

Merrill tops Phillips for SGA presidency

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Editor

Merrill drew the line, and a majority of University students followed. Merrill became the sixth incumbent in SGA history to become president when he defeated Machine-endorsed David "Buck" Phillips 2,492-1,531 in Tuesday's presidential run-off.

The junior political science major from Heflin, who trailed Phillips by 153 votes following the Jan. 30 general election, won the record-setting run-off by 110 votes. The 4,874 ballots cast in Tuesday's race was the most ever in a SGA run-off.

BUT WHEN SGA Election Committee Chairman Jim Bercaw announced the results at 9:15 p.m. in the Ferguson Ballroom, Merrill was nowhere to be found.

He had just finished a church league basketball game.

"We won the ballgame by three points," he told a crowd of supporters after he and his wife Cindy arrived 20 minutes later. "It's just been a good day for me all the way around."

For Phillips, however, the day was not as good.

"WE RAN a clean, hard race, and there's a winner in every one," said Phillips, a junior in the College of

Commerce and Business Administration. "This will just give me a chance to get back to my studies, hunting and fishing."

"The cost to win is high. The cost of losing is even higher, but we will survive."

Phillips said he was surprised by the outcome because he "had been so optimistic."

Merrill was surprised, too.

"IT'S HARD to believe," said Merrill, who was backed by the Alabama Student Party. "I was expecting it to be close. I thought it might be decided by as few as 10 votes. I'm pleased that it turned out the way it did."

"I thought it was going to be flip and coin and see who wins."

ASP Executive Director Richard Nix said the party was "taken seriously" because of independent voter turnout in both SGA elections. "That means something," he said.

ASP member Scott Sims, who served as Merrill's campaign manager, said the run-off was "a good election because of the tremendous turnout."

PARTY Chairman Bob Schraeder said the group "won a great victory tonight" with the election of Merrill and two ASP-backed candidates in SGA senate run-off elections.

In the New College run-off, Pat Byington defeated Anne Compton, 29-18. Richard Stringer beat Jesse Vogtle 132-110 to become the Law School's senator.

But Nix called the evening's returns "a small victory" because Machine-endorsed candidates hold 40 of 50 seats in the SGA senate.

Merrill says that imbalance in the senate may limit his effectiveness.

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Photo by Scott Dulaney

Supporters of John Merrill celebrate election results in Ferguson Ballroom Tuesday night following a bitterly fought presidential campaign.

Election



John Merrill (left) receives congratulations from SGA adviser Melford Espey.

Photo by Scott Dulaney

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"I DON'T know how much we'll be able to accomplish because of the way things have gone," he said. "It'll be hard to get things done that I want to do. The first thing is constitutional revision, but that may be difficult."

He said a "mini athletic department" to fund sports clubs is possible because "both sides want to work on that."

Merrill, who based his campaign on "drawing the line" against the select coalition of fraternities and sororities called the Machine, said he was glad "the student body has truly spoken."

"We have the potential to get as many students involved in the student government as want to," he said. "But I'm not against the greeks."

Merrill takes office Thursday during the annual SGA banquet.