

# State and Local

## Window-washing platform falls from Houston tower; three die

HOUSTON (AP) — A window-washing platform fell from near the top of a 36-story downtown skyscraper Tuesday, killing at least three people and injuring a pedestrian, officials said.

The victims were two men on the platform and a woman walking by below, said Paul Pepe, director of city emergency services. Another female pedestrian suffered a foot injury, officials said.

Four bolts anchoring the window-washing platform to the top of the Pennzoil Building gave way as winds blew the scaffolding sideways, Houston Deputy Fire Chief L.O. Martin said.

"These skyhooks are designed to go up and down," he said. "It appears the wind blew it sideways, and when it got to the end of the track it came off. They (the victims) did have their safety harnesses on, but it's just that the whole machine came down."

"They rode it down. They were locked into it. These men were dead on impact and so was the lady. There was no help for them."

Martin said investigators had talked to the injured woman — Julia Comeau, 35. She was in stable condition at St. Joseph's Hospital with multiple lacerations and contusions over most of her body, said hospital spokesman Sue Sonnier. Comeau was undergoing foot surgery, Sonnier said.

Martin said Comeau didn't see the platform falling.

"She doesn't even know what happened," he said. "One moment she was standing there and the next moment she was lying on the ground."

Police Sgt. J.C. Mosier said he could not recall any incident similar to this.

Homicide detectives will investigate because of the magnitude of the accident, Mosier said.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration is also investigating, and its probe will not be complete for at least two weeks, area director Gerald Baty said.

Winds in Houston were unusually strong

Tuesday, gusting to 25 mph at the time of the accident, according to the National Weather Service. Martin said he was unaware of any city regulations that limited window washing during high winds, but he said that would be investigated.

Officials said the platform was near the top of the 36-floor building, possibly on the 31st floor.

The scaffolding hit the street, bounced once and hit the two female pedestrians who were standing on the corner of the busy intersection. Rescue crews took about two hours to pry the bodies out of the wreckage.

The accident occurred at about 12:20 p.m., when the street normally is filled with lunch-hour pedestrians.

The wreckage of the platform lay crumpled in front of the building, and traffic was snarled for several blocks in either direction.

"The thing that surprised me is that it's only three," Pepe said. "It could have been much worse."

### Crew of Stark seeks return to families

CONROE (AP) — The mother of a crewman on board the USS Stark says her son has told her he and other crew members who survived the missile attack would rather come home than try to repair their battered ship.

Petty Officer Nick Norfleet said he was upset with Navy plans to have the original crew repair the ship and bring it home, said his mother, Jean Brown.

Brown said her son, who telephoned home Sunday, also said the crew is suffering a shortage of clothes and personal items.

"My son may get a lot of flak for all of this," Brown said, "but he's got a lot of support from the other crew members. He's upset and angry that they're going through with all this."

Brown said her son contacted the news media, complaining that the crew needs time away from the vessel, now off Bahrain.

Other sailors, she said, have phoned Claudia Lovern, who is acting as a liaison between the Navy and the vessel's families, saying they want to come home for a while.

Lovern's husband is a Stark crewman, but he was not on the vessel at the time of the May 17 attack.

Navy policy, Lovern said, is to remove those from the vessel who are not fit physically or psychologically for sea duty.

She believes many of the crew members are under tremendous stress.

"They're in a state of shock," she said. "People don't understand what these men have gone through."

"They still don't know they were hit."

Lovern said Norfleet and others in the Stark's combat systems section appear the most affected by the attack, since 23 of the 37 men killed were members of that section.

Stark sailors are now living aboard the USS La Salle, also off Bahrain. La Salle sailors gave Norfleet a pair of shoes and a spare toothbrush, his mother said.

Brown said her son had nothing to wear but a pair of sweat pants following the explosion that ripped through berthing compartments. She said he made a shirt out of a pillowcase.

Lovern said the Navy was shipping clothing and personal items to Bahrain for the sailors, who are working to clear the debris from the attack.

## Committee OKs plan to sell notes to ease cash shortfall

AUSTIN (AP) — The governor, treasurer and comptroller Tuesday gave the preliminary OK to borrowing more money to help the state government through a cash shortfall expected later this year.

Although details won't be finalized until August, Treasurer Ann Richards said she expects about \$1 billion in "cash management notes" to be issued.

Richards said she hopes the notes can be sold to bring in cash to help the state to pay its bills Sept. 1.

Gov. Bill Clements, who during last year's election campaign criticized then-Gov. Mark White for approving such notes, was among those voting to issue them this time.

The notes allow a government to keep cash coming in during periods when tax collections fall off.

"In some places, it's done every year," said Raines, who is a consultant for the state on the sale.

Clements said he considers the notes deficit financing, but he said

*"I don't like them. But under the circumstances, I don't think we have any choice."*

— Gov. Bill Clements

the Legislature's failure to write a balanced budget has left no options.

"It's a direct reflection on planning and anticipation," he said. "If we had run our business properly, we wouldn't be in this spot."

The resolution to begin work for selling the notes was approved by the three-member Cash Management Committee, which includes Richards, Clements and Comptroller Bob Bullock.

Richards said the details — including the exact amount of the notes and the interest rate — won't be determined until early August. She said she hopes the Legislature will finish budget work by July so the sale can proceed.

## Senate committee approves bill banning abortion in last trimester

AUSTIN (AP) — A Senate committee Tuesday approved legislation that would prohibit abortions performed during the final trimester of pregnancy.

The Senate Health and Human Services committee took up the issue again after receiving a House-passed abortion regulation bill. A Senate bill, sponsored by Sen. Ted Lyon, D-Rockwall, earlier passed the committee but remains pending in the Senate.

Voting 5-3, the committee Tuesday approved a bill that would ban abortion in the third trimester of pregnancy but would allow the procedure if the fetus has a significant abnormality.

Under the bill, the Texas Board of Medical Examiners could revoke, cancel or suspend the license of a physician who performs a third-trimester abortion.

Sen. Hugh Parmer, sponsor of the substitute bill approved by the committee, said the third-trimester ban

is an attempt to "pin down" viability, the time when a fetus can survive outside the mother's womb. The bill also allows the abortion of a fetus that has a cranium smaller than 60 millimeters.

"What we're concerned with is a physician might perform an abortion believing the fetus was nonviable, find it was viable too late, and find himself in a situation of having violated the law inadvertently," he said.

With less than a week remaining in the legislative session, the bill's chances of passage appeared slim, lawmakers said.

Sen. Craig Washington, D-Houston, said he will filibuster against the measure if it reaches the Senate.

"I don't think the state has any business being involved in that at all," Washington said Tuesday.

But Lyon said the threat won't stop him from pushing the bill forward. He said he has 27 or 28 votes for an abortion regulation bill.

Lyon said the question of whether

Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby will allow a vote on the bill on the Senate floor is uncertain. Hobby refused to permit a vote on the Senate bill earlier.

The provision to allow abortions if a fetus has a significant abnormality, came in response to concerns that a woman would be forced to carry to term a child that would be severely handicapped.

The committee-approved bill also allows third-trimester abortions if a woman's mental or physical health is jeopardized.

Lyon said he's not sure whether Gov. Bill Clements would include abortion in a special session if the bill fails to pass both houses before the regular session ends June 1.

"Originally (Clements) told me without equivocation he would put it in the special session," Lyon said. "Then he told me he would consider putting it in the special session. So again he's demonstrated his great flexibility."

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