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# Union officials join investigation of fatal explosion at plastics plant

PASADENA (AP) — Officials from the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union said Wednesday they will join the investigation of the blast at the Phillips Petroleum Co. plastics plant to be sure that there were no safety violations and that overwork didn't contribute to the disaster.

"This is a major explosion and it's a major tragedy with a lot of people dead," Bob Wages, vice president of the international OCAW's oil section, said Wednesday. "It's symptomatic of what's going on in this industry."

"I think companies are concerned about safety, but I think they have competing interests: profit and production," Wages said. "I'm concerned about that."

Three bodies have been recovered and another 19 people are believed buried in the rubble of the plant. Another 124 people were injured when explosions touched off flammable gas Monday afternoon.

Joe Misberner, national president of the Denver-based OCAW, said union officials were to join Phillips and a team of examiners from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the investigation.

Wages, who met with hundreds of Phillips employees at the local 4-227 center, said employees are worried that long hours, staff shortages and

an abundance of contract workers has led to unsafe conditions at many of the nation's refining plants.

"People don't feel that there's been adequate attention to safety," Clay Howell, a 14-year Phillips employee and union man, said. "We've had too many contractors, people not familiar with

**"People don't feel that there's been adequate attention to safety. We've had too many contractors, people not familiar with work areas, and people working too many hours."**

— Clay Howell, Phillips employee

work areas, and people working too many hours. There's been a freeze on hiring and yet an increase in production."

Howell said although the union and Phillips had discussed safety problems in the past, "I just don't think they've realized that follow-ups were inadequate."

Bud Ramirez, a Phillips employee and union member, agreed.

"I am concerned about safety, but I feel we have a pretty good safety record out there," Ramirez said. "My biggest concern is to see that everybody is taken care of and I think the union will stand behind us on that."

Wages said the union will try to negotiate with Phillips to get reassignments and other job assignments for workers while the firm rebuilds the massive plastics refinery.

"We realize the company announced this morning that it will rebuild the facility and our people will be taken care of for two months," Wages said. "But we want to do everything we can to ensure that the workers remain employed during the rebuilding process."

The union, meanwhile, announced it would keep its 4-227 local office open around the clock to provide current information and begin offering the services of grief counselors for workers and their families.

"If you've ever been in one of these, it's an awesome feeling — even if you escape without injuries," Wages said.

# Hobby offers House worker's comp solution

AUSTIN (AP) — In a dramatic bid to break the months-long legislative deadlock over workers' compensation reform, Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby offered his own plan Wednesday and won guarded optimism from some state leaders.

House Speaker Gib Lewis, whose chamber has been at odds with the Senate since January over the issue, called Hobby's proposal "very encouraging . . . a positive step toward ultimate resolution of this issue."

Gov. Bill Clements, who says workers' comp is his top priority and has called another special legislative session to address it, also sounded upbeat.

"I was impressed," Clements said, adding that he is anxious to see a formal bill that incorporates Hobby's proposals. "I think it's a real step forward."

The Republican governor also said, "I think it will certainly contribute to breaking the deadlock . . . It was a very constructive and helpful program."

Lawmakers return to Austin on Nov. 14 to resume work on overhauling the system that pays benefits for workers killed or injured on the job.

Hobby noted that the current system is beset with problems, including high costs for employers and low benefits for workers.

Highlights of his plan, outlined at a briefing in the Senate chamber, include:

- Curtailing skyrocketing medical costs, which Hobby called "the greatest cause of problems" in the current system.
  - New emphasis on workplace safety, including a new state division of worker health and safety to identify hazardous employers and design safety programs and fines of up to \$5,000 a day for safety violations.
  - Objective criteria for determining benefit payments.
  - Higher compensation for catastrophic injuries and death.
  - Incentives to settling disputes without expensive and long trials.
  - Incentives for injured workers to return to their jobs.
- A second bill will deal with insurance issues, Hobby said, but that isn't finalized yet.

Hobby stopped short of predicting whether his plan would break the logjam that has seen two legislative failures this year — the 140-day regular session and a 30-day special session this summer.

"I hope so," Hobby said when asked if his plan could do the job. He said he had reviewed it with a number of people and, "Nobody's thrown me out of their office yet."

Hobby's bills as yet have no sponsor, but it is unlikely that a senator would refuse to introduce it for the lieutenant governor, who presides over the chamber.

One senator who served on the

previous House-Senate conference committee that negotiated on workers' comp voiced optimism that some bill would be passed now that Hobby is writing his own.

"I think that (Lt.) Gov. Hobby has sent a strong signal that he wants a bill. Different state leaders have said that before, but nobody has sat down and proposed one," said Sen. Cyndi Krier, R-San Antonio.

"I commend him for making that effort, and I think that will have an impact on the Senate," she said.

Rick Gentry, a spokesman for the insurance industry, attended Hobby's briefing and called the plan "A

supreme effort to break the legislative inertia over this particular issue so that we can move forward."

Many aspects of the plan "sound very positive. He's made an attempt to be very fair," Gentry said.

Trial lawyers and labor, who have opposed business during the reform battle, may see it differently, one lawyer said.

"I don't think labor's going to like it," said Deece Eckstein, a San Antonio attorney who also attended Hobby's briefing. "I don't think business is going to like it. That'll slow it down a lot more than whether or not the trial lawyers like it."

# Committee prepares to clean Texas money laundering stain

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Banking Committee plans field hearings in Texas to examine why the Southwest is reportedly "awash with drug monies" being laundered through banks in the region, Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez announced Wednesday.

Gonzalez, a San Antonio Democrat, said the hearings would be conducted in his hometown Dec. 6 and 7 to examine the growing problem of money laundering in the Southwest and whether current banking laws are adequate.

"We chose San Antonio as the site of this hearing because it is in the center of a region that is seeing an unusually high level of money laundering," Gonzalez said.

"Recent reports show that more cash is flowing into certain Southwest financial institutions than is being withdrawn," Gonzalez said in a statement. "Such an influx of cash — particularly in small bills — is often an indication that the deposit is the result of an illegal drug sale."

Gonzalez cited a story in the Austin American-Statesman that said the cash surplus in the San Antonio vault of the Federal Reserve rose from \$900 million in 1986 to \$1.6 billion in 1988.

"Only the Federal Reserve Banks in Miami, Los Angeles and Jacksonville, Fla., have larger cash surpluses," Gonzalez said.

Money laundering is the practice of exchanging or investing money in such a way as to conceal that it came from an illegal source.

**"We chose San Antonio as the site of this hearing because it is in the center of a region that is seeing an unusually high level of money laundering."**

— Henry B. Gonzalez, chairman

Gonzalez said his committee would ask officials on the "front lines in the war against drugs" to discuss the extent of the drug problem and money laundering in the Southwest and how local and state law enforcement agencies are coordinating their efforts with federal agencies.

Witnesses would also be called from the Border Patrol, Drug Enforcement Administration, Customs

Service and Internal Revenue Service, Gonzalez said, as the committee attempts to assess the federal government's effectiveness in combating money laundering activities.

The role of financial institutions would also be examined.

"When Congress passed the Omnibus Drug Initiative Act of 1986, the Banking Committee made sure that the bill contained strong language designed to prevent our nation's banks from being used as conduits to launder the ill-gotten gains of drug dealers," Gonzalez said.

Rep. Albert Bustamante, D-San Antonio, whose district includes a stretch of U.S.-Mexico border, said increased enforcement in Florida has moved a lot of smuggling activity to the Southwest.

"And we've been getting reports that not only are we getting the drugs, we've been getting a bunch of the money," Bustamante said Wednesday. "I think that there is speculation that there's a lot of the type of money in many, many of our areas, and not only on the border but the inland areas."

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# Polls, politicians predict Democrat will win Leland's congressional seat

HOUSTON (AP) — Judging by polls and political observers, it's not a question of whether a Democrat will replace the late Mickey Leland as representative for Houston's 18th congressional district — it's which Democrat.

"This is considered to be one of the most Democratic areas of the state, if not the nation," Sherry Johnson, chairman of the Harris County Republican Party, said. "It was drawn that way as a guaranteed seat. In the last election, something like 70 percent voted for Michael Dukakis."

A special election to replace Leland will be held Nov. 7.

Leland was killed in a plane crash in August while on a famine mission in the jungles of Ethiopia, a trip that was part of Leland's longtime effort to focus national attention on the problem of world hunger.

Before Leland, the district created in 1971 sent Barbara Jordan to Washington, where she became one of the nation's leading statesmen.

District 18 is a disparate conglomeration of downtown oil company headquarters and slums in central and northeast Houston.

It includes most of the city's black population and many of its Hispanics. In 1980, 41 percent of its residents were black and 31 percent Hispanic.

"I don't believe there is any question that it is a Democrat's seat," Jack Carter, chairman of the Harris County Democratic Party, said. "The question is, which Democrat?"

Seven of the 11 candidates vying for Leland's unexpired term in the special election are Democrats. Three others are Republican and one is Libertarian. The four front runners — all Democrats — already are elected officials.

State Sen. Craig Washington, City Councilman Anthony Hall and state Reps. Ron Wilson and Al Edwards lead polling in the race. Other Democrats in the running include Shirley Fobbs, Timothy John Hattenbach and Lee Arthur Demas Jr.

Republicans vying for the term include Beverly Spenser, Manse R. Sharpe Jr. and Byron J. Johnson. Gary Johnson, no relation, is the Libertarian candidate.

Washington and Hall are considered the most likely to emerge from the vote for a runoff election. A candidate would have to garner at least 50 percent of the special election vote to win the seat outright.

Washington, 47, a defense attorney, served 10 years with the Texas House and has served another six in the Senate. He has a reputation as a champion of liberal causes, including abortion rights, gay rights and AIDS health care and social issues for the poor.

**"This is considered to be one of the most Democratic areas of the state, if not the nation."**

— Sherry Johnson, Republican chairman

"I think this job requires one to have the courage to stand up and make hard decisions," Washington said. "I am afraid of politicians who have no ideas of their own, but merely regurgitate what other politicians say. You may not always agree with me, but you always know where I stand."

Hall, 45, also an attorney, has served on the Houston City Council the past 10 years and as a state representative from 1973 to 1978. He credits himself with drafting a minority and women business enterprise ordinance for the city, negotiating the city's anti-apartheid law and sponsoring a bill that brought Texas Southern University a "special purpose" status in the state. In addition, he has helped establish anti-drug "Just Say No" youth clubs.

Another front runner, Wilson, 36, has been a state representative since 1977. He was a teen-age aide to Leland in 1973.

# Here's how Texas cities ranked in poll

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Here is how Texas metropolitan areas ranked among 333 metropolitan areas nationwide and their overall rating as judged in the Places Rated Almanac.

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