See SHARKS, continued from page 3

Federal law says only accredited services — which are always free, like Veterans Service Organizations and the American Legion — can help file claims. The for-profit consultants are not accredited.

Last Statehouse session, the for-profit consultants sought to pass a bill that promised to put guardrails on the companies, but in actuality would have legitimized their practices on the state level.

One of those same groups poured thousands of dollars into Kansas campaigns this election season, signaling that they likely intend to reintroduce the bill.

Proponents of the bill promised Kansas legislators that their practices were legal, but months later, a federal judge disagreed.

While their practices may violate federal law, there are no criminal penalties attached, which creates a legal loophole.

The for-profit consultants argue that veterans deserve to have a choice between the paid service and the accredited free services that have faced steep criticism.

That bill barely failed last session, when the vast majority of legislators were Republicans who favored the bill. A few Republicans switched sides to support Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's veto, some after hearing from accredited consultants like Jim Karleskint.

Karleskint said if the Legislature passes a similar bill again this session, presumed Democratic Governor-elect Cindy Holscher would veto it — and without a Republican supermajority, the bill would likely stay dead.

The near-passage of the 2026 bill was an about-face from 2024, when lawmakers almost effectively banned the practice, joining the handful of states to crack down on paid consultants.

Rep. Mari-Lynn Poskin, a Leawood Democrat, wants to see a similar bill introduced this session. The 2024 bill, proposed by Karleskint, would prohibit anyone from receiving compensation for helping veterans file a disability claim.

Poskin said if she doesn't introduce it, someone else will.

Campaign donations from for-profit consultant

The 2024 bill was vaporized after the vice chair of the Veterans and Military Committee didn't vote in favor with Republican leadership on a tax bill that would've disproportionately benefited high earners. Legislation that he supported was suddenly removed from the House calendar.

The speaker of the House, in general, holds power over much of the House's agenda.

Veteran Benefits Guide, one of the companies that helps a veteran file their disability claims for a fee, requested lawmakers introduce the bill that would've greenlit their practices. Last year, they donated $2,000 to House Speaker Dan Hawkins' campaign. Hawkins has reached his term limit as speaker.

This election season, Veteran Benefits Guide donated $1,000 to Republican Rep. Chris Croft, who was among the contenders to be the next speaker. Croft lost his bid for reelection.

The group also donated $4,000 to Republican gubernatorial candidate Ty Masterson's campaign, though he also lost. Masterson will return to his role as a state senator.

It donated $1,000 to Republican Rep. Shawn Chauncey, vice chair of the House Veteran and Military Committee last session. Chauncey won his election.

Each of the aforementioned Republicans voted in the for-profit companies' favor in 2026.

Poskin was the ranking minority member of the House Veterans and Military Committee last session. She said she also took a campaign donation from Veteran Benefits Guide. She voted against the bill it favored.

"I would never impugn somebody else's motives and what a donation is going to do for their consideration in their elected position, because I know in mine I vote with what's right for my district and for veterans," Poskin said.

The group also donated $2,000 to Republican Attorney General Kris Kobach's campaign. If the greenlighting law were to pass, then face lawsuits like a similar one did in Louisiana, Kobach would've been expected to defend the law in court had he won his reelection. He lost to Democrat Chirs Mann.

Federal vs. State level

In 2006, Congress removed criminal penalties for violating the federal law that states only accredited agencies can help a veteran file a disability claim.

Kobach and 43 other state attorneys general signed on to a letter encouraging Congress to reinstate those penalties.

Multiple bills have been introduced on the congressional level to reinstate criminal penalties. After the federal judge's order, U.S. senators and congresspeople introduced more attempts to criminalize the practice. Kansas U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids cosponsored one of those bills.

Veterans Guardian, another for-profit benefits navigation group, has spent millions lobbying on the federal level. A federal bill that would have legitimized the for-profit consultants' practices advanced in the U.S. House last year.

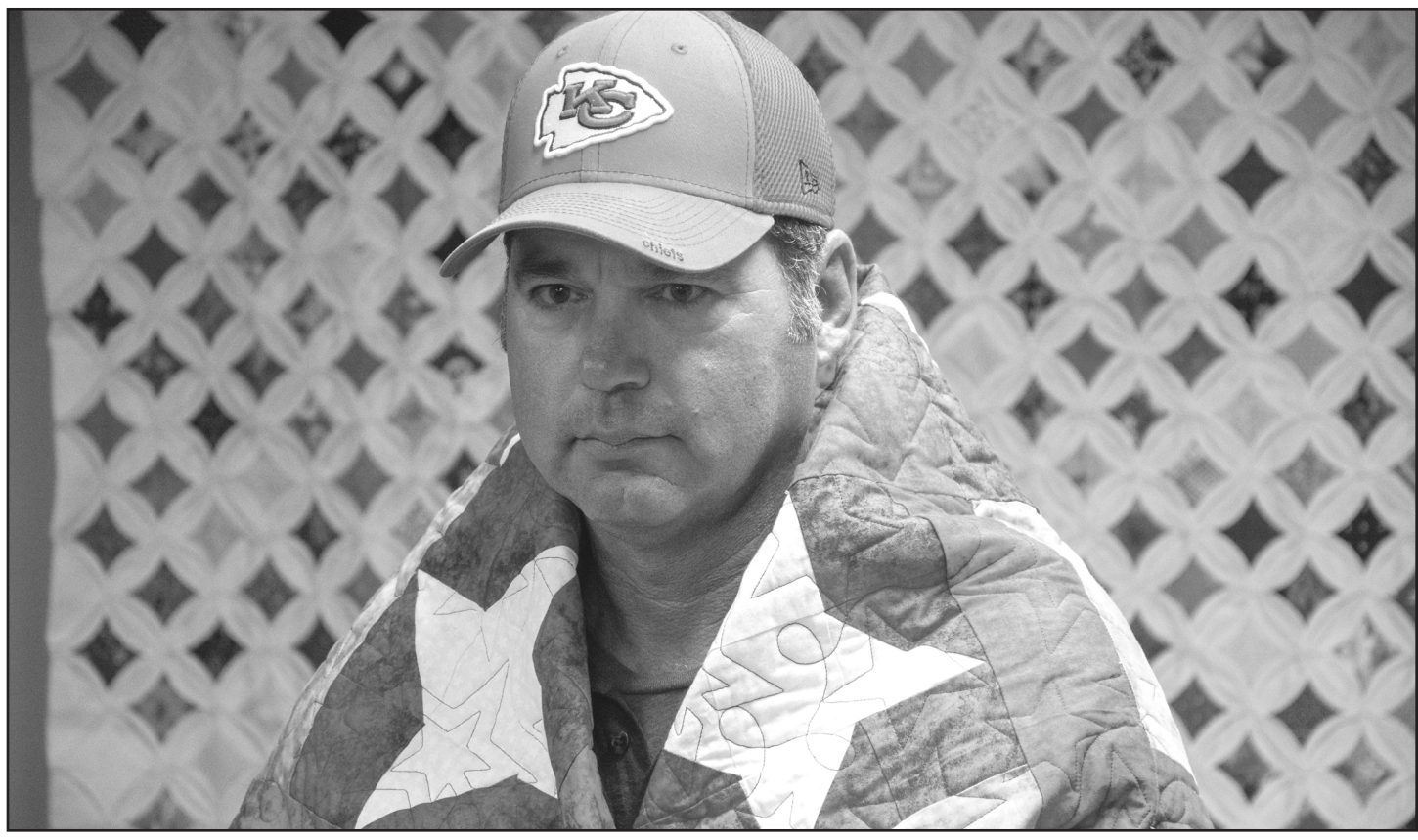
After the company's lobbying efforts in Kansas, a federal judge found that Veterans Guardian's practices violate federal law. The company was recently ordered to pay some Veterans who used their service more than 1 billion dollars in damages.

"Veterans Guardian's mission is to help Veterans pursue the benefits they have earned. We have served Veterans in pursuit of that goal, and our commitment to serving them remains our focus," a spokesman from Veterans Guardian said. "We intend to continue serving Veterans. Helping them understand and pursue their earned benefits is at the center of our work."

The federal judge's decision came after the Department of Veterans Affairs sent a slew of warning letters to for-profit consulting companies.

"It's clear that these claim sharks are trying to make inroads in the state legislatures to legitimize their business procedures," Poskin said.





AJ Kohler | Tribune Photos

Top Photo: Veterans are presented with quilts from the Quilts of Valor ceremony at the Chanute Art Gallery on Nov. 13. From left are: Michael Delatorre, Stephen Fickel, Trefor Francis, Ryan Lefernz, John Ward, and Gary Wikel II.

Above: Veteran Gary Wikel II, wears his quilt which was presented to him at the Quilt of Valor Ceremony.

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CHANUTE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OF THE MONTH



NOVEMBER - MASON GREVE

Mason was born in South Korea and is 17 years old. His parents are Mike and Melannie Greve.

His activities include working as a lifeguard 3 years, Christmas and Easter choir at St. Patrick's Church.

His hobbies are playing guitar and gaming.

Mason's academic achievements are Honor roll 3 years, 4.0 GPA, graduating the CTE engineering pathway this year.

Mason's Clubs, Organizations & Honors are Cross Country, 4 years State Cross Country, 4 years track, Service officer for NHS, 3 years Select Ensemble choir 3 years District Honor Choir.

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Community National Bank & Trust is Pleased to Sponsor & Salute Chanute High School's Student of the Month.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Evergy Kansas Central (EKC) and Evergy Kansas Metro (EKM), combined as "Evergy," have filed a Petition with the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) requesting a determination of the prudency of five generation investments, if the investments will result in just and reasonable rates for customers, and whether EKC and EKM would be entitled to recover costs of the investments and under what terms. The generation investments are one unit at a new combined cycle gas-fired generating turbine plant (CCGT), one stand-alone solar facility, two stand-alone battery storage facilities, and one hybrid solar and battery storage facility.

Public Hearing

The Commission has scheduled a virtual public hearing to provide Evergy Kansas customers an opportunity to learn more about the proposed projects, as well as ask questions and make comments about the proposal. The virtual public hearing will be:

Thursday, December 10, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.

An evidentiary hearing on Evergy's request is scheduled to begin February 15, 2027 at 10:00 a.m. Central, at the Commission's Offices, 1500 SW Arrowhead Rd., Topeka, KS 66604-4027.

Attendees that participate virtually using Zoom must register at https://kcc.ks.gov/your-opinion-matters by noon the day before the hearing. The hearing will be broadcast live on the agency's YouTube channel for those unable to attend. Any person requiring special accommodations at the hearing site under The Americans with Disabilities Act must notify the Commission at least 10 days prior to the scheduled public hearing by calling 800-662-0027.

Public Comments

The Commission will also accept written comments from the public through 5 p.m., January 29, 2027. Comments regarding the case should reference Docket No. 27-EKCE-0149-PRE and should be sent to the Kansas Corporation Commission Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Protection, 1500 S.W. Arrowhead Road, Topeka, KS 66604-4027. Comments may also be submitted online at https://kcc-connect.kcc.ks.gov/s/public-comments, by e-mail to public.affairs@kcc.ks.gov or by calling 1-800-662-0027.

Evergy's Petition Request

Evergy's Petition requests approvals as follows: 1) EKC's 100% ownership of the Buchanan Bluffs Unit 1 CCGT located in Buchanan County, Mo.; 2) EKC and EKM split ownership (50%/50%) of Iron Horse Solar to be located near Parsons in Labette County, Kan.; 3) EKC and EKM split ownership (50%/50%) of Iron Horse Storage to be located near Parsons in Labette County, KS; 4) EKC's 100% ownership of Pixley Energy Storage located in Barber County, Kan.; and 5) EKC's 100% ownership of Pixley II Hybrid solar and storage located in Barber County, Kan.

Evergy has asked the KCC to allow recovery of construction work in progress (CWIP) during the construction of the CCGTs and in a future rate proceeding will ask for recovery of the investments once they are in service, which is is expected in in 2028 for the Iron Horse Solar, Pixley Energy Storage, and Pixley II Hybrid projects; 2029 for Iron Horse Storage; and 2031 for Buchanan Bluffs Unit 1 CCGT.

EKC serves about 749,000 customers in Topeka, Lawrence, Olathe, Leavenworth, Atchison, Manhattan, Salina, Hutchinson, Emporia, Parsons, Wichita, Arkansas City, El Dorado, Newton, Fort Scott, Pittsburg, and Independence, among other towns and rural areas. EKM serves about 279,800 customers in Lenexa, Overland Park and other communities near the Kansas City metro area.