

Confidence carries Thompson through first year

The Texas A&M chancellor reflects on the past, present and future of the A&M System.

By Wes Swift
THE BATTALION

The most noticeable thing about Dr. Barry B. Thompson is his attitude.

The Texas A&M chancellor speaks about his first year at the helm of the A&M System with a zeal that is confident, like an old gunslinger who shoots from the hip, because he knows he is the quickest gun in the West.

"I have very high expectations for myself," Thompson said when judging his performance over the last year. "I know I can perform at a higher level and I intend to. I'd give myself an honest B+ [this year], and I think next year I'll earn an A."

"I make 25 to 30 major decisions a day, so they're not all good ones," he said. "But most of them are by far."

Thompson became the System's 10th chancellor on Aug. 18, 1994, after retiring as West Texas A&M's president.

He entered amid a whirlwind of controversy that shuffled the leadership of both the System and its largest school, Texas A&M.

The controversy began when Robert Smith, then A&M's vice president for finance and administration, came under fire in an investigation by the Texas Rangers that suggested that he solicited gifts during negotiations with Barnes and Noble Bookstores, Inc. Smith was later convicted in November 1994.

The System's reputation suffered another blow in January 1994, when state auditors criticized former A&M administrators like

Smith and Ross Margraves, chairman of the A&M Board of Regents, for mismanagement and unethical practices.

One of Thompson's first challenges was to help the System recover from the controversy the audited created.

A year later, Thompson proudly said he always stuck to his guns, and never felt intimidated by his job as chancellor.

"I've been a combat general — so to speak — for many years, so I was never intimidated," he said. "But I was always challenged, because when I make a bad decision it impacts negatively so many people and I feel that responsibility."

Thompson said he was prepared for the scrutiny he came under as chancellor, because he entered a similar situation at West Texas A&M University.

"I've always been watched extra close," he said. "When I went to West Texas A&M, it was in absolutely the worst situation, so I've been conditioned in the crucible."

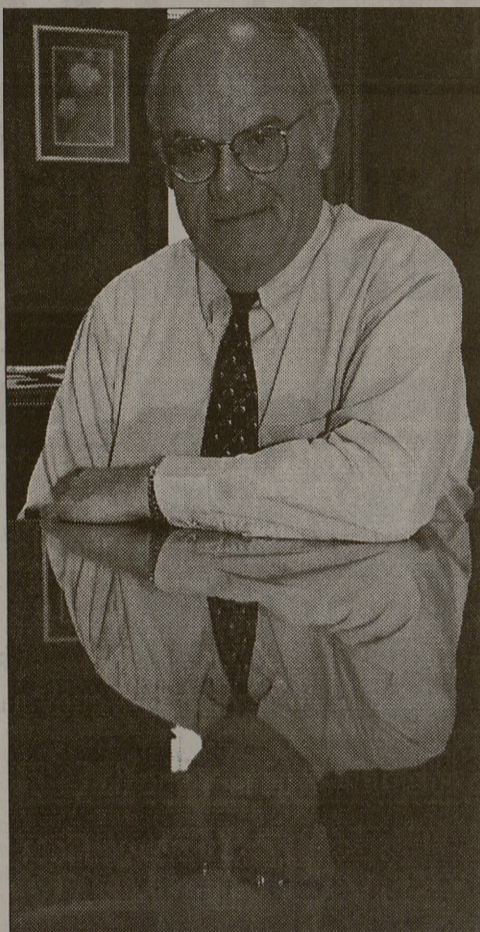
"I was not at all resentful, nor am I today, of the scrutiny," Thompson said. "I think when you're a public official, with the responsibility I have, that's a given."

He also had to provide stability to a System that had been playing musical chairs with its top administrators. When Thompson took office, the System had had three chancellors, two chairmen of the Board of Regents and three A&M presidents in the last five years.

Another challenge came during the 74th Texas legislative session last spring, when the System was at risk of losing substantial funding because of the audit controversy.

The System, led by Thompson, came out with their political guns blazing and got through the legislative scare with only a few

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Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Dr. Barry Thompson has just completed his first year as Texas A&M chancellor.

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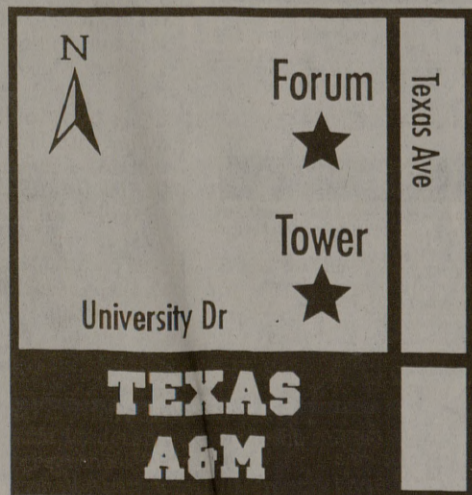
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