

KEATING, MCCAULEY LAUNCH MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN, THREATEN ROAD PROJECTS, EDUCATION FUNDING

From Senate Media

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Gov. Keating's Transportation Secretary has been "shoot-ing from the lip with little regard to accu-racy" in his recent attacks on a legislative program for roads and highways, according to a Senate budget leader.

"I'm really surprised to see this kind of misinformation coming from Neal McCaleb," said Sen.



Sen. Larry Dickerson

Larry Dickerson, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government and Transportation. "He knows what the real budget numbers are, but at Governor Keating's direction, he's deliberately trying to mis-

lead Oklahomans on this point."

McCaleb has been traveling around the state in recent weeks, threatening to cancel local road projects and telling newspapers and civic clubs that legislators are advocating a standstill budget for the Transportation Department. In reality, lawmakers are proposing a \$21 million increase for ODOT, \$6 million of which has already been delivered to the agency in the general appropriations bill passed earlier this session.

"I noticed Secretary McCaleb has conveniently forgotten that we've already given his agency a \$6 million increase and are trying to give him another \$15 million to beef up our road and highway construction program," said Senator Dickerson.

If enacted, the legislative program would represent the largest increase in state funds for the Department of Transportation since 1988.

"Roads and highways are a top priority and we're treating them as such. I don't see how Governor Keating and Neal McCaleb can misconstrue that fact, even on their most partisan day."

In his recent statements, McCaleb has also decried the loss of federal highway funds, implying that state legislators should be responsible for offsetting any and all federal cuts handed down by the Republican Congress in Washington.

"Unfortunately, as Oklahoma lawmakers, we can't stop Newt Gingrich from cutting

our federal highway funds. We're doing the best we can to make up for those cuts by increasing our state road investment, but we can't repair all the damage the Republican Congress has caused to the highway budget," said Senator Dickerson.

"As Republicans, Governor Keating and Mr. McCaleb are a lot closer to Newt than I am. I would suggest that if they're really interested in improving our infrastructure, they should use their relationship with Mr. Gingrich to save Oklahoma's federal highway funds, instead of spreading misinformation about the Legislature's road investment program."

In their effort to discredit legislative attempts to increase road and highway funding, Governor Keating and Secretary McCaleb are promoting an alternative plan drafted by the executive branch. That proposal would use funding traditionally dedicated to schools, economic development initiatives and law enforcement to bolster the transportation agency's budget.

"We're going to do everything we can to boost our road construction program, but not at the expense of education and law enforcement. That's why the legislative proposal is far superior to the one drafted by the Governor. Our proposal will invest additional dollars in roads and highways, without taking money from our schools," said Senator Dickerson.

"You can't effectively promote economic development by draining money from education. You have to focus on both schools and roads. That's what we're trying to do with the legislative program."

McCaleb has suggested that ODOT's five year construction plan will be disrupted and local projects canceled if the Governor's program is not adopted, but Senator Dickerson says that statement is also untrue.

"By threatening to kill local road projects, Governor Keating and Mr. McCaleb have resorted to the good old boy, arm-twisting politics that Oklahomans rejected a long time ago," said Senator Dickerson. "They've demonstrated they're willing to sacrifice vital infrastructure improvements in communities around the state just to advance their partisan agenda. It's completely irresponsible."

"The legislative budget proposal will keep everything on track with the five year program. Mr. McCaleb knows that, he's just

trying to get his hands on every dollar he can. If I didn't know him better, I'd think he was just trying to build his own little personal empire at ODOT."

The Poteau legislator says he's surprised by the tone of McCaleb's statements in light of the bipartisan budget agreement hammered out by legislators and the Governor last week.

"I think it's pretty ironic that Mr. McCaleb launched his misinformation campaign at the same time we were shaking hands with the Governor on a historic budget agreement. Apparently, he's out of the loop on the spirit of bipartisan cooperation at the State Capitol."

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mately \$20.5 million.

Panel members questioned Ganstine repeatedly about whether it might be possible to reduce the number of cases by better determining which clients were truly indigent or by collecting the cost of defending those determined not to be actually indigent.

"That might reduce the number of applications," Ganstine replied, adding that he could not estimate what affect it would have on the agency's caseload.

The subcommittee took no action on the bulk of the agency's request, following the procedure it established with its first meeting. Instead, members approved the agency's allocations for the statewide employee pay raise and associated benefits increase.

The panel is expected to renew consideration of the agency's request at a later meeting.

