

State

New judges could lessen backlog of 3,200 cases on appeal

Senate delays debate on jurisdiction of civil courts

AUSTIN — The Senate debated more than half an hour Tuesday on implementation of a plan giving the state's 14 Civil Appeals Courts jurisdiction over criminal cases, then postponed further action until Monday in a dispute over the number of new judges and how they would be assigned.

The Senate first defeated 20-10 a motion by Sen. Chet Brooks, D-Pasadena, to postpone further work on the bill until next week. But stalling tactics by Sen. Lloyd Doggett, D-Austin, and the prospects of prolonged debate on a series of amendments apparently convinced the senators to change their minds, and five minutes later they voted 29-1 to delay further debate until Monday.

"There were questions about the addition of judges in Amarillo and Fort Worth, and Sen. (Tati) Santiesteban raised a question about adding a judge in El Paso," said Sen. Ray Farabee, D-Wichita Falls, sponsor of the bill.

"Because of these inquiries, it was my feeling the Senate could best process this bill Monday rather than on this day."

Farabee's bill would add 21 new judges to the existing 14 courts of civil appeals to expedite handling of criminal cases. Currently, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals is the only appellate court for criminal cases, and it has a backlog of four years with 3,200 cases waiting to be heard.

Farabee initially proposed that 1,400 of those pending cases be distributed among the 14 intermediate level appellate

courts after Sept. 1 to help erase the backlog, but the Senate approved 16-14 an amendment by Sen. Jack Ogg, D-Houston, leaving all 3,200 pending cases before the existing Court of Criminal Appeals.

Doggett, who has clashed frequently with Gov. Bill Clements concerning appointments, attempted to amend the bill to have the three new judges for the 3rd Court of Civil Appeals in Austin elected rather than appointed by the governor.

Senators rejected that proposal 16-14, and Doggett retaliated with a lengthy series of questions about another proposal by Sen. E. L. Short, D-Tahoka, to add a fourth judge to the Amarillo appellate court.

Short contended a fourth judge would be beneficial to the

Amarillo court, even though state law requires the courts to sit in panels of three judges.

"What would the fourth judge do while the other three are meeting?" Doggett asked.

"I guess he could go fishing. If we get some rain we have some mudcats up there," Short replied.

The Senate earlier approved and sent to the House a bill by Brooks removing a current \$5 million per biennium ceiling on spending for educational programs for gifted and talented students, and requiring that program to be included in the general appropriations bill rather than financed through special legislation.

Police grill two in gold coin scam

HOUSTON — A business seeking loans in exchange for quality copies of the South African gold Krugerrands, worth \$558 apiece, has been operating for 18 months and has bilked banks, jewelry stores and coin shops in at least four Texas cities, investigators say.

Houston Police Detective J.C. Davis said an Amarillo man arrested in Houston and charged with theft in the case is believed to have distributed 100 to 1,000 of the counterfeit coins a week.

A Secret Service agent said the Tascosa National Bank in Amarillo authorized a \$270,000 loan backed by the fake coins.

In Lubbock, as many as 300 of the bogus Krugerrands could be afloat, Lubbock County District Attorney John Montford said.

Evidence of the illegal activity has also turned up in Dallas.

The coins attracting all the attention are filled with lead and coated with 22-karat gold. The ones Davis has seen cost about \$60 to \$100 apiece to mint, he said.

"I've never seen any (fake coins) this good," he said. "They are good copies. The information we have is that one of the dies they use to stamp these things out with is from South Africa."

The Krugerrand is minted and distributed by the South African government.

Davis disclosed Monday that Sidney James Heard, 39, a "swap shop" owner from Amarillo, and another man were arrested Feb. 18 in Houston after a coin dealer tipped police to an unusually good Krugerrand sale being offered him.

Heard, who Davis called a "middle man" in the operation, was charged with two counts of theft and one count of possessing cocaine after the jeweler purchased the fake coins from him at the Chemical Bank & Trust Co.

A Houston man who acted as a broker in the deal was arrested but not charged, Davis said.

Hunt family under SEC investigation

DALLAS — Six members of the wealthy Hunt family have filed suit against the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, arguing the SEC overstepped its authority in issuing a subpoena of Hunt-related loan records at First National Bank in Dallas.

The suit, which seeks to overturn the subpoena, contains the first formal acknowledgment by the Hunts that they have been under SEC investigation.

The investigation was ordered against Nelson Bunker Hunt, W. Herbert Hunt and Bache Group Inc. in April, eight days after the silver market crash that saw the price of silver drop from a high of \$52.20 to a low of \$10.80 in three months.

The crash left the Hunts about \$1.7 billion in debt and instigated a stock market panic.

The SEC subpoena asks for "all contemplated, requested, proposed or executed loans, advances, guarantees, extensions of credit or other forms of credit extended or arranged by the bank, directly or indirectly in amounts greater than \$250,000, to or for the benefit of the Hunts," after July 1, 1979. It was issued to First International Bancshares, the holding company which owns First National Bank.

Family members included in the subpoena and named in the petition to quash it are Nelson Hunt, W. Herbert Hunt, Lamar Hunt, Houston B. Hunt, Douglas H. Hunt and Albert Huddelston, an in-law.

In the suit, which was filed Monday, the family charges the records requested include important information about their current and anticipated oil and gas holdings that could be used by companies bidding against the family.

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