

Bush pledges support to TSU

Following settlement of \$4.6 million, stability of school called into question

AUSTIN (AP) — Gov. George W. Bush says he supports keeping Texas Southern University an independent public school despite recent criticism of some of its operations.

"I know it's an institution that's educated a lot of people in the past and can do so in the future," Bush said Wednesday. "It's an important part of the Harris County area. I think it provides a very important symbol for Houston that blood vessel."

Bush met with leaders of the legislative black caucus in private a day earlier. His support is a boost for the historically black university in Houston at a time when lawmakers are considering whether to force the school into a state university system.

Lawmakers fighting that move say the school's unique mission of educating black students is as critical as ever. A 1996 federal

court ruling and a state attorney general's opinion eliminated affirmative action in admissions, recruitment and financial aid programs

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— GOV. GEORGE W. BUSH

at Texas colleges and universities. Enrollment of black students at state flagships institutions — the University of Texas and Texas A&M University — has declined

since the court ruling.

Texas Southern has been struggling with financial and administrative services and state auditors cited inadequate accounting practices.

A review last summer showed that more than \$260,000 in federal financial aid checks had not been given to students.

Last year, the university reached a settlement with the federal government for \$4.6 million stemming from findings that students were given financial aid without proving they qualified.

"There's some skepticism here in the House and Senate. It's not the first time that TSU has been called to issue," Bush said.

"We've got to come up with a plan that assures people that TSU can remain viable. Now the objective is to convince people ... that plan is doable."

Senators file open container bill

AUSTIN (AP) — For the fifth time in his 10-year tenure in the House, state Rep. Fred Hill, R-Richardson, filed a bill Wednesday that would strengthen Texas' open container law and increase penalties for repeat drunken driving violations.

Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, has filed similar legislation in the Senate.

"Texans feel they have the right to finish up a day of working out in the hot sun and drive down the highway in their pick-up truck, down a bottle and toss it empty in the back," said Hill, whose legislation never made it out of committee in previous years.

"Each time this bill fails to pass, more people die. We not only lead the US in alcohol-related fatalities, we probably lead the world," he added.

Hill cited national statistics that 1,748 people perished in alcohol-related crashes in Texas in 1997, although the Texas Department of Public Safety, which has strict standards, said 1,066 people were killed.

DPS officials said their statistic represented 30.4 percent of all traffic deaths in Texas that year.

Nelson pointed out that lawmakers have an extra incentive to pass the legislation this session.

This time, it is not only a matter of life, she said, but money.

If new federal standards for the penalties of both repeat drunken driving violations and open container laws are not in place by Oct. 1, 2000, Texas would be forced to divert about \$40 million in highway construction funds to other safety programs, she said.

That amount would then increase to about \$80 million in October 2002 if the federal provisions are not in place, she added.

David Laney, the chairman of the Texas Transportation Commission, said that could severely hamper construction, as only about 40 in every 100 projects can be funded under the state's current budget.

"We're already operating under a financial handicap," said Laney. "We cannot afford to have our other arm tied behind our back, too."

After 28 years, Dallas man faces drug conviction

DALLAS (AP) — After spending nearly half his life on the run from the law, Charles Edward Garrett has returned to a courtroom to find out that time had not erased the sentence he skipped out on in 1970.

State District Judge Harold Entz gave the 56-year-old Garrett the same sentence that a Dallas County jury handed down 29 years ago: life in prison.

The sentencing on Tuesday ended three months of legal wrangling over Garrett's fate. He was convicted on Feb. 12, 1970, of possessing 23 capsules of heroin, but while still free on bond he left the courtroom before the jury sentenced him to life in prison.

Although Garrett said he moved back to Dallas about 15 years ago, it was not until last October that Dallas County sheriff's deputies tracked him down.

In his 29 years on the lam, Garrett said, he steered clear of the law, fathered about a dozen children and held down steady jobs.

Supporters said after his arrest that the state should not waste resources imprisoning a law-abiding man who would have been sentenced to a far shorter term if convicted today.

Garrett walked into the courtroom slowly, wearing large bifocals and an orange jail jumpsuit, his scalp showing through his gray hair.

He stood silently as his lawyers told Judge Entz that they could offer no legal reason he should not be sentenced in accordance with the jury's decision.

He showed no emotion when the judge told him he would spend the rest of his days behind bars.

His lawyers told the court that they planned to appeal. Tom Pappas, one of Garrett's lawyers, said he hopes the conviction will be thrown out on appeal because the trial transcript cannot be found.

ALCOHOL BILLS

HB487 and SB128

- Suspend repeat drunk drivers' licenses for up to one year
- Ban open containers from driver and passenger compartments

HB210 and SB114

- Lowers the BAC for drunk driving from 0.100 to 0.080

The proposed legislation would suspend the driver's license of a repeat drunken driving offender for a minimum of one year, in addition to providing jail time and fines.

Violators currently receive a minimum six-month license suspension.

The second bill would ban open containers of alcohol from the driver and passenger compartments of motor vehicles.

Current law allows an arrest only if the driver is seen drinking from the container by a law enforcer, a system which has been called ineffective by activist groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

"Separating drinking from driving is fundamental to our philosophy," said Francisco Coll, MADD's public policy coordinator.

"We're not out to criminalize social drinking and we are not prohibitionists; we are just trying to save lives."

He added that MADD will closely watch another piece of legislation that would lower from .10 to .08 the legal blood alcohol level considered too drunk to drive. Coll said a .08 blood alcohol concentration level would be approximately three drinks in one hour on an empty stomach for a 137-pound woman.

"My main priority when it comes to drinking and driving is 0.08. Hopefully we'll get that through this time," said Gov. George W. Bush.

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- Student Activities Office, Suite 125 Koldus Building
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Acct 229	Test Review Thu Feb 11 7pm-10pm			
Bana 303 Dr. Anthony	Part I Mon Feb 8 5pm-8pm	Part II Tue Feb 9 5pm-8pm		
Bana 303 Dr. Stein & Haylett	Part I Mon Feb 8 8pm-10pm	Part II Tue Feb 9 8pm-10pm		
Biol 113	Part III Mon Feb 8 9pm-11pm	Part IV Tue Feb 9 9pm-11pm		
Econ 203 Dr. Ullmer	Part I Sun Feb 7 6pm-9pm	Part II Mon Feb 8 6pm-9pm		
Econ 322 Dr. Allen	Part I Tue Feb 9 6pm-9pm	Part II Wed Feb 10 6pm-9pm		
Finc 341	Part I Sun Feb 7 7pm-10pm	Part II Mon Feb 8 7pm-10pm	Part III Tue Feb 9 7pm-9pm	
Math 141	Part I Sun Feb 7 9pm-11pm	Part II Mon Feb 8 11pm-1am	Part III Tue Feb 9 11pm-1am	Part IV Wed Feb 10 9pm-11pm
Math 251	Part I Mon Feb 8 10pm-12am	Part II Tue Feb 9 10pm-12am	Part III Wed Feb 10 10pm-12am	Part IV Thu Feb 11 10pm-12am
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