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Junior guard Isaac Williams IV
Lariat file photo

What do Baylor students care about in midterm elections?

HANNAH WEBB
News Editor

For some Baylor students, the midterm election comes down to rent and grocery costs. For others, it is a question of human dignity, the integrity of elected officials or the role religion should play in government.

The issues overlap, but students do not always agree on which deserve the most attention. Baylor students revealed different priorities shaping how they approach the ballot, from immigration policy and economic security to political corruption and religious values.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration emerged as a defining issue for students, though their concerns reflect different ideas about what the government owes the people affected by its policies.

Longview sophomore Lillian Mauriello said her primary concern is

how politicians treat immigrants and other marginalized groups. Although she recognizes the importance of economic issues, she said her personal circumstances — including scholarships and financial support from her parents — make immigration a more immediate voting priority.

“I think the most important thing to me is what’s happening with immigration and the humanity with which election officials and politicians are treating immigrants,” Mauriello said.

Crawford senior Luke Landskov also identified immigration as his top concern, but approached it from the perspective of border security. He said political developments in France have influenced how he thinks about immigration policy and what the United States could face if it loosens border restrictions.

For Landskov, the issue extends beyond the border itself to questions about national identity and preserving traditions.

Mansfield freshman Brayden Banks

said immigration matters but ranks lower than corruption or economic security. He questioned the tendency of politicians to blame immigration for broader problems instead of addressing their underlying causes.

“I don’t think that immigration, as some people like to say, is the root of all the issues that go on today,” Banks said.

Belleville, Illinois, sophomore Thomas Miller, who is registered to vote in McLennan County, said he approaches immigration through a broader understanding of human dignity. He said he evaluates candidates based on their commitment to protecting human life, including the unborn and immigrants.

ECONOMY

Even among students who rank other issues first, economic security remains part of the calculation.

Banks said he pays particular attention

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You are who you vote for: Identity politics in Texas midterm election

GISELLE LEE
Staff Writer

While the campaigns in Texas have been focused fundamentally on the affordability crisis, the Texas Senate race between Republican Ken Paxton and Democrat James Talarico remains highly contested due to the engagement of identity politics from both candidates.

Described as linking a group’s identity, typically racial or ethnic, to a political identity, identity politics has fueled discussions about Talarico’s and Paxton’s characters, particularly their interpretation of Christianity and their views on gender and sexuality.

Dr. Patrick Flavin, chair of the political science department, said the definition of identity politics has evolved beyond linking personal success to race to encompass different parts of an individual’s identity.

Flavin said the term now carries a “negative connotation” because of the intense pushback against diversity initiatives across the nation.

“When you hear identity politics now, it’s too focused on someone’s racial or ethnic identity at the loss of their political opinions,” Flavin said. “That shouldn’t be so strongly linked together; whatever racial group or gender group or whatever you’re a part of shouldn’t be your political identity or transcendent [what] you’re going to vote for.”

San Antonio senior Jackson White said singling out aspects of identity to influence these groups could affect voting on an issue-by-issue basis and have tangible effects at the community level.

“People may have a tendency to simplify down complicated issues, complicated topics and see kind of an us-versus-them mentality,” White said. “It results in us voting along very narrow lines of identity rather than what might actually be in the best interests for us and our communities.”

Flavin said the relationship between partisanship and voting patterns across the U.S. has “increased in strength” over the past few decades.

“Political partisanship explains a lot of where we are today,” Flavin said. “If party attachment or party loyalty or animosity towards the other side leads you to support candidates ... or if you took the party labels off and think, ‘I would never vote for that person,’ I think [that] is problematic.”

According to a survey conducted during the 2024 presidential election by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, the future of politics belongs to the next generation of voters, as people aged 18-34 made up over 40 million potential voters, nearly one-fifth of the American electorate.

The Woodlands senior Sophia DaSilva said it is important that students vote to take “control and ownership” of their political journey as they become adults,

IDENTITY POLITICS >> Page A4



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

TALARICO Democratic U.S. Senate candidate James Talarico speaks at his rally at the Hurd Welcome Center Sept. 17.



Owen Carson | Broadcast Reporter

PAXTON Attorney General and Republican U.S. Senate candidate Ken Paxton speaks on Oct. 3 at The Palladium.

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Baylor’s job is to shape thinkers, not followers

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Baylor’s Baptist affiliation seems to spark questions and opinions whenever anything remotely political happens in the community — and reasonably so. As a religious institution, there should be high expectations surrounding how the university carries itself in times of strife.

In order to respectfully challenge the university’s approach to contentious topics, however, we need to understand what the true mission of a Christian college student should be.

Last week, Baylor’s chapter of Ratio Christi, a Christian apologetics organization, planned to host an event in Waco Hall. Due to a late notice of higher-than-expected security costs, however, it was announced the event was canceled Monday morning, hours before it was set to take place.

Frank Turek, president of Cross Examined, posted a YouTube video in response to the dispute, expressing his qualms with Baylor’s core values.

“We know that the words inclusion, tolerance and diversity are words that are often used to get people to accept and celebrate sin,” Turek said, referring to what he saw as Baylor’s use of these terms.

In another video, Turek elaborates on his qualms with Baylor’s class offerings, specifically courses surrounding feminism, gender studies and race.

Claims like this aren’t new. In August, a social media post from Mercy Culture went viral for questioning Baylor’s Christian mission because it accepts non-Christian students and endorses “woke agendas.” The post instructed Baylor to “turn back to God.”

Baylor’s faculty members are required to be either Christian or Jewish, per the university’s Christian Mission and Identity statement. The religious faith of Baylor’s staff is widely represented in the classroom, yet some academic topics are not directly influenced by scripture in their manner of instruction.

“At a major research university like Baylor, faculty employ methodologies (i.e., scientific, logical, historical, literary, artistic) that are common to major research universities worldwide irrespective of any religious identities,” the statement reads.

If a Christian university intends to wield its Christian stance well, it will produce students who are well educated, all-loving and understanding of the world around them. That does not mean those students will be groomed to agree with a certain political agenda or reject the existence of specific disciplines,



Randy Clute | Cartoonist

but rather hold a well-rounded perspective of God’s earth and his people.

Courses surrounding gender studies, race and other studies of diversity are often questioned for their validity and necessity to provide a well-balanced education. We might even see science courses scrutinized for how closely they align with the Bible’s teachings.

People often forget that the goal of certain classes isn’t to teach you what you believe, but to guide you in solidifying your own beliefs. others. Each and every student is entitled to their own opinions — if that means treating what a professor says as false, so be it. Understanding, however, that certain topics and lessons may have value beyond being immediately adopted as an opinion is key.

If all you’re able to get out of a course is a more developed understanding of someone else’s perspective, that is a win. Regardless of your personal qualms with a topic, being able to conceptualize and understand diverse perspectives is necessary to developing your own opinions.

If we were to tie ourselves down into echo chambers, we would have skewed, unquantified beliefs that would be undeserving of respect.

We, as The Editorial Board, don’t need to remind you that midterms are quickly approaching and the United States’ political atmosphere is as tense as ever. But we can encourage Baylor’s community to keep walking a path of stewardship and curiosity.

We also likely don’t need to remind you that giving in to social media hysteria is a recipe for misinformation and emotional hijacking. Question your sources, be skeptical and make judgments after assessing multiple

media channels.

Consistently seeking truth and understanding just might be what differentiates us; setting us apart from just being average citizens, but positioning us as intelligent, ethical global leaders.

From microbiology to the social sciences, a true Baylor success story is a student who graduates knowing more than they did when they enrolled and with a stronger, more loving respect for their neighbors.

Looking to the bible for guidance helps us understand the power of acceptance. Understand we are all made in his image, embrace one another and strive to be Christlike in every facet.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Romans 15:17.

Being famous does not equal political expertise

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

Celebrities and American politics have become intertwined. Singers endorsing candidates, actors encouraging voter participation and athletes voicing their opinions have become regular scenes for the average American.

Celebrities have the platforms to create conversations with their large following, which can often be a very valuable way of sparking change.

There isn’t a true issue with celebrities engaging in political conversation. They pay their taxes, vote



and still feel the effects of decisions every day — they’re citizens, just like the rest of us.

Denying them the ability to talk about issues would be like telling the average American voter to stop talking about their own opinions. They should still have the right to speak, even if they have a mass platform to do it.

Celebrities can bring unknown issues to light for their followers. When a well-known celebrity talks about issues, people who may not watch the news or pay attention to the political landscape are directly affected.

Taylor Swift provides a recent example of a celebrity spreading their influence.

Swift openly supported Kamala Harris in September 2024. Swift shared a link to vote.gov with her followers and encouraged

“

Celebrities have the platforms to create conversations with their large following ... However, it’s difficult to wield that power responsibly.

”

them to vote.

The federal voter registration website received approximately 338,000 visits in 15 hours, showing the effect Swift could have on politics.

However, it’s difficult to wield that power responsibly.

Celebrities can share whatever they want, whenever they want — but sometimes, that information is false or unverified.

When audiences see and trust a celebrity, they may accept the information as true without verification and form their opinions based on the celebrity’s fame.

A 2012 study by Anthony J. Nownes found that celebrity political activity does influence voters decisions by affecting which party a person aligns with.

Another study by Nownes found that celebrity endorsements could change how voters felt emotionally

toward a particular candidate, specifically reducing anger.

Nownes’ research proves how celebrity endorsements affect not only voting decisions, but also feelings towards specific candidates.

Overall, the responsibility to be fairly engaged in politics belongs to both celebrities and audiences.

Celebrities have the right to engage with politics when they feel inclined. When they do, though, they should emphasize sharing accurate information and remind followers that it is their opinion.

At the same time, audiences should think for themselves. Just because a celebrity supports something shouldn’t shape your opinion. Do your own research and form your own opinion.

Celebrities can have a voice, but not the final say.

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How ‘October surprises’ stir the pot ahead of 2026 midterms

ELLIOTT NACE
Assistant News Editor

In the summer of 1988, then-governor of Massachusetts Michael Dukakis held upward of a 17-point lead over his opponent, then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, in presidential election polls. But by Nov. 8 of that year, Bush had surged to the point of defeating Dukakis in a landslide 426-111 electoral victory. Though many factors contributed to that outcome, one commonly cited tiebreaker was an advertisement run by the Bush campaign lampooning Dukakis for his extension of “weekend passes” to prisoners during his tenure as governor. The ad prominently featured the actions and likeness of convicted murderer and rapist William “Willie” Horton.

“Despite a life sentence, Horton received 10 weekend passes from prison,” the advertisement said. “Horton fled, kidnapped a young couple, stabbing the man and repeatedly raping his girlfriend.”

The ad, which began airing in late September, is one of many examples of an “October surprise,” a revelation about a political candidate released late in the election cycle to try and tarnish their image or reputation.

Ahead of the Nov. 3 midterm elections, Texas Republicans and Democrats alike have had to navigate through October surprises of their own, ranging from sensational cheap shots to shifting policy positions.

Texas Attorney General and Republican nominee Ken Paxton first came under fire for his history of extramarital affairs and recently attracted scrutiny for a video where he can be seen partying in Dubai with U.S. fugitives on New Year’s Eve in 2024.

Controversy also plagued Texas State Representative and Democratic nominee James Talarico’s campaign early October following a nine-day absence from the campaign trail, prompting intense criticism from Republicans and the wide circulation of a claim that Talarico had received treatment for mental illness in Ohio.

Talarico returned to the public



Graphic by Hannah Webb | News Editor

SURPRISE! October is one of the most important months for last-minute campaigning in candidate rivalries.

eye Oct. 9 to speak to voters at the Austin City Limits festival, with his campaign dispelling the rumors by attributing his absence to a severe case of the flu.

Dr. David Bridge, an associate professor of political science, said he views October surprises as generally partisan attacks on candidates’ character with minimal sway on independents, citing the late-stage jabs made during at the end of the 2016 presidential election cycle.

“It’s not like someone was going to vote for Hillary Clinton, then the email thing came out and they said, ‘Oh, well now I’m a Trump supporter,’ or someone was a Trump supporter, and they saw the Access Hollywood tape and then they decided to vote for Hillary Clinton.

“In fact, I think the Access Hollywood tape is a really good stress test for October surprises,” Bridge continued. “If ever we were to see an October surprise really swing an election, I think it would have been the Access Hollywood tape. In hindsight, it really didn’t do much.”

Over the past 20 years, midterm elections have consistently favored the party lacking congressional majorities and an incumbent president. The

2026 political climate, according to political science chair Dr. Patrick Flavin, leans in the Democrats’ favor due to their “strong candidates” and President Donald Trump’s historically low approval rating.

“It seems like most forecasters are expecting the Democrats to at least take over the majority in the House, and ... I think they’ve got a probably better than 50-50 shot at winning the Senate majority as well,” Flavin said. “Six months ago, [that] was not the case.”

Although more of a “September surprise,” the onset of billionaire Elon Musk’s \$158 million contribution to the Senate election in Texas early last month firmly placed Republicans in the lead on campaign spending.

Texas, Flavin said, will be “ground zero” for observing the efficacy of last-minute spending, given that polls conducted as recently as Oct. 16 continue to place Talarico and Paxton within two points of one another, with a majority favoring the former.

“The question will be now, ‘How much can [this spending] change people’s opinions about Ken Paxton?’” Flavin said. “Instead, it’s probably more [about] trying to attack Talarico and pin him as too extreme for Texas,

because it seems like voters are probably not changing their minds too much on Paxton, and we’re two weeks from Election Day.”

Certain policy-based attack advertisements, akin to the ones aired against Dukakis, remain relevant in the 2026 election cycle. According to an article published by the Dallas Morning News Oct. 2, Democratic candidate Gina Hinojosa has attempted to remove one of Gov. Greg Abbott’s ads for “falsely claiming she voted 40 times to raise taxes.”

The economy leads as the most important issue to American voters this fall. An Oct. 15 poll published by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago found that out of 1,119 surveyed adults, only 45% overall deemed immigration “one of the most important issues.” While 85% placed the economy in this category.

“The big issue is going to be the economy, and that encompasses so much: grocery prices, jobs, salaries, healthcare benefits, gas prices,” Bridge said.

In a reversal from the 2024 presidential election, the issue of immigration, Flavin said, “has completely flipped in terms

of its value to the two parties,” despite Trump’s previous gains with Latino voters living along the Mexican border.

Due to “widely perceived overreach” by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, he continued, border security has become a contentious campaign item for Republicans.

“Look at the ads ... now it’s actually Democrats running ads about immigration, like Talarico, making it clear that they’re for a secure border, but also wanting to rein in the excesses of ICE enforcement,” Flavin said.

Anticipating a correlation between high gas prices and Republican struggles at the polls, an article published by The New York Times Oct. 16 reported that Trump signed an executive order exempting military sanctions intended to be imposed on Russia in order to lower energy costs ahead of the elections.

“It’s very interesting that Joe Biden did the same thing that Trump is doing right now, trying to lower gas prices right before the election ... to be able to say, ‘Hey, look, things are getting better and I just lowered them for you, and if you elect my party, we’ll continue that,’” Bridge said.

Polling during midterm election cycles, according to Flavin, has been more accurate than in general election years. He explained how Trump’s current unpopularity as an incumbent gives Democrats a solid chance of securing majorities in both chambers of Congress.

“In 2026, certainly here [in Texas] among some Republicans, that the polls are off, that of course could be the case, but I don’t think that the record points to big misses in midterm elections in the way that there [has] been an [underestimation] of Trump support in presidential elections,” Flavin said.

Bridge said he expects both parties to excite voters by “narrowing” their policy positions in the final weeks heading up to Nov. 3.

“I think that Democrats are going to push the economy more and I think Republicans are going to push Democrats’ stance on ‘trans issues’ more, at least in Texas,” Bridge said.

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Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

BLOCK WALK Democratic U.S. Senate Candidate James Talarico speaks on the importance of defending democracy at the Executive Plaza in Waco Sunday afternoon to kick off Block Walk with the Texas Democratic Party.



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

TURNING POINT Texas Attorney General and Republican U.S. Senate ominee Ken Paxton opens up Turning Point USA’s “This is the Turning Point” tour April 22 at Waco Hall.

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Want to know what is on the ballot? Read Election 101.



Read about Talarico's Baylor visit on Sept. 17



Read Election 102 to find out the other names on the ballot.



Read about Paxton's Waco visit on Oct. 3



Fact or fiction: Misinformation in Texas’ midterm elections

KAMRYN ANTHIS
Staff Writer

In an age of constant content flowing straight to pockets, misinformation is inevitable. Between rumors of mental insanity and artificial intelligence deepfakes, voters must be cautious about what they believe as the November election draws near.

Political attack advertisements have long been used to sway the public's perception of candidates during election season. But the upcoming midterms are being further complicated by AI-driven media attacks.

Democratic U.S. Senate candidate James Talarico has expressed his frustration with ads claiming he’s a communist or in support of gender reassignment surgeries for children, claims he deems to be false. AI deep-fakes of Talarico reading from a “King James (Talarico) Bible” have also circulated, fueling conservative criticism of his faith.

Political advertisements can feel unavoidable across television and social media. Cypress sophomore Olivia Galanski said she sometimes feels frustrated by the influx of “redundant and ridiculous”

political attack ads.

“With calling James Talarico a freak, they tried to use that name against him, but it sort of backfired on them,” Galanski said. “Their ads are so ridiculous that they can't be taken seriously, especially when they make things up that are easily fact-checked.”

Distinguishing truth from fiction can be difficult given the large amount of information available. Sinai Wood, associate professor and documents librarian, advised students to use the fact-checking resources provided by the Baylor Library system to “get out and listen to the other side, the other opinion” and to “find balance.”

“For students, in 2026, it's not a new phenomenon; it's just that we have more information coming at us ... and sometimes we don't take the time to evaluate what we're reading,” Wood said. “And then on top of that, now we have AI and social media that can really take us down a rabbit hole, and if we don't go out of our own echo chambers, we may never see the other side.

Exaggerations and quotes taken out of context are examples of misinformation used to manipulate voters. In an ad run against Attorney General Ken Paxton, it

was claimed that he voted to protect puppy abusers. This claim was deemed “mostly false” and an exaggeration of the true intent of the vote, which did not decrease punishments for animal abusers.

“When a student comes across information, and it just seems kind of unreal or outrageous, you need to consider a variety of things,” Wood said. “And you need to consider who is saying it. ... Look at the source of the information — do they have the authority, the credentials, to provide this information? You need to also see if other sources are saying the same thing, and then trace where the story is coming from.”

This election season is complicated by the ever-changing nature of media and how candidates can manipulate it in their favor. Wood sympathized with students who may not be accustomed to the skepticism required to discern the truth behind political claims.

“We know that information has value, and students tend to be, for the most part, very trusting of things that are written in print or they see online,” Wood said. “So we try to teach them to kind of sift through the information.”

IDENTITY POLITICS from A1

become adults, especially in upcoming local or state elections.

“With this generation, we like to be very vocal on our opinions,” DaSilva said. “Going to the poll and trying to make a difference, especially in your state politics ... because then your voice is heard. It's important to vote based on yourself and how you believe Texas should be run for the next upcoming years.”

White echoed the sentiment.

“The decisions that are being made today are going to impact our generation for the rest of our lives,” White said. “Most of the changes that affect people’s everyday lives happen locally, whether that’s your mayor’s race, whether that’s your local council people. It would do us good to focus on our home districts and educate ourselves on the candidates and the policies there, which often differ from maybe the national platform of the parties that they might be representing.”

Flavin and DaSilva urged students to look beyond social media and campaign advertisements to form their own opinions before voting, as misinformation about candidates and issues

keeps emerging.

“A lot of people are really quick to do a Google search, maybe look at each candidate’s website and then just go in and for the most part vote on their party lines,” DaSilva said. “I think [it’s important] to do a deep dive on both candidates, not just looking at what Instagram or TikTok or what the campaign ads are saying.”

White said students should not be “intimidated” by friends or family who tell them that voting for a certain candidate is a “vote for the opposition,” as it creates a negative perception of the purpose behind voting.

“A big reason why we are where we are in terms of division in our country is because we are focused on keeping the other person out of power rather than finding the best people that we want to support,” White said. “If we start voting based on who we really want to see rather than against the person that you hate, that’s how we can start to reunify our country and find more constructive ways forward.”

According to the Pew Research Center, top issues for the Republican party for this midterm election include immigration, gun policy, government size and violent crime.

Beyond the ballot, block walking brings politics up to the doorstep

HANNAH WEBB
News Editor

At roughly 40 doorsteps, a group of Baylor students encountered a cross-section of voters: some eager to talk, some ready to close the door and others willing to spend nearly half an hour discussing politics across party lines with people they had just met.

The conversations were part of a Sunday block walk in McLennan County, where volunteers went door to door to encourage voter participation ahead of the midterm elections. Though organized with the Democratic Party, the effort offered a glimpse into the challenges of engaging voters in a polarized political climate.

“What makes a difference is neighbors showing up at their neighbors’ doorstep and telling them why this election is so important,” Democratic Senate candidate James Talarico said. He kicked off the afternoon with a brief stop at Executive Plaza in Waco Sunday.

Houston senior Hanna Al-Hayek, president of Baylor College Democrats, said about 140 people signed up for the effort. Organized by the Texas Democratic Party and Texas Together, groups were deployed throughout McLennan County, carrying literature about voting locations and Democratic candidates on the ballot.

“We just try and contact people in a number of ways to encourage them to get out and vote,” said Meg Wallace, a Woodway resident participating in the walk.

Block walking, also known as foot canvassing, is a campaign strategy in which volunteers meet potential voters at their homes to share information and encourage turnout. Unlike television advertisements or mailers, the method creates an opportunity for direct conversation.

At one house, the students encountered a resident who planned to vote Republican in the midterms. Instead of dismissing the group, he spent nearly 30 minutes asking why the students supported their preferred candidates and chose to campaign.

Waco senior Joanna Able, who participated in the walk, said this conversation stood out to her because residents are not always willing to hear from people with different political views.

“We had a really interesting conversation with somebody who typically votes Republican who really wanted to hear why we personally like Talarico and support him,” Able said. “He took time to hear more of why we believe what we believe, which I think is really interesting because a lot of

people don't want to have conversations on the other side.”

Other residents told the students Democrats could “absolutely” count on their votes, while some sent them away. Despite the mixed reactions, Able said the most important outcome was getting people to participate, regardless of party.

“I think the biggest thing is that people are planning to vote,” Able said. “Whether they are voting Democrat or Republican, a lot of people don't vote in elections that are not for president.”

Voter turnout hit 63.9% of eligible U.S. voters in the 2024 presidential election. On the contrary, only 46.2% of eligible voters filled out a ballot for the 2022 midterms, according to Ballotpedia.

In a new age of voting, Al-Hayek said exchanges with community members show how face-to-face conversations can reduce the distance people feel when engaging with politics online.

“Living through screens is very polarizing until when you're actually out here and you're able to have conversations with people,” she said. “You realize how close we actually are, even if they do shut the door in your face.”

Wallace said volunteers use an app to identify Democratic voters who do not

consistently participate in elections. The group then visits those homes to encourage residents to vote.

Talarico, who stopped in Waco while traveling to a rally in Plano, described door-to-door outreach as one of the most consequential parts of campaigning. He compared democracy to parenthood, saying we think it is “automatic,” but we “take it for granted.”

“Just like parenthood, democracy requires attention,” Talarico said. “It requires nourishment. It requires love and commitment, and that’s what you are doing today.”

For Al-Hayek, the goal extends beyond any single candidate or election.

“I know a lot of people sit it out because they think, ‘What’s the point if politics is just coming up with the most creative nickname’ or asking ‘How quick can I attack back?’” she said. “But that’s not the point of what politics should be.”

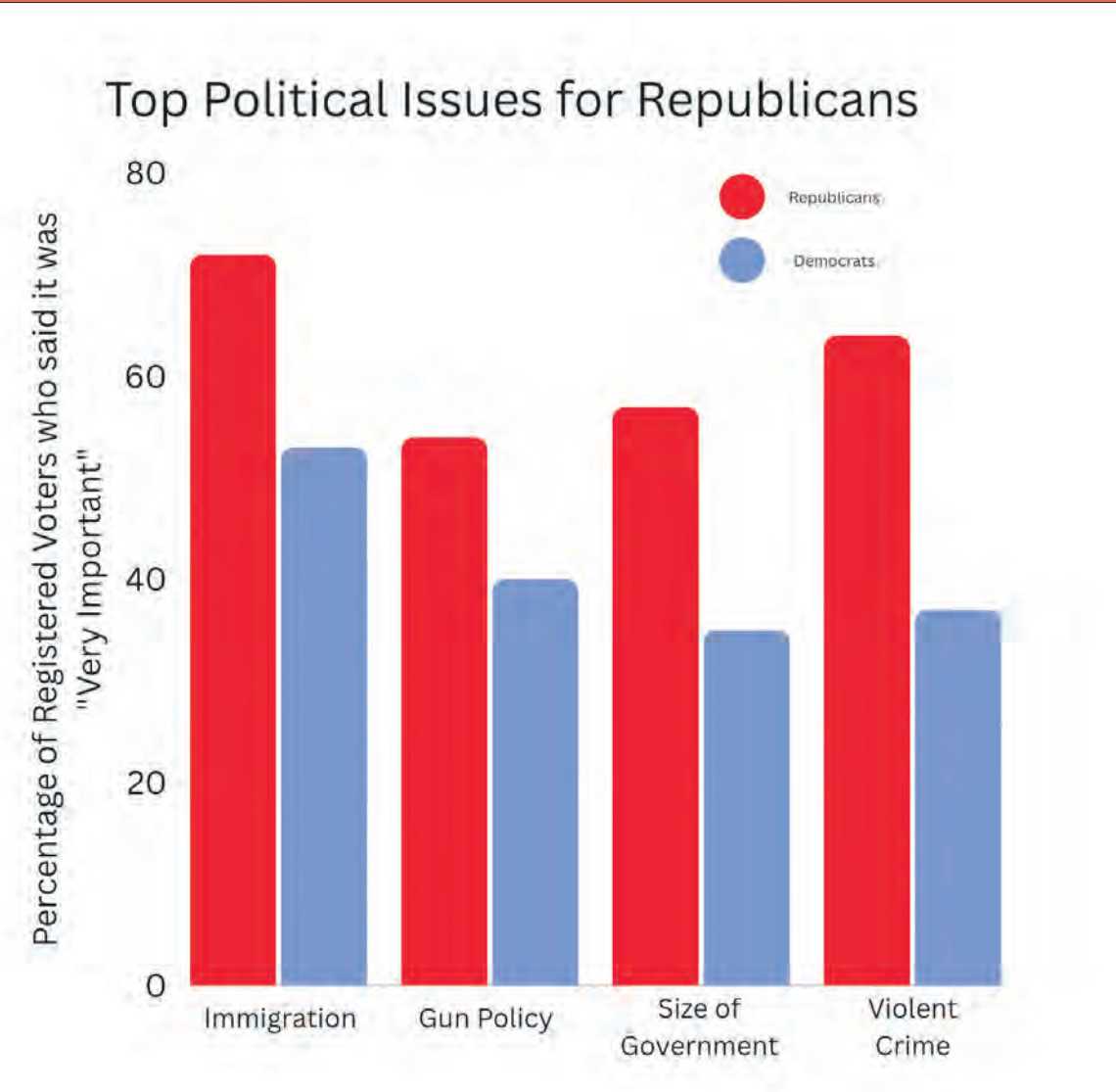
She pointed to the streets where volunteers walked, noting the lack of sidewalks, as an example of how political decisions affect everyday life.

“I think politics, at its best, works for everybody,” Al-Hayek said. “Better politics is better accessibility to everything for everyone.”

Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

KNOCK KNOCK Volunteers knocked on doors and had conversations with residents about the upcoming midterm in Woodway Sunday afternoon.

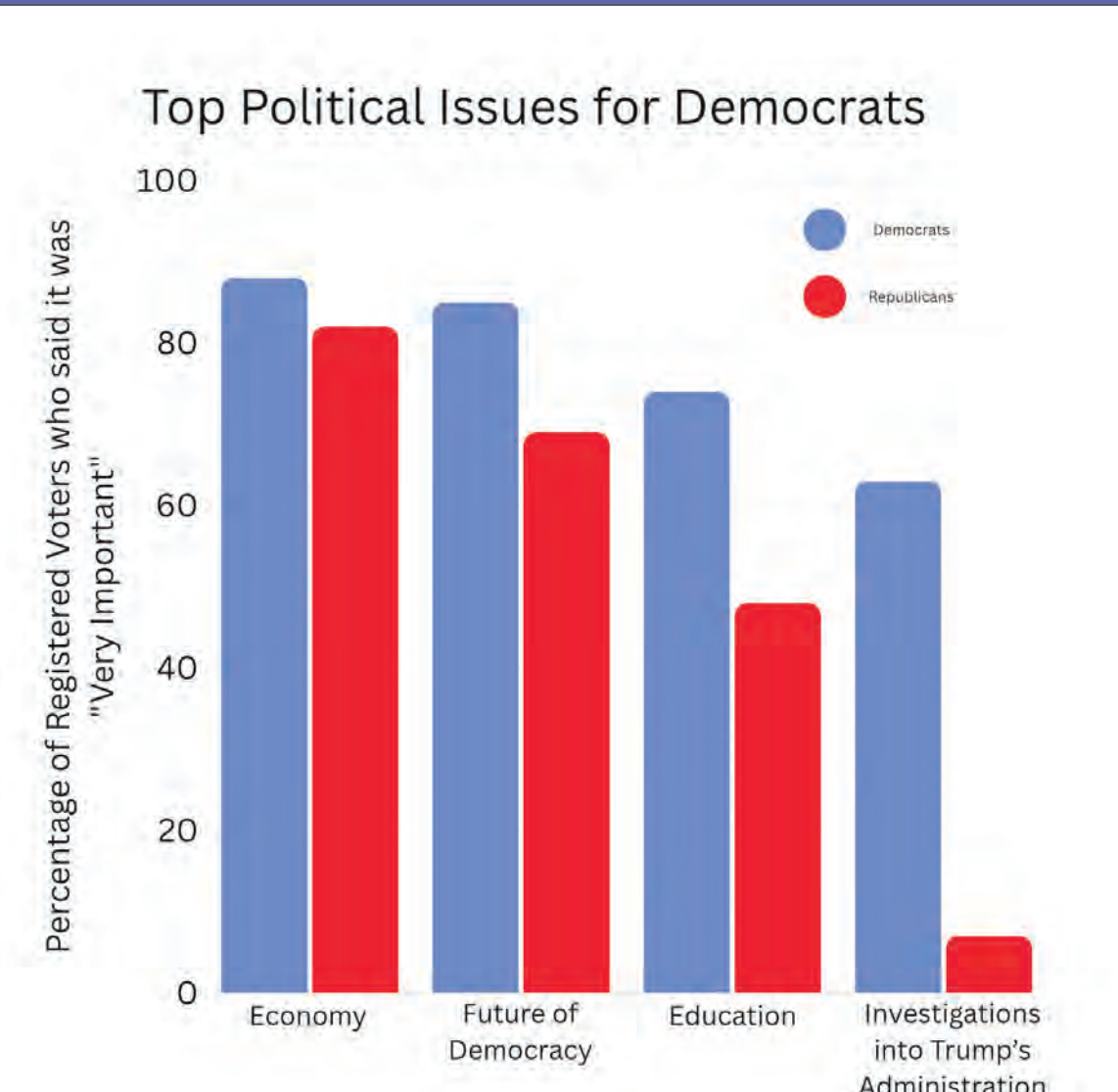
Top Political Issues for Republicans



Issue	Republicans (%)	Democrats (%)
Immigration	75	55
Gun Policy	55	40
Size of Government	58	35
Violent Crime	65	38

Graph by Fallon Head | Web Editor
Source: Pew Research Center

Top Political Issues for Democrats



Issue	Democrats (%)	Republicans (%)
Economy	88	82
Future of Democracy	85	70
Education	75	48
Investigations into Trump's Administration	65	5

Graph by Fallon Head | Web Editor
Source: Pew Research Center

The Pew Research Center notes that the economy, the future of democracy, education and investigations into Trump and his administration all rank as high priority for Democrats this midterm election.

Meet the two local men vying for students’ vote

TRIPP HENDERSON
Staff Writer

Election Day is just around the corner, and Baylor students registered to vote in McLennan County can head to the polls to choose a U.S. representative in Texas’ 17th Congressional District.

The two names on the ballot are Republican incumbent Congressman Pete Sessions and his opponent, Democrat Casey Shepard. Both men are Waco natives and are now vying for their hometown’s vote. Sessions has served as a congressman for 28 years, while Shepard, a criminal defense attorney, has never held public office.

The candidates’ campaign platforms differ sharply; here is everything a voter needs to know to help inform their vote.



Casey Shepard



Pete Sessions

ECONOMY

According to Trading Economics, the annual inflation rate is currently 3.7%, above the Federal Reserve’s 2% target. The conflict in Iran has contributed to rising prices, with the Congressional Budget Office citing the war in the Middle East as causing 40% of inflation.

Sessions acknowledged that the war in Iran has contributed to rising prices, but said, “We have the greatest economy we’ve ever had.”

He pointed to seven million job openings and market growth as signs of that success.

“The world’s never been better,” Sessions said. “There are so many jobs available.”

As a “pro-growth conservative,” Sessions’ website says he strongly advocates a free-enterprise system alongside the private sector. His website says those two things contribute most to reducing poverty while increasing innovation, and that deregulating the free market while protecting investors and consumers is a priority.

“Markets are the best way, and we do have markets,” Sessions said. “We have markets in health care [and] we have markets in energy.”

Beyond supporting free markets, Sessions highlighted his priorities at the State of the Nation address to the Waco community: protecting the American dollar and incentivizing the tax code so workers will be encouraged to return to work.

Shepard had a different view on the economy than Sessions, pointing to high inflation as a result of President Donald Trump’s policy.

“[High inflation is] a mixture of the Trump administration’s push to lower interest rates and at the same time impose tariffs, which historically has led to all the greatest recessions or depressions in the United States,” Shepard said.

If elected as a congressman, Shepard said he would push back on some of Trump’s economic and trade policies and that the executive branch has very little emergency power to actually impose tariffs.

“My first and foremost would be we need to fight the tariffs themselves ... we’ve got to get that free trade going again,” Shepard said.

Additionally, in a Community Impact Q&A, Shepard highlighted the need to invest in infrastructure to address local traffic and build a national power grid.

“For a strong country, we need strong infrastructure,” Shepard said.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

All across the country, communities are debating the construction of data centers, with proponents pointing toward economic development and job growth, while critics raise concerns over environmental impact, impact on energy prices and water consumption.

This debate is particularly relevant to Waco, where KWTX reported a proposed \$10 billion data center just outside the city.

Shepard expressed concern about the proposed Waco data center and skepticism that it would generate job growth.

“It’s not like data centers are bringing bustling job markets to the places they go to,” Shepard said. “What I’m more concerned about is that the data centers, the companies that are developing these data centers, are picking areas just outside of major areas where the infrastructure can’t support their electrical needs, can’t support their water needs, and it falls on the taxpayer to upgrade all that.”

Shepard said that Waco’s infrastructure cannot meet the energy demands of data centers that average about six million gallons of water a day.

Similarly, Sessions also recognized the massive energy required to power data centers, but stressed the need to stay at the forefront of innovation to beat China in the AI race. He warned that if China gets ahead of the U.S. in superintelligence, it can put Americans’ personal data and national security at risk.

“We have to be able to protect [data],” Sessions said. “It is in our best interest.”

Beyond protecting national security, Sessions said that data centers can spur economic growth.

“The state of Texas is all for bringing high-tech, which is what it is, to Texas,” Sessions said. “It’s jobs, it’s infrastructure, it’s development, it’s the future.”

Sessions said data center construction is a “volatile issue” largely in local government’s hands, not the federal government, and that because data centers consume so much energy, Texas leadership will have to determine what to prioritize.

Ultimately, Sessions said that America can’t get away from AI and “the country still needs this.”

IMMIGRATION

One of the most stark policy differences between Shepard and Sessions is their view on immigration.

During his time in Congress, Sessions has favored strict border policy and consistently voted for border-security bills, including the Secure the Border Act of 2023, which resumed wall construction and increased the number of Border Patrol agents.

Sessions said he supports strong immigration enforcement to protect Americans’ jobs and to prevent illegal immigrants from living in the country for free.

In contrast, Shepard took a more left-leaning approach to immigration, supporting major changes to agencies.

“We need to do away with ICE, not just the agency, but the entire idea that immigration, naturalization and law enforcement should overlap like they do,” Shepard said.

Both Sessions and Shepard agree that the U.S. should work with Mexico on a program that lets foreign workers come to the U.S. to work in agriculture. In an interview with Fox, Sessions said that Texas needs a plan like this to support family-owned farms and provide more labor. An example of this effort is Sessions’ co-sponsored bill, the Securing Agriculture’s Workforce Act of 2026 (H.R. 9535, which reforms H-2A visas to expand opportunities for foreign workers.

Shepard echoed similar support for a guest worker plan.

“We have to work more with Mexico, not only to control their southern border so that we can process asylum applications there, but also to establish work visa programs, for instance, day laborers,” he said.

SOCIALISM VS. CAPITALISM

Recent polling shows mixed attitudes toward socialism, with a New York Times study finding that about half of voters view socialism favorably. Socialists have won a series of primary elections, raising questions about the Democratic Party’s direction.

“We have to show the world what our perfect world looks like, and that it’s not just one thing; it’s a bunch of different ideas working together,” Shepard said.

Shepard did not directly endorse the socialist movement, but he did point to what he called good socialist policies like Medicaid, Medicare and food stamps.

“There has to be some form of a safety net,” Shepard said. “I think even Republicans would agree with that. The difference between us is how large that net should be. I think it should be much larger than it is.”

Sessions, who has been outspoken about being anti-socialist, also said it was a “netting issue,” but said that democrats “are for a socialism that hands out more than it ever receives back.”

At the State of the Nation luncheon at the Baylor Club, Sessions strongly defended capitalism’s benefits.

“We are strong, we are ready for tomorrow, and Texas is the beneficiary of conservative economics, of entrepreneurship and perhaps most of all of capitalism,” Sessions said at the luncheon.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing prices have gotten significantly more expensive, with home prices surging roughly 40% since 2020, according to the S&P/Case-Shiller U.S. National Home Price Index.

Sessions pointed to interest rates as a main driver of rising prices. He has historically favored deregulation and lowering homebuilding costs, co-sponsoring and voting for the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act.

Shepard claimed that the investor class’s privatization of housing has decreased home affordability.

“I would eliminate [investors’] depreciation of deduction on their taxes, so that they couldn’t claim depreciation of these properties,” Shepard said.

MIDTERMS from A1

to whether candidates have plans to address the cost of housing, electricity and water. Rising expenses, he said, make poverty an increasingly pressing concern for Texans.

“If a politician brings up the cost of living, that’ll also grab my attention more,” Banks said, adding that he looks at candidates’ records to determine whether their actions match their promises.

Landskov similarly identified the cost of living as a major concern. For students approaching graduation or preparing to enter the workforce, the economy may become a more immediate concern as they begin supporting themselves.

Miller, meanwhile, acknowledged the economy’s importance but argued that other unresolved questions about the dignity of human life take precedence. He said that if the government were functioning properly, he would be more concerned about economic issues.

“I think it’s important, but it’s forced to be a secondary issue, which is bad because that means it’ll just keep going downhill,” Miller said.

CORRUPTION & INTEGRITY

For Banks, the question of whether politicians can be trusted comes before nearly everything else.

He said he looks for evidence that elected officials use their positions to benefit themselves financially rather than serve the public. The influence of money in politics, he said, has made corruption and integrity central to his evaluation of candidates.

That concern also surfaced in Mauriello’s assessment of the Texas U.S. Senate race between Republican Ken Paxton and Democrat James Talarico.

Mauriello said allegations of corruption surrounding Paxton have become a prominent argument against his candidacy. She views corruption as a particularly important issue in a race that has attracted significant attention.

Landskov said he has also heard concerns about Paxton’s record as attorney general, though he acknowledged that he did not live in Texas during much of that tenure.

The students’ concerns differed in emphasis, but they agreed that candidates should be judged not only by the positions they campaign on, but also by how they have exercised power.

RELIGION

Religion adds another layer to how some students evaluate candidates, particularly in a Texas Senate race in which both Paxton and Talarico have emphasized their religious beliefs.

Miller said his Catholic faith shapes his understanding of political responsibility, including his positions on abortion,

immigration and the death penalty. He believes religious convictions inevitably influence how voters understand the common good.

“I think [the economy is] important, but it’s forced to be a secondary issue, which is bad because that means it’ll just keep going downhill.

THOMAS MILLER
BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS,
SOPHOMORE

Mauriello, who also considers her Christian faith when voting, said she does not believe one political party is inherently more Christian than another. Instead, she asks whether a candidate’s policies reflect the call to care for others.

“I want to be able to articulate my reasons for who I’m voting for,” Mauriello said.

Landskov offered a more strategic interpretation of the candidates’ religious appeals. He suggested Talarico’s emphasis on faith may help him reach Christian voters, while Paxton relies more on his established support among Republicans and Christians.

Banks, meanwhile, said he opposes efforts to bring religious endorsements into public school classrooms, citing First Amendment concerns. For him, education policy is another test of how candidates understand the limits of government.

MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD

Despite their different priorities, students also shared an interest in political participation.

Mauriello said voting is a way to care for others, a perspective she believes resonates with Baylor’s Christian community. She worries that midterm elections receive less attention leaving some voters unfamiliar with the offices and candidates on their ballots.

Landskov said he is encouraged by how many young people he has seen voting during this election cycle. He said members of his generation sometimes assume their votes will not make a difference.

Seeing them participate anyway, he said, is something to be proud of regardless of the outcome.

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Senate race campaign merch divides, unites students

ARDEN BERRY
Arts & Life Editor

James Talarico's black-and-white shirts and President Donald Trump's red-and-white hats may be a common sight along the campaign trail, but it is not common to see students wearing or using political merchandise on campus.

However, political events like Talarico's campaign stop in September and Turning Point USA's tour stop in April reveal that students do own shirts, hats and signs representing their political beliefs.

Dr. Patrick Flavin, chair of the political science department, said the lack of day-to-day campaign merchandise may be because wearing this clothing can be divisive.

"You do see a couple [students] who are very proud to wear their Trump merch or whatever," Flavin said. "But I would say what I routinely hear from students is they don't because they're cognizant that it creates conflict and they want to avoid that, as opposed to showing which candidate they support."

Flavin said this mindset is understandable but can be problematic for students.

"The campus becomes apolitical," Flavin said. "I don't think that's what we're aiming for too. I think Baylor's trying to cultivate a civic environment, but one that has civil discourse so that, so like if someone was wearing a shirt from the opposing campaign, you could say

like, 'Why do you support them?' instead of just attacking them and try to learn something from them."

Houston senior and Baylor College Democrats President Hanna Al-Hayek said she finds that her Talarico shirt is a conversation starter.

"It's kind of given people an opportunity to approach with conversation, knowing where my stances are," Al-Hayek said.

Flavin said merchandise is effective not because it advertises to undecided voters, but because it energizes supporters and raises money for campaigns.

"You donate 'X' amount of money and you'll get this," Flavin said. "So donate even more and you get a really cool T-shirt or something like that. So I think campaigns have sort of built it into their fundraising appeals. And it makes sense because then that's free advertising even if it only has effect on the margins for the campaign if people are out there wearing it when they're out in public"

Al-Hayek said wearing political merch is a unifying experience.

"I think it helps with the, there's more of us than you think, and that could help other students or people who are more aware and weary of political violence," Al-Hayek said. "Like if one person does it and that starts a chain reaction, then it helps."

When it comes to this midterm Senate



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer
KNOCK ON WOOD Houston senior and Baylor College Democrats President Hanna Al-Hayek wears her "Talarico for Texas" shirt as she goes block walking Sunday afternoon.

election, much of Talarico's merchandise features white text on a black background.

Flavin said he would guess that Talarico is trying to create a unique political brand.

"If you can create, whether it's the colors of your signs or the color or the format of your clothing or the hats, whatever you give out, they get, it makes them more effective," Flavin said. "It makes them stand out."

Al-Hayek said the style is neutral.

"It's very simple, and it's not very scream-in-the-face blue or scream-in-the-face red, and I think that that might help people feel like, because I know a lot of Republicans who are voting Talarico, so that might be a choice that helps," Al-Hayek said.

Talarico's campaign also sells shirts that say, "I'm a Talafreako."

"I think it shows sort of a good-natured awareness of being able to take what's viewed as an insult from campaign supporters and try to turn it around and in some ways almost embrace it," Flavin said. "And so I think it's probably been effective at muting the 'Talafreako' sort of discourse that you see."

Ken Paxton's merchandise often features the American flag, and attendees of Paxton's Waco campaign event wore Trump merchandise.

The Baylor College Republicans could not be reached for comment, but Flavin said Paxton's merchandise reflects his emphasis on "true Texas values."

"I think that aligns with sort of the Paxton

campaign message, which is certainly running as a supporter and having the support of President Trump," Flavin said. "But also, I think, how you would put it, is defending Texas from, again, how you would put it, a liberal takeover or a democratic takeover."

However, Flavin said he has not seen much Paxton merchandise in Waco.

"A lot of the Paxton political ads are being run not by the campaign, but by outside groups," Flavin said. "So the campaign may be relatively thrifty on merch. But it just, again, anecdotally, seems like you don't see a bunch of people wearing Paxton shirts or even signs, even here in McLennan County, which is 60% to 70% Republican leaning."

Despite the absence of political merchandise in Baylor classrooms, Flavin is optimistic that wearing this merchandise at an academic institution like Baylor has the potential to create productive civil discourse.

"It often doesn't, so I understand why students wouldn't wear it," Flavin said. "But I do think Baylor is in maybe a unique position ... we want students to be politically engaged, we want them to vote. And so, yeah, so I'm going to be optimistic and be hopeful that students at Baylor are thoughtful and mature enough that if someone's wearing merchandise of the opposing party, opposing candidate, that they could have an intelligent, reasonable conversation with that person."



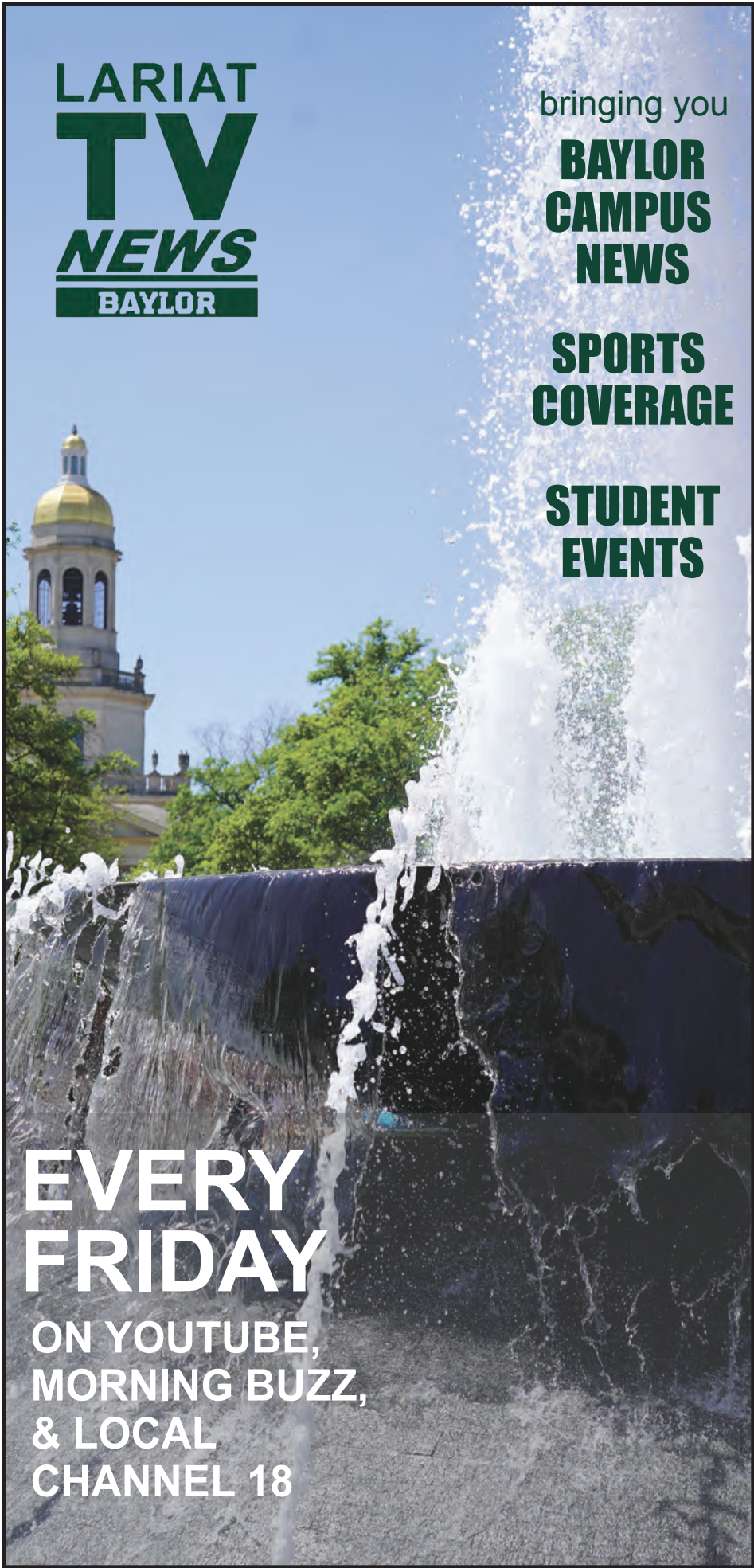
Owen Carson | Broadcast Reporter
POLITICAL POSES Attorney General Ken Paxton takes photos with supporters wearing Trump merchandise following his Waco campaign event Oct. 3 at The Palladium.

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Senior forward Evan Chatman (Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics), junior guard Isaac Williams, junior guard Taliah Scott, fifth-year center Caden Powell, sophomore guard Mar cayla Johnson (Lariat file photos)

Scott returns home to Baylor WBB

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Editor

Baylor women's basketball embraced a strong core that entered the program with head coach Nicki Collen in 2022. Jana Van Gytenbeek, Darianna Littlepage-Buggs and Bella Fontleroy anchored the program for the last four years. Once their time at Baylor came to a close in the spring, it was time for a changing of the guard. Collen and the Bears looked to senior guard Taliah Scott. "It's definitely weird not having them because they were all natural-born leaders," Scott said. "They were on the program for four years; they knew exactly what Nicki wanted." Scott arrives at the 2026-27 season at the top of Baylor's seven returners. Being on that list, the newcomers are looking to her to guide them into their first season in the green and gold. "[I'm] having to take that leadership role, whether it's by example or by being more vocal about stuff and helping them through stuff and helping them see through stuff or saying what Nicki wants and helping put that out in the air," Scott said. "It's been very different because I wouldn't say I'm a vocal leader." Scott has found a home with the Bears. She

is staying at the same school for the first time in her collegiate career after spending her freshman season at Arkansas and sophomore at Auburn. She finds herself in a position to lead a group of transfers rather than being one of them. "I'm really happy to be back," Scott said. "[I] love Baylor so much, so I'm so excited to be back with a whole bunch of new faces. And just this year, just to continue to keep winning and stuff, to go farther than we did last year." Scott is not the typical outspoken leader. While she leads by example on the court, she also tries to foster one-on-one connections with her teammates to help them grow. "Taliah's doing a great job this year stepping up and filling that leadership role," junior guard Tianna Thompson said. "She said she's not vocal, but I hear her. ... As we get into official practice too, we'll all get to see our roles, and we'll really start to go into specifically how we can each individually help out this team." Scott has served as an illustration of success for a Power Five program. She led the team with 19.7 points per game en route to earning an All-Big 12 First Team selection. Scott has also received more recognition heading into the year as a unanimous preseason

All-Big 12. Those accolades didn't come without trials and setbacks. Scott shot under 30% from the floor in six of the last 10 games of the season as the season's grind continued to wear her down. She has taken up more of an effort to remain an elite scorer into March. "[It's] just the little lessons I learned throughout the year last year, especially when we got to the end, and seeing my body break down a little bit," Scott said. "Seeing how important it is for the physical part of the game to how important it is for the conditioning, the strength, the nutrition part." Scott started in 32 of the 33 games she played last season — the most she has appeared in a season since entering college. She competed in 20 games as a freshman and only three as a sophomore, but contributing throughout a whole season has taught her how to help the team down the stretch. "Not only will I be able to make the season healthy, I'll still be able to perform at top level as I was at the beginning of the year," Scott said. "Learning those little lessons, just the discipline, just seeing

where we lacked in some areas and what could have pushed us over the hump, and be able to take that into this new year." The women's game has shifted to benefit players like Scott, who rely on speed and skill to generate offense. While the Bears had to make a concerted effort last year to get Scott the ball, a strong frontcourt can open the floor for her to shoot from different levels. "The game isn't about size," Collen said. "It's about skill. It's about spacing. If you're going to have size, you have to be able to utilize them. We wanted someone when plays break down, when we had to run floppy side-to-side to get shots for Taliah." Scott will get to command an offense supported by fifth-year forward Kyla Abraham and junior forward Kate Koval, who transferred from LSU. Scott has been a top scorer in the country since she was a freshman, but is now taking a new step as an impact returner for the first time in her career.



Lariat file photo



ROCK THE RIM Fifth-year center Caden Powell slams a dunk in Baylor men's basketball's 78-69 win over Washington in 2025. Lariat file photo

Rim protectors bring necessary experience

BENNETT PARKER
Sports Writer

In a sport where experience is an increasingly rare currency, the Baylor men's basketball frontcourt is wealthy. Senior center Caden Powell and senior center Juslin Bodo Bodo are both healthy and talented, but perhaps their greatest asset is their experience. There is a slew of new faces across the court for Baylor basketball but the big men have seven years of combined experience and are both tenured Bears. Powell is stepping in as a leader to bring the young team together. "I just try to be a shoulder to lean on," Powell said. "I feel like we've meshed pretty well. Everybody gets along with one another off the court, but I definitely say we play together as a unit on the court, so it's really refreshing to be a part of." Powell played in all 30 games for Baylor last season and brought a strong defensive presence to the paint. Many thought he had played his last game in the green and gold but was granted another year of eligibility in August. The Waco local brings a 6-foot-9 frame, which helped him attain a team-leading 6.3

rebounds per game and a 67.2% field goal percentage throughout the 2025 season. "It's great," Bodo Bodo said when asked what it's like playing with Powell. "He's one of the smarter defenders we got. He really helps us win some games." Bodo Bodo is going into his senior season but has yet to see the court for the Bears. His career started with a bang at High Point, winning back-to-back Defensive Player of the Year awards for the Big South conference, averaging 1.7 blocks and 8.4 rebounds per game. Upon transferring to Baylor, the Cameroon native suffered a season-ending injury and was redshirted. Bodo Bodo experienced growth beyond the sport despite the disappointment. "I learned about patience," Bodo Bodo said. "Of course, it was a long journey for me. I grew so much faith-wise and trusted God's timing. And I just realized it was all about God. It's not about basketball!" Powell had high praise for how Bodo Bodo has handled himself since returning. The duo brings much-needed depth to what was a struggling frontcourt last season.

MEET THE MINGOS

KAYDEN + DYLAN

WHAT BAYLOR BASKETBALL'S
NEWEST BROTHERLY DUO
HAS IN COMMON

Distant cousins with Baylor
Basketball teammate Caden Powell

Played high school basketball
with Baylor standout and
Philadelphia 76er VJ Edgecombe

Have streets named after them
in their hometown of
Farmingdale, New York

6' 3" | G | SOPHOMORE
FARMINGDALE, NEW YORK

2025 STATS (PENN STATE)

13.7 p | 4.3 a | 2.1 s

ACCOLADES

HIGHEST-RATED RECRUIT IN PSU
HISTORY (NO. 34)

2025 NEW YORK GATORADE
PLAYER OF THE YEAR

NO. 24 RATED TRANSFER PLAYER

6' 5" | G | FRESHMAN
FARMINGDALE, NEW YORK

2025 STATS (NIKE EYBL)

19.3 p | 7.8 r | 2.6 a

ACCOLADES

NO. 15 RANKED PLAYER IN THE
CLASS OF 2026

FIVE-STAR RECRUIT

FLIPPED COMMITMENT FROM
UNC TO BAYLOR LAST SPRING

Photos courtesy of Baylor Athletics | Source: HoopsHQ

Takeaways from MBB exhibition win over Florida

JEFFREY COHEN

Sports Editor

Baylor men's basketball has been plagued by injuries for the past couple of years, and it seemed to come to a point last season.

The Bears trudged through the 2025-26 season with a seven-man rotation as then-seniors center Caden Powell and forward Michael Rataj were the only ones in the frontcourt. That lack of depth for head coach Scott Drew's squad resulted in a 17-17 record — the worst finish since it went 16-16 in 2006-07.

Baylor started out its 2026-27 campaign by putting the country on notice. It took down preseason No. 1 Florida 82-76 in overtime at the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena in Jacksonville, Florida.

The improbable victory has left college basketball fans around the nation curious about the trajectory of the Bears' season after a disappointing campaign.

Here are some takeaways from Baylor's win Sunday afternoon.

THE MINGOS ARE HERE

Sophomore guard Kayden Mingo and his brother, freshman guard Dylan Mingo, were the highlights of the Bears' offseason.

Kayden transferred to Baylor from Penn State as the No. 32 player in the portal, averaging 13.7 points per game along with 4.3 assists. He brought along Dylan, who was ranked as the 15th-best player and third-best combo guard in the nation out of Long Island Lutheran in Glen Head, New York.

The brothers made their presence known against the top-ranked Gators. Kayden exploded for 31 points, 8 rebounds and 4 assists while Dylan tallied 12 points with 8 rebounds and 2 assists.

The duo were not scared to drive into the paint, finishing against bigger defenders and crashing the boards. They went 10-for-18 from inside the 3-point arc and combined to 39% of Baylor's rebounds.

The two also spent ample time as the Bears' primary ball handlers with Kayden commanding the offense from the top of the key while Dylan dished out some passes off of drives.

The electrifying brother connection can be a catalyst for another year of Baylor guards making noise.

DEPTH IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

The exhibition win displayed exactly what last year's team was missing. The 2025-26 squad struggled with only two rotation players on the bench.

Baylor utilized nine players on Sunday with eight of them seeing the court for over 10 minutes.

SUPER MINGO BROS Sophomore guard Kayden Mingo and freshman guard Dylan Mingo get back on defense in Baylor's 82-76 win over No. 1 Florida. The brothers combined for 43 points and 16 rebounds in the exhibition game.

Drew brought four guards, four forwards and senior Juslin Bodo Bodo as his lone center.

Junior Liberty transfer Brett Decker Jr. and junior Isaac Williams join the Mingos to form a solid guard core.

"We have more depth than we had last couple of years," Drew said. "Our ability to create at the point guard positions a lot greater than it was last year, just depth-wise, numbers-wise."

The Bears had the advantage with its bench. All nine in green and gold scored while three of the nine Gators to play were held scoreless, shooting 0-for-10.

FOUND THE CLUTCH GENE IN OT

The second half of the Bears' win proved to be a back-and-forth affair with neither side grabbing a lead greater than four points.

They found their stride in overtime after falling behind 72-70, outscoring Florida 12-4 the rest of the way.

Baylor played an aggressive brand of offense, going to the free throw line

five times across the final period. The Bears made nine of their 10 shots from the charity stripe to lift them over the Gators.

The nailbiting win was refreshing for Baylor, who went 6-9 in games decided by 10 or fewer points last season, including a 3-9 record against conference opponents.

NEED BETTER SCORING FROM THE FRONTCOURT

While Baylor put up a respectable 82 points against Florida, the frontcourt did not contribute to much of that effort.

The four forwards and one center combined for only 21 points. They shot 6-for-18 with junior forward Isaac Celiscar led the group with 7 points.

Scoring from the inside was a noticable issue for Baylor. Powell and Rataj averaged 14.1 points per game between the two last season.

The unit worked on the lower block defensively with 18 total rebounds.

LET IT FLY FROM BEYOND THE ARC

Baylor embraced its history of strong 3-point shooting under Drew. The Bears strayed away from that tradition a year ago, ranking 187th in the country with a 33.9% 3-point percentage.

Working from behind the arc played a major factor in Baylor's win. The Bears shot 7-for-17 from 3 to finish with a 41.2% rate while the Gators could not get the long ball to hit. They hit only four of 29 3-pointers for a frustrating 13.8%.

Williams contributed the most to Baylor's success from downtown by nailing three of four attempts on Sunday.

There is plenty of newfound hope for Baylor after a strong showing against the Gators, but there is a long season ahead.

Junior guard Isaac Williams (left), Junior forward Isaac Celiscar (right)

Photos courtesy of Baylor Athletics

Sports

Collen expects ‘big jump’ with her retooled roster

BENNETT PARKER
Sports Writer

Baylor women’s basketball stood at 21-4 while being ranked No. 12 in the country with three weeks before March Madness.

The Bears stumbled through their final seven games, going 3-4, suffering two losses to TCU. The struggles continued, not making it out of the first weekend in the NCAA tournament with a second-round loss to Duke.

Head coach Nicki Collen was faced with a substantial rebuild over the offseason, losing four of her five starters from the 2025-26 campaign. Collen got to work in the transfer portal, beefing up the backcourt with a pair of junior guards out of the SEC. Trinity Turner and Tianna Thompson headline the list of those joining the Bears.

There is only one player with expiring eligibility on the roster, which has Collen expecting big things for the coming seasons.

“The majority of this team can return,” Collen said. “You can’t assume anything, but I think it’s a team that can make a big jump this year and a greater jump next year.”

After an anticlimatic close to last year’s run, Collen’s squad is “chasing greatness” with the retooled roster.



Lariat file photo

PLAYCALLER Head Coach Nicki Collen directs freshman guard Marcyala Johnson in victory over Arizona State at Foster Pavilion.

“I think we’ve got a lot of hungry players,” Collen said. “Players that have been productive, whether it was in major minutes or limited minutes at other places, to go along with our returners.”

Collen has yet to break through the Sweet 16 in her time with Baylor despite finishing top-5 in the Big 12 and making the dance in every season of her five-year tenure.

The underlying issue last season was on the offensive side of the floor, finishing eighth in points per game and 12th in field goal percentage in the conference.

“Our greatest jump needs to be on the offensive side of the ball,” Collen said. “We were elite offensively for four years. ... We were not a year ago, won 25 games, and had to lean on our defense.”

Collen has brought in some pieces to hopefully right some of those wrongs, but the solution lies more in the consistency and decision-making.

“We’re only going to be better offensively if we share the basketball better,” Collen said. “If we take better care of the ball.”

The Bears have playmakers across the court. At the forefront is last season’s leading scorer, senior guard Taliah Scott, along with the pair of SEC guards.

“We’ve got a lot of people that can make plays,” Collen said. “It’s about consistently making the right play and getting them to understand points per possession, points per shot.”

One of the big additions Collen was able to bring in was junior forward Kate Koval out of LSU. Collen is hoping to expand her game and make her a scoring threat from all three levels.

“She has international flair to her game,” Collen said. “I was surprised that she didn’t take a three in college, because watching her in club basketball, she was someone that would stretch the [defense] and play on the perimeter more. Hopefully she brings a dimension that combines something different than those three post players.”

Collen has finished the grind of roster construction. Now, the focus turns to putting a good product on the floor for an entire season. The regular season success is expected, but Collen and the Bears are looking for more.

“This team has to have the mindset all the time that good isn’t good enough and to truly chase greatness and chase it in a way that eliminates ego,” Collen said.



Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics

DOWN THE LANE Junior guard Brett Decker Jr. drives down the lane against Florida guard Denzel Aberdeen in Baylor’s 82-76 exhibition win.

Decker adds to line of MBB 3-point threats

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Editor

Baylor men’s basketball under head coach Scott Drew has been highlighted by its history of sharpshooters.

Junior guard and Liberty transfer Brett Decker Jr. adds another fold to that tradition. That is exactly what drew Decker to the Bears.

“They’ve definitely shown me a couple, Brady Heslip, Adam Flagler, those kinds of guys,” Decker said. “They’ve shown me how I can fit into offense, too.”

What excited Decker wasn’t only that he’d play for the same program as elite shooters but that he could continue to grow as one, too.

“They’ve shown me how they develop players,” Decker said. “It’s made me excited just to see that I can come to a program and get even better.”

He shot 47% from deep to lead Conference USA and averaged 16.9 points per game as a Flame.

Decker joins a deep guard core with the Mingo brothers and junior Isaac Williams. Head coach Scott Drew said he is encouraged

by this year’s better overall group than the one the Bears touted out last year.

“Our ability to create at the point guard positions a lot greater than it was last year,” Drew said. “Just depth-wise, numbers-wise. So usually, college basketball is a guard’s game, and we’re back to having a lot of bigger guards.”

The group has fostered a strong connection over the offseason. Decker said the guards have meshed well despite most of them transferring in the past few months.

“[It’s] just playing on the court a lot, doing things off the court, going out to eat or go hang out at somebody’s house,” Decker said. “[It’s] just getting to know each other very good. Not isolating ourselves, doing stuff together all the time.”

Part of the group’s chemistry is its collective competitiveness. They got to show off their prowess against some former Bears, including VJ Edgecombe and Keyonte George in the team’s annual Vet Scrimmage.

“It was fun to see the guys that came through here and how they came back,” Decker said. “It’s still a family. It was great to play against NBA guys.”

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Baylor basketball brings back players, coaches to new positions

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Editor

College sports is a world of constant change. Players and coaches come and go when there is something that looks bigger and brighter or if things are not going according to plan at their current location.

Baylor men’s basketball head coach Scott Drew and women’s basketball head coach Nicki Collen have not been exempt from this.

Drew had to form a completely new roster last year after all the players from the 2024-25 season did not return from Waco. He has also dealt with some of his top assistant coaches taking a step up to higher coaching opportunities elsewhere. Collen has also dealt with her

This past offseason has shined a different light on the state of Baylor basketball. While both teams have notable portions of their rosters made up of transfers and incoming freshman, they have embraced the return of multiple familiar faces, whether they competed on the floor last year or have spent years away from the programs.

Associate head coach Jerome Tang

Naismith Men’s College Coach of the Year.

Despite the hot start to his tenure with Kansas State, his relationship with the program went sour last season. It all came crashing down in February after a 91-62 loss to Cincinnati, dropping the Wildcats to 10-14. Fans wore bags over their heads to show their displeasure, while Tang promptly chose to remove players’ names from their jerseys after saying they “do not deserve to wear this uniform”

Kansas State parted ways with Tang soon after, ending his four-year stay with Kansas State.

Tang decided to go back to a his old home after growing discord ended up splitting him from his heading coach position.

Assistant coach Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua

Tchamwa Tchatchoua made his way to Waco as a promising forward in 2019, transferring from UNLV. He became a fan favorite after redshirting his sophomore year. Know as “Everday Jon,” Tchamwa Tchatchoua brought a daily energy to one of the top programs in the country. He spent four total seasons with Baylor, seeing the court in three of them.

Tchamwa Tchatchoua was part of one of the most productive benches in college basketball during the 2020-21 season. He came off the bench in 29 games during the Bears’ national championship run.

He found his stride in 2021-22, averaging 6.8 rebounds a game and intimidating opposing players from entering the paint. Tchamwa Tchatchoua suffered a season-ending injury in mid-February, resulting in surgery to repair multiple ligaments in his left knee.

Despite missing the last month of the season, Tchamwa Tchatchoua won Big 12 Defensive Player of the Years and was selected to the conferences All-Defense Team. His energy and drive that earned him his nickname brought him back to the court 357 days after surgery.

Tchamwa Tchatchoua served two seasons as Basketball Operations Video Assistant for the San Antonio Spurs, working with superstar Victor Wembanyama. He took part in the Spurs’ trip to the 2026 NBA Finals before deciding to return to his alma mater as an assistant coach. He will help bigs like fifth-year Caden Powell and junior Juslin Bodo Bodo.

General manager Jake Lindsey

Lindsey brings familiarity to two positions within Baylor men’s basketball. As the general manager, he will deal with managing the team’s roster, how it utilizes the transfer portal and the players’ Name, Image and Likeness. He also works as an assistant coach for Drew, fostering relationships with the team.

Lindsey was a one player in a long line of Baylor guards to make a living beyond the 3-point arc. He shot lights out as a junior in 2016-17, connecting on a career-best 40.4% from deep. His sharpshooting helped that Baylor team to reaching a No. 1 ranking for the first time in program history.

He medically retired before his senior campaign in 2018, becoming a graduate assistant for the Bears.

After playing under Drew for all four years of his collegiate career, Lindsey moved to the NBA to work for the Utah Jazz for three years. He served as a basketball operations intern and basketball operations assistant for his first two seasons before being promoted to the Jazz’s coordinator of collegiate scouting. He played a role throughout the scouting and draft process, contributing to pre-draft interviews and workouts as well as evaluating college prospects.

Lindsey spent the last four seasons with Grand Canyon as an assist under Scott Drew’s brother Bryce.

Lindsey comes from a family involved in basketball front offices. He started out as director of player personnel before moving up to assistant coach in 2023. He helped lead the Antelopes to the NCAA Tournament three times, highlighted by an upset victory over No. 5-seed Saint Mary’s in 2024.

Junior guard Isaac Williams

Williams broke out as a consistent rotational guard for Baylor last season. While many eyes were on Cameron Carr and Tounde Yessoufou, he was making an impact both as a starter and off the bench.

He averaged 10.4 points per game with 19 double-digit outings in his first season with the Bears, including a career-high 22 points against Arlington Baptist.

He began his sophomore season coming off the bench in 19 of the first 20 games he appeared in. Once the calendar turned to February, Williams found himself consistently in the starting lineup, starting his last 13 games.

Williams finds himself gearing up for a leadership role for the 2026-27 season after inking a deal to return to Baylor in March. He serves as a leader for a guard group that features the Mingo brothers and junior Libery transfer Brett Decker.

Junior guard Taliah Scott

Scott had been searching for her home throughout her collegiate career.

She played at Arkansas as a standout, leading the Razorbacks with 22.1 points per game. She then transferred to Auburn where she played in three games for the Tigers and put recorded 20.3 points a contest.

Scott found herself in the transfer portal for the second time in two seasons heading into the 2025-26 season. She ended up at Baylor under Collen. She did not slow down as a scorer with the Bears.

The Jacksonville native averaged 19.7 points in her first season in Waco, earning an All-Big 12 First Team selection and an All-American honorable mention. Scott proved to be the Baylor faithful that she is an elite scorer no matter what program she is with.

Over this past offseason, Scott made a decision she had not before as a collegiate athlete: She decided to stay. The guard finally found her home at Baylor.

Scott is now moving up from the reliable shooter to a team leader. She said she is not the most vocal leader but guides her teammates through her own example and fostering one-on-one connections.

Scott takes up more responsibility as Baylor faces a shift in its roster. The Bears relied on the leadership of Jana Van Gytenbeek, Darianna Littlepage-Buggs and Bella Fontleroy. Those three joined Baylor with Collen, and the group was the defining factor behind the program’s success over the past four years. It is now up to Scott to keep Baylor in the mix as a top team in the Big 12.

Fifth-year forward Kyla Abraham

Abraham did not light up the stat sheet in her fourth year at Baylor, averaging 4.1 points a game along with 3.8 rebounds while coming off the bench in every game she played last season.

While her numbers did not stand out, Abraham remained consistent. She shot 58.9% from the floor, leading the Bears, as well as tallying a block in 31 games. She also recorded a block in 20 straight games during the 2025-26 campaign, including a season-best four against Duke.

Abraham comes into the new season as the most experienced and longest-tenured player on Collen’s roster. With that experience comes the expectation to guide the incoming freshmen and transfers. Abraham is familiar with Collen’s system and can help the five newcomers assimilate into Baylor’s team culture.

The core of transfers include senior forward Reese Ross and junior forward Kate Koval. Ross, who transferred from Utah, and Koval, who transferred from LSU, present serious threats in the frontcourt for the Bears.

Ross recorded five double-doubles last season while Koval reached that feat seven times with the Tigers. Abraham’s rapport with Collen and how she runs the team allows her to help the new forwards reach another level at Baylor.

Men’s Basketball Roster		
No. 0 Elijah Williams	No. 7 Andre Iguodala II	No. 20 Maikcol Perez
No. 2 Brett Decker Jr.	No. 8 Isaac Celiscar	No. 21 Juslin Bodo Bodo
No. 3 Drew Perry	No. 10 Isaac Williams	No. 22 Tegra Makabu
No. 4 Kayden Mingo	No. 13 James Goodis	No. 44 Caden Powell
No. 5 Dylan Mingo	No. 15 Evan Chatman	No. 46 Mayo Soyoye

Women’s Basketball Roster		
No. 0 Taliah Scott	No. 8 Kayla Nelms	No. 20 Reese Ross
No. 1 Ines Goryanova	No. 11 Lorena Awou	No. 21 Marcayla Johnson
No. 3 Ella Brow	No. 12 Kyla Abraham	No. 35 Tianna Thompson
No. 4 Skylar Jones	No. 13 Kate Koval	No. 55 Trinity Turner

Thompson finds fit with Baylor as 3rd team

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

Through the process of visits, Baylor felt like the only right option for junior guard Tianna Thompson.

“I feel like on my visit, it was honestly like I had to say ‘yes,’ ” Thompson said. “You know you just have that feeling.”

She didn’t light up the stat sheet at ‘Ole Miss, averaging six points per game. But her 42% shooting from beyond the arc made her a desirable addition while she was in the transfer portal.

Thompson has had to learn a new locker room, a new system and a new team.

Summer and fall have been that learning period. Figuring out the team’s strategy and building relationships with the players she will be with for the season. Thompson has shown an eagerness to join a successful program after the Rebels failed to reach the Sweet 16 last season.

Thompson’s visit with head coach Nicki Collen and the team helped prove it was the right decision. Thompson came to Waco looking for a place to grow as an athlete and a person, and she found it with the Bears.

“I just knew that this was a place that I would be able to fit in on and off the court,” Thompson said.

The decision to mark a new chapter isn’t Thompson’s first. She spent her freshman year at hometown Georgia Tech as a top-100 recruit



Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics
FRESH START Junior guard Tianna Thompson runs down the court during practice.

coming out of The Galloway School in Atlanta. She appeared in 21 games, recording 4 points per game on 53.4% shooting before heading to Oxford, Mississippi.

Thompson arrived in Waco to a different environment, ready to contribute for the Bears as a multi-level scorer.

“She is a versatile guard with elite shot-making ability,” Collen said. “Tianna is a high-level 3-point shooter who can also score off the bounce. Her length lets her play the passing lanes and create offense

from defense.” Collen is also excited to get another impact player who can be a shining light for the program.

“Tianna is a strong student and will be an excellent representative of Baylor University in the Waco community,” Collen said.

Thompson has been a part of a team that shows an impressive work ethic and competitiveness in every practice. The competitiveness comes from a roster that includes five Power Five transfers looking for a fresh start, and they’re eager to compete.

“I think we’ve got a lot of hungry players,” Collen said. “We have players that have been productive, whether it was in major minutes or limited minutes at other places.”

Thompson is one of four transfers for the Bears this offseason. Thompson joins another SEC guard junior, Trinity Turner. The duo gives the Baylor backcourt two steady producers.

Combined with veteran senior guard Taliah Scott, the duo could make the Bears’ backcourt dangerous.

“They bring a fight and a dog that I feel like we didn’t have as much of last year,” Scott said. “Everybody that’s coming in is competitive; they want to win.”

That eagerness has shown up in practice. Thompson feels the Bears have shown toughness throughout the summer as they build toward the season.

“I feel like we worked very hard this summer,

and we’re all very like-minded,” Thompson said. “We’re putting in the work because we want to be really good.”

Thompson’s veteran teammates have helped her learn. She praised Scott for stepping up as a leader.

“She always makes sure that if I look a little confused about a drill or whatever, she always tells me the options,” Thompson said. “She helps me see things the way that they do it here.”

Scott’s leadership has helped Thompson ease into the team, but the next step is production on the court. Thompson will embrace whatever role with intensity.

“That’s what I’m really excited for, piecing the things together that we’ve been working on and seeing what my piece is,” Thompson said. “[It’s] just playing it with the best I can do, 100% effort, just giving it to the team.”

The Bears have embraced the acronym “DOG,” a mentality shared among the team. Thompson feels it reflects the Bears’ commitment to hard work and competition.

“Our acronym is DOG; we want to be dogs, and we have been working towards that,” Thompson said.

Thompson came to Waco to find a place to fit in and is now ready to discover exactly where she fits on this Baylor team.

“I think we’re going to have a really good year,” Thompson said. “I’m just really excited to be a part of that and contribute to this team.”

RIM PROTECTORS from B1

“I feel like [Bodo Bodo] has been through a lot, and we’re glad to have him back on the court,” Powell said. “He’s getting better every day, and he also helps me get better every day because we’re playing against each other.”

Powell and former Bear Michael Rataj were the only two manning the front court in a seven-player rotation. Rataj’s production was a drop-off from Powell’s, shooting 42.3% from the floor.

Head coach Scott Drew also brought in senior forward Evan Chatman, a glass-cleaning transfer from UAB. The forward is returning to Waco after spending his freshman and sophomore campaigns at McLennan Community College.

The Bears were 11th in defensive rebounds per game in the Big 12 last season. The team turned to senior forward Michael Rataj for help on the glass but still struggled with an average of 4.6

rebounds per contest. The frontcourt has bulked up during the offseason.

“The best thing is we’ve always had some good bigs,” Drew said. “But especially in practice, if you’ve got those shot blockers and that length the guards have to finish over, now you get in a game and they’re not surprised; they’re used to it.”

Drew will have the luxury of playing as big of a lineup as needed, which was not a real option last season. Baylor has both a pair of true centers and a pair of true power forwards in Chatman and junior Isaac Celiscar, one of the most exciting additions to the roster after earning All-Ivy Second Team recognition at Yale.

Celiscar and Chatman had nine rebounds and three blocks in the Bears exhibition win over preseason No. 1 Florida.



Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics
BREAK THROUGH Senior center Juslin Bodo Bodo warms up before Baylor basketball’s exhibition against Florida Sunday in Jacksonville, Florida.



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Yale transfer Celiscar is playing at his ‘dream school’

BENNETT PARKER
Sports Writer

Baylor’s magical 2021 March Madness run won over many across the country, one of whom is joining the Bears in 2026.

After two seasons with Yale, junior forward Isaac Celiscar is suiting up in the green and gold, ready to make an immediate impact.

“Growing up as a kid, Baylor was my dream school,” Celiscar said. “I was watching the Davion Mitchell and the Jared Butler and MaCio Teague team. And just growing up as a kid, looking at that on TV, like, ‘Wow, I really want to do that; I really want to be there.’”

Celiscar is finally there.

Watching the 2021 team isn’t the only reason he made his way to Waco. He is also following the

footsteps of guard Makai Mason, who played three seasons with Yale before capping off his collegiate career with the Bears in 2019.

“I talked to Makai Mason,” Celiscar said. “Before I made my decision, we talked a lot. ... He basically said that I’m going to play for a great program and a great coach and just trust my work, and I’ll be good at this level.”

Players recruiting players is nothing new to Scott Drew, who has built the famous “Culture of JOY” in his 24 years with the program.

“I know the Baylor players we’ve had have been our best recruiters,” Drew said. “That’s because they love Baylor, they love the community, they love their experience, and they want to see Baylor be successful, and that’s really neat.”

The NCAA championship

and high praise from Mason were not the only reasons Celiscar landed on Baylor in his transfer portal process. The faith-centered school offered value beyond the hardwood.

“The fact that it’s a Christian university [was important],” Celiscar said. “I don’t really get to share my faith a lot. But the way I get to just actively seek, actively share, I think that’s just a great part of why I’m here.”

The Yale transfer is a part of the equation in replacing Tounde Yessoufou, who had a stellar freshman campaign for the Bears last season, averaging 17.8 points and 5.9 rebounds with 12 20-point outings.

Celiscar’s 6-foot-6 frame is similar to Yessoufou’s, but there are differences in their game.

Yessoufou carried a heavy load for the Bears last season, but expectations will be lower for the transfer who will likely be battling for a starting spot.

In his sophomore year, Celiscar helped lead Yale to a first-place finish in the Ivy League while leading the conference in field goal percentage with a mark of 57.3, earning him Second Team All-Ivy honors. He recorded 13.2 points per game and 6.3 rebounds for the Bulldogs.

He may not bring the flash Yessoufou had at times, but Celiscar is a steady performer, bringing depth to the Bears, who seriously lacked depth last season.

“So far, we’ve really liked this group,” head coach Scott Drew said. “We have more depth than we had the last couple of years.”

Celiscar is a big part of the change. The transfer will offer versatility for the Bears. He can be either a playmaking small forward or a glass-cleaning power forward that can knock down a 3-pointer if needed.

Whether Celiscar starts or comes off the bench, he is a valuable piece on the fresh roster.

“Just being new to the team, being a new addition, I think I can help win and just get back on the winning streak and make it to the tournament and play Baylor basketball,” Celiscar said.

Drew continues to build a culture that still attracts some of the top talent from around the country. Celiscar is one of the many examples on the 2026-27 squad, bringing much-needed talent and experience to a promising roster.

Returner Williams embraces leadership role for new season

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

For some college athletes, the offseason brings uncertainty. The transfer portal has let athletes find new homes and opportunities, making it tough to decide where to go next.

But for junior guard Isaac Williams, there was never any uncertainty about where he was going.

After a successful first season at Baylor, Williams never doubted he would remain a Bear. Established relationships, experience and the chance to do something special with Baylor were enough to bring him back.

“For me, it was really a no-brainer,” Williams said. “I had no doubt that I wasn’t going to be a Baylor Bear.”

Williams enters the new season with a year of experience under his belt. Williams averaged 10.4 points and 3.3 assists per game, improving with each game.

He came to Waco behind a pair of experienced guards in Dan Skillings Jr. and Obi Agbim. He started last season fighting to see 20 minutes of playing time but found himself breaking 30 minutes in seven of Baylor’s last 11 games.

He now looks to take his experience to the next level.

“Just building on my confidence out there, being more of a leader because I have been here a year,” Williams said. “Just leading these guys, knowing the do’s and don’ts.”

Williams’ veteran experience could prove to be useful for a team with seven new transfers. Since arriving in Waco, Williams has noticed a common theme among the transfers: a craving for winning.

“They’re hungry,” Williams said. “They want to win. We compete out there. It gets physical.”

The competitiveness in practice is an encouraging sign of what the team could become. Williams and his teammates will need to build chemistry and an identity as they enter the season.

The new team had the opportunity to showcase their competitive spirit in the annual Vet Scrimmage, facing off against former Baylor players like VJ Edgecombe and Keyonte George.

The Bears will benefit from Williams’s return and the return of familiar teammates. Williams expressed his eagerness to play with fifth-year center Caden Powell and senior center Juslin Bodo Bodo, who redshirted.

Williams has a chance to build on last year’s

chemistry while commanding the offense with a healthy front court.

“I’m excited to see some people play that I didn’t really get to see play because they were hurt last year,” Williams said. “And obviously, Caden Powell is a great leader for our team, so I’m excited.”

The Bears will also have more depth at guard, with Williams and several transfers in the rotation. Williams said he trusts the talent on the floor and could be key to Baylor’s success.

“Isaac and Kayden [Mingo] have really stepped up as the true point guards,” sophomore guard Drew Perry said. “It’s been a leadership by community because we’re so deep.”

The all-in mentality could be a defining factor for Baylor as it looks to improve on last season. It struggled to work past its lack of depth with a seven-man rotation.

With veterans like Williams, new players and rotational depth, Baylor can make a leap from last season.

For Williams, becoming a dependable leader and helping his teammates adjust to life in Waco remain at the forefront of his goals.

The team’s goals with Williams at the helm remain high even for freshman guard Dylan Mingo.



Lariat file photo
IN ACTION Junior guard Isaac Williams drives down the lane against Texas Tech in January.

“Obviously, win the Big 12,” Mingo said “Win the national championship is just the main goal. We just got to keep trusting and just keep working as a team.”

Williams’ reluctance to leave the Bears may have been a no-brainer, but the season ahead will prove what the Bears can be. Whatever the season holds for the new roster, Williams is ready to lead every step of the way.

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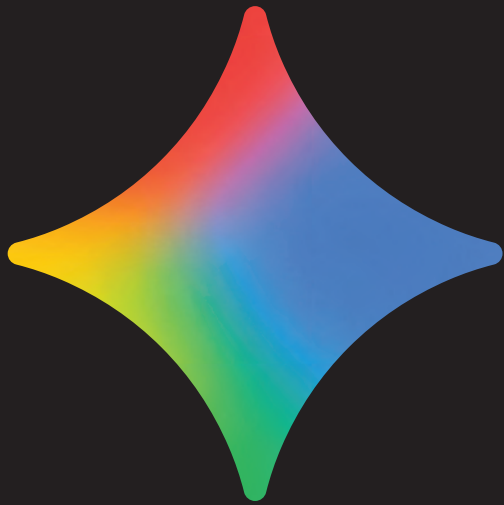
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