

State

South Texans refuse measles immunizations

United Press International
Hundreds of parents have refused measles vaccines for their children in south Texas, despite a

Senator vows to be objective

United Press International
AUSTIN — Sen. Hector Uribe, D-Brownsville, indicated Tuesday he would remain objective regarding the governor's decision to re-submit nomination of McAllen Mayor Othal Brand to the Texas Board of Corrections.

Brand, 61, was re-elected to a four-year term last Saturday after a bitter campaign against Dr. Ramiro Casso.

Gov. Bill Clements had withdrawn the nomination of Brand last month when the mayor said he could not attend a hearing before the Senate Nominations Subcommittee.

Brand has been accused of ordering videotapes showing McAllen police officers brutalizing prisoners to be destroyed. He denied the allegations, but several lawsuits have been filed against him and the McAllen Police Department by former prisoners who said they were beaten by police.

At the time Clements withdrew the first nomination, Uribe said he wanted an assurance that Brand would not be renominated after the Legislature adjourned on June 1 and the Senate would not have an opportunity to confirm or refuse the appointment.

Since Brand is a constituent of Uribe, the senator has the option of invoking senatorial courtesy and "busting" the appointment.

But Uribe indicated he would not make the decision until Brand appears before a hearing of the nominations subcommittee.

"I've asked for a hearing on Othal Brand because there are some serious allegations against him," Uribe said. "I think it behooves the whole Senate to listen to Brand's answers to the allegations."

However, the senator said he was concerned about the appointment because Brand would make decisions affecting the Texas prison system.

spreading epidemic of red measles that has infected more than 300 Texans and killed an infant.

Oscar Garza, a Harlingen immunization specialist with the Texas Department of Health, said at least 134 confirmed cases of measles have been reported in the lower Rio Grande Valley with 40 of those occurring in the past two weeks.

"It (the epidemic) is not slowing down," said Garza. "This thing is out of control. Now it's hopping from area to area."

Garza, who said the only measles-related death in the na-

tion this year was a 11-month-old Harlingen infant who died last month at a Galveston hospital, said about half of the measles cases in four south Texas counties have occurred in young children.

He added that half of the 134 infected persons have been hospitalized and another 66 measles cases in the lower Rio Grande Valley are suspected, but have not been confirmed.

In El Paso, at least 144 measles cases have been reported with another 33 suspected cases, and health officials of the west Texas town see no end to the epidemic.

"I have declared an epidemic

and we are requiring all school-age children to get a vaccine, regardless of whether they've already been immunized," said Dr. Bernard F. Rosenblum, El Paso city-county health director.

Rosenblum said health officials have found that children given a measles vaccine before 1968 are capable of contracting the disease. He explained that dead viruses were used in pre-1968 vaccines instead of live viruses now in use.

Rosenblum said approximately 7,000 vaccinations have been administered in El Paso in recent weeks.

"We're taking kids out of school

if they're not immunized," Rosenblum said. "I don't think we've seen the end of this."

Garza, who noted that the Texas epidemic is the worst in the nation other than a red measles outbreak in Philadelphia, said health teams traveled last week into the measles-saturated poor sections of south Brownsville, but parents refused to allow their children to be vaccinated.

"We went in there with two nurses, clerks and four aides knocking on doors. We even had a man with a megaphone going up and down the streets, asking for people to bring their children for

vaccinations," Garza said. Although the medical team was prepared to administer at least 500 vaccinations, only 36 doses were administered during two days of door-to-door efforts.

"It's very frustrating when you know you can stop the disease and more cases keep popping up. It's very frustrating," Garza said. "Maybe they have the feeling that if God wills it, no matter what, they'll come down with the disease."

Other Texas cities have reported measles outbreaks, but none as severe as the lower Rio Grande Valley and El Paso.

Houston health officials said at least 37 cases had been confirmed by late last week, but more cases were expected in the weekly report issued Wednesday.

In San Antonio, health officials who expressed concern over confirmed cases of measles, Monday started an immunization campaign, urging parents to bring their children to local health clinics.

Dr. Courand Rothe, San Antonio health department director, said he expected more than 100,000 children to be vaccinated from the seven city health clinics.

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Rabies bill approved by state House

United Press International
AUSTIN — The House gave final approval to a bill Tuesday giving Texas Counties and the State Department of Health emergency powers to handle rabies epidemics, but amended the bill to apply only to carnivorous animals.

The amended bill, passed on final reading by a 79-64 vote, now goes back to the Senate.

Rep. Jerry Clark, D-Buna, called the original bill "an overkill" and offered an amendment to limit the bill to carnivorous animals, so all warm-blooded animals would not be subject to quarantines.

"We've got to recognize that wild animals are the real problems that give us rabies across the state and not domestic animals," Clark said. "When you go messing with people's cats and dogs and your kids, you get into a critical area of their life."

The bill gives counties ordinance-making authority to require registration and vaccination of carnivorous animals to deal with rabies in epidemic situations, and allows the Department of Health to quarantine regions of the state for up to six months to control rabies outbreaks.

Rep. Doyle Willis, D-Fort Worth, said he supported the bill and accused the original bill's opponents of taking up for cats and dogs.

"There's nothing more insidious than rabies," Willis said. "I can't understand how we can take up for cats and dogs and not have an ordinance initiated which might keep one child in Texas from having rabies."

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