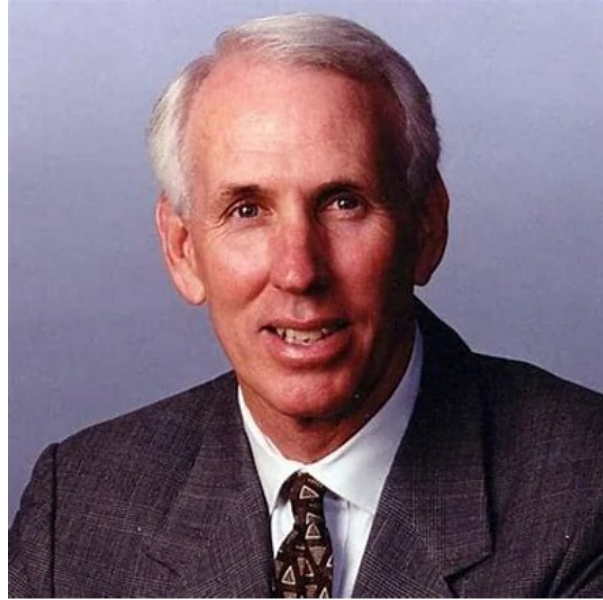




Texas A&M Chancellor John Sharp
...Retires as Great Ever



Top Aggie Coach RC Slocum
...Cancer Free at 80th Birthday

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Aggie Leader No Joke....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Had a Texas Aggie been a Rip Van Winkle wannabe in 2011, he (she) might hardly recognize the university upon awakening from slumber in 2025.

There might be understandable confusion. Is real time clearly in focus or is the awakening accompanied by swirling figmentary dream extensions from a heap of sleep? Surely the eye-rubbing Aggie isn't experiencing the world's biggest Aggie joke.

Hardly. Retiring Chancellor John Sharp spent his tenure wielding political capital, vision and energy so expertly that when he retires on June 30, he will leave behind the nation's largest higher education system of on-campus students. Texas A&M has excelled academically, athletically and in numerous other ways. And that's no joke.

Student body president, he also was a charter member of the anything-for-a-laugh crowd, where loose boundaries started. He was challenged to lead some fellow Aggies in rounding up a passel of armadillos, cover them with burnt orange paint and set them free in Austin.

Actually, the challenge was more specific. They were to be loosed in equal numbers from all corners of the field during halftime of the 1971 A&M-UT game, when the Longhorn band was ready for its halftime show. It was “mission accomplished” when 33 armadillos scurried through the ranks, setting the band asunder before the first formation was in . (Okay, one of the corners had an extra critter, so here’s fodder for an Aggie math joke....

Turns out that a prominent former A&M student planned the prank, so all John got was a wrist-slapping, perhaps with an “atta-boy wink” to boot.

R. C. Slocum--winningest and longest-tenured head football coach who led the Aggies to their last conference championship 26 years ago--and quite simply is as good as it gets--dared to remind Sharp of the prank recently on the chancellor’s weekly TV show, “Around Texas.”

It was all in good fun. The affable Slocum--given walking papers in 2002 despite compiling the Aggies’ best record of 123-47-2 and climbing to number six in wins nationally by coaches at major schools--stayed on as a special presidential assistant until January. Just turned 80, he is cancer free, closing out 53 years of service to Texas A&M. (First member of his family to graduate from college, he LOVES TEXAS A&M, where 15 members have graduated--so far.)...

Back to Sharp: He thinks at warp speed, mastering political maneuverings honed during Austin years. He’s as comfortable there as Roy Rogers was on Trigger. Visionary, hard-working, courageous, thick-skinned and doggedly committed, he has “bulls-eyed” numerous targets that arguably make him the most effective CEO in the history of higher education. The oft-quoted late Houston Oilers Coach “Bum” Phillips comes to mind. When asked if Earl Campbell was in a class by himself, “Bum” drawled, “If he ain’t, it don’t take long to call the roll.”

The Texas A&M System now includes eight universities with total enrollments exceeding 150,000. There are some 75,000 at College Station, more than double the number enrolled when Sharp took over.

Both dental and law schools were acquired, with the latter ranked 57th nationally five years later and now in the top 30. Sharp’s accomplishments are many, including his successful pursuit of an appropriation of more than \$1 billion for Texas A&M projects last year from the Texas Legislature.....

Sharp, 73, isn’t being fitted for a rocking chair. He has already volunteered to help his successor, fellow Aggie and current Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar, in all the ways that he can. (Maroon blood doesn’t change colors at retirement.)

Finally, I'm given the chance to expound on the correct pronunciation of "comptroller." It is exactly the same as the pronunciation of "controller." True, most comptrollers call themselves "KOMP-trollers." Superb "audience-reader" that he is, Sharp likely claimed he was "controller" in the presence of academicians, and KOMP-troller when addressing most Aggies....

My 30 years of "chancellorship" falls light years short of Sharp's. I was elected "most likely to remain left-handed" in high school, though, but never once trapped an armadillo....

Dr. Newbury, longtime university president, continues to speak and write. The Idle American, begun in 2003, appears weekly in newspapers throughout Texas. Contact: 817-447-3872. Email: newbury@speakerdoc.com. Audio version at www.speakerdoc.com.