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*At Ease*

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 for Faculty Senate

# Court: Death penalty valid despite biases

Decision dashes hopes of many opponents

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the death penalty laws can be valid even if statistics indicate they are carried out in racially biased ways.

In its most important ruling on capital punishment since 1976, the court split 5-4 in upholding Georgia's death penalty system even though killers of white people in that state are far more likely to be sentenced to death than those who kill blacks.

The ruling dashed what many death penalty opponents considered

to be their best chance of saving hundreds of the nearly 1,900 men and women on death rows nationwide.

The decision removed the last legal claim many of those inmates had raised in fighting for their lives, but it is not expected to dramatically quicken the pace of executions.

Since the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976, 70 U.S. prison inmates have been executed by electrocution, poison gas, firing squad and lethal injection.

"The court is saying there may be

racial discrimination in choosing who lives and who dies but it doesn't care," Seth Waxman, a lawyer for the Congressional Black Caucus, said of Wednesday's ruling.

Jack Boger, the New York lawyer who argued against the Georgia system before the high court, said the justices "failed to acknowledge a very powerful pattern of discrimination."

David Whitmore, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union in New Orleans, said the decision removed the last hope of nearly a dozen of Louisiana's 47 death row inmates.

Illinois prosecutor Mark Rotert called the ruling "very, very good news."

"It was one of the last, best chances to get a broad-based attack on death penalty litigation nationwide," Rotert said.

Justice Lewis F. Powell, writing for the court, said a statistical study of Georgia's death penalty system "at most indicates a discrepancy that appears to correlate with race."

But he said the discrepancy does not violate the Constitution's equal-protection guarantees.

In previous decisions, the court has allowed statistical evidence to

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## Supreme Court decision no surprise on Death Row

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — Texas Death Row inmates expressed little surprise Wednesday as the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against them in a major capital punishment case, noting instead that the court is continuing a trend that makes it easier to execute people.

"The court doesn't pay any attention to statistics," Jim Vanderbilt, convicted and awaiting death for an Amarillo slaying, said. "It was dead in my mind before it got started."

The high court, in a 5-4 ruling upholding the Georgia death penalty law, said the statute was constitutional despite statistics that show blacks convicted of killing whites are more likely to get the death penalty. It is the latest in a series of Supreme Court rulings in recent years that have narrowed legal avenues for halting executions.

"Bang, bang, bang," Vanderbilt said, noting that the court already has struck down arguments from death penalty opponents citing disproportionality of sentences and qualifications of jurors.

Clifford X. Phillips, a black man who awaits death next week for the slaying of a white Houston woman, said he did not have much hope in the court even before its decision.

"I don't put my faith in the institutions of society," said Phillips, who prefers to be called by his Islamic name, Abdullah Bashir. "I think things will get worse long before they get better."

Phillips said he lost interest in the legal process after the 1982 execution of Charlie Brooks, the first of 22 men to be executed in Texas since the Supreme Court allowed the death penalty to resume. Phillips said continued interest in legal matters would have driven him to suicide.

Vanderbilt said a ruling against the death penalty in the Georgia case could have meant commutation for all of the 250 men and women on Death Row in Texas, which leads the nation in the number of executions.

Of the 22 people executed, 12 have been white, six Hispanic and four black. About 40 percent of the Texas Death Row inmates are black.

"What it does is tell people there won't be any major movement away from the death penalty in quite a while," inmate Lester Bower said. "They've shut the door for quite a while and it'll take a pretty good crowbar to get the door open."



## Raising The Roof

This building, the former student center belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, will be used by a Bryan couple for their first

home. The Church is building a new student center at 100 E. Dexter St. and is donating the old building to the couple.

Photo by Doug LaRue

## Iran sentences American to 10 years in prison

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — Iran has sentenced an American engineer to 10 years in prison on charges of spying for the CIA, the official Iranian news agency reported Wednesday.

The Islamic Republic News Agency, monitored in Nicosia, quoted "informed sources" for its report on the sentencing of Jon Patts, a 50-year-old telecommunications specialist. It did not say when the trial occurred.

Patts, employed by Cosmos Engineers of Bethesda, Md., worked at the Asadabad telecommunications center 200 miles southwest of Tehran. He was arrested last June, shortly after an Iraqi air raid on the center that interrupted Iran's communications with the outside world.

According to the news agency, he faced seven

charges related to espionage and using a forged passport to enter the country. It did not specify the charges of which he was found guilty.

In an appearance on Iranian state television in October, the American engineer said he passed information through his company to the CIA on Iranian military activities, oil production, inflation and food distribution.

He said he gave information about the Asadabad complex and the warning system it uses to guard against Iraqi air raids. The two Persian Gulf neighbors have been at war since September 1980.

Neither the CIA nor Cosmos commented on the televised confession.

State Department spokesman Bruce Ammer-

man said Wednesday in Washington: "We are aware of the press report (about the sentence), but we have no independent confirmation and I don't have anything more on it at this point."

Ammerman said confirmation would have to come from the Swiss, who represent U.S. interests in Iran.

Charles Redman of the State Department reiterated that Patts was not an employee of the U.S. government. He said Iran repeatedly refused requests by Swiss diplomats in Tehran for consular access to Patts. The Swiss have handled U.S. interests in Iran since relations with that country were severed in 1980.

## Mattox: Texas has problem with teen-age pregnancy

By Melanie Perkins  
 Staff Writer

Teen-age pregnancies, telemarketing fraud and problems with child-support payments are some of the problems facing Texas today, Attorney General Jim Mattox told a group of reporters gathered at the County Commissioners Court in Bryan Wednesday.

"Texas likes to brag about being No. 1 in the nation," he said. "We are No. 1 in the nation, unfortunately, with the number of teen-agers that are under 14 years of age and have children."

He said Texas is second in the overall number of teen-age pregnancies, with 18,600 babies born to unwed teen-agers in Texas in 1985.

"We should be ashamed of ourselves," Mattox said. "We, as a society, are not teaching young people the moral values and common sense necessary to stop the problem of babies being born to unmarried teen-agers."

Mattox said his office is in the process of setting up a statewide speaking program on the issue of teen-age pregnancy and its resulting problems — a program which he said will primarily address the teen-age male.

"We are attempting to explain to him that if he is going to play, he is going to have to pay," Mattox said.

He said the Legislature is considering a bill — which he expects to pass — that will hold the parents of teen-agers responsible for their teen-ager's child until he or she reaches 18 years of age.

"I think what this is probably going to do is make the parents get about explaining the birds and the bees a little more rapidly than they have in the past," Mattox said.

Delinquent child-support payments are also a big problem in Texas, he said, with more than one million cases involving individuals who are not making required payments.



Photo by Tracy Staton

Jim Mattox describes a pamphlet on telemarketing fraud.

Mattox's suggestion for dealing with the problem is to confiscate the income tax refunds of delinquent parents through the Attorney General's Office's IRS Intercept Program — a program that collected \$6 million in overdue payments last year and is expected to bring in about \$8 million this year, Mattox said.

Over 20,000 billing letters are being sent out to those behind in child-support payments. The letters explain that non-payment of child support can result in garnishing of wages or a possible jail term.

Mattox said the significant change in child-support collection has been in the area of wage garnishment. When a person is 30 days behind in child-support payments, wage garnishment action can be taken quickly and simply.

The Bryan-College Station collection office has increased child support collections by 108 percent in the last year, and collections have increased by 300 percent statewide, he said.

"Failure to pay child support and the problem of teen-age pregnancy and the number of deaths and the amount of child abuse and the other problems that arise because of this teen-age pregnancy problem are far greater than the kind of problems we have today with AIDS in this country," Mattox said.

The real distinction between these problems is that they are curable, while AIDS is not, he said.

Another problem the Attorney General's Office is addressing, with the help of Southwestern

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## Sodium level too high in B/CS drinking water

Report: Salt level higher than EPA standard

By Lee Schexnaider  
 Reporter

The next time you decide to take a sip from a water cooler or a glass of ice water, you might consider what you're drinking — besides the water.

You may be drinking sodium, lead, mercury, fluoride, chloroform or even arsenic, according to a Texas Department of Health analysis of Bryan-College Station drinking water.

Chemical levels in the water in this area are within Environmental Protection Agency guidelines, but for many chemicals, such as sodium, regulations do not exist.

In a report on alternate municipal water sources for a Texas A&M civil engineering course on hydraulic engineering, increases in sodium concentration were the main problem of the area's water supply.

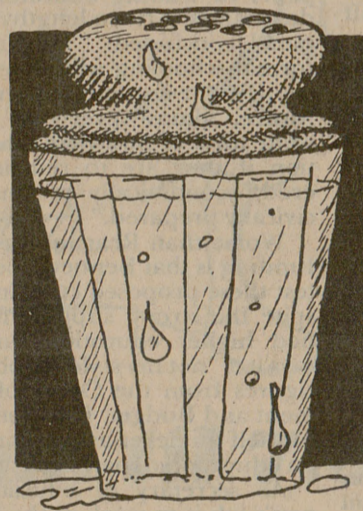
The latest water analysis reports available show Bryan's average sodium concentration at 242 milligrams per liter, College Station is at 212 milligrams per liter, and A&M's water supply ranges from 88 to 202 milligrams per liter.

The National Science Foundation has recommended sodium levels below 100 milligrams per liter and the American Heart Association suggests a limit of 20 milligrams per liter.

Dr. Gordon Mitchell, a local cardiologist, said excess sodium intake can cause a problem for people with, or who have the potential for, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure and kidney disease.

When the body has too much sodium, it tends to retain water to dilute the chemical until it is excreted. This puts a strain on both the circulatory and excretory systems of some people, he said.

"Controlling high blood pressure is very important for several reasons," he said. "It can cause strokes. It is very hard on the heart over a long period of time. The heart muscle becomes thick and that is not good for it. High blood pressure, or



hypertension, can also lead to severe kidney disease," he said.

According to a report in the Health Net Reference Library of the CompuServe Information Service, high blood pressure damages the linings of the arteries.

This may cause them to be more prone to clogging due to cholesterol deposits, which in turn may lead to heart attack or stroke. The damage also may result in weakening of the arteries, causing internal bleeding.

Mitchell said some hypertension patients can reduce salt in their diet rather than take medication.

But this may be difficult because, according to the civil engineering report, the salinity situation in drinking water is expected to worsen as salt intrusion increases in the Simsboro Sand — the primary underground water source for Bryan, College Station and A&M.

The only two alternatives to tap water are bottled water and treatment facilities installed in a building's water system. A March 4 article in the Bryan-College Station Eagle said there are approximately 25

brands of bottled water available nationwide at grocery stores. The article noted the varying levels of contaminants in bottled water as well as tap water.

Kyle Schreckenbach of Brazos Valley Water Conditioning said a reverse osmosis system can be used to remove salt from tap water. Such a system costs approximately \$600 to \$700. But it can't remove many of the organic compounds that also may be present in the water, he said.

"It's kind of weird," he said. "Many of my customers are doctors, or in the medical profession."

But the entire water quality situation may change as the result of an amendment made to the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1986. The EPA will require cities to test water supplies for 83 contaminants by 1990, said Tom Decker, an engineer with Black and Veatch Corporation in Kansas City, Mo. The EPA, he said, will set standards and will be able to enforce them. Sodium is among those listed, he said.

"There is a phenomenal number of new chemicals developed and introduced into the environment every day," Decker said. "Many of the testing procedures date back to the 1940s and 1950s, when people were more interested in how the water tasted, smelled and what color it was," he said.

Charles Maddox, the chief of water quality for the Texas Health Department, said the state tests for only 40 contaminants.

The problem, Maddox said, may be removing toxic chemicals from the water supply with current technology. Activated charcoal may be used to neutralize some of the chemicals, he said.

According to the civil engineering report, the only satisfactory way to reduce the salt concentration is to switch to surface water supplies. Unfortunately, few practical supplies of surface water are available in this area.