

# STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY

## APPROPRIATIONS

### GOVERNOR ISSUES LINE-ITEM VETOES

■(GIT) Appropriations of 'new money' to six state agencies were vetoed by the governor on Tuesday.

Governor Frank Keating vetoed the appropriations "because the appropriations contained in those items exceed the Executive Budget. The excess funds must be preserved for future budgetary needs in order to offset fiscally irresponsible spending in other parts of the budget," he wrote in his veto message for each of the bills containing a line item veto.

Agencies having their funding vetoed include the Office of the Auditor and Inspector and Oklahoma Tax Commission, **HB1787**; the Human Rights Commission and the Indian Affairs Commission, **HB1800**; and the State Election Board and State Ethics Commission, **HB1812**.

Earlier in the session, the governor signed legislation increasing state employees' pay by \$1,200 annually. Lawmakers chose to fund that pay increase with this year's so-called new money or additional revenue.

Base funding for all six agencies was included in a bill approved by both houses of the legislature and signed by the governor earlier in the session. The governor and legislative leaders touted the bill as a way to avoid a state government shutdown should budget matters become a stumbling block for lawmakers and the executive branch.

—SHAWN ASHLEY  
05/28/96

### HOUSE SUSTAINS THREE LINE-ITEM VETOES

■(GIT) House Democrats were unsuccessful in three attempts on Wednesday to override Governor Frank Keating's line-item vetoes.

Four votes was all that separated two of the attempts from success on **HB1812** and **HB1800**. Five votes was the gap on **HB1792**, when Rep. Charles Gray, D-Oklahoma City, broke ranks and voted with Republicans in sustaining the governor's veto of additional funding for the Merit Protection Commission.

The Democrats launched their attack before noon on Wednesday, targeting first **HB1812** and the governor's veto of sections one and four. The sections appropriated

funds to the State Election Board and the State Ethics Commission. The effort would ultimately fail 64-36, reflecting a straight party-line vote.

In urging the override, House Democrats referred repeatedly to the process of writing the state budget, reiterating several times that attempts to override a gubernatorial veto were comparable to the recommendations made by the governor concerning the budget. In urging that the veto be sustained, House Republicans accused the opposing party of "trying to spend every dime they could get their hands on."

Rep. Tommy Thomas, D-Atoka, argued that the legislature and the governor needed "to put the money where their mouth is," saying Keating and lawmakers had endorsed a state employee pay raise and that part of the money in the sections vetoed by the governor was appropriated for those raises.

In arguing for the override, Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore, said he found the governor's veto message to be "not understandable." He added that the vetoed bill sections dealt with important issues with which he felt there was general support.

House Majority Leader Rep. Loyd Benson, D-Frederick, said "If everyone stands up and votes their conscience, we can send a message to the governor's advisors. I don't think the governor would do this if he understood the consequences of his actions."

In response to the Democrats' arguments, Rep. Jim Reese, R-Narden, accused Democrats of packaging additional appropriations with the state employee pay raise in hopes of winning the governor's signature.

"If anyone had asked, the governor is more than happy to pay for the pay raise, but he had no choice. He had to veto the entire package," Reese said.

Asked whether Republicans might be portrayed negatively if they helped sustain a veto of ethics commission funding, Reese replied, "I don't think any one of us has anything to worry about. We've cast enough votes to prove we're for stronger ethics in government."

Rep. Leonard Sullivan, R-Oklahoma City, also accused House Democrats of irresponsible spending, saying they were waving a red flag in the governor's face.

"You're spending the state into bankruptcy," he said, "and we're looking at a shortfall next year. But the governor has

given us an out, an opportunity to save face, but it looks like some of us would prefer to wave the red flag one more time."

The most impassioned argument during the debate came from Speaker of the House Glen Johnson, D-Okemah, who also referred to the House effort as just another part of the budget process. Johnson also challenged Republican members to recall their vote on the bill last week, noting that it had passed by a 94-0 vote.

"This vote today is a vote on the process," Johnson emphasized. "When we brought this bill out here it did not result in a party line vote. It passed unanimously, 94-0."

"Today, I want to ask you, 'What has changed?'"

"We voted unanimously for this bill last week, and not one word, not one line has changed," Johnson intoned. "Your vote today will say whether your vote is an independent vote or a vote subject to the whim of the governor when he decides he wants to veto something," Johnson said in conclusion and to applause from House Democrats.

Johnson's impassioned plea, however, was not enough, and along party lines, the House voted 64-36 on the override motion, four votes shy of the two-thirds vote needed to override the veto.

The vote was essentially the same late Wednesday evening when Democratic lawmakers set their sights on line-item vetoes in **HB1800**, where section 7 dealing with the Human Rights Commission and section 10 had been vetoed by the governor.

In launching what would become perhaps the most fiery speech of the legislative session, Rep. Don Ross, D-Tulsa, said, "I take this vote and the governor's veto personally. This is an absolute insult to a class of people in our state."

Picking out Republican members of the House by name, Ross reminded those on the north side of aisle of the success of some of their programs and the money involved.

"But when it comes to my people," he said, "you've got a problem with \$53,000."

Ross said he and other legislative leaders had met with the governor and his advisors and that they had expressed no concerns about the appropriations. "Now he comes along and vetoes a bill that's even less than we said we were going to spend," Ross said.

After listing Republican House members who had voted for the bill's passage last

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