

WATKINS WINS WAYS & MEANS SEAT

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Oklahoma's Third District pseudo-freshman Congressman Wes Watkins got what he bargained for Friday after winning election to the House of Representatives in this month's general election — a seat on the prestigious Ways and Means Committee.

Watkins, who represented the district for 14 years as a Democrat, was one of two Republican freshmen, named to fill three open slots on the panel, which is heavily involved in tax writing.

During his campaign, Watkins admitted that a promise of a slot on the committee from House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Georgia, played a role in his move from independent — the banner under which he sought the state's governorship in 1994 — to Republican. His conversion to independent followed 14 years as a Democratic representative for the district and a failed 1990 bid for party's gubernatorial nomination.

"I can't see myself outside that room, trying to get my voice heard for the Third District," Watkins said, referring to the promise of the position with the committee when he officially announced his bid for the congressional seat July 1.

State Sen. Darryl Roberts, D-Ardmore, attempted to make that promise a campaign issue in the contest for the seat, branding Watkins an "opportunist."

In his July 1 announcement, Watkins said, "If I were a political opportunist, I would be running as a Democrat. But the national Democratic Party is controlled by extreme liberals and does not represent Oklahoma's traditional conservative and moral values."



VA EXPANDS OUTREACH TO SEXUAL TRAUMA VICTIMS

From U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs

■(WASHINGTON) The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is expanding efforts to reach out to women veterans who experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military.

VA recently publicized its national toll-free number, reminding women veterans who need information on sexual trauma counseling and treatment, and filing claims for disability compensation to call VA's toll-free number — 1-800-827-1000.

The department activated the number after normal business hours in connection with the Nov. 15 airing of ABC's 20/20 which featured two segments on rape in the military. More than 2,000 calls were received. Although not all were related to sexual trauma, VA staff were able to assist a number of women veterans who needed counseling and referrals to the nearest VA facility or community resource.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown said, "It is important that women veterans know that there is help available to them. The

experience of sexual trauma can have a tremendous impact on a person's physical and emotional health. VA has a cadre of professionals who can help women cope with sexual trauma so they can regain their confidence, self-esteem and quality of life."

Women veterans who call the toll-free number seeking assistance are routed to the regional office women veteran coordinators who can provide information and assist in referrals to VA medical centers or Readjustment Counseling Service Veterans Outreach Centers (Vet Centers). Male veterans are referred to the nearest VA facility with a post-traumatic stress disorder program or to the nearest Vet Center.

Legislation signed in 1992 authorized VA to provide priority counseling and treatment to eligible women veterans to overcome trauma resulting from sexual assault, battery or harassment while on active military duty. More recent legislation extended that authority and made it gender-neutral so that VA can provide these services to male and female veterans.

LAND SECRETARY WITHDRAWS PURCHASE, SEEKS AG'S OPINION

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) The top administrator of the state's School Land Commission said Monday that he plans to ask the commission to drop his purchase of a parcel of commission-owned land and to seek an attorney general's opinion on the legality of such a purpose.

Speaking to reporters only minutes before a scheduled meeting of the commission, secretary Rob Johnson told reporters of his plans to withdraw from the purchase of a 160-acre parcel of land in Pawnee County and to seek a ruling from the attorney general.

According to published reports, Johnson, who was appointed to the post in 1995 by Governor Frank Keating and previously served in the state House of Representatives, bought the land through a third party, a Tulsa Realtor, for \$99,000. The land includes a 22-acre lake and is located approximately five miles west of Pawnee.

The commission decided last year to sell more than one-half of the land it holds in trust for the state school system over a 12 to 15-year period, to keep from driving prices down.

Money from the sale of the land will be invested, where commission members said

they believed they would receive a higher rate of return over the revenue generated by leasing the land.

Until last December, the commission's own rules prevented its employees or members from buying land it offered for sale. Those rules were changed during a meeting 11 months ago.

Although the matter was discussed during Monday's commission meeting, the commissioners did not address Johnson's request to drop his plan to purchase the land, because the issue was not a part of the commission's posted agenda.

"We do not base a choice on the goodness of democracy, which may be doubtful, but solely on the evilness of a dictatorship, which is certain. Not only because the dictator is bound to make bad use of his power, but because a dictator, even if he were benevolent, would rob all others of their responsibility, and thus of their human rights and duties."

Sir Karl Popper

"Popper on Democracy"

The Economist, April 23, 1988