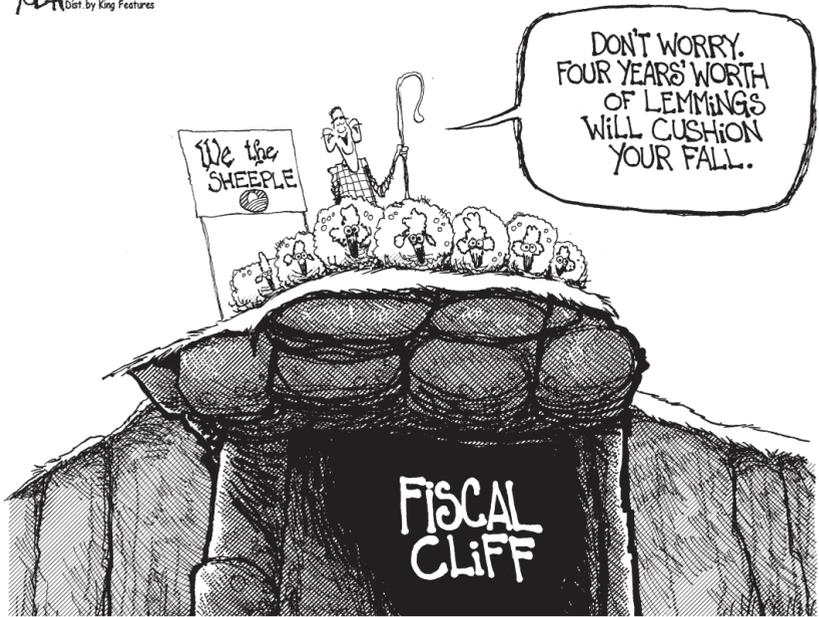


Wednesday's

Editorials, Columns & Letters

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State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



Record number of Texans register to vote...

AUSTIN — Secretary of State Hope Andrade, the state's chief elections officer, on Oct. 19 announced Texas reached a historical peak in the number of registered voters on her election division's "official list of registered voters."

As of Oct. 19, Andrade said, Texas had 13,646,226 registered voters, the highest number in state history. Oct. 9 was the last day to register to vote in the Nov. 6 general election. Early voting began Oct. 22 and runs through Nov. 2, and voters may cast a ballot at any polling place in their county during the period.

Judge puts policy on hold

Hardin County State District Judge Steven Thomas on Oct. 18 granted a temporary injunction preventing Kounze Independent School District and its superintendent from stopping cheerleaders from displaying banners or run-through signs that have religious references on them at school sports events.

Plaintiffs, the parents of cheerleaders, argued that the school district's policy prohibiting religious expression at school events violated their minor children's constitutional right to freedom of expression.

A trial is scheduled for June 24, 2013, in Thomas' 356th state District Court.

Unemployment rate drops

Texas Workforce Commission on Oct. 19 reported Texas' seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell to 6.8 percent in September, down from 7.1 percent in August.

Texas added 21,000 seasonally adjusted nonfarm jobs in September for a total of 262,700 jobs added since last year, the Commission reported, and the state's unemployment rate is down more than a point, from

7.9 percent a year ago.

"We saw encouraging signs in our state's labor market in September and a decrease in the unemployment rate last month," said Texas Workforce Commission Chairman Andres Alcantar. "Texas continues to add jobs and we now have a record number of people employed in our state."

The U.S. Department of Labor Statistics calculated the national unemployment rate at 7.8 percent for the month of September.

Call made for higher pay

At its Oct. 19 meeting, the Texas Public Safety Commission — the body that oversees the Texas Department of Public Safety — signaled unanimous support for increasing the base salary for state highway patrol troopers.

According to figures in a recent report by the Office of the State Auditor, trooper pay would have to increase at least 20 percent to be competitive with compensation at the seven largest local law enforcement departments in the state.

The commission and Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steven McCraw plan to work during the 2013 legislative session with lawmakers to bring about a pay increase for troopers.

Kids kick off anti-drug week

More than 1,200 Texas fifth grade students from Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio gathered at the state Capitol to declare that "drugs don't make sense," the theme of this year's Texas Red Ribbon Rally.

The rally kicked off Red Ribbon Week, a national campaign observed Oct. 23-31 that uses school and community events to teach millions of students about

the dangers of drug abuse.

Part of the program was a mock legislative session in the House and Senate chambers, where students debated and voted on drug and alcohol related resolutions they drafted in advance.

A recent survey by the Texas Department of State Health Services and Texas A&M University's Public Policy Research Institute shows that the use of tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs is declining among Texas youth.

Sadler-Cruz debate again

Republican Ted Cruz and Democrat Paul Sadler engaged in their second and final televised debate on Oct. 19, each seeking to succeed U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison of Dallas, who is retiring from office at the end of her term on Dec. 31.

Among topics on the table were tax reform, immigration reform, taxation, health care and foreign policy. The tenor of the second debate was less heated than the first, yet sharp differences between the two over the range of issues, and the federal Affordable Health Care Act and how to spread the tax burden in particular, were notable.

Galena Park senator dies

State Sen. Mario V. Gallegos Jr., D-Galena Park, died Oct. 16.

Gallegos, 62, was a retired Houston firefighter. He served two terms as a state representative before he was elected to the Senate in 1994. He was reelected to the Senate Dist. 6 seat in 2002 and 2008.

Gallegos is credited as the first Hispanic to serve as a senator for part of Harris County. He was regarded for his advocacy of firefighters, police, teachers and elder citizens.

Paper 'n Ink... prowess in a bottle...

By Lynn Brisendine

How the mighty can fall. Too many times we see sports heroes fall from grace. It is an unpleasant occurrence at the best.

Over the last couple of years, Lance Armstrong has denied charges that he used enhancing substances allowing him some almost superhuman efforts to win in his sport.

He won an unprecedented seven Tour de France bicycle races. He also biked and won in many other racing formats across the globe.

In between victories in these challenging races, he suffered from a serious bout of cancer. Yet, he prevailed, fought through the disease and its treatments. In a few words, it made him out to be Superman wearing a leotard speed suit rather than a cape.

He was so talented, so strong and so competitive that doubts began to circulate in the touring world. Many of the sports participants and its followers began to question his ability to do all of the fantastic things he was accomplishing. Winning seven titles in anything is practically unheard of on a team level and especially as an individual.

Rumors began to circulate that his accomplishments may have come from a bottle. He denied them at every chance he got. He was backed with the fact that he had been tested many times for years and the results were always negative. Still, others in the sport were adamant that he was using substances, plus utilizing other techniques to enhance his body.

One procedure is called "blood packing," where pints of blood are taken and stored while the body rebuilds the supply. Then just before competition, the blood was put back, giving the donor more blood to carry more oxygen. This added capacity allowed the body being packed to sustain more energy.

Armstrong was stripped of all of his hard won Tour de France titles this past week. His name has been stricken from the record books and it's as if he never was in the race at all.

Of course, Armstrong is also known as a cancer survivor. He beat the disease in the middle of his remarkable run of titles. Now according to many, it was not such a great deal as he cheated to cross the tape. Some are heard to say that it was the stuff he used to win which aided in his getting so sick.

Steroids and other illegal techniques aren't exclusive to bike racing. We have seen many one-time sports heroes fall from the public's good graces.

Football players who had built their bodies into muscled specimens and ran faster, got bigger, hit harder and won began to confess to using the "roids" to such an extent that they ended many careers and then, sadly, ended lives prematurely. Many of these men didn't beat cancer, they

contracted it from using too much of the noxious miracle drugs.

Lyle Alzado confessed to using the steroids and in a battle for his life, he blamed his illness on the use of banned enhancers. He pleaded with youngsters near the end of his life to stay away from the needle.

Many of these men who play games for a living have denied using anything to gain that little extra, only to be proven liars. It amazes me that some of them continue to make millions even after the cheating was uncovered. Roger Clemmens was hounded and even tried for lying about using banned substances. He beat the rap and even tried a comeback this season. Alex Rodriguez, a multi-million dollar Yankee infielder and prolific home-run hitter (until just recently) also was slapped on the wrist and then allowed to go on playing.

But the thrill of being able to run faster, hit harder and win is too much for too many.

Football isn't the only sport to be plagued with these problems. Baseball has seen abuse to such an extent that many sports records now have an asterisk by them, indicating the record setter was using substances to again make them faster, able to throw harder and swing a bat knocking balls out of the parks.

Big time home-run hitters like Barry Bonds and Mark McGuire went from skinny rookies who had talent to massive muscled bodies. Batters weren't the only users as several big league pitchers also had help from a bottle and a needle. In today's more sophisticated world of sports, tests are made sporadically, but often to make sure unnatural aid is not taking place.

Perhaps even more troubling is the fact that it hasn't just been the pro athletes who are accused of misusing these artificial enhancers. College athletes and high schoolers, too, have used a little help from the chemicals to be just a step faster and a few pounds of muscle heavier.

Bad things have happened to a lot of men. Like Alzado, they purchased a few seasons of glory for a lot of years of life.

Back to Lance Armstrong and his ongoing woes. He has vehemently denied any kind of help from a bottle for a lot of years. Some informants had testified of his abuse, still the test proved negative. Again just recently, new evidence has come about. And the proof must have been unassailable because Armstrong simply dropped out of the fight.

So many heroes, people who fans looked up to with adoration and high praise, have been taken down. Not by a more adept opponent, but by a bunch of dirty needles.

Say it ain't so... but it is...

Thinking in Type ...

By Brian Brisendine

Word of a new restaurant always stirs buzz locally and the possibility of a well known Japanese Steakhouse opening up shop in town has many excited about a new dining option.

I too am anticipating a good meal with a pair of chopsticks in hand, but not without a few painful memories coming to the forefront of my mind.

I don't know what it is about oriental cuisine, but that genre of food has not always been nice to me.

I almost lost an eye in a Japanese Steakhouse on one of my earliest dates with the Misses.

It's amazing we stayed together after the horrifying incident.

We were both crying after it happened. My tears were shed in pain. Hers in laughter.

I somehow scrounged up enough change in my timid college budget to take her to the finest Japanese Steakhouse in Amarillo.

She was a fan of the restaurant and I was trying to impress.

It was the type of place where the chef fires up the hot surface and cooks your meal right at your table.

Flames fly high and knives flash and everyone oohs and ahhs and a great time is had by all.

Until somebody gets hurt. And that somebody was me.

Our Japanese chef was busy grilling up the meal for us and a few others packed around the hot plate.

He had just performed his egg throwing trick and cracked the yolk perfectly with a sizzle that delighted us all.

Up next was the highlight of his show, the volcano effect created when the chef applies a match to the cut onion filled with evil sorcery...or whatever fluid is in that squeeze bottle they wield with such careless recklessness.

We all knew what was coming and the anticipation was building as he stacked the onion rings and readied the match.

But I missed the big moment. Milliseconds before he ignited the tabletop inferno, a molten hot piece of still-sizzling fried

rice popped off of the cooking surface.

Now, I realize traumatic events are remembered differently by those in attendance.

Details get confused and muddled in the chaos that ensues.

But I can attest to the truth of this tale because it happened in super slow motion.

The pop of this single grain of rice off of the stove top sounded like a gun shot.

I then watched, mesmerized and wide-eyed, as the smoking piece of rice started its ascent toward my face.

It twirled end over end in spectacular 3D motion, growing in size and temperature, until it lodged itself -- still crackling with hot oil and flavored with soy -- in my left eye.

I'm not bragging, but I have the reflexes of a cat. A very old, sick cat.

Unfortunately for me, my lightning quick reaction was not to dodge the flaming foodstuff shooting toward my naked eye.

No, my gut reaction was to clamp my impressively strong eyelid down as hard as possible, effectively trapping the spicy morsel against my pristine, body-temperature, air cooled eyeball.

In the instant everyone at the table was wowed by the flaming onion -- a cheap trick administered by vengeful charlatans -- I slapped both hands to my burning socket and fell backwards from the table with a yelp of agony.

When the smoke cleared, my date found me on the floor trying to dunk my head into a glass of iced tea.

I had never before, nor have I ever since, seen a person laugh so hard.

I failed to see the humor in the incident.

In fact I failed to see anything out of my left eye for the rest of the night.

I still have an involuntary flinch on my left side anytime one of these shady Japanese chefs bares his wide grin and juggles his spatula to begin his cooking experience.

After all that, you might

think nothing else could go wrong at that particular eatery.

You would be wrong.

When I finally regained my composure and my seat, being the chivalrous guy that I am, I vowed to continue the date.

But I kept an eye on my Japanese nemesis. Literally just one eye as the other was beginning to swell.

Once our meal was in front of us, I noted with glee that my entree came with a small bowl of guacamole.

I love guacamole.

I eat guacamole by the spoonful.

I took a large portion of guacamole onto my palate.

This was not guacamole. I grew up in Brownfield, Texas.

I was never introduced to a Japanese delicacy known as Wasabi.

Wasabi is supposedly a relative of horseradish.

I am of the firm belief Wasabi was developed in a Japanese laboratory for the express purpose of waging chemical warfare.

It turns out that touching a single molecule of Wasabi to the human taste bud can in fact cause a man's hair to instantly combust.

I had a mouthful of Wasabi.

I took what was left of my iced tea after splashing it on my face and guzzled it with abandon to quench the inferno in my mouth.

More tears were shed, by me and my date -- and my Japanese nemesis who watched the whole thing go down.

I have never returned to that particular eating establishment. I honestly didn't know a restaurant could ban someone just for screaming at the table.

It's been a long time since that fateful night. My vision has mostly returned. My taste buds are beginning to return on portions of my tongue.

You might even run into me trying out Brownfield's newest Japanese steakhouse.

I'll be the guy wearing goggles.



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