

## Cook County Board of Commissioners

February 21, 2007

With fiscal crisis threatening and the budget deadline approaching, one might have expected a show of public interest at the County Board meeting. However, attendance by members of the public was modest, perhaps because proposed changes to the budget would not be discussed until the following day.

The meeting began at about 10:25. Early in the proceedings it was announced that the wife of former commissioner Carl Hansen had died over the weekend. (*Ed. Note:* Hansen, who served on the Board for many years, had narrowly lost his bid for another term in the November election.)

Matters before the Finance Committee included a payment to Sequoia, the firm providing the County with new, computerized voting equipment. Comr. Tony Peraica (R-16), who had made an unsuccessful run for County Board President in the November election, was especially incensed by the delay in obtaining results from the suburbs on election night; he urged that payment of the bill be delayed and the matter sent to the Election Subcommittee, but the proposal was narrowly defeated on a roll-call vote.

Another problem involving computers concerned an effort to computerize information on whether patients treated in county health facilities were eligible for Medicare or Medicaid, in which case the county could be reimbursed for their care. The commissioners were told that the system appeared to be working in the hospitals, but it was another story at the clinics.

- Doctors and nurses were not trained to use the system, and some simply ignored it; for example,
- some 26,000 bills were ready to be sent, but some requisite information was lacking.
- In some cases information on patients had never been entered, and
- some clinics were described as “drowning in paper.”

On a related topic, Comr. Jerry Butler (D-3) wondered whether the practice of doctors bringing relatives into county facilities for free medical care was still common.

The Finance Committee adjourned at about 11:30 and the Building and Zoning and Roads and Bridges agendas were completed in less than five minutes. During consideration of the regular Board agenda, there was an attempt by some commissioners to delay a ban on smoking in taverns and restaurants with bars from March 15 to July, 2008, when a ban would go into effect in Chicago. (Municipalities with their own laws on the subject would be exempt.) However the proposal lost when a roll-call vote resulted in an 8 to 8 tie. (Comr. Joseph Moreno, D-7, was absent.)

The meeting adjourned at 12:35 and all were invited to a birthday celebration for Comr. Liz Gorman (R-17.)

*(Ed Note: A February 22 meeting on the budget, which lasted well into the night, was mostly closed to the public.)*

Observed and reported by Daphne Daume