

## EDUCATION REFORM BILL PASSES SENATE, MID-TERM FUNDING KEY ISSUE

■(GIT) With ten amendments, nearly seven hours of debate and seemingly endless partisan deadlock, Senate lawmakers passed an education reform measure Tuesday that, among other issues, seeks to permanently fix the state's mid-term education funding problem.

Forty-five sections in length, SB1100, by Sen. Don Williams, D-Balko, also adds steps to the minimum teacher salary schedule for career teachers, creates the "Parental School Choice Act," and establishes funds for education technology improvements.

Sen. Charles Ford, R-Tulsa, went head-to-head with Williams early on, attempting to insert his own mid-term funding solution into the bill. The issue of chargeables quickly became the issue topping debate.

With a vote of 28 to 17, the Ford amendment was tabled.

Williams said his mid-term funding solution is based on funding of school districts' needs and not on enrollment figures.

Of the approximately \$101 million in common education funding proposed in the governor's executive budget, \$48 million is proposed for mid-term funding, which would only affect a handful of the state's schools, Williams said. Only \$3.1 million of budgeted funds would affect schools statewide.

Don Williams said Oklahoma only funds its schools at 75 percent of the national average. Even with the state's low cost of living taken into account, the numbers still rest at about 85 percent.

Sen. Penny Williams, D-Tulsa, disagreed with mid-term funding language, saying it should be dealt with in a separate measure.

Penny Williams supported an earlier amendment by Sen. Grover Campbell, R-Owasso, that attempted to remove the language all together. The amendment ultimately failed.

"I will personally ask the governor to veto this measure on the basis of school funding," said Senate GOP Leader Gerald "Ged" Wright, R-Broken Arrow.

Wright called the measure unfair. "The children in these school districts should not be forced to suffer when other communities are receiving more than their fair share," he said, claiming under the measure, growing school districts will be penalized for additional property tax revenue.

Despite dissenting votes from 12 Republicans and 5 Democrats, the measure and its emergency clause, passed with a vote of 27 to 17. Don Williams filed a motion to reconsider, allowing the measure to be heard again within three legislative days.

Other amendments to the bill include the repeal of current law relating to AIDS and sex education in schools, language addressing possession of firearms by students, use of school property by the district and a section allowing the American flag to be flown in classrooms.

The bill now goes to the House.

FROM: BRANDON BEARD

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## HOUSE HEARS DEBATE OVER AMENDMENT TO SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET ACT

■(GIT) House Members Tuesday heard debate regarding HB2323, authored by Rep. Dale Smith, D-St. Louis, which creates the School District Budget Act. The intense debate, however, was not regarding the content of the bill, but rather an amendment proposed by Rep. Dan Webb, R-Oklahoma City. This amendment relates to the powers of the Oklahoma State Board Association.

As questions arose regarding the possible relationship between the OSBA and their stand against SQ669, and their exclusion from the measure, Rep. Don McCorkell, D-Tulsa responded,

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