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Friday, March 09, 2001

Kentucky News Briefs

Search for body continues along river

BURLINGTON — Detectives searched the banks of the Ohio River near Petersburg for about two hours Thursday, looking for a body believed to have been dumped in the Ohio River last week, said Lt. Jack Banks of Boone County Criminal Investigations.

Richard A. Lambert, 23, of 6272 Petersburg Road is being held in the Boone County jail in lieu of \$50,000 bail.

He is charged with tampering with physical evidence and abuse of a corpse.

Police believe Mr. Lambert killed a woman, transported the body to Boone County and dumped it into the river, according to a uniform citation on file at Boone County courthouse.

Police have said they do not know the identity of the woman.

Boone County Water Rescue and police haven't searched the river for the body since Sunday, when deteriorating weather and river conditions forced them off the water.

Mr. Lambert's next court appearance is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Thursday in Boone County court.

Contract compromise gives teachers raise

A year-long salary dispute in Boone County Schools was finally put to rest Thursday night.

The Boone County school board revised its teacher salary schedule, giving teachers an additional \$150 this year beyond raises approved last summer.

District officials and the teachers' union reached the compromise last month, after teachers threatened to picket at



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a school board meeting.

The teachers' union approved the agreement Feb. 15 on a 344-75 vote.

Union and district leaders had been negotiating teacher raises since last March.

The board had approved a 1.9 percent raise in addition to a state-mandated 2.2 percent cost-of-living increase. The union, however, sought an additional \$300.

Negotiations for next year's salaries begin March 20.

Democrats squelch anti-abortion initiatives

FRANKFORT — Democrats who control the Kentucky House decided privately Thursday that a number of anti-abortion initiatives would be squelched without a vote.

They included proposals to create a crime of “fetal homicide,” which would get around court rulings that a fetus is not a person.

Also proposed was a “conscience-clause” law for pharmacists who refuse to dispense abortion-inducing drugs. A third issue was to define the abortion drug RU-486 as an abortion procedure.

All were embodied in bills that had stalled in House committees.

Abortion opponents hoped to attach them as amendments to bills still moving through the House. Democrats, who hold 66 of the House's 34 seats, decided otherwise in a closed-door caucus, Majority Leader Greg Stumbo said.

“It wasn't the issues. A lot of members said they would be for those issues,” said Mr. Stumbo, D-Prestonsburg.

But, “they respect the process. They didn't want to be called on to vote on bills in the last couple of days that hadn't gone through the process.”

It was not entirely about the process. The caucus occurred after complaints by some of the House's female members.

Mr. Stumbo was the key figure because, as floor leader, he controls the flow of bills in the House. Mr. Stumbo can kill a bill by simply declining to bring it up for a vote.

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Medicaid commissioner to return to U of L

FRANKFORT — Medicaid Commissioner Dennis Boyd will resign effective March 15 to return to the University of Louisville where he worked previously, he said on Thursday.

Ellen Heslen, general counsel for the Cabinet for Health Services, was named interim commissioner pending a search for a permanent replacement.

Mr. Boyd has headed the \$3.2 billion program in the Cabinet for Health Services for three years.

Jimmy D. Helton announced last week he also was resigning as the secretary of the Cabinet for Health Services effective March 15.

Senate OKs "gutted" telemarketing bill

FRANKFORT — A bill to let consumers avoid calls from telephone solicitors was substantially stripped, then passed by the Kentucky Senate on Thursday.

The House, where the bill originated, refused to go along with the Senate's changes. If the Senate declined to back down, a compromise would have to be negotiated.

Under the bill, people 65 and older could have their names added to a "zero call" list maintained by the attorney general. People younger would have to settle for the state's current "no-call" list, for which there are numerous exemptions.

The bill was considerably tougher when the House passed it on Tuesday. There was no minimum age for zero-call, and the bill also extended to misleading sweepstakes and prize promotions by mail.

House leaders thought they had an agreement with the Senate to pass the House bill with two changes: to delete the sweepstakes provisions and to add "safe harbor" language for local merchants who accidentally made a prohibited marketing call. Otherwise, the attorney general could pursue a \$1,000 fine for each violation.

Instead, the Senate Judiciary Committee reinstated a minimum age requirement. The sponsor, Rep. Buddy Buckingham, was taken aback.

"My bill no longer exists," said Mr. Buckingham, D-Murray. "I assumed the bill would be modified some. ... I didn't expect to find the whole bill gutted."

65% of nursing homes fail to seek certification

FRANKFORT — Nearly two-thirds of the assisted-living developments in Kentucky have yet to apply for certification required under a law enacted last year, regulators said Thursday.

There was a “quasi deadline” when regulations for implementing the law took effect in December, said Bernard Elmer, a social services specialist in the Cabinet for Health Services' Office of Aging Services.

Thirty-five of the 100 assisted-living complexes known to the agency have applied for certification.

Six have been approved and the rest are being processed, according to a statement from the agency.

Mr. Elmer said reminders were being mailed to the others. Violators could be fined up to \$500 per day under the law.

Proponents of required certification said it would help consumers in selecting a residence for themselves or loved ones needing assistance but not nursing care.

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