

# Sell a drug, lose a finger

## Lawmaker's proposal draws fire from officials

HOUSTON (AP) — Federal prosecutors are questioning a state representative's motive in drafting legislation to authorize cutting off convicted drug dealers' fingers since the legislator recently sought probation for a convicted drug dealer.

Rep. Al Edwards, D-Houston, announced Saturday he was drafting legislation to cut off the tip of the little finger of a person convicted for the first time of drug dealing or possession of a large amount of drugs.

Yet Edwards wrote to U.S. District Judge David Hittner asking for leniency when sentencing Martha Marie Preston.

Prosecutors contended Preston and co-defendant Johnny Binder were drug kingpins who got rich selling crack and powder cocaine. They said Preston owned five crack houses in Houston and used other people as pawns in her criminal activities.

Despite Edwards' attempt to keep Preston out of jail, Hittner gave her a 40-year prison term and a \$200,000 fine Jan. 13. The judge also ordered her to serve six years on parole after she is released from prison.

Jesse Rodriguez, an assistant U.S. attorney who was one of the prosecutors in Preston's case, said he had seen Edwards' letter. The letter, he said, was cited in court by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mel Pechacek before Preston was sentenced.

"It certainly makes me question what his true motives are in either case," Rodriguez said Sunday about Edwards' letter and his plan to maim drug dealers.

"Politicians that write letters on behalf of drug dealers — maybe we ought to cut something off other than their fingers," Pechacek told the *Houston Post* Sunday night.

"There can't be a double standard

for politicians' friends and people who aren't their friends," he said. "If they don't know them, they're ready to cut off a finger. If they do know them, they're ready to write letters and do everything they can to get a lighter sentence."

Edwards said Sunday that he wrote the letter asking that Preston receive probation because prosecutors had painted her as the "kingpin" with primary responsibility for putting drugs on Houston's streets, and he believed she was just a scapegoat.

Edwards said if Preston did deal drugs she ought to be punished under his proposed law "like anyone else."

If Edwards' bill were law and Preston had been convicted in state court, she could have lost the tips of her smallest finger.

# Officer injured in car chase over Mexico-Texas waterway

EL PASO (AP) — Two burglars fired several shotgun blasts at pursuing police and smashed through a roadblock at an international bridge, pinning one policeman between a squad car and guardrail, officials said.

Municipal police in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, said they arrested the men without incident minutes after the suspects sped across the bridge Sunday night.

El Paso officer Richard Gonzales was treated and released for a knee injury after the burglars burst through the roadblock and knocked a police car into him, police said. No other injuries were reported.

Mexican police identified the suspects they arrested as Maximino Armandariz Gallegos, 32, and Francisco Armandariz Gallegos, 31, both of El Paso. The men are believed to be brothers.

The chase began about 7:30 p.m. when police surprised two men burglarizing a vacuum-cleaner repair

shop in northeast El Paso, police Lt. Tom Naubert said.

"They fired at officers four or five times with a shotgun, but no one was hit," he said.

He said police in the two pursuing cars didn't return fire, but U.S. Customs agents at the bridge shot at their vehicle after it burst through the police roadblock.

Juarez municipal police said they stopped the car about 100 yards inside the customs booths and arrested the men. They said they didn't find a weapon, and El Paso police said they would search the chase route for the shotgun.

Juarez police said they did find some vacuum cleaners in the car's trunk.

Vacuum cleaners and other appliances of dubious origin are readily available from numerous sidewalk vendors in a rough Juarez neighborhood called La Chavena.

If the suspects are returned to the United States, they will be charged

with attempted capital murder, aggravated assault and burglary, said El Paso police Lt. J.R. Grijalva.

Juarez police said they were checking to see whether the men are Mexican citizens. If they are, they could be charged with committing a crime in another country and tried for that before being returned to the United States.

If the men are not Mexican citizens, they probably will be deported to the United States to face charges, Juarez police said.

## DA claims police burden Houston office

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Police Department diverts an unacceptable number of uninvestigated criminal cases to the district attorney's office, creating inconvenience and frustration for citizens, District Attorney John B. Holmes Jr. said.

The problem, apparently caused by lack of police manpower, means victims of crime in Houston sometimes are left with the responsibility of gathering witness information themselves, even in the case of assaults, records indicate.

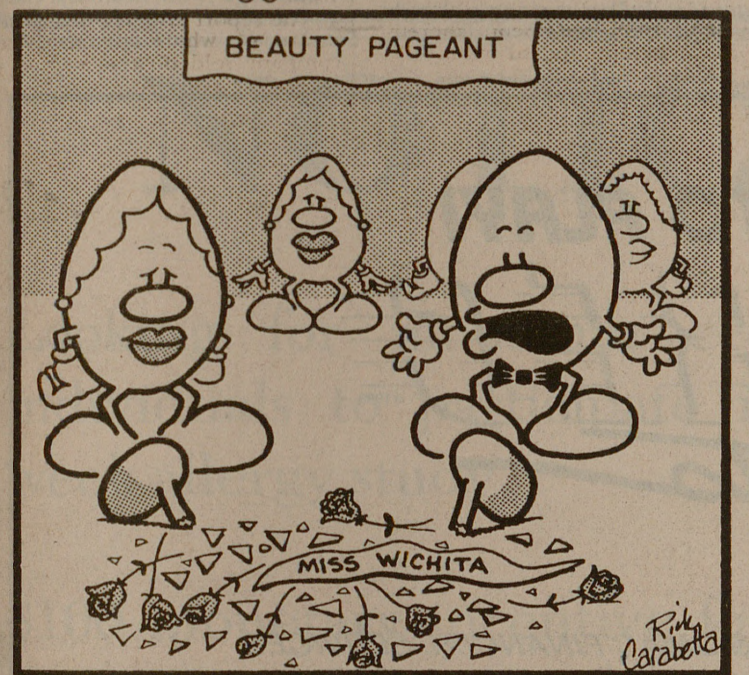
"If you don't die, you're going to have to investigate it when you get out of the hospital yourself, because all they (Houston police) do is go to the hospital and say, 'Hey, you want to file charges, go to the DA,'" Holmes said.

Holmes said police continue to refer many uninvestigated criminal cases to his staff even though his job is to prosecute and not investigate.

Houston Police spokesman J.C. Mosier said Monday that he could not readily respond to Holmes' allegations.

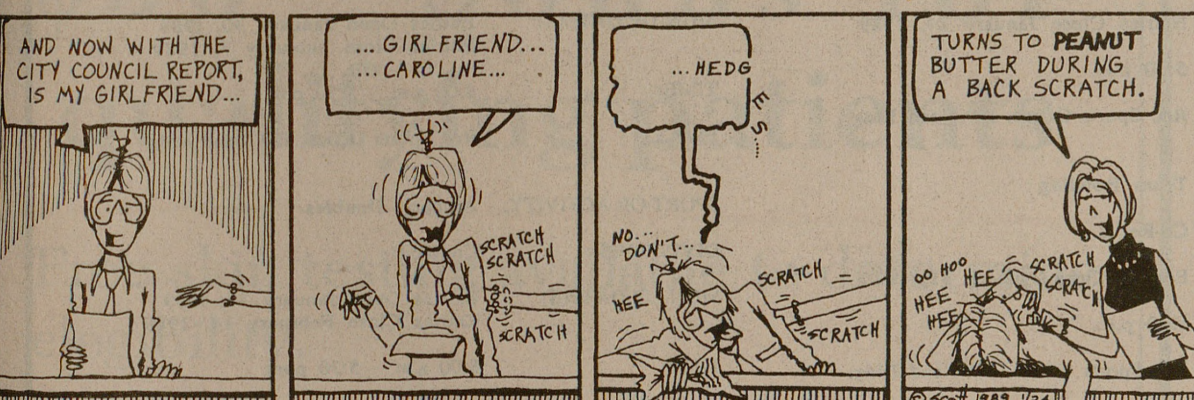
But a high-ranking police official who asked not to be named told the *Houston Chronicle*, "The criminal investigation bureau apparently does not have enough personnel to handle the caseload. Then patrol is going to tell you that we can't afford to give them (criminal investigation) more personnel because we don't have enough personnel to run the calls that we have."

### Scrambled Eggs

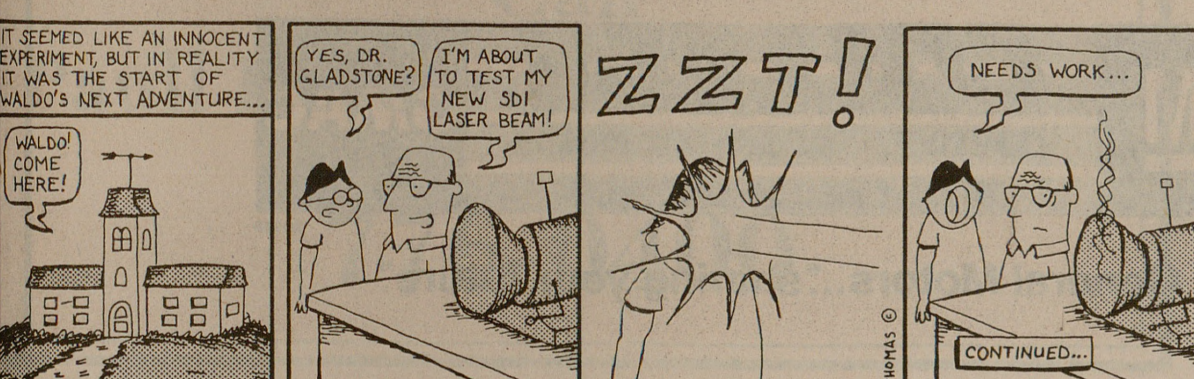


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