

# STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED

"The provision puts pretty severe remedies on two college roommates who decide to duke it out," Sen. Brooks Douglass, R-Oklahoma City, told *Capitol Network News*. He said the language could be interpreted to include college dormitory and nursing home situations as well.

Douglass, a member of the bill's conference committee, said current law offers "ample provisions" for addressing domestic violence.

Though his signature appears on the bill's conference committee report, he ultimately voted against the bill.

The provision creates a more severe penalty than if the defendant was a stranger, said Sen. Howard Hendrick, R-Bethany.

Calling the provision "sloppy legislation," and "for political purposes," Sen. Jerry Pierce, R-Tulsa, said it would "denigrate the quality of the law."

A clearly angry Sen. Penny Williams, D-Tulsa, author of the bill's domestic violence provision, blasted opposing parties, saying her amendment "puts things in balance."

"We seem to be treating the bears as victims rather than treating people as victims," she said, referring to the amendment's provision that increased the fine for domestic violence, which was originally lower than the fine for bear wrestling.

A one-time victim herself, Williams said victims of domestic violence, at one time or another, must eventually go home. She said the bill would "give law enforcement the teeth it needs."

"I think it's shameful for people to get up and debate this," said Long in his closing remarks. "What we are trying to do is aim this at some two-bit bully who beats up on his wife."

Members voted 32 to 13 to adopt the conference committee report. The bill and its emergency clause passed with a vote of 35 to 9. Voting nay were Sens. Campbell, Cole, Douglass, Fair, Ford Gustafson, Hendrick, Herbert, Martin, Pierce, Rubottom, Snyder and Wright. Sens. Capps, Long (Ed) and Shedrick were excused from voting. Long lodged a motion to reconsider, allowing him to re-address the measure within three legislative days.

—BRANDON BEARD  
05/01/96

*"The absent are always wrong."  
English proverb*

## OFFICIALS REACT TO TANNEHILL VERDICT

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

—SHAWN ASHLEY  
05/02/96

## REVERSE CERTIFICATION CLAUSE MAY COME OUT

■(GIT) The so-called "Reverse Certification" bill by Sen. Robert M. Kerr, D-Altus, may change, becoming less restrictive, in the next week. The bill, SB1184, contains a pro-

vision that would allow 13 to 15 year-olds to be tried as adults in criminal cases, unless the court opts to try them as juveniles. Currently, juvenile offenders must be certified as adults before being tried as such. Kerr said the bill will be sent to conference some time next week, where he will consider removing the provision.

The Oklahoma Juvenile Affairs Board is opposed to the reverse certification provision. At a recent meeting, the board passed a resolution opposing any legislation involving the reverse certification of 13 to 15 year olds, except in cases of first degree murder, which is current law.

"We have a great deal of concern about a bunch of 13 year-olds being in the Department of Corrections," said Dawn Byram, spokesperson for the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA). "What is DOC going to do with a bunch of 13 and 14 year-olds?"

Voicing similar thoughts, DOC spokesman Jerry Massie, said mixing juveniles with adult offenders is cause for concern.

Massie said only about 100 of the nearly 7000 prisoners received by DOC last year were under 18 years old.

He suggests, like other states, placing juvenile offenders who reach the age of 18 into the regular prison system. Currently, offenders in OJA custody are released at 18, though petitions may be made to hold the youth until age 19 if they are considered a threat or untreatable.

The bill's House author, Rep. Jari Askins, D-Duncan, said the reversed certification should be examined.

The bill also creates the Alternative School Program, a residential facility aimed at 12 to 17 year-olds who are at risk of "penetrating deeper into the juvenile justice system."

OJA officials are uncertain how much the new facility will cost. Final figures will depend on exactly what type of facility it will be. A 24-hour, secured facility, Byram said, will cost considerably more.

—BRANDON BEARD  
05/02/96

*"Trouble is a part of your life, and if you don't share it, you don't give the person who loves you a chance to love you enough."*

Dinah Shore