MU system president Forsee will take a leave of absence after wife's cancer diagnosis

University of Missouri system president Gary Forsee will take an extended leave of absence to deal with his wife's cancer diagnosis.

The university system said in a statement that Forsee’s wife, Sherry, was diagnosed with cancer after emergency surgery last week.

The system’s Board of Curators met in a special session via conference call Thursday evening. The meeting was held out of the president’s office at University Hall. Forsee participated by phone.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reported that Steve Owens, the system’s general counsel, will handle Forsee’s duties during the leave.

Forsee, a former Sprint CEO, has been president of the four-campus system since February 2008. He and his wife have two grown daughters.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UM System President Gary Forsee to take extended leave

By MISSOURIAN STAFF
December 2, 2010 | 7:50 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Gary Forsee, president of the University of Missouri System, told the Board of Curators on Thursday night that his wife was recently diagnosed with cancer, requiring him to take extended leave.

According to a statement from the president's office, Sherry Forsee had emergency surgery last week.

The UM president has already delegated authority to chancellors and vice presidents on various campuses, the statement noted. Steve Owens, general counsel of the UM System, will handle other matters normally addressed by the president.

The board met in a quickly called closed session Thursday that lasted an hour. The statement was released at the end of the session. Scheduled curators meetings Dec. 9 and 10 in St. Louis will be held as planned.

In the statement, Forsee acknowledged the board's understanding and support. He also said that he and his wife "appreciate the expressions of care and concern from our many university colleagues and friends around the state."

The Forsees have been married for 35 years and have two daughters, Melanie and Kara.

According to the UM System website, Sherry Forsee grew up in St. Louis, attended University City High School and is a graduate of Southeast Missouri State University, where she majored in secondary education.

She serves on the boards of directors of Starlight Theatre, the United Way and the Rose Brooks Center, which helps victims of domestic violence. She is also on the board of directors of the Alpha Chi Omega Foundation, her sorority.

Michelle Markelz and Megan Cassidy contributed to this report.
MU Cancer Scientists Form New Company With International Pharmaceutical Firm

University of Missouri leaders celebrated a nanomedicine milestone today as they announced the creation of a new drug development company. The new company forms a partnership between university researchers and an international pharmaceutical firm to advance testing of a potential cancer treatment created at MU.

Shasun Pharmaceuticals Ltd., one of the world’s leading suppliers of ibuprofen, formed the new company in partnership with MU nanomedicine experts Kattesh Katti, PhD, and Raghuraman Kannan, PhD. The scientists are developing a promising prostate cancer treatment that uses gold nanoparticles they created at the university. The new company will continue research and testing that is required for the treatment to receive approval for use in humans.

“MU brings many strengths to this new partnership, which will allow us to clinically translate the unique nanotechnology developed by Drs. Katti and Kannan,” said Abhaya Kumar, a founding director of Shasun. “Everything we need for developing this product for use in patients is at the University of Missouri.”

Katti and Kannan have studied their new therapy for treating late-stage prostate cancer for more than five years. Their efficacy studies in mice with prostate tumors have demonstrated an unprecedented 85 percent reduction in tumor volume after administering a single dose of their radioactive gold nanoparticle. They have observed little or no toxic side effects as a result of the injected dose.

“This is probably the most promising result we could expect,” said Andrew Kurtz, PhD, a program manager at the National Cancer Institute’s Small Business Innovation Research Development Center. “The next stage would be to hopefully move things into clinical trials to see if we find the same results in humans.”

The therapy will advance toward human testing with support from a $1.5 million initial investment by Shasun. The money will help MU hire scientists and conduct further laboratory studies. If the therapy is approved for humans, patients at MU’s hospitals and clinics could be among the first to benefit from the cancer treatment.
"In addition to offering hope to patients, the partnership with Shasun reflects MU's commitment to supporting high-tech companies that will create jobs and enhance our quality of life in Missouri and beyond," said Robert Duncan, PhD, vice chancellor for research at MU.

MU business development specialists helped Katti and Kannan form a company, Nanoparticle Biochem Inc. (NBI), to pursue commercialization opportunities for the scientists' nanotechnology discoveries. Shasun joined NBI to form the new company, Shasun NBI, which is housed in MU's Life Science Business Incubator. MU, NBI and Shasun could someday share royalties from the prostate cancer treatment.

"Shasun is a perfect partner to hopefully bring MU's promising new cancer therapy to a world market," said Michael Nichols, PhD, vice president of research and economic development for the University of Missouri System. "Universities like MU need strong commercial collaborators, especially in medicine, because it typically takes hundreds of millions of dollars and more than a decade to take a potential treatment for patients from the laboratory to the clinic."

Prostate cancer is the second most deadly cancer in men. The American Cancer Society estimates that 217,730 people in the United States are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year, and 32,050 U.S. residents die annually from the disease. One in six U.S. men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in his lifetime.

In 2005, Katti received a prostate cancer research grant that distinguished MU as one of 12 universities to participate in the National Cancer Institute's Nanotechnology Platform Partnership. The grant established MU as a leader in advancing nanomedicine by uniting a variety of biomedical research resources across campus. For example, the MU Research Reactor, the most powerful university reactor in the world, is one of only a few sites able to produce the radioactive gold nanoparticles created by Katti and Kannan.

"MU's proactive support of our research has allowed Dr. Kannan and I to join Shasun in taking this important step toward helping cancer patients," Katti said. "This kind of culture has put MU on the map as a destination for world-class science that attracts international attention and investment."

Katti is a Curator's Distinguished Professor of Radiology and Physics and a Margaret Proctor Mulligan Distinguished Professor in Medical Research. Kannan is the Michael J. and Sharon R. Bukstein Distinguished Faculty Scholar in Cancer Research, assistant professor of radiology and director of the Nanoparticle Production Core Facility at the University of Missouri.

Shasun was incorporated in 1976 and is headquartered in Chennai, India. It manufactures active pharmaceutical ingredients and exports pharmaceutical products to countries across Europe, North America and elsewhere. More information about the company is available at http://www.shasun.com/.
MU researchers launch company

Startup focuses on cancer drug.

Two University of Missouri researchers and the director of an India-based pharmaceutical company today announced a business partnership that they say holds the promise of improved cancer therapies.

Called Shasun Nanoparticle Biochem Inc., the new startup is based at the M.U. Life Science Business Incubator at Monsanto Place. The company was formed to commercialize a prostate cancer treatment using gold nanoparticles.

MU nanotechnology researchers Kattesh Katti and Raghuraman Kannan have been studying the new therapy for treating late-stage prostate cancer in mice for more than five years.

"When we injected the nanoparticles into tumors, "they did not leak out," Katti said. "We noticed about an 85 percent reduction in tumor volume. We're excited, but we're also cautious."

The two researchers will be assisted by Shasun Pharmaceuticals Ltd., which has the capacity to manufacture the drug. The company has plants in Chennai, India, and the United Kingdom.

"Shasun believes nanotechnology is going to be the future of medicine," said Abhaya Kumar, company director.

Katti and Kannan plan to seek permission from the Food and Drug Administration in the next 12 to 18 months. The therapy will advance toward human testing with support from a $1.5 million initial investment by Shasun.

Katti and Kannan work with particles so tiny they are 100,000 times smaller than the width of a human hair. The two men have created a catalog of about 100 nanoparticles with which to work.

Ultimately, they decided to use gold because it has been used in medical research for decades and it is the only element that remains un-oxidized when reduced in size, Katti said.

Nanoparticles tend to be "extremely reactive" and are prone to clumping, Kannan said. That problem led the researchers to study ways to coat the particles with a benign substance.
They also knew cancer cells have receptors that are capable of attracting certain proteins and peptides.

"By attaching a protein or peptide with a pre-established affinity" for the tumor cells, "we provide these nanoparticles a sense of direction," Katti said.

Finally, the two men made sure their particles wouldn't bind to normal cells, only cancerous ones.

By irradiating the gold nanoparticles at the MU research reactor, the two researchers have learned how to deliver small doses of radiation directly into a tumor. No additional chemotherapy or radiation is needed.

Katti said the role of the reactor was pivotal to his research, but so was the MU School of Veterinary Medicine's oncology program, which tested the therapy on dogs suffering late-stage prostate cancer.

He agreed it was "karma" the right ingredients existed together on the MU campus.

"All the components are aligned in a way that offers a surer shot for success," Katti said.

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COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU researchers work with Indian firm to develop cancer treatment

By Pavan Vangipuram
December 2, 2010 | 1:04 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — **Two MU professors are partnering with the Indian pharmaceutical company Shasun to work on a new treatment for prostate cancer.**

The collaboration will form a new company, Shasun *NBI, to research and market radiopharmaceuticals, a technology that uses irradiated particles to attack cancer tumors.

Kattesh Katti, an MU professor of radiology who is part of the collaboration, said this method of combating cancer is "very precise" and "site-specific."

Traditional radiation therapy involves subjecting a cancer patient's entire body to high doses of radiation. This often kills the cancer, but leaves the patient weakened and susceptible to other disease.

The technology Shasun NBI hopes to develop involves subjecting individual gold molecules to radiation and then injecting those irradiated molecules directly into the tumor.

"The gold nanoparticles we're developing have a unique affinity to tumor proteins," Katti said. "They attack the tumor directly and leave healthy cells alone."

Raghuram Kannan, the other doctor collaborating with Shasun, said he "wanted a strategic partner to take (our research) to the next level. Shasun has good manufacturing capabilities."

"We have a strong belief that nanomedicine can bring us new drugs," Kannan said. "This drug is for prostate cancer, but it's not limited to that. This is a technique which might be applied to all solid tumors."

Shasun Pharmaceuticals is a Bombay Stock Exchange-listed company with a market capitalization of $250 million.
Shasna's director of operations and strategy, Abhaya Kumar, said his company had invested $1.5 million in the partnership, but said they could extend more. Kumar flew from India to attend the Thursday morning announcement at the Life Science Business Incubator. "We chose MU because we know they have a capability of doing a lot of radioactive pharmaceutical work," Kumar said. "We heard about nanoparticle technology available through MU and we thought this was our best opportunity for taking a molecule from the laboratory to the community."

Kumar also identified MU's research reactor as a strong reason for the partnership. The scientists use the MU Research Reactor Center to irradiate the gold particles.

Mike Nichols, MU's vice president for research and development, said that "while the investment is very large, so is the potential benefit, such as creating high-tech jobs here in the community." Nichols also said the drug could result in "substantial sales."

"MU researchers are responsible for nine-tenths of the radiology products released in this area," he said.

Robert Duncan, MU vice chancellor for research, lauded the partnership as "the opposite of outsourcing."

Jamal Ibdah, MU's senior associate dean of medicine, highlighted the importance of this research.

"The American Cancer Society estimates 220,000 men are affected by prostate cancer every year," Ibdah said, "and 32,000 U.S. residents die from it every year. One-sixth of U.S. men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime."

Ibdah said the best hope MU can offer these patients is to translate its research discoveries into new therapies.

The partnership aims to do that. Kumar said that his vision is to be the first to introduce nanoparticle-based treatment for the treatment of cancer.

"We're looking for at least a million doses of the drug per year," Kumar said of his ultimate goals for the treatment.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Thompson Center to celebrate new center, director

By Michelle Markelz
December 2, 2010 | 6:20 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders at MU will open its new doors at 205 Portland St. on Friday and welcome its new executive director, Joel Bregman.

The new building will offer 10,000 square feet more space than the center had at the formerly-occupied 300 Portland St. location, according to a news release from the MU News Bureau. It will include resources such as books, toys and computers for families to use, more therapy and examination rooms and a cafe.

A ribbon cutting will take place at 10 a.m. outside the center with guest speakers including Gov. Jay Nixon and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton. The ceremony is free and open to the public.

The space vacated at 300 Portland S. will be filled by child health offices and pediatric rehabilitation, former Thompson Center director James Poehling said.

Bregman developed autism research centers at Emory University and the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System and held the title of director of clinical research at Fay J. Lindner Center for Autism.

"It was always in the plan for the Thompson Center to have a director with clinical training in autism as well as management experience," Poehling said.

Poehling, whose new title is assistant vice chancellor for health sciences, said he will remain involved with the autism effort.

"I will be available to Dr. Bregman to offer support," Poehling said. He will also work on the Thompson Foundation Board, a development board separate from the university, which handles fundraising for the center, he said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Students of suspended professor seek public apology

By Megan Cassidy
December 2, 2010 | 9:11 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The MU students who filed a grievance against suspended engineering Professor Greg Engel said Thursday that they want a public apology.

Undergraduate students Wenling Zhou, Wanya Gu, Yushan Chang and Lauren Griggs said they had met with Deputy Provost Ken Dean. They said he offered them the option of meeting with Engel in an informal hearing to resolve their issues.

"We're willing to meet with him informally, and we're asking for a public apology," Griggs said.

Engel was suspended Nov. 13 on the grounds of "sexual and racial discrimination." The charges were brought to light after the four women filed a formal complaint against him.

Engel has since maintained his innocence. He said the issue is rooted in a case of academic dishonesty brought against three of his students earlier this semester in an experimental engineering class.

The three students, all female and Chinese, claimed that plagiarism charges were based on gender and race.

Zhou, Gu and Chang said the plagiarism accusations Engel brought against them were unsubstantiated. In a separate incident, Griggs said Engel had filed a formal complaint against her that could have jeopardized her standing with the school.

"We are the only four women in the entire electrical engineering graduating class," Griggs said. "I decided that we needed to go into this together."

Zhou, Gu and Chang said they were given zeros on a lab assignment they completed as a group project because they turned in identical lab reports, which Engel prohibited.
The three women maintain, however, that this rule was not included in the syllabus nor did he address it in earlier assignments. Additionally, Gu said other students in the class had followed the same practice but were not punished.

“I went to his office hours to talk to him about it,” Gu said. “He refused to compare the other groups’ reports to ours. He could not give me a reasonable answer and slammed the door in my face.”

Engel said Thursday that although he refuses to comment on the specific complaints made against him, he had warned the class early in the semester that there would be consequences if they did not do their own work.

“I maintain that the three students cheated,” Engel said. “The students in the class were warned, and it continued. My job is to uphold the integrity in these classes.”

The women’s grades are undergoing review, and they said they hope the situation doesn’t affect their academic status.

Engel said he no longer has control over the grades in his classes.

“All my BlackBoard privileges were removed with my suspension,” he said.

After the women submit a final grievance report, they said Dean will follow up with Engel to determine whether to set an informal meeting or conduct a formal hearing.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Former UM System employee named commissioner of higher education

By Michelle Markelz
December 2, 2010 | 5:21 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — David Russell, a 19-year employee of the UM System, was named commissioner of higher education for the state of Missouri on Thursday.

Russell was appointed interim commissioner on July 1 after former Commissioner Robert B. Stein’s retirement. Kathy Love, public information officer for the Missouri Department of Higher Education, said Russell showed potential for permanent employment early on.

"(The members of the Coordinating Board) acknowledged that he had all the credentials they were looking for, and that he had the ability to lead it full time," she said.

Russell said in the release that his experience in the interim position was helpful in the transition to commissioner and that he expects the job to be "demanding," but "rewarding."

The Missouri Department of Higher Education is overseeing the review of recently targeted "low-producing" higher education programs. Russell’s role in the process will involve looking at the work that staff at the department has done on program reviews, and he will be involved in drafting the report that will go to the governor, said Love.

Russell’s title as commissioner will earn him a $170,000 salary, she said.
Jefferson City, Mo. -- A former administrator at the University of Missouri has been named chief of the Missouri Department of Higher Education. David Russell has been serving as interim higher education commissioner since July. The Coordinating Board for Higher Education decided Thursday to make his position permanent.

Russell worked in the University of Missouri system for 19 years, most recently as the senior associate vice president and chief of staff. Before that, he served 22 years in the Army, retiring in 1991 as a lieutenant colonel.

Russell, of Columbia, agreed to a five-year commitment as higher education commissioner. He replaces Robert Stein, who retired July 1.
Russell gets permanent job as higher-ed chief

David Russell has been named Missouri's higher education commissioner. He has been serving as interim commissioner at the Missouri Department of Higher Education since July 1.

Russell previously served in various roles at the University of Missouri System, most recently as associate vice president. He took a leave from that job to fill the commissioner role but also indicated an interest in the title on a permanent basis.

The Coordinating Board for Higher Education voted to hire him Thursday.

CBHE Chairman Lowell Kruse said naming Russell as commissioner reflects the board’s confidence in him as leader of the Missouri Department of Higher Education. Russell agreed to a five-year commitment as commissioner.

"The board is extremely gratified to have someone of David Russell’s credentials and abilities," Kruse said in a prepared statement. "He hit the ground running from day one as interim commissioner, visiting 17 campuses around the state, meeting with government and college leaders, and becoming familiar with the whole range of issues facing higher education. The Coordinating Board has utmost confidence in his judgment and looks forward to his long-term leadership as commissioner."
Kelly gives MU professors legislative rundown

By Janese Silvey

University of Missouri faculty members need to better organize and boost their lobbying efforts if they want state lawmakers to better understand and perhaps fund the mission of the state’s only land-grant university, state Rep. Chris Kelly told them this morning.

In what was part pep talk, part promise and part comedy act, Kelly spent more than an hour with 25 professors at MU. The informal discussion was sponsored by MU’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors — a relatively small group that might have more members after Kelly’s challenge today.

“You and your colleagues at Truman and Central Missouri and Missouri State University should be a vibrant political force,” Kelly, D-Columbia, said, suggesting the AAUP could become a powerful advocating organization.

When AAUP President Victoria Johnson suggested some professors feel discouraged from lobbying, Kelly acknowledged: “People would not like it if you do that.”

But lobbying and educating might be the only way to bypass uninformed mandates from the state, he said, such as Gov. Jay Nixon’s degree review. That review is requiring universities to submit lists of programs that graduate, on average, fewer than 10 undergraduates, fewer than five master’s students and fewer than three doctorate students a year. That report is due by the end of the year, with the indication that those degrees will be eliminated or reconfigured.

Nixon supports higher education, Kelly said, but the degree review fails to take important context into account. For instance, French professors might teach hundreds of students but award relatively few degrees. “You’ve got to have somebody teaching French anyway; you might as well have someone competent,” be said.

In other areas, such as specialized engineering, a program might have few graduates but faculty members in those areas are doing world-changing research, he said.

Kelly suggested the university play along with the degree review program until Nixon finds another legislative priority.
“Hopefully” UM System President Gary Forsee and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton “are skillful enough to ‘yes’ him to death until he thinks about something else and doesn’t bother French.”

Kelly warned faculty members, though, that his colleagues from outstate Missouri — even those who represent districts with colleges — aren’t always interested in fact-based arguments. State decision makers include “legislators who think the Earth is 5,000 years old and fossils are from the devil.” To them, he told faculty members, “you guys are pointy-headed wastes of time.”

Several faculty members questioned whether lawmakers are interested in reviewing the number of administrators on campuses or their high salaries. Kelly warned taking that fight to lawmakers distracts from the bigger argument that Missouri is not funding the university’s education and research work adequately.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
MU students pitch big plans for cotton

By Janese Silvey

They’ve drafted the business plans, come up with the marketing schemes and have ties to the farmers who can provide the cotton. Now, all the University of Missouri textile students have to do is get companies to take notice.

Four teams of seniors have spent this semester coming up with new product lines featuring 100 percent Missouri-grown cotton. It’s part of a project in Jung Ha-Brookshire’s textile and apparel management class in the College of Human Environmental Sciences — but the students are hoping for more than just good grades at the end. They’re hoping companies such as The Buckle, Vera Bradley and Ralph Lauren buy into their ideas.

On Wednesday, they’ll present their business plans — collectively branded as Heartland Premium — to the Missouri Department of Agriculture and Bayer CropScience Center. A week later, they’ll send their business plans to the companies.

Victoria Erhart and Kelsey Mayabb are confident the co-founders of Vera Bradley will take notice. After all, the company that sells cotton luggage, handbags and accessories was started by two women in Indiana who know how ideas can turn into a business, Mayabb said.

Their team has come up with proposed Vera Bradley bed and bath collections, featuring 100 percent Missouri-grown cotton and Vera Bradley’s signature paisley prints.

“I’d be the first to buy,” Mayabb said. “I have 10 Vera Bradley bags at home; I would love to have her bedding.”

Brittany James and Emily Boland are pitching the idea of incorporating cotton pieces into wedding dresses. They know cotton won’t replace the lace and tulle, but they’re proposing that Ralph Lauren add cotton embellishments such as bows to a line of bridal gowns. Their slogan is “Labor of Love,” aimed to link the farming process to a bride’s journey.

Growing cotton “is a labor of love, like watching your child take her first steps as a child to taking her first steps down the aisle,” Boland said.
Steffi Dickmann’s team stuck with basics and is pitching a line of stylish 100 percent Missouri cotton T-shirts and leggings to The Buckle. The “Homegrown Style” line would feature quality American products with patriotic appeal, Dickmann said.

This is the first year Ha-Brookshire has featured Missouri fabric in her capstone class. In past years, she has required her students to team up with students in Korea, Mexico and Canada to develop international business proposals. MU hosted a cotton summit this fall, though, and Ha-Brookshire wanted to continue that theme in her class.

Missouri produced more than 800,000 bales of cotton in 2008, according to the National Cotton Council, and the state accounts for more than 6 percent of national cotton production.

Ha-Brookshire is hoping the project and next week’s presentations boost awareness of Missouri’s cotton industry.

And if the students’ proposed lines ultimately end up on store shelves? That would mean a financial boost to farmers and Missouri’s economy, she said.

“We’ll see what happens,” Ha-Brookshire said.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
COLUMBIA, MO (AP) - The federal official who oversees the Gulf oil spill claims process and also reviewed executive pay among companies receiving bailout money will speak Friday in Columbia.

The lecture by Ken Feinberg is entitled "Government Determination of Private Executive Pay: Opportunities and Challenges." He is scheduled to speak at 11 a.m. at the University of Missouri's Trulaske School of Business.

Feinberg was appointed by the federal Treasury secretary to serve as the Special Master for TARP executive compensation. He is also administrator of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility, which is processing claims by businesses and individuals affected by the BP oil spill.

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Mo. housing agency to redo secret vote on ethics

Posted: Thursday, December 2, 2010 9:57 am

A Missouri agency that finances low-income housing developments plans to redo a vote on ethics policy changes that occurred in a meeting that was closed to the public.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported Thursday that it raised concerns that the closed meeting by a subcommittee of the Missouri Housing Development Commission may have violated the state’s open-meetings law. In response, agency director Margaret Lineberry told the paper that the subcommittee will meet again to vote on the ethics policy in a public session.

The commission’s current ethics rules include a one-year ban on former employees seeking to influence the commission on behalf of private firms.

A commission subcommittee met privately Tuesday to discuss a lawsuit challenging the ethics policy by former employee Deb Giffin, who left state government in September 2009. Giffin and former agency director Pete Ramsel received e-mails from the commission’s attorney in August suggesting they were violating the standards of conduct policy because they were working with developers on housing projects in Missouri less than a year after they left the agency.

During the closed meeting Tuesday, the subcommittee voted to send the full board a proposed revision to the ethics policy that includes some changes which appear to be in response to criticisms raised in the lawsuit.

Two experts on the state Sunshine Law said the closed meeting violated the Sunshine Law, which allows narrow exceptions to an open meeting requirement for discussing specific legal matters.

"The exception relates to specific legal entanglements, not drafting public policy that might have some relation to those entanglements," said Charles Davis, an associate journalism professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia and former director of the National Freedom of Information Center.

Lineberry said the discussion of the ethics policy was done in a context of the criticisms made in the lawsuit, but it was not related to any settlement of that lawsuit. Because of that, said Kansas City lawyer Jean Maneke, the meeting was improper.
"If it was not part of a settlement discussion, then I think it should have been carved out of the closed session," said Maneke, a Sunshine Law expert who advises the Missouri Press Association.

Commission chairman Jeffrey Bay, who is on the subcommittee, said he supported the decision to meet again to redo the vote on the ethics policy. A meeting of the policy committee has been set for Dec. 15 in Kansas City.

"We're all kind of learning," Bay said. "We certainly didn't intend to do anything inappropriate."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Stolen Christmas decorations returned

By David Dishman
December 2, 2010 | 8:16 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA -- When four reindeer and a Santa in his sleigh were stolen from her residence Monday, Betty Wetmore didn’t think she would ever see them again.

She called the police to report the incident and then started praying.

"I was praying all day that I would go to bed and wake up the next morning and they would all be back in their place," Betty Wetmore said.

It wasn’t long before the light-up decorations were returned.

Columbia Police Department spokeswoman Jill Wieneke said in an e-mail that several reports filed late Monday night and early Tuesday morning all claimed the same thing — someone was stealing Christmas decorations.

In the e-mail, Wieneke said a witness who had noticed a suspicious vehicle in the neighborhood took down its license plate number and contacted the police Tuesday. 

Wieneke said Officer Steve Wilmoth traced the vehicle to the Sigma Chi fraternity, and Wilmoth and fellow Officer Vance Pitman visited the fraternity and began to question some of the members.

Wieneke said fraternity members Jackson Hobbs and Alexander Hanson spoke with the officers and admitted to stealing the decorations from the Wetmores’ Skylark Drive residence as well as from several other houses in order to decorate their fraternity. Hobbs and Hanson were arrested on a Class C felony charge because the stolen items were valued at more than $500.

Sigma Chi President Kyle Haberberger said in an e-mail that Hobbs and Hanson have been involved in the fraternity since the beginning of the semester. Haberberger said the two will appear before their chapter’s judicial board system, which is meant to hold its members accountable for actions violating the fraternity’s code of conduct. He added that the incident
involved only the two individuals arrested and that their house would be decorated for the holidays with legally obtained items.

After the two men were arrested, they rode with the police officers to help identify which decorations they had stolen from which houses, Wieneke said.

"I was inside and a light started shining through the front window, and my husband was upstairs watching the Missouri basketball game," Betty Wetmore said. "I walked outside and saw the police car, talked to the officer and was told the two were in the back seat. I shook my finger at them, and I knew I had an answered prayer."

The Wetmores were able to reclaim their decorations at the police station.

Richard Wetmore, Betty's husband, said they were glad to have them back, but the lights on them had been ripped up and would no longer light up.

"I spent two hours working on them yesterday, and I was only able to get one of them working again," he said.

When describing the morning that she realized the decorations were missing, Betty said she tried her best to fight back the tears.

"I started crying because each one meant something to me. I bought one every year at the Illacres Center," Betty Wetmore said. "I got the snowman at the Rock Bridge craft show 15 years ago."