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Chief Justice candidates debate leadership issue

By Scot Walker
Staff Writer

Judge Wesley Peyton and Justice Bob Thomas, candidates for Chief Justice of the 10th Court of Appeals, squared off Thursday night in Rudder Tower in a debate sponsored by the MSC Political Forum.

Only 20 people turned out for the program, but Micheal Bitter, director of state programs for Political Forum, said that he was pleased with the evening's events.

"The people who are interested in learning about the candidates in order to make an informed choice will be able to do so, Bitter said.

"And considering our competition (a televised debate between presidential candidates George Bush and Micheal Dukakis), I think we accomplished our goal."

Thomas, the Democratic candidate, repeatedly listed his experience as a practicing lawyer and an associate justice on the court, while Peyton, a Republican, asserted that the deciding factor in a judicial campaign should be the ability to provide leadership.

"Since my first campaign for political office (in 1974), I have been told that I was too inexperienced, Peyton said.

"Yet I have continually shown that my leadership abilities make me qualified for positions of trust."

Thomas said that he agreed that leadership was important, but that the ability to be an effective leader came only as a result of earning the respect of other judges and lawyers through prior service on the bench.

"I have been on the 10th Court for six years," he said. "I've written over 300 opinions in my capacity as an associate justice. Peyton has never written an appellate decision. The other justices want a leader who knows what is going on, who has been down the road."

Peyton, Class of '70, tried to blunt the question of his experience by making several analogies to A&M traditions that he said showed experience was not as important a factor as ability and leadership.

"When the coach came over to the sidelines and said, 'We're out of players and we need your help,' the Twelfth Man responded, and no one asked about experience," Peyton said.

Despite agreeing that judges can only ethically campaign on the basis of competence, qualifications and experience

and not issues, both were quick to give opinions on the issue of Texas judicial reform.

Thomas said that judicial reform was the hot topic in the last session of the Legislature, and that it will be again this year. He said that he thought the most significant change that the Legislature could make would be to remove judicial elections from partisan political process.

"The issue is experience and qualifications, and a candidate for the bench shouldn't have to declare a party and constituents shouldn't vote on that basis," he said.

Peyton strongly disagreed, saying that party affiliations were necessary to make distinctions between the candidates.

"A party platform says a lot about the candidate," he said. "It's important to know if he has conservative inclinations and shares the values of the people and families of his district like I do."

Peyton also attacked his opponent on the issue of campaign financing, saying that it is wrong for judges to accept large campaign contributions from lawyers who later come before them.

"A litigant is in court because he feels he has grievances that should be redressed," Peyton said. "He deserves the full attention of the court, without regard to who donated how much money."

He said he recently filed his final campaign financial statement with the Secretary of State's office, and that he had received less than \$10,000 in contributions, only \$300 of which came from lawyers.

Thomas said that he agreed that there should be some limit on how much money a candidate can receive, but he defended his own financial statement, which listed approximately \$75,000 in contributions.

"The 10th district comprises 16 counties, stretching from Brazos County north to Ellis and Robertson counties, just south of Dallas, he said.

"A judicial campaign is one of name recognition, and I've spent \$1500 on advertising in the Battalion alone to get my message out. It obviously takes contributions to do that."

Thomas also denied that there was any impropriety in judicial candidates accepting contributions from lawyers.

"Lawyers know the judges and if they are incompetent or doing a good job," he said. "We have a situation now where a person can go up to a governor and say, 'I think you are doing a good job and I want to give you \$25,000.' But if a law-

yer goes to a judge and says the thing, everyone thinks something's wrong."

Both candidates said that the Legislature was too timid to act on the issue of judicial reform any time in the immediate future.

Thomas said that it remained to be seen whether changing from elected appointed judges is a good idea. He said that he saw many problems with a system that would have judges appointed.

"The federal system utilizes appointed judges, and I don't think the people of Texas want an appointed state system," he said. "The system we have is the best we can afford and is the best to state at this time."

Peyton and Thomas both said the biggest problem with any appointment system would be deciding who would be appointing.

Several references were made to Missouri plan, by which a list of candidates is drawn up by a legislative committee.

The governor then makes a selection from the list, and that name goes to the Senate for confirmation.

If confirmed, the judge serves six years, and then runs against his opponent in a statewide election.

A vote of yes lets the judge serve another six year term, while a negative vote turns the judge out of office.

Thomas said that it would be difficult to study to see if the Missouri plan would not be easy to convince voters to give up their right to choose the dates for office.

Professor: Economy nonpartisan

By Matt Marion
Reporter

Economic variables — not political parties — dictate unemployment rates and other economic trends, a political science professor said Thursday.

William Keech of the University of North Carolina said that political parties are a minor determinant of the nation's economic health.

Keech, who spoke at the Political Science Colloquium, discussed economic variables have on politics.

To demonstrate the idea that economic factors are more important than political parties, Keech described "typical" Democratic and Republican party. The parties were evaluated using a set of economic variables from the past eight administrations.

He then analyzed each administration according to its economic policies and was then compared to how the Democratic or Republican administration would have reacted under the same conditions. In most cases, he found that economic trends had a greater effect on the economy than policies implemented by any administration.

"Who is in office at the time is not what is doing at that same time that determines what happens to the economy — like unemployment. The typical has little influence."

Economic factors have more effect on the economy than do political parties, Keech said.

"Politicians are floating on economic variables that have little effect on the change of events," he said.

Examining the Carter administration and the factors that caused a high unemployment rate, Keech hypothesized the typical Democratic and Republican party policies also would have had similar high unemployment results.

"It would be wrong to say that a public president can handle unemployment better than a Democrat," he said. "If the economy is in a downward spiral, unemployment is going to rise regardless of the administration."

A question that arises from the study is whether those in office are to credit or blame for what occurs when they serve their terms.

"During the Kennedy administration, the unemployment rate went up," Keech said. "Considering the economic factors during his administration, employment would have gone down regardless of his party affiliation."

Texas universities join hands to work on minority plan

By Russ Brown
Reporter

Texas A&M, the University of Texas and the University of Houston are encouraging and helping prepare minority students to attend college through a minority outreach program.

"Texas is the only place I know of where the three largest (academic) institutions have joined hands to do this," A&M school relations department director Edwin Cooper said.

The program concentrates on teaching junior high and high school minority students and their parents what courses to take to prepare the students for college, how to take standardized tests and what financial aid is available to them.

It also can find tutors for classes the students are struggling with, organize visiting days on college campuses and design enrichment programs.

The enrichment programs give students a chance to spend a few days on campus in the summer and take a short course in an area of their particular interest.

The programs are designed to give the students an idea of what college life is like, Cooper said.

During the programs, the students also will be introduced to other minority students who have gone to college and on to a successful career.

"Basically, we are taking them by the hand and giving them assurance and support and showing them what it means to succeed," Cooper said.

Cooper, who started the outreach program, said he got the idea for it after studying minority recruitment and reading about a similar and successful program implemented in California.

After learning of the program, the University of Texas asked to join in the effort, he said.

The University of Houston also agreed to help in the Houston area.

The program is operated by full-time staffs in minority outreach offices in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and McAllen. The offices are funded by the universities at a cost of approximately \$188 per student per year, Cooper said.

Cooper said the center should not have much trouble getting aid from the state, because about 91 percent of people in state prison are school dropouts. It costs much more to support a prisoner than it does to help a minority student stay in school, he said.

Bash back following 3-year hiatus

By Matt Marion
Reporter

The Texas A&M chapter of Beta Theta Pi is bringing a taste of New Orleans to town. The fraternity will bring the Bourbon Street Bash back to the Brazos County Pavilion Saturday night.

The last Bourbon Street Bash was in 1985. The Bash was an annual affair that emphasized drinking, dancing and a good time. The party was at its biggest in 1985, when more than 5,000 people came to see the Busboys, a popular music band, perform. But the increase in the drinking age to 21 ended the Bash, after a three year stint.

Bourbon Street Bash coordinator, Craig Johnston, believes that with a new approach, the Bash can work again.

"We're not stressing the beer this time," Johnston said. "We're promoting the Bash as an escape from the club scene. All ages are welcome."

The Bash has been in the making for more than a year. The biggest obstacle to overcome in the planning stage has been the drinking age, Johnston said.

"The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission has been really cooperative and easy to work with," Johnston said. "We plan to ID people at the door and give wristbands to those of age. We don't foresee any problems."

In addition to checking identification at the door, the TABC will conduct spot checks during the party.

This year's Bash features two bands. The Kerouacs, a local pop band, will set the stage for Austin's funk band, Xavion. The music will continue until the Bash ends at midnight.

Admission to the Bash is \$5 in advance or \$8 at the door. The menu includes free Coke or beer.

Gideon's Barbecue will provide ribs and sausages for less than \$2.

The profits from the Bash will be donated to the local chapter of the Olympic Committee. In 1985, Beta Theta Pi collected \$20,000 in profits from the Bash.

Because the local fire department limited the number of tickets that can be sold this year to 3,000, the Bash does not plan to make as much money as in previous years.

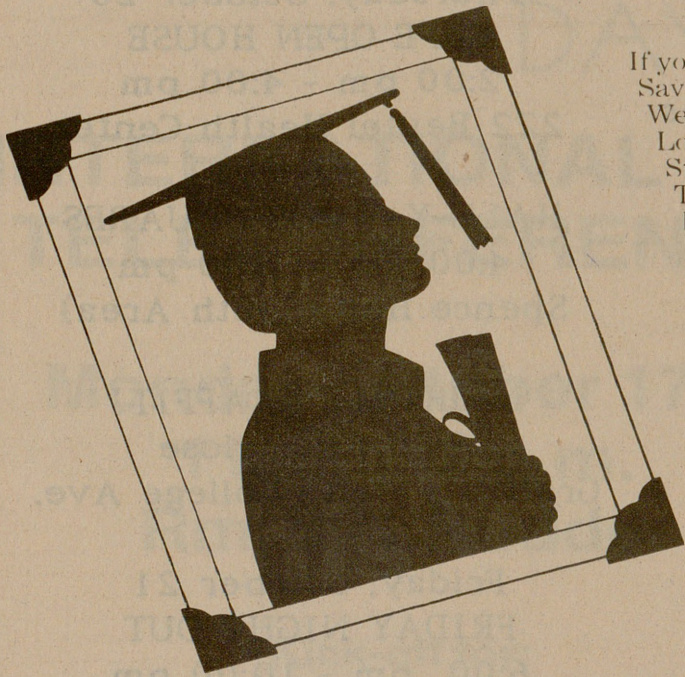
"It bothered us having a limited amount of tickets we could sell by Monday we had almost reached our limit," Johnston said.

Taxi service will be provided for those unable to drive home after the Bash.

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