



Capitol Network News

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KEATING, FERGUSON SPLIT ON OPEA PROPOSAL

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Two of the state's top Republicans are split on a proposal to put a one-half cent sales tax proposal to provide additional funding for the Department of Corrections up to a public vote.

House Minority Leader Larry Ferguson, R-Cleveland, told *Capitol Network News* he would not oppose putting the proposed tax increase to a vote of the people. Governor Frank Keating, however, said it is "way too premature" to even discuss such a proposal.

The Oklahoma Public Employees Association unveiled the proposal Monday. The plan calls for a statewide one-half cent sales tax increase and for the revenue generated by the increase to be dedicated to the construction of two new prisons and the funding of 600 additional correctional officers.

Gary Jones, OPEA executive director, said he plans to push the idea during meetings with the governor and House and Senate leadership. If he fails to find support for the plan there, Jones said, he will take the plan to the people in the form of an initiative petition. Jones said he would like to see the issue put to a vote next summer.

"My initial reaction is that I would favor sending the proposal to a vote of the people," said Ferguson on Tuesday. "However, I say that only with the understanding the term of the tax increase would have to be limited in time and used only for construction, not for

the addition of any correctional officers."

Ferguson, who along with other Republican lawmakers and state legislative candidates pledged last month to end the prison system's early release program and to look for ways to provide more funding to the system, said personnel costs should come from general fund revenue, rather than from a tax hike.

Keating, on the other hand, said the OPEA and others should delay any planning until a review of the prison system can be completed by a private consultant. That study began last month, and Keating indicated on Monday that it could be completed in as few as 30 days.

"When I have the results of that study," Keating said, "I intend to sit down with the legislative leadership and resolve a course of action."

The governor added that he was "opposed to discussing anything until I know all the

facts," but added that it was his opinion that there was no need to consider raising taxes to address the prison situation. That's because, he said, such an increase would be on the table only if the system faced what he called a "horrific crisis," and such a situation, Keating said, does not currently exist.

While the two GOP leaders openly disagree about whether the proposal should even be considered, Ferguson said he offers his endorsement with some serious reservations.

"I learned a few years ago when we passed and the people approved the gas and diesel tax that you have to handle these things carefully," Ferguson explained.

In that case, the House Minority Leader said, lawmakers and the public were told that the tax increase was necessary to help insure the return of other funds from Washington. After the tax was approved, however, the legislature cut its general fund appropria-

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ROACH: APPROPRIATIONS TO DECIDE FLIGHT FACTS

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) A Tulsa lawmaker said he hopes the legislature's appropriations committees will take into account the number of aircraft the state maintains and the amount of money spent on airline travel when they make spending decisions next year.

"One of my main reasons for doing this," said Rep. Russ Roach, D-Tulsa, "was so that the appropriations committees would be aware for the first time of the number of aircraft and amount of money spent on air travel by the various state agencies."

According to a review of state records requested by Roach, state agencies and schools spent more than \$8.4 million on their fleet of airplanes and on airline travel during the past fiscal year. Nearly \$4 million of that money was spent on the direct purchase of airline tickers by 137 agencies, departments, boards, commissions, colleges and universities, while the remaining funds went to the operation, insurance, storage and

maintenance of 64 state aircraft.

Roach said he hopes the information will influence appropriations decisions next year.

"I think the question that has to be asked is whether we need all 64 aircraft," said Roach. "For example, I wish the governor had asked that question before he fell in love with the idea of having his own airplane. Why couldn't the state sell some of its other aircraft and use the proceeds to fund the purchase of the governor's new plane?"

"It's those types of issues I hope the appropriations committee will have in mind next year."

The seven-passenger 1990 Beechcraft was purchased for the state's chief executive through a \$3 million lease-purchase agreement contained in the Department of Public Safety's budget. Few lawmakers noticed the inclusion of the aircraft in the appropriation until late in the legislative session, well after the bill had been approved and signed by the governor. According to

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