

Cut in nursing home stipend sparks debate

Advocates push for former level; others tout fiscal discipline

By **ROBERT T. GARRETT** / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN – Democrats and advocates for the elderly pleaded Thursday for the state to give back the \$15 it cut last session from the monthly allowance for impoverished nursing home residents.

But a researcher for a foundation that advocates limited government warned the House Human Services Committee against increasing the Medicaid allowance for personal needs other than room, board and medical care.

Mary Katherine Stout, health care analyst for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, said, "This is a perfect opportunity for the state to continue to use some fiscal discipline. ... The little things really do add up."

Rep. Senfronia Thompson, D-Houston, a longtime supporter of increasing the monthly allowance, said Texas nursing homes are so poorly funded that many incontinent residents don't receive enough free diapers and must buy their own.

"Here we are, the Legislature, looking at balancing our budget on the back of ... people with bedsores," she said.

The Texas Silver-Haired Legislature, AARP, United Way and the nursing home industry endorsed an increase in the allowance, now \$45 a month. They said old people with no relatives often can't afford a hairdo, denture cream or a sweater. Restoring the stipend to \$60 would cost \$13 million over two years.

Rep. Suzanna Gratia Hupp, R-Lampasas, who heads the committee, said Speaker Tom Craddick, R-Midland, has told her to put "on hold" all bills that would spend money. But she allowed testimony on Ms. Thompson's bill, which would raise the allowance to \$75, and another bill restoring the \$60 level, by Rep. Norma Chavez, D-El Paso.

No vote was taken.

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