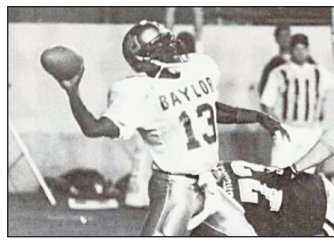


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Being a good listener is a skill — sharpen it



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SPORTS:
Legendary Baylor Quarterback J.J. Joe dies at 54



A&L | A5

ON-CAMPUS CONCERT:
Turnpike Troubadours come to Waco in August

'CARING, LOVING, RESPECTFUL'

Baylor to continue to foster campus environment where all students 'feel seen' amid blows to DEI programs nationwide



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

MACKENZIE GRIZZARD
Staff Writer

President Linda Livingstone met with state legislators on Monday in Austin to evaluate the future of diversity, equity and inclusion programs at Baylor after a wave of state-wide bans swept the state of Texas in recent weeks.

"You will see us continue to lean into supporting students and faculty from all kinds of backgrounds and experiences," Livingstone said.

State legislators passed Senate Bill 17 last spring, a law prohibiting DEI offices and initiatives in public education, according to the Intercultural Development Research Association. Last month, Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order directing all Texas state agencies to eliminate all forms of DEI in public institutions of higher education.

Baylor as a private institution is not bound to these state mandates in the same way Texas public universities are. Despite this, many wonder if Baylor will remain committed to diversity or if they will follow suit with their public counterparts.

"We appreciate that our legislature in Texas values the independence

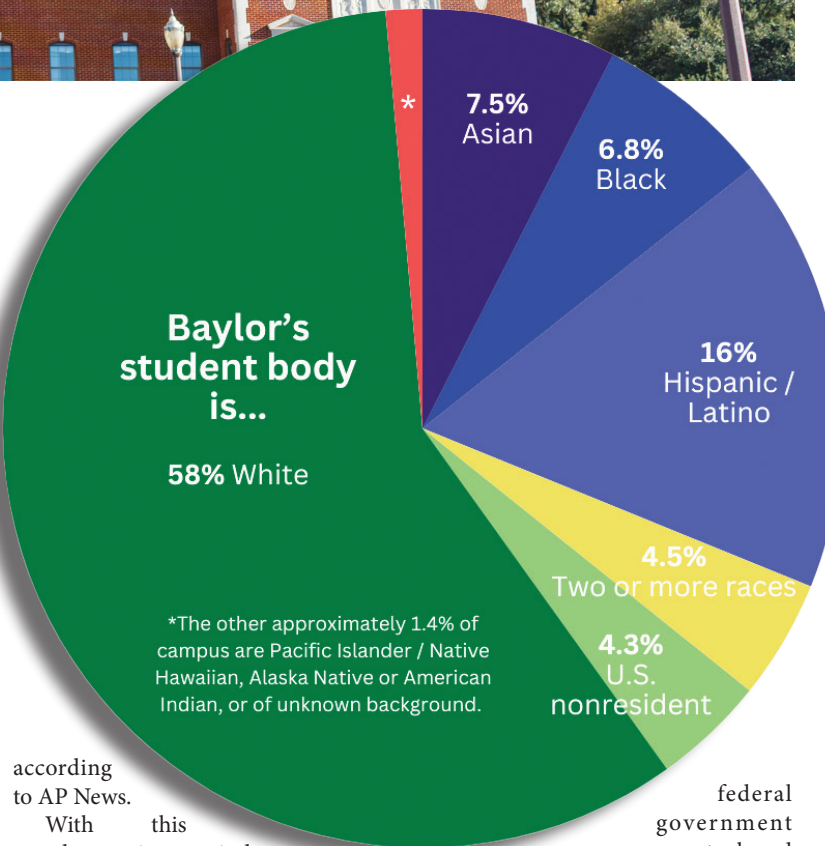
of private institutions in this state and recognizes that the role of the state government in state institutions is different than the role of the government in private institutions like Baylor," Livingstone said.

Baylor has received "a lot of support from legislators," in recent weeks about how the university will function in terms of DEI, she said.

"We do pay a lot of attention to what [legislators] decide on behalf of public institutions and try to make sure we understand the spirit of that but continue to function the way we believe we should in support of our Christian mission as a university," Livingstone said.

On a broader scale, the swift eradication of DEI programs continue as the Trump administration gives public schools and universities a two-week deadline to eliminate diversity initiatives or risk losing federal money.

While Baylor individually awards a number of merit-based scholarships to students, the university also receives a number of federal and state grants. The official memo from the Department of Education last week includes the elimination of scholarships of students from certain racial background,



according to AP News.

With this mandate in mind, Livingstone affirms that need-based scholarships at Baylor are safe, and she doesn't anticipate that changing.

"When it comes to scholarships, most of what students get from the

federal government are grants based on need, so they are not tied in any way to the gender or ethnicity or the race of an individual," Livingstone said.

DEI >> A8

In case you missed it...

Regents raise tuition, approve new degrees, scholarship program

At their regular February meeting, the Baylor Board of Regents took major steps towards its five-year strategic plan. One of these steps is the "Extend the Line" scholarship initiative, with goals to raise \$250 million by 2030 for student scholarships.

The board also expects the average net out-of-pocket increase in tuition and fees to be \$2,255 per incoming student.



Vonleh scores season-high, No. 17 Baylor hands No. 14 Kansas State first home loss 79-62

Senior center Aaronette Vonleh tallied a season-high 24 points as No. 17 Baylor women's basketball never trailed, handing No. 14 Kansas State its first home loss of the season, 79-62, Monday night at Bramlage Coliseum in Manhattan, Kan.

The Bears (25-5, 15-2 Big 12) will play No. 10 TCU on Sunday to decide the regular-season conference title.



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

SO LONG, SUGAR Sweets and snacks could be removed from SNAP.

Junk food could be banned from SNAP

COLE GEE
Staff Writer

After his recent nomination to secretary of health and human services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has expressed a desire to "Make America Healthy Again" by removing junk food from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. Junk food has been on the chopping block for years, but now there seems to be a growing momentum to get this done.

SNAP, food stamps and EBT each run under a different name but the goal is ultimately the same — to support lower-income families with their grocery shopping. As of 2023, around 42.1 million or 12.6% of the U.S.

OH SNAP >> A8

Pro-Life, Pro-Choice advocates protest outside Waco CVS

BLAKE HOLLINGSWORTH
Staff Writer

Pro-Life Waco activists gathered outside the CVS on 5th Street near Baylor's campus Wednesday to protest medical abortion access, prompting a pro-choice counter-protest by Baylor students and local advocates.

Founding Director of Pro-Life Waco and former Baylor economics professor John Pisciotta said the goal of the organization's gathering is to protest pharmacies' decisions of "getting in the business of killing people."

"We're talking about killing babies from five to 15 weeks of pregnancy, and [pharmacies have] already started in six states," Pisciotta said.

Furthermore, Pisciotta aims to educate people about self-managed abortions, calling them "dangerous," and a "real, serious problem."

"You start out with mifepristone, which breaks down the lining of the uterus so that the baby has no way of supporting his life anymore," Pisciotta said. "Then, two to three days later, you take the misoprostol to have the abortion, and then, typically, everything comes out and your baby goes down the toilet."

The organization believes that life begins at conception, according to former Baylor School of Nursing student Jannie Niemeyer.

"We are for life," Niemeyer said. "No one can say 'it's a fetus only.' Once you are conceived, you're supposed to be safe in your mother's womb. So, we fight for the rights of those babies."

In opposition, a similarly-sized pro-choice group assembled at the store as well, led by Waco junior JW LaSrape, president of College Democrats at Baylor.

"We heard about this [Pro-Life Waco protest] Monday evening, and we thought it was unconscionable," LaSrape said. "Texas already has one of the strictest abortion bans ... At least three women have died, and further restricting access as maternal death rates and sepsis cases among women rise is unacceptable. That's why we're here — to show that there are people in Waco who want to fight for women."

Donna Wright, a retired Lutheran pastor and member of the McLennan County Democratic Party, further emphasized the safety of mothers.

"These anti-abortion and anti-family

PROTEST >> A8

Inside jokes, college experiences fuel student band's '808s & Roommates'

What do a cardboard cutout of Queen Elizabeth, lemons and Kanye West have in common? The answer lies in four roommates who decided to write an album inspired by their college experience as individuals and living together.



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Being a good listener is a skill – sharpen it

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Your mom is making dinner and you just got home from school. You're telling her about how Sophie from math class stole your favorite pencil. She doesn't even look up from the crockpot and, in a fit of rage, you stomp back to your room due to her lackluster reaction. "I can't believe she doesn't care."

The sad part is that in our juvenile state, we thought that maybe once we started talking about "adult things" people would listen. Unfortunately, whether we talk about politics, AI or the classes we are taking in college, we risk the chance of people not listening.

Sharing stories of the good or the bad times and not feeling heard can be a major blow to self-esteem and feeling validated by the people around us. In an already disconnected reality and with the loss of third spaces everywhere, being a good listener is paramount to maintaining our communities.

You know the feeling — you're telling a story and your friend keeps glancing at their phone and says "Oh, I'm sorry just one second." You've lost your rhythm now and you aren't going to repeat the same joke you heard in class for the second time.

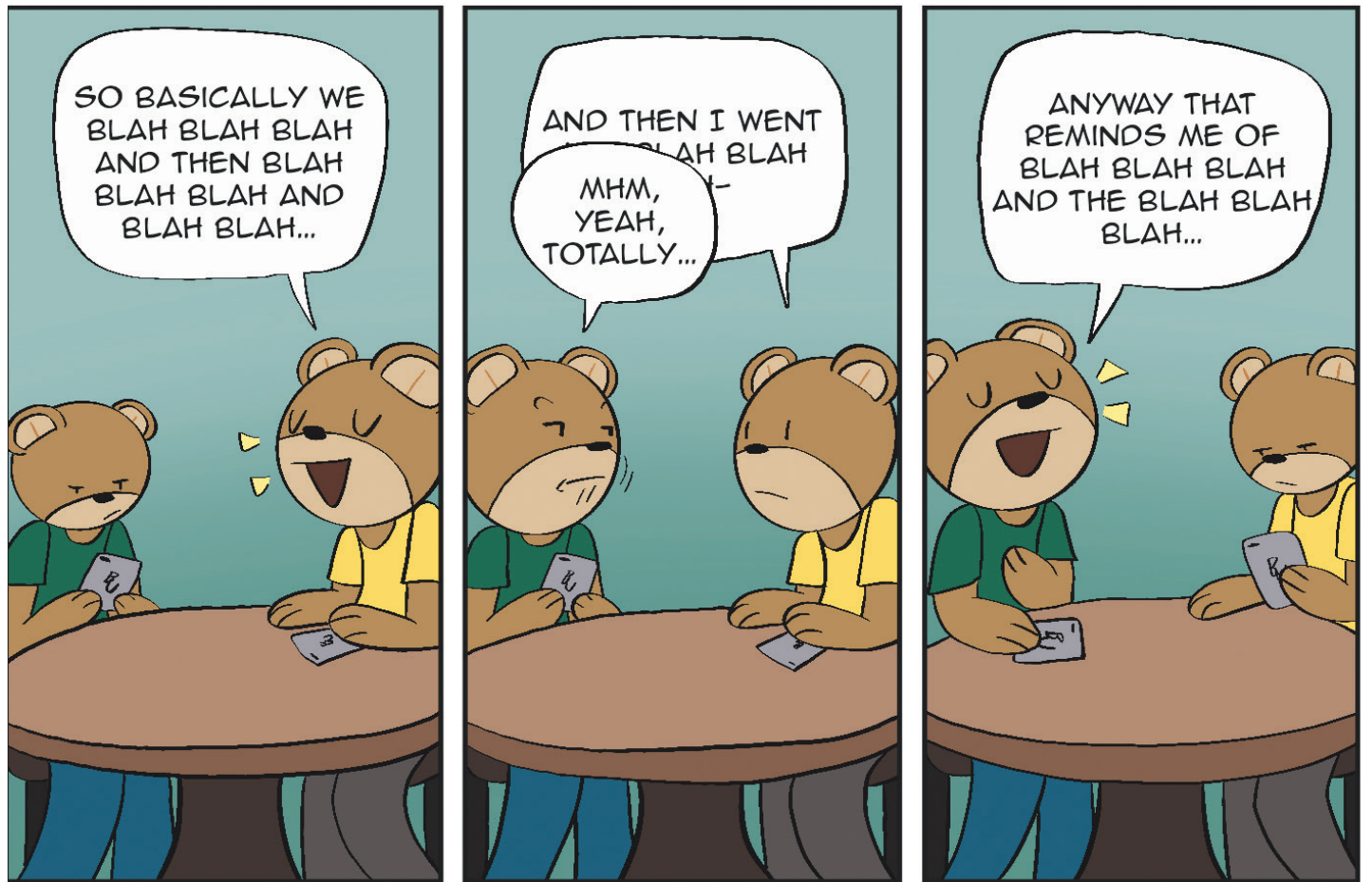
Instead of contributing to this form of heartbreak, taking steps to become a good listener will enhance your relationships, your memory and your ability to support the people around you.

TURN YOUR PHONE ON DO NOT DISTURB

When you're with a friend grabbing a coffee, turn your phone off. This is a time to truly reconnect and touch base while you're not swamped with work or school. This could also go for a movie night with your partner — actually watch the movie and chat about it afterward. I promise the Instagram Reels can wait.

GIVE ACTIVE RESPONSES

Sometimes it can be hard to know what to say when a friend is going through it. However,



James Ellis | Cartoonist

it's even harder to respond when you aren't listening. Instead of answering with "Yeah, I understand," ask a question that proposes an ever deeper response. Even taking a small pause to think about a good reaction is better than defaulting to verbal emotes.

STUDY YOUR CONVERSATIONS

"Hey Bill, how was that birthday party for your great aunt's cat two weeks and three days ago?"

We all know someone who has a freakish way of remembering everything we've ever told them. It is one of the best feelings to have a person recall, and more importantly ask, about

something we told them weeks ago. That is a good listener. As college students, we study for our exams and prepare for presentations. Next time you get lunch with a longtime friend, recall the previous conversation you shared. Is there anything you can draw from to strengthen this meeting? Just like an exam, you'll see how much better things turn out if you prepare.

PUT YOUR THOUGHTS ASIDE

It can be hard to always be present in conversations, but it matters. When approaching a conversation where the other party wants to feel heard, don't have your next thought loading up while they are speaking. You might miss

the whole point. And if you can't shut that side of your brain off, simply stating that you have something on your mind is better than seeming dismissive and unthoughtful.

While becoming a better listener yourself, keeping in mind that everyone has something going on is key. There is no need to get upset if you don't feel heard one time. But, a pattern is a pattern, and vocalizing that you don't feel listened to is just as important as working on your listening skills.

Don't be like the mom at the crockpot (no offense, moms). The next time you're having a conversation with someone or listening to someone's story, really lean in, show you're interested and make them feel heard and understood.

Oil and gas gets a bad rap; it's still a viable option

JOSH SIATKOWSKI
Staff Writer



It's been well over 100 years since oil and gas was the sleek and sexy new disruption to the global economy. But unlike other historic, yet revolutionary discoveries and inventions — fertilizer, air conditioning or aviation — oil and gas has not been able to quietly age into an unsung hero of modern life. Instead, the industry and its nearly 11 million American workers, have been villainized and rejected by the very people who reap the benefits of oil and gas.

The narrative that the oil and gas industry must be extinguished rapidly like it's an invasive species is not just unfair to the millions of nine-to-five workers just trying to put food on the table; it's also flat-out wrong.

Micah Smith, head of consulting giant McKinsey and Co's oil and gas team, summarizes the state of the energy industry perfectly: "The energy transition toward cleaner, less carbon-intensive sources is real. Oil and gas are not going away any time soon. That may sound like a contradiction, but it is more like a description."

And oil and gas isn't just lingering around at the will of a few greedy oilmen. It is and will continue to be a critical part of the global economy because — get this — it does a lot of good things for the world. Here are just some of those good things.

OIL AND GAS ARE RELIABLE

Recent studies have found that renewable energy sources can now compete with oil and gas in many arenas, one of the most important being prices. This is a great thing whether you're on team zero-carbon or the world's biggest fan of pump jacks. Climate change aside, we need affordable alternatives to fossil fuels because oil will eventually run out.

But even as wind and solar power become cheaper to generate, there's a significant issue: reliability. Solar and wind power are most often stored in batteries, which require constant recharging, which in turn require more sun and more wind.

For now, without oil and gas, cloudy or windless days also mean powerless days.

Renewable energy's storage problem is also why we won't see electric planes or other energy-hungry machinery anytime soon. As scientists inevitably figure this challenge out, you can thank oil and gas that your trip to Europe took a day and not a month.

OIL AND GAS ARE THE GREATEST AGENTS AGAINST ENERGY POVERTY

Energy poverty, or the lack of reliable access to energy, affects over a billion people, mostly in India and Sub-Saharan Africa. For these people, heating fuel often comes in the form of wood chips or animal dung — both of which are less hygienic and cause more pollution than oil and gas.

Nothing can more quickly and reliably get Sub-Saharan Africa fully on the grid than oil and gas, and it's already starting to happen.

OIL AND GAS ARE GETTING CLEANER

There is a conception that the oil and gas industry does not care about the environmental impact of its work. I won't contest that some oilmen care more about the bottom line than emissions, but we've reached an era where lower emissions and more profitability can move in the same direction.

Natural gas is already overtaking dirty coal in electricity production because of its cost effectiveness and abundance. But with this replacement, carbon emissions are coming down — something even

President Barack Obama boasted during his administration.

There's also the incredibly under-discussed invention of horizontal drilling. Replacing inefficient vertically-drilled wells, this method of extraction can produce a whopping 200,000 times more energy than an old well, according to Continental Resources CEO Harold Hamm. Horizontal drilling means more energy with fewer wells and fewer disruptions to the surfaces we drill beneath.

OIL AND GAS HAVE FUELED INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTIONS - AND WILL DO IT AGAIN

As it has already done before, oil and gas looks poised to be the power behind another industrial revolution — the AI boom. As power-hungry data centers scramble for all the energy sources they can get — even Three-mile Island will reopen.

But with demand for energy soaring here and now, no one is willing to wait for more renewables to be brought onto the grid. Natural gas has been, and will continue to be, the driver behind data centers, and thus, any question you ask ChatGPT. I'm not going to say "enjoy it

while you can," because nobody is going to particularly miss oil and gas when their power comes from another source, so long as it is cheap and reliable. But respect the fact that as we are creating an energy system that's cheap, reliable and sustainable, we at least have resources and people to keep us comfortable while we get there.

The narrative that the oil and gas industry must be extinguished rapidly like it's an invasive species is not just unfair to the millions of nine-to-five workers just trying to put food on the table; it's also just flat-out wrong.

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Caleb Garcia
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EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
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*Asterisks indicate members of The Editorial Board

Contact Us

General Questions:
Lariat@baylor.edu
254-710-1712

Sports:
LariatSports@baylor.edu

Arts:
LariatArts@baylor.edu

Opinion:
Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu

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PINK OUT DUBS!



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

PLAY4KAY No.17 Baylor women's basketball celebrates breast cancer awareness during their pregame walkout on Saturday at the Foster Pavillion.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

ON FIRE Senior guard Jada Walker celebrates after graduate guard Sarah Andrews scores on a foul during No. 17 Baylor women's basketball's 67-52 win over Iowa State.



Sarah Andrews (24)



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

TAKE IT TO THE HOOP Graduate guard Aliyah Matharu drives to the basket during No. 17 Baylor women's basketball's 67-52 win over Iowa State Saturday at Foster Pavilion.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

CUPID SHOT Junior guard Bella Fontleroy attempts a layup during No. 17 Baylor women's basketball's 67-52 win over Iowa State Saturday at Foster Pavilion. Fontleroy scored 14 points on 6 for 8 shooting from the floor.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

PURE MOTION Senior center Aaronette Vonleh drives past a Cyclones defender and races to the rim during No. 17 Baylor women's basketball's 67-52 win over Iowa State Saturday at the Foster Pavillion.



Jada Walker (11)

Student committee to launch Food Security Network

KRISTY VOLMERT
Staff Writer

The Student Food Security Council, which formed last fall within the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, is in the process of launching an on-campus food recovery network to help with student food insecurity and reduce the quantity of waste.

The SFSC is partnering with Baylor's new food service provider, Chartwells Higher Education, and Food Recovery Network, a national non-profit. They will work with the dining staff to create a plan that reduces food waste and repurposes it for students struggling with food insecurity.

Waco junior Bella Burns, founder of the SFSC, is a student worker with the Baylor Collaborative. She said that the council meets weekly to discuss ideas about addressing and destigmatizing student food insecurity. They meet with the staff of Chartwells and The Store, Baylor's student food pantry located near the Career Center in Sid Richardson.

"Currently, we are

working on starting a food recovery network on Baylor's campus where we will cool and repackage leftover food from the dining halls on a weekly basis and deliver it to our on campus food pantry," Burns said.

She said they hope to ensure that no food goes to waste and everyone gets sufficient access to nutritious food.

Marcus Franklin, Baylor Collaborative's marketing and communications specialist, provides guidance to the SFSC.

"One less student having to experience any level of hunger or food insecurity is a step in the right direction," Franklin said.

According to Burns, Franklin wanted the Collaborative to be more involved on Baylor's campus and strengthen its impact on students. Franklin helped Burns form the council, and together they selected students from an applicant pool.

"We need to bring in more student voices to speak into this social issue," Franklin said.

As they begin the project, they will start with the Penland Crossroads and hope to expand the network to operate

from all dining halls in the future, according to Burns.

"We hope to transport more meals inside and outside of campus to food pantries and other shelters in Waco," she said. "Our council will also be pursuing other projects to normalize and expand the conversation of food insecurity issues."

The SFSC is motivated by the initiative to improve both the environment and the community by cultivating leftover food into a student's next meal and reducing environmental waste.

"Currently, all the leftover food that is not repurposed for the dining by halls is composted," Burns said. "While composting is a noble effort, composting should be a last resort method for food that is expired or cannot be recovered."

She said that a large number of students struggle with food insecurity because they do not have the transportation or money to go out to the grocery store.

"This issue could be solved with a little effort from students and staff, and because of this, we believe this is a noble cause



Photo courtesy of Bella Burns

COMBATTING STUDENT HUNGER The Student Food Security Council, under the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, is working on an on-campus food recovery system to reduce food waste and assist with student food insecurity.

to pursue," Burns said.

The Store has ingredients, but scarce access to ready-made meals. The SFSC intends to provide The Store with meals to help reduce food insecurity.

Franklin wants students who struggle with food insecurity to feel heard and know that they are not alone.

"Vulnerability is hard," Franklin said. "It's not everyday that a student walks

up to you and shares that they've been struggling to have consistent access to food. More often than not, students believe they are the only ones with this struggle."

Franklin said that these initiatives will help cultivate a more positive collegiate experience by tackling problems that are often overlooked.

"Intrinsically, we know Baylor to be a wonderful

university for learning, growth and development both inside and outside of the classroom," Franklin said. "However, just as we hold these beliefs to be true, there are often outside factors that can negatively impact the collegiate experience. No matter the underlying cause, when a student experiences not just hunger but food insecurity, there are so many ways that student's day-to-day life can be affected."

Later, Hollywood: Lawmakers announce major investment into Texas' film industry

COLE GEE
Staff Writer

When many people think about the film industry, Hollywood is usually the first place that comes to mind. From the expensive and glamorous houses to the big studio lots and celebrities as far as the eye can see, it's no surprise that California has had a monopoly on film and television for the past half-century. However, lawmakers in Texas now want a bigger slice of the film production pie, with many pushing legislation to make Texas the next big film capital of the south.

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick a massive \$498 million investment to ramp up the state's film incentive program proposed last Wednesday. This investment is a part of Texas Senate Bill 1. Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program offers grants and tax credits to production companies producing film and TV in Texas to boost the economy. The 18-year program has seen great success, with around 182,000 jobs created along with earning \$2.52 billion in state spending.

Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey recently went viral for their Super Bowl "True Detective" parody ad where they were both calling for a larger investment into Texas film studios. However, like the first season of "True Detective," things are a lot more complicated, as the money from these investments come with some tight strings attached.

Like most creative grants, the Texas government has some sway over the production, mainly the content of any film and television produced. Directors in the past have had their incentive requests rejected due to their project's content, such as "Spy Kids" director Robert Rodriguez. His movie "Machete" lost incentive funding due to an unfavorable portrayal

of Texas.

Dr. Daniel Beard is a professor of producing and management for the film and digital media department. He's a veteran producer who has helped create many short films and documentary shorts. Beard has a lot of hope for the future of Texas filmmaking but understands that Texas' past attitude toward filmmakers might make them slightly wary.

"Texas has been kind of not very friendly to filmmakers in terms of incentives and having people come to Texas," Beard said. "One of the examples that was given a long time ago was that TV show 'Waco' about the Branch Davidians was pretty much all shot in Arizona or New Mexico. So this program is definitely a step in the right direction."

Even without the recent investments, however, they were still Texans fighting to support the film industry. Louis Hunter is one of the directors of the Waco Indie Film Festival and has seen the evolution of the Texas film industry up close. He's been in the industry for around 20 years now and still has a passion for supporting film projects large and small.

"Texas has a lot of production work happening, especially in the Austin area," Hunter said. "There is a lot of commercial work being done. There's also shows like 'Fear the Walking Dead' that are shot down there. There's some kinds of Amazon shows that are shot in Austin area as well as Dallas. Because it is a large corporate hub, tons of training videos are shot there."

The films he shows at the Waco Indie Film Festival range from small student and local films to some projects from the Cannes Film Festival and Oscar nominees. While they may not all have a big budget like other Texas productions, he still believes in the importance of supporting

TEXAS FILM >> Page 8



Maggie Meegan | Photographer

LIGHTS, CAMERAS, COWBOYS Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick proposed investment to ramp up the state's film incentive program last Wednesday.

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GET PAID FOR YOUR STYLES!

Turnpike Troubadours, Cross Canadian Ragweed to perform at McLane Stadium

OLIVIA TURNER
Arts & Life Editor

The 2025 fall semester is set to kickoff the school year in McLane Stadium — not with a football game, but with a country concert that will likely go down in Baylor history as one for the books.

On Feb. 11, Baylor's Instagram announced that Cross Canadian Ragweed and Turnpike Troubadours will be coming to McLane Stadium on Aug. 23 to perform in a concert for students and the Waco community. The show, themed "The Boys from Oklahoma Texas Encore," will feature special guests Shane Smith & the Saints, American Aquarium and Wade Bowen — a Waco native — according to Jason Cook, Baylor's vice president of marketing and communications.

"I think that there's excitement to have something different outside of football at McLane stadium," Cook said. "And then the following weekend, we kick off the football season against SEC [opponent] Auburn. So I think that it just got a great momentum for what promises to be an exciting fall semester."

Cook said the show's promoter, Louisiana-based Doussan Music Group, had been seeking a Texas venue to host the bands in the fall and decided on Baylor due to the area's high interest in purchasing tickets.

St. Louis, Mo., senior Zoe Brandenstein, vice president of Baylor's Music Industry Club, said she predicts a decent turnout for the concert due to the popularity of country music among students.

"I would say, like, based on our location, I think that the turnout will be pretty good," Brandenstein said. "I'm not sure if it will totally fill McLane stadium, because that's a lot of seats, but seeing their statistics on Spotify, it seems like they're a very talented group, and I would expect good numbers."

Brandenstein said the Music Industry Club acts as a record label for student artists, assisting them in music production and marketing efforts. She is especially excited to see Baylor host bands and some more obscure artists.

"I think that right now, as a whole, the music industry is highlighting more solo artists," Brandenstein said. "From what we've seen at



Maggie Meegan | Photographer

OUTBREAK Turnpike Troubadours and Cross Canadian Ragweed, along with additional country musicians, will be headlining a concert at McLane Stadium in August. The theme of this red-dirt country show will be "The Boys from Oklahoma Texas Encore."

Baylor, there's a good mix of students who are interested in being solo artists and a good mix of students who enjoy playing in bands. And so having a strong band come on campus, I think will be really encouraging to those students who enjoy a group music scene more."

Cook said tickets were sure to be in high demand not only for the prominence of the bands and popularity of the country genre, but because of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity offered.

"Cross Canadian Ragweed has not really performed as a band in such a big venue in about 20 years," Cook said. "So it was very significant for them in terms of getting back together and in playing the shows ... in Oklahoma City, at Oklahoma State in April, and in Waco at

McLane Stadium in August."

In terms of setup, the stage will be positioned in front of the scoreboard, with the back facing the river. Seating will be available on the field and in the bleachers surrounding the field, though the corner seating will be blocked off. The doors are anticipated to open earlier in the evening, around 4:30 or 5 p.m. Cook said he predicts there will be possible pre-show events occurring in and around the stadium.

Collinsville sophomore Caleb Wheeler, a big-time fan of both Cross Canadian Ragweed and Turnpike Troubadours, said he anticipates seeing what work will follow the big night.

"[Turnpike Troubadours] had a couple of years of not being around," Wheeler said. "They

were dealing with some conflict, with sobriety problems, but now that they are back and now that they're restructured, I am really hoping that that leads to a lot of good coming out of the band."

In the meantime, Wheeler encourages those attending the concert to get hyped.

"For those who do have the privilege of going, I would say just go for a drive and blast their music as you drive down I-35," he said.

Cook said he can see this show going down in Baylor history as nothing less than "historic."

"This is the kind of event that brings generations of music fans together, and what an opportunity to have a Saturday night in McLane stadium along the banks of the Brazos River listening to some special talent," Cook said.

Review: Tate McRae's 'So Close To What' misses the mark

BELLA WHITMORE
Intern

Tate McRae has undoubtedly made waves in the pop music scene with her incredible stage presence and fun, flirty lyrics. But does her newest album, "So Close To What," which dropped Monday, solidify her among the pop icons of her generation?

The answer isn't simple, but let's start with what this album does right.

From the music videos to her styling to the artistry of the album cover, "So Close To What" firmly establishes McRae's aesthetic. It is an album of neutral and beige hues, sparkles, luxury sports cars and new, avant-garde outfits we have never seen from her before. The visuals and promotional artistry are striking, helping to position her as a more mature artist in her 20s rather than the teenage persona of her early career.

She also isn't afraid to take risks in both her sound and image. Songs like "Purple Lace Bra" and "Nostalgia" showcase a more vulnerable side of McRae that we haven't seen before, and she does it in a more veiled and creative way. At the same time, she stays true to her fun, provocative roots with tracks like "Miss Possessive" and "Revolving Door." The collaborations on the album with artists like Flo Milli and her boyfriend, The Kid LAROI, also serve to elevate and accentuate the album.

But while Tate McRae — the artist and persona — is making waves, the album itself doesn't necessarily stand out.

At the core of the problem with the album, in my opinion, is a lack of originality, which is a problem that plagues most of her discography. Both the lack of originality in her lyricism and the sound of the music make it stagnant. If you play the



Photo courtesy of Spotify

album from start to finish, they all kind of run together and sound the same. Don't get me wrong, it's an entertaining sound, but it certainly shows an inability to make versatile and diverse music.

In terms of her writing and lyricism, she has definitely made progress from her first album to her latest, but it still has the same recycled and basic feel. To put it bluntly, this album isn't doing anything particularly new and feels like every other song she has ever

written that has gotten popular and become mainstream.

"...while Tate McRae — the artist and persona — is making waves, the album itself doesn't necessarily stand out."

That said, I think Tate McRae is a talented artist and performer and I'm really enjoying the new artistic persona and aesthetic that she has adopted. I just wish she would take the same creative risks with her songwriting as she does with her visuals. The best way to enjoy this album? Put it on shuffle, have fun with it, and don't overthink it — which is exactly what I'll be doing.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

How to enjoy spring break if you're staying in Texas

SHANE MEAD
Staff Writer

Without a single day off from school so far this semester, it's finally time for us students to get a week to ourselves to vacation, visit family or simply relax here in Waco.

The soaring plane ticket prices accompanied by recent flight mishaps make it completely understandable for students to not want to go anywhere for spring break. For those staying, here are some activities that will keep you busy and hopefully enjoying your time off. The only thing you'll need is your car.

WACO SURF

If you're a Baylor student and haven't heard of Waco Surf, I'd be very surprised. But it's a must-mention considering its close proximity to campus. With the weather in Waco

finally warming up, there's no better way to spend a day in the sun than being in the water.

TOPGOLF

This one is another Waco staple, and is enjoyable no matter your golf skill. What makes it a perfect spring break activity is its weekday morning deal — unlimited play from open to noon for just \$15, Monday through Friday. With hourly rates typically double (or even more), this is a great way to start a day over break.

LAKE WHITNEY

A short drive from Waco, Lake Whitney is the kind of place where you can easily spend more than a day. Whether you're fishing, jet skiing, cliff jumping or paddleboarding, there's plenty to do. Plus, you can camp overnight and do it all again the next day.

Hiking, camping, fishing — you name it, Texas has it. For more spring break trip inspo within the Lone Star State, scan here!



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Legendary Baylor QB J.J. Joe dies at age 54



Roundup File Photo

GUNSLINGER J.J. Joe (13) played quarterback for Baylor football from 1990-93, throwing for 5,995 yards and 31 touchdowns. Both were program records when he graduated.

FOSTER NICHOLAS
Sports Editor

Baylor Athletics Hall of Famer, former quarterback and radio broadcaster J.J. Joe passed away Tuesday at age 54 from an apparent heart attack.

After a four-year football career with the Bears from 1990-93, Joe joined the Baylor football radio broadcast team alongside John Morris. Joe spent 21 seasons as the primary color commentator and was inducted into the Baylor Athletics Hall of Fame in 2006.

"J.J. was a Baylor man to the core," Morris said. "From his playing career as a four-year starter at quarterback, to the past 21 years as the color analyst on our radio broadcasts, J.J. was universally loved and respected by everyone who knew him and by fans who felt like they knew him through the airwaves."

Joe grew up in Arlington, where he excelled at Lamar High School. As a senior in 1988, he earned Fort Worth Star-Telegram Offensive Player of the Year honors after throwing for 2,124 yards and 16 touchdowns while leading the Vikings to the Class 5A state quarterfinals.

"As a sportswriter in Arlington, I had the privilege to cover many of Joe's games at Lamar, as well as a few at Baylor," Arlington Voice Editor-in-Chief Ken Costlow said. "There was not a more pleasant and accommodating student-athlete to interview and get to know. He was a legend in North Arlington, where kids of all ages wanted to be just like 'J.J.'"

Joe led Baylor to back-to-back bowl games in 1991 and 1992, and by the end of his career, he held all the school passing records. He still owns the program record for career yards per completion (17.3) and ranks in the top 10 for career passing yards (5,995), completions (347-of-665) and touchdown passes (31).

"I am honored to have been J.J.'s coach," Hall of Fame Baylor head coach Grant Teaff said. "I am heartbroken. J.J. is

one of the finest men I ever had the privilege of coaching. He was an excellent leader and a talented athlete. He was unselfish and always cared more about the success of his teammates than his own accolades. He was tough, determined and, boy, did he love his teammates and Baylor University."

Dallas, where he served as the senior executive director and chief financial officer after working in the banking industry. In 2004, he fulfilled his wish to remain part of the university when he joined the radio broadcast team. Over the years, he called three Big 12 championship seasons.

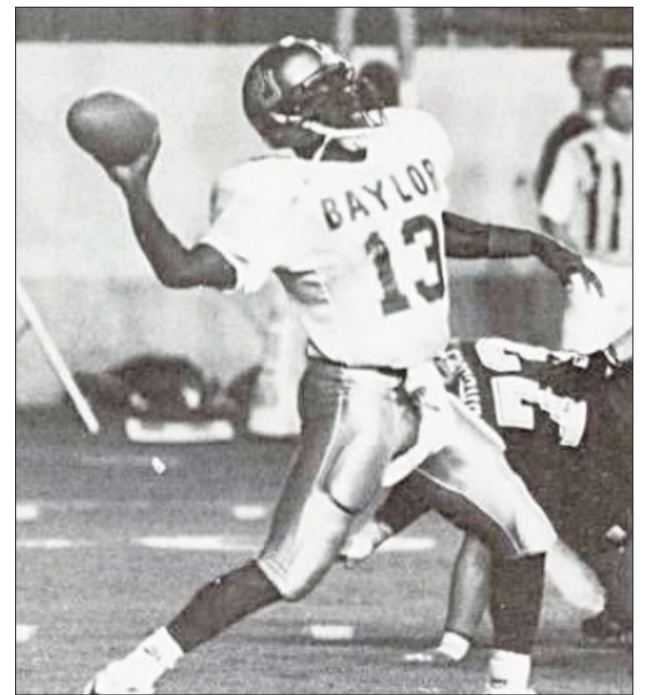
"When you're playing and going through it, (the Hall of Fame) is not something you think about," Joe said when he was inducted into the Baylor Athletics Hall of Fame. "I really only knew about it when I was broadcasting, when they would introduce a class every year. Whenever you play, you want to leave a legacy. I know my records will be broken ... but you want to be thought of as a good guy."

J.J. is survived by his wife, Lakeesha, and sons, Jordan, Josh and Jacob. Funeral services are pending.

"
J.J. was a Baylor man to the core. J.J. was loved and respected by everyone who knew him.

JOHN MORRIS | VOICE OF THE BEARS

Joe aimed to leave as much of a lasting legacy off the field as he did on with Baylor football. His faith led him to First Presbyterian Church of



Roundup File Photo

AIRING IT OUT J.J. Joe is the program record-holder for career yards per completion (17.3) and ranks in the top 10 in program history in four other passing categories

A&Ts Washington finds success in selflessness after shooting

KALENA REYNOLDS
Staff Writer

At the intersection of adversity and perseverance, sophomore tumbler Payton Washington found more than just a place on Baylor acrobatics and tumbling — she found herself as a leader.

Before her first year at Baylor, Washington and three teammates stopped at a grocery store, a regular carpool pickup spot for the Woodlands Elite Cheer Company, team owner Lynee Shearer said in a Lariat article.

When one of her friends mistakenly entered the wrong vehicle and, upon realizing there was a stranger inside, she quickly returned to her friend's car. The man approached, pulled out a gun and opened fire, striking Washington in the leg and back.

"So April, it happened, that whole month I had staples," Washington said. "Staples got removed on May 10 [and] I wasn't allowed to do any activity until the end of June ... That's when I was able to do abs, so I did my standing full."

Head coach Felecia Mulkey said Washington's recovery wasn't the most inspiring part — it was the fact that her first skill back was a standing full.

"I think it's worth noting that a standing full is an elite tumbling skill that a very small percentage of the country has, and that was the first skill she did when she came back," Mulkey said.

Beyond the shooting, Washington was born with one lung. She said that despite the challenges, she had never faced a traumatic athletic-related injury before. Rather than viewing the incident as a tragedy, she saw it as a blessing that allowed her to grow in new ways.

"I feel like this was the one big thing that I needed to get through," Washington said. "I feel like it was God, showing me something, telling me something, showing me that I could get through anything. So I was really thinking down the back of my head, like, 'This happened for a reason. Let's get to where we need to go.'"

Determined to compete at Baylor, Washington focused on regaining her strength and being the best teammate possible.

"I think it was just healing," Washington said. "The time period was great in my brain that I had months to recover, that helped me a lot. I didn't need to rush, and [Baylor] also had open arms."

Mulkey recalled the moment the coaching staff heard about the shooting from one of Washington's former teammates.

"We found out where she was, and the whole staff jumped in the car and went there," Mulkey said. "I needed to see her."

After bouncing back from her injury, Washington set bigger goals for her freshman year at Baylor. She worked on discovering her place as a college athlete and cementing the role she played on the team.

Washington achieved massive success in her first year, earning NCATA All-American honors and winning 2024 Freshman of the Year. She attributes her success to her teammates and their slogan: "It's not about you."

"We say this a lot, but it's not about you," Washington said. "I think that when you're cheering for other people and you're just loving on your teammates, that makes you better, almost automatically. So, yeah, just loving everyone being there for everyone that will help you individually, grow ... athletically, mentally and all around."

Mulkey said Washington's selfless attitude and perseverance make her a unique athlete and person.

"No matter what your approach to a challenge is, you've got to have the work ethic and then just a selfless mindset and a team mindset, and she's the ultimate team player," Mulkey said.

Washington has big ambitions, including earning a perfect 10 on the kick double, winning every year and graduating. She also hopes to work in medical sales and advocate against gun violence.

Baylor acrobatics and tumbling will be back in action against Azusa Pacific at 5 p.m. Saturday at the Ferrell Center.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

TOP DOG Sophomore Payton Washington was named the 2024 NCATA DI Freshman of the Year despite being shot in the leg prior to arriving on campus.

Sports

Woodson leads tennis by living out late mom's legacy

AIDAN O'CONNOR
Staff Writer

Growing up in Raleigh, N.C., Baylor men's tennis head coach Michael Woodson had no interest in playing tennis until seventh grade, when his mom convinced him to pick up a spare racket and try out for the junior varsity team.

This moment changed his life forever. "My dad had a big impact on my life ... basically [from] birth [I was] surrounded by high-level professional sports," Woodson said. "A lot of our lives, my mom and [I] revolved around traveling and seeing him play and just being on the road with him, so the exposure was great."

With World Series Champion Tracy Woodson and second-grade teacher Maria Woodson Dann as his parents, Michael learned valuable lessons from a young age. His dad taught him how to excel in sports, while his mom showed him how to mentor others. Their influence shaped many of the core principles he still carries today.

"I started out at NC State, then I transferred to Valparaiso," Woodson said. "I had three years to play at Valpo, and in my senior year, I was planning ... to go to med school."

At Valparaiso, Woodson racked up countless honors. He served as team captain and earned awards such as the Bill Steinbrecher Sportsmanship and the Laurel Award. Even with the success, he never thought about being involved in tennis after graduation. He had dedicated years to becoming a doctor, triple-majoring in chemistry, biology and exercise science. Any other path seemed impossible.

Then, everything changed. "In November of my senior year, my mom was killed in a car accident, hit by a drunk driver, and so that really changed my path," Woodson said. "I was pretty set on where I was, what I was going to do, where I was going to go, but when that happened, I didn't know how I was going to handle it long term."

Full of grief, the future he once envisioned now felt uncertain. The impact that Woodson's mother had on him was immeasurable. The woman who used to write letters in his lunchbox, texted him constantly and danced with him to "Crocodile Rock" had been taken from his world. During the difficult period, Woodson put his future on hold and stayed as close to his loved ones as possible.

Then, former Valparaiso head coach Jim Daugherty called with an unexpected offer: an assistant coaching position.

"I didn't know if it would be best for him," Daugherty said. "He was No. 1 in his class academically. His dad was not happy with me at first because not only was he supposed to go to med school, but he probably would have become a top surgeon."

Despite initial hesitation from everyone involved, Daugherty's offer became the best path forward for Woodson.

"My coach at the time suggested that I stay and be his assistant coach ... because he thought I would enjoy it," Woodson said. "Plus, I would be able to get a master's [degree] and would be where family was. Any of the options that I had moving forward [weren't] going to be anywhere near family, and I really only felt super comfortable being in Raleigh or North Carolina, where I grew up, or in Valparaiso."

"At the time, my dad was a baseball coach there, so I had lots of people there that cared about me. So, yeah, I made the decision on a whim to stay and be the assistant."



Lariat File Photo

FINDING HIS PATH Men's tennis head coach Michael Woodson found his calling at Baylor, but the job wasn't always in his plans. A top student and triple major, Woodson was a phone call away from leaving his tennis career behind and attending medical school.

Woodson's presence immediately helped Valparaiso. After a few years with him on staff, Valparaiso reached new heights, achieving its best record in school history (22-6) and its first NCAA Tournament appearance in 2016.

"I had the opportunity to come to Baylor in 2016, and I didn't know much about [it]," Woodson said. "[Then-head coach] Matt Knoll gave me a call, I guess I was recommended by the Illinois staff. [They] flew me down here and offered me the job."

Woodson worked as an assistant until his big shot came in the 2020-21 season. He was promoted to interim head coach and oversaw the Bears as they went 34-5 and were NCAA National Championship runners-up. That success secured him the full-time role in May 2021.

With the reins in hand, Woodson built a culture that broadened Baylor's reach and appeal, helping recruit talent both locally and internationally.

"When Mike was messaging me, he was so kind," sophomore

Luc Koenig said. "[He] really supported me. When I was on the pro tour and when I visited, I saw the people around here, saw what they were like, a great Christian community. And I just knew that this was the place for me."

Under Woodson's leadership, Baylor has returned to the national spotlight. He had reached 100 wins as a head coach and won multiple Big 12 Tournaments, solidifying the program's status among the best in the country.

"I wanted to be a mentor like [my mom] to individuals," Woodson said. "My main motivation for being at a place like Baylor is to have a platform to be able to speak about her and talk about her incredible impact and the type of person she was and to try to live out her legacy."

By using his platform as a coach, Woodson keeps his mother's memory alive. He shares her story, her lessons and her love with every player who comes through his program. In doing so, he ensures her spirit continues to inspire those around him — just as she always inspired him.

Kubacha, Yu bring 'love and gratitude' to women's tennis

JULIA KONESKY
Reporter

Baylor women's tennis is off to a 9-1 start for the first time since the 2019-20 season and looks to keep rolling as Big 12 play begins, led by talented underclassmen.

Sophomore Zuzanna Kubacha and freshman Wenfei Yu bring an engaging attitude on and off the court, and head coach Joey Scrivano said the Bears remain focused on every point.

"A lot of times when you win a match, you get the four points [and in] the remaining matches, the players lose focus, they lose their intensity," Scrivano said. "But this group is really good at just keeping their spirit over the scoreboard." Kubacha's mindset has fueled the team's success. She came to Baylor from Piechanin, Poland, where she represented her country at the Baku 2019 European Youth Summer Olympic Festival. Kubacha was ranked as high as No. 132 in the International Tennis Federation junior rankings.

"I don't think about being undefeated at all," Kubacha said. "The only thing I'm thinking about during the matches is to do the right things — to play with joy, to be grateful for where I am, for the things that I have here and to play with an amazing team. That's what I focus on; I don't focus on the score."

In her freshman season, she competed in the H-E-B Invitational and the Big 12 Fall Invitational, finishing with a 4-1 singles record in the fall. She has more than doubled her wins in the spring, remaining undefeated in singles at 10-0 and dropping only two doubles matches.

"We are being aggressive and supportive



Brady Harris | Photographer

LEARNING FAST Wenfei Yu has excelled on the doubles court despite limited experience.

towards each other, and even when I'm playing singles, I'm always trying to be supportive toward my teammates," Kubacha said. "[I try to] especially play with a lot of gratitude and with a lot of joy."

"Never forget [tennis] is always about joy, love and gratitude. I'm really trying to always remind my teammates about it because I think it's the most important."

Yu came to Baylor from Beijing, China, and found quick singles success before pairing with Kubacha in doubles. While they come from different parts of the world, their chemistry on the court has been seamless.

"Before I came to the university, I wasn't playing doubles as much, so I'm not very experienced," Yu said. "I just listen to what the coaches say and we just do it."

Kubacha, Yu and the Bears will open Big 12 play against Cincinnati at noon Friday at the Hurd Tennis Center.



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

JUST HAPPY TO BE HERE Even when firing a forceful backhand, Piechanin, Poland sophomore Zuzanna Kubacha never plays angry. For her, "tennis is always about joy, love and gratitude."



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DEI from A1

In addition to federal and state scholarships, Baylor also receives a number of federal research grants through Grant.gov, which includes \$400 billion in grants for schools around the nation.

"We do continue to watch carefully what happens in the research space and grants and contracts from the federal government as it relates to research that our faculty are doing," Livingstone said.

According to Livingstone, Baylor has not seen a halt in federal funding and does not have any concerns that they will but will continue to monitor it closely.

"We want to be sure that we're in compliance with federal law and that we are respectful of and follow what's in the Dear Colleague letters," Livingstone said. "We really want to make sure that everyone on our campus feels cared for, feels seen, feels engaged and feels like they are valued on our campus."

The 'Dear Colleague' letter is from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and reaffirms the department's stance against racial discrimination in public institutions that receive federal funding. This letter underscores the Supreme Court's 2023 decision in Students for Fair Admission v. Harvard, which held that race-based affirmative action programs in college admissions violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The letter goes on to argue that DEI initiatives often function as "race-based discrimination" and are not only illegal, but will constitute a loss of funding for non-compliant institutions.

Livingstone said Baylor is not aware of any campus or educational programs that violate any laws and spends a lot of time "understanding what's going on in the political climate."

"We work very hard to ensure that our scholarship programs, our hiring practices [and] our admissions practices are consistent with federal law [and] Supreme Court cases" Livingstone said. "We will certainly continue to do that while continuing to lean into our support, care and concern for all the members of our community."

Discussion about the future of DEI at Baylor will continue, according to Livingstone, who

met this week and last with the university's general counsel, student government and the deans of several academic departments.

"We will continue to be engaged with the community, with our students [and] our faculty and staff," Livingstone said. "We're going to certainly continue to find venues where people have questions and want to learn more and to be as educated as possible."

As Baylor's administration continues to deliberate, students begin to wonder what these uncertainties will mean for them.

For Houston junior Ashlyn Manley, DEI is more than just policy — it's part of her life.

"I think it's really sad that we're taking steps backward in history, and our generation is going to have to fight the same fight that our grandparents did to get a seat at the table in a lot of these places," Manley said.

Manley believes that everyone on Baylor's campus can benefit from DEI programs, regardless if you're a person of color.

"Me as a woman of color having an opportunity doesn't take away from someone else's opportunity," Manley said. "[It] helps people across the board by bringing awareness to this things. It can literally help everyone."

Dr. Blake Burleson, senior lecturer in the department of religion, echoes the sentiment that anti-DEI mandates will harm Texas and said his classes are always better with students from diverse backgrounds.

"The class is always better if I have not only the Christian majority of students, but if I have a Muslim student or Hindu student," Burleson said. "That's just one example of our commitment to diversity and inclusion that makes Baylor stronger."

Baylor is now faced with a socio-political crossroad: uphold its commitment to diversity as a private university or blend in with the unavoidable fate of state education. With this in mind, Baylor will continue to lean into its core values as a Christian institution, Livingstone said.

"I think everything we do on campus is driven by that mission and by supporting the wide array of people and backgrounds they have on campus," Livingstone said. "And we want to do that in a caring, loving and respectful way."



CHANGES IN DEI President Linda Livingstone continues to navigate constant changes, such as the future of diversity, equity and inclusion at Baylor after eliminated funds. *Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor*

TEXAS FILM from Page 4

both local and mainstream film projects. This is because they help creatives gain the experience and credits needed to move up in the industry and eventually produce their own films.

"When you bring in large productions here, they hire local costumers, they hire local caterers, they hire local camera people," Beard said. "Then when you work on those local low-budget productions, you may not see a financial impact, but what you're gonna see is the folks that you work with here locally will gain a lot of experience."

Dr. Daniel Shafer is a professor in the film and digital media department. His expertise lies in media analysis and the business aspects of media. With all the potential money flowing in the near future, he believes there will be a new crop of studios making their way to the Lone Star State fairly soon.

"It's easier to get into the film industry more than ever and there's more outlets for content more than ever," Shafer said. "So I think when you look at Texas, and with all these incentives that the government's giving in particular, you're going to see a lot more studios popping up here. I think there's a lot of land that's good for filmmaking, and there's a lot of potentially cheap land too where facilities can be built."

As it stands now, the proposed incentives will be tightly debated by lawmakers in the Texas Senate, although many hope it will be sooner rather than later before Texas filmmakers will be able to say "lights, camera, action!"

OH SNAP from A1

population rely on SNAP for grocery shopping.

Dr. Craig Gundersen is a professor of economics and a chair of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty. As an expert in SNAP and food insecurity, his work has been cited and used across the country. One of his many reasons for supporting SNAP comes from the fact that the program gives "dignity and autonomy" to its struggling users.

"I think SNAP is a great program so far as it respects the dignity and autonomy of recipients," Gundersen said. "It also gives autonomy to SNAP recipients as a lesson to choose whatever they wish to purchase."

The core issue at hand with these proposed junk food restrictions is that they challenge SNAP users' autonomy. Many critics of SNAP point to the idea that taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for unhealthy and sugar-filled food when there are so many healthy alternatives available. Gundersen, however, explains that many SNAP users have access to healthy alternatives, but healthy foods in this country are notoriously expensive.

"It keeps on coming up that people don't have access to healthy foods, which is just a myth," Gundersen said. "For example, SNAP redemptions, which is one example of how vulnerable Americans are snapping to spend their money, 80% of snap dollars are spent at large-scale supermarkets or supercenters, 10% are spent at supermarkets, 90% of all SNAP

dollars are spent at places where 'healthy food' is very easy to get to."

Many local programs across the country have also worked to address food insecurity, and one of them is even located here in Waco.

Dr. Jeremy Everett is the founder and executive director of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty. The organization's main goal is to "end hunger through policy, education, community organizing and community development." Policy and productive programs are some of the main ways Everett works to fight food insecurity, and he reiterates that restricting food is a step backward in the fight against food insecurity.

"We have food deserts all over rural America," Everett said. "Somewhere between 22 million and 40 million people live in rural food deserts, not to mention urban and suburban food deserts. There are a number of different initiatives that we can initiate to get healthy food access to households that don't have it. What we want to do is say 'how do we solve that?' Not 'how do we restrict access to certain foods for low-income households?' We're trying to solve the wrong problem in my opinion."

Any changes to the guidelines of SNAP would require a vote from Congress to change the law. So for now, the 42.1 million SNAP users still have access to their sweet treats, but that can all change very soon.

PROTEST from A1

planning groups say, 'We don't want unborn babies killed,' but we don't want already born moms to die either; Jesus loves them," Wright said. "That's why we need abortion, because it's

healthcare. If something goes wrong with the pregnancy, and the baby dies inside, doctors aren't allowed under Texas law to help the woman live. It's just the saddest thing."



CVS STIR-UP Groups of pro-life and pro-choice protesters alike gathered outside of the CVS at 820 S 5th St. on Wednesday. *Blake Hollingsworth | Staff Writer*

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