

THE DOTHAN EAGLE

THE DAILY NEWSPAPER OF THE WIREGRASS

A MEDIA GENERAL NEWSPAPER
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SUNDAY

\$1.25

THE COLUMBIA SHUTTLE CREW



Dr. Laurel Clark
Mission Specialist



Ilan Ramon
Payload Specialist



Michael P. Anderson
Payload Commander



Rick Husband
Mission Commander



William C. McCool
Shuttle Pilot



Kalpana Chawla
Aerospace Engineer



David Brown
Mission Specialist

What went wrong?

Brickford Lero, left, and his 11-year-old son Hank visit the Astronauts Memorial in Titusville, Fla., to pay their respects to the crew of the space shuttle Columbia Saturday.



MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE

As nation mourns, officials look for answers

BY MARCIA DUNN
AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Investigators trying to figure out what destroyed space shuttle Columbia focused immediately on the possibility that its thermal tiles were damaged far more seriously than NASA realized by a piece of debris during liftoff.

Just a little over a minute into Columbia's launch on Jan. 16, a chunk of insulating foam peeled away from the external fuel tank and smacked into the left wing, which like the rest of the shuttle is covered with tiles to protect the ship from the extreme heat of re-entry into the atmosphere.

On Saturday, that same wing started exhibiting sensor failures and other problems 23 minutes before Columbia was scheduled to touch down. With just 16 minutes to go before landing, the shuttle disintegrated over Texas.

"As we look at that now in hindsight ... we can't discount that there might be a connection," shuttle manager Ron Dittmore said on Saturday, hours after the tragedy. "But we have to caution you and ourselves that we can't rush to judgment on it because there are a lot of things in this business that look like the smoking gun but turn out not even to be close."

Just a day earlier, NASA had

given assurances that the launch-day incident was absolutely no reason for concern. The space agency did an extensive engineering analysis that included a frame-by-frame examination of the launch video, and concluded that any damage to Columbia's thermal tiles would be minor.

If the liftoff damage was to blame, the shuttle and its crew of seven may well have been doomed from the very start of the mission.

Dittmore said there was nothing that the astronauts could have done in orbit to fix damaged thermal tiles and nothing that

Please see *Wrong*, 9-A

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Shuttle launches became routine. 10-A

What's next for NASA? 10-A

'Empty feeling' fills Alabamians with NASA ties. 1-B

A taxing decision

Wiregrass residents to decide fate of education tax proposals

BY PEGGY USSERY
Eagle Staff Writer

As Selma Street Elementary School physical education teacher Greg Watson counts off on his hand, a group of about 30 kindergartners jump up and down, counting with him.

"The first thing I'm concerned with is safety," Watson said a few minutes later.

It's more of a concern for Watson these days since he is the only adult in a gym or even a playground full of elementary students. When Dothan City Schools cut 110 positions in the 2001-2002 fiscal year, the physical education aide at Selma Street Elementary School was lost.

The school of 373 students lost its classroom teaching assistants as well. The elementary school has two Title I aides who are paid through federal funding.

Art and music are now taught once a month and technology support has been stretched thin.

"Even though we have experienced this I don't think the quality of education has changed," Selma Street Principal Mary Zeron said. "I would credit that to dedicated teachers."

But like other city and county school officials, Zeron feels the pinch of tight budgets and fears future cuts that might occur.

Please see *Decision*, 3-A

Officials pinning hopes on voters

BY PEGGY USSERY
Eagle Staff Writer

The projections are bleak at best. Descriptions like "meltdown" and "unmitigated disaster" have been used to explain the financial crisis that could occur in 2004.

There are conflicting reports for educators on the severity of the predicted budget crisis. Figures from a 5-percent to a 10-percent budget cut have been used in an attempt to put a face on a financial monster that may or may not exist.

"There are no scenarios I've seen that leave us unscathed," Dothan City

Schools Superintendent Leon Hobbs said. "We will be touched by a state reduction, and at some point the board will have to make a decision on what cuts to make."

Dothan City and Houston County school officials are putting their hopes on the Feb. 4 special election. Tuesday voters will decide whether or not they want to pay either an additional 5-mill property tax or a half-percent sales tax. Or, they could vote both options down.

"If they both fail then the school systems are going to have some serious

Please see *Voters*, 8-A

EDITORIAL: YES TO A 5-MILL HIKE ... 4-A

FIND OUT HOW AREA RESIDENTS FEEL ... 6-A

ISSUE DIVIDES BUSINESS COMMUNITY ... 6-A

THE PRICE OF INCREASE

On Feb. 4 Houston County voters will have a chance to approve or disapprove either a half-cent sales tax increase or a 5-mill property tax increase. Voters can approve both or either increase or disapprove both.

With a 5 mill property tax increase...

FIRST, WHAT'S A MILL?

A mill is equal to \$1 on every \$1,000 of a property's assessed value. In Alabama, residential property is taxed on 10% of a property's appraised value. For example, a resident who owns a home valued at \$100,000 would be taxed for only \$10,000 of the property's value.

FIGURING PROPERTY TAXES WITH A 5-MILL INCREASE

Property taxes are based on your home's assessed value
Appraised Home Value X 10% = Assessed Home Value
Assessed Home Value X Millage Rate = Property Taxes You Pay
(Expressed in decimals, a mill should show a decimal point plus three digits to the right)

EXAMPLE:

Your Home is Appraised At **\$100,000**
(Appraised Home Value X 10% = Assessed Home Value)
\$100,000 X .10 = \$10,000
(Assessed Home Value X Millage Rate = Property Taxes You Pay)
Dothan's Current City Millage Rate is **.31 (or .031)**
\$10,000 X .031 = \$310 in property taxes



A 5-mill increase in property taxes would make Dothan's millage rate **36** (or .036)

So, with a \$10,000 assessed home value ...

\$10,000 X .036 = \$360 in property taxes

A home valued at \$100,000 would pay an additional \$50 per year in property taxes with a 5-mill increase.

With a half-cent sales tax increase...

Dothan's current sales tax is 8 cents for every dollar — your \$1 cheeseburger actually costs you \$1.08. A half-cent sales tax increase would make 8.5 cents for every dollar — rounded up, that cheeseburger will cost you \$1.09.



A trip to the grocery store.

A family of four spends **\$247.33** at the grocery store before sales tax is added

With the current 8 cents sales tax, **add \$19.78**

Which brings your total to **\$267.11**

With a half-cent sales tax increase (8.5 cents total), **add \$21.02**

Which makes your total **\$268.35**

A YEARLY EXAMPLE

A family of four, with both parents working, nets **\$50,000** in one year.

Of that \$50,000, **\$28,500** was spent on taxable goods and services.

With the current 8 cent sales tax, that family would have spent **\$2,280** in sales tax.

With a half-cent sales tax increase (making sales tax 8.5 cents per \$1), they would have spent **\$2,422.50** in sales tax that year.

EAGLE GRAPHIC

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