

Group: Increased capacity only solution for prisons

AUSTIN (AP) — The only solution to problems in the Texas criminal justice system is increasing prison capacity by 40,000 beds at a cost of \$1.2 billion, the chairman of a Dallas-based anti-crime group said Wednesday.

"If we do anything less than 40,000 beds over the next several years, then we will be here again in two years, same problem, in four years with the same problem, and over and over," Richard Collins, chairman of Associated Texans Against Crime, said.

Rep. Sam Johnson, R-Plano, also urged the expansion and added that he was considering filing legislation to allow the death penalty to be imposed on criminals who commit multiple felonies.

Johnson, one of several lawmakers who joined Collins at a news conference, said he got the idea for the capital punishment bill after partici-

pating in a radio call-in show in San Antonio.

"Five straight callers said, 'What are we going to do with the repeat felony offenders?'" Johnson said. "And I said I don't know, unless we build more prison beds and keep them in jail, because they are not being rehabilitated."

Callers asked why capital punishment wasn't available for second- and third-time felony offenders, Johnson said, adding, "I'll tell you right now, I'm thinking about doing that (filing legislation) because of those people's suggestion."

An additional 40,000 beds would increase Texas prison capacity to 90,000 by 1992, Collins said, and the average time served by inmates would increase from about 21 percent of the sentence assessed to about 30 percent.

The expansion could be financed through taxes, bonds, spending cuts in other areas or passage of a lottery

and dedication of the game's proceeds, Collins said.

The prison system is under a federal court order because of crowded conditions, and an estimated 8,000 to 11,000 inmates who have been sentenced to state prison are being held in local jails.

Gov. Bill Clements has called for nearly 11,000 new prison beds, with expansion to be financed with \$343 million in bonds.

Lawmakers also are looking at alternatives to incarceration, such as prison "boot camps."

"Texas is the leading state in the country in providing alternatives," Collins said. "We have 290,000 probationers on probation. We have 67,000 people on parole. What more alternatives can we provide?"

A proposed constitutional amendment authorizing the issuance of general obligation bonds for corrections facilities is in the House Corrections Committee.

Rains: Texas political hopefuls should reveal funding sources

AUSTIN (AP) — Public disclosure of where political candidates get the money to run for office is essential in Texas, the chairman of campaign finance reform task force declared Wednesday.

"I can find no reason in the law or in just plain common sense that we should allow a situation to exist where it is impossible to trace money in a campaign and know its true source," Secretary of State Jack Rains said.

Rains, a Republican, heads the bipartisan task force that will recommend changes to the Legislature.

"Everyone who is close to campaign finance in this state, I think, shares a troublesome concern," Rains said. "We may be giving the public the wrong impression in that we do not disclose enough so that reasonable voters can say with assurance and certainty that they know who is financing each and every campaign."

Rains said campaign reform has the support of the state's top leaders, including Gov. Bill Clements, House Speaker Gib Lewis and Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby.

Another committee member, state Rep. Ashley Smith, R-Houston, noted the soaring costs of Texas campaigns. Clements, for example, spent some \$12 million on his 1986 race.

"The size of contributions in the political campaigns that we have on a statewide basis, as well as a legislative and local basis, have gotten so large they merit a review," Smith said.

Rains presented the panel with a lengthy list of pro-

posed reforms, that included:

- Limiting contributions to a candidate to \$5,000 a year by individuals and \$10,000 by political committees.

- Limiting individuals to total contributions of \$25,000 a year to any combination of candidates or political committees.

- Prohibiting "laundering" of political funds through a series of political action committees.

- Expanding reporting to require candidates to give cumulative totals on contributions from individuals and PACs.

- Requiring accurate reports to end the current practice of some politicians who hide the nature of spending by reporting only credit card payments or staff "travel."

Sen. John Montford, D-Lubbock, said he has been interested in campaign finance reform for years but added, "It's been lonely . . . In 1985, I couldn't even get a committee vote on campaign finance reform. In 1987, I got it out of committee, even though it was on the last day of the (legislative) session."

Former state Sen. Searcy Bracewell of Houston said one improvement would be to reduce the length of time between primary and general elections. In 1988, the state primary was March 8, with the general election in November.



Photo by Richard James

Capt. Tim Fickey of the College Station Fire Department fans smoke away from a fire that started in the basement of Davis-Gary on Wednesday. The incident started when

sparks from a workers' acetylene torch caught a door on fire. It was isolated and there were no injuries. The renovation of the dormitory should not be delayed because of the fire.

East Texas' 2-year drought kills 30,000 trees

CROCKETT (AP) — A two-year drought in East Texas is being blamed for the deaths of more than 30,000 pine trees in the Davy Crockett National Forest.

Up to 10,000 acres amounting to 3 million to 4 million board feet of lumber in the Neches District of the forest in Houston and Trinity counties are affected, Sten Olsen, district forest ranger, said.

"Some areas have been harder hit, but the dead trees are scattered, from one to 20 per acre," he said. "All ages and all kinds have died — natural seedlings up to 10 years old, planted seedlings to six years, natural pole timber and young and old sawtimber."

Forest Service spokesman Carl Gidlund said Wednesday the tree

kill appears to be confined to the 77,685-acre Neches District.

"We don't know of any other drought-killed trees in the forest in the South," he said. "At least none has been reported to us. Location is probably the biggest factor."

The two counties are at the western boundary of the Southern Coastal pine forest.

"During periods of average or higher moisture, the tree line advances west," Olsen said. "When it's dry, the line retreats east a few miles."

For the past two years, rainfall in the area is 28 inches short of normal. "There's no question we've the potential for further loss if the drought continues," Olsen said.

He said experts speculate that trees are accustomed to high moisture and the drought has put them under stress. One characteristic of the dying trees is that they were in a soil known as Keltys.

"Those are loamy soils and contain a lot of moisture under normal precipitation conditions," he said.

Salvage efforts to harvest the dead trees began in the fall but Olsen said there's more work in the two counties than local salvage logging operations can handle.

"We still have drought conditions and the trees have been dying at an accelerated rate," he said. "Even by harvesting all we can there'll still be lots of dead trees left to benefit various wildlife needs."

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door prizes
will be
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| Kimberly Ferrell | Donna Ross |
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