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WHAT MADE IT OVER THE COMMITTEE HURDLE ... AND WHAT DIDN'T

By Brandon Beard
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Horse tripping and domestic violence, open records, educational reform, environmental restrictions and changing the way Oklahoma sentences and houses its criminals. These are just some of the tough issues facing lawmakers this year. With this week's wrap-up of committee work, some of this key legislation may yet make it to the governor's desk. However, with the wrap-up of committee work this week, many bills were left out in the cold. So as the committee chairmen put their gavels on the shelf until next year, *Capitol Network News* took a look at what made it over the committee hurdle...and what didn't.

Oklahoma prisoners may soon find themselves serving a minimum of 85 percent of their sentence before being eligible for parole if the Truth in Sentencing Policy Advisory Commission has its way. **HB1138**, by Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore, would also change the way prisoners are sentenced, doing away with the need to sentence a prisoner to a 100 year sentence to ensure they serve at least 30 of those years.

"We need credibility in the system," said District Attorney Bob Macy, supporting the initiative during a recent press conference. "The people need to believe in it."

The measure unanimously passed the full Senate last April and is currently awaiting conference with House and Senate members. The commission is scheduled to meet sometime this month to put the finishing touches on its report to the governor and legislative leadership. "We are about eighty-five percent finished," said Chief Deputy of the attorney general's Criminal Division Richard Wintory recently. "Our concern is getting it right, not right away."

Tents may be the place where those tougher sentences are carried out if Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 47 is adopted. Originally designed to create four new 500-bed medium security prisons, the measure, by Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, was amended recently, directing the Department of Corrections to purchase tents, barbed wire and fencing to house prisoners, an attempt to address the state's prison overcrowding problem. Author of the amendment, Sen. Jerry Pierce, R-Tulsa, called the change a "cheaper" alternative.

Similar legislation has proved successful in other states, such as Arizona. The Arizona State Prison Complex at Tucson utilizes the concept, housing prisoners in 500 tents on the facility's grounds.

"We will possibly be expanding the number to 900 at the request of the Legislature," said John Hallahan, warden at the Arizona facility.

"I think a lot of people think we treat prisoners too good," said Sen. Sam Helton, D-Lawton, supporter of the Pierce amendment. "I think a lot of senators were sending a message to their constituents."

Though the measure does not carry the effect of law, resolutions are often considered a "firm recommendation" to agencies to follow legislative intent. SCR47 is awaiting approval from the House.

Sen. Kevin Easley experienced defeat recently with the defeat of **SB793**. Members of the House Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources killed the measure, designed to remove the Corporation Commission's authority to regulate oil and gas, by assigning it a

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