

El Editor

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Sex Scandals and Secrets at West Texas State School

A classic case of who knew what; and whether they pretended not to know it

By Abel Cruz
Chances are, if you've traveled through the town of Pyote located about 17 miles from Monahans in West Texas, you've seen the sign directing visitors to the West Texas State School, a youth correctional and detention center under the authority of the Texas Youth Commission (TYC); the state agency charged with oversight of Texas' 13 juvenile correctional centers.

The commission "provides for the care, custody, rehabilitation and re-establishment in society of Texas' most chronically delinquent or serious juvenile offenders", according to the agency's web site. Included in the state system are 13 "secure institutions" like the one in Pyote and "9 residential halfway houses". Youth committed to a TYC institution are youth convicted of serious criminal offenses that rise to the level of a felony offense. The one major difference being that these acts were committed by youth at least 10 years of age but less than 17. TYC maintains jurisdiction over these youth until they reach the age of 21.

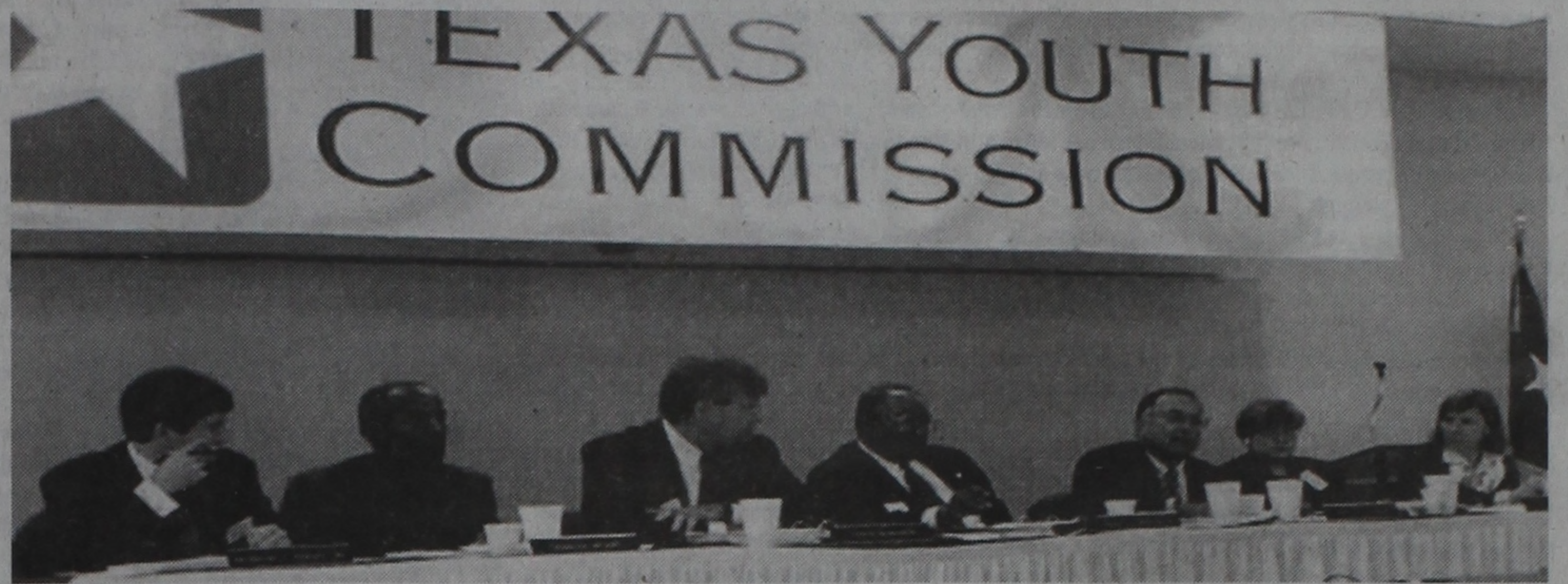
The large sprawling campus in Pyote may be unremarkable to the naked eye perhaps, but it's what has taken place behind the walls of the facility that has Texas Governor Rick Perry and other Texas legislators scrambling to find out if allegations of sexual abuse and other improprieties at the facility have been covered up. And more importantly, why nothing was ever done after an investigation uncovered a mountain of wrong doing and misdeeds by at least 2 top administrators.

It is a classic case of who knew what, when they knew it; and whether they pretended not to know it.

It's been two years since a Texas Ranger investigation concluded that at least two administrators, former principal John Paul Hernandez and former Assistant Superintendent Ray Brookins, sexually abused inmates at the facility in 2004.

And even though Texas Ranger Brian Burzynski, the Texas Ranger primarily responsible for the findings in the investigation, presented his findings to prosecutors at the "federal, state and local level", no one was ever charged or brought to trial to answer for what can only be described as despicable acts. In an emotional hearing before a special legislative committee, Ranger Burzynski "tearfully recounted his two year struggle to bring justice for the alleged victims..." He also lamented the fact that he had failed to bring justice to the many victims he had interviewed during his investigation and had assured that they would see justice served.

The reports from the investigation include victim's accounts alleging that both Brookins and Hernandez engaged in sexual acts with residents of the West



Texas facility in exchange for showing favorable treatment toward the victims; and revealed both men's method of choosing boys considered to be effeminate; those they felt wouldn't report them; out of fear for their safety. Reports also include details about an individual with a history of sexual offenses being hired and promoted at a TYC facility in Bronte, Texas. Officials there are accused of not conducting proper background checks and the official responsible for approving the employee's promotion has admitted to not even looking at the individual's personnel file before approving the promotion.

And on Wednesday, March 14, a man by the name of Barry Ransberger, a former employee of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), which houses adult prisoners, was arrested in connection with charges that he had sexually assaulted an inmate at a TDCJ facility in Abilene in 2005; while an employee of the facility. But Ransberger quit when he found out that he was being investigated, he was then hired at a TYC facility in Brownwood, Texas; continuing the perception that at least some TYC employees are being hired without passing background checks or being hired despite having questionable work histories.

As for former West Texas State School Assistant Superintendent, Ray Brookins, the Ranger investigation also found that he had a fondness for pornography when pornographic videos and other material were found during a search of his vehicle.

According to a story in the Texas Observer, "agency records showed that Brookins had performed oral sex on an 18 year old student; that he had watched another student masturbate; that he had inappropriately touched at least two other students; and that he had talked to students about sex toys, penis pumps, and masturbation". Hernandez's transgressions included late night encounters with students where he would feed them and show them movies in an effort to entice them.

Brookins resigned shortly after the investigation began and Hernandez resigned after he was informed that he would be terminated.

Last week, after reports surfaced in the Dallas Morning News and Texas Observer, the lid finally came off the whole sordid affair and Texas Governor Rick Perry appointed Jay Kimbrough as Special Master to oversee an investigation into the reports of abuse and subsequent cover-up since 2005. In addition to Mr. Kimbrough, TYC board members unanimously selected Ed Owens as the commission's acting Executive Director to replace former Executive Director Dwight Harris, who was quoted in the Dallas Morning News as saying: "Quite frankly, it was a shock and a surprise to us that this could ever happen". The problem is that the Morning News also reported that an internal

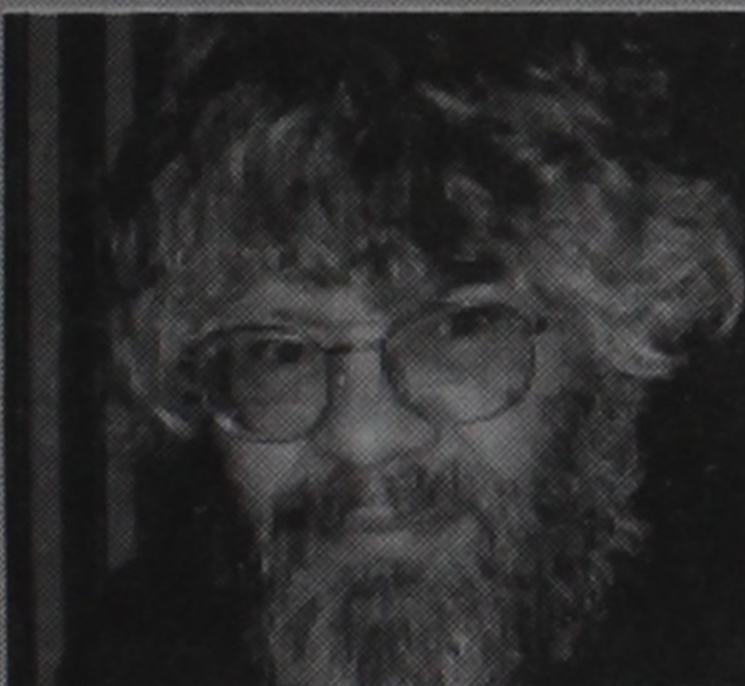
TYC investigation showed that a West Texas caseworker had addressed the issue to Mr. Harris at least 5 months before Ranger Burzynski's investigation. Those who know Mr. Owens praised him as a good choice and expressed confidence that he was the right person to act on whatever Mr. Kimbrough's investigation uncovered.

The Dallas Morning News reports that Mr. Kimbrough, has "moved swiftly, sending law enforcement agents to facilities across the state, opening investigations, running background checks on employees, and making plans for unannounced site visits". Kimbrough has also suspended the TYC's director of youth care investigations, Ray Worsham, over allegations that he had personally removed "damaging information from a report on sexual abuse at a West Texas juvenile prison".

For those who are wondering if there is a connection between the TYC system and the local juvenile center here in Lubbock, there is. One of the first stops for youth who get in trouble or violate the law, and who are too young to be assigned to an adult facility, is within the Texas juvenile justice system. Here in Lubbock, the facility is overseen by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) and is totally separate from the TYC. The facility is located at 2025 N. Akron in north Lubbock. While some juvenile offenders manage to rehabilitate either through the services they are offered or by satisfactorily serving a probationary term, some youth are eventually committed to the TYC system after the case has been adjudicated.

(Continued Page 2)

Comentarios de Bidal Agüero



This coming week again, we again poll our readers to tell us their opinions on an important issue that affect our community. We have extended the deadline mainly because of Spring Break. Normally do this through emails but because of the importance of the issue this week we are printing the question in this column for the entire public to answer. We invite you send in your opinions.

Hispanic Pulse Question: In the past few weeks we have see our City fathers and leaders in our area travel to Austin and Washington D.C. to tell our legislators about what they say is our most dire needs. According to them those include energy, transportation and water.

Texas is currently has the worst teen age pregnancy rate in the nation. Texas currently has the 4th highest dropout rate. Twenty two percent of Lubbock residents live in poverty. Lubbock currently has the worst STD rate in the State. Children continue losing their health benefits with CHIP under current Texas law.

Do you think our City leaders should re-examine their priorities?

Send opinions to eleditor@sbcglobal.net

One of our good friends at the Civic Center told us this past weekend while we were celebrating our Viva Azlan that various phone calls were received at the Civic Center asking how come so many Mexicans were there dancing. The caller also stated that he was going to call the immigration to come and check out everyone's papers.

To us and many that I mentioned it to, they expressed little surprise that this would happen in Lubbock, on the Giant Side of Texas.

Those that did not attend this past week's activities missed an opportunity of a lifetime to see some of the most beautiful costumes and dancing that has ever come to Lubbock. Well there is always next year. By the way, I saw very few of my close friends from LULAC, the Chamber, Association of Women and other organizations attend. We could always blame spring break.

Our congratulations to the Ballet Folklorico Azlan and Ballet Folklorico Nuestra Herencia for their awards during the Festival.

Cinco de Mayo will soon be here and plans are probably being made as we speak for different activities including Concerts. We hope that this year we might see something culturally enriching for our young people to enjoy.

Efforts are also being made to make Cesar Chavez day a national holiday. Ya era tiempo!

Activistas pro inmigrantes presionan a legisladores Solicitan que se ponga alto a las redadas en el país

Maribel Hastings
Ayer las oficinas de legisladores en el Congreso pidiendo una reforma migratoria amplia lo antes posible para evitar que, como el año pasado, dijeron, caiga víctima de la política electoral.

De momento, la estrategia legislativa para avanzar la reforma parece estar cambiando, pero se aseguró que es sólo para "agilizarla".

Pero los activistas dicen que hay urgencia.

"Estamos muy preocupados de que [la reforma] vuelva a caer en politiquería de candidatos, de poder. Nuestra comunidad está enfrentando una situación de crisis humanitaria que cada día es más seria", dijo a pregunta de La Opinión Ángela Sanbrano, directora del Centro de Recursos Centroamericanos de Los Angeles (CARECEN), y presidenta de la junta directiva de la Asociación Nacional de Comunidades Latinoamericanas y Caribeñas (NALACC), al término de una rueda de prensa en el Congreso.

Los grupos solicitaron además una moratoria a las redadas y deportaciones y acudieron a dependencias del Departamento de Seguridad Interna (DHS) a condenar los efectos de los operativos: separación familiar y niños, muchos de ellos ciudadanos estadounidenses, dejados en el limbo.

Entre tanto, consideraciones de política electoral parecen influir en los esfuerzos que pretenden producir una ley que ambos partidos apoyen.

Ayer se indicó que las consultas continúan a todos los niveles pero para agilizar el proceso el senador demócrata de Massachusetts, Edward Kennedy, quien encabeza los esfuerzos en el Senado, ha optado, de momento, por proponer como base del debate el proyecto bipartidista que el Comité Judicial del Senado aprobó el año pasado.

Este contemplaba una vía de legalización adquirida para millones de indocumentados -sin dividirlos en categorías-, un plan de trabajadores temporales, así como mecanismos de seguridad fronteriza y de verificación de elegibilidad de trabajadores, entre otras cosas.

cosas. Aparentemente hay diferencias por asuntos "técnicos" con el senador republicano de Arizona, John McCain, aspirante a la nominación presidencial de su partido en 2008. Varios republicanos que el año pasado apoyaron el proyecto integral se quejaron de que este año los estaban dejando fuera de las negociaciones.

De ahí que Kennedy opte por presentar un proyecto que el panel Judicial avanzó con el apoyo de cuatro senadores republicanos, incluyendo algunos de los que ahora se quejan de haber quedado fuera de las negociaciones, como Sam Brownback, de Kansas, quien, por cierto, también aspira a la nominación presidencial republicana.

Por su parte, los congresistas Luis Gutiérrez, demócrata de Illinois, y Jeff Flake, republicano de Arizona, negocian entre sí un proyecto de más de 700 páginas que, hasta ahora, se presentaría de forma independiente y no al mismo tiempo que el Senado, como se esperaba.

Sanbrano declaró que están conscientes de que "el ambiente político está muy complejo", pero que no por eso van a aceptar cualquier cosa que se les proponga.

Agregó: "Desde mi punto de vista, los demócratas y los republicanos se están echando la pelota unos a otros".

Los demócratas, ahora en mayoría, dicen que para aprobar cualquier medida necesitan de 20 republicanos en el Senado y de 40 a 50 republicanos en la Cámara Baja. Y los republicanos acusan a los demócratas de querer otorgar amnistías, mientras la Casa Blanca dice que apoya la reforma integral y negocia con aliados republicanos del Congreso un lenguaje que garantice votos republicanos.

"Ya empezó la campaña presidencial de 2008 y ahorita [los demócratas] se están posicionando para mantener las dos cámaras y ganar la presidencia. No quieren tomar temas candentes que los lleven a un debate donde hay mucha controversia", opinó Sanbrano.

Pero recordó que en 2006 los hispanos votaron por un cambio "y sabemos quiénes están con nosotros y quiénes no... y si los demócratas quieren demostrar que nos están apoyando, tienen que hacer cosas concretas para ganarse nuestro voto".

Mientras el Congreso pondera estrategias, la falta de una reforma amplia afecta a millones de personas y así lo expresaron los inmigrantes en unas 150

representa el congresista republicano David Dreir, opuesto al plan de reforma integral, y con quien esperaba reunirse ayer. "Está negado [Dreir] totalmente a



oficinas del Congreso.

Berenice, una joven de 15 años de edad de Los Angeles, llegó a California cuando tenía año y medio. "No vine... Me trajeron", indicó, y como millones de alumnos indocumentados, quiere que la llamada DREAM Act se haga realidad. "Queremos educación, no deportación", declaró.

También de Los Angeles, David Ceja, el joven de 17 años y ciudadano estadounidense cuya madre está presa en Texas en espera de ser deportada a México, presentó su caso, el de tres de sus hermanos y los de más de 400 niños en situaciones similares a través de cartas a los legisladores.

Al concluir su visita a la capital dijo que "no es justo lo que están haciendo con las familias porque las están separando", pero declaró que regresa "con más esperanza" de que haya una resolución.

Eso espera Ana González, quien vino desde Claremont, en el distrito que

todo lo que sea una reforma migratoria y está muy a favor del muro", indicó la activista.

Decenas de miembros del Movimiento por una Reforma Migratoria Igualitaria se dieron cita ayer en las oficinas del Congreso de EU, en Washington, D.C., para exigir avance en el debate del tema.

Coming March 29

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Texas House votes to block Perry's HPV mandate

Confidence in Gonzales

The Texas House sent Gov. Rick Perry a stinging rebuke Tuesday, overwhelmingly approving a measure that would reverse his order requiring schoolgirls be vaccinated against a cancer-causing sexually transmitted disease.

"The Legislature should be the one to make the decision," said state Rep. Pat Haggerty, R-El Paso. "Éste es no something that should be done by gubernatorial fiat."

With a 119-21 vote after about three hours of debate, the House passed a bill that would prohibit the state health commissioner from mandating that girls receive the human papillomavirus vaccine before attending school.

Perry angered lawmakers Feb. 2 when he issued an executive order requiring that girls ages 11 and 12 receive the inoculation before being admitted to the sixth

grade. He stood by his order Tuesday, saying that mandating the vaccine would protect 95 percent of Texas women against the HPV strains that cause cervical cancer.

"Gov. Perry will always stand on the side of protecting life," Perry spokeswoman Krista Moody said.

In the wake of Perry's order, legislators filed bills that would prevent the measure from taking effect and asked Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott whether Perry had authority to enforce the mandate.

Monday, Abbott, in an informal opinion, told lawmakers Perry's order was simply an advisory measure without the weight of law that would not force the state health commissioner to require the HPV shots.

In addition to concerns over

Perry's end-run around lawmakers, legislators have worried that the mandate usurps parents' rights, that the drug could have negative long-term side effects and that the cost of the drug is too high.

"We do not warrant a mandate of a vaccine we do not know all the facts about," said state Rep. Dennis Bonnen, R-Angleton, who sponsored the bill.

Some legislators, though, agreed that mandating the vaccine could save thousands of women from getting cervical cancer or developing cancer cells that lead to cancer.

Without the mandate, state Rep. Jessica Farrar, D-Houston, said girls — especially from minority communities and in low-income households — might not have access to the drug that could potentially save

them from cancer. "This issue has been highly politicized and the science and the benefits of the vaccine have been put on the back burner," Farrar said.

While some argue vaccinating young girls against sexually transmitted disease would imply tacit approval for sexual promiscuity, state Rep. Paul Moreno,

ease," he said. State Rep. Norma Chávez, D-El Paso, said preventing HPV is an important health issue that will have to be addressed, but that she disapproved of Perry's mandate.

"This conversation is far from over," she said.

El Pasoan Patricia Gomez, who has two daughters, age 3 and 13, said she thought legislators made the right decision.

"It's outstanding that now they're going to leave it to parents' discretion to do that," she said.

The bill still must pass the Texas Senate, where it also has strong support.

Perry could veto the bill, though he has not said whether he will do so.

U.S. President George Bush Wednesday said he is "not happy" about the way a number of federal prosecutors were fired by the U.S. Justice Department.

Bush, in an exchange with reporters in Merida, Mexico, said he still has confidence in Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and has asked him to go to Capitol Hill to explain to Congress why certain decisions were made.

Gonzales has been under fire for the dismissals of eight U.S. attorneys, but vowed he will not resign over the controversy. Former White House counsel Harriet Miers suggested all 93 U.S. attorneys be replaced at the start of Bush's second term, but the suggestion was deemed impractical.

"Mistakes were made," Bush said. "And I'm, frankly, not happy about it, because there is a lot of confusion over what really has been a customary practice by the presidents. U.S. attorneys and others serve at the pleasure of the president. Past administrations have removed U.S. attorneys. They're right to do so."



D-El Paso, said it was more about protecting them. "We're trying to prevent dis-

Hispanic Caucus dispute comes just as group poised for influence

Rep. Raul Grijalva says he feels like he's been in a "telenovela" - a steamy Spanish-language soap opera - as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus wrestles with a nasty power struggle, complete with accusations of name-calling.

The group has squandered time on a "circus," the Arizona Democrat laments, and must "get back to the business we were elected to do."

Grijalva's frustration is shared by other Latino lawmakers and advocates as infighting has snarled the 21-member, all-Democratic group just as its power should be at its peak. Democrats finally are in control of Congress, the caucus represents the nation's fastest-growing minority group, immigration reform is a national priority and many individual Hispanic lawmakers have risen to key leadership posts. Yet the focus has been on Rep. Loretta Sanchez quitting the caucus and accusing fellow Southern California Democrat Joe Baca, the group's chairman, of calling her a "whore."

Still, some analysts see the struggle as evidence that members now have real power to fight over. Most contend that the dispute will prove a temporary distraction as the caucus, which started in 1976 with five members, expands along with the growth of the Hispanic community.

"There's some growing pains that you're seeing here, but I think it's all, in the end, going to be a positive outcome and positive for the Hispanic community," Janet Murguía, president of the National Council for La Raza, said Monday. "With them having been so long in the minority... I think they've kind of been out of practice in leveraging their voice."

Latinos now comprise nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population, though they accounted for only about 8 percent of the electorate in the 2004 presidential election, according to exit polls. Many are non-citizens, making them ineligible to vote.

There are 23 Hispanics in the 435-member House, according to the House clerk's office, a count that includes three Republicans from Florida who aren't in the Hispanic Caucus but excludes three lawmakers of Portuguese descent, including two Democratic caucus members. In the Senate there are three Hispanics.

The Hispanic Caucus was formed by late Democratic Rep. Edward Roybal of Los Angeles to give Latino lawmakers a voice in the model of the Congressional Black Caucus, which was founded in 1969 and now has 43

members. The Hispanic Caucus jumped in size when congressional districts were redrawn after each Census, more than doubling to about 12 members in 1982 and growing to 19 members in 1992, according to National Council of La Raza. Analysts expect more growth after the 2010 census.

Members include Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Nydia Velázquez, chairwoman of the House Small Business Committee, and others near the top of committees and in the House Democratic leadership.

Republicans were part of the group at one time but left in the mid-1990s in a dispute over Cuba.

"There's been personality conflicts within the caucus ever since the beginning," said Harry Pachon, Roybal's chief of staff in the late 1970s and now president of the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute at the University of Southern California. "The big difference this time is they've gone public with it."

The most recent dispute has been undeniably public, and colorful, partly because of the personalities involved.

Loretta Sanchez, whose sister Rep. Linda Sanchez is also a Democratic House member from Southern California, has figured in her share of political dramas. During the 2000 Democratic convention in Los Angeles she planned a fundraiser at the Playboy Mansion, moving it only after criticism from party leaders.

Baca, who represents a working-class inland Southern California district, is known for winning a congressional chili-eating contest by eating a reported 47 chili peppers and has repeatedly introduced legislation to award golfer Tiger Woods a congressional gold medal. He was supported by only one of six women in the caucus when he was elected in November, and critics complain of an autocratic leadership style.

Baca denies calling Sanchez a whore. She says she won't rejoin the caucus as long as he remains chairman. He insists he won't step aside or share power, but after surviving a confidence vote last week agreed to accept some changes to how the caucus is run, including less emphasis on seniority.

Those changes are to be taken up Thursday, but there's no guarantee they'll do more than paper over the dispute. Some of Baca's critics, such as Reps. Hilda L. Solis and Dennis Cardoza of California, have stayed away from recent meetings and say they can be effective in Congress apart from the caucus.

Serán iglesias de EU "santuario" de inmigrantes perseguidos

Iglesias de distintas denominaciones en Estados Unidos se aprestan a servir de "santuario" a inmigrantes indocumentados que enfrenten deportación o estén siendo perseguidos, en respuesta a crecientes redadas migratorias que separan familias. El nuevo movimiento "santuario" que será lanzado públicamente en fecha próxima sería semejante al practicado por las Iglesias de las entidades fronterizas de Estados Unidos durante los años 80, cuando los templos sirvieron de albergue a refugiados centroamericanos.

"Los cristianos lucharemos para prevenir que las familias sean divididas", explicó Alexia Salvatierra, directora ejecutiva de Clérigos y Laicos Unidos por Justicia Económica (CLUE, por su sigla en inglés), organización que congrega a iglesias de diversos credos.

CLUE promueve el nuevo movimiento santuario como "una coalición de diversos credos y feligresías que sienten el llamado a responder en forma activa y pública a serias injusticias que en la actualidad sufren nuestros hermanos indocumentados que residen en Estados Unidos".

El lanzamiento del movimiento está en su fase final de preparación y será dado a conocer en fecha próxima en forma simultánea a lo largo del país con múltiples conferencias de prensa.

Salvatierra informó que en el

movimiento participan líderes religiosos de diversas denominaciones, incluyendo a la Iglesia Católica, Luterana, Metodista, Presbiteriana y otras.

"Estas son congregaciones de todo el país que ven esto como un asunto moral", precisó Salvatierra. La comunidad religiosa, dijo, tiene "una tradición de ser la voz de los que no tienen voz".

Salvatierra, una ministra luterana, precisó que las metas del nuevo movimiento santuario son: Asumir una posición moral y pública sobre los derechos de los inmigrantes y proteger a inmigrantes contra el odio.

Así como la discriminación y la injusta deportación y revelar el actual sufrimiento de trabajadores inmigrantes y de sus familias bajo

las actuales leyes migratorias.

Bajo la estrategia a seguir, las iglesias proveerán públicamente albergue y protección a un número limitado de familias inmigrantes cuyos casos revelen claramente las contradicciones de la injusticia moral de las actuales leyes migratorias.

Para recibir albergue en los templos, las familias deberán estar en proceso de deportación y tener, en el caso de los adultos un buen récord laboral y una buena conducta.

Las iglesias participantes albergarán a las familias hasta por tres meses, pero éstas podrán rotarse de una congregación a otra conforme se necesite hasta que sus casos sean resueltos.

De acuerdo a la declaración

de principios del movimiento, "las iglesias estamos juntas en la creencia de que cada ser humano, sin importar su nacionalidad, tiene derechos básicos que deben ser resguardados, incluyendo el derecho al trabajo.

Así como "a la unidad familiar y el derecho a la seguridad física y emocional".

"Juzgamos que estos derechos están siendo violados por las leyes de inmigración y vemos y rechazamos ignorar, el sufrimiento de niños, muchos de los cuales son ciudadanos estadounidenses que están siendo separados de sus padres ilegales mediante una injusta deportación".

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PROPUESTA 1
(Resolución Senatorial Conjunta 13)

La Resolución Senatorial Conjunta (S.J.R) Núm.13 serviría para enmendar la Constitución a fin de autorizar que la legislatura ajuste el impuesto al valor a las escuelas públicas o las tasas tributarias correspondientes a contribuyentes que tengan 65 o más años de edad o que estén discapacitados y que sean dueños de un hogar residencial exento de dichos impuestos. De esa manera la enmienda permitiría que la legislatura conceda una desgravación a consecuencia de la reducción de tasas tributarias promulgada por la 79 Legislatura en su tercera sesión convocada.

La enmienda que se propone aparecería en la boleta de votación en los siguientes términos: "Enmienda constitucional que autoriza a la legislatura para disponer la reducción del monto total de impuestos al valor que, siendo para fines de las escuelas públicas, puedan establecerse sobre los hogares residenciales de ancianos o discapacitados, de modo que se refleje cualquier reducción de la tasa tributaria correspondiente a los ejercicios fiscales de 2006 y 2007".

Publicado por Roger Williams, Secretario de Estado de Texas.

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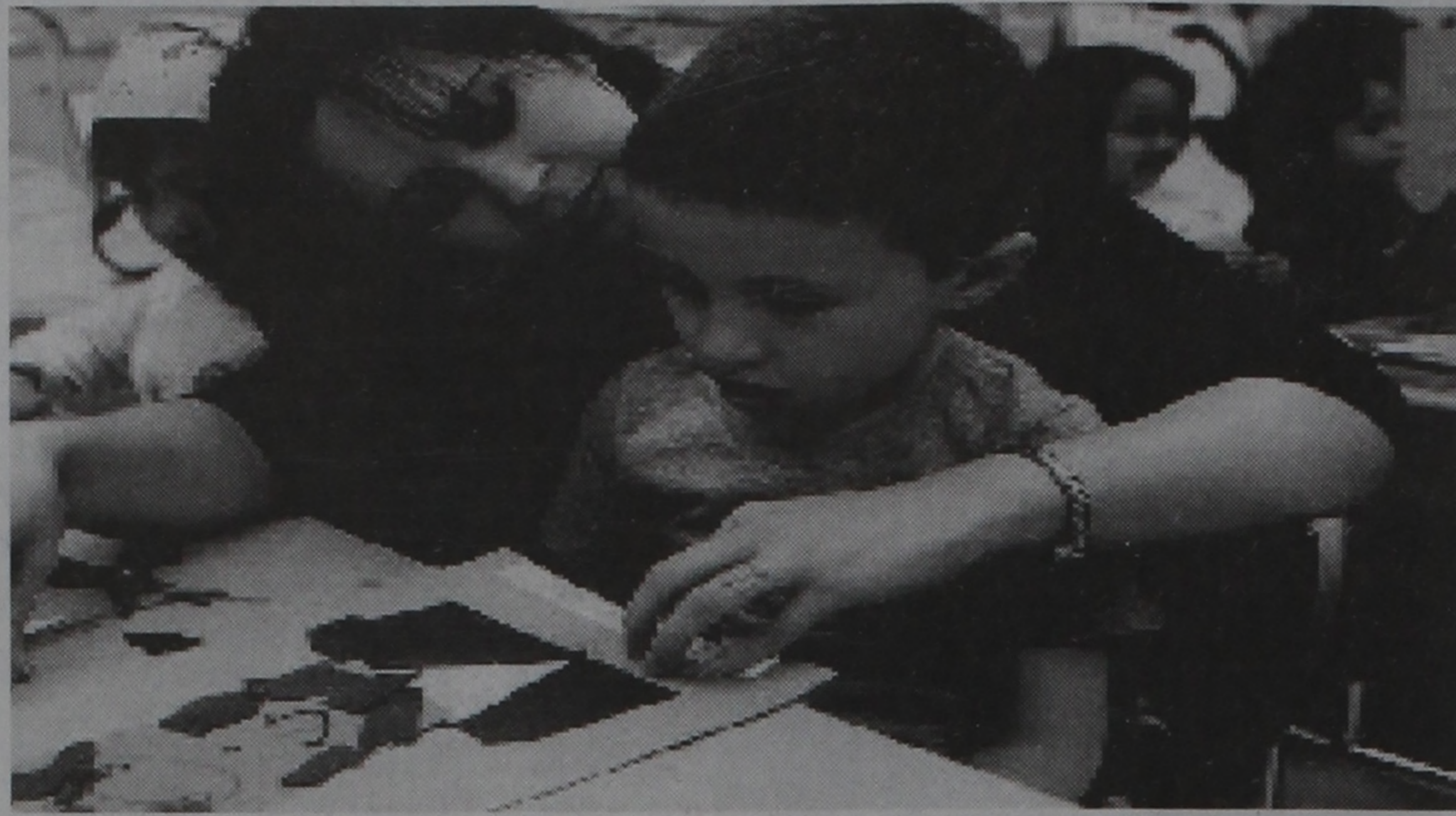
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Por nuestros niños



Los niños latinos también tienen más probabilidades que los blancos de empezar la escuela sin conocimientos básicos de lectura ni de matemáticas, por lo que es necesario que tengan acceso al prekínder.

Que los niños hispanos tengan acceso a la educación inicial del prekínder es uno de los pasos clave, no sólo para cerrar la brecha educativa que existe entre niños hispanos y los blancos, sino para prevenirla.

Así lo manifestó la directora Adjunta de Programas a Nivel Estatal de Pre-K Now, Danielle Gonzáles, quien emitió un comunicado sobre un informe de la Agrupación Nacional para la Educación de los Niños Hispanos que ofrece recomendaciones para aumentar la matrícula de hispanos en prekínder.

"Cuando hablamos de la brecha educativa que hay entre los niños latinos y los niños blancos, no debemos hablar tan sólo de cerrar la brecha, sino de prevenirla en primer lugar. Este nuevo informe concluye que el acceso a pre-k de alta calidad es una de las maneras más efectivas de garantizar que todos los niños cuenten con las destrezas necesarias para un buen desempeño escolar desde el primer día de kínder", puntualiza.

Detalla que estudios anteriores de Agrupación muestran que por lo menos uno de cada tres estudiantes hispanos empieza el kínder sin tener los conocimientos necesarios para un buen desempeño académico.

Los niños latinos también tienen más probabilidades que los blancos de empezar la escuela sin conocimientos básicos de lectura ni de matemáticas. Los estudios muestran que estas desigualdades persisten a lo largo de la carrera educativa de los niños y conducen a una tasa de deserción escolar del triple de la de otros grupos.

"Sabemos que el pre-kínder de calidad puede beneficiar a todos los niños en estas áreas, pero en este momento se les niega ese beneficio a demasiados niños latinos, debido a su costo o a barreras lingüísticas o culturales", agrega Gonzáles.

La directora especifica que sólo un 40 por ciento de niños hispanos asisten a prekínder en comparación con el 60 por ciento de niños blancos y afroamericanos e insta a los legisladores a que traten de resolver esta desigualdad.

"Durante muchos años hemos descuidado a los niños latinos y hemos permitido que empiecen

la escuela en desventaja. Ya no podemos esperar más. Según los informes más recientes del censo, uno de cada cinco niños menores de cinco años en Estados Unidos es hispano. El futuro de nuestro país depende de nuestra capacidad y compromiso con la educación de este creciente segmento de nuestra población", demanda.

Eliminar obstáculos para la matrícula en prekínder, como el costo y la limitada disponibilidad, dice, contribuirá a asegurar que los niños hispanos tengan acceso a este importante primer paso en sus carreras educativas.

"Los legisladores a nivel federal y estatal deben ampliar considerablemente los programas estatales de Head Start y de pre-k a fin de incluir más niños, con divulgación coordinada para matricular niños hispanos. Ya es hora de que se responsabilicen de proporcionar pre-k a todos los niños hispanos. Cuando los niños hispanos estén preparados para la escuela y nuestras escuelas estén preparadas para los niños hispanos, la sociedad entera cosechará los beneficios", finaliza.

Pre-K Now colabora con activistas y autoridades encargadas de formular políticas estatales, a fin de encabezar un movimiento a favor de la educación de alta calidad para todos los niños de tres y cuatro años.

Fibromialgia, una enfermedad engañosa

Por más de una década, Claudia Contreras creyó tener artritis. Así se lo aseguraron varios médicos, quienes le recetaron medicamentos que tomó hasta noviembre de 2006, cuando un especialista le dijo que lo que tenía era fibromialgia.

"Nunca había escuchado hablar de esa enfermedad y me asusté", comenta la mujer de 46 años, natural de Puebla, México. "Pero me sentí mucho más tranquila cuando el médico me explicó y me dijo que por el tipo de dolor que sentía, más en los músculos que en las coyunturas, era más probable que se tratara de fibromialgia".

El nuevo diagnóstico resultó más que confirmado cuando Contreras se sometió a una prueba médica minuciosa que consiste en tocar ciertos puntos del cuerpo, los cuales duelen con un simple roce o presión. Hace muy poco que comenzó a utilizarse esta prueba con el objetivo de identificar el mal.

"Esta enfermedad me vino de repente y cambió por completo mi vida", cuenta Contreras. "Pero lo que más lamento son los 10 años que perdí de recibir un tratamiento médico efectivo como el que tengo ahora, donde me dan pastillas para relajar los músculos, antidepresivos, terapia de agua caliente, ejercicios de relajación y una dieta especial".

La historia de Contreras no es única. De acuerdo con la Asociación Nacional de fibromialgia (NFA), miles de personas tienen por años los síntomas del síndrome que es mal diagnosticado debido a que los dolores pueden confundirse con los artríticos.

"Las estadísticas muestran que más o menos el 5% de la población mundial padece de fibromialgia y unos 10 millones de estadounidenses la tienen", señala Claudia Carrillo, portavoz de la mencionada asociación.

Según estudios, el síndrome se da en personas de cualquier raza, sexo y edad. Sin embargo, la mayoría de las víctimas está conformada por mujeres (el 75% de los casos) y la incidencia es mayor entre los 20 y los 60 años de edad, siendo los más afectados aquellos que tienen entre 26 y 46 años.

Muchos se preguntan por qué resulta tan difícil el diagnóstico de esta enfermedad.

El doctor Bill McCarberg, especialista en medicina familiar con práctica en Kaiser Permanente de Escondido, San Diego, dice a La Opinión que la fibromialgia es un síndrome complejo de síntomas que in-

cluyen dolores en los músculos y tejidos que conectan los huesos, ligamentos y tendones.

"Los síntomas y dolores pueden llegar a ser tan severos que interfieren con las actividades laborales y cotidianas de la persona", explica el doctor McCarberg, quien también es profesor de la Escuela de Medicina de la Universidad de San Diego.

En cuanto al diagnóstico, el galeno señala que resulta difícil debido a que hasta el momento no existe una prueba única de laboratorio que identifique el mal y los exámenes de sangre, radiografías y biopsias que se realizan al paciente resultan normales.

Sin embargo, en 1990, el Colegio Americano de Reumatología (ACR) estableció un examen médico que ayuda al diagnóstico del síndrome de la fibromialgia.

Según los criterios establecidos por el ACR, una persona la padece si presenta un historial de dolor generalizado durante un período mínimo de tres meses, así como dolor permanente en 11 ó 18 puntos específicos del cuerpo que son sensibles a la presión o al tacto.

Castillo dice que no se sabe a ciencia cierta qué la provoca, pero las investigaciones han deducido que existen diversos factores, que por sí solos o combinados, pueden causar fibromialgia. Por ejemplo, una enfermedad infecciosa, un trauma físico o emocional o cambios hormonales.

"Las tomografías tomadas a varias pacientes con fibromialgia han encontrado niveles anormales de varias de las sustancias químicas involucradas en la transmisión y amplificación de la sensación de dolor, tanto hacia el cerebro como desde éste, y una disminución del flujo de sangre en áreas específicas de este órgano matriz", expresa Castillo.

Por su parte, el doctor McCarberg dice que en materia de incidencia, se ha visto que el 40% de los casos se presenta de repente, sin motivo alguno; el 60%, después de un período en la vida de mucho estrés (pérdida del empleo, del compañero, etc.) o un trauma emocional causado por las lesiones de un accidente

automovilístico, golpe o caída. La enfermedad no es hereditaria, no mata, no causa inflamación ni deformaciones y permanece en la persona durante toda la vida. "Por ahora tan sólo sabemos que podría estar involucrado un gen y que tan sólo pocas personas (8%) llegan a curarse", resalta el galeno.



McCarberg, quien es creador del programa Para Manejar el Dolor, de Kaiser Permanente, dice que existen varios tratamientos para tratar la fibromialgia; el más común es el que usa antidepresivos y medicamentos para el dolor, programas de ejercicios de estiramiento y cardiovasculares, baños de tina caliente, técnicas para aliviar la tensión muscular y la ansiedad y clases educativas sobre el mal y la buena nutrición.

"La educación sobre el comportamiento de la enfermedad y cómo reducir la intensidad de los múltiples dolores musculares es la clave para los pacientes que desean tener una mejor calidad de vida", acota.

Según el entrevistado, en materia de prevención tal vez la clave estaría en aprender a controlar el estrés, respetar el horario de sueño, hacer ejercicio y llevar una buena alimentación.

El doctor McCarberg informa que éstos son los síntomas más comunes:

Dolor muscular: generalmente se da en todo el cuerpo, aunque puede comenzar en el cuello u hombros, y extenderse a otras áreas al cabo de cierto tiempo. Según el sentir de los pacientes, el dolor se presenta de diversas formas: ardor, punzada, rigidez y sensibilidad.

Fatiga: el nivel de fatiga varía de un día para otro e interfiere con las actividades diarias de la persona.

Alteración del sueño: se presenta durante las diferentes etapas del sueño. Las personas no tienen problemas para conciliarlo, pero se despiertan con frecuencia durante la noche y, como resultado, se sienten cansadas y agotadas al siguiente día.

Dificultad para pensar y cambios en el humor. Estudios han demostrado que las personas con fibromialgia pueden reportar lagunas mentales o dificultades para concentrarse o realizar tareas mentales sencillas.

Otros síntomas que se pueden presentar son: dolores de cabeza y abdomen, migrañas, movimiento involuntario de las piernas, mareos, estreñimiento y diarrea (síndrome de colon irritable) y espasmos e irritabilidad de la vejiga

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For Calle Ocho Organizers, Size Really Matters

The people who bring you Calle Ocho every year seem to be a bit, er, competitive.

It has to be the biggest street festival in the United States. It has to be better than it was last year. It has to have more music, more food, more surprises.

They had to have the world's longest conga line (119,000 bodies shaking to Miami Sound Machine's Conga in 1988) and the world's biggest pinata (measuring 29 feet and weighing 10,000 pounds in 1990), marked in Guinness World Records.

This year, the Kiwanis of Little Havana -- which started the annual party in 1978 -- wants to break the record for the world's largest Zumba, with more than 100 instructors leading thousands in the frenzied workout. The current record, set in the Philippines, is 48,000.

"We can break that," said Raul Camaliche, one of the chairmen of the Kiwanis Calle Ocho committee, adding that Calle Ocho typically attracts more than a million people.

But the crowd will be moving long before that 3 p.m. aerobics break. With 24 stages across 23 blocks, Calle Ocho is one long, pulsating tribute to the sounds of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Because for all its other accouterments -- food, competitions, free samples of detergent and chewing gum -- music has always been the focus of the Calle Ocho festival, the culmination of the Kiwanis' Carnaval Miami series of events, which fund the organization's projects for area youth.

The lineup is familiar, with Calle Ocho regulars like Willy Chirino, Oscar de Leon, Albita Rodriguez, Conjunto Progreso and Frankie Negron. Israel



Reville is producing the MTV series in association with Road Games and Menuendo Entertainment. Reville, producer of the two-time Golden Globe winner and Latin crossover hit Ugly Betty, is expert in developing programming with multilingual appeal. The company also produces the Emmy Award-winning The Office, Nashville Star and The Biggest Loser, to name just a few.

The search to recreate Menuendo, one of the biggest and most successful Latin pop singing groups, gets underway on March 31 in Los Angeles, followed by casting sessions in Dallas, Miami and New York through the end of April. MTV Tr3's will chronicle the entire journey of thousands from the first audition to the last, culminating with the selection of seven finalists in Road to Menuendo which debuts on May 12. The road continues on MTV this fall when the band will dwindle down to the five final members of the new Menuendo as the channel air the 10-episode reality series (title TBD).

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Once selected, Menuendo will be part of the Epic Records family. The partnership between Epic and Menuendo kicks off with a first single in July and the group's "debut" album in December 2007.

MTV Tr3's will document the nationwide search to find the talented and hungry young artists that will get their shot at making it big in the fast-paced world of the music industry. Four casting sessions will take place beginning in the Los Angeles community of Lynwood on March 31st at Plaza Mexico; in Miami on April 14th at Bayside Marketplace; in Dallas on April 21st at the Valley View Mall; and in New York on April 28th at the Queens Center Mall in Queens. Celebrity judges along with renowned music manager,

Johnny Wright will be on hand to audition teenage boys on their natural singing and dancing abilities, charisma and stage presence. The auditions are open to males who are at least 15 years old and appear to be less than 19 years old. All contestants will be asked to sing a song, in English or Spanish, from a pre-selected song list available on mtvtr3s.com. A legal guardian who can sign a release must accompany contestants under 18. Complete eligibility requirements are available at mtvtr3s.com.

"The Menuendo series will introduce an entire new generation to a cross-cultural music phenomenon that once captured the hearts and minds of music fans all over the world," said Lois Curren, President, Entertainment and Programming, MTV. "The series is poised to deliver content that connects deeply with our audience by giving them unlimited access across all our screens, to the young and talented hopefuls aspiring to join Menuendo and win their spot on the world stage."

MTV Tr3's Road to Menuendo which begins on May 12, will include four half-hour shows that take viewers to all auditions and give them front-row access to all the anticipation and excitement. After the casting sessions, 12 semi-finalists will be picked and each one will be featured in short form capsules that will introduce the potential band members to multiple MTV audiences across all MTV screens. MTV Tr3's will also air a 1-hour special in July, Road to Menuendo: The Finals, where the members of the new Menuendo will be revealed.

MTV Tr3's will also produce a four-part series, Road to Menuendo Presents: De La Calle to the Stage that showcases musical success stories from the Menuendo audition cities such as Miami's Gloria Es-

tefan and PitBull and New York's Jennifer Lopez, Marc Anthony and Fat Joe.

Online, mtvtr3s.com and mspace.com/mvtr3s will feature Road to Menuendo details including casting information, audition highlights and early audience favorites.

MTV Tr3's Radio and VH1 Radio affiliates in the audition cities will feature on-air Menuendo trivia contests for prizes, interviews with the judges and live remotes at auditions with contestant interviews.

"MTV Tr3's has set out to create and define a new generation of Latino pop music and culture and what better expression of that than helping to discover the new Menuendo, the biggest brand in Latin pop music over the last thirty years," said Lucia Ballas-Traynor, SVP and general manager of MTV Tr3's. "The new Menuendo will be reflection of our audience in every way and we are going all out to ensure that every talented teenage boy across the country has a shot at stardom. It's another way MTV Tr3's is providing a voice to young Latinos."

Additional summertime Menuendo programming on MTV Tr3's will include a half-hour special on the history of Menuendo; Fans of Menuendo, a trivia game between parents and teens; History of Boy Bands, a 30-minute look at the biggest and most successful boy bands of all time (Menuendo, NKOB, BSB, NSYNC, Barrio

Boys, Proyecto Uno, etc); and "Life after the Band," a half hour show featuring videos from the solo careers of boy band members (Ricky Martin, Robby Rosa, Justin Timberlake, Robbie Williams, Ashley Parker Angel.)

The MTV series will follow the



new Menuendo's rise to super pop stardom and feature the band recording their first album together, learning about the music industry and interacting with legendary icons who will offer personal and professional advice along the way. As fans see the band struggle to become a cohesive unit, the guys will have to learn how to overcome their differences, challenges and rigorous work schedules during this crucial time in their career.

The original Menuendo, which took the US and Latin America by storm during its run in the late 70s and 80s, recorded 35 albums and sold more than 40 million records and set concert attendance records worldwide and produced superstars Ricky Martin and Robby Rosa. The new Menuendo will record a contemporary hip urban/Latin rhythmic sound and will be managed by Menuendo Entertainment and legendary manager Johnny Wright who has worked with *NSYNC, Backstreet Boys and Justin Timberlake as a solo artist.

Diego Luna estrenará Chávez en Festival de Cine en NY

El documental "Chávez", el debut tras las cámaras del actor mexicano Diego Luna, se estrenará aquí mundialmente esta primavera en la sexta edición del Festival de Cine de Tribeca, fundado por Robert de Niro.

Los organizadores del certamen, que se celebrará entre el 25 de abril y el 6 de mayo, hicieron público este martes otro avance de la programación de esta edición, después de que la víspera anunciaron las películas a concurso en las dos principales categorías.

Este martes difundieron los títulos que, fuera de la competición oficial, se exhibirán en las secciones "Encuentros", "Restaurada/Redescubiertas" y "Medianoche".

Dentro de la primera, que

incluye trabajos realizados por talentos ya reconocidos y que según los organizadores "es posible que provoquen algunos de los comentarios más vivos dentro del festival", destaca la presencia de Diego Luna.

El actor, que protagonizó junto a Gael García Bernal "Y tu mamá también" (Alfonso Cuarón), presentará en su estreno mundial "Chávez", documental en el que repasa la vida y la carrera del boxeador mexicano Julio César Chávez.

"Este apartado muestra la pericia de algunos reconocidos talentos fuera del campo en el que son ya conocidos", dijo la cofundadora del festival, Jane Rosenthal.

La presencia de México se completa con la proyección de "Días de otoño", dirigida en 1962 por Roberto Gavaldón, escrita por Julio Alejandro y Emilio Carballido y protagonizada por Pilar Pellicer, dentro de "Restauradas/Redescubiertas", gracias al trabajo de Gabriel Figueroa.

En esta sección se incluyen cintas "del pasado de forma que parezcan nuevas otra vez", bien tras haber sido restauradas o porque nunca se difundieron lo suficiente o ni siquiera llegaron a estrenarse en Estados Unidos.

Junto a estas dos cintas, y tal y como se anunció la víspera, otra mexicana se proyectará durante el certamen pero dentro de la competición oficial de largomet-

rajes. Se trata de "Dos abrazos", de Enrique Begné.

En total, el Tribeca Film Festival presentará 159 largos y 85 cortos seleccionadas de entre cuatro mil 550 películas recibidas.

Festival de Cine de Tribeca fue fundado en 2002 por Robert de Niro, Rosenthal y Craig Hatkoff como respuesta a los atentados terroristas del 11-S para ayudar a la recuperación y revitalización de Nueva York, en especial de la zona del Bajo Manhattan.

En sus primeras cinco ediciones, el certamen ha atraído más de un millón y medio de personas y ha supuesto para la ciudad una derrama económica de 325 millones de dólares.



"Cachao" Lopez, the legendary Cuban bassist, will close in a performance with local singer Marlon, who won a Spanish TV version of American Idol.

But this year, the stages will be in the middle of the street, instead of off to the sides.

"This way, people can feel like they are part of it," said Kiwanis President Lino Fernandez. "We want them to dance, not walk, from one end to the other."

Or not. This year, for the first time, Calle Ocho has been divided into sections by music genre.

"You can stay in one area and enjoy the type of music and entertainment you like without

having to be shoulder-to-shoulder walking through the crowd," said Guillermo Senmartin, the Kiwanis member in charge of the new Salsa-Son Zone.

Fernandez said it was part of the natural evolution as the festival -- which started as a 15-block party to showcase Cuban culture

to other communities -- became a pan-American microcosm of the community it represents.

"As the city changes, we have changed," Fernandez said.

Already in the works for next year -- the festival's 30th anniversary -- is a stab at yet another world record, this time for the largest number of couples in a rueda casino style salsa dance. The current record is 362 people -- or 176 couples -- in Singapore, he said.

"We can do much better than that at Calle Ocho," Senmartin said, confidently.

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PROPUESTA 1
(Resolución Senatorial Conjunta 13)

La Resolución Senatorial Conjunta (S.J.R) Núm.13 serviría para enmendar la Constitución a fin de autorizar que la legislatura ajuste el impuesto al valor a las escuelas públicas o las tasas tributarias correspondientes a contribuyentes que tengan 65 o más años de edad o que estén discapacitados y que sean dueños de un hogar residencial exento de dichos impuestos. De esa manera la enmienda permitiría que la legislatura conceda una desgravación a consecuencia de la reducción de tasas tributarias promulgada por la 79 Legislatura en su tercera sesión convocada.

La enmienda que se propone aparecería en la boleta de votación en los siguientes términos: "Enmienda constitucional que autoriza a la legislatura para disponer la reducción del monto total de impuestos al valor que, siendo para fines de las escuelas públicas, puedan establecerse sobre los hogares residenciales de ancianos o discapacitados, de modo que se refleje cualquier reducción de la tasa tributaria correspondiente a los ejercicios fiscales de 2006 y 2007".

Publicado por Roger Williams, Secretario del Estado de Texas.

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¿Que Pasa?

Mentor Tech Banquet

Christopher Gardner, rags-to-riches author of "The Pursuit of Happiness" and CEO of Christopher Gardner International Holdings, will be the Mentor Tech event keynote speaker and gives motivational speeches addressing keys to self-empowerment, beating the odds and breaking cycles.

A series of circumstances in the 1980s left Gardner and his toddler son homeless in San Francisco. Without connections or a college degree, he earned a spot in the Dean Witter Reynolds training program, then became a top earner at Bear Stearns & Co.

Gardner's book recently was made into a movie by the same title and starring Will Smith.

The banquet supports the Lauro Cavazos & Ophelia Powell Malone Mentoring Program (Mentor Tech), a program that enhances the quality of the educational experience of students from underrepresented populations through programs, services, advocacy and campus and community involvement.

Tickets are \$35 apiece or \$600 & \$400 for a table of eight.

To organize an interview with Gardner or for more information on the banquet, contact Cory Powell.

Covenant Schedules Free Health Screening

Covenant Health System will host a free Community Health Screening on Saturday, March 24, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Exhibit Hall of the Lubbock Memorial Civic Center.

This program is one of several conducted throughout the year by Covenant as part of its Community Health Screening Initiative and is designed to help create healthier South Plains citizens by detecting potential health issues before they become life-threatening.

Medical professionals from Covenant will be on hand to check, among other things, weight, height and body mass index, blood pressure and cholesterol of those who attend the screening.

Tests for fecal blood, bone mineral density, hearing and dental issues also will be available.

In addition, there will be gender specific examinations for attendees.

Information concerning mental and general health issues as well as sexually transmitted diseases will be available.

For those interested in quitting smoking, Covenant health professionals will provide tobacco cessation tips.

No appointment is needed for the free Community Health Screening. More information can be obtained by calling Covenant Health System at 1-866-426-8362.

Covenant Health System is Offering: Medical Terminology Course

The Medical Terminology Course offered by Covenant Health System is designed to teach students to easily remember, pronounce and apply 350 prefixes, roots and suffixes that combine to form more than 11,000 medical terms. The course is designed for total retention through audio-visual instruction and interactive workbook activity.

Students in the course will have the opportunity to use organized, effective memory techniques to learn and remember the subject. The course includes 10 sessions that are each two hours long. The course does not provide continuing education or college credit, but it is a certificate-based course.

Anyone who works as a non-clinical employee or needs to know medical terms for his or her profession should attend. Students who are only interested in taking the course for self-improvement are also welcome.

The course fee is \$50 for public participants and \$25 for Covenant employees. Students must be present at all meetings to receive their certificate. Classes will meet in the Knipling Education Conference Center from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on the following dates:

- Tuesday, April 3
- Tuesday, April 10
- Tuesday, April 17
- Tuesday, April 24
- Tuesday, May 1
- Thursday, April 5
- Thursday, April 12
- Thursday, April 19
- Thursday, April 26
- Thursday, May 3

Cash payment for the course must be made at the time of registration. A refund of \$25 will be applicable upon successful completion of the course.

To register for the course, please contact Janette Jimenez at the Knipling Education Conference Center, or for more information about the course, contact Scott Crane at 725-0766.

Weekly Essentials: There's no busting West's best

The NCAA Tournament will rightfully captivate the minds of basketball fans around the country this week, but be sure to take a break from slaving over your brackets to catch the finest the sport has to offer.

The big boys in the Western Conference are about to do some heavy muscle-flexing.

Combined, Dallas, Phoenix, San Antonio, Utah and Houston won an unbelievable 42 consecutive games entering the week's action, led by the Mavericks' 17-game win streak, which was snapped Monday night with a 117-100 loss at Golden State.

Dallas looks to bounce back with a home game against Phoenix on Wednesday. The Suns, who had a 17-game win streak through January, will try and take down the Mavs for the first time in three tries.

Phoenix, which defeated Houston on Monday, takes a five-game win streak into Dallas. Now that Boris Diaw and Kurt Thomas are healthy, Mike D'Antonio has his full complement of bigs to utilize.

It's amusing that despite wins

in nine of 10 games, the perception is that the Suns are slipping. Part of it has to do with the success Dallas and San Antonio (12 consecutive wins) have had, but there's also been displeasure with their performance last week, where they struggled to beat the short-handed, slumping Lakers. They also needed overtime to take out Charlotte and survived a last-second shot attempt by the Hornets to win Friday night. All those games were at home.

"We're not firing on all cylinders," Raja Bell said, "but I'm not going to put a negative spin on it anymore. We're fine."

Beyond their games against Houston and Dallas, the Suns also have a back-to-back this weekend vs. Detroit and Denver.

After a shaky return in a loss at Cleveland last Monday, the Rockets have won three consecutive games with Yao Ming and Tracy McGrady complementing each other wonderfully. Utah has won six in a row and takes its act East for a four-game swing featuring back-to-backs against the Heat and Magic and Sixers and Cavs.

Of all the teams in the loaded

West, none has altered its public perception more than San Antonio in recent weeks.

The talk throughout the league as recently as a month ago was that the Spurs were washed up. Finished. Between the Mavericks and Suns, they had been overtaken. After being humbled by Miami on Feb. 11, the Spurs haven't lost since -- and likely won't this week. The Clippers, Bucks and Celtics don't figure to offer up much of a challenge, increasing the likelihood that at least one of the Southwest Division's juggernauts will carry a double-digit winning streak into next week.

Team of the week

Udonis Haslem spoiled Washington's postgame party aspirations by knocking down a buzzer beater and pulling the Heat within one game of the Wizards in the Southeast Division. Miami continues to do

more than tread water without Dwyane Wade and has made earning a



top four seed a very good possibility. The Heat have won their first five home games of the month, including statement games against the Pistons, Bulls and Wizards. Utah arrives for its lone visit of the season Tuesday, and after a brief trip to New Jersey on Thursday for a nationally televised game, the Heat finish the week back in Miami with weekend games against the Kings and Magic. If Pat Riley's team can continue to hold serve, there's a good chance they can pull ahead of Washington by this time next week.

Team of the week

Indiana's post All-Star collapse has reached a boiling point. The Pacers have lost nine in a row entering Tuesday night's visit to Minnesota, a game they will play without top scorer Jermaine O'Neal. He opened the week in California getting a second opinion on his sprained left knee, and the earliest he'll be back is Wednesday's game against Washington. That's not expected to happen, either. With Miami and New York quickly gaining ground, and the Magic and Nets both better equipped to make a run over the NBA's final month, the Pacers' streak of nine consecutive playoff appearances looks destined to end.

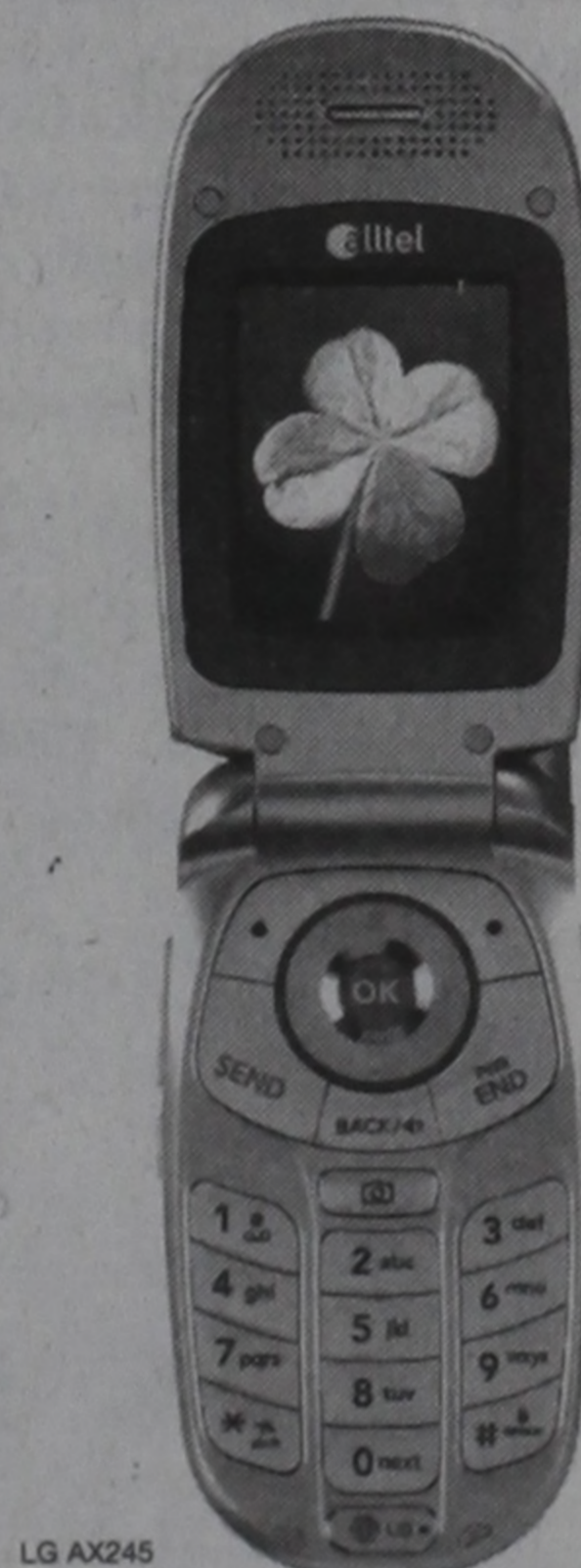
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