

During the recent campaigns, there was talk of "reviewing" the long-running litigation against poultry companies that Oklahoma's attorney general alleges have polluted the Illinois River watershed in eastern Oklahoma. The talk continues and, reading between the lines, it is starting to sound as if the lawsuit isn't going to be pursued. If that is the case, we can only hope that efforts to clean up the waterways in the region won't be abandoned as well. Gov.-elect Mary Fallin and Attorney General-elect Scott Pruitt say they plan to review the case. After years of failed negotiations with the companies, outgoing Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson sued the poultry companies, alleging that poultry litter applied to the ground has resulted in pollution of the Illinois River watershed. The trial concluded earlier this year, but a federal judge has yet to make a ruling. Many observers believe the lawsuit, highly unpopular with poultry growers in eastern Oklahoma, was a factor in Edmondson's loss to Lt. Gov. Jari Askins in the Democratic primary contest for governor. Pruitt has been criticized for accepting campaign donations from poultry company employees, but a spokeswoman said those donations would have no effect on his decision on the case. While Fallin and Pruitt have been coy - at least publicly - about their intentions, stakeholders in the poultry industry seem absolutely giddy about the turn of events, talking about "having an open discussion" and looking at the case "with a fresh set of eyes." A Fallin spokesman went so far as to suggest environmental laws "should be written in a way that isn't unfair to agriculture." There's been a lot of debate over whether poultry waste is the primary problem in the watershed, but there's no debate on this point: The water quality in the area has degraded significantly over the years, and something has caused it. The problem will only grow worse if the root cause of it isn't addressed.

SUBHEAD: Poultry lawsuit under review editorials