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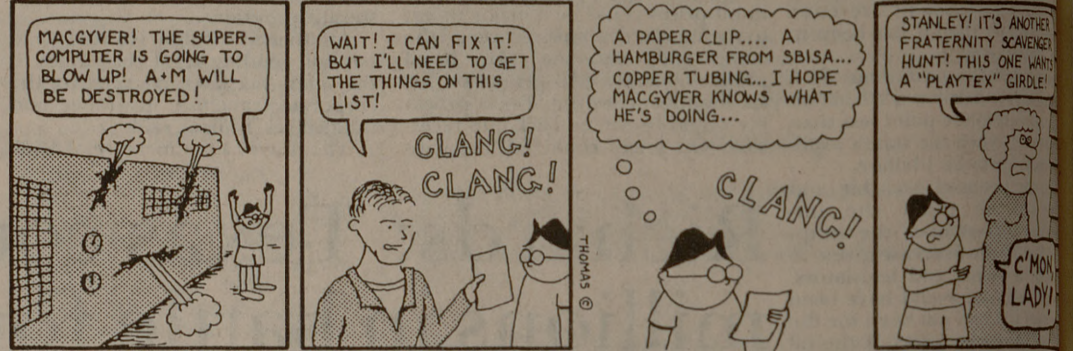
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by Scott McCull



Waldo

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Disease rate 2 times higher than norm on Texas border

WASHINGTON (AP) — Diseases linked to poor hygiene and unsanitary conditions occur at twice to three times the national rate along the Texas-Mexico border, a depressed region riddled with health care shortages, according to a study released Tuesday by Sen. Lloyd Bentsen.

Communicable diseases reported at a higher rate than in the United States include gastrointestinal diseases, hepatitis, tuberculosis and syphilis, the General Accounting Office study said.

Cases of leprosy and malaria, diseases not common in most other parts of the country, were also reported on the border, the GAO, Congress' investigative arm, said. Reported cases of those diseases, however, were low compared to other health problems, while the incidence of AIDS and gonorrhea also was lower on the border than nationally.

The six leading causes of death on the border, however, were the same for the United States and Texas, the study said.

The GAO study looked at the incidence of disease and the availability of health care in the 16 counties lining the 1,000-mile border between El Paso and Brownsville.

"Not surprisingly, the GAO study indicates some serious health problems along our border, and less medical care to cope with those problems than is available in the rest of Texas and the country at large," Bentsen said.

Bentsen, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, vowed to use the influential position to push for answers and money to combat the health care crisis along the border.

The study said three of the 16 counties — Culberson, Hudspeth and Terrell — have no doctors at all, and another five have less than five physicians. Two counties have no dentist, another eight have only one, and one county has two dentists.

Six counties have no hospital, and the ratio of hospital beds is one for every 375 people, compared to the national average of one bed for every 219 people, the study said.

The study found relatively fewer nurses and physician assistants on the border than in Texas, and that

sparsely populated counties have few emergency care personnel.

Most emergency care vehicles were concentrated in the most populated counties, leaving rural counties that span vast distances with little coverage, the study said.

The U.S. Public Health Service in May classified nine border counties and portions of five others as health manpower shortage areas, the study said.

The study said 1.5 million people live along the border, making up a

percent of the Texas population, the border population, 89 percent concentrated in urban counties.

The border population earns the lowest income in the state, with the Department of Commerce figures showing that in 1986, the per capita income for Texas was \$13,488 compared with \$8,422 for the border area. U.S. Labor Department figures showed the 1987 unemployment rate on the border hit a high of 15 percent in Starr County.

New bridge eases traffic on Texas-Mexico border

HIDALGO (AP) — A new bridge across the Rio Grande at Hidalgo is seen as an economic boost to the area by easing the clogged traffic between Texas and Mexico.

The new four-lane span doubles the traffic capacity between Hidalgo and the Mexican border city of Reynosa.

Hidalgo, 10 miles south of McAllen in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, has experienced steady growth in traffic headed both directions with the location of 32 U.S.-operated maquiladora plants in Reynosa, as well as increased populations on both sides of the border.

"Since we have an expanded bridge now, that really helps in attracting them (more industry) to McAllen and Reynosa because it facilitates them getting their products back across the border," Linda Brown, marketing director with the McAllen Economic Development Corp., said.

The new bridge serves only northbound traffic, while southbound vehicles and pedestrians now use the old bridge.

Charles Walper, bridge superintendent at Hidalgo, said the new bridge also should increase other imports and exports, tourist traffic and cross-border shopping in time for the Christmas season. On some Saturdays, it used to take as long as three hours to cross, but that has been reduced by at least half, Walper said.

John Cain, a customs broker at Hidalgo, said he has noticed a reduction in crossing time.

"I think it's going to be real good for business because this is the place around here where you have two bridges dedicated to one traffic," Cain said.

The new Hidalgo bridge, built by the City of McAllen International Bridge on the U.S. side and Reynosa II on the Mexico side, is the span to be completed across the Rio Grande this year. A new four-lane bridge was built at Del Rio and opened last April to replace a narrow, two-lane structure linking the city with Ciudad Acuna.

On the Hidalgo bridge, the right hand lane is reserved for trucks, Walper said.

It was opened for limited northbound traffic in September, but toll booths on the Mexican side were not opened until Friday.

The U.S. half, owned by the City of McAllen, cost about \$2 million and was finished several months before construction began on the Mexican half. No cost figure was available for Mexico's half of the bridge, owned by that country's federal government.

Several cities along the Texas-Mexico border are working on new bridges.

But the process can take years because of difficulties in bringing people on both sides of the river to agree on locations and other details.

Ruling punishes Dallas judge

AUSTIN (AP) — Dallas appeals court Judge Charles Ben Howell has been punished for a second time this month for suing in bad faith — this time by a federal judge who ordered Howell and his lawyer to pay more than \$23,000 in attorneys' fees and expenses.

U.S. District Judge James Nowlin concluded Howell filed lawsuits in an effort to harass the Supreme Court and delay a judgment that could have been used against him in his recent campaign for a seat on the court.

Howell and attorney Ken Mackey were ordered to pay expenses of defendants, including Texas Supreme Court Justice Oscar Mauzy.

Nowlin wrote, "It is abundantly clear to the court that Howell filed this case to harass the incumbent Texas Supreme Court justices in the three months immediately preceding the Nov. 8, 1988, election in which he sought to become a Texas Supreme Court justice."

Howell said Monday he planned to meet with his lawyer to study the case before deciding whether to appeal the unfavorable ruling.

"I'm disappointed," Howell, an associate justice on the 13-member 5th District Court of Appeals, said. "I'm not shocked or surprised."

On Nov. 1, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct disciplined Howell, saying he violated ethical standards and discredited the judiciary.

The panel accused Howell of filing a lawsuit "in bad faith" and "in intentional disregard of the rights of others." The lawsuit was one that also prompted Nowlin's ruling.

The commission issued a public reprimand against Howell — the harshest penalty short of censure and removal from office — one week before the general election in which the Republican was challenging Democratic incumbent Justice Raul Gonzalez for a Supreme Court seat.

In the federal court decision, Nowlin said he viewed Howell's tactics as "a transparent effort to further delay . . . collection of the judgment, for both political and personal reasons."

Nowlin ordered Howell and Mackey to pay \$12,588 to Homecraft Land Development and U.S. Home Corp.; \$3,697 to Mauzy; \$5,328 to Stewart Title Co.; and \$1,575 to the Supreme Court justices and the Texas attorney general's office.

"The court," Nowlin wrote, "is of the opinion that a lesser sanction would not have the desired effect."

Five years ago Howell filed a suit against Homecraft, U.S. Home and Stewart Title Co., later amending the case to include claims against the Deceptive Trade Practices. He appeared in the case both plaintiff and as his own attorney.

Homecraft countersued Howell. The jury, concluding Howell initiated his lawsuit in bad faith, awarded Homecraft an \$87,000 judgment that later was reduced to \$75,000. The judge in the case ruled that Howell's deceptive claims were groundless.

Howell appealed the decision to the Supreme Court and demanded that all nine justices disqualify themselves from the case. They refused and rejected his appeal twice.

Failing to win in state court, Howell pursued the issue in federal court, where he again lost in a decision issued by Nowlin.

Howell had sued Mauzy and wife for allegedly violating campaign contribution and disclosure laws. That case was ongoing when Howell asked the Supreme Court to review the Homecraft ruling.

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