

Chet Edwards' congressional papers unveiled at Baylor | Wacotrib.com 2/15/12 9:22 AM

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Baylor University is preserving two decades of congressional history donated by Waco's former U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards.

During his congressional career from 1990 to 2011, the Democratic lawmaker saved thousands of emails and letters from constituents, as well as speeches, campaign fliers and official documents on everything from the Branch Davidian siege to Fort Hood's expansion.



Photo by Rod Aydelotte / Waco Tribune-Herald

The archives include a tabletop model of L-3 Communication's Sophia jet-borne telescope and a photo he took of the burning Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

They also include documents from his years as a state senator from 1983-89.

"Our papers belong at Baylor, in Waco and McLennan County, because if not for this community, I wouldn't have had the honor to represent the families of Central Texas," Edwards said during a media event Tuesday at Baylor's W.R. Poage Legislative Library.

Edwards is at Baylor for two weeks to teach three classes, part of his new job as Baylor's

W.R. Poage distinguished chair for public service.

Edwards said he was honored to be able to house his archives next to those of Poage, a predecessor as Waco's congressman.

"Bob Poage was a hero to me," he said. "This will always be Bob Poage's district."

The Poage library will spend the next two years or so archiving 218 boxes of Edwards papers and 30 boxes of physical artifacts to make them more accessible to researchers.

Library director Ben Rogers said the archives would have taken up much more space, but much of the material Edwards donated is digital.

"In some ways, the digital records are more challenging," Rogers said, noting that, unlike paper, electronic files can become obsolete and must be occasionally transferred to new media.

Rogers said many of the paper archives also will be digitized and made available online.

The website for the collection is www.baylor.edu/lib/poage/edwards.

The archives will be valuable to historians who want to know about the Edwards era in Central Texas, Rogers said.

"There's no end of topics people might want to investigate," he said. "People don't realize all you can get from a congressional collection. There's a lot more than you can get from Google."

Edwards said he hopes the collection can inspire young people to enter politics. "I hope that young people might learn that public service can still be a noble calling," he said. Edwards added that he enjoys teaching public service-related classes at Baylor. "So far, there have been no reports of head injuries from students falling asleep in the three classes I have taught," he quipped.