

(Continued)

- SB1312 by Sen. Herb Rozell, D-Talequah, received a vote of 44 to 3, with an emergency clause and a stricken title. The bill was amended, providing grammatical clean-up language.
- HB 2104 by Rep. Joan Greenwood, R-Moore, received a passing vote of 45-0 with an emergency clause.
- SR35 by Sen. Billy Mickle, D-Durant, was adopted by a voice vote without opposition.

RESOLUTION TO TRANSFER DEQ RESPONSIBILITIES BACK TO THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT SPARKS DEBATE

By Heather Myers
Staff Writer

■(GIT) "I'm going to make both sides mad! It's not who's doing it. It's the whole system. It's the whole bureaucracy. I don't think it will make any difference who it goes to. I don't think it makes a hill of beans were it's put. The fees will still be the same," said Rep. Mark Seikel, D-Harrah today during a debate on the House floor regarding HJR1095, authored by Rep. Mike Mass, D-Hartshorne.

This measure transfers certain responsibilities from the Department of Environmental Quality back to the Health Department. The measure brought forth startling differences of opinions, and sparked a dynamic debate by numerous members of the House.

Rep. Mass said he authored the bill after increased complaints from his rural constituents regarding the astronomical fees they felt they were paying under the DEQ. After the DEQ was born, employees of the Health Department were transferred to the new agency. Mass said he feels that under different leadership back at the Health Department, issues may be resolved more effectively.

The areas involving private sewage, public works and wastewater management, are some of those included in the bill to be transferred back under the jurisdiction of the Health Department.

Rep. Bill Graves, R-Oklahoma City, said, "Certainly the government has abused their power in regards to the environment. There are things done in the name of the ozone that are unnecessary. When people are forced to give up their land because of an endangered species, dams can't be built because of threats, land is taken away for oil unnecessarily. We should curb the government's involvement."

Rep. Terry Matlock, D-Garvin, said, "Before we switched things over, I had never had any complaints from my constituents. I get call after call now. I get stopped in the grocery store, I get stopped at the filling station. I am always getting complaints over DEQ. They charge exorbitant fees for things that shouldn't be that high. Everytime we turn around, there's another fee with DEQ. Everyone pays under DEQ's system. It doesn't seem to be working. Let's switch it back to something that works."

Rep. Seikel argued that he felt neither system was working. He said he felt the system would follow the bureaucracy regardless of its location.

Taking a definite stand, Rep. Howard Cotner, D-Altus said, "I read in the newspaper the DEQ is maybe buying a \$3 million dollar building for offices. When I think about this Department, I look to see where the funds go. While we're searching for money to fund education, they're coming to HARASS my constituents. This is the first bill I have seen to do something good for the people of Oklahoma."

Rep. M.C. Leist, D-Morris, who authored the legislation which gave birth to the DEQ, argued the DEQ was doing an acceptable job.

Concluding the defense of his bill, Rep. Mass said, "I was on the study which helped form DEQ,

(Continued)

"Certainly the government has abused their power in regards to the environment. There are things done in the name of the ozone that are unnecessary."

*Rep. Bill Graves
R-Oklahoma City*