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WHEN: March 4 (8 a.m.) - March 8 (5 p.m.)

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Monday, March 4, 2002

6

Candidates support border-area agenda

PHARR, Texas (AP) -Democratic gubernatorial candidates Tony Sanchez and Dan Morales told a crowd of about 2,000 Sunday they supported a border area-agenda that included raising wages for public workers and expanding the Childrens Health Insurance Program.

"I'm in agreement one hundred percent," Sanchez said. "I'm in the campaign so all in Texas — including children can have a dignified life."

Said Morales, "As governor of the state of Texas, I am going to continue fighting for your very important interests and I believe we can make things much better."

Morales and Sanchez limited their answers to Spanish before the lively Spanish-speaking audience assembled for an "accountability session" by Valley Interfaith, a consortium of 45 churches and schools in deep South Texas. The candidates were asked whether they approved a platform of issues important mostly to the poor along the Mexican border.

The group is leading the getout-the vote drive among the mostly Hispanic voters in South Texas. Volunteers say that so far this year they have added 25,000 Rio Grande Valley voters to the roles. "I didn't like the way Dan

Morales said Spanish can't be even with English," said Felipe Banvelos, a 45-year-old school bus driver who became a citizen three years ago.

After Sunday's 90-minute session, Morales said he felt there were some forums in which Spanish was appropriate.

He defended his decision to use both languages Friday, saying he wanted to reach as many voters as possible.

"The vast majority of Texans prefer to communicate in English. This is Texas, this is the United States of America, and

our primary language is English," he said.

than 30 politicians, including U.S. Senate candidates Ken Bentsen and Ron Kirk, who pledged to support granting legal status to working, taxpaying immigrants.

Kirk Watson, a candidate for attorney general, answered "yes" when asked if would enforce laws meant to approve living standards in colonias and work for health care for the poor, including undocumented immigrants.

U.S. Reps. Ciro Rodriguez, Ruben Hinojosa and Solomon Ortiz also said they supported the agenda.

The few candidates who did not answer in Spanish inserted some Spanish phrases into their answers, including state comptroller candidate Marty Akins who said he believed "el sueno Americano" (American Dream) should be for all.

record lows were early Monday for eve The two were among more ern parts of South Te

Lows across South were expected to range 19 to 32 before warming the 50s by afternoon. B precipitation is en before Tuesday, when a fog are expected.

> Afternoon temp Sunday ranged from a 32 at Paris to a high d Del Rio. The "warm spot aseball te the eastern half of the was 41 degrees at field Sunda

THE BATTA

NEWS IN BRIE

Low temperatur

spread over Te (AP) - Freeze war

in effect overnight Texas coast and as far

as the Rio Grande Va

Killeen and Lufkin. series Sunday's low was a were desp chilling 5 degrees at Dat thing that v It was sunny, but cold a With Texas on Sunday after freezing an

High clouds were wind blow across the southern pan more fitting state - generally south d at Kyle Fie from Eagle Pass to Vitat Olsen Fi Beaumont. Other high It took a were moving from no right fie south over the Panhande

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Bitter gubernatorial battle stea the spotlight from Senate race

DALLAS (AP) - They are neck-andneck in the polls, but the three Democrats vying for Phil Gramm's Senate seat seem to be losing the battle for the public's attention.

The spotlight has shone instead on the gubernatorial tug-of-war between Tony Sanchez and Dan Morales, who have clashed on everything from affirmative action to the number of debates they will have.

The gubernatorial race is sucking all the oxygen," said Jerry Polinard, longtime political science professor at the University of Texas-Pan American.

While Sanchez spends his millions on TV ads and Morales criticizes his oppo-nent's campaign tactics, Senate front-runners Ron Kirk, U.S. Rep. Ken Bentsen and Victor Morales are running a peaceable campaign that borders on dull.

Even their debate Friday night was not much of a debate, with each candidate politely stating his position and barely acknowledging his competitors.

Dallas voter Marlyss Skipwith can name both candidates for governor, but she has trouble with the Senate race.

"I know Ron Kirk because he's from here, but some of the other ones I'm not as

familiar with," said Skipwith, 50. Analysts say they expected more fireworks in a high-stakes race for one of

in nearly a decade, and the nominee who prevails could tip the Senate's delicate balance in favor of his party.

"Everyone was expecting that all the attention would be on the senatorial race because there wasn't going to be much of a gubernatorial race," Polinard said. "Then suddenly the ball game changed."

> 66 Every day the Texas public is reading what's going on in the governor's race.

> > - Eddie Aldrete spokesperson for Lloyd Bentsen

It changed the first week of January, when former Attorney General Dan Morales decided at the last minute to run for governor instead of senator.

"It greatly benefits Morales," said Richard Murray, political scientist at the University of Houston. "Bentsen and Kirk really needed the visibility.'

Gramm, who is now retiring. school geography teacher su Democratic nomination from ben candidates after crisscrossing these white pickup truck. He could a from sharing a last name with Darl

Bentsen's gold-plated name of valuable. His uncle is Lloyd Be legendary Texas senator who se 1970 to 1993, when he joined h Clinton's cabinet.

But Kirk is flailing in the alp of political names. Though he's rat money than Bentsen and Morales mer Dallas mayor and secretar still little known outside his here

Mudslinging might put some the race, but analysts say it w much good at this point.

'Kirk and Bentsen are not sayi mean things about each other," Mu "It doesn't make a lot of sense nobody knows who in the hell they What the candidates need is mo

tion from the media, says spokesperson Eddie Aldrete.

"Every day the Texas public is what's going on in the government Aldrete said. "Once a week they're about the Senate race. I think all th candidates would be further along

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Washington's most coveted positions. A Texas Democrat has not held a Senate seat voters stemming from a 1996 bid to unseat same coverage.

Morales enjoys some recognition from are now if the Senate race were ge

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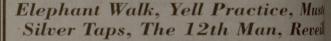
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