

Victims want lab better system

United Press International
HOUSTON — A rape victim, who for 15 months was not told about her assailant's confession to the crime, was among several witnesses who urged President Reagan's Task Force on Victims of Crime to recommend ways to improve the criminal justice system's responsiveness to victims.

The group, chaired by Lois Herrington, a former Oakland, Calif., prosecutor and wife of Navy secretary John Herrington, began the last of six national hearings in Houston Tuesday. It planned to conclude the hearings Wednesday.

"People are victimized in their homes or on the street and then the more insidious victimization begins when the criminal justice system starts to grind away at them," Mrs. Herrington said. "This indifference to the suffering of the innocent must stop. We must restore a balance to a system which tries to be both responsive and fair but often is neither."

"When we take the justice out of the criminal justice system we leave behind a system which serves only the criminal."

The eight-member panel, appointed by Reagan in April and given a \$150,000 budget, plans to submit a report to Reagan and Attorney General William French Smith by the end of the year, Herrington said.

The first witness Tuesday was Ann Keith, 44, of San Antonio, who blamed an insensitive justice system for ruining her life. She said a man armed with a pistol broke into her Austin home Dec. 31, 1978, and raped her.

Although the criminal remains free, Keith said she has suffered psychiatric trauma, paid \$95 an hour to a psychiatrist for three years of sporadic sessions, and lost more than \$150,000 in income when she could not continue her land sales job.

Keith, who now works as a sculptor and writer, said the sheriff's deputies who investigated the case were unsympathetic. And when the Travis County district attorney's office obtained a confession from her assailant, she said, prosecutors did not tell her for 15 months.

When she asked to file charges, Keith said she was told the rapist was a "born-again Christian who had suffered enough."

Rosemary Lehberg, assistant Travis County district attorney, denied describing the alleged rapist in those terms and said Keith did not understand the handling of her case, partly because it was unusual.

Lehberg said the man, who was indicted in the case last week, first confessed in church and church members contacted police. She said the suspect still could receive 99 years if convicted on charge of burglary with intent to commit rape.

However, Lehberg admitted, she did not immediately tell Keith about the suspect's confession.

"I have spent more of my time working with rape victims — victims of sexual assault — and I'm more sympathetic with rape victims than anybody I know," Lehberg said.

Travis County District Attorney Ronald Earle said in a telephone interview following the hearing: "This case, to say the least, was a most unusual case. Sure it could have been handled a lot differently. We do make mistakes. We did not contact her as quickly as we should have."

Keith said she did win a damage suit against her landlord for giving out her key to a maintenance man and that she was pleased to have set a precedent that might aid other crime victims.

The task force Wednesday was scheduled to discuss proposed recommendations for improving society's responsiveness to crime victims.

Texaco refinery cleanup sought

United Press International
PORT ARTHUR — Investigators for three families that filed lawsuits totaling \$45 million in damages against Texaco Inc. want to clean up the portion of the refinery where a blast last week killed five workers and injured eight others.

However, tons of powdery

catalyst must be removed from a cracking unit before the investigation can begin to determine why a pipe ruptured, officials said Tuesday.

Texaco spokesman Charles Rentz said cleanup had been postponed until this week to allow the catalyst to cool. However, a federal judge

ordered that the site where evidence is contained should not be disturbed.

Tom Swearingen, attorney for three families who filed suit against Texaco, said the area where a 78-inch pipe failed last Wednesday is covered with 6 inches of catalyst. The bolts and debris under the powder may

indicate the cause of the pipe failure.

Swearingen represents the families of Jessie Dennis Jr., 34; Herman Hope, 35; and Frederick Rhine, 39, all of Port Arthur. Each family filed suit for \$15 million, charging Texaco had not properly maintained the unit and had failed to protect

the men working around it. Also killed were Charles Chonate, 33, of Netherland, and Vernon J. Cole, 56, of Groves.

Rentz said the unit, built in 1943, contained 400 to 450 tons of the catalyst, which helped break down crude oil into gasoline and other petroleum products.

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Horne cancels benefit shows

United Press International
DALLAS — There's no business like show business, unless it's the business of politics, and in that case singer Lena Horne said the show won't go on.

Horne, claiming she was caught in a political crossfire, Tuesday canceled six performances at the city-owned Majestic Theater next January.

The curtain was raised on the brouhaha when Dallas City Councilwoman Elsie Faye Heggins last month criticized sponsors of "Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music" for charging opening night prices she said amounted to economic discrimination.

Heggins, a black, said tickets priced from \$50 to \$600 would force most blacks to sit in the balcony as they did at the theater before integration.

Horne Tuesday accused Heggins of using the singer's name to draw national attention to a local issue.

Tom Hughes, director of opening night activities, said all 227 \$600 tickets for the benefit performance had sold, and sales of other tickets have been brisk.

"I hope there's just been nothing more than a breakdown in communications," said Hughes of continuing negotiations to get Horne to reconsider.

"I do not want to be caught in the middle of a local dispute and used as a pawn or symbol by either side," Horne said, adding that her manager had determined no local black organizations had been invited to the opening and only a "select few" black members of multi-racial organizations had been invited.

"More important, and the reason I cannot blindly support the councilwoman's allegations, is that neither she nor the theater asked me how I felt about the issue," Horne said.

"This was to have been a charitable event. Charity is something which should be supported by the people who can afford it in the true name of charity, regardless of their color."

The show was scheduled to begin Jan. 18, with the opening night to benefit the renovation of the theater and other arts projects.

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Regular Meeting to follow at 7:30 Harrington 110

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