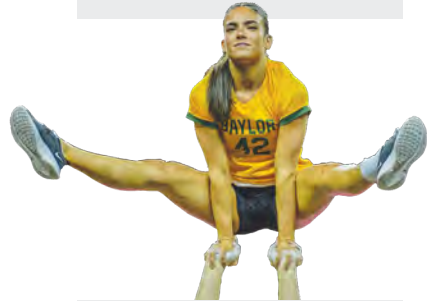




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EDITORIAL:

Don't listen to the cringe police — just be you and do what you enjoy



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ACRO & TUMBLING:

Baylor A&T's final NCATA chase begins with a dynasty still unshaken



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FUN & GAMES:

Baylor Esports finds national success during first year



Brady Harris | Photographer

DIALOGUE "Border Czar" Tom Homan discusses border security with political commentator Benny Johnson at the "This is the Turning Point" tour stop Wednesday night at Waco Hall.

TPUSA on campus

Speakers address immigration, American families, civil discourse

ARDEN BERRY

Copy Editor

Volunteers clad in white TPUSA shirts with black text reading "freedom" lined the aisles while pop songs and red, white and blue lights filled Waco Hall Wednesday evening as the room prepared for Baylor's stop on the TPUSA tour.

Students were periodically encouraged to chant, "USA," do the wave and pose for pictures. The seats available on the floor section were nearly full, though sections in the back and all balcony spaces were blocked off.

The Lariat, along with all other news outlets that requested credentials, was denied media access Wednesday morning after Turning Point closed the event to the press in the interest of its students.

The Lariat instead reported on the night from general admission seating. The Lariat consulted

the Student Press Law Center and followed all rules posted to attendees before publishing its coverage.

The event featured Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, "Border Czar" Tom Homan and political commentator Benny Johnson.

Opening the event, Paxton briefly discussed his experience at Baylor and his journey to running for Texas Attorney General.

"I thought to myself, I wonder what happens if you ask God for a very specific answer you don't do," Paxton said. "Well, I didn't want to find out."

Turning Point Baylor President Peter Fernandez addressed the students, speaking about Baylor TPUSA's general mission.

"When we table, we'll ask a controversial question," Fernandez said. "We'll also make sure

TURNING POINT TOUR >> A4

All Are Neighbors calls to 'love everybody' amid campus tensions

HANNAH WEBB

Staff Writer

In the wake of campus tension sparked by Turning Point USA, a student-led gathering at Baylor on Wednesday night advanced a counterclaim rooted not in politics, but in theology — the command to love one's neighbor is both central to Christian life and inseparable from public action.

All Are Neighbors, held in the Cashion Academic Center, drew 270 ticketed attendees, totaling 352 people, including VIP guests and speakers, nearly filling all available seats. The event was created in response to TPUSA's presence on campus, but speakers and organizers consistently emphasized that the gathering was not merely reactive.

Instead, it functioned as a faith-centered call to action, rooted in Christian teaching and expressed through civic engagement.

The evening opened with a band performing songs such as "Lean on Me" and "Goodness of God," setting an early tone that blended worship with public discourse.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

UNITY Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson embraces conversation with attendees following the All Are Neighbors event held in the Cashion Academic Center.

Attendees disappointed after new policy bars thousands from Turning Point event

JOSH SIATKOWSKI

Staff Writer

After late adjustments, Turning Point USA's stop at Baylor shifted from a public community event into a private, student-centered gathering that left over 80% of ticketholders unable to attend.

In the days leading up to the event, which was planned to host Trump Organization Executive Vice President Donald Trump Jr., political commentator Benny Johnson and "Border Czar" Tom Homan, attendees navigated speaker changes, attendance requirement updates and more. Tuesday saw Trump Jr. replaced with Texas Attorney General and U.S. Senate candidate Ken Paxton, while Wednesday morning saw numerous members of the press denied access.

Because of the updated press rules, The Lariat reported on the night from general admission seating, following all rules posted to attendees before publishing its coverage.

Just hours before the event was a final change: thousands of general admission tickets were voided to accommodate a "Baylor-only" policy that the university said was always in place.

Because of the changes, Waco Hall closed off over half of its 2,200 seats, including all of the balcony section. Students and a few Baylor community members occupied nearly all of the available

seats. Baylor's official attendance measure, based on ticket scans, came in at 438.

But the vast majority of those who planned to attend were cut off from entry, as over 4,500 non-students registered for the event expecting to be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. With the short notice, some of these 4,500 did not hear about the rule change until they were turned away at the doors.

Bob Sutherby of Big Sandy, Tenn., was one of those ticketholders. A consistent supporter and audience member of Turning Point, Sutherby said he was disappointed to see his 11-hour drive end the way it did.

"It hurts our heart," Sutherby said with his wife. "You drive from Big Sandy, Tennessee — that's a great distance to come down to Texas."

He also expressed confusion at the decision to keep the general public out when student attendees didn't fill up the venue. As he stood at the entrance about an hour before the event, he said that the vast majority of Waco Hall would be empty.

"There's a capacity of 2,000 people in Waco Hall," Sutherby said. "As you can clearly see, we don't have 100 people here. So why turn people away, until you have 2,000 people?"

Olan Tisdale, who lives three hours away in Fredericksburg, was also frustrated by what he said was a lapse in communication.

"They advertised this as it was for the public as well," Tisdale said outside Waco Hall. "Something happened where they didn't communicate."

In an email to ticketholders, Turning Point USA clarified that it was not responsible for the voids and that the organization, in fact, disagreed with the decision.

"We strongly believe this is the wrong decision by school administrators," the email reads.

Baylor said that in its discussions with Turning Point, the students-only policy had always been in place. But The Lariat reported in March, without rebuttal from the administration, that the event was open to the general public. Tickets were also sold through Waco Hall without confirmation of student status for weeks before the event.

Students who did make it in said they felt for the thousands who were unable to go. But they also thought that limiting it to students might have been a precautionary measure.

"I feel like everybody should have been able to go," Carmel Valley, Calif., junior Lucy Johnson said. "But I do think it might have been for security reasons."

Inside, the conversation mostly focused on topics unrelated to the planning and execution of the event. Paxton opened the night and spoke briefly about his time at Baylor and did not address his run for Senate. He was followed by TPUSA Baylor

President Peter Fernandez, who thanked the crowd and introduced "The Benny Show" host Benny Johnson, one of the keynote speakers.

In his 20-minute talk, Benny Johnson quipped on news of the day, like Congresswoman Ilhan Omar's financial reporting controversy and birthrate discrepancies between liberals and conservatives. Following this was a fireside chat between Homan and Benny Johnson, which focused primarily on Homan's work in reducing illegal immigration. The event concluded with a Q&A session. As questions reflected both favorable and critical views of the speakers, conversations remained cordial.

While all on stage stuck mostly to topics like border security and having children, Benny Johnson did comment briefly on the situation as the event began.

"Let them have the top row," Benny Johnson said in reference to the blacked-out balcony section. "Christ said, 'Let the children come unto me and do not stop them.'"

Despite the limitations, however, students expressed satisfaction with the crowd and its engagement throughout the event.

"I think it would have been nice to have a lot of people, but I think it was still a good turnout," New Braunfels junior Natasha Samson said after the event.

NOTES TO NAILED IT



GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

We want to hear it. Send us your thoughts: Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu

EDITORIAL



James Ellis | Cartoonist

In case you don't know, someone is proud of you

GISELLE LEE
Staff Writer

Disaster struck me on a Monday. It had not been a pleasant day. The rain turned dirt into mud and painted a frown as gray as the sky across my face. I was trying to eat my Sushic noodle bowl at the Bill Daniel Student Center in a futile attempt at cheering myself up, only to make the mistake of opening my laptop and looking at the list of things I've yet to complete.



I let out a sigh. For weeks, I had been experiencing chronic busyness: a state in which I am constantly looking for ways to keep myself occupied. To put it simply, staying still is not an option.

Admittedly, I had also been challenging myself a lot more than the previous semester: I took on my first real job, joined the Baylor Crew team and continued working on my independent project, all while balancing my rigorous coursework and trying to spend time with my friends.

Yet I still thought that there was something missing.

I still needed to prove my worth by being accomplished; after all, no one on LinkedIn is hiring unless you have the statistics to back yourself up.

Consequently, instead of doing anything productive, I resorted to doomscrolling, trying to understand the internet's definition of success and secretly comparing myself to the internships or side quests other people were doing. My list of "to-dos" only grew longer and longer.

From my social media adventures, I concluded that the only way I could feel "enough" was to work more.

My eyes stung from the light radiating off my screen. I shut my laptop.

Before I could lament in my head about the endless number of tasks I had to do, my friend took a seat opposite me. A conversation began, and before I knew it, I had an Oscar-worthy crash out. In real life. With an actual person bearing witness.

I thought to myself, "This is not good."

I spent too much time creating an image of calmness and composure, or at the very least a decent impression of being optimistic, only for it to disappear in a moment.

I began preparing for her to respond, but what she said surprised me:

"Even when you think that you are barely staying afloat, there is someone on this campus that looks at you and asks how you manage to do everything you're doing and do it well."

As I went along with the rest of my not-so-merry day, her words stayed in my mind.

Initially, I refused to believe it. If there was room to do better, what I have achieved so far is not worth celebrating yet. However, that way of thinking hindered me from seeing how much I've overcome, especially living 8,000 miles away from home for the first time.

We are in a constant pursuit of more, but with every two steps we take, it can feel like we are still one step behind. Despite that, I think we should give ourselves some credit for the little things in life that we achieve just by showing up and doing our best every day. Everyone's journey is different, but we should celebrate one another all the same because sometimes others see us better than we see ourselves.

After all, if you take two steps forward and one step back, you're technically still taking one step forward.

As we approach the final push in the academic year, if you know a friend who might be struggling, I urge you to tell them how proud you are of them; it might just be the shred of hope they have been waiting for.

Don't listen to the cringe police

To be cringe is to be free.

Many of us have repeated this to ourselves as we prepare for some sort of perceived public humiliation. Somehow, the most normal actions, interests and enjoyments have been labeled as "cringe."

While there might be comfort in commonality, there is an equal peace in personal acceptance — something we might all be too afraid to be OK with.

Maybe you giggle at the girl next to you in class wearing bright colors with frills and bows. Of course, you would never wear something like that. Maybe you roll your eyes at the group of guys wrestling each other on Fountain Mall. Whatever you deem to be cringe seems to always appear.

But as you hyperfixate on a

stranger's "cringey" outfit, action or personality, you've unwittingly wasted precious seconds of your own day. In the time it takes your brain to formulate a quick opinion on what's cringe and what's not, you've already missed the funny joke your friend whispered to the group. You've missed the first sunny day after a week of gloom, and you've spent precious energy worrying more about others than your own life.

How much time do we really waste hyperfixating on others? Far too much, in our opinion. Whatever someone does in our general vicinity, even if it doesn't involve us in the slightest, it seems we have a predisposition to care.

What gives us the authority

to decide what is "cringe"? We cannot possibly consider ourselves so important to be the all-knowing determiners of what is the norm.

We've gotten so wrapped up in our perception of others that it's warped our sense of self. The reason we joke, "to be cringe is to be free," is simple — it gives us an excuse to be ourselves in a world that is often far too judgmental.

Our individual interests are what make us, well, us. Without the outward expressions of exciting interests we bury out of fear, we become a boring world, devoid of color and, for lack of a better word, whimsy.

A world without a diverse range of interests cannot support the tenacity and intricacies of

being human. What makes us so different from AI models and chatbots that rely on others for their information if we cannot form our own interests?

Don't be afraid to be you. Dance around in public, wear your favorite Broadway musical shirt and tell anyone who listens the science behind NASA's Artemis II.

People will think whatever they want. Let them. One person's cringe is another's passion, and we need more passion in a world that celebrates nonchalance.

Above all, don't be afraid to enjoy your life. Talk about your interests and let your personality shine through, and perhaps we can make this world a little more accepting, one quirk at a time.

Baylor dining halls need better hours

JOSH SIATKOWSKI
Staff Writer

Last year, I took a trip to Durham to visit some high-achieving friends at Duke. In more ways than one, it's an impressive place: straight-A students, legendary athletics, beautiful buildings — the list goes on.

But what they do best is the late-night meal.

Despite a Hogwarts-esque campus, a student population that is seemingly allergic to both B's and pimples and dominates over Baylor on the basketball court, I never felt any inferiority on that trip or in the following weeks. I remained, for several reasons, very grateful for my life here at Baylor.

There was one thing I couldn't shake. As my body sank into a wheezing air mattress in the middle of my friend's dorm, I felt a familiar feeling for college-aged guys — the late-night stomach grumble that calls you out of bed and into the kitchen. But I commented dismissively about my hunger and lay back down.

Instinctively, I assumed everything would be long closed, as it was 1 a.m. on a weekend.

Fifteen minutes later, I was eating a restaurant-quality cheeseburger at Pitchfork, one of Duke's 34 on-campus dining spots. Not only was the food frighteningly delicious, but the kitchen would also continue to serve students for another two hours.

This is no unusual thing at Duke. Pitchfork is open until 3 a.m. four nights a week, and it's one of five spots on campus that consistently remain open past midnight.

It's not improved academics, better athletics or campus beautification that I want to see Baylor compete with Duke over. It's not even the number of dining options or the food quality that had me wishing Baylor made changes — I'd much rather stick with Baylor's more modest options if it means avoiding Duke's \$5,000 per semester meal plans.

But more than anything I saw that weekend, the gap in dining hours was the one thing that seemed like it could and should disappear without students footing a massive bill.

As a freshman, I recall planning my weekends around dining hall hours, which, for an unlimited meal plan, seems rather limiting. Two years and one new food supplier later, Penland Hall is still the only spot that stays open past 9 p.m., and it happens only four nights a week. In that time, Baylor also closed Brooks Great Hall without meaningfully changing other facilities' hours.

Weekends are also challenging. On Saturdays, the meal options shrink down to just Penland and a few spots in the Bill Daniel Student Center. And Sundays are equally sparse, with Penland open for about six hours and East Village open for four, while the rest of campus shuts down.

While Duke has more upperclassmen who live on campus than Baylor does (and thus focuses more on on-campus dining), the raw number of students on campus is not all that different. The demand, from this perspective, must be there.

Baylor is not short on dining spots as a whole, either. Not counting the faculty center or law school cafeteria, the university has 18 different food options, including three dining halls and six franchise restaurants across campus. But still, even with thousands of students on campus, there are times of day — especially nights and weekends — when getting something to eat is more difficult than it should be.

While it may not affect my other off-campus classmates and me, it seems only fair to give on-campus students more flexibility with their dining options. Between the hours of 9 a.m. and 10 p.m., there should always be a dining option available that students, especially those with unlimited plans, can count on — which means keeping not just restaurants, but dining halls open.



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News

THE RISE OF BYX

Beta Upsilon Chi fraternity achieves biggest recruiting class ever

ABBY RATHBURN
Staff Writer

Fresh off a first-place Sing win and recruiting 28 new members, nearly doubling its membership within one semester, Beta Upsilon Chi is gaining momentum and drawing attention across Baylor's campus.

Brothers Under Christ, also known as Beta Upsilon Chi, is a Christian fraternity on Baylor's campus, and this year, it drew more eyes than ever. In spring 2025, the fraternity inducted 11 new members. This spring, 28 members joined the fraternity, including Thornton, Colo., freshman Tyler Elmore.

"There is a shift towards wanting this fully integrated Christian life, like, to bring your relationship with God into more than just the church, but into your school and education and into your social interaction," Elmore said.

Many recruits said that they felt drawn to the idea of Brothers Under Christ, doing life together under a Christ-centered lens. BYX President Robert Gulley, a senior from San Antonio, said that a big reason he chose BYX was that the recruitment process felt far more intentional than what he ever expected.

"The entire process for BYX was questions like, 'How does God work in your life? Tell me about your faith, why are you saved and what's your salvation like?'" Gulley said. "I haven't had people want my heart rather than what I have to offer."

When looking for future recruits, the men of BYX hope to continue their growth without sacrificing their organization's

values. Gulley said there are three things they look for in potential new members: a love of God, a desire to support each other and a desire to be a part of a social fraternity.

"You just got to kick that intentionality into high gear because you do have to put in more effort to actually know and love and care about the people around you when you start growing in numbers," Gulley said.

This mutual selection process brought together men from diverse backgrounds at various points in their faith journeys. However, they are all united under a desire to grow in their relationship with Christ. Argyle freshman Micah Gassaway said he had heard about BYX before arriving on campus and after meeting some of the guys, he knew he had found the right fit.

"If you're looking for what a fraternity actually is, like what it's intentionally supposed to be ... it is supposed to be a brotherhood of guys building each other up and making each other better — I feel like that truly is what BYX is," Gassaway said.

Members said that emphasis on community extends far beyond internal relations. At each of their events, they make an effort to reiterate what their organization stands for and the purpose it seeks to fulfill.

"The recent parties we've had have been successfully advertised, and there's been good attendance and we've been capitalizing on that, using it as opportunities, not only to share the fun parts of the fraternity, but at every event we have someone talk about the personal relationship with Christ that comes with it," Elmore said.



Photo courtesy of Robert Gulley

BROTHERHOOD Beta Upsilon Chi brought in 28 new members as part of its spring recruitment class for 2026.



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

LEADERSHIP Vice President and Provost Dr. Nancy Brickhouse will step down from her role this summer after seven years as Baylor's chief academic officer.

'Not a political decision' Brickhouse discusses sudden departure

MACKENZIE GRIZZARD
Assistant News Editor

Vice President and Provost Dr. Nancy Brickhouse announced her departure from administration last week — a decision that raised questions throughout the Baylor community. Amid a recent tuition increase, budget cuts and national attention over Baylor hosting Turning Point USA on campus, Brickhouse emphasized the reasoning behind her choice.

"This is not a political decision," Brickhouse said. "It's not a factor at all. It certainly has nothing to do with Turning Point being here."

After Brickhouse's official announcement, Baptist News Global posted an article insinuating discussions within the Faculty Senate to hold a "vote of no confidence" concerning Brickhouse and University President Dr. Linda Livingstone. A statement from Faculty Senate Chair Dr. Karenna Malavanti denied the claim.

"The statement that the Faculty Senate is considering a vote of no confidence in the president and provost is categorically false," the statement reads.

Multiple sources within the Faculty Senate confirmed that there was no discussion of a vote of no confidence. Brickhouse said she was "incredibly surprised" at the article and emphasized that "not every decision is a political one." Brickhouse pointed back to her original letter announcing her departure, citing personal reasons and her desire to return to the professoriate.

"I think that the outpouring of gratitude that I've received from faculty across campus has been really heartwarming and reinforces my confidence that there are no secrets here," Brickhouse said.

In a Presidential Perspective email, Livingstone highlighted Brickhouse's decorated tenure and expressed her gratitude for her seven years of dedication to the university.

"Under her guidance, our research expenditures and research doctorates have increased significantly, and by all measures, Baylor is well-positioned for continued forward momentum," Livingstone said. "Additionally, Provost Brickhouse has been instrumental in helping the University achieve all-time highs in graduation and retention rates, understanding the crucial connection between timely graduation and affordability for students."

Brickhouse said her decision was in complete alignment with the university administration and Livingstone.

"I've been in conversation with the president about this for several months," Brickhouse said. "This was not a rash decision that came all of a sudden. It just seemed like it was the right time. It was the right time for me. And a good time for the institution as well."

Despite previously serving as provost at Saint Louis University and 27 years at the University of Delaware, Brickhouse's appointment as Baylor's chief academic officer in 2019 was as much a homecoming as anything else.

"I'm a Baylor alum," Brickhouse said. "So a lot of coming back as Baylor's provost was an opportunity to kind of give back to the people that launched me. It was a familiar community in many respects; I understand the values. I understand our Christian commitments."

Looking back on her tenure, Brickhouse recalled her first week on the job, when Baylor received a \$100 million gift to the "Give Light" philanthropic campaign, which advanced the university toward its eventual Research 1 designation a couple of years later.

"The week that I arrived was the announcement of a gift that would allow us to hire new endowed chairs," Brickhouse said. "And these endowed chairs were also very important to helping us achieve the R1 designation."

Brickhouse said her time at Baylor as a student and a provost was fundamental

to her growth and is what she hopes for all Baylor students who step onto campus.

"That's what education should do; it changes who you are as a person," Brickhouse said. "It changes what you're able to do, how you're able to move in the world. And so to be able to give that back to today's Baylor students, I think, is particularly special for me."

After championing a new strategic plan and Baylor's R1 status, Brickhouse also reflected on challenges during her tenure, most notably Baylor's recent decision to increase tuition and decrease budgets.

"To be able to work collectively with other senior leaders on that effort with the full support of the board of regents has made this year, you know, hard in some respects, but it's also good work," Brickhouse said. "I mean, it was needed work in order to make a Baylor education more accessible."

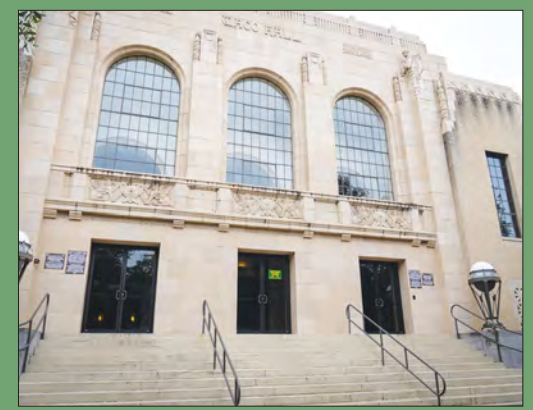
Dr. Lee Nordt, former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, will step in as interim provost upon Brickhouse's departure this summer. Brickhouse said she and the faculty were fully supportive of Livingstone's decision to appoint Nordt.

"We did have conversations about who'd be good in the role, and I'm incredibly supportive of Lee in that role," Brickhouse said. "He's trusted by the deans and the vice provosts, and he's trusted by the administration. He'll be a great, steady hand. He also understands R1 very well, so he will be great during the transition."

For Brickhouse, a transformational seven years at Baylor fill her with pride and gratitude for the relationships she's cultivated with students and faculty. Amid struggles and celebrations, Brickhouse remains excited for what's in store next — for her and the university.

"I love a challenge," Brickhouse said. "I love hard work. But right now, I do feel like I'm ready to hand off the baton to someone else and let someone else take it from here."

TPUSA tour denies all press pass requests, pivots to 'private' event



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

ACCESS DENIED Six members of The Lariat were denied credentials to TPUSA's "This is the Turning Point" tour, taking place at Waco Hall on Wednesday evening.

READ MORE HERE!



Students reflect on late Maggie Skinner's legacy



Photo courtesy of Baylor Chamber of Commerce

LASTING LOVE Los Angeles junior Maggie Skinner, who passed away in December of last year, made an impact on the lives of her friends and anyone who had the chance to meet her.

READ MORE HERE!



TURNING POINT TOUR from A1

that it's known that it's OK to disagree with us. My favorite days of tabling are those days when the agrees and the disagrees are pretty even because those are the days when the most civil discourse is happening. And those are the days that Charlie would be the most proud of."

Johnson said he would talk about conservative "wins," singling out Rep. Ilhan Omar's financial disclosures and providing charts documenting young men's rising religiosity, immigrant population decline in major American cities and the number of children conservatives are having.

"That means that by the year 2100 ... 80% of America will, by that year, will be the progeny of conservatives," Johnson said.

Johnson referenced a variety of political figures and issues throughout his speech and ended with a focus on civil discourse and Christianity.

"I wanted to say there are good things happening," Johnson said. "You can have good-faith disagreements. It's important to have that, good-faith

debate ... Don't get down on yourself. Make sure that you remember that there are actually really good things ahead. And most importantly, if you're a Christian, you know that God's got us."

Homan's speech centered on his experience as border czar. Homan served under both Barack Obama and Donald Trump, and he returned as border czar after Trump's first term. He expressed dismay with Joe Biden's handling of immigration and a desire to find 300,000 missing children.

"We've got plenty of time because of the four years of open border," Homan said. "The children are the most difficult because they don't have that digital footprint ... They found 146,000. But President Trump has made a promise. We won't run down every single lead until we find every one of them."

Students clapped, laughed and cheered throughout the event. However, Temecula, Calif., junior JT Nichols said Johnson made a joke that "did not land well."

"For Benny Johnson, a guy I looked up to for a long time ... today he made a couple remarks about making fun of liberal women," Nichols said. "One of the seminary students asked a question about it, which I thought was a totally fair question, and he treated it as a joke, which I think if we are going to speak the truth and love, that's not the best way to go about it."

The Q&A at the end involved students addressing questions to Johnson and Homan. Question content ranged from ICE to the current Iran conflict to being American.

"What is an American exactly?" Johnson said. "America, up until the last 200 years, was founded, created, built, all of the infrastructure, all of the culture, Christian European. That was plus 90% of all immigration to America. That was the original founding. That was the original founders and how they structured our nation. The Bible calls to God and calls to a Christian God are throughout."

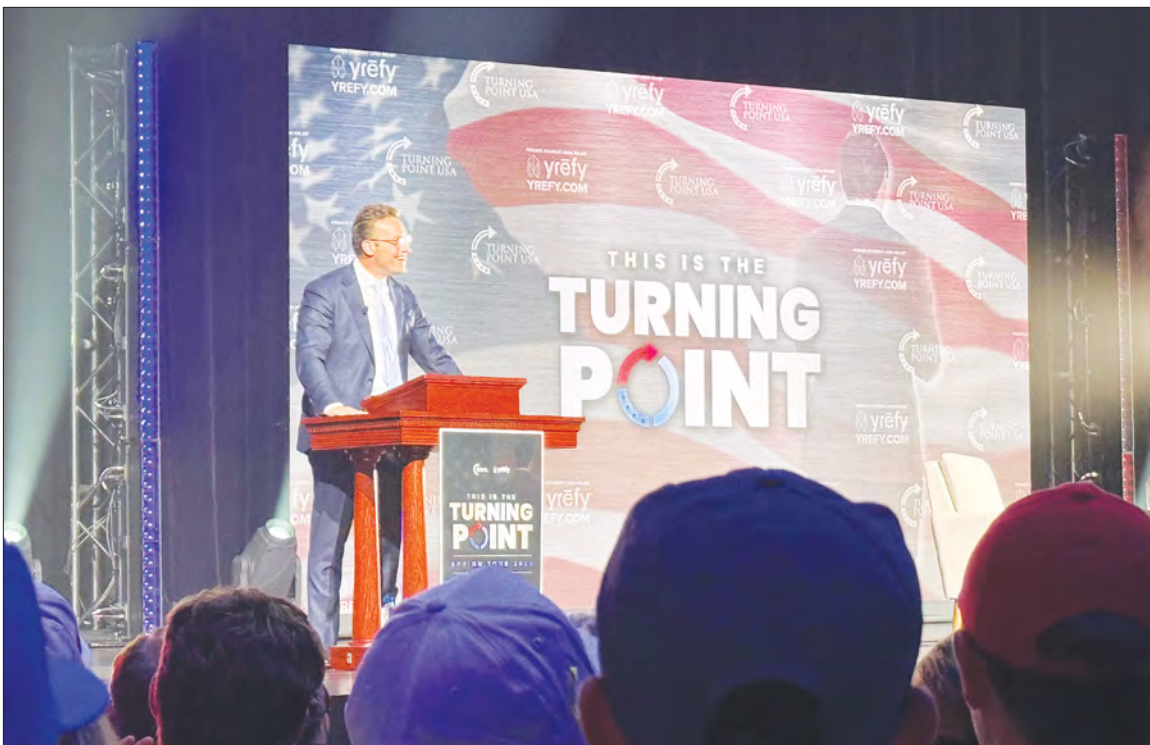


Brady Harris | Photographer

TEXAS PRIDE Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton speaks to Baylor students in Waco Hall as a part of Turning Point's "This is The Turning Point" tour at Baylor.

At the end of the day, I do respect that both perspectives were welcome; I think that's correct. I think Baylor capping the attendance to only Baylor students ... I don't think that leads to a very free and open discussion.

AUBURN, MAINE, SENIOR LANDON COUGLE ON TPUSA



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

TRADITION Political commentator Benny Johnson was among the lineup of speakers at the "This is The Turning Point" event at Waco Hall on Wednesday evening.

When we proclaim all our neighbors, we are also committing ourselves to the moral, spiritual and tangible work that comes with loving all our neighbors of every race, religion, immigration status, gender or sexual orientation.

REV. PAUL BRANDEIS RAUSHENBUSH INTERFAITH ALLIANCE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Is Baylor 'backing down?'

Faculty, staff, community dominate All Are Neighbors

KAMRYN ANTHIS Intern

While students dominated the TPUSA crowd Wednesday evening, All Are Neighbors drew predominantly faculty, staff and members of the Waco community in addition to the students in attendance.

Tensions grew high across campus regarding the opposing Turning Point USA tour, scheduled for the same night, especially after it was announced that outside members of the Baylor community would be denied entry. Baylor English professor Dr. Greg Garrett shared his personal connection to the debate from the stage.

"Two years ago, Turning Point USA named me to their professor watch list, proclaiming me a dangerous radical here to indoctrinate students, which tells me that there are two things they don't understand," Garrett said. "They don't understand a Baylor education, and they don't comprehend my deep faith."

Garrett emphasized afterward that the point of the event was to love thy neighbor — even when that love is met with hate.

"One of the things I needed to be reminded of is that the people over at the Turning Point rally are not our enemies," Garrett said. "We are called to love them."

The speakers and organizers said they hope their message encourages members of the community to take action. The primary speaker, Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson, said that as she spoke and earned a standing ovation from the audience, her mindset was future-focused.

"I'm most excited about what happens when people leave the room, what the campus groups go on to do, what the faculty is inspired to talk about and teach about, and what all the community members are inspired to get



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

NEW IDEAS Over 200 students, faculty and Waco community members attended the All Are Neighbors event on the 5th floor of the Cashion Academic Building.

engaged in," Robinson said. "That I think is what started today, but doesn't end with this meeting."

Following the event, recently retired religion professor Dr. Blake Burleson said he saw the event as ushering in a new era of inclusion at Baylor.

"It was really one of the most religious experiences I've had on this campus," Burleson said. "I taught for 38 years here, and this was one of the most wonderful, joyful events I think I've ever seen here."

English professor Dr. Thomas Hanks, who's been a member of the Baylor faculty for over 40 years, and whom students may have seen around campus sporting his cross and pride pins, said he has seen Baylor's growth — or decay — throughout his tenure.

"Baylor has seemed to me, lately, to be growing more timid," Hanks

said. "A university cannot remain a university and be timid. Baylor has a fine tradition in Christianity and in Baptists. Neither Christians nor Baptists were ever renowned for timidity."

Many speakers throughout the night addressed the Baylor administration's role in shaping the campus political climate. Hanks addressed the trends he's observed over the past few years.

"I don't know that Baylor is backing down and shutting up, but I fear that it is," Hanks said.

Hanks said he supports All Are Neighbors speakers and organizers for their passion for unity across campus.

"In spite of being made in God's image, God leaves us the free choice to express that image as we choose," Hanks said. "And a university is supposed to show us the different ways of looking for that image in

ourselves and in each other."

Speakers at the event offered their advice to young college students who find themselves lost in the world's political climate. Interfaith Alliance President and CEO Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush directed his speech to the students in the crowd.

"Young people in America have so much curiosity, so much energy, and I just invite you to take advantage of that at a place like Baylor, where there are diverse people all around you, and the opportunity is here to learn from one another," Raushenbush said.

While students dominated TPUSA's event, All Are Neighbors drew in an older crowd. Still, many students, faculty, staff and members of the greater Waco community came to the Cashion Academic Center for the alternative event.



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

TURNOUT Over 400 Baylor students gathered in Waco Hall for the "This is The Turning Point" event, featuring several prominent conservative speakers.



Brady Harris | Photographer



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

PRAYER The Burleson quad was filled with students and faculty alike following the All Are Neighbors event.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

NEIGHBORS Students and the Waco community gather together on the Burleson quad for a prayer vigil following the All Are Neighbors event.

NEIGHBORS from A1

"What does it mean to show up for our neighbor?" Raushenbush said. "What does it mean to love our neighbor? What does it mean to really believe that there's a future of our democracy together where everyone has dignity and everyone belongs?"

Raushenbush framed neighbor-love as both a theological and civic principle.

"Each one of us ... is an embodiment of the image of God here on earth — no exceptions," he said.

He also cautioned against using religion to impose uniformity.

"We can't have a democracy with so many diverse people where one group gets to tell the rest of us how to live," Raushenbush said. "That's not what democracy is. That's theocracy."

Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson described the event as historically significant for the university.

"For the first time in Baylor's nearly 200-year history, they had an advocacy event that featured all of these speakers," Robinson said. "That's incredible."

In reference to the creation of the event, she said it is obvious it did not happen "by accident."

Robinson framed her presence not as separate from faith, but as a direct expression of it.

"I'm not here in spite of my faith; I'm here because of my faith," she said. "It calls me to fight for the justice and dignity of every person."

She described the gathering as an act of collective agency.

"We're not just waiting for the future to come — we are the architects of it," Robinson said. "When you get people like this together in a room ... anything is possible."

Dr. Greg Garrett, professor

of English, challenged narratives of Christian marginalization.

"I am a straight white Christian male, and I am not one of the least of these," Garrett said. "Some white American Christians claim to be persecuted. ... This is not reality. It is assumed victimhood."

Student organizers described the event as both rapid in formation and deeply intentional. Waco senior JW LaSrape, president of Baylor College Democrats, said the idea emerged organically among students.

"It was a whirlwind of energy and activism that I feel really proud about," LaSrape said. "We had around ... four and a half weeks ... and it was very student-led."

LaSrape emphasized that the event signals future efforts.

"This is very far from the end," LaSrape said. "This is a beginning, if anything."

Fort Worth junior Joseph Naylor, president of Hearts for the Homeless, echoed that sentiment.

"If one is to be persecuted, let them be persecuted on their possession of the ability to love," Naylor said.

Some students in attendance emphasized the importance of hearing differing perspectives on campus. Seth Bullard, a Willow Park master's student,

said it was "good to see differing views" represented and described the event as fostering "a community that feels a little more welcoming" to a range of viewpoints, a sentiment Robinson echoed from the stage.

"This moment that we're sitting in exists because people spoke up, because students organized, because the community decided that if harmful ideas were going to have a platform, that, by God, the truth would have one, too," Robinson said.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

GATHER Students listen to new perspectives at All Are Neighbors.

Central Texas organizations hold protest for 'Border Czar's' presence in Waco

RORY DULOCK Copy Editor

A protest that challenged "Border Czar" Tom Homan's arrival in Waco was held by various organizations across Central Texas Wednesday evening at the Interstate 35 underpass of 4th and 5th Streets.

Homan was in Waco for Turning Point USA's "This is the Turning Point" tour, which started at 6:30 p.m. at Waco Hall.

Among the crowd of protesters holding signs and prompting car honks along Jack Kultgen Expressway was Mikayla Jedlicka, a Waco resident and active event organizer for the Waco branch of the Party for Socialism and Liberation. She said the idea for the protest came immediately after the TPUSA tour announcement that they were coming to Waco.

"Tom Holman is not welcome in Waco, and he's not welcome in Texas," Jedlicka said. "What ICE has done under his leadership has been insanely violent and ripped apart families, has been terrorizing our communities, and we're not going to let him come through into our communities and [we're going to] let it be known that he is not welcome here."

PSL initiated the rally alongside Waco Friends of the Climate, Indivisible CenTex, General Strike Waco, Vision 4

organizations and the Waco community and offered an alternative for those unable to attend the TPUSA tour.

Several members of the Waco were turned away due to an announcement made hours before the event that only students would be permitted.

TPUSA said it was Baylor's decision to make it a student-only event, to which the university responded that those were the terms from the beginning.

Wendy Pethel and her daughter Lucy are both Waco locals who attended the rally. Wendy Pethel said they came to show the community that they are "not alone in being angry" about how current issues are being handled across the country — and at Baylor.

"I think it was good of Baylor to allow for a secondary event of opposition," Wendy Pethel said. "I'm a little curious as to why they decided they should host a Turning Point event. The organization hasn't brought much positives ... there's just a lot of negatives that they've brought, and I don't understand why you'd want to bring those negatives to campus."

All Are Neighbors, an alternative event to the TPUSA tour, also occurred at 5 p.m. in the Cashion Academic Center. It was hosted by Baylor's College Democrats, the NAACP, Students Demand Action, Hearts for the Homeless and

organizations and the Waco community and offered an alternative for those unable to attend the TPUSA tour. Several members of the Waco were turned away due to an announcement made hours before the event that only students would be permitted.

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Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

PROTEST Members of the Waco community gather under the I-35 bridge to protest Border Czar Tom Homan's presence on campus.

Texas Rising, and was available to all who had a ticket.

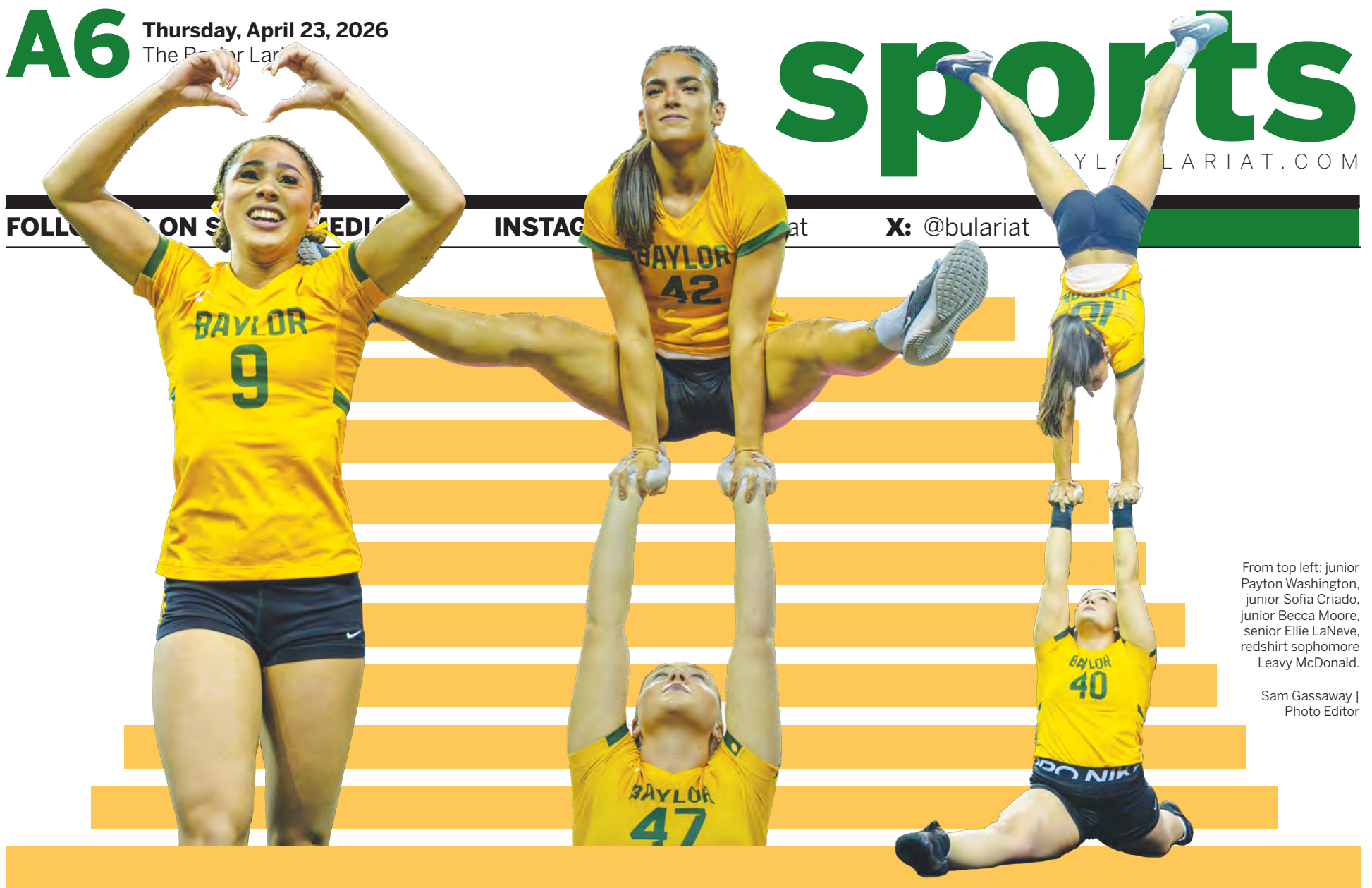
However, Deborah and Dean Michals, Waco residents who participated in the protest, said they were interested in the All Are Neighbors event but didn't think they would be able to participate.

"The messaging was becoming very confusing, and it appeared that we wouldn't be able to [go to] All Our Neighbors," that it was student and faculty only at both events," Deborah Michals said. "And so we wanted to find a place to at least visually show that the community is behind our immigrants in our community ... and so we just wanted to provide an alternative to that message."

Homan was one of the original three keynote speakers for the TPUSA tour, along with Executive Vice President Donald Trump Jr. and political commentator Benny Johnson, before it was announced on Tuesday morning that Attorney General Ken Paxton would replace Trump Jr.

Homan is a former police officer, immigration official and political commentator who was appointed as Immigration and Customs Enforcement's executive associate director of enforcement during the Obama administration, served as acting director for ICE during the first Trump administration and is now serving in the second Trump administration as border czar.

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From top left: junior Payton Washington, junior Sofia Criado, junior Becca Moore, senior Ellie LaNeve, redshirt sophomore Leavy McDonald.

Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

The march toward history

Baylor's acro and tumbling dynasty unshaken ahead of final NCATA title chase

MARISSA ESSENBERG
Sports Writer

It's been over 4,370 days since Baylor acrobatics and tumbling left championship weekend without the crown. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was sweeping the nation, Musical.ly, now known as TikTok, had just launched and this year's freshmen were still mastering recess politics in grade school.

More than a decade later, No. 1 Baylor heads to Azusa, Calif., chasing its 11th consecutive NCATA title and another layer of hardware for a dynasty that has redefined the sport's standard. With championship weekend now here, the Bears are set to make one final run at the crown before transitioning into a new era.

"This is the big one," junior top and tumbler Payton Washington said. "This is what we've been waiting for, and we just can't wait to unleash all that we've been doing."

With eight teams competing in a single-elimination tournament, Baylor's pursuit begins

at 9 p.m. Thursday against No. 8 seed Duquesne (3-3), a team the Bears (9-0) defeated by a 23.27-point margin in March.

Should the Bears advance, they would face the winner of No. 4 Fairmont State and No. 5 Augustana in Friday's semifinal before a potential national championship rematch at 7 p.m. Saturday against the winner from the other side of the bracket, with No. 2 Oregon looming as the most likely contender.

With little margin for error in a three-day, single-elimination format, Baylor's preparation has centered less on overhaul and more on refinement.

"Sometimes this time of year, we're changing a lot of things in preparation," head coach Felecia Mulkey said. "This year, we left a lot of things the same. We did make a few changes, a few tweaks, and mostly just fine-tuning because we still have some room to improve."

That same approach has defined how the defending champions have handled the final stretch of the season. Rather than piling on

more volume, the Bears have leaned into efficiency, trusting the foundation already in place and believing the biggest gains now come from focus, precision and consistency at the right time.

"Each year is different, and every team is different," Mulkey said. "This year, we've gotten to a point where we haven't had less practice, we've had shorter, more productive practices, really coming in and being able to force our focus because I think down the stretch this next week in the championship, that's going to be the biggest key."

In a season where meets are often separated by at least a week, Baylor now faces a different kind of challenge: three opponents in three days from Thursday through Saturday.

But competing on three consecutive days is nothing new for the Bears, who, thanks to their head coach, have grown accustomed to the grind all season.

"Not only are they talented, but they outwork everyone in the country, and that sets

them apart," Mulkey said. "We've been prepping for it all year. We did it by design, made a lot of in-and-out trips at the beginning of February and really wore ourselves out that month. I did that on purpose."

That depth — both physically and across the roster — remains one of Baylor's many defining advantages.

"We were really deep last year. We're deeper and better," Mulkey said. "You may see a team do one of something; we do four of something."

Still, inside the locker room, the message remains the same one repeated at the start of every new season.

"This team hasn't won anything yet," senior base and tumbler Meredith Wells said. "We've had a really great season and we're just hoping to keep that moving forward."

Now with its final NCATA championship chase ahead, Baylor will open the tournament with a quarterfinal meet against Duquesne at 9 p.m. Thursday. All meets will be streamed on ESPN+.



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

WAY UP Sophomore top Makayla Vasquez performs a routine during a win over No. 8 UMHB on Feb. 22 at the Ferrell Center.



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

TOP OF THE GAME Head coach Felecia Mulkey and the Bears have won the past 10 NCATA Championships. Baylor is undefeated heading into this postseason, which begins Thursday.



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

WE'RE SOARING Junior Emily Bott goes flying against UMHB.

Texas Western champ talks 'character,' current state of CBB

DYLAN FINK
Sports Writer

Sixty years ago, the 1966 Texas Western men's basketball team made history, becoming the first school to win the NCAA Tournament with an all-Black starting five. The team has been immortalized in countless books, on film and — as of Saturday — as the first team to be inducted into the Texas Sports Hall of Fame.

The 1966 Miners were represented at the Hall of Fame induction ceremony by power forward Nevil Shed.

Shed played three years at Texas Western, now known as UTEP, under head coach Don Haskins. During his time in El Paso, he helped drive one of the largest shifts in the history of the ever-changing world of college basketball.

"We didn't go out there expecting to become these figures in American history," Shed said. "We didn't have all the media there is today where you can see that. 'Oh, this guy is the first to do this since whoever.' The greatest moment to us that day was when the clock ticked down five, four, three, two, one ... and then we were champions."

The Miners claimed their national title on March 19, 1966, in an upset win against the all-white Kentucky Wildcats. The favorites were coached by four-time champion Adolph Rupp and captained by Pat Riley.

Texas Western rocked the college basketball world that early spring evening when they took the national title in a 72-65 victory over the Wildcats. Change was forever made in the sport as stereotypes fell. The win paved the way for changes that are still seen across college basketball today.

"There's always some of this new stuff that comes up with the

players now," Shed said. "Yes, we made some of those 'firsts,' but at the end of the day we also just wanted to win. Because that's what it's all about, and today you can really see that get away from the bigger picture."

In the modern collegiate dynamic, dominated by the perennially mutating scene of NIL payments and the transfer portal, players hold the most power over the direction of the sport since Shed and his teammates changed the world in 1966.

"With how it is now, it seems something is changing every year," Baylor head coach Scott Drew said in January. "But again, we don't make the rules, and as we find out about things, we're always going to adapt to put our program in the best position to be successful because that's what we get paid to do."

The collegiate sporting world is forever developing, but many veterans of the realm see shifts in college basketball as positive, as long as one aspect stays at the center of the game: character.

"We didn't have all of this media there is now where we know every player's stats," Shed said. "I feel that we need to go back and remove the focus from so much of that stuff and put it all back into if these guys are playing with character."

Shed repeatedly noted how, while playing under Haskins, he and his teammates were taught to go into every game with the weight of choosing to play their hardest. To find a way to win while battling backlash and racism, all while demonstrating the highest of character.

"At the end of the day, it is all about how to win," Shed said. "The focus should always be to find a way to win and to do so while representing your character and who you are. That's how we won our championship and that's why we get remembered ... Sure, the 'firsts' are always there, but people remember how you change something if you win and if you win with character."



Marissa Essenberg | Sports Writer

CHAMPION Nevil Shed and the 1966 Texas Western Miners were inducted into the Texas Sports Hall of Fame on Saturday.

Combat, campus, community

Baylor group helps veterans thrive in classroom

ALEXANDRA BREWER
Arts & Life Writer

They've led troops. Traveled the world. Now they're navigating lecture halls, textbooks and deadlines. At Baylor, student veterans are discovering the challenges of college are battles of a different kind — and they're not doing it alone.

Northumberland, Va., junior Nick Bradford balances military and academic life while raising a family. Bradford spent four years on active duty and is now a drill sergeant in the Reserves.

Bradford is the vice president of Veterans of Baylor, an organization that connects student veterans to Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, campus resources and local organizations in Waco, while also helping guide their transition from military service into college and eventually into professional life.

Veterans of Baylor serves more than 1,000 student veterans, spouses and ROTC members, providing practical support and a community for those navigating the transition from military to campus life.

Regular events, mentoring and social opportunities give student veterans the support that can be the difference between feeling lost and thriving.

"Even if you're the only student veteran in a class, there's a community for you," Bradford said.

Bradford described the discipline and performance skills he developed in the military as vital for handling stress and pressure in college.

"The discipline you gain in the military is different from the discipline needed for school," Bradford said. "Military consequences are immediate; school is intrinsically motivated."

Even though the risks aren't the same, the pressure to perform never goes away.

"In the military, failing your duties can put lives at risk; school doesn't," Bradford said. "The most useful skill I bring is performance under pressure, handling stress for long periods without breaking down."

Even with the stress, Bradford has found support within the classroom.

"Professors at Baylor are incredible," Bradford said. "If you talk to them, they'll go the extra mile ... One even cooked a meal for me and my wife after our son was born."

He also emphasized that student veterans face unique challenges that are often misunderstood by their peers.



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

SIC 'EM SOLDIERS Veterans of Baylor provides resources for veterans and military dependent students to help navigate the challenges of a college environment.

"We're just regular students trying to earn our degrees," Bradford said. "Our experiences give us a different perspective, especially in subjects like political science and military studies."

Lubbock junior Chris Varner is a Marine veteran who joined Baylor after a 16-year career in the military. She faced a stroke and a complete life reset before deciding to return to school.

"I never dreamed I'd be coming back to school at this age," Varner said. "I was 55 when I started, and I was a year past having a stroke. It's been some incredible highs and lows and a lot of hard work in between."

The transition from military life to college was difficult. Varner said she initially felt lost.

"Before I realized there was a Veterans of Baylor group, I fell through the cracks," Varner said. "Nobody knew I was here, nobody reached out. I was second-guessing myself. The homework was so hard. I kept falling asleep in class."

Support from Veterans of Baylor

became essential.

"Having people around who understood where I was coming from made a huge difference," Varner said. "Being a veteran is like being in a 12-step program. We're better off when we have a mission and we're serving someone."

Making friendships and connections made her excited to show up.

"I forged a couple of relationships," Varner said. "Once you see somebody, you're like, 'Oh, I hope so-and-so is there today.' It gives you a reason to keep coming back. We genuinely like these people, and they genuinely like us back."

Varner described the group as a genuine community that blends social support with organized events.

"We try to be a light for our fellow veterans, not just on campus but in the broader community," Varner said.

Varner's academic journey is ambitious. She is a University Scholars major with concentrations in art history, history and

museum studies.

Currently, she is writing her honors thesis on whether museum interventions can be used as an adjunct to therapy for veterans with PTSD and traumatic brain injury. Her ultimate goal is to pursue a doctorate in social care through museums.

Tyler senior and ROTC cadet Mya Crayton brought another perspective. Inspired by her brother, a Navy veteran, she joined ROTC and is learning firsthand the demands of leadership, early mornings and weekend exercises, all while keeping up with nursing curriculum.

"People think ROTC students are super serious all the time," Crayton said. "We're just regular students. It's definitely harder than I thought, but it's preparing me for what comes next."

All three stressed the importance of understanding veterans beyond their service.

"Ask about our story, sit down, listen," Varner said. "Don't just say 'Thank you for your service.' Walk the talk."

Baylor Esports finds national success during first year

STACIE BOYLS
Arts & Life Writer

What began as an experiment has quickly become one of Baylor's most unlikely but enveloping success stories. In its first official season, Baylor's varsity esports program has established itself among top collegiate competitors, pushing them to the brink of national prominence.

Adam Stanley, head coach and director of esports, emphasized the uniqueness of this team's inaugural season.

"We showed up, and we were going to take the whole year to just build things out," Stanley said. "But I got ambitious ... And having said that, I'm pleased to say that it was a very huge success this year."

The program, which competes in Rocket League, Valorant, Overwatch 2 and Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, entered the season without a dedicated facility and with limited infrastructure.

Still, Baylor's Rocket League team, the program's only scholarship roster, quickly distinguished itself, finishing undefeated in conference play and winning the Power Esports Conference Championship.

That rapid ascent surprised even Stanley.

"I thought we would be good this year, but I didn't think we would be one of the best teams in the country,"

Stanley said.

That success traces back to a foundation laid long before the players ever arrived in Waco.

Franklin Park, Ill., sophomore Kadin "Zineel" Zineelabidine began playing video games on a PlayStation 2 as a child and eventually developed a love for Rocket League.

By age 16, Zineelabidine was already competing in small tournaments and earning prize money, realizing the game could become something more.

"That's when I found out there was a whole scene of professional players on contracts," Zineelabidine said.

Zineelabidine's path to Baylor was equally unconventional. Originally enrolled remotely at Northwood University for esports, he was recruited to Baylor alongside teammates Sun Prairie, Wis., junior Andrew "Andy" Nolan and Pittsburgh freshman Colby "Hockser" James.

"I had known them and teamed with them a ton before any of us were at Baylor," Zineelabidine said. "I put my faith and my trust in the program, and they put their faith and trust in me, and it ended up working out perfectly."

That preexisting connection translated into immediate success on the national stage and a team culture that extends beyond competition.

"The vibes are always high," he said. "We're going out, celebrating wins, exploring places we travel to. It really helps."

Despite the program still being young, Baylor esports has already amassed an impressive list of accomplishments.

The team claimed titles at the Hawaii Esports Invitational — earning a surfboard trophy — and a Texas statewide



Photo courtesy of Adam Stanley

ROCKET LEAGUE RESONANCE Head coach Adam Stanley helped lead the Baylor Esports team to success in their first year.

invitational, cementing its reputation as one of the top programs in the region.

"We're officially the best team in Texas," Stanley said. "And now hopefully [we have] two chances at the national championship."

As the team's success has grown, so has attention from the university and the city of Waco.

In a twist of timing, Waco will host both a Texas high school esports championship and the Collegiate Esports Commissioners Cup from April 30 to May 3 at the Waco Convention Center, a bid driven by the city of Waco due to the national success of Baylor Esports.

"All things are pointing at Baylor right now," Stanley said.

The event, expected to draw thousands of competitors, will include a kickoff at McLane Stadium and serve as a major recruiting opportunity for the program.

"It's so cool," Stanley said. "We want to get the attention of students who have an inclination for esports."

For Stanley, the significance of esports extends beyond trophies and rankings. He points to its accessibility — something traditional athletics cannot always offer.

"My best friend growing up had cystic fibrosis," Stanley said. "This was his way of competing. Practicing perseverance and fortitude, that's what it's about for me."

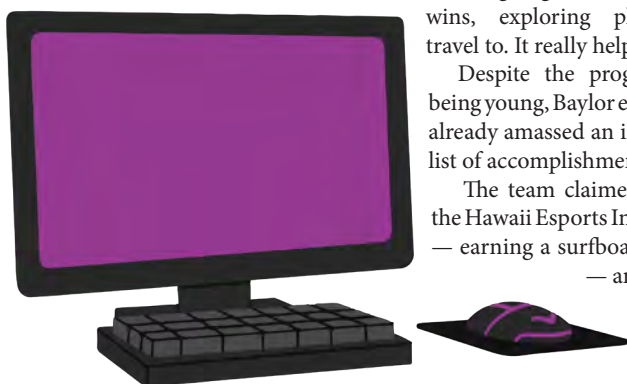
That inclusivity is reflected in the program's growing diversity, with

both undergraduate and graduate students competing, including a Waco doctoral student in physical therapy on the Valorant team, Javier Alvarez.

With a national championship appearance in Orlando looming and additional tournaments scheduled in Waco, Baylor esports is entering a defining stretch.

Meanwhile, plans for a dedicated facility in the Mark and Paula Hurd Welcome Center and potential expansion into new titles, including League of Legends and even chess, are in the works.

"Rome was not built in a day, and neither was esports at Baylor," Stanley said.



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