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Commissioner orders insurance rate cuts

Texas Insurance Commissioner Elton Bomer last week ordered cuts averaging 5.5% to the private-passenger auto insurance benchmark rate.

The cuts are to take effect Feb. 15. Drivers carrying only liability insurance also will see cuts averaging 7.8%, Bomer said.

Bomer's action follows a 5% benchmark cut he ordered last Jan. At the time, he urged companies to file lower rates. Major companies in the personal auto insurance market responded by reducing rates 7% on average.

Insurance company claim payouts continue to lag behind premium collections because of tort reform, safer cars, less drunken driving and other factors, Bomer said.

"We need to close this gap so that customers don't pay too much for their car insurance. All the evidence justifies a substantial rate reduction that still should leave the companies a fair profit on their Texas business," he said.

The rate changes apply only to drivers insured by rate-regulated insurance companies that cover about 75% of the drivers in Texas.

Bomer did not order changes to rates for commercial auto insurance,

State Capitol Highlights

By Ed Sterling
Texas Press Association

following a recommendation by administrative law judges.

Minorities, Poor Pay More

Where a driver lives may have a bearing on how much he must pay to get behind the wheel with suitable insurance coverage in Texas, a new study shows.

State Rep. Lon Burman, D-Fort Worth, last week told the *Austin American-Statesman* that data collected in the first quarter of 1998 by the House Insurance Committee show that "many lower-cost, standard insurers appear to systematically deny coverage to consumers who live in poor and minority areas."

Only 49.7% of drivers are insured by less-costly, rate-regulated lines of insurance if they live in areas where the minority population is 85% or greater.

In 1997, rate-regulated premiums in Texas averaged \$800 a year, while

non-regulated premiums averaged \$1,300 a year, the study said.

Welfare Rolls Have Shrunk

A study released last week by the Texas Department of Human Services gives a first look at the impact of the 1995 welfare reform law.

More than two-thirds of adults pushed off welfare rolls found work; those workers were paid an average of \$6.28 an hour; and most of them found jobs in the food service, clerical, retail sales or healthcare fields, the study shows.

The average annual salary of the respondents was slightly more than \$11,000. The figure the federal government uses to mark the poverty level for a family of three is \$13,650.

Since 1994, state welfare rolls have dropped by nearly 400,000 recipients, and over the same period, food stamp rolls have dropped by 1.3 million recipients, the study said.

Work requirements and time limits on Texas welfare benefits took effect in 1996. Work or job training is mandated for most people between ages 18 and 59.

Scholarship Hike Proposed

State Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, last week filed legislation that

would give Texas high school students access to \$250 million more in financial aid for college.

Student loan and grant programs presently total about \$156 million.

Under Cuellar's proposal, an applicant's family's annual income would have to total less than \$75,000, among other criteria.

Teacher Reward Plan Proposed

Education Commissioner Mike Moses, in response to a legislative directive, last week announced a teacher pay-for-performance program that will reward teachers for gains in student performance.

Every year, cash rewards of \$750 per person would go to 25% of the state's educators, under the commissioner's proposal.

Rewards would go to all teachers at campuses that have shown significant improvement in student performance, as measured by the state education agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System.

Other Highlights

Officers of 25 law enforcement agencies are fanning out in Austin's Sixth Street club district to catch and arrest minors using fake identification. Offenders face a stay in jail, a fine and interrogation by federal agents.

Let's Look Back...

24 & 48 YEARS AGO

Aug. 31, 1973

Mrs. Edith Jares has retired from the Rice District after 37 years of teaching. She joined the Sheridan staff as a first grade teacher in 1957...

This quintet of beauties will be leading the Rice High School Raider Band in its activities for the 1973-74 school year: Miss Janelle Bauer, Miss Rhonda Kochwelp, Miss Dana Wiese, drum major Donna Danklefs and Miss Dina Kohleffel...

Friends in the community will regret to learn of the sudden death of Jacob Zoeller who died of a heart attack en route to Canada at 5:20 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 28th...

Mrs. Lil Stallman, manager of the new KULM-FM Radio Station in Columbus, was the guest speaker at the noon meeting of the Rotary Club Wednesday...

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Lee Caven-der of Atlanta, Ga., announced the Aug. 7th wedding of their daughter, Jeri Lynn, to Gerald Gordon Birdwell, son of Mr. & Mrs. Gordon Birdwell of Eagle Lake...

Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Zbrank of Sheridan are the new owners of the F&W Food Market in Sheridan and

are in their third week of operating the local grocery store and meat market...

Funeral services were held Friday, Aug. 24, at 9 a.m. from the Chapel of the Mill-Bauer Funeral Home in Eagle Lake for Florentino (Charlie) Sosa.

Nov. 30, 1950

Joe Frazar, Everett McRee, Verner Matthews, Mose Thomas and Vance Duncan report having had such a good time on their trip to see the Texas-Baylor football game that they are figuring on taking in one of the bowl games New Year's Day. They will very likely wind up by attending the Home Bowl... mama ain't said "Yes"... yet...

A one-man wildlife exhibit is on display this week at the American Rice Growers office. It is an exhibit of hunting trophies of Pete Gertson of Lissie. A number of the trophies were brought back from Mr. Gertson's Canadian hunt last year...

The death of E.N. Sparks, 57, of Rock Island on Sunday morning brought sadness to many relatives and friends...

Gordon Causey, son of Mr. & Mrs. C.W. Causey, left Houston by plane Monday for Ethiopia. He will be doing exploration work there for his company. However, a stroke of bad luck marred his departure... his automobile was stolen in Houston Saturday night. The car was insured, but the stack of Christmas gifts he had just finished shopping for were not...

As Marilyn Meitzen, presently the youngest child of Mr. & Mrs. Walter Meitzen Jr., was eating breakfast Monday morning, she fell off the kitchen stool on which she was sitting and broke her collarbone...

In Roy Bedichek's recently published book, "Karankaway Country", there is a chapter "Cocks of the Booming Grounds" for which he did research in the Eagle Lake area last March. In the acknowledgements he lists I.V. Duncan who he says set him up in the middle of the old and famous Coushatta Ranch, under lease from David Wintermann. The author also pays a compliment to Game Warden Tom Waddell saying that he probably knows more about the prairie chickens than any other person now alive...

A new arrival to the E.F. Frnka family is a daughter born early Tuesday, Nov. 28th. Grandparents are Mr. & Mrs. Seth Pennington and Mr. & Mrs. Fred G. Frnka...

The Eagles will soon begin the cage session. Lettermen returning are Tommy Scott, Robert Zahradnick, Frank Parma and Ernest Larmer. Others on the roster are Jack Dowdy, James Ricks, Weldon Knox, Sammy Tise, Billy Stiles, Bruce Kilgore, Cledus Hollas, Tom Wilcox, Craig Adams, Bill Hanly, Buck Flournoy, Bobby Payne, Roy Addicks, Tommy Smith, Billy Stapleton, John Shepherd and John DeShazo...

The new police chief, Joe H. Pas-sant of San Antonio, is expected to report for work here Dec. 1st.

To THE EDITOR & You

Thanks for relief

The following people need to be thanked for the way they gave so generously in time of need during the Flood Relief, 1998: Steve Cordova, Candy and Joe McCreary, Connie and David Keith, Bill and Kitty Kell, Tanchie and Leo Cordova, Judy Pustejovsky, the Prairie Edge Museum, the Red Cross, Cyrus Johnson, Steven

Meineke, Robert and Maxine Griffith, J.W. Shavers and the Nativity Catholic Church.

Without them, helping the flood victims would have been much harder.

Thank again,
Connie Larsen Hartley

LCRA makes \$200,000 grant to La Grange

The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), a conservation and reclamation district established to improve the quality of life in Central Texas, has announced a \$200,000 grant to the City of La Grange for the development of the amphitheater at the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center (TCHCC).

The grant will help build a \$2 million, open-air amphitheater, to be located in a natural cove on a hillside

of the 70-acre TCHCC.

Overlooking the 60-mile vista including La Grange and the Colorado River valley, the performance facility will be the first amphitheater on the Lower Colorado.

"The LCRA welcomes the opportunity to support the TCHCC as well as furthering economic development in La Grange," says Gale Lincke, LCRA director from Fayette County, La Grange. "As a performance venue for music, theater and dance, the amphitheater is a vital addition to the quality of life in this area. Nestled in a hill above the river, its location is as practical as it is beautiful."

"The LCRA's grant establishes a benchmark for leadership giving in our \$17 million campaign for the TCHCC," says Retta Slavik Chandler, president of the board of directors,

TCHCC. "On behalf of the Center, we are most grateful to the LCRA for this most-generous grant."

With seating for 1,000, the amphitheater will be available for concerts, plays and other productions by community groups, touring shows or foreign exchange performances. Both Czech and non-Czech performers will be featured.

The TCHCC will be an interactive historical and cultural center dedicated to the heritage of Texas' one million Czechs. Located in La Grange, the Center will be built on 70 acres above the Colorado River off Hwy. 77.

Originated by a coalition of Texas Czech organizations, the Center is a non-profit organization.

A \$17 million capital campaign to fund the Center is currently underway.

To contribute to the TCHCC or for more information about contributions or named facilities, please contact Donna Ingram at 409-968-5756 or 1-800-La Grang (524-7264).

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Bible Verse of the Week

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—Romans 8:28

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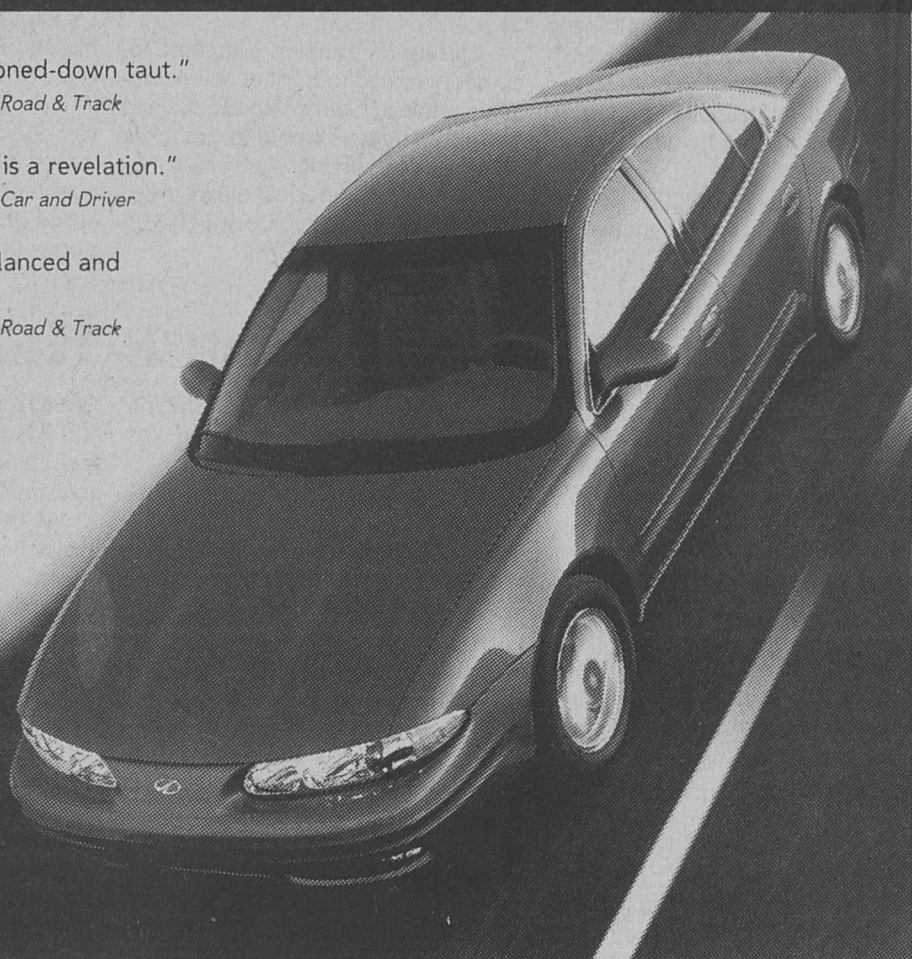
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