

## ATTORNEY GENERAL LOSES FUNDING BATTLE

By Brandon Beard and Shawn Ashley  
Staff Writers

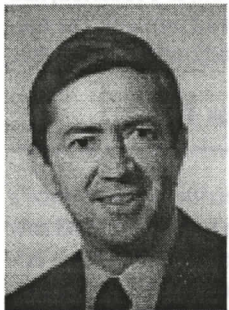
■(GIT) Attorney General Drew Edmondson lost an eleventh hour battle Friday to restore \$975,287 vetoed by Governor Frank Keating this week. Reportedly, the loss will represent a 20 percent reduction in staff.

The funds, contained in **SB802**, were designated to annualize the agency's FY '96 supplemental funding, provide additional funds for increased operating expenses and \$159,491 for the mandated state employee pay-raise.

Richard Wintory, with the Office of the Attorney General, said the earlier \$250,000 supplemental appropriation did not fund basic needs such as desks and other office equipment for some employees, making the additional \$350,000 in operating expense funding necessary.

"We have people working in the conference room, sharing one phone because we don't have desks for them."

In a last-minute letter to lawmakers Friday, Edmondson said he would embargo the difference of \$100,000 between the



Drew Edmondson

governor's budget and what the Legislature approved, returning it to the State Treasury, in exchange for overriding the governor's veto.

"With the commitment contained above there would remain no fiscal reason to sustain the governor's veto," the letter states. "On the contrary, fiscal responsibility would dictate passage since the failure to properly fund this office would prolong appeals in death penalty cases, reduce our ability to defend the state against tort actions, necessitate state agencies resorting to private law firms for legal representation and limit our ability to recover moneys otherwise due the State of Oklahoma."

Edmondson added that the greater fiscal impact of the funding deficit would far exceed the amount vetoed by the governor.

The Executive Budget only allotted some \$600,000 for the Office of the Attorney General, 50 percent less than the figure approved by the Legislature.

Falling on deaf ears, lawmakers failed to override the governor's veto. Though the attempt was successful in the Senate, House

members killed the action with a vote of 65 to 32, three votes short of the needed two-thirds majority to reverse the governor's decision.

House Democrats blasted the governor, asking how a so-called law and order governor could veto a key law enforcement appropriation.

"What in the world are we doing," asked Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore, "when we say we want to be responsive to the public's concerns about crime and an appropriation like this gets vetoed?"

House Speaker Glen Johnson, D-Okemah, said that the governor's veto "will deprive the attorney general of the ability to discharge his duties."

Referring to the bill's initial passage in the House, Johnson said, "If every member will vote the same way we did eight days ago, we will override this veto. Nothing in this bill has changed. So, let's do the right thing. Let's override this veto."

Republicans countered that they and the governor supported the efforts of the Attorney General's office. What they objected to, they said, was some of the funding and the manner in which it was presented to the gov-

ernor. Because the pay raise appropriation, annualization of the supplemental appropriation and other funding were grouped into one line item, Republicans argued, the governor had no choice but to veto all of the agency's funding when he objected to a portion of it.

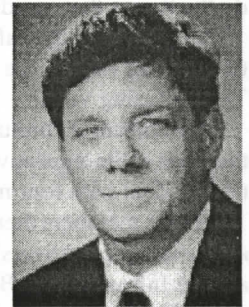
The most heated criticism of the appro-

priation and the veto override attempt came from Rep. Chris Hastings, R-Tulsa, who had met with Edmondson earlier in the day. Referring to the attorney general's offer to embargo \$100,000 if the veto was overridden, Hastings said, "The attorney general is telling this legislature that he doesn't need \$100,000 of the money that's been appropriated. He's admitting it."

Then, turning his attention to House Democrats, Hastings accurately predicted, "You know what's going to happen — You're not going to get this veto overridden."

During the debate leading to the Senate

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Rep. Chris Hastings

## COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS AND TRUTH IN SENTENCING DIE IN FINAL HOURS

By Brandon Beard  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) The battle over how Oklahoma will sentence its criminal offenders is over. State lawmakers Friday defeated the measure that would not only have allowed first, second and non-violent offenders to serve their sentences in their own communities but also require those sentenced to prison to serve at least 85 percent of their sentence before being paroled.

**SB1200**, by Sen. Herb Rozell, D-Tahlequah, in the last hours of the Legislature, became a measure that combined the two initiatives. **HB1138**, containing the Truth in Sentencing Act, was incorporated into the Rozell Community Corrections Act bill.

Ninety-three pages in length, the combined measure was still in its final conference committee at 3:00 p.m. on Friday. By 4:15 p.m. it was on the Senate floor for dis-

cussion, where a hurried Rozell met with some resistance from fellow members.

"I have a problem with a 93 page bill being dropped on my desk 30 minutes before we adjourn for the year," said Sen. Mike Fair, R-Oklaoma City.

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Though he said he supported the effort, he was concerned about rushing such important legislation through at the last minute.

"I have a problem with us not having the time to read the bill and the potential to pass bad law. I think we we'll be sorry if we do this."

Senate lawmakers passed the measure with a vote of 31 to 11, sending it to the House, where the bill's conference committee report was rejected with a vote of 25 to 71.

It took only 29 minutes for the bill to be defeated by both houses of the Legislature.