

Friday, December 7, 1990

The Battalion

Murder increase in Texas blamed on poverty, gangs

DALLAS (AP) — A woman is shot to death as she unwittingly walks into a gun battle between two 18-year-old men arguing over a baseball cap.

A teen-ager is shot after a high school football game in a confrontation with another youth who apparently stepped on his tennis shoes.

Two teen-agers are shot to death and two are wounded in a fight over a gold tooth that fell from the mouth of one of them.

That's just in Dallas.

The number of murders has surged in Texas' three largest cities this year, part of a nationwide trend that worries many experts and citizens.

"In this country, we really do have an underclass. ... To some degree, nothing in life looks very valuable to them. They don't have a lot of options."

— Dean Kilpatrick, crime researcher

There have been 414 homicides in Dallas so far this year, compared to 351 for all of 1989 and a previous record of 366 in 1988.

Houston police say 555 people have been murdered compared to 512 in 1989. By this time last year, 452 people had been slain in Texas

largest city.

And in San Antonio, police report 203 murders, up from 156 at this time last year and 169 for all of 1989.

The Texas cities are not alone; the number of murders has increased in the other seven of the nation's 10 largest cities.

"We can expect most major cities to surpass all-time homicide rates

this year," said Dean Kilpatrick, director of the Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.

The reason is drugs, poverty and, some experts say, a growing disregard for human life.

"Little value is being placed on human life," Kilpatrick said. "In this country, we really do have an underclass. ... To some degree — to a lot of people in that underclass — nothing in life looks very valuable to them. They don't have a lot of options."

Houston police have linked more than a third of the city's homicides this year to drugs, said Debbie McMenemy, statistical analyst for the department.

Gang activity is blamed for the increase in San Antonio, said Sandy Perez, a police spokeswoman. At least 30 deaths have been connected to the so-called Mexican Mafia, a gang that operates in Texas prisons and the city.

Reporter jailed for contempt over source

CORPUS CHRISTI (AP) — A district judge Thursday ordered a newspaper reporter jailed for refusing to answer questions about interviews with a capital murder suspect.

At a pre-trial hearing, reporter Libby Averyt of the Corpus Christi Caller-Times refused 12 times to answer questions about the interviews with Jermarr Arnold, accused of killing a jewelry store clerk during a 1983 robbery.

State District Judge Eric Brown of the 28th District Court cited Averyt for contempt of court, then released her on her own recognizance until a 9 a.m. Friday hearing, to allow time for paperwork to be completed for her incarceration.

The judge said once Averyt goes to jail she will stay there until she agrees to discuss the interviews.

Averyt claimed protection under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and a corresponding provision in the Texas Constitution.

"I don't want to go to jail," the 26-year-old reporter said after Thursday's hearing. "But my desire to avoid jail is outweighed by my duty to stand up for what I believe in."

"And I believe that if every time I interview someone, the entire conversation could be scrutinized by attorneys, then significantly fewer people would be willing to talk to me. And if they will not talk to me, then I cannot fulfill my role as a reporter and inform the public."

Averyt and the newspaper's attorney, Jorge Rangel, told the judge that free-speech provisions protect reporters from having to divulge the content of interviews, other than what is published.

Rangel said requiring testimony on unpublished material would have a "chilling effect" on the newsgathering process.

Ethics reform Richards makes change top legislation priority

AUSTIN (AP) — Ethics reform legislation will be a top priority in the 1991 Legislature, Gov.-elect Ann Richards says.

The Democrat, who will be sworn in Jan. 15, said in an interview with the Associated Press that she already has discussed ethics reform with Bob Bullock, who will become lieutenant governor, and House Speaker Gib Lewis.

"We are of one mind that ethics legislation should be No. 1 or 2 or 3 on our agenda," Richards said. "It'll be discussed and debated very early on in the session."

She also said former congresswoman Barbara Jordan has agreed to serve as her special counsel on ethics.

The three state leaders made ethics reform an issue in their campaigns, and aides said the three staffs met Wednesday to begin drafting the legislation.

Richards said she wants to require disclosure of lobby expenses of more than \$100 per occasion and the creation of an ethics commission to oversee ethics law enforcement.

She also said she would like to see a limit on campaign contributions. "I think there has to be limitation on the size of contributions from any source, whether it be a PAC (political action committee) or an individual," she said.

Richards said she wants an ethics package that includes full financial disclosure, including federal income tax returns for all statewide elected officials.

"That way, the public has a very clear idea of whether there are any conflicts of interest," she said.

Tim Conger, press secretary to Lewis, said the four-term speaker wants to see a reform bill passed in the upcoming session.

"He's been committed to passing ethics for some time," Conger said. "We made a fairly large push in the special sessions (earlier this year) to get ethics in the call and pass a bill."

Conger said that a low House bill number, usually reserved for priority legislation, had been set aside for ethics legislation.

Bullock issued his own detailed ethics reform plan during the campaign and reiterated last week that he wanted action. "Not only is the government short on cash ... it is short on credibility," Bullock said.

For nearly two years, dozens of news stories have detailed lobbyists' lavish gifts to members of the Legislature.

These included everything from golf outings to vacations. An Associated Press survey found that lobbyists reported spending more than



Ann Richards

\$2.2 million on gifts and entertainment in 1989 alone.

Campaign contributions also have been under scrutiny, particularly after East Texas chicken magnate Lonnie "Bo" Pilgrim distributed blank \$10,000 checks on the Senate floor during a special session on workers' compensation insurance.

Several lawmakers also are working on ethics bills. Among them is a bill by Rep. Betty Denton, D-Waco, to create a Texas Elections and Ethics Commission. The panel would have sweeping power and a million-dollar budget to enforce campaign and ethics laws.

FBI joins NASA in investigation of alleged hacker phone fraud

HOUSTON (AP) — The FBI has joined an investigation of an alleged computer hacker ring accused of pilfering millions of dollars in telephone charges from the Johnson Space Center over the past two years.

But NASA officials on Thursday "categorically denied" news reports of large-scale, unauthorized use of long distance phone service at the center.

In a copyright story on Wednesday, the Houston Chronicle reported that computer-assisted thieves obtained telephone service that experts said could be worth \$12 million — a breach described as the

biggest in the nation.

The Chronicle quoted sources in the computer underground who requested anonymity as saying NASA's phone exchange had become the primary conduit for "phone phreaking" in the months since the DEA sealed its breach.

"Phreaking" is slang for unauthorized use of phone service, typically done to charge off extensive costs for tapping into electronic bulletin boards through phone lines to other computers around the world.

"I can confirm that we are looking into the Johnson Space Center" incident, said FBI Special Agent Orlando Moss in Houston.

NASA officials disputed the estimate.

"The entire (Federal Telephone System) charges for the Johnson Space Center average about \$3 million per year," the center said in a prepared statement. "There has been no appreciable change in FTS call statistics from JSC nor indication of significant abuse of the FTS system over the last several years."

"The particular FTS service cited in the article was disconnected on Nov. 16, 1990, when JSC officials discovered that the service had been published in a so-called 'hackers' bulletin board," the statement read.

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