

INFANT SCREENING BILL BACK IN COMMITTEE

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) A bill creating the Early Identification and Support for Infants Act was returned to conference committee for the third time by the House on Tuesday with instructions to include a provision banning so-called partial birth abortions.

HB2393, by Rep. Mark Seikel, D-Harrah, would allow, "with the consent of the parent or legal guardian of the infant, a voluntary screening procedure for the early identification of infants who may require or benefit from health or other community infant support services shall be conducted for each infant."

Seikel took a chance on the bill's future when during debate over acceptance of the third conference committee report he asked what it would take to adopt the instructions proposed by Rep. Joan Greenwood, R-Moore. Greenwood asked that a provision be added to the bill protecting parents who refused the services recommended as a result of the proposed screenings.

The Moore Republican said she had documentation from other states with similar laws that showed parents being penalized, even losing custody of their children, when they had refused the services recommended

by screenings similar to the one proposed by Seikel.

Lying on the desk at the time, however, were instructions from Rep. Bill Graves, R-Oklahoma City. Those instructions had been submitted ahead of Greenwood's, and as a result, were due to be heard first. The instructions call for the addition of a provi-

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certain requirements. The measure also authorizes the state commissioner of health to authorize a workplace medical plan other than that recommended by the administrator of the Physician Advisory Committee if the administrator fails to choose a plan.

The measure provides that workers' compensation carriers may use present value discounting at a rate of four percent for claims involving disability and death.

A provision of the bill provides that any person not required to carry workers' compensation insurance may apply to the commissioner of labor for a Certificate of Non-Coverage Under the Workers' Compensation Act. The certificate, for a fee of \$10.00, would excuse the bearer from the requirement to carry the coverage.

A "reasonable inquiry" will determine if the application is legitimate. The labor commissioner along with the workers' compensation fraud unit of the office of the attorney general are responsible for conducting the investigation.

The measure also exempts the State Insurance Fund from any future hiring freezes implemented by the governor.

"The State Fund has saved our collective back sides more than once," said Sen. Ben Robinson, D-Muskogee. He said he was concerned that the bill will impose requirements on the fund that private insurance companies would not have to follow.

The bill's conference committee report was adopted with a vote of 40 to 7. The measure itself passed as an emergency measure with a vote of 46 to 0.

Shedrick lodged a motion to reconsider, normally giving her three legislative days to re-address the issue. Under a Tuesday suspension of Senate rules, however, all motions to reconsider must be addressed that same day. The measure was not brought up again. It now goes to the House for its consideration.

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crease, \$31,117; the OPERS increase, \$2,896; and the addition of one full time equivalent, \$23,000. Indian Affairs Commission appropriations included in the bill were \$6,603 for the employee pay plan and \$441 for the OPERS increase, with \$26,000 allocated for the agency to maintain its operations.

The governor's recommendations for the 1997 fiscal year did not include a funding increase for the Human Rights Commission. A \$15,000 increase in funding for the Indian Affairs Commission was recommended by the governor for the employment of a clerk typist and to cover summit costs.

Some \$353,306 was included in the HB1812 appropriation to the Election Board. The allocations included \$143,617 for the employee pay increase; \$3,102 for the OPERS increase; \$1,587 for the OTRS employer increase; \$214,130, precinct official compensation; \$145,723, full-time county offices; \$70,000, motor license registrations; and \$75,147 for county benefits reimbursements. Also included in the provisions of the bill was \$300,000 in savings from OEMS refinancing.

Funding vetoed for the Ethics Commission included \$9,949 for the employee pay increase; \$2,197, OPERS increase; \$500, diskettes for electronic filing; \$2,225, expanded fax capabilities; \$4,150, computer system upgrades; \$5,000, replacement of revolving funds; \$3,552, general counsel salary; and \$1,300 One-Net hardwire interface.

The governor recommended a \$1,000 increase in appropriations to the election board for teachers' retirement contributions and an \$11,000 increase in funding for the Ethics Commission to pay the cost of the commissions operations.

Earlier in the session, the governor signed legislation increasing state employees' pay by \$1,200 annually. Lawmakers chose to fund that pay increase with this year's so-called new money or additional revenue.

Base funding for all six agencies was included in a bill approved by both houses of the legislature and signed by the governor earlier in the session. The governor and legislative leaders touted the bill as a way to avoid a state government shutdown should budget matters become a stumbling block for lawmakers and the executive branch.

"History is more or less bunk."

Henry Ford

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