

Kansas activists rally for more money for social services

TOPEKA (AP)—Gov. Kathleen Sebelius urged social service advocates who rallied at the Statehouse to pressure legislators to put more money into programs for elderly, disabled and needy Kansans.

“You all are their bosses,” Sebelius said Wednesday, drawing applause from the crowd of about 250 people. “They work for you, so make sure they hear from you and they know you’re paying attention.”

The rally was convened by the Big Tent Coalition, an alliance of more than 80 advocacy groups that wants to eliminate waiting lists for in-home services, keep more se-

niors out of nursing homes, increase payments to doctors and hospitals that serve the poor and improve dental services for needy adults.

Sebelius has gained legislative agreement for a \$13 million increase in the upcoming fiscal year for a program that provides in-home services to disabled and “frail” elderly Kansans.

But members of the coalition say achieving their goals would cost an additional \$54 million.

“The governor has started the good work,” coalition spokeswoman Shannon Jones told the crowd. “The reason we are here today is to tell our legislators that

there is still unfinished business.”

Sebelius said later she would continue to look for additional money to put toward the coalition’s agenda.

“These, I think, are folks who have to be the top priority,” Sebelius said. But House Appropriations Committee Chairman Melvin Neufeld said Sebelius and many legislators have made education the top priority by proposing higher taxes to provide more money for schools.

Neufeld, R-Ingalls, said he worries that state revenues will slump otherwise.

As for social services, Neufeld said, “There’s much more likelihood that the amount we have in the

current budget will have to be reduced than that it will be increased.”

The coalition said that even with the extra money Sebelius proposed, hundreds of disabled and elderly Kansans still will wait for in-home services.

Zach Coble, a 19-year-old University of Kansas student, said rallies are valuable even if legislators add only a little extra money to the budget in response.

“Every year we gain a little bit, that’ll make the job easier” in the future, said Coble, who has cerebral palsy.

The Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services would re-

ceive \$801 million in general state revenue — an increase of \$93 million — next year under the compromise budget drafted by House and Senate negotiators.

But much of the increase will go toward the rising cost of providing health care to the poor and to covering expenses currently funded by a one-time receipt of \$40 million under the Federal Budget Relief Act.

The Legislature is expected to debate the \$10.2 billion compromise budget before its annual spring recess begins Friday.

Legislators will consider one final budget bill when they reconvene

on April 28 to wrap up the year’s business.

In other action:

— Senators reviewed two House-passed school finance measures that differ broadly in how much additional money they would provide to education.

— Sebelius criticized a House-approved proposal intended to reduce lobbyists’ paperwork, saying it could prevent the state ethics commission from auditing them.

— A bill imposing a new, 50-cent monthly fee on wireless phones to finance improvements in county 911 systems cleared the Legislature and went to Sebelius.

— The Senate unanimously approved and sent Sebelius a bill taking a step toward development of what could become the largest lake in southwest Kansas.

Insurgents attack U.S. convoy after grisly killings

FALLUJAH, Iraq (AP)—Insurgents attacked a U.S. military convoy and a Humvee was burned Thursday near Fallujah, witnesses said, a day after the grisly killing and mutilation of four American civilians in the city.

It was not clear if there were any casualties in Thursday’s assault. Associated Press Television News footage showed smoke pouring from the vehicle that had been abandoned on a roadside just outside the city. Witnesses said the Humvee was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade.

U.S. officials said they could not confirm the attack.

Also Thursday, two explosions near a U.S.-escorted fuel convoy wounded at least one Iraqi in northern Baghdad, witnesses said. APTN footage showed U.S. soldiers putting a wounded person on a stretcher inside an armored vehicle.

In Fallujah, meanwhile, Iraqi police manned standard roadside checkpoints, but no U.S. troops could be seen inside the city. Shops and schools were open.

Some residents on Thursday vowed to repel U.S. forces if they raid the city.

“We will not let any foreigner

enter Fallujah,” said Sameer Sami, 40. “Yesterday’s attack is proof of how much we hate the Americans.”

Another resident, Ahmed al-Dulaimi, 30, said, “We wish that they (U.S. forces) would try to enter Fallujah so we’d let hell break loose.”

On Wednesday, jubilant mobs dragged the burned, mutilated bodies of four American contractors through the streets and strung two of them up from a bridge after rebels ambushed their SUVs.

Some of the bodies also were loaded onto the back of a donkey-pulled wooden cart later Wednesday and paraded through Fallujah’s streets as crowds clapped and whistled. It was not clear where the bodies of the Americans were early Thursday.

The abuse of the corpses was similar to the scene more than a decade ago in Somalia, when a mob dragged corpses of U.S. soldiers through the streets of Mogadishu, eventually leading to the American withdrawal from the African nation. The images were broadcast worldwide and became the subject of the book and movie “Black Hawk Down.”

Five U.S. soldiers of the 1st In-

fantry Division also died Wednesday when a bomb exploded under their M-113 armored personnel carrier north of Fallujah, making it the bloodiest day for Americans in Iraq since Jan. 8.

U.S. officials denounced the violence and vowed to stay the course in Iraq. The White House blamed terrorists and remnants of Saddam Hussein’s former regime for the “horrific attacks” on the American contractors.

“It is offensive, it is despicable the way these individuals have been treated,” White House press secretary Scott McClellan said.

Referring to the planned June 30 transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis, McClellan said “the best way to honor those that lost their lives” is to continue with efforts to bring democracy to Iraq.

State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said the contractors, all men, “were trying to make a difference and to help others.”

Fallujah, about 35 miles west of Baghdad, has been the scene of some of the worst violence on both sides of the conflict since the beginning of the U.S.-led occupation a year ago.

Chanting “Fallujah is the grave-

yard of Americans,” residents cheered after Wednesday’s assault on two four-wheel-drive civilian vehicles left both cars in flames.

Iraqis said insurgents attacked the contractors with small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades. After the attack, civilians, none of whom appeared to be armed, gathered to celebrate, dragging the bodies through the street and hanging two of them from the green, iron bridge spanning the Euphrates River.

One body was tied to a car that had a poster in its window of Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the founder of the Palestinian militant group Hamas who recently was assassinated in Gaza City by the Israeli military.

Many of those in the crowd were excited young boys who shouted slogans in front of television cameras.

“The people of Fallujah hung some of the bodies on the old bridge like slaughtered sheep,” resident Abdul Aziz Mohammed said.

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