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Texas Legislature trims \$140 million, calls for a full audit

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Loan from Lobbyist

According to deed records, in 1983 House Speaker Gib Lewis gave a promissory note to one of the Capitol's most powerful lobbyists and in seven years has never reported it as required by state law.

State law requires lawmakers to

report all outstanding loans on a personal financial disclosure form filed each year with the secretary of state.

Attorney Allen Hill, representing Lewis on two misdemeanor ethics charges, said neither Lewis nor lobbyist L. Dean Cobb could recall details of the transaction and both doubted the note ever existed.

Close Friends, Roommates

In 1982, Lewis and Cobb together bought a 563-acre ranch located in Burnet County by signing two notes totaling \$386,000 to the landowners.

They were lawmakers-roommates in the 1970s, and both took the now infamous vacation to Mexico paid by a San Antonio law firm.

But Lewis, elected speaker in 1983, promised to sever his business ties with Cobb after he caught media and legal flak for the close association.

Mired in Notoriety

After that vow, Lewis then assumed both ranch notes and gave Cobb a \$30,619 note to buy Cobb's share of the ranch, according to deed records.

The controversial ranch has since mired Lewis in notoriety at every turn. Media reports disclosed he developed with ex-wife Gail Lewis a company with exotic game provided by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department for unclear compensation, and questioned its basis for agricultural-use property tax status.

Loan Details Unclear

While Lewis and Cobb may doubt the loan paper ever existed, the promissory note was reported mentioned in the sale deed and in a deed trust which

recently, the Texas Hospital Association filed suit against the National Heritage Insurance Company and the Department of Human Services. Filed in state court, the litigation addresses inadequate payments to hospitals and administrative problems associated with the state's Medicaid program.

Medicaid, a joint state and federal program to provide health care services to the poor, covers about 1.5 million Texans who are disabled, elderly, pregnant women and children.

For the first 10 months of 1990, Texas hospitals lost an average of \$840 for every Medicaid patient treated, according to THA information. "In addition, in 1989, Texas

hospitals provided \$2 billion in uncompensated care," THA President Terry Townsend said. "Hospitals have to make up these losses. They do this through higher costs to paying patients and through higher local taxes, if the hospital is tax supported," he noted.

"Paying patients, insurers and other third-party payers are no longer willing to accept such cost shifting. Most hospitals have exhausted their reserves, and local taxpayers are overburdened. Unless government reimburses hospitals adequately for the services delivered to Medicaid patients, many hospitals will have to cut services to survive, and some will close," Townsend noted.

"During the last several years, THA has pursued every legislative and regulatory avenue to achieve adequate Medicaid funding," Townsend said in a recent Capitol news conference. In 1989, the 71st Legislature passed House Bill 1345 which expanded Medicaid coverage and included direction to the Texas Department of Human Services to restore 7.5% of the 10% budget reduction enacted at the governor's request in 1986. To date, only 4.5% has been restored in hospital payments. The 1992-93 TDHS budget request does not seek priority funds to correct payment inadequacies.

Texas hospitals also are plagued by lengthy delays in receiving reimbursement due to slow review of administrative challenges to claim denials, Townsend said. "Litigation is now the only option remaining."

When other agencies make cuts, services get delayed or canceled. Bridges, prisons or water reservoirs don't get built," Townsend said. He added, "But, when health care is cut, people still get sick or injured and die. And we must be there to deliver those services, regardless of the person's ability to pay."

There are two areas I believe President Bush should have talked about that were either not explained or not mentioned. First, I believe the President should have commended the Israelis for their restraint in retaliating against Iraq. Their restraint is thwarting Hussein's tactics to turn the Iraqi-Alled Coalition War into an Arab-Israeli War.

Second, although I am pleased that he addressed the importance of providing for America's needs, I was disappointed that President Bush did not outline how we would achieve these objectives or how they would be funded. We are all aware that our country is in dire need of a domestic energy policy. Three essential components to achieve this goal must include energy conservation and efficiency, increased domestic production and increased use of alternative fuels. The energy crisis we experienced in the '70s was indicative of our country's need for a domestic policy then as it is in 1991. By becoming self-sufficient, we can curb our dependence on foreign oil, and avoid the implications of an energy crisis.

Our country's infrastructure needs are critical for safe and maximum use. Congress will soon be considering legislation that will determine the infrastructure needs of our highways, bridges and roads for the next five years. As a member of the Public Works and Transportation Committee's Surface Transportation Subcommittee, I believe Americans should know this issue is on its way to being addressed.

Affordable health care is vital to maintain an active and productive workforce. Urban hospitals are now beginning to experience the losses suffered by rural hospitals. Health care must be as affordable to health care providers as it should be to its recipients. Like health care, the education needs of our children are paramount to the productivity and efficiency of our workforce. Our country cannot afford to have an unskilled or illiterate workforce in today's competitive global market. I would prefer to hear President Bush outline goals in this area and how they would be achieved.

The agenda for the 102nd Congress is substantial, and although the war in the Middle East is shadowing our domestic needs, we must take the effort to forge ahead and meet the needs of all Americans.

Rep. Saunders to chair Environment Affairs Committee

Texas House Speaker Gib Lewis, announced recently he has appointed Rep. Robert Saunders, D-La Grange, to chair the House Committee on Environmental Affairs. Saunders has also been appointed to the State Affairs Committee.

"Rep. Saunders has the background and knowledge to play an important role in crafting the legislation that will be considered in these committees," Lewis said.

"The committee system is the real backbone of the legislative process in the House. The system works because of the dedication and hard work that Rep. Saunders and all the other members devote to their committee assignments," the Speaker said.

The Committee on Environmental Affairs has jurisdiction over air, land and water pollution, and regulation and control of wildlife and fish and hunting and fishing regulations.

The Committee on State Affairs deals with matters of state policy and administration of state government.

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