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Gates: Bonfire will not burn in Fall 2003

Pending litigation a concern

By Janet McLaren
THE BATTALION

With litigation pending and his predecessor's past delays in the balance, University president Robert M. Gates announced Wednesday that Aggie Bonfire will not burn this fall.

In a letter addressed to faculty and students, Gates explained that he will postpone a decision on the future of Bonfire until lawsuits arising from the 1999 Aggie Bonfire Collapse, which killed 12 Aggies and injured 27 others, are resolved. This is the first time in his seven months as president that Gates had made an official pronouncement on the fate of the University's 90-year tradition.

"I have concluded that any announcement, decision or change in the status quo regarding the future of Bonfire would be inappropriate while litigation is still on-going," Gates said.

Trial dates have yet to be set for the six federal and seven state lawsuits filed by families of the Aggies killed in the collapse on Nov. 18, 1999.

University Relations Deputy Director Lane Stephenson said he could not speculate on when the litigation would be complete.

Steve DeWolf, an attorney representing four of the victims' families in court, said lawsuits in the state courts would take years to resolve. DeWolf is representing the Breen, Davis, Kimmell and Scanlon families.

"I am currently involved in a federal case that should have some clarity within a year," DeWolf said. "But all of the state court cases in the Brazos

County courts will take two years at least."

DeWolf said the University has refused to discuss settlement with the families or their attorneys.

"We have tried multiple times to get A&M or some of its insurers to sit down and resolve this, and they just seem disinterested," he said. "That is hard for me to understand."

DeWolf said the University has said that it will require one offer from all plaintiffs before it will agree to discuss a settlement.

DeWolf said litigation proceedings should not prevent Bonfire from returning this year.

"I don't know where litigation comes into this decision," he said. "In my view, because Bonfire is such a revered tradition, it should go forward as long as it can be done in a safe way—which it obviously can."

Vice President for Student Affairs J. Malon Southerland said he agreed with Gates' decision.

"I support President Gates' decision 100 percent," he said.

Included in Gates' announcement was the decision to declare Nov. 18 an official Bonfire Remembrance Day "in honor of those who lost their lives and were injured." Gates also said the Bonfire Memorial, which will be dedicated Nov. 18, 2004, will "be exempted from all budget cuts from this date through its completion."

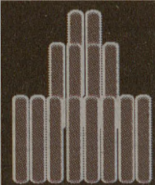
Southerland said next year's Remembrance Day will be officially recognized, although classes will not be cancelled.

"Everyone appreciated the form last year's unofficial remembrance day took," Southerland said. "This year's will probably bear some resemblance to that."

Bonfire decision notes

Bonfire will not burn until litigation finishes

No trial dates have been set for the lawsuits filed against the University



TRAVIS SWENSON • THE BATTALION

SOURCE: DR. ROBERT M. GATES AND STEVE DEWOLF, LAWYER FOR PLAINTIFF'S FAMILY

Students, families disappointed

By Janet McLaren
THE BATTALION

Students, parents and alumni reacted to University President Robert M. Gates' announcement Wednesday that Aggie Bonfire will not return to campus this fall with a mixture of disappointment and hope for next year.

Nancy Braus, whose son Dominic

was injured in the Bonfire collapse, said litigation should not prevent the return of Bonfire.

Dominic Braus was a freshman when Bonfire fell, and is now a senior agricultural business major.

"I do not think that (litigation) is a valid reason," Nancy Braus said. "Of course litigation is a factor, but if you

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Watch your step



ALISSA HOLLIMON • THE BATTALION

Junior Speech Communications major **Lauren Huly** concentrates on not slipping as she walks up the steps of Bolton Hall Wednesday morning. The weather has caused

the University to pay close attention to steps and ramps that could be slippery. Sand was spread on these critical areas to prevent student injuries.

RHA meeting focuses on funds

By Rolando Garcia
THE BATTALION

After a lengthy and heated debate, the Residence Hall Association General Assembly voted down a resolution Wednesday condemning the group's officers for abusing their authority and mispending RHA funds.

At issue was the decision by the RHA executive council to spend \$500 on a half-page advertisement that ran in *The Battalion* rebutting criticisms of the organization leveled in a Feb. 18 opinion article by *Battalion* columnist Nicholas Neumann.

"Given the current budget constraints, spending that kind of money to dispute one naysayer seems extravagant and self-serving," said James Murray, president of Clements Hall and a sponsor of the resolution.

Murray added that the officers' action was indicative of what many on-campus residents feel is wrong with RHA.

"There is a sense among residents that RHA is worried too much about public relations instead of serving their constituents," he said.

RHA President John Casares, said it was necessary to respond quickly to inaccuracies in Neumann's column and that there was not sufficient time to consult the RHA assembly to approve the expenditure. He did not submit a letter to the editor because the officers were doubtful *The Battalion* would publish it, Casares said.

One delegate complained that Neumann's criticism that the organization spends too much time bickering over internal matters was underscored by

See **RHA** on page 2A

War plan targets Saddam Hussein

By Barry Schweid
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Bush administration on Wednesday dismissed a compromise proposal by Canada to set an end-of-March deadline for Iraq to comply with U.N. disarmament demands.

After Secretary of State Colin Powell conferred by telephone with Foreign Minister Bill Graham, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the proposal "only procrastinates on a decision we all should be prepared to take."

Boucher recalled other governments tried earlier to set a deadline for Iraq. But he said, in the meantime "we have heard from inspectors again, again and again" that Iraq had not agreed to fully disarm.

Earlier, President George W. Bush offered to Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien "a resolution that he thinks is the way to go," said spokesman Ari Fleischer.

"He's confident in the end that his position will be accepted and voted on," Fleischer said of the president.

Bush also called Prime Minister Peter Medgyessy of Hungary, a country which has supported the U.S. position, to thank him for that backing. Bush noted that the Hungarian parliament voted to authorize the transit of U.S. equipment through Hungary, Fleischer said.

As the administration pressed for a vote on a U.S.-British-Spanish resolution designed to back the use of force to disarm Iraq, Bush called Saddam Hussein "a master of disguise and delay" and mocked the Iraqi leader for disclosing some weapons that he'd previously denied were in his arsenal.

"The danger with Iraq is that he can strike in the neighborhood and the danger with Iraq is that he has got the willingness and capacity to train al-Qaida type organizations and provide them with equipment to hurt Americans," Bush said.

Meantime, Russian President Vladimir Putin's chief of staff, Aleksander Voloshin, held a third day of meetings with senior U.S. officials. Since Monday he has talked to Vice President Dick Cheney, Powell and Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser. Bush dropped into the Rice meeting.

Bush also stepped into a meeting with President Geidar Aliev of Azerbaijan, a country 250 miles northeast of Iraq, which has backed the U.S. call for Iraq's disarmament.

Amid indications that Russia could be moderating its opposition to forcibly disarming Iraq, Boucher called the hour-long Powell-Voloshin meeting "very, very good" and said "we will see if there is an opportunity to narrow the gap."

Bush was to give a speech on Iraq Wednesday at the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington think tank from which he drew many of his aides. He was expected to argue that getting rid of Saddam would make the Middle East more stable.

Construction on Traditions Golf Course to continue

By Bernhard Hall
THE BATTALION

The final hurdle for building the new Traditions Golf Course was cleared Tuesday when the Bryan City Council voted to relinquish control of the land for the course to the Melrose Corporation.

The vote passed unanimously with the only amendment being that Melrose Corp. would be an equal partner with the city of Bryan. The pre-

vious plan called for the city to be a subordinate partner.

The Traditions Golf Course, which has been delayed since construction began in October 2002, will be home to the Texas A&M men's and women's golf team for both practice and matches.

The 18-hole course, co-designed by golf legend Jack Nicklaus and son Jack Nicklaus II, will also include an indoor practice studio, player lounge, locker rooms and a study area for the golf teams, Higgins said.

The course is located on 240 acres in Bryan, approximately five miles from campus.

Melrose Corp., a recreational community and club development company, began construction on the site last fall without the council's approval, and construction was halted. The company's owners needed the final go-ahead from the council in order to continue construction and open the golf course this fall.

The city council had sharply debated the project at earlier meetings.

"We're very excited," said A&M Head Coach

J.T. Higgins. "It's the final hurdle for us, and to see it passed unanimously was big."

Melrose Corp. will use the land as collateral in order to receive an \$8 million loan from Gold Bank of Oklahoma City to fund construction of the course and facilities.

The land surrounding the golf course is still owned by the city's development subsidiary, the Bryan Commerce and Development Corporation, and will be developed at a later date, most likely for high-end homes or possibly a hotel, according to the Bryan-College Station Eagle.