

commentary

from other pens...

Controversy sparks debate on state board

The Garden City Telegram on State Board of Education:
The State Board of Education needed only seconds to create controversy and set a tone for the next two years, which should spark legislative debate over the board's future.

It took two days just to name a chairperson, then two more days to sign off on a waiver so the Topeka school district could hire a Spanish-speaking teacher for its Parents at Teachers program.

Not surprisingly, Connie Morris opposed the waiver that would allow a PAT educator to work without achieving the required 60 college credit hours...

Morris plans to champion her cause of barring children of illegal immigrants from attending public school. She contended participants who need Spanish-speaking tutors for the PAT program must be illegal immigrants...

Fortunately, the board saw the obvious need facing the Topeka district and approved the waiver. But its shenanigans in the first week of meetings send a troubling signal to Kansans.

Some lawmakers have previously lobbied for a Constitutional amendment to disband the board and create a cabinet-level education department in the executive branch...

A cabinet-level position in the governor's office would be better suited to manage the state's educational system. A secretary trained in education is preferable to the politicized board we now endure.

The focus should be on education. These board members seem more intent on pushing their own social and political agenda.

And they'll do it at the educational expense of Kansas children.

The Topeka Capital Journal on Sebelius:
In her state of the state address on Wednesday, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius talked of more than the state budget. Tucked amid all the dollars-and-cents talk, she made a plea for Kansans to get more involved in their communities, their neighborhoods "and each other."...

A big part of that quality of life is citizen involvement, which she described as including "voting, joining civic clubs, going to church, mentoring a child, and even just socializing together." All of that, she said, makes for healthier, better-educated children, safer neighborhoods and happier people.

"And in today's uncertain world, one of the most effective strategies for Homeland Security is to reconnect people to each other," Sebelius said. "How much more difficult would it be for those who wish us harm to plot and act if people lived in tightly knit, interconnected hometowns, where people knew their neighbors and took an interest in each other?"

She's right. Kansans are a very caring, giving people. Just look at how they came together during the holiday season to help the less fortunate...

Involvement forges a connection between people, and out of that grows a sense of belonging.

"I call on all Kansans — all of us together — to renew our commitment to our communities," Sebelius said. "Over the next four years, I would like for us to experience a rebirth in civic involvement and a rediscovery of the value of service."

It's a call all of us should answer.

Letter Policy

The Goodland Daily News welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with names and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <daily@nwkansans.com>.

The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association
The Associated Press

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association
National Newspaper Association
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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.
Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.
TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansans.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansans.com
The Goodland Daily News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.
SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$25; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$79. Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$30; six months, \$45; 12 months, \$80. By mail daily in Kansas, Colorado: 12 months, \$115. (All tax included.)

The Sherman County Herald
Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company



With Sebelius, abortion foes shift focus

With abortion rights supporter Kathleen Sebelius in the governor's office, abortion foes have revised their legislative agenda.

Their top priority this year is a bill to establish minimum health and safety standards for clinics, and they hope Sebelius might sign it.

Abortion opponents describe their clinic regulation proposal as a public health measure, but they'll have to overcome skepticism about their motives from the abortion rights activists who are likely to be influential with the new Democratic governor.

"Where's the line between protecting safety and harassment?" said Rep. Paul Davis, D-Lawrence, an abortion rights supporter. "I'm not sure where that line is."

Anti-abortion activists generally view the state's abortion law as permissive, even given U.S. Supreme Court rulings that limit how states can restrict the procedure.

The Kansas law guarantees a woman's right to the procedure until the fetus can survive outside the womb. A woman must receive a booklet with information about fetal development and the risk of abortion procedures, however, and must wait eight hours before undergoing an abortion.

The law says a minor who seeks an abortion must inform a parent or guardian first, but it allows courts to waive the requirement, and abortion foes say other loopholes greatly weaken the notification provisions.

Kansas law also bans late-term abortions except when a woman's life is in danger or she would suffer irreparable harm to health by carrying a pregnancy to term.

However, a conflicting provision on a specific procedure, identified as "partial-birth" abortion, permits that single method to preserve a woman's mental health. Abortion rights



john
hanna

• news analysis

advocates say the mental health exception must apply to all late-term procedures to be constitutional; abortion foes disagree.

When he took office in 1995, Gov. Bill Graves tried to avoid being identified with either side. But during his eight years, abortion opponents came to view him as hostile to their cause.

Last year, abortion opponents pursued changes in the parental notification law, a clinic regulation measure and even a bill to create a "Choose Life" license plate, the proceeds of which would have financed adoption efforts.

Anti-abortion activists had little doubt about where Sebelius stood when she ran for governor last year.

As a Kansas House member, she was architect in 1992 of the language guaranteeing a woman's right to abortion through most of a pregnancy and opposed what restrictions the law contains. In 1990, she voted in favor of a proposal to permit taxpayer-financed abortions.

Yet Kansans for Life, the state's largest anti-abortion group, still hopes it can persuade her to sign a clinic regulation bill.

"This is an excellent bill to reach common ground," said Kathy Ostrowski, the group's legislative director. "It's an evolution: How do you assist citizens faced with crisis pregnancies?"

Last year, the House approved a clinic regulation bill, but it died without a vote in the Senate.

Busy first week of the session in Topeka

Health Midwest Issue

On Thursday, the Kansas Legislature heard testimony from Attorney General Phill Kline regarding the control of proceeds from the sale of Health Midwest (a not-for-profit organization worth an estimated \$700 million NET) to Hospital Corporation of America, or HCA.

Kansas and Missouri both filed suit to ensure the proceeds from the sale went to charitable foundations in each state to provide health care for the needy. Health Midwest and Missouri settled their suit in a late night deal Tuesday (21st) that gives Missouri control of 90 percent of the proceeds, with the remaining 10 percent to be used in Kansas despite the fact that 15-25 percent of the assets belong to Kansas.

Effectively, Kansas has been excluded from any control of the proceeds through this deal. Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline sought and received a temporary restraining order on the proceeds from Kansas assets. To assist him in gaining control of our assets the House and the Senate passed legislation (SB 44) Thursday and the Governor signed on Friday "emergency legislation."

The legislation created a foundation to administer proceeds from the sale of Health Midwest to HCA. Furthermore, it provides for a board of 18, serving 3-year terms, all being residents of the area that is served by the charitable hospital. Five are appointed by the Governor, 5 by the Attorney General, 3 by the Senate President, 3 by the Speaker, and 1 each by the Minority Leader of both the Senate and the House. This foundation is intended to finance charitable healthcare in Wyandotte, Johnson, and Allen counties.

Broadband Deregulation

According to SBC (Southwestern Bell Telephone), their willingness to deploy high-speed Internet services across the state depends on the fate of HB 2019. The President of SBC feels that price regulation proposed by the KCC would discourage the company from extending its broadband service to smaller communities. According to opponents of the bill, (many local and national telecommunications companies) SBC could still provide service while being regulated.

In effect, the bill would remove the KCC



jim
morrison

• capitol review

from any oversight, thus allowing SBC market control over DSL service. With or without the bill, cable can continue to compete in this market.

Currently, SBC has to share their voice network with other phone companies. The KCC ruled that they have to share data also. Passage of this bill would remove the requirement to share.

Drivers Licenses for Illegal Aliens

The Judiciary Committee will be having hearings on HB 2039, a possibly controversial piece of legislation. Passage would allow undocumented immigrants (who pass required tests) to obtain a driver's license using federal tax id numbers.

Fiscal Year 2003 Budget Recision

The Appropriations Committee passed Governor Sebelius' recision bill (HB 2026) for Fiscal Year 2003 on Friday morning. The House of Representatives should debate the bill on Wednesday or Thursday of this week. The bill cuts spending in the current fiscal year ending June 30. It also restores some budget cuts by Governor Graves to education and social services.

Other items:

Corrections and Juvenile Justice:

Will be reviewing Sentencing Guidelines. Possible alternative sentencing for drug offenses could be a controversial issue this year.

Education:

Legislation has been introduced to reform teacher tenure by eliminating the hearing officer and going straight to District Court. It considers allowing districts to renegotiate contracts for teachers and administrators when their budgets are cut.

Ethics and Election:

Considering a bill to tighten recall petition standards for school board members. Association of Broadcasters has requested a review of the Open Meetings Act in light of Governor

Sebelius' transition meetings.

Higher Education:

Receiving briefings from Regents Institutions, Vocational Technical Schools and Community Colleges.

Insurance:

The most controversial issue for the year will be credit scoring for insurance rates. Currently the committee is considering foreign language insurance contracts, mandates for contraceptives and mandates for coverage of care during clinical trials.

This session is looking to be a good one. We are getting our work done quickly and cooperatively. I hope things will continue rapidly, efficiently and in a way that improves the future for all of Kansas.

Please contact me with your concerns and questions. Email me (jmorrison@ink.org) if you wish to be added to a mailing list that I will start using in a week or so.



from our
readers

• to the editor

A deep thank you

To the Editor:

I am writing to convey my deepest appreciation for support shown to my son, Jordan Anderson. Your support has been an amazing bright spot for him (and his parents).

I believe it take a community to raise a child. That community includes our schools. We desire our children to be safe. All play a role in maintaining that safety. This responsibility is many times a burden.

Thank you, everyone. I'm aware the decisions made did not come easily, nor were they taken lightly. Life lessons have been learned by many — parents, students, teachers and administrators alike.

Shawna Anderson
Hays