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Program aims to attract doctors to hurricane-affected areas

The Daily Advertiser | 07.16.07

Kyle Jackson

ABBEVILLE - Bringing healthcare professionals into the hurricane-affected areas of south Louisiana is the goal of a new program that kicked off Sunday afternoon at Abbeville General Hospital.

The Healthcare Recovery Training System, also known as HeaRTS, officially began Sunday in Abbeville with a meeting open to the public as well as healthcare professionals.

The program, which is funded by a HUD community development block grant, will work to train 1,000 healthcare professionals by December 2009 and place them across 20 parishes that were affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Officials who work with HeaRTS said that because of the hurricanes, many of the state's healthcare workers have had to relocate, leaving medical positions unfilled and the state of healthcare in Louisiana in disarray.

Since the storms, the federal government has allocated \$38 million to help revitalize the workforce in Louisiana," said Bootise Durand, HeaRTS director.

Of that \$38 million, \$6 million has been allocated to help the HeaRTS program train and restaff the medical community of Louisiana.

The program will especially benefit rural hospitals like Abbeville General with healthcare professionals, Durand said.

"There's a shortage of health workers in Louisiana and it affects the emergency room and how long people wait to be seen at a hospital," said Mimi Fuselier, HeaRTS training services coordinator. "Hopefully, by us supplying healthcare workers, we can help cut down on those long hospital waits."

Patricia Bourgeois, a LPN at Abbeville General who attended the first HeaRTS meeting Sunday, said she was glad a program like this one existed to help those wanting to enter into the healthcare profession.

"I think it's a good program," Bourgeois said. "I think it's awesome. I think it'll help me finish school, because it's hard to finish school without help."

The program has three specific goals, which include returning skilled healthcare workers back to southeast Louisiana, retaining the current medical workforce, and increasing the skill set of those who already work in healthcare, said Carla Landry, interim executive director for the Louisiana Workforce Commission.

"We're excited about this existence of the HeaRTS program," Landry said. "We're ecstatic about what this program can do and the opportunities it can bring to our communities."

<http://www.theadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070716/BUSINESS/707160304/1046>

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Healthcare Shortage in Acadiana **KLFY | 07.16.07**

The federal government identified these 5 parishes; St. Mary, Acadia, Vermilion, Iberia, and Jeff Davis, in Acadiana as areas experiencing a shortage of healthcare workers.

A training program that kicked off on Sunday is hoping it will help decrease this shortfall.

Abbeville General is just one example of a healthcare facility experiencing a shortage of trained professionals.

With the growth of the community because so many people were displaced with Rita and Katrina that requires more services for this area says Denise Noel with Abbeville General.

With more people to serve and jobs to fill the hospital tells us they hope students will take advantage of a new program...the Healthcare Recovery Training System.

The program's goal is to recruit, train and employ these additional workers.

Eligible applicants can receive free tuition, support services and work placement in one of Louisiana's 20 hurricane affected parishes.

Sandra Primeaux tells us she's decided to go back to school to be an LPN.

The program is paying for her tuition...start to finish.

She says she wants to work in Vermilion Parish because it's her home and she knows hospitals like Abbeville General are in need.

Currently Abbeville General tells us they are looking to fill 10 LPN positions.

Not only is there a shortage of healthcare workers but educators tell us there's also a shortage of people who teach and train the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Right now Louisiana needs between four to five thousand additional nurses and twenty-five hundred LPN's or licensed practical nurses.

The Hearts Program's goal is to have at least one-thousand new healthcare professionals trained and employed in south Louisiana by 2009.

To find out more information on the hearts program go to www.lahealthcareertraining.org.
<http://www.kfy.com/Global/story.asp?S=6792238>

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Our Views: More money in old bottles **The Advocate | 07.15.07**

For Gov. Kathleen Blanco, the “historic” outcomes of the 2007 legislative session are not in doubt.

For the first time in 25 years, state government-funded universities at 100 percent of the formula for higher education budgets. Teacher pay was raised to the long-sought Southern average. The largest single appropriation of surplus dollars for highway construction, \$600 million, was approved. The state provided \$150 million in ready money for a fund to be used to bid for major job-creating industrial prospects that come along.

As Commissioner of Administration Jerry Luke LeBlanc said, “Any one of these achievements would have been a success in any administration.”

The word “historic,” used frequently by the governor and LeBlanc, provides a window into the way the administration and Legislature have approached spending.

Making history, for the governor and her allies, is funding state institutions. Through state institutions, the state does good things for society. With the historic funding levels of the 2007 Legislature, institutions will “accrue dividends for decades for Louisiana citizens,” LeBlanc said.

The future of the state, then, is not really about new ideas or new directions. It is, in LeBlanc’s words to the Press Club of Baton Rouge, a matter of “staying the course.”

Is that all there is? Is making history merely the matter of filling the bucket brigades of state agencies trooping through the Capitol during the session?

With elections coming up this fall for a new governor and Legislature to be seated in 2008, this analysis might suggest there’s nothing for the candidates to talk about. “History” has been made.

It would be a caricature of Blanco’s efforts to say the budget has been achieved without effort, that all the administration had to do was fill the buckets with easy money.

LeBlanc said the administration has fought to focus the huge spending bills on the broad priorities of state government: education, economic development, infrastructure and health care. “If not those, what?” he asked.

In the final analysis, the Blanco vision of making history is about pouring more wine into the old bottles of state institutions.

That’s not all bad. It might well reflect the wisdom of long service in state government; the governor has been a state insider for decades, many legislators have served even longer. Watching institutions fail to be competitive because of funding crises makes legislators — and governors — sensitive to the needs of the institutions, much more so than the larger public.

More money means more services. Giving pay raises to the public payrolls is almost an inherent good, in this view of the world. LeBlanc used a phrase at the Press Club that expressed this

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inside-the-Capitol view. It was historic to “give them (state institutions) the resources to execute,” he said. “Everyone’s been saying that.”

Everyone, to Blanco and other old-timers at the Capitol, means the people they deal with: state administrators and interest groups dependent on state expenditures.

We don’t believe that’s all wrong. Expertise has its place in the world. State institutions are important, and funding them is important. Just cutting budgets isn’t the definition of efficiency, and the private sector isn’t the solution to most public-sector problems.

But pouring more wine into old bottles does put a premium on the conventional wisdom, and doesn’t do enough in our view to challenge state institutions to do better.

Remember, Louisiana wasn’t doing well by most measures of social and economic health before the hurricanes of 2005. State institutions maybe didn’t have the funding they wanted — although even this year legislators could have given them billions more and there still would have been unfilled requests — but even with the dollars they had many were not performing well if you looked at outcomes for the money.

The challenge for candidates for office is to show us how state institutions can do better. Not how much more money they need. Those buckets are as full as they’re ever likely to be.
<http://www.2theadvocate.com/opinion/8513097.html?showAll=y&c=y>

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Closing the gap: Louisiana continues to lag behind the rest of the nation, can a new governor and a new Legislature change things?

The Advocate | 07.15.07

By PENNY BROWN

How does Louisiana rank?

Economy

49th: in private investment in research and development
 38th: in average annual pay
 7th: in the percentage of “working poor” — those who earn less than 1 1/2 times the poverty level
 2nd: in overall poverty rate and rate of children in poverty

Crime

1st: in homicide rate per 100,000 habitants
 1st: in prisoner incarceration rate
 8th: in violent crime

Health

1st: in births to unmarried mothers
 1st: in infant mortality rate
 2nd: in low birthweight births
 6th: in births to teenage women
 25th: in percent of children without health insurance
 45th: in percent of population without health insurance

Environment

11th: in toxic releases in millions of pounds
 Source: Council for a Better Louisiana’s “Louisiana Fact Book for the 2007 Election”

It’s the perpetual punch line to a very old joke:

When state rankings come out on education or the economy or almost anything else that truly matters, Louisiana is first among the worst and last among the best.

But there’s a growing sentiment that the time for such self-mockery has long since passed. A feeling that Louisiana — with its pockmarked roads, trailing schools, burgeoning poverty, dubious politics and mass exodus of its college-educated youth — has reached a do-or-die point. That this year just might be the time to do something about how far the state has fallen behind the rest of the nation.

This fall, voters will elect a new governor and, thanks to term limits, a markedly different Legislature. That new leadership must oversee a massive rebuilding effort, the spending of recovery money and redistricting after the 2010 Census — all of

which could help the state reverse decades of neglect or shove it further down the road to ruin.

Whether exhausted from driving congested roads and working second jobs to pay private-school tuition or jolted awake by the hurricanes, some who still call Louisiana home may be ready for real change.

An LSU Public Policy Research Lab spring survey asked a broad question: “Would you say things are generally going in the right direction, or do you think things are going in the wrong direction here in Louisiana?”

Half of the 870 participants in the survey, conducted from mid-March to mid-April, replied that they felt the state is going nowhere. More than 60 percent lacked confidence in state government to effectively address problems.

“This election cycle is Louisiana’s chance to turn things around,” said Elliott Stonecipher, a Shreveport political analyst and demographer. “There will not be another election as important in at least a generation.”

Should Louisiana fail to elect a true reform governor and Legislature that move quickly to address the gap, Stonecipher predicts, then “Louisiana spins quickly down into an irrecoverable cycle of decline. Louisiana is out of time.”

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Over the next six weeks, The Advocate, WBRZ Channel 2 and Louisiana Public will give voters a broad outline of the problems faced by the state and describe some of the potential solutions and roadblocks to improving the economy, education, health care and roads.

The state we're in
Can it really be all that bad?

After all, builders can't seem to spit out new houses fast enough, shops are popping up along Interstate 12 faster than it takes to drive home on it during rush hour. The Legislature got to play with how to spend about \$2 billion in extra cash. Recently the U.S. Census estimated Livingston and Ascension parishes are two of the fastest growing counties in the nation.

Economist Loren Scott reminds people that in the not-too-distant past, voters were forced to choose between Edwin Edwards and David Duke for governor and the state's checking account was flat empty.

"There were other elections in the past where we experienced terrible financial crises," he said. "We're not facing that right now. All elections are important, and I don't think this one is as critical as some of those we've had in the past."

But consider just a sampling of the sobering statistics from the public policy group Council for a Better Louisiana's 2007 Fact Book:

- Louisiana ranks 41st in per-capita income and has the second-highest poverty rate in the nation. Forbes Magazine ranked the state dead last among the best places for business.
- Some 170 Louisiana schools still are considered academically unacceptable when it comes to school performance scores. A total of 522 do not perform at the basic level.
- Louisiana has the highest murder rate, the highest prisoner incarceration rate and one of the highest violent-crime rates in the nation.
- Louisiana ranks No. 1 in age-adjusted deaths from diabetes, No. 2 from cancer and No. 3 from HIV/AIDS. The state also boasts the highest birth rate to unwed mothers and the highest infant death rate.
- Latest Census estimates indicate Louisiana lost nearly 250,000 of its 4.5 million people in the year after Hurricane Katrina. During the five years before that, it lost 70,000 people even as Southern states around it were brimming. The total under-18 population has declined by nearly 11 percent since 2000; women of child-bearing age, nearly 10 percent.
- Louisiana has a \$14 billion backlog of highway needs that will grow to \$15.5 billion by the end of the decade. A quarter of the state's roads are in poor condition, and 32 percent of its bridges deficient.

CABL President and CEO Barry Erwin concludes the state has reached a "do-or-die" situation.

"It will take some time to close this gap because we were so far behind to begin with," Erwin said. "We're making some progress, but that's because we're doing some of the things other states have done before us. And those other states are not waiting for us to catch up, so we're trying to catch up with states who are continuing to move forward. To close the gap, we have to move faster than those other states."

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Jim Brandt, president of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, an independent think-tank on government, said the gap also has grown because Louisiana continually sets its sights too low.

“You can certainly get an idea of how large the gap is by the fact that our standard goal is to strive just to reach the Southern average,” he said. “Talk of exceeding that or reaching the national average rarely is mentioned.”

Tempting as it is to blame the storms, Katrina and Rita didn’t do anything but speed up the decline. Historians and political scientists say it took Louisiana a very long time to rack up stats like those.

Jeffrey Sadow, an associate professor of political science at LSU in Shreveport, dates the state’s woes to the early 1800s, when an undiversified economy relied heavily upon slavery. But the same could be said for the rest of the South.

What is unique to Louisiana’s history is its affection for populism — perhaps most notoriously illustrated by Huey Long’s promises of “Every Man a King” and “Big Oil” footing the bill for everything, Sadow said.

“Its hold has never quite been broken,” he said. “Until the state’s ethos among a significant number of people changes to make them feel responsible for their own situations instead of somebody else who can pay for it and/or solve the problems for them, the problem continues.”

Many Louisianians share a widespread perception that the purpose of gaining power in government is “to get at the trough, which only justifies a highly intrusive, large government,” Sadow said.

Populism’s legacy, then, is a vicious cycle in which government gains control over resources, boosting political conflict and making corruption more likely and even tolerated. As the stakes rise, Sadow contends, more people are likely to break rules to win power and resources.

Baton Rouge Area Chamber President and CEO Stephen Moret points to another culprit: a wealth of natural resources that dulled the drive to build other aspects of the economy.

“For generations, people in our state have been able to make a good living off of the land or off of the oil and gas/petrochemical industries,” he said. “The presence of great wealth from those sectors and associated government revenues limited the sense of urgency to change that was more present in other places.”

Moret points to North Carolina as an example. He said the state didn’t have oil or the petrochemical industry to fall back on when tobacco and textiles started faltering.

“Accordingly, five decades ago, they began developing a new economy by investing in higher education and research and development,” Moret said.

Another key factor, according to Stonecipher, is Louisiana’s high “nativity” rate — the last Census found nearly 80 percent of the state’s residents were born here. Few have known any other way of life.

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“I believe we can understand the source of our relative rank in these categories when we understand what that means in terms of our people not having experienced a better of quality of life elsewhere,” he said. “That insularity creates scarcity or perceived scarcity in all things, leading in turn to Louisiana conducting itself, always, as the loser in a zero-sum game.”

Problem solved?

Wanted: One governor and dozens of legislators to change the tax structure, reduce government spending, attract newcomers to the state, overhaul the health-care system, ensure insurance, stem the high-school dropout rate, improve higher education, attract new industry, boost research and development, repair and build roads, rebuild storm-devastated areas, handle troubling population shifts and restore national confidence in the state.

It's a tall order, and such massive change won't happen overnight. After all, Louisiana spent decades getting where it is now.

But there are those who believe the October election isn't just another excuse for a party afterwards.

“This election is absolutely critical for the future of Louisiana,” Moret said. “The nation's perception of our state has been badly harmed by the aftermath of Katrina. We are in last place on many indicators while other Southern states race ahead of us. If we don't elect strong leaders now, we may remain in our current position for another two decades or more.”

Moret warns that Louisiana could wind up at rock bottom as poverty, an aging population and out-migration reduce productivity and create more demand for costly social services. That financial drain could keep the state from putting money into long-term economic drivers such as higher education and research and development, he added.

Kirby Goidel, director of the Louisiana Survey done by the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs at LSU, said the state would do well to look back to 1987, when former Gov. Buddy Roemer “ushered in a major reform movement but was unable to maintain the momentum of his revolution.”

“The field is ripe for a significant shift — one that fundamentally reshapes the political environment and recasts what we consider to be ‘normal’ politics within the state,” Goidel said. “Public opinion is unsettled, voters seem open to leadership and budget surpluses present opportunities to address at least some of our most pressing problems. All signs point to the potential for an election that should empower political leadership to make major advances across a number of policy areas.”

But he notes that as in 1987, the “real test will be less about what happens in the election and more about how the election facilitates or fails to facilitate governance after the election.”

Sadow said the windfalls reaped from federal aid and oil prices could dry up during the next administration.

Compounding the problem: A shortfall in the amount of money needed to pay pensions for state employees and transportation needs — carrying a combined price tag of \$26 billion — as well as the Legislature's recent hikes in government spending on recurring commitments.

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“Those will be less sustainable in the coming years,” Sadow said of the recurring expenses. “It will require an ability to make priorities rarely witnessed in state politics in terms of actual need and benefit to the entire state as the prime criteria.”

In other words, what’s needed is a leadership willing to make some tough decisions.

Barriers to change

“There’s the right way, the wrong way and the New Orleans way.”

That saying heard around New Orleans is classic parochialism, Sadow argues, and is one of the biggest barriers to change in Louisiana.

“There is a disdain for outside ways of doing things and an insistence on doing things how one pleases,” he said.

Several political observers also warned that growing regionalism within the state could also divert attention from addressing shared interests.

North Louisianians are most focused on the economy, while the Baton Rouge region, experiencing a growth spurt, is desperate for infrastructure improvements and remains concerned about education. New Orleans, meanwhile, wants all the resources it can get for rebuilding.

Goidel and others agree that New Orleans, which stands to lose major representation in the congressional redistricting that will follow the 2010 Census, is likely to be “less important politically in the future of the state.”

Stonecipher predicts a coalition of communities along the now-booming I-10/12 corridor is most likely to emerge “by default, almost, as Louisiana’s new leadership.”

“If the coalition leadership stresses actions which get at the root of the ills we all suffer, because that gives those 11 parishes what they want, too, everyone wins,” Stonecipher said. “But the coalition cannot succeed in its own objectives with the state — whether New Orleans or North Louisiana — in such danger of further decline. If the coalition tries to gain further without treating other areas of the state in the process, the push-back will stop it cold.”

Sadow sees less of a willingness in the rest of the state to bail out New Orleans. In fact, the Louisiana Survey shows indications of that.

When asked, “What do you see are the three most important problems facing the state of Louisiana,” less than 26 percent identified rebuilding — a 36-point decline from the year before.

And more than half the respondents agreed with this statement: “We have paid too much attention to rebuilding New Orleans and need to think more about other issues or other areas of the state.”

“I don’t see much of a north/south division because, frankly, the north is way outgunned in terms of population and productive capacity,” Sadow said. “It’ll be more the state vs. New Orleans, with the I-12 corridor pulling the train, the rest of the I-10 corridor helping out, and the rest of the state going along for the ride because it doesn’t have the clout to do otherwise.”

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The biggest question of all, however, is whether voters will insist on something new or settle for the same old thing.

Goidel concludes that even more than leadership, Louisiana needs “continued and sustained pressure from the public” to close the growing gap with the rest of the nation.

“Leadership alone is never enough, not if one is envisioning any sort of broad transformation in the political process,” he said. “For this, leadership must be empowered by public support, so that when issues become difficult there is adequate pressure to continue to move forward.”

Sadow predicts Louisianians will be hard-pressed to part with their old ways.

“The biggest barrier is the perception among many elected officials and within the electorate that a main purpose of government is to redistribute wealth,” he said. “A number of people — elected and the electorate — judge the quality of government in terms of how much ‘stuff’ they can get from it and not on the basis of how it can create conditions to allow the individual to succeed, separately or through associations, through his own efforts.”

For example, instead of simply dumping money into education, the state should continue emphasizing and increasing standards, implementing a strict teacher accountability and evaluation system, Sadow said.

Stonecipher wonders, too, whether those who live in Louisiana understand the dangers the state faces from its poor standing in comparison to the rest of the nation.

“I honestly don’t think even the candidates for governor understand what the future holds for us, much less a significant number of Louisiana residents,” he said. “These wounds are each and every one self-inflicted, and we don’t even acknowledge what we’ve done to ourselves. As we struggle to leave our childhood and enter our adolescence, the rest of the country — with a couple of exceptions — competes in a global economy as adults, with growing maturity.”

But Sadow spots some hopeful signs. He sees indications, for example, that “personalistic politics” — where candidates are elected primarily based on their images — is losing its hold in Louisiana. More and more voters are making choices along shared ideological interests.

Sadow sees it as an indication that voters are better educated, the political system has matured and populism may be losing its hold.

“Even if there is no great sea of change in 2007, it won’t be long in coming because the deeper the hole gets, the increased darkness will create and magnify popular revulsion,” Sadow said. “The culture can change, and the disasters accelerated the process.”

The Baton Rouge Area Chamber is hopeful enough to have begun raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for FuturePAC — a new political action committee to support worthy candidates.

“One advantage to being last is that there is a lot of low-hanging fruit if we really get started in earnest,” Moret said. “If Louisiana did nothing else but create a sense of expectation — a sense of real momentum — then the country would take notice. We could build on small wins in each area and start to get a snowball of change going to create a brighter economic future for our state. Every journey starts with the first step.”

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About the series

Laying out the issues

This fall Louisiana will choose a new governor and, because of term limits, a host of new legislators. The state struggles on many fronts, confronting long-term problems that were compounded by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. But Louisiana also has the opportunity to change the way it has done business for decades. Over the next six weeks, The Advocate, WBRZ Channel 2 and Louisiana Public Broadcasting will explore the problems faced by the state and some of the things Louisiana's leaders — and its voters — can do about them.

Economic Development

Louisiana's workforce — at 41 percent of the population, the smallest proportion in the nation even before Katrina and Rita — is insufficient to fulfill the needs of new and existing businesses and to rebuild what the storms destroyed. Hampered by poor education and overly reliant on the petro-chem industry, Louisiana needs to land more well-paying jobs in more diverse fields.

Higher Education

In North Carolina and Texas, universities have long played a key role in fueling booming economies. But Louisiana lags many states in building the type of research programs that attract grants and businesses — and must find a way to provide the education people need to fill well-paying but demanding jobs.

Elementary and High Schools

Louisiana's students do poorly when compared to the nation, not surprising given the state's pervasive poverty. Employers complain that high schools fail to produce workers able to function at the most basic level. The state's decade-old "school accountability" program offers some hope, but much remains to be done, both in and out of the classroom.

Transportation

Roads are a key factor in economic development, and Louisiana's are terrible. By some estimates, at least \$14 billion of needed work, both repairs and major new construction, remains undone. But paying for it will require hard decisions in a poor state where every penny set aside for roads will be fought over.

Health Care

Louisiana has too few doctors, nurses and medical specialists. The shortage — made far worse by Katrina — threatens to further erode the health of a state where too many people are sick and too many are uninsured. And the situation could drive wealthier people out of the state and dissuade others from moving in.

<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/8515062.html?showAll=y&c=y>

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Mental health treatment programs available in region

The Daily Advertiser | 07.15.07

Marsha Sills

In the past, treatment for mental illness meant institutionalization.

There were thousands of state-funded beds for patients, but they were often separated from their families and communities to places known not by their names but the towns that held them like "Pineville" and "Jackson."

"At one time, Pineville had 3,000 beds," said Jim McFaul, the outgoing regional manager for the Office of Mental Health. He's worked in the state's mental health system for nearly 33 years. "Then, there was a push not to institutionalize them but return them to their community."

The state recognizes the need for more outpatient services and alternatives to hospitalization - not only because it would cut down on the need for more psych unit beds, but the overall health of the patient.

With federal and state funding, the regional office of mental health has been able to contract with nonprofits and community agencies to provide services.

One new program managed by the Volunteers of America is the Living Room. The unit is in a wing of University Medical Center's acute psychiatric unit on the grounds of Tyler Mental Health Center.

The unit is not a replacement for hospitalization, but a step to prevent hospitalization.

Some mental health patients go to the emergency room because they know they need help, that things are spiraling out of their control.

"They're in crisis," said Germaine DeRouen, division director of the mental health services provided by Volunteers of America. "When they're in crisis their symptoms have escalated. They may be depressed. It could be because of family dynamics or something going in their community or that they're off their medication. They may just need their medication monitored.

"Our goal with the crisis stabilization is to prevent hospitalization. We find that clients cycle in and out of hospitals if we provide these support services we think we can prevent that."

The unit has two bedrooms - one for two males and another for two females - and includes a living room with a flat screen TV, a sofa and an oversized chair. The lighting in the room and the bedrooms is soft with lamps and windows. No hum or glow of fluorescent lights.

Jolanda Waiters, the Living Room's supervisor, pulls open the curtain in one of the rooms that looks more like a hotel room than a room off a wing of the acute psych unit at Tyler.

"We wanted it to be homey," she said and pointed to the sleigh twin beds with coverlets. At the bedside on each nightstand was a basket filled with toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, soap and other toiletries someone would need for a stay.

The programs are designed to stabilize the patient.

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One program is a day treatment program - Pont du Jour, or day bridge. The program is a support system for the clients that takes a holistic approach of care from counseling to helping them with money management and social skills.

In the past three months that the day program has been in effect, only one client has needed to be rehospitalized.

More hands on case management includes a team of social workers, case managers, counselors, nurses and a doctor make up the Aggressive Community Treatment team.

Team members work one-on-one with clients and provide the network of support they may need to live their day to day lives - whether its a ride to a doctor's appointment or to get groceries. Team members also call the patients daily to check in to see if patients took their medications for the day.

What's different from other treatment options is the one-on-one interaction, said Stan Hoover, a physician who specializes in addictive medicine. Hoover sees clients in at Tyler about twice a week as part of the new program.

The programs are just getting off the ground, but they're desperately needed.

Judy Wade is one of the case managers on the ACT team. From her own personal experiences of having family members with mental illnesses, she knows how difficult it is for families to find the services they need to care for their loved ones.

"Our family did all of this. There were eight of us, and it took all of us. We were exhausted," Wade said. "I wanted to be involved with this because this is hope that people need."

<http://www.theadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070715/NEWS01/707150350/1002>

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Mental health patients often seek help in ERs as a last resort

The Daily Advertiser | 07.15.07

Marsha Sills

One hundred eighty-eight.

That's how many beds are available in Acadiana for adults in need of inpatient psychiatric services, excluding geriatric beds.

The wait for one of those beds often happens in emergency rooms. Last year, at University Medical Center alone, at least 655 mental health patients were boarded in the emergency department.

Private hospitals don't keep track of the number of mental health boarders, but report it's rare that a day goes by without an emergency room bed being taken by one of the patients. Lafayette General Medical Center and UMC are the only hospitals in Lafayette with both an emergency department and acute psychiatric unit.

"They know if they come here, they're going to get seen," said Mitch Martin, a registered nurse who directs the emergency room at Lafayette General. "To them, it is an emergency. Being depressed and suicidal is an emergency, so they get seen right away. The biggest problem is having somewhere to send them."

In the state, there are 915 inpatient public and private psychiatric beds. It's not enough on any given day to serve patients' mental health needs, say those who work in the field.

While the Office of Mental Health received funding from the Legislature this year for an additional 100 beds, adding beds isn't the sole answer to emergency department boarding, said Dr. Kathleen Crapanzano, Office of Mental Health state medical director.

"If we had a sufficient outpatient mental health system and meet people's needs, they could go in and get help when the issues are small," she said. "In-beds are last resort. What we really want to see happen is expand the funding and resources given to the outpatient sort of things to prevent people from going to the hospital."

The regional mental health office has been busy developing new contracts with service providers, which offer more comprehensive crisis management and case management for clients.

The state provides services to those with no insurance or resources for care, but the system is overloaded. Clients cases are overseen by social workers, counselors and case managers. A shortage of mental health professionals has made the situation worse.

In this region, there are four full-time and one part-time psychiatrists for more than 3,800 outpatient cases. Some seek assistance from the private sector - where the lack of resources in the state are felt as well.

"Sometimes it's a three-month wait before those patients can be seen for outpatient services" said Michelle Hughes, vice president of marketing and development for Compass Healthcare of the public mental health system. "So, they end up in the emergency room. It's a cycle that negatively affects the patients. It's a dysfunctional system."

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Compass receives calls from across the state from both private and public hospitals, particularly the Baton Rouge and New Orleans areas, for inpatient beds. A federal law says hospitals cannot refuse patient care in an emergency situation.

"Unfortunately, Medicaid does not reimburse free-standing hospitals for this care," Hughes said.

Those with insurance struggle with companies that will only cover a set period of stay in a facility and limited coverage of outpatient services. Typically the stay isn't long enough to stabilize the patient's medication levels.

Low reimbursements also have caused some private hospitals and services to bow out and close their doors.

"The result," said Hughes, "(is) fewer outpatient and preventative services."

New models of care

One way the state is trying to respond to the boarding issue is with a Mental Health Emergency Room Extension that will serve as an observation area for mental health patients who seek help at the emergency room.

With the help of a federal block grant and funding from the state, a facility is being set up in each region.

UMC hopes to have its in place by the end of the summer.

Its purpose is to open up beds in the emergency room, but also to prevent hospitalization of those patients who may need more than a few hours to stabilize.

"Some are in here in an acute crisis because they haven't been taking their medication," said Méj Matte, associate nursing director at UMC. "If they start their medications, sometimes they become stable and can go home."

Now, an on-call team of social workers and psychologists or a doctor with a specialty in addictive or mental disorders assists the emergency room doctor with the assessment and evaluation of psych patients.

But it's rare that a psychiatrist is able to evaluate the patient because there aren't enough of them, said Jim McFaul, outgoing director of the regional Office of Mental Health.

A few years ago, a coalition of mental health professionals in the region attempted to form mobile crisis units that would respond to emergency departments with psych patients and critical incidents that may involve a person with a mental illness. But those plans failed because of manpower issues.

"The job pool for mental health professionals is dried up," McFaul said.

Day by day

Tamra Broussard has bipolar disorder. She's dealt with frequent bouts of depression and thoughts of suicide. Her disorder often manifests itself in hypomania and strong compulsions to surf the Web applying for credit cards and spending out of her means.

She's been in and out of hospitals 10 times.

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Broussard has found herself in the emergency room when she's known that she's needed to be hospitalized.

She's now in a day treatment program, which gives her access to counseling and other services she needs to help her stay healthy. It's her fifth round in the program, one that gives her the encouragement she needs.

"They make me feel comfortable. I was scared the first time I went in, and it was amazing to me how people cared," Broussard said.

Each morning, Broussard wakes up in time for her pick-up about 7:10 a.m. for the drive to an outpatient clinic in Crowley. Around 2 p.m., she's dropped off again.

"That's why this program is so well balanced for me," she said. "I've only been hospitalized twice since I've been in the program."

She's established a bond and trust with her social workers who help her work through issues and has found a network of support in a Youngsville couple, Harold and Della Trahan, who care for a son who is bipolar.

Harold Trahan is executive director of the Lafayette chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill's support group. Journey of Hope helps family members caring for those with mental disorders.

Outpatient programs like the one Broussard attends is a way the state is trying to keep patients healthy - out of the emergency room and out of the hospital.

Starting over

Lafayette General has 14 beds in its mental health unit. There are 20 beds - 10 for women, 10 for men - at UMC's Acute Psychiatric Unit. That unit is on the campus of the Dr. Joseph Henry Tyler Jr. Mental Health Center, the regional headquarters of the Office of Mental Health.

Even before Hurricane Katrina, lack of beds was an issue. Now, mental health professionals say there are fewer private inpatient beds for adults than in the past.

A philosophy to create more community outpatient services resulted in the reduction in the number of beds at state institutions decades ago.

In the past, state facilities like the ones in Jackson and Pineville were institutionalization facilities where hundreds of patients were treated long term.

"At one time, Pineville had 3,000 beds," said McFaul, who has worked in the state's mental health system for nearly 33 years. "Then, there was a push not to institutionalize them but return them to their community."

Because the Office of Mental Health can't provide all the services a community needs on its own, the agency contracts with nonprofit service providers.

Regionally, partnerships have been developed with Gulf Coast Family Teaching Services and Volunteers of America for outpatient services and case management.

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New initiatives include a crisis response and stabilization program facilitated by Volunteers of America.

Volunteers of America has set up shop in the Tyler building with 40 counselors and social workers running services like a day treatment program where patients meet for group and individual counseling. One team works one-on-one with patients in a method known as Assertive Community Treatment, a community-based approach to psychiatric rehabilitation.

And soon, another alternative to hospitalization called The Living Room will open. The new program, complete with the comforts of home, will serve as a stability unit for clients.

"It's for people who don't need hospitalization but need assistance in the interim," said Ellen Deaton, regional manager of Office of Mental Health.

Boosts in federal and state funding have helped make the plans happen, as have the involvement of the community for the holistic approach.

Each of the programs is designed to keep clients healthy.

"There wouldn't be a problem of not enough beds if we have enough alternative services," Deaton said.

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Louisiana Stiffed Again On Charity Health Care Model

Bayoubuzz.com ; N.O. CityBusiness | 07.14.07

Written by: Dan Juneau

Close to the end of the recently completed legislative session, the Legislature—obviously with the support of the governor—stiffed the taxpayers of Louisiana for \$300 million. Perhaps it was hard to notice this obscene gesture cast in our direction because of the stampede of spending going on at the same time. However, it deserves to be noticed by everyone who pays taxes in any form or fashion to the state treasury.

The central issue at play is the question of how large of a Charity Hospital should be built in New Orleans to replace the old facility; how its mission—and the mission of the entire system—should interface with health care redesign in Louisiana; and whether or not dollars for indigent health care should follow patients or should flow directly and almost exclusively into Louisiana's one-of-a-kind system.

The proposed price tag for the New Orleans' facility is a whopping \$1.2 billion. Some \$300 million of the funding was slated to come from federal Community Development Block Grants funneled through the Louisiana Recovery Authority. For months now, both the federal Department of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development have made it clear that they were not enamored with plugging hundreds of millions of extra federal dollars into what they considered an archaic "two-tiered" (Medicaid and uninsured versus privately insured) system of health care delivery in Louisiana. Some of our state elected officials have been equally as clear that they are not at all interested in changing in any significant fashion the way indigent health care is delivered in the Bayou State.

There is a significant amount of support building in Louisiana for a redesigned health care system which would allow public dollars to follow indigent patients, begin to dismantle the "two-tiered" system, and encourage more public-private partnerships in health care. The warlords in government who are protectors of the status quo are fighting an all-out effort to stop true reform from happening. The \$300 million bill they recently stuck the taxpayers with is part of that effort.

After the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development—who must sign off on the \$300 million—sent a letter stating concerns about how the new hospital would interface with health care redesign efforts, the record-breaking appropriations bills were amended in the Legislature to transfer \$75 million in direct appropriations to the hospital project and to pay for the remaining \$225 million by selling bonds. One of the architects of this maneuver offered the interesting comment that the taxpayers would be "better off" handling the situation in this fashion.

Louisiana's taxpayers can expect more "surprises" in the future from this project. The "business plan" for the hospital assumes that the new facility will treat 80 percent of the indigent population in Southeast Louisiana and, at the same time, attract a sizeable number of private sector patients. There are many knowledgeable skeptics who strongly question that premise. The plan also envisions the new hospital being in the black during the first year of operation. If it is wrong, guess who is going to have to cough up more money to pay off the bonds? Yes, that would be you!

There is a big push to move this project as currently constituted beyond the point of change before a new governor and new Legislature are sworn into office. Perhaps the champions of the status quo—the folks who stuck you with an unnecessary \$300 million bill—don't want the new group coming in to apply the smell test to this very questionable project.

http://www.bayoubuzz.com/News/Louisiana/Government/Louisiana_Stiffed_Again_On_Charity_Health_Care_Model_4241.asp

<http://www.neworleanscitybusiness.com/UpToTheMinute.cfm?recID=11694>

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LSU's new chief may ruffle feathers in his pursuit of national excellence

Times – Picayune | 07.14.07

By Bill Barrow

BATON ROUGE -- The best predictor of what kind of president the Louisiana State University System is getting in John Vincent Lombardi is what he has done in his previous jobs. That seems to be what Lombardi himself would suggest.

"We need the past because we humans prove quite predictable," the 64-year-old historian wrote in 1998. "We do similar things and find similar solutions to similar problems. We respond to challenge and opportunity in ways that track a relatively narrow range of alternatives."

So, if Lombardi's pattern holds true after his unanimous appointment Friday by the LSU System Board of Supervisors, the Golden Band from Tigerland will soon welcome a new guest marcher. He'll arrive in an unassuming pickup truck, wearing black-rimmed spectacles befitting a professor and sporting a pair of suspenders, probably purple and gold. He'll wield a clarinet and a sharp tongue, with more than a few strong opinions at the ready.

It's safe, too, to foretell that the Bayou State's premier conglomerate of academic campuses, research centers and indigent care hospitals is in for a shakeup -- or at least an intensive review from a boss bent on improving a struggling health-care network and a public university system that by most accounts is good, but not great.

Along the way, from the Governor's Mansion and Capitol halls to alumni gatherings and faculty convocations, some feathers are bound to be ruffled as Lombardi offers unvarnished views about the way things should be and why Louisiana isn't there yet.

Those are lessons drawn from the California native's four decades in higher education, a journey that has taken him from the undergraduate classrooms of Pomona College in his home state to senior administrative appointments at Indiana and Johns Hopkins universities and more recently to the helms of flagship schools in Florida and Massachusetts.

During that span he has largely endeared himself to students and faculty, while also engaging in public spats with some colleagues and superiors. He's made headlines both for the marked increase in stature that he wrought for the University of Florida and for calling another college administrator in that state an "Oreo -- black on the outside, white on the inside." He later apologized.

Lombardi stepped down at Florida in 1999 amid disputes with and among state system bureaucrats and board members, and he's leaving the chancellorship of the University of Massachusetts Amherst after five years to return to the South after losing a power struggle with the system president and trustees there.

Yet his departure from Gainesville spawned a series of tributes rarely conducted for the living, and news accounts after both exits featured money raisers for each school saying that several donors nixed financial commitments in protest.

'He's distinguished'

The LSU System board's vote Friday came one week after a 17-member search committee named him as the lone finalist. The latest action ends an eight-month hunt for a successor to the retiring William Jenkins. Contract negotiations are in progress, though Lombardi said he expects to start around Labor Day.

Jenkins said he has known Lombardi and his wife, Cathryn, for more than 15 years. "I could not be more delighted," Jenkins said of his successor "He's astute. He's distinguished. He's capable."

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The president oversees a system that includes 11 institutions, headed by the Baton Rouge campus, designated officially as the flagship; four other academic campuses, including the University of New Orleans; two medical schools, in New Orleans and Shreveport; a law school; agriculture center; and 10 public hospitals in the state's Charity Hospital System.

Lombardi has declined to offer a detailed agenda for the system, saying he has not yet gathered enough information to offer "considered opinions." He has met with all of the chancellors who will report to him. "They're all effective people," he said, adding that he foresees no immediate changes.

Beyond that, other recent statements combine his extensive writings and the public record of his career to offer a compelling view of his philosophy of education in general and, more specifically, how he might approach his new post.

Increasing grants

As a historian, Lombardi's home in academia is the liberal arts, with an expertise in Latin American studies and Venezuela. In 1999, he wrote an opinion piece defending the pursuit of liberal arts doctorates and argued essentially in favor of learning for the sake of learning. He has continued to teach throughout his career, usually one class per term.

He said he will do the same at LSU, taking a tenured professorship on the Baton Rouge campus. "When I don't do it, I feel deprived," he said. After he stepped down as Florida president, he stayed on campus as director of a humanities center until he left for UMass three years later.

Expanding his liberal arts roots, Lombardi has developed courses on higher education governance and the history of college sports. His résumé bespeaks his management experience in still other disciplines, including agriculture and medicine, critical components in the LSU System.

And he's an acolyte of the doctrine that while universities are not profit-driven businesses, they are still enterprises whose fortunes turn on money, management and performance. He shares those views with college governing boards through his consulting business. The LSU System is among his previous clients, as was the UMass System before trustees there lured him to Amherst.

As provost at Baltimore's Johns Hopkins, he had responsibility for medical instruction programs. At Florida, he had oversight of two teaching hospitals and other health-care facilities and instructional programs. The Gainesville campus also boasts a law school and, as a land-grant institution, houses Florida's agricultural extension system. In Baton Rouge, the LSU Law Center and LSU Agriculture Center are free-standing units run by chancellors who report to the president.

During Lombardi's Florida presidency, the school's annual research spending doubled to \$276 million. It climbed to \$447 million by 2004. LSU's main campus and Health Sciences Center combined for \$312 million the same year. Also doubling at Florida during the 1990s were the number of National Merit Scholars enrolled in undergraduate programs and the number of graduate degrees awarded each year. By 1999, U.S. News & World Report ranked Florida 16th nationally among public four-year universities. Like many of his colleagues, Lombardi has questioned that ranking methodology but conceded their importance in the pursuit for students.

Faculty was listened to

Lombardi was known in Gainesville for strolling about campus and talking to students, getting enthusiastic welcomes during the annual Homecoming Parade, cheering boisterously at sporting events, for which he donned Gator suspenders, and occasionally playing with the alumni band as a clarinetist. The last graduating class of his tenure voted to have him sign their diplomas individually.

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He's still revered by Gator fans for helping bring Steve Spurrier back to the Florida football program and later hiring Billy Donovan as men's basketball coach. Spurrier, who arrived the same year as Lombardi and stayed until 2002, made no secret about his disappointment over Lombardi's exit. Donovan is still coaching at the school, having won consecutive NCAA championships.

At UMass, neither the academic nor athletics rise has been so dramatic, though Lombardi said the institution is positioned to become "a major research institution" after living in the shadows of neighboring private schools like Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and even Boston University.

A \$40 million state budget cut welcomed Lombardi. But Ernest May, a music professor and faculty senate spokesman, said, "We've come back from that" in part due to Lombardi's handling of the situation. May said the chancellor went through two rounds of posting his recommended budget cuts online and taking public comments. "He answered every e-mail," May said. "People felt like they were listened to."

May said Lombardi, as at Florida, pushed measurable standards on faculty, staff, departments and other programs, challenging each to justify the investment being made in them. The process, May said, put Lombardi's strengths on full display: "He's a virtuoso administrator . . . in his ability to explain and justify what he's doing. He sets high standards, and if you ask him a question, you may not enjoy what you hear, but you'll get an answer straight."

It's that last characteristic that perhaps has yielded the blips, at least in terms of public relations and political niceties, on Lombardi's record. In Florida, he angrily lashed out at the state Board of Regents for running "an idiotic system."

At a private function in 1997, he called Adam Herbert, then president of a smaller Florida school, an "Oreo." He later apologized and Herbert, who had become the state system chief by the time the comment was public fodder, helped him keep his job.

"I made once an inappropriate comment which wounded a friend," Lombardi said this week. "I apologized to that friend. . . . He forgave me, and we have put it behind us. I don't see that there is a lot more to say about it."

At UMass, one trustee complimented Lombardi as a "brilliant" educator, but said he's incapable of being "a team player." Lombardi said, "That's what he thinks, I guess. I don't believe it, but, hey, he's entitled to his opinion." May, the Amherst professor, said that stems more from Lombardi's disagreement with how UMass President Jack Wilson wants to reorganize the system. "Our president and trustees are making a mistake," he said.

Measurable progress

Taken together, it's a record that leaves little doubt Lombardi will attempt big things in Louisiana. Perhaps the most relevant questions, then, are : How he will deal with the transition from running campuses within a system to shepherding the system itself? And how will he play with the Louisiana lawmakers who control the state budget?

"One of the attractions of this opportunity is that all my life I have been criticizing systems, (complaining) that the system didn't do this right, didn't do that right," Lombardi said. "Well, it seems incumbent upon me if there were an opportunity to lead a system to see whether I could do it right. I don't know whether I can do it right, but I believe I can."

He said he immediately will begin assessing system components, with the aim of each clearly defining its mission and then being given the resources and authority to accomplish it. "You can't be told you have the responsibility to do God's work and then not have the authority to bless the meal," he said. Progress, he said, will be measurable: " 'Feel better' is not a metric. More performance is metric. Better-taught students is a metric. More research is a metric."

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In 2001, Lombardi indicated that he understands the potential roadblocks to that approach. "A university system serves political as much as educational ends," he wrote, noting that "political actors . . . will seek more money and an expanded mission for their school, anticipating economic growth and higher status for their community."

He told LSU board members Friday that he looks forward to hearing their advice on handling Louisiana politics. And he said he intends to meet with legislators around the state, "in their districts to hear their concerns" and vision for the system. "You usually aren't successful when you just show up (at the Capitol) with your hand out," he said.

And, he reminded reporters earlier this week, "This isn't my first round in the South . . . I even learned how to say y'all."

<http://www.nola.com/timespic/stories/index.ssf?/base/news-8/118439750655700.xml&coll=1>

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Lombardi new LSU president

Masslive.com | 07.14.07

By DIANE LEDERMAN

AMHERST - John V. Lombardi was officially named the new president of Louisiana State University yesterday in a unanimous vote of the 16-member board of supervisors there.

He will begin Sept. 1, said Charles F. Zewe, Louisiana State University system vice president for communications and external affairs. Lombardi was the only candidate recommended to the supervisors by the Presidential Search Committee, which selected Lombardi on July 6.

Stephen P. Tocco, chairman of the board of trustees, said he has been collecting names of interim chancellor candidates to be presented to President Jack M. Wilson. Wilson will in turn make a recommendation to the full board for appointment. That is likely to happen this summer, Tocco said, adding that a special meeting would probably be called for that appointment. The next scheduled board meeting is in September.

Tocco also said that the interim chancellor would not be a candidate for the permanent position.

Robert P. Connolly, spokesman for Wilson, said that the office has not yet been notified of Lombardi's departure date but that the president would like to have an interim chancellor in place before Lombardi leaves.

He said Wilson will be talking to people at the Amherst campus about possible candidates as well as talking and listening to others.

The last interim chancellor was Marcelette G. Williams, who served from 2001 to 2002, between the resignation of chancellor David K. Scott and the hiring of Lombardi.

Williams has been mentioned as a possible interim chancellor again.

Tocco, meanwhile, has named Jennifer C. Braceras of the board of trustees to head the chancellor search committee. He said on Thursday that he hopes to have a full committee appointed by the end of the month.

He said Braceras will be "very capable" as the chairwoman. She is a UMass -Amherst alumna and Concord lawyer. Braceras could not be immediately reached for comment.

Tocco said the committee will be looking for a chancellor who will approach the system more collaboratively.

Zewe said that Lombardi was "was on the list of potential candidates from the beginning (last fall)." The search committee was created then while consultant R. William Funk, of Dallas was hired to conduct a private search.

Zewe said that Lombardi told the committee in the fall that he wasn't interested in the job. "After the events in Amherst, he was approached (again)," Zewe said, and at that point he did express interest. He formally applied on July 2.

In May, President Wilson had suggested a year-long trial of merging the president's and

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chancellor's office into one position as a way to increase collaboration between the system and the Amherst campus.

According to that proposal, Lombardi had agreed to stay on for the year to help in the transition and then take a sabbatical. Afterward, he was to return as a consultant and also teach. Connolly yesterday said that this was just one of several possible ways to address the issue of collaboration and was not intended to be the only governance model offered.

Tocco said that Lombardi cut off contract negotiations in April when the trustees wanted language to reflect the board's direction that there be a greater collaboration.

But Lombardi - who created a separate fund-raising arm - was vocal about keeping the Amherst campus independent.

Zewe said Lombardi's contract is still being negotiated, including his base pay and housing allowance. He is also being given tenure in the history department. Lombardi's base salary at UMass was \$347,500 per year.

Lombardi was planning to return to Oregon to complete his vacation and then head to Amherst to pack up and move, Zewe said.

In a prepared statement from Wilson's office, the president "wishes Chancellor Lombardi well in his new endeavor and thanks him for the contributions he has made to the University of Massachusetts. We are now looking ahead and focusing on what we believe will be an exciting next chapter for UMass Amherst."

<http://www.masslive.com/news/topstories/index.ssf?/base/news-2/118440507068570.xml&coll=1>

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Temporary Medicaid Program Gets Three-Month Extension Congressional Quarterly | 07.16.07

By Michael Teitelbaum, CQ Staff

The House cleared a three-month extension of a program that allows families to continue receiving Medicaid temporarily as they transition from welfare to work.

The bill (S 1701), passed 291-126 on July 11, would extend until Sept. 30 the Transitional Medical Assistance program. The program, which expired June 30, is designed to ease the move off welfare rolls by allowing families to continue their Medicaid coverage for up to four months as their income levels rise above the normal allowable ceilings. (House vote 610, p. 2134)

An estimated 2 million Americans use the program, created in 1988 (PL 100-485), for health coverage. "No one should be made to choose between a job and health insurance," said Gene Green, D-Texas, the bill manager.

The measure also would keep alive through Sept. 30 a \$50 million per year grant program for abstinence education that House Democrats have sought to kill. A leadership aide said Democrats "will address permanent reforms in the abstinence program" when the House renews the State Children's Health Insurance Program (PL 105-33). (1997 Almanac, p. 6-3)

The bill would offset the costs of extending the Medicaid program by sunsetting a program that allows certain Medicare beneficiaries to enroll throughout 2007 and 2008 in Medicare Advantage plans that do not cover prescription drugs. The program would sunset July 31.

The legislation also would cut funding for the Medicare Advantage Stabilization Fund. Current law provides \$3.5 billion for the fund in 2012 and 2013 combined. Under the bill, total funding over the two-year period would be cut by \$110 million. It would provide \$1.6 billion in 2012 and \$1.79 billion in 2013.

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