

## Robin Hood plan is still stealing



ADAM SCHARN

Three years ago, West Orange Cove C.I.S.D. challenged Chapter 41 of the Texas Education Code, commonly known as Robin Hood, claiming the system constitutes a state-property tax, which is forbidden by the Texas Constitution. The fight has risen from the shadows and now has about 300 school districts on the plaintiff side. Although the districts involved do not have identical reasoning, they all believe the system has failed and is unfair. The system is not only unconstitutional; it is undemocratic. Even if the courts do not abolish Robin Hood, the Legislature must take immediate action to reform it.

The main problem with the Robin Hood plan lies within the state's passive role in primary funding. According to the Coalition to Invest in Texas Schools (CITS), roughly 55 percent of funding comes from local sources, namely the property tax. However, the maximum amount a district can levy on property within the district is \$1.50 per \$100 in value. Many school districts in Texas cannot generate enough revenue, even at the maximum tax level, to fund the maintenance and operations of their schools because of low property values. Rather than using a system of state aid, the Texas Legislature has decided to first see how much money can be taken from wealthy school districts and given to these poor districts, hence the name Robin Hood.

The state does not have a right to this money. Property taxes are local taxes: They are levied by independent school districts to fund management and operations of the schools in that area. Requiring schools to send any amount to the state would constitute a tax levied by the state, which is illegal according to the Texas Constitution. The fact that the excess revenue goes to another school district is irrelevant — it was not raised by the recipient district. It is a portion of revenue paid by property owners of one district to support their children's education. However, as Chapter 41, section 41.002 states, "A school district may not have a wealth per student that exceeds \$305,000." Therefore, not all of the money that citizens invest in their children's schools is guaranteed to be spent on their children's educations.

That quote appears on the first page of the bill. For a government to pass any law telling its citizens how much money they are allowed to have is essentially communism. This law forces equality by taking directly from some what they have worked hard to achieve and redistributes it elsewhere. Furthermore, it hinders the ability for any district to progress. Why would any school district want its property values to rise if extra profits cannot be kept?

To determine how education should be funded, politicians ask first whether funding should be based on adequacy or equity.

To summarize these two concepts, adequacy refers to how much money is needed to meet the basic goals of public education, while equity asks whether funding is being distributed fairly. One must think logically to answer this question. Adequacy means giving every student the appropriate tools to succeed — equity is an undemocratic concept.

If a district does not have sufficient sources for providing an adequate education to its students, the state must step in to help, rather than allowing one district to take money from another. There are better sources of money in Texas. For example, only one-fourth of the motor fuels tax revenue goes to state funding for education. According to the Texas Comptroller's Office, the motor fuels tax generated roughly 2.8 billion dollars in 2003 — one fourth of that is not even \$1 billion. Moreover, a Political State Report article covering the issue states the "recapture districts" make up only 12 percent of Texas, whereas the recapture recipient districts constitute 85 percent. There are not enough wealthy districts to balance the poor districts, and there are better and more sufficient sources of funding.

Abolishing the Robin Hood plan is not part of a right-wing conspiracy to maintain social class boundaries. Few, if any, school districts in Texas are seeing the benefits of this plan. Equity would be nice, but is not always possible. Adequacy is the democratic solution. This is a land of equal opportunity, not equal outcome.

Adam Scharn is a junior political science major.



DAVID SHOEMAKER

Last spring, students voted on a proposed increase in the Student Services Fee and, already hurt by tuition increases, they wisely voted the measure down. But those who backed the fee slipped in an increase over the summer, against the wishes of the student body.

It seems that some decision-makers failed to use their brains when coming to this decision. The administration should scour their budgets for spare money and solicit donors for support instead of relying on student fees to fund renovations and programs. At minimum, the University should try to make up for what it is planning to do.

The increase seems small, just 29 cents per credit hour and for most students, it shows up as just an extra \$3 on their bill. According to internal memos supplied by the Department of Student Affairs, this should increase revenues from the SSF by about \$300,000 this year. This increase does not require a referendum like that in the spring because the maximum fee, \$145.83, does not exceed the \$150 cap. If it did, it would require a vote of the student body. The student body soundly defeated the proposed fee increase this spring, as it did the spring before. Obviously, the student body does not want to pay more in student services fees without changes in the way those fees are currently spent.

But there was still a need to fund state-mandated salary increases. These increases will be funded by the current increase, according to Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Tom Reber. But they could have also been funded out of the SSF Reserves, which according to Reber, is usually kept at \$3 million. This amount is deemed to be sufficient for meeting operating needs of those who use the fee for several months. There are several programs that are projected to be funded from fee reserves as well, to the tune of more than \$2 million.

The first of these programs is the new Readership Program, which will require \$250,000 for the year unless alternate, non-fee funding is found. In fact, if the program continues, it will likely be submitted as a request to the Student Services Fee Advisory Board (SSFAB) for its recommendation this spring, according to SSFAB chair Jim Carlson.

Aggie Nights is also projected to receive \$90,000 from fee reserves, despite the fact that the inclusion of Aggie Nights in last year's fee proposal seriously hurt the referendum chances for success.

Although the decisions of those on the SSFAB to support these programs is questionable, the decision to make two of the biggest planned expenditures were not made by the SSFAB, but by senior administrators, over the last few years. The memos also include using fee reserves for renovating Cain Hall for

## Why vote?

### Students rejected an increase in fees, but they were raised

use by Student Affairs and office furniture for its new home. The renovation of Cain is estimated to cost \$1.2 million, and the new office furniture \$800,000.

The idea of renovating Cain, which is on the Campus Master Plan hit list for demolition, is only acceptable as long as the University remains committed to using it for the next 15 years as planned. The reason Student Affairs wishes to relocate there and needs furniture for the move is due to bad planning over the past decade. According to Reber, the vice president of student affairs' office is spread over five locations, some of which are borrowing office furniture from other departments.

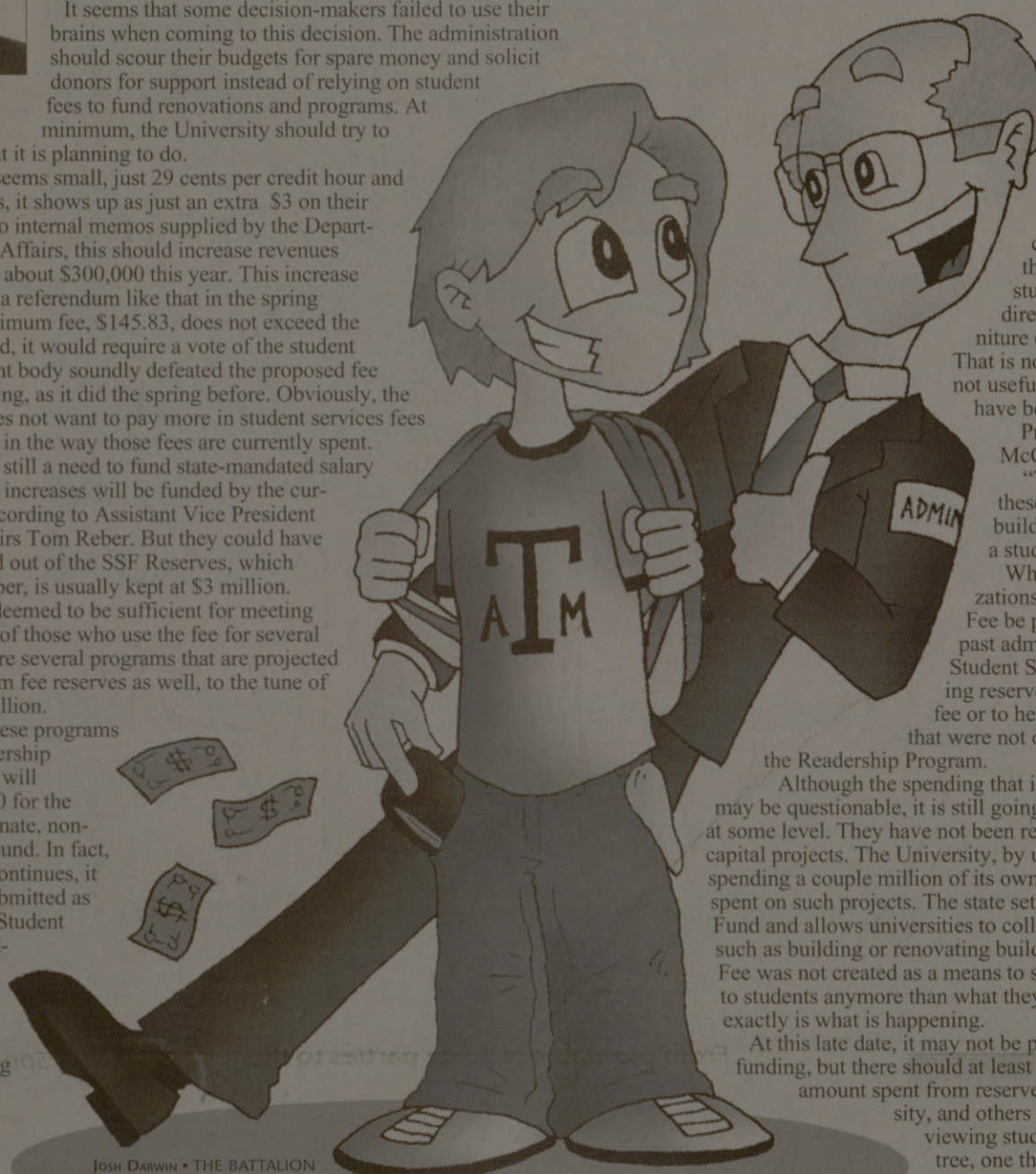
The situation should clearly be rectified, but not at the students' expense. A&M students will not derive any direct benefit from new office furniture or from the Cain Hall project. That is not to say that the projects are not useful, just that the wrong people have been tapped to pay for them. President of Aggie Watch Mark McCaig agrees.

"This is an inappropriate use of these funds. Paying to renovate a building on a demolition list is not a student service," McCaig said. Why should students and organizations that use the Student Services Fee be penalized for bad decisions by past administrators? The reserves of the Student Services fee is meant as operating reserves for programs funded by the fee or to help fund programs that come up that were not originally considered, such as the Readership Program.

Although the spending that is recommended by the SSFAB may be questionable, it is still going to programs used by students at some level. They have not been recommending spending for capital projects. The University, by using the fee reserves, avoids spending a couple million of its own dollars, which are meant to be spent on such projects. The state set up the Permanent University Fund and allows universities to collect tuition for capital projects such as building or renovating buildings. The Student Services Fee was not created as a means to shift the costs of capital projects to students anymore than what they already contribute. But that is exactly what is happening.

At this late date, it may not be possible to fully replace fee funding, but there should at least be an attempt to minimize the amount spent from reserves on the projects. This University, and others like it across Texas, must stop viewing students as a never-ending money tree, one that allows them to fund whatever they feel like whenever they feel like. This school is a service provider, one run by the state to meet a public policy goal of providing higher education. Perhaps administrators would do well to think about the quality of service they provide before assuming that they have the right to charge monopolistic prices.

David Shoemaker is a senior management major.



JOSH DARWIN • THE BATTALION

## MAIL CALL

### Red, White and Blue Out will give faith in Aggieland

In response to an Sept. 8 mail call:

Mr. Walker should be commended for reminding us about the significance of Saturday's game. I was terribly disappointed when it was announced last month that the previously planned Red, White and Blue Towel Out was being replaced with commemorative Sept. 11 editions of the 12th Man towels. While this noble effort will benefit the Fallen Patriot Fund, it is frustrating that we will not repeat our magnificent accomplishment during a nationally televised game. I admit that the summary released in the Aug. 23 Aggie Hotline stated, "At the request of Sept. 11 survivors and several members of the NYPD, FDNY and numerous Aggies currently serving in the military, this event will be replacing the Red, White and Blue Towel Out that was planned for the game."

So, perhaps we do not know the full story here. However, that should in no way hinder the student body from proceeding with an impromptu Red, White and Blue out. As I recall, the original Towel Out planned for a reversal from 2001; first deck was red, second deck was white and third deck was blue. Wouldn't it be spectacular to at least see the east side of Kyle Field pull this off?

Show us what you're made of, old Ags. Give us faith in the future of Aggieland.

Tonia (Dousay) Grigg  
Class of 1998

### Don't ruin the original day by attempting to repeat it

Sept. 11 is a date, just like June 19, Dec. 7 or Nov. 18. Every date holds some meaning to someone due to birthdays, anniversaries, funerals, etc. While I understand that Sept. 11, 2001 holds an even greater, unified significance to Americans because of the terrorist attacks on New York, that period in time and the months that followed were special. Americans renewed their patriotism and love for their fellow Americans.

Red, White and Blue Out was born from that

love. The event was a simple action that created profound effects and cannot be repeated. Attempting to re-create that moment, either with colored towels or shirts, would devalue the message of the original statement.

So, I suggest to anyone who wants to display their pride and patriotism on Saturday or any day: do so with your thoughts, words and actions. As to anyone who wants to recreate the event as a means of forgetting about the Utah game, today we stand as members of the 12th Man if our team needs us, and Sept. 22, 2001, we were here when our country did need us, not three years later.

Joey Mims II  
Class of 2003

### Corporate sponsorship cheapens school rivalry

Well Ags, the Athletics Department has once again come up with a brilliant idea to boost publicity and make more money. For those of you who are not aware, our rivalry with The University of Texas is now brought to you by State Farm Insurance.

Isn't that spectacular. We now have an official sponsor for our historic rivalry. Just when I think things can't get any more different around here, Bill Byrne hits us with another one.

What's next, Ags? The Bud Light Court at Reed Arena, or how about Kyle Field brought to you by Gallery Furniture? We can all go to the game and see if we can get on the Dodge Jumbotron from your seats on Cingular's second deck.

The point I am trying to make is that little changes like these tend to lead to much bigger issues down the road. We already have to put up with the Athletics Department's new spirit band that has made a complete mockery out of the Aggie War Hymn.

If I would have told you 20 years ago that the War Hymn would be played using a bass guitar and a rock drum set by someone other than the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band, you would have called me crazy. Well here we are, folks; that is now a reality. Just imagine where we will be in another 20 years.

I love this school more than most anything, as do

most of you, and that just makes it that much harder to see where we may be headed. Some of the changes that have come over the last four years I have been here have been beneficial to the University as a whole, but others like these are just plain ridiculous.

Rob McClelland  
Class of 2004

### Opinion drawing missed the point of the column

In response to a Sept. 8 graphic by Ivan Flores:

Although the subject of Ivan Flores' controversial drawings has been broached before, I think Wednesday's drawing demands discussion. Women are often objectified in every type of medium, so I no longer find it surprising that The Battalion chooses to portray women as sexual objects in Flores' drawings.

However, today's drawing was completely misrepresentative of the nursing mother. Breast-feeding is a nourishing act that strengthens the loving bond of attachment between mother and child. The drawing portrayed the nursing mother as a sexual object and seemed to taint the vocation of motherhood and make it less beautiful.

The drawing is also inappropriate as an accompaniment to the article. While the article was informative and non-biased, the drawing adds bias by suggesting that breast-feeding is indeed a sexual act, thus swaying readers toward an opinion they otherwise might not hold.

Amy Sattler  
Class of 2006

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters should 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: 015 Reed McDonald, 1111 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647. Email: mailcall@thebattalion.net