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COLUMN ONE

Powerful Foes of Legal Aid

■ State money for a Virginia justice center for migrants is slashed after business protests. Dispute focuses on who needs government-funded attorneys.

By HENRY WEINSTEIN
TIMES LEGAL AFFAIRS WRITER

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va.—After a year of living with congressional restrictions on his legal services program, veteran poverty lawyer Alex Gulotta had had it. "We were sick and tired of telling our clients, 'We can't do that,'" Gulotta said.

The ban on political lobbying and filing class-action lawsuits was odious, but Gulotta was most upset that the 1996 law barred him from helping the state's 41,000 migrants, many of whom weren't citizens, didn't speak English and had little awareness of their rights.

So in the spring of 1997, Gulotta went to his bosses at the Legal Services Corporation of Virginia with a creative way to get around limits Congress had imposed at the urging of groups like the American Farm Bureau Federation: Establish a program free of federal funds.

Legal Services signed on, using \$120,000 in state money to launch the Virginia Justice Center for Farm and Immigrant Workers. Headed by a tenacious young civil rights attorney named Mary Bauer, the fledgling center quickly made an impact. In its first three years, the project recovered \$500,000 in back pay and overtime. It filed class-action lawsuits on behalf of migrants who harvest apples, plant trees, shuck oysters and paint homes. Bauer went so far as to fly to Sinaloa, Mexico, with her colleague Tim Freilich to ensure safe delivery of \$110,000 to 60 workers collecting back wages from a seafood processor who settled a federal lawsuit.

Just as quickly, the program made some powerful enemies.

In February, Legal Services halted funding—faced with the stark alternative of a move by the Virginia Legislature to effectively hamstring all facets of Legal Services' overall \$6.5-million operation. "If you are in the wilderness and your leg gets caught in a bear trap and you have a chance of dying by cutting your leg or possibly living, what would you do?" said Jack Harris, executive director of the Virginia Trial Lawyer Assn. and a Legal Services board member.

The situation has cast a sharp focus on a long-running debate about what government-funded legal aid lawyers ought to be doing and who they should be able to represent. The controversy may also be a harbinger of similar disputes in other states.

In this case, the center's parent organization pulled the plug after legislation—instigated by the Virginia Farm Bureau and the Virginia Seafood Council—was introduced that would have barred any state-funded Legal Services program from filing class actions, lobbying on poverty-related legislation, collecting court-awarded attorney fees or representing migrants.

Please see LAW, A14

FDA Works to Revive Drug's Sale

Health: Official voices support for pill despite risk of deaths.

By DAVID WILLMAN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—Senior Food and Drug Administration officials are planning how to bring back to market a pill for a common bowel disorder despite new evidence that the risk of a life-threatening complication is far higher than thought when the drug was withdrawn in November, government documents show.

The FDA began reconsidering the withdrawal amid an outcry from patients who say they benefited from the prescription drug, called Lotronex. In early clinical studies, as many as 1 in 5 participants showed improvements that doctors attributed to Lotronex.

Dr. Janet Woodcock, director of the FDA's drug evaluation center, has privately voiced support for the drug to executives of GlaxoSmithKline, the manufacturer, according to the documents and people familiar with the matter. Woodcock and her aides have discussed with the company how best to orchestrate the drug's return to pharmacies—including how to structure a public advisory committee meeting so as to minimize the effect of criticism of the drug.

The flurry of activity over Lotronex once again puts a spotlight on the FDA's handling of a drug with demonstrated lethal risk and modest proven benefits. Lotronex is one of 11 prescription drugs withdrawn for safety

Please see FDA, A8

High Court Lets Disabled Golfer Martin Use Cart

By DAVID G. SAVAGE
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—Ruling in favor of golfer Casey Martin, the Supreme Court held Tuesday that disabled athletes are entitled to "reasonable modifications" in some rules that would enable them to compete, so long as the changes do not fundamentally alter the competition or give them an unfair advantage.

The 7-2 decision requires the PGA Tour Inc. to waive its walking rule for Martin and to permit him to ride a cart between the holes.

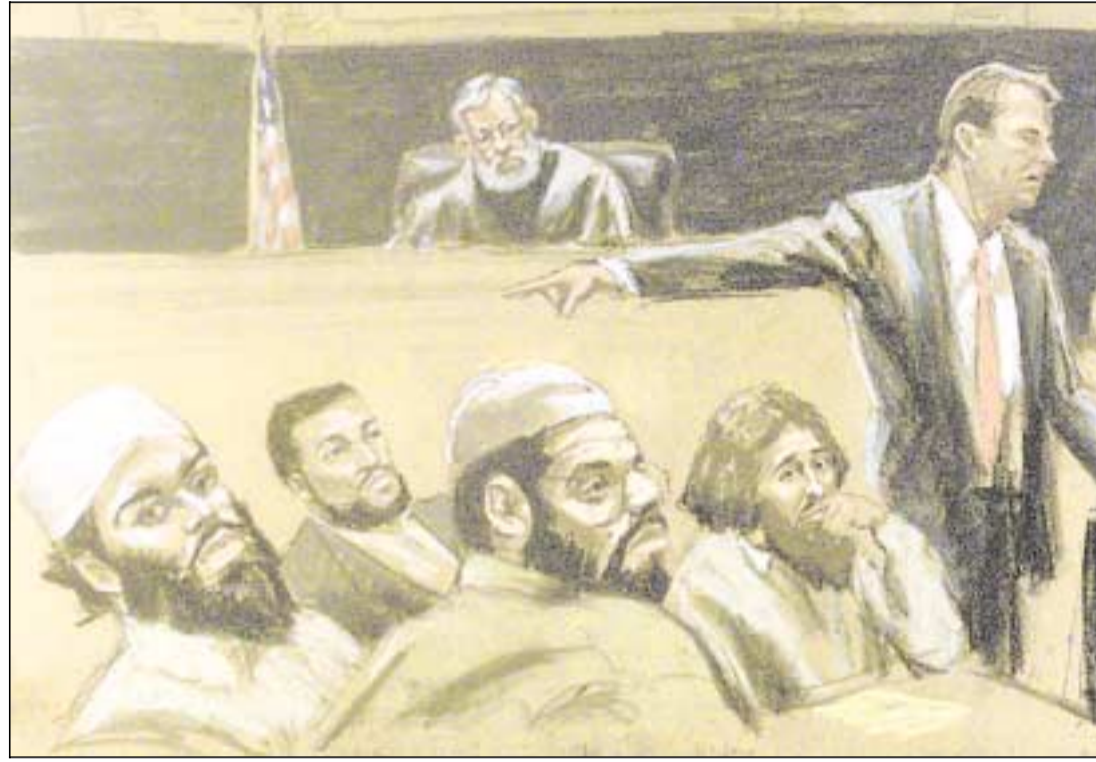
"The essence of the game [of golf] has been shotmaking," not walking, said Justice John Paul Stevens, a persistent, if not particularly skilled, golfer.

While walking the 18 holes adds an element of fatigue to the competition, Martin "easily endures greater fatigue" than the other players when he hobbles from the cart to his ball, Stevens

Please see LAW, A7

MORE INSIDE
Ten Commandments: High court says plaques must come down. A5

4 Guilty in 1998 Terrorist Blasts at U.S. Embassies



A sketch of defendants, from left, Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-Owhali, Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, Mohamed Sadeek Odeh and Wadhi El-Hage during their trial in a New York federal courtroom.

Law: It marks the first convictions in American court of those who plot to kill citizens abroad. Two Bin Laden followers could face death for roles in East Africa bombings.

By JOHN J. GOLDMAN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

NEW YORK—A federal court jury convicted four followers of Islamic militant Osama bin Laden on Tuesday in the bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998 that killed 224.

The almost simultaneous attacks on the diplomatic facilities in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, were part of what prosecutors said was a worldwide plot to murder Americans. More than 4,500 were injured, many seriously, in the massive explosions.

The jury of seven women and five men, whose identities were kept secret, convicted all four defendants of conspiring to kill U.S. citizens. The verdicts on the 12th day of deliberations were the first conviction in an American court of people who killed U.S. citizens abroad in a terrorist bombing.

The carnage, which included a dozen Americans, was underscored in the heavily guarded courtroom as the name of each victim—a separate count in the indictment—was read aloud Tuesday.

"Guilty," the forewoman of the jury repeated over and over in a liturgy of the dead.

"Let me summarize," said U.S. District Judge Leonard B. Sand when the reading of the complex 302-count verdict finally was completed after more than an hour. "You have found all of the defendants guilty on all the counts. . . . You have more work."

Starting today, the penalty phase of the trial will begin.

Jurors will consider whether Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, a 27-year-old Tanzanian, and Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-Owhali, 23, of Saudi Arabia, should be executed or receive life in prison.

The two were convicted of conspiracy and murder. The jurors found that Al-Owhali participated directly in the Nairobi attack and that Mohamed took part in the Tanzanian bombing, purchased equipment and helped load on a truck the explosive destined for the embassy.

Both were convicted of using an explosive to cause mass destruction.

Two other defendants, Wadhi El-Hage, 40, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Lebanon and living in Arlington, Texas, and Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, a 35-year-old citizen of Jordan, face life in prison without parole.

Please see BOMBINGS, A6

Bush, Davis Remain Divided on Energy

Politics: President still opposed, governor vows to sue. Bush heckled during L.A. speech.

By JAMES GERSTENZANG and DAN MORAIN
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

President Bush, venturing into California for the first time as president, stood firm Tuesday in his opposition to reining in wholesale electricity prices, prompting Gov. Gray Davis to announce that he would sue Bush administration energy regulators within a month.

In their much-anticipated private summit, Bush met with Davis for nearly 40 minutes in what was characterized afterward as a cordial, businesslike session. Davis said Bush offered little to help with California's energy crisis, while Bush's aides said Davis' prescription would worsen the state's woes.

"He just listened and said he is against price caps," Davis said.

For his part, the president said in a midday speech to the World Affairs Council in Century City: "My administration will continue to work to help California through the difficult months ahead."

The president's first full day in California consisted largely of appearances before friendly audiences. The only discord came at the World Affairs Council luncheon, where three hecklers disrupted his otherwise well-received

Please see BUSH, A8

Terrorist Said to Be Talking, Aiding Probe

Crime: Sources say he says he intended to explode bomb at LAX.

By JOSH MEYER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A Montreal man convicted last month for his role in a millennium terrorism plot has confessed that he intended to detonate a large bomb at Los Angeles International Airport and is cooperating in an ongoing federal investigation, law enforcement sources said Tuesday.

Ahmed Ressam, 33, who refused to tell authorities anything for 17 months after his arrest, admitted his terrorism plans in recent weeks, according to sources familiar with the case.

Sources did not say whether Ressam has discussed the details of an attack on LAX.

He was convicted April 6 on nine counts of conspiring to commit an act of international terrorism and related charges.

Ressam, an Algerian national, faces up to 140 years in prison when sentenced in federal court. He is expected to receive a lighter sentence in exchange for his continuing cooperation in the ongoing investigation of a Montreal-based group of Islamic extremists and that group's alleged ties to suspected terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, sources said.

Four Bin Laden operatives were convicted in New York on Tuesday of conspiring to blow up two U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998, killing 224.

Sentencing for Ressam is scheduled for June 28, but delays are now expected given Ressam's cooperation.

Authorities, including the FBI
Please see CRIME, A10

Consumer Hopes Deflated by Japan's Economic Woes

Deflation: The world's second-largest economy finds itself in a downward spiral.

By MARK MAGNIER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

TOKYO—Noriko Kanbayashi and her husband tried to buy a condominium in the early 1990s only to lose out repeatedly to other buyers. Finally in 1993, a small three-bedroom opened up and they grabbed it, even though its \$415,000 price tag severely stretched their budget and locked them into a 30-year mortgage.

Eight years later and a world apart, their investment is worth half what they paid for it, leaving Kanbayashi furious at the banks for allowing her family to get into

such trouble and at the government for ignoring the broader debt problem.

"How come we are made to suffer so much?" Kanbayashi said. "In 20 years' time, our house won't be worth anything."

Like a cancer, deflation is eating away at the world's second-largest economy. Japan is the only advanced nation since World War II to experience such serious price declines, leaving policy-makers in uncharted economic territory. Japan's deflation has become a drag on global growth at a time when the U.S. economy is down and American exporters could benefit from a more vibrant trade partner. Wholesale prices in this country have dropped steadily over the last three years, while retail prices excluding fresh

Please see JAPAN, A4



CAROLYN COLE / Los Angeles Times

President Bush greets Gov. Gray Davis. "We have an agreement to disagree, but it is a big disagreement," Davis said of Bush.

INSIDE

Nearly 200 Wildfires Throughout Florida

The state's prolonged, record drought is blamed. Thick smoke was thought to have played a part in multiple highway pileups. A5

California Leads Nation in Youth Gangs' Growth

Immigration and drugs have spurred a dramatic rise in youth gangs over the last 30 years, a report says. A7

Muscle Cells Implanted in Bid to Mend Heart

Researchers have implanted arm muscle cells in an attempt to heal a heart attack victim. A9

Court Files Heighten 'Survivor' Drama

CBS put its best spin on a former contestant's testimony that, if borne out, casts skepticism on the show's veracity. D1

Laker Coach Jackson May Laugh Last

Phil Jackson receives criticism casually, and often with a smile, as if none of it can touch him. B1

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