

Wednesday, May 1, 1991

The Battalion

Horse race tracks look for break

Tax cut bill gallops from House to Senate

AUSTIN (AP) — A proposal to cut the state tax on horse racing by up to 80 percent was sent to the Senate Tuesday, and its House sponsor said he is optimistic.

"Hopefully, they will move it out expeditiously," said Rep. Hugo Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi, after the House gave the bill final approval on a 104-37 vote.

Berlanga and other racing supporters argue that the tax cut is needed to spark construction of the three big, Churchill Downs-style Class 1 tracks envisioned for Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio.

Horsemen say the current 5 percent tax on each dollar wagered is so high, it makes building and operating a \$100 million Class 1 track unprofitable.

Berlanga's bill, which counted House Speaker Gib Lewis among its co-sponsors, would lower the tax to a sliding scale that begins at 1 percent on the first \$100 million wagered at a track annually. The levy gradually would rise to 5 percent on wagers over \$400 million a year.

The measure also would permit "simulcasting" — allowing bettors to go to a track and place wagers there on televised races being run at other locations.

Gov. Ann Richards supports lowering the tax, her press secretary Bill Cryer said.

"She's in favor of it generally," Cryer said. "Her basic goal in the horse racing bill is to get those Class 1 tracks off the ground."

Berlanga said the Senate in the past had been more supportive than the House of lowering the tax rate.

The large House majority that voted for the tax cut should send a message to senators, he said. "The House has sent a very strong, clear signal of support," he said.

Berlanga said other states tax racing at a much lower rate than 5 percent, adding that "5 percent of nothing is nothing."

But opponents contend that lowering the tax would break a promise to voters, since the racing industry said before the 1987 referendum that it could make a profit with the 5 percent tax.

"This is what we call in flying parlance a sucker hole," said Rep. Al Price, D-Beaumont, a retired airline pilot. "When you think you see a hole in the clouds and you turn there to get out of the weather and all of a sudden it closes on you."

"That's what we put the people of Texas through," he said. "We played them for suckers."



RICHARD S. JAMES/The Battalion

GOAL!

Kim Winkler, a sophomore biomedical science major from Taylor, practices kicking a soccer ball. Winkler was practicing diligently Tuesday

morning in the Southwood Valley Athletic Park for an exam on kicking in her beginning soccer kinesiology class.

Coastal residents encourage resort bill

AUSTIN (AP) — Coastal residents told a House committee Tuesday they need the jobs a proposed \$2.5 billion resort on South Padre Island could bring, but environmentalists warned against a bill to boost the development.

"If this 72nd Legislature should pass this legislation and let this great national and state treasure give way to greed, this Legislature will live in history as the Legislature that destroyed this state and national treasure," said former U.S. Sen. Ralph Yar-

borough, D-Texas. Yarborough introduced the 1957 legislation proposing creation of the Padre Island National Seashore.

The bill before the House Environmental Affairs Committee would create coastal conservation districts. The districts could sell tax-exempt bonds and levy taxes for public improvements.

The measure has been called the "American General bill," because American General Insurance of Houston envisions a 3,000-acre project on South

Padre Island. It would include a resort complex including such recreational facilities as condominiums, boat harbors and golf courses.

The proposed resort area, now undeveloped, is on the northern part of island, across the Laguna Madre from Port Mansfield.

The House committee took no immediate action on the bill, which passed the Senate last week. Committee Chairman Robert Saunders, D-LaGrange, said the measure must include strong safeguards to protect the

coastal area.

"That's a pristine area," Rep. Saunders said. "There's no other place like it, and I think that we need to make sure that we don't change that."

Rep. Hugo Berlanga, a Corpus Christi Democrat and House sponsor of the bill, said American General could proceed with the project even without the legislation. He said the measure would allow state control of private developments along the coast through a special commission.

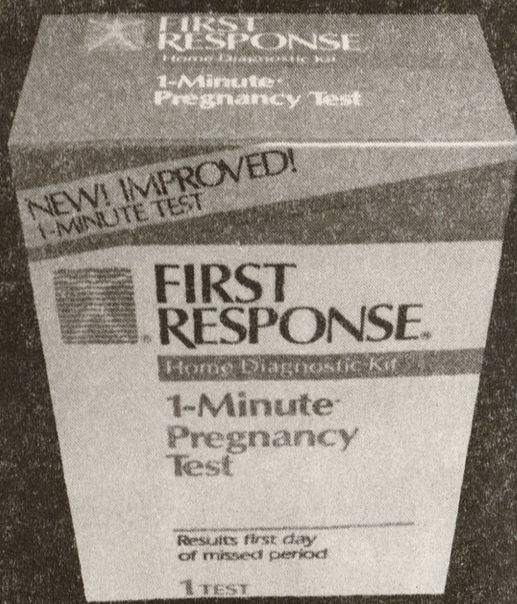
In Advance

Awards honor faculty and former students

The Annual Faculty Meeting and Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Awards Ceremony will be from 1:30 to 5 p.m. today in Rudder theater.

University President William Mobley and Provost E. Dean Gage will speak during the ceremony, and 22 awards will be presented in the areas of teaching, research, student relations, continuing education, staff and administration.

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