Legislators blast Malloy veto that torpedoed hospital sale

BY LLUVIA MARES
STAFF WRITER

BRISTOL — Words were heated between Bristol Hospital officials and state legislators Thursday morning as they discussed a vetoed bill that has put the brakes on the hospital's sought-after purchase by a for-profit company.

The exchange came at a Bristol Hospital Legislative Breakfast as discussion centered on Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's veto which makes it so non-profit hospitals cannot operate as for-profit entities.

The breakfast is held three times a year. It's held so state legislators visit the hospital to discuss issues affecting the medical facility and the community it serves.

Although Kurt Barwis, president and CEO of Bristol Hospital, began his presentation on the importance of cultural diversity at a hospital, the veto was on everybody's mind.

The veto blindsided the hospital, said state Rep. Whit Betts, R-Bristol.

According to Betts, Malloy's veto was disturbing because staff from the governor's office negotiated with Republican and Democrat legislative leaders on the bill's passage. The veto puts joint ventures that both Bristol Hospital and Waterbury Hospital were planning with Vanguard Health Systems Inc. in jeopardy.

Betts said Malloy's choice to veto the bill without giving the hospital an opportunity to discuss the issue was a "stab in the back."

"I'm just sickened by what has happened here," said Betts. "There was a plan, everyone has a chance to talk about it but in the end you basically just got screwed."

Barwis said what is most upsetting is not getting the opportunity to discuss the decision.

"We spent a year doing research and $700,000 in attorney and consulting fees," said Barwis. "Had we known a year ago that this bill would have been vetoed we wouldn't have spent all that money."

Money, Barwis said, that could have been used for the hospital and patients' quality of care.

If the bill had not been vetoed it would have enabled for-profit companies to organize for business reasons as "medical foundations." The 2009 law that created medical foundations was meant to give hospitals more freedom in operating professional medical practices, but requires the medical foundations to be nonprofit ventures.

Mike Orazzi | Staff
Bristol Hospital President Kurt Barwis says the hospital will "find a way to move forward" after a veto that halted the sale to a for-profit company.

Due to the veto, negotiations for the sale of Bristol Hospital to Vanguard Health Systems Inc. have been stalled.

"This isn't going to kill us," said Barwis, if the sale doesn't occur. "It's not the end of the world for us. We are fighters and we will find a way to move forward."

Barwis said the hospital will begin looking at other alternatives such as refinancing its debt.

"You need to stop crying and don't just sit on your butts," said State Rep. Frank Nicastro, D-Bristol. "If at first you don't succeed, try and try again. Let's do something about this."

Barwis said Malloy has reached out to him and plans to revisit the issue are currently in the works.

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July 27 Walk with a Doc in Southington to focus on coping with heart disease

Hartford HealthCare's next Walk with a Doc will be held July 27 at 9 a.m. at YMCA Camp Sloper Outdoor Center, Southington. It will include a 30-minute walk and health tips from Inku Lee, M.D., cardiologist, who will address the topic "You Have Heart Disease: Now What?"

Sign-in is at 8:30 a.m. New participants will receive a hat and pedometer; each walker will receive a water bottle. The Hospital of Central Connecticut is hosting the event.

There will also be a walk on Aug. 24 walk at Rockwell Park in Bristol at which Timothy Parsons, M.D., neurologist, will talk about "Stroke Symptoms and Treatment."

Hartford HealthCare's Walk with a Doc program is part of Just Walk!, a program that hosts free community walks at area parks that are led by doctors who stress the benefits of exercise while providing health tips.

Walk with a Doc was started in 2005 by a cardiologist in Ohio. There are nearly 100 active Walk with a Doc sites in the United States as well as in other countries.

For more information, visit whartfordhealthcare.org/walkwithadoc or call (877) 914-WALK.

Giving Back Girls hope to 'fill school bus' in Southington

SOUTHINGTON — It's not even August yet, but the Giving Back Girls are already thinking about gathering back-to-school supplies for the less fortunate.

On Saturday they will be hold a "Fill That School Bus" event at the Southington Walmart on Queen Street from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

he items most in need are binders, pocket folders, single-subject notebooks, pencil boxes, note cards, dividers, red pens, lined notebook paper, sticky notes, colored pencils, calculators and plain extra large backpacks.

The Giving Back Girls hope to fill over 400 backpacks for kids in town who are in need.