

New rules: State Rep. Carol Bush, R-Tulsa, said she plans to introduce legislation that would allow county governments to adopt ordinances covering a limited number of subjects dealing mostly with internal operations, such as drug diversion programs, hiring private security at county hospitals and the amount that can be charged for fingerprinting. Counties have long complained they have little independent decision-making power, even over things as minute as the margin width of official documents. “Can’t they just do that?” Bush said she’s often asked. “When the law is silent, the answer is no, the county cannot just act on its own. Modernizing government will allow for faster response to constituents, especially in areas of a county where the only form of government is the county,” Bush said. Bush insisted she is not looking for a back-door into county home rule. “There is no support for that and no need for that,” she said. Bennett

Brigade: State Republican Chairman John Bennett has apparently endorsed another incumbent-hunting GOP primary

A flyer for a Nov. 6 rally for Republican gubernatorial candidate Mark Sherwood lists

Bennett as one of the speakers, along with U.S. Senate candidate Jackson Lahmeyer and state Sens. Jake Merrick and Warren Hamilton and former state Rep. Dan Fisher. Sherwood, a Broken Arrow naturopathic physician, bodybuilder and former Tulsa Police officer, has entered the GOP primary against Gov. Kevin Stitt. Sherwood and Lahmeyer are also supported by Ekklesia of Oklahoma, a hard-line anti-abortion rights group of evangelical Christians who helped elect Merrick and Hamilton and aspires to bigger things politically. PBMs: Pharmacy benefit management may not be as headline-grabbing as non-binary birth certificates or mask mandates, but it probably affects a lot more Oklahomans. Pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs, administer the prescription plans of just about every health insurance policy in the country, and as a result have a tremendous influence on the cost to consumers of prescription drugs and pharmacies themselves. Last week the latest chapter in the ongoing fight involving legislators, independent pharmacies and PBMs played out in a House interim study. Rep. Marcus McEntire, R-Duncan, who has bucked the Stitt administration and the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce on this and

other health care issues, indicated a willingness to do so again, telling PBM lobbyists and executives they “may have your work cut out for you this coming year.”

PBMs originally acted as independent liaisons between health insurers and pharmacies, but critics say the managers are now mostly owned or controlled by pharmacy chains and insurers, with the result that consumers and independent pharmacies are being squeezed out. PBMs argue they save consumers money in the long by negotiating better prices. “I want a solution that allows Oklahomans to get their health care needs met and that ensures consumers pay a fair price for their prescription medication,” McEntire said. “At the same time, we must ensure our local pharmacies are treated fairly. This doesn’t mean we kill the competitor — the pharmacy benefit manager. But we do have to do what’s

right for the people.”

Death row: While considerable attention has been focused on death-row inmate Julius Jones, state Rep. Kevin McDugle, R-Broken Arrow, has been trying to save a different death-row inmate from execution. Richard Glossip, now 58, was convicted of murder in the 1997 beating death of Oklahoma City motel owner Barry Van Treese, even though all parties agree Van Treese was actually killed by a man named Justin Sneed. Sneed confessed to the crime but claimed Glossip was behind it. By doing so, Sneed was spared the death penalty while Glossip refused a plea deal. At one point the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals overturned Glossip’s conviction, but he was again found guilty at a second trial. Last week McDugle held watch parties in Tulsa and Oklahoma City for an episode of the Dr. Phil program featuring the Glossip case. “I am totally convinced that we have an innocent man on death row right now, and executing him would be a complete miscarriage of justice,” McDugle said. “Our justice system needs to be completely sure of a person’s guilt or

innocence before someone’s life is taken.”

Side effects: State representatives skeptical of efforts to vaccinate Oklahomans against COVID-19 quizzed public health officials on their messaging campaigns, including Tulsa County Health Department Executive Director Bruce Dart and Communications Director Leanne Stephens. The bulk

of the questions dealt with why the public wasn't being warned more about possible side effects of the vaccine, why more instances of death and serious injuries such as paralysis and appendicitis aren't being reported, and why the messaging encouraged vaccination instead of warning people off of it. All clinical studies of the vaccines used in the United States have found very low risk of serious side effects and only a handful of deaths attributable to vaccination, but skeptics believe the numbers are being underreported or suppressed. "Our health departments should be as transparent as possible with Oklahomans regarding the effects and potential adverse reactions to vaccines, especially when using state and federal taxpayer dollars," said Rep. Wendi Stearman, R-Collinsville. "We must ensure that people know the risks of receiving a rapidly-developed vaccine and that the voices of those who have experienced these adverse reactions are being heard." Rep. Kevin West, R-Moore, the principal author of this spring's legislation limiting school districts' ability to require masks, said: "We want to ensure that Oklahomans are given the overall look of all potential effects of the vaccine so that they can make an informed decision on whether or not to receive the vaccine. Our citizens have the right to determine for themselves what health decisions are right for them, and omitting or burying information does not provide them the full picture."

• Meetings and events: Second District Congressman Markwayne Mullin will have a telephone town hall at 6:25 p.m. Monday. Sign up at mullin.house.gov/live. Bottom lines: State Sen. Blake Stephens, R-Tahlequah, said he's going to take another run at year-around Daylight Savings Time for Oklahoma. ... Laramie Cochran, a 2019 Oral Roberts University graduate, is U.S. Sen. James Lankford new field representative for southeastern Oklahoma. ... The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced grants totaling \$8.1 million for improvements to the Hartshorne and Haileyville municipal water systems. ... An interim study by state Rep. Ryan Martinez, R-Edmond, signaled possible action in the coming legislative session to bolster the unmanned aircraft sector. "

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