



Capitol Network News

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CANDIDATES, OFFICIALS FOCUS ON EDUCATION

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) In a forum that sometimes sounded like a political debate and at other times resembled a legislative interim study meeting, three candidates for the Fourth District Congressional seat, the state's secretary of education, a university official and a representative of the state's school boards association focused their attention on education issues Monday evening.

Much of the night's discussion was framed by Secretary of Education Floyd Coppedge. Replying to a question concerning school vouchers, Coppedge said the intense debate on the issue illustrates the concerns about the quality of public education.

"Until those concerns are addressed," the state education secretary said, "we are going to continue to have this debate."

Much of that debate Monday was between Republican Congressman J.C. Watts, a proponent of the voucher system, and his challenger, Democrat Ed Crocker, an opponent of the system.

Watts, who said the system was neither a "panacea" nor a "cure-all," said such a

voucher plan, which would provide parents with a specific amount of money that could be used for public or private school, gave parents an opportunity to find the schools which could provide their children the best possible education. Crocker, however, said such a plan would discriminate against poor families who would be unable to make up the difference between the value of the voucher and the cost of their child's education, particularly at private schools.

Libertarian candidate Robert Murphy argued on the one hand for the abolition of government run schools, noting that money to fund them had to be taken from Americans and that students had to be compelled to attend them. On the other hand, Murphy said the implementation of a voucher system would promote parental choice and the development of a free market in education,

two issues he said he supports.

Oklahoma State School Boards Association government relations director Kay Floyd offered the public school system's view of the proposal, saying, "Public education is not afraid of competition."

What public educators fear, she explained, was that a voucher system might limit the opportunities provided to public school students.

"The solution to the problem," she said, "is to fix those schools, and that means starting completely over if that's what it takes."

Much of the evening's discussion focused on candidates Watts and Crocker, with Murphy playing a lesser role. On a handful of funding issues, including Head Start, school lunch and scholarships, Crocker accused his Republican opponent of indis-

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WINDS OF CHANGE BLOW THROUGH DHS, ADVISORS TOLD

By Gerry Cherry
Staff Writer

■(GIT) "The clock started running October 1 for temporary assistance for needy families in Oklahoma,"

George Miller, Director of the Department of Human Services (DHS) told the Advisory Committee on Mental Retar-

dation Services Tuesday. Miller gave a broad outline of the changes in human services since welfare reform became federal law.

"AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) no longer exists in Oklahoma.

"We're at a very demanding period in the history of human services. States are being called on to make decisions we've never made before. There are a lot of changes in Medicaid, changes for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients, we're inundated by problems with child protection services," Miller said, as he outlined the tip of the iceberg that is welfare change in America.

Some of the solutions are being sought, even now, as problems begin to arise. A new

program, Miller said, involves every child worker in the state.

Laptop computers and desktop computers will eliminate clerical workers. We've

eliminated 89 positions in the state office, after 400 were eliminated or transferred. We have to operate more efficiently.

Other changes Miller cited include child support enforcement collection methods to be certified by the federal government, debit cards to be used in place of food stamps and "18,000 AFDC mothers are going to be put to work.

"All these changes extend to people with developmental disabilities," Miller reminded the advocates.

"If you get excited facing difficult challenges, this is the time for you to be happy," Miller added wryly.

"The key to success," he said, "is community relationships. Mandates and requirements are too great for any one agency. It's

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