

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED



below the national average in everything.

Task force chairman Sen. Lewis Long, D-Glenpool, wanted to know what other states are doing to solve some of the same problems. Regional jails are one solution, Sheriff Glanz said, with perhaps a 48-hour holding facility in each county. An additional statewide tax, to be used just for county law enforcement was mentioned. Using statewide computer systems already in place, such as the Department of Human Services or Oklahoma libraries was a solution mentioned to take advantage of video hearings.

No matter what, Sheriff Dayle James of Okmulgee County said, "we need to keep law enforcement local." In rural counties, the sheriff is the bottom line in law enforcement, one sheriff said, "the thin blue line."

—GERRY CHERRY
10/17/96

EDUCATION

CANDIDATES, OFFICIALS FOCUS ON EDUCATION

■(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.

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 indiscriminate budget slashing.

Watts countered that Crocker was distorting the end result of the legislation on which he had voted, saying that many of the examples cited by his opponent had ultimately resulted in increased funding for specific programs.

The back-and-forth accusations between the two led Murphy to exclaim at one point, "Listen to this. This is what is wrong with Washington. They're arguing about what's a cut and what's an increase. They can't even agree on the basic numbers."

—SHAWN ASHLEY
10/15/96

KEATING OUTLINES EDUCATION PLANS TO APOE

■(GIT) Governor Frank Keating pledged on Thursday to pursue an agenda he said he believes will make Oklahoma schools great and will promote further economic development in the state.

Speaking in Norman before more than 100 teachers at the first Association of Professional Oklahoma Educators statewide convention, the governor said the idea that

"if we spend more, we'll get more" has been proven false. Rattling off a lengthy list of statistics, Keating said despite increases in funding for education at both the state and national levels that there has been no improvement in the students leaving public schools.

Keating said the issue of strong academic standards is one which has become blurred in recent years.

Finally, Keating said, there should be accountability in public education. Students, he said, should be accountable for learning, teachers should be held accountable for teaching and administrators should be held accountable for creating an environment in which teachers can teach and students can learn. Parents, too, he said, should share in that accountability.

Those objectives, Keating said, could be accomplished by embracing his plans for education. One such proposal, which he advanced earlier this year, would increase the teaching of basic subjects — math, science, English and social studies — and graduation requirements. Called "4 by 4," the program would require four years of high school education in each of the subjects.

Other components of Keating's education plan included:

- ✓ School choice;
- ✓ Charter schools;
- ✓ Career teacher pay raises; and
- ✓ Increased emphasis on teaching what he called the state's "best and brightest."

Ultimately, the governor said, the way to improve public schools is "to return to what works and discard what doesn't."

—SHAWN ASHLEY
10/17/96

ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES

NATURAL GAS POLICY COMMISSION HOLDS SECOND MEETING

■(GIT) BTUs and molecules; practices and policies; regulation and legislation were all brought before the second meeting of the Joint Commission on Natural Gas Policy Thursday at the State Capitol.

BACKGROUND

The Commission was created to study the policies, laws, agency rules, and economics affecting the natural gas industry and make recommendations on any issue determined

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