

Medicaid woes

Few Brazos County needy approved for medical aid

By PAUL BARTON
Battalion Reporter

For the poor person in Texas, it is a good idea not to get sick. Chances are he will have to treat his illness himself.

More than 1.3 million people in this state fall into a category known as the "medically needy." Their incomes fall below the federal poverty level, but they are unable to qualify for Medicaid, the federal-state

health insurance program for the poor. And in most instances they have nowhere else to turn.

Conceived as a plan to help low-income individuals receive the same type of medical care enjoyed by the rest of society, Medicaid falls deplorably short of that goal in both Texas and Brazos County. Because of restrictive eligibility requirements, Medicaid recipients make up only 18 percent of the state's

poverty population. According to a report published by the Texas Rural Health Field Services Program, the majority of needy individuals in Texas — 1,324,000 people — are not provided with health care services.

In Brazos County, the situation is much the same. Figures released by the Texas Department of Human Resources, the state's welfare agency, show that only 2,753 people were eligible to receive Medicaid benefits in this county as of August 1978. That's only 3 percent of the county population, yet 17 percent are below the poverty level.

One of Lyndon Johnson's famed "Great Society" programs, Medicaid began in 1966. It combined state and federal funding and was designed to serve people already on welfare.

In Texas, a person qualifies for Medicaid if he is eligible for either the Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) or the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs.

AFDC provides financial aid to low-income families missing one parent. SSI, on the other hand, provides monthly checks to needy individuals who are 65 or blind or disabled.

These two groups are required by the federal government to be included in every state's Medicaid program. Each state has the option of providing coverage to several other groups as well, including the medically needy.

Thirty states, plus Guam, Puerto

Rico and the Virgin Islands provide this coverage. Texas does not.

As a result, many individuals find themselves in a predicament similar to the one faced by Ramona Guillen of Bryan. She is 61, can't speak English and has been told by her doctor that she is permanently disabled. She has heart problems and has to be checked by her doctor every three weeks.

"She can't do housework, and she can't get around too well," says Mary Guillen, her daughter-in-law.

Ramona Guillen has no income and her requests to qualify for Medicaid through SSI have been turned down. Her son and daughter-in-law are trying to help her with the medical bills, but they say they can't keep it up much longer.

"People who really don't need it get on it easily," Mary Guillen says of Medicaid. "But the people who really do need it can't get on."

Holly Rees, district manager for Social Security, says 50 percent of initial SSI applicants are turned down. "Social Security rules are quite strict," he says. "A person has to be severely disabled to qualify."

The applicant's medical records are examined by the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency in Austin,

which decides whether or not the person is badly enough disabled to qualify.

Mary Guillen says they have not turned in her mother-in-law's records yet.

Currently, there is a bill in both the State House and Senate that could lead to a remedy of the medically needy problem. If passed, it would authorize a "demonstration project" that would extend Medicaid coverage to the medically needy in Travis County.

The feasibility of extending this same coverage to the rest of the state would also be explored, and the Texas Department of Human Resources would submit a report on the project to the next Legislature.

In the meantime, there is no place in this county where the medically needy can turn. Many counties have hospitals that offer free care to the poor, but Brazos does not. The free services provided by the Brazos County Health Unit are mainly preventative ones, such as immunizations.

Inflation plan may risk a recession

United Press International

DALLAS — Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal Tuesday said the Carter administration is prepared to risk recession and a rise in unemployment in its battle against inflation and hoped to see progress against rising costs by late summer.

Blumenthal, addressing the Center for International Business' annual convention, said the administration was improving the trade balance and had strengthened the dollar abroad but still was "failing" against inflation.

In February, consumer prices experienced the greatest increase in 4 1/2 years, but Blumenthal said that trend started several months ago and it will take more time to judge how President Carter's 6-month-old anti-inflation plan is faring.

"In the next few months — I think in the summer or early fall — we hope to see a significant downturn in this unacceptable trend," he said. "We must take the risks entailed in maintaining and, if necessary, intensifying our anti-inflation measures."

Later Blumenthal told reporters fighting inflation would require slowing the economy, which could cause a rise in unemployment.

"A slowdown of the economy from its present pace to the level we anticipate may well mean an increase in the 5.7 percent unemployment rate," he said. "But what we don't want to see is a recession and unemployment up like 8 percent. It's a long way from 5.7 percent to 8 percent."

Blumenthal also admitted a recession could come about but the administration hoped to hold it to a minimum.

"Nobody sets out to cause or risk a deep recession," he said, "but I do believe that we have got to cool down the economy — it grew unacceptably fast in the last quarter and it continues. The only way to slow it down is to continue tight monetary and fiscal policies. But many predict that will lead to recession."

"But we must make something bring about a slow down. If we don't, what we get (eventually) is worse recession."

"Our objective must not be and is not only to bring the rate of inflation down from the double-digit range," he said. "It is to set in place a complex set of policies dedicated to continued, persistent reduction in inflation over time," he said.

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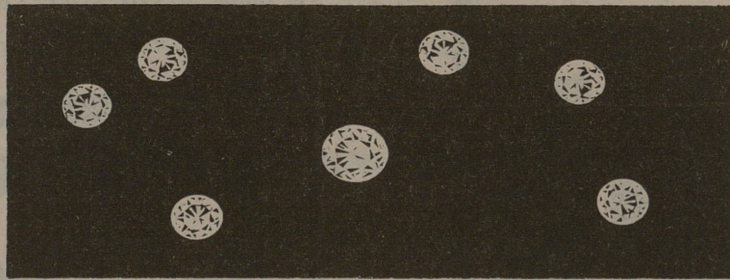
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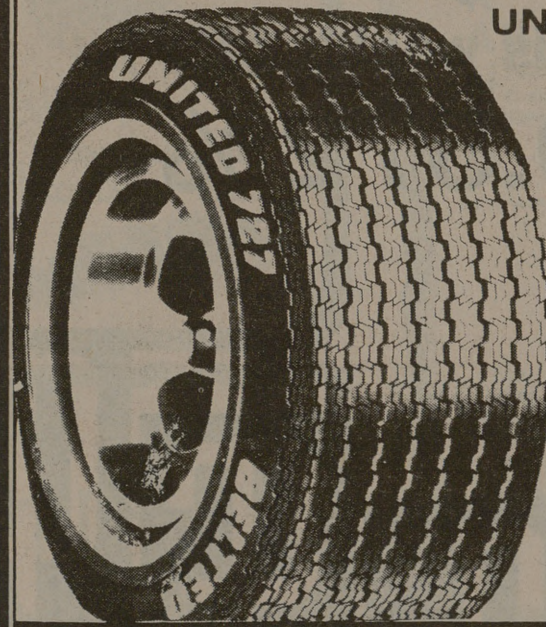
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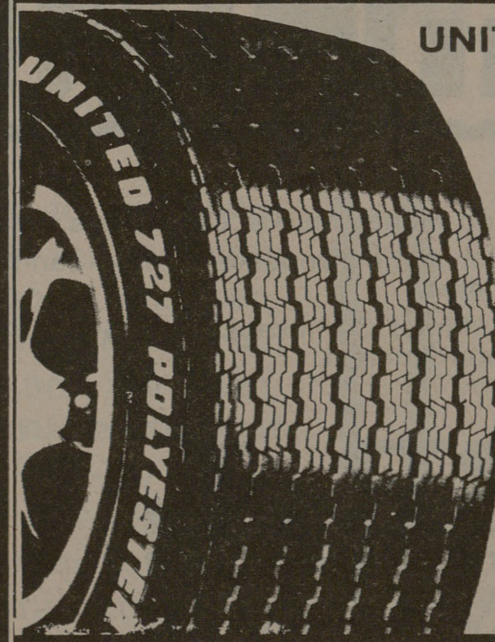
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