

## Shawn Slocum State representative challenges to return to \$500,000 cap on possible lawsuits Texas A&M

BY DOUG SHILLING  
AND JASON LINCOLN  
The Battalion

The shake-up of the Texas A&M football coaching staff is bringing back old faces. After a two-year hiatus, Shawn Slocum is returning to Aggieland. A&M football coach R.C. Slocum announced he will rehire his son to coach him once again.

sons, replaces Bill Johnson who recently took the defensive line coach job at the University of Arkansas.

Tam Hollingshead, who coached special teams since Slocum's departure two years ago will narrow his focus to tight ends.

Offensive coordinator Steve Kragthorpe will retain his current position as coordinator and move from wide receivers coach to coach quarterbacks. Kragthorpe takes over the quar-

BY ROLANDO GARCIA  
The Battalion

State Representative Ron Wilson, D-Houston, who says Texas A&M University is responsible for the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse, is challenging the current liability limit on possible lawsuits against the University.

"I thought about the families of the students who were killed or injured, and I think the state should provide some economic compensation for the tragedy that occurred," Wilson said.

Current law places a cap of \$500,000 that units of Texas state government, like the University, can be made to pay should they be found guilty of negligence in a lawsuit.

"Five hundred thousand [dollars] is pitifully small compared to the lives that were lost and the cost of the medical care," Wilson said.

He added that since the cap is "per occurrence", any award would have to be split among all the plaintiffs in any Bonfire-related lawsuits.

Wilson said he plans to introduce a bill, or a constitutional amendment if needed, to increase the liability cap in the 2001 session of the Texas Legislature.

### AGGIE BONFIRE

Wilson dismisses the idea of "sovereign immunity," the legal doctrine that protects state governments from civil lawsuits.

"A state shouldn't be immune from lawsuits even if it's legally at fault. Sovereign immunity is an idea whose time has come and gone, and the University shouldn't hide behind it," Wilson said.

Though Wilson has not yet determined an appropriate figure for the liability cap to include in his legislation,



CODY WAGES/THE BATTALION

Rescue workers clear logs after the Nov. 18 1999 Aggie Bonfire Collapse. If any victims choose to pursue legal action against Texas A&M University, state law mandates that no more than \$500,000 be awarded. State Representative Ron Wilson is pushing for legislation eliminating the law capping the award.

he said it will be substantially higher than \$500,000.

Wilson also said the University is responsible for the Bonfire accident whether or not the investigation finds instances of negligence or not.

"It was a University sponsored event, and that's enough for me," Wilson said.

Elynn Perrone, vice president for Governmental Affairs at A&M, declined to comment on Wilson's proposal.

"I really can't comment one way or the other until I've seen an actual bill," Perrone said.

In another legal matter, the four consulting firms hired by the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie Bonfire to investigate the collapse have asked that Texas A&M pay their expenses if they are called to testify or give depositions in accident-related lawsuits.

But state law prohibits such arrangements, Genevieve Stubbs, the senior associate general counsel for the Texas A&M System said.

"The state doesn't indemnify or pay someone else's debts. We just don't do that," Stubbs said.

Leo Linbeck, chairperson of the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie Bonfire, said that without any contract clause obligating the state to pay for the firms' court expenses, they may choose not to take part in the investigation.

"It's only fair, that if as a result of their service for us they have to testify in court, that they be compensated," Linbeck said.

"I want to emphasize my belief that an arrangement can be worked out, whether we call it 'indemnification' or not."

### News in Brief

#### Report reveals concerns of bonfire stack instability

A report describing a debriefing of a dozen engineers involved in the rescue efforts five days after the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse revealed concerns among the engineers of structural instability before stack fell.

Peter Keating, an associate civil engineering professor who aided in rescue efforts, expressed concern that the logs on the second stack seemed looser than those on the other three stacks.

Engineers in attendance also suggested that the centerpole be examined for defects, the soil be examined for instability and the methodology of tying logs together be altered.

## New engineering building slated to reduce staff Parking Area 5

BY JORDAN DAVIS  
The Battalion

The Facilities Planning Committee is recommending that proposed \$35 million building replace 100-150 spots in Parking Area 5, a staff lot located between Blocker Building and University Drive.

The elimination of staff spots could cause displacement of some student parking.

The building, first suggested three years ago, will house the offices and laboratories of the Department of Chemical Engineering.

The committee met Tuesday and unanimously recom-

mended that the building replace the lot, which has about 100 spaces.

The committee acts merely as a recommending body. A&M president Dr. Ray M. Bowen must approve the proposal before official action is taken.

Chuck Sippial, interim vice president for administration, expects a positive response to the recommendation from Dr. Bowen.

Chemical engineering is currently headquartered in Zachry, with labs and classrooms in Richardson and Cater-Matill Hall. But according to officials, this space is not adequate for the rapidly growing department.

Although chemical engineering is not the only department experiencing growing pains, the special needs of the depart-

ment — including its use of hazardous materials in its laboratory classes — make a new building a feasible solution.

"Our goal is to provide the best and safest possible labs for the department," Dr. Don B. Russell, associate dean of the Look College of Engineering, said. "[A separate building] will allow for the use of materials students otherwise could not use."

Russell said Parking Area 5 was chosen because the committee felt it would cause the least amount of disruption to students and staff.

If the proposal is approved, staff and faculty currently using the lot will have to find somewhere else to park.

Tom Williams, director of Parking, Traffic, and Transportation Services, said that this could mean moving those fac-

ulty and staff into the Northside Parking Garage, effectively displacing northside residents.

"I do not agree with the decision," Will Hurd, Student Body President and the only student member of the Facilities Planning Committee, said. "It is not a student-friendly solution; I am against students being displaced."

Hurd was unable to attend Tuesday's meeting.

Inconvenience to students was among the concerns of the committee according to one member.

The committee, which meets quarterly, is composed of a variety of University officials from both the University and the

See PARKING on Page 2.

Reminder to all A&M students

# LAST DAY TO DROP

REGISTRATION LINES ARE OPEN TODAY 6 a.m. - 10 p.m. BUT CLOSED ON THE WEEKEND

## Q DROP BEGINS MONDAY

BRANDON HENDERSON/THE BATTALION

## Census office opens in College Station

BY APRIL YOUNG  
The Battalion

A new local census office in College Station — which held its grand opening yesterday — has brought students job opportunities and a chance to influence the amount of federal funding allocated to the state, county and, ultimately, Texas A&M University.

The census, conducted every 10 years, provides statistical information which aids the federal government in determining how funds for government programs will be allocated.

Danny Stone, the College Station Census Bureau office manager, said college students are encouraged to apply for census jobs.

"We'll need full-time as well as part-time folks to work odd hours when people are at home," Stone said.

"It's not just an eight-to-five job."

The local bureau is seeking 300 workers for Brazos County and 1,200 workers for all 15 counties for which the office is responsible. Applicants must submit an application as well as take a skills test.

Stone said testing sites are set up in each county, and the test consists of basic skills, such as reading, writing, addition and subtraction.

"We call it a test, it's really just a basic skills exam," Stone said. "Practice tests are available for those folks that feel challenged by having to take a test."

Gustavo DeSousa, International Student Association president and senior food science major, attended the grand opening to gain information on how the census will affect international students.

Since many international students come from countries that don't have a census, DeSousa said he wanted to find out if international students should participate.

"We're not residents, so we want to make sure that all international students know they need to do this," DeSousa said. "Every person living in the Bryan-College Station area during this time should participate in the Census, regardless of the county they are from."

Stone said the biggest challenge is educating the community on the role they play in making the census a success.

"Education is the biggest challenge," he said. "We have to make sure that everyone knows that they have a bit of responsibility in seeing to it that the census is handed out and returned."

Census questionnaires for Brazos County will be mailed to each address on March 15, and must be returned by April 1.

Residents who do not mail in a questionnaire will be contacted through a follow-up interview by census workers.

Stone said A&M students in the Bryan-College Station area will be counted as citizens of Bryan-College Station.



SALLIE TURNER/THE BATTALION

Gustavo DeSousa, president of the International Student Association and a senior food science major, attends the grand opening of the new Census Bureau in College Station where he speaks with Fred Vanholveck, a recruiting clerk for the bureau.

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Aggies host 12th ranked Cowboys Page 9

Aggielife

The Year in Film Review of the trends in the movies of 1999. Page 3

Opinion

Speaking in tongues Columnists debate 'English only' laws. Page 13

Batt Radio

Listen to KAMU 90.9 FM 1:57 p.m. for details on the upcoming OPAS presentation