

University peace officers' dismissal linked to politics

HOUSTON (AP) — Licensed peace officers could face conflict when politics and the law clash at universities, some law enforcement experts say in the wake of two Texas incidents.

Texas Southern University (TSU) police chief Cordell Lindsey was fired 10 days ago. He says it was because he refused to back off an investigation into the theft of \$4,000 in university funds.

George Hess was dismissed last year as police chief at the University of Houston (UH). The reason, he claims: He disobeyed a demand from the university administration not to pursue charges against a football player who committed a felony on campus.

In both cases, the universities deny trying to stop the chiefs from doing their jobs and cite other reasons — insubordination or restructuring of university positions among them — for their termination.

But several law enforcement officials interviewed in a copyright story in Sunday's editions of the *Houston Chronicle* say the two cases spotlight an inherent weakness in a state law allowing universities and school districts to maintain their own fully licensed and accredited police forces.

A university might want to deal with a crime "in-house" and bypass

negative publicity while a police chief believes it should be investigated and prosecuted, the experts say.

"These are certified peace officers who have no choice about whether to investigate a crime or not. If the uni-

"They can be terminated for doing their jobs and enforcing the law. Welcome to Texas."

— Charlie Wilkison
Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas

versity fires them for doing so, they have no rights," said Charlie Wilkison, the political and legislative director for Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas (CLEAT), or CLEAT, a police labor advocacy organization. "They can be terminated for doing their jobs and enforcing the law. Welcome to Texas."

Wilkison said conflicts like Hess and Lindsey faced are rare but that people like them have limited recourse: appeal their firing to the school — as allowed by state law — or seek reinstatement through a civil lawsuit.

Hess' firing stemmed from an in-

cident in late 1998 when Michael DeRouselle, a starting defensive lineman who was already on probation for a previous felony, forged a university document.

The incident was not reported to the campus police, and Hess found out about nine months later.

Despite an administrative order against it, Hess took the case to the Harris County district attorney's office, insisting it was his duty as a police officer.

DeRouselle eventually was sentenced to four years in the state penitentiary. Hess was fired last July after he told an UH staff meeting that the administration had tried to cover up the incident.

Lindsey said the investigation he maintains led to his Jan. 26 firing pointed to Tiffany Thompson, TSU's special events director. Lindsey alleges that Thompson made a false burglary report last September to cover up the theft of \$4,000, proceeds from a concert.

In both cases, said Harry Caldwell, a former chief of the Houston Police Department, the officers were required by state law to do what they did, even if it meant losing their jobs.

"There are absolutely no circumstances in which certified law enforcement officers should be subordinate to the administration," Caldwell said.

Hunting amendment proposed

Opponents contend existing statute is sufficient protection

DALLAS (AP) — Fears of diminishing freedoms for Texans who hunt and fish are fueling a lawmaker's push for a constitutional amendment to ensure their rights.

Texas law currently permits hunting and fishing. But some hunting proponents contend that because laws are subject to change, a constitutional amendment is needed to ensure hunting and fishing rights in the face of an increasingly urban population and growing pressure from animal rights groups.

"We are no longer a small rural state. We are a major industrial state," said state Rep. Barry Telford, D-DeKalb, who is sponsoring the joint resolution.

"A lot of the activities and beliefs and whatnot that we grew up understanding and approving of... the urban and suburban culture many times has not placed the same value on such things," he said.

Some animal rights activists, Telford added, "are perfectly willing to tie themselves to trees to keep people from shooting a deer" and would love to ban hunting.

Opponents dismiss the amendment as an unnecessary extension of the already lengthy Texas Constitution, which they say is cheapened by such measures.

"Should the Texas Constitution be reduced to a bill-book for every special interest in Texas?" asked Wayne Pacelle, senior vice president of the Humane Society of the United States in Washington, D.C. "It's just an attempt by a small segment of the hunting lobby to beat its chest and to really mount a political trophy within the state constitution."

An amendment, opponents said, may make it easier for hunters to overrule local ordinances under the guise of constitutional protections.

Randy Turner, a Fort Worth lawyer who said he plans to raise money to fight the amendment, said it is expensive to amend the constitution — and in this case, redundant.

"Should we pass a constitutional amendment to say everyone has the right to go bowling?" he asked. "Why spend all that money to give people a right they already have?"

Fort Worth hunter Dave Fulson, 41, agreed that the proposed amendment would reiterate an existing right. But he supports the measure because he is concerned that laws restricting hunting may stiffen.

"I am concerned at any point where an uninformed metropolitan vote overcomes sound wildlife and conservation practices," said Fulson, who hunts predators such as coyotes and bobcats.

"NASA doesn't take a vote on how the rockets are built from an uninformed public," he said.

Experts on both sides agree that common hunting and fishing rights currently are not threatened. Disagreement erupts over whether that will last.

Pacelle said his organization wants to stop "inhumane and unsportsmanlike" hunting, but not ban the sport entirely. The Humane Society specifically opposes using steel-jawed leghold traps for fur, as well as canned hunting, a practice where hunters pay a fee to shoot exotic mammals within fenced enclosures.

If Texas lawmakers adopt the resolution, voters still must approve it in a referendum.

Should that happen, the state would follow at least two others — North Dakota and Virginia — that have passed similar measures recently. Other states, including Arizona and Alaska, have tried and failed to pass such measures.

News in Brief

Crosby woman in serious condition from meningitis

BAYTOWN (AP) — A Crosby woman was reported in serious condition in a Baytown hospital, two days after being admitted with a presumptive case of meningitis, a hospital official said.

The 18-year-old woman was brought into the emergency room at San Jacinto Methodist Hospital

on Saturday while the facility was giving vaccines for the infection.

Cases of presumptive meningitis exhibit the early symptoms of meningitis, including fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea and vomiting.

Accused kidnapper flees to Mexico with two victims

EULESS (AP) — The man accused of abducting a suburban

Fort Worth mother and toddler has fled to Mexico with the two, authorities said Saturday.

U.S. Customs officials said they have determined that Delfino Romero crossed the border at Eagle Pass Thursday morning with his 17-year-old ex-girlfriend Candida Chavira and their 2-year-old daughter, Alyssa, intending to catch a bus to Durango.

Authorities said neither the woman nor the child has been harmed.

2001-2002 UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWS PROGRAM

CALL FOR STUDENT RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Outstanding juniors who will have completed nine hours of honors coursework before the fall semester and who have at least a cumulative grade point average of 3.4 are invited to apply for participation in the University Undergraduate Research Fellows Program during their senior year. The Fellows Program offers a two-semester independent research experience that culminates in a senior honors thesis. It is the most prestigious research opportunity available to undergraduates at Texas A&M and provides participants with opportunities usually extended only to students pursuing graduate degrees. Over the last several years, 40 to 70 students have been selected annually as Fellows based upon faculty review of research proposals submitted to the University Honors Program. The Fellows Program features a close, master-apprentice relationship between student researcher and faculty advisor and involves both students and advisors in periodic interdisciplinary group meetings to encourage the development of a scholarly community.

Faculty acquainted with capable juniors who meet the criteria for participation in the Undergraduate Fellows Program may wish to encourage them to consider preparing a proposal. An informational meeting concerning the 2001-2002 Fellows Program, open to faculty as well as students, has been scheduled for 4:00 PM on Thursday, 15 February, in 292B MSC. Research proposals will be due on Thursday, 22 March. Students will know whether they have been admitted to the program in early April. For additional information, contact Dr. Donald R. Dickson, Fellows Coordinator, d-dickson@tamu.edu or visit the Honors website at <http://honors.tamu.edu>.

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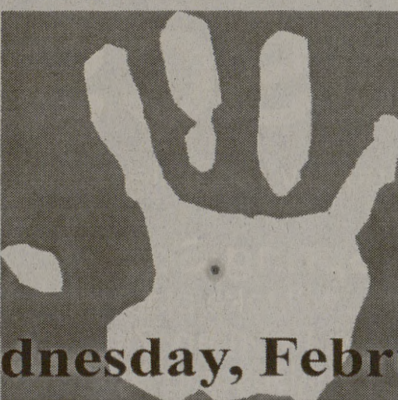
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