

# Suspect in disappearance pleads guilty to extortion

AUSTIN (AP) — The chief suspect in the disappearance of atheist leader Madalyn Murray O'Hair and her family pleaded guilty to a single extortion charge in exchange for leading investigators to their dismembered bodies.

U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks on Monday unsealed David Waters' plea agreement, which was reached last week but kept secret by court order.

A weekend search aided by Waters at a Hill Country ranch revealed the remains of three people believed to be the missing atheists. All were buried in a single shallow grave and were partly dismembered.

Waters, 53, is already serving lengthy state and federal prison terms on other charges and could get another 20 years under his plea agreement when he is sentenced March 30.

Waters was indicted on five counts of kidnapping and extortion in the O'Hair case and was scheduled to go on trial Monday before agreeing to the deal with prosecutors.

He pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to interfere with commerce by robbery and extortion. The missing atheists disappeared with \$500,000 in gold coins. The money had been taken from the family's atheist organizations.

Prosecutors agreed to drop the other charges in the indictment and

recommend that Waters not face other charges in the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Gerald Carruth said the government was prepared to go to trial but saw Waters' plea as an easy resolution to a lengthy investigation.

**"This might not have been a great deal if he had been 21 years old."**

— Gerald Carruth  
Assistant U.S. Attorney

"This seemed to be a just resolution that would allow us to solve this case, so to speak," Carruth said.

Prosecutors have recommended that Waters be allowed to serve all of his time in federal prison.

Carruth said Waters' age combined with potential sentences make it likely Waters will spend the rest of his life behind bars.

"You do the math," Carruth said. "This might not have been a great deal if he had been 21 years old."

Waters' attorney, Bill Gates, said he would not comment until Waters is sentenced.

Although specific details of the crime were not in the records unsealed by the court, Waters admitted he did "threaten and commit

physical violence" to O'Hair, 77, her son Jon Garth Murray, 40, and Robin Murray O'Hair, 30, in 1995.

Authorities have alleged that Waters and others kidnapped the family and forced them to take money from their atheist organizations.

The money was converted into gold in San Antonio. Investigators say the family was then killed and the bodies dumped on the Cooksey Ranch, about 120 miles to the west.

It could take about two weeks to confirm the identities of the remains found Saturday and Sunday, investigators said.

Among the items found in the grave was a metal hip replacement. O'Hair had hip replacement surgery a few years before she disappeared.

Dental records, DNA and possibly a serial number from the artificial hip could be used in identifying the remains.

David Glassman, chairman of the anthropology department at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, assisted with the removal of the remains. He said he had no immediate conclusions about the causes of death.

O'Hair called herself the most hated woman in America. She was involved in successful court battles in the 1960s to ban prayer and Bible-reading in the nation's public schools.

# Agencies need funds for bills

## Perry, Railroad Commission chairman to tackle energy costs

AUSTIN (AP) — Gov. Rick Perry said Monday he has been talking to Railroad Commission Chairman Michael Williams about helping public agencies that are million of dollars over budget because of soaring energy costs.

"I don't think we have anything concrete yet but Michael and I have been discussing the impact of gas prices on particular public sector entities be they hospitals, public schools, public libraries," Perry said.

Williams said it was too premature to discuss specifics of the conversation with Perry.

Texas' public universities have been hit hard by rising gas bills. The University of Texas, Texas A&M and Texas Tech are preparing to ask the Legislature for a combined \$57.5 million in emergency funds to help pay utility bills.

Most state agencies will have similar emergency requests, said Thomas Johnson, spokesman for the General Services Commission.

The average Texan also is feeling the pinch as the price of natural gas continues to skyrocket and winter remains for at least another month.

According to the state's largest electric company, TXU Electric, the average residential utility bill in December

increased by 140 percent compared to last year, while usage increased by 92.5 percent.

The average bill in December 1999 was \$34.44 and increased to \$82.65 for December 2000.

Figures released by the federal Department of Energy showed the price for natural gas to be as low as \$2 per thousand cubic feet a year ago. Now prices range between \$9 and \$20.

Williams said it is not too early to plan for the future so that Texas does not find itself in the same situation as California, where electric shortages have caused blackouts.

"I think with the experience of California and the experience of the higher-than-normal natural gas costs that consumers are paying, it draws attention to the fact that the need to produce is not simply a producer issue. It's also a Texas consumer issue," Williams said.

As winter lingers on and summer's air-conditioning demands loom, the need for natural gas will continue to persist. Power plants increasingly burn natural gas for electricity.

The Legislature will likely consider incentives for producers, including, possible tax relief, Williams said.

### News in Brief

#### Playboy Playmate back in trial court

HOUSTON (AP) — Nearly a month after winning a \$475 million bankruptcy judgment from her late nonagenarian husband's estate, former stripper and Playboy Playmate Anna Nicole Smith told a probate trial jury she will "never ever know true love again."

Although Smith "dropped her challenge to the will of J. Howard Marshall II after the California

bankruptcy case was finalized Dec. 29, she still faces stepson E. Pierce Marshall's counterclaim that she interfered with his inheritance rights.

Smith, who met the wheelchair-bound oil mogul in a Houston strip club in 1991, was 26 and he was 89 when they married in 1994. He died the following year.

"I hear all the things y'all say ... my husband loved me unconditionally," Smith said, often sobbing on the stand. "He bought me things I

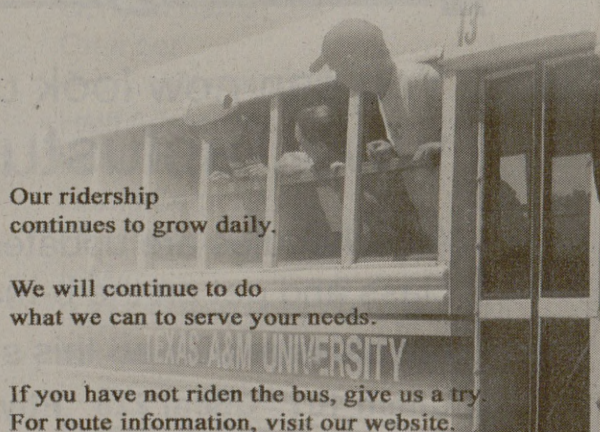
didn't even know about. He worshiped me. I never had the love this man gave me and I'll never have it again."

Now 32, Smith had sued 61-year-old stepson Pierce Marshall for part of her late husband's multimillion-dollar oil fortune. She was joined in the challenge by her other stepson, 63-year-old J. Howard Marshall III.

The elder Marshall did not include either Smith or Howard Marshall III in his will.

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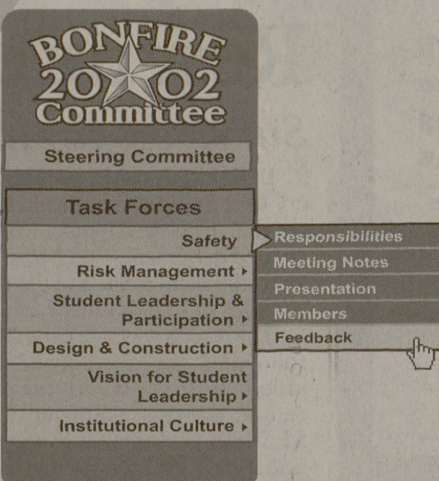
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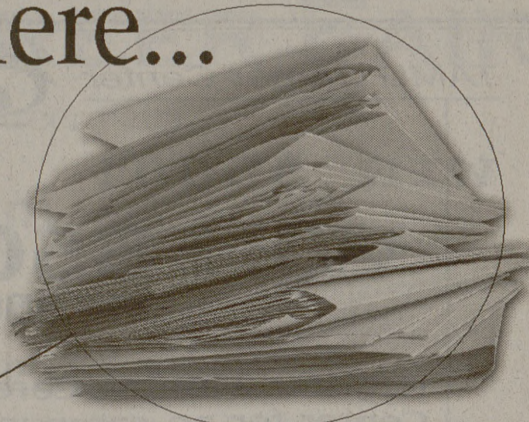
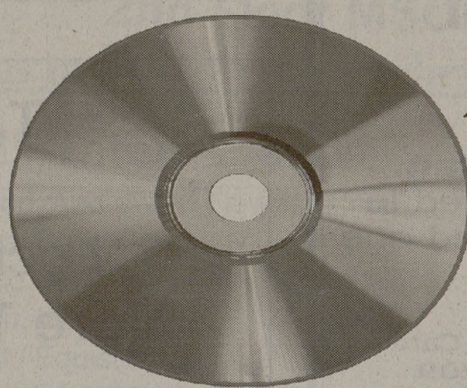
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