

MURCER "ANTI-SMOKING" AMENDMENT COULD STILL BECOME LAW

By Marta McCloskey
Staff Writer

■(GIT) In a press conference held by the Oklahoma Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees), Sen. Ed Long, D-Enid, said an amendment to **HB2494**, inspired by former New York Yankees baseball legend Bobby Murcer, would allow municipalities to enforce harsher penalties on merchants who sell tobacco to minors. However, the amendment was excluded from the bill when it was considered by the Legislature, and although the bill has now been transmitted to the governor for approval, Long said he will try to include the amendment in other legislation.

HB2494, co-authored by Long and Rep. Ray Vaughn, modifies sections of the Prevention of Youth Access to Tobacco Act. In current form, the bill imposes fines of \$25 to \$50 on merchants who sell tobacco products to minors. The bill also makes it against the law for minors to possess tobacco products. If minors violate this law, they would be subject to fines of \$25 to \$50, and could ultimately lose their drivers' licenses.

Although the Jaycees and Long said HB2494 is good legislation, they believe that municipalities should be given more options for enforcing anti-smoking legislation in their communities. The Jaycees, in accordance with their anti-youth smoking program, are asking merchants statewide to sign a pledge restricting the access of tobacco products to minors.

"Twelve hundred communities are already involved nationwide, with the support of five governors, including Keating," said Jaycees President Teresa Mullican.

Mullican commented on the Murcer amendment, explaining that it would allow cities to prohibit placement of tobacco vending machines and self-service displays in areas accessible to minors. "The amendment would also establish a licensing requirement subjecting tobacco retailers to a seven-day license suspension for reoccurring violations," she said.

Barbara Nickles, Jaycees project manager for the "Against Youth Smoking" program, said that 21 Jaycee chapters are participating in the "Responsible Merchant Pledge" campaign. "If merchants lock up liquor, then they should lock up tobacco, it is a drug too," she said.

Nickles said that over 300 stores in Oklahoma, such as Git-N-Go and Seven-Eleven, have already signed the pledge. She explained that the Jaycees did accept an "unrestricted" grant from the R.J. Reynolds tobacco company to help fund their anti-smoking programs.

Dean Henderson, a former smoker and current policy chair for the Tobacco Free Oklahoma Coalition, said that tobacco lobbyists were part of the problem. "We need to take laws away from tobacco lobbyists ... it is time for lawmakers to tell tobacco lobbyists to take a hike," Henderson also said

he would like to ask members of Presbyterian Hospital, the Girl Scouts of America Association, and others, why they had a chief tobacco lobbyist, Ken Nance, lobbying for them?

Henderson said, in addition to lobbyists, a certain segment of the Oklahoma Grocers' Association was not taking anti-minor smoking issues seriously enough. "Out of the \$400 daily tobacco product sales by store owners, HB2494 would only fine them \$25. That fine is too easy."

In response, Nance said he was "extremely" supportive of HB2494. "That law will go a long way in keeping tobacco out of the hands of youth," he said. In fact, Nance explained that when he was in the Legislature, he was the first to endorse legislation that prohibited merchants from selling smokeless tobacco to youth.

Nance further explained that Henderson did not understand the difference between adults, who choose to smoke, and prohibiting minors from smoking. "He would like to ban tobacco all together," he said.

Nance also said he was "greatly offended and angry" at Henderson's comments directed towards organizations such as the Girl Scouts of America. "I volunteer for that organization and do a lot youth work, and will continue to do so," he replied.

GCCA SUBCOMMITTEE HEARS PAY PLEA AGAIN

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) State employee pay was again the main topic of discussion when the General Conference Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee on judicial, public safety and law enforcement service met on Monday.

Lawmakers heard presentations from the Court of Criminal Appeals, Supreme Court and District Courts, approving by unanimous consent provisions necessary to fund the state employee pay raise approved earlier in the session by the legislature and signed by the governor.

Making the presentation on behalf of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Alma Wilson also addressed a requested 10 percent across the board pay raise for state judges and their staffs.

Wilson put the cost of the request, which would affect more than 220 judges, including district judges, as well as the Supreme Court justices and judges on the Court of Criminal Appeals, at more than \$6 million. But that cost, she noted, was offset by money being brought in by filing fees and new fine collection efforts.

Wilson was asked by Rep. Bill Settle, D-Muskogee, why court workers should be treated differently from other state employees.

Wilson noted that many in the state's judicial system are paid significantly less than those holding similar positions in other states. She also said salaries were a determining factor in the quality of people filling the various positions, many of which are elected.

"I know it's difficult to ask the taxpayers to fund more for one branch of government than another," Wilson added.

Lawmakers took no action on the chief justice's request. Like other pay raises requested of the subcommittee, the request is expected to be taken up at a later time.



"Until I started reading Capitol Network News, I never knew what happened to the bills I wrote."