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★ Texas Rehabilitation Commission ★ A Human Energy Agency ★

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Legislature Ends with Gains for Employees/Clients

The gavel fell on the 71st Legislature May 29 and state employees walked away with a 5 percent across-the-board pay increase for FY 1990--the highest salary hike in several years.

The spending package further provides an increase in the state contribution to employee health insurance. The higher contribution will help offset the drastic increases in premiums scheduled for September.

Consumers of TRC services also made gains in this legislature. They pushed for and got a personal attendant service line item included in the TRC appropriation.

"Each session consumers give us a major program priority," says Commissioner Arrell. "In years past it was ERS, Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Services, Comprehensive Medical Rehabilitation Services and so on. This year it was personal attendant care."

He stresses the crucial influence consumers can have on the Legislature. "If it hadn't been for the consumers, we wouldn't have gotten this program," he says. "The legislators really responded to them."

The newly-adopted \$47 billion state budget is \$5 billion higher than current spending from all revenue sources. Health and human services budgets will rise

to \$11,935 million in FY 1990-91, a \$2,176 million increase over current spending levels.

"We did 'OK' in this session," says Commissioner Arrell. "Not as well as last session when we did better than ever in our history. But we did 'OK.'"

Although FY 1990-91 state spending will not require new taxes, many legislators warn that tax increases are inevitable in the next legislative session.

The use of temporary taxes (which will soon expire) and one-time revenue sources will

automatically force a tax hike in two years, according to Rep. Jim Rudd, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

A Special Session of the 71st Legislature is currently overhauling existing workers' compensation laws. TRC is watching this process to see if new legislation will have any impact on Commission services.

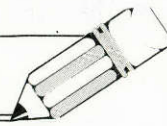
Several regular session bills passed which are of interest to TRC clients and employees.

Legislation Affecting TRC Employees:

- Five percent across-the-board pay hike for state employees beginning September 1. No salary increases were planned for 1991.
- Anticipated health insurance increases should all be covered except \$10 in 1990 and \$20 in 1991.
- Management can now award up to 6.8 percent of an employee's annual salary as a "lump sum" merit increase (bonus) outside the normal merit raise process. Officials believe this will allow "Step 8" employees to get a financial reward on the basis of merit. No rules or procedures have yet been drafted for this provision.

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Commissioner's Message Box



Editor's Note: "News & Views" presents the first installment of a new monthly feature based on selected questions submitted to the Commissioner's Message Box. Each month, two - three questions appear along with Commissioner Max Arrell's answers so that all employees can benefit from his responses. Questions chosen for this feature are those of broadest interest to most TRC employees. Names of those submitting questions are omitted to maintain writer confidentiality. Questions for the Commissioner's Message Box should continue to be addressed to the Commissioner's Office of Special Services, NOT to "News & Views."

The following message box question prompted this "News & Views" feature:

MILESTONES

TRC Service JUNE 1989

15 years: Region I
George Valdez

15 years: Region II
David Judd Burks
Robert E. Garner

20 years: Diana Hejl

20 years: Region III
Polly Walton

20 years: Region IV
Maria M. Trevino

15 years: Region V
Estella Salinas

10 years: Region VI
Faye G. Temple
William L. Cupit
Bettye N. Boyd

15 years: Marlene A. Owens

10 years: DDS
Pauline J. Jimenez

20 years: Art J. Lavalle
Martin E. Luker

10 years: Central Office
Robert Allen Gray

15 years: Richard A. Coaxum
Maria G. Norvell
Dorothy L. Pasley

Q: One unique part of the IBM Monthly Newsletter is a section that is referred to as "Speak Up." Employees ask questions of management and management responds in this section of the newsletter. Often, questions that are being asked, and responses given, educate as well as inform others of certain policies, procedures and concerns. Perhaps TRC should consider this same format in the "News & Views" in accordance with the letters or memos sent to the Commissioner's Message Box.

A: This is something that we have been discussing for some time now. I agree that many of the issues raised in the Message Box might be of interest to other employees. I have asked the "News & Views" editor to draft procedures which will keep the writer anonymous and make sure questions and answers are brief. You have come up with a great idea that can only enhance the spirit of the "message box" concept.

Q: The "Circle of Excellence Award" for Commission counseors is a good idea and I would like to suggest a comparable award be given to disability examiners in DDS. This would be an award for several DEs from TRC rather than a Social Security award for one person. I feel that this would improve morale and help with the "oneness" concept. The criteria would be based on quality as well as timeliness and would be established by a committee composed of DEs as well as management.

A: I appreciate hearing your thoughts about the development of a "Circle of Excellence Award" system for

examiners. I think this is an excellent idea! Les Albrecht, deputy commissioner for DDS, is overseeing development of a procedure for a disability examiner excellence award which will be in place around the first of August. Plans are for the first awards to be presented September 30. I think a system that rewards examiners who commit to and reach a certain "mark of excellence" is very worthwhile, as it has been for counselors working with clients in the field.

Q: I am a single parent with two young children and I live with my parents. My salary does not afford me the opportunity to live on my own and support my children. Although TRC benefits are extremely helpful in my situation, I find that I cannot make it in the "real world" on my salary. I feel a supervisor should be allowed to award an exceptional employee more than a one step merit increase and/or not limit it to once a fiscal year.

A: Our current policy on merit salary increases does not prevent an exceptional employee from receiving more than a one step merit increase. Nor does our current program limit merit salary increases to one per fiscal year. The policy does, however, indicate that each office is allocated a certain amount of money for use in awarding merit increases. It also suggests that approval authority use discretion in awarding them to assure that funds are available the entire year. Apart from this, the 71st Legislature passed provisions for a "lump sum" merit award (targeting Step 8 employees) of 6.8 percent of an employee's annual salary, outside the normal merit raise process. Rules for applying this provision are now being drafted.

First Lady Plays Hostess to Media Award Winners



Carolyn Cutler (left) and Claire Bugen (middle) receive 1989 Barbara Jordan Media Awards from Rita Clements for their brochure "The Quality Choice" which promotes the Texas School for the Deaf.

1989 Barbara Jordan Media Award Winners

Television

Documentary

Dennis Johnson, WFAA/Dallas

News Feature

Nann Goplerud, WFAA/Dallas

John Gudjohnsen,

WFAA/Dallas

Pat Broyles, WFAA/Dallas

Radio

Public Affairs Programming

Shanna Peeples, KDJW

AM/FM - Amarillo

Public Relations

Texas School for the Deaf

Claire Bugen and Carolyn

Cutler/Austin

Print

News Feature

Denise Gamino/Austin

American-Statesman

Feature Article

Marty Primeau/Dallas

Special Contribution

Individual

Chalda Maloff, Ph.D./League

City

Susan Macduff Wood/ Houston

Organization

Very Special Arts/San Antonio

Mel Casas, Chairman

Winners of the 1989 Barbara Jordan Media Awards were announced by the Texas Governor's Committee for Disabled Persons last month.

In a June 14 Governor's Mansion reception, First Lady of Texas Rita Clements presented eight awards to individuals and organizations in the communications media. Clements cited media award winners for helping increase understanding of problems faced by people with disabilities as well as their potential.

Each award winner received a three-inch bronze medallion designed by internationally-known Austin sculptor David Deming. The medallions have the image of Barbara Jordan, former U.S. Congresswoman and current professor at the University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs.

Legislature

Continued from page 1

- SB 357 provides for a sick leave pool for employees who become seriously ill or injured and need more time to recuperate than they have leave hours available to them.
- Employees who are members of the Teacher Retirement System with 30 years of service can now receive full retirement benefits at age 55.
- For employees thinking about retirement, a bill passed allowing one month serviceable credit for every 320 hours of accumulated sick leave.
- State employees who travel will soon get an increase in allowable "cents per mile" travelled up to a maximum of 25 cents per mile. Exact mileage reimbursement for TRC employees (above 21 cents per mile) has not yet been set by Commission policy-makers.
- The meal allowance per day for state employees travelling out of town was raised from \$15 to a maximum of \$25 for in state travel.

TRC Programs:

In most instances, general revenue funding for TRC programs increased for the next biennium. Overall, TRC general revenue funding rose by \$1,775,400 to \$33,880,539 in FY 1990 and by \$1,626,840 to \$33,731,979 in FY 1991. Here are some funding comparisons for programs of particular interest:

	FY 1989	FY 1990	FY 1991
Vocational Rehabilitation	\$20,905,246	\$22,405,246	\$22,405,246
Extended Rehabilitation Services	3,835,604	3,835,604	3,835,604
Independent Living Services Including Deaf/Blind Client Services	3,978,861	4,278,861	3,978,861
Developmental Disabilities Services	208,777	210,048	212,988
Comprehensive Medical Rehabilitation	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Interagency Transitional Services	400,000	400,000	400,000
Personal Attendant Services (new program)	0	350,000	500,000

ADA Reintroduced in Congress

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was reintroduced into Congress in May. If passed, the ADA would protect people with disabilities from discrimination in employment, transportation, public accommodations, activities of state and local government, and communications. It gives protection comparable to that afforded other groups in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on the basis of race, sex, national origin, age and religion. The act has early bipartisan support in the Senate and the House with such sponsors as Sen. Tom Harkin (Iowa), Sen. Edward Kennedy (Mass.) and Rep. Tony Coelho (Calif.). Congressional leaders expect cooperation from the Bush administration as well as active support from disability advocates.

Legislation for People TRC Serves:

- A bill passed allowing people with disabilities to get self-serve prices at full-serve gasoline pumps.
- TRC counselors will receive some funds for transitional services based on legislation passed this session.
- The 71st Legislature created an Office for the Prevention of Developmental Disabilities.



Robert Jackson, former TRC client of Paul Peterson in the Austin Field Office East, received TRC-sponsored services at Goodwill Industries of Central Texas. Now, Jackson is back at a TRC office not as a TRC client but as a Goodwill employee. He is the "day man" on the Central Office custodial crew supervised by Jim Wright, Goodwill director of industrial contracts. "Jim believed I could do the work and gave me a chance," says Jackson. Previously, he worked for a year-and-a-half on the cleaning crew at the Warehouse/Printshop complex. He drew high praise from the warehouse staff for his hard work and dedication to doing a good job. Jackson is planning for the future, too. "My goal is to work for the state and get some benefits and retirement started," he says. After all, says Jackson (age 24), "I'm not getting any younger."

Goodwill Places Crew in New Central Office

The 16-worker night crew arrives to relieve the one-man day crew at the new Central Office Building in Austin promptly at 5 p.m. each afternoon. By 1:30 a.m., they will be finished cleaning approximately 250,000 square feet of office space.

The crew is unique, not only for the volume of work they do, but also because most of them (11 of 17--including one day worker) have disabilities. Eight of the 11 are current or former TRC clients.

Goodwill Industries of Central Texas provides the custodial crew under a contract with TRC and

the State Purchasing and General Services Commission made possible through Texas Industries for the Blind and Handicapped. The agreement took shape while the building was still under construction.

All parties involved agreed the crew should consist mostly of workers who have disabilities, a concept which gives life to the TRC mission as well as the Goodwill mission.

As members of the Goodwill crew cycle into community-based jobs, more disabled workers will be added.

"The whole project is a natural," says Jim Wright, director of industrial contracts at Goodwill. "Our goal is to have a crew of 100 percent people with disabilities as soon as possible."

"It was definitely planned that way," says Commissioner Arrell. And he doesn't stop there.

"The crew from Goodwill is good, but I want to see more people with disabilities working for TRC here in this building . . . there's no reason why not!" he says.

"We not only wanted the building to be a model of accessibility, we want people with disabilities working here."

Based on TRC's commitment to productivity and independence for Texans with disabilities, Commissioner Arrell says of the work crew, "That's part of the whole concept; that's it in reality!"

"If this isn't a prime example of rehabilitation working for the people of Texas, then I throw my hands up!" says Wright.

He believes it's the kind of decision that might influence other organizations thinking about hiring people with disabilities.

"TRC has put their money where their mouth is; that's outstanding!" he says.

★ Applause

The following TRC employees recently received press coverage for the Commission: **Wes Huerta**, area manager, and **Mary Correa**, counselor, both in the Harlingen Field Office; **Judy Marvel**, employment preparation instructor/coordinator in the Beaumont Field Office; **Judy Freeman**, counselor in the Longview Field Office; and TRC Board Member **Jim Gray**.

Polly Walton, counselor in the Beaumont Field Office, discussed services for the handicapped at the Second Annual Fair for Persons with a Handicap and/or a Disability at Lamar University. **Andy Loker**, counselor in the Beaumont Field Office, served on the job fair's coordinating committee.

TRC employees in the Lubbock Field Office were recently recognized by the Lubbock Food Bank for their active participation in the state agencies food drive.

Deborah Burks, counselor in the University of Houston Field Office, was named rehabilitant of the year by the Arkansas Rehabilitation Association. Burks, paralyzed in a 1972 auto accident, was a client of the Arkansas Division of Rehabilitation Services. She became a TRC counselor in 1987.

DDS Leads the Nation in Quality

TRC's Disability Determination Service's spring accuracy ratings led to a number one ranking in the nation on quality (see April "News & Views").

In early 1988, Texas' accuracy hovered around the national average. Then, DDS statistics began to climb.

By the end of March 1989, Texas ranked first in the nation with a 98.8 percent accuracy rate compared to a national average of 94.3 percent in initial case determinations.

Commissioner Arrell noted this achievement to DDS Deputy Commissioner Les Albrecht in a

memorandum of appreciation. "You and your staff are to be congratulated and should be proud of your accomplishment," he wrote.

In addition to the Federal Quality Assurance Program, the DDS's Program Evaluation Services reviews 12 percent of all cases processed by Texas.

Congratulations to two initial disability examiners who achieved a zero return rate in the PES sample review for the past year (April to April): Lloyd Duncan, in Unit 13, and Pamela Chisholm, in Unit 17.

Quality decisions mark the work of reconsideration and continuing disability review DEs in Appellate Operations. Five DEs received no PES sample returns during 14 consecutive months: Larry Miller, Unit 01; LaVonne Hummel, Unit 09; Perry Watson, Unit 09; Roger Hight, Unit 11; and Julie Casner, Unit 35.

Two examiners in Recon Unit 11, Kathleen Slesnick and Tina Brewer, had 100 percent case accuracy for 13 and 12 months respectively.

Three case consultants received no substantive returns: Anne Monnig, Unit 01; Linda Daniel, Unit 11; and Becky McNicol, Unit 35.



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