

Tuesday, August 8, 1989

Texas road project stirs up dissent

Official: Use of South African steel hurts U.S., apartheid battle

AUSTIN (AP) — The possible use of South African-produced steel in the costliest state road project in Texas history will hurt American steel companies and is a slap against people trying to end apartheid, the local chapter president of the NAACP said Monday.

Gary Bledsoe called on the Texas Highway Commission to cancel the contract to build a bridge over the Houston ship channel because the two firms chosen plan to work with a South African company to supply 3.1 million pounds of steel.

"Countries such as South Africa that permit slave labor in mining steel and other materials are able to underprice American companies and

take away their business," Bledsoe said. "This causes thousands of persons to be unemployed and numerous American businesspersons to become bankrupt or near bankrupt," he said.

Although a new state law virtually forbids the use of foreign steel in road projects, state highway officials say the \$91 million contract for the 4,100-foot bridge across the ship channel was approved before that law took effect June 14.

"We cannot restrict the source of materials," said Byron Blaschke, department engineer for the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation.

"As long as the contractor provides the material that meets our specifications, the de-

partment cannot prevent them from obtaining it from any particular source," he said.

A joint venture involving Williams Brothers of Houston and Traylor Brothers of Evansville, Ind., was awarded the bridge contract in December 1986.

Under the new law, limitations on use of foreign steel for highway projects in Texas now mirror limits on federal projects that had been in place since 1984. The amount of foreign steel allowed can total 0.1 percent of the project or \$2,500—whichever is greater.

State officials say another anti-apartheid investment law passed in 1987 places limits on investments of state treasury money, but not contracts, supplies or purchases.

Education holds key to changing views on minorities, prof says

By Fiona Soltes CITY EDITOR

For the world to change its opinion of minorities, more minorities need to hold leadership positions in the technical and scientific fields, Dr. Alan Letton, assistant professor of mechanical engineering, said Sunday.

Addressing high school participants of Youth Opportunities Unlimited, he stressed the importance of education.

"You need to think about who controls your life," Letton said. "It's not your parents—it's you. And in order to control your life, you need an education."

Letton told the group of about 100 teen-agers that the main decision-making groups of society have a low percentage of minority members. As a result, he said, minorities are not well represented and are not in control of their futures.

"Three things control your fate: having the right resources given to you, having the opportunity to use them and having the

knowledge of how to use them," he said.

Without education and representation in the technical and scientific segments of society, decisions like these will already be made for the youth, Letton said.

"For everyone to do better, you must do better individually," he said. "You may not like the way things are. So, I dare you to change them."

Letton's speech was the last of an eight-part series aimed at the youth on campus for this year's Y.O.U. program. The program is designed to encourage high school students from areas such as East Texas and Houston to experience the campus community and what it offers.

The students, who lived in dormitories during the eight-week camp, worked at on-campus jobs four hours per day for minimum wage. Each participant also attended four hours of classes at A&M, including classes in English, reading or math. These courses count as credit toward high school graduation.

Law may require informing home buyers of any previous AIDS infected occupants

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas real estate agents may be required this month to inform buyers or tenants that a property for sale or lease was previously occupied by someone suffering from AIDS.

But first, the Texas Real Estate Commission says, it needs more information about a new AIDS law.

Under legislation that takes effect Aug. 28, an agent who has "actual knowledge" that a former owner or tenant had acquired immune defi-

AIDS

ned agrees to release the information.

The Real Estate Commission, in a letter to the attorney general, says the statutes "pose an irreconcilable conflict."

The commission asked the attor-

ney general's office to issue an opinion on what constitutes "actual knowledge" of AIDS. The agency wants to know whether that means the agent has seen results from an AIDS test, obtained the information from the seller of the property or simply heard rumors.

In addition, the commission wants to know if it should develop a stan-

dardized form to be used by agents when a buyer or renter wants AIDS-related information. Rep. Debra Danburg, who sponsored the new requirements in the House, said lawmakers wanted to protect real estate agents from the threat of lawsuits by purchasers who wanted disclosure of the information and sellers disturbed by the invasion of their privacy.

Real estate agents have continued to disclose in advertising that a house had been inhabited by an AIDS patient, despite the 2-year-old law designed to prevent tests for the disease from being used to discriminate against people who have it, said Danburg, D-Houston.

For example, she said, an ad placed in a newspaper last year by the Veterans Administration to sell foreclosed Austin properties warned that one of the houses for sale had been occupied by someone with AIDS.

State Health Commissioner Robert Bernstein said medical experts' opinion is that AIDS cannot be transmitted through casual contact, such as being picked up from someone's living quarters.

"There is no danger whatever.

"AIDS is not contracted that way. In fact, you have to go out of your way to get it..."

— Robert Bernstein, State Health Commissioner

ciency syndrome will have to disclose that fact if asked to do so.

If the information is not available, the agent is protected from legal action by potential buyers or renters.

However, the legislation does not address a law passed two years ago prohibiting AIDS tests results, from being made public unless the person

neither general's office to issue an opinion on what constitutes "actual knowledge" of AIDS. The agency wants to know whether that means the agent has seen results from an AIDS test, obtained the information from the seller of the property or simply heard rumors.

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HUD officials question expenditures of San Antonio Housing Authority

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Department of Housing and Urban Development officials are questioning millions of dollars in expenditures by the San Antonio Housing Authority in a confidential report that maintains there was a conflict of interest involving housing board members, according to a San Antonio newspaper.

But the housing authority's executive director dismissed the report, saying allegations of improprieties were politically motivated.

In the report, obtained by the San Antonio Express-News, HUD investigators question the housing authority's use of two non-profit corporations to gather funds and do work. The corporations — San Antonio Housing Assistance Corp. and San Antonio Housing Facility Corp. — are subsidiaries of the housing authority.

SAHA is an independent agency of the city and is funded mainly through HUD.

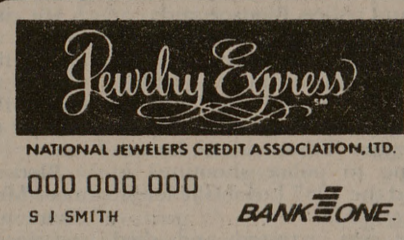
Federal auditors allege conflict of interest by housing authority board members because they also serve as trustees of the two non-profit corporations, the Express-News reported Monday.

Among the allegations in the report are claims that contract-bidding regulations were violated; that the SAHA board did not approve account transfers of \$15,000 or more, as required by law; and that the authority used federal low-income funding for a project where tenants are not required to demonstrate low income.

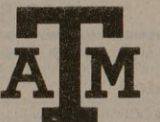
The housing authority entered into 24 agreements and one contract without competitive bidding, according to the report. Bids are required for expenditures of more than \$10,000. The contracts at issue total \$3.46 million.

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