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Board of Regents meeting

- Approved \$2.5 million project for fire and life safety modifications to MSC Hotel and Annex
- Expected to be completed in eight months
- Parts of MSC Annex will close

SOURCE: BOARD OF REGENTS TRAVIS SWENSON • THE BATTALION

\$2.5 million project approved

By Brad Bennett
THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents approved a \$2.5 million project to upgrade fire and life safety conditions in the Memorial Student Center Hotel and Annex during a teleconferenced meeting Thursday afternoon. During the 10-minute emergency

meeting, regents discussed modifications that will include the installation of a sprinkler system to the hotel and annex and removal of asbestos in the annex, said Charles Sippial, vice president of administration for A&M.

Bob Wright, director of communications for the University System, said the emergency meeting was held because the two agenda items, which also included unanimous approval of a ground lease agreement for Prairie

View A&M, were not ready before the meeting held last month and needed to be approved before the meeting in March.

Sippial said the modifications to the MSC and hotel came after two years of planning by A&M to comply with fire marshal recommendations made in late 2000.

The reason for the delay in

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Bush asks U.N. for help

By Ron Fournier
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — On the eve of a showdown over Iraq, President Bush said Thursday the United Nations must help him confront Saddam Hussein or “fade into history as an ineffective, irrelevant, debating society.”

As Bush issued his call for unity, the administration said Americans should be prepared for “a fairly long-term commitment” in Iraq if the United States goes to war.

Secretary of State Colin Powell told the House Budget Committee he had no

estimate of the cost of war with Iraq. But he did say he thought Iraq should be able to adjust quickly afterward — in contrast to the slow pace of recovery in Afghanistan.

“I would hope that it would be a short conflict and that it would be directed at the leadership, not the society,” he said. Iraq has an effective bureaucracy, rich oil resources and a developed middle class, the secretary of state said.

The flurry of events laid the groundwork for Friday, when U.N. weapons inspectors are to report to the Security Council on whether Iraq is complying with

orders to disarm. Bush is expected to quickly follow up with a request for a U.N. resolution authorizing force.

However, the top U.N. nuclear weapons inspector said Thursday that inspections should continue.

“We’re still in midcourse, but we are moving forward, and I see no reason for us to bring the inspection process to a halt,” Mohamed ElBaradei said in an interview with The Associated Press as he drafted his report on a flight from Vienna, Austria, to New York.

U.N. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity,

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Panel uncovers Enron’s \$2 billion IRS schemes

By Marcy Gordon
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Enron set up an array of dizzyingly complex schemes to hoodwink the Internal Revenue Service, reap more than \$2 billion in questionable tax and accounting savings and inflate its income as it paid its executives lavishly, a congressional panel found in an investigation made public Thursday.

The now-bankrupt company created a dozen tax-sheltering transactions that used techniques like claiming the same tax loss twice, according to a report by the House-Senate Joint Committee on Taxation, which spent a year investigating Enron’s tax practices. With names like Project Apache, Project Renegade and Project Condor, the

transactions show a vast new arena of Enron activity beyond the web of off-balance-sheet schemes and partnerships that have already been revealed.

“Money, money, money,” declared Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, at a hearing on the tax panel’s report. “Money above honesty and financial accounting.”

The massive three-volume report “reads like a conspiracy novel,” Grassley said.

The evidence of Enron’s clever manipulation of the tax laws and the fact that other big U.S. corporations do the same are fueling a push by lawmakers to crack down on tax shelters. Senate Democratic

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Tokens of love



JOSHUA HOBSON • THE BATTALION

Derek Merritt, a senior geography major, carefully chooses white and purple hybrid roses for his girlfriend of 5 at a local flower shop on Thursday in preparation for Valentine’s Day.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Spanan opposes Bush’s tax plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats praised Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Spanan on Wednesday for opposing President Bush’s new \$1.3 trillion in tax cuts. The move is expensive in light of soaring budget deficits. The White House meanwhile, was pushing ahead with efforts to build a coalition in Congress.

The economy needs a little “why wait?” Bush said his plan with a group of investors in Alexandria, Va., Spanan, delivering the twice-a-year economic report to the House Financial Services Committee, was opposed by Democrats on the committee for his tough comments before a Senate panel Tuesday. He told committee members that any future tax cuts should be paid for either by raising other taxes or trimming spending.

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Cowboy boots and photos featured at Bush Library

By Lauren Smith
THE BATTALION

The collection of cowboy boots at the George Bush Presidential Library Complex’s “Legends of the West” exhibit has never been matched by the paraphernalia at the Dixie Chicken on Northgate.

“The boots are wild, raucous pieces that spice up the 100 serious Western classics from artists such as Frederic Remington, Charles Russel, Peter Hurd, Frank Reaugh, Tome Lea, and Thomas Moran,” said Patricia Burchfield, curator of the Bush Museum.

Until July 5, the museum exhibit hall will be adorned with 150 pairs of boots with carvings, beaded designs, and paintings by some of the most prestigious artists of the trade. The exhibit includes bronze and oil pieces and a vast collection of black and white photos from 19th century Native Americans.

A vintage Native American

motorcycle from the 1940s is also part of the exhibit, placed next to the 2002 version of the motorcycle, Burchfield said.

Contemporary artists are also represented in the eclectic mix of classic and modern pieces from Carrie Fell and Larry Pirmie, who give their take on the West as a state of mind, said Brian Blake, public relations specialist for the library and museum.

“The West is still very much alive in people’s psyche. It is a state of mind, a sense of adventure,” Burchfield said. “It is people following their dreams.”

Students visiting the exhibit walked away impressed with the aesthetic quality and elaborate designs of the boots, Burchfield said.

“I was mesmerized by those boots. Each of them is a little masterpiece. They probably took hours to make,” said Jenny Baker, a junior industrial distribution major.

The whole gallery will be set up as a western lodge for the duration of the exhibit.

“I hope students will gain a sense for the rich history of the West and the wonderful and enduring influence on our history,” Burchfield said.

Legends of The West Exhibit

- ☀ Bush Museum: Feb. 15 - July 5
- ☀ Focus on the lure of the West, art, history and culture
- ☀ Features photographs and boot art

SOURCE: BUSH LIBRARY PUBLIC RELATIONS TRAVIS SWENSON • THE BATTALION

Investigators: Tear in shuttle skin may have caused explosion

By Ted Bridis
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The space shuttle Columbia probably suffered a devastating breach of its skin, allowing superheated air inside the left wing and possibly the wheel compartment during its fiery descent, investigators said Thursday.

In its first significant determination, the accident investigation board announced that heat damage from a missing tile would not be sufficient to cause the unusual temperature increases detected inside Columbia minutes before it disintegrated. Sensors noticed an unusual heat buildup of about 30 degrees inside the wheel well before the accident.

Instead, the board determined those increases were caused by the presence inside Columbia of plasma, or superheated air with temperatures of roughly 2,000 degrees. It said investigators were studying where a breach might have occurred to allow plasma to seep inside the wheel compartment or elsewhere in Columbia’s left wing.

The board did not specify whether such a breach could be the result of a structural tear in Columbia’s aluminum frame or a hole from debris striking the spacecraft. The board also did not indicate when the breach occurred during the shuttle’s 16-day mission.

Officials have previously focused on an unusu-

ally large chunk of foam that broke off Columbia’s external fuel tank on liftoff. Video footage showed it struck part of the shuttle’s left wing, including its toughened leading edge and the thermal tiles covering the landing gear.

The announcement focused renewed attention on possible catastrophic failures inside the wheel compartment that may have contributed to the Feb. 1 breakup over Texas that killed seven astronauts.

Officials are not sure where a breach might have opened in Columbia’s skin, NASA spokesman James Hartsfield said. But he said the leading edge or elsewhere on the left wing, the fuselage or the left landing gear door were prime candidates.

“Any of those could be potential causes for the temperature change we saw,” Hartsfield said. “They do not and have not pinpointed any general location as to where that plasma flow would have to originate.”

In an unusual plea for assistance, NASA urged Americans on Thursday to share with them any photographs or videotapes of Columbia’s descent from California to eastern Texas. Some members of the public have already handed over images, “but more material will help the investigation of the Columbia accident,” the agency said.

The board’s announcement didn’t surprise those experts who have long believed that a mysterious failure of sensors within Columbia’s left

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