

State and Local

Wright regrets series of letters mailed to news organizations

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Jim Wright is distancing himself from a series of angry letters a newly hired press aide sent to news organizations that included charges of possible plagiarism and a reference to the Mormon religion of a team of columnists.

Wright said he was sorry the letters were sent and that he did not see or pass judgment on the content before they were sent out.

"I regret very much any intemperate or unjustified remarks the letters may have contained," the Texas Democrat said in a statement Monday.

The letters, complaining of the treatment Wright had received in the news media, were written by George Mair, who was hired in December to help improve the speaker's image.

Mair is a former Washington columnist for the Los Angeles Times Syndicate and former editor and publisher of the *Alexandria Gazette* in suburban Virginia.

One letter sent last week to syndicated columnists Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta was critical of a recent

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column and ended with the comment that "The Church of the Latter Day Saints must be particularly pleased."

Anderson and Van Atta are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the Mormon Church, and have written extensively about Wright's involvement with the shaky Texas savings and loan industry.

"We both kind of looked at each other and asked, was it anti-Mormon the same way an anti-Semitic comment is anti-Semitic," Van Atta said Tuesday.

The letter attacked a Jan. 4 column, saying Anderson and Van Atta "had been suckered," that it was "a poor cut and paste job" and that they had stolen the information from unrepentable sources in desperation.

"There is a view that the Mormon

Church is conservative, and I wonder whether he was trying to say we were part of a Mormon plot to get Jim Wright, which is insane," Van Atta said.

"The initial thought of both of us was that this must be a fraud. We thought somebody must be pulling a joke on us," he said. "Of course, our statements are extremely accurate on Jim Wright."

Earlier reports of Mair's strongly worded letters to the *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report* prompted Wright to issue his statement Monday about the letters.

"The letters written by George reflected the anger and frustration which, as an experienced newspaperman, he felt over some of the inaccurate and unfair news coverage I

have received as speaker," Wright said.

"While I am as concerned as George over lack of balance in some of this coverage, angry letters obviously do little to correct it," he said.

Mair defended the letters in an interview with the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, saying: "It's my feeling that we've got to correct any inaccuracies about the boss because they get set in stone . . . and wind up in somebody's clip file."

In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, Mair said a Jan. 4 article assessing Wright's first year in office was "badly researched, poorly written and possibly plagiarized."

The two reporters who wrote the story interviewed Wright and the newspaper denied any assertion of plagiarism.

In a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, Mair wrote: "It will not surprise you that the December 4th article on my boss leaves me surprised and pained because it is marbled through with innuendo that is so far beneath the professional standards one used to expect from the *Wall Street Journal*."

Research grant to Houston firm aids University

By Mary-Lynne Rice
Staff Writer

The Houston area-based Texas Accelerator Center's acceptance of a \$3 million federal appropriation has opened up new research and development opportunities for Texas A&M accelerator physics researchers working at the center.

The Department of Energy recently awarded the grant to the TAC, which is a division of the Houston Area Research Center. A&M, as well as Rice University, the University of Houston and the University of Texas, staff and support the HARC research consortium.

A&M faculty and students have a "very vigorous role" in the TAC, said Peter McIntyre, A&M physics professor and scientific spokesman for the center. About 40 percent of the staff is from A&M, he said.

McIntyre said the appropriation would allow the TAC to move past pure research to practical application of accelerator physics principles.

"There's a number of real-

world applications becoming very important, as well as the technology essential to the future of high-energy colliders," he said.

With the \$3 million in DOE funds, he said, the TAC also will be able to expand its research base.

"The funds were appropriated in a direct action of Congress to assist the TAC in broadening its research focus," he said.

Development of medical innovations, including magnetic resonance imaging, will benefit from the funding, McIntyre said.

"(Resonance imaging) is the newest diagnostic method available to medicine," he said.

The process uses superconducting magnets in the place of radiation in producing images of the body.

In addition to funding basic accelerator physics research, the appropriation will be put toward research and development of superconducting magnets and another particle accelerator, a synchrotron light source used in manufacturing microelectronic chips.

Parents of two Challenger victims settle claims with Morton Thiokol

HOUSTON (AP) — Morton Thiokol Inc. has agreed to settle wrongful death claims lodged by the parents of two astronauts killed in the space shuttle Challenger explosion, an attorney said Tuesday.

The amounts agreed on by Morton Thiokol, Sarah Resnik Belfer, mother of mission specialist Judith Resnik, and Bruce Jarvis, father of payload specialist Gregory Jarvis, are confidential, Houston attorney Ronald Krist said.

He said the National Aeronautics and Space Administration is not contributing to the settlements.

"We filed a claim (against NASA) for Bruce Jarvis, but it'll be resolved in this," Krist added.

The attorney said Tuesday that although no formal lawsuit was filed, he and Morton Thiokol attorneys negotiated the same as if there had been a lawsuit filed.

"There were claims asserted," he said. "We threatened a lawsuit."

Morton Thiokol officials in Chicago would neither confirm nor deny the reported settlement on Tuesday.

"We have no comment," said a Morton Thiokol secretary who would not give her name.

Mrs. Belfer said Tuesday she would not comment on the settlement. Jarvis could not be reached, and Krist said he would not talk about the agreement either.

"They were satisfied relative to the amounts of money involved, although you can't replace human life with money," Krist said of his two clients.

The Challenger exploded Jan. 28, 1986, killing all seven crew members on board. The disaster was blamed primarily on the solid rocket booster assembled and manufactured by Morton Thiokol.

NASA and Thiokol shared the cost of settlements reached in December 1986 with survivors of astronaut Francis R. Scobee, astronaut Ellison Onizuka, payload specialist and New Hampshire teacher Christa McAuliffe, and Jarvis' wife.

The four families settled for a

combined total of more than \$750,000, according to the U.S. Justice Department, but the precise amounts have been kept secret.

Krist said he viewed the lump-sum settlements this week as very favorably comparable with the original four.

Last May, Krist settled a lawsuit filed against Morton Thiokol by Challenger astronaut Ronald E. McNair's widow, Cheryl.

Since the facts about the explosion were presented in the McNair lawsuit, Krist said it was not necessary to go through the same long process again with the Jarvis and Belfer cases unless Morton Thiokol had refused to settle.

Acid spill brings injury, resident evacuations

AUSTIN (AP) — A 2,000-gallon hydrochloric acid spill at a chemical distribution plant caused nearby residents to be evacuated for several hours Tuesday, a fire official said.

Several minor injuries were reported, but none of those injured required medical treatment beyond an examination by emergency medical service staff at the scene, Mike VanBlaricom of the Austin Fire Department said.

Most clean-up efforts were ex-

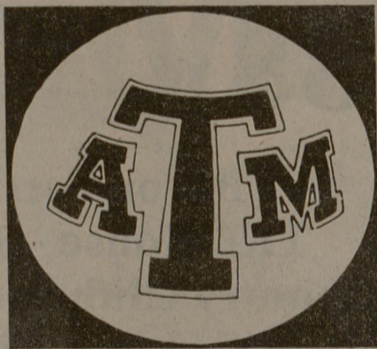
pected to be completed Tuesday night, he said. Residents evacuated from 20 to 30 houses in a one-block radius of the Central Texas Chemical plant were expected to return home by evening.

The hydrochloric acid was almost 100 percent concentration and gave off fumes, VanBlaricom said.

Officials were using lime to absorb the acid and planned to store the mixture in containers that would later be taken to a disposal site, VanBlaricom said.

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