

Texas A&M The Battalion

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Private prison bill approved by Clements

AUSTIN (AP) — Legislation to allow private construction and operation of prisons in Texas was signed into law Tuesday by Gov. Bill Clements, who said it could help relieve overcrowding in the state prison system.

Clements and Al Hughes, chairman of the state Board of Corrections, said the law is a big step toward solving the crowding problems which repeatedly have forced the Texas Department of Corrections to stop admitting new inmates this year.

The new law allows the TDC to contract with private companies and counties for construction and operation of minimum- and medium-security prisons.

Clements said facilities built under this plan must meet all state standards, as well as court-ordered requirements of the long-standing lawsuit against the prison system.

The state prisons currently hold about 38,000 inmates. A court-ordered population ceiling has forced TDC officials to stop accepting new prisoners on 11 occasions this year.

Hughes said he hopes bids can be obtained by Aug. 31 for construction of up to 2,000 new prison beds.

"August is the outside date," he said. "We're going to try to beat that date."

Sen. Ray Farabee, D-Wichita Falls, the bill's sponsor, said that while the new law won't solve all the crowding problems, it should help.

"It's not an answer, but it is an alternative and one of the tools that I think will be helpful to meet the increasing need for corrections facilities in the state of Texas," Farabee said.

Hughes said a number of counties have voiced interest in the program.

"We anticipate the majority of them will be around urban areas," he said, but rural areas aren't being ruled out.

Hughes said the plan is "somewhat of an experiment," since it could make Texas the leader in contracting to private entities the operation of prisons.

The 2,000 beds that could be built would be "probably close to the total amount of privatization of all other states combined," Hughes said.

The guards and other personnel would be private employees, with state corrections officials assigned to each new prison to keep tabs on the operations.

"There will be TDC employees in every facility monitoring the operation of the facility," Hughes said, adding that he expects no trouble using private employees to staff the new prisons.

"It's done . . . in other states at this time," he said. "It's done here in the state for federal facilities. We think the problems are not insurmountable. Obviously, you have liability problems, but they can be insured around."

On another issue, Clements said he now opposes the idea of asking voters to approve a tax increase that would be dedicated to prison funding. It's the job of lawmakers to raise money for such things, the governor said.

"I think the Legislature has the primary responsibility," Clements said. "We need to earn our pay and make the decisions that will answer these questions. We are in session, so let's answer the question."

Asked why he backed away from earlier support of a prison tax referendum, Clements said, "I just gave it some considerable thought that during this regular (legislative) session and with the prospect of some special sessions that we have a job to do and we need to earn our pay."

Countries question rise in radiation

BONN, West Germany (AP) — West Germany, which was in the path of Chernobyl radiation, said Tuesday it is asking Moscow whether higher radioactivity levels detected in Europe last month were caused by another Soviet nuclear accident.

West Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and France confirmed Tuesday that varying increases in atmospheric radiation were recorded in March, but reported no damage or injuries. Kremlin officials denied the Soviet Union was the source.

The Soviets were criticized for a delay of nearly three days in reporting the explosion and fire last April at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the Ukraine. It killed 31 people and spewed an invisible cloud of radiation over Europe that eventually worked its way around the world.

Officials in Bonn said unusual levels of the radioactive element iodine 131 and four to five times the normal amounts of xenon gas were measured in West Germany between March 9 and March 15.

Environment Ministry spokeswoman Claudia Conrad said the radiation posed no health threat, but the government asked the Soviet Union for further information.

"The experts are all saying it was almost certainly a nuclear power accident," Heinz-Joerg Haury, a spokesman for the government-financed Institute for Radioactivity and Environmental Research in Munich, told the Associated Press.

A Western diplomatic source in Moscow said Tuesday that the Soviets were asked about a possible radiation leak after some Scandinavian countries registered an increase in emissions last month. The source, who spoke on condition he not be further identified, said the Soviets denied any such leak.

The source said it was unlikely a nuclear power plant accident had occurred, since it would have released many radioactive isotopes, not just iodine 131.

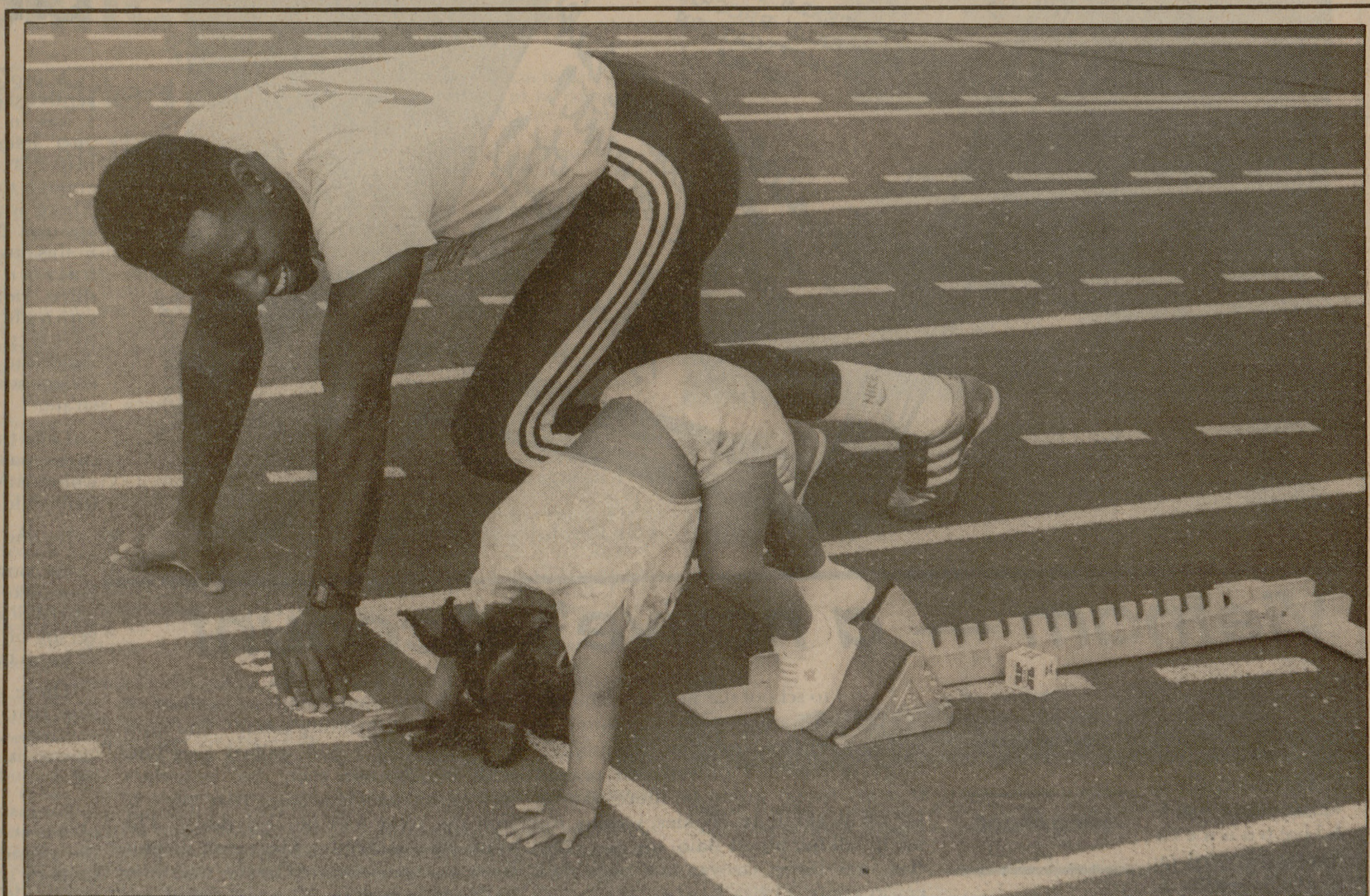


Photo by Andria P. Goldwire

On Your Mark . . .

Stanley Kerr, a member of the Texas A&M track team, gives his 2-year-old niece, Tiffany Allen, lessons on how to come out of the start-

ing blocks. Allen was visiting the 19-year-old agricultural education major at track practice.

Student Publications Board chooses editors for *Battalion*, 1988 Aggieland

By Robert Morris
Staff Writer

Senior journalism major Sondra Pickard was nominated as editor for *The Battalion* for the summer and fall semesters, and junior accounting major Joanie Pate was nominated as editor of the 1988 Aggieland by the Student Publications Board Tuesday afternoon.

Both nominations must be approved by Provost Donald McDonald.

The board delayed its nomination for editor of the video yearbook for two weeks in hopes of attracting more applicants.

Pickard, who has worked for *The Battalion* for about two years as staff writer, senior staff writer and assistant city editor, was a unanimous choice for both semesters.

Pate's experience includes acting as assistant section editor for classes

for the 1986 Aggieland and classes editor for the 1987 edition.

Both Pickard and Pate said they feel their respective publications are successful as they are now, but some changes will probably occur.

"Overall, I'm pleased with *The Battalion* now; I'm not looking to make any sweeping changes," Pickard said. "However, there are a few adjustments I would like to make in the area I am familiar with (city and campus coverage)."

Part of that adjustment may be the inclusion of non-journalism majors as staff writers — an occurrence which in principle is now done but in reality rarely occurs, she said.

Pickard also hopes for improvement in coverage of campus organizations and events, but tempers that hope with the knowledge that *The Battalion* is a professional



Sondra Pickard

newspaper and not a campus public relations tool.

Tentatively, applications will be accepted for *The Battalion* staff positions within the next two weeks.

Pate feels the Aggieland is suc-



Joanie Pate

cessful as is and sees the need for change to be minimal.

"There is no need for structural changes," she said, "but possibly a few administrative changes will be made."

Mattox opinion nixes Granada-TAES project

By Carolyn Garcia
Staff Writer

Attorney General Jim Mattox has ruled that a business partly owned by a member of the Texas A&M Board of Regents may not enter into a proposed research project with the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

Mattox said there would be a conflict of interest if Granada Development Corp., partially owned by board Chairman David Eller, entered into an agreement with the experiment station.

The ruling followed an A&M request that Mattox review the interpretation of a case that set the precedent for contractual conflict-of-interest questions in Texas.

Eller said A&M requested the review to clarify the ruling.

"The reason (A&M) requested it was to get a ruling," he said. "The verbal interpretation of the ruling left many questions. I brought it up to get the issue on the table."

Eller, who has been giving A&M money since 1977 in the form of research grants and contracts, said that expanding technology and research is the only way A&M will be able to compete in the world market.

The Granada Genetics building, which is scheduled for completion this summer, will not be owned by Granada Corp., but leased through a Houston developer.

"This is not uncommon," he said.

" . . . Most of the time the building is named for the largest tenant."

Mark Money, vice chancellor for research park and corporate relations, said Granada will be the second occupant of the research park.

"The first in the park was the Ocean Drilling program of the National Science Foundation," he said. "Granada will be the second. The question was asked for a research unit of TAES to enter into a contract with Granada to do joint research which would result in commercialization and which they (Granada) would have a monetary interest."

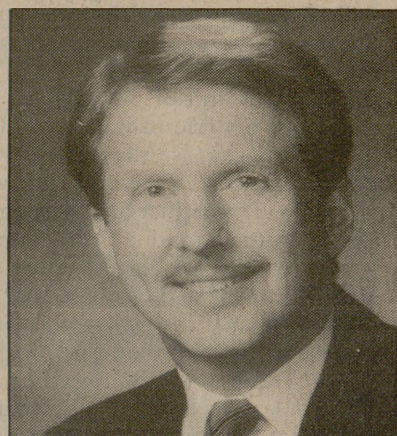
"Granada will be in the park on leased land," he said. " . . . They leased on fair market value. The purpose of a research park is to en-

courage corporations to establish research and to provide a place for students and spouses to work."

Eller said his research relationship with A&M has aimed to fund projects, not to make a huge profit.

"The only successful — really successful — thing I could ever do is get back what I put in," Eller said. "I've never had a contract (with A&M) where that (making a lot of money) has been the reason. We're just the funder."

"All this was brought on because I give money to Texas A&M. . . . I have no quarrels with the attorney general. I talked with Jim Mattox today (Tuesday) and he personally supports my endeavors regarding research at A&M."



David G. Eller

'86 farm crisis ruined 5 percent of Texas farmers

By Olivier Uytendaele
Senior Staff Writer

A Texas A&M University study has found evidence the farm crisis put nearly 5 percent of Texas farmers out of business in 1986 and may claim one-fourth of all Texas farmers by 1990 if the crisis holds its present course.

The study also suggests that the crisis has been especially harsh on farmers of the Plains region of West Texas, medium-size farmers and farmers who got into business since 1970 — a period of high interest rates and land prices.

"Farmers may be facing their most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression,"

says the study, conducted by A&M's Department of Rural Sociology.

The study is based on a survey of approximately 1,000 farmers around the state

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in 1986, compared with a similar survey of the same farmers a year earlier.

The detailed telephone survey asked questions ranging from such bread-and-butter issues as energy, fertilizer costs and debt levels to personal questions concerning marital problems and suicides resulting from the crisis.

"A year's time has brought no noticeable improvement in the economic crisis in

Texas Agriculture," the study notes. "In 1986, about one out of every four Texas farmers still had levels of debt that were likely to be difficult for them to manage and which may result in their inability to remain economically viable."

In general, farmers are no longer borrowing money, the study says. Thus, the average farmer's debt remained roughly the same from 1985 to 1986, at around \$109,000. But because of plummeting land prices, average farm and personal assets fell more than 20 percent between 1985 to 1986, from \$815,000 to about \$640,000.

Dr. Don E. Albrecht, an A&M professor of sociology who participated in the study, says that farmers have been devastated by

the collapse of land prices in 1981, following 40 years of speculative buying that drove prices up to unrealistic highs.

"From 1941 to 1981, we had 40 continuous years when, every year, the average acre of farmland in the United States was higher than the year before," Albrecht says. "The price of land was far above what it could justify in its productive potential. It was being held up there on speculation."

Since land prices reached their peak in 1981, the value of farmland has declined an average of 30 percent nationwide.

Texas, as a whole, has gotten off rather lightly, Albrecht says. The average price of farmland here has declined only 12 percent

since 1981, while Plains states such as Nebraska and Iowa have suffered drops in land values as high as 59 percent. The Plains region of Texas — the Panhandle and northwest Texas — has experienced the same drastic price declines as other Plains states, and it is here that many farmers are dropping out of the business.

The Plains region is by far the most productive agricultural region in the state, Albrecht says.

"There's mainly one way of making a living up there, and that's farming," he says. "Anybody who's not employed in farming is employed in oil, which bottomed out at the same time."