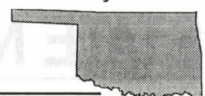


STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED



from Chisholm Trail Museum Inc. of Kingfisher and community volunteers. For more information, contact Mitchell at (405) 375-5176.

—OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
05/28/96

BUSINESS & LABOR

WORKERS COMPENSATION REFORM MEASURE PASSES SENATE

■(GIT) A measure reforming the Oklahoma Workers' Compensation Act passed the Senate Tuesday. The bill, **SB1310**, by Sen. Bernice Shedrick, D-Stillwater, received unanimous support, despite early opposition from a handful of members.

The bill is the result of a House interim study conducted late last year concerning the State Insurance Fund.

Under the measure, insurers, except for the State Insurance Fund, must provide access to a certified workplace medical plan. After 60 days written notice to its insurance carrier, insurers may choose a plan of choice and contract for one year.

Also, if the State Insurance Fund fails to contract with at least three certified workplace medical plans, each covering at least 50 counties in the state, then the insured may contract for one year with a carrier of choice.

If an employee elects not to enroll in the certified workplace medical plan, they may choose from a list of physicians who meet certain requirements.

The measure also authorizes the state commissioner of health to authorize a workplace medical plan other than that recommended by the administrator of the Physician Advisory Committee if the administrator fails to choose a plan.

The measure provides that workers' compensation carriers may use present value discounting at a rate of four percent for claims involving disability and death.

A provision of the bill provides that any person not required to carry workers' compensation insurance may apply to the commissioner of labor for a Certificate of Non-Coverage Under the Workers' Compensation Act. The certificate, for a fee of \$10.00, would excuse the bearer from the requirement to carry the coverage.

A "reasonable inquiry" will determine if the application is legitimate. The labor commissioner along with the workers' compen-

sation fraud unit of the office of the attorney general are responsible for conducting the investigation.

The measure also exempts the State Insurance Fund from any future hiring freezes implemented by the governor.

The bill's conference committee report was adopted with a vote of 40 to 7. The measure itself passed as an emergency measure with a vote of 46 to 0.

Shedrick lodged a motion to reconsider, normally giving her three legislative days to re-address the issue. Under a Tuesday suspension of Senate rules, however, all motions to reconsider must be addressed that same day. The measure was not brought up again. It now goes to the House for its consideration.

—BRANDON BEARD
05/28/96

CORRECTIONS

SENTENCING MEASURES' FATE UNCERTAIN

■(GIT) The two measures designed to change the way Oklahoma sentences its convicted offenders, one containing the Community Corrections Act, and the other containing the Truth in Sentencing Act, are both on hold this week as the Legislature prepares to adjourn Friday.

SB1200, by Sen. Herb Rozell, D-Tahlequah, contains the Community Corrections Act. It would allow first and second-time non-violent offenders to be sentenced to a variety of community sentencing options, including house arrest.

The bill has met with resistance, specifically from the Oklahoma Sheriffs' Association, who claim the measure would place too much financial and administrative stress on the already burdened agency.

The bill's House author, Rep. Jari Askins, D-Duncan, has been rallying support for the measure all week, reportedly having difficulty gathering needed votes.

Askins said part of the problem with the bill is the definition of "non-violent offender," which is not easily definable in the bill. She said if language from the Truth in Sentencing Act, **HB1138**, by Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore, were in place, the task would be much simpler.

Askins added that the interest in community corrections lies in the ability to remove

the, what some call severe, Department of Corrections (DOC) overcrowding problem.

"We need to save that prison space for violent offenders," she said.

Steidley couldn't agree more. He said the Community Corrections Act is necessary before the Truth in Sentencing Act can be effective.

Since the Truth in Sentencing Act would require prisoners to serve a minimum of 85 percent of their sentence before being eligible for parole, the already serious prison overcrowding problem would become unmanageable.

Steidley said the Community Corrections Act will act as a type of "release valve" for DOC, allowing prison space to be used for violent and dangerous offenders.

HB1138 is waiting to be dealt with in its conference committee. Steidley said he was hopeful a Thursday meeting with involved parties would yield progress.

Steidley said he was going to push for the bill's passage, removing the specific sentences from all of the matrices and directing the Truth in Sentencing Policy Advisory Commission and the DOC to conduct a study to determine the financial impact of the measure.

Both measures will have to be passed and sent to the governor's desk before Friday at 5:00 p.m., when the Legislature is scheduled to adjourn until next year.

—BRANDON BEARD
05/29/96

CRIME & JUDICIARY

ANOTHER JUVENILE JUSTICE MEASURE IS SIGNED INTO LAW

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Legislation by a Tillman County lawmaker that would deprive school drop-outs of the privilege to drive was signed into law recently.

HB2692 by House Majority Leader Loyd Benson clarifies and strengthens **HB2640**, a 1994 juvenile justice reform package by the Frederick Democrat that established juvenile detention centers across the state, including Manitou.

A key feature of HB2692 is that, effective July 1, it will deprive school drop-outs of the privilege to drive. Approximately 8,000 students quit public schools in Oklahoma each year, Benson said.

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