



# Capitol Network News

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## OFFICIALS REACT TO TANNEHILL VERDICT

By Shawn Ashley  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) In an unusual move, two top state officials commented on the acquittal Thursday of a defendant in a criminal trial.

After nearly 10 hours of deliberations, an eight-woman, four-man jury in McAlester acquitted 33-year-old Larry Tannehill of first-degree murder in the March 5, 1995, child abuse death of two-year-old Ryan Luke, resulting in harsh comments from Oklahoma's governor and attorney general.

"Like most Oklahomans," Governor Frank Keating said, "I am shocked at the verdict delivered today. This murder should never have happened and this verdict merely compounds an already terrible tragedy.

"Child abuse crimes such as this should never be permitted to recur in today's society," the governor added. "Society must have a no tolerance attitude toward any crime which victimizes and murders innocent children. Individuals who commit these heinous crimes must be swiftly identified, prosecuted and executed, however, that did not happen in this case and that is wrong.

"If the defendant didn't murder Ryan Luke, then who did?" Keating also asked. "Unfortunately today's verdict will do nothing

more than to continue to erode the public's confidence in the judicial system and for that I am angered."

Attorney General Drew Edmondson, who appointed Muskogee County assistant district attorney Janet Bickel to prosecute the case, said, "I am obviously disappointed by the jury's verdict in the Ryan Luke murder case. I commend Janet Bickel for conducting a vigorous prosecution. The jury apparently found that there was

reasonable doubt as to the guilt of Larry Tannehill. I disagree with the result, but acknowledge that our system provided him a fair trial."

The toddler's death drew statewide at-

tention and is considered the catalyst for **HB2053**, a child abuse prevention measure authored by Norman Democrat Laura Boyd.

Bickel would have sought the death penalty for Tannehill had he been convicted. It was Tannehill, Bickel claimed, that struck the blow that ultimately proved to be fatal to the two-year-old toddler. Bickel based much of her case on circumstantial evidence, such as the time Tannehill had spent in the company of only the two-year-old Luke and his own then-five-year-old biological son, as well as testimony from Tannehill's son that his father had "hurt" the toddler.

Tannehill's attorneys accused Ryan Luke's mother, Wendy Luke, of being responsible for the child's death. Tannehill also testified, telling jurors he did not kill the child and that he loved the toddler like he was his own son. Tannehill also raised the question

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*"I am shocked at the verdict delivered today. This murder should never have happened and this verdict merely compounds an already terrible tragedy."*

Governor Keating

## LUKE BILL BACKED UP, DELAYED AGAIN

### Author Comments on Tannehill Acquittal

By Shawn Ashley  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) It will now be Tuesday before the House considers the so-called Ryan Luke child abuse prevention bill, its House author said on Thursday.

Rep. Laura Boyd, D-Norman, said the

additional one day delay was necessary so that a provision could be added to the bill to address some recently raised concerns about its costs.

Boyd said a new conference committee report, which will be released Monday, will make the

bill's continuing monitoring provision dependent on the availability of funding.

A House fiscal analysis indicated **HB2053** will cost approximately \$370,000 per year to implement, while a Department of Human services estimate puts the cost of implementation at \$1.4 million. The DHS estimate included the addition of 20 social workers and four supervisors to the DHS staff.

Boyd has called the DHS analysis inaccurate, noting, "We realize that DHS needs more caseworkers, and we're working on that. But their last estimate — that another

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*"I feel the system failed this baby. It failed us and it failed that family."*

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