

## 'Robin Hood' funding bill awaits Texas Senate vote

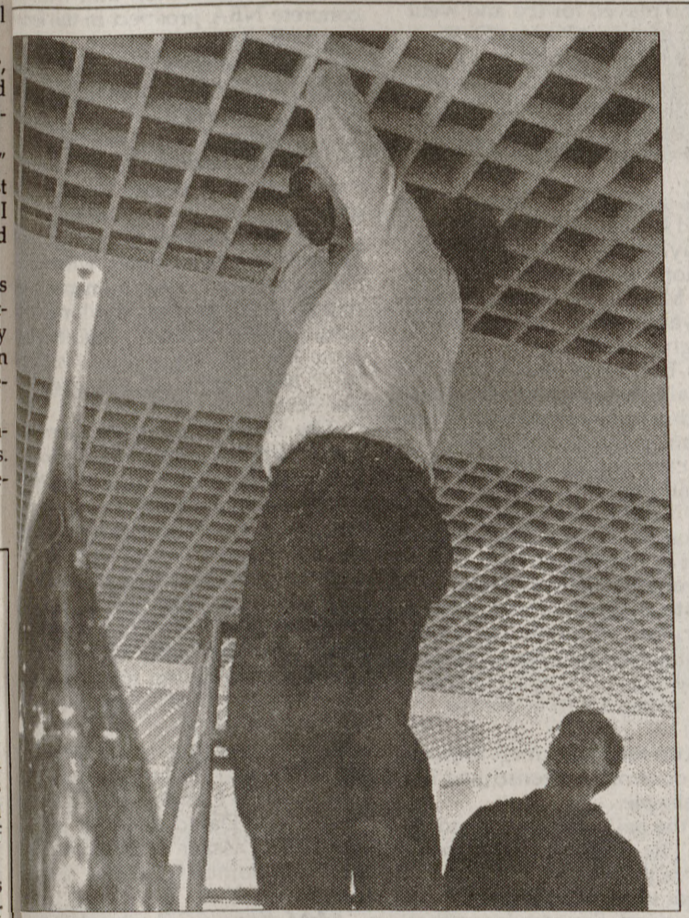
**THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
**AUSTIN** — The Senate Education Committee this week may take up a proposal to continue the "Robin Hood" system of redistributing school property tax within county districts, the panel's chairman said Monday.  
 Bill Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant, said he planned to file the bill by Tuesday, assuming there were no problems in a draft copy.

The Education Committee could consider the measure Wednesday, he said. Ratliff said he wouldn't push for an immediate vote, but if the committee was ready to act this week, the full Senate could take up the proposal early next week.  
 The current school funding system redistributes some local property tax mon-

ey among school districts within single or multi-county education districts, or CEDs.  
 It was designed to meet a Texas Supreme Court order to equalize funding available to property-rich and poor school districts, which rely on a combination of state aid and local property taxes.  
 But the Supreme Court said the system violates the state constitution by imposing a statewide property tax, and by levy-

ing a property tax without voter approval. The court has given lawmakers until June 1 to come up with a constitutional plan.  
 In a pre-Christmas special session, a proposed constitutional amendment to authorize statewide redistribution of local funds was blocked by House Republicans.  
 An amendment requires two-thirds support of the Legislature to go on a

statewide ballot for approval.  
 Ratliff said his plan also includes a constitutional amendment, but it could work without one. Bills other than constitutional amendments require only a majority legislative vote to pass.  
 Ratliff's proposed amendment would keep the current system and set the CED tax rate at 90 cents per \$100 property valuation.  
 The current rate is 82 cents.



**Manipay Lieou** looks on as **Mark Wickersham** fixes the lights for the opening of a blown glass exhibit by **Stephen Rolfe Powell** on the second floor of the MSC.

## NASA crew tests mass in shuttle

Astronauts walk edge of open cargo bay

**THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
**CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.** — Two spacewalking astronauts took turns dragging one another along the edge of Endeavour's open cargo bay Sunday in a grueling mass-handling demonstration 188 miles high.

"If you don't think this is work you're fooling yourself," Gregory Harbaugh told his spacewalking partner, Mario Runco Jr., after carrying him from one end of the 60-foot-long bay to the other.  
 Harbaugh grasped a rail with one hand and held Runco, hanging upside down, with the other as he slowly made his way along the sill.  
 "I can tell you, this is pretty awesome from here," Runco said, gawking at Earth as he was being carried. "People are right about that feeling you get when you look below your feet and nothing's there."

The spacewalkers then traded places.  
 The two had an easier time performing other spacewalking chores: slipping into foot restraints and balancing themselves on the sill, and clambering about the bay loaded down with wrenches, ratchets and other tools. They evaluated each task before moving on to the next.  
 The spacewalk lasted four hours, 27 minutes and 50 seconds, and was the first spacewalk by

Americans in nearly a year.  
 NASA added the spacewalk to the mission just two months ago so astronauts, trainers and flight controllers can be better prepared for the start of space station assembly in three years.  
 Officials estimate a spacewalk will be required about every month or so to maintain the orbital outpost.  
 A more immediate need is the Hubble Space Telescope repair mission in December, which will require several spacewalks, or EVAs, short for extra-vehicular activity.

"I didn't see anything, and talking to the EVA guys, they didn't see anything that would cause any kind of concerns" for the Hubble mission, said NASA flight director Chuck Shaw.  
 Shaw said spacewalking officials were "very, very pleased, pleased in the standpoint that they got through virtually all the tasks and pleased from the standpoint that they didn't get any dramatic surprises."

Harbaugh and Runco became the 47th and 48th Americans to walk in space when they floated out the hatch as the shuttle soared over the South Pacific early Sunday morning.  
 They were 40 minutes late getting started because of the extra time it took to get into their space-suits.  
 Runco was tidy as he went about his chores.

## Chairmen to create task force for issue

**THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
**AUSTIN** — The state's chief pollution regulators are proud to be tackling the problem of environmental racism.  
 Texas Air Control Board Chairman Kirk Watson and Texas Water Commission Chairman John Hall formed a 17-member task force to study the problem and issue a report by June so that recommendations can be reviewed for possible implementation.  
 Watson, a 34-year-old attorney, said, "When the governor asked me to take this job, she told me to do what I thought was right. And that's what I'm doing."  
 Hall, 38, offered similar rationale: "When folks tell me I'm not doing things the way they've always done, I take that as a compliment."  
 Both have been chairmen since 1991 and are serving while they await confirmation by the Texas Senate.  
 They said the task force should focus on why pollution risks seem to be concentrated in lower-income and minority areas, and how the state can reduce en-

vironmental problems in such neighborhoods.  
 While the Task Force on Environmental Equity and Justice has yet to meet, it is attracting attention throughout Texas and the nation, the Austin American-Statesman reported Monday.  
 "This could be a model," said Robert Bullard, a California sociologist who has studied environmental racism for years. He said the task force is a significant step in examining a difficult issue.  
 "Environmental racism was an issue that was swept under the rug. No one wanted it mentioned," he said.  
 Hall said, "This is an important issue, and it's important that we receive an accurate and constructive report. Otherwise, the process will be a failure."  
 Despite their like-minded stance on many issues, Watson and Hall have different backgrounds.  
 Hall grew up on a farm in Washington County. After graduating from Sam Houston State University and the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Hall worked as an aide to Houston's mayor in 1977, then as a presidential intern at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and in the White House.

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