

Warped

by Scott McCullar



Insurance firms agree to pay state

Companies also agree to testify

AUSTIN (AP) — Two major insurance companies agreed Thursday to pay \$500,000 each and testify in the state's antitrust lawsuit against other of the nation's largest insurers, Attorney General Jim Mattox said.

Mattox said the Travelers Insurance Co. and St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Co. also agreed to stop certain industry activities in a settlement agreement signed by state District Judge Pete Lowry of Austin. In the agreements, both companies denied any wrongdoing or liability. The pacts say each \$500,000 payment is for investigative and legal costs and "does not represent a fine or penalty."

"In essence, these companies have entered a nolo contendere (no contest) plea and have agreed to testify for the state as the lawsuit continues against the other defendants," Mattox said.

The state accuses the insurance industry of seeking to create a phony "insurance crisis" several years ago in which insurers claimed that an increase in lawsuits was forcing them out of the commercial liability field.

Mattox in March 1988 sued eight major insurance companies and other insurance groups, accusing them of illegally conspiring to boycott, coerce and intimidate insurance consumers in order to drive up rates, cut back coverage and create a false insurance crisis in the commercial liability field. Several other states joined a similar lawsuit filed in federal court in California.

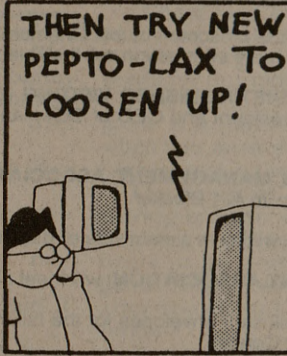
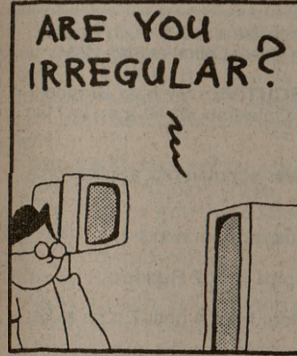
"We fully intend to proceed with our legal action against all these other defendants," he said. "As a prosecutor, I can explain it to you like this: Sometimes you cut a deal with one member of a gang in order to put the entire gang out of business."

"We are asking the court to set us a trial date as soon as possible for the rest" of the defendants, Mattox said. The state's lawsuit seeks civil penalties and restitution for consumers.

The civil penalties could range up to \$1 million for each violation of the state's antitrust law by corporate defendants and up to \$100,000 for each violation by individuals.

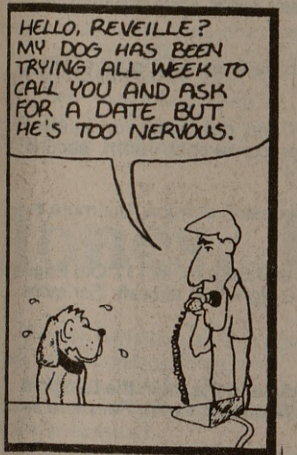
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By KEVIN THOMAS



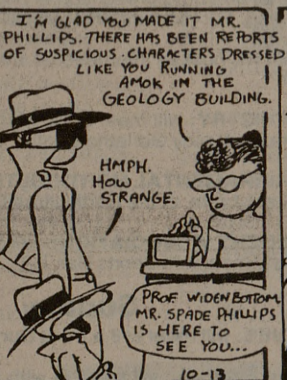
Adventures In Cartooning

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SPADE PHILLIPS, P.I.

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Shark bites boy surfing in Gulf of Mexico

SURFSIDE BEACH (AP) — A 12-year-old boy was hospitalized in stable condition Thursday after being bitten by a shark three times on his foot and leg while surfing with friends in the Gulf of Mexico, authorities said.

"He was hurting a lot and lost a lot of blood, but he wasn't screaming in pain," Black said. "If it had been me, I'd have been screaming bloody murder. I guess the kid's pretty brave. He's got guts."

Surfside Beach Director of Public

Works Pete David administered first aid to the boy and waited with him for his stepfather, Lee Centrell, to arrive and take him to the hospital.

Unite said he wanted to make public the shark attack as a warning. "The shark may still be out there tomorrow," he said. "Who knows?"

We just want to warn people. If anyone else goes out there, well, they need to know about this."

The last reported shark bite incident in Texas was July 9 when a 9-year-old Houston girl was bitten near Sargent Beach in adjacent Matagorda County.

Austin plans for species protection

AUSTIN (AP) — After a yearlong effort to devise a strategy to protect Austin-area endangered species, government officials, developers and environmentalists have signed a \$350,000 contract with consultants to prepare the plan, organizers said.

"It has taken months to negotiate it," said David Braun, director of the Texas Nature Conservancy. "It's made me feel like we're definitely going to get this project done."

Braun is also chairman of the coalition of developers, environmentalists and government officials who are working on the Austin Regional Habitat Conservation Plan.

The plan will identify habitats necessary to preserve

10 endangered or threatened species, including two songbirds, the black-capped vireo and golden-cheeked warbler; five cave-dwelling creatures and three plants.

Implementation of the plan would involve the purchase and maintenance of permanent preserves to protect the 10 species — as much as 20,000 acres at a cost of \$25 million, according to rough estimates.

The impetus for such a task has come from federal law, implemented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which prohibits development from encroaching into the habitat of endangered species.

The habitat of the vireo and the cave creatures is primarily west and northwest of Austin and in those areas the federal law has virtually created an unofficial moratorium on government and private projects.

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