

Wednesday, April 24, 1991

The Battalion

Senate reports bill approval

Proposed legislation provides life in prison without parole

AUSTIN (AP) — Amid reports on the release of former death row inmates, a Senate committee Tuesday approved a bill providing life in prison without parole, and the reappointment of two criminal justice officials who have voted to parole murderers was delayed.

Sen. Ted Lyon, D-Rockwall, said the proposed legislation "basically would stop the horrendous problem that we've seen evidenced ... of murderers being released on the streets."

Since 1971, 68 former death row inmates have been paroled from prison, according to lawmakers.

Those individuals either had their death sentences commuted to life in prison or received less severe sentences after winning reversals of their death penalties.

Under current law, persons convicted of capital murder can be sentenced to death or life in prison. But there is no prohibition against parole for capital offenders who are serving life terms.

"This will enhance confidence we have in the system," said Sen. Carl Parker, D-Port Arthur, the bill's sponsor. The Senate Criminal Justice Committee sent the measure to the full Senate on a 6-0 vote.

Lawmakers said they will add provisions to the bill that would allow no parole on life sentences if that person's death sentence was commuted and enhance the capital murder sentence to death

if the person commits a capital crime while behind bars.

Parker said prison officials need this amendment to handle no-parole prisoners. "Otherwise," he said, "you are going to have some bulletproof inmates."

Meanwhile, the controversial reappointment of two members of the state Board of Pardons and Parole was put on hold for at least a week by Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos, chairman of the Nominations Committee, which makes recommendations to the Senate on nominees by the governor.

Barrientos, D-Austin, said he wants more time to consider Gov. Ann Richards' selections because "it's more of a serious vote than I thought it was going to be."

"I try to put myself in the shoes of my constituents. They would be asking, 'Barrientos, how would you feel if I let out of prison the man who murdered two of your daughters?'"

The two appointees — Peggy McAdams and Kenneth Coleman, both of Huntsville — were grilled by lawmakers last week on their votes to parole murderers.

McAdams said she voted to parole James C. Cross Jr., who was convicted in the 1965 slaying of a University of Texas coed and felt "comfortable" with her decision. She noted, however, that the board refused to parole Cross on a 15-2 vote.



DOUGLAS PILLS/The Battalion

Sweating finals

Ginnyann Kappler, a freshman environmental design major from McAllen, took time between classes Tuesday to work on her final design project for ARCH 112. The project, which she hopes to make an A on, consists of taking pieces of different pictures and forming them into one.

Richards gives suggestions for boost in education quality

AUSTIN (AP) — Gov. Ann Richards said Tuesday that sending "SWAT" teams of education experts to assist failing schools is one of several ideas the Legislature should include in a bill aimed at boosting the quality of Texas education.

The governor also called for monetary rewards for good schools, higher teacher pay and scholarships for top-achieving high school graduates in a legislative package she wants passed before the current session ends May 27.

"We spend a lot of money on education in Texas," Richards said. "But we are not certain that the students are getting their money's worth or that our taxpayers are getting their money's worth."

Now that lawmakers have approved a \$1.3 billion school finance reform plan, Richards said it is time to focus on educational performance. "The time is drawing short, and I think

we need to get the ball rolling on what I believe is an important piece of legislation," she said.

Richards said her proposals would be encompassed in a bill being sponsored by Sen. Bill Haley, D-Center.

A key proposal would allow the state education commissioner to assemble a so-called SWAT team of expert teachers and administrators to help troubled schools make improvements.

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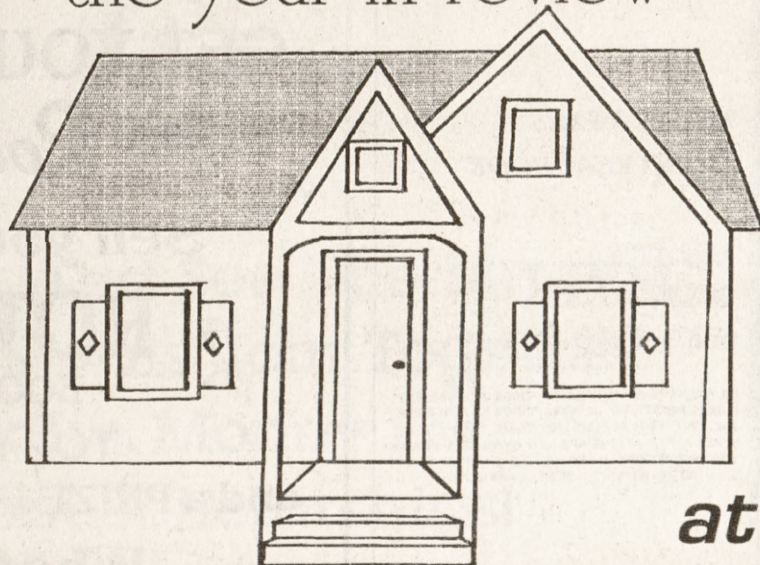


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