

Newfoundland's seal hunters counter anti-sealing lobby with new marketing blitz

ST. JOHN'S, Newfoundland (AP) — Weary of being branded vicious thugs, Canada's sealers are fighting back with a slick marketing campaign touting such products as pepperoni and cure-almost-anything oil pills.

It is a new tactic for the sealers, who face a decade-long trans-Atlantic protest campaign. The seal-hunting season moves into full swing over the next few weeks.

The anti-sealing lobby is recruiting celebrities and public relations kits being prepared by the sealing industry contains no images of seals, plenty of glossy photos of appetizing steaks prepared with seal meat.

Samples of seal sausage and seal pepperoni are being offered at food fairs across Canada. Newfoundland's first seal-leather shoe recently opened. And Canadian and U.S. health stores are stocking seal-oil pills which allegedly ease arthritis pain, unclog arteries and relieve symptoms of diabetes.

Seal penises are sold in Asia for use in traditional medicine.

"We've been carrying on the seal hunt in

Newfoundland for 200 years," the provincial fisheries minister, John Efford, said in an interview. "There's no group in the world that's ever again going to stop it."

The hunt almost was stopped in the 1980s. Protests resulted in a European ban on the import of seal pelts, driving large commercial sealing ships out of the business.

Newfoundlanders continued small-boat hunting, but the market was so poor by the early 1990s that only about 50,000 seals were taken annually.

Starting in 1996, the annual kill rose to more than 200,000. Government officials decided to back the industry with temporary subsidies in hopes of partly offsetting the loss of 27,000 jobs when Newfoundland's vital codfish industry collapsed in 1992.

This year's quota is 285,000, and Efford said it could increase if markets for seal products are strong.

Efford says animal-rights activists are more concerned about seals than Canadians struggling to survive in a province with 18 percent unemployment. "Why are these so-called humanitarians not concerned about 400 communities in Newfoundland left without work?" he asks.

Anti-sealing activists have tried to counter the economic argument by suggesting that sealers shift to eco-tourism, serving as guides for tourists wanting to view the seals close-up on their ice floes.

But mostly, the anti-sealing campaign depicts the sealers as vicious.

The industry's most vocal antagonist, the London-based International Fund for Animal Welfare, alleges that many seals are skinned

alive and abandoned on the ice after their penises are removed for export to Asia. It contends that white-coated baby seals continue to be killed, even though the practice was banned a decade ago.

Last year, the group sent federal fisheries officials a videotape that it claimed showed sealers committing 140 violations of hunt regulations.

The government charged seven sealers with 17 offenses, including failure to kill a seal quickly and using improper instruments.

Tina Fagan, a former radio host who heads the Canadian Sealers Association, says the issue of cruelty is pivotal. Her group has enlisted a national veterinarian watchdog panel to help ensure that the 6,000 licensed sealers use the most humane methods possible.

Efford admits that the hunt is inherently bloody.

"Who would suggest that killing is pretty?" he asked. "You can go into any slaughterhouse in the world — who'd want to take pictures?"

One argument the anti-sealing lobby cannot use is that the seals are endangered. The last government count, in 1994, estimated there were 4.8 million harp seals in the region. Efford says today there are about 6 million, posing a threat to already dwindling fish stocks.

The IFAW says there is no proof that seals are responsible for the codfish shortage. The group also disputes claims that the seal industry is worth nearly \$20 million a year, saying its net value is minimal if costs of enforcement and government subsidies are deducted.

Celebrities' health-treatment choices may not be good for all

CHICAGO (AP) — When Nancy Reagan had a breast removed rather than going with a less-radical lumpectomy, the percentage of breast cancer patients who did the same jumped in ensuing months, researchers found.

The increase shows medical decisions made by the famous can have a profound influence on the rest of us, and that is not such a good thing, doctors said.

"We do many things we see celebrities doing, buy cars, doing exercises," said Dr. Mohammad Akhter, executive director of the American Public Health Association.

"People like to follow celebrities," he said. "But what may be good for the celebrity may not be good for individual patients. A mastectomy is a very individual decision."

Reagan had surgery on Oct. 17, 1987, an event widely reported in the media.

During the following six months, women diagnosed with breast cancer were 25 percent less likely than in previous

months to opt for breast-conserving surgery, researchers reported in Wednesday's edition of *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Some 3,400 fewer women underwent breast-conserving surgery than otherwise would have, said survey leader Dr. Ann Butler Nattinger of the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

After the six-month spike, the celebrity influence vanished and the rates for mastectomy and lumpectomy returned to where they had been before.

Researchers had been nothing published at this time that questioned the use of lumpectomy.

The effect was most prominent in central and southern regions of the country, and in counties with lower levels of education and income.

"As might be expected, the effect of Mrs. Reagan's surgery was greatest among women who were demographically similar to her, white women aged 50 through 79," the researchers said.

"... What may be good for the celebrity may not be good for individual patients."

Mohammad Akhter
Doctor

INS announces deployment of new Border Patrol agents to Southwest border

WASHINGTON (AP) — Texas is gaining 25 of the 1,000 new Border Patrol agents being deployed this year as the federal immigration service continues up its Southwest border enforcement under direction from Congress.

The head of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, joined by Sen. Kay Hutchison of Texas, made the announcement Tuesday morning at a Washington news conference.

"Steadily and surely, we are building a Border Patrol force of adequate strength to get the job done," said Hutchison, who had prodded the Clinton administration to send most of the new reinforcements to Texas.

Border-state lawmakers were irked because even though Congress mandated the addition of 1,000 new agents this year, the administration initially only sought to add 500. Congress is providing \$125 million

this year to fund the 1,000 agents.

By year's end, the Border Patrol will boast more than 7,000 agents — double the number just five years ago.

Having focused earlier Border Patrol gains on the most popular crossing point for illegal immigrants — California — INS now is turning its sights to Texas, where the Operation Rio Grande crackdown was launched with fanfare last year.

Of the 1,000 new Border Patrol agents,

625 are headed for Texas. Next is Arizona, with 190 new agents; California, 140; and New Mexico, 46.

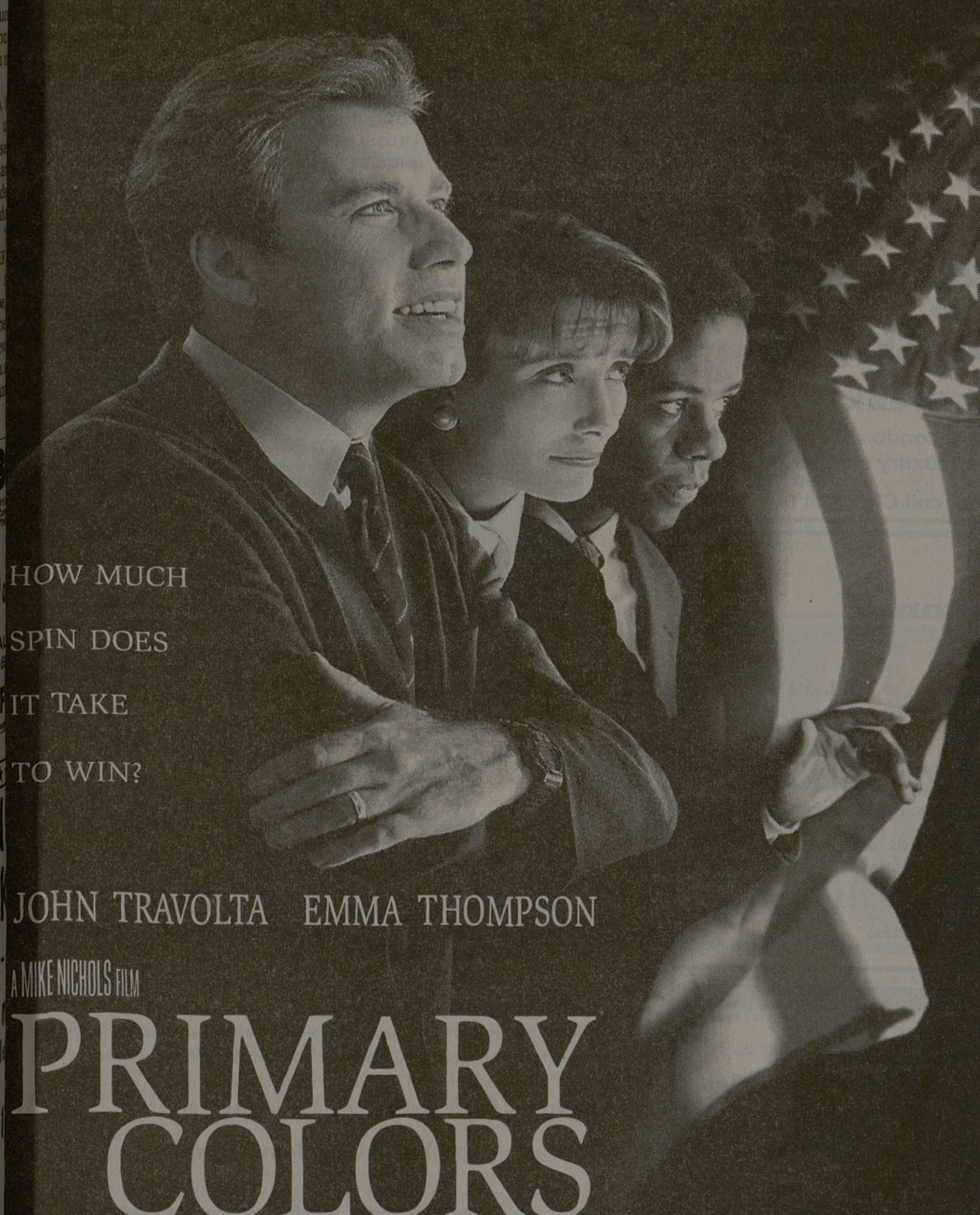
Referring to her agency's \$3.8 billion budget, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner said: "With another record budget, we are further securing the nation's borders, deterring illegal immigration at ports of entry and integrating new technologies so that U.S. citizens, immigrants and foreign vis-

itors are served by a more efficient and modern INS."

The Texas agents will be deployed to the following sectors: 260 to McAllen; 205 to Laredo; 135 to Del Rio; and Marfa, 25. In addition, the Texas sectors are gaining 88 support personnel.

With the new reinforcements, Texas will surpass California in number of Border Patrol agents, with 2,957 agents to California's 2,688.

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