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**AP: PROMINENT LAWYER PLEADS GUILTY TO
AMBULANCE CHASING CASE**

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Prominent lawyer pleads guilty in ambulance-chasing case

MONA BRECKENRIDGE December 16, 1997 GMT

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — One of the nation's richest personal injury lawyers, who had been accused of soliciting victims after a 1994 USAir crash, pleaded guilty Monday to practicing law without a license in South Carolina.

John O'Quinn was fined \$2,500 for pleading to the misdemeanor charge and also agreed to donate about \$250,000 to fund ethics seminars and a special prosecutor's unit that will investigate ambulance-chasing and other charges against lawyers. Seven other counts were dismissed.

"I love the law. I respect the law. And I believe the law should be obeyed," O'Quinn said outside the courtroom. "I am very glad these charges have been resolved."

Carl D. Shaw, who worked in O'Quinn's Houston law office, pleaded guilty to improper practice. He was fined \$2,500 and will contribute about \$100,000 to the unit. Seven other counts against Shaw were dismissed.

O'Quinn and Shaw were accused of hiring ``accident runners'' to recruit clients after the July 1994 crash of USAir Flight 1016 near Charlotte, N.C.

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The crash killed 37 people, most from South Carolina where state law bars lawyers from personally soliciting accident victims.

O'Quinn, who reportedly earned an estimated \$40 million from breast implant cases, had also been charged with splitting fees with non-lawyers hired to round up clients.

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State Attorney General Charlie Condon said O'Quinn's behavior was ``extremely embarrassing for the legal profession."''

``What he did is not only unprofessional (or) unethical, it is criminal," Condon said.

The charges led to an investigation of O'Quinn's conduct by the State Bar of Texas, where his office is based. That investigation is continuing.

In 1987, the Texas Bar sued to have O'Quinn disbarred in a similar case. He pleaded no contest to the charges and was allowed to keep his law license.

Charges against two other lawyers involved in the case are pending. Two non-lawyers from Houston and a minister also face charges for recruiting clients.

O'Quinn was listed in Forbes magazine as the second highest-paid lawyer in the nation. The National Bar Journal previously has named O'Quinn one of the nation's top 10 litigators.

A jury in April found the airline, now known as US Airways, liable for actual damages but not for punitive damages. At least \$40 million has been paid in settlements with the passengers and victims' families.

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