

Legislators hire each others' relatives to avoid nepotism statute

AUSTIN (AP) — State officials are forbidden to hire their relatives. But somewhere in the past members of the House and Senate got the idea it was okay to hire each other's relatives.

"It could be we've been wrong all this time," says Charles Schnabel, secretary of the Senate.

"It has been a longstanding practice. I guess it has gotten out of hand," says Speaker Rayford Price.

The nepotism statute says no

legislator "shall appoint, or vote for, or confirm the appointment of" certain close relatives—or, and this is the big or—persons closely related to other members of the legislature.

No distinction is made between the House and Senate. They are considered to be one body—the legislature.

Under the law, the husband of a first cousin of a legislator's wife is too close.

Violation of the law is a mis-

demeanor punishable by a fine of \$100 to \$1,000.

It has been argued that the relatives are employees of the House or Senate and not employees of the legislators, that they are actually hired by the speaker or the lieutenant governor or the secretary of the Senate.

Travis County Dist. Atty. Bob Smith says the courts probably would call this a subterfuge.

Besides, the speaker freely ad-

mits: "The members hire their own secretaries and assistants."

The practice has gone unchallenged. There are no court decisions or attorney general opinions on it.

"We're going to do some work in this area," says Smith, the district attorney.

He suggested a possible solution that avoid prosecution.

"I may talk with the speaker and the lieutenant governor after the election and tell them we

haven't been enforcing this law but that we're going to start and that we're giving everybody a chance to clean house," he said.

Asked why he would wait until after the election, he said: "I'm in a position to ruin people, and I don't want to ruin people just for the sake of ruining people."

The most recent revelation of relative-swapping involves the children of Sen. David Ratliff of Stamford and Rep. John Allen of

Longview. John and Lynnora Ratliff were paid \$15,167 as employees of Allen over a period of five years.

Peggy and Barbara Allen received \$19,456 over a comparable period as employees of Ratliff.

Barbara Allen was a student at Abilene Christian College from 1966 to 1970. Ratliff says she did research, clipped newspapers and was subject to call.

John Ratliff worked at the Sierra Blanca ski area near Rui-

dosco, N.M., from Nov. 2 through March 14, 1972. He drew more than \$100 as an employee for the final month of February 1972.

The district attorney's agreement to put some of the state payroll who will work could result in a conspiracy to commit a crime of state funds, punishable by a prison sentence of two years.

Drill Team defends title on April 7

A new kind of Freshman Drill Team is preparing at A&M for defense of four straight national titles in Washington, D. C., April 7.

Observers feel the 1971-72 Fish Drill Team will go down as one that made a comeback, digging up more skill and concentration when it counted most.

"The team made a slow start, but once it found itself, it really spurted ahead," senior adviser Louis Ullrich evaluated. The FDT lost to Texas A&I in the first two competitions. The turn-around began two weeks ago and reached full stride at the State of Texas Championship last weekend.

"The fish will be ready again for the nationals," Ullrich promised.

Trophies from Texas' first state championship meet for college teams were presented Wednesday to the university through President Jack K. Williams. The FDT swept all first place awards, its first such accomplishment since the UT-Austin Scabbard and Blade meet in 1970.

"I wish the Fish Drill Team its usual good luck at the national meet," Dr. Williams commented, "and that Washington area Aggies will go out and support the team."

Chief sponsor J. Malon Southerland said the FDT has been assigned an early afternoon marching slot in the competition, 27th among 34 men's teams. Eleven coed units also will compete.

Commander Mark Roberts of Killeen will take the FDT on to the District of Columbia National Guard Armory floor at 2:50 p.m. CST. The National Intercollegiate ROTC Drill Contest consists only of the fancy marching phase, scored by a Washington-headquartered military unit.

Elections

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least 25 qualified voters in the city before their name is placed on the ballot. Before, candidates did not have to file such a petition.

Amendment 5 changed the method of recall of councilmen by voters. Previously the law said that a petition signed by 40 percent of the voters in any given ward was enough to recall a councilman even though they are elected at-large.

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