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NEWS BRIEFS

Gore attends U.S. Conference of Mayors

AUSTIN (AP) — Several U.S. mayors expressed fears to Vice President Al Gore on Sunday that deficit-reduction efforts in Congress would devastate their cities.

Gore met with 17 mayors behind closed doors during the second day of the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting at the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

The vice president agreed with the mayors, criticizing Republican-authored budget bills targeted to reach a balanced budget in seven years.

"The budget resolution now being considered in the Congress would in fact be devastating to the cities of America, and it doesn't matter whether the mayor is a Democrat or a Republican," Gore said.

Jury to decide whether Smith deserves to die

UNION, S.C. (AP) — A tragic figure? Or evil incarnate?

When Susan Smith returns to court today, jurors will weigh those dueling depictions as they decide whether she should spend her life in prison or go to the electric chair for drowning her two young sons.

In the sentencing phase for the woman convicted of murdering 3-year-old Michael and 14-month-old Alex, lawyers will argue about her mental state on the night she strapped the boys into her car and rolled them into a lake.

The jury took about 2 1/2 hours Saturday to decide Ms. Smith's guilt. The panel rejected a lesser charge of involuntary manslaughter, which carries a sentence of up to five years in prison.

The jury now must decide whether Ms. Smith deserves the death penalty for murdering the boys.

Props and politics create drama at Waco hearings

WASHINGTON (AP) — The hearings, scheduled to resume today, have offered plenty of drama, but none more compelling than 14-year-old Kiri Jewell telling how cult leader David Koresh had sex with her when she was 10, and how she was taught the best way to commit suicide.

The hearings have featured plenty of props, including hand grenade casings, powerful rifles and blacked-out documents.

And there has been plenty of politics, with members of both parties professing to search for the truth but setting off in different directions to get there.

Democrats have lined up to blame Koresh, to suggest the opposition has an unholy alliance with the National Rifle Association, and even to question the need for the hearings.

Republicans try to place the blame on the Clinton administration.

GOP split on charge fee for child support services

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Republican drive to overhaul welfare promises a crackdown on deadbeat fathers and mothers, but GOP plans to balance the budget call for making millions of single-parent families pick up half the federal cost of enforcing child support.

As the Republicans try to make unprecedented cuts in the country's social programs, some lawmakers are arguing that a 15 percent fee on child support collections will hurt low-income families struggling to stay afloat and off welfare.

"This is just going to take desperately needed dollars from families that are really struggling to fund the administration of a system that, frankly, government ought to provide," said Rep. Nancy Johnson, R-Conn.

But other Republicans say that in this era of budget-cutting, it is fair to ask consumers to pay for the services government provides.

HEALTH TIPS

Stress can bring on blues

A survey reported 75.5 percent of A&M students occasionally feel depressed.

By Rhonda Lillie SPECIAL TO THE BATTALION

A recent health behavior survey reported that 75.5 percent of A&M students occasionally feel depressed.

Being a college student and trying to balance work and school, yet still maintaining a social life can be stressful. Without proper management of these

stressful situations, a form of mild depression called "the blues" may occur.

Mild depression is the most common emotional disturbance. Most people feel down or "blue" now and then. The symptoms, however, are not are not recognized by some students.

Some of the symptoms of mild depression are an inability to concentrate, sleeping disturbances, irritability and lack of energy or appetite.

Mild depression usually lasts for a short time. But like any form of depression, the blues may result in serious illness if proper actions are not taken.

When the blues get you down, consider a change in activities. Talking to a close friend can help you sort out your feelings. Exercising raises your adrenaline and gets your body moving.

Some other suggestions include quiet time alone, or simply giving someone you care about.

If depression occurs frequently, don't delay getting help. Visit a counselor at the Student Counseling Services in Hensson Hall.

For information on depression, students can visit the Health Education Center in 016 A Beutel Health Center.

PROVOST

Continued from Page 1

reviewing all applicants and narrowing the list to a series of finalists. Each finalist, as before, will be interviewed on campus.

The committee then will recommend one of the finalists to Dr. Ray Bowen, Texas A&M president, and the Board of Regents for approval.

Dr. Charles Lee currently holds the position as interim vice president and provost. When filling the interim position, Bowen set the condition that the interim vice president would not be a candidate for the permanent office.

Weichold said he expects the interviews to begin the first two weeks of the fall semester.

"We'd prefer to have all the faculty, staff and students involved with the search," he said.

Previously submitted applicants will be considered, as well as any new applicants.

The two other previous finalists, Dr. B. Hobson Wildenthal, provost and vice president for academic affairs at the University of Texas at Dallas, and Dr. Deborah A. Freund, vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean of faculties at Indiana

University-Bloomington, are still candidates. Weichold said that Wildenthal and Freund should be considered candidates, but not necessarily front-runners for the position.

"Since the decision was made to pursue Dr. Hobson and not Freund and Wildenthal, I think I would say they're front-runners," he said.

Wildenthal said he would consider taking the post, but would not lobby for it.

"A&M is a great university," Wildenthal said. "Obviously, I've gone through the interview application process, so they know me. I think the initiative is up to them."

Freund, who is out of the country, could not be reached for comment.

Weichold said whoever is tabbed for the position must have extensive administrative and academic experience. He said he expects the final candidate to have worked as a professor, department head and dean.

"This candidate will probably have well over 20 years working in higher education," he said.

Weichold said the final candidate should be familiar with land-grant institutions like A&M, have skill in budgetary and legislative matters and work well with all University groups.

DEFECTS

Continued from Page 1

find the causes, he said. Despite the acquisition of a birth defect registry, it is hard to know if all of the birth defects are ascertained.

Approximately 25 percent of all births along the border are performed by midwives, not doctors.

"If a baby has a lethal condition, it may not be reported," he said. "We may have an underestimate of the number of kids that have neural tube defects."

Neural tube defects are occurring in the Brownsville-Matamoros area, and last December there were eight cases reported in the Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras area.

Finnell said it is unusual for such a small population like Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras to have that many.

A number of factors are considered when looking for the causes of the birth defects, he said. Neural tube defects have a genetic component and an environmental component.

Certain heavy metals such as arsenic, which is prevalent in the Rio Grande Valley, can cause neural tube defects. Industrial solvents and by-products, certain pharmaceutical agents and some medications are other causes.

Each of these factors has to be considered, Finnell said, so it is not possible to say just one is the cause.

"It could be one of those, some of those or all of those," he said. "It is unfortunate that it takes a great deal of time and money to sort those factors out."

Dr. Stuart Shalat, an associ-

ate professor in A&M's Department of Anatomy, is monitoring the border population for incidents of birth defects.

Shalat is monitoring the water, household dust and pesticides in the communities of women who gave birth to babies with neural tube defects.

Finnell's laboratory is researching the various environmental factors in animal models to examine whether they have the capacity to cause neural tube defects.

"If they do, we look at how these environmental factors change the functions of certain genes in the neural tube," Finnell said. "This explains why some fetuses have neural tube defects and others don't."

If women take folic acid, a B vitamin, supplements before and during the first trimester of pregnancy, incidents of neural tube defects can be reduced by 50 percent or more.

"We are looking at populations of women for those who may have an abnormal gene for this folate receptor," he said.

The folate receptor is the part of the cell that hangs outside of the cell and carries the folic acid into the cell where it can be utilized.

However, Hispanic women do not appear to benefit from folic acid supplementation like African-American or Caucasian women do.

"It may be that this folate receptor gene is less functional in a higher percentage of Hispanics," Finnell said.

If that turns out to be the case, then other ways of dealing with this problem can be recommended such as the use of methionine, he said.

Methionine is an amino acid

that aids in the transformation of folic acid to its most useful form.

Kimberly Greer, a graduate student studying genetics in Finnell's lab, said the late project is important because populations respond differently to folic acid supplementation.

The government wants to directly impose folic acid on everyone's food, Greer said.

"Where as they are saying 'hop on going to help everyone, in reality it helps some populations' and not others," she said. "It is important to find out why, so a more efficient method can be implemented by the government."

Norma Jimenez, a senior genetics major from the University of Grande Valley, also works in Finnell's lab.

"It is a serious problem for the Hispanic population," Jimenez said. "This is what I got me interested in working on this lab and on this project."

Finnell said the rate of neural tube defects occurs in at least one of every 1,000 births.

An increase in defects was seen in an increase in the amount of money used for medical expenses and to care for the newborns.

Texas spends an estimated \$58 million a year on the care of neural tube defects. Some of these cases may be prevented by providing vitamin supplements to all women of reproductive age.

"The problem clearly goes back to the issue of poverty," Finnell said. "Better nutrition, better babies. It is pretty simple."

"There is no reason, in a country as rich as this, that our population should be comprised of a higher rate of neural tube defects along the border."

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