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OSBI investigating possible open meetings violations, fraud

By NANCY KLETECKA • Guymon Daily Herald He had already tendered his resignation, but now, he has been terminated. Memor
ial Hospital of Texas County's Board of Control called an emergency meeting at 2:30 p.m., Friday at the behest of Texas County District Attorney Mike Boring.

Three and a half hours later – a decision was handed down.

"I make a motion we terminate CEO Lee Hughes immediately," said MHTC Board of Control member Wayne Johnson.

The motion was seconded and then approved unanimously by board members: Johnson, vice chairman Buddy Holbert, Don Fajen and Robert Henson. Board chairman John Nye was not in attendance Friday.

Prior to going into executive session, Boring explained why the meeting had been requested. "This is a bit unusual," Boring said. "Obviously, we do not particularly like emergency meetings or for any board to have an emergency meeting. I feel we need to provide some kind of an explanation of why we asked for this meeting."

Boring said it began with an investigation he had requested the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation to conduct into potential violations of the open meeting act, relating to prior board meetings and board activities.

"In the course of that investigation, the OSBI agent came across other information, that in my opinion, pretty well indicates there is at a minimum, a strong likelihood other offenses may have been committed and are likely to have been committed - including fraudulent activities."

Boring said the OSBI agent had discovered additional information over this past week, through and including late Thursday.

"(The information may) directly impact or affect the hospital and could result in liability for the hospital as well," Boring said. "We feel there are some concerns about records and information in the hospital, because frankly – that investigation is looking at actions of the CEO and we know the CEO has access to a lot of records and contracts in the hospital."

The hospital was not left without leadership by the board, who quickly moved next to put Chief Nursing Officer John Jones and Director of Risk Management Julie West in as co-interim CEOs.

Boring then made a special request of the board regarding hospital employees.

“Since there are some investigations pending at this time involving the hospital,” Boring said, “my office is very concerned about any kind of retaliatory stuff against any employees.”

Boring said he was concerned employees could face repercussions for cooperating or visiting with law enforcement, in relation to the investigations.

“I would appreciate the board consider, at least during the (duration) of this action, voting to require any disciplinary action, especially terminations be approved by the board before something would be done,” he said.

“Where we can kind of rest assured employees are not going to be dealt with adversely because, say Mr. (OSBI Agent Morgan) Wilkinson, or another agent has to visit with them,” he added. “I’m not asking that be a permanent policy, but I think it is something that would be merited under the circumstances.”

The board then approved the request stating in their motion that “any reduction of pay, change of employment – be board approved.”

A final move from the long executive session was a motion for Nye and/or Holbert to contact officials at NewLight Health Care in regards to the Chief Financial Officer position at MHTC.

“I don’t want to make a decision in regards to NewLight saying anything about whether their employee should be here or not be here without board approval,” Holbert said.

The approved motion by the board was for Nye and/or Holbert to “contact NewLight with regards to the employment of the CFO (Jaime Jacoby).”

Holbert reminded everyone at the end of the meeting of why they are there.

“I would encourage each and everyone of you (to remember) we are here doing a service,” he said. “Please be diligent about what you do and in moving forward.”

Following the executive session, Boring explained a little more to the Herald about why NewLight was to be contacted.

“The board wants to talk to NewLight,” he said. “They have some concerns and questions. They want to visit with them about (Jacoby’s) service here at the hospital.”

After the meeting, Boring also explained a little more about why the urgency was there to have a meeting.

“We initiated an investigation that is pending regarding possible violations of the open meeting act and in the course of that investigation, as being conducted by the OSBI, other information came to our attention indicating the possibility of the issues involving fraud,” he reiterated. “That

was the primary thing that motivated us to the point we felt it needed to be addressed immediately. I'm thankful we were able to have this meeting today. I think there is a good possibility we have been able to avoid the hospital getting in a situation it surely didn't need to be in."

Having the meeting was important, according to Boring, because there "are some things going on that needed immediate action".

"I think the board has recognized that and have tried to take steps to work with us in the investigation to make sure the hospital is as protected as we can be at this point in time from anything bad happening," he said.

Assistant District Attorney Buddy Leach agreed with Boring's sentiments.

"We were just trying to protect the hospital from potential liability," Leach said, adding he didn't think the board was aware of the problems prior to Friday. "We were trying to bring to their attention what we discovered, so we can protect our hospital and our community."

During the executive session, a number of hospital employees were called in to the closed session – one by one. When they returned to open session, some of those same employees were directed by Boring to accompany officers who had been waiting in another room, to retrieve information from various departments that they needed for their investigation.

Boring's concern was also with the employees, which is why he requested the board take steps to protect them.

"We have some good employees here and frankly with the financial condition the way it is – they are operating under enough stress," he said. "They sure don't need someone putting pressure on them, because they talked to someone about what is going on."

According to Boring, they are looking at multiple people in their investigation.

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