



# Capitol Network News

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## RURAL LEADERS HOPE TO 'REAP' REWARDS

By Shawn Ashley  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) A plan to pump \$17 million into rural economic development projects was much heralded by state government leaders this week.

And some local leaders in one rural community told *Capitol Network News* that there may be something to the promises being made at the state level.

"If you've got a new industry wanting to come to your town and it means you're going to have to build a new wastewater treatment plant that costs \$3 million, where is a smaller community going to get that kind of money?" McAlester city manager Randy Green asked. "Most smaller communities don't have access to that kind of cash.

"It's those kinds of issues that the small towns need help with."

It's those kinds of problems legislators and the governor said they hope will be addressed with the money they are planning to set aside for the so-called Rural Economic Assistance Program, 'REAP' for short.

A budget agreement announced earlier this week calls for \$17 million to be dedicated to rural road development, rural infrastructure improvements and rural economic development. Governor Frank Keating and others compared the rural economic development program to the state's Quality Jobs Program, a program which members of both political parties say has been effective in attracting jobs to the state.



Rep. Mike Mass

"This is great news," Rep. Mike Mass, D-Hartshorne and a major proponent of rural economic development funding, said. "We worked long and hard with a lot of people in developing this program.

"If I could have it 'all my way,'" he added, "it would be ten times the investment. But this is a good be-

ginning and one I am personally committed to building on."

Mass' sentiments were echoed by Nashoba Democrat Rep. Randall Erwin.

"It has been 20 long years since any comprehensive rural economic development plan like



Rep. Randall Erwin

REAP was passed," Erwin said. "Rural Okla-

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## FROM THE TRENCHES — TRUTH IN SENTENCING ACT DRAWS COMMENTS

By Brandon Beard  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) In addition to changing the way Oklahoma prisoners are sentenced, the proposed Truth in Sentencing (TIS) Act will also change the way the state's criminal justice and corrections systems operate. *Capitol Network News* asked some of Oklahoma's attorneys, judges and corrections officials what they thought about the initiative and how it would affect them.

"Overall, I look for it to be much more satisfactory than our present system," said District Judge Richard Freeman. "Right now, I will give someone 40 years and hope he serves four."

Under the system, convicted criminals would be required to serve at least 85 percent of their prison term before being eligible for parole.

"Overall, it's really going to level out the playing field and give us a more equitable system."

If the act is engaged, juries would no longer provide sentencing, except in capital cases. They would still determine guilt or innocence, but judges would be responsible for issuing sentences with the help of a sentencing grid, or matrix.

During a recent experiment, judges were asked how they would sentence various offenders using the grid as a guideline. Freeman said, while it would take time for judges to familiarize themselves with the system, the grids were, overall, fair.

"Some poor slob could come into my courtroom and get ten years," he said, "but he could go across the hall and end up getting 100 years."

Department of Corrections (DOC) officials are anticipating the measure will cause internal changes.

Jim Rabon, DOC spokesman, said, while the measure would not necessarily increase

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