

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED

in his race against Stillwater Democrat Mike Morgan in the Senate District 21 race. Morgan notched a 32-vote victory over Wedel in the general election, but like Roggow, Wedel alleged some of those who voted for his opponent were either registered in other counties or not registered at all. A Lincoln County judge, Ward said, dismissed the allegations related to those voters who may have been twice-registered and recognized that 11 Payne County voters appeared to have voted although they were not registered. The 11 voters were not enough to surmount the difference between the two men, and Morgan was declared the unofficial winner, pending action from the election board on Monday.

Either of the losing candidates, Ward noted, have one avenue remaining: An appeal to the Oklahoma Supreme Court, where they could seek a stay of the election board's action pending arguments concerning their cases.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
11/14/96

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

TASK FORCE HEARS REPORT ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

■(GIT) Oklahoma's Advisory Task Force on Children's Services was asked repeatedly Wednesday to remember two words: home visitation.

Home visitation, the task force was told by Debbie Richardson, with the Healthy Families child abuse program, and representatives of the Department of Health, is a key component in the fight against child abuse and neglect.

Referring to a number of studies which identified early intervention as the most important factor in decreasing abuse rates and improving parenting skills, Richardson told the panel that home visitation, particularly for first-time parents, was key to initiating those intervention efforts.

That fact, combined with the findings of both public and private studies, Richardson said, led the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse to recommend in 1992 that a nationwide home visitation system be put in place. Called Healthy Families America, the initiative was based on the idea that first-time parents would participate voluntarily and would use those who visit their homes

as resources for help in a variety of areas, such as parenting skills and other areas of need. The proposed system, Richardson said, would also rely on community-based help organizations to provide the needed services to the families.

Currently, Richardson told the task force, some 200 programs in 36 states utilize the recommendations of the national committee, including eight in Oklahoma.

The current problem Richardson said, is that there is not the infrastructure that is needed to provide the training and technical assistance, evaluation, research and development of new programs and expansion of existing programs. Such an effort, she said, would require approximately \$33 million annually in Oklahoma.

Representatives of the Department of Health supported Richardson's claims before the task force, noting that the state's child abuse prevention program relied heavily on the idea of home visitation and early intervention in its efforts to combat child abuse.

Also appearing before the task force were Midge Woodard, who oversees the Department of Human Services foster care program, and Debi Farmer, department program administrator, who explained that the state's need for foster families currently outpaces the availability of such families. Specifically, Woodard said, some 3,500 children are now in foster care in the state, while only 1,600 foster families are available. Approximately 300 of those, she added, participated without the benefit of reimbursement normally associated with being a foster parent.

Additionally, she noted, the foster care division will ask the Commission on Human Service to approve the expenditure of up to \$800,000 to pay daycare costs for foster families in which both parents work as part of an effort "to tap into a new family base" for foster care placements.

The money, Farmer said, would cover the anticipated costs for the second-half of the 1997 fiscal year.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
11/13/96

"Progress is born of cooperation in the community—not from government restraints."

*Herbert Hoover
inaugural address
March 4, 1929*

LUKE BILL AUTHOR DISAGREES WITH LACKEY

■(GIT) The author of what is considered the state's most extensive child abuse reform legislation in recent memory disagrees with the governor's human services secretary over the possible impact her legislation could have had in the case of an eight-year-old boy believed murdered last year.

"The bill requires that multidisciplinary teams be established in each district attorney's district," explained Rep. Laura Boyd, D-Norman and author of HB2053, the so-called Ryan Luke Bill.

A report prepared by a special task force appointed by Governor Frank Keating to investigate the handling of the Shane Coffman case repeatedly recommended the implementation of multidisciplinary teams in child abuse investigations. Keating appointed the special task force, headed by Secretary of Human Services Ken Lackey, after reports that law enforcement agencies and the Department of Human Services had multiple contacts with the family prior to the boy's death, going so far in one case as to remove the little boy and his siblings from their mother's care.

During a Nov. 1 press conference, Lackey said he doubted any of the provisions of the Ryan Luke Bill, which ironically took effect the same day the task force released its report, would have benefited Coffman.

Boyd disagrees, saying some of the recommendations included in the task force's report address specific issues covered by her legislation, particularly the establishment of multidisciplinary teams.

Boyd stopped short of saying the presence of a multidisciplinary team would have prevented the Coffman child's death, explaining that it's impossible to speculate on how a case would have been handled if different procedures were in place.

Specifically, Boyd said, there may be a need to hire what she called part-time coordinators to work with the teams.

"I'm interested in seeing some uniformity in the way these teams work," she explained. "I would like to see everyone on the same page, doing things essentially the same way."

Boyd's suggestion bears a certain resemblance to a suggestion made by Governor Keating, who said a primary investigator should direct child abuse cases and make

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