

NEW McALESTER DHS BUILDING APPROVED

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) A resolution approved Thursday by the House of Representatives clears the way for the construction of a new Department of Human Services office in McAlester.

SCR49, by McAlester lawmakers Sen. Gene Stipe and Rep. Lloyd Fields, authorizes the Commission for Human services to enter into a lease-purchase agreement for office space for local units of the Department of Human Services in Pittsburg County. The resolution was adopted Thursday by the House and has already received Senate approval.

The department's Pittsburg County building was an issue in last year's grand jury investigation related to the death of two-year-old Ryan Luke. Among the grand jury's numerous recommendations was that the department end its practice of leasing the building from a McAlester attorney and buy a building, either through the state or county, instead.

Late last year, state officials asked Pittsburg County Commissioners to buy the current McAlester DHS building so that the state could buy it in a lease-purchase agreement similar to the one approved by the House. But that plan was met with resistance in the form of a scathing report by DHS employees who called the current building a money trap.

The department's options, however, are limited. Under state law, it must first approach public trusts, such as those created by county commissioners, for lease or lease purchase agreements.

Pittsburg County Commissioners have said they would help the state with a building, but only if the country was not financially liable and only if bonds to finance the purchase were secured by a DHS lease-purchase contract, such as the one approved on Thursday.

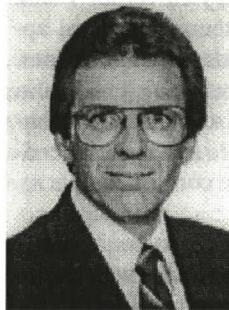
Before any additional action can take place, both Pittsburg County officials and the Commission on Human Services will have to react to the resolution.

The department has rented its 10,800-square-foot office building in McAlester for the past 14 years at an annual cost of \$83,000.

Field's amended Thursday's resolution to increase the term of the lease-purchase agreement from 10 years to 15 to 20 years.

WEBB SAYS OMBUDSMAN BILL KILLED BY AUTHOR, NOT AMENDMENT

From House Media



Rep. Dan Webb

■ (OKLAHOMA CITY) "If Rep. Abe Deutschendorf is looking for the person who killed his bill, he need only look in the mirror," Rep. Dan Webb, R-Oklaoma City, said on Thursday.

Webb was referring to his proposed amendments to a bill that would have preserved the state's Ombudsman program for nursing home residents.

The controversy between the lawmakers began Monday when Deutschendorf, D-Lawton, brought up **House Bill 2407**. The measure would have preserved the State Long-term Care Ombudsman Program, which trains volunteers who monitor the treatment of nursing home residents.

Webb moved to send the bill back to a conference committee with instructions to attach two provisions relating to the regulation of abortion by the state Health Department.

The first provision requires the Health Department to promulgate rules on the safe termination of pregnancies. The second provision allows the department to levy a \$100 fine on medical professionals who fail to report they have performed an abortion.

The House overwhelmingly agreed with Webb and returned the bill to the conference committee with the instructions.

The instructions threatened the bill, Deutschendorf said, because Senate members of the conference committee would not agree to attach the amendments. That would result in the bill remaining in conference committee, effectively killing it.

If that happened, Deutschendorf would have the option of asking the House to release the instructions. In a story published in the Lawton Constitution, the Lawton lawmaker said he would ask the House to do just that.

"I am not unreasonable about this," Webb said. "If there was no way for this bill to go forward with the amendment attached, I believe the House would have released the conferees from the instructions."

"The problem is that Thursday was the deadline for him to have that motion. He

didn't and if the bill dies, it is Abe Deutschendorf's fingerprints on the murder weapon."

Adding to the controversy was the personal animosity that developed between the lawmakers. Deutschendorf, according to a published report, was upset because Webb had not consulted him before sending the bill back with instructions. Webb countered that it was more important to "dot the right thing" than to worry about arcane protocol.

"I am sorry that Representative Deutschendorf felt slighted, but when he introduced that bill it became the property of the House to do with whatever it pleased," Webb said.

"Our colleagues voted for the instructions. If Abe is angry, it seems to me that he was more concerned with his own authorship of the bill than to simply do what everyone knows is the right thing."

Webb said he wants the bill to pass — with its original provisions and his amendments — and he encourages Deutschendorf to continue backing the bill.

"That would be the best option," he said. "I pledge to help him pass the bill, but under the rules, he has control of it. The ball, as they say, is in his court."

Webb added that he believes his amendments strengthen the bill because it expands the number of helpless people the bill would help.

"If Representative Deutschendorf allows this good bill to die because his feelings are hurt, he might need to re-evaluate whether he has the mettle to be in public service."



"Decisions, decisions."