

Letting students know their voices matter

Administration made the right choice to support freedom of speech, personal expression

On Sept. 29, the usual House Park football game announcer came over the loudspeaker a couple of minutes before 7:30, asking for everyone—from the stands to the field—to remove their caps and face south for the usual playing of “The Star Spangled Banner” before the beginning one of the biggest football games of the year against LBJ. Most everyone did, as most everyone usually does, except for seven McCallum cheerleaders. Instead of facing south towards the flags, they dropped to one knee, instantly joining the #TakeAKnee movement, which has, over recent weeks, turned into a national issue. The movement was originally started by Colin Kaepernick, and was intensified by President Donald Trump after he referred to the professional football players that participated in the kneeling as “sons of bitches” on Twitter.

The same week of the LBJ rivalry game, several other Texas high schools had players that touched shoulders, linked arms or took a knee during the anthem. However, the administrative response from these schools was very different from the response from the McCallum administration. One high school in Houston kicked two football players off the team for taking a knee at their Friday night game, while the McCallum administration defended our cheer squad’s right to speak up and be active for what they believe in.

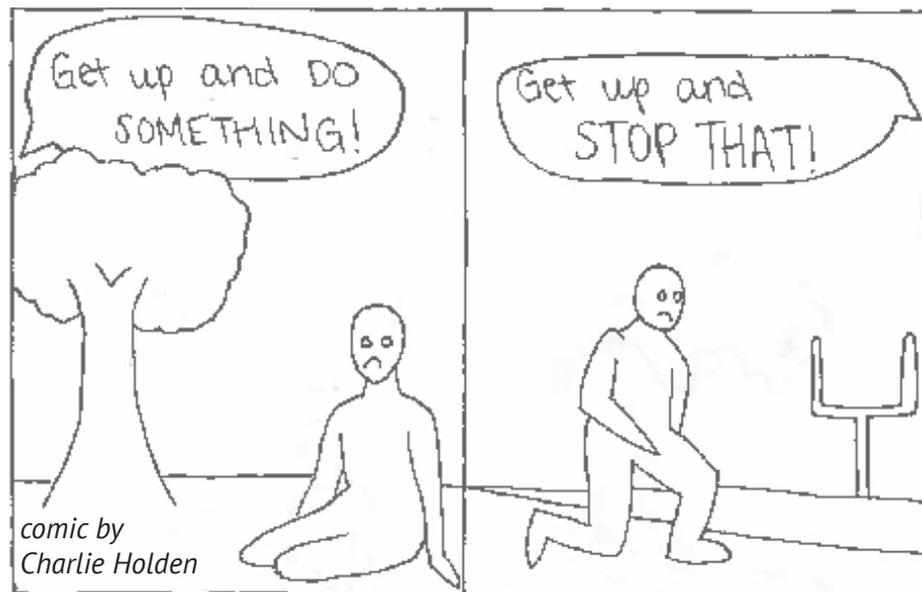
The cheerleaders taking a knee sent massive ripples through the community at large; the cheer squad’s protest was covered by KXAN, *The Austin-American*

Statesman, and even went on to be featured in an online story in a London newspaper, *The Independent*. Even though our administration was not exactly welcoming the attention, one thing that cannot be denied is how well they handled the affair.

The support of adults, teachers and faculty especially, is what students need in times like this, when being politically active can be so frowned upon. The fact that our principal, Mike Garrison, and our cheerleading sponsor, Chastity Colbert, chose to allow the cheer squad to take a knee, citing that there were no district rules against it, is a vote of encouragement for students to stand up for what we believe in during this time of political strife.

Younger generations are often accused by those older than us of being too indifferent, of turning our backs on politics and current events. They complain that we are more concerned with our phones and various social media networks than the things that “really matter.” When we decide to take a stand, however, they say that we are “uneducated” or that we “do not know what we are talking about.” There is no winning this game. But now that we have a president who is involving himself in practically everything that he disagrees with, no one can say anything about high school students not knowing what we are talking about.

By allowing students to take part in the #TakeAKnee movement, the McCallum administration is letting us use a voice that we might otherwise not be able to



comic by Charlie Holden

use, because the majority of high school students are not of the voting age yet. And although it was just the cheerleading squad taking a knee, many students and parents paid attention and watched them, which inspired people to think about how they can be politically active in times like these. Sometimes it can seem as though we are not making a difference, no matter what we do, but by taking part in something as powerful as a national protest we can feel like we are participating in something bigger than ourselves.

It is a feeling that would not have been

possible had our administration prevented the free expression of student opinion.

These days, it is so important to be able to feel like you have the chance to speak freely, to take action and to stand up for what you believe in. Many adults dismiss the voices of teenagers as uneducated and unimportant, which is why our administration’s response is so refreshing.

Letting those who are not yet of voting age know that their voices are valuable in the complicated social and political spheres of the ‘real world’ is not just important; it is essential.

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