

Wednesday, January 9, 1990

The Battalion

## Navy decision hits home

● Layoff of 3,400 workers begins at Fort Worth plant

● Geren fights for stealth; Texans react indifferently

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — General Dynamics on Tuesday began firing 3,400 workers who were developing the A-12 stealth attack plane at the company's giant Fort Worth plant.

The layoffs, about 13 percent of the plant's 29,000-person workforce, will trim some \$500 million from the local economy. But an economist said Fort Worth and Tarrant County can absorb the shock.

"I would rather be in Fort Worth than Boston right now," said Bernard Weinstein, a University of North Texas economist, referring to the fallout from the \$2.3 billion failure of the Bank of New England.

Rusty Stewart, a 21-year-old toolmaker, has two job offers. He started looking for new work in November when the government review intensified.

Defense Secretary Dick Cheney on Monday canceled the radar-evading, carrier-based A-12 because General Dynamics and McDonnell Douglas Corp. were a year behind schedule and \$1 billion over budget in its development.

Judy Bell, who worked on the A-12 but was not laid off, said workers are "just kind of in awe."

"We just blame a lot of people," Bell said.

"We certainly regret the disruption this is going to have on the professional and personal lives of some very good people in the A-12 program," said Chris Schildz, spokesman at General Dynamics headquarters in St. Louis.

The company opened career counseling offices with the state employment agency to help laid off workers find other jobs. Gov.-elect Ann Richards pledged the state would help workers any way it could.

"I think we also must make certain that the federal government is not making an error here and explore every opportunity to have work on

that stealth (plane) continue," Richards said in Austin.

The A-12 was designed to replace the A-6 Intruder, which entered service in the early 1960s and is the Navy's only bomber that can attack at night and in bad weather.

Another 150 General Dynamics workers were fired at a plant in Tulsa, Okla. McDonnell Douglas plans to lay off 5,000 workers at a St. Louis plant.

Both companies said last month that layoffs would occur if the program was canceled. They proposed restructuring the \$4.8 billion contract with the Navy. But Cheney rejected the idea, saying the companies could not say how much more money they would need to get the plant into production.

Vicki Park of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce said the layoffs would send the Tarrant County unemployment rate from 5.1 percent to 5.5 percent, still below the nation's 6.1 percent jobless rate and Texas' 7.2 percent figure.

The chamber is trying to lure some aerospace companies to the Fort Worth area and the availability of experienced workers may help, Park said.

"There are going to be a lot of people vying for the same jobs," said Ron Leonard Withers, a senior engineer who had been with the company three years. He said he may return to school and pick up another degree.

"It's hard to say who's at fault," Withers said. "It looks like there were shortcomings on every area."

"These 4,000 people have what will prove to be highly desirable and marketable skills," Weinstein said.

He estimates Tarrant County will lose \$500 million over the next year because of the layoffs. But he said the ripple effect of the loss of a \$150 million payroll is hard to accurately gauge.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Pete Geren hopes to rally the Texas congressional delegation behind his efforts to save the Navy's A-12 stealth attack plane, but some Texans appeared cool to the idea Tuesday.

"I think that it is likely, given the gross mismanagement of the program by both the Navy and General Dynamics, that Geren is going to find himself hard-pressed to find many congressional allies," a congressional aide said. "This program is a dead duck."

Defense Secretary Dick Cheney canceled the \$52 billion A-12 on Monday, ending jobs for 3,400 General Dynamics workers in Fort Worth and at least another 150 in Tulsa, Okla.

General Dynamics Corp. and McDonnell Douglas Corp., the project's two prime contractors, were declared in default of the contract for failing to design and develop the wedge-shaped airplane on time and according to the Navy's specifications.

The program also is the subject of a federal criminal investigation.

Geren, a Democrat who represents the General Dynamics plant in Fort Worth, has declared that the fight, however, is not over.

"I intend to work within Congress to breathe life back into the A-12 program," Geren said. "It will be an uphill battle but it's worth the struggle. I am committed to fighting for Tarrant County jobs."

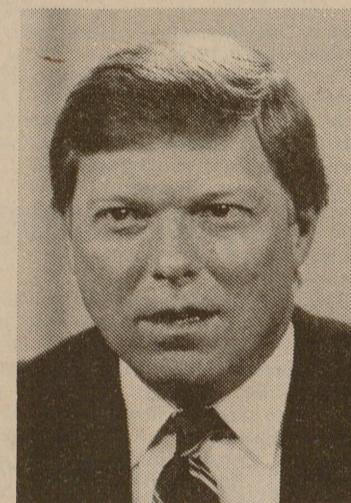
A Geren aide said the congressman would be looking for A-12 allies within the Texas congressional delegation, known as one of the most influential on Capitol Hill, and elsewhere in Congress.

But another congressional aide said the Texas delegation needs to pick its battles wisely this year, as it will already be fighting for tight dollars for such big ticket items as the

space station and the super collider.

One Texas congressman whose district includes General Dynamics workers said he wants more information on the secret A-12 program from the Pentagon before he decides whether to fight to keep the fighter, chosen to replace the Vietnam-era A-6 Intruder planes.

"If it can be demonstrated that this is not the first, best choice, I'd be happy to go with that," said Rep. Dick Army, D-Copper Canyon. But on the other hand, "don't leave us with a big hole in defense needs and



Rep. Richard Gephardt said he wants to study further the Navy's decision.

two, don't waste taxpayers' money.

House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt, whose St. Louis district includes some of McDonnell Douglas workers whose jobs are threatened, said he wanted to study the decision "to determine whether the government's action in this case is justified."

## House speaker re-elected Lewis to serve again despite allegations

AUSTIN (AP) — Fort Worth Democrat Gib Lewis, under indictment for alleged ethics violations, won overwhelming re-election Tuesday to an unprecedented fifth term as House speaker after a colleague said, "Today, we make history."

"This is a proud and solemn moment for me," said Lewis, who is beginning his 21st year in the House and is the first person ever to win five two-year terms as its speaker.

His election on a 146-1 vote came despite his being indicted on two misdemeanor ethics charges by a grand jury that prosecutors say is investigating ties between lobbyists and legislators.

Lewis has denied any wrongdoing and said he will plead innocent to the charges of failing to report a gift from a San Antonio law firm and failing to disclose his

interest in a Fort Worth company on which the law firm allegedly paid some property taxes.

The only lawmaker voting against Lewis was first-term Republican Ted Kamel of Tyler.

"I cannot, in good conscience, support a speaker who is under indictment on charges of violating the ethics laws of this state," Kamel said.

Several lawmakers voiced strong support for Lewis, saying he had been fair in dealings with other lawmakers and that he tries to do what is best for the state.

Helping administer Lewis' oath of office was former Speaker Billy Clayton, who was elected to a fourth term as speaker in 1981 after being acquitted of federal charges of racketeering and conspiracy.

"You have just set a historic record," Clayton told Lewis.

## Richards rejects proposal for ethics commission

AUSTIN (AP) — Gov.-elect Ann Richards, predicting quick passage of ethics reform legislation, Tuesday rejected a proposal to allow a state ethics commission rather than voters to set lawmakers' pay.

Salary decisions should remain with the voters, Richards said, while the commission should enforce ethics rules.

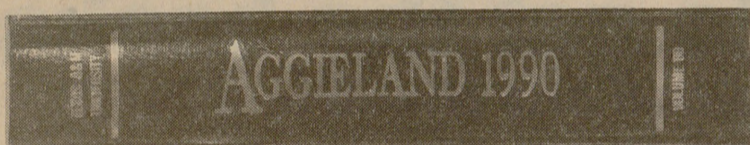
"The purpose of the ethics commission is — and should be — to assure the people of Texas that the highest ethical standards are written in law and to give elected officials the guidelines by which they conduct themselves," Richards said

In the wake of news reports about special interest lobbyists spending on gifts and entertainment for lawmakers, Richards and Lt. Gov.-elect Bob Bullock, both Democrats, campaigned for a strong ethics reform bill last year.

Negotiations between their offices and that of House Speaker Gib Lewis have been going on in recent days, and one proposal advanced is to have a new Ethics Commission set lawmakers' pay.

The speaker says he is innocent of any wrongdoing, and Richards said she doesn't think his indictment will affect ethics reform legislation.

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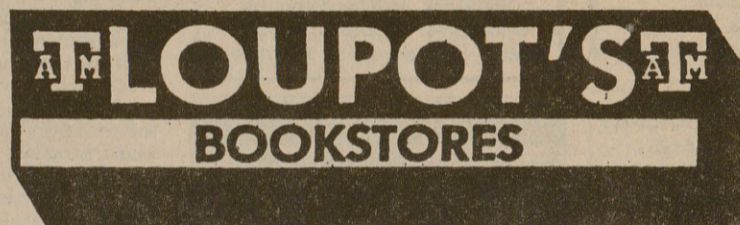


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