

SCOTT: JESUS HOUSE SITUATION PROBABLY NOT UNUSUAL

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Oklahoma's auditor and inspector believes the findings of his investigation into an Oklahoma City charity would probably be replicated across the country.

"It's probably not unusual," said Clifton Scott, the state's auditor and inspector, of his investigation into the Oklahoma City-based Jesus House that found inadequate procedures in place to assure accountability in the handling of public funds. "The problem is that when someone works with a ministry or organization of this sort they sometimes put people in leadership positions who may not be qualified or have the skills they need to properly oversee (government) programs.

"I think problems like this are probably widespread all across the country."

In an investigative report of the Jesus House's handling of the federal HOME program, Scott recommended that a new board of directors be appointed for the organization and that stringent accountability procedures be put in place to oversee government-related programs.

"Before the (Oklahoma) Department of Commerce, U.S. Housing and Urban Development, the city of Oklahoma City or anyone else gives the Jesus House a program to administer, the organization needs to have assurances that the board of directors is qualified to administer such programs in accordance with the program's guidelines," Scott said.

"That," he added, "was the main reason for a foul-up here — the board did not have

the expertise to oversee the program."

Scott also urged the organization to use more stringent accountability procedures in a variety of areas, ranging from the verification of employees' qualifications for their jobs to the administration of programs.

"There's an old saying that says when your mother tells you she loves you that you'd better check it out," Scott said. "That's true here — when you're dealing with public funds you have to have checks and balances over your employees, as well as in the administration of your programs."

Scott said he has been assured by the Jesus House's leader, Ruth Wynne, who is affectionately called Sister Ruth, that the recommended changes will be made.

"It's not reflected in the report," Scott said, "but I have talked with Ruth Wynne and she has assured me that she will take the steps necessary to put the proper internal controls in place, including appointing a new board of directors made up of professionals and people more experienced in handling matters like those the Jesus House is involved in."

Ultimately, Scott said, the organization's problem boiled down to trust being put in people without appropriate expertise. That, he added, was unfortunate.

"I've known of the Jesus House for a

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gained seats, I think we had reason to feel good. While we didn't gain any seats in the House, we didn't lose any, and we picked up two seats in the Senate."

Additionally, Ferguson noted, the party completed a sweep of the state's congressional delegation when Wes Watkins reclaimed the Third District seat, this time under the Republican banner.

The results, however, did not please Oklahoma City businessman Greg Brown, who announced earlier this week that he would seek the state GOP's top leadership post. That post is currently held by Quineta Wiley, who previously defeated Brown to win the seat.

"Despite a record number of candidates and lots of money, the '96 results were dismal: No net gain in the state House where just a few years ago there was great promise of a 15-seat gain to achieve a Republican majority," Brown said.

Control of the state GOP will be decided during its April convention.

number of years," said Scott. "I even made some modest contributions to its efforts. I believe that what happened was Ruth Wynne put her trust in the wrong people, people without the expertise needed to oversee programs like this, while she focused her attention on other efforts, like feeding the hungry who come to the Jesus House."

Scott said it is unfortunate that the problem, which has reportedly affected contributions to the organization, may mean the Jesus House will have to shut its doors.

"That would be unfortunate," said Scott, "because it does so much good work. It provides a much needed ministry."

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dusty, Burton proposed that the legislature adopt a competition model similar to the one employed by FERC, which unbundled gas services, establish a program allowing for the purchase of natural gas by competitive bidding and remove anti-competitive rules and statutes relating to sole source providers.

Shane Woolbright, executive director of Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma, Inc., offered support for Burton's proposals, while also expressing one concern — that a strong definition of competition be adopted by the Corporation Commission.

Without such a definition in place, Woolbright told the commission, some communities, particularly smaller ones, might find themselves having to make large capital investments to pipe gas from what appears to be a lower cost distributor.

"Some little towns wouldn't be able to do that, and they may be happy and feel that the gas they're getting is priced competitively," Woolbright said.

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The staff of *Capitol Network News* wishes you a safe and happy Thanksgiving.

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