

Kansas spotlight

Media people see flaws in open meetings bill

TOPEKA (AP) — A bill requiring that groups appointed to advise certain newly elected officials hold meetings in public doesn't go far enough, media representatives told a Senate committee Thursday.

The measure would apply the Kansas Open Meetings Act to task forces created by people who have won elections — but not yet taken office — in state, city, county and school board races.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius appointed just such advisory panels after her election last Nov. 5. In a case brought by news organizations, a judge ruled that the panels did not fall under the Open Meetings Act until Sebelius took office Jan. 13.

Under the legislation, such task forces would be required to have open sessions and notify the public of meetings. Officials-elect would be limited in their ability to discuss public business in private.

Jim Bloom, editor and publisher of the Hutchinson News, told the Senate Elections and Local Government Committee he supported the bill but that it should include more officials.

As examples, he noted that the list does not include community college trustees or groundwater management district directors.

Harriet Lange, lobbyist for the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, agreed, telling the committee, "It doesn't quite go far enough."

Opposing the bill was Don Moler, lobbyist for the League of Kansas Municipalities, who suggested it would inhibit informal discussions among newly elected officials.

And Moler said local governments should be left out of the debate over whether Sebelius' advisory teams should have met in public.

Judge to rule today on Health Midwest lawsuit

OLATHE (AP) — An attorney for Health Midwest said Thursday if Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline continues to resist the proposed sale of the health system to a for-profit company, the deal will

likely fall apart.

During closing arguments in Johnson County Circuit Court in Health Midwest's lawsuit against Kline, attorney Charles German said Kline's actions were jeopardizing the proposed \$1.13 billion sale of the nonprofit Health Midwest to HCA Inc., the nation's largest for-profit health care system.

He said if Kline, or the Johnson County District Judge Thomas E. Foster, put conditions on the sale, "the deal is dead."

Foster said he would rule on the lawsuit today.

Reid Holbrook, an attorney for Kline, countered that the attorney general objected to the sale partly out of concern HCA would not provide the same level of medical care to indigent patients that Health Midwest currently provides.

The sale of Health Midwest's 13 hospitals — 10 in Missouri and three in Kansas — and other assets would result in the creation of a foundation or foundations overseeing sale proceeds of between \$700 million and \$800 million.

Attorneys general in both states challenged how those funds would be disbursed. Health Midwest sued, challenging their authority to oversee the sale and the creation of a nonprofit foundation. Both states countersued.

Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon reached a settlement last week with Health Midwest, agreeing to the creation of a single foundation that would distribute the sale proceeds to charities in both states. But Kline objected to the agreement and talks between him and Nixon did not settle the dispute.<

Several Wichita candidates have felony convictions

WICHITA (AP) — Three mayoral candidates have been convicted of felonies and the fiancée of a fourth filed for a court protection from abuse order.

The *Wichita Eagle* reported in its Thursday edition that background checks of 15 mayoral candidates revealed that:

— George Poulos, 77, spent 20 years in prison in two stints after

convictions for arson, racketeering and gambling. Poulos referred to his criminal background in announcing his candidacy, saying, "People are going to have to get up awful early in the morning to get scams past me."

— Martin Mork, 39, served two years' probation after a 1992 conviction for attempted possession of marijuana with intent to sell.

Mork said he thinks smoking marijuana is sinful in the same sense that drinking alcohol is sinful. But he said he didn't think it should be illegal.

— King David "K.D." Davis, 46, had a 1992 conviction for being a habitual traffic violator.

The *Eagle* also reported that two days after announcing his candidacy for Wichita mayor, movie theater mogul Bill Warren got a judge to seal court records in which he and

his fiancée make allegations of abuse, threats, extortion and slander. No criminal charges were filed as a result of the complaints.<

Identity theft bill clears Senate

TOPEKA (AP) — The Senate on Thursday approved and sent to the House a bill to require Kansans to provide certain proof of identity to get driver's licenses.

The vote was 32-8. Supporters said the measure offers protection against identity theft, but critics worried that Kansans would have their privacy invaded.

The bill would require someone applying for a driver's license or state identification card to provide a Social Security number or taxpayer ID number — or sign a statement that he or she is a legal resident.

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