

Health care issues criticized

Advocates rank some leaders low for votes on health-care issues

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Some 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 Gov. Brad Henry in 2006 showed more than half of the 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.

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 per-



Nancy Thomason, founder and president of the Oklahoma Brain Tumor Foundation, speaks at a news conference held by a consumer advocacy group to criticize lack of support for the rights of medical patients in Oklahoma City Tuesday. Looking on at right is Monty Collings, father of Steffanie Collings, a Noble teenager who died in March from a brain tumor. ASSOCIATED PRESS

cent score.

Raymond said lawmakers did do some good things this past session, including pass-

ing 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 ex-

pressed 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.

UTILITY ANNOUNCEMENT

OG&E customers won't see another rate hike this year

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma Gas & Electric Co. customers won't see another increase on their electric bills to recover additional fuel costs deferred from earlier this year, the state's largest utility announced on Tuesday.

The Oklahoma City-based utility notified the Oklahoma Corporation Commission in June that it planned to pass along higher fuel costs to its customers. Rather than re-

covering 100 percent of its costs, the company said it planned to recover only 50 percent of the higher costs in the summer and recover the remaining amount during the milder months of fall and early winter if necessary.

"During the last few months, natural gas prices have declined, and we've decided not to increase the fuel-cost recovery from the current level," OG&E's Vice President of Regulatory Af-

fairs Howard Motley said in a statement.

Motley said the company will continue to work with the commission to address the effect of fluctuating natural gas and coal costs on customers' bills.

"We will likely see continued fluctuations in the natural gas and coal markets," Motley said. "By working with the Commission to examine fuel costs on a more frequent

basis, we hope to reduce the short-term impact of any spike, or drop, in fuel price."

OG&E also announced Tuesday that it has completed its acquisition of the Redbud natural gas-fired power plant near Luther.

OG&E acquired a 51 percent interest in the 1,230-megawatt Redbud plant for a purchase price of about \$434.5 million and will operate the plant on behalf of

GRDA (acquiring a 36 percent stake) and the Okla-

homa Municipal Power Authority (13 percent).

MISSING FUNDS

Muskogee bookkeeper charged with embezzlement

MUSKOGEE, Okla. (AP) — A former bookkeeper in the Muskogee County Court Clerk's office has been charged with embezzlement as state auditors began investigating more than \$340,000 in missing funds.

Prosecutors on Monday filed one felony count of embezzlement against Jackie L. Borovetz, 57, of Muskogee.

Borovetz surrendered to authorities and entered a not guilty plea to the charges on Tuesday, said her attorney, Chris Blankenship. Bond was set at \$200,000, and Borovetz remained jailed Tuesday afternoon, he said.

"While she did enter a plea of not guilty as a matter of procedure, she's here to be accountable and cooperate with the authorities in every way," Blankenship said.

State auditors arrived at the court clerk's office on Monday, and an audit is expected to take at least two weeks, said Court Clerk Paul Sexton.

Borovetz had worked as a bookkeeper at several Muskogee businesses before going to work as a deputy and bookkeeper in the Court Clerk's office in September 2002, Sexton said.

Court administrators believe the funds were embezzled between November and September 2008.

Sexton said his office was alerted after a local bank questioned a check written on an office account. An internal investigation showed some money paid to the office appears to have been diverted into an account controlled by Borovetz, Sexton said.

Information from: Muskogee Phoenix, <http://www.muskogeephoenix.com>

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