

State

Indictments returned, nursing home officials chided

United Press International
CALVESTON — A grand jury returning murder indictments against a Texas City nursing home in the deaths of eight patients Wednesday issued a report blasting some authorities regulating the home and investigating the "horror story."

The panel worked off and on for two years to return 23 indictments at midnight Tuesday against the Autumn Hills Convalescent Center. Four of the center's administrators also were indicted, a district attorney said.

In its report, the 12-member

grand jury said Texas' laws were not severe enough against those who neglect the elderly.

Also in that report, Galveston County District Attorney James Hury was accused of "throwing up obstacles" to the investigation, and the Texas Health Department was cited as needing a "complete investigation from the administrator in Austin to the low man on the totem pole."

The nursing facility is one of 17 Autumn Hills Convalescent Center Inc. homes within 100 miles of Houston. The company and the indicted employees were charged

with abuse and neglect leading to murder by omission of seven women and one man during 1978 and 1979.

Assistant District Attorney David Marks said 21 more indictments were expected to be returned after a new grand jury is impaneled Monday.

The grand jury indicated it believed doctors were aware of the neglect, and that those doctors should be "investigated and severely penalized for their actions (or lack of actions) in this horror story."

Autumn Hills chain owner

Robert E. Gay of Houston said he did not understand the indictments.

"I was just talking with one of the ladies who was indicted and she said she has talked to no one in the case for two years," he said. "The grand jury built this case as they went along. We absolutely don't know what to think about it. We're puzzled."

The names of the individual defendants were withheld pending notification.

Gay said Autumn Hills had been operating for 18 years and had the highest rating of any nursing home chain in the state.

"Out of the 17 centers, 80 percent of them are rated superior, the highest rating. No one else gets close to that," he said.

The grand jury questioned some 200 witnesses and checked the records of every patient in the Texas City nursing home from September 1977 through August 1979.

Autumn Hills lawyer Carol Vance said the investigation was triggered by a "disgruntled former employee," Betty Korndorffer, who went to work for the state Health Department as a nursing

home inspector after leaving a position as nursing supervisor at Autumn Hills' Friendswood center.

Mrs. Korndorffer is the wife of Galveston County Medical Examiner William Korndorffer.

The eight Autumn Hills patients who prosecutors allege died

of neglect were: Edna Mae Witt, Oct. 16, 1978; Betty Cappony, March 7, 1978; Elnora B. Breed, Nov. 20, 1978; Freddie Mae Larsen, July 14, 1978; Francisco Coss, Nov. 16, 1978; Alberta Welcome, April 5, 1979; Fannue Burns, May 9, 1978, and Laura Bell Johnson, April 23, 1978.

McAllen vote fraud inquiry underway

United Press International
McALLEN — A Hidalgo County grand jury Wednesday investigated allegations of voter fraud in McAllen involving Mexican nationals, duplicate registrations and votes cast by deceased voters, city officials said.

McAllen City Attorney Ted Calisi said more than 450 voters are being checked by the grand

jury after Mayor Othal Brand complained of possible voter fraud.

"I spoke with the grand jury yesterday (Tuesday) and I believe the panel is still convening today (Wednesday)," Calisi said. "I reviewed the allegations, and irregularities appeared, if not outright fraud."

Calisi said Brand employed

computers to cross-check names and addresses of registered voters in McAllen and found enough questionable voters to "change the election results in two seconds."

Brand was unavailable for immediate comment.

Among irregularities cited by Calisi were:

- Registered voters whose

addresses are vacant lots.

- Mexican nationals from Reynosa, Mexico, with valid voter registration.
- Voters registered two or three times in different districts with one-letter changes in spelling of names or one-day changes on birthdates.
- Deceased individuals registered to vote in the Saturday election.
- Registered voters casting more than one ballot in absentee polling.

department awarded in brutality lawsuits and economic issues have stirred the McAllen mayoral contest this year.

Opposing Brand for the top executive post in the Saturday election are Dr. Ramiro Casso, a local physician, and city commissioner Michael Frost.

Funds issued for prison

United Press International
AUSTIN — Comptroller Bob Bullock said Tuesday he was issuing \$6.7 million in checks to allow the Texas Department of Corrections to complete its purchase of about 5,900 acres of Grimes County land for a new prison near Navasota.

The comptroller said he decided

to release the funds for the prison land acquisition after legal advice from the attorney general's office and a request from prison director W.J. Estelle Jr.

Texas is under federal court order to relieve overcrowding conditions that currently force about 2,400 inmates to sleep on cell floors, and the new Grimes County

prison is part of the plan to relieve that overcrowding.

The 3rd Court of Civil Appeals last week dissolved an injunction preventing the state from proceeding with the purchase, although Grimes County residents who initially filed the suit indicated at that time they would appeal the decision to the Texas Supreme Court.

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