

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED



staffs.

Wilson was asked by Rep. Bill Settle, D-Muskogee, why court workers should be treated differently from other state employees.

Wilson noted that many in the state's judicial system are paid significantly less than those holding similar positions in other states. She also said salaries were a determining factor in the quality of people filling the various positions, many of which are elected.

Lawmakers took no action on the chief justice's request. Like other pay raises requested of the subcommittee, the request is expected to be taken up at a later time.

—**SHAWN ASHLEY**
05/06/96

PLANE LEASE SURPRISES SOME LAWMAKERS

■(GIT) Some state lawmakers were surprised to learn on Wednesday that funds had been appropriated to the Department of Public Safety for the lease and operation of a new state airplane for the benefit of the executive branch and the legislature.

The revelation came during the meeting of the General Conference Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee on judicial, public safety and law enforcement issues. Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, noticed the twice-mentioned item on the agency's fiscal year 1997 budget analysis and questioned acting DPS commissioner Bob Ricks about the matter.

Funding for the lease and operation of the aircraft — \$602,000 — was included in **SB837**, the general appropriations bill, approved earlier this session by both legislative houses and signed by the governor on March 19.

Ricks said the aircraft, a KingAir 350, will be lease-purchased over the course of some four to five years. The plane, which can accommodate up to eight passengers and has a range of 1,200 to 1,500 miles, will be available for use by the governor, as well as members of the legislature, Ricks added.

"I've got no problem with that," Stipe said, "but it ought to be available for use by state agencies, too."

Other members of the subcommittee sat in stunned silence, quietly asking one another whether they were aware of having approved the funds for the aircraft.

Asked by a member of the subcommit-

tee whether the appropriation was "a done deal," vice chairman Rep. Danny Hilliard, D-Sulphur, said the funding had been approved when the legislature considered the general appropriation bill in March.

Ricks went on to add that the decision by former Governor David Walters to sell the executive branch's last aircraft "was probably a mistake." Walters sold the aircraft and then leased it back on an as-needed basis.

"I think it has probably ended up costing us more to lease it back than it did to own it," Ricks explained.

Asked how long it would take for the state to buy the new aircraft under the lease-purchase plan, Ricks estimated four to five years. At which time, Hilliard noted, a provision of the appropriations bill will prevent whoever is governor from selling the plane without legislative approval.

—**SHAWN ASHLEY**
05/07/96

GCCA SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES TALKS BUDGET ISSUES

■(GIT) In a small and informal meeting Tuesday, Sen. Ben Robinson, D-Muskogee, discussed budget issues with members of the GCCA Subcommittee on Health and Social Services.

The agencies discussed during the meeting include the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, the Oklahoma Health Department, the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) and the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Pertaining to the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, a total of \$15.4 million constitutes the agency's additional funding requests for the fiscal year.

Among the higher items, are \$9.7 million for cost of living allowances (COLAs), \$4.8 million to replace money used to fund FY '96 and \$3.2 million to fund federal mandates.

Reported savings for the authority include \$5.1 million in managed care savings and \$1.9 million in additional HMO premium tax revenue.

Also included in the calculation is a figure of \$2 million to fund a UNISYS contract.

With total allocations at \$15.4 million, the authority has only been recommended to receive \$6.9 from the governor's office.

Sen. Howard Hendrick, R-Bethany, said such services provided by the Health Department, like its dialysis fund, would be better served by the authority.

The Health Department is asking for \$9.7 million for FY '97. Included in this figure is \$3.2 million for vaccines and immunizations. Up against the governor's proposed \$202,000, the department's goal is to raise its vaccination rate to 100 percent.

A proposed project called "Children First" is carrying a requested allocation of \$2 million. Patterned after a program in Hawaii called "Healthy Start," the program is aimed at Oklahoma counties with the highest child abuse rates, including Garvin and Tulsa Counties.

The funding request also includes \$1 million to fund teen pregnancy prevention and \$60,000 to fund the so-called Ryan Luke bill (**HB2053**).

DMHSAS is asking for \$8 million to fund such requests as \$1.1 million for psychotropic medication, a line-item request that is higher due to higher costs of new generations of drugs.

A request of \$395,919 would fund a workers' compensation premium increase which occurred when the mental health facility at Vinita downsized operations. Similar increases of \$250,000 were reported last year.

The \$40 million in DHS requests include \$21.9 million to restore Medicaid administration funds, \$15.1 million to replace FY '96 carryover funds and \$4.8 million to restore cuts from the governor's office. Total recommendations from the governor's office total \$860,000.

Each of the 14 agencies listed in the proposal have funds to cover employee pay raises given in **SB1128**, totaling \$21,820,085.

The total subcommittee allocations are \$62.8 million.

—**BRANDON BEARD**
05/07/96

LAWMAKERS, GOVERNOR REACH PARTIAL BUDGET, TAX CUT ACCORD

■(GIT) "Historic" was the term used by a bipartisan group of lawmakers and the governor on Wednesday as they announced an agreement on a series of tax cuts, midterm school funding adjustments and the use of the state's Rainy Day Fund.

Continued on next page