

# Senator to sponsor gambling

## Texas congressman to propose bill legalizing operation of casinos

AUSTIN (AP) — A state senator said Wednesday he'll sponsor a proposal for "first-class, first-rate" casino gambling in 1995, although he acknowledges the measure will face a hard legislative fight.

"What I'm pushing for is to give the voters of Texas the opportunity to decide whether or not they favor casino gambling ... I think if it gets on the (statewide) ballot, it has a very good chance of passing," said Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston.

Attorney General Dan Morales has ruled that a constitutional amendment is required before casino gambling can be legalized in Texas.

That means passage requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature and Texans' approval on a state ballot, rather than just a majority vote of lawmakers. Lawmakers next meet in regular session in January.

While Morales' decision has been viewed as a stumbling block for legalizing casinos, Ellis called it "a blessing in disguise."

"It's a lot easier if someone has a philosophical problem with the notion of gaming to simply vote to let the people decide," he said.

However, Ellis added, "I think it's a tough battle ... I think we have a decent chance of getting it out of the state Senate. In the House, I think the battle's going to be a bit more difficult."

Ellis said he doesn't gamble and has never even bought a lottery ticket. He said his reasons for pushing the legislation are economic, citing estimates that Texans spend \$2.5 billion annually on gambling in Nevada and Louisiana.

"I want that money. There are tremendous needs in Texas that could be met with that additional revenue," he said.

Under Ellis' legislation —

which would provide for 25 casino gambling licenses to be awarded statewide, subject to local-option votes — he estimates the state would get an additional \$1 billion every two-year budget period. City and county governments would get another \$200 million, he said.

An estimated 40,000 jobs also would be created, he said.

Ellis said although dockside casinos would make sense in some areas, his trip to a New Orleans riverboat casino "really did just kind of turn my stomach."

"The boat was full of working-class people ... at 11 o'clock on Saturday morning, and some of them looked like they'd been there all night, and only half of them looked happy," he said.

Ellis said he wants casinos that will include shows and family entertainment, not just places where people can do nothing but drink and gamble.

"My push will be for first-class, first-rate, high-class, high-dollar, major casino entertainment complexes in Texas," he said.

# Quarantine decreases Texas TB cases

DALLAS (AP) — Tuberculosis cases in Texas appear to have plateaued, in part because of aggressive testing of jail inmates, a tough quarantine program and an increased dedication of resources, an expert said Wednesday.

Ten years ago, TB was considered a scourge of the past, vanquished in America by modern antibiotics. But in recent years, the chronic bacterial infection has made a comeback.

"What we're being faced with is a leveling-off situation," said John Bybee, director of the Texas Department of Health's tuberculosis elimination division.

Health officials still consider tuberculosis a serious threat. It usually strikes the lungs and spreads through coughing and sneezing. It still kills more people worldwide than any other infectious agent.

Last year in the United States, 26,673 cases of active TB were reported, a 20 percent increase since 1984, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Texas ranked third in the nation in the number of TB cases with 2,393. California had 5,212 cases; New York, 3,953.

The 1994 pace is only about 2.8 percent ahead of last year's, according to figures reported through September, Bybee said.

Bybee said the disease has become prevalent

again because HIV-infected individuals are more susceptible to TB infection and immigrants who come from countries where the disease is prevalent carry it into the United States. Additionally, the state has a large prison system and "it's all kind of interrelated," he said.

But Bybee said a boost in resources to find infected individuals, identify people who may have been exposed and follow up with treatment is cutting down on the disease's spread.

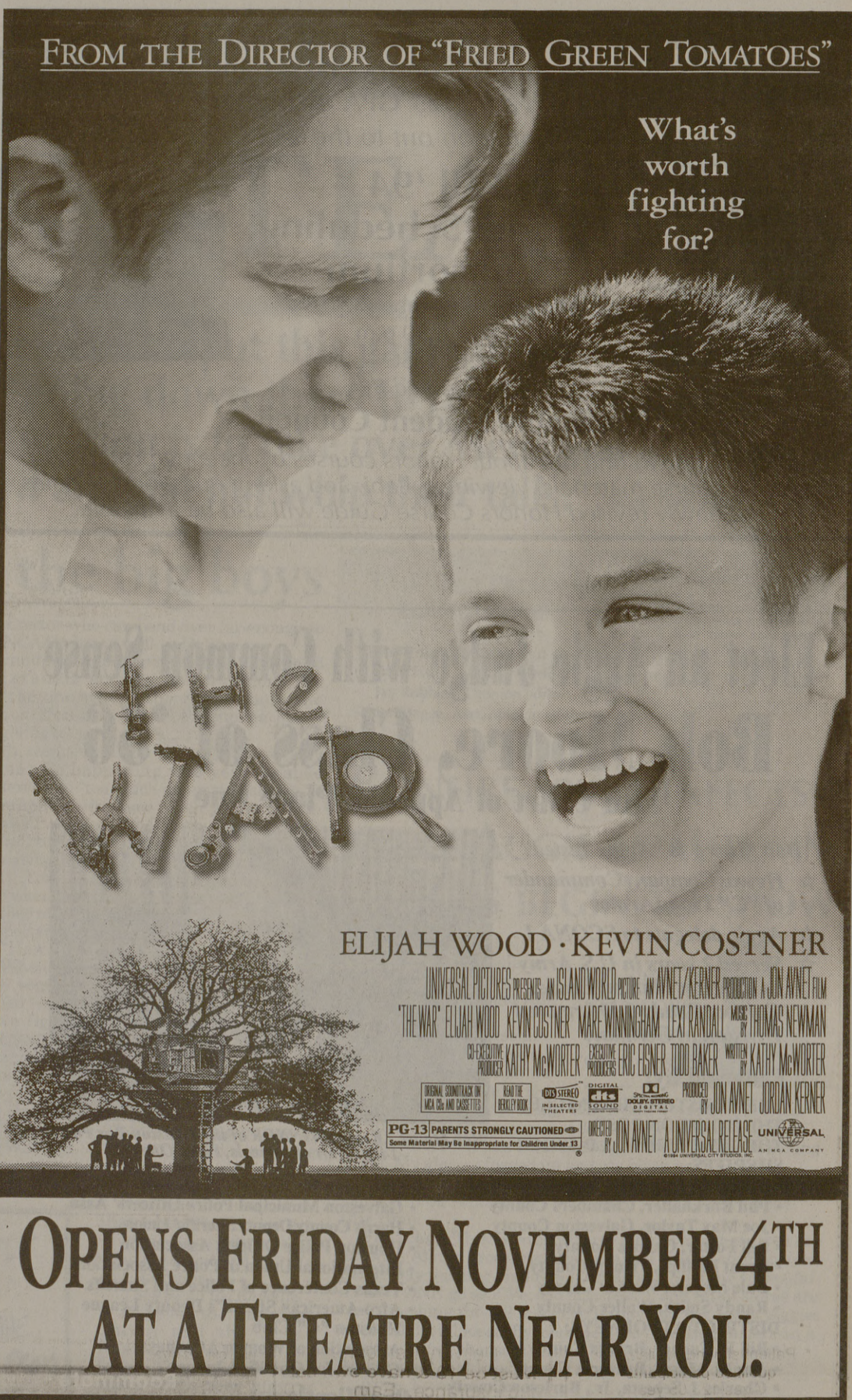
The health department's concern about the illness is evident in the size of Bybee's tuberculosis eradication department. The amount of resources and personnel dedicated statewide to the problem is about five times bigger than it was in 1987, he said.

Additionally, new legislation went into effect this year requiring county jails to screen all inmates, he said.

Transmission usually takes place in crowded environments like hospitals, prisons, schools and shelters.

A staple of elimination efforts is directly observed treatment. Knocking out a TB infection requires that a patient take potent antibiotics for at least six months. But symptoms — which may include fever, chest-pain and coughing up blood — diminish after a few weeks, and many patients don't bother to finish their treatment.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF "FRIED GREEN TOMATOES"



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