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Heart attack claims inmate's Convict was awaiting execution for Smith County double murder

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — An East Texas man on death row since 1980 for killing a Smith County couple died early yesterday morning in his cell, apparently of a heart attack, prison officials said.

James Edward Session, 42, died alone at the Ellis Unit around 3:20 a.m., Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokesperson Larry Fitzgerald said.

"It's not the way you expect them to go," Jack Skeen, the current Smith County district attorney, said. Skeen was not involved in Session's prosecution, but his office has fought the inmate's appeals.

Session, a high school dropout, was condemned for killing Clifford McDougal and his wife, Belle, in a bloody robbery of their Troup, Texas, home on Jan. 8, 1980.

Session was identified by a mortally wounded McDougal, who was stabbed six times and suffered gunshot wounds to the jaw and a shoulder. McDougal remained conscious long enough to scrawl Session's name with a pencil on a bloodstained piece of paper; Mrs. McDougal was dead at the scene.

The suspect's palm print also was found on a metal cash box in the victims' home, located about 20 miles southeast of Tyler.

Session was 22 at the time of the killing and had been in prison previously for burglary.

Session insisted he was innocent, according to an Internet letter he wrote three years ago inviting potential pen pals to correspond with him.

"My trial lawyer did nothing, and a 12-year-old could have defended me better," Session wrote, adding that he was a "loving and caring" person who wrote poems and created "art and craft projects."

Fitzgerald said Session's time behind bars had been uneventful except for a Jan. 22, 1982, attack in which fellow death row inmate

James Demouchette stabbed Session with a sharpened pen threatening Demouchette's execution in 1992.

In 1985, the Supreme Court declined to hear his case. Blacks were underrepresented on grand juries in Smith County from 1970 to 1980. Session was one of those, William Davis said to die today for a 1978 case.

Session was nearing the end of his appeals but did not have a date pending.

UT officials report rise in minority enrollment

AUSTIN (AP) — Enrollment at the University of Texas-Austin this fall totals 49,034, and school officials said yesterday the freshman class includes increases in minority students.

The total includes 37,179 undergraduate students; 10,475 graduate students, and 1,380 law students. It is a slight increase over last fall's enrollment of 48,906.

UT administrators said they are pleased with the composition of the 7,040 entering freshmen. It showed increases in the numbers and percentages of African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American students.

According to UT, the number of new African-American freshmen increased to 286, up 87 students or 43.7 percent; Asian-Americans reached 1,217, up 84 or 7.4 percent; and Hispanic enrollment was 974, up 83 or 9.3 percent.

"I am delighted with the diversity of this year's entering class and that we

have been successful in returning to pre-Hopwood levels for African American and Hispanic freshmen," Larry Faulkner, UT president, said.

Texas officials have worked to boost minority enrollment despite the 1996 federal court ruling known as Hopwood, which ended consideration of race in college admissions in Texas.

Among other steps, a state law automatically admits students in the top 10 percent of Texas high school graduating classes.

"The top 10 percent bill has helped create the good results we are seeing in the diversity of our freshman class," Bruce Walker, associate vice president and director of admissions, said.

UT also has increased and focused its outreach to public school students. In addition, the university has begun a scholarship program for those in the top 10 percent of their class in 49 high schools in high-minority areas.

"I am delighted with the diversity of this year's entering class."

— Larry Faulkner
University of Texas president

Son of Cisneros skipped housing

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — A former San Antonio Housing Authority executive helped the son of former Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros bypass a year-long waiting list for government-subsidized housing, documents show.

Choco Meza, who was fired from her housing authority job in March in the wake of the allegations, has said she did nothing wrong.

The Express-News used the Texas Public Information Act to obtain documents from an investigation into the case.

In a sworn statement, Meza said a staff member erroneously issued a housing voucher to Sylvia Arce-Garcia's son, Israel Trevino, pregnant fiancée, Candale Laxson.

Several housing authority employees told Meza that in 1998 she instructed them to bypass the Section 8 program for Trevino and two other families even though they were on the waiting list. There were 11,000-12,000 people on the waiting list for Section 8 housing during that time.

Housing authority documents obtained by Express-News show Trevino and his fiancée applied for a certificate for Section 8 housing in 1998 on the day they met with Meza in her office to talk about subsidized housing.

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