

Senator decries inaction on health board

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By Doug Wilson

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State Sen. Bill Brady said billions of dollars for hospital projects in Illinois remain on hold because the governor won't appoint members to the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board — or to a panel that's studying ways to replace or revamp the board.

"I think it's ironic that the governor has held the General Assembly hostage for health care (programs) and on the other hand he fails to foster the investment in health-care facilities," Brady said Monday during a visit to Quincy.

Spokesmen for Gov. Rod Blagojevich did not return phone calls seeking comment. Last week they told reporters that some appointees are being screened to make sure there are no conflicts of interest or ethical reasons why they cannot serve.

Brady, a Republican from Bloomington, is acquainted with the Health Facilities Planning Board as a member of a task force created in May to evaluate the board and recommend by March whether to make changes or let the board expire.

Brady said the Republicans in the House and Senate have already named their appointees to the 19-member task force. The governor, attorney general and legislative Democrats have yet to make their appointments.

The Health Facilities Planning Board is supposed to keep hospitals from overbuilding or duplicating services in a small geographic area. The board issues a "certificate of need" for projects that are deemed worthy. But the board became controversial in recent years when some of its members allegedly accepted kickbacks or steered business to certain companies.

There are now only three members on the board, the bare minimum needed to conduct business. Although members met last week, there have been several other times that meetings have been impossible because not all of the members could attend.

Lawmakers are preparing to return to Springfield to deal with mass transit issues in the Chicago area in the next few days. Brady also hopes to vote on a capital bill.

Brady doesn't know which will come first. He believes Speaker Michael Madigan wants to vote on a mass transit bill before tackling a capital budget. Senate President Emil Jones seems to want a capital budget before moving on to a mass transit bailout.

"I believe the solution for the Chicago transit problem is not in raising taxes or in raiding general revenue," Brady said. "We've got to be eliminating patronage and corruption."

He also wonders whether it's time to get a private entity to operate Chicago's transit network.

Brady, who ran for governor in 2006, made Monday's tour on behalf of presidential candidate Fred Thompson. Brady, Thompson's Illinois campaign chairman, said the former U.S. senator from Tennessee "has the best shot of any Republican at beating Hillary Clinton."

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