



Capitol Network News

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PANEL PRESSES DAC FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) What was supposed to be a discussion of the fiscal needs of the state's district attorneys turned into a debate over the accountability of funding maintained by the District Attorneys Council.

Appearing before the General Conference Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee on judicial, public safety and law enforcement services, DAC director Bruce Walker found himself having to defend the agency's handling of a variety of funds, including those appropriated by the state, in a sometimes heated exchange with some members of the panel. The DAC oversees the distribution of state funds to individual district attorneys throughout the state and also administers the disbursement of other state and federal funds to law enforcement agencies and groups.

Sen. Herb Rozell, D-Tahlequah, asked Walker how much money, including state and federal appropriations, the council had been responsible for handling during the most recent fiscal year.

As Walker began to detail the various appropriations made to the agency, Rozell interrupted, asking if the total amount was not close to \$56 million. Walker disagreed, saying a total of \$47.4 million had come into

the council, including \$1.67 million in federal funds that went directly to district attorneys.

Rozell then pressed Walker for the total amount spent by the council on operations. Walker said the amount was \$755,104.90.

Perhaps the harshest questioning during the meeting came from Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, who asked, "Who decides which members of this committee you will de-

nounce after we meet?"

When Walker said he did not understand the senator's question, Stipe said, "It happens every session. The council and individual district attorneys hold press conferences to de-

nounce this committee because we do what you wanted us to do." The senator also alluded to the comments of an individual district attorney, saying their statement was "un-

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Sen. Herb Rozell



Sen. Gene Stipe

DOC REQUESTS ADDITIONAL \$96 MILLION

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) The Department of Corrections on Monday asked the General Conference Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee on judicial, public safety and law enforcement services for an additional \$96 million in its fiscal year 1997 budget.

Sen. Cal Hobson, D-Lexington, had called the department and its financial needs a monster during an earlier meeting of the

subcommittee. On Monday, the Lexington Democrat challenged the analogy, but the message was much the same.

"We've tried to save back every dime we could," Hobson said, "but regardless of what we pour into the bucket, it's not going to get anywhere near the top."

Two requests alone account for nearly one-half the department's request — annualization of the fiscal year 1996 supplement and the leasing of additional private prison bed space.

Annualization of this year's supplemental appropriation to the department will cost an estimated \$18 million, allowing the continued leasing of some 969 private prison beds in Texas and Oklahoma, the continued employment of an additional 150 staff members, the purchase of additional security equipment for probation and parole staff and energy contract payments for the W.S. Key Correctional Center.

The supplemental appropriation became necessary when prison officials ran out of alternatives for housing inmates in the state and county facilities. In addition to contracting with private prisons in Texas, as well as

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