

## GCCA SUBCOMMITTEE CHANGES APPROACH

By Shawn Ashley  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) The General Conference Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee on the judiciary, public safety and law enforcement services on Wednesday changed its approach to dealing with agency requests under its jurisdiction.

Subcommittee vice chair Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore, told the subcommittee's members and the agency directors in attendance that the panel would hear presentations from each agency, but would deal only with the appropriation matters related to the statewide employee pay raise and related benefits. That meant, Steidley explained, that the subcommittee would consider other aspects of the agencies' requests at a later time.

The move brought no objections from the subcommittee's members.

It was the second meeting of the subcommittee, and the attention was on next year's additional revenue, rather than general appropriations.

Although a Democratic allocation accord provided the some \$52 million to the subcommittee for allocation, Rep. Danny Hilliard, D-Sulphur, noted in Monday's meeting that only \$22.6 million will be available for allocation after funding for the state employee pay raise and resulting benefit increases was taken into account.

Receiving the largest allocation in Wednesday's action was the Attorney General's office. In addition to funding totaling \$189,605 for the employee pay raise and benefits increase, the subcommittee voted to annualize the results of a supplemental appropriation made earlier this year. That amounted to \$303,681, bringing the office's total approved allocation to \$493,286.

The earlier supplemental appropriation totaled \$101,227 and provided funds for the addition of six full-time equivalents for the remaining four months of the current fiscal year. Four of the FTEs were attorneys assigned to different divisions within the of-

fice. The remaining two FTEs included a victim witness coordinator and a computer technician.

Attorney General Drew Edmondson told the subcommittee that those employees would have to be let go unless the supplemental appropriation was added to next year's budget.

Those agencies for which funding related to the employee pay raise was approved included the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, \$116,604; the Workers' Compensation Court, \$131,284; and the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigations, \$291,538.



Rep. Dwayne Steidley

## SENATOR EXPANDS UNEMPLOYMENT TAX CUT Reduction Would Save Business \$30 Million

From Senate Media

■(GIT) Saying Oklahoma's continued economic growth has cleared the way for an even larger unemployment tax cut, State Senator Lewis Long is expanding legislation that would reduce the unemployment taxes existing Oklahoma businesses pay.

"The surplus in the state unemployment insurance fund just keeps getting bigger and bigger because we keep putting more and more people back to work," said Senator Long. "I'm revising my bill to reflect the continued growth of our economy. I think we can give our existing businesses an even larger tax cut without damaging the integrity of the fund."

In its original form, **HB1672** would have cut the unemployment tax on existing businesses by approximately \$5 million. The latest version of Senator Long's legislation would increase the tax cut to approximately \$30 million. That amounts to about a 25 percent reduction in the amount of unemployment taxes that each business pays.

"I'm trying to put some money back into the hands of Oklahoma business people so they can create more jobs," said Senator Long. "There's no reason to ask them to pour more and more money into an unemployment fund that is overflowing, thanks to our record job growth."

If Senator Long is successful, this will mark the second year in a row that he has led the fight to cut unemployment taxes. Last year, legislation authored by the Glenpool legislator reduced unemployment taxes on new businesses by approximately \$20 million annually.

"Anyone who claims that we haven't cut taxes on Oklahoma businesses is ignoring the facts. When HB1672 is implemented, we will have reduced the unemployment taxes on business by a total of \$50 million over a two year period. That's a pretty substantial tax cut in my book, and I think business people will agree," said Senator Long.

"The Legislature has taken a proactive approach to create the best possible business climate in Oklahoma, and our economy has responded to our efforts. Quality Jobs, workers compensation reform and tax incentives have all played a role in our economic development strategy. The latest tax cut will give our economy an additional boost."



"Tell me, do you see any way we can fund all these budget requests."