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Texas Democrats reject proposal for official language

AUSTIN (AP) — The State Democratic Executive Committee on Tuesday rejected a resolution pushed by a group that wants Texas lawmakers to make English the state's official language.

Ed Martin, executive director of the state Democratic Party, said the official language resolution could be viewed as a "slap in the face" to some Texans of foreign descent.

Also Tuesday, the American Ethnic Coalition, whose leader says English must be made the official language to avoid "a tangle of squabbling nationalities," kicked off a petition drive to encourage Texas lawmakers to back their proposal.

"America is increasingly populated by illegal immigrants and other factions who look upon America's English language as a secondary language and who cling to their ethnicity so strongly as to do both themselves and America a great disservice," said Lou Zaeske of Bryan, founder and chairman of the coalition.

California voters in November approved a similar official language proposal.

If approved in Texas, the proposal would bar bilingual ballots and bilingual education. Instead of bilingual education, the coalition favors intensive English courses for students who speak only another language.

The State Republican Executive Committee in November backed the official language resolution. But Bill Toney of Nacogdoches, chairman of the coalition's Democratic caucus, said he was "flatly rejected" Tuesday by the Democrats.

The SDEC resolution committee approved a counter-resolution that there is no need to adopt an official language.

"There is no threat to the English language," Martin said. "Immigrants have always learned English and desire to learn English. We don't need to be doing something to be divisive."

The full committee approved the counter-resolution with no discussion and no opposition.

The petitions being circulated by the coalition say "recent policies have unwisely granted recognition to rival languages which threaten to undermine the status of English as the language of the United States and the state of Texas."

At a Capitol news conference, Zaeske said, "America must never be allowed to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities divided along ethnic or language lines.

"Should this ever happen, America would cease to be the strong, united, secure and prosperous nation it has become. Indeed, it would cease to be a nation at all."

Doctors: Participation in Medicare 'forced'

DALLAS (AP) — Lawyers representing a group of doctors argued at a hearing Tuesday that the government is trying to force them to decide on participating in Medicare without knowing how much they can charge.

But government attorneys said the doctors are just being greedy.

"The physicians' interest is in getting more money than Congress intended," Sheila Lieber, a Justice Deparment attorney, told U.S. District Judge Barefoot Sanders.

She and other government lawyers accused the American Medical Association of trying to usurp the will of Congress in their lawsuit against U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Otis R. Bowen.

Tuesday's hearing stemmed from a Dec. 24 suit filed by the AMA, the Texas Medical Association, the Lubbock-Crosby-Garza County Medical Society, seven Lubbock doctors and three of their patients.

They claim doctors should not be required to decide on taking part in Medicare when it may be March before they get essential information on the fees they can charge.

Under new rules, doctors were required to decide by Jan. 1 whether to sign Medicare participation agreements locking them into a fee structure set by the government.

But two temporary restraining orders were granted and the deadline has been postponed until Jan. 20.

The doctors claim the law is unconstitutional because Medicare recipients cannot use their own money to buy more expensive medical care.

Medicare recipients who go to non-participating doctors are reimbursed only 96 percent of what is paid to patients of participating doctors. Non-pariticipating doctors would not be allowed to charge more than the MAAC without facing sanctions from the government.

State Briefs

Thieves fool machines with fake dollars

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Three people have been jailed on charges of bilking change machines out of $4,000 with photocopies of dollar bills, authorities said.

"It is not a prank," Secret Service Special Agent-In-Charge Ed Nowland said. "It is not considered a minor crime."

Gerald Fischer, 35, his wife, Cassie Alexander, 24, and Jimmy Stover, 24, all of New Braunfels, are accused of using the fake bills in three South Texas counties.

The three allegedly made two-sided copies of dollar bills and used those replicas to take coins from dollar changers, mostly at car washes and self-service laundries in Bexar, Guadalupe and Nueces counties, agents said.

Secret Service agents arrested the trio on Saturday at Fischer's home in New Braunfels and confiscated $1,200 in cash and several photocopies of dollars, Nowland said.

Butane explosion forces evacuation

GEORGETOWN (AP) — A leaking butane gas tank exploded Tuesday, starting a fire that forced evacuation of a high school, some homes and several businesses and temporarily closed a portion of two highways, authorities said.

One person suffered minor injuries in the blast, officials said.

Denise Lebowitz, an assistant city manager who was fielding calls to the Georgetown Fire Department, said the 1 p.m. explosion occurred at a Centex Butane storage facility two miles north of the city.

A 49-year-old man, whose identity was not immediately released, suffered minor chemical burns, said Cathy Bryant, spokeswoman at Georgetown Hospital.

Michigan fugitive found in West Texas

VAN HORN (AP) — A Michigan state prisoner who escaped from a psychiatric center with the apparent help of a guard was arrested in far West Texas while driving a pickup whose owner was found dead, authorities said.

William Day was arrested Monday by a state trooper in Culberson County on Interstate 10 just west of Van Horn, said David Wells, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The officer stopped Day on a suspected traffic violation in this West Texas town after he had clocked the pickup truck Day was driving at about 90 mph, Wells said.

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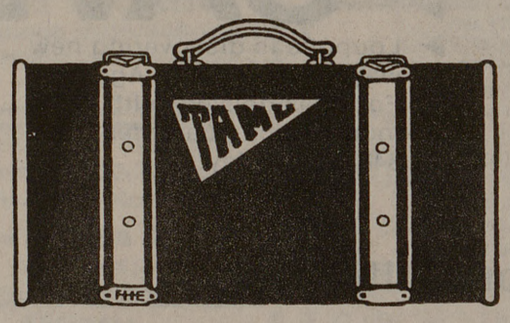

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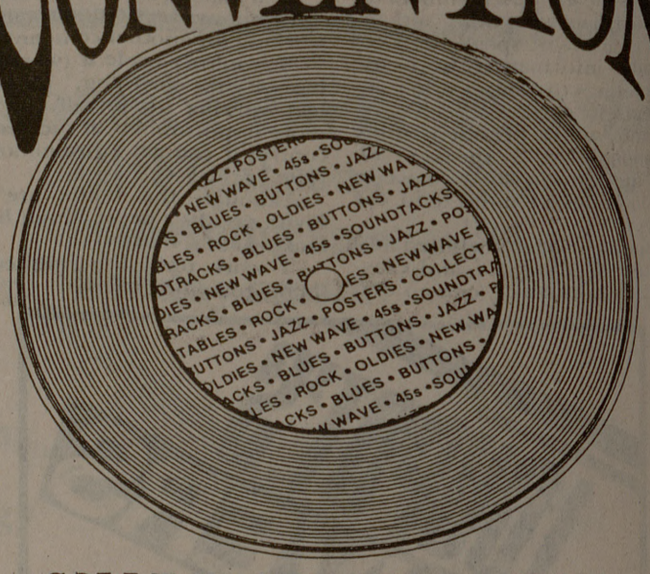

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