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Mystery disease not flu; virus or toxin suspected

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Medical detectives scored their first breakthrough yesterday in the search for the cause of the "legionnaires disease" that has killed 23 persons.

Researchers almost completely ruled out influenza, including swine flu, and suggested instead the disease may have been caused by a virus or toxin, a chemical agent that could be in such everyday items as plastics, paper or soap.

There were two new deaths yesterday that have not been officially linked to the disease by state health officials. The two victims had attended the American Legion convention and had symptoms of the disease, hospital spokesmen said.

Health officials said they wouldn't be able to say whether the two deaths were linked to the disease until today at the earliest. Officially, 23 persons have died and 138 are hospitalized.

A new crop of cultures being grown in a state laboratory here will be harvested this morning and should further pin down the exact cause of the disease.

Meanwhile, eight investigators from the city's Health Department and a consultant from the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta were checking downtown city hotels.

The team will visit the six hotels used by the 161 persons who were stricken by disease at the legion convention last month. The investigators will test carpets, wall paper, air conditioning, among other things to find a possible environmental cause of the disease.

"There is a possibility that we will never find the answer," said state Health Secretary Leonard Bachman. But he promised to continue the investigation "for a year or two years if it is needed to get to the bottom of it."

The new deaths were both from southwestern Pennsylvania. Elva Hamilton, 73, of Upper St. Clair, died in Pittsburgh's St. Francis Hospital, and Earl Cox, 63, of Muse in Washington County, died in Washington Hospital.

Earlier yesterday, Bachman said the

number of cases reported began decreasing Tuesday and no cases have been reported since then which began in the past two days.

"Given the publicity that this has received, we believe the reporting system is good and we are optimistic," he said.

All victims were connected in some way with the four day convention. State health officials say they have no evidence yet of secondary infection, which would mean the disease is not contagious.

Results of the first crop of cultures grown in chicken embryos at the state lab were announced at a news conference in Harrisburg.

"There is no evidence that influenza virus was present in those eggs," Satz said. "I'm 99 per cent sure it's not a flu virus."

It may be another type of virus, Satz said, but if so, "it's going to be an unusual virus."

Bachman said Satz and his team of 14 researchers, working nonstop since Monday and occasionally napping on cots near the rows of incubated eggs and baby mice, face the greatest danger.

"We are using every precaution with our lab people," said Bachman. "They are particularly susceptible."

If the disease, which has symptoms of fever, chills and lung congestion, was caused by a toxin, it's probably something that was spread through the air, Bachman said.

Bachman said there is "acute viral pneumonia going on in Pennsylvania and throughout the country, but it has nothing to do with this." Some of the symptoms of the two are similar.

If the disease is a virus, it may be difficult to ever pin down. A virus can change. At Ft. Dix, N.J., where swine flu was first isolated earlier this year, the virus killed one man and sickened several others, then changed into a tamer form. Several hundred other men were infected, but did not even get sick.

Dr. William Parkin, the state's chief

epidemiologist, or medical detective, said the mystery disease is unique.

"I'm not saying it's never occurred before," he said. "But the type symptoms we're seeing, the lack of secondary cases ... it isn't ringing a clear bell for us."

If the disease is a toxin, Bachman said, it would be a new one for him.

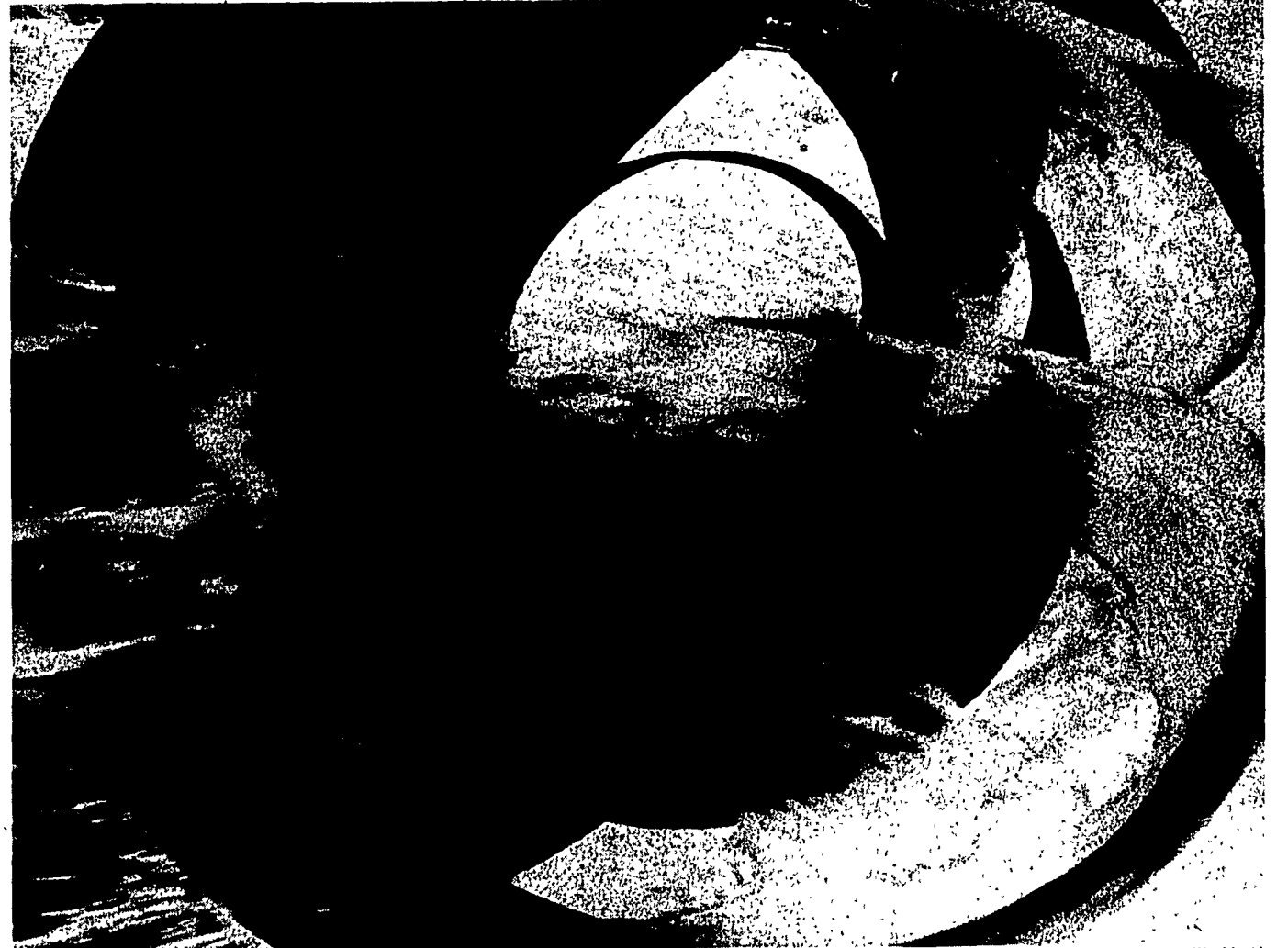
"I'm not familiar with any toxin that through gaseous means or ingestion would cause this type of reaction," he said.

The question of whether the outbreak was caused by sabotage came up again at the news conference. Bachman said he had discussed it with law enforcement agencies, but that he considered it unlikely.

"I think there is some natural cause to this ... I have been practicing medicine long enough to be baffled by diseases people get."

Satz agreed. "It's almost impossible to spread something like that through sabotage. I just don't know how it could be done."

At the lab, on the fourth floor of an abandoned tuberculosis hospital in a rowhouse area of North Philadelphia, researchers plan to harvest several sets of cultures over the next several days. The cultures are grown in mice, eggs and monkey cells from tissues taken from infected persons.



Into the maelstrom ...

The fountain standing in the courtyard in front of the Theater Arts Building takes on another dimension in this tightly cropped and tilted photo, reminding one of the maelstrom in Jules Verne's "Journey to the Center of the Earth."

Photo by Barry Wyshinski

Reagan gains six more delegates

By UPI

Ronald Reagan made his first trip to the northeast yesterday since choosing Pennsylvania Sen. Richard Schweiker as his running mate, and picked up half a dozen previously uncommitted delegates in New York and New Jersey.

Reagan aides unveiled four new supporters in the New Jersey delegation and two in the New York delegation as Reagan and Schweiker sought to exploit Reagan's ticket-balancing selection of the liberal Schweiker three weeks ago.

Besides the New Jersey and New York converts, Reagan picked up the support of Louisiana delegate Robert Livingston. President Ford, refusing to be goaded by the Reagan camp into naming his running mate before his own nomination is assured, said through a spokesman, the No. 2 spot on the GOP ticket will be

filled "in the traditional manner" if Ford is the nominee.

And Watergate, an issue that may not die despite nearly everyone's stated desire to kill it, floated back to the top yesterday.

In interviews with the Washington Star and the Scripps-Howard newspapers, Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter said it would be unfair and politically harmful for him to use Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon as an issue, although the Watergate scandal itself is fair game.

Within the Republican party, the wisdom of Ford's apparent consideration as a running mate of John Connally, whose name is linked by many to the word "Watergate," was questioned again.

Sen. Robert Griffin of Michigan,

Ford's convention floor manager, noted there are "pluses and minuses" attached to a Connally vice presidential candidacy, mainly his indictment and later acquittal on bribery charges. Sen. Howard Baker, often mentioned as a vice presidential possibility himself, praised Connally, but said, "We all have our warts."

Presidential press secretary Ron Nessen, asked about the wave of anti-Connally sentiment among some members of Congress, referred to Ford's decision to ask convention delegates and other party leaders to list their running mate preferences by mail.

"The President has established what he believes is a sound procedure to gather the views of members of Congress and this is the proper way for

members of Congress to express their views," Nessen said.

He also said Ford intends to name his running mate after he is nominated, if that happens, and thus less than a day before his choice would be voted on at the convention.

Connally has started to attack his critics, referring specifically to Wednesday's visit to the White House of GOP Reps. William Cohen of Maine and Thomas Railsback of Illinois. Both voted in the House Judiciary Committee two years ago for Nixon's impeachment and now have asked Ford to listen to some of his predecessor's tape recordings involving Connally.

"I'm not going to stand by, vice presidential prospects or not, and let them besmirch me any longer," Connally said Wednesday night.

Report says nuclear sites lack adequate protection

WASHINGTON (UPI) — U.S. nuclear installations are inadequately protected against possible attack by terrorists, with most guarded by only two men with revolvers and shotguns, according to a congressional report released yesterday.

Reps. Morris K. Udall, D-Ariz., and Paul E. Tsongas, D-Mass., releasing the report on behalf of a House subcommittee, said they were especially concerned because the Nuclear Regulatory Commission itself acknowledged the security deficiencies, but many had not been corrected.

Udall and Tsongas said the commission was particularly worried about possible success of attacks by "three or more ... well-armed, well-trained persons, who might possess inside knowledge or assistance."

"The commission believes that such groups might possess explosives, machine guns, anti-tank weapons, and helicopters," their statement said. "Yet materials presented to the subcommittee indicate that, at present, unclear installations are protected by as few as two guards armed with .38 caliber revolvers and shotguns."

They said a July 20 letter from NRC Chairman Marcus A. Rowden revealed that security deficiencies were found at all 15 facilities handling plutonium or highly enriched uranium.

"A subsequent review found that

seven of the 15 had continuing deficiencies despite the earlier investigation," Udall and Tsongas said.

The congressmen also expressed concern about possible sabotage of nuclear power plants "resulting in release of harmful quantities of radioactive substances into the environment."

"While there is considerable dispute regarding the existence of groups that might be motivated and equipped to undertake such an act, most expert opinion holds that reactors can be designed and operated so that there is minimum risk of sabotage," they said.

But they said there were serious questions "as to whether this design and operational vulnerability had been generally achieved at existing nuclear generating facilities."

The congressmen also found inadequate the methods used to account for nuclear materials.

"There is reason to doubt whether present accounting techniques are sufficiently accurate to detect the absence of nuclear materials in quantities sufficient for a bomb," they said.

"The NRC should conclude either that the threat to security is overblown and that existing protection systems are adequate, or they should decide the threat is or could well be of major proportions and that much more stringent measures are needed."

House Demos push voter registration bill

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Republicans called it a "sloppy mess" and "an invitation to fraud," but House Democrats forged ahead yesterday with a post card voter registration bill although its chances of enactment this year are small.

The measure was resurrected in the Rules Committee and quickly sent to the floor after former Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter, the Democratic Presidential nominee, phoned Speaker Carl Albert last week.

The bill would set up a mass mailing of post card registration forms to all eligible voters in the nation, with states monitoring the returns to establish which persons are qualified to be placed on the rolls. The registration would cover only federal offices, not state or local elections.

The bill came up for debate yesterday with a vote tentatively scheduled for Monday. The Senate will wait for the House bill.

Albert conceded President Ford will undoubtedly veto the bill.

"I doubt if we can override the veto," he said, "but that does not relieve us of

our responsibility of doing what we have always stood for, and that is making it possible for as many eligible voters as possible to be registered."

He also estimated that, if all eligible voters in the nation were registered, "I guess 75 per cent of them would vote Democratic."

Rep. Bill Frenzel, R-Minn., said, "I resent the way this sloppy mess was

presented to us."

Rep. Delbert Latta, R-Ohio, said, "this bill is an outright invitation for fraud in federal elections."

"You can go out and write down names off of tombstones and mail them in," he said, "and you can also send in a card saying a certain party has moved and get him removed from the rolls."

Rep. Frank Thompson, D-N.J.,

manager of the bill, said it has safeguards against fraud, starting with creation of a Voter Registration Administration within the Federal Election Commission to oversee the program.

The present measure was approved by the House Administration Committee last year but languished in the rules panel until Carter's telephone call.

USG given no voter registration forms

By KATHY O'TOOLE
Collegian Staff Writer

The Undergraduate Student Government has not yet received any of Centre County's 13,700 voter's registration cards for campus distribution, Paul Stevenson, director of USG's Department of Political Affairs, said yesterday.

Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners John Saylor said the postcards would definitely be distributed on campus although he was unsure when or how many cards would be distributed.

Saylor said distribution of the postcards was as follows: 3,750, Democratic County Chairman; 3,750, Republican County Chairman; 750, State Elections Commission office; 750, League of Women Voters and 4,700, Centre County Board of Elections.

Of the 4,700 postcards received by the County Board of Elections, Saylor said only 1,700 have been distributed. "Rather than distribute all the postcards on the first day we decided to keep 3,000 cards on reserve," he said, "We'll wait to see where they are moving and where they are needed."

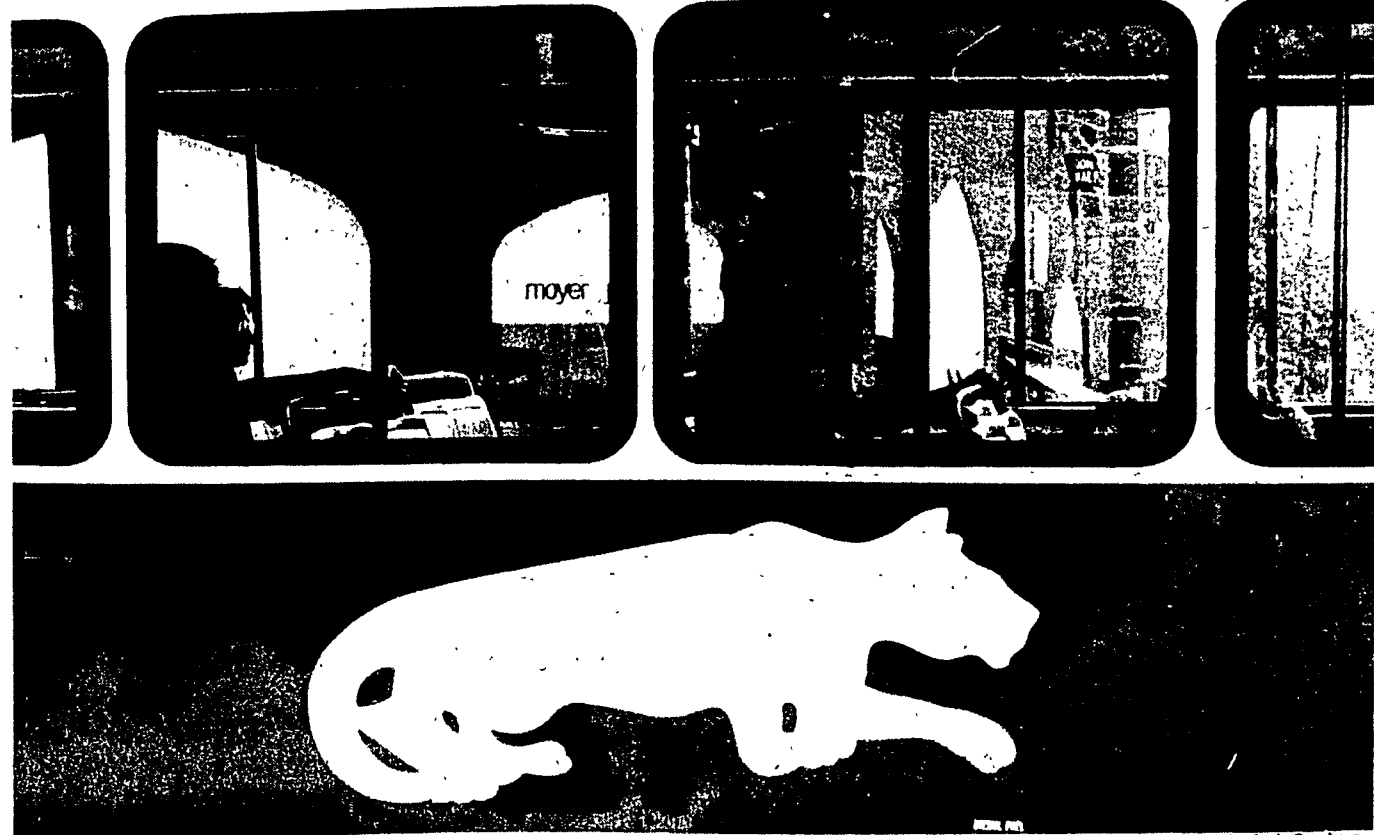
According to Saylor, a study made by the Centre County Planning Commission revealed that 57.3 per cent of the unregistered voters over 18 in Centre County are in State College Borough. He said distribution of the cards will be based on where the unregistered voters are.

Saylor said there would be a second printing of the postcards by late August and Centre County would receive more cards at that time.

Stevenson, who had hoped to have the cards in time for Fall Term registration, said, "My biggest concern is getting enough cards. We'll need at least 10,000 cards at the very minimum." Stevenson also plans to have a field registration at the HUB in mid-September.

Saylor said he has agreed to help instruct people in filling out the registration cards properly. He said cards not properly filled out would be rejected.

Saylor said he urges anyone filling out a card to include his or her phone number even though this item is optional. "That way, if a card comes in with inconsistencies or uncompleted, our office can phone the person and attempt to clear up any discrepancies," he said.



Lion on the Loop

The latest addition to the Campus Loop bus system is the giant white emblem of the Nittany Lion painted on the side of the blue buses.

Photo by Andy Gumberg

Senate okays annual tax break to offset student school costs

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate voted last night to create a tax credit to help offset the costs of higher education and approved sweeping changes in estate taxes.

When fully implemented, the two provisions, added to an omnibus tax bill, would cost the Treasury 3.1 billion a year in lost revenue.

The tuition credit would benefit most families with members enrolled in college or vocational school. The credit would go as high as \$250 per student.

The major change in the estate tax would be to raise from the current \$60,000 to the equivalent of \$198,000 the amount of estate that could escape taxation.

The effect of the increased exemption and other liberalizations is to tax only the wealthiest 2 per cent of estates. Currently, the tax applies to 7 per cent.

The tuition credit was approved by

voice vote after the Senate rejected, 68-20, an attempt by Sen Edmund S. Muskie, D-Maine, chairman of the Budget Committee, to kill the credit.

No similar provision is in the House version of the tax bill.

The tuition credit, proposed by Sen. William Roth, R-Del., would start out at \$100 per student on July 1, 1977, and rise by \$50 a year until reaching the maximum \$250 in 1980.

The credit, which would cost the Treasury \$1.1 billion a year by 1981, could be used to reimburse the taxpayer for tuition, fees, books and equipment but not for food or dormitory expense.

Subtracted directly from taxes owed, the credit would be available to the student, if he files a tax return, otherwise to his parents.

The credit would apply only to the costs of undergraduate or vocational school and not for graduate courses.

Before settling the issue of the tuition credit, the Senate defeated 48 to 42 a motion by Sen. Lowell Weicker, R-Conn., to extend only existing individual tax cuts and kill the rest of the bill.

Weicker, Muskie and others contended the massive tax bill has been so weighed down with special-interest provisions that it contains more bad than good.

Weather

A rule of thumb: Good weather in State College doesn't last very long. Cloudy and damp today with a few showers, especially this morning. High of only 73. Slowly clearing, breezy and cool tonight, low of 56. Becoming mostly sunny and comfortably cool tomorrow, high near 76. Partly cloudy and cool Sunday, high around 75.