Democrats think new Kansas AG can become ready to run in 2010

By JOHN HANNA
AP POLITICAL WRITER

TOPEKA (AP) — Democrats have put their hopes of keeping the attorney general's office in Stephen Six, even though they acknowledge he hasn't developed the political skills he needs.

Six, a Douglas County district judge, has never run for elected office, but Gov. Kathleen Sebelius appointed him attorney general last week. He'll take over Jan. 31 for Paul Morrison, who's stepping down because of a sex scandal.

Six will serve the remaining three years of Morrison's four-year term, and some Republicans expect the 2010 attorney general's race to be competitive because of Morrison's downfall. Morrison spent $2.65 million on his successful 2006 campaign.

A top Republican Party official and a former adviser to Sebelius questioned Monday whether Six is ready to run a statewide campaign. Democrats assume Sebelius would appoint a candidate only if he promised to run, but Six hasn't publicly committed.

"Judge Six is focused on getting up to speed on the cases and issues important to the attorney general's office," spokesman Ashley Anstaett said Monday. "It's too early to talk about politics or campaigns."

Still, Sebelius and other prominent Democrats believe Six has enough time to build a solid record as attorney general and pick up the campaigning, public speaking and fundraising skills he'll need.

"She had no concerns about that at all," said Sebelius spokeswoman Nicole Corcoran. "First and foremost, she wanted to get the right person in the job."

Burdett Loomis, a University of Kansas political scientist who once served as a Sebelius adviser, said the governor appears comfortable with someone who's "pretty raw material" as a potential candidate because he appears "squeaky clean" and is willing to run in 2010.

But Loomis and Christian Morgan, the state GOP's executive director, said Six seemed unprepared for a question about abortion during the Friday news conference in which Sebelius announced his appointment.

Abortion was a key issue during Morrison's 2006 campaign. An abortion-rights Democrat, he unseated incumbent Phill Kline, an anti-abortion Republican. Abortion opponents repeatedly criticized Morrison afterward over how he handled investigations of abortion providers.

"The Democratic Party has a lot of work to do to get this guy ready for the kind of scrutiny that the people of Kansas are going to put on this guy," Morgan said. "The office of attorney general is going to turn out to be one of the more hotly contested races in 2010, and it remains to be seen whether Steve Six is up to the task."

Attorneys, Democrats and at least a few Republicans, have praised the appointment, describing Six as intelligent, thoughtful, hardworking and possessing strong legal skills. In accepting an appointment from Sebelius to the Douglas County court in January 2005, he showed he could tackle new challenges, said state Democratic Party Chairman Larry Gates.

"What he really is not is a politician," Gates acknowledged. "He'll get to that eventually. He made it pretty clear to me that he doesn't want to be too bothered with that right now. He's got the office to take care of."

But Gates said politics will intrude soon: He plans to ask Six to speak to the Democrats' annual Washington Days convention, Feb. 29 and March 1 in Topeka.

Gates argued that Six, as a former civil trial lawyer, already has speaking skills that will help him in politics.
The Kansas Board of Regents may not be ready to cap costs at state campuses, but it's smart to be talking about when enough is enough. The issue could come up at the meetings Feb. 13-14, in advance of the board's traditional late spring approval of tuition hikes for the fall. Tuition and fees have more than doubled at the University of Kansas and Kansas State University since 2002, though other institutions have seen smaller increases. Meanwhile, the state's share of support for university operations has been shrinking. “It's a tax on kids,” said Jill Docking, the Wichita member of the board. And those kids who can't pay it either must load up on student-loan debt or pass on college.
Bob Dole makes $500,000 donation

LAWRENCE (AP) — Former Sen. Bob Dole has given $500,000 to the institute that bears his name. With the gift, the endowment at the Dole Institute of Politics grows to $8.5 million. The institute is at the University of Kansas. Dole attended the university but didn’t graduate, having joined the Army and gone off to fight in World War II. His political career included eight years in Congress and nearly three decades in the U.S. Senate.
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Eventually, officials hope the Dole Institute endowment will reach $20 million.

Interest earned on the endowment supports programs such as the annual Dole Lecture, the Dole Leadership Prize and the Presidential Lecture Series.
WHAT OTHERS SAID
Lawrence Journal-World, on tuition for higher education:

What a tremendous irony it would be if the Kansas Board of Regents decides to take such a hard line on university tuition increases that Kansas University students who were given the special "guaranteed tuition" deal actually end up paying more for their education.

It's great news that the regents are concerned enough to at least offer some tough talk on repeated tuition increases.

Regent Gary Sherrer pointed out that tuition increases at state universities had exceeded both the consumer price index and the higher education price index in the last five years.

And, during that time, he noted, the per-capita income of those paying tuition had been largely unchanged.

This is not news to Kansas families who are stretching their budgets to cover university tuition.

Despite the squeeze tuition is putting on Kansas families, university leaders continue to defend the increases.

Kansas State University President Jon Wefald responded to the regents' concerns this week by saying, "You can either pay for access to mediocrity or you can pay for access to excellence. We're choosing excellence."

That's fine, but rising tuition puts that choice out of reach for many Kansas students. Many are having to bypass that university "excellence" and make less costly choices such as attending a community college or a vocational-technical school.

Since more than doubling tuition for Kansas residents several years ago, KU officials have continued to sell the idea that KU still is "a bargain" compared to universities in other states. ...

If tuition continues to rise and a student completes a degree in four years, the guaranteed tuition plan might actually result in a savings.

If, however, regents put a cap on tuition increases, as they seemed to be suggesting this week they would do, students locked into a four-year payment plan that assumed ongoing increases might actually end up the losers. ...

It's certainly time to ask those questions and to take some action to get state university tuition increases under control.
Sebelius shrewdly picks Six

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius often portrays a shrewdness befitting a seasoned politician who knows that every decision and appointment made will undergo intense scrutiny by media and critics.

So some expected Sebelius to appoint Kansas Securities Commissioner Chris Biggs as a replacement for departing Attorney General Paul Morrison, and critics were ready to pounce once the governor did so.

Biggs has ties to an abortion rights political action committee, and anti-abortion groups were readying their ammo.

Instead, Sebelius wisely - shrewdly - chose Stephen Six, a 42-year-old Douglas County district court judge. He comes with little baggage; Six never has sought an elected office. So the partisan critics who often try to derail such appointments will need to sort through the judge's court decisions before issuing a public assessment.

In choosing Six, Sebelius clearly signaled a housecleaning for the Kansas attorney general's office, muddied by its previous two occupants, Phill Kline and Morrison.

Kline's single-minded anti-abortion crusade while in office lasted just one term. Morrison's tenure came to an abrupt end last month when a former lover went public with their dirty laundry.

If the adage is true, that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, then Six ought to be an outstanding attorney general.

His father, Fred Six, served on the Kansas Supreme Court from 1988 to 2003 and was a respected jurist and attorney.

University of Kansas law school professors described Six as intelligent and organized. ...

Kansans likely aren't looking for a hero in the AG's office; they simply want the state's top cop to enforce the law fairly and provide guidance for county attorney and district attorney offices.

The state needs a true public servant who doesn't use the AG's office for personal gain or to pursue a personal agenda.

Sebelius might have found such a person with her appointment of Six.
LEPC meetings open to public

Don Button called the January 17 meeting of the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) to order with six members present: Jerry Jo Deckert, John Crosby, Roger Gardner, Richard Everett, Don Button and Vivian Button.

Deckert's motion to retain the LEPC officers as is was approved: Officers are Don Button as Chairman, Al Baker as Vice Chairman and Vivian Button as Secretary.

Two grants for Hazardous Materials Emergency Planning have been applied for; one intended for four people to attend the Railcar Specialist training at TTCI. The second for one person to attend the 80 Hour HazMat Technician class at TTCI.

At the last meeting, sections of the new Local Emergency Operations Plan were handed out for review and Don inquired about questions or recommendations.

Since the last meeting the state has passed the county ESF (Emergency Support Function) 10 and the need to attach Standard Operating Guides to the LEOP was discussed.

Continuity of Operations Planning (Coop) Training on January 16 was attended by 42 participants, a really good turnout considering the weather.

The National Weather Service of Dodge City conduct Annual Storm Identification and Spotter Training in Ulysses March 18 at 3:00 PM and 7:00 pm. Training times is surrounding areas are: Liberal, February 28 at 3:00 and 7:00; Sublette, March 3 at 7:00; Johnson, March 4 at 7:00 PM; Garden City, March 10 at 3:00 and 7:00 PM and Hugoton, March 11 at 7:00 PM.

The State of Kansas is receiving additional EMPG Funds for Resource Typing of equipment and Credentialing of responders. Only 2007 EMPG counties are eligible and the EMPG counties may also have to match as much as 50% of the funds received. Grant County is an EMPG county. February 7 in Salina is the Kansas Planning team meeting to discuss this further.

Kansas Animal Health Dept will be holding training in Dodge City on February 13.

Kansas University will be sponsoring trainings. They are looking at Emergency Operation Center and Command training. These trainings will not have a big drill like they did in Wichita.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad will hold training in Garden City on January 23 from 1:00—5:00 PM, on January 24 from 1:00—5:00 PM and from 6:00—9:00 PM; and January 25 from 1:00—5:00 PM. These training are the same just at multiple times so more people can attend. BNSF HazMat Specialist will be conducting the training.

Kansas Pipeline training will be January 22 at 9:00 AM at the Civic Center. This training included information on 34 Pipeline Companies.

The committee looked at some of the E-911 mapping updates and when the maps are ready, hope to put a copy in our EOC and use them to assist Emergency Services.

Equipment resource lists for the LEOP is needed. This is a list from each department of their equipment and its capabilities.

Deckert stated she would like to see the county get a satellite phone. Everett stated the Health Department has a satellite phone.

The 07 NIMS compliance needed a point of contact for each county. The 08 NIMS compliance wants a point of contact in each department.

Having an informational meeting about CERT Training - Community Emergency Response Team training was discussed. The meeting will be February 18 or February 11 at the Fire Department. Just an informational meeting, no one attending the meeting will be under any obligation to attend the training.

With not a very large turnout at the past few minutes, Vivian suggested the next meeting be a brown bag lunch at noon. The motion passed. The next LEPC meeting will be February 21 at noon.
KU Chancellor announced as speaker at KU honor banquet

KU’s top Hawk will be coming to Washington in early March. University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway will be the guest speaker at the Kansas Honors Program dinner and awards program starting at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 5 at First National Bank of Washington.

The event, sponsored by the University of Kansas Alumni Association, will highlight the academic achievements of a select group of high school seniors from Washington and Marshall Counties. The “Kansas Honor Scholar” students will receive a hardcover American Heritage Dictionary and a keepsake certificate.

Larry and Nancy Stoppel, Washington, are the local alumni coordinators. A list of the local Kansas Honor Scholars will be released at a later date.
Counselor's Corner
by SCHS Counselor Ben Horyna

Remember, from Jan 1, to July 1, you can fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine how much federal funding you will be eligible to receive for the 2008-09 school year. I would encourage you to complete the FAFSA, even if you think you will not qualify for federal aid. Remember, it's free to apply.

Moreover, some private scholarships require proof of a completed FAFSA as part of their application to verify that students did not receive adequate federal aid and are eligible for private funds.

Visit www.fafsa.ed.gov for more information and for further help on completing the FAFSA.

Coffeyville Community College has been strengthening its activities programs over the past few years. In the fall of 2008, they will be offering the Kansas Enhancement Scholarship to Kansas students awarded scholarships in activities at Coffeyville Community College. This scholarship will allow most students to pay less than $1,500 per semester for room, board, loan of books, tuition and fees. This is by far the best value in higher education in the state of Kansas. Some of these activities are art, broadcasting, ag (FFA), Livestock judging, meats judging, rodeo, horticulture, athletic training, band, orchestra, choir, dance, cheer, theatre, and STUCO.

If you are the son or daughter of a custodial worker, please see me concerning a scholarship that you are eligible to apply for. They will award one $250, one $500, and one $1,000 scholarship to the top three qualifying students. These scholarships are available only to graduating seniors of custodial workers who wish to continue their education at the college level. Students must be a resident of Kansas and graduate from a Kansas high school and plan to attend a Kansas college.

The University of Kansas will be hosting Junior Days during the second semester. Students, parents and guests will be treated to a comprehensive introduction to KU and its beautiful campus. The day will be spent touring campus, visiting buildings on campus, and students will gather academic information from any of the eleven schools at KU. Admission representatives will cover academics, student life and other information unique to KU.

You can pre-register for any date by going online at www.admissions.ku.edu/juniordays. The junior dates are Monday, Feb. 18; Monday, Mar. 31; Friday, Apr. 4; Monday, Apr. 21; Friday, May 2 and Monday, May 5.

If you are interested in attending Kansas State University you need to apply for admission, scholarships and housing ASAP. Priority deadline for the FAFSA at KSU is Mar. 1. They will also be hosting Senior Day Monday, Feb. 11, and Monday, Feb. 18. If you are interested in attending, please see me for an application.
Civic Club Meets, Hears of Childhood Mental Disabilities

by Evelyn Reed, reporter

Lisa Sypher spoke about mental disabilities of childhood, and some of her experiences in working with children that have those disabilities at the Dec. 11 meeting of Civic Improvement Club. Originally from Wichita, she and her husband are currently living north of Coldwater due to the Greensburg tornado.

After receiving her degree at Kansas University in 1986 she worked in the KU child development center. During her 15 years in the field, she has also worked in the Lawrence and Greensburg schools.

During one employment, there was a three-year-old child that climbed all over everything, carried on, and was very hyper-active. It was discovered that his IQ was through the roof, and the behavior problem was due to boredom. Lisa has also worked with adults with disabilities after they had been dismissed from mental institutions, and autistic children in the Lawrence schools.

Lisa shared information that in the United States, around 4.5 million children, or 17 per cent, are born with a mental disability. There is a federal mandate for disability screening after a child is born. Fifty per cent enter school without help for conditions that include cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and limited mobility. There is often more than one condition present, she explained.

Some causes of these disabilities are due to genetic causes; other causes are toxic substances, drugs, alcohol, the birth process, and car accidents. Retardation is sometimes due to premature birth, genetic malnutrition, or toxic malnutrition. Cerebral palsy is often from lack of oxygen during the birth process. Children with speech problems are often quite intelligent. Autism limits or slows learning. The child can’t relate to persons, events, and objects, has limited interest, has repetitive movements, and can’t deal with change. Sometimes these children are savants with great math ability. Downs Syndrome is due to an extra chromosome, and has distinctive characteristics in the face. An afflicted person often has problems with leukemia and cataracts.

Lisa has been inspired from working with these children; there is a need for them to be free from stigmatism. A job perk is that you realize your own health, she said. She shared an article with us that she wrote on blindness published in the KU undergraduate journal, “Luminary.”

Our meeting was in Marjorie Overocker’s home, and Joyce Comfort was co-hostess. Roll call was answered by telling of a good way to save money. Everyone agreed that an ideal way to do so would involve not only saving money, but saving the environment.