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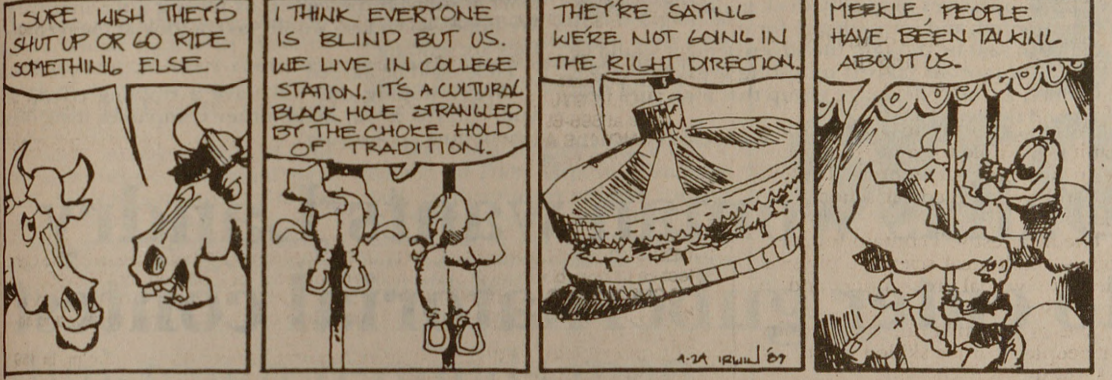
Reverend says legislators not AIDS-aware by Scott McCullar

DALLAS (AP) — The former chairman of the state Legislative Task Force on AIDS says too many lawmakers still do not know enough about the deadly disease. The Rev. Chris Steele, who spent more than a year studying the statewide AIDS epidemic and tracking its wide-reaching effects, said too many state legislators continue to "blame the victims." "I thought we'd done such a good job educating people on AIDS," said Steele, an Episcopal priest. "Now I find out that some legislators don't know that we issued a report on AIDS. Some don't even know that we had a task force."

Waldo by Kevin Thomas



Proboscis by Paul Irwin



Federal Witness Protection Program accepts convicted murderer of judge

HOUSTON (AP) — Jimmy Chagra, target of the most expensive criminal investigation in FBI history, was accepted into the federal Witness Protection Program 16 months after he was prosecuted for the murder of San Antonio federal judge John H. Wood, the Houston Chronicle reported Sunday. Chagra, an El Paso narcotics dealer and high-stakes gambler, was accepted into the program in 1984 in exchange for promising to testify against a Boston man he hired to murder an assistant U.S. attorney, according to the copyright report. Chagra never testified after the government reached a plea bargain with triggerman James R. Kearns, who accepted a life term in exchange for the Justice Department's promise not to prosecute his wife. The prosecution of Chagra for hiring Charles V. Harrelson of Dallas to kill Wood ended in the defendant's acquittal in February 1983. Although the government secretly had taped more than 1,000 hours of conversations involving the suspects and spent more than \$11 million to prove its case, Chagra was in the witness security program by June 1984, the Chronicle reported. Chagra's acceptance into the witness program was part of a plea bargain negotiated by assistant U.S. attorneys Ray and LeRoy Jahn of San Antonio and Lawrence Lippe, chief of litigation in the criminal division of the Justice Department in Washington, the newspaper said. The deal was approved by trial judge William S. Sessions, who succeeded Wood as chief judge of the federal Western District of Texas and now is director of the FBI, according to the newspaper. Sessions ordered records of the agreement sealed in 1984 and it continues to be off limits to public scrutiny. Chagra's whereabouts are known only to a handful of federal officials. Jahn said Chagra is no longer in the maximum security prison at Marion, Ill., where he was serving 30 years without parole for his 1980 conviction as a drug kingpin. The attacks on Wood and assistant U.S. attorney James Kerr occurred in San Antonio during the federal government's crackdown on the international narcotics trade directed by Chagra from El Paso and Las Vegas. Kearns opened fire on Kerr's car on Nov. 21, 1978, as the prosecutor drove to work. Kerr, who escaped serious injury by sliding to the floor-board of his Lincoln Continental, was unable to identify his attacker. A single rifle shot killed Wood outside his stylish North San Antonio townhome on May 29, 1979. Harrelson was convicted of the murder. Jimmy Chagra's wife Liz was convicted of delivering the payoff money — an estimated \$200,000 — as part of a conspiracy to kill Wood. Because Jimmy Chagra never testified against Kearns, no details of the agreement that placed him in the witness security program were revealed until lawyers for Chagra's wife accused the Justice Department of reneging on its promise to reduce Liz Chagra's sentence. In addition to placing him in the witness program, Chagra's plea bargain provided for a 10-year reduction in his wife's 30-year sentence. The Justice Department refused to reduce her sentence after she appealed her conviction and won a new trial. Liz Chagra was convicted again in 1986 and Sessions again assessed a 30-year term. Former U.S. attorney Jamie Boyd, who assigned Kerr to dismantle the Chagra empire in 1977 and who initially directed the investigation of Wood's murder, said Chagra's acceptance into the witness program is a "rank injustice." "I didn't make that decision and I'm out of the federal government now and I can afford to disagree with them," said Boyd, who was replaced in 1981 as U.S. attorney for the Western District. "He (Chagra) deserves to be in Marion," said Boyd, now a prosecutor in the Bexar County district attorney's office. "He tried to escape from Leavenworth. That's a matter of record. Planned his escape while he was there in Leavenworth. Frankly, I think he ought to be in a hard-time joint." The Justice Department believed that without Chagra's testimony against the triggerman it could not clear the Kerr case. "It's always difficult to explain the reasoning that goes behind a plea bargain," Jahn said. "At the same time, you have to realize there were two people facing trial in that case — Jimmy Chagra, against whom we had quite a bit of evidence, and Jimmy Kearns, who was the triggerman." Sources requesting anonymity said the plea bargain was made possible by Chagra's fear of prison gangs and by the approaching five-year statute of limitations in the Kerr case. Although Jahn acknowledges a plea bargain exists, he will not confirm Chagra is in the witness program. But in addition to references to Chagra's special status in motions pending in his wife's case, the Bureau of Prisons' national prisoner locator service confirmed Chagra is in the protection program.

Engineering students challenge borders of robotic technology at national contest

LUBBOCK (AP) — They have names like Ithinkan, Lurch and Robo-Raider, but bear little resemblance to R2D2 and C3PO, the Star Wars robots. Six robots designed by undergraduate engineering students from universities across the country matched wits, or rather, microprocessors last weekend in the nation's only walking robot competition, the Walking Machine Decathlon. With a whir and a hum, a redesigned version of last year's winner was one of only two machines able to push a hockey puck while walking in the specified diamond pattern marked out on a gymnasium floor. Aply named Lurch, Colorado State University's entry, fitted with six legs that marched across the floor with military precision, completed the task to win the contest for the second year in a row, beating out the University of Maryland's much smaller creation, dubbed Prototerp. "We weren't sure it was going to make it," said Jim Schultz, a senior CSU electrical engineering student, who along with his six teammates acted as a pit crew for the machine, which was troubled throughout the contest by mechanical problems. Hammering and tinkering with controls until seconds before the first event, the CSU team, which like the other student contestants spent thousands of hours constructing the robots, coaxed their creation on with all the anxiety of protective parents. The contest features 10 levels of increasingly difficult tasks for the robots to perform as quickly as possible. Lurch, wearing a bumper sticker reading "What the hell, it runs!" covered a 10-meter sprint in less than 42 seconds, the second best time behind Prototerp's 34.9 seconds. But halfway through the figure eight event, Lurch's turning mechanism became stuck, so it was back to the pits for more tinkering before trying a second run. The machine rebounded to perform a perfect figure eight, then push the hockey puck with a detachable arm, but it couldn't climb a three-step platform, the fifth competition level. But neither could the other robots, which apparently couldn't compute well enough to compete. One of those was the University of Central Florida's entry, christened NOMAD and fitted with a stripped-down personal computer as well as a joystick. "This is a third-generation machine," boasted David Reimel, president of UCF's robotics club, a veteran participant in the contest. But the high-tech gimmickry didn't help NOMAD, which resembled a six-legged spider, walk fast enough to keep in the running. Mechanical and electronic snafus claimed a few early victims. Paws, Penn State University's Programmable Autonomous Walking System, blew out a key control panel days before the contest and was forced simply to stand while the other machines lumbered about. The \$14,000 and thousands of hours' work poured into Paws, equipped with six legs that enable it to walk somewhat like an insect, will be put toward next year's contest, project leader Steve Pattison said. "We were disappointed, because we spent a lot of nights working on it and lost a lot of sleep," he said, adding that while some teams had started building their robots eight or nine months ago, Paws was just three months old. New Mexico State University's Ithinkan never made it out of the starting gate either. The contest, which has grown from three participating schools in 1987 to eight and gained further legitimacy this year through the sponsorship of the Society of Automotive Engineers, aims not only to advance robotic technology by posing some problems no expert has yet solved but to teach engineers how to work with people from other engineering fields. "We want to show the students real-world problems and how to work within the disciplines," said Texas Tech University assistant mechanical engineering professor Jaime Cardenas-Garcia, who founded the competition. "This requires mechanical engineering, work with electrical circuits and computer programming." Cardenas-Garcia wasn't surprised that no robot could advance beyond the fourth level of difficulty. "We made it hard, so that students really think about the problems," said Cardenas-Garcia, adding that the top three levels are not attainable by current technology.

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