

IN THE NEWS

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[WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2008]

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Jindal-backed mental health bills pass legislature

Associated Press | 06.11.08

Melinda Deslatte

BATON ROUGE, La. -- A package of bills sought by Gov. Bobby Jindal as a way to bolster Louisiana's mental health services and prompted by the strain on services in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina has received near-unanimous support from lawmakers.

The state estimates that about 30,000 adults and children statewide need some sort of mental health crisis services annually. Louisiana has been criticized as short of services, but the situation worsened after Katrina. Many services in the New Orleans area were shuttered by the storm's floodwaters while mental health needs are reportedly rising.

A plan to create regional crisis centers to treat the mentally ill, with a pilot program to begin in New Orleans, won House approval on Tuesday. Supporters said the centers would relieve hospital emergency rooms of caring for mental health patients and give police officers a place to bring people with mental health needs.

Already approved by the Senate, the bill by Sen. David Heitmeier, D-New Orleans, goes back to the Senate for approval of minor changes before heading to Jindal's desk.

A second measure, by Sen. Cheryl Gray, D-New Orleans, that would allow for mandatory involuntary outpatient treatment for mentally ill patients -- if a judge finds certain conditions apply -- received final passage with a vote of the Senate on Tuesday. It goes next to Jindal.

The bill, called "Nicola's Law," was motivated by the January killing of New Orleans police officer Nicola Cotton after she approached a mentally ill man who often refused to take his medication. It is modeled after a similar law in New York.

Before a judge can order a patient into mandatory outpatient treatment, patients must be at least 18 years old, deemed unlikely to voluntarily participate in a treatment program, considered unlikely to survive safely without supervision, and have either a history of violence or two instances within the past three years where a lack of compliance with mental health treatment led to hospitalization.

"This bill, combined with other legislation, takes an important step toward protecting the safety and welfare of both Louisiana communities and our citizens with mental health care needs," said state Health and Hospitals Secretary Alan Levine.

Sent to Jindal last week for his signature was a third mental health bill sought by the governor that would allow psychiatrists to examine patients and recommend commitment using video conferencing technology.

The "telemedicine" measure by Rep. John LaBruzzo, R-Metairie, provides that while the psychiatrist may do the exam by video conference, a licensed health care professional must be in the room with the person being examined.

<http://www.wvltv.com/local/stories/wwl061008tpmental.1d631c7a.html#>

Health Care Reform News Around the Nation for the Week of June 9 California Healthline | 06.11.08

Colorado

On Tuesday, Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter (D) signed into law 11 health care bills, including measures to expand coverage requirements and increase children's access to care, the AP/Denver Post reports.

One of the measures (SB 160) Ritter signed will expand eligibility for Child Health Plan Plus, the Colorado's version of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, to include children in families with incomes up to 225% of the federal poverty level. The bill also will expand mental health benefits for children enrolled in the program.

A companion bill (SB 161) also signed into law will remove administrative barriers to applying for Medicaid and Child's Health Plan Plus (AP/Denver Post, 6/3). According to the Denver Rocky Mountain News, the legislation will qualify an additional 50,000 uninsured children for the programs (Torkelson, Denver Rocky Mountain News, 6/3).

The other health care bills signed into law were:

- * SB 57, which will require insurers to cover children's hearing aids;
- * SB 135, which will create standardized health plan identification cards to make it easier for providers to get information from insurers;
- * SB 138, which will establish minimum requirements for designations or rating systems for physicians developed by health care or insurance entities;
- * SB 194, which will direct the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to develop a public health improvement plan for the state;
- * SB 217, which will direct two state agencies to develop a "Centennial Care Choices" plan that could provide many state residents with basic health coverage;
- * HB 1100, which will restore funds to the Colorado Responds to Children with Special Needs Program;
- * HB 1385, which will establish a consumer guide to purchasing health insurance on the state Division of Insurance Web site and increase transparency of insurance brokers' commission fees; and
- * HB 1410, which will require most insurance plans to cover colorectal cancer screening tests (AP/Denver Post, 6/3).

Connecticut

On Tuesday, Connecticut House Majority Leader Christopher Donovan (D) asked Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R) to delay implementing a new health plan for uninsured adults because of concerns that it could disrupt care for children in low-income families, the Hartford Courant reports.

The administration plans to merge the new Charter Oak health plan with HUSKY, which covers 320,000 low-income children and adults who are eligible for Medicaid.

Charter Oak is expected to cover about 20,000 adults next year and about 50,000 by 2011.

The state is accepting bids for the combined program contract.

HealthNet and WellCare, two of the four HUSKY providers, left the program in April, and Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Connecticut withdrew from the bidding for the combined program in March, citing "concerns about inadequate state funding." Two other insurers bidding on the program do not have provider networks established in the state.

Starting July 1, HUSKY beneficiaries will have six months to transition to new HUSKY providers.

Sheldon Toubman, a Connecticut legal aid attorney, said the merger could force thousands of HUSKY beneficiaries to find new physicians for the second time in less than one year.

Rell has no plans to delay the program, according to spokesperson Chris Cooper.

Donovan said some state lawmakers would like to hold a special session next week to discuss delaying Charter Oak (Pazniokas, Hartford Courant, 6/4).

Illinois

On Saturday, the state Senate sent a bill to Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) that would increase funding for state hospitals that provide care to a large number of Medicaid beneficiaries, the Chicago Tribune reports. The measure was approved unanimously by the state Legislature.

Under the bill, the state would provide \$640 million annually over a period of five years to hospitals that treat Medicaid beneficiaries and an additional \$130 million annually for general health care spending in the state. The measure would be financed by federal funds and taxes on state hospitals (Wiehle, Chicago Tribune, 5/31).

Louisiana

Louisiana's Charity Hospitals will have to begin cutting services this summer unless the state Legislature provides them with an additional \$35 million, Louisiana State University officials told the state Senate Finance Committee on Monday, the New Orleans Times-Picayune reports.

Michael Butler, interim CEO of the hospitals division, did not identify which services would be cut if the funds are not provided, but in a letter he stated that "this will certainly mean drastic reductions in the services available to those who have no other viable options."

Butler wrote that those decisions would be made shortly after July 1.

According to the Times-Picayune, Charity's \$30 billion budget for next fiscal year is about \$111 million under the state's constitutional limit on spending, which can only be changed by a two-thirds vote.

The system's budget is expected to increase by \$89 million next year to \$952 million, but the majority of those funds will be designated to "continuation costs" and to restore services in New Orleans.

According to Fred Cerise, LSU's vice president for health care, the system needs an additional \$55 million next year to avoid using money from its equipment and upkeep funds.

The Times-Picayune reports that the Charity financial challenges can be attributed to "costs -- such as prisoner care, outpatient prescription drugs and doctor salaries -- that cannot be reimbursed with federal Medicaid dollars" (Moller, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 6/3).

Massachusetts

Massachusetts spent \$636 million in fiscal year 2007 to provide health care coverage to employees of large companies that do not offer health benefits -- a 14% increase over FY 2006, according to a recent report by the state Office of Health and Human Services, the Boston Globe reports.

According to the Globe, the report shows that although the Massachusetts health insurance law has extended health coverage to thousands of residents, "many employers still rely on state programs to provide health care benefits for their workers."

Under the state's health insurance law, employers are considered to be making a "reasonable" contribution to their employees' health care coverage if at least 25% of workers are enrolled in a company-sponsored health plan or if the company pays at least 35% of workers' premiums. Companies that do not meet the minimum contribution standards must pay \$295 per employee into an insurance pool for the uninsured (Krasner, Boston Globe, 5/31).

In other news, Massachusetts businesses and most of the state's health insurers on Wednesday announced the formation of the Coalition for Affordable Health Coverage, a lobbying group that will work to control rising health care costs in the state and to prevent cost-shifting to employers, the Boston Globe reports.

The group will work to avoid increased fees for employers who do not offer health benefits for workers and to oppose raising the "reasonable" contribution standards under the Massachusetts health insurance law (Krasner, Boston Globe, 6/5).

Mississippi

On Thursday, the state House voted 55-53 to reject a bill (HB 17) that would have increased state taxes on cigarettes, liquor and wine to fund an expansion of Medicaid, the Jackson Clarion-Ledger reports. The measure needed 65 votes to pass the House before the Senate could consider it.

The bill would have increased the cigarette tax by 18 cents to \$1 per pack and increased the liquor and wine tax by 1%.

The tax increases would have been combined with a hospital tax -- which is supported by Gov. Haley Barbour (R), the Senate and officials of the Mississippi Hospital Association -- to address a \$90 million deficit in the program (Chandler, Jackson Clarion-Ledger, 5/30).

South Carolina

South Carolina lawmakers on Wednesday voted to override Gov. Mark Sanford's (R) vetoes of several bills, including a measure to expand SCHIP, the AP/Raleigh News & Observer reports.

The bill provides an additional \$21 million to expand the income eligibility limits for Partners for Healthy Children, the state's version of SCHIP.

Supporters of the bill said the measure will allow 88,000 additional children to enroll in the program (Davenport, AP/Raleigh News & Observer, 6/4).

<http://www.californiahealthline.org/articles/2008/6/9/Health-Care-Reform-News-Around-the-Nation-for-the-Week-of-June-9.aspx?topicID=37#>

La. House approves surplus spending bills
Forbes.com | 06.11.08

BATON ROUGE, La. -

Spending plans that would tap into hundreds of millions of dollars in extra, unspent state cash from the current year were unanimously passed by the Louisiana House on Monday.

The spending is contained in two bills that now head to the Senate for debate.

One bill includes more than \$110 million in state funding for LSU-run public hospitals; new professorships at universities; an economic development grant program; legal judgments against the state; and for the state's contractual obligations to the New Orleans Saints and Hornets. It also includes millions for lawmakers' pet projects.

The supplemental budget bill is packed with projects pushed by Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration. The money comes from better-than-expected state tax collections and what House Appropriations Committee chairman Jim Fannin, D-Jonesboro, said was a \$41 million savings from a state government hiring freeze put in place by Jindal.

The committee debate on the spending plan was filled with complaints from several lawmakers who said they hadn't had enough time to review it, but no one objected to the measure on the House floor.

A second bill would plow \$307 million in excess cash from the current budget year ending June 30 into an economic development fund designed to attract so-called "mega-projects" - big-ticket manufacturing facilities sought by the state. The fund currently contains \$140 million, and the Jindal administration is pushing to add the new money.

Any spending from the mega-project fund would need to be voted on by lawmakers.

<http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2008/06/10/ap5100628.html>

Love letters flesh out already rich life stories

Shreveport Times.com | 06.11.08

By John Andrew Prime



Drs. Joe Holoubek (left) and Alice Baker Holoubek on their wedding day, July 18, 1939. (Photo courtesy of the Holoubek family)

Snapshots of the lives of two medical students in Depression-era Louisiana, wrapped in the context of long-distance love, form the substance of three years' worth of letters between doctors who left their mark on Shreveport, Louisiana and the world.

The letters, hundreds penned from 1937 to 1939 by Joe Holoubek and Alice Baker, have been collected, annotated and researched by their daughter Martha H. Fitzgerald, a former Times writer, editor and columnist. With other family members, she is giving copies of the collection to four historical archives over the course of this summer, with the first donation set for Wednesday morning at Noel Memorial Library on the campus of LSU-Shreveport.



Fitzgerald

"There are 770 letters in eight different volumes," said Fitzgerald, who met last week with Laura McLemore and Domenica Carriere, of the LSU Archives. She benefitted from having a primary source partner for her initial work with the collection — her father, who died May 17, 2007, at age 91. "We started working on these before he died. I still have a lot to go through in the storage shed."

Through the letters, which mention names, customs and details of life in Louisiana at the time, researchers of early 20th-century medicine and higher education will be able to share first-hand the

experiences and thoughts of the two Holoubeks, who became pioneering Shreveport physicians and led lives devoted to religion and social causes.

"Our family hopes this will be of great value to historians across the country," Fitzgerald said.

In addition to the letters, the collection to be donated includes 24 pages of research aids, biographical sketches, guides to medical terms and symbols and a timeline.

LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans will receive its copy Saturday, the same day it dedicates the Alice Baker Holoubek M.D. Professorship in Medicine. "Dr. Alice," as she was known, one of the first women to graduate from the medical school, practiced medicine in Shreveport for more than 40 years.

Remaining copies will be presented to the University of Nebraska College of Medicine in Omaha, "Dr. Joe's" alma mater, and to the Mayo Clinic.

"Alice Baker, of New Orleans, and Joe Holoubek, of Omaha (Neb.), met at Mayo Clinic and courted by letter for two years before their marriage in 1939," Fitzgerald said. "They wrote each other twice a week during their senior years of medical school and daily during their internships.

"Their letters re-create the medical era before antibiotics, when radiation was applied liberally and sulfa compounds were the latest miracle drugs. Public hospitals were crowded, tuberculosis was rampant and interns were easy prey for serious infections. Medical training differed widely from school to school, and women doctors encountered prejudice."

The Holoubeks practiced internal medicine together in Shreveport. He led the drive to establish LSU School of Medicine in Shreveport in the 1960s. Alice Holoubek, who contracted tuberculosis while a medical student and who wrote many letters to her future husband while recovering from that condition in Alexandria, died in 2005, at age 90.

Noel Memorial Library eventually will receive the original letters, which will join an extensive collection of the two doctors' writings and personal papers. It includes about 18 cubic feet of material at this time,

"The Holoubeks' more than half century of professional, church and community activism makes the Joe E. and Alice Baker Holoubek Papers an invaluable historical resource," said McLemore, head of LSUS Archives and Special Collections. "These letters are an important and integral addition to their collection."

The letters left Fitzgerald pondering some mysteries, with some questions likely never to be answered, including the identity of a woman mentioned in the letters only as Sarah and who dated a friend of the couple, Lewis Ates, in 1938.

After retirement, Joe Holoubek became an award-winning writer. His 2004 gospel-based novel, "Letters to Luke: From His Fellow Physician Joseph of Capernaum," won the Writers' Digest Award for Inspirational Literature and the Independent Publisher Award for Religious Fiction.

In 2006, LSU School of Medicine in Shreveport established the Joe E. Holoubek M.D. Professorship of Medicine. In May, the LSU Health Sciences Center Foundation presented the first annual Drs. Alice and Joe Holoubek LSU Medical School Founder Award at the student awards convocation.

In addition to the lessons and examples imparted by their lives, Fitzgerald and the library staffers hope the preservation of these letters may encourage many families to save items they might otherwise think are too personal or even insignificant.

"These letters are a treasure-trove of primary-source material," Fitzgerald said. "Through them, I have learned a lot about the medical education of the time and how medical students in New Orleans were learning medicine differently from those in Nebraska or at the Mayo Clinic.

"I would love for readers to give second thoughts to collections they might have of their parents and grandparents and their value. Everyday life is of great interest to historians."

<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080608/NEWS01/806080315>

Campus Spotlight

Alexandria Town Talk | 06.11.08

Mandy M. Goodnight

Native graduates from Naval Academy

William Cole Spears has graduated from the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis.

Spears earned a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering and a commission as an ensign in the United States Navy.

Spears is a graduate of Tioga High School and has been accepted into the submarine service and will enter the officers' program at the Naval Nuclear Power Training Command in Charleston in June.

Local graduates

Shari L. Gray has graduated summa cum laude from Saint Martin's University in Washington.

She earned a bachelor's degree in education.

Gray is the daughter of Elaine Walker of Pineville.

Tech students honored

Louisiana Tech University's journalism students and faculty were honored during the Louisiana Press Women's 2008 Communications Contest, university officials said.

Cenla students honored were Elizabeth DeGrie of Pineville -- second place, feature writing and Justin Phillips of Alexandria -- first place, feature writing.

Phillips' work will be entered into the National Federation of Press Women's Communication Contest.

Organization raises funds for hunger

Louisiana State University's Gamma Beta Phi Chapter raised \$530 for Heifer International.

The international organization works with communities to end hunger and poverty. Heifer International sends animals all over the United States and the world.

LSUA's chapter of Gamma Beta Phi, were able to donate one breed heifer, a flock of chickens and a share of rabbits.

LSUS names academic honorees

Louisiana State University at Shreveport has released its spring 2008 Chancellor's list and Dean's list, which includes students from Central Louisiana.

To be named to the Dean's list, a student must have a 3.5 to 3.79 grade-point average for the semester. Students with a 3.8 to 4.0 GPA are named to the Chancellor's list.

Cenla students on the Dean's list include Blake Allie of Many, Jamie Bruce of Leesville and Shannon Wells of Pineville.

Named to the Chancellor's list were Brandon Leggio of Boyce, Wesley Martin of Converse, Katie Moak of Ferriday and Na Willis of Leesville.

Cenla students among LSUS graduates

LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport has announced its graduates, which were honored last month during a ceremony. The center graduates 135 students.

Cenla students earning a degree included Jennifer Martin Dowden of Leesville, who received a master's of communication disorders.

Earning a degree from the School of Medicine in Shreveport were Matthew Ross LaFleur of Alexandria, John Wesley Smith of Ferriday and Robert Adam Brocato of Many.

Dry Prong native

finishes college

Scott DuBois of Dry Prong has earned a bachelor's degree in history from Buena Vista University, university officials said.

DuBois graduated magna cum laude.

More than 800 students graduated from the university for the 2007-2008 year with commencement services held in May. The university is located in Iowa.

<http://www.thetowntalk.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080609/NEWS01/806090308/1002>

College notebook
The Daily Advertiser | 06.11.08

LSUHSC graduates local students

LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport awarded graduate degrees in the health sciences to more 135 students during commencement exercises held May 24.

Britni Hebert, Stuart Hebert, Christopher Herrington, Kathryn King and James Russo, II, all of Lafayette, received degrees from the School of Medicine.

Family establishes professorship at UL

The Dr. Joe Kite Endowed Professorship in Governmental Ethics was recently established at UL by the Kite family. The Kite Family previously created an Endowed Professorship in Dietetics.

Flume finds new home at NOAA

A \$180,000 piece of equipment, called a flume, was moved from UL's Abdalla Hall to the NOAA facility. The move further solidifies the relationship between the university and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

A flume is a machine that allows for highly precise measurement of water flow. It is used in calibrating and creating flow models. It has been used by the UL Center for Louisiana Inland Water Studies to assess the performance of flap gates, which are used to hold salt water out of unwanted areas.

His research will help improve computer models of coastal wetlands.

Two scholarships set up through donations

An anonymous donor to UL recently established the E. Ray Desormeaux Endowed Scholarship in Civil Engineering. The \$500 scholarship will be awarded annually.

An anonymous donor to UL also recently established the Mark E. Zappi Endowed Scholarship in Engineering. The \$500 scholarship will be awarded annually.

<http://www.theadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080608/NEWS01/806080330/1002>

Number of Underinsured U.S. Adults Increased by 60% Between 2003 and 2007, Study Finds

Kaiser Network.org | 06.11.08

The number of underinsured U.S. adults increased by 60% from 2003 to 2007, according to a study published on Tuesday on the Web site of the journal Health Affairs, the New York Times reports (Abelson, New York Times, 6/10).

For the study, Cathy Schoen, president for research and evaluation at the Commonwealth Fund, and colleagues surveyed about 3,500 adults between June 2007 and October 2007. About three-fourths of the adults were between ages 19 and 64. The study defined as underinsured adults who had health insurance all year but had out-of-pocket medical costs equal to at least 10% of their annual incomes or greater than 5% for those with low incomes, as well as those who faced deductibles greater than 5% of income (Colliver, San Francisco Chronicle, 6/10).

The study found that 25 million U.S. adults -- about one in every five younger than age 65 -- were underinsured in 2007, compared with 16 million in 2003. According to the Times, people generally receive generous health insurance through large companies had adequate coverage, but coverage through small companies or the non-group market is increasingly characterized by high deductibles or limited benefits (New York Times, 6/10).

Forty-five percent of the underinsured adults reported that they had problems with payment of their medical bills, were contacted by collection agencies about bills or changed their lifestyles to pay medical costs, compared with 51% of uninsured adults and 21% of those with adequate health insurance, the study found. About 53% of underinsured adults said that they went without necessary medical care because of cost issues, compared with 68% of uninsured adults and 31% of those with adequate health insurance, according to the study.

Commonwealth Fund President Karen Davis said, "Lack of insurance is only one part of the problem as even the insured have serious gaps in coverage." She added that the national health care debate should address the quality of health insurance. Schoen said, "Here is the United States, you can have health insurance all year long and still go into medical debt or face bankruptcy" (San Francisco Chronicle, 6/10).

American Public Media's "Marketplace" on Tuesday reported on the study. The segment includes comments from Schoen and Henry Aaron, a health care expert at the Brookings Institution (Hobson, "Marketplace," American Public Media, 6/10).

NPR's "Morning Edition" on Tuesday also reported on the study. The segment includes comments from Schoen and a family that is underinsured and having trouble paying for health care (Rovner, "Morning Edition," NPR, 6/10).

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_hpolicy.cfm#52639