



Senator Eliot Shapleigh

District 29

Texas Press Release

"OP-ED"

Contact:

Claudia Ordaz

(915) 544-1990

Claudia.ordaz@senate.state.tx.us



For Immediate Release

August 27, 2009

"COMPASSIONLESS CARE"

HOW MENTAL HEALTH WORKS IN RICK PERRY'S TEXAS

"Because Rick Perry has neither the courage nor responsibility to deal with his issue, he now has mayors like John Cook deal with it as their issue. John Cook's police now have to pick up Rick Perry's patients that El Paso property taxpayers will have to pay to treat."

Earlier this summer, El Paso's [Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority \(EPMHMR\)](#) [announced](#) that nearly one in three with significant mental health issues will no longer get care. On September 1st, 1,107 of its 4,441 adult clients and 320 of 1,350 its child clients with issues ranging from bipolar disorder to schizophrenia will get a pink slip—all will be moved from treatment and care to Rick Perry's waiting lists.

Now, instead of front line health workers at the state's mental health authority providing professional treatment, [El Paso policemen, firemen and emergency room workers](#) will see them break down, often in extreme psychotic events, without medications or treatment programs that help them function—all because Rick [Perry prefers tax cuts for the wealthy](#) over compassionate care for Texans.

How does that work? Let's take the case of Cassandra B., who happens to have bipolar disease, a manageable disease with the right medications.

When Rick [Perry bragged to the Wall Street Journal](#) on August 22nd about "fiscal discipline," here's what he means. In 2006, during the school finance debacle in Austin, Perry's initial plan to "solve" the school finance challenge cut taxes by \$920 million for everyone making more than \$104,000, many of whom had faithfully funded his last campaign, then hiked taxes by \$10.8 million on everyone making less than \$33,000, nearly all of whom did not support his campaign. In the end, what marked his plan was an historic structural deficit year after year that will literally kill people like Cassandra. As a result of Perry's handiwork, we [start budget talks each session in Austin](#) with a [\\$9 billion structural deficit](#) that dramatically impacts budgets like mental health.

- More -

800 WYOMING AVE., SUITE A • EL PASO, TEXAS 79902

(800) 544-1990 • (915) 544-1990

But the biggest deficit is the courage of a Governor to deal with issues on his watch.

You see, Texas is now [50th in overall spending](#) and [49th in mental health spending](#) per capita. People like Cassandra are purposefully put on "wait lists" in El Paso so people like Rick Perry can brag about tax cuts in Austin. By failing to fund mental health in Austin, Rick Perry shifts the burden to El Pasoans do to it here. Whose responsibility is mental health? Let's be clear: mental health funding is a Governor's issue—just the same way that city police are a mayor's issue. Because Rick Perry has neither the courage nor responsibility to deal with his issue, he now has mayors like John Cook deal with it as their issue. John Cook's police now have to pick up Rick Perry's patients that El Paso property taxpayers will have to pay to treat.

If Cassandra's medications end, if she needs immediate help, citizens will call, police will respond, lawyers will act. With her current treatment program and medications, she'll be fine—but in Rick Perry's Texas, she could end up in an El Paso jail suffering from a manic episode. And then, mental health judges and caretakers, who are paid with your local city and county tax dollars, will take her to an emergency room where she may get care, all at the highest cost.

In El Paso, the [County](#), [City](#), and [EPMHMR](#) are all now in emergency budget talks to keep doors open and take care of our citizens in need—those who are critically mentally ill—and to keep them at home, not in jails.

And what about Rick Perry? He's traveling the state talking about "fiscal discipline."

You can bet he's not talking about how El Paso taxpayers have to pay his tab—for his compassionless care.

-End-

800 WYOMING AVE., SUITE A • EL PASO, TEXAS 79902

(800) 544-1990 • (915) 544-1990