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Lawyer aids astronauts' widows

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HOUSTON (AP) — A Houston attorney says that widows of astronauts killed in space disasters are quickly forgotten as the tragedies fade from the national consciousness.

Today is the second anniversary of the space shuttle Challenger disaster, but Wednesday was another tragic space anniversary — the 1967

Apollo 1 capsule fire in which three astronauts died.

"Yes, I know how it went then, and I know how it goes now," said Ronald D. Krist, who represented astronaut widows seeking compensation in both tragedies.

"The president attends your husband's funeral," he said. "Congress lowers all the flags to half mast. The president delivers the eulogy. "Every television station in the

world talks about it. You are in 3,000 headlines around the world.

"But in three years you are forgotten. NASA doesn't care. You have to present your identification at a 7-Eleven to cash a \$5 check. Tears are cheap, and memories fade, and you better look out for yourself. And that's how that cookie crumbles."

On Jan. 27, 1967, astronauts Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Roger B. Chaffee and Edward H. White II were killed in an electrical fire, trapped

inside the Apollo 1 capsule at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Like the Challenger accident in which all seven crew members were killed, the Apollo 1 fire was shocking not only because of the deaths, but also because the accident erupted after 16 consecutive successful flights of the Mercury and Gemini series.

Krist won a landmark case and a financial settlement in 1972 for Betty Grissom, widow of Gus Grissom, just as the case's statute of limitations was expiring in Florida.

"Betty never doubted that she was doing the right thing," Krist said.

"She never wavered. Up until then, no one — least of all an astronaut's wife — had ever challenged NASA or any aerospace company, and it was not until four years after the fire had killed the astronaut trio that I took the case."

More than a decade later, Krist won a out-of-court financial settlement for another astronaut widow: Cheryl McNair, whose husband, Ronald McNair, died in the Challenger disaster on Jan. 28, 1986.

In each case, Krist went after the company responsible for the accident.

In the 1960s it was North American Rockwell, prime contractor of the problem-plagued Apollo capsule. In the 1980s it was Morton Thiokol Inc., prime contractor of a faulty rocket booster.

Reagan requests aid for Nicaraguan rebels

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan sent Congress a scaled-down request Wednesday for \$36.2 million in aid for Nicaraguan rebels, reserving for himself the power to determine if any of the money could be spent for arms and ammunition.

Reagan promised he would consult with four Central American

presidents before releasing any arms money. The arms money, totaling \$3.6 million out of the \$36.2 million, would be held in escrow until March 31 pending an assessment of Nicaragua's steps toward peace.

His proposal sets the stage for a major congressional battle next week that the administration argues will

make or break the Contra rebel force, which relies on U.S. aid for the battle against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

Vowing to wage an all-out battle to win approval of his request, Reagan declared, "I didn't come to Washington to preside over the communization of Central America."

Clements, Mattox agree on need for more prisons

By Kimberly House
 Staff Writer

Attorney General Jim Mattox and Gov. Bill Clements agreed Wednesday that an addition of 10,400 new beds for the Texas Department of Corrections over the next two years will not end the overcrowding in Texas prisons.

"It's not going to solve the problem," Mattox said. "We're going to continue to let far more folks out of the penitentiary than ought to get out."

Clements said he has "set out a plan calling for the allocation of funding for more than 20,000 new prison beds in the next four years, which is an unprecedented expansion in Texas."

An appropriations bill provision that permits the transfer of prison funds will give the state enough money to begin construction on Texas' second maximum-security prison. Construction on the first one has already been approved.

The provision was made as a result of Clements' declaration of emergency in the TDC.

Clements and Mattox spoke at the 30th annual County Judges and Commissioners' Conference at the College Station Hilton.

Clements also highlighted the re-

Clements plans expansion of education for minorities

AUSTIN (AP) — Gov. Bill Clements called on state officials Wednesday to begin a new drive to expand higher education opportunities for minority students.

An equal opportunity plan ordered by the federal courts is scheduled to expire this year.

The current plan has sought to recruit more black and Hispanic students into undergraduate, graduate and professional studies, officials said. Special programs also have been created — including tutoring, peer counseling and others — to keep minority students in colleges and universities.

cent success of the Texas Department of Commerce, a combination of nine related agencies and boards, in attracting Sematech, a national semi-conductor research consortium, to Texas.

He said the project will bring an annual \$250 million operating budget and 800 jobs to the state when it moves to Austin.

"With this type of partnership — combining the talent of the department, my administration, the private sector, our academic institutions and our congressional delegation — we can bat a thousand when critical projects such as the superconducting supercollider consider locating in Texas," Clements said.

Clements referred to Texas' economic condition and the days when "energy" was the mainstay. He said Texans must respond to current economic reality like they are responding to prison overcrowding.

Mattox said Texans must move forward and face the challenge of meeting their objectives for the future — bringing about the options, the diversification and the balanced economy they need for the state.

The conference had workshops keyed to special needs of county employees and was sponsored by the V.G. Young Institute of County Government, which is part of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.



Photo by Shelly Schluter

Spokesmen

Before hitting the backroads, members of the Texas A&M cycle team discuss their 2 1/2 hour route. These bicyclists meet daily at 3 p.m. behind

the MSC to ride and prepare for the Southwest Conference Collegiate Competitions scheduled throughout the spring.

Apartments lose power after fire

A small grease fire left residents of eight units of the Doux Chene apartments, including four students, without electricity Wednesday night.

The fire was reported at 7:42 p.m. and was under control by 8:11 p.m. after five units of the College Station Fire Department responded to the call. Lt. Thomas Goeho of the Fire Department said.

The apartment complex is located at 1401 FM 2818, on the outskirts of Southwood Valley.

Goeho said fire damage to one apartment and smoke damage to two others resulted from the blaze.

Barbara Jones, manager of the apartment complex, said the fire started when a woman cooking dinner tried to extinguish a grease fire with water.

She said residents would not be able to return to their apartments until this morning for safety purposes.

"It was a fire in the kitchen, and part of it was electrical in nature, and they asked that we leave the electricity off to the entire building until morning," Jones said.

Specialist sees problems with 65 mph

By Jamie Russell
 Staff Writer

A Texas A&M research specialist at the Texas Transportation Institute foresees problems with raising the speed limit on some non-interstate roads in Texas.

"There are two parameters of speed distribution of concern — speed variance, related to accident frequency, and absolute speed, related to accident severity," said Dr. Quinn Brackett also said.

It is obvious that the faster a driver goes, the greater the forces generated should he have an accident, he said.

The Texas Highway Commission voted Wednesday to increase the speed limit to 65 mph on some Texas roads that are similar in safety design to rural interstates, which have had a 65 mph speed limit since last spring.

John Chagle, public information officer for the Texas Highway Department, said the highway commission voted to extend the higher limit to include 74 miles of non-interstate roadway with interstate quality and design.

The increased speed limits will not affect any roads in Brazos County, Chagle said.

According to Texas Department of Public Safety figures quoted in the Dallas Morning News, the number of fatalities on Texas roadways has been declining since 1981, which was the worst year in Texas traffic history.

But some researchers are con-

Highway commission raises speed limits

AUSTIN (AP) — The speed limit on 74 miles of rural, non-interstate highways in Texas will be raised to 65 mph under action taken Wednesday by the State Highway and Public Transportation Commission.

The change follows federal law and should take effect by Feb. 5, said Byron Blaschke, deputy engineer-director of the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation.

This is the second time speed limits have been raised on some Texas highways since the national speed limit was set at 55 mph by Congress in 1973. Last May, Texas exercised its option under federal law and raised the speed limit to 65 mph on more than 2,000 miles of rural interstate highways.

Jim Sykes of Houston, a member of Citizens for Rational Traffic Laws, urged the higher speed limit.

"We want to encourage you to raise speed limits to

reasonable levels throughout the state of Texas, where practical," Sykes said.

The commission action, with the governor's consent, will hike the speed limit to 65 mph on U.S. 75 from the Sherman-Denison urban limits to the Dallas urban limits, 29,554 miles; U.S. 60 in Randall County near Canyon, from Interstate 27 to U.S. 87, 2,507 miles; and U.S. 190 in Bell County from Nolanville to the Temple-Belton urban limit, 5,531 miles.

This limit doesn't apply to vehicles with lower limits set by law, including trucks, school buses and trailers.

For the speed limit to be raised to 65 mph, a road had to be located outside an urban area with a population of 50,000 or more. It also must have been constructed to interstate highway standards, connect to an interstate posted at 65 mph and be a divided, four-lane, controlled-access highway.

culty with motorists driving 70 mph," he said.

Motorists who adapt to travel at high rates of speed on rural roadways designed for speed and then move off onto roadways designed for 55 mph need to be aware of the transition, he said.

Brackett calls this transition "speed-creep" speed generalization. "A motorist creeps up to mean speed and generalizes to non-interstate highways," he said.

Because of this tendency, Brackett said, motorists are now driving at more varied speeds — for example, one motorist may be driving 55 mph on the same road as another motorist who has just exited a rural interstate and may still be driving 70

mph. In this situation, he said, the potential for conflict increases.

But in some cases, Brackett said, motorists in a situation like this may be traveling at similar speeds, because most people tend to exceed the 55 mph limit anyway.

"There has been some indication we have reduced speed variance on roadways because of the large portion of people exceeding the 55 mph speed limit by about 5 to 10 mph," Brackett said.

The 65 mph speed limit is also a problem from the enforcement standpoint, Brackett said.

It's difficult for motorists to distinguish one speed zone from the next, he said, so the chance of getting a speeding ticket is much greater.

Wells said this problem can be corrected if motorists are more observant.

"Motorists need to develop a mentality to watch for changing speed limits in rural areas — just like watching speed limits in the city," Wells said.

Wells said the DPS still is keeping motorists obeying the speed law. But he said that seat belt use is another important issue, especially since the speed limit has been raised.

"We need to keep motorists wearing their seat belts," Wells said.

Texas is one of the top states in favorable response to the seat belt law, Wells said; about 66 percent of motorists wore seat belts in Texas in 1986.