rape as a "humorous" situation, should not be tolerated at A&M.

Nick Anthis  
Class of 2005

