

State to combine welfare groups

AUSTIN (AP) — A state health and human services commissioner, expected to be appointed within 10 days, will have the job of developing "one-stop shopping" for needy Texans.

Gov. Ann Richards will appoint the commissioner, who will oversee efforts to coordinate assistance programs that are now distributed among 11 agencies.

The commissioner also will make recommendations to the Legislature to further the one-stop shopping idea, such as a new governing structure and possibly consolidation of some agencies.

The concept, which includes submission of a single budget request for the agencies to lawmakers, was approved last year by the Legislature.

The reorganization is to be complete in 1995.

Commissioner must develop 'one-stop shopping' for needy

"The idea is to have in each community a central office where people can go to just one building to get what they need," said Sen. Chet Brooks, D-Pasadena.

Brooks, who heads the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, told the Austin American-Statesman that people often do not get that help "because there are so many places to go that they just give up."

Targeted services include those offered by the Texas departments of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, Human Services and Health; Department on Aging; commissions for the blind, and the

deaf and hearing impaired; the juvenile probation, rehabilitation and youth commissions; the Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse; and the Interagency Council on Early Childhood Intervention Services.

The reorganization also will create a Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.

That agency will handle reports of child and elderly abuse.

It also will investigate accusations of neglect or abuse by private facilities and by facilities operated by MHMR, which currently investigates itself.

"Investigations need an inde-

pendent agency," said DeAnn Friedholm, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock's special assistant for human services. "When an agency investigates itself, there is always the appearance of conflict of interest. This new department will help put suspicions to rest."

Under the 1991 law, Richards had a March 1 deadline for appointing the new commissioner. Chuck McDonald, deputy press secretary to Richards, said the governor's office approached the selection thoroughly and that it "took a little longer than anticipated."

Brooks and other lawmakers say the delay is not serious, but they want the commissioner on the job as soon as possible.

The commissioner must be confirmed by the Senate but will report directly to the governor.

Albanians cheer victory of opposition party leader

TIRANA, Albania (AP) — Tens of thousands of Albanians cheered Monday as an opposition leader hailed his party's election victory as the end of a "very deep sleep" under Stalinist power.

The Central Election Commission said Monday that the Democratic Party had captured 76 of 97 electoral districts in which results were known.

Returns were not in for three other contests in this poor, mountainous country wedged on the Adriatic Sea between Greece and Yugoslavia.

With a two-thirds majority, the Democrats could change the constitution to force Socialist President Ramiz Alia out of office. Alia has completed one year of the five-year term the last parliament gave him.

Isolated for decades by its hard-line leadership, Albania in 1990 became the last of the Communist states on the European continent to introduce reforms and throw off one-party rule.

The last year has been one of massive hardship. There are few jobs, riots have broken out at warehouses distributing foreign food donations, and people in the cities often go without heat or electricity.

U.S. and other Western diplomats support the Democrats, meaning the new government is likely to attract more foreign aid and technical assistance.

According to the election commission, the Socialists, former Communists, captured only five seats Sunday, with 26 percent of the vote compared to the Democrats' 64 percent.

The Socialists had easily won last year's elections, Albania's first multi-party vote since World War II.

Rubber plant seeks support

Dynagen attempts to remain open despite economic fall

ODESSA (AP) — The manager of the Dynagen Inc. rubber plant said Monday he will call on economic support from state and city leaders to help keep the troubled plant open despite indications from its parent company that closure "appears to be inevitable."

"We do know there are high capital costs involved," Dynagen plant manager Tim Gorman said Monday. "Any solution must be of a long-term nature. We will need substantial relief in a number of areas to maintain the plant's economic viability."

General Tire Inc., Dynagen's Akron, Ohio, based parent, released a study Monday that shows the plant, which produces synthetic-based rubber, should be closed to save money.

But Edward Kalail, General Tire's director of corporate communication, said support shown by local leaders to preserve Dynagen's 250 jobs has postponed a decision about the plant's future.

"The community has gotten behind keeping the plant open," Kalail said. "We have had thousands

of letters and communication come to Akron regarding this very matter. This is the reason we have really looked at this longer than we probably would have after the data showed the plant should be closed."

General Tire, which is one of the nation's leading producers of commercial tires, has given Dynagen and Gorman a one-month deadline for a final review, Kalail said.

Gorman refused to divulge his strategy to save the plant, adding only that he will take his ideas straight to the "people involved."

Perryman said Monday "we just have a tough job over the next month. No one is diluting that this is a piece of cake. But we are going to do everything we can — go full force to solve the problem and keep the plant open."

Last September, Dynagen agreed to pay \$1.4 million in civil penalties for air pollution violations dating back to 1989. It was the largest penalty ever assessed under the Texas Clean Air Act.

Politicians consider effects of Perot as candidate on third-party ticket

Continued from Page 6

In any event, Perot could be a major factor in states where the vote between the two major candidates is close, Buchanan said.

Drives are under way in every state to have Perot's name placed on November ballots as an independent candidate.

Although an independent candidate has never come even close to winning the presidency, there has never been one backed with \$100 million.

The last candidate to wage an independent candidacy was John Anderson in 1980. The former Republican congressman, whose campaign was severely short of

cash, got just 6.6 percent of the vote.

With so many disenchanted voters, "There's room out there for a third-party candidate who could run stronger than Anderson did," said Democratic analyst Bob Beckel.

Beckel, who managed Democrat Walter Mondale's 1984 presidential campaign, said "analyzing whom Perot would take votes from is very difficult to do because nobody knows what he stands for — other than that he's a billionaire who's very successful."

Perot seems liberal on some social issues, but also is pro-business and for a strong defense. At the same time, he opposed the Persian Gulf War.

A self-financed campaign would not face the same federal spending restrictions imposed on the Democratic and Republican candidates, whose races are financed by tax dollars.

But getting on the ballot in all 50 states is a daunting prospect.

For instance, in Texas, Perot must round up 54,000 signatures by May 11 from voters who didn't vote in Texas' Super Tuesday primary.

Perot's staff has set up a toll-free telephone number in Dallas that is being answered by volunteers with 100 phones to assist in the state-by-state petition drive. A spokeswoman said the phone banks have been getting 2,000 calls an hour.

Treasury changes check-cashing policy

Continued from Page 6

State Treasury officials took a look at the practice "in light of everything that's going on in Washington," Toohey said.

However, he has emphasized that the state's check-cashing service was not like the operations of the House bank in Washington, which was closed after revelations that members of Congress had written hundreds of bad checks.

That bank covered overdrafts with money from other congressmen's accounts.

The congressmen often were not informed of them. Instead, the checks were treated as a

salary advance.

In Texas, the checks were processed for the Treasury by First City Texas in Austin. When a check bounced, either the bank or the Treasury notified the lawmaker, who had time to cover it before the bank processed the check again.

The bank charges ordinary customers \$20 for an overdraft. But Toohey has said it did not charge that fee to the Treasury, and that the Treasury did not charge lawmakers for bad checks.

Few checks were returned, Toohey said. About 300 checks were cashed for lawmakers and other elected officials last year, and about 100 in 1990, with most in the \$100 to \$200

range, he said.

Ethics leaders, who had urged an end to the Treasury's check-cashing practice, favor the new arrangement.

"This is a much better way to do it," said State Ethics Commission Chairman George Bayoud.

Suzy Woodford, executive director of Common Cause, said, "That certainly makes more sense than the Treasury doing it."

Texas Commerce Bank was not chosen for any particular reason, other than it has a statewide network and Treasury officials believed it could handle the task, Toohey said.

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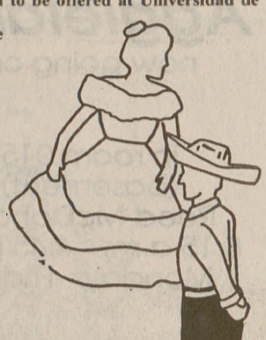
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