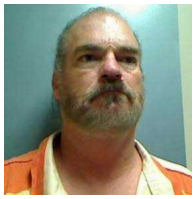
State could announce intent to seek death penalty against triple homicide suspect next month

Written by Betsy Blevins, Editor and Publisher
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Capital murder suspect Thomas Lloyd Taunton, shackled and clothed in maroon inmate attire, appeared in the 336th District Courtroom at the Fannin County Courthouse Thursday morning for a motion hearing. Taunton quickly entered from the holding cell, took his place alongside court-appointed defense attorney Steven R. Miears, and raised his right hand to be sworn in. After a brief exchange - no longer than ten minutes - it was determined that the motion expected to be made that day would be postponed by at least a month.

336th District Judge Lauri Blake addressed Assistant Fannin County Attorney Brad Setterberg, who was representing the state during the hearing, and indicated that the hearing scheduled for that day would be to decide whether or not the state would pursue the death penalty against Taunton. Setterberg announced that due to a lack of cooperation with some of those needed for necessary testimony, the state was not prepared at that time to make that decision, and requested a continuance.

Miears showed no obvious objection to that request, but did take time to remind the court that the defense would need 12-18 months after that announcement to be prepared for trial. Miears further stated that at that time, he would have to assume that was the direction the state desired to go, and would take the necessary action to be prepared. Judge Blake asked Miears if he wished to appoint secondary counsel at that time, to which he requested Keith Gore from McKinney. The request was approved.

At that time, Setterberg requested to set a date 30 days out for the next hearing, and it was granted.

Taunton is accused of murdering his mother Sue Harpst, step-father Harold Harpst, and sister Regina Taunton at their home outside of Leonard on Sunday, Jan. 15. The arrest affidavit for Taunton, signed by Justice of the Peace Alan Hale, showed the strongest probable cause for

executing the warrant was the recording of a conversation between Taunton and another person where he reportedly confessed to shooting the trio and provided details about the crimes. The warrant was signed on Wednesday, Jan. 18 and Taunton was arrested at the Jimmy Granger Ford dealership in Stonewall, La. the following day. That Saturday, Jan. 21, authorities located the three bodies belonging to his family members behind a barn in the community of Luella. Taunton was extradited back to Texas on Jan. 23, and has remained in the Fannin County Jail since that time. He was formally indicted on capital murder charges by the Fannin County Grand Jury on April 5.