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## Port Arthur officials contemplate district for casino gambling

PORT ARTHUR (AP) — City officials are hoping Pleasure Island can live up to its name and become a haven for legalized casino gambling.

"We need something to revitalize our city," Mayor Mary Ellen Summerlin said. "We need jobs."

Port Arthur is one of the country's oldest petrochemical centers, but the number of jobs available at area plants has decreased sharply in the past decade.

So Port Arthur last year became the first Texas city to approve a straw vote to create a casino district. City officials want to create the district on Pleasure Island, located in Sabine Lake.

Legislation to pave the way for creation of such a district has been approved by a state House subcommittee.

The Island Gaming Act, sponsored by state Rep. Frank Collazo, D-Port Arthur, still faces many hurdles, including a full committee vote, a House vote, approval by the Senate and the governor's signature.

Then it must return to Port Arthur voters for final, binding approval. Summerlin predicts voters would approve the measure

by even more than the 56 percent majority it got in the straw vote.

Casino backers insist there's no danger of Port Arthur becoming the Las Vegas or Atlantic City of the Gulf Coast. The available space for casinos would probably mean there would be two to six casinos.

The Texas Legislative Budget Board predicted that by 1996 the casinos would pay the state almost \$3 million a year in taxes and fees. Port Arthur would get almost \$3 million a year and Jefferson County would receive almost \$600,000.

But some say the potential revenue notwithstanding, the casino district should not be allowed.

"The cost is too high," said the Rev. Rick Erwin, pastor of the Procter Baptist Church and head of Port Arthurs Who Care, an anti-casino group.

Erwin and other opponents warn that casinos would destroy the moral fiber of the community and increase lawlessness, and the need for increased law enforcement and services would negate any income the city and state would get.

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## Young offender program attacked

FORT WORTH (AP) — A little-known program giving young first-time lawbreakers a second chance and a clean slate is under attack because it benefits mostly middle-class white youths.

Under the Young Offenders Program, the Tarrant County district attorney's office drops some criminal cases without the youths ever going to court.

The program is the only one of its kind in Texas. It is limited to individuals between 17 and 21 and to specific non-violent, non-drug-related crimes ranging from petty theft to home burglary, a first-degree felony punishable by five to 99 years in prison.

But records show that the program doesn't include minorities at a rate proportionate to the population, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported Sunday.

"It's the best-kept secret in town," said

Nelda Harris, former president of the Fort Worth Black Bar Association. "The district attorney hasn't given it any publicity."

Case files obtained by the newspaper through the Texas Open Records Act and court records show that of the 522 young offenders accepted into the program from 1986 through 1989, just under 8 percent were black and just over 7 percent were Hispanic.

Blacks and Hispanics each make up 12 percent of the population in Tarrant County. Minority representation in the program also is far below their percentage in the criminal justice system.

Blacks and Hispanics together made up 38 percent of Tarrant County offenders aged 17 to 21 on the next rung of punishment, de-

ferred adjudication, the mildest form of probation, according to 1989 records.

In the four years reviewed, about 83 percent of those accepted by the Young Offenders Program were white and slightly more than 1 percent were Asian. Whites make up 73 percent of the county's population and Asians 2 percent.

Based on addresses, reference letters from friends and other personal information in the 1989 files, the majority of those admitted appear to be from middle- or upper-income families, the newspaper reported.

Offenders accepted into the program range from high school dropouts to class presidents and members of the National Honor Society to those who talk on their applications of European vacations and tennis camp.

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