

• Dreams of Gold

Former student Curt Young to compete in Summer Olympics

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• Listen to KAMU 90.9 FM at 1:57 p.m. for details on the Milam Elementary bilingual program.

• Check out *The Battalion* online at [battalion.tamu.edu](http://battalion.tamu.edu).



**Weather:**  
Mostly cloudy with a high of 90 and a low of 76.

# THE BATTALION

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106 YEARS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

## Bonfire discontinued until 2002

### Fate of bonfire answered with postponement

MAUREEN KANE  
*The Battalion*

On Friday, Texas A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen announced his decision to postpone Bonfire until 2002 and to completely eliminate cut, a student-run tree-cutting event.

"I don't think it will surprise anyone that we will not have a bonfire this year," Bowen said. "We fully anticipate a bonfire-related event, a memorial, a tribute to the young people lost and injured. This is something our student leadership has indicated an interest in, and we will support it. It is our decision that we will not have a cut. Not having a cut achieves a number of goals. Major improvement in the safety environment, major reduction in the amount of time it takes to build bonfire, and there are academic benefits to that. The basic desire to do something good is out there. It doesn't necessarily have to be to go to cut and put yourself at risk, expose yourself to some really despicable behavior and put your academics in jeopardy," he said.

Although it was difficult, Bowen said his decision will help the University improve safety, decrease bonfire-building time and make the construction site more organized and secure.

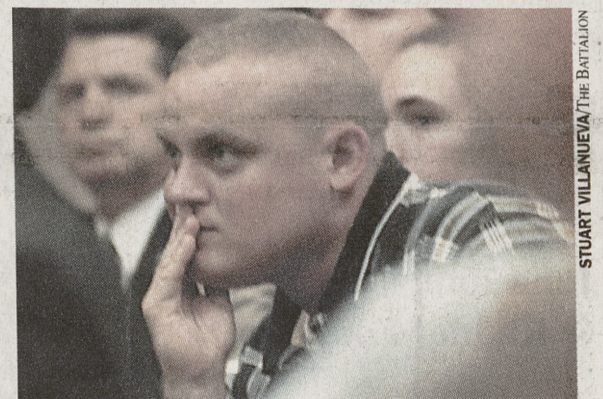
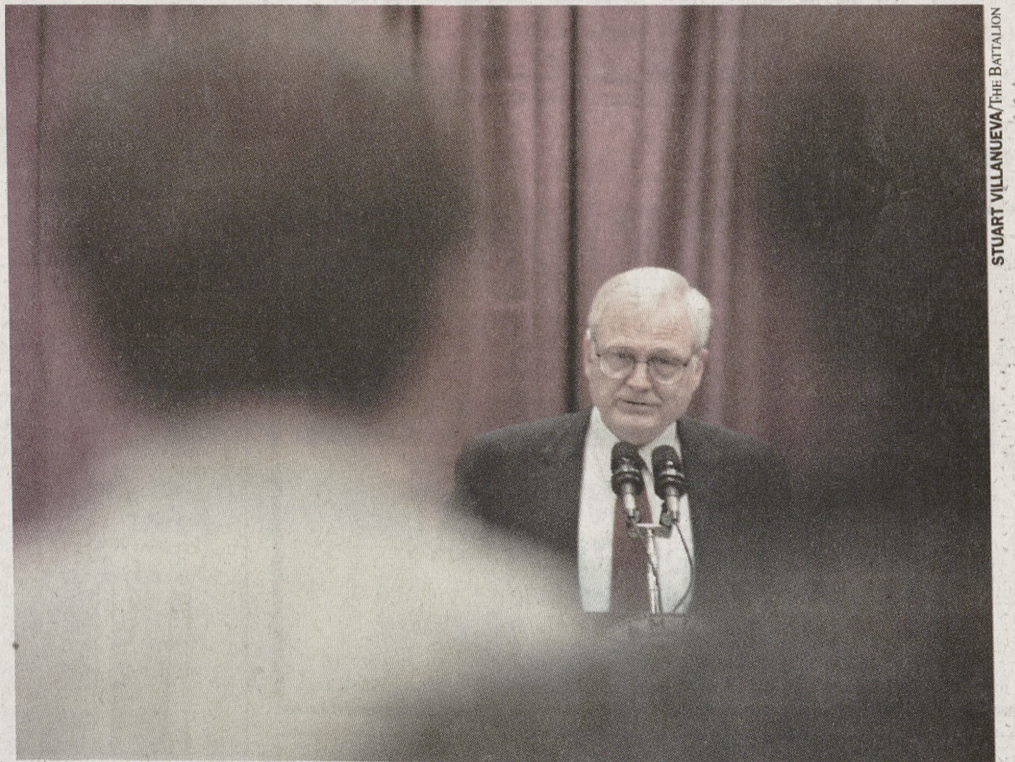
He said a plan for the next bonfire must be created with a detailed design prepared by licensed professionals. Height limits will be set, and stack work times must be set.

"We will have a bonfire if it is completely restructured," Bowen said. "We will have a bonfire which is not unlike historical bonfires — a single stack, tepee-shaped bonfire. Bonfire will have a construction plan made by licensed professionals. Construction time will be limited to two weeks. We will not have work after midnight or before sunrise."

He added that Aggies need to be flexible in response to this decision.

"The challenge to them is to protect this tradition, to cause this tradition to be here as a safe, positive element of our University," Bowen said. "I am confident that they are and will be committed to the fundamental changes necessary. Our responsibility as administration, faculty and staff of this University is to guide the young people, not to make their decisions for them. It's not to take away this tradition as a student-led activity."

Bowen said there have always been extreme viewpoints concerning the continuation of bonfire, and it "includes people who say 'stop the bonfire,' or 'don't change it,' but the vast majority say 'make whatever changes are necessary to save it.' I'm amazed at all the support I've gotten from the broader Aggie community, regents, chancellor, faculty senate, and Association (of Former Students) for what I do," he said.



(top) President Ray M. Bowen addresses the student body on the fate of bonfire. (left) Rusty Thompson joins the crowd to hear Bowen's decision. (right) Ryan Thompson, coordinator of the Keep The Fire Burning organization, was also in attendance.

Bowen said that deciding the fate of bonfire was emotionally difficult. He also said, "Some will speculate that this decision is too tough. I do not think so. Remember the bonfire is a manifestation of the Aggie spirit. If, in fact, this University were ever to decide it would not have a bonfire, the Aggie spirit would find some other beneficial activity that would allow the students to display their leadership."

On the subject of his resignation, Bowen said, "I do not plan to resign. ... The question was asked in a friendly way: Are the students going to be held responsible for the collapse of the bonfire? and I said, 'no, the buck stops here.' No student or anyone else

is going to be held responsible. The most important thing was to have our students understand that we're not going to turn our backs on them and have them take responsibility for what happened out there," he said. "We're standing together, and the easiest way to clarify that in people's minds was to say, 'look at me, don't look at them.' The idea of having authority and accepting responsibility is fundamental to the leadership in management. The people that run this University accept responsibility."

Bowen added that there has been no litigation filed against A&M, although legal action may be taken in the future.

See DECISION on Page 6.

- **DESIGN**
  - Prepared by licensed professionals
  - Single stack tepee-shaped bonfire
- **CONSTRUCTION**
  - Plan prepared by licensed professionals
  - Construction time limited to two weeks
  - No work from midnight to sunrise
- **ANNUAL REVIEW**
  - Compliance review of all objectives to authorize the following year's construction
- **UNIVERSITY OVERSIGHT**
  - Student Affairs oversight with professional construction expertise
- **SAFETY PROGRAM**
  - Safety plan prepared by licensed professionals
- **STUDENT LEADERSHIP**
  - More inclusive selection process
- **NO CUT**
  - Logs will be cut by professionals and delivered to site
- **CONSTRUCTION SITE**
  - Fenced site
  - Video monitoring
  - Limited access

## Students continue 2000 bonfire plans

STAFF AND WIRE  
*The Battalion*

Bonfire may burn this year after all.

Following Texas A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen's decision to suspend Aggie Bonfire until at least 2002, many former and current students have begun discussing the possibility of an alternative bonfire.

Marie Johnson, a senior agricultural development major, said she knows students who are already planning on building their own bonfires.

"Bonfire will happen next year. It won't be on campus, but there are students who will make it happen," Johnson said.

Don Ganther, an A&M graduate and owner of the Dixie Chicken, also disagrees with the suspension of bonfire and is exploring the possibility of holding his own bonfire this year.

"[Bonfire] should be held this year to honor those fallen children," Ganther said. "Texas is a big state. There's lots of places you could go [to have a bonfire]."

Ganther approached Dr. Larry Gresham, an A&M marketing professor, and requested that he ask his current and former students how they would feel about an off-campus sponsored event.

"There was an overwhelming consensus that the students I surveyed wanted to have an event, but there was no real consensus about how the event would be held," Gresham said. "If Ganther does decide to sponsor an off-campus bonfire, then it would need to be closely supervised, because he would be taking on a lot of responsibility."

Ganther said that he will decide by September 2000 whether he will hold a bonfire. Ganther's substitute bonfire will be a solemn, family-oriented event, with no alcohol, he said.

An off-campus bonfire would not violate any laws, according to Bert Fuller, deputy of Burleson County.

"As long as there is not a county or state 'burn ban' in place, and the bonfire is held on private land, with the owner's consent, then there is no law against a [bonfire] being held," Fuller said. "In some counties if prior notification is given, the fire department may stand by in case of an emergency."

See PLANS on Page 6.



Nancy Braus, mother of victim Dominick Braus, being interviewed by reporters after the press conference.

## Victims, parents and students respond to Bowen's decision

STAFF  
*The Battalion*

Students gathered at television sets all over campus Friday, anxiously awaiting Texas A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen's official decision on the future of Aggie Bonfire.

At the student recreation center, students set their weights aside to listen to Bowen's decision. Once the decision was announced, students reacted differently.

"I think President Bowen showed real professionalism in making his decision," said Jacquelyn Henderson, a senior Russian and psychology major. "Even though it may not have been popular, he took the initiative needed to preserve lives. He put safety first. That's the most important thing," she said.

Amber Arnold, a junior psychology major, said bonfire is a special memory that future Aggies should have the opportunity to experience.

"Every year that I can remember has a memory of bonfire in it. Once I became an actual Aggie student, the bonfire became more meaningful than ever. I am

very upset that two more freshman classes will not have the opportunity to participate in a wonderful tradition the way I remember bonfire always being."

Many students expressed displeasure at the elimination of cut. Cut took place on the weekends, preceding the building of the bonfire stack, when the trees were cut down.

"I think Dr. Bowen overall made a good decision. Bonfire definitely needed more regulation, but one thing I disagree with was taking away cut," said Matthew Weir, a senior industrial distribution major.

Ryan Thompson, a co-founder of Keep the Fire Burning and a senior history major, said Bowen's

See STUDENTS on Page 4.



## Aggies accept change in tradition

### Former students express feelings on elimination of cut

KIM TRIFILIO AND APRIL YOUNG  
*The Battalion*

President Dr. Ray M. Bowen's decision to postpone Aggie Bonfire until 2002 and eliminate cut — when students themselves cut down trees — were the main concerns for several former students.

"I can't say that I am totally pleased that [bonfire] is going to wait until 2002," said Mark Gratkowski, Class of '92. "I think the engineering could have been done by 2001. And as for eliminating cut, that just blows me away. [Cut] is a major, major part of the tradition," he said. "That is very disappointing since I did cut for several years. I agree everything needs to be changed, but I think a lot of the tradition will be lost by waiting so long."

Judy Franklin, president of the Houston A&M Club and Class of '68, said she is glad bonfire was not discontinued.

"As a former student and head of a club, I applaud Dr. Bowen's decision. I

**"I am glad that it will continue in a safer manner. Students go to A&M for all that it represents."**

— Judy Franklin  
president of the Houston A&M club

am glad that bonfire will continue," Franklin said. "I am glad that it will continue in a safer manner. Students go to A&M for all that it represents."

However, Franklin also expressed displeasure about the elimination of cut. "There is nothing more important than the life of a student. I didn't think

things like cut site would be eliminated. I know it does represent a source of danger, but there has never been a fatality at the cut site," Franklin said. "That was kind of a surprise, but it does make sense. Eliminating cut does cut out some steps in the total collective bonding process."

Roland Hurst, Class of '72 and owner of the AggieLand of Texas store in Houston, said he supports only some parts of Bowen's decision.

"I have some mixed feelings about the decision. I am not sure about the cut aspect. That was part of the bonding. I, by no means, want another tragedy, though," Hurst said. "I never wanted to hear that we are not going to continue bonfire because that would show that Aggies give up, and Aggies don't give up. I think this decision, associated with [Vision 2020], will make [the University] grow to the next level, but it is the

See FORMER STUDENTS on Page 6.