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Santa Monica Daily Press

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Lawyer charges fraud over parking impacts

City provided 'doctored' info, neighborhood says

ANDREW H. FIXMER
Daily Press staff writer

The Santa Monica City Council was given "fraudulent" and "misleading" information about the number of cars a new parking structure would generate when they approved it years ago, the lawyer for a nearby neighborhood said Monday.

"City officials looked at a map in their offices and marked arbitrary intersections," said Lee Grant, attorney for the Pico Neighborhood Association. "They never counted one car at any of these intersections. The city council was given doctored, fraudulent information."

Attorneys for the city and the college disagreed, arguing that the court should not take into account data from the most recent study because it wasn't available when the project was approved.

"Environmental impact studies take a lot of time to prepare and of course things are going to change," said Cara E. Silver deputy city attorney. "(The city) tried to take into account future improvements but we could only use the information we had at the time. Therefore it would not be appropriate to take

into account other studies after the (report) was approved by the city council."

"(The city) tried to take into account future improvements but we could only use the information we had at the time."

— CARA E. SILVER
Deputy city attorney

The city report done before the project began found only 750 new vehicles would cross the intersection at Pico Boulevard and Seventeenth Street. But when city officials studied the same intersection in March 2001 for a separate project, they estimated traffic increases would be closer 4,200 cars.

The traffic consultant the city hired for the parking garage project chose not to study

See PARKING, page 3

Predatory pricing or money grab for banks?

Appeals court battle over ban on ATM fees gears up

BY DAVE DANFORTH
Daily Press staff writer

While Santa Monica's battle to ban ATM fees intensifies, the court file continues to grow.

When big banks attacked Santa Monica's bid to stop them from double-charging customers who use ATM machines, what followed was a battle over obscure laws and fine print.

But you'd never know it from the reams of briefs appearing before federal judges. The legal niceties are buried in an avalanche of economic arguments about unfair competition, free choice and bank consolidation.

The new arguments, appearing in law briefs from groups claiming an interest in the ATM fee case, focus less on legal argument and more on simple persuasion.

Now in the hands of a U.S. Appeals court in San Francisco, a judge will determine if ATM fees are predatory pricing or a money grab bag for banks. Lawyers for Santa Monica and San Francisco — both cities that attempted to ban ATM fees — presented oral arguments in the case last month. It's unknown when the circuit court will rule on the appeal.

Cities fight for the little guy

The national battle began in April 1996, when two large banking networks cleared the way for surcharges by lifting restrictions

See ATM, page 4



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Attorneys representing Meg Ryan speak to reporters Monday outside the Santa Monica Courthouse. The actress was awarded a restraining order against a Florida man.

Ryan gets restraining order against stalker

By The Associated Press

Actress Meg Ryan won a three-year restraining order Monday against a stalker who claims he's her husband and broke into a Malibu home he thought belonged to the "Kate & Leopold" star.

Last year, John Michael Hughes was convicted for trying to sneak firearms into the Crawford, Texas, ranch of then President-elect George W. Bush in December 2000.

Hughes, 30, of Navarre, Fla., was sentenced to six months in jail and released last August after pleading guilty to the misdemeanor Bush charge.

On Jan. 6, he was arrested at a Malibu home that belonged to Andrea and Tomas Ryan, but the owners were not related to the actress.

Sheriff's deputies searched Hughes' car and found whiskey, wine, \$2,700 in cash, a magazine featuring Ryan on the cover and a night vision scope, according to court documents.

Hughes faces a misdemeanor charge of unauthorized entry for the break-in.

Meg Ryan, meanwhile, sought a restraining order against the man in Santa Monica Superior Court.

The star of "You've Got Mail" and "Proof of Life" did not appear in the

courtroom Monday, but sent a statement saying Hughes' actions were "alarming" and "caused me to be concerned and fearful for me and my family's safety."

Hughes, sporting a yellow jail jumpsuit and dark circles under his eyes, acted as his own attorney.

Judge Alan Haber asked him about his alleged relationship with Ryan.

"Meg has been my wife for over a year now," Hughes said, adding that Ryan was denying their relationship because she was angry. "My wife is a little upset with an incident we had a few months ago."

He claimed he married the actress on Nov. 11 at a ceremony in Vancouver, Canada.

In reality, the 40-year-old Ryan is the single mother of a 9-year-old son and was divorced last year from actor Dennis Quaid. She was later linked romantically to actor Russell Crowe, her "Proof of Life" co-star, but that relationship has since ended.

Psychiatrist David Glaser, hired by Ryan to testify at the hearing, said Hughes represented a danger to the actress.

"There's not a fiber of doubt in my mind that Mr. Hughes is delusional," Glaser testified.

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ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★★ Speak your mind directly. Others love brainstorming with you if you can remain open. Manifest the ability to grow and develop in a new direction. Friends surround you, ready to pitch in and make your life easier. Emphasize your goals. Tonight: Make an important meeting.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ Deal with others on a one-on-one level. What makes sense to someone else will eventually make sense to you, once you have a lengthy conversation. Let someone give you necessary feedback. Work on money agreements. A boss has good advice. Listen. Tonight: Get together with a special friend.



GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★★ Others reach out for you. Let someone express what's on his or her mind, even if it is on your dime. Make other calls as well. Take an overview when others present their points of view. Popularity could make your work difficult to complete. Express concern. Tonight: Follow someone's suggestion.



CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★ Deal directly with someone. Your sense of humor comes out while others seem to be struggling for answers. Be willing to reorganize your work if need be. Reach out for a partner or associate who has unusual savvy. Verify what you hear. Tonight: Off to the gym.



LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ Allow your imagination to emerge. Your brightness and directness make a difference to those you deal with. Creativity emerges if you work with someone and let this person take responsibility. Remain confident. You can pass the limelight to someone else. Tonight: Ever playful.



VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★★ Your family reverses a stance, knowing clearly what is important to them. Now the decision is up to you. Allow someone to explain his or her opinions, though certainly put in your two cents. Every person has strengths. Mobilize strengths, not weaknesses. Tonight: Get a good night's sleep.



LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Meetings continue to be a source of success. You always do well in a group, especially right now. A partner or associate needs your time and attention. Work as a team, and success follows you. Feedback gives unusual insight. Return calls. Tonight: Flirt the night away.



SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★ Your finances could cause distress if you're not careful. Be sure about what is financially important to you, especially with home, family and long-term investments. What keeps running through your mind could be valid. Speak. Tonight: Pay bills.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ You beam, and others note the glow. Speak your mind openly to a loved one. Trust that this person will listen. You might want to share your opinions, but also make it a point to make them interesting. Express your dynamic personality. Tonight: Just ask.



CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★ Settle down. Don't feel like you need to express every idea today, right now! Mull over a financial decision, getting feedback. Your intuition takes you down many paths and directions. Listen to your inner voice. Right now, you don't need others' opinions. Tonight: Curl up with a good book.



AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★★ Friends surround you. Network and use your ability to relate to many. Right now, you do well in meetings. Present ideas in front of many people rather than one-on-one. Your intelligence guides a decision, but so does someone's feedback. Review a matter close to your heart. Tonight: Be where your friends are.



PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★ You cannot get around a boss's demands. This person wants what he or she wants and will not settle for less. You know what you think, but you might be wise to hush up. Use your intuition when dealing with a higher-up and eliminate a problem. Tonight: In the limelight.



WEATHER

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Tomorrow ...	Mostly Sunny	High—68°F	Low—45°F
Thursday ...	Partly Cloudy	High—67°F	Low—46°F



QUOTE of the DAY

“Always be smarter than people who hire you.”

— Lena Horne

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LOCAL



Neighborhood may force college to move garage

PARKING, from page 1

more intersections in the Pico neighborhood because many were not through streets and traffic data suggested students traveling to the parking structure would not cross through residential neighborhoods, Silver said.

"According to the study, the traffic paths students are expected to travel would not take them through many residential neighborhoods," Silver said.

City officials said 39 percent of students are expected to come from the freeway to the west, while an additional 14 percent would arrive from north, traveling through the residential portion of the

Pico neighborhood.

Silver said that studies found only small traffic increases at the intersections of Olympic and Pico Boulevard with 17th Street, which therefore meant that intersections with Delaware Avenue and Michigan Avenue to the north would not be affected.

"We found there would be no increase to the south (of Pico) so we assumed the same would go for the intersections at Delaware and Michigan," Silver said. "Of course if there is no increase at Olympic Boulevard and Pico Boulevard, there wouldn't be a change north of there too."

Grant said because the information provided in the original report was incor-

rect, the entire document should be revoked and a new study done.

Pico residents want the city and the college to include the new data in the new study they're requesting, and possibly force the college to move the parking garage to another intersection.

"Any new EIR will use the same fraudulent data, and new construction projects would further compound the problem by referencing the same bad information," Grant said.

However, the parking structure is expected to be fully operational in less than a month because the lawsuit never asked that construction be delayed.

Judge Terry B. Friedman said he would study each side's arguments and would "expeditiously" make a decision in writing.

"There's a lot to look over in this case," said Chris Harding, attorney for the college. "It will take some time to sort through it all."

Federal judge sentences NASA hacker to prison

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A federal judge on Monday sentenced a hacker who used the aliases "Shadow Knight" and "Dark Lord" to 21 months in prison for breaking into computers belonging to NASA, Oregon State University and an Internet service provider.

U.S. District Judge Dean D. Pregerson sentenced Jason Allen Diekman, 20, of Mission Viejo on three hacking cases that included the wiring of money through Western Union Corp., and the stealing of credit card numbers and 8,000 minutes of long distance services from AT&T Corp.

Diekman has been jailed without bail since April 18, 2001.

The judge also ordered Diekman to pay \$87,736 restitution, and once he is released, Diekman's computer use will be restricted for three years.

While free on bond after pleading guilty in November 2000 to charges of hacking NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena and NASA computers at Stanford University, Diekman used his home computer to hack into the Oregon State University system in Corvallis 33 times through April 2001.

In the third case filed by the U.S. attorney in San Jose, Diekman pleaded guilty in September 2001 to federal charges of hacking into Internet Solutions Inc., an Internet service provider, causing \$50,000 damage.



The Associated Press

A Los Angeles city firefighter calls instructions as others, unseen in the hole at lower right, work to free a construction worker trapped when loose soil caved in on him, burying him up to his chin. The hole was being drilled in the side of a hillside for support pilings.

Man rescued from hole in Pacific Palisades

By The Associated Press

A construction worker became trapped in a hole on a Pacific Palisades hillside for 90 minutes Monday before firefighters rescued him in apparent good condition.

The man was able to walk after being dug out by firefighters, but he was taken

to a hospital for examination, Fire Department spokesman Jim Wells said.

The man, in his late 20s or 30s, was not immediately identified.

The cause of the accident was not immediately known. Firefighters had clear dirt from around the man and shore up the hole to extricate him.

Natural gas leak triggers explosion

By Daily Press staff

One person was injured and two apartments were destroyed Friday night

after a leaking natural gas line sparked an explosion at a building on the 1300 block of Berkeley Street.

The hurt person was treated at the scene for minor injuries, according to the Santa Monica Fire Department. Two of the building's seven apartments were deemed "unsafe to enter" by the fire department, while a third was damaged. The explosion occurred at about 8 p.m. Friday.

A contractor had worked on a heater in one of the damaged units earlier that day, the fire department said.

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LOCAL

Federal government backs banks in ATM fee battle

ATM, from page 1

they had previously imposed. Banks were charging customers \$2 as a "foreign fee" to use another bank's machine.

Then came the "surcharge" — another \$1.50 fee, tacked on directly by the "foreign" bank owning the ATM. It was widely scorned as a money grab by banks but the banks claimed they actually lost money — \$8,000 on average — on each ATM.

Consumer advocates and some state attorney generals scoffed at the notion, claiming that banks were profiting handsomely by firing tellers while customers turned to ATMs for cash.

general from California, Nevada and Minnesota, as well as the California Public Interest Research Group and consumer groups arguing for the ban. The banks enlisted big business groups.

But the most strident arguments against the ban came from the Pacific Legal Foundation, which weighed in for free enterprise, indexing one of its arguments as "There's no free lunch."

Where the cities claimed the surcharges were aiding big banks by forcing customers to switch to them and avoid fees, Pacific Legal Foundation said the real story was entirely different. It argued that small banks that can't afford ATMs, don't deserve to survive, and if customers don't like the ATM fees, they could switch to the "cash back" feature of debit cards.

Banks get big backing

Lurking behind the economic arguments is the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, the division of the Treasury Department that not only regulates nationally-chartered banks, but also fights off consumer activists that want to protect customers from predatory activities like paycheck lending with 300 percent interest rates.

The OCC is maintaining a "political agenda," noted consumer groups, arguing that the OCC competes to persuade banks to become chartered by it, rather than by the states. The OCC has issued several opinions in banking law that gives Congress the sole authority to regulate banks and fees. States and consumer groups say that's not true; that parallel banking laws have specifically invited regulators to come in with stricter consumer protections on banks.

The banking industry scoffs at cities like Santa Monica and San Francisco for attempting to "re-structure competition in the banking industry."

The cities, however, are taking aim at the OCC, urging the judges to "remind the agency of its duty to uphold, rather than find ways for banks to avoid the law."

And the Pacific Legal Foundation claims the ban amounts to "government-imposed wealth distribution" and that \$3.50 is a small price to pay for the ability to get a machine to deliver up to \$300 in cash on demand at 3 a.m. in spots as obscure as Kazakhstan.

On one Pacific Legal Foundation claim both sides are likely to agree: Consumers, it says, are "neither lazy, nor stupid, nor helpless." While the argument backs the notion that they can avoid ATM fees if they try hard enough, in Santa Monica and San Francisco, customers chose to illustrate those traits by passing the ban.

**The banking industry
scoffs at cities like
Santa Monica and San
Francisco for attempting to
"re-structure competition
in the banking industry."**

Both Santa Monica and San Francisco are dominated by Bank of America and Wells Fargo, with a market share of 72 percent in San Francisco and 86 percent in Santa Monica, according to the Santa Monica city attorney.

In October of 1999, the Santa Monica City Council, dubbed by some as the ruling authority in a "people's republic," prohibited banks from charging ATM fees. Three weeks later, San Francisco voters followed suit. The day after the San Francisco vote, the banks sued.

Joined by the California Bankers Association, banks won a federal judge's order a few days later temporarily setting aside the ban. By July of 2000, U.S. District Judge Vaughn Walker in San Francisco ruled the ban was "preempted" by the Congressional National Bank Act, a law passed in 1863 that allows banks to charge whatever they want as part of normal business practice.

Proponents of the ban said the combined \$3.50 fee amounted to 17.5 percent for a \$20 cash withdrawal. Banks claim the bans are impermissible because they are allowed under federal charters to charge whatever fees they want.

When federal judges recently heard arguments in appeal, they heard attorneys

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U.S. investigates wrong killing in Afghanistan

BY PAULINE JELINEK
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — American forces have returned to investigate claims they killed the wrong people in a raid in Afghanistan, and they should apologize on the spot if the claims prove true, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld said Monday.

U.S. soldiers have gone to the area in Uruzgan province where special forces killed 15 or 16 people and arrested 27 in a nighttime raid two weeks ago, Rumsfeld told a Pentagon press conference.

Responding to a question, he said he had no information about reports that the Americans were apologizing for mistakes and had been paying \$1,000 to the family of each man killed in the raid.

"I do know that U.S. soldiers have gone back into the area, I believe with Afghans, to try to determine the facts," he said.

"I would hope that if, in the course of that, they discover that somebody was in fact killed who should

not have been killed ... that American forces would express apologies. I can't say that I know that, but I would hope they would."

After days of insisting they had struck the right people, Pentagon officials said last week they would investigate the incident. The interim Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai said it also was investigating.

On the subject of reported payments to families, Rumsfeld said Monday:

"I know nothing about that," he said. Rumsfeld said he recalled Karzai telling someone in the U.S. military that "in the event that it turns out that people were in fact killed who were friendly to the interim government, that would be unfortunate and it would be helpful if some way could be found to compensate them."

The Pentagon has insisted U.S. special forces attacked a legitimate military target in the raid on an ammunition dump that intelligence analysts believed al-Qaida or Taliban forces were using.

But some Afghans said Taliban renegades were handing over weapons to Karzai's government at the site. They said some pro-Karzai figures were killed and others, including a police chief, his deputy and members of a district council, were among those arrested.

Meanwhile, the top Marine Corps general for Central Asia and the Persian Gulf is moving his command post from Hawaii to Bahrain in another sign that the U.S. anti-terror campaign in Afghanistan and elsewhere won't be over any time soon.

Little ones for liberation



Muhammed Sadek/Associated Press

Palestinian children carrying signs calling for the Liberation of Palestine run from tear gas fired by Israeli troops during minor clashes in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Monday.

Argentine president suspends all court challenges to banking freeze

BY BILL CORMIER
Associated Press Writer

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — President Eduardo Duhalde took the unprecedented step Monday of suspending all court challenges to an unpopular banking freeze for 180 days in an attempt to shore up the teetering financial system.

The move, outlined in an executive decree, follows a surprise Supreme Court ruling Friday declaring the banking restrictions unconstitutional and sets up a likely showdown among the three branches of government.

The restrictions, which severely limit access to Argentines' savings deposits and triggered mass protests, were imposed Dec. 1 by Duhalde's

predecessor to stop a run on the banks. Argentines had removed \$2 billion from their bank accounts in one day alone.

Duhalde has said that giving Argentines unfettered access to their savings accounts risks collapse of the financial system and could even spur some foreign banks to pull out of the country.

"We will allow the people to spend their money, but we will have to take great care with our next steps so that the financial system doesn't collapse," Duhalde told reporters Monday.

He said he hoped to bring greater stability to the economy so that later this year he could begin relaxing the banking restrictions further.

Lawyer Gregorio Badeni, a consti-

tutional expert, told The Associated Press he thought the decree was highly questionable.

"First of all, it is not valid because no one can stop people from going to the courts to defend their rights," said Badeni, adding that a 180-day suspension goes far beyond what is reasonable.

"In this case, you just can't tell someone that their cases before the judiciary are being suspended; you cannot deny a person the right to access to the courts."

The decree came after a weekend in which Duhalde's economy minister rolled out a broad recovery plan that includes a move to float the peso against the dollar fully for the first time in 11 years, starting Wednesday.

Judge flips coin to decide where kids spend holidays

By The Associated Press

TRENTON, Mich. — A judge is being criticized for flipping a coin to decide where children of divorced parents would spend Christmas.

The children's grandfather, Norman Bresinski, has threatened to file a judicial misconduct complaint against Wayne County Circuit Judge Helen Brown.

"In 22 years of being in local, state and federal courts, I've never seen anything like this," said Bresinski, a former police sergeant. "She made a mockery of the judicial process."

Brown, 53, wouldn't discuss the incident. Brown's boss criticized the move.

"Tossing a coin to resolve a parenting time dispute is unacceptable," Wayne County Circuit Co-Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly told the Detroit Free Press for Monday's editions. She said it displays a lack of sensitivity for the seriousness of the process.

The Dec. 14 coin toss determined that Bresinski's granddaughters would spend Christmas with their father, not their grandparents, who had custody of the girls at the time.

Philip Colista, former chairman of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission, said the coin flip violated Michigan court rules. He said judges are supposed to decide issues based on the law, the facts and the best interest of the children.

The lawyer for the girls' father, David Bousquette, said the judge wasn't legally obliged to give the Bresinskis any consideration in the decision.

"I think the judge was trying to get them to work it out," Ronald D'Avanzo said. "I don't think she did it in any way to abrogate her decision making."



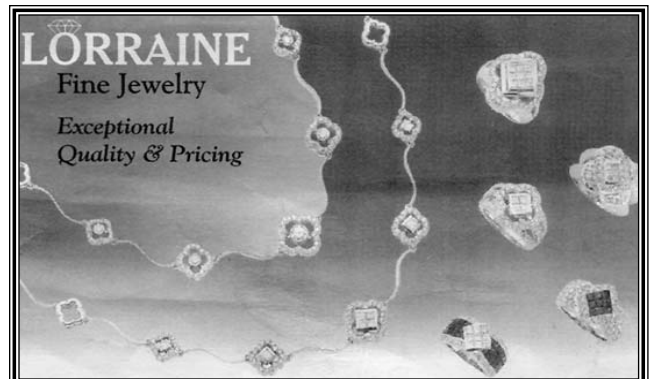
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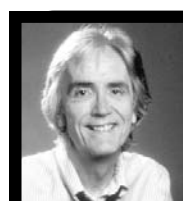
Yesterday's answer

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2-5

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Woman allegedly stabs boyfriend in butt

In October, police in Fairbanks, Alaska, charged Gail Bergman, 41, with second-degree assault for stabbing her live-in boyfriend in the buttocks with two paring knives in a domestic squabble. Bergman denied it, claiming that the boyfriend actually showed up at the door that night naked with the two knives already stuck in him. According to police, Bergman's main concern seemed to be that she had finally relocated the knives: "I've been asking him where those knives have been for the last three weeks. Why is he walking around town with knives sticking out of his butt?"

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BACK PAGE

Entrepreneurs fight DEA rule banning hemp food

BY MICHELLE MORGANTE

Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO — The energetic 60-year-old woman with cropped white hair and seagreen eyes wouldn't fit the usual profile of a drug pusher. But inside her cozy condominium, there's trouble cooking.

The Drug Enforcement Administration is steeling itself to put Gertrude Spindler out of business and make sure she keeps her wares away from would-be buyers.

There's no meth lab in Spindler's bath tub, nor an Ecstasy ring based in the garage. But the retired packaging designer from Switzerland is using a family recipe to create her "Alpsnack" snack bars that include hempnuts. And under a recent DEA ruling, she may as well be selling heroin.

Hempnuts come from hemp, an industrial plant grown outside the United States that is related to marijuana. Fiber from the plant long has been used to make paper, clothing, rope and other products. Its oil is found in body-care products like lotion, soap and cosmetics.

Entrepreneurs like Spindler argue the nuts and oil from hemp are among nature's best sources of essential fatty acids — omega-6 and omega-3. Twice a day, the San Diego woman swallows a spoonful of raw hempnuts, which she says improves — no pun intended — her joints.

"I hate chemicals. I like natural things," Spindler said. "God has given us those natural things and we should use it."

But the DEA is saying no. In October, the agency declared that food products containing even trace amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC — the psychoactive chemical found in marijuana — were banned under the Controlled Substances Act.

It ordered an immediate halt in the production and distribution of all goods containing THC that were intended for human consumption. It gave until Feb. 6 for all such products to be destroyed or removed from the United States.

The ruling has galvanized hemp-product manufactur-

ers, who contend the DEA violated the law by failing to hold hearings or accept public comment before issuing its declaration.

The Hemp Industries Association, which represents U.S. hemp product manufacturers and Canadian hemp exporters, has challenged the ruling in the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in San Francisco and asked for a stay of the Feb. 6 deadline.

"God has given us those natural things and we should use it."

— GERTRUDE SPINDLER
Entrepreneurs

Meanwhile, association members are continuing to produce and sell their goods, arguing that since the DEA did not issue a standard to measure THC levels they will follow standards set by Canada: By that scale, the THC is so negligible it could be considered undetectable — and certainly far below any level that would produce a "high."

"There is no such thing as a true zero in nature. It's like how the government allows trace levels of arsenic in water or alcohol in orange juice," said David Bronner, who leads the association's food and oil committee and is chairman of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap, an Escondido-based company.

Bronner and association members argue that hemp is not marijuana, just as field corn used for livestock feed is not the same as sweet corn eaten by humans. Smoking industrial hemp does not produce a high, just a big headache, he said.

"But it's part of this whole drug warrior ideology where they just associate anything that looks like cannabis to drug culture," Bronner said. "They're making it a drug-

war issue."

DEA spokesman Will Glaspy said the agency simply is upholding the law.

"A lot of people did not understand the law. The clarification says if a substance contains THC and is intended to enter the body then it is an illegal product," Glaspy said.

Hemp and marijuana, as the DEA sees it, are different parts of the same plant, he said. And THC in any amount is an illegal drug.

So far the DEA has not taken enforcement action against people continuing to produce hemp food products, Glaspy said. What will happen after Feb. 6 remains to be seen.

Hemp activists say Congress intended to exclude hemp products from anti-drug laws. They say the government should treat hempnuts as it does poppy seeds, which are exempted from regulation despite trace levels of opium.

Moreover, Bronner and others hope the court rules in favor of hemp producers, which would settle the question of legality and allow the hemp market to grow.

In the United States, hemp is a \$100 million industry, mainly in textiles and cosmetics. The food product sector was worth \$5 million last year, but has been doubling in size for the past three years, Bronner said.

Hemp is being used to make energy bars, waffles, tortilla chips, milk-free cheese, veggie burgers, salad oil, bread and other edible goods. A hemp-milk product backed by actor Woody Harrelson is in the wings.

"It's just accelerating and the sky's the limit. ... If we get the DEA out of it, it's just going to boom," said Bronner, who compared the hemp industry today to where soy producers were 20 years ago.

Spindler launched her one-woman Alpsnack business last year. She produces 1,500 bars a month and sends them to distributors in six states. The threat of being shut down just as she's starting worries her.

"It hurts. But I have some very strong feelings that it's going to work. It's going to be settled," she said. "It's a good product. I just believe in it."

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