

MARTIN AMENDMENT TO SUSPENDED SENTENCE BILL FAILS

By Brandon Beard
Staff Writer

■(GIT) "You have bypassed the committee process," said Sen. Herb Rozell, D-Tahlequah, to Sen. Carol Martin, R-Comanche. The comment came in response to Martin's amendment to SB1231, by Sen. Bruce Price, D-Hinton, dealing with suspended sentences. Originally an unheard bill before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Safety and Judiciary, the amendment was brought to the floor, drawing criticism for Martin. It would create county farm work programs as a form of alternative sentencing.

"The problem I have with this is money," Rozell said. "Where are you going to get the money to pay for this?" The measure states funding for the program "shall be subject to the availability of funds from the county, state, or a combination of both the county and the state."

Questioning the necessity for the bill, Sen. Keith Leftwich, D-Okla. City, said judges are capable of sentencing prisoners to similar community sentencing programs without the measure. "Why not come forward with a resolution endorsing this," he asked.

"My concern is we are about to saddle the state with more pressure to build more and more prisons," said Sen. Ben Brown, D-Okla. City. "I am hesitant to add to that burden." Brown said the money would be better spent on prevention and treatment rather than incarceration. "My understanding is that eighty-five percent of the people that come through DOC [Department of Corrections] programs have drug and alcohol problems."

Senate Majority Leader, Billy Mickle, D-Durant, said the bill was not specific to types of crimes, allowing for violent criminals to be placed into programs with less than maximum security supervision. "Your bill is not specific."

"We are going to have seventy-seven little miniature, tiny prisons," Mickle said. "We should never yield our discretion in lieu of political expediency."

With a vote of 16 to 25, a nearly straight party-line vote, the amendment failed. The bill, "gutted" of most of its language, with its emergency clause, passed with a vote of 41 to 0. It will now go to the House for consideration.

EXECUTION VIEWING BILL RECEIVES MINOR DISCUSSION

By Marta McCloskey
Staff Writer

■(GIT) HB2056, authored by Rep. Wayne Pettigrew, R-Edmond, proposed a bill Monday that would provide a place within the walls of the state prison for immediate family members of the victim to watch those convicted of the capital crime die.

Pettigrew explained to members that a room set up with a closed circuit monitor will serve as the viewing area. Rep. William Paulk, D-Okla. City, expressed concern and asked Pettigrew if there would be any copies of the video or if the viewing process would be "live."

Pettigrew assured Paulk and other members that the purpose of the closed circuit television was to block the efforts of others who might want to view the video.

House Speaker Pro Tempore, Jim Glover, D-Elgin, asked Pettigrew how many people could fit in the viewing area. He expressed a concern that family members would be limited.

Pettigrew explained that immediate family members defined by the bill mean the spouse, a child by birth or adoption, a stepchild, a parent, a grandparent or sibling of the deceased victim.

The measure passed with a vote of 98 to 2. It will now go to the Senate for further consideration.