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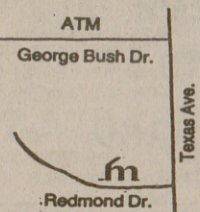
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Computers speed, open process of redrawing political districts

AUSTIN (AP) — In 1991, the redrawing of political districts by the Legislature could be more complicated than ever before. But it also could be more open. Not only are state and federal courts looking over the Legislature's shoulder, but computers can quickly calculate the demographic effects of moving a district's lines. This has given more people a voice. In 1981, "if you wanted to draw a plan, you went down to the Legislative Council and they said, 'Yeah, we can get you a plan in three or four weeks,'" state Sen. Bob Glasgow, who heads his chamber's redistricting panel, said. Now the information is available within hours. Glasgow, D-Stephenville, said it will be possible for many computer terminals to have access to redistricting data. He wants to ensure that every senator has a staff member trained in operating the computer. "We're trying to open up the process as much as we can," Glasgow said, "and computers are the way to do that."

Over the past decade, Texas' population has grown by about 20 percent, double the national average, but growth has not been even. While 15 of Texas' 254 counties grew by 50 percent or more, 108 counties lost population. As population increased in South and Central Texas and in the suburbs, it decreased in East and West Texas and in central cities. This has caused wide variations in the populations of political districts in Texas. Redistricting is done every 10 years, after the federal census, to correct such imbalances. In Texas, the Legislature will redraw districts for congressional seats, for Texas House and Senate and for State Board of Education. If the Legislature fails to redistrict itself during the first regular session after census data become available, the task falls to a board composed of the House speaker, lieutenant governor, attorney general, comptroller and land commissioner. Under the federal Voting Rights Act, redistricting plans must be approved by the U.S. Justice Department. They can be challenged in court. To get ideas from public officials and private citizens, Glasgow and House counterpart, state Rep. Tom Uher, D-Bay City, are holding hearings around the state. They will include in Austin in early September, Glasgow said.

Free trade pact causes concern

McALLEN (AP) — Some U.S. businessmen warned an international trade commission Monday to proceed with caution on a free trade pact with Mexico. A pact could harm some businesses on the U.S. side of the border and could drive some U.S. vegetable producers out of business, leaders told the U.S. International Trade Commission at a hearing. Three members of the six-member commission Monday were in McAllen, 10 miles from the Mexican border, for the third in a series of public hearings on the effects of a proposed free-trade agreement with Mexico. President Bush and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari last month agreed to begin preliminary negotiations on a pact to reduce restrictions on commerce between the two countries.

Philippine president Corazon Aquino is also in the middle of a tense situation, Shafer said, and the problems caused by the earthquake have only made it worse. "The political situation is already so bad," Shafer said. "There is rotting garbage in the streets of Manila, the transportation situation has grown more congested and she has not been able to control the violent New People's Army, a group of Filipino-nationalist communists." Furthermore, Shafer said Filipinos thought it was funny that Aquino was found hiding under a table after the quake. Shafer said he planned to spend the next few days working on his portable computer researching the role of Filipino women in the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos and the mysterious deaths of journalists in the Philippines. "It's a lot like ice days at A&M," Shafer said. "All of a sudden you don't have to go to work or school and you have a beautiful day ahead of you as long as you don't go too far from home. Right now we're just trying to get the morning coffee going."

Rationing continues despite rain

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — There was water, water everywhere in South Central Texas but not enough to fill your bathtub. Roads flooded and creeks spilled over their banks from showers that dumped 2 to 4 inches of rain in the region during the weekend. But authorities said it wasn't enough to end mandatory water rationing. Rationing will be enforced until authorities are sure the water supply, weakened by drought, is stable. "We have established a certain conservation ethic — we've got some believers out there now," Kelly Morris, spokeswoman for the Edwards Underground Water District, said. The district covers a three-county area and monitors the level of the Edwards Aquifer, an underground water reservoir used by 1.3 million people. Dry weather and increased water demand lowered the aquifer level below 628 feet for the first time last week. The weekend rains boosted the aquifer level Monday to 631.9 feet, up 4.6 feet from Friday. Officials said the aquifer level average above 628 feet for 10 days for the water district and city of San Antonio to consider easing up on water conservation. The Edwards Underground Water District plan went into effect last week and covers unincorporated areas of Bexar, Hays and Comal counties.

Shafer

(Continued from page 1)

person to leave an air-conditioned restaurant in downtown Manila where she was working on her dissertation. Jill Shafer is an A&M doctoral student in the department of Adult Education. Shafer said few places in the Philippines have air-conditioners and Jill was trying to beat the heat. After the tremors subsided, Shafer said his wife calmly gathered her notes, left the building and came home. Shafer said he was glad to see that news of the earthquake had replaced the ongoing debates about U.S. military bases in the front pages of Manila newspapers. The leases at Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base in the Philippine Islands have expired and renewal is being considered by the Filipino government. Shafer said opposition to the base has become the biggest issue in the country. "Lately it's been a little scary to be an American here," Shafer said. "Many places are off-limits to us. It's



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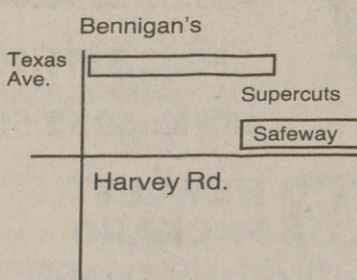
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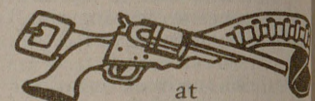
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