

RYAN LUKE PASSES NEXT PHASE

By Heather Myers
Staff Writer

■(GIT) The highly publicized "Ryan Luke Bill" passed the Senate today with a vote of 47-1. However, the Senate author of the measure, Sen. Ben Brown, D-Oklahoma City, made the motion for a reconsideration, so it may be few days before the bill crosses the governor's desk.

HB2053, modifies the requirements for those involved in child abuse and neglect situations, requires criminal history investigations of foster parent applicants and provides for prompt medical treatment for abused children.

The measure also provides for a special review application to be made after removing a child from custody, states that no child shall be placed in the custody of any individual subject to the Oklahoma Sex Offenders Registration Act, provides for legal representation for abused children, transfers responsibility for removed children to the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs and provides for review and approval of training curriculum.

After a brief explanation of the conference committee report, which Brown said simply cleaned up the measure, Sen. Jerry Pierce, R-Bartlesville, had a few words to say about the bill.

"I realize everyone will vote for this bill. I am explaining why I don't think it does anything to change the system. All this bill is, is political hype about a serious issue. You all think by passing this, people will think we're doing wonderful things," Pierce said.

The Senator, who is not running for reelection next term continued by saying, "We made a mistake by creating a bureaucracy to deal with child abuse. We need to break this up by returning power to the local police and sheriff's offices."

Pierce said that the current social worker network is leading to more fraudulent accusations of child abuse cases. He said by involving local law enforcement in handling the cases in their jurisdiction, fewer false claims will be filed.

"I submit that this is inherent failure. We need to act quickly to eliminate the bureaucracy these children fall through. Page after

page of this bill reflects how children are getting lost in the cracks.

"Let's make this a police issue, not a bureaucratic issue."

Pierce also expressed a concern regarding the stipulation in the bill which would require judges involved with domestic violence cases to attend seminars relating to those issues.

Pierce said these seminars would serve a specific organization's agenda to "brainwash" the judges.

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ing solution meets his requirements for providing a permanent solution to the midterm funding program, a goal the governor had said previously had to be met before he would authorize the use of Rainy Day funds for its funding.

Keating, Johnson and others at the press conference also praised the rural economic development package, saying it would help economically disadvantaged rural areas in job development.

The governor has previously called on the legislature to appropriate money from the Rainy Day fund for rural fire departments and weather modification. The OHP trooper academy was also a part of the governor's recommended 1997 budget.

Keating indicated on Wednesday that he would sign off on the proposed Rainy Day Fund expenditures.

The final component of the program calls for some \$45 million in annualized tax cuts, including a plan to give private sector retirees the same tax break afforded state and federal retirees. That plan gives retirees over the age of 65 and with an annual income of \$25,000 or less a \$5,500 tax break. The tax break will be implemented over five years at \$1,100 per year.

Additionally, the tax cut plan includes income tax credits for estate taxes paid on family farms and businesses; income tax credits for investing in agricultural processing facilities and income tax credits for taxes paid on marginal wells.

The cuts are expected to total some \$5.2 million in fiscal year 1997. Considered on an annual basis, the governor noted, the cuts represent "the largest in Oklahoma's history."

Keating is expected to issue an executive order on Thursday authorizing the tapping of the Rainy Day Fund.

In addition, both legislative houses will

"Who will hold these seminars, who decides the curriculum, and whose agenda will it fill?"

"Judges should be able to think for themselves and make judicial decisions based on their research, not some seminar," Pierce said.

Pierce said to have the judges go to such seminars would be a breach of the separation of powers, much like he feels having the State Supreme Justices in the same build-

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soon consider legislation appropriating money from the Rainy Day Fund and making the specified midterm funding appropriations. Lawmakers will also have to complete work on the REAP bill, **HB1434**, and **HB2055**, which sets in place the midterm funding plan.

The legislature will also have to identify and draft language to enact the agreed to tax cuts.

Senate minority leader Ged Wright, R-Broken Arrow, said, "This budget agreement is very positive news for Oklahoma taxpayers. Not only does it provide a permanent fix to the annual problem of midterm adjustments for our growing school districts but (it) also provides targeted tax cuts which will greatly assist economic development efforts and investment in Oklahoma."

Wright, a 14 year member of the legislature, went on to call the agreement "probably the finest bipartisan agreement since I've been here. The citizens of Oklahoma can take some satisfaction in the fact that Republicans and Democrats can work together."

House minority leader Larry Ferguson, R-Cleveland, called the midterm solution a "key component" of the agreement. The agreement also "provides economic relief to vital sectors of rural Oklahoma including rural firefighting and weather modification and that is tremendously important."

Ferguson was critical of the Democrats' allocation plan for the new money the state is expected to receive during the 1997 fiscal year, saying the opposing party was "raiding the candy store." On Wednesday he referred back to that comment and said, "Today they opened candy store to all the people in the state of Oklahoma."

"Everyone is going to get something out of this agreement."



Sen. Jerry Pierce