

Mints may redesign quarters

WASHINGTON (AP)—The majestic eagle gracing the back of the quarter for more than half a century may soon temporarily cede its place to such critters as California's bear and Louisiana's pelican.

A proposal before Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin would direct the U.S. Mint to produce 50 new designs, one for each state.

The familiar profile of George Washington would remain and the quarters would be the same size and weight, so they'd work in vending machines. But starting in 1999, five new designs for the quarter's reverse side would be issued each year for 10 years, replacing the eagle.

Collectors bored with the same old coin designs are enthusiastically lobbying for plan. Under a law enacted last October, Rubin has until Aug. 1 to decide.

"This would be the biggest thing to happen in numismatics (coin collecting) in my lifetime," said Kenneth Bressett, president of the 106-year-old American Numismatic Association.

Critics worry that the plan would subject the Treasury Department to a flood of commemorative proposals from Congress. But backers say the new quarters would earn the government billions of dollars and teach children about the heritage of their states.

"Forgetting everything else, I just think it's fun," said Rep.

Michael Castle, R-Del., whose own state, the first to ratify the Constitution, would lead the cavalcade of commemoratives. "When you get quarters for change, now you're going to look at them."

Castle, chairman of the House Banking monetary policy subcommittee, sponsored the law requiring Rubin to mint the quarters or explain his reasons for declining. It also provided for a feasibility study,

"When you get quarters for change, now you're going to look at them."

**Michael Castle
Delaware Representative**

which was prepared by the Coopers & Lybrand accounting firm and released by Rubin's department.

The March telephone poll of 2,032 adults aged 18 and older, with a margin of error of 2 percent, found far more respondents favored the program, 51 percent, than opposed it, 11 percent. A substantial minority, 38 percent, was indifferent.

More importantly, 75 percent

of those polled said they'd likely save some of the new quarters, just as Americans squirreled away an estimated 1.8 billion of the slightly more than 2 billion Bicentennial quarters produced in 1975 and 1976.

The study estimated 34 percent of American adults are still saving an average of 27.5 of the Bicentennial coins, picturing a colonial drummer on the reverse. It projected that 98 million adults each would collect an average of 7.8 of the 50-coin state sets. That doesn't include the quarters that might be saved by 52 million school-age youngsters.

Because the government spends about four cents to mint a quarter but sells them to the Federal Reserve for face value, it would earn between \$2.6 billion and \$5.1 billion over a decade, the study said.

Rubin, in a letter to Castle last week, said, "I have some personal reservations in light of the serious public policy concerns surrounding this unique program."

He didn't specify his misgivings, but the study raised several issues. Before the government earned any money from the program, it would need to spend money on a promotional campaign. There could be potential squabbles between state and federal officials over the designs for each state.

Bush signs bills into law

BROWNSVILLE, Texas (AP)—Gov. George W. Bush traveled to the Texas border Monday to sign into law a batch of bills, including measures that aim to crack down on teen smoking and boost minority enrollment at universities.

Legislation allowing federal officers to help enforce state drunken-driving laws and a measure establishing a regional academic health center in the Rio Grande Valley also were signed by the governor.

The anti-smoking law, touted by supporters as one of the toughest in the nation, imposes new penalties against minors who possess or use tobacco products.

Previously, state law provided no penalties against young smokers, only the retailers who sell to them.

"We want our young people to make healthy choices by avoiding drugs, alcohol and tobacco," Bush said during a signing ceremony at a Laredo middle school. "This legislation sends a crystal clear signal to Texas teen-agers: Don't smoke."

Under the law, a minor convicted of using or possessing tobacco may be required to attend a tobacco education course or pay a fine ranging from \$125 to \$250. Teens who do not attend required courses could have their driver's licenses suspended.

The law, the bulk of which takes effect Sept. 1, also increases penalties for selling tobacco to a minor. Retailers would face fines of up to \$500 for a first offense and up to \$1,000 for subsequent offenses.

The measure also places new restrictions on tobacco advertising, prohibiting tobacco signs within 1,000 feet of a school or church and implementing a 10 percent fee on the price of tobacco billboards.

It also prohibits tobacco vending machines in businesses open to minors and requires retailers to display tobacco products in areas controlled by

store clerks.

Sen. Judith Zaffirini, who sponsored the measure, said it will help reduce tobacco use among Texas teens.

"It will help ensure that children and teen-agers understand that smoking can lead to a dangerous addiction," said Zaffirini, D-Laredo.

Surrounded by both educators and legislators, Bush signed the minority enrollment bill into law during a ceremony in Brownsville.

The law requires Texas universities to automatically admit students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school classes.

In considering the applications of other students, universities will have to consider race-neutral factors such as economic status and family background in addition to academic performance.

The law, sponsored by Rep. Irma Rangel, D-Kingsville, was written in response to a federal appeals court ruling issued last year that struck down affirmative-action admissions policies.

The court sided with four white students who argued that the University of Texas law school's admissions policy unfairly favored minorities.

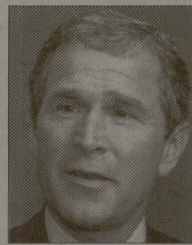
Proponents of the new law said it provides universities a constitutional way to ensure that all students, regardless of race, are given the opportunity to attend college.

"It is a wonderful first step for many of us," said Julia Garcia, president of the University of Texas at Brownsville. Bush said the measure allows universities to "reach out to students from all walks of life."

"We want all of our students in Texas to have a fair shot at achieving their dreams," he said.

At the Brownsville ceremony, Bush also signed into law a measure establishing a \$30 million regional academic health center in the Rio Grande Valley.

The facility, to be developed by the University of Texas System, has been touted by local lawmakers as the first step toward creating a medical school on the Texas border.



Gov. Bush

Texan claims innocence before execution

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP)—A West Texas man with a history of drug dealing professed his innocence before the death chamber gurney Monday before he was executed for killing a convenience store clerk during a \$96 robbery in 1986.

David Stoker, 38, was pronounced dead at 6:15 p.m. CDT, six minutes after a lethal dose of drugs began flowing into his arms.

In a six-paragraph prepared statement he passed to the prison chaplain but did not read aloud, Stoker said he was innocent and thanked family members, friends and his lawyers for support during what he called "one hell of an ordeal."

"I am sorry for the pain that my death has caused you," he wrote.

He also addressed his victim's family, five of whom witnessed the execution through glass a few feet away.

"I am truly sorry for your loss, but I didn't kill anyone," Stoker said. "The D.A. knows this. I do wish you peace and comfort."

"Now as for my death, killing me will not solve anything. The taking of life is never right. I am innocent of murder. This just shows that there is no justice anymore in this once-great land. People need to please wake up!"

He ended the statement by saying "Let's rock-n-roll."

As the drugs took effect, Stoker coughed twice and stopped breathing.

Stoker was the first of three condemned inmates scheduled for lethal injection this week. His execution was the sixth this month and 22nd this year, extending a Texas record for most executions in a single year.

Stoker, a native of Potter County in the Texas Panhandle, was convicted of fatally shooting David Manrique, a 50-year-old overnight clerk at an Allsup's convenience store in Hale Center, about 50 miles north of Lubbock, before dawn Nov. 9, 1986.

The store manager reporting for work about 6 a.m. found Manrique lying in a pool of blood. He had been shot in the head and back with a .22-caliber pistol and died of his wounds about an hour later.

Manrique, a father of six, was a Baptist minister on vacation, hoping to earn some extra money with the part-time job. One of the members of the ambulance crew responding to the shooting was the victim's son.

A police informant tipped authorities to the murder weapon after he said Stoker, an eighth-grade dropout who worked as a heavy equipment operator and carpenter, gave him the gun so he could help Stoker kill two more people.

Stoker's fingerprints were found on the gun and ballistics tests matched shell casings from the murder scene to another shell casing found in Stoker's car.

According to court records, a friend, Ronnie Thompson, testified how Stoker told of killing "the guy working at Allsup's" and described the nature of the victim's wounds.

Sketch



By Quatro

WEATHER OUTLOOK

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