



Joseph
Benigno



Michael
Murtha



Isaiah
Tsau

Aggie Story

Joseph Benigno grew up in Austin with an Aggie dad and a Longhorn mom — a house divided — but it wasn't much of a question as to which university he would attend.

"My dad was an Aggie, his brothers were Aggies, my other uncle on the other side was an Aggie," Benigno said. "Guys I looked up to in high school who mentored me, that led Bible studies, those were Aggies. My pastor was an Aggie, and so it started to become very clear to me early in high school that the men that I wanted to be like were Fightin' Texas Aggies."

Since Benigno stepped on campus as a student, he has been involved in Student Government Association. As a freshman, he was in Fish Aides and the SGA Legislative Relations committee. As a sophomore, Benigno was a student senator and policy manager for Kyle Kelly's campaign.

Benigno is also a member of Brotherhood of Christian Aggies, but he has spent the last semester as SGA executive vice president, which helped motivate his decision to run.

"I'm really thankful I got to spend a semester close to the position and be able to make an informed decision," Benigno said. "The last thing I want to do would be to make a decision and not fully understand what it takes to be student body president."

Platform

Benigno said the chief purpose and power of the position is to be an advocate for students.

"I don't get to make rules, I get to advocate on behalf of the student body to the administration," Benigno said. "And the relationships I've made this year as vice president and the relationships that I plan on continuing to make I think are very important for the student body, because at the end of the day we can say that we want a bunch of things, but we have to go to the administration."

With his platform, Benigno hopes to build on the tenure of Kelly and strengthen student ties.

"The goal, vision and purpose for our campaign is to preserve the best of our past and promote the best of our future," Benigno said.

Benigno wants to increase attendance at Silver Taps and endow Silver Taps travel costs for families who are financially unable to attend the ceremonies.

"We never want families to not be able to see the outpour of love the Aggie family has through the tradition of Silver Taps because they financially can't make it," Benigno said.

Benigno also said he wants to strengthen the tradition of Muster by sending out student representatives April 21 to Muster ceremonies around the state.

Benigno said he will advocate for tax-free textbooks.

"We go to a Texas state public institution, I don't think there's an reason we should be paying Texas state taxes," Benigno said.

In light of a recent City Council ordinances targeting multiple students living in the same residence, Benigno said he will push for student representation in Bryan-College Station politics.

"We have reached out to them, and we do know they are receptive to the idea of having a non-voting advocate for the student body to represent students at meetings," Benigno said. "Regardless of whether or not I win, that's something we need now."

Aggie Story

Coming from a Catholic family and a high school with a strong football culture, Michael Murtha said he originally wanted to attend Notre Dame and try to walk on the football team.

"I'm a first generation Aggie — my family is all from up North, so I actually grew up with everyone wanting me to be Rudy from Notre Dame," Murtha said.

Eight sports-related concussions and one auto accident later, however, Murtha decided to change course.

"So, I started thinking, if I'm not going to go to Notre Dame and try to walk on, I want to find a school that is enriched in tradition, just like Notre Dame," he said. "Then I came to A&M, and I think it's more enriched in tradition than Notre Dame."

After his injury, Murtha said he adopted a life motto — "You only have so many seconds." He said this motto motivates him to leave the best possible impact during his time as a Fish Camp counselor, Class Councils vice president of Class of 2016, Old Ags member, student senator, transportation advisory system member, St. Mary's Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults mentor, Muster host and campus EMT.

Platform

Murtha said his decision to run for office was cultivated at the Spencer Leadership Conference but born out of the belief that there is a disconnect between groups on campus.

"So I was seeing a lack of representation and I wanted to fix it, so I ran for senate," Murtha said. "When I became a senator, I saw that there were so many things that we could still improve on. We are making good strides in the right direction, but I think we need more of a bump to get there."

As such, Murtha said his platform aims to ensure that SGA can maintain the Aggie experience as the university grows with initiatives like 25 by 25. Murtha said student government represents only 1.9 percent of the student population.

"Almost everything else — parking, transportation, dining — falls under that representation, it's lacking," Murtha said. "We can, as a Student Senate, pass a bill to get rid of meal plans, for instance — the trades, not the whole thing — but we don't know who we are really representing when we only have 1.9 percent."

Murtha's answer to this comes in the form of a "Unification Council," a student opinion council that would be run by roughly 10 student leaders, including the MSC president, RHA president and Student Senate speaker. The council will hold monthly meetings with groups of student organization presidents.

Murtha also wants to start an SEC wide-charity project, possibly through the Big Event. Murtha said he has not yet consulted Big Event directors, but he envisions a charity project on the same day and at the same time with live feeds to other SEC campuses.

"We would train them to run the Big Event," Murtha said. "I know that we have already been training other universities how to run the Big Event, but we would just train the SEC schools."

Murtha said he also supports priority registration for veterans as well as mandatory excused absences for job interviews.

"Right now it's at the discretion of professors, and we wanted to make it a mandatory thing," Murtha said.

Aggie Story

For Isaiah Tsau, growing up as a first-generation American instilled in him characteristics that bode well at A&M.

Tsau said his father — a Chinese immigrant who taught himself computer programming and worked his way up from small companies to working as a software engineer for NASA — taught him the value of hard work while his mom — a special-needs teacher who works with cancer patients from China at M.D. Anderson — reminds him of the value of humility.

Tsau said he came to A&M when his brother was a senior on campus and the first thing he noticed was the Aggie family.

"I remember from day one, the first thing that stuck out to me was when you meet someone they say, 'Howdy' — number one. Number two, they look you dead in the eye and number three, they just crush your hand."

Because he is paying his way through college, Tsau said he has worked a wide array of jobs to pay off loans.

"I remember my freshman year when I paid off my tuition, I walked in between the skywalk between the MSC and Rudder, found a little corner for myself, called home and said, 'Mom, I have \$42 in my account,'" Tsau said. "That's probably the only time in my life I asked my dad for money."

Tsau said he draws inspiration from some of the cancer patients his mom worked with who have passed away. Their zest for life pushes him to be grateful for the opportunities in life.

Tsau said he is looking to empower others on campus and engage more of the thousands of students who don't get involved during elections.

Platform

In a population of more than 50,000, Tsau said campus is home to a diverse set of people and that this diversity comes in many forms, including intellectual, cultural, ethnic, gender, work experience and socioeconomic diversity. The goal of his platform is to address this diversity in a way that is more engaging than current student body president roundtables.

One of his bigger goals is the creation of the "Pass It Back App," either as a separate mobile app or an extension of the TAMU mobile app. Tsau said this app would allow students to send concerns directly to the student body president.

With the app, Tsau said students will be able to request things like CARPOOL or Corps of Cadets escorts with the push of a button. Tsau said he also hopes to build an anonymous reporting capability into the app. Tsau said he hopes to have a prototype soon, but there are still logistical problems in need of further development.

Tsau said he would like to revamp the SBP newsletter with catered notifications of various events on campus, including Silver Taps and sporting events, according to the user's decision.

Tsau also hopes to advocate for increased parking on campus, reasonable permit pricing and pardons for a student's first parking violation.

Tsau said he hopes to reach out to groups within the Department of Multicultural Services and across campus.

"If you are involved in SGA, I'd like to see you reaching out more to different areas of campus," Tsau said.

Photos by Shelby Knowles, written by Aimée Breaux

BATTASKS: What do you look for in a student body president candidate?



"I look for someone that knows a lot of people, so they can get a diverse group of people and opinions."

Taylor Seaman, math junior



"I want a candidate that genuinely cares about making a difference for the student body."

Taylor Smith, communication senior



"Someone that can make Texas A&M better by thinking outside the box and challenging the status quo."

Taylor Wilson, ecosystem science and management graduate



"I want someone who is very servant hearted, wants to make a difference and is willing to reach out to the students."

Sarah Gibson, political science senior



"I want someone who is organized, personable and responsible."

Katie Bell, allied health sophomore

Shelby Knowles — THE BAT ALION

Voting for student body president begins at 9 a.m. Thursday and ends at 3 p.m. Friday