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Why does justice stop at the top? What to learn from the Epstein fallout



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Former Baylor track athlete was nearly a winter Olympian



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Over 300 people went to a coffee shop showcase with authors



US, Israel kill Iran's supreme leader in joint military strike

AP Photo

TOLGA SAHIN
Intern

The United States and Israel killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a joint military strike on Iran early Saturday, according to U.S. and Israeli officials. Khamenei served as the supreme leader from 1989 onward and held total authority over Iran's government and military.

President Donald Trump said the United States had launched a "massive and ongoing" military campaign to dismantle the Iranian military, eliminate its nuclear program and bring about a change in government. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced in a separate video statement that the strikes were a "joint operation" against the threat posed by Iran.

The attack struck numerous military targets across the country, including sites in Tehran,

the capital housing the presidential palace, Iran's National Security Council and the Ministry of Intelligence. Israeli officials indicated that the operation's central goal was to hit as many senior Iranian leaders as possible.

The Department of Defense — renamed by Trump's executive order to be the Department of War — shared a post on X declaring the operation as "Operation Epic Fury."

The strikes came despite diplomatic efforts. Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's envoys, met with Iranian officials in Geneva on Thursday, two days before the attack. In addition, Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi flew to Washington regarding the U.S.-Iran relationship. Albusaidi said Tehran had agreed to never stockpile enriched uranium, but Iran refused to discuss other reported American demands, including giving up enrichment entirely, limiting

its ballistic missiles and ending support for Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis.

Trump expressed Friday that he was discontent with the ongoing talks.

"I'd love not to use force," Trump said. "Sometimes you have to."

In a video posted to Truth Social at 1:30 a.m. Saturday, Trump called the campaign a long-overdue reckoning.

"Our objective is to defend the American people by eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime, a vicious group of very hard, terrible people," Trump said. "Its menacing activities directly endanger the United States, our troops, our bases overseas and our allies throughout the world."

As of Monday, four U.S. service members were

MILITARY STRIKE >> A8

Congress's EXILE Act

What's at stake for international students

GISELLE LEE
Staff Writer

With heavy visa restrictions imposed on international students, the process of studying in the U.S. can be challenging. But more uncertainty looms for students who hope to work in the U.S. after graduating.

On Feb. 10, U.S. Rep. Greg Steube, representing Florida's congressional District 17, introduced the Ending Exploitative Imported Labor Exemptions Act (EXILE Act). The proposed bill would reduce the number of H-1B visas to zero at the beginning of the financial year 2027 and for every subsequent year.

Steube said the bill was put forward to protect "workers and young people continue to be displaced and disenfranchised by the H-1B visa program."

Professor Frank Enriquez, a lecturer in the political science department, explained that H-1B visas allow people from other countries to temporarily come to the United States with a specific purpose, typically employment. The three-year visa is only renewable once.

"The purpose is to attract the best talent across the world and bring it to the United States," Enriquez said. "Whether you're a student looking to hopefully get an H-1B visa and then become a U.S. citizen, and your employer would sponsor you for that, or you're someone in the middle of your career and you also want to achieve citizenship or working in an American company of some sort."

Enriquez said the elimination of the H-1B visa program may benefit local talents in filling a "vacuum" that may occur, but forcing international students out of the U.S. could pose a geopolitical risk beyond the low enrollment rates of foreign nationals in American universities.

"You're going to lose a lot of people from across the globe who want to invest their talents in American companies, and now you're going to keep that talent in their home countries," Enriquez



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

FIGHTING FOR HOME The EXILE Act is poised to reduce H-1B visas to zero by 2027, and Waco residents have continued to peacefully protest for their home.

said. "All that talent is going to go back home, whether it's from China or Latin

America or even Europe, wherever they're coming from, it's going to go back home and stay there."

Dr. Patrick Flavin, chair of the political science department, said that increasing uncertainty makes future careers "tougher to plan out" for international students.

"How do you know if the policy is going to change tomorrow, or the next week, or the next year?" Flavin said. "If so, that is going to make it less enticing to stay and study here in the United States, as the opportunity after graduating and working here is either pretty expensive or not possible, depending on whether the program is eliminated."

Despite that, Flavin remained optimistic for Baylor's international students and commended the university for "paying more attention" to global intake. Baylor experienced an increase in international students during the 2025-2026 academic year amidst

“ You're going to lose a lot of people from across the globe who want to invest their talents in American companies, and now you're going to keep that talent in their home countries.

FRANK ENRIQUEZ
POLITICAL SCIENCE LECTURER

EXILE ACT >> A8



Photo courtesy of Carrie Humphrey

STEPPIN' UP Santa Clara, Calif., junior Isabella Zailer (left), Liberty Hill senior Carlton Schrank (right) and Houston senior Carrie Humphrey (cart) have helped plan Steppin' Out 2026.

Students volunteer behind the scenes before Steppin' Out

ABBY RATHBURN
Staff Writer

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was Steppin' Out 2026. The Steppin' Out planning committee will host its first meeting Tuesday in preparation for its Day of Service event April 11.

With 1500-plus students participating across various Baylor organizations, the planning committee has plenty to organize before the day arrives. Liberty Hill senior Carlton Schrank is the internal communication coordinator for Steppin' Out. Schrank said he volunteered his freshman year and wanted to take on more responsibility.

"Service is an active expression of faith and being able to serve continually challenges me to continue to lead with humility and gratitude," Schrank said via email.

Unlike traditional hands-on volunteering, this committee oversees and coordinates the annual event, according to Houston senior Carrie Humphrey, head student director for Steppin' Out.

STEPPIN' OUT >> A8

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

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EDITORIAL

Why does justice stop at the top?

What the Epstein fallout reveals about accountability in America

Jeffrey Epstein was first investigated by Palm Beach, Fla., police 21 years ago, and yet, many victims have yet to find justice. For 21 years, men and women have suffered from the exploitation, and closure still looks to be a long way off. Epstein is dead, but for 21 years, accomplices have continued to slip through the cracks.

In 2024, around 4,500 pages of “heavily redacted” information from Virginia Giuffre’s lawsuit with Epstein were released, but it wasn’t enough. The call for the files grew louder. In February 2025, about 200 pages of additional documents were released, but after review, it became clear that they contained little new information. In July, the Department of Justice declared that no additional disclosure of files was necessary.

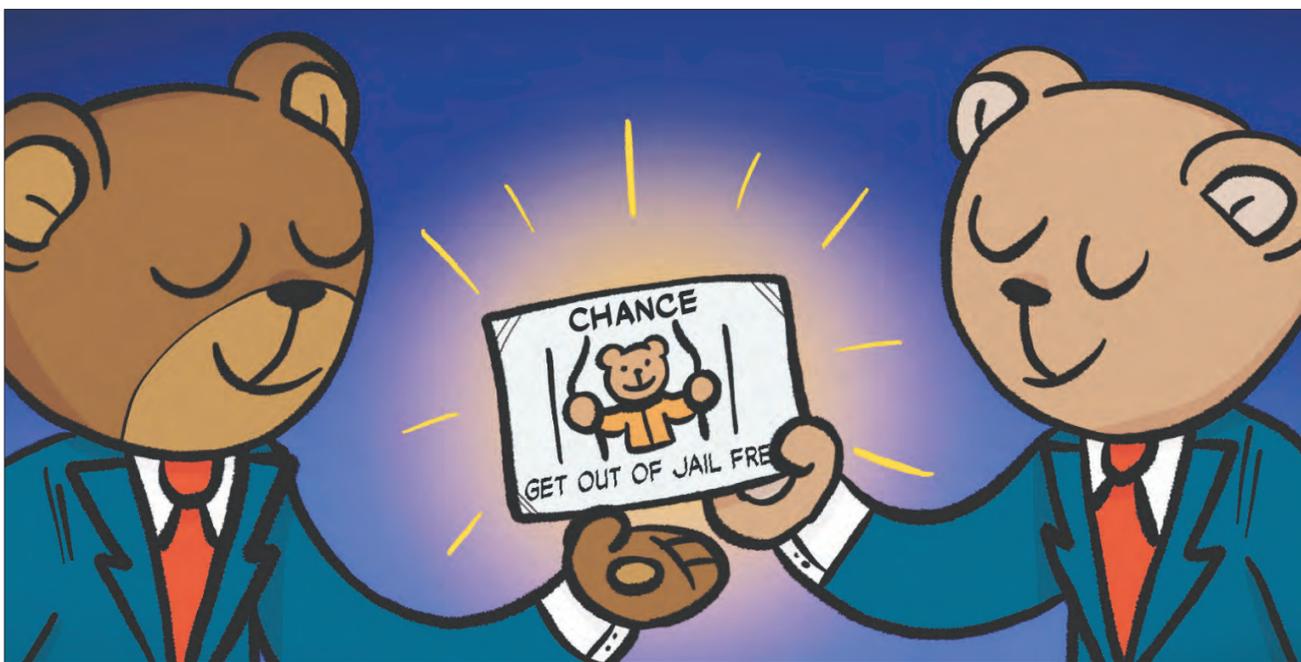
Finally, in November 2025, the House of Representatives passed the Epstein Files Transparency Act. In December, hundreds of thousands of documents were released in compliance with the act and more followed in January. The battle was won.

But then came the unthinkable. The documents were rife with household names — Bill Clinton, Donald Trump, Bill Gates, Richard Branson, Elon Musk, Steven Tisch — and most got off without a scratch; not even a slap on the wrist.

Bill Clinton was subpoenaed at Republican request in December 2025. The Epstein files are riddled with mentions of the former Democratic president, yet he and Hillary Clinton testified before Congress in a private deposition. Bill left without an accusation, and Republican members of the House Oversight Committee declared they would turn their attention to other individuals, according to PBS.

In 2025, FBI Director Kash Patel testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee that there was “no credible information” proving Epstein was involved in trafficking underage girls to other individuals. The now-public files disprove this completely.

In February, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi denied any credible evidence of Trump’s involvement with



James Ellis | Cartoonist

Epstein’s crimes. At the time of the January batch of files being released, Trump’s name was mentioned more than 38,000 times.

This information doesn’t prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt; however, Epstein was convicted of child sex trafficking, and our president is mentioned in pages alongside him, pictured with him and a known friend and business partner of his. Trump even told the New York Magazine in 2022 that Epstein “likes beautiful women as much as I do, and many of them are on the younger side.”

We’re not saying he is guilty; we are saying that we have questions, and the American people have asked over and over for transparency and honesty from our leaders.

And yet, no action has been taken. The evidence is before us. Countless criminals have not been convicted, and our highest form of government hopes we turn a blind eye. We have been convinced to look away. We have allowed ourselves to be distracted by politics, war and drama.

When Britain’s former Prince

Andrew was revealed to be involved with Epstein, he was stripped of his royal and military titles. But American leaders have yet to be convicted or punished. Victims of Epstein’s crimes are being forced to watch his accomplices go free.

This should outrage us. There are over 6 million pages of files detailing relations between a convicted child sex offender and the most powerful in our country. There are photos, emails and videos revealing Epstein’s involvement with our leaders. The evil didn’t die with Epstein in his jail cell. It has permeated our Department of Justice, our presidency and our economy.

There are over 6 million pages of American CEOs, influencers, actors, public figures, politicians and more communicating, dining and negotiating with a man who committed heinous crimes.

And rather than calling for justice, our highest levels of government have asked us time and again to turn a blind eye. They’ve told us to look away while they redact, deflect and deny. We are in danger of allowing

criminals to go free because we forgot our outrage.

For the average person, involvement with Epstein calls for an investigation. So why is it so different for this group of elite? How does the justice system suddenly break apart once it reaches men with power?

Immigrants are being jailed daily without due process, while countless leaders in our country stand blameless where that process is due. Where the law applies to one, it should apply to all. As long as we fail to hold accountable leaders and elites who are guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, we perpetuate a lie and allow one’s status to disguise their guilt.

ICE, funded by \$45 billion in Trump’s second term, had detained 66,000 people by the beginning of December, and that number is growing. ICE also stopped allowing discretionary releases as immigrants undergo trial, forcing them to petition judges for bond.

So as immigrants on trial are denied bond and detained before being convicted, numerous notable figures who have control

and influence in our country are walking free.

Before becoming Patel’s deputy at the FBI, Dan Bongino spoke on the All Things Considered podcast. In September 2024, Bongino was as outraged as the rest of the public about the lack of accountability, and he uttered words that would prove true 17 months later.

“Folks, the Epstein client list is a huge deal because it speaks to an enormous problem we have in this country,” Bongino said. “It is that there is a connected class of insiders that feel that they can get away with anything, because they can.”

Justice cannot be something that reaches the ordinary and collapses at the feet of the powerful. If we believe the law applies equally to all, then we must demand transparent investigations, refuse partisan deflection and loudly insist that accountability does not stop where inclusion begins.

Mackenzie Grizzard, while a member of The Editorial Board, had no involvement with the creation of this piece due to prior news coverage.

Baylor students – legal, casual drinking is not sinful

DYLAN FINK
Sports Writer

Nearly all the most important moments throughout history have happened over a shared drink: the signing of the American Constitution,



the delivery of Winston Churchill’s “Their Finest Hour” speech (allegedly) and in the evenings after Ernest Hemingway finished writing for the day.

Safe to say, sometimes the only answer for humanity in certain times is a good drink. It’s time Baylor students reduce the stigma of casual drinking culture.

In a digital era where loneliness is a raging epidemic among college students, a trip to the local bar every now and then is the perfect way to hang up and hang out.

Pub culture has been a source of community

and local camaraderie, accompanied by the refreshing taste of a well-brewed beer, since the appearance of English alehouses in the 10th century.

“The great British pub is not just a place to drink beer, wine, cider or even something a little bit stronger,” Ben Johnson, the editor of History UK, wrote in 2015. “It is also a unique social centre, very often the focus of community life in villages, towns and cities throughout the length and breadth of the country.”

This is a culture scene that could easily exist here in the Baylor community if the stigma around having a casual drink with friends were reduced. With places like Pinewood Public House and The Buckle, Baylor students are primed to cap off a long day of classes with a relaxing drink enjoyed among fellowship.

While Baylor is a dry campus, that doesn’t mean students of age can’t enjoy a time in fellowship with an ice-cold lager off campus.

Such opportunities as trivia nights at Dancing Bear Pub or Freight Icehouse and Yardbar or an evening around a pool table at

The Buckle or Cricket’s Drafthouse and Grill, all offer a unique experience that is hard to find elsewhere.

Now the argument that such communal pros of hanging out at the local bar can be found at just about any coffee shop does exist. Coffee, on the other hand, has historically been the everyday drink of aristocrats and the elite.

“Although both coffee and tea were introduced into Britain around the mid-1600s, their prohibitive prices ensured that they remained the preserve of the rich and famous,” Johnson wrote.

Whereas the price of a specialty drink at Starbucks can be over \$7, a fresh beer during happy hour at your local bar can be found for as low as \$2.50. As coffee prices rise, the cost to find fellowship in a neighborhood pub remains the same.

For college students being educated on a budget, a cheap beer seems like the most reasonable option for a post-class pick-me-up.

With the enjoyment of good beer with even

better friends, we must acknowledge the need for control. As the most majestic of Budweiser Super Bowl commercials always end with, the importance of “drink responsibly” is a badge to bear with the delicious sip of America’s most famous pilsner.

Responsible drinking is the center of the pub culture that Baylor students ought to be more open to. Despite what your elementary school DARE officer might have told you, a good beer or two over a competitive game of trivia with your friends will not have God at the ready to smite you.

The opportunity for better bar fellowship among the Baylor community could take an already top-10 undergraduate experience and cement the Baylor student community at the top spot.

The next time midterm studying feels like too much of a weight on your shoulders, go down to one of many great bar options around the Baylor community and enjoy a pint or two with your friends. Better yet, make some new ones.

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*Asterisks indicate members of The Editorial Board



Photo courtesy of Ryan McCord

BY THE BOOK Members of the Dialectical Club pose for a photo at Dr. Kimlyn Bender's home (back row left to right), David Johnson, Dan Shaefer, Caroline Shaefer, Kayelee Arensman, Phillip Arensman, Neil Rondina and Lisa Rondina. (Bottom row left to right) Ryan McCord, Julia Butler, Michael Butler and Bender.

Book club combines community, history

RYAN VASQUEZ
Reporter

Students of George W. Truett Seminary gathered to discuss modern theory as part of this year's start of the Dialectical Club. The book club, hosted by Truett Professor Dr. Kimlyn Bender at his home on Saturday, offered refreshments and a space for students to converse.

This semester, the group is reading "Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World" by Larry Hurtado.

The club, while hosted by Bender, is completely student-motivated. Though the club was started by students in the spring of 2023, this semester marks the fourth that the club has met in Bender's home.

"This club was for students, and the reason it continues is because there is absolutely no obligation for them to come to my home on a Saturday," Bender said. "I'm still kind of surprised by it, but it's continued on, and the only thing I can take from that is that they enjoy reading and thinking and conversing about this and doing it in a different social context."

In past semesters, the book was chosen by students who wanted to examine different themes across subjects and periods of history. This year, Bender chose the book because of how its exploration of early Christian lives can relate to those in the

modern world.

"One reason I've chosen this book is it's not entirely different from books by Robert Wilken and others, but it tries to see how Christianity and its convictions really differed from the dominant religious, political, cultural and social convictions of the time," Bender said.

This discussion is important for Truett students as they study ministry and prepare to preach in the world today, Bender said.

"What students are interested in, and what I'm interested in, is what made early Christians different from the people around them," Bender said. "How did the people around them see Christians and understand them? What practices did early Christians have that were intriguing to the people around them? I think especially in view of how Christians are thinking about living in the current situation, we can learn things from the original Christians in the context in which they lived."

Ryan McCord, a Master of Divinity and Master of Social Work student from Round Rock, is a member of the Dialectical Club. McCord particularly enjoys the book chosen for this semester, as it applies to both past and current Christianity.

"It was clear to me the goal of this book club was not just to read theology or to read sermons together, but to think deeply about the wisdom from the past theology gifts us and how we can use this to make us better ministers today," McCord said.

Students gain a different experience from the classroom through the Dialectical Club. Bender's home provides a more

casual space for students to go deeper into the book than they would in the classroom.

"When I was in seminary, I had a professor who would have graduate students in her home, and then we would eat afterward," Bender said. "I think there's something about conversation and food that is very powerful, and I think it allows students to see a different side of you."

McCord said students share this view of the atmosphere and how the change in spaces shifts the conversation. McCord said she is deeply grateful for Bender's hospitality and passion for his work.

"I could tell how much Dr. Bender cared about this club, not only for the content we discussed but also for the way the group connected and learned together through the care displayed in Dr. Bender's opening his home up," McCord said. "Some of my favorite memories took place after we finished our discussion for the night as we gathered in the Bender's kitchen, shared sweet treats and often savored decaf coffee together."

While exploring Hurtado's description of early Christianity, Bender hopes students will resonate with the material and reflect on how it affects them today.

"I think we so often believe we live in particularly difficult times as Christians," Bender said. "I understand that on one level — and I'm not saying there aren't particular challenges in the times in which we live — but all Christians have felt that they lived under the pressures of their time."

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Jake Schroeder | Photographer

IT'S FINALLY MARCH The Bears have already secured their 25th consecutive 20-win campaign. Now their focus shifts to the postseason.

The march to Missouri

Baylor women's basketball eyes a Big 12 Tournament title in Kansas City

MARISSA ESSENBERG
Sports Writer

After capping the regular season in Fort Worth on Sunday and securing its 25th consecutive 20-win campaign, No. 20 Baylor women's basketball turns its focus to the Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City, Mo., where one more opportunity at a conference title awaits.

With the bracket finalized, Baylor enters the weekend as the No. 3 seed following a tightly contested Big 12 slate that saw TCU secure the top spot and West Virginia claim No. 2. The Bears earned a double-bye into the quarterfinals, and will face the winner of Colorado's second-round matchup against either Kansas or UCF at 8 p.m. Friday at the T-Mobile Center.

"The parity in the Big 12 is that it feels like anybody can win on any given night, especially among the top seeds," head coach Nicki Collen said. "I think about the coaching jobs across this league and the number of teams that have had unbelievable years. There are so many things I'm proud of as a league."

Redshirt sophomore guard Taliah Scott echoed that sentiment entering postseason play.

"We're coming in with a new vengeance," Scott said. "This team is hungry, and I don't think that's wavered at all. We want to come back and prove that we can still beat good teams. Everybody in

our locker room is ready to go, step up to the challenge and that's the conference tournament."

For Baylor, now in head coach Nicki Collen's fifth season, the journey has stretched four months from a top-10 season-opening win over Duke in Paris through the highs and lows of conference play. With four of its five starters playing their final season and a healthy roster entering postseason play, the Bears will look to battle through the bracket and secure the program's 16th appearance in the Big 12 Tournament final.

If Baylor advances past the winner of Colorado, Kansas and UCF, the Bears would await the winner of No. 2 West Virginia's matchup against either No. 10 Arizona State or No. 7 Iowa State, setting up a potential rematch with a Mountaineer squad that overwhelmed Baylor in a turnover-filled contest earlier this season in Morgantown.

"Believe me, if we play them in the conference tournament, we'll look different," Collen said.

There is no easy path in the Big 12. The Bears will take things one game at a time as they chase a conference tournament title that has eluded them under Collen — and one that painfully slipped through their fingertips last March.

"Every night you come in, you're playing a really good team and it's big time," Scott said. "There are a variety of styles in this league. I feel like in other conferences it might be about

physicality or straight skill, but here [in the Big 12] we have that variety that makes this league so tough to play in. Anybody can win on any given night."

And if anybody can win on any given night, Baylor's moment comes when the lights are brightest — an 8 p.m. Friday tipoff followed by possible evening showdowns at 5:30 p.m. Saturday and 4 p.m. Sunday.

"The Big 12 is different, and it needs more respect because we are a league that's built differently and you have to respect everyone," sophomore forward Kayla Nelms said.

Beyond a conference title, more could be waiting for Baylor in Kansas City. A Big 12 Tournament championship would likely position the Bears to host an NCAA Tournament regional — a reward reserved for the nation's top 16 seeds and one that could bring March Madness back to Waco.

"That would mean a lot to us. You always want to play at home," senior forward Darianna Littlepage-Buggs said. "We're comfortable at home. It's less hectic, so that just means we need to go out in Kansas City and do what we do best."

Four days separate the Bears from the start of their run through the Phillips 66 Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City. Tipoff is scheduled for 8 p.m. Friday at the T-Mobile Center in Kansas City, Mo., with the game streaming on ESPN+.



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

GREAT SCOTT Redshirt sophomore guard Taliah Scott, an Auburn transfer, leads the Bears with 20.2 points per game.



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

ON POINT Graduate guard Jana Van Gytenbeek averages a team-high 6.3 assists per game.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

DOUBLE-DOUBLE MACHINE Senior forward Darianna Littlepage-Buggs leads the Big 12 with 10.1 rebounds per game.

Taking the next step

Upset win over No. 25 Ole Miss marks milestone in rebuild

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Writer

When head coach Mitch Thompson made his return to Baylor, he inherited a program that had fallen from second in the Big 12 in 2019 to second-to-last in 2022.

The man who saw the program at its peak as an assistant coach found it in need of a rebuild. The Bears (6-5) took a new step in their rebuild and in the 2026 season with their upset win over No. 25 Ole Miss on Friday.

"I'm proud of all the guys," Thompson said. "It's a big-time win for us."

Baylor has improved every year since Thompson took over as the skipper. The progress started slowly as the Bears missed the Big 12 Tournament in the first two seasons

under Thompson, compiling a 42-66 overall record with a 16-38 mark against conference opponents.

"We're going to build this thing back into a national power," Thompson said in his introduction as the Baylor head coach in 2022. "If God be willing, we're going to take this place back to Omaha and we're going to compete to win the whole dadgum thing."

The methodical and consistent growth was what Thompson envisioned for the program with him at the helm.

"We needed to try and flip the program and get it turned back in the right direction," Thompson said after the 2023 season. "The future looks bright with what we're able to do



Lariat file photo

SKIPPER The Bears have taken steps forward every season under fourth-year head coach Mitch Thompson, culminating in a 33-22 finish in 2025.

Right on the edge of history

Former Baylor athlete nearly became United States' first Black skeleton Olympian

DYLAN FINK
Sports Writer

Two months ago, former Baylor track athlete Darryl Payne Jr. was on the edge of Olympic history, nearly becoming the first Black skeleton athlete to compete for the U.S. in the Winter Games.

Now he's staring down the barrel of retirement from a sport he's given over six years of his life and hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Payne fell in love with competition at a young age. By his sophomore year in high school that love became an obsession. As a 15-year-old track star, Payne knew he wanted to be an Olympian the moment he first watched the 2008 Beijing Summer Games.

"I saw the opening ceremony just on TV," Payne said. "I immediately knew that it was something I wanted to be a part of. Everyone all dressed up getting to represent their countries and so many different cultures all brought together over competition was amazing to me."

Payne carried his high school track talents into a short collegiate career at Baylor, where he excelled at the 400-meter hurdles in his lone season for the Bears.

"I've always been good at finding how to use my athleticism to find something I could compete at," Payne said. "I was good at the hurdles and I could run a pretty fast 400 meter, so I combined the two to get a place at Baylor."

In 2016, Payne decided to make his first attempt to represent the United States at the Olympics, as he tried out for the 400-meter hurdles ahead of the Rio De Janeiro Summer Games. Despite his committed training, the hurdler fell short of his childhood dream at the Olympic qualifiers.

"Those guys there were on a whole other level," Payne said. "I thought I was in pretty good shape but I got just blown out of the water there."

Following his first chase at his Olympic dreams, Payne was not able to return to Baylor due to financial issues.

"There was a whole deal with my FAFSA stuff and I just wasn't able to afford to stay there," Payne said. "I made some really close friends at Baylor that I still hear from, but unfortunately I wasn't able to be there very long."

Unsure of what his future would be, Payne made his way down I-35 to Austin hoping to find a new career outside of track. Facing a fork in the road, Payne brought his competitive

spirit off of the track and into the kitchen as he enrolled in culinary school.

"I've always loved to cook," Payne said. "I did well in culinary school and worked in a couple different kitchens across Austin for a while."

Payne was working two jobs, as a sous chef in a higher-end Austin restaurant and as a personal trainer at a local gym when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. That year saw a lot of change for the former Bear.

With the closing of restaurants throughout the pandemic, Payne walked away from the culinary world and began to pursue personal training full-time. His childhood Olympic dream felt long lost, until a phone call one late summer afternoon changed the trajectory of his next half-decade for Payne.

"The U.S. Olympic Committee called me and wanted me to come up to their facilities in Lake Placid, New York, and try out for the bobsled," Payne said.

Payne had never competed in a Winter Olympic sport before, let alone bobsledding, but the opportunity to further chase his dream was too good to pass up.

The former hurdler, standing at 5-foot-9, was deemed too small for the bobsled. Instead, Payne was introduced to his next passion when he was given a shot to compete on the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation circuits for the skeleton.

"Skeleton is named after the sled the athlete is on," the official Olympic description for the sport reads. "Riding on a thin metal frame, athletes fly down a track headfirst at over 80-G's of force."

Payne once again found a niche sport curated for his athleticism that he was able to excel at. He spent the next four years going around the world to train and compete in skeleton tournaments, with his eyes on the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan.

Winter sports are regarded as some of the most expensive athletic events to remain competitive in, often requiring athletes to have a handful of sponsors who believe in their ability to qualify for and excel at the Olympic games.

"Skeleton probably costs about \$50,000 a year just to remain the least bit competitive," Payne said. "I was lucky enough to have some generous sponsors who supported me along the way, but I also had to give a lot to this myself."

While spending the last few years on the road competing in many skeleton circuits, Payne often found himself missing home.



Photo courtesy of Darryl Payne Jr.

NEED FOR SPEED Darryl Payne Jr., a former Baylor track athlete, came within a single spot of making history with the U.S. Olympic team this year.

Long travel days and competitive tournaments created extended stretches where he and his wife would be in Europe looking for ways to battle their homesickness.

Food is what kept them grounded on the road.

"As an American, you have to celebrate Thanksgiving," Payne said. "I remember one year we were in Switzerland, which oddly enough had loads of turkeys at the local grocery store. We had all our friends from the circuit over to the Airbnb we were staying at and I fixed up a whole traditional Thanksgiving for everybody. It was a lot of fun."

The past season for Payne became the most important competition of his life so far. The U.S. Olympic team only takes two skeleton sledders to the Games and Payne was sitting in the third spot, looking to make the jump up.

"We had a whole plan to overtake him," Payne said. "I just had to sled my consistent race and hope that he would get in his head and make a mistake. If the guy ahead of me could have slipped up then I would be able to overtake him in the rankings."

Alas, for Payne, the Olympic dream remained just out of reach as his leader, Austin Florian, secured a berth.

"He probably got in his head a little bit because everyone does, but I was the one who was way into mine," Payne said.

Payne missed out on a trip to the Olympics once again, having to watch his peers compete on the highest stage from home.

"I couldn't bring myself to watch the opening ceremonies this time," Payne said. "I shot my friends a text and told them like, 'Oh, good luck,' and some other words of encouragement, but it was too emotional for me to sit down and watch any of the actual events."

Payne, now 33, is not completely ruling out the possibility of one last attempt at his Olympic dream in 2030, but is most likely looking to retire from the skeleton for now.

"It costs too much money and is too wearing to try and maintain at this point," Payne said.

The skeleton sledder is now looking to move past his half-decade of winter sport competition and look to the future to see what is next for him.

"I have been thinking about going back to school and finishing my degree," Payne said. "I was studying biology when I was at Baylor so now I'm seriously contemplating exploring a career in physical therapy. But again, who knows what God has for me next."

BASEBALL from A4

now recruiting-wise."

Baylor returned to the conference tournament for the first time in three years in 2025, finishing with a 33-22 record — the best mark in the Thompson era.

The Bears expected to take the next step in 2026. They faced multiple opportunities early on with matchups against then-No. 7 Oregon State and No. 18 Southern Miss at the Round Rock Classic but failed to topple either of the proven programs.

"We played three really good ball clubs," fifth-year right-handed pitcher Caleb Bunch said. "Being able to stay in those games after we get punched and punched right back, I think that shows the character of this team."

Baylor believed its battle-tested resume would eventually pay off against other top opponents.

"That's going to help us when we get to those situations because we've been there before," Bunch said.

It seemed like Baylor needed to get over the hump in close games against premier teams to take another step forward. It had another chance to prove itself at the Bruce Bolt College Classic.

"It's just a huge opportunity for us to show how good we are," redshirt sophomore

catcher Brayden Buchanan said before going to Houston. "We were super close last weekend against quality opponents."

The Bears finally found their opportunity against the Rebels.

The Friday-night matchup at Daikin Park in Houston looked familiar to the previous weekend, with a multitude of strikeouts and a stagnant offense. That is, until timely hitting in the eighth, ninth and 10th innings led Baylor to its eighth ranked win under Thompson.

"We've been fighting, fighting, fighting," Thompson said. "Finally got a couple guys on, and we made the right rip, made the right swing and it was big time."

The statement victory looks to be a turning point in a season that saw multiple competitive losses to top-25 squads and for a program that wants to return to national relevance.

"A lot of fight, a lot of heart," Thompson said. "They showed up, competed their tails off"

In pursuit of another Big 12 Tournament appearance and their first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2019, the Bears are still scheduled to face off against three currently ranked teams with a pair of series against No. 23 West Virginia (March 13-15) and No. 17 TCU (April 17-19) and a meeting with No. 25 UTSA on April 14.



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

ROUNDING THIRD Senior outfielder Caleb Bergman cheers during a 14-4 win over Texas State on Feb. 17. The Bears are 6-5 this season, with three of the losses coming against ranked teams.

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Puppies and poetry

Fabled book fair showcases local child authors

ADDISON GERNENZ
Intern

Once a year, Fabled Bookshop & Cafe hosts a Local Author Book Faire to showcase local authors to the Waco community. On Feb. 19, three young authors were included in the array of writers.

This event drew a large crowd — nearly 300 people — and the store became crowded with attendees walking around the bookshelves, perusing the different displays and exhibited books.

Eleven-year-old Reyna Shanks is one of the showcased authors at the Local Author Book Faire. Shanks published a poetry collection last April titled “Chapter 10.”

While this is her first big poetry break, she has been writing for most of her life. “Chapter 10” is an assembly of poems from when Shanks was 10 years old, all written by Shanks herself. Now, almost 12, Shanks has stepped into her “author shoes” more confidently.

“I’m not used to this attention,” she said. “It’s a little intimidating, but it’s exciting to see where I could be someday.”

“Chapter 10” started out as just me writing in my room,” Shanks said. “It’s mostly my thoughts. I would be feeling a specific thing, and I would start to write it down. One of them is about a tree and what I think about them, what feeling they give me.”

Shanks’ love of writing began with a deep love of reading.

“I love ‘Little Women,’” Shanks said. “I love ‘Matilda.’ I read a lot of Roald Dahl, Shel Silverstein. I read a whole bunch, mostly realistic fiction, but some classic books.”

Shanks attends Lake Air Montessori Magnet School as a sixth grader and said she dreams of having her book published, but she knows it’s a lofty goal. She describes the feeling of

holding a bound book of her published writing as “surreal.”

“Chapter 10” invites readers into the mind of Reyna Shanks, elevating the simple things in life through the eyes of a child — trees, pets, moments of quiet — into magic.

Reyna Shanks was not the only young author Fabled was hosting.

Tabitha and Clayton Buttner co-published “Tails of Adventure” in September, a book featuring a short story by each author.

They published with help from their parents, but writing was done independently.

Twelve-year-old Tabitha and 10-year-old Clayton both wrote their short stories about dogs.

“Mine is about these dogs who are stuck in their house in a snowstorm,” Tabitha said. “They have to get it out, but it’s



‘Chapter 10’ started out as just me writing in my room. It’s mostly my thoughts. I would be feeling a specific thing, and I would start to write it down.

REYNA SHANKS
AUTHOR



Addison Gernenz | Intern

BUBBLY BOOKS Fabled Bookshop & Cafe showcased Reyna Shanks’ poetry collection, “Chapter 10.”

hard because they are blocked in.”

Clayton’s story takes a more historical twist.

“It’s the Titanic,” he said. “In this case, it’s called the ‘Pup-tanic.’ It’s about dogs who are on the Titanic. They all go into the rooms at once, and then simultaneously the doors lock. They have to figure out how to get out.”

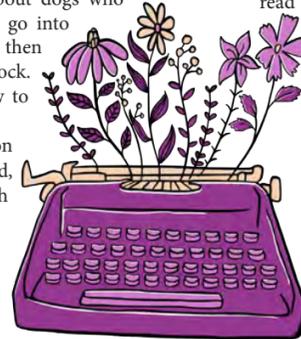
While Tabitha and Clayton are both homeschooled, they said that they are both large readers.

“I’m a bookworm,” Tabitha said. “My family can never get me out of a book; I have

to physically take myself out of a book.”

As a lover of literature, Tabitha said she will read about anything. Clayton has a strong affinity for historical fiction or action books and is currently reading “Way of the Warrior Kid.”

“I love reading, and I also really love to write,” Tabitha said. “The opportunity to write this short story and give it to people to read isn’t something I thought I’d get to do, at least not for a while. We’re really thankful.”



Design time: Graphic design students find success at competitions

ALEXANDRA BREWER
Arts & Life Writer

Baylor graphic design students are making a name for themselves by putting their creative blueprints to the test. On Thursday, three students in the art and art history department earned multiple awards at the Dallas chapter of the American Advertising Awards (ADDYs), including the coveted best of show.

The students’ award-winning projects don’t stop at the local level. Winning pieces advance to the district competition, where they’ll compete against top submissions from multiple states.

Top district winners can then move on to the national stage, judged by professional creative directors from across the country, giving their work a chance to be seen and evaluated alongside the best student

designers in the nation.

Austin senior CJ Kaltwasser submitted three logos to the competition.

“I received honorable mention for two of my logos, and a silver award for another logo,” Kaltwasser said.

Kaltwasser said that one of the recognized logos was part of a larger rebrand project he completed in class.

“It all really comes down to the research,” Kaltwasser said. “I get to incorporate hands-on studio classes into my design classes, which gives me a one-up compared to larger programs.”

For Kaltwasser, the win was a major validation after a year of experimenting with his work.

“I applied with some different projects last year and didn’t make it, but I just kept applying, kept pushing my ideas,” Kaltwasser said. “It showed me that all the work I’ve done in my



Photo courtesy of Genaro Solis Rivero

WINNER WINNER Austin senior CJ Kaltwasser and Greenwood Village, Colo., junior Lily Asher pose with their awards at the Dallas American Advertising Awards, held at Gilley’s Dallas.

design classes has really paid off, like this on a professional scale.”

Branson, Mo., sophomore Ella Sparks had a different experience. Initially, she thought her work hadn’t made it into the competition, but a scoring error revealed otherwise, and

she ended up winning silver.

“I was super honored and encouraged,” Sparks said. “It can be really intimidating, seeing much larger programs than Baylor. But I cannot be prouder to be a Baylor Bear, especially in our graphic design department. Our professors truly believe in us and push us to dream big, knowing failure is possible, but also believing in our capability.”

Her campaign focused on children’s media addiction.

“The final design was actually my fifth idea,” Sparks said. “The creative process takes a lot of time, research and perseverance. It relies on conceptual strategies as much as creativity.”

Greenwood Village, Colo., junior Lily Asher earned gold in the campaign category and best of show for a project that raised awareness of the high cost of menstrual products.

“My project was a series of three posters,” Asher said. “They all have a red background representing the blood of a period and feature a panty liner, tampon and pad. I used materials like newspaper, cloth and toilet paper to make it tangible and real.”

Asher said the awards were more than just recognition: they confirmed her path as a designer.

“It really solidified in me that I have the talent and means to make it in the industry,” Asher said. “The

award isn’t just validation for me — it shows that others can appreciate the hard work I put in, and that motivates me to keep going.”

The students were guided by Genaro Solis Rivero, assistant professor of art, who emphasizes concept, research and real-world exposure in his teaching.

“In advertising and graphic design, what is really important is the concept,” Solis Rivero said. “Every piece, even a logo, poster or campaign — when it is memorable or it touches fibers in the human mind, it is successful. That’s what my teaching focuses on.”

Solis Rivero explained why competitions like the ADDYs are so important for students.

“Even if students don’t win the first time, their mentality changes,” Solis Rivero said. “They become very self-aware of what they are doing in every project. It’s not only about receiving recognition; it’s also about learning why some projects didn’t make it, or why others got silver or gold.”

Beating programs that have historically dominated the Dallas ADDYs also elevates Baylor’s presence in the competitive design market.

“The students now feel confident that they can go and try to find a job at prestigious advertising agencies, and they have the quality of work to prove it,” Solis Rivero said.



Newspaper is meant for reading, not soaking up blood

Period poverty is the lack of access to hygienic menstrual products, sanitation and education. It affects around 500 million women. Rising costs, averaging \$13.25 per month. In 2024 seventy five percent of women had to rely on substitute items. Many teens also resort to makeshift materials due to affordability barriers and limited access. period.org

Photo courtesy of Lily Asher

DESIGN DEPTH Greenwood Village, Colo., junior Lily Asher earned gold in multiple categories for her graphic design project that raised awareness of the high cost of menstrual products.



The students now feel confident that they can go and try to find a job at prestigious advertising agencies, and they have the quality of work to prove it.

GENARO SOLIS RIVERO
PROFESSOR

Arts & Life

LIGHTS, CAMERA, INFLUENCER

How Bryan Cordova gained 30,000 followers by sharing his life

KALENA REYNOLDS
Arts & Life Editor

“Take the risk” — a motto that graduate student Bryan Cordova lives by and also frequently shares on his social media platforms. With over 30,000 followers across his Instagram, TikTok and Facebook, Cordova has built a brand on motivating others while sharing lessons of his own journey.

Cordova grew up in South Korea until he was 13, when his family decided to move back to Peru. He eventually earned his bachelor’s in audiovisual communication in Peru, which led to a job as a TV producer and reporter at Panamericana Television.

Cordova said his favorite part of the job was the adrenaline of working in live programming.

“I love it, every second counts in television ... There’s no margin of error,” Cordova said. “You gotta do everything perfect, but you got to have passion for that.”

As Cordova progressed in his career, eventually being asked to teach at a college in Peru, he decided to return to school to earn his master’s degree.

“Actually, the United States wasn’t even my first option — It was South Korea,” Cordova said.

After applying to graduate journalism programs and praying about the right path to take, Cordova decided to expand his horizons to the U.S. and apply to Baylor and the University of Texas at Austin.

“When I came to Baylor to check it out, not exaggerating, it was like ‘God, this is a place where you want me,’” Cordova said. “Baylor, it felt like this is the place where I have to be.”

Currently, Cordova is in the journalism graduate program and also works as an office assistant within the department. He uses his free time to create videos showcasing his journey as an immigrant and student.

Cordova said that a main point for showcasing his journey is to motivate and inspire others.

“When my first semester started [at Baylor], I was already sharing [my] journeys,” Cordova said. “I remember the first time it generated engagement was on TikTok and got like 20,000 views, and it was my ‘First



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

FAME Graduate student Bryan Cordova has amassed over 30,000 followers across social media platforms by sharing his life through content.

Day as an International Student at Baylor University’ video.”

Close friend Erin Cottle said that when she first met Cordova, she was shocked by his charisma and passion for life.

“I know he’s just very, very driven by his career goals,” Cottle said. “He did leave a good job and friends and his family and all that to come over to do this, to better himself and reach his goals. So I think he is taking advantage, and like, ‘While I’m over here I’m going to do the best I can.’”

In November, Cordova decided to go all in on social media and began posting every day.

“At first, I was like, ‘OK, [this is] not working, I’m not getting the attention that it has the first time I posted the video,’” Cordova said. “Then

in the end, I think it takes a lot to be consistent ... you just got to enjoy this because it’s less than 1% of people that blow up.”

Once Cordova shifted his philosophy to “enjoying the journey,” he said he began to skyrocket on social media.

“That is when I think the biggest video until now that I have popped out,” Cordova said. “It’s ‘My Saturday as an International Student,’ and that has like 50K views.”

Cordova said he has also had the opportunity to collaborate with a multitude of Waco businesses and events through his platform.

“I’m not doing it for the numbers,” Cordova said. “I’m doing it because I’m enjoying it and ... I have faith and I know that this is going to keep paying off bigger and bigger.”

As he continues to build his brand, Cordova said he eventually hopes to build a sustainable career from social media as well as building a path into the TV industry in the U.S.

“This is what I want to do the rest of my life, and that’s being in front of the camera,” Cordova said.

Cordova emphasized the importance of faith alongside his passion, stating that God is a main factor in his success.

“God has blessed me in so many ways,” Cordova said. “We don’t always get what we want, and when we do it’s because it was meant to be, and that was God’s planning bit. When we don’t, it’s like God’s plans are better than what we imagined.”

Baylor student turns creative passion into side business

ALEXANDRA BREWER
Arts & Life Writer

For Franklin, Tenn., sophomore Madelyn Gregg, a simple question has shaped an entire creative career: Why not?

Gregg pursued watercoloring and yearbook design as a hobby while primarily focusing on athletics in high school. Art was always present in her life, but it wasn’t until her senior year that it bloomed into something more intentional that has now become a side hustle and passion for Gregg.

The interior design major arrived in Waco knowing only three people from her high school. What she did know was that she had a passion for beauty. While the move from out of state felt like a leap of faith, Gregg said the leap has been “definitely worth it.”

“The community has been like no other,” Gregg said. “The church culture that I’ve been plugged into has been awesome. My classes and professors have all been wonderful. I just love it here.”

What began as commissions through Instagram messages eventually expanded into a full-scale small business. Gregg designed and launched her own website, mgartwork.com, where she sells stationery and prints and accepts custom commissions.

“I try to make pieces that people might not have the opportunity to get out of a store,” she said. “Original, colorful, creative and playful — but also really intentional.”

Her portfolio ranges from playful bunny-themed stationery to detailed portraits and abstract cityscapes filled with personal “Easter eggs” unique to each client.

Over the past year, Gregg’s side hustle has accelerated into what she describes as



Photo courtesy of Madelyn Gregg

PASSION Franklin, Tenn., sophomore Madelyn Gregg poses with one of her art pieces.

“crazy cool opportunities.” Among them are creating commissioned pieces for three NBA players — Keon Johnson, Kobe Brown and Shaedon Sharpe — as well as presenting paintings to President Linda Livingstone and the Baylor Board of Regents.

After independently creating a painting of Pat Neff Hall and gifting a copy to President Livingstone during her freshman year, Gregg later received a request for a larger commissioned piece as a gift for the Baylor Board of Regents. She eventually presented the work in person at a board meeting. From then on, business boomed.

“It was kind of like, since I was able to reach out and take a step that could have been seen as silly — like, why would you do that? — but kind of,

why not?” Gregg said.

Her mother, Amy Gregg, said creativity had long been a part of their household culture.

“My husband is a homebuilder, so sketching and designing and building and creating has always been part of our home,” Amy said. “I just saw a little girl who enjoyed crafting and drawing. We always kept supplies nearby and never minded the messy part of creativity.”

Knowing her talents, a family friend facing a difficult season asked Gregg to create a commissioned portrait. The experience reframed how she saw her work.

“Art just became a way that I could capture memories for people,” she said. “The goal is always just to make them smile when they see a piece that they hold daily.”





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EXILE ACT from A1

student visa restrictions, a stark contrast to other universities in the US.

"Baylor has done a very effective job in terms of the international students' office here and the global engagement office in fighting the headwinds," Flavin said. "I think the classroom and the student experience greatly benefit from having a wide array of viewpoints for a personal standpoint for the driving students who are from another country besides the United States, and then bringing their background and

their viewpoints."

While international students' futures in the U.S. remain unpredictable, Enriquez advised students to "think ahead of time" and work hard while studying in the U.S.

"Be very clear and deliberative about the career path you want to go down," Enriquez said. "If you know exactly what you want to do, it gives you those four years to become the best version of yourself and the best potential candidate for an H-1B visa."

STEPPIN' OUT from A1

"I think that our planning committee is really, really great because you kind of get that experience of stepping out of your comfort zone and doing something for the Waco community," Humphrey said.

Santa Clara, Calif., junior Isabella Zailer is the co-director of external communication for Steppin' Out. Zailer said preparation for the event includes meetings, site visits and more. Despite the hefty preparation, Zailer said it is very manageable.

"Our meetings are about an hour max, and then from there we do our site visits, and that really depends," Zailer said. "I know a lot of people like to just knock out a bunch in a day, but even then, our site visits only take about 10 to 15 minutes."

Although most of their recruiting came from Late Night, students are welcome to join the team throughout the year. Students can expect to learn a great deal of skills, stretching themselves beyond their comfort level, Humphrey said.

"I've learned a lot of great people skills and stepping out of my comfort zone, and especially stepping out of the Baylor bubble to different parts of Waco, I feel like I have a really good grasp of the community that I wouldn't have had had I not been a part of the committee," Humphrey said.

The committee's impact expands beyond the skills individual members gain, though. Their work throughout the year ensures the event runs smoothly come April.

"On the day of service, they are at headquarters and they're helping with tool organization and checking in team leaders and sending them on their way, keeping up with groups well at their site, and then they're for whenever people return," Humphrey said.

As the event nears, team leaders should check their emails to confirm their involvement in Steppin' Out.

The day before the event, Steppin' Out organizers will celebrate their 40th anniversary on Fountain Mall. All are welcome to join in celebrating 40 years of Baylor students serving the Waco community.

MILITARY STRIKE from A1

killed and five were seriously wounded during the operation, according to U.S. Central Command. The troops were part of an army sustainment unit stationed in Kuwait, struck by an incoming Iranian munition. Trump said they expected casualties.

"The lives of courageous American heroes may be lost, and we may have casualties," Trump said. "That often happens in war, but we're doing this not for now. We're doing this for the future, and it is a noble mission."

Trump directed a message to the Iranian people, urging them to rise against their government and go against the members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard to lay down their weapons. He promised "total immunity" to those who surrendered and "certain death" to those who did not.

Netanyahu said the strikes could "create the conditions for the brave Iranian people to take their destiny into their own hands."

The U.S. conducted operations against Iran's nuclear facilities on June 22, 2025, during the 12-day war between Iran and Israel. College Station senior and College Republicans President Lindsay Flanigan emphasized the success of this mission.

"The bombing of the Iranian nuclear facilities was a great step towards stability in the Middle East," Flanigan said. "Removing the threat of nuclear weapons from Iran was a great step toward stability and looking to Israel as a partner and ally in the global stage."

Despite Supreme Leader Khamenei's death, Iran's military conducted retaliation strikes against many U.S.-allied countries such as Israel, Qatar, UAE and Bahrain. Sirens and shelter-in-place alerts have gone in Israel and Bahrain. Yemen's Houthi rebels, an Iranian-backed group, continued attacks on shipping in the Red Sea corridor.

Iran's foreign minister said it was time to defend the homeland. The websites of several Iranian news agencies, including the official state outlet IRNA, went down, with IRNA reporting it had been hacked.

Tensions with Iran have long tested American presidents of both parties. Dr. Patrick Flavin, chair of the political science department, said Iran remains



AP Photo
CONFLICT A motorcycle drives past a picture of the late Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei along an empty street in Tehran, Iran, Sunday following the confirmed death of Khamenei in U.S. and Israeli strikes.

one of the world's enduring hotspots.

"I think you could sort of divide it out into long-term political hotspots, such as unstable places," Flavin said. "Iran certainly is one of those that, regardless of who was president, they would probably be reacting to that or trying to figure out how to respond to that situation."

The operation drew criticism from the Democratic Party. Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee. He said Congress received no real briefings or intelligence on the attack and that the Trump administration presented no strategic justification for the strikes.

Sen. Ruben Gallego of Arizona, a Democrat and former Marine who served in Iraq, said the United States can support the democracy movement and the Iranian people without sending troops to die.

One of the top frontrunners for the 2028 presidential election, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, released a statement calling the attacks a choice.

"Mr. President: this was not an inevitability," Ocasio-Cortez said. "This is a deliberate choice of aggression when diplomacy and security were within reach. Stop lying to the American people. Violence begets violence. We learned this lesson in Iraq. We learned this lesson in Afghanistan. And we are about to learn it again in Iran. Bombs have yet to create enduring democracies in the region and this will be

no different."

Ocasio-Cortez also indicated that she will vote for the bipartisan War Powers Resolution, urging every member to join it.

"In moments of war, our Constitution is unambiguous: Congress authorizes war," Ocasio-Cortez said. "The President does not. I will do my part to uphold our Constitution by voting YES on Representatives Ro Khanna and Thomas Massie's War Powers Resolution. Every member of Congress must join."

Administration officials, including Vice President JD Vance, said they plan a quick air-only campaign with no American troops fighting on the ground. But Trump told reporters he expects the operation to last four to five weeks and has not ruled out sending ground troops.

The war is also driving up oil prices. U.S. crude oil jumped more than 6% Monday after ships stopped moving through the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway near Iran where about one-fifth of the world's oil is shipped.

Before the strikes, Trump also turned his attention to Cuba Friday, suggesting the U.S. could soon take over the island nation.

"The Cuban government is talking with us; they're in a big deal of trouble, as you know," Trump said. "Maybe we'll have a friendly takeover of Cuba. We could very well end up having a friendly takeover of Cuba."

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