

Morales says he will not seek re-election

AUSTIN (AP) — Attorney General Dan Morales will not seek re-election next year.

The seven-year incumbent said Tuesday that despite a high approval rating and name recognition, he will focus his immediate future on his new wife and her two children.



Morales

Morales, 41, married for the first time earlier this year. He will serve out the remaining 13 months of his current term but did not indicate what he will do after that.

"It's unlikely I'll go into a traditional legal practice," Morales said. "We all recognize there are more lucrative opportunities in the private sector. But that was not a major consideration. It really was more related to time, energy and commitment directed toward my family."

As the state's highest elected Hispanic, Morales had been expected to draw Hispanic voters, mainly Democrats, to the polls next year. He said he does not think his decision will dissuade Hispanics from voting.

"There are a number of qualified and competent Hispanic elected officials who are ready to carry the banner," Morales said. "I really disagree ... that my absence as a formal candidate on the ticket will depress the Hispanic vote."

Morales and Democratic Party Chair Bill White pointed to state Rep. Richard Raymond, D-Benavides, as a strong Hispanic running for statewide office.

Raymond, who is running for land commissioner, said Morales' departure could draw more interest to the election.

"When you have a wide-open race, you tend to have more participation than when you have a popular incumbent," Raymond said. "It's just too hard to say today that less people in South Texas or wherever are not going to vote because Dan isn't running."

Morales is the second high-ranking in-

cumbent Democrat to announce he will not seek office next year.

Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock, the state's top elected Democrat, earlier said he would not run again. The two other Democrats in statewide office — Land Commissioner Garry Mauro and Comptroller John Sharp — are seeking their party's nominations for governor and lieutenant governor.

Susan Weddington, who chairs the state GOP, said Morales' decision was bad news for the Democrats.

"Dan Morales was the best candidate the Democratic Party had on their '98 ticket," she said.

Former Republican chair Tom Pauken — one of three men seeking the GOP attorney general nomination — also said he believes Democrats will miss Morales.

"Clearly, an incumbent who's been in office as long as Morales has some real advantages statewide," Pauken said. "You take that away, and it's going to be tough for the Democrats."

Fellow Republican candidates, Railroad Commissioner Barry Williamson and former Supreme Court Justice John Cornyn, praised Morales for his service and his commitment to his family.

Morales' decision left — at least temporarily — only Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Judge Morris Overstreet in the Democratic primary race.

But Morales said he believes other Democrats will enter before the candidate filing deadline on Jan. 2. He would not say who he expects to enter the race.

Others mentioned as possible Democratic candidates included state Sen. Rodney Ellis of Houston; state Rep. Paul Sadler of Henderson; Houston businessman Paul Hobby, who has already announced for state comptroller; Houston Mayor Bob Lanier; and former attorney general Jim Mattox.

"The attorney general's job is the best job I've ever had," Mattox said. "It's a wonderful opportunity to provide public service. I'm seriously considering it."

Court considers free-speech debate

Constitutionality of abortion-clinic buffer zones questioned by anti-abortion activists

AUSTIN (AP) — The Texas Supreme Court is considering whether buffer zones keeping anti-abortion activists away from clinics and doctors' homes may be an unconstitutional restriction of free speech.

The court heard oral arguments Tuesday from anti-abortion groups appealing a ruling that found they had conspired to hinder business at Planned Parenthood and nine other clinics during the 1992 Republican National Convention in Houston.

Attorneys for Planned Parenthood of Houston and Southeast Texas also made arguments.

Benjamin Bull, attorney for

Operation Rescue, Rescue America and two anti-abortion activists, said the court did not consider less-restrictive options, such as banning protesters from obstructing entry to clinics.

The anti-abortion protesters are appealing a 1994 injunction of fixed buffer zones at Houston-area clinics and doctors' homes.

"We believe that a ban on obstruction (of entry into a clinic) would have been enough," he said. "And now we're left to wonder whether a smaller buffer zone would have been effective."

A Harris County jury in 1994

found the anti-abortion activists had conspired to interfere with business at abortion clinics

"We believe that a ban on obstruction would have been enough."

BENJAMIN BULL
ATTORNEY, OPERATION RESCUE

during the 1992 GOP National Convention in Houston. The ruling, plus \$1.01 million in damages, was upheld by the 14th Court of Appeals.

The anti-abortion activists have appealed the Supreme Court, which set time table to rule.

"This is not a ban on speech," said attorney for Planned Parenthood, Peddie.

Peddie reminded the Supreme Court — candidates — are from coming within voters on election day.

Peddie added she is concerned the court is ruling out laws specifying issues.

"Just treat it like a case," she said.

Senate committee hears testimony on easier access to public information

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Public information should be readily available via paper documents or new technology, but some laws and government officials limit access, open government advocates testified Tuesday.

"Despite what some individuals believe, public information is for members of the public, not just for newspapers," Thomas A. Stephenson, senior vice president for operations and administration at the San Antonio Express-News, said.

Stephenson was the first of about a dozen witnesses to testify before the Texas Senate Interim Committee on Public Information, chaired by Sen. Jeff Wentworth, R-San Antonio.

The committee is holding hearings throughout the state before issuing its final report in October 1998.

Stephenson provided an update on a lawsuit filed by the Texas Daily Newspaper Association and Texas Press Association challenging a new state law limiting public access to traffic accident reports.

A state district judge in Austin is expected to decide Friday whether to make permanent a temporary order blocking parts of the law from taking effect, Stephenson said.

Under the law, anyone seeking information about a traffic wreck must know the name of at least one person involved and either the location or date of the wreck. The law also limits access to motor vehicle records containing personal information and makes it illegal for that information to be posted on the Internet without permission from the person involved.

The city of San Antonio supports the law.

City Attorney Frank Garza said businesses that sell wreck reports and medical providers have turned accident reports department into a market, "creating such congestion and difficulty for all citizens to get service."

The city wants to charge for the costs associated with providing reports, Garza said.

Reggie James, director of the state office of Consumers Union, told the committee some government agencies circumvent the Texas Public Information Act by seeking opinions from the Texas general's office on whether information public even when they already know.

Some also classify information related to pending litigation, though it is only vaguely connected to a lawsuit, James testified.

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