

Opinion

Deny Clements spending power

Gov. Bill Clements and the state's top two legislative leaders hammered out a fragile agreement Wednesday on a budget for the 1988-89 biennium.

But if Clements has his way, that agreement could be changed even after the Legislature has adjourned.

Lost in most of Thursday's headlines was a promise by Clements to call a third special session if the Legislature did not grant the governor more power over state spending.

Although voters in 1985 approved a constitutional amendment to give such power to the governor in a fiscal crisis, or to a panel of officials including the governor, legislators have yet to pass a law allowing it.

In his quest for more power, Clements has decided to blackmail the Legislature into passing the law.

With the tenuous state of the Texas economy, chances are good the state will face another fiscal crisis in the next two years, giving Clements an opportunity to back out on the compromise he forged with Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby and House Speaker Gib Lewis.

The governor already has shown his hostility toward education by requiring a cut in state aid to primary and secondary schools before he would agree to the compromise. Increased funding to higher education, desperately needed if Texas colleges and universities are to remain competitive, would have been slashed if Hobby had not insisted that it remain. If legislators give Clements the added power over spending, there's no doubt that education will be the first area hit in the event of a "fiscal crisis."

If education in Texas is to proceed on a progressive path, and if the budget compromise is to remain intact, the Legislature must resist Clements' threat and deny him the power to freely exercise his often questionable judgment over state spending.

Pilots can't afford to make mistakes

Thunderous engines drown out all other sounds.

Although you're strapped tightly to it, you sit almost comfortably in an upright seat which will, if need be, serve as a "floatation device" — or at least that's what the grim black print on the next seat reads. Smiling stewardesses have vanished — they, too, are buckled in for the count. Just overhead, a small, rectangular light glows, silently urging you not to unhook your seatbelt or smoke a cigarette until the business at hand is complete. A white paper bag resembling a lunch sack lingers among the frequent flyer magazines stashed in front of you, but instructions aren't needed as to its use. You pretend to be reading one of those magazines or listening to the radio you brought along, as are other passengers. But just beneath the calm expression is a rumbling tension awaiting the slightest unfamiliar movement or noise, in which case heads quietly jerk up and helpless eyes dart around the compartment, wondering, questioning.

Outside, double-paned windows, palm trees, terminals and airport employees slowly glide by as the wheels beneath you roll forward, seeming much too weak for the load they bear. Upon reaching the designated runway, even more sound is muffled by engines preparing for takeoff. These engines don't work alone, but are instead directed by the proud, but very human few who now reside in the cockpit. They alone control. They alone will determine whether that hidden tension



Sondra Pickard

inside will result in composure or panic. Far-fetched as it may sound, your life is at their fingertips.

The wheels turn faster and the pressure against your body rapidly increases until it becomes difficult to lift your head from its headrest. There's no mistaking that split second when sheer momentum causes you to stop rolling on Earth and start floating above it. It's wonderful and at the same time frightening. There's nothing else like it.

This particular runway is unique, for only three things lie beyond it: sand, water and more water. Within seconds, you realize that, besides rising above the ground, you've left it altogether. Looming 1,500 feet below is nothing but the cold Pacific Ocean.

Then, just as ears become accustomed to the roaring engines, and strain begins subsiding into calm, it happens: the engines stop. All is quiet, but *nothing* is right.

The force exerted firmly against you just seconds before has suddenly been replaced by a biting nausea as the nose of the huge craft lurches downward, with you trapped inside. Bordering on panic, erratic thoughts crowd your mind. Thoughts of home, thoughts of family, thoughts of the cushion you're perched upon — does it *really* float? Why now? Why me?

An unsure voice from the intercom above warns, "Prepare for a crash." With one last glance out the window and another around the compartment, you throw your head down between your knees, bracing yourself, knowing it's next to impossible to come out of this alive.

Within 600 feet of impact, a familiar sound bursts above the hysteria. The sound is immediately accompanied by a sudden, powerful lift. The engines are

back on. The craft levels out. You're going to die — not now.

I can only imagine what someone on this particular commercial airline has experienced. I care only to *imagine*. I've been through part of it many times before — up until the part when the engines quit. Unfortunately, a plane full of people had to go through it this summer.

On June 30, a Delta Air Lines plane mistakenly cut off fuel to both engines of a Boeing 767, shortly after takeoff from Los Angeles International Airport. The plane glided from 1,500 feet to within 600 feet of the ocean before the engines could be restarted.

It was a mistake, but in this case many like it, it was an inexcusable and potentially disastrous one. The pilot apparently thought he was turning an automated flight control system. A slip of the hand that could have been avoided and should be, his last.

Whether or not it will do any good, the Federal Aviation Administration announced Wednesday it will investigate the training practices at Delta. The FAA's decision to do so stems from other incidents besides the one in Los Angeles. These include pilots taking off on the wrong end of runways, landing on the wrong runways, landing at the wrong airports and flying within 100 feet of other airplanes.

But the specific airline is really not important. Delta, Continental, American — it's probably happened the best of their pilots. It shouldn't be the Delta incidents and in all others, a finger can be pointed. Someone was at fault. That someone should not be a pilot — too many lives depend on it.

Sondra Pickard is a senior journalist and editor of The Battalion.

Bill-payer emancipation is just a vote away

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the announcement you have been waiting for. I am — are you ready? — forming a committee to study the possibility that I may, someday and somehow, run for President. I am contemplating the formation of such a committee for the following reason:



Richard Cohen

I propose that all of us — the rich and the poor, Republican and Democrat, of whatever sexual orientation — be given a single account number for all our credit cards and other bills. I would make this a law.

Under the Cohen administration (merely to write those words gives me a thrill), no one would ever again have to study a bill with a diamond-cutter's intensity to find an account number to write in the lower left-hand corner of a check. There would be no account number, such as the one I have with a bank that was silly enough to grant me credit, that has seven zeroes in the middle of the number and that, every month, I have to count out to write on the check. I am afraid that if I am wrong by one zero, my payment will wind up in Ollie North's Swiss bank account and go to underwrite a dinner for Los Freedom Fighters in a Miami restaurant.

The Cohen administration would see to it that every bill payer has the same account number for American Express, Visa, Choice, MasterCard and even the gas company. Moreover, it would be against the law for any company to add a prefix to your account number, leaving you unsure of just what your real account number is and unaware that you have made a mistake until you try to write the number in the little boxes on the envelope and see that there are too few boxes for the number that is already on the check sealed inside.

Moreover, the Cohen administration would insist that all checks be made out to the name of the company on the credit card. Thus, checks to Visa would be made out to "Visa" and not, as in my case, "UV Bak," whatever the hell that is. As it is now, I have to pause before writing a check to see what fool name the company has come up with. Usually, the information is found in very tiny print somewhere in a maze of disclosures, indecipherable interest rates

and notices that you have exceeded your credit limit. Visa would be Visa, and that would be it.

In addition, any bill from a group health practice would have to state in capital letters who the check should be made out to. (Feinblum, Smith, Golden, Arrowsmith & Newman simply will not fit on a check.)

The Cohen administration (aaah) has other plans as well. It would forbid any elevator to have a button for the lobby that did not say "L." No "G" or "1" (sometimes the basement) or "LL," which I think must stand for lobby-lobby. Also, people who run red lights would be shot, litterers would be jailed, and bicyclists who ride on the sidewalk would be stoned to death.

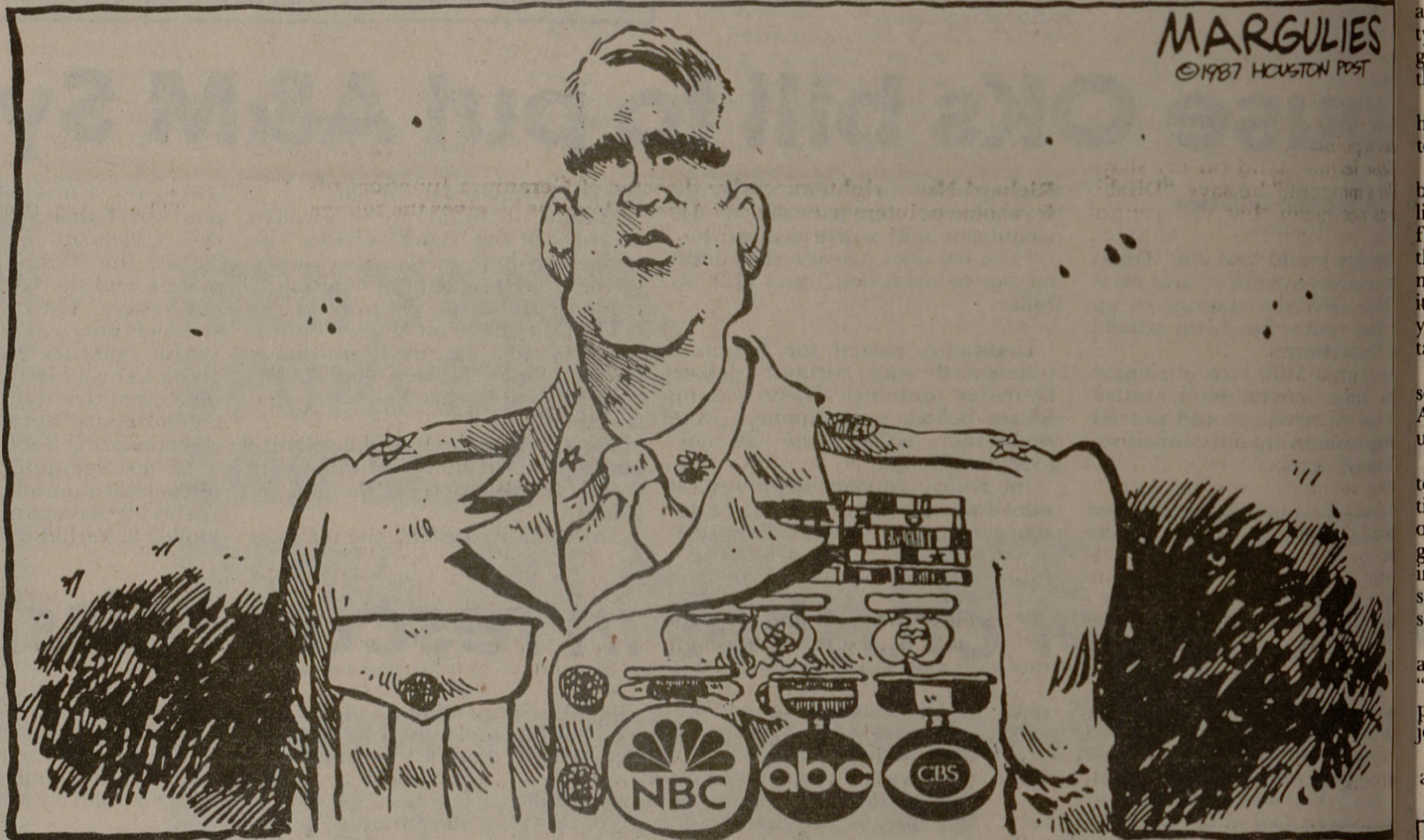
A stiff jail sentence would be given to people who play car radios too loudly, to drivers who perch their kids on their laps, to TV weathermen who call rain "precipitation," to newscasters who say accident victims were "victimized," to flight attendants who tell you to remain seated until the plane comes to a "full stop" (what other kind of stop is there?), and to people whose cars carry "Baby on Board" signs (I am never sure what I am expected to do about it).

It would be forbidden to say "Have a good day" (to which my wife always says, "Thanks, I have other plans"), and no bellhop, on pain of death, would be allowed to show you how your hotel TV set works. And any restaurant that puts quotes around such phrases as "Today's Special" would be closed for a week.

But it is by emancipating the average American bill-payer that the Cohen administration will leave its mark. Return envelopes that are too small for the "top portion" would be strictly forbidden, as would envelopes with little windows that reveal your name and not the company to which you are sending your payment, a fact you discover only after sealing the envelope. (You don't know how many times I've mailed the payment to myself.) Also forbidden would be the several pounds of special offers and newsletters that fall out when you open the bill. While I'm at it, I would also ban subscription cards that fall out of magazines.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is my platform. It is direct and to the point. I am about to form a political-action committee to accept donations. Send your checks to me and make them out to RCPAC. I'll send your permanent account number by return mail.

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Drunk driving laws lax on habitual offenders

Five years and \$500.

Robbyn L. Lister
Guest Columnist

That's the sentence State District Judge Carroll E. Wilborn Jr. handed a 60-year-old man on Monday for his crime against society. That seems like a reasonable sentence until the facts surrounding the man's case are disclosed.

Samuel LaRoy Hargrave, of Anahuac, pleaded no contest to a charge of felony driving while intoxicated. But this wasn't the first time Hargrave had gotten into his car and driven away under the influence of alcohol.

Hargrave has been convicted 18 other times for drunken driving. Four of those convictions were handed down in Wilborn's court.

And last week, State District Judge W.G. Woods Jr. gave Hargrave the same 5-year, \$500 sentence for driving while intoxicated on Feb. 10, 13 days after the crash that brought him into Wilborn's court.

Hargrave's 18 convictions don't seem to have convinced him to change his ways, and taking away his driver's license didn't do any good. Hargrave, by

his own admission, has been driving without a valid license since 1966.

In fact, Hargrave now is serving a six-month sentence because his probation was revoked for driving without a license or liability insurance.

But not even his five-year prison sentence can possibly make up for the tragic aftermath Hargrave left in his drunken wake one morning in January.

At 9 a.m. on Jan. 28, a station wagon stalled on Interstate 10 in the middle of Lost River Bridge. Shrouded in fog, the car triggered a chain reaction of crashes.

After the 25 cars involved in the accident were untangled, five members of a Rockport family were dead, and six others were injured.

Troopers from the Texas Department of Public Safety said Hargrave was the driver of the station wagon. A blood sample was taken, showing Hargrave had 11 percent alcohol in his bloodstream.

A person is considered intoxicated in Texas if the blood-alcohol content registers at 10 percent.

The people who lived to climb out of the pileup now must live with the pain and anger they feel against Hargrave, his drinking and the justice system that let him get away. Hargrave rewarded

the system by finally managing to kill someone with his reckless disregard for others' lives.

Although the laws against drunk driving are getting tougher, mainly to lobbying efforts by Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the public outcry against drivers like Hargrave, harsh penalties must be drafted to keep the killers off the streets.

The laws that now exist serve only to handcuff the judges who would like to see justice carried out in the sentences given to drunken drivers who kill through their actions.

One of the worst facets of the case that because Hargrave could not be convicted as a repeat or habitual offender, Wilborn's hands were tied in the sentencing process.

"You have been convicted more than I can count of felony offenses," Wilborn said as he sentenced Hargrave. "But for the peculiar quirk that does allow you to be indicted as a repeat or habitual felon, the maximum punishment this court can allow is five years in TDC."

Five years for five lives. A fair trade.

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