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Town under fire for high number of tickets issued

PATTON VILLAGE (AP)—Calling the community a disgrace, the Montgomery County district attorney is asking the state attorney general's office to investigate the troubled town north of Houston.

"Those people have absolutely demonstrated repeatedly that they have no business operating as a city," District Attorney Peter Speers said. "I think part of the problem is that they're operating off traffic tickets instead of taxes out there. I don't know what they spend their money on except maybe more policemen."

The town along U.S. Highway 59 derives more than 90 percent of its revenue from traffic tickets written on the highway. It has no ad valorem taxes. Speers said a Texas Judicial System annual report shows the town of slightly more than 1,000 people reported \$567,758 in Municipal Court revenue from ticket writing during fiscal year 1987. In comparison, Conroe, a town of nearly 20,000, reported revenue of \$279,000, he said.

"The place is a disgrace," said Speers, who sent a letter Tuesday requesting the attorney general to assist "in a thorough investigation of this rotten situation."

Speers said he had hoped that a new mayor and council members elected in May, coupled with a state bill passed last year to limit the amount of money the city could keep from speeding tickets, would curtail the abuses.

But three months into the job, the town's mayor, Robert Devaney, resigned after allegations of official misconduct. Two of three councilmen elected with him as a slate proposing town unity also have resigned.

"Those people have absolutely demonstrated repeatedly that they have no business operating as a city . . . they're operating off traffic tickets instead of taxes out there."

— District Attorney Peter Speers

"It's one thing after another out there, and I'm sick of it like everyone else," Speers said. "The council people never get along and they come running to me all the time wanting to file things against each other. Somewhere along the way, it has to stop."

The town has a history of controversy. Most recently, the town's Municipal Judge Floyd Duval, 76, was indicted for allegedly offering to pay a woman's traffic fine in exchange for sex. He is suspended, pending the outcome of the case.

Speers also has asked Mike Hodge, chief of the criminal law enforcement section of the attorney general's office, to investigate several allegations of illegal practices by Patton Village police. The most recent complaint, he said, is that motorists along the highway are ticketed for not wearing seat belts when, in fact, they are.

Patton Village Police Chief J.D. Broussard said illegal ticket writing by police occurred under previous police chiefs.

Airplane travellers witness deadly crash

GRAPEVINE (AP)— Passengers aboard planes sitting on the runway watched Delta Flight 1141 in horror, helpless but cheering for the pilot to coax the floundering jet into the air.

The Boeing 727 lifting off from Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport for Salt Lake City crashed on takeoff, killing 13 people, officials said. Ninety-four passengers survived the accident.

Gene Metz, was aboard a commuter flight that had just landed at D-FW from Wichita Falls.

"His right wing was coming straight at us," Metz said. "It was probably no more than a foot or 18 inches off the ground. As he pulled it back to the left, I don't know how the hell he missed us, but he missed us."

As passengers on Metz's plane watched Flight 1141 struggling to get off the ground, they began to cheer. "It was like a football game," Metz said. "We were cheering this guy to get that plane off the ground. It was very emotional. Plus, we were in danger of our own lives."

Rick Arnett, an attorney from Austin, was also on a plane that had just landed.

"As the plane came up to take off, it was barely getting off the ground and the right wing was dipping as it passed behind us," Arnett said. "There were flames coming out of the right engine and the wing touched the ground," he said.

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