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A&M may face further cuts

By Rolando Garcia
THE BATTALION

With Texas A&M University officials scrambling to slash 7 percent from this year's budget, early estimates indicate even deeper cuts may be in the works for next year.

Tom Kale, vice chancellor of business services for the Texas A&M System, said he was informed Thursday by state officials that state agencies, including the universities, may have to cut spending by 11 to 13 percent for the 2004 fiscal year, which begins in September. For A&M, which receives more than a third of its \$800 million budget from state funds, that could result in at least \$25 million in spending cuts.

"We're just beginning to consider how we would absorb such draconian cuts," Kale said.

With the state facing a \$10

billion budget deficit, A&M's request for a 10 percent increase in funding has become a "non-issue" Kale said.

"We're just beginning to consider how we would absorb such draconian cuts."

— Tom Kale
Vice Chancellor of A&M's
Business Services

A&M President Robert M. Gates said he has heard similar estimates, but said it is still too early to predict next year's budget situation.

"There's a headline a day coming out of Austin, and if you get serious about every

number you get, you'll become a manic depressive," Gates said. "We need to wait until we have more solid information."

If the cuts of the magnitude proposed last week do materialize, Gates said, the University would be able to present a strong case to have some of the funding restored. With the lowest per capita administrative costs of any university in Texas, A&M has demonstrated that it uses every dollar wisely and efficiently, he said.

To cut 7 percent, approximately \$16 million from the year's budget, Gates has already imposed a staff hiring and travel freeze.

A committee tasked with finding more budget cuts will meet today to draft recommendations to Gates. Possible cuts include postponing the purchase of expensive equipment and suspending consulting contracts, Gates said.

More Texas troops sent to Iraq

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — An additional 150 members of the 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade at Fort Bliss have been deployed as part of President Bush's military buildup to put pressure on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The troops will join about 1,300 other Fort Bliss soldiers already deployed in the past five months, post officials said.

Additionally, an undisclosed number of Air Force F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighters are expected to deploy from Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, N.M., to an undisclosed location.

About 125 airmen from the 49th Fighter Wing are expected to deploy soon. They will join nearly 250 other airmen who have deployed from Holloman.

Aurora Marcos' son, Sgt. Dennis Marcos, is part of the Fort Bliss deployment on Saturday.

Her husband was also in the military, teaching her to deal with deployments. However, she never imagined she'd see her son deployed to face a potential war.

"This time it's hard because they are going to war and it's an indefinite," Marcos said.

Area schools inspect for shuttle debris

By Melissa Sullivan
THE BATTALION

School administrators in Texas counties were asked by Gov. Rick Perry Sunday to inspect school grounds for debris that may have fallen from the space shuttle Columbia, and shut down their schools if any discovered debris was removed from school property.

Perry's spokesperson, Gene Acuña, said although only one school reported debris on school grounds, the governor is asking school administrators to take precautionary measures to protect school children from toxins in the debris.

Police said pieces of the shuttle could contain toxic materials and warned citizens to remain a distance from the pieces for their own protection.

A representative from the Anderson County Sheriff's Office said a piece of the shuttle was found near Neches High School, 12 miles east of Palestine, on Saturday. The debris has been removed and will not prevent the high school from holding classes Monday.

There have been no reports of other schools with debris on their property.

Acuña said law enforcement and Texas Education Agency (TEA) officials notified school administrators of the required inspections.

Acuña said if any debris is found, identification and removal of the parts would occur promptly.

"NASA has indicated the removal of debris on school property would be a top priority," Acuña said.

The Department of Public Safety has also advised law enforcement to notify administrators of public and private schools to inspect their facilities, Acuña said.

Bryan Independent School District Superintendent Herman Smith said this would be the first time officials have ever inspected the school grounds. Bryan schools will be inspected at 7 a.m. Monday morning, Smith said.

"We want to ensure the safety of our faculty and students," he said.

Belinda Mitchell, who has two children in the Bryan School District, said she would be upset if debris were found on school properties and schools had not been shut down.

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