

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Out of touch

President Gates and administration must remember what makes A&M



MIKE WALTERS

The majority of Aggies came to this school not based on a merit ranking some ivory tower magazine reviewer gave us. Aggies don't come here for the food, the buildings or for the surrounding town. The real reason most Aggies are attending this university is to be a part of that "spirit which can ne'er be told."

Sadly, that spirit and the will of the administration seem to be at crossroads. While the student body had high hopes for Texas A&M President Robert M. Gates to make positive changes to the school, it's become clear he does not understand what it means to be an Aggie and would rather conform to other schools than do right by the students.

In an article published by The Battalion on Sept. 13 Gates said, "This business of 'when you're on the inside you can't explain A&M, and when you're on the outside you can't understand it needs to go by the wayside.'" The sage he quoted and tossed aside is one of the most famous phrases used to describe Aggieland. A&M stands out among universities as a place where students can unite in camaraderie and encourage important values such as honesty, integrity and bravery.

Gates' vision however, seeks only a spot at the top of school rankings, oblivious to the fact that Aggies already stand out as something special. Visit Yell Practice, Muster, Silver Taps and the hallway in the MSC filled with Aggie Medal of Honor plaques, and you will know there is something wonderful and different about A&M, without forcing students to accept rhetoric that says Ivy League schools are by definition better.

Time and again, Gates has proven a complete lack of understanding for Aggie traditions. In a May 2004 article in Texas Monthly, Gates said, "If, after 127 years, the loyalty and love that Aggies so demonstrably feel toward their institution depends on resisting change that is necessary for the University to take its place among the nation's best ... it's reasonable to ask whether traditions are worth it after all."

With that kind of attitude, is it any wonder

that he has failed to return Bonfire to campus?

The cry that "Old Army" Aggies are merely resisting change, as they did when women were first admitted, simply doesn't apply here. The changes Aggies resist are ones that threaten our individuality by homogenizing our school to fit a bland Ivy League ideal.

Aggie traditions — practices such as saying "Howdy" and building and burning Bonfire — stand for higher values. Bonfire allows the school to come together in hard work, laughter and brotherhood. "Howdy" represents a friendliness that the South is famous for. These traditions aren't just silly habits. Yet Aggies have had to stand silently by as Gates slowly sells off Aggieland in favor of his own vision.

Gates also said improvement in diversity recruiting was the primary objective for the 2003-04 school year. Once again, Gates has an ignorant vision of what it means to be an Aggie. Simply put, if anyone — of any race, philosophy or background — wants to come to A&M and can prove he is academically worthy, Aggies should throw open their doors and welcome him as a brother. Forcing certain backgrounds and cultures into the student population does little to help Aggies learn about different experiences because every person has a different experience from which he can celebrate and share, regardless of his skin color.

When it comes down to it, Gates presents an antithetical vision to what most of us were correctly taught as children: While you should care about other people, you shouldn't live your life for their approval, but rather according to what is right for you. Life isn't a popularity contest, but often a contest between right and wrong, between values and conformity. Gates only sees an opportunity to make this University conform to schools he believes are better.

No one can deny that A&M will always have change. It's part of life. But if those changes distort or destroy the Aggie spirit, they must be opposed with the strength and determination of Aggie reputation.

Mike Walters is a senior psychology major.



CHRIS GRIFFIN • THE BATTALION

Americans without health insurance isn't a looming issue



JOSHUA DWYER

In all the political rhetoric in this election year, one domestic issue that seems to get a lot of coverage is the supposed catastrophe in the health care system, specifically the number of people without health insurance. Democrats and Republicans have proposed several alternatives to improve health care, from tweaking or reforming the current system to replacing it completely with a taxpayer-funded universal coverage system.

But before Americans allow the government to encroach upon their personal rights and responsibilities, some facts should be discussed about the current health care system. There is no crisis of uninsured, and the problems that do exist are largely due to state and federal policies that plague the system.

According to the Census Bureau, there are 44.9 million Americans who lack health insurance. This translates to 15.6 percent of the population, the same as in 1996. What most media reports left out was that more people have health insurance today than ever before.

One significant problem with the 44.9 million uninsured is how the Census Bureau got the information. In its survey, the Bureau records how many people did not have insurance at any time in the previous year. That means someone who changed jobs and had a temporary lapse in insurance is treated the same as someone who couldn't afford insurance all year long. According to the Pacific Research Institute, a public policy research organization, "three-quarters of the uninsured remain so for less than a year."

Also, the Census Bureau appears to have trouble counting the number of people on Medicaid who don't qualify as uninsured. According to the Bureau, 35 million people used Medicaid in 2003. However, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services found that 53 million people had received Medicaid assistance. This means the Census Bureau is counting people with Medicaid as uninsured, which creates

an inaccurate picture of the situation.

A common misconception is that people without health insurance lack health care. Even without considering community health clinics and charities, this is not the case. According to the National Center for Policy Analysis, there are more than 40 federal health care programs to help people in need, and as many as 14 million people who qualify have not enrolled in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Programs. Furthermore, it is against the law for hospitals to refuse emergency treatment to anyone, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. As long as there is free health care, one can expect there will always be some people who are uninsured.

According to Sally Pipes, CEO of Pacific Research Institute, doctors spend an average of three hours per week treating patients for free, and hospitals contribute \$21 billion worth of services to those who can't pay. In fact, Pipes states that uninsured patients of hospitals only pay 9 percent of what their treatment costs.

Even if the Census report were accurate, there are some people who don't want or need health insurance. According to Investor's Business Daily, one out of three uninsured individuals has a household income of \$50,000, and one in seven has a household income of \$75,000 or more. Surprisingly, more people in this income range are losing or refusing insurance than those who make less. Half of the uninsured are under 35, and half of those are under 24. Twenty percent of uninsured workers offered group insurance declined it. In many cases, these are people who don't want health insurance because they would rather spend their money on other things, or they don't believe they will be sick often enough to justify the expense.

Ironically, some of the high cost of health insurance can be at-

tributed to bad policies that state and federal governments force on insurance providers and employers. One such policy that should be reviewed is compelling insurance companies to cover certain treatments or conditions. Not all of these mandates are bad, but one study found that premiums rose by 13 percent, partly because of one-size-fits-all mandates, such as requiring men to pay for insurance that included breast cancer treatments, or forcing women's insurance to cover prostate exams. The Health Insurance Association of America stated that these policies could have caused 10 million people not to have health insurance, many being employees of small businesses.

Most would agree that citizens have a moral obligation to help those in need, especially when they get sick. Expanding outdated government programs that encourage people to remain uninsured and preserving inefficient and impractical policies should

not be the solution. A universal coverage system that forces taxpayers to pay for the health care of alcoholics, smokers and other people who don't want to take care of themselves is not the answer either.

Reducing the number of uninsured Americans is a goal that can be accomplished by not penalizing employees who want to pay for private insurance and by offering tax credits to individuals and families. Common sense suggests that this should be attempted before citizens cede more of their rights to the government.

Joshua Dwyer is a junior political science major.

MAILCALL

'Customers' should never adapt to TS's needs

In response to Jimmy Hissong's Sept. 28 feature:

I may not be a business major, but I do think there is something fundamental wrong with the position Rod Weis takes in regard to his "customers." Weis states that "It's important for the customers of Transportation Services to understand the challenges we face."

Now I am a customer of many establishments in the Bryan-College Station area. I get my cable from Cox, I eat out at Taco C and I make midnight runs to Wal-Mart. The funny thing is that I cannot recall any one of these entities ever asking me to understand THEIR challenges and in fact, more times than not, they are asking me questions to better understand MY challenges. Maybe that's why I keep doing business with these places and can't wait for the day when I never have to deal with TS again!

Mark McSpadden II
Class of 2004

TS charges for services that students can't use

Mr. Weis claims the students at Texas A&M need to understand him, instead of complaining about his policies as director of Transportation Services. Mr. Weis doesn't realize that for students to be able to understand him, first he must explain to us what in the ever loving heck his policies are.

The bus system when I first came to A&M was probably the quickest method of getting around on campus. Now, it's faster for me to walk from my class at the Chemistry Building to Wehner than try to catch a bus, especially during the middle of the day. The buses are crowded, overworked and worthless to me now.

TS is the only business I've ever heard of that charges you for its services, and then refuses to give them to you. If I thought it'd make any difference, I'd call up the Better Business Bureau.

James Ripps
Class of 2006



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