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Prof says fire at A&M could have killed thousands

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Reporter
and
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A fire that sent smoke billowing through the Chemistry Building on April 16 could have killed thousands had it ignited and exploded some poisonous cyanide powder stored in an adjacent storeroom, said Dr. Rod O'Connor, professor of chemistry. "We were lucky," he said. "It could have been a catastrophe of major proportions."

But Ron Carter, chemistry business office manager, said O'Connor "was making a big deal about nothing." He said there had not even been a fire, just a dust fallout from the chemical reaction of the phosphorus being exposed to air. The incident occurred when a stock clerk dropped a jar containing about five pounds of white phosphorus sticks on concrete stairs just inside the main entrance to the old Chemistry Building. O'Connor said the white phosphorus, the same chemical used in phosphorus grenades, came very

near to exploding a storeroom full of explosive chemicals and poisonous cyanide powder that could have killed many students and faculty. White phosphorus is "pyrophoric," which means it ignites when it comes in contact with air, O'Connor said. "As a safety measure, white phosphorus is usually carried in a double container so if the first container breaks, the second one will remain intact," he said. O'Connor arrived on the scene before the phosphorus ignited, but while waiting for someone to get a

bucket of water the sticks caught fire, according to a report sent by O'Connor to Dr. Donald Sawyer, chemistry department head. In the report, O'Connor said he sounded the alarm, sent a stockroom worker to notify the fire department and began looking for an air-breathing apparatus so he could extinguish the fire. However the only available air-breathing apparatus was on the opposite side of the stockroom and the smoke from the fire made the apparatus inaccessible, O'Connor said. He said that in the stockroom

where the phosphorus is stored are shelves upon shelves of flammable liquids and explosive solids. The stockroom was no more than 10 feet from the scene of the accident, he said. "Had that clerk dropped the jar any sooner, the whole stockroom would have gone up in flames," he said. "And adjacent to that stockroom is a solvent storeroom with huge drums of explosive chemicals." Even though the fire was on the concrete stairs outside the storeroom, O'Connor said, it might have blown into the stockroom anyway. If

it had blown into the stockroom, he said, "that whole side of the building might have gone up." "The only reason it didn't is because when I left to go watch for the firemen I left the door in front of the fire open. That caused it to be sucked away from the stockroom." Several people inhaled the potentially harmful smoke generated by the fire, O'Connor said, but no one was injured. "However," he said, "if that fire had started in the stockroom itself

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Photo by Greg Bailey

Snakes Alive

George Lewis shows Raphael, a 6-foot-long snake, at a pet show at Bryan High School Sunday. Raphael took second place in the "Big-

gest Pet" category in the show, which was held by Texas A&M first-year veterinary medicine students.

Terrorism tops priority list at allied summit

TOKYO (AP) — President Reagan and six allied leaders weighed a summit statement today calling for concerted action against terrorism, but allowing for nations to take unilateral action when necessary. They met as Japanese authorities investigated the misfiring of homemade missiles by anti-summit saboteurs. During their first meetings together, the 12th economic summit was dominated by non-economic concerns — terrorism and nuclear safety.

Aides drafted and agreed on a terrorism statement, said Reagan spokesman Larry Speakes. Such a statement was no foregone conclusion considering the opposition some European leaders expressed after last month's U.S. raid into Libya. Another summit statement, concerning the Soviet handling of the Chernobyl nuclear accident last week, was in the draft stage at the Akasaka Palace.

Aides worked overnight on the terrorism and nuclear statements as the leaders began their first full day of the 12th summit of western industrial nations.

Concerning the terrorism statement, Speakes said, "I think the tone would be . . . addressing the issue of terrorism in a very direct manner. It would give the opportunity for the allies to work in a concerted manner to combat terrorism and at the same time it would not preclude unilateral action to combat terrorism, so it's a balanced statement, it's a good approach."

On the nuclear safety issue, Speakes said Sunday that the leaders agreed safety procedures should be strengthened and accident reporting procedures should be improved.

Several hours before Reagan gathered for dinner with the other leaders Sunday, several projectiles were launched in the direction of the State Guest House.

Police said five missiles were fired from an apartment building about 1 1/2 miles north of the guest house. Fragments of the projectiles were found around the Canadian Embassy, about 700 yards south of the palace building where Nakasone welcomed Reagan and other Western leaders.

Asked if he was upset by the incident, Reagan replied, "No, they missed."

Waldheim in June runoff for Austrian presidency

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — Kurt Waldheim, the former U.N. secretary general who has been dogged by claims he hid his Nazi past, received the most votes Sunday but fell just short of the absolute majority necessary to win Austria's presidency.

A runoff election will be held June 8 between Waldheim, 67, the candidate of the conservative People's Party, and Kurt Steyrer, the candidate of the socialists who head the governing coalition.

Interior Minister Karl Blecha announced the results, which were based on 100 percent of the voting districts reporting but described as unofficial.

Waldheim received 2,343,387 votes, or 49.64 percent, and Steyrer had 2,061,162 votes, or 43.7 percent. Two other candidates won 6.7 percent of the vote.

After the results were announced, Waldheim said he expected the controversy over his Nazi past to die down during the next five weeks, although attempts would probably be made to interfere in the election campaign.

"But do not forget these interventions have come from private organizations and not from governments," Waldheim said, apparently referring to allegations made against him in recent weeks by the World Jewish Congress.

The World Jewish Congress had accused Waldheim of hiding his membership in Nazi youth groups before World War II and of concealing his wartime service in a German unit that committed atrocities in the Balkans.

Waldheim said he served in the unit, but has continually denied that he was a Nazi or took part in massacres of partisans or civilians.

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Rocket failure may halt launches

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The destruction of an unmanned Delta rocket shortly after liftoff could halt all U.S. rocket launches for months as investigators analyze the third disastrous attempt to reach space this year, officials said Sunday.

Richard H. Truly, NASA's associate administrator for space flight, appointed a board to examine the loss of the three-stage, \$30 million Delta rocket and a \$57.5 million storm-tracking satellite aboard.

The Delta had been NASA's most used and dependable launcher, but on Saturday the rocket's main engine shut down little more than a minute after take-off. The rocket was destroyed on the ground after it tumbled out of control over the Atlantic Ocean.

The rocket's loss came after the Jan. 28 explosion of the space shuttle Challenger and an April 18 blast that destroyed an Air Force Titan 34D rocket.

NASA's director of expendable vehicles, Charles Gav, said it was too early to tell what impact Saturday's failure would have on future Delta flights. The storm-tracking GOES orbiters — Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite — are vital to U.S. weather-monitoring capabilities since only one is in orbit and its five-year life cycle is almost up, said Gerald Longenecker, manager of NASA's meteorological satellite program.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration paid NASA \$42.5 million to launch the GOES-7. It was to have permanently orbited the equator 22,300 miles over Columbia, and

would have been used to detect storms brewing in the Caribbean and lower Atlantic.

NASA's Delta project manager, Bill Russell, said the rocket's main engine stopped operating 71 seconds after the 6:18 p.m. liftoff.

When the main engine shut down, the vehicle began careening violently for another 12 seconds or so, he said.

At 91 seconds, a range safety officer detonated explosives aboard by radio command to destroy the rocket.

The launch had been postponed from Thursday, when leaking fuel was discovered in the rocket's main engine. Engineers reported no sign of this problem Saturday, and Russell said a fuel leak was not the cause of the engine shutdown.

Faculty seeks to better policy

Senate 'long overdue'

Editor's note: In this, the first of a three-part series on Texas A&M's Faculty Senate, the senate's history and accomplishments are explored.

By Sondra Pickard
Staff Writer

In 1957 when Texas A&M faculty members took the idea of a Faculty Senate to University President Earl Rudder, he vetoed the idea, saying he received orders from the A&M Board of Regents and the faculty would receive orders from him.

In May 1983 the Faculty Senate held its first meeting, 25 years after it was first envisioned.

In his first address to the newly created group, Dr. Gordon Eaton, provost and vice president for academic affairs, and an ex-officio member of the senate, admitted the senate was long overdue.

"Given the University's 107 years of existence, you're late — we're all late," Eaton said. "I would judge we are at least an entire generation late, and probably more than that."

The senate was set up to recommend policy — not to make it.

Its official functions encompass three major areas: policy, advisory and rhetorical. It's empowered to suggest all policies dealing with curricula and teaching, academic standards, scholarships, honors, hiring, tenure, promotion and faculty evaluation.

The senate may give advice on subjects ranging from overall educational policy and planning to the appointment of administrators.

Although still in its infancy, the senate's last three years have proven that the body is clearly a benefit to any major university.

The senate's first year was spent creating the eight major committees and numerous subcommittees that now exist.

But that wasn't all that was done in the senate's initial year.

As a result of senate action, students can now receive a degree in speech communication. It also helped establish the Department of

Speech Communication and Theatre Arts.

A committee was set up to review University-wide curriculum requirements — a committee subsequently named the Core Curriculum Committee and one which recently completed action on a proposal which will broaden the education of A&M undergraduate students.

Once the administration gives final approval to the core curriculum, all students will have to take courses in computer science, a foreign language, speech and writing, math or philosophy, science, cultural heritage, social science, and technology and renewable resources before they can graduate from A&M.

Beginning in Spring 1988, all students will take a 51-hour mandatory core of courses including the state required core of history, political science and physical education.

The development of a core curriculum is the most significant senate accomplishment yet.

Clements, White face November rematch

DALLAS (AP) — Texas primary voters set up a November bout between Gov. Mark White and the man he knocked out of office, ousted an 18-year Supreme Court justice and overwhelmingly rejected candidates linked to political extremist Lyndon LaRouche.

But nine nominations for statewide office still must be decided in June 7 runoff elections.

Former Gov. Bill Clements, true to pre-election polls, garnered nearly 60 percent of the Republican vote Saturday against rivals Kent Hance and Tom Loeffler and will get his chance in November to avenge his upset loss to White four years ago.

White had a tougher time Saturday, but got nearly 54 percent of the vote to avoid a runoff in his bid for a second four-year term as the state's chief executive.

Republicans face runoff elections for nominations for lieutenant governor, attorney general, railroad commission and two

seats on the Supreme Court. Democrats will compete in runoffs for nominations for the Railroad Commission and three Supreme Court seats.

Incumbents fared well, with the exception of Supreme Court Justice Sears McGee, who ran third in the Democratic primary and missed a runoff.

Fellow Justice Robert Campbell failed to win his party's nomination outright and will battle in a runoff against appeals court justice Jim Brady of Austin.

The success of LaRouche supporters in Illinois earlier this year failed to spread to Texas. The lone LaRouche candidate for statewide office lost resoundingly and 10 candidates for congressional and 10 candidates for congressional nominations finished last.

Two LaRouche backers had no Democratic opposition for nominations to congressional seats, but the Houston-area districts are considered safe for Republicans.

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