

Armstrong urges cancer research

Tour de France winner presses for more federal funding of medical research

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, who counts his victory over cancer as the "proudest achievement" of his life, appeared yesterday on Capitol Hill to urge Congress to increase funding for cancer and other medical research.

"We can have our local charities, our regional charities or even national charities, but we are only raising millions," the cyclist told a congressional committee. "And the key isn't the 'M' word. The key is the 'B' word — billions."

The 27-year-old, who divides his time between Texas and France, shocked the cycling world in July when he capped a remarkable comeback from testicular cancer that had spread to his lungs and brain to win cycling's most prestigious and grueling event.

"You have been an inspiration to us," Sen. Connie Mack, R-Fla., himself a cancer survivor who organized the Joint Economic Committee biotech summit during which Armstrong and others appeared, said.

Armstrong pronounced himself "a living example of successful cancer research" funded in part by the federal government.

"[Without research] there would be no Tour of France wins or forthcoming children in my life today."

— Lance Armstrong
1999 Tour de France winner

Without that research, which produced a platinum derivative that has become standard treatment for many types of tumors, "there would be no Tour de France wins or forthcoming children in my life today," Armstrong said.

Mack and other committee members expressed support for doubling funding for the National Institutes of Health over the next five years. Congressional Democrats are pressing on other fronts, demanding Medicare prescription drug coverage — a proposal the pharmaceutical industry is fighting.

Mack urged caution, saying lawmakers must avoid squelching the biotech sector's vibrant growth while seeking to expand patients' treatment options.

"Making miracles is hard work — expensive work," he said. "That's why we need a system that recognizes the interplay between our market economy and the pursuit of medical knowledge."

Armstrong's doctor, oncologist Lawrence Einhorn, and other physicians who appeared before the committee pressed for changes to a current system that allows insurers to deny coverage for certain treatments, experimental or otherwise, even if they prove more cost-effective.

Student punished for prayer

JUSTIN (AP) — A Northwest High School senior has been disciplined for leading a 30-second prayer before the school's varsity football game Friday night.

The 17-year-old female walked into Texan Stadium's press box and said a prayer over the public-address system before Northwest's game against Mineral Wells, school officials told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

It is one of several incidents across Texas in defiance of a recent 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling student-initiated prayers on public address systems at sporting events violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

"My immediate reaction was to walk up to the press box and find out what had happened," Northwest High School Principal Jim Chadwell said Tuesday. "It's really unfortunate. We weren't intending to violate a federal law."

Officials declined to discuss the student's punishment.

The Texas Justice Foundation and other groups are challenging the February court ruling, which was based on a 1995 case in which two Houston-area parents contended that pregame prayers violate constitutional guarantees of separation of church and state.

Jury watches tape of abuse

3 officers on trial for mistreatment of Missouri prisoners

GALVESTON (AP) — A jury intently watched a graphic videotaped Texas jail shakedown showing inmates being bitten by a police dog, electrically jolted and kicked as testimony began yesterday in the civil-rights deprivation trial of three officers accused of abusing a Missouri inmate.

The 14-member panel, including two alternates, appeared attentively during the 31-minute video, shot by a Brazoria County sheriff's deputy during a Sept. 18, 1996, operation described by defense attorneys as a contraband search and riot prevention raid.

Prosecutor Barry Williams immediately presented the videotape after he and defense lawyers made their opening statements.

"Our laws state that inmates may lose their liberty, but they're not to be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment," Williams said. "They were not to be punished by the defendants. That is not their job as jailers."

The video, exposed in 1997 by *The Facts* newspaper of Brazoria County and shown on television programs worldwide, showed sheriff's personnel and jailers from Capital Correctional Resources Inc. forcing inmates to lie on the floor and crawl around during searches.

During raids of several cell "pods" at the Brazoria County Detention Center, authorities are seen kicking and shoving inmates during a blizzard of screamed obscenities.

The inmate who is most clearly

visible, Toby Hawthorne, uttered a high-pitched yelp when a police dog bit his leg. The three jailers on trial all are accused of violating Hawthorne's rights against cruel and unusual punishment.

David Cisneros, 39, and Wilton David Wallace, 52, both of Angleton, and Robert Percival, 37, of Lake Jackson, could face up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

A fourth defendant, 50-year-old Lester Arnold of Vanderpool, entered into a plea arrangement Tuesday in which he agreed to cooperate with prosecutors.

Arnold, who faced three civil-rights counts for using a stun gun on inmates, pleaded guilty to one civil-rights charge and faces less than a year in prison or probation.

Veteran's cemetery faces delays

DALLAS (AP) — Cloyde Pinson is frustrated and growing more impatient over delays in opening the first North Texas cemetery for veterans.

Pinson, chair of the Texas National Cemetery Foundation, has spent 12 years championing a burial ground for local veterans. Ground was broken for the Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery almost two years ago, but no firm date has been set for its opening.

"It's frustrating, but you just have to roll with the punches," he said.

There are more than 1 million veterans and family members in North Texas who are eligible for free burial in a national cemetery, Pinson said, and he believes the closest sites — in Houston and San Antonio — just will not do.

Repeated delays in completing the cemetery, Pinson said, can be blamed on Incore Inc., the San Antonio-based contractor. He said the company lacks the management skills or expertise to "manage a contract at long distance or of this size."

Jack Lopez, Incore's president, declined to respond to Pinson's accusations. Although he confirmed there have been delays, he would not give specific reasons, *The Dallas Morning News* reported yesterday.

"There are a whole lot of factors, changes and lots of things," he said. "There is no one thing responsible."

The initial phase of 110 acres was scheduled to open by May, but that was pushed back to October. Lopez now says the phase should be completed by mid- to late November.

Pinson and cemetery director Jim Adamson said that estimate is overly optimistic. They believe the actual opening could be delayed until February or later. Adamson, hired by the Department of Veterans Affairs to operate the cemetery, said he could not address specific reasons for the construction delays.

The cemetery will cost \$15 million and have 14,220 burial sites, including 2,000 crypts and 2,220 garden niches for cremated remains. Adamson says it should meet area burial needs through 2010.

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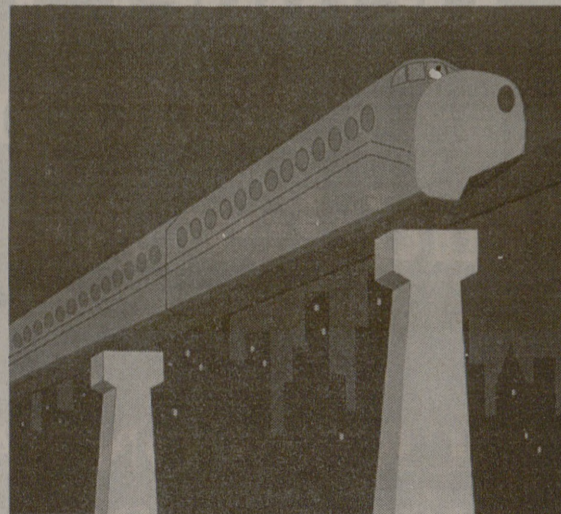
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