

Lawmakers serve up kids care

Mark Scott

msscott@themercury.com

Child care and deferred maintenance were the primary issues discussed at the Eggs and Issues Legislators Forum Saturday morning.

About 50 people gathered at the train depot to hear updates from State Sen. Roger Reitz, 66th District Rep. Sydney Carlin, 67th Rep. Tom Hawk, and 61st Rep. Richard Carlson.

Hawk, a Democrat, said child care is one of the issues he's been following this session. He said the problem is finding a balance between funding and safety for small children.

"I'd like to see a little more flexibility," Hawk said. "Rural legislators are furious with KDHE. They feel they are just out there trying to catch them (child care providers) doing something wrong, punish them, and then people get fined. I don't think that is what we want."

At the same time, Hawk cautioned against overcrowded situations where supervision suffers. "We know there are plenty of horror stories about what happens then," he said.

Carlson, a Republican, said some child care centers occasionally exceed their capacity.

"Maybe they are over the limit for two hours because of an emergency or snow day," Carlson said. "We're trying to find a balance."

Carlin, a Democrat, said it would help to treat child care workers as professionals.

"They receive low pay, no benefits, and no retirement," Carlin said. "They can only afford to do this while they have young children. They have got to make a living with benefits for being in that profession."

Reitz said he is regrettably hearing no talk about deferred maintenance needs at Kansas State University and other Regents institutions this session.

"Everyone in this room owns those buildings," Reitz said. "Now, where are you going to get the money? Don't push me. Don't push me, because I'll tell you, and you don't want to hear it."

Several members of the audience responded to Reitz by saying "raising taxes."

Carlin noted that there is still \$7.8 million budgeted for deferred maintenance as a result of last year's legislation.

"No, it's not enough money," Carlin said. "But we have a plan now. We have a list of buildings that need work and we're getting priorities established. That is progress."
