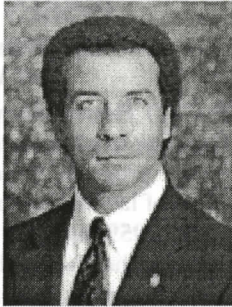


REAP, continued from page 1

the charge against adoption of the measure's conference committee report in the House. Urging members to consider the intent of the bill — "to bring jobs to rural Oklahoma" — Pettigrew argued that larger rural communities, such as Miami, Guymon, Weatherford, McAlester and others, would be able to do more with the money than would communities of 7,000 people or less.



Rep. Wayne Pettigrew

"The question is whether you just want to put some money out there or whether you're looking to pass a true economic development bill," the Edmond Republican said, suggesting that the population limit be increased from 7,000 to 20,000.

For Rep. Robert Worthen, R-Oklahoma City, the concern was how the money might otherwise be used.

"Did you know," Worthen asked Erwin, "that state agencies have requested \$560 million more than we're going to have?" After Erwin said that he did not know that, Worthen pressed, "So this is money we're not going to be able to consider for the corrections department, child abuse prevention and other programs?"

"If you think \$17 million is too big of an investment in rural Oklahoma, I don't know what to tell you," Erwin replied.

As would later be reflected in their votes, however, the vast majority of the representatives supported the bill, and many spoke out in favor of it.

Rep. Larry Adair, D-Stilwell, told the House, "There aren't too many times we get to do something that will affect as many people as House Bill 1434 is going to affect. This is an opportunity to assist communities we normally don't get to assist."

That, he said, was important, "because some of our constituents feel like no one is really concerned about them in Oklahoma City."

Rep. Tommy Thomas, D-Atoka, told his fellow House members that many communities find themselves desperately in need of funds. "Then, \$12,000 might as well be \$12 million," he said. "This gives them access to some money, money that's not going to be available any other way."

If pitted against larger communities in a battle for the money, Thomas said in advance of Pettigrew's argument, "The money is going to go to the larger communities and the small communities are going to lose out."

Thomas also reminded those in the Legislature that they had helped the urban areas, such as Tulsa and Oklahoma City, in the past. "Now we're asking for something for the smaller communities," he said.

Referring to the Broadway production of *Lil' Abner*, based on the comic strip of the same name, Rep. Bill Paulk, D-Oklahoma City, urged lawmakers not to apply 'General Bullmoose-thinking' to bill. That kind of thinking, Paulk explained, follows the idea of the slogan in the play, "What's good for General Bullmoose is good for the USA. We tend to think that way about Oklahoma City and Tulsa, but that's not always true."

Also urging the adoption of the conference committee report was Mass, who told members, "To watch a small community die over a period of 20 or 30 years is a bad thing."

The co-author of the bill added that if he could, he would have lowered the size of the communities eligible for the program even more, perhaps in the 3,000 resident range. "I want to help people having the hardest time helping themselves."

House majority leader Rep. Loyd Benson, D-Frederick, said, too, that small communities would suffer if larger communities were allowed to compete for the funds.

"If you want to gut, to cut the legs out from under this bill, to neuter it, vote against the conference committee report," he said. "But if you want to help small towns in rural Oklahoma, I urge you to vote for it."

Responding to Pettigrew's argument to increase the ceiling for those communities eligible for the funding, Erwin said in his closing that one needed only to visit the larger rural communities "to see that they are doing well, because they are able to get other money to address their needs."

"What we want to do now," he concluded, "is to help the smaller communities."

And the vast majority of representatives agreed, adopting the conference committee report by an 87-11 vote. Passage of the bill followed by a 91-6 vote, with mostly Oklahoma City Republicans voting against the measure.

There was no debate among House members of the funding bill, HB2830, which received easy passage.

The concerns about HB1434 were some-

what different in the Senate, where Sen. Dave Herbert, D-Midwest City, voiced the most objection to the bill.



Sen. Dave Herbert

Referring to the \$4.5 million to be administered through the Water Resources Board, Herbert said the legislature was on the verge of creating a massive bureaucracy.

"This will put the burden on the state to provide funding for things that the counties should raise the money to do themselves," he said. "I think we are creating something that will become a bureaucracy, that, in time, will create a sizable hole in our boat."

But Herbert's position was countered by Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, who said, "This is local government at its best."

Stipe went on to call the program "a mechanism that puts revenue back into small communities."

Herbert said he was going to vote for the bill and "keep an eye on it." He did indeed vote for it, but then cast one of only four Senate votes against the program's funding mechanism, HB2830.

RETIREES' TAX CUT PASSES HOUSE

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Private sector retirees are a step closer to equality with public sector retirees after passage on Thursday of **HB1621** by the House of Representatives.

Authored by Lawton Democrat Ron Kirby, the bill phases in a \$5,500 tax exemption for private sector retirees at the rate of \$1,100 per year over five years. At the end of that period, private sector retirees will be entitled to the same tax exemption afforded public sector retirees.

The proposal was one of several planned tax cuts announced last week by Governor Frank Keating and a bipartisan group of lawmakers from both legislative houses.

Although endorsed by every member voting in Thursday's House session, the bill's trip across the floor was less than easy.

A second conference committee report for the bill was on the verge of adoption when Kirby asked without explanation that the

See *Retirees*, page 4