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"I also encourage you to contact Congressman Ernest Istook to go on record supporting the Senate omnibus education bill." Hodges explained that the House version of the bill asks for \$1.4 billion, however, the Senate version of the bill asks for \$4.4 billion. She added that Title 1 will lose 17 percent in funding as a result of pending legislation.

In the end of the presentation, Hodges commented on local politics. "At the local level, I was amused, but not surprised that the governor's education conference did not include any educators." She commended members and Oklahomans for voting down SQ669. "If we cannot take a stand, we should not be involved in rural education," she said.

Jerry Needham, OROS's current executive director, echoed Hodges's request for members to become active in legislative issues. "The Republicans elected think they are anointed." He continued, "We forget the importance of national legislation." Needham explained that elected officials are not aware of the local impact of their legislation. "It is up to us, we have a responsibility...and I will certainly call Istook," he said.

Perry Willis, OROS's executive director-elect, backed Needham and Hodges and asked for members to become involved in the legislative process. "This is the most trying time in education...I urge members to put the organization and rural education issues in the forefront."

Willis made a proposal to schedule the organization's next Spring conference at the State Capitol during session. "There is no reason to not tie the conference together with the Capitol, we need to be represented at the Capitol," he said. Willis and Needham commended the organization's legislative liaison, Vernon Florence, and encouraged members to follow his lead. "Legislators, who are not educators, rely on us for input on education related legislative issues."

Ray Henson, Talihina superintendent and OROS director for Southeastern Oklahoma, informed members of an upcoming trip to Washington. During the trip members will have the opportunity to meet and discuss educational issues with Oklahoma Congressional delegates.

In addition, Florence told members that this Wednesday, 100 to 150 rural superintendents from across the state will visit the State Capitol. He explained that there are three crucial issues facing rural education and educators. They include teacher retirement, mid-term funding and the ad valorem tax protests. "I encourage superintendents to become educated on the political process, not just the issues," he said.

Florence updated members on local legislation that could affect smaller school districts. **HB2102**, authored by Rep. Jack Begley, D-Goodwell, would create two funds to address property tax protests. One would set up an escrow and the other a cash flow fund. If a company wins a court case protesting property taxes, the escrow fund would be utilized. However, the cash flow fund would allow schools to retain obtain cash advances. This method would take pressure off the school with unresolved ad valorem tax protests. He said the bill had been amended for protests to be handled by administrative law judges and protesters would bear the burden of proof, not the Tax Commission.

Florence introduced Hager to discuss the Senate education reform bill. "SB1100 is the catch-all bill," Hager said. "Wednesday, the bill left the House Education Committee." He explained the changes made to the measure by committee members. "Telecommunications was reduced from \$25 million a year, for four years, to \$10.4 million for the first year." He added, "We will have to work on this in conference."

Hager explained that members proposed \$40 million for teacher retirement, but the Senate did not propose anything. Members raised career teacher salaries by \$14 million, alternative education programs by \$6.8 million and mid-term funding by \$16.5 million. "The House is also wanting to expand early childhood programs," he said. With residency, Hager said the education is the receiving end of a "tragic situation." However, the Office of Juvenile Affairs is currently trying to work with the state on the issue. "I also plan to contact the Commission on Children and Youth."

Hager told OROS members that the bill's title had been stricken, and that lawmakers will continue to hammer out the details of the bill in conference.

OROS members voiced concerns on the transportation issue with open-transfer, teacher re-

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