

El Paso water woes cause unrest

VALENTINE, Texas (AP) — Relaxing beneath a midnight sky, a group of visitors sway in rocking chairs on the porch of a historic West Texas hotel, their boot-clad feet propped on a rail while they enjoy longnecks and the idyllic night.

"Listen," says a visitor from Austin. "Do you hear that? It's so quiet here."

But in recent months, the tranquility of this vast West Texas land has been shaken by what locals call an urban intruder: water-hungry El Paso.

Two months ago, the city of El Paso's water utilities board announced it planned to purchase for \$2 million the 25,000-acre Antelope Valley Farm, which sits on the tip of the Ryan Aquifer.

But West Texas residents have said the plans are tantamount to an invasion to rob their riches. They plan as their first counter-

Plan to purchase farm land over aquifer stirs antagonism

sault to pack a Friday meeting of the Rio Grande Council of Governments, hoping the voluntary body of officials from El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Brewster and Presidio counties will pressure El Paso to drop the plans.

"It's our livelihood. Not only is the little town of Valentine dependent on that water supply but the ranchers in the area are dependent on that water supply," said Jody Miller at a recent Jeff Davis County town meeting. She and her husband, Clay, own a 36,000-acre ranch adjacent to the Antelope Valley Farm. "That's why it's important to us. And when that aquifer's drained, they'll drain another one."

In fact, area land owners are so serious about protecting their water supply some have proposed alliances with traditional foes, the government and wilderness groups, with hope of discovering an endangered species on the farm.

But Ed Archuleta, El Paso Water Utilities Public Service Board general manager, said El Paso does not intend to suck the aquifer dry. He said the ground water would be a supplemental water supply and is at the bottom of a list of options for the city.

"Part of our water planning is we're looking at all the combinations of options that would start with conservation, second would

be surface water, third would be reuse of wastewater and then the ground water in the area. The other two options are importing and desalinization," he said.

He said El Paso was approached about buying the farm by its owner, Connecticut General Life Insurance Co., and has been offered other land in the area by West Texas ranchers.

"It's beautiful ranch country out there," he said. "There's no doubt about it, any use of minerals and water should be properly managed."

This is not the first time El Paso has enraged a neighbor as it has sought to ensure an adequate water supply for its growing population, expected to reach 1 million by the year 2040. In March, the city settled a multimillion-dollar lawsuit with New Mexico that began when El Paso tried to tap an aquifer in southern New Mexico.

Couple admits to killing seven girls, officials say

MATAMOROS, Mexico (AP) — A Matamoros couple has confessed to killing seven girls they lured to their home with the promise of work, authorities said, and police Thursday were searching for more possible victims.

The couple, identified as Rodolfo Infante, 28, and Ana Maria Villeda, 19, formerly of Brownsville, were arrested Wednesday by Judicial State Police, said police agent Sergio Gonzalez.

The couple confessed to the killing of seven girls over the last 18 months, "but perhaps they have killed many more, so we have to continue the investigations," Gonzalez said.

A young girl working as a maid prompted an investigation that led to the arrests, Gonzalez told The Brownsville Herald.

Gonzalez said the couple is accused of luring the victims with the promise of hiring them to work as maids.

The victims were taken by taxi to the El Ebanito communal farm where they were robbed of their possessions then drowned or beheaded, Gonzalez said.

"This couple would pick up the girls and would take them to (communal farm) and this way they went about killing them one by one," said another police spokesman.

Four of the bodies of the slain young women were found in the past week in the Rio Grande and irrigation ditches.

Bentsen to propose health care solution

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Thursday he'll propose a short-term solution to the nation's health care crisis that relies on making insurance more affordable for small employers.

Bentsen, D-Texas, told reporters his proposals are "things that I think we can do now — things that will block fundamental change later."

Though Bentsen favors comprehensive reform, "major overhaul is going to take some time and in the meantime, lots of people are going to suffer." His proposals would improve some of the problems now, he said.

Bentsen said he would introduce his bill in the next few days and Rep. Dan Rostenkowski, Ill., plans to introduce a similar bill in the House next week according to an aide.

Bentsen's proposal would increase the federal government's contribution to health care over five years, most from increasing the tax deduction for health care premiums from 15 percent to 100 percent for the self-employed. The rest, about \$2 billion, would result from expanded Medicare benefits to include cancer screening, influenza immunizations and other preventive care services.

Bentsen said he had not settled on a way to finance the measure and he declined to discuss the options he's considering.

His legislation would set minimum standards for health insurance sold to employers with up to 50 workers. Insurance companies would be barred from excluding individuals in a group from coverage and could not cancel policies because of claims experience or health problems.

RHA casino will provide free buffet for Aggies

Continued from page 2

This year the club will provide a free food buffet to Aggies as well as reducing the prices on many other items, such as drinks.

Although the Houston Casino cannot compare to the RHA Casino Night held in the Spring, they've had to double the number of gambling tables and dealers from last year in order to accommodate everyone, Terry said. The casino will include approximately 50 tables this year.

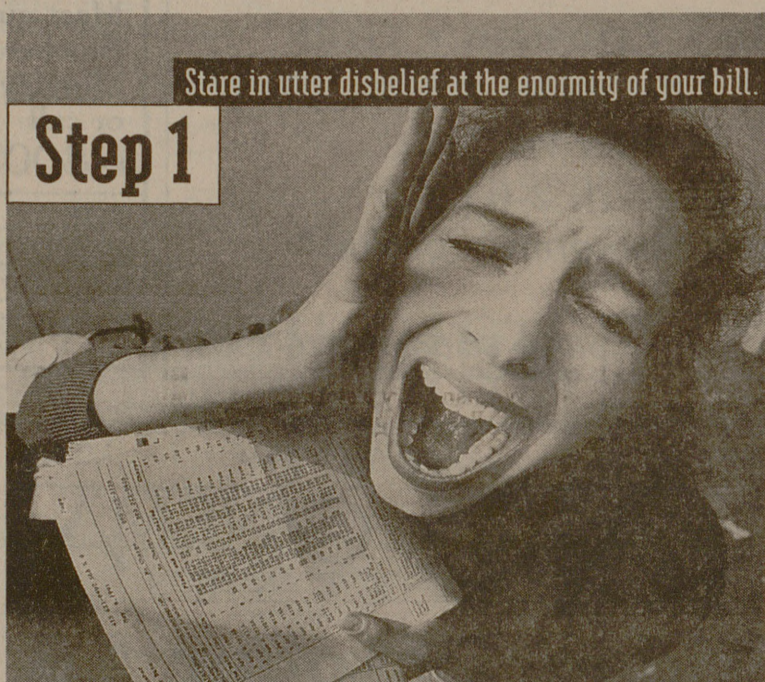
"It's nice to have something like this when a game is out of town," said Ham. "People aren't from Houston will be somewhere to go the night before the game to have a good time and help raise funds for Aggie scholarships."

The organizers will charge gamblers a \$5 fee. Part of the proceeds will support Aggie scholarships.

The free buffet will open at 5 p.m. and continue serving until 10 p.m.

Some of the prizes offered in the auction include: week-end trips to Las Vegas and New Orleans, a night in the Memorial Stadium Center Hotel, OPAS tickets to Nutcracker, and free dinners at both College Station and Houston.

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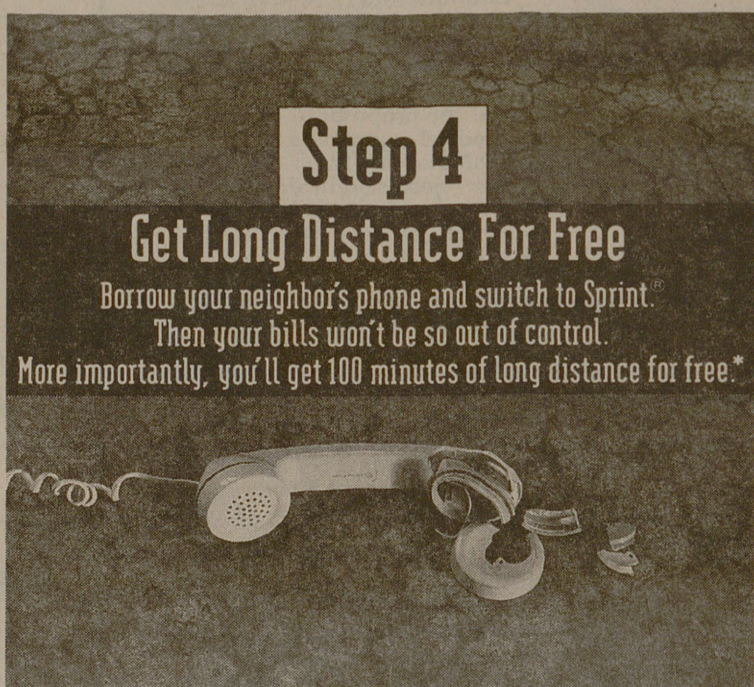
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