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MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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Glenn seated in Kentucky House

Committee formed to hear 13th District House contest

BY JAMES MAYSE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

FRANKFORT — Rep. Jim Glenn took his seat in the state House of Representatives on Tuesday afternoon, representing Owensboro's 13th District. Although Glenn was sworn in by a Daviess Circuit Court judge last week, he rose with other members of the General Assembly and took the oath of office, which was again administered by a judge.

How long Glenn will stay in the 13th District seat, however, is yet to be determined.

Tuesday was the first day of the 2019 General Assembly, and business in the House was dominated by how to handle the 13th District election contest. In November, Glenn, a Democrat, won the race by one vote, defeating incumbent Republican DJ Johnson. As allowed by state statute, Johnson filed a contest,



which statute says must be conducted by the members of the House.

The decision, which starts the process of reviewing the election, caused harsh words in the House, which is dominated by a Republican majority. Democrats called the review unprecedented and charged Republicans with attempt-

READ MORE

- Kentucky legislature to begin 2019 session | **Story, Page B3**
- Gofort directly challenges Bevin in GOP primary | **Story, Page B3**

ing to steal the 13th District seat, while GOP members said they are following a process that is included in state law that mandates they review the election result.

Glenn didn't speak during the House session but said afterward he won the election.

SEE **GLENN/PAGE A2**

Parking an obstacle for downtown housing

BY AUSTIN RAMSEY
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Downtown Owensboro will need at least 500 available parking spaces to meet the demand for future affordable housing there, and the latest public parking garage the city opened late last year only facilitates about half that need.

City Manager Nate Pagan says the next leg of downtown's placemaking strategy, which would attract affordable housing to the city's burgeoning downtown sector, may need more input by from City Hall to provide the parking spaces required to support it.

The \$8 million, 437-space parking garage the city has now opened for public



SEE **HOUSING/PAGE A2**

INSIDE

A digest of the Owensboro City Commission is on **Page A2**.

RiverPark Center in negotiations with Spectra

BY AUSTIN RAMSEY
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

The Owensboro RiverPark Center Board of Directors is in negotiations with Spectra, the Owensboro Convention Center and Sportscenter venue management company, that could result in the company taking over partial management control of operations there.

Sources say the board initiated a request for proposals several months

SEE **SPECTRA/PAGE A2**

Back to work



Enid Roach, center, professor of art at Kentucky Wesleyan College, stands behind student Ashley Butler while teaching a special topics painting and drawing class with Butler and students Jasmine Sturgeon, left, and Lamont Wilson, right, on Tuesday in the art studio at the Ralph Center of the Arts at the college in Owensboro. Tuesday was the second day back for students after the holiday break.

Trump pleads on TV for wall money

BY CATHERINE LUCEY, JILL COLVIN AND LISA MASCARO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump urged congressional Democrats to fund his long-promised border wall Tuesday night in a somber televised address that was heavy with dark immigration rhetoric but offered little in the way of concessions or new ideas to break the standoff that has left large swaths of the government shuttered for 18 days.

Speaking to the nation from the Oval Office for the first time, Trump argued the wall was needed to resolve a security and humanitarian "crisis," blaming illegal immigration for what he said was a scourge of drugs and violence in the U.S. and asking: "How much more American blood must we shed before Congress does its job?"

Democrats in response accused Trump appealing to "fear, not facts" and manufacturing a border crisis for political gain.

Using the formal trappings of the White House,



President Donald Trump speaks from the Oval Office of the White House as he gives a prime-time address about border security Tuesday in Washington.

Trump hoped to gain the upper hand in the standoff over his demand for \$5.7 billion to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. He plans a visit to the border Thursday as he continues to pitch what was a signature promise of his 2016 presidential campaign.

He addressed the nation as the shutdown stretched through its third week, with hundreds of thousands of federal workers going without pay and some congressional

Republicans growing increasingly jittery about the spreading impact of the impasse. Trump will visit the Capitol on Wednesday to meet with Senate Republicans, and has invited Democratic and Republican congressional leaders to return to the White House to meet with him later that day.

He claimed the standoff could be resolved in "45 minutes" if Democrats would just negotiate, but previous meetings have led to no agreement.

For now, Trump sees this as winning politics. TV networks had been reticent about providing him airtime to make what some feared would be a purely political speech. And that concern was heightened by the decision Tuesday by Trump's re-election campaign to send out fundraising emails and text messages to supporters trying to raise money off the speech. Their goal: A half-million dollars in a single day.

"I just addressed the nation on Border Security. Now need you to stand with me," read one message sent out after his remarks.

In their own televised remarks, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer accused Trump of misrepresenting the situation on the border as they urged him to reopen closed government departments and turn loose paychecks for hundreds of thousands of workers.

SEE **WALL/PAGE A2**

Democrats: Trump relies on fear and malice in wall debate

BY ALAN FRAM
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Top congressional Democrats said Tuesday that President Donald Trump “has chosen fear” in his drive to build a southern border wall and called on him to reopen the government shuttered because of the standoff over his demand for money for the barrier.

Speaking moments after Trump made his case for the wall in an Oval Office address, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told a national television audience that the president’s rhetoric has been “full of misinformation and even malice.”

Standing alongside her, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said America’s symbol “should be the Statue of Liberty, not a 30-foot wall.” He accused Trump of trying to “stoke fear and divert attention” from his

tumultuous administration.

The Democrats’ prime-time remarks were something of a debut for the newly empowered opposition. Less than a week after Democrats seized control of the House, Pelosi and Schumer stood side-by-side at a lectern in a joint appearance that appeared designed to emphasize their party’s unity.

They spoke moments after Trump warned of a “growing humanitarian and security crisis” at the border with Mexico. He said it was “immoral” for politicians “to do nothing and continue to allow more innocent people to be so horribly victimized” by the drugs and criminals he claims are streaming across the boundary.

Trump and the Democrats have been dueling during a partial government shutdown over his demands for — and

their opposition to — \$5.7 billion to begin building a border wall with Mexico. Some 800,000 federal employees are working without pay or have been furloughed at dozens of federal agencies, and each side is blaming the other for the closure.

The longest shutdown ever was 21 days that stretched from December 1995 into January 1996.

Polls have shown that Trump’s proposed wall and the shutdown fight have played well with his die-hard conservative supporters, but poorly with the general public. The wall was one of Trump’s highest-profile campaign promises and his performance on that issue could have a major impact on his 2020 re-election effort, while Democrats have made opposition to the proposal a cornerstone goal.

WALL

FROM THE **FRONT PAGE**

Negotiations on wall funding could proceed in the meantime, they said.

Schumer said Trump “just used the backdrop of the Oval Office to manufacture a crisis, stoke fear and divert attention from the turmoil in his administration.”

In his dire address, Trump ticked off a string of statistics and claims to make his case that there is a crisis at the border, but a number of his statements were misleading, such as saying the new trade deal with Mexico would pay for the wall, or suggesting through gruesome examples that immigrants are more likely to commit crime.

Trump, who has long railed against illegal immigration at the border, has recently seized on humanitarian concerns to argue there is a broader crisis that can only be solved with a wall. But critics say the security risks are overblown and the administration is at least partly to blame for the humanitarian situation.

Trump used emotional language, referring to Americans who were killed by people in the country illegally, saying: “I’ve met with dozens of families whose loved

ones were stolen by illegal immigration. I’ve held the hands of the weeping mothers and embraced the grief-stricken fathers. So sad. So terrible.”

The president often highlights such incidents, though studies over several years have found immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than people born in the United States.

Trump has been discussing the idea of declaring a national emergency to allow him to move forward with the wall without getting congressional approval for the billions he’s requested. But he did not mention that Tuesday night.

The partial government shutdown reached its 18th day, making the closure the second-longest in history. Hundreds of thousands of federal workers are going without pay, and government disruptions are hitting home with everyday Americans.

Trump was nearly halfway through his 9-minute address before he ever mentioned the border wall, describing it as a request from law enforcement rather than his own longstanding political pledge. He also suggested that his proposal to build the wall from steel, rather than concrete, was a concession to Democrats, although they don’t see it that way.

HOUSING

FROM THE **FRONT PAGE**

use, however, will only have about 267 spaces available for downtown residents, not taking into account the need for retail, restaurant and entertainment venue parking needs that already do exist and are almost guaranteed to grow, Pagan said. The garage cannot be entirely leased out in order to meet the public infrastructure requirements to be refunded by money generated in the city’s downtown tax-increment finance district.

“The fact is that the parking garage, in and of itself, is not sufficient,” he said. “These parking concerns are something we will be dealing with collectively over the coming months.”

Options available to the city include acquiring

Digest

Owensboro City Commission

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|---|---|
| At its 3:30 p.m. special-called meeting Tuesday on the fourth floor at Owensboro City Hall, the Owensboro City Commission took up the following agenda items: | recommendation. |
| • Heard a fund balance policy | • Heard an OBKY Project update. |
| | • Heard a presentation on downtown parking. |
| | • Heard updates on ongoing city projects. |

additional property, pursuing public-private partnerships as developers continue to build downtown, regulatory changes to the requirements laid out by the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission regarding parking and even the construction of more on-street parking as residential areas begin to crop up.

One of those residential areas slated to break ground as early as this year is a hotel-apartment complex directly to the west of that brand-new public

GLENN

FROM THE **FRONT PAGE**

“I think the people of Daviess County elected me, and want me to be elected,” Glenn said. “I think the electoral process was fair.”

A recanvass confirmed the election result, he said.

“I’m not a lawyer. I’m just saying the people of Daviess County voted for who they wanted to vote for,” Glenn said.

Shortly before the session began, a group outside of the House chambers began chanting “let Glenn in” and “every vote counts.” People cheered as Glenn, with family members, began ascending the stairs.

Once the House got down to business, House Speaker David Osborne, a Prospect Republican, called a committee to discuss the election contest. That process, which was initiated over the protests of House Democrats, created a nine-member board to hear the contest.

The board is made up of six Republicans and three Democrats. The board, according to a House report, will have the “ability to send for persons, papers and records relevant to the contest, and shall do so at the earliest practicable opportunity.” The board can examine witnesses and the process will resemble a court proceeding, where attorneys for both Johnson and Glenn can cross-examine those witnesses.

The “fact-finding” process will be open to the public and subject to the state’s open meetings law, although the board will be able to go into executive session. The board will issue a final report that will be acted on by the full House.

Glenn said before taking his seat he expected he would be allowed to join other legislators, but that he also expected the contest board to be formed. While that action was anticipated, it still prompted outrage from Democrats on the House floor.

“It is with deep sadness that I rise today, because I feel compelled to speak out against a great injustice,” Rep. Derrick Graham, a Frankfort Democrat and member of the Democratic minority’s leadership team, said. “... The people of Daviess County and the people of Owensboro have elected a good man, a dedicated public servant and the rightful winner of the 13th District” seat.

“We stand behind the people’s choice,” Graham said, and “we should not allow politicians to decide ... who will represent the 13th District on this floor.”

Rep. Chad McCoy, a Bardstown Republican, in turn, accused Democrats

of attempting to ignore the state law giving the House authority to hear contested House elections.

“This chamber has a duty to take up the contest,” McCoy said. He noted the state law governing House contests says legislators “shall” take actions.

“I’m honest-to-God saddened the entire minority party” wanted to ignore the statute, said McCoy, who also opened up the possibility of the contest board reviewing 17 rejected absentee ballots. Those ballots weren’t counted because the Daviess County Board of Elections ruled them invalid for lacking signatures, or in one case, lacking the actual ballot. No one knows if any of those ballots were cast in the 13th District race.

“What about those 17 people?” McCoy said. “What about their rights?”

After the session was over, Osborne said decisions to look at individual ballots would be made by the contest committee. He said statements by Graham and other Democrats were “political things that need to be said on the floor” for the benefit of the television cameras, but the House is required by statute to hear the contest.

“We have no choice but to take this matter up,” Osborne said.

Osborne said there’s no deadline for the contest board to finish its work, but it will be their responsibility “to act as quickly as we need to.”

Of the contest, Osborne said, “I’m trying to make this as open and transparent as possible.”

Rep. Rocky Adkins, a Sandy Hook Democrat and minority floor leader, said afterward he was concerned about the prospect of opening the rejected absentee ballots, and the contest shouldn’t have been allowed to go forward without a vote to proceed by the full House.

“(Glenn’s) election has been certified locally” and by the Secretary of State, Adkins said. “He has been sworn in by two judges. He’s taken the oath here on the floor.”

“When we start talking about ballots that were rejected by a bipartisan board (of elections), that concerns me deeply,” Adkins said.

The contest board met briefly in the afternoon to elect a chairman. The board is scheduled to meet again Wednesday, Jan. 10. The board cannot begin examining ballots, because those ballots are still in Daviess County, secured under lock and key by the Daviess County Clerk’s Office.

James Mayse, 270-691-7303, jmayse@messenger-inquirer.com, Twitter: @JamesMayse

SPECTRA

FROM THE **FRONT PAGE**

ago that resulted in three total bids from outside contractors. Spectra, a sports and entertainment firm based in Philadelphia, was among them, and Board Chair Jeff Ebelhar called it “the most viable candidate” at this stage of the negotiations.

With Executive Director Roxi Witt’s retirement being considered in one or two years, Ebelhar said the board entered into strategic planning discussions more than two years ago that have centered on the non-profit’s future in regional performing arts and civic entertainment.

“We have been doing some strategic planning and thinking about what our options might be as we move forward over the next 25 years,” Ebelhar said Tuesday. “(We have been) trying to figure out what is our best course of action. Do we engage some outside consultants to assist us or do we hire somebody?”

Part of the ongoing discussions among board members do include whether to simply hire another executive director in Witt’s absence, Ebelhar said. Negotiations with Spectra, he added, should not be interpreted as any final action the

board will ultimately take. The RiverPark center is a private, non-profit entity neither subject to open records nor open meetings laws. The request for proposals, therefore, was only described to the Messenger-Inquirer by Ebelhar as having to do with outsourcing “programming, marketing and perhaps facility or operations management.”

It’s unclear as of yet whether that would have an impact on the dozen or so staff the center already employs, but Ebelhar did say the negotiations do not threaten the board’s overall control of the non-profit entity. The city of Owensboro owns the 60,000 square feet of space the center currently occupies, and city officials said they are not a part of the negotiations, nor are they currently considering selling that space.

Mayor Tom Watson said the city did recommend that the RiverPark Center at least consider Spectra’s venue management services, as such an arrangement would be in the community’s benefit.

“We were not pushing for it, but we did make an offer, because we knew there was going to be a change in leadership over there and we were planning out for the future,” Watson said. “We thought Spectra may work out, and we wanted to see if it would, even if it was on a trial basis. It was

not a demand, though. We did not say, ‘You’ve got to do this.’ I just think it’s helpful for every one of our entertainment venues to know what each other are bidding on and to work together. We have three different venues that can do three different things, and if somebody in one venue squeezes in or has a whole bunch of extra space for one event that could have gone elsewhere and made the crowd bigger and been more successful, that’s a shame. At least they will all know what’s going on.”

The city’s relationship with the RiverPark Center is much like its relationship with the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum; it owns each entity’s spaces but leaves control up to individual boards and directors. The mayor said no such offer has been made to the bluegrass museum because its new, state-of-the-art center downtown “does not compete in the same genre.”

Officials with the RiverPark Center say they hope to ratify some sort of an agreement or decide on a future administration sometime this year. Other board members who were reached Tuesday declined to speak on the record.

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more spaces to open up. You all have the entertainment facilities, and, as the mayor brought up in his State of the City Address, the residential aspect is the third leg of the stool. That makes sense to us from an economic perspective, but we want to continue to work with (Pagan) and the rest of the city’s staff in finding a parking solution for downtown to really flourish.”

High-end housing, after all, is already available downtown, Ray pointed out. Units are already built and many have come on and off the market in recent years, but the residential aspect

of downtown’s development has left out retirees, millennials or young families who want to live in a dense urban area.

In fact, Ray said, between Gulfstream and other developers interested in the downtown area, more than 600 units between Brescia University and the Ohio River could be feasible over the next decade, which would require an enormous infrastructure on the part of the city and county.

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