



Capitol Network News

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BUDGET MOVES CONTINUE

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Less than one day after a bipartisan group of lawmakers announced an agreement on a major budget and tax cut initiative, the budget momentum continued to move forward.

Members of the House of Representatives on Thursday voted overwhelmingly in favor of three budget measures designed to give certain agencies in need a financial boost and to re-fund two agencies originally set for elimination.

House members voted 80-19 in favor of **SB838**, making supplemental appropriations to several agencies; 82-17 for **SB843**, making an appropriation to the Liquefied Petroleum Gas Board; and 97-2 for **SB847**, making an appropriation to the Commission on Consumer Credit.

It was SB838 which generated the most debate during Thursday's session. Several House members expressed concern over what appeared to be conflicting, as well as confusing, fiscal year references. But as Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore, noted, the use of dates from the current fiscal year is the result of previous approval granted by the legislature for which there was not funding available.

In essence, Steidley explained, lawmakers were simply being asked to release money

for projects which they had already approved.

Specifically, the bill appropriates \$426,462 to the State Board of Education for the Early Intervention (Sooner Start) program; \$500,000 to the State Supreme Court for the computer system enhancement; \$124,458 to the Court of Criminal Appeals for computer system enhancements; and \$200,000 to the Office of the State Auditor and Inspector for moving costs and a shortfall in collections.

Other language in the bill clarifies problems in the general appropriations bill, Steidley said.

Without debate, the bill received its passing vote.

Also receiving passing votes without debate were funding bills for the Liquefied Petroleum Gas Board and the Consumer Credit Commission. Both agencies had been scheduled for elimination by Governor Frank Keating.

A total of \$405,590 was appropriated to the petroleum gas board and its FTE limited to 10, while the consumer credit commission was appropriated \$683,795 and given an FTE approval of 16.

The three measures were approved in the Senate on Wednesday, only minutes after receiving conference committee reports and recommendations from the General Conference Committee on Appropriations.

Governor Keating will be the next recipient of the measures for consideration.

RELIEF TO DROUGHT DISASTER A LITTLE TOO LATE FOR SOME

By Marta McCloskey
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Dennis Howard with the State Department of Agriculture, said Thursday, that by January 1, 1997, five to ten thousand Oklahoma farmers will have to "fold" on their farms. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Dan Glickman announced a disaster declaration for Oklahoma earlier this week that will provide low interest loans to farmers. However, these loans only cover losses suffered by farmers in 1995.

Howard and Governor Keating both expressed their appreciation for the announcement by Glickman, and for the state budget agreement to take money from the Rainy Day Fund to help aid against the drought. But unfortunately, some of those funds are too late to help this year's crops. "Time is critical ... and the funds will help in time for fall planting," Keating said.

Howard explained that out of the approximately 70,000 farmers in the state, 50 percent are in critical trouble. This due to a combination of the drought and the drop in cattle prices. "These farmers are not bad managers, they cannot control the weather ... most of the farmers in trouble are young and don't have enough equity built up."

"Thousands of farmers will not be able to make their July 1 mortgage payments ... many were not able to make January 1 this year," Howard said.

Keating again said that most of the designated relief will not kick-in until late summer. The Governor said he would like to additionally help agriculture in the state by providing value-added tax credits. "Adding value, that's where the money is," he said.

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