

ET CETERA

SHOE



by Jeff MacNelly

State group reviews indigent health care

Associated Press
 AUSTIN — Preventing pregnancies might be the most cost-effective method of dealing with health care for the indigent, said Rep. Brad Wright, R-Houston, chairman of a House committee taking testimony Tuesday on the matter.

"We've got to address that issue," Wright said after a brief session of the House Public Health Committee. "We've already heard it will save money."

The committee was assigned the task of considering four bills recommended by the Task Force on Indigent Health Care, including one that would levy a 1 percent tax on net profits of private hospitals.

Wright said the four measures probably would go to a "friendly" subcommittee chaired by Rep. Jesse Oliver, D-Dallas, author of three of the measures, to be returned for a vote next week.

The first bill to be heard would provide more services and care for indigent mothers and their children. "Basically the indigent are the

uninsured in Texas," said Helen Farabee, head of the task force.

Oliver said his bill would provide prenatal care and birth services for about 50,000 women, resulting in about 150 fewer infant deaths each year.

Dr. David Smith, head of the Brownsville Community Clinic, said he had three patients who needed a Caesarean section but did not have the money to go to a hospital for the surgery. He said he had a "waiting line" of 300 women who did not have the \$400 or \$500 necessary for tubal ligations so they could not have any more children.

"If the state has an obligation to take care of the indigent, do we have the right to stop people from having children?" the committee chairman asked.

Smith said, "I think many of these people would like to have the operation but don't have the money."

Wright said, "It seems to me we should have some means of dealing with repeat pregnancies and the voluntary way may not be the way to do it."

Halt put to no-risk speeding

Associated Press
 BRIDGEPORT — Truckers driving through Wise County "kept the hammer down" on their accelerators after learning the county attorney refused to prosecute traffic tickets appealed to district court, officials said.

But that's all a thing of the past now, said Pat Morris, who took over in January as the new county attorney for Wise County.

The old reputation of refusing to prosecute the tickets led truckers to thunder down State Highway 114 instead of the recommended U.S. 380-287 to deliver their 35-ton loads of sand and gravel to Dallas area construction sites.

"I didn't go to law school for three years to try traffic cases, but Wise County is kind of unique," Morris told the Dallas Times Herald.

A state crackdown on reckless driving produced more than 1,500 traffic tickets last month in Wise County, and Morris promises that a vigorous effort will be made to collect fines on them.

Police and local prosecutors say they hope this enforcement effort succeeds where others have failed. In the past, they say, truckers viewed traffic tickets in Wise County as little more than small annoyances.

"It's been a big problem in Wise County for a long time," Morris said. "All those truckers write a lot of tickets, but it hasn't done a lot in terms of deterrence."

In Wise County, 1,257 tickets were appealed to district court in 1984, and virtually every one was routinely dismissed, Morris said.

Former County Attorney Sam Gallo said he used the policy of dismissing the tickets in district court because his staff was too small and the court docket was overcrowded.

Troopers are scheduled to continue their Wise County crackdown through June. Using a \$50,000 federal grant, five additional police cars patrol Wise County highways 11 days each month.

Wife finishes husband's term

Widow recalls sheriff's job

Associated Press

BIG SPRING — Lucille Merrick tenderly picked up the pair of polished handcuffs.

"My husband had these engraved," said the county's only woman sheriff. She held the steel cuffs up to the window so light gleamed on the block letters spelling her late husband's name, "A.J. Merrick."

She sorted through the rest of the items on the table near her: the pearl-handled Colt automatic pistol; the short, lead-heavy leather club; a set of four sheriff's badges — keepsakes of her and her husband's tenures as Howard County sheriff.

The gun is hers, though she never used it during the 11 months she followed her husband in office. She served as Howard County sheriff from Feb. 7, 1944, to Dec. 31, 1944.

"Working helped me cope," said Merrick, 78.

"My husband died Feb. 3, 1944, from a heart attack," she said. "They buried him the 6th, and the commissioners appointed me sheriff the 7th."

Merrick stayed away from the office when she was first appointed to fill her husband's place. Later, she came to enjoy working in the office.

"If I hadn't had the the responsibility, it would have been much harder," she said. "I would have been alone more. I felt like it was something I must do. My husband was elected to the office, and I felt I had to finish his term."

"I didn't ever lock but one person up. There was a teenager who had given us a lot of trouble. I saw him walking down the sidewalk (in front of the courthouse), so I called to him and brought him into the office, and we arrested him." — Lucille Merrick

Other widows in the nearby counties of Dawson and Glasscock had been chosen to replace their husbands about the same time.

In Dawson County Mrs. Joe Ray ran for re-election after her appointment and won, Merrick said.

"It was not unusual (for a widow to be appointed)," Merrick said. "There were several men who asked for the appointment but the commissioners court and the county judge, James Brooks, asked me to do it. They were very supportive."

Merrick said she concentrated on the administration and office work in her tenure; the chief deputy under her husband, Denver Dunn, was in charge of the field work, she said.

"I didn't ever lock but one person up," she said. "There was a teenager who had given us a lot of trouble. I saw him walking down the sidewalk (in front of the courthouse), so I

called to him and brought him into the office, and we arrested him." Merrick also had a jailbreak during her term in office.

"One of the lesser deputies left the door open after feeding the prisoners," she said. "There weren't very many. We got them all back within a couple days."

"There were always jailbreaks then. We had a combination lock, and after the deputies fed the prisoners, they weren't always careful to see if it was locked right."

Merrick said she didn't regret her husband's career, though it caused many sleepless nights during the 20 years they were married.

"He was a deputy sheriff when I met him, when I was working in the sheriff's and county tax offices in Lamesa," she said. "I didn't mind him being off. He liked that kind of work. He liked trying to figure out why people would do things."

"There were many nights when I stayed up to 3:00 or 4:00, waiting for him to get home. I worried about him. I didn't worry about me. I wasn't out in the field."

When Andrew Merrick first started working for the Howard County sheriff's office, the town was in the middle of an oil boom, and bootleggers had operations all over town.

"It was dangerous to walk down the 100 block of Main," Merrick said. "My husband wouldn't let me walk down the sidewalk by myself."

GI twins 'buddies'

Associated Press

FORT HOOD — James Carpenter is seven minutes older than his brother Jon, but both have been in the Army for exactly the same amount of time.

Sgts. 1st Class James Carpenter and Jon Carpenter enlisted in the Army 16 years ago, in their hometown of Stow, Mass., under the "buddy system," which allows "buddies" to enter the Army together and guarantees they will stay together through basic and advanced individual training.

But the togetherness didn't stop there.

After basic and AIT, both were sent to the same two-week door-gunner course, and then in 1970, both were sent to the same unit in Vietnam.

"You really weren't supposed to have two brothers fighting in a combat situation at the same time," James Carpenter said.

The Carpenters are now together at Fort Hood — for the second time.

In 1970, after fighting with the 282nd Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam, they were assigned to the same unit in Fort Hood. Fort Hood is the only U.S. post to which either one of them has permanently been assigned, and other than a three-year tour in Germany and his Vietnam service, Jon has spent his entire military career at Fort Hood.

Even though they're in the same company again, separate jobs and families give the two little time together.

It sounds as if it would get pretty confusing — two brothers, same initials, same rank and same Social Security number except for the last two digits.

James said his brother gets all the good assignments and jokingly said there must have been a mixup.

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