



CAPITOL NETWORK NEWS

Today's news from Oklahoma's best government information resource

INSIDE

WEEKLY EDITION

Friday

March 8, 1996

Educators Comment
on Reform Bill
page 2

Highway
Beautification Act
Review?
page 3

Lumbermen Oppose
SQ 669
page 5

State News
Weekly Summary
page 6

Federal News
Weekly Summary
page 34

Bill Activity
page 37

Statutory Cite
Cross Reference
page 64

Bill Subject
Cross Reference
page 76

Calendar
page 78

PRISON BUILDING PROPOSAL MAY DIE

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) A measure requiring the Department of Corrections and any private prison company to apply for and receive a certificate of need before building new prisons in Oklahoma may be left to die in committee, its Senate author says.

Senator Bruce Price, D-Hinton, said he will likely ask that SB1219 be sent back to committee, where it could be left to die.

"It still has to be reconsidered, and I'm not totally sure what I want to do with it," Price said. "I may just have it sent back to committee and let it die."

Price filed notice to have the bill reconsidered after it failed Tuesday by a 18-25 vote. Opponents of the proposal argued that the marketplace, not government, should decide whether private companies build new prisons.

Under the provisions of the bill, private companies, as well as the Department of Corrections, would have to show the need exists for additional prison bedspace before construction of new prison facilities or the expansion of existing facilities would be permitted. Two provisions of the measure indicate that a primary factor in determining the need for additional prison space would be the amount of bedspace required by only the DOC and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

That means private companies could not build facilities in Oklahoma for the purpose of housing out-of-state prisoners, a point Price conceded.

"It would limit who they could house," Price said. "That was something that was brought up both on the floor and in committee. I would be willing to listen to ways to open it up."

However, Price cautioned, the likelihood exists that the state will need to impose some restrictions on prison construction, particularly that undertaken by private companies, in the future.

"I think we're eventually going to have to come up with some discipline in the system of building prisons. Maybe this was too premature, but we're going to have to get a handle on it, or it's going to get to the point it has in Texas."

In Texas, where 554 Oklahoma medium security inmates are currently being held in private prisons, the chairman of the state prison board has threatened to consider imposing various regulations on the construction and operation of private facilities. Officials there are concerned about the number of facilities being built, as well as the types of prisoners being brought into the facilities from other states.

Those problems, Price said, is something he hopes Oklahoma can avoid.

"I'd rather not see us get to be like Texas," Price said. "I think we need to have some order to this process to make it work right."

Corrections department spokesman Jerry Massey said Price's proposal was not likely to have an adverse effect on the department and its search for additional prison bedspace.

"We already have to go through a justification process whenever we ask the legislature for funding," Massey explained. "Funding is not easy to come by, and it has to be justified thoroughly."

Regulations such as those proposed by Price, Massey added, are more likely to impact

(Continued)