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continued from page. 8

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NATION

THE BATTALION

Tuesday, April 8, 2003

NASA: foam from earlier shuttle not considered hazard

By Marcia Dunn THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — Severed foam insulation was not considered a hazard or a high-priority problem even though it broke off during a space shuttle launch just a few months before Columbia's doomed flight, a NASA expert said Monday at a hearing into the accident.

James Halsell, an astronaut who worked as a launch manager, told the accident investigation board that the October incident did not appear to

sensitive parts of the shuttle.

In the Atlantis mission, the foam that fell during launch struck the bottom of one of the strap-on booster _ rockets, doing no

harm to the shuttle itself. So longtime Marshall Space Flight Halsell and other managers proceeded with the shuttle Endeavour's flight in November and Columbia's in January.

"How in the world do you determine, how does the system determine that there's no safety of flight'' concern, asked Harold Gehman Jr., the board's chairman and a retired Navy admiral. 'Is it judgment?''

Halsell replied that NASA felt comfortable there was nothing new or generic about the problem and that no changes or weaknesses in the application or manufacturing of the polyurethane foam were made that would have introduced errors.

For 10 years before the Atlantis launch, no foam debris

had fallen from this area of the fuel tank. Because of that and the fact that changes to the foam were made in the interim, engineers thought the trouble was solved.

But during Columbia's launch on Jan. 16, a 2-pound chunk of foam ripped off the fuel tank and slammed somewhere along the leading edge of the left wing. Investigators are trying to determine whether that damage could have been severe enough to doom the spaceship upon reentry

> "Did you ever think it was possible to pop a

big enough piece of foam off of We were always this external tank worried there's goto severely damage the shuttle ing to be a big piece that comes out.

itself?" Air Force Mai. Gen. Kenneth Hess, a board member, ____ Lee Foster asked a NASA Marshall Spce Flight Center fuel tank expert.

"The answer is yes. We have large areas ... that are hard to

spray," replied Lee Foster, a Center employee. "Yeah, we were always worried there's going to be a big piece that comes out."

Hess said he is perplexed about why NASA considered the foam problem, up until the Columbia catastrophe, to be a maintenance rather than a safety issue. That's because most of the pieces that came off were small, explained J. Scott Sparks, a NASA department head for fuel tank issues.

A new member of the investigation board, Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, asked Halsell if NASA would have done anything differently to address the foam problem if it had been considered an in-flight anomaly.

Republicans begin discussing Owen's

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2-Female roommates needed for May-August subleases, University Place Con-dos, 4/4, on shuttle, close to campus, w/d, internet ready, \$325/mo. +1/4bills. 979-

2-M/F roommates needed for May lease, 3bdrm/2bth house on bus-route, \$320/mo +1/3utilities. 775-4043 or 676-0810.

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2/2 Mobile Home. No money down. Financing available in Rollingridge. Call (979)324-5435. kes, 2bdrm/1.5bth fourplexes, 776leasing May/August. Spacious rm/1.5bth, w/d included. Manuel Drive.

4 Chevrolet/ GMC Rims, American Racing, 15x10, 5-lug, Atlas style, like new, on-ly used for 3-mos, \$450. 361-834-8896 or 979-218-4943.

CS, Brick, 3/2/2, 1600+sqft., on Burnburg. Fence, w/d, \$124,900obo. (979)224-0675. Jeep Cherokee Laredo Chrome Nurf Bars. Valued at \$1000, selling for only \$250/obo. Call 680-9297. lease May, large 3/2 house. w/d con-tions, good neighborhood. 2312 Bris-

Jet Ski, 1997 Seadoo XP, trailer, new mo-tor, 1-year warranty \$4,500. 229-3900.

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SEARCH CONTINUED The Texas A&M University Student Media Board is accepting applications for Editor

THE BATTALION

- Including radio and online editions –

Fall 2003 (The fall editor will serve from Aug. 18 through Dec. 17, 2003)

Qualifications for editor in chief of The Battalion are:

- Be a Texas A&M student in good standing with the University and enrolled in at least six credit hours (4 if a graduate student) during the term of office (unless fewer credits are required to graduate);
- Have at least a 2.00 cumulative grade point ratio (3.00 if a graduate student) and at least a 2.00 grade point ratio (3.00 if a graduate student) in the semester immediately prior to the appointment, the semester of appointment and semester during the ferm of office. In order for this provision to be met, at least six hours (4 if a graduate student) must have been taken for that semester;
- Have completed JOUR 301 (Mass Communication, Law and Society), or equivalent;
- Have at least one year experience in a responsible editorial position on *The Battalion* or comparable daily college newspaper, OR -
- Have at least one year editorial experience on a commercial newspaper, - OR -
- Have completed at least 12 hours journalism, including JOUR 203 and 303 (Media Writing I and II), and JOUR 304 (Editing for the Mass Media), or equivalent.

Application forms should be picked up and returned to Dell Bomnskie, Student Media business coordinator, in room 011A Reed McDonald Building. Deadline for submitting application: noon Monday, April 14, 2003. Applicants will be interviewed during the Student Media Board Meeting beginning at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, April 16, in room 221F Reed McDonald.

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private bedroom, private bath. (979)696-7286. udicial nomination

By Jesse J. Holland THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Stymied by the Miguel Estrada filibuster, Senate Republicans on Monday moved to another White House iudicial nominee. Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen.

"I hope we don't have a filibuster on this case, like we are with Miguel Estrada," said Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Republicans want a quick confirmation vote on Owen, who is nominated for a seat on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

But many Democrats and liberal groups oppose Owen, who was nominated by President Bush. Democrats have called her an anti-abortion and pro-business judicial activist whose opinions and rulings are overly influenced by her personal beliefs but have not said whether they would filibuster to block Owen's confirmation.

Democrats voted her nomination down in committee last year when they controlled the Senate, but the Republican-controlled Senate Judiciary Committee approved her nomination last month.

Republicans brought Owen's nomination to the full Senate on Monday and expect to talk about it on-and-off for most of the week. The Senate goes home for its Easter break on Friday.

"I'm hopeful that my colleagues will not stand in the way of an up-or-down vote on her nomination," said GOP Sen. John Cornyn of Texas. "Under any fair standard, she deserves

confirmation, not continued obstruction and delay.'

But one of Owen's most vocal opponents, NARAL Pro-Choice America, warned Democrats on Monday they would be watching the Owen vote closely and would use votes for or against the Texas judge in their future scorecards and campaign literature.

"Owen's nomination is critical to anti-choice activists' relentless effort to pack the courts with conservative ideologues, and this is precisely why it must be stopped," said Kate Michelman, the group's president.

Republicans contend that Democrats have distorted Owen's judicial record and decisions, and Owen said that she would be a fair and impartial judge if confirmed by the Senate.

"As she has done throughout this process, Justice Owen consistently demonstrated her intelligence, her legal acumen and her respect for the law," Senate Judiciary Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said Monday.

Democrats already are blocking a final vote on another Bush judicial nominee they consider objectionable.

That Democratic filibuster against Miguel Estrada's nomination to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia has lasted for more than two months. Only two appeals court nominees have been approved since the Estrada filibuster started.

"I hope this body will not descend into a pattern of filibustering nominees for the Courts of Appeals," Sessions said.