

ANOTHER JUVENILE JUSTICE MEASURE IS SIGNED INTO LAW

From House Media

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Legislation by a Tillman County lawmaker that would deprive school drop-outs of the privilege to drive was signed into law recently.

HB2692 by House Majority Leader Loyd Benson clarifies and strengthens HB2640, a 1994 juvenile justice reform package by the Frederick Democrat that established juvenile detention centers across the state, including Manitou.

"We only aggravate the problem when we suspend a student from school and kick him out on the street."

A key feature of HB2692 is that, effective July 1, it will deprive school drop-outs of the privilege to drive. Approximately 8,000 students quit public schools in Oklahoma each year, Benson said.

The new law directs the State Department of Public Safety to deny a new driver's license application or revoke an existing driver's license — for a minimum of two months — whenever anyone younger than 18 cannot prove that he or she is enrolled in a public or private secondary school or vocational-technical school, is home schooled, has graduated from school or is enrolled in a general equivalency degree program.

Submitting false information about a student's school attendance will be a misdemeanor crime.

In a related vein, HB2692 will require schools to offer alternative education programs for disobedient and non-violent delinquent students.

The bill decrees that any student who is suspended from school must be placed in "a supervised, structured environment in either a home based school work assignment setting or another appropriate setting" in accordance with a plan prescribed by the school administration that educates and monitors the student.

"We only aggravate the problem when we suspend a student from school and kick him out on the street," Benson asserted. "We need to keep these kids in a more structured environment."

HB2692 directs the State Board of Education to phase in alternative education programs in schools throughout the state over the next five years.

Implementing these programs ultimately will cost an estimated \$30 million, Benson said. The Legislature appropriated \$6.4 million to introduce the project in 100 school districts during the next school year, he added.

Educators who have implemented alternative education programs "are sold on the benefits that results for their schools," Benson said.

HB2692 also allows the Juvenile Justice Department to contract with private service providers to create jobs that will enable ju-

venile lawbreakers to make restitution to their victims. At least 75 percent of a juvenile lawbreaker's net earnings from a job will be earmarked for restitution, the bill decrees.

The bill stipulates that a supervised work program must not interfere with the child's schooling.

Last year the Office of Juvenile Affairs processed 10,523 juveniles involved in events serious enough to warrant state intervention. Almost 27,000 other youths who were deemed at risk and/or were involved in relatively minor incidents were diverted into youth service programs.

OKLAHOMA GAS PRODUCTION ALLOWABLE CONTINUES AT 50%

From Okla. Corporation Commission

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) The Oklahoma Corporation Commission Thursday continued the production allowable for Oklahoma unallocated gas wells at the greater of 50 percent of wellhead absolute open flow potential or 1 million cubic feet per day for the third quarter of 1996.

The production allowable is the same as for the second quarter of 1996.

Unallocated wells are not regulated by production allocations for specific fields. About 95 percent of Oklahoma gas wells are unallocated.

The commission staff recommended continuation of the present production allowable to help replenish a below-average supply of gas in storage, caused in part by extremely cold weather last winter in eastern and upper midwestern states.

Claude McNully, Technical Department manager, cited an American Gas Association estimate of gas in storage at the end of May of less than 1 trillion cubic feet, about 54 percent of the federal Department of Energy's six-year average of 1.839 trillion cubic feet of gas in storage at the end of May.

"From all indications, (gas) consumption
See Gas Production, page 6

PETTIGREW MOVES TO STOP UNNOTICED TAX SALES

From House Media

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Jim and Dee Stottlemire thought it was a bad joke the evening a stranger approached them saying he had purchased their home at a sheriff's sale. During the course of the following days, their bad joke turned into painful reality.

According to recent information uncovered by Rep. Wayne Pettigrew, the Stottlemires' predicament is not an isolated incident.

"In visiting with the county treasurers of Oklahoma and Canadian counties, I discovered that as many as 20 or 30 properties are sold each year at sheriff's sales because of delinquent tax bills," the Edmond Republican said. "Yet of these sales, there is always the chance an owner may not be aware that action is being taken by the county to recover back taxes."

In response to the situation, Pettigrew, a first-term legislator, amended **Senate Bill 682** to require physical notification of the imminent sale of homestead property to be posted on the front door of the home in question at least 30 days before the sale.

Governor Keating signed the bill into law May 14.

"At the very least it would be decent to let people know they may be losing their home," Pettigrew said.

Stottlemire says neither she, her husband nor the mortgage company which financed the house was notified of the sale until it was too late.

"Our home was literally sold from underneath us," she said. "We had paid our taxes for 1992, 1993 and 1994; the back taxes were just an oversight."

Written notice of the Stottlemire sale was published in the El Reno newspaper, a town 15 miles away, which they neither take nor read, she said. Personal correspondence of the impending action was mailed to a post office box which they closed in 1992.

"I thought surely it must have been some sort of mistake," she said. The county treasurer's office "even had the unopened letters on file."

Within days, the Stottlemires found themselves out of the home she had occupied for 19 years — all for an unpaid tax bill amounting to about \$189. Adding insult to injury, their home, valued at \$45,000, was sold as sheriff's sale for \$501.

"We couldn't stay in the home," she said.
See Tax Sales, page 6