

## UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT PENALIZED AGAIN BY HOUSE DEMOCRATS

From House Media

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Democrat leaders in the House voted again Wednesday to take punitive action toward Union School District, GOP Rep. Don Weese of Broken Arrow charged.

The third-term lawmaker criticized the House leadership after a legislative subcommittee killed a measure that would have reimbursed the school district for the loss of more than half a million dollars in ad valorem taxes attributed to a refund which Tulsa County must make to a Tulsa Manufacturer that overpaid its property taxes.

Union School District received more than half of the approximately \$900,000 excess tax payment, Weese related.

Although the statute of limitations for the manufacturer to claim a rebate expired, Weese said, a mandate requiring the Tulsa County Treasurer to repay the entire overpayment in five equal annual installments was quietly slipped into a bill last year by a House Democrat from north central Tulsa.

The bill cleared both houses of the Legislature during the final, hectic days of last year's session and was signed into law by the governor, records reflect.

Consequently, Republican Sens. Charles Ford and Jerry Smith of Tulsa and Ged Wright of Broken Arrow, along with Weese, introduced **SB707**. It would have appropriated \$517,995 to the State Board of Education to defray the ad valorem tax loss to Union School District stemming from the refund.

The Senate endorsed the bill 43 to 0 on Feb. 28, but the House Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee on Education killed it Wednesday by a 4 to 4 tie vote. "The bill wasn't even debated," Weese said.

Opposing the bill were Rep. Jack Begley, D-Goodwell, chairman of the subcommittee; Rep. James Hager, D-Pawhuska, chairman of the House Committee on Education; Rep. Larry E. Adair, D-Stillwell, a former school teacher and administrator who chairs the House Transportation Committee; and Rep. Calvin Anthony, D-Stillwater, a member of the House Education Committee.

Voting in support of the bill were Rep. Betty Boyd, D-Tulsa; Rep. John Bryant, R-Tulsa; Rep. Jim Reese, R-Deer Creek; and House GOP Leader Larry Ferguson, R-Cleveland.

The vote on SB707, coupled with numerous other actions by Democratic House leadership, have cost Union School District several million dollars in state aid in recent years, Weese said. For example:

- Union School District received barely 88 percent of the state average in per-pupil funding from the State Department of Education.

- The Democrat-dominated Legislature appropriated supplemental "mid-term adjustments" to growing school districts such as Union at only two-thirds of the full requirement in 1991-92, barely over one-half in 1992-94, and not at all the past two years. At a full-funding level, Union School District would be due \$1.54 million in supplemental state aid for last year and this year, Weese said.

- A Democrat-sponsored bill that passed the House and is pending in the Senate proposes a permanent solution to the mid-term funding crisis that "would be worse than doing nothing," Weese asserted.

The proposal would require growing school districts such as Union, which has approximately 11,000 students, to deduct growth in local ad valorem tax revenues from their supplemental appropriations.

Because of steady growth in student enrollment, Union School District "is at 100 percent of its legally allowable bonding capacity and is exempt from such requirements as class-size limitations," Weese said. "We need every dime we can get to build new classrooms, buy desks, hire teachers and provide textbooks," for students.

"The leaders of the Legislature say that education is important to them, but it's just hollow

(Continued)