

The Battalion

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Students make their choice: Walker for president

Thompson, Williams, Ray and Baggett capture other runoff elections

By JENNIFER SMITH

The Battalion

Brian Walker won the runoff election for Student Body President Tuesday by capturing 60 percent of the vote to Rick Taylor's 40 percent.

Walker and Taylor earned the most votes in last week's election, but they were forced into a runoff because neither finished with fifty percent of the vote.

Walker, the current speaker of the student senate, said improving Texas A&M's reputation will be his highest priority when he takes over in the fall.

"I want to attack the multicultural issue at Texas A&M and maintain the credibility and the name of the Aggie Ring," Walker said.

Taylor could not be reached for comments



Walker

on the runoff election.

Walker won 1,653 of the 2764 votes in the runoff election. Taylor, a member of the Corps of Cadets, captured 1,086 votes.

Walker said the campaign was tough, but definitely worth the effort.

"We had a hard road ahead of us, but we took it one step at a time," he said. "We rose to the occasion and got the job done."

Walker credited his victory to his campaign staff and the students.

"It was the student body of Texas A&M who voted me into office," he said.

Walker said he wants to improve the Greek system at A&M by enlarging the Greek staff.

Throughout the campaign, Walker stressed that the Student Senate needs to become more accountable to the student body. To do this, Walker said the Senate needs to be larger and more powerful.

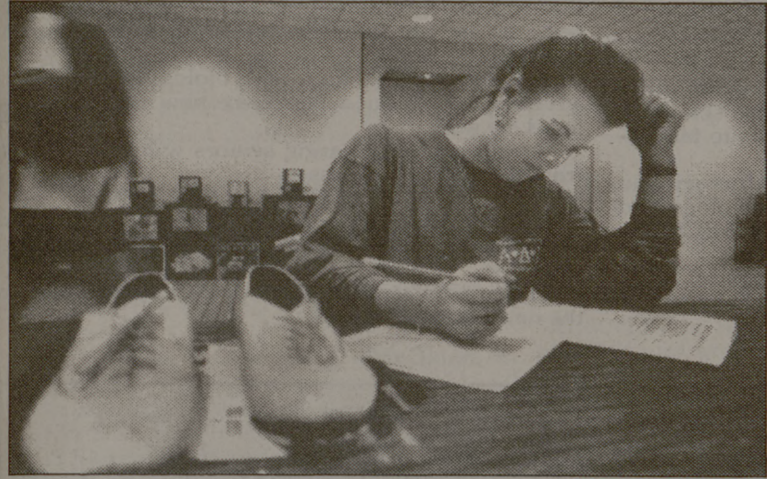
Further, the speaker of the senate and the student body president must work together to avoid the traditional conflict between the two positions, he said.

"We want to make the student senate more effective, and this will hopefully make the University more effective," Walker said.

Walker has been involved in student government for three years. He has presided as speaker of the senate and has served on various University committees.

Walker has also represented students in Austin by testifying before the state legislature,

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KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

Martha Walker (no relation to Brian Walker), a freshman business major, votes for the student election runoff Tuesday afternoon.

Radiation spreads over Siberia after weapons plant explosion

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSCOW — A tank of radioactive waste exploded and burned Tuesday at a weapons plant in the Siberian city of Tomsk-7, contaminating a vast area and exposing firefighters to dangerous levels of radiation, Russian officials said.

The accident could be among the worst in the former Soviet Union since a reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine exploded in 1986, spewing radiation across Europe.

It was unclear how much radiation was released in the accident, or how many people might be affected.

The Interfax news agency reported that about 2,500 acres were contaminated with radiation from the explosion. It said the wind was carrying the radiation toward unpopulated areas.

Vitaly Nasonov, a spokesman for the Nuclear Energy Ministry, said some firefighters at the scene were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. Interfax said the maximum dose among the firefighters was 0.6 roentgens.

Roland Finston, a health physicist at Stanford University, said in a telephone interview that such a dose "would not cause any clinically detectable illness." The average acceptable dose for nuclear workers is 2.0 roentgens per year according to the International Commission on Radiological Protection.

The international environmental group Greenpeace said the explosion took place in a plutonium separation factory, part of a secret nuclear weapons complex in Tomsk-7.

Greenpeace said the explosion apparently did not involve plutonium.

It said its information came from a unidentified Russian group member who had spoken with Nuclear Energy Minister Viktor Mikhailov.

Tomsk-7 is believed to be about 12 miles outside Tomsk, a city of 500,000 people about 1,700 miles east of Moscow. Because Tomsk-7 is secret, it does not appear on ordinary maps.

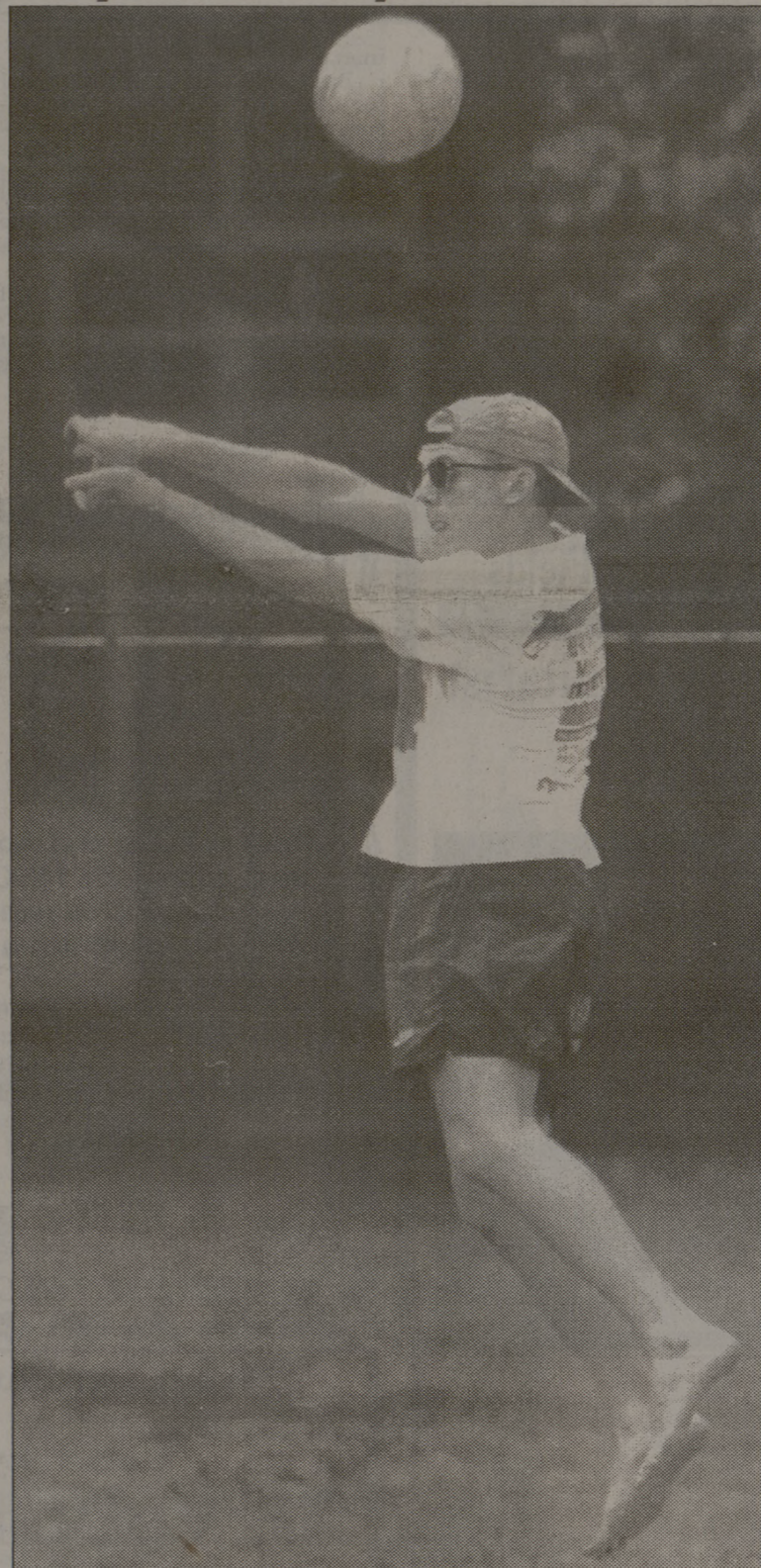
No efforts to evacuate the region were reported. Authorities said the tank that exploded contained a solution of uranium waste products, and the cause of the explosion was under investigation.

Greenpeace said the explosion apparently was caused by a rapid increase in temperature in the tank after nitric acid was added to the uranium.

Although the tank was made of stainless steel, buried in the earth and covered by a concrete slab, the explosion "has released all of the radioactive materials into the atmosphere and surrounding environment," Greenpeace said in a written statement.

It added that the explosion was accompanied by a fire that apparently started because the explosion short-circuited electrical systems in the plant.

Puryear Volleyball



KEVIN IVY/The Battalion

Brad Groves, a sophomore, digs a serve during a volleyball game Tuesday afternoon outside Puryear Hall. Groves played with five other residents of Puryear.

Computer glitch causes shuttle liftoff

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — For the second time in two weeks, a space shuttle countdown came unglued in the final few seconds before launch early Tuesday. The likely culprit: a computer glitch.

Computer data indicated a valve had not closed in Discovery's main propulsion system, raising the danger of a hydrogen fuel spill and a possible explosion. Engineers believe the valve closed properly and that a bad circuit might be to blame.

NASA officials hoped to have the problem corrected and resume the countdown by Tuesday evening. That would allow Discovery to blast off at 1:29 a.m. EDT Thursday on its mission to examine Earth's fragile ozone layer, NASA officials said.

Columbia's countdown on March 22 was aborted three seconds before liftoff when a stuck valve caused the main engines to shut down. And Discovery's on-board computers automatically halted the countdown 11 seconds before launch, less than five seconds shy of main engine ignition.

NASA immediately doused the engines with water and had to drain 528,000 gallons of fuel from the external tank. Shuttle director Thomas Utsman estimates every launch scrub at the pad costs about \$500,000.

The five-member crew spent the day reviewing flight data and flying training jets.

"Space flight is a complicated business, and sometimes things don't go as planned," said shuttle commander Kenneth Cameron.

John Pike, space policy project director for the Federation of American Scientists, was less charitable.

"It's bad luck that they've had two aborts in a row. It's good luck that they caught the problem on the ground. It is a reminder that this system is not perfect and that at some point in the next decade we're going to have another Challenger accident."

Hours before Discovery's countdown was abruptly halted, Utsman acknowledged that NASA had "hit a surge of problems" in recent weeks.

Medicare funding near exhaustion

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Rising health care costs have left the Medicare trust fund with only enough money to pay hospital benefits for senior citizens and disabled Americans through this decade, according to a federal report released Tuesday.

The report shows that Medicare's hospital insurance trust fund will be exhausted as early as 1998.

More optimistic estimates suggest the trust fund could remain solvent through the year 2000, but that's still sooner than expected.

The board of trustees for Medicare's Hospital Insurance Trust Fund, which issued Tuesday's report, had predicted last year that the fund's reserves would be exhausted by the year 2002.

"These new estimates show a significant worsening in the economic health of the Medicare program," said Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala. "They reflect many of the problems that we see across the

board in our health care system today and they are another demonstration of the need for system-wide change."

Congress is likely to act before there is any real threat to seniors' hospital insurance. A congressional aide noted that while the trustees' reports suggest "the sky is falling... it never does."

"These new estimates show a significant worsening in the economic health of the Medicare program."

— Donna Shalala, Health and Human Services Secretary

Members of the Medicare hospital insurance board of trustees are Shalala; Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen; Labor Secretary Robert Reich; and Stanford Ross and David Walker, presidential appointees who represent the public.

The five also are members of the boards of trustees for the Social Security retirement and disability insurance trust funds.

Their report Tuesday indicates that although the retirement trust fund has enough money to pay benefits for decades, the disability insurance trust fund is also going broke.

The trustees' report says the disability insurance fund will be exhausted by 1995.

Last year, their report said the fund would be insolvent by 1997.

The trustees recommended that Congress avert problems for the disability trust fund by reallocating the payroll taxes that finance both disability and Social Security's retirement trust funds. The action would make both trust funds solvent till the year 2036.

The trustees also suggested Congress address the Medicare trust fund's problems by controlling medical costs through a comprehensive health care reform package.

The Social Security Administration expects to pay \$300 billion in old age, survivors and disability insurance benefits this year.

Action-oriented conference to address minority issues

By ELIZABETH LOWE

The Battalion

Critical issues facing minorities in Texas is the focus of a two-day conference beginning today in Rudder Tower.

The Race and Ethnic Studies Institute at Texas A&M University is sponsoring the event, titled "Meeting the Challenge: Critical Issues in Education, Health and Employment for Minorities in Texas."

The conference will bring together students, educators, policy makers, researchers, business and community leaders to discuss solutions for improving the quality of life for Texas minorities.

The discussion will be unique in its attempt to set an agenda to implement the strategies suggested by the forum, said Gail Thomas, director of the Race and Ethnic Studies Institute and conference coordinator.

Lecturers will present their perspectives and join the participants in workshops to fill the gaps, prioritize and discuss the remedy they as a group want to propose to Texas, she said.

"We've had enough of identifying the problem," Thomas said. "The dialogue will be fully participatory. Each participant must take the responsibility of finding a remedy."

Rather than simply theorize about solutions, the discussion will stress determining how to fulfill the solutions, Thomas said.

University President William H. Mobley said the conference, as well as the Race and Ethnic Studies Institute, "will serve as an important lens through which the broad-based research activities of the University are focused on areas critical to Texas and the nation."

Thomas said the disparity between the individuals who make policies and people who serve them is one of the most important topics to be discussed.

Other important subjects she anticipates the conference will address include the importance of balance in empowering minorities and new perspectives which cut across race, gender and social classes.

The conference will be highlighted with a dinner speech in the MSC by media entrepreneur Tony Brown. Brown, a

recipient of the NAACP Image Award and founder of the School of Communications at Howard University, will discuss the nature of race relations and the formation of a strategic plan for the 1990s.

Other keynote speakers include Joshua I. Smith, president and Chief Executive Officer of the Maxima Corporation, who will discuss black entrepreneurship; and Maria Robledo Montecel, executive director of the Intercultural Development Research Association in San Antonio.

Sen. Royce West will deliver a speech titled "Meeting the Challenge: Which Direction?" Also, Reuben Warren, associate director for minority health at the Centers for Disease Control and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry in Atlanta, will discuss freedom as the ultimate measure of well-being.

The conference will feature more than 20 other panelists. Thomas said the conference is fortunate to have such a distinguished panel. "Any one of these could be a keynoter," she said.

Student passes for the conference are \$10 and available until 3 p.m. today on the second floor of Rudder Tower.

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