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Committees:

Public Health
Public Safety
Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee
on Public Health and Social Services

Oklahoma House of Representatives

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Weekly Review

Speaker Bengé Names GCCA Members

House Speaker Chris Bengé today has named the members of the General Conference Committee on Appropriations, which will complete details of a state budget for the next fiscal year.

Budget negotiations are ongoing, with the governor recently rejecting a budget proposal crafted by the House and Senate and sending a counterproposal.

Officials expect an agreement could be reached by next week.

Lawmakers Honor Boy Scouts

State lawmakers recognized the centennial of the Boy Scouts of America and the role played by the citizens of Oklahoma in founding the organization.

The first Boy Scout troop in America was organized in Pawhuska in May 1909 by Reverend John F. Mitchell, a missionary priest from England sent to St. Thomas Episcopal Church, by the Church of England. The group had the honor of being Troop No. 1 in the Boys Scouts of America and the original certificate is still on exhibit in the Historical Museum in the Scout Room and is commemorated with a life-sized bronze statue in front of the Osage County Historical Museum.

Several scout troops and their leaders were honored in the state House this week.

The Boy Scouts will celebrate their American centennial at their Historic Trails Camporee to be held in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, July 3, 4, and 5, 2009.

Government Reform Will Protect Citizen Information

State lawmakers and technology security experts say reforms advancing in the Legislature will increase protection of citizens' private data and reduce its theft from government computers.

In addition, the reforms would increase efficiency and reduce waste during a tough budget year.

In recent months, several state computers containing citizens' private information were either lost or stolen, including a flash driver from the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission and laptops from the Department of Human Services and the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency.

Two bills introduced this session would streamline information technology services and increase data security in state government: House Bill 1704, by state Rep. David Derby, and Senate Bill 980, by Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee and Murphey.

Both measures would create a Chief Information Officer for state government, who would direct technology purchases and security policies for all state agencies.

Oklahoma is only one of four states in the country without a centralized technology officer.

Currently, each state agency has its own IT department and Oklahoma government spends \$340 million a year on IT not including personnel and salaries.

It is estimated that Oklahoma employs close to 1,500 state employees dedicated to information technology across various agencies.

The lack of a chief information officer in state government makes it difficult to hold anyone individually accountable for government security breaches, officials noted, and it also wastes money.

According to a recent report by the Ponemon Institute, the average cost of a stolen laptop is roughly \$50,000 per computer. Other studies suggest the cost may be greater – a 2002 CSI/FBI Computer Crime and Security Survey put the cost at \$89,000 per laptop and the 2003 ACCSS said the average value of data on a laptop is \$250,000.

Oklahoma government had to spend \$200,000 in mailing costs just for notification letters after the theft of the two laptops.

Studies show that another laptop is stolen every 12 seconds, at least 2.6 million per year. A 2006 survey by The Ponemon Institute showed that 80 percent of government agencies surveyed reported losing data via laptop theft in last 12 months.

Lawmakers are also working on broader reforms. House Speaker Chris Benge has also asked state Rep. John Wright to conduct a review of state information technology policies.

House Overwhelmingly Approves Official English

The citizens of Oklahoma will have the opportunity to make English the official language of their state government following final House passage of legislation.

House Joint Resolution 1042, by state Rep. Randy Terrill, recognizes that English is Oklahoma's common and unifying language, and declares that all official actions of the state must be conducted in English. It also bars individuals from suing the state to have services provided in languages other than English.

Under the provisions of the legislation, private individuals and businesses will still be allowed to use whatever language they choose. Only official government business would be affected.

The bill also contains specific provisions protecting the "use, study, development, or encouragement" of any Native American language, including the languages used by Oklahoma's 39 federally recognized Native American tribes.

House Joint Resolution 1042 achieved final passage in the Oklahoma House of Representatives on an 89-8 vote. The proposal now goes to the ballot where voters will decide the issue in 2010. According to a recent poll conducted by SoonerPoll.com for the Tulsa World, 86 percent of Oklahomans support making English the official language of state government.

Legislation to Increase Oversight of Government Attorney Contracts Goes to Governor

Legislation that would increase public scrutiny and oversight of government contracts awarded to private attorneys is headed to Gov. Brad Henry's desk after final House approval.

House Bill 2167, by state Rep. Mark McCullough, would create the "Private Attorney Retention Sunshine Act." The bill would require state agencies to use a more transparent, competitive legal service solicitation process when services (fees and expenses) are expected to exceed \$5,000.

Problems with questionable "no bid" government attorney contracts have gained national attention in recent days.

An April 16 editorial in the Wall Street Journal noted that Houston plaintiffs lawyer F. Kenneth Bailey has been "running a nationwide 'pay-to-sue' operation."

The editorial noted that Bailey was given a no-bid, contingency-fee contract to sue Janssen Pharmaceuticals on the behalf of the state of Pennsylvania after he made campaign donations to Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell.

The paper reported that Bailey had approached the state about suing Janssen, and had also sought similar work in Louisiana, South Carolina, Arkansas, Mississippi and New Mexico.

The paper noted that Bailey or his law firm donated significant campaign funds to numerous attorneys general across the country, as well as political parties, at the same time the firm was shopping its lawsuit.

To avoid similar ethically questionable arrangements, House Bill 2167 would require Oklahoma agencies to issue and publicly post a Request for Proposals for legal services and then publicly list all attorneys and law firms that are awarded contracts.

Under the bill, if a proposed contracts for legal services is expected to exceed \$500,000, state agencies would be required to file a copy with the governor's office. The governor would 30 days to review and recommend changes to the proposed contract. If no changes are recommended, the contract could then be executed. If changes are recommended, the agency would have to review them and, if those changes were not incorporated, agency officials would then have to explain their decision.

At the conclusion of any legal proceeding where a state agency has retained outside counsel on a contingency-fee basis, the bill also requires the lawyer to provide a statement of hours worked on the case, expenses incurred, the aggregate fee amount, and a breakdown as to the hourly rate based on hours worked divided into fee recovered, less expenses.

House Bill 2167 was approved by the state House 57-39 after passing the Senate unanimously. It is now headed to the governor's desk.

Governor Signs Legislation to Ensure Early Reading Competency

Legislation authored by Rep. Ann Coody that would require all Oklahoma institutions offering elementary, early childhood or special education programs to ensure their prospective teachers are qualified to teach the five elements of reading has been signed into law by Gov. Brad Henry.

House Bill 1581 requires that prospective teachers undergo a comprehensive assessment in the area of reading instruction and that they have been instructed in the teaching of the five essential elements of reading – phoneme understanding, phonics, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary. Institutions offering elementary, early childhood or special education programs would have until July 2010 to implement the assessments.

Ten Commandments Monument Bill A Step Away from Governor's Desk

The Ten Commandments Monument legislation is one step closer to Governor Brad Henry's desk after receiving approval from the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

House Bill 1330, by state Rep. Mike Ritze, would authorize the placement of a monument of the Ten Commandments on state Capitol grounds. Private entities would pay for its placement.

House Bill 1330 received final approval from the state House this week. The bill must next receive a final vote in the state Senate before heading to the governor's desk.

As I proudly represent District 80, I will always strive to be pro-business by reducing the burdens of government regulation on the Free enterprise system. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 1-800-522-8502.



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