

the nation

Denver sued for spending taxpayer money on nativity

United Press International
DENVER — The American Civil Liberties Union doesn't mind the brightly colored lights, the Christmas trees or the figure of Santa Claus which decorate the Denver City and County Building each yuletide, but it says the nativity scene has to go. ACLU attorneys filed suit in U.S. District Court Wednesday demanding that the scene be removed from the city's annual holiday display. The

suit said the city was violating both the state and federal constitutions by using taxpayer dollars to erect, maintain, disassemble and store a nativity scene on public property. James H. Joy, director of the ACLU's Colorado chapter, said the suit was filed after the city council and Mayor William McNichols continued to ignore repeated requests about eliminating the nativity scene from the decorations.

"We recognize that many Denver citizens and visitors enjoy viewing the creche scene each year," Joy said. "Surely an equivalent or better display could be established by private individuals, corporate bodies or religious institutions. However, the city of Denver must stop participating in sectarian observances." The suit said the holiday decorations — which attract thousands of viewers each year — violate the First and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibit government bodies from supporting the establishment of religion. The lawsuit, filed in the name of "Citizens Concerned for Separation of Church and State," said city officials appropriated \$23,600 for the display for the coming holiday season.

Conserving energy, cities alter lamps

Lights obscure sky for astronomers

United Press International
RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN, Wash. — The starry night sky isn't what it used to be in fast-growing southeast Washington — and that's bad news for astronomers at the Rattlesnake Mountain Observatory. Booming towns in the area are glowing brighter than ever at night, interfering with the observatory's studies of the aurora borealis, or northern lights. The towns and the observatory used to have a pretty good relationship, so good that several years ago many communities passed "light pollution" ordinances designed to keep night glow at a minimum. But the energy crisis has those towns thinking about replacing their current street lamps with more efficient lamps that use less electricity but produce light over a wider spectrum. "That would be a very bad light for us," said Robert Stokes, manager of space sciences at Battelle Northwest Laboratories, which operates the observatory. "At least a part of our operation here would be less effective." The old ordinances restricted the towns' lighting to mercury vapor lamps, which throw off a relatively narrow band of light that doesn't interfere much with the telescopes. But Stokes said the General Electric Co. has embarked on a major marketing campaign to persuade cities and utilities to switch to high-

pressure sodium vapor lamps for conservation purposes. Low-pressure sodium vapor lamps would be even more efficient, wouldn't interfere with the astronomers, Stokes said, but General Electric doesn't make them. The nearby cities of Kennewick and Richland already have repealed their ordinances and Sunnyside and Grandview are getting ready to follow suit, said Bill Holmes, spokesman for Pacific Power & Light. Holmes said conversion could begin as early as next Thursday if city councils approve. The observatory plans to send scientists to meetings to present their side of the issue. "It's mostly G.E. that we're up against," said Stokes. The Rattlesnake Mountain Observatory is the key facility in a work of nine telescopes across the nation watching the northern lights in a study of how solar storms affect the earth's upper atmosphere, said. Star-gazing near any population center is increasingly threatened by man-made light and Stokes said the trend was disturbing for reasons of beauty as well as science. "There tends to be a lack of appreciation of the aesthetic appeal of being able to see the starry sky at night," Stokes said. "Many of us dwellers have never even seen the Milky Way."

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Interest rates make home owning luxury

United Press International
WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress says if prices and interest rates keep soaring, "home ownership for young couples will become a luxury for the privileged few." Committee Chairman Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, said soaring prices and high interest rates are "turning the American dream of home ownership into a nightmare." Jay Janis, chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, told the committee what most people already suspected — soaring interest rates will result in sharply lower housing starts in 1980. Janis said he nevertheless reports Federal Reserve Board that have pushed mortgage rates to 14 percent in some areas. Janis said the fed's strategy "not necessarily" hurt housing long run. "The fed's actions might lead to a sharper decline in interest rates over the longer run than was occurred without these actions," he said. Dr. Saul Klamman, president of the National Association of Mortgage Banks, testified many of the houses would take them off the market rather than cut prices.

4 people gunned down going to birthday party

United Press International
PHILADELPHIA — A gunman, for no apparent reason, fired on a group of elderly guests at a birthday party for a 104-year-old woman. Three of the partygoers were killed, including the woman's 106-year-old brother, and a fourth was critically wounded. The dead were identified as Moses Beckett, 106, Shade Sherman, 63, and Althea Denmark, 60, all of Philadelphia. Edward Durrah, 75, also of Philadelphia, was hospitalized in critical condition with multiple gunshot wounds. The incident occurred outside Haven Memorial United Methodist Church in North Philadelphia. Inside the fellowship hall, the church about 40 guests were ready to celebrate the 104th day of Beckett's sister, Ella Beckett. Police Inspector Donald Larson described the incident as "a car going south on 23rd Street. The driver of the car got out and fired multiple gunshots, reloading back into his car and continuing on 23rd Street."

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Ex-workers found guilty of cat beating

United Press International
BOSSIER CITY, La. — A municipal judge has convicted four ex-workers of animal pound employees of cruelty to animals, including beating a cat to death with a hammer. C.I. Blanton, Robert Jackson and Alejandro Vasquez were convicted Wednesday by Judge Ross Robinson. He scheduled sentencing for Dec. 11. All four were charged with using a lead pipe to beat cats to death at an animal shelter.

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