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High court says 'no' to allowing silent moments

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to let New Jersey provide moments of silence for public school students but gave no hint whether similar laws in other states impermissibly promote school prayer.

The court ruled unanimously that the New Jersey legislators who sought to press the controversy in court no longer have the proper legal standing.

The ruling therefore said nothing about the constitutionality of a 1982 New Jersey law that said students may use the daily silent moments "for quiet and private contemplation or introspection."

About half the states have similar laws.

A federal appeals court struck down the New Jersey law, ruling that it violated the constitutionally required separation of church and state.

The issue has been, and most likely will continue to be, politically charged.

"The constitutional issue is still a live question," said Steven F. McDowell of the Milwaukee-based Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

McDowell said the league had urged the court to uphold the New Jersey law.

"I expect that some other state's law will be reviewed by the high court," McDowell said.

"With a new justice joining the

court, I believe we will see that law being upheld," he said.

"I was concerned the current court might be evenly divided on the issue, which would have upheld the lower court's ruling," McDowell said.

President Reagan has asked the Senate to confirm Anthony M. Kennedy, a conservative federal appeals court judge from Sacramento, Calif., to fill the Supreme Court vacancy created when Justice Lewis F. Powell retired last June.

Little is known about Kennedy's church-state views.

Kennedy represents Reagan's third nomination for the high court position.

In other decisions, the justices:

- Ruled unanimously in a Virginia case that only government regulators may sue industrial polluters for past violations of the federal Clean Water Act.

The case has been watched closely by environmental groups across the nation.

- Voted 8-0 in a case from Louisiana to narrow the power of federal judges to overrule labor arbitrators' decisions deemed to be against public policy.

- Ruled unanimously in another Louisiana case that the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., a government agency, may collect debts owed to failed banks it takes over even when the banks misled the borrowers.



Oh, Christmas tree

Members of the MSC Hospitality Committee sing "Jingle Bells" Tuesday at the ceremony to celebrate the annual lighting of the Christmas

tree that is set up in the lounge of the MSC. A reception was held after the ceremony.

Photo by Robert W. Rizzo

NASA names 4 firms to construct space station

WASHINGTON (AP) — NASA named four "clearly superior" companies on Tuesday as winners of billions of dollars in contracts for construction of a space station, the next major step for U.S. exploration and use of space.

The contracts eventually may be valued at \$6.5 billion and could provide about 12,000 jobs, officials said.

The contractors selected for the space station hardware design and development are Boeing Aerospace of Huntsville, Ala.;

McDonnell Douglas Astronautics Co. of Huntington Beach, Calif., and Houston; General Electric Co., Astro-Space Division, Valley Forge, Pa., and East Windsor, N.J.; and Rocketdyne Division of Rockwell International, Canoga Park, Calif.

"The best minds in the nation went to work on this project and all of the proposals we received were outstanding," said James Fletcher, the administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The space station plans call for a perma-

nently manned base in earth orbit that would be in operation in the mid-1990s. The station would include four habitable modules, two to be provided by the United States and one each by Japan and by the European Space Agency.

NASA has told Congress the total cost of the station would be \$14.6 billion.

Boeing was awarded a contract for what is called Work Package 1. NASA said the proposed cost for that package in the first phase of the station is about \$750 million. If

a phase II option is added later, another \$25 million would be tacked on.

Work Package 1 includes the space station laboratory and living modules, along with life support systems.

McDonnell Douglas won the contract for Work Package 2 with a proposed cost of \$1.9 billion in phase I and \$140 million for the phase II option.

Work Package 3 was awarded to General

Electric on a cost estimate of \$800 million. This package will include a free-flying platform that would orbit in formation with the space station. It also would include a robotic satellite-servicing system. A phase II option could add \$570 million to this contract.

Rocketdyne's estimate for Work Package 4 was \$1.6 billion with a phase II add-on option of \$740 million.

The package calls for power generation and distribution throughout the system.

Bryan fire chief put on probation for job by manager of city

By Richard Williams

Reporter

Embattled Bryan Fire Chief Claude Jenkins III will keep his job with the city of Bryan, but he has been placed on six-month probation.

"I have reassigned the fire chief under disciplinary probation, and will employ a management consultant to review all the operations of the department," City Manager Ernest Clark said.

Jenkins, who had been put on administrative leave after all uniformed personnel in the Bryan Fire Department signed a grievance petition and statement of no confidence in the fire chief, refused to comment on the petition or on the committee's findings.

The grievance committee members were Clark, Executive Director of Personnel Services Georgia Langston and Police Chief Charles Phelps.

Bernie Fette, citizen coordinator informationist for Bryan, said the grievance committee spent over 150 hours looking into the charges against Jenkins.

After examining the allegations, the committee found some basis for the charge that Jenkins has destroyed the department's morale. The committee found "the department is at its lowest morale level in recent years due to imposed management practices."

The committee also found that some actions by Jenkins "may have seemed retaliatory in nature."

The committee found the rest of the grievances were either management prerogatives not subject to grievance proceedings or were not supported by conclusive testimony.

Bryan firefighters were not informed of the decision officially until a 10 a.m. meeting between the senior staff of the fire department and Clark Tuesday. Clark

held another meeting with the front line supervisors to inform them of his decision.

Both meetings between Clark and the firefighters lasted more than an hour, and during the second meeting at least five firefighters left early. Two of the five were visibly upset when leaving the meeting.

Firefighters at the meeting said they already had heard of the decision through an interview Jenkins had given a reporter from a radio station.

Mike Donoho, acting deputy fire chief, said it was unfortunate Jenkins had talked to the news media before the firefighters had learned of the decision.

During that interview Jenkins said he expected to keep his job despite all of the firefighters signing a petition saying they did not feel they could work with him any longer. Jenkins also had said there would be changes made in the department to improve communication lines.

Donoho said the firefighters have been assured they are not subject to retaliation.

Jenkins said he would be able to work with the firefighters.

"We've got a real good fire department and we've got a real good management team," Jenkins said. "Although right now we have some communications problems, we will be working as professionals to correct those to give the city the best possible protection at the most affordable cost."

But the city probably has not heard the last from the firefighters. They plan to meet tonight to decide what action they will take.

Several of the firefighters said there is a strong possibility one or more lawsuits will be filed about the matter. No one would say if the firefighters would file a suit as a group or if it would be left to individuals to file.

Couple attempts suicide after jet vanishes

MANAMA, Bahrain (AP) — A mysterious Asian couple took suicide pills Tuesday just before being questioned about a South Korean jetliner that disappeared over Burma and may have been bombed.

Officials said the couple boarded Korean Air flight 858 at Baghdad, Iraq, where it originated Sunday, and got off at Abu Dhabi before the Boeing 707 headed across Asia toward Seoul with 115 people aboard.

It vanished near the Burma-Thailand border, before a scheduled re-

fueling stop in Bangkok. Officials in Seoul said there were strong suspicions a bomb destroyed the aircraft.

The man, who appeared to be middle aged, died four hours after biting into a suicide pill concealed in a cigarette, said Takao Natsume, Japanese ambassador in Bahrain. He said the woman, who was younger, was unconscious in critical condition at a military hospital but "she will survive."

They had been waiting to be questioned by immigration officials who

stopped them from boarding a Rome-bound flight. The two were believed to be either Japanese or Korean and were traveling on forged Japanese passports.

"Just after swallowing the pills they both fell on the floor and their bodies went very stiff," Ambassador Natsume said.

Both collapsed "in seconds," but the woman apparently survived because she swallowed less of the poison hidden in the cigarette filters, he said.

Japanese and Bahraini officials said the couple flew from Baghdad to Abu Dhabi on Flight 858 and caught a Gulf Air plane to Bahrain, a Persian Gulf island state, while the South Korean plane left for Seoul.

South Korea's government broadcasting service said investigators were checking possible links between the mystery woman and Chosen So-ren, an organization of Koreans living in Japan that supports communist North Korea.

A&M medical scientists study effects of harmful bacteria strain on humans

By Jenny Hynes

Reporter

Researchers in the Texas A&M College of Medicine's pathology and laboratory medicine department are studying harmful strains of bacteria and the effects of mycotoxins on humans.

Dr. Thomas W. Milligan, an assistant professor in the department, is studying a disease caused by the bacterium *Escherichia coli*.

"This organism was previously thought to be not too important in causing disease," he says. "But in the last two years there've been outbreaks of something called hemorrhagic colitis. It's a diarrheal syndrome."

About 1,200 types of *E. coli* have been identified. While some forms of the organism occur naturally in the human digestive system, the type Milligan is researching was determined to be harmful about two years ago. Before this time, he says, the serotype, or organism type, only rarely was identified.

"They screened about 3,000 stool samples prior to 1982 and found only one with this (organism)," Milligan says. "Now we're finding it much more commonly."

Thirteen isolated outbreaks occurred in the United States in the past two years, each involving between 100 and 150 people, he says. Milligan, who has studied the disease for about a year, says it's most

often found in nursing-home patients and children in day-care centers.

"Most of the outbreaks occur with older or younger people, but not always," he says. "Two of the outbreaks were linked to fast-food hamburger restaurants, and these were people of all ages."

The disease can be transmitted from eating undercooked beef, especially hamburger obtained from dairy cattle, or acquired from other people infected with the organism.

Once the organism enters the body, the disease progresses in two stages. The first and more mild phase is a diarrheal syndrome, hemorrhagic colitis.

"The person is not really sick in terms of fever," Milligan says. "The problem is that about two weeks after having the episode of hemorrhagic colitis, a small percentage of these patients will develop a syndrome called hemolytic uremic syndrome. This is what we're basically interested in."

This second stage of the disease causes a more severe illness, often ending in death.

"The reason for concern is it has

such a bad outcome," Milligan says. "It's kind of like AIDS in that it has such a high mortality rate." Acquired immune deficiency syndrome is a severe and often fatal disease in which the immune system breaks down and cannot protect the body against invading organisms.

Milligan says hemolytic uremic syndrome causes three major changes in those affected:

- A drop in the number of white blood cells, or cells that aid in blood clotting.
- Shutdown in kidney function.
- Hemolyzing, or splitting apart, of the red blood cells.

Milligan says it isn't yet known how the organism causes the disease. "Some people say it makes a toxin that triggers hemolytic uremic syndrome," he says. "That's one hypothesis."

The researcher is working with patients in the Veterans Administration hospital in Temple to identify and isolate a toxin from patients with the syndrome.

But researchers in the department aren't limited to working on only one project.

Dr. Sonja Geerling, a senior lecturer in the department, is researching a more efficient testing process to detect the sexually-transmitted disease chlamydia. Geerling also is working with A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine to study the effects of mycotoxins on people and animals.

"Mycotoxins are naturally occurring toxins in fungi," she says.

The toxins, found worldwide in grains used to feed animals and in some food for human consumption, cause different symptoms in different animals. Effects on humans include:

- Keratitis, or inflammation of the eye's cornea.
- Bleeding in the digestive system.
- Liver problems, including liver cancer.

Geerling, who has studied mycotoxins for eight years, says liver cancer is a common long-term effect of mycotoxins, which act in conjunction with the Hepatitis B virus. The virus on its own can cause inflammation of the liver, but even more serious problems arise when mycotoxins also are present.

"Hepatitis B virus on its own doesn't have the same devastating effect on the liver as the two combined," she says.

Outside the United States, which has relatively stringent food-safety laws, the problem of mycotoxins is serious.

"In some parts of the world, liver cancer is the most common cancer there is," Geerling says.

Mycotoxins may cause liver cancer by breaking down the body's immune system, she says, allowing tumor cells to grow and multiply.

