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Prairie View student's death prompts demands for hospital in Waller County

PRAIRIE VIEW (AP) — The death of an asthmatic university student who had to be transported more than 20 miles to a hospital has renewed calls for an emergency medical facility and a hospital in Waller County.

"We feel that situations are happening so fast now, we need emergency care for Prairie View and Waller County," Prairie View Mayor Ron Leverett said Wednesday. "I do know of two other people who expired en route to a hospital."

Memorial services for Brad D. Wright, 18, a computer science major from Chicago, were held Tuesday at Prairie View A&M University.

Wright was pronounced dead Monday afternoon shortly after his arrival at Bohne Memorial Hospital in Brenham, about 21 miles from the Prairie View campus. He died from respiratory distress after an asthma attack, officials said.

Waller County's only hospital closed in Hempstead in 1985 because of financial problems. Although a temporary emergency room operated at the facility for a few months, it also closed. Attempts to create a hospital district in the

county also have failed.

"We're trying to do anything we can to get a medical facility," County Judge A.M. McCaig said.

Leverett said it may take emergency funding or a federal grant, but officials must do something immediately to provide some form of emergency care in the county.

Wright was in his dormitory room Monday afternoon when he started having trouble breathing. Two friends got him in a car to drive him to the campus clinic, while another one alerted the center.

"He had a long history of asthma," Dr. Emery Owen said. "He was getting his medication home, and apparently he ran out."

Clinic physician Dr. Glenn said he began resuscitation when the student arrived. Wright was comatose. A paramedic and ambulance called to transport him to Brenham in Washington County.

The doctors said it is unlikely patient's life could have been saved even if there was an emergency room or hospital nearby.

Lawmaker: State officials ignored ways to change school financing

AUSTIN (AP) — A special subcommittee heard from a lawmaker Thursday who said his plan for financing public schools had been ignored by the Legislature until a state judge ruled the current system unconstitutional.

"This is a problem that has cried out for solution for more than a decade in this state, but which we have tried to evade and to avoid and to live with," said Rep. Jack Vowell, R-El Paso.

Testifying before a subcommittee of the Select Committee on Education, Vowell described school financing as a "social difficulty (that) doesn't have one and only one direct, correct answer — it may have a number of solutions."

Vowell said Texans have three options if Austin Judge Harley Clark's ruling holds up on appeal.

They can amend the Texas Constitution to keep the present financing system, which Vowell said is inequitable; or they can allow the state to

finance public education totally, which would require very high state taxes.

Or, Vowell said, the state can try to find an equitable system which might discard "some cherished concepts" but would preserve "the most central element — equal treatment under the law" for students, school districts and taxpayers.

Vowell's plan would direct the State Board of Education each biennium to estimate how much revenue would be needed to finance an adequate Foundation School Program, and would authorize the board to establish a state property tax rate to finance at least 25 percent of that program. The remaining 75 percent would come from legislative revenue sources, he said.

Local school districts would collect the state tax money and keep whatever they needed to meet the established per-student allotment.

Surplus collections would be turned over to the state comptroller

for redistribution to property-poor school districts that could not raise enough from the uniform tax rate to meet the student allotment.

"We are, in fact, giving legislative power, in a sense, to a state agency," Vowell said. But he reminded the subcommittee that the Board of Education is an elected body and responsible to the voters.

"Some districts would lose money from the state, (but) most which are having problems would be at least as well off," Vowell said. "Admittedly, this would raise problems for tax-rich school districts."

Vowell said his plan, which would require a constitutional amendment, is not a new idea, and he predicted there would be "variations upon variations" of school finance proposals before the 1989 Legislature convenes.

He said he first proposed his plan in June 1984, and it has been before the Legislature three times but was ignored until Clark's decision a year ago.

Grand jury to hear more on jail death

LIBERTY (AP) — A grand jury is scheduled to hear more testimony Friday from enforcement officers involved in the arrest of a man who died five hours in the Cleveland Jail.

Liberty County District Attorney Michael Little declined to say who will testify.

Seven Cleveland police officers, two deputy sheriffs and state troopers were questioned Wednesday by grand jurors concerning the events leading to the March 16 death of Kenneth Simpson, 30, of Cleveland.

Simpson was arrested for disorderly conduct, officials said, after he quarreled with Officer Tom Yates.

Officers said they stopped Simpson after they found him smoking marijuana in his cell. They said they found Simpson dead in his cell five hours later.

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