

## QUESTIONS SURROUND IMPLEMENTATION OF COFFMAN REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

By Shawn Ashley  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) George Miller hardly hesitates when he's asked about the recommendations made by a special governor's task force appointed to look into the death of an eight-year-old Cleveland County boy.

"We would love to carry out each and every one," said Miller, executive director of the Department of Human Services.

Then, however, he pauses.

"I'm doubtful we'll get all these things," he said, adding that the political environment is such that many want to privatize services, keep government out of peoples' lives and cut taxes.

"There's not many of the task force's recommendations that you can implement without crossing some of those lines."

Governor Frank Keating appointed the special task force earlier this year to study the facts surrounding the death of eight-year-old Shane Coffman. The young boy's mother and her boyfriend face first-degree murder charges in the death. Keating's interest grew, in part, out of reports that the Department of Human Services had dealt with the family previously, going so far as to remove the boy from his mother's custody and then allow him to be returned to her.

"The task force started its work partly because of rumors of missing records, secret information and the idea that the case was mishandled," Miller said. "In my opinion, they found none of that, and for that reason, I feel it reflects well on the Department of Human Services."

One of the things the task force did find was what its members called "The Wall," a series of multiple reports to the department, law enforcement officers and others concerning the family and the well being of Shane and his siblings. That information, the task force concluded, was never completely researched by those investigating complaints involving the family, leaving each ensuing official to get only one part of the picture

and for the panel to call for improvements in the sharing of information.

Some of that, Miller notes, is already being done, because of a 1995 state mandate for the establishment and maintenance of a central registry of child abuse, sexual abuse and neglect cases.

"We have the first certified system in the United States," Miller said, "that is being used as a model for other states across the country."

The system, Miller added, has only been on-line for a short time. "It's not totally perfect, and we're still making some enhancements to it," he said.

Asked whether the system might have helped Coffman by providing social workers, law enforcement officers and prosecutors access to his family's apparently long case history, Miller said, "Possibly, because it makes a lot of that kind of information available to prosecutors, the courts and social workers throughout the process."

There is little doubt, Miller said, that those responsible for investigating child abuse and neglect cases "need to know as much as possible about the family and any previous contact they have had with the department or law enforcement agencies."

Another key component of the task force's recommendations are the so-called multidisciplinary teams, a group of local professionals designed to coordinate child abuse investigations and to minimize the number of interviews necessary with a child victim.

The same 1995 bill that established the abuse registry system, HB1993, also requires that district attorneys, working in coordination with the Child Abuse Training and Coordinating Council, "in counties having 50 or more incidents of confirmed child sexual abuse or physical abuse" convene such teams by July 1, 1997.

Miller, whose child welfare workers would be a part of such teams, agrees the idea is great, but cautions it may not be too realistic.

"First of all," Miller explained, "you don't have all the mandated professions available in all the counties. That's going to be a problem. Secondly, this is a very time consuming process, and you're asking people who may already be overburdened to take on a rather large responsibility. That's going to discourage some people from actively participating."

Additionally, Miller said, there is the possibility of turf wars.

"Everyone is going to want to have their piece," said Miller, "and that can lead to disputes over who's in charge and who is supposed to do what."

That issue, too, was addressed in the task force's recommendations, albeit in an indirect manner, when the panel suggested that a case manager or lead investigator supervise child abuse investigations. It's a recommendation which Governor Keating particularly liked, comparing it to the workers of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with which he previously worked, and saying he would be willing to back legislation to give local law enforcement officers that role.

Miller, too, said the Department of Human Services would see that any legislation needed to deal with the task force's recommendations would be introduced. Without that, he said, "All you'd have is a bunch of paper with a lot of ink on it. It wouldn't save any children."

## CONGRESSIONAL BATTLES SET TO END

By Shawn Ashley  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) It has all the makings of a classic political fight:

Oklahoma Republicans were one seat away from gaining complete control of the state's congressional delegation and state Democrats were vowing not to let that happen.

It didn't quite turn out that way.

Much like the presidential election failed to spark the interest some had hoped, Oklahoma's race for Congress has been less than spellbinding.

That, however, is not the case of Oklahoma Republican Party executive director Quineta Wylie and Oklahoma Democratic Party executive director Pat Hall. The pair disagrees significantly over the outcome of this year's congressional races in Oklahoma. Wylie is quick to say that she expects her party will win control of every seat allocated the state. Currently, Republicans hold all but one office, the Third District US House seat, and are heavily favored in almost all the races.

Hall, however, expects the Democrats will make a run for several of those seats, most notably in the second, third and fourth districts, as well as in the race for US Senate.

In the First District, incumbent Republi-

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**Wildlife Commission, cont. from page 2**  
directors can look at the proposed facility.

After executive session, directors voted to authorize an exchange of a 95 acre tract of land in the Deep Fork WMA with an adjacent landowner, on an acre-for-acre basis. The board also voted to try to purchase a 160 acre in-holding in the Packsaddle WMA at the school land auction.