

THE BATTALION

Volume 109 • Issue 74 • 8 pages

Texas A&M University

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Tuesday, January 14, 2003

Economic turmoil curtails A&M funding

By Rolando Garcia
THE BATTALION

With a \$10 billion state budget shortfall looming, additional funding for Texas A&M is out of the question, a leading state legislator said, and the University will be lucky to escape budget cuts.

"There won't be an increase, I'll tell you that," state Sen. Steve Ogden, R-Bryan, said last week from his office at the state capitol in Austin.

The Texas legislature, which convenes today, must grapple with a huge budget deficit and a political environment that makes large tax increases unlikely — meaning state agencies, including public colleges and universities, may have to make do with less.

A&M got almost \$290 million from the state for the 2002 fiscal year, covering more than one-third of the University's \$808 million annual budget.

The tight budget situation has not made A&M officials bashful. They are asking for a more than 10 percent increase from last year's appropriation. According to requests filed this year, the University is asking for \$321 million from the state, much of it to keep up with the growth in enrollment, said Michael O'Quinn, A&M's vice president for governmental affairs. O'Quinn said A&M will make its case to the legislature and hope for the best.

"It doesn't look good right now, but we believe in our cause. Higher education is important to Texas, and the legislature understands that," he said.

A&M officials are also asking legislators to change the way public universities are funded. Currently, system, most funding is distributed by a complex set of formulas that takes into account factors such as how many credit hours a university offers.

However, additional funds are available only to selected schools, partially to offset the Permanent

University Fund. The fund's primary beneficiaries are A&M and the University of Texas. Distributing all funds through the formulas would be a more equitable system, O'Quinn said, and would compensate the schools with the highest enrollment growth.

University of Texas System Chancellor Mark Yudof is urging legislators to deregulate tuition rates, which would remove caps on tuition and allow the board of regents to raise tuition without legislative approval. Also, as part of the proposal, UT would waive tuition for students from low-income families. This measure would create a system similar to private institutions that aid poor students and charge full tuition for all others.

"UT just wants to be a private university," Ogden said.

O'Quinn said tuition deregulation is not currently a top priority for A&M, but the University may lobby for it as a funding alternative if the legislature cannot adequately provide for A&M's needs.

• \$10 billion state deficit announced
• No additional funding for A&M; likely budget cuts

In 2002:
A&M received approximately \$290 million from legislature, covering one-third of total budget

In 2003:
A&M is asking for \$321 million
- Final revenue projections still to come

Sources: State Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn, Sen. Steve Ogden, R-Bryan

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However, Ogden said he opposes deregulating tuition, except for summer terms. If tuition caps were removed and schools raised their tuition, the legislature would likely cut funding by an amount equal to the increased tuition revenue.

See **Funding** on page 2

Take a number



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Long lines filled the Pavillion Monday as Will Johnson, junior political science major and Erika Bhatoley, a freshman biology major, waited for two and a half hours to pay their tuition bills. Students will be dropped from classes Wednesday if tuition fees are left unpaid.

\$9.9 billion budget hole unexpected

By Connie Mabin
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rising Medicaid costs and a slowing economy have helped create a \$9.9 billion budget hole, twice as large as expected, state Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn said Monday.

When lawmakers gather for the start of the 140-day legislative session Tuesday, they will find a \$1.8 billion deficit in the current \$114 billion, two-year budget that ends Aug. 31. The state constitution prohibits deficit spending, so they must balance that budget before crafting another.

The shortfall is mostly due to higher-than-expected enrollment in Medicaid, and other health and human services, Strayhorn said.

Just to maintain existing services, lawmakers will need to find an estimated \$8.1 billion more than Strayhorn says the state will have.

That makes the combined \$9.9 billion shortfall a Texas-sized headache.

The amount is enough to run the \$4.8 billion state prison system — twice. It's 14 times larger than the \$706 million spent to run the 50,000-student University of Texas at Austin this budget cycle.

Republican Gov. Rick Perry has already warned that nothing is safe from cuts. "In tough economic times the focus must be on government spending less, not on taxpayers paying more," he said.

For the past two years, Strayhorn has said the

See **Budget** on page 2

International students face U.S. visa complications

By Janet McLaren
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M student Daniel Ayewa's sister has given up hope of attending college in the United States.

Sarah Ayewa was denied a visa in the summer of 2001 even after her acceptance to Baylor University in Waco, and denied again a year later.

Daniel, a junior aerospace engineering major and Nigerian student, is president of the Texas A&M African Students' Association.

Intense screening of international students seeking visas and the detailed requirements that must be met after their arrival have made it increasingly difficult for these students to study in the United States.

The Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) announced, on Dec. 11,

2002, the most recent in a long series of changes in the requirements for student visas.

For Sarah, having two brothers already in college in the United States, scoring well on her TOEFL and SAT tests, and paying in advance for her first year of college were not good enough criteria to allow her to get a visa to the United States.

"The embassy never gave a really concrete reason for the visa denial.

There just doesn't seem to be a solid reason why she was denied," Daniel said.

He said the United States is likely trying to control the number of people that enter the country.

The INS changes are aimed toward stricter monitoring of the activities of international students, said Suzanne Drolesky, director of International Programs for Students. Universities must provide all information con-

cerning international students' course schedules, grades and other personal information. Some of the most recent changes require that international students take at least 12 hours every semester and officially inform the INS within 10 days of changing addresses.

Daniel said the new regulations

See **Visas** on page 2

Wellborn road sees future lane closures

By Melissa Fowler
THE BATTALION

Since construction started on Wellborn Road in August 2001, motorists have dealt with continuously changing lane closures as construction workers completed different phases of the project. All four lanes of Wellborn Road are now fully operational, but there are a few more short-term closures expected in the future, said Doug Williams, associate director of Transportation Services.

Lanes will be shut down on Wellborn Road again within a few months. The lane closure will allow for gutter work and curb placement on the east portion of Wellborn.

Williams also said the parking areas near the Student Recreation Center may be disrupted tem-

porarily in mid-February when the contractor, Vaughn Construction, removes tower cranes from the construction site.

The completed construction will add the largest parking garage on campus in the area formerly known as commuter parking area 56 that lies north of the Rec Center.

Williams said the construction is on schedule and should be complete in August 2003. Despite additional expenses that will add handicapped parking near Kyle Field, he said the work is on budget.

The passageway will run from Main Campus near the north end of Kyle Field under Wellborn Road and from the railroad tracks to West Campus by the soon-to-be finished garage site. The passageway opens to a plaza on either side of Wellborn Road.

This initiative to unite East and West Campus complies with the goals of Vision 2020 as listed on the Texas A&M Web site to "develop pedestrian, bike and

vehicular pathways for the safe movement of people" and "break down the distinction between

See **Road** on page 2



Architects original renderings of the planned walkway and parking garage
Courtesy of Transportation Services

Cadets reveal doubts, readiness in wartime

By Janet McLaren
THE BATTALION

Senior Corps Commander Spence Pennington said he is going to fight in the Middle East on behalf of all the worried friends and family of those who serve in the military.

"I am more than willing to risk my life to protect the American way of life for my family and friends," he said. Other cadets agree with him.

Senior accounting major Nick Sikes said he was excited about the possibility of being deployed after graduation in August.

"I am anxious for the chance to repay America for the blessings of a good life that America

has given me," he said.

But along with these heroic attitudes, many cadets admit they are afraid to go to war. Corps member Kyle Lippold said his biggest fear is death.

"Everyone is afraid of dying. I don't think anyone in their right mind can say that going to war doesn't scare him," he said.

Lippold, a senior sociology major, said he will miss his family, friends, and "the little things like going to the movies or out to eat."

The idea of the Lippold's son going to fight overseas echoes of the conflict from his parents' generation: Vietnam.

See **Cadets** on page 2