

Votes on consumer, health care issues criticized

BY RON JENKINS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

OKLAHOMA CITY – Some state House and Senate leaders have drawn low ratings for their votes by a group that advocates for more protections for health care consumers and nursing home residents.

The 2008 Legislature drew an overall rating of "average" from the Oklahoma Foundation for Consumer and Patient rights.

The group cited the defeat of bills to require insurance coverage for children with autism and for seriously ill patients who undergo clinical trials and legislation to require nursing homes to carry liability insurance.

"During the last session, help for cancer patients, children with autism and nursing home residents failed to overcome powerful, selfish interests. The poor, sick and the elderly continue to suffer because of it," said Jeff Raymond, executive director of the foundation.

Guy Thiessen, Tulsa attorney, said a task force appointed by Gov. Brad Henry in 2006 showed more than half of the

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- Monte Collings, father

state's nursing homes had no liability insurance. He said patients and their families suffer as a result in abuse cases.

He said some nursing home operations are able to, in effect, thwart lawsuits through multiple corporations that allow owners to hide assets.

Senate Co-President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-Oklahoma City, voted only 43 percent of the time for bills supported by the foundation.

A spokesman in Coffee's office said the senator was not available for comment Tuesday afternoon.

Several House and Senate members

voted only about half the time for issues backed by the group. House Speaker Chris Benge, a Tulsa Republican, voted 62 percent of the time.

State Rep. Ken Luttrell, D-Ponca City, had the only 100-percent score.

Several lawmakers had scores in the high 80s and 90s. House Democratic leader Danny Morgan of Prague had a score of 87 percent and Senate President Pro Tem Mike Morgan, D-Stillwater, had a 90-percent score.

Raymond said lawmakers did do some good things this past session, including passing bills to toughen penalties for

elder-care abuse, inform consumers when their confidential information has been breached and require child-care centers to carry liability insurance.

But he and others expressed disappointment that lawmakers did not take final action on such bills as Steffanie's Law, which was approved in the Senate but failed to get a hearing in the House.

Steffanie's Law would require insurance companies to pay for the routine medical care of people who have insurance, but who take part in clinical trials in a last-ditch effort to find a cure.

It is named for Steffanie Collings, who died in March at the age of 18 after a four-year battle with brain cancer. Her family incurred debt of \$400,000 after their insurance carrier would not pay for her routine medical bills.

Monte Collings, Steffanie's father, said routine coverage should not be canceled just because seriously ill patients take part in clinical trials.

"If we quit paying our premiums then we would lose our coverage, but we pay our premiums as they tell us to, so why don't we get what we pay for?" Collings asked.

Poultry companies gratified judge turned down motion

BY MARIE PRICE
THE JOURNAL RECORD

OKLAHOMA CITY – Poultry companies say they are gratified that a federal judge considered their position in turning down Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson's motion for a preliminary injunction to prohibit land application of poultry litter in the Illinois River watershed.

"We were grateful for the opportunity to

present the evidence to support our position," said Jackie Cunningham, community relations director for the Poultry Community Council. "We feel that this ruling recognizes what we have been saying since this lawsuit began: that the science simply does not support the attorney general's claims against the hardworking farmers of northeast Oklahoma and northwest Arkansas."

Judge Gregory Frizzell said Monday that

the state had not met the burden of proving that bacteria in watershed waters are caused by application of poultry litter, rather than by other sources, including cattle manure and human septic systems.

Edmondson said Monday that Frizzell's decision does not affect the state's overall environmental case, which the state expects to go to trial next year.

The attorney general also said his office discovered evidence indicating that exces-

sive land application of poultry waste could be a danger to public health, and brought to the court's attention.

Frizzell said the testimony of two of the state's expert witnesses was not sufficiently reliable to meet the standard for issuance of an injunction in such a case.

He said the state's motion fell within two disfavored categories, altering the status quo and being mandatory, and must meet a heightened standard.

Tulsa officially opens doors of new City Hall

TULSA (AP) – Tulsa opened the doors of its new City Hall to the public amid some complaints about the efficiency of the still-unfinished project.

The former City Hall, located at Civic Center Plaza, is closed and the doors are locked. A sign on the door directs people to the new City Hall in the One Technology Center located at the corner of Second Street and Cincinnati Avenue.

Monday was the first day the new City Hall was open to the public.

"This is all crazy. It is stupid not to have City Hall sign on the building," said Eran Prudom, who drove past the building a couple of times. "How does the mayor expect us to find it?"

A master lease that addresses the leases for some of the private companies in the building prohibits a City Hall sign on the building's exterior. The building, at 100 S. Cincinnati Ave., also does not have an address posted on it.

A spokesman for the city, John Durkee, said he expects some signage in front of the building before the building is officially dedicated in November, and that it's not unusual for citizens to take a while to adjust to the new location.

"Yesterday was our first day into the new facility with everyone over here, and they're still doing some punch-list items on the building," Durkee said Tuesday. "We're learning as we go, listening to what the cit-

izens are telling us and addressing those concerns as we can.

"This was 1,000 people consolidated into an office space for the first time, so there's going to be some growing pains."

Like most of the people interviewed Monday, Prudom's irritation didn't end once she found City Hall traversing one-way streets. She and a few others said they were upset that the handicapped spaces in the lot across the street are located near Third Street nearly a block away.

"What's the point of having special parking for those of us that need it if it is going to be that far away?" Prudom asked.

City employees who greeted the steady stream of customers on Monday had a dif-

ferent assessment. They all agreed that the first day seemed to go well despite the ongoing construction inside the public area.

This area, where customers can pay bills and fines or obtain business licenses and permits, is still partially under construction and issues with computer and electronic equipment connections were still being worked out.

Nader Abdavis said he has been trying to get business conducted with the city since last week with no success.

"This is a big joke," he said. Abdavis questioned the need to go to a security area to get a visitor's badge for a task that should take a short time to conduct.

THE JOURNAL RECORD

**UPCOMING
LISTS:**

Catering Companies - Oct. 10
Computer Retailers - Oct. 13
Web Development and Design Companies - Oct. 13

Call Dawn Darbon at (405) 278-2876 if you haven't received a questionnaire and you think your company would qualify to make one of these lists.

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