

Thursday, June 22, 1989

Poor school districts hope to gain equitable funding through courts

AUSTIN (AP) — Supporters of a lawsuit which says the state's method of public education funding is unconstitutional because it discriminates against poor schools praised the Texas Supreme Court's decision Wednesday to consider the case.

Cove, chairman of a group of 55 school districts who intervened in the lawsuit, said, "I'm elated. We're optimistic that the Texas courts will do what's right for Texas children."

House Education Committee Chairwoman Ernestine Glossbrenner.

But Glossbrenner, D-Alice, and a former schoolteacher, said, "I'm terrified," of that occurring.

Poor school districts say they cannot raise enough local property tax revenues to enrich education funding to the same extent that wealthy districts can. School financing in Texas is funded through a mixture

of state and local funds.

In 1987, the poor school districts won a round in the battle when a state district judge held the state's funding system as unconstitutional, saying it denied equal access to education funds, which he termed a fundamental right.

But on Dec. 14, 1988, the 3rd Court of Appeals in Austin reversed that ruling. The poor school districts then appealed to the state Supreme Court.

Since then, Gov. Bill Clements signed into law a \$450 million school finance bill for the 1990-91 budget period designed to help close the gap between poor and wealthy schools.

Sid Pruitt, president of the Equity Center, which was formed to represent students in property-poor districts said that amount is inadequate. Pruitt, who also is superintendent of the Alvarado school district near Fort Worth, said his district is having to raise the property tax rate by 20 cents in order to meet state-required education mandates.

"That ought to tell the story enough," Pruitt said.

Gramm asks Senate to restrict asylum application procedure

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Phil Gramm asked the Senate Immigration subcommittee Wednesday to back legislation that would require Central American refugees to apply for asylum before they reach the U.S. border.

"Our policy encourages people to tell everything they own, head out on the highway, where they're likely to be murdered and robbed, and 90 to 95 percent are denied asylum when they arrive in the United States," Gramm said.

"I don't see that as being humanitarian," he told the Senate Judiciary subcommittee on immigration and refugee policy.

Gramm has introduced legislation that would require Central and South American refugees to apply for asylum at a U.S. consulate or embassy in a country with which the United States has diplomatic relations, and which the refugee must pass through to reach the U.S. border.

The Texas Republican said refugees from Poland or the Soviet Union seek asylum at a safe harbor like Rome, and those granted refugee status are then given visas to enter the United States.

"It works everywhere in the world except in the Americas," Gramm

said. "The situation is different because the geography is different."

Gramm said the costs of handling the crush of Central American refugees passing through South Texas earlier this year have severely stretched the Justice Department's budget.

Cutbacks in Border Patrol operating expenses have been as great as 50 percent in some locations "because we're spending money on this problem," Gramm said.

"This is not in personnel or pensions, but in operating costs," Gramm said after the hearing.

He said the cutbacks have the potential "of affecting our ability to keep drugs out of the country, to protect the integrity of our border."

"People want to come to America to have economic freedom and political freedom and that's unlikely to change," Gramm said. "Our system is not working because of geography."

Wade J. Henderson, associate director of the Washington national office of the American Civil Liberties Union, said Gramm's bill would reduce the ability of undocumented Salvadorans and Nicaraguans to apply for asylum in the United States.

"Henceforth, they would have but one interview with an INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) employee," Henderson said. "The alien would have to prove that he or she had a well-founded fear of persecution or face immediate deportation."

Bayoud confirmed by Senate as Texas secretary of state

AUSTIN (AP) — George Bayoud Jr., a longtime associate of Gov. Bill Clements, was confirmed by the Senate as the 96th secretary of state.

The Senate approved Bayoud without dissent Wednesday.

"The Senate's confidence is greatly appreciated and I pledge to do my utmost to live up to their expectations and the governor's," said Bayoud, 34.

He succeeds Jack Rains, who had held the position since January, 1987. Rains, who is considering running for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, resigned Friday. Bayoud, of Dallas, served as

Clements' chief of staff before the governor appointed him secretary of state. He had been an executive in a development and investment firm in Dallas prior to heading up Clements' 1986 election campaign.

The secretary of state is Texas' chief election officer and the governor's top appointment. The office also is responsible for all corporate, business and debt filings in the state.

"The responsibilities of this office are great, but with the support of my many good friends I am confident that I can carry out my duties in the best interest of the state," Bayoud said.

Brooks says Wright should forget race for seat in Congress

WASHINGTON (AP) — The dean of the Texas congressional delegation said Wednesday former House Speaker Jim Wright should forget about seeking political vindication by running again for his Fort Worth seat.

Rep. Jack Brooks, who led Wright's defense during an ethics investigation that led to the Democrat's fall from power, said Wright should not attempt to recapture his 12th District seat in a special election later this year.

Instead, Wright should return to Fort Worth, where he could "give a couple of speeches, serve on a couple of boards, write a couple of books, make a lot of money. It'd be a good life," Brooks said after a luncheon of Texas Democrats, where behind closed doors they discussed strategy and fund-raising for the race to fill Wright's seat.

Rep. Michael Andrews of Houston said his fellow Texas Democrats agree with Brooks, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, that Wright should not run.

"I would be startled if Jim Wright ran for Congress," Andrews said. "I am confident he will retire from the House."

Other Democrats suggested Wright was enjoying the attention of constituents who are urging him to seek the seat he has held for three decades.

On Tuesday, Wright suggested he might attempt a comeback, saying he would consider running if there were "an absolutely genuine draft of a bipartisan nature."

"It's got to feel good to be stroked by the people who have sent him here for 34 years, after the tremendous beating he has taken up here," said Rep. Jim Chapman, a Sulphur Springs Democrat.

Chapman suggested the attention of his constituents "has got to be a tremendous boost to his ego. It's probably something he needs to hear."

Brooks, a Beaumont Democrat, said he talked to Wright on Wednesday morning and that the former speaker must enjoy hearing that people back home "would re-elect him tomorrow."

"It'd make anybody feel better," he said. "But personally, I think he won't run."

Said Chapman: "The general feeling of the Texas delegation is that Jim Wright is about to retire from Congress. Jim Wright is not going to run in an election for a job he already has."

Gov. Bill Clements will set a date for the special election.

Texas Democrats were planning strategy for that race at their weekly luncheon Wednesday, meeting with Rep. Beryl Anthony Jr., chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, to discuss fund-raising for the party's candidate.

Chapman said Pete Geren, a Fort Worth attorney and former aide to Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, would be the party's strongest candidate, "our most attractive candidate."

When he announced he was stepping down as speaker, Wright said he would leave the House by the end of June.

Other Texans said Wright had not consulted with them about a possible change in plans.

"We don't know what he's going to do," said Rep. Mickey Leland, who has described himself as one of Wright's closest allies. "We don't know what Jim is thinking."

"I've given it no thought," said Rep. John Bryant, a Dallas Democrat. "I've had no conversation with him."

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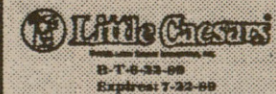


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