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Newsletter prompts lawsuit

West Texas State chief says faculty to blame

By Terry FitzPatrick

CANYON, Texas — West Texas State University President Ed Roach says he has been the victim of harassment and death threats and claims some members of the school faculty may be to blame.

Roach and his wife have filed a lawsuit charging several "John Does" with libeling him through an anonymously published campus newsletter that has bitterly attacked the way Roach manages the university. Roach is asking a state district judge to use his subpoena powers to learn the identities of the authors and bring them to trial.

"Darlene and I believe the time has come to stop what has been a well-organized, malicious and deliberate attempt to destroy me professionally," Roach said in a written statement last week. "Their anonymous acts are, in very simple terms, not part of the American way."

Roach declined a request for an interview.

The irreverent underground newsletter — *The Rest of the Prairie* — surfaced during the fall semester and has attacked Roach's management style in five issues.

The publication is run by faculty members upset because Roach has mothballed some university build-

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Battle between university president, faculty intensifies

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ings and merged several academic departments. And they have claimed Roach has unfairly fired dissenters.

Roach, West Texas State's president since 1984, also was criticized for cost overruns on the construction of a million-dollar university president's mansion and for the firing of outspoken head football coach Bill Kelly on Jan. 29.

The single-sheet newsletter has been circulated by secret couriers dropping stacks of the fliers on campus-area countertops.

"You have destroyed any semblance of collegiality," the professors wrote in one edition. "You have turned the faculty into a cadre of whispers afraid to speak too loudly for fear they will be heard by one of your stooges."

The editors have insisted that secrecy is needed to protect their jobs.

"There have been reprisals against people speaking out against the party lines of the administration," said one editor who spoke on the condition that his name not be used.

But Roach's supporters say charges that he retaliates against critics are unfounded.

Roach's libel suit, filed Thursday, claims the newsletter portrayed him in a "false light." He seeks unspecified cash damages for an alleged



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Roach's statement says that any money he wins in court will be donated to the university for student scholarships and professorships.

"They have really been through emotional ups and downs," said George Whittenburg, Roach's attorney. "No one under the guise of free-

dom of speech can set about to engage in outrageous conduct with the purpose of inflicting pain on another human being."

The only clue to who is responsible for the newsletter is the post office box number listed on each edition.

Roach wants the court to determine the identity of the post office box holder. But newsletter organizers say the box-holder is not connected to the publishing project but merely forwards mail to people who are.

Roach also is suing the people responsible for an advertisement placed in the Feb. 7 edition of the *Sunday Amarillo News-Globe*. A group calling itself Students, Alumni and Faculty for Education said in the ad that Roach's "domineering regime" has committed "atrocities."

The ad encouraged readers to start a letter-writing campaign to seek Roach's removal from office. The ad listed a post office box different from the one on the faculty newsletter.

The Rest of the Prairie organizers said they don't know who placed the ad in the Amarillo newspaper.

People involved with the newsletter also deny responsibility for telephoned death threats that Roach received last summer.

Randall County District Attorney Randy Sherrod said last week that

his office and the FBI investigated the calls. "I didn't think we needed to put anyone out there with him full time, but we did take them as serious," Sherrod said. No one has been arrested in connection with the threats, he said.

The FBI would not comment on the case.

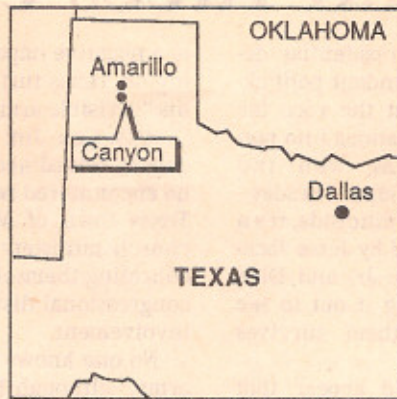
Many students have grown weary of the ongoing feud between faculty members and the Roach administration.

The Rest of the Prairie organizers claim the newsletter is needed because of recent changes in the university's publication policy, changes that some see as censorship of the student newspaper *The Prairie*. But student journalists say they feel no pressure from Roach.

"I hope it doesn't drag on any longer," said student body president Scott Robinson, 22, a business graduate student. "But I'm not sure it will ever end."

Roach became involved in controversy in 1986 with the disclosures of major cost overruns on a new home for the university's president. The project was originally budgeted for about \$495,000, but the cost ballooned to \$991,000.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board told West Texas State that it couldn't authorize the use of state funds to pay all the additional expense, and the school had to raise \$211,000 from other sources.



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The funding crisis came as Roach was developing his plan to reorganize the university in the face of a 15 percent decline in enrollment since 1982. (Enrollment this year is 5,700.) Roach began a program to reduce the number of academic departments from 26 to 14 and to mothball or tear down five university buildings that no longer were needed.

The mansion cost overruns and belt-tightening prompted a faculty revolt. The Faculty Senate passed a resolution of no confidence; 87 percent of the senate's members disapproved of the way Roach was managing the university.

Roach did win the confidence of the students, however. One hour after the final vote, the Student Senate voted 21-2 to support the president, saying that "to blame one person for

the problems of the university is unrealistic and irresponsible."

The university's board of regents also supported Roach. Its chairman is oilman and corporate raider T. Boone Pickens.

Last month, Roach fired football coach Kelly for "major philosophical differences." The move came one month after Kelly blasted Roach's recruiting objectives in *The Canyon News*.

"Anybody would be a fool to try and stay here when they're trying to tell you they not only want you to win, they want you to win their way," Kelly said. He charged that Roach wanted to end national football recruiting at West Texas State and wanted a team made up solely of Texas athletes.

Athletic director Bruce Grimes denied the charge but fired Kelly, saying that "effective and compatible working relationships are no longer possible."

Kelly had been looking for another coaching job for some time, but is now fighting his dismissal through faculty channels and in state District Court.

Kelly is credited with turning around West Texas State's football program, making the Buffaloes the 1986 Lone Star Conference champions and winning the league's Coach of the Year award.

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