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New legislation helps enforce housing laws

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan signed legislation Tuesday putting new enforcement teeth in the open-housing law Congress passed in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 assassination.

Standing with members of Congress in the White House Rose Garden, Reagan hailed the newly enacted bill as "the most important civil rights legislation in 20 years."

Singling out Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., who had accompanied King to Washington for the civil rights leader's "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963, the president said the legislation "has brought us one step closer to realizing Martin Luther King's dream."

The measure, which was passed overwhelmingly by the House and Senate, extends anti-discrimination protections to the handicapped and to families with children. It also empowers the federal government — for the first time — to seek fines of up to \$100,000 against individuals or organizations found to have engaged in a pattern of housing discrimination.

Under the open-housing provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the government was given only a mediating role in housing discrimination disputes.

"Discrimination is particularly tragic when it means a family is refused housing near good schools, a good job or simply in a better neighborhood to raise children," Reagan said. "This bill is the product of years of bipartisan work, and repairs a significant defect in civil rights law."

He said that while the 1968 law was well-intentioned, "it lacked teeth. Its conciliation provisions were ineffective when used."

Reagan said that he and Housing Secretary Samuel Pierce had "devoted eight years" to seeking improvements in the 1968 law, "to redress the absence of penalties and the inability of the government to initiate actions except when a pattern of discrimination could be proven."

Under the bill he signed Tuesday, the Department of Housing and Urban Development will have authority to initiate enforcement actions and to seek penalties against individuals, businesses or organizations that discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex or national origin in the sale, rental or financing of housing.

It authorizes civil penalties, which could be recommended following an agency administrative enforcement process, of up to \$10,000 or a first offense, \$25,000 for a second and up to \$50,000 for a third.

In instances where a pattern of discrimination has been alleged, the government could seek up to \$50,000 for a first offense and as much as \$100,000 for subsequent offenses.

Besides strengthening existing provisions in law dealing with racial discrimination, the measure protects the handicapped against housing bias. For instance, a landlord could be considered to be in violation if he refused to make reasonable modifications in premises to accommodate the handicapped.

Under the section protecting families with children from discrimination in the sale, rental or financing of housing, buildings that are now "adult only" could exclude children only if the managers or owners of these structures adopted a policy to rent or sell to the elderly only.

Gilbert storms across Caribbean

Hurricane Gilbert, one of the strongest storms in history, roared toward Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on Tuesday with 160 mph winds and torrential rains after lashing the tiny, low-lying Cayman Islands.

The hurricane, traveling westward across the Caribbean Sea, was upgraded Tuesday to Category 5, the strongest and most deadly type of hurricane. Such storms have winds greater than 155 mph and cause catastrophic damage.

Gilbert, which devastated Jamaica and the Dominican Republic with flash floods and mudslides, has killed at least five people.

Bob Sheets, director of the National Hurricane Center in Coral Gables, Fla., described Gilbert as

a great hurricane that is in the top 10 percent (historically) as far as intensity, size and destructive potential.

See related stories
pages 5,6 and 14

Only two Category 5 hurricanes have hit the United States — a 1935 storm that killed 600 people in Florida, and Hurricane Camille, which devastated the Mississippi coast in 1969 and killed 256 people.

"The people who need to be concerned now are those people over on the Yucatan Peninsula — Cancun, Cozumel, that whole area," Sheets said.

"There is very serious flooding in the Cayman Islands," Erina Nichols, a tourism official in Miami, said Tuesday after speaking

Gulf Coast residents brace

Associated Press

Residents all along the Texas Gulf Coast on Tuesday began bracing for the possible onslaught of Hurricane Gilbert, which is taking aim at the Gulf of Mexico.

"Oh man, business is really booming," said George Shannon, an assistant manager at a Wal-Mart store in Galveston. "We've got people all over the place right now buying flashlights, batteries,

lamp oil — everything. "It's very steady and they're not just coming in getting a handful of stuff — it's cartloads of stuff."

Ricky Burge, an assistant manager at McCoy's Building Center said, "Everyone's buying plywood. It's escalating at this time and it doesn't look like it's going to slow down. Our business easily has doubled since yesterday." citizens."

with residents of the islands. "The Run Point (community) is taking a real beating," she said. The storm later knocked out

all telephone service to the Cayman Islands, a British dependency of 23,000 people that was expecting 12-foot tides.

CS receives absentee polling site

By Susan B. Erb
Staff Writer

The Brazos County Commissioners Court, rescinding its decision of last week to move absentee voting from the county courthouse to the Brazos Center, voted Tuesday to designate the College Station Community Center as a temporary absentee polling site in addition to the courthouse site.

The decision is the result of debate concerning site accessibility, fairness to minorities and cost of polling sites.

GOP Party Chairman Rodger Lewis, who strongly suggested an absentee voting site on the Texas A&M campus, said the College Station Community Center site was a step in the right direction, but he was disappointed in the decision not to locate an absentee site on campus.

"I think that the notion of having a branch at the Community Center was a very good one," Lewis said, "but I do think that you also need one where most of the people who vote would find it convenient, and that is on the Texas A&M Campus."

"There were students here who were upset about the decision because they know that the University of Texas has an absentee poll on its campus. This is just one more instance where Brazos County is dragging its feet into the 20th century."

Minorities as well as students are concerned about fairness in placement of absentee voting sites.

Robert Orozco, a Bryan attorney, suggested either equal convenience, in the form of a site in every precinct, or equal inconvenience, one site at the county courthouse.

"Traditionally, the Hispanic-minority community of this county resides in the west and northwest parts of the county," Orozco said. "Putting a ballot box in a neighborhood that is predominantly Anglo and without a significant number of Hispanics or blacks would tend to dilute the minority participation."

"The obvious, although possibly not convenient or economically feasible, solution would be to place an absentee polling place in each pre-

dict in addition to the courthouse.

County Judge Dick Holmgreen, chairman of the commissioners court, said the attitude some have taken is that the absentee sites are the only places people can vote.

"The fact is there will be 40 boxes all over the county on election day, including one at the Memorial Student Center," Holmgreen said. "We feel students have the same rights as anyone else — that's the reason we put a box on campus."

Holmgreen said he believes the Legislature has gone too far in its extension of absentee voting regulations.

"The election is not to be held 20 days before election day. It's to be held on election day."

Originally established for voters who had to be out of their precinct on election day, absentee voting, through the Texas Legislature's response to low voter turnout, has evolved into a system that allows anyone to vote absentee.

Absentee voters may cast their ballots Monday through Friday, Oct. 19 to Nov. 4, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

South African activists take refuge in embassy

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — Three prominent anti-apartheid activists, detained for more than a year without charge, escaped from a hospital Tuesday and took refuge at the U.S. Consulate in a high-rise office building.

The U.S. Embassy said it had "high regard" for the men and would not force them to leave against their will.

Two of the three are senior officials of the now-banned United Democratic Front — acting publicity secretary Murphy Morobe, a black, and acting general secretary Mohammed Valli Moosa, an Indian. The other is Vusi Khanyile, a black who was chairman of the banned National Education Crisis Committee.

The U.S. Embassy statement confirmed that the three had taken refuge at the consulate, on the 11th floor of an office building in downtown Johannesburg. The building is two miles from the hospital where they were being treated.

The main U.S. embassy is in Pretoria.

The men have asked to meet with their relatives and with leaders of the anti-apartheid movement, but they have not disclosed any other requests.

"We were in frequent contact with these three men prior to their detention without charge, and hold them

in high regard," the U.S. statement said. "We will not press them to leave against their will."

The statement said the United States does not offer asylum at its diplomatic offices. But it said these premises are inviolable under international law and may not be entered by the host government without consent. The embassy said it was discussing the situation with the activists and the South African government.

A colleague of the three, union activist Jay Naidoo, said he was seeking a meeting with U.S. Ambassador Edward Perkins to discuss the situation. Perkins is the first black to hold the post.

Brig. Leon Mellet, a spokesman for the Law and Order Ministry, said the men had escaped from Johannesburg Hospital, where they had been receiving physiotherapy. No details of the escape were disclosed.

Previously, the three had been at Johannesburg's Diepkloof Prison.

At the consulate, there was no visible sign of security force deployments. A private guard stood at the entrance while about two dozen journalists waited in the hall for several hours before dispersing.

Morobe, 32, and Valli Moosa, 31, were detained in July 1987 after going into hiding when a state of emergency was declared June 12, 1986.

Guerrillas takeover bus destined for papal visit

MASERU, Lesotho (AP) — Guerrillas hijacked a bus Tuesday carrying 60 nuns, schoolgirls and other people traveling to see Pope John Paul II, who was expected in this tiny mountain kingdom, diplomats and sources said.

Jervis Chavase, deputy high commissioner at the British Embassy, said he learned of the hijacking when the bus drove up and stopped in front of the diplomatic compound.

"A bus is parked outside the commission (embassy) and I believe the police have the situation in control," Chavase said Tuesday evening. He said the hijackers have asked to come into the compound and were refused.

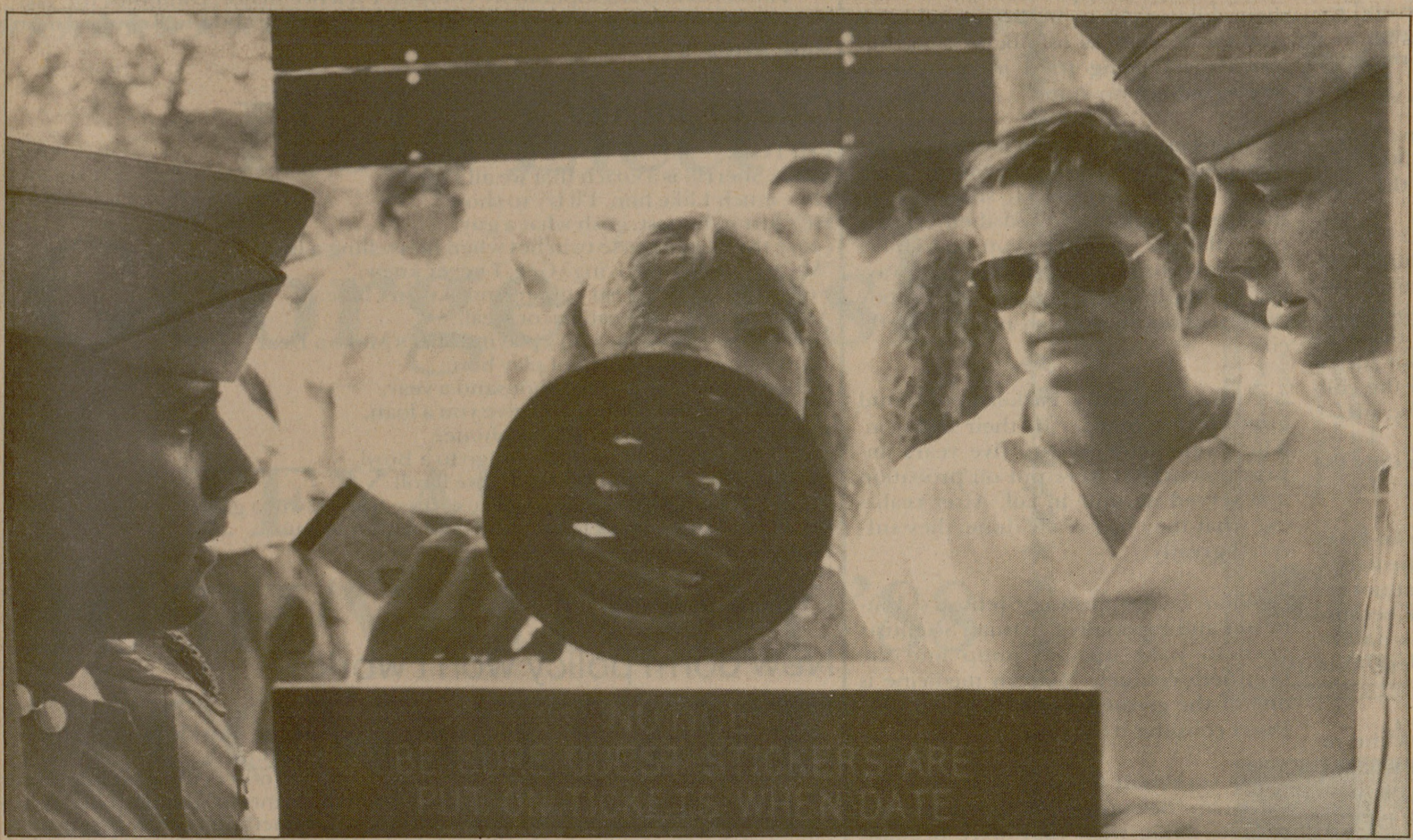
He said the bus arrived about 6 p.m. Tuesday.

Diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the guerrillas are believed to be members of the Lesotho Liberation Army, which had been fighting the left-wing regime of Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan.

The guerrillas left the country after a January 1986 military coup deposed Jonathan, and had been holed up in South Africa.

A nun at the Papal Visit Office, Sister Rita Brassard, said that the bus had come from the town of Quacha's Nek, which is in a remote area in the south of Lesotho, a mountain nation completely surrounded by South Africa.

She said nuns, teen-age schoolgirls and teachers were in the bus.



A sticky situation

Senior civil engineering majors Trace Hill, of Oahu, Hawaii, and Jose Sosa, of Fort Worth, wait in line Monday at the G. Rollie White Col-

iseum ticketbooth; to purchase guest stickers for tickets to this weekend's football game against Alabama.

Photo by Sam B. Myers

U.S. trade deficit declines sharply

WASHINGTON (AP) — The deficit, in the broadest measure of U.S. trade, narrowed sharply from April through June as overseas sales of American merchandise surged to a record high, the government reported Tuesday.

However, the good news was tempered by the fact that America suffered its first deficit in three decades in the trade category which includes investment earnings.

The Commerce Department said the deficit in the current account shrank to \$33.3 billion in the second quarter, a 9.8 percent improvement from a first quarter imbalance of \$36.9 billion. It was the biggest quarterly improvement since a 20.1 percent drop in the final three months of last year.

The current account is the most important of all the government's trade statistics because it covers not only trade in merchandise but also trade in services, which primarily reflect the flow of investment earnings between countries.

The improvement in the second quarter current account deficit occurred because the deficit in merchandise trade fell to \$29.9 billion, down

from \$35.2 billion in the first quarter, as exports rose to a record level and imports posted the first quarterly decline in three years.

This improvement was offset by a \$492 million imbalance in services, which meant that foreigners earned more on their investments during the quarter than Americans earned on overseas investments.

Also adding to the current account deficit was \$2.9 billion in U.S. payments for foreign aid and pensions to Americans living overseas.

For the first six months of this year, the current account deficit has been running at an annual rate of \$140.5 billion, a substantial improvement from a record deficit of \$154 billion in 1987.

The improvement has come about because of a boom in U.S. exports, reflecting declines in the value of the dollar since 1985 which have made American goods competitive once again on overseas markets.

The export rebound has translated into hefty job gains in American manufacturing which the Reagan administration hopes will benefit Repub-

lican George Bush's presidential chances.

However, Democrat Michael Dukakis has charged that the surge in trade deficits this decade and the resulting growth in foreign debt is one of the major failures of the Reagan economic program.

The current account was last in surplus in 1981, a year in which Americans' earnings on overseas investments were enough to offset a deficit in merchandise trade.

Since that time, Americans have handed over billions of dollars to foreigners in exchange for imported goods, transforming the country from the world's largest creditor nation to the world's largest debtor country.

That means that foreigners now own more in U.S. investments than Americans hold in foreign investments.

This transfer of wealth was reflected in the second quarter deficit in the services category the first deficit in this category since 1958.