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Panel rejects Toland nomination

By RICHARD LUKEN
The Iola Register

TOPEKA — David Toland's nomination for Secretary of Commerce was given a thumbs down this morning by a vote of 6 to 5 by members of a Senate Commerce Committee.

From here, the full Senate will take a vote to determine Toland's fate.

Toland has been serving as acting secretary while awaiting confirmation.

This morning's hearing to consider his nomination was the second of two and will be reported on in Saturday's paper.

Several members of the Iola community as well as Toland's family attended both days of hearings.

On Wednesday, Toland laid out his vision for the Kansas Department of Commerce — to recruit new businesses to the state; to support existing businesses and help them



David Toland's confirmation as Secretary of Commerce will be decided by the full Senate. COURTESY OF THRIVE

grow; and to see the state's economy expand.

If confirmed, Toland would be the first-ever Iolan to serve in a state cabinet level position.

The length of Wednesday's

hearing prompted Chairwoman Julia Lynn to continue the proceedings to today, to allow more senators an opportunity to ask questions.

Toland's task — "to rebuild this agency" — will be

a daunting one, he admitted, pointing to a number of long-standing issues the Department of Commerce faces, including an outdated economic development strategy; a lack of resources when compared to other states; and a general lack of trust between the agency and a variety of stakeholders, including the Legislature.

"I did not create these problems, but I am here to solve them," Toland said, "and to solve them in partnership with the Legislature, the business community and local developers. Since Day One, I've been working to address the failures of the present and the past."

To that end, he pledged greater transparency and communication from the department, even when legislators are not in session.

"We've got to be on a regular communication basis. If

See TOLAND | Page A5

Report: Health improves in county

By VICKIE MOSS
The Iola Register

In a national health report, Allen County rose a whopping 46 places when compared to other Kansas counties between 2018 and 2019.

The report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ranks Kansas counties on various health issues, from things like physical activity to premature deaths. Those conditions fall into two categories: health outcomes and health factors.

Allen County ranked 38th out of 103 Kansas counties in health outcomes, which in-

See HEALTH | Page A3

Area athletes earn All-State honors



PAGE B1

Wings of Warriors joins Amazon Smile

PAGE A2

EU fines Google for third time

PAGE A2

Trump: Public should see Mueller report

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said he believes special counsel Robert Mueller's report should be released to the public, even as he disparaged its very existence as "ridiculous."

"Let it come out, let people see it," Trump told reporters Wednesday. "Let's see whether or not it's legit."

Mueller is expected to present a report to the Justice Department any day now outlining the findings of his nearly two-year investigation into Russian election meddling, possible collusion with Trump campaign officials and possible obstruction of

See TRUMP | Page A5

ICT stages smart, bawdy Broadway show

By RICK DANLEY
The Iola Register

It must be the case that, among the many performing arts events staged each year in Iola, nine out of 10 are family-friendly. And that's nice...if, you know, family-friendly is your thing.

The Iola Community Theatre, on the other hand — in its expert staging of "Avenue Q," the long-running Broadway puppet musical that rides the line between the profound and the profane with hilarious finesse — recognizes that adults can't subsist on pap alone, and that an uncomfortable truth expressed in the form of a dirty joke is sometimes the best catharsis. And when it comes to "Avenue Q," this musical has catharsis coming out the waz.

Staged as a "Sesame Street"-style musical, "Avenue Q" tells the story of Princeton (played by an excellent Dave

See PUPPETS | Page A6

AVENUE Q



Kate Terhune, above, in ICT's "Avenue Q." At right, puppets operated by Steven Henderson (left) and Paul Borcharding. REGISTER/RICK DANLEY

ICT presents Avenue Q

When: 7:30 p.m. Friday & Saturday, and March 29-30

Where: ICT Warehouse Theatre, 203 S. Jefferson Ave.



Medicaid expansion backers revive, advance plan

By JOHN HANNA
The Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Supporters of expanding Medicaid in Kansas forced a debate Wednesday in the Republican-controlled Legislature on Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's plan and advanced an expansion bill with bipartisan support over GOP leaders' objections.

The House voted 70-54 to give first-round approval to a modified version of Kelly's

plan for expanding Medicaid health coverage to as many as 150,000 more residents. House members planned to take another, final vote Thursday to determine whether it will pass and go to the Senate, but the debate on it showed that the support for it was solid.

While expansion supporters face a fight in the GOP-controlled Senate, events in the House were a significant victory when Kelly's plan remained bottled up in committees for weeks with no sense

that a vote or even a hearing was coming. Republicans hold an 84-41 majority in the House, and Medicaid expansion opponents hold key positions, but 29 GOP members sided with the Democrats in advancing the bill.

That vote followed two earlier ones that allowed expansion supporters to force the debate and replace the contents of a bill dealing with rules for nurses with Kelly's expansion plan. During a break in the debate, House Majority Leader

Dan Hawkins, a conservative Wichita Republican, conceded that the bill ultimately would pass, adding, "I would say it will change the dynamics."

"It was the only way to get this done," said state Rep. Kathy Wolfe Moore, a Kansas City Democrat who led the push for the debate and Kelly's expansion plan. "The pressure this year came to a crescendo and I think people were demanding it, and they

See MEDICAID | Page A3

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Puppets

Continued from A1

Glauner), an idealistic young college grad who lands in New York full of dreams of becoming, his imagination suffused with the certainty that the perfect life is just around the corner — a great career! an ideal love! happiness! meaning! purpose! But it isn't long before Princeton's optimism is roughly dashed against the sharp rocks of adult disappointment and our buoyant protagonist finds himself front stage, belting out grimly funny numbers like "I Wish I Could Go Back to College" or "What Do You Do With a B.A. in English."

Princeton's only consolation, if it even is that, is that he's fallen in with a group of similarly overeducated, underperforming neighbors who have it as bad, if not worse, than he does.

But, again, this isn't a musical for the pearl clutchers. Its sophisticated, off-color wit will likely remain invisible to anyone whose sensitivities are easily disheveled by the show's course surface.

Instead, "Avenue Q" is for people who don't mind — or even enjoy — seeing two puppets simulate sex while TV's Gary Coleman (Bryan Johnson) sings a song called "You Can Be as Loud as the Hell You Want (When You're Making Love)." It's for those who won't blanch when an Oscar the Grouch-inspired monster (Paul Vernon) sings about his hardcore porn addiction. Oh, and there's an irksome kindergarten teacher named Mrs. Thistletwat (Ranie Whalmeier) and a promiscuous cabaret singer named Lucy the Slut (also Whalmeier). Tim Everson, one of the few humans in the



Paul Borcharding, front, with castmembers, left to right, Tim Everson, Dave Glauner, Kate Terhune, Alison Fees, Bryan Johnson and Steven Henderson.

show without his hand up a puppet, plays Brian, a failed stand-up comedian engaged to an overbearing Japanese woman named Christmas Eve, played with an enormously broad accent by Alison Fees, who also directs the two-hour play. At one point in the show, Everson [an Iola Register reporter] serenades the audience with a very moving rendition of "I'm Not Wearing Underwear Today." And you believe him.

Not to be outdone, his

Kate the Monster (Kate Terhune), a kindergarten teaching assistant and Princeton's main love interest — when he isn't lusting after the amply bosomed Lucy, that is.

Princeton's emotional crisis is internal. It's the anguish of feeling, deep down, that you're meant for something great but not knowing exactly what it is you're being called to do. His is the silent scream of the flounderer. "What is my purpose?" Princeton

ence, encourage the vulnerable Princeton to drink more, to sleep with strangers, and, finally, to kill himself (spoiler alert: he doesn't follow their advice).

While "Avenue Q" plumbs dark themes, the show itself is flooded with raucous joy. It ranks — like certain great works of satirical literature, by Rabelais or Chaucer, say, or TV shows like "The Simpsons" or "South Park" — among that species of beautiful filth that, by touching on forbidden biases or desires, makes you laugh even when you shouldn't.

Finally, there is a subplot in "Avenue Q" that concerns a pair of Ernie and Bert-based roommates (Steven Henderson and Paul Borcharding), a closeted gay Republican investment banker remains unable or unwilling to acknowledge his sexuality, and spends untold energy across the length of the musical trying to convince everyone around him that he isn't gay, a project that culminates in an extraordinary, hilariously camp invocation of a song called "My Girlfriend, Who Lives in Canada."

You should see the ICT show just for that.



Dave Glauner in ICT's production of "Avenue Q."

betrotted, Christmas Eve, sings her best version of "The More You Ruv Someone." And in case you're wondering whether "Avenue Q" knows that it's trading in Orientalist stereotypes, it does. The show even includes a perky song about this very brand of casual racism, called, well, "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist."

Perhaps the only morally unblemished character in the musical is

asks again and again throughout the show.

But Princeton has real-world nemeses, too. For starters, there are two extremely cute, demented, Care Bear-like creatures (Ben and Sofie Alexander), who exercise an adorable malice over Princeton's life, appearing during his various moments of self-doubt. The Bad Idea Bears, with their squeaky cartoon voices and id-oriented influ-

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