

Bush asks parole board to review killer's case

Governor wants evidence looked at before Henry Lee Lucas faces execution

By MICHAEL HOLMES
The Associated Press

AUSTIN — Gov. George W. Bush said Monday he is bothered by questions raised about the guilt of confessed serial killer Henry Lee Lucas and has asked the State Board of Pardons and Paroles to review the case.

Lucas, who once confessed to as many

as 600 killings, is scheduled to be executed June 30 in the slaying of an unidentified woman, wearing only orange socks, whose body was found near Georgetown in 1979.

Although prosecutors say they have no doubt Lucas committed the crime — and he confessed to it — investigations by the news media and a former attorney general cast some doubt on the conviction.

Bush said he wants to make certain that Lucas, or any Texas inmate put to death, is guilty.

“I am concerned that there are some

who have expressed some doubt as to whether or not he committed this particular crime,” Bush said.

“Therefore, (I) have urged the Pardons and Parole Board to make sure that the allegations that he may not have committed this crime are fully vetted,” Bush said.

Former Attorney General Jim Mattox, who is seeking that office again this year, says an investigation conducted by his staff in 1986 showed Lucas was in Florida at the time the woman known as “Orange Socks” was killed in Texas.

“Knowingly executing a man for a crime he did not commit will damage our prosecutors’ reputation before the eyes of our juries,” Mattox said.

Mattox and former McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell led a 1985 McLennan County grand jury investigation into many of the confessions made by Lucas. That grand jury investigation raised questions about the validity of confessions gained from Lucas by the Texas Ranger Homicide Task Force.

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Bush looking into guilt of Lucas

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The McLennan County grand jury no-billed Lucas in three McLennan County murders to which Lucas had confessed, and Mattox later issued a report that said Lucas could not have been responsible for many of the murders for which he had been charged.

Lucas last week formally requested clemency, and an appeal is pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Under Texas law, Lucas must convince a majority of the 18-member parole board that he deserves clemency for the board to make such a recommendation.

That recommendation then would go to Bush, who could agree and grant clemency or allow the execution to proceed. If the board rejects clemency, Bush is left only with the option of granting Lucas a one-time, 30-day reprieve.

The Republican governor said that in every death row case, he wants to be sure of the facts.

"I take every death row case very seriously," Bush said. "If anybody is put to death in the state of Texas, we want to be certain that that person committed that crime."

Tribune-Herald staff writer Tommy Witherspoon contributed to this story.