

Professor Crump's letter to the Houston Chronicle regarding the Cameron Todd Willingham case appeared in Sunday's edition.

Annise Parker found.

calls.
ports Metro's plans for light
riticizes the agency manage-
a lack of transparency and ad-
ive arrogance in dealing with
nry. As with HPD, she would
leadership for the agency.
Locke, like Parker, has taken
ventional path to politics. He
il rights leader on the Univer-
uston campus in the late '60s
ed a degree in political science.
steelworker and union mem-
re enrolling at South Texas
f Law. After passing the Texas

Bar, Locke joined the
Washington staff of
the late Rep. Mickey
Leland, and later re-
turned to Houston to
serve as president of
the Houston Commu-
nity College Board.

Once a protester
outside the halls of
power, Locke became
an influential attor-
ney, serving as coun-
sel for the Port Au-
thority, Metro and the
Harris County-Hous-
ton Sports Authority.
He was appointed by
Mayor Bob Lanier in
1995 as city attorney.

Locke strongly sup-
ports creation of a re-
gional crime lab to
replace the scandal-
scarred Houston Po-
ensic facility "for a whole bunch
ons, from appearance to actual-
While he will not say whether
uld replace Chief Hurtt, Locke
es to have an effective and effi-
eader and manager running HPD
his tenure. According to the
ate, "I'm looking for someone
ses state-of-the-art policing tech-
; to keep the city safe."

ke says the city's current finan-
problems can be dealt with by
g economies across the board, in-
cluding renegotiating
insurance arrange-
ments for employees,
increased cooperation
with Harris County
on parks and library
projects and a joint
ail and booking fa-

LETTERS

Perry on Willingham case

Disturbing

REGARDING "Perry blasts
arson probe's critics"
(Page A1, Thursday), Gov.
Rick Perry's remarks and ac-
tions regarding the Cameron
Todd Willingham execution
case would be almost laugh-
able if they weren't so dis-
turbing. First, he describes
the multiple well-established
arson experts who disagreed
with the prosecution's origi-
nal scientific reasoning as
merely latter-day supposed
experts. Then he replaces the
state Forensic Science Com-
mission committee, includ-
ing the chair Sam Bassett,
two days prior to a meeting
scheduled to hear Dr. Craig
Beyler's extensive report.
That meeting has been
suspended indefinitely. Fi-
nally last week, the recently
canned Bassett was quoted
as saying he felt pressured
by Perry's aides, who were
unhappy with the direction
the Willingham case was go-
ing earlier this summer. Of
course they were unhappy!
A leading arson expert was
about to publicly denounce
in front of a state-sanctioned
commission the evidence
that led to the prosecution,
and ultimately execution, of
Willingham. All of which just
so happened to occur on Per-
ry's watch. Perry's actions
reek of foul play motivated
by potential political fallout,
especially in an election year.
The Forensic Science Com-
mission should be allowed to
reconvene to consider Bey-
ler's report.

- RAMSEY SMITH,
Houston

Misunderstood

THE Todd Willingham
arson-murder case has
been badly misunderstood.
For example, Lisa Falken-
berg's column ("It's not just
about the 'bad man,'" Page
B1, Thursday) asks, "Did
Texas execute an innocent
man?" And it says that this is
the "big-picture question."

But no one in the press seems
to have reported on the evi-
dence that would answer that
big-picture question. You
see, in arson cases, whether
there was arson isn't usually
the hardest question. The
hardest thing to prove, if it
was arson, is, who did it? In a
criminal case, every element
of the crime must be proved
beyond a reasonable doubt,
including the identity of the
person who committed the
arson. And the proof about
who did it, almost automati-
cally, provides proof of the
arson element, too. In other
words, the evidence of who
did the arson also provides
evidence that it was arson,
because you can't prove
that that person committed
arson without happening
to corroborate the evidence
that proves arson in the first
place.

Falkenberg observes that
Willingham was a bad man,
but adds, "being a bad man
isn't a crime punishable
by death, even in Texas."
Of course not, and the
gratuitous slam against Texas
is unfortunate. The point is,
there has to have been strong
evidence that Willingham
did it. In fact, there has to
have been more than strong
evidence; there has to have
been evidence proving it
beyond a reasonable doubt.
Otherwise, the courts that
reviewed his case — and
there were many of them
— would have had a duty to
reverse the conviction and
direct an acquittal. I'd like to
know what that evidence was
before I shot off my mouth
about whether the governor
was being an obstructionist
or whether an innocent
man was executed. The
governor may be completely
correct in saying that the
commission's hiring of an
East Coast expert to analyze
the arson investigation was
a waste of state funds. From
what I've seen, there's no
way to tell. It may be that the
expert was simply indulging
a taste for suggesting that an
investigator from Corsicana
was too rural to be credible.

For example, criticizing a
burn-pattern conclusion, as
the expert did, because the
report does not explicitly
rule out electrical sources
in connection with the
burn pattern, sounds to me
like an academician's put-
down of a field investigator.
Anyone who has read police
reports would not think it
surprising if an investigator's
report happened to omit
explicit mention of electric
sources in connection with
a burn pattern, particularly
if no electrical source
was nearby. But the real
point is that in spite of the
overheated rhetoric about
this case, nothing in the
press supports a conclusion
that the governor is wrong,
particularly since all of that
rhetoric has been uttered
without any report of the
evidence against Willingham.

- DAVID CRUMP,

Professor of law, University of
Houston Law Center

'Justice for all'

GOV. Rick Perry describes
Cameron Todd Will-
ingham as a monster, a bad
man, a wife beater, someone
who spews obscenities with
his last breath. I'll give the
governor the benefit of the
doubt: Willingham may have
been all those things. But
what bearing does that have
on the crime with which he
was charged? Justice is for all
of us, not just nice people.
If evidence now available
suggests Willingham did
not commit the crime for
which he was executed, that
evidence should be heard
in order to better serve jus-
tice in the future and keep
our courts from repeating
mistakes. The next time our
governor puts his hand over
his heart to recite the Pledge
of Allegiance to the flag of
the United States of America,
I hope he listens to what he's
saying. The Pledge ends with
these words: "with liberty
and justice for all."

- JAN PING,
Huffman