

OFFICE OF VOLUNTEERISM COULD BE ABOLISHED BY BILL

By Marta McCloskey
Staff Writer

■(GIT) In session today, House members voted in favor of abolishing the Office of Volunteerism. The measure would transfer the authority over the office from the Secretary of State to the Department of Civil Emergency Management. It also creates the Oklahoma Commission on Volunteerism. The one full time employee of the office would transfer to the commission.

Author of the bill, Rep. John Bryant, R-Tulsa, agreed to strike the title and explained that the measure was prompted by events following the blast of April 19, 1995. "After the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, the department realized more disaster relief was needed for individuals involved in the bombing," he said.

"Why do they think the responsibilities of the office will function better under the Department of Civil Emergency Management as opposed to the Secretary of State," Rep. Al Sadler, D-Ardmore, asked Bryant.

Sadler said he believed the purpose of the office would be lost when it was absorbed into the proposed commission. Rep. Mark Seikel, D-Harrah, pointed out that he had a similar bill barely pass yesterday because it created a new board. "My bill had one big stumbling block...it created a new board," he said. "Members were telling me they did not want any new boards or commissions." Seikel wanted to know how Bryant's bill was different. Bryant told Seikel and members that he had included a repealer in the bill to dissolve the Oklahoma Volunteerism Advisory Council.

Rep. William Paulk, D-Oklahoma City, wanted Bryant to reassure him that the one full time employee of the office would not be eliminated as well. Bryant and Rep. Jim Reese, R-Deer Creek, assured Paulk that the employee would transfer to the commission.

The measure, and its emergency clause passed with a vote of 68 to 31.

LAWMAKER GOES TO BAT FOR MENTAL ILLNESS

By Brandon Beard
Staff Writer

■(GIT) An Oklahoma City lawmaker wants to require that psychiatric services be included in both individual and group health insurance policies. SB799, by Sen. Angela Monson, went before the Senate Tuesday. The measure would require the coverage for victims of severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia, panic disorder and severe depression.

Responding to a constituent request, the Oklahoma City Democrat defended the measure, saying it might be worth additional costs to insurance companies. "I understand the nature of insurance," she said. "There is a sharing of risk — we share in the risk that at any time it could be one of us."

Sen. Bernest Cain, D-Oklahoma City, estimated the cost to be approximately \$1.00 per month, per covered employee.

"You know and I know that nothing comes off this floor at the cost we said it was going to," said Sen. Dave Herbert, D-Midwest City. "I want to be sure when we get this finished that we don't have something that is going to balloon on us in five years." Herbert called the bill "landmark legislation."

Sen. Ben Robinson, D-Muskogee, said the insurance industry has a long history of treating mental illness as something other than an illness.

"The insurance companies are complaining that this will cost them more money," said Sen. Lewis Long, D-Glenpool. "I haven't seen too many insurance companies filing for bankruptcy."

Concerned that individual health policy costs would skyrocket as a result, Sen. Howard Hen-

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