



THE EAGLE LAKE HEADLIGHT

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To THE EDITOR & YOU

Why are hospitals closing?

The Balanced Budget Act of 1997

The Stock Market is booming, unemployment is at historic lows, and the U.S. economy is the picture of fiscal health. So why are so many hospitals in Texas in danger of closing this year?

In 1997, President Clinton signed the Balanced Budget Act (BBA), a law designed to balance the federal budget and begin the long, difficult process of paying off the nation's multi-trillion dollar debt.

Congress intended the BBA to produce \$44 billion in Medicare hospital savings for five years - the largest contribution to balancing the budget

and the biggest reduction in Medicare spending ever.

However, in the case of Medicare, the cuts have gone too deep and are now jeopardizing hospitals - and the health care - across the nation.

Medicare payment cuts to hospitals are expected to total \$71.5 billion - almost twice the initial forecast!

The Texas share of this larger cut is estimated at \$5.7 billion over the five years from 1997 to 2002.

Even worse, most of the BBA cuts - about 80% of the total over five years - occur in fiscal years 2000, 2001 and 2002, which means that the BBA's negative effects will be even more severe in the next two years.

The Unintended Consequences of the BBA

At Rice Medical Center, Medicare makes up approximately 50% of total revenues. But, because of the BBA's Medicare cuts, Rice Medical Center and hospitals across the nation are being forced to make very difficult decisions that directly impact the services available to our patients.

To make matters worse, the uninsured population across the nation is growing by more than a million patients every year.

In Texas, 25% of the states population - more than 5 million Texans - are uninsured.

And many of these uninsured patients seek care in hospital emergency rooms, the most expensive place to deliver care.

At the same time, Medicaid and private payers emulate Medicare payment policies, so hospital payments are being reduced by other payers as well.

Consequently, hospitals are scaling back or eliminating vital services like home health care, skilled nursing facilities and rehabilitation services. Funds for new equipment are harder to obtain, construction projects are being postponed or canceled, and hospitals are scrambling to overcome cash flow problems to maintain their accreditation and facilities.

To protect Rice Medical Center and preserve our access to local healthcare, please call or write your U.S. Representative and Senator today. Urge them to co-sponsor HR 5220, "The Essential Rural Hospital Preservation Act."

David N. Keith, FACHE
Hospital Administrator
Rice Medical Center

Gov. Bush kicks off 'ChildSafe'

Gov. George W. Bush last week kicked off "Project ChildSafe" with the first distribution of gun safety locks to children at Knox Elementary School in San Antonio.

The San Antonio Police Department and the Bexar County Sheriff's Department began distributing the first shipment of safety locks in the \$5 million program that aims to provide 5 million free child safety locks and firearm safety information to Texas parents over the next five years.

The program is funded through a state grant from the Governor's Criminal Justice Division using monies collected from court fees paid by convicted offenders.

The non-profit agency National Shooting Sports Foundation was selected to administer the program and will deliver locks based on population data to local police and sheriff's department for distribution. Each household can receive two locks at no charge and no registration is required.

Committee hears utility debate

Advocates and opponents of electric utility deregulation squared off last week at a public hearing of the Joint Electricity Restructuring Legislative Oversight Committee.

The committee was created by Senate Bill 7 (SB7) to oversee the implementation of the deregulation legislation and to monitor its effectiveness. The bill allows customers to be able to choose their retail electric provider starting in Jan. 2002.

SB7 included a price-to-earnings measure that should keep customer bills from rising two to three times as Californians experienced after deregulation in that state. Industry officials predict most residential and small commercial customers will see a 6% drop in rates on Jan. 1, 2002 under the measure.

Representatives from electric utility companies assured the committee that problems California experienced during its deregulation process would not effect Texas. Residents there have experienced increased outages due to static generation capacity and increasing population. Utility representatives told the committee Texas currently has 15 new plants under construction



State Capitol Highlights

By Pauline Word
Texas Press Association

and 33 more are in the planning stages.

Death row inmate executed

The only death row inmate ever to receive a reprieve from Gov. Bush was executed in Huntsville last week for the 1993 rape and murder of this 12-year-old stepdaughter.

Bush granted Ricky McGinn a reprieve June 1 only minutes before his execution to allow for new DNA tests. A Bush spokesman said the governor always believed McGinn was guilty of the murder but that advances in DNA testing might prove he did not commit the rape.

The rape charge coupled with the murder charge is what sent McGinn to death row.

The new DNA test confirmed that a hair found in the girl's body belonged to McGinn or one of his maternal relatives, none of whom were ever suspects.

Some legislators have pledged to sponsor legislation that would give convicts limited access to DNA testing in appeals of their cases.

Let's Look Back...

24 & 48 YEARS AGO

Oct. 7, 1976

Macklin Johnson has announced that he is an Independent Write-In for District Attorney for the 25th Judicial District...

Theo Schultz became the 11th Colorado County agriculturist to win the Columbus Rotary Club's annual Man of the Year...

Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Lanahan are pleased to announce the birth of a son, Sept. 25. He has been named Brian Michael...

The death of Mrs. Frank (Laura)

Frnka of Garwood deeply saddened her family and friends on Oct. 4...

Friends in the community will be interested in the battle which Mike & Mary Stoddard and daughters, Tina, 8, and Michelle, 10, and their son, Tommy, 14, are waging in the "Battle of Joe's Creek" in Dallas...

Patricia Woodard, a 4-H member of Eagle Lake, will be honored at a dinner to be held Oct. 15...

Students from this area enrolled as freshmen at Sam Houston State University are Michael Armstrong, Carl Jones and Othel Pirtle...

Rice High School Principal & Mrs. Fred Grahmann are the proud parents of a daughter, born Sept. 30 in Yoakum. Her name is Sharon Elaine...

Miss Sheila Beth Grigar became the bride of Allan Thomas Valigura on Aug. 21 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Eagle Lake...

A record number of students has been named for the Dean's List of University of Texas School of Allied Health Sciences at the University of Texas Medical Branch of Galveston. Among them is Sharon Craneck, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Louis V. Craneck of Garwood...

Mr. & Mrs. Stanley Parma Jr. announced the arrival of a baby son, Sept. 21. The little gentleman has been named Jeffrey Scott...

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Zbraneck of Nada are being honored on their 60th wedding anniversary, Oct. 10 at St. Mary's Parish Hall in Nada...

Mr. & Mrs. John Muzny are the proud parents of a baby girl, born Oct. 4. Her name is Karen Lynn...

Miss Patsy Schoeneberg, bride-elect of Mitchel Smith of Garwood, was honored with a shower at the Plainview Community Center last week...

Miss LaVeta Lynn Wilkes and Connie Ray Toliver were married Sept. 18 in Pflugerville. They will live in Eagle Lake...

Mr. & Mrs. Pete Merta of New Taiton announced the engagement and approaching marriage of their daughter, Madilyn Marie, to Gary Louis Zbraneck of Garwood, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ludwig Zbraneck of Garwood. The couple plans a Nov. 6 wedding at St. John's Catholic Church in New Taiton...

Mr. & Mrs. Carl Seaholm Jr. were the honorees at a delightful champagne buffet on the happy occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary, Sept. 30 in the Fred R. Frnka home. They will have been married 25 years today, Oct. 7th...

Marilyn Dannels will serve as a judge for the Fort Bend Fine Arts contest in Rosenberg...

Forty-nine hostesses honored Miss Jeanette Leopold of Nada, bride-elect of Gary Wayne Schoenfeld of El Campo, with a Miscellaneous Come-and-Go Shower, Sept. 29 at the Walter (Shorty) Schoellmann home in Nada.

(See 24 & 48, Page 4)

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