Twitter Thread by Shawn Ashley



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Good morning, early birds! The Oklahoma State Department of Health is considering privatizing at least the management of its new public health lab and the state's new pandemic center.

A letter to agency employees Tuesday from Commissioner of Health Dr. Lance Frye said, "This consideration will include the potential privatization of some functions, programs, services, units and/or divisions of the agency,"

A statement Wednesday by OSDH Deputy Commissioner Travis Kirkpatrick indicated the agency did not intend to privatize the lab as a whole and instead said it was considering a management agreement with Prairie One, a not-for-profit subsidiary of the OSU Research Foundation.

"This agreement, which has not been finalized, would allow OSDH to focus on and strengthen public health priorities to better serve Oklahomans and leverage public resources to maximize our capabilities," Kirkpatrick said.

"'Privatize' is broadly defined under state statute - it means to enter into a contract for the performance of a duty or function that is currently being performed by a state employee," he added.

Frye's letter immediately drew the ire of the Oklahoma Public Employees Association (OPEA), with Spokesman Tom Dunning noting his organization was "100 percent" against privatization of the lab.

"Nobody disputes that a new Public Health Lab needs to be built but to relocate it to Stillwater and privatize it, I don't think that was the intent of the Legislature when they did the bond," OPEA spokesman Tom Dunning said.

Lawmakers provided financing for construction of a new public health lab in 2017 when they authorized a $59.555 million bond issue for the project.

Speaking at Wednesday's State Chamber of Oklahoma's Public Affairs Forum, House Speaker-designate Charles McCall & Senate President Pro Tempore-designate Greg Treat said they are talking with members & staff about the COVID-19 protocols that will be in place when session starts.

McCall stressed that all his chamber's proceedings will be livestreams. Masks will be a requirement, it appears, and Treat said it may be necessary to limit the number of people in some committee rooms.

House Minority Leader Emily Virgin encouraged the leaders to find a way for the public to participate virtually in legislative proceedings, in addition to watching the livestreams.

Oklahoma and 16 other states' attorneys general signed on to a brief Wednesday that supports the Texas attorney general's lawsuit challenging the 2020 election results in Pennsylvania, Georgia, Michigan and Wisconsin.

Texas AG Ken Paxton claims the states are in violation of the Electors Clause and the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution and asks the US Supreme Court to require the states to hold a special election or select a new set of electors for their electoral college votes.

"I regret that the US Supreme Court is the only forum available to resolve the many legitimate concerns regarding state elections," Hunter said in a press release.

"That is why I am joining the amicus brief in support of the Texas case, to encourage the highest court in the land to thoughtfully consider and address the matters presented," he explained.

A group of nearly 50 House members expressed support for Hunter's efforts, claiming there is enough evidence of fraud in the general election in the states mentioned to warrant a legal challenge: https://t.co/0kAl0gQcwE

2020 comes to an end three weeks and just over 18 hours from the time I am writing this. Yeah, I know: It's hard to believe.