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Concealed handgun bill waste of time, Bullock says

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — A bill that would allow Texans to carry concealed handguns if approved by voters was shot down Wednesday by Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock.

Bullock said the Senate would not consider the House-approved handgun bill because of Gov. Ann Richards' promise to veto the legislation, and because of the numerous other issues before the Legislature.

"She said she's going to veto it, and that's good enough for me, and that was good enough for members of the Texas Senate," Bullock said after he met with senators behind closed doors for about 40 minutes.

"And if any blame is to be placed, they can blame it on me. My name is Bullock," he said.

As a personal favor, Bullock said he asked senators not to waste time in the final month of the legislative session debating the measure.

"Our major issue here in Austin is schools, it is the state budget. It would be a waste of our time" to consider the gun bill, Bullock said.

Sen. Ken Armbrister, D-Victoria, who was expect-

ed to carry handgun legislation in the Senate, said he wasn't disturbed by the Senate's decision.

"I'm certainly not going to waste this body's time on an issue that ultimately for all practical purposes is a dead issue," he said.

In vowing to veto the bill if it reached her desk, Richards said it would spark more violence.

She commended Bullock for stopping the bill at the Senate door.

"I think he understands that we've got serious problems in this state and the Legislature needs to address them," Richards said.

"The fact that we have spent this much time on this issue is simply amazing to me with all the work we have to do."

As adopted by the House, the bill would allow Texans 21 and over to apply for a license to carry a gun. A provision added to the measure calls for it to be approved by voters before going into effect.

The measure's supporters in the House said they had enough votes in the House and Senate to override a veto by Richards.

It takes a two-thirds vote of the 150-member House and 31-member Senate to override a gubernatorial veto.

"I'm certainly not going to waste this body's time on an issue that ultimately for all practical purposes is a dead issue."

- Sen. Ken Armbrister, D-Victoria

Court reverses death sentence

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Wednesday reversed the death sentence of a member of a prison gang convicted of killing a fellow inmate in 1988 to improve his ranking in the gang.

Texas Syndicate gang member Noe Beltran was sentenced to die for stabbing inmate Ramon Gomez in the Ellis One Unit at Huntsville on July 18, 1988.

The Court of Criminal Appeals, however, reversed the conviction and ordered the case back to the trial court with instructions for acquittal.

The court's ruling Wednesday marks the fourth reversal of death sentences for members of the white prison gang Texas Mafia

and the mostly Hispanic Texas Syndicate.

Texas Mafia members Mark Fronckiewicz and Tony Rice, as well as Texas Syndicate member Gilbert Urbano have had death sentences reversed recently.

At the heart of the capital murder convictions was evidence presented by the state that both gangs had standing promises to reward members who killed other inmates. Those rewards included money, drugs or improved rank in the gang, according to court testimony.

Killing for remuneration is punishable by death.

The gang has long been accused of organized crime inside and outside the prison, including drug running and prostitution.

In Beltran's case, the prosecution's evidence included testimo-

ny from former prison gang members that Beltran would be made the gang's chairman of the Ellis One Unit if he killed Gomez.

But the Court of Criminal Appeals ruled Wednesday that the state's "evidence fails to establish that a Syndicate member would necessarily receive any tangible benefit upon the death of someone else."

The court's action Wednesday marked the second time Beltran has had a capital murder conviction thrown out. In 1987, the Court of Criminal Appeals said there was not sufficient evidence to show Beltran would be a danger to society after being sentenced to death for robbing and shooting a Brownsville woman who ran a tortilla factory.

His sentence in that case was reduced to life.

Reno: No choice in Waco outcome

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Janet Reno said Wednesday she considered every option to end the Waco standoff, even tunneling into the Branch Davidian compound, but the failed tear-gas attack seemed to be the only viable plan.

"Nobody will ever know what the right answer was," Reno told a congressional committee looking into the disaster.

Before the assault, she said she repeatedly asked the experts: "Why now? Why not wait?" And every day since, she said, she has wondered what she might have done differently.

Reno was the first witness before the House Judi-

ciary Committee in a sometimes confrontational day of second-guessing about the operation that ended after 51 days in flames and the deaths of David Koresh, his followers and their children.

She emotionally recalled a call from President Clinton after her final television appearance that night.

"I don't think I've ever been so — I guess lonely is the word," she said. "It was 12:20 at night."

"The first call I got was from my sister," she said, her normally strong voice lost in her throat. "She said 'That-a-girl.' The second call I got was from the president of the United States, saying, 'That-a-girl.'"

Reno received similar back-patting from most of the committee, but harsh criticism from Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich.

San Antonio to face limit on aquifer pumping

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANTONIO — The water war over the Edwards Aquifer may be nearing a ceasefire now that several parties in the dispute have reached a compromise that would limit aquifer pumping.

"I believe this is a compromise we can live with. I believe we have held to our principles," San Antonio Mayor Nelson Wolff was quoted as saying in Wednesday's San Antonio Express-News.

State Sen. Ken Armbrister, D-Victoria, ham-

pered out the agreement early Tuesday after marathon bargaining sessions in Austin, the Express-News reported.

Armbrister said he hoped to have the proposed legislation ready for final review by interested parties by the end of the week.

Lawmakers are under a May 31 deadline to enact aquifer pumping limits or face possible cuts in federal funds.

State Rep. Robert Puentes, D-San Antonio, a House sponsor of the measure, said the tentative Senate agreement marks a "steady progression of compromises that we need to get for an effective bill to come out of the Legisla-

ture." In addition to enforcing aquifer pumping limits, the plan would distribute water rights and create a new authority to meter wells and collect fees.

Armbrister and the group he was working with drafted a bill that would create a new Edwards Aquifer Authority and abolish the existing Edwards Underground Water District and its property tax.

The authority's operations would be paid for by Edwards Aquifer and Guadalupe River pumping permit fees.

Judge won't dismiss corpse abuse charge

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RICHMOND — A mortician accused of leaving a partially embalmed corpse on an apartment doorstep likely will face trial.

Fort Bend County Court-at-Law Judge Walter McMeans refused Tuesday to dismiss an abuse-of-a-corpse charge against mortuary owner Newell Evans and set a June 30 trial date.

Evans is accused of dumping cancer victim George Bojarski's body at his Richmond apartment after a dispute over a \$683 cremation fee with the man's son.

Evans' attorney, Walter Pink said his client committed no crime.

"I'm sure that if you put 30 or 40 morticians on that stand and gave them the same fact scenario,

they would be split as to what they would do — businesswise," Pink told the judge Tuesday.

But Assistant District Attorney Anu Shah said Evans' actions Oct. 12 violated a Texas statute and the misdemeanor complaint against him sets out in detail how Bojarski's corpse was abused.

In a graphic affidavit attached to court documents, Evans, 61, accused of leaving the dead man sheet-covered nude body lying on a board outside the apartment where he had lived and where his son, Larry Bojarski, was staying.

The corpse was unshaven, the mouth and one eye were open and there was an incision on the leg, according to court papers.

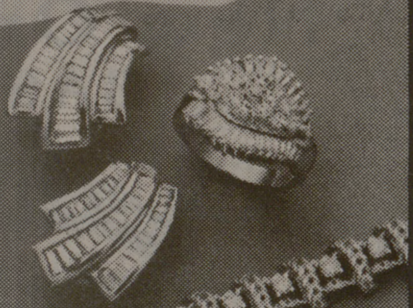
Assistant District Attorney Mike Elliot described the crime as "obnoxious, it's insulting, it's moral disgrace."

Mortuary owner to go to trial in May

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