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Car rates rising Chairman: Texans not hurt

AUSTIN (AP) — State Board of Insurance Chairman Lyndon Olson, stung by criticism from Attorney General Jim Mattox, said Wednesday a staff-proposed 9.8 percent increase in auto insurance rates would have Texans paying no more than they paid two years ago.

Olson stressed to the annual hearing on motor vehicle insurance that the board had approved decreases in premiums the past two years — 3.8 percent for 1985 and 5.1 percent for the current year.

"Everybody tries to take the credit, but it was this board that gave those decreases," said Olson. "If we should decide to accept the staff recommendation that would mean people will be roughly paying what they did two years ago."

The insurance industry has recommended a statewide increase of 19.7 percent or about \$550 million in additional premiums.

Olson said the three-member board will not decide on the 1987 rate, effective next April 1, until later.

Olson also warned that the auto insurance may be "the next crisis" in the Texas insurance industry.

"Hopefully, the crisis in general liability insurance is beginning to work itself out," Olson said. "I'm concerned that two or three years from now the next crisis will be in auto insurance."

"This board is not going to allow the consumer to be kicked around but at the same time we want to keep the companies solvent."

Olson commented after Gaylon Daniel, board actuary, said that about 60 percent of the companies now selling auto insurance in Texas are selling policies at lower prices than the maximum rates set by the board.

Mattox told a news conference Tuesday that the board should not grant any increase in auto insurance, because the companies could still make a profit if premiums were cut 9 percent for next year.

"The request by insurance companies for a 19.7 percent increase is 'unconscionable,'" Mattox said.

Mattox said insurance rates should be lowered because most drivers are wearing seatbelts and the drinking age has been raised from 17 to 21, resulting in a smaller traffic toll.

Daniel said the staff recommendation was based on an estimate of 65 percent compliance with the state's

"If we . . . accept the staff recommendation that would mean people will be roughly paying what they did two years ago."

— Lyndon Olson, insurance chairman

mandatory seat belt use law, compared with an estimate of 15 percent use before the law went into effect last year.

He said the staff recommendation allowed a 3 percent reduction because teen-age drivers can no longer legally buy liquor.

He said much of the increased cost of insurance was caused by mounting bodily injury claim awards and also an increase in the number of claims filed.

Olson said the increase in bodily insurance coverage would have been far greater if the staff had not given credit for use of seat belts.

Lewis' advice to freshmen: 'Keep your sense of humor'

AUSTIN (AP) — Predicting that tough budget decisions await them, House Speaker Gib Lewis told new state legislators Wednesday they should rely on straight talk and a sense of humor to succeed.

It also helps not to have too high an opinion of oneself, he suggested.

Lewis told the orientation session for newly elected members of the Legislature, "Don't take yourself too seriously. And don't take anybody else too seriously, I might add."

"Probably you think you're the most important person in the world because you just got elected. Let me assure you, there's 150 prima donnas down here (in the House) and there's 31 supreme prima donnas over in the Senate."

Lewis, who hopes to be elected House leader for a third time when the Legislature convenes next month, noted that Texas still faces a staggering financial crisis despite two special sessions this year which cut spending \$750 million and raised taxes \$860 million.

Comptroller Bob Bullock has predicted that lawmakers will face a \$1 billion deficit for the rest of the current fiscal year and the possibility of a \$4 billion shortfall for 1988-89.

"It's going to be a difficult time. We're going to have

some shortfalls in our budget that we are not looking forward to," Lewis said.

He said lawmakers must keep their credibility with one another, the press and the public.

"Always shoot straight," Lewis said. "Don't ever distort any facts on the House floor. That is the big no-no. Don't be afraid to say, 'I don't know.' I think I've gotten in more trouble by trying to answer a question that I didn't know the answer to than on any other thing I've encountered."

Lewis said it is important to remember that each lawmaker is trying to represent those who elected them.

"In the heat of the legislative battle, be sure to remember to keep your cool," he said. "Always realize that (the other) person is expressing a viewpoint in many cases of their constituency back home or their own personal beliefs."

The speaker also suggested prudence should a lawmaker visit an Austin watering hole.

"If you embarrass yourself, you embarrass at the same time those people who elected you," he said. "You are an elected official of the state of Texas, and you have to present that image at all times. Be sure it is an image you'd be proud of."

In Advance

Panel to discuss African agriculture

A panel discussion on African agricultural and industrial development titled "Africa: Facing the 21st Century" will be held at 8:30 tonight in 301 Rudder.

Two Texas A&M professors and two Nigerian graduate students will each present 15-minute talks. Dr. Donald Farris, agricultural economics professor, will speak on economic policy in African livestock marketing.

Dr. Wesley Peterson, assistant professor of agricultural econom-

CS parks to sponsor Christmas events

The College Station Parks and Recreation Department and Lester's will sponsor a series of events to start off the Christmas season.

"Christmas in the Park" includes a Christmas light display every night during December from 6 to 10 p.m. The display can be seen at College Station Central Park, off the East Bypass at 1000 Kenneth Tap Road.

The other events scheduled at Central Park include:

- Stage Center performing a Christmas play at 7:30 p.m.
- The A&M Central High School Choir will sing Christmas carols at 7 p.m.
- A variety of entertainment scheduled for Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. Visitors can view the manger scene, and enjoy snacks.

Seminar hosts former shuttle astronaut

Former shuttle astronaut Dr. Bill Thornton will discuss the role of bioengineers in space in the MSC Main Ballroom at 1 p.m. today.

Thornton, scientist and astronaut with NASA, will lecture on the role of medicine and engineering in space and the adaptability of human bodies in space.

Thornton developed the shuttle treadmill for in-flight exercise used by shuttle astronauts and holds 35 patents on space related inventions.

Also, Dr. Wendell Mendell, a planetary scientist with NASA,

will discuss engineering problems that occur during space flight.

Mendell is currently working with NASA's Solar System Exploration Division to develop plans for future lunar missions that result in the building of a manned lunar base.

Carole Baas, a graduate engineering student and chairman of the event, said the program is designed to show numerous areas of bioengineering and the close relationship between biology and engineering in space.

Aetna to pay for cut hand

AUSTIN (AP) — A state court has ruled that an insurance company must pay workers' compensation benefits to an Austin man who injured his hand in a bus accident in a College Station area.

Aetna Casualty and Surety said Andrew E. Orton was injured when a glass shattered in his hand at a Ramada Inn on 1983. But the state's Industrial Accident Board said he was not.

Aetna took the case to court. District Judge William L. Georgetown backed the Industrial Accident Board decision.

The 3rd Court of Appeals in Austin on Wednesday agreed with the decision that Orton was injured at the Ramada Inn because he was preparing for work.

Orton, national sales manager for Texas Nuclear Corp. of Dallas, was in Bryan for a business conference at Texas A&M. He was hurrying to get ready for the conference when the glass shattered from his hand and shattered

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