

Order for sex offender questioned

DALLAS (AP) — A judge who ordered an admitted sex offender to post a sign at his home identifying himself says she isn't trying to brand the man, but, to borrow a phrase from director Spike Lee, do the right thing.

Parents may welcome the notice, but others wonder whether the get-tough approach is a long-term solution.

The district attorney in Tarrant County, where the case originated, has asked Attorney General Dan Morales to determine whether a judge can require such a notice.

State District Judge Sharen Wilson said Tuesday she believes it's appropriate in certain instances to require a sign be posted, especially if the offender has a child in the home.

Morales, who hasn't reviewed the case pending before the opinions committee, said Tuesday he isn't aware of any specific constitutional violation.

Forty-nine states already operate or are establishing their own registries to track sex offenders, as mandated by the 1994 anti-crime law.

Texas law requires residents to be told when sex offenders move into their neighborhoods. But at least one report earlier this year suggested that

the legislation hasn't made the intended impact.

Wilson isn't alone in meting out unusual punishment. Two years ago in Houston, a piano teacher accused of fondling two students was ordered to give away his \$12,000 piano and post a sign on his house warning children to stay away.

In New York, a judge ordered a man with six drunken driving convictions to put a license plate that reads "CONVICTED DWI" on his vehicle.

Sometimes, neighbors take matters into their own hands. In Detroit, hand-painted signs screaming "Child Molester Lives Here" drove a man from his home in 1994. A year earlier, a house in Lynnwood, Wash., where a convicted child molester had moved after his release from prison was torched.

In this latest case involving a Lewisville man, Wilson ordered that he post a 2-foot-square sign reading: "A person on probation for a child sex offense lives here."

Ricky Lee Shields, 37, was given a choice in July of going to jail for violating his probation or placing the sign in his yard, said his attorney, Albert Perez. "Of course we opted for the sign

knowing his exposure was up to 99 years. Wouldn't you do the same thing?" Perez said.

Shields is serving probation for a seven-year deferred sentence for a 1994 charge of aggravated sexual assault of a child. He violated the conditions of his sentence when he picked up his daughter from day care after his wife's car broke down, the attorney said.

"Of course, he feels terrible about it," Perez explained of his client's view of the sign. "There are a lot of ramifications. What about his family, his kids who go to school? If he should choose to move out of his house and go into isolation, who is going to want to rent to him?"

Neighbor John Veenker, who has a 4-year-old son, said he appreciates knowing the background of the man who lives two doors away but might wonder if he were selling his home about the affect on his investment.

"The sign is good to let the public know. Are there other ways to let the public know? I don't know," he said. "Should he go out and hand out brochures himself? I don't know. Public humiliation is getting a good rap these days here in Texas."

► Tobacco Lobby

Candidates look to reform

The following are responses of the major presidential candidates to the question: "Should your party continue to take con-

tributions from tobacco companies?"

Bill Clinton

"The question we should ask is whether contributions have an adverse impact on policy. That is why my disagreement with the Republican position is about their tobacco policy, which I believe is wrong. The problem is that 3,000 children start smoking every day and 1,000 of them will die sooner because of it. We must do something to stop it, and I want to keep our attention on this issue. The tobacco industry is wrong in fighting our proposal to cut off children's access to tobacco

products and reduce the appeal to children."

Bob Dole

"As president, I will commission to focus campaign finance reform. One of the primary reasons that I will push for is to slash soft money contributions from corporations and labor unions to federal candidates or parties to influence electoral elections."

Ross Perot

"Reform Party candidates will not accept any special interest money. The party will be financed by millions of hard-working Americans sending in contributions."

ON THE ISSUES CAMPAIGN



Perot builds up Reform Party

DALLAS (AP) — Even as his drawing power in the presidential race is diminishing, Ross Perot is trying to build the influence of his new Reform Party by parcelling out endorsements in congressional races.

Last year when he founded the party, Perot said it would endorse House and Senate candidates pledged to work for issues such as campaign and lobbying reform. In the final weeks of the campaign, the endorsements are coming from party leaders in individual states.

"More than anything, people are beginning to realize this is about something so much larger than any one or two people," said Bob Belcher, party chairman for Alabama and Mississippi. "This is an independent movement that is likely to rock the status quo."

The state parties, expected to make their endorsements over the next week or so, are using different methods to make their decisions. Some invited candidates to speak, a few states invited candidates to attend state conventions, others set up committees to interview candidates, many distributed questionnaires.

In all the states, candidates for endorsement had to sign a pledge to run a positive campaign and take positions on seven "principles of reform." These include their positions on redesigning federal entitlement programs, ethical standards for government, campaign finance reform, a balanced budget, a new tax system, creating U.S. jobs and renegotiating trade agreements.

All of the state parties are expected to endorse candidates in congressional races and some will make choices in state

legislative races.

"I think some of the states will go to the state levels, especially some of the mature organizations," said national coordinator Russ Verney.

Whether the Reform Party endorsements will have an effect on the races is unknown. Perot, who captured 19 percent of the vote nationally when he ran in 1992, now registers in single digits and it's hard to gauge whether a Reform Party endorsement carries weight.

In Texas, Democratic Senate candidate Victor Morales is exactly the kind of candidate the Reform Party likes. He won't accept money from political action committees and he's an anti-establishment alternative to GOP Sen. Phil Gramm.

Morales' campaign coordinator Greg Weiner said the campaign believes the Reform Party's endorsement, announced last week, could pay off.

"In all the polls we've seen, there's a substantial number of undecided voters and we think this is a good signal," he said.

Gramm spokesman Larry Neal doesn't think the Reform Party's endorsement will have any effect. He said Gramm deliberately ignored the Texas party's questionnaire because he supports Bob Dole and wanted no confusion. Support for Perot is not a requirement to obtain the Reform Party's endorsement.

Endorsements have already been made in some states. In Minnesota, where Perot tallied 24 percent of the vote in 1992, all major-party candidates courted the Reform Party by attending its state convention in June, answering questionnaires and making presentations to party caucuses.

WILDFIRES

Continued from Page 1

Thousands of people fled their homes, schools and businesses in four counties Monday as flames exploded, propelled through the canyons by winds that gusted as high as 71 mph.

By Tuesday, many were learning the worst. "I saw the news and they were standing in the rubble of our home," said Lou Stark, who lost his Carlsbad home. His wife wasn't sure. "She said, 'Maybe it's not ours.' I said, 'Yes, it's ours.'"

Carlsbad was the site of the worst fire, a fast-moving blaze that burned at least 60 houses and 10 other structures over 8,592 acres in the 65,700-resident suburb on northern San Diego County's seashore.

Just east of Carlsbad, authorities ordered evacuations early Tuesday for parts of San Marcos, a retirement community of 42,800 people.

In the celebrity seashore enclave of Malibu in Los Angeles County, flames charred 13,650 acres and destroyed five houses and a mobile home, and more than 1,000 people were evacuated during the height of the fire Monday.

Marine volunteers were sent from Camp Pendleton to help the firefighters. Huge air tankers bombed the flames with water sucked from the ocean and reservoirs, joined by cargo-hauling helicopters fitted with big water tanks.

Eleven aircraft made repeated flights near Malibu, including two Air National Guard C-130s, each dumping 27,000 pounds of fire retardant.

FORUM

Continued from Page 1

"Any work that we do has to address the human condition ... and offer our hand at improving [it]," she said.

"We need to be leaders in the nation, and together we can do it. We can't afford to stay isolated. We can profit together."

Ashley Peterson, co-chair of the Brazos County Domestic Violence Task Force, said Tuesday's forum bridged the gap between the University and the community.

Peterson said both have resources that can help in the fight against domestic violence and the forum revealed some of those resources.

Phoebe's Home offers shelter to abuse victims until they make alternate living arrangements. The shelter also counsels victims and helps them obtain referrals to find jobs.

Peterson said Bryan-College Station law enforcement officials are aggressive in their treatment of domestic disputes.

The Family Violence Unit, run by the Brazos County attorney's office, provides protective orders for abuse victims.

Peterson said distributing information and educating people

about the resources available to them is the key to combating domestic abuse.

"The more the victim knows about the services and where to go to get help, the more likely they are to leave their abuser," she said.

Domestic abuse occurs worldwide, and Thomas said the United States should use its position with the United Nations to encourage other countries to confront the problem.

"One of the things we have to do as a country is encourage [other countries] to take a more proactive stance toward human rights and peace," she said.

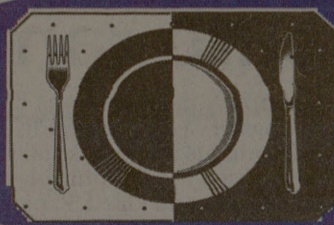
Thomas said attitudes about abuse vary worldwide, necessitating the development of culture-specific counseling.

"Race and ethnicity are very important issues to look at in approaching domestic violence because of the cultural significance and contribution (to abuse)," she said.

"But at the same time, we have to look beyond that (race and ethnicity) to the broader social context."

The forum was co-sponsored by the University, Phoebe's Home in Bryan, the Women's Studies Program and the A&M chapter of Race and Ethnic Studies Institute.

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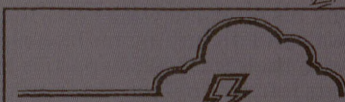
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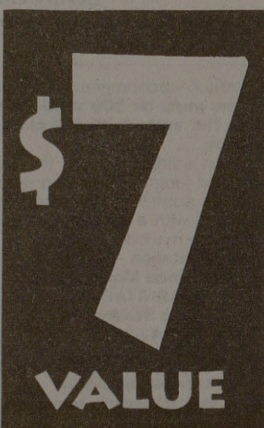
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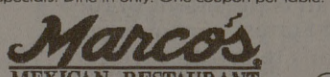
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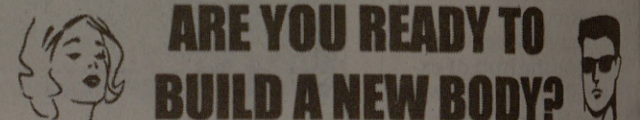
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