

# STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED

significant impact in reducing unnecessary legal expenses to both employers and employees; the program has experienced a doubling of participation in educational seminars in 1996 and has saved Oklahoma employers hundreds of thousands of dollars in premium costs.

(Copies of the Senate study may be obtained by contacting LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION NETWORK by e-mail or phone, 528-2546)

—SHAWN ASHLEY  
11/26/96

## EDUCATION

### REP. LAURA BOYD MEETS WITH HOME SCHOOL ADVOCATES, DISCUSS POSSIBLE REGULATIONS

■(GIT) Home school advocates told an Oklahoma lawmaker Monday that a system is already in place to verify that parents who claim to be home schooling their children are living up to that obligation and that no additional regulations are needed.

"I don't think (any additional regulation) is necessary," Joe Esposito, a home schooling parent from Owasso, told Rep. Laura Boyd, D-Norman, during a meeting at the state capitol Monday. Citing Tulsa County as an example, Esposito said district attorneys, under the state's truancy laws, have the ability to verify that a student is being home schooled.

"The system is in place. It does work. It just needs to be implemented properly," said Esposito.

Boyd called the meeting after some state officials, including Governor Frank Keating, suggested that some regulations may be needed to verify that parents who claim to be home schooling their children are living up to the obligation and to prevent abusive parents from using home schooling as a shield from child abuse investigations.

The issue arose in the report of a task force appointed by the governor to review the case of Shane Coffman, an eight-year-old Cleveland County boy who authorities claim was beaten to death by his mother and her boyfriend.

According to members of the task force, the Department of Human Services and law enforcement officials backed away from their investigations into the case after being told the boy was being home schooled. That led

the governor's task force to conclude, "In this case, home schooling was used to effectively hide the death of one child and the abuse of several others from those who were attempting to investigate their abuse. The public policy which allows for home schooling in the absence of any oversight needs to be critically examined."

Nearly 20 home school advocates, primarily home schooling parents, participated in Monday's meeting; some brought their children. Like Esposito, the majority expressed concern over the idea of imposing some sort of regulation on home schooling.

Scott Somerville, an attorney representing home schooling parents for the Virginia-based Home School Defense Association, agreed with Esposito, adding that the efforts of Tulsa County prosecutors to verify parents' home schooling claims needed to be replicated across the state.

"Do you know what they do in Oklahoma County?" Somerville asked. "Nothing. But the fact is it's against the law for a child not to receive an education, either in the public schools, private school or at home."

Somerville called the interaction between home schooling parents and social workers "a recipe for disaster," pointing largely to the distrust that exists on both sides of the relationship. Instead of dealing with social workers, Somerville said home schooling parents would be better served by the adversarial relationship with law enforcement officers or prosecutors, framed within the context of one's constitutional rights.

Somerville cited the efforts of Virginia to codify such a relationship. In that case, information obtained by a social worker cannot be used against an individual in a court proceeding. That, he said, puts the burden on social workers and law enforcement officers to ensure that individuals' constitu-

tional rights are properly protected and that a search warrant be obtained in order to gather evidence for use in a criminal proceeding.

Somerville told *Capitol Network News* following the meeting, "There's not a single state in the country where the laws concerning home schooling could have deterred the death of Shane Coffman."

Rev. Johnny Hinton, a home schooling parent from Wewoka, expressed a similar sentiment, noting that states which regulate home schooling, such as Wisconsin, do so on the basis of the education being provided, rather than on the basis of child welfare or protection.

—SHAWN ASHLEY  
11/25/96

## GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

### SENATE PANEL DISCUSSES LANGUAGE LEGISLATION

■(GIT) Members of a Senate interim study committee were urged Monday to consider adopting legislation that would make English the state government's official language.

"Fluency in the English language will do more to empower people coming to America — and Oklahoma — than any government service that may be provided to them in their first language," Mauro E. Mujica, chairman of the board and chief executive officer for U.S. English, told the interim study committee on English as an official language (96S-105). The organization describes itself as "the largest national, non-partisan, non-profit citizens' action group dedicated to preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States."

"Unfortunately," Mujica added, "the effect of many of the government's well-intentioned multilingual programs is to handicap those very people these programs are designed to help. The programs destroy the incentive to learn English by sending the message to newcomers that you don't have to learn English to succeed. The fact of the matter is that you do need to know and to master English to succeed in America."

Mujica called English "the catalyst that has brought us together as Americans." Legislation adopting the language as the state's official language, he added, "encourages newcomers to learn English, while at the

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*"While taking his leave of the king to go off and command the army, Marshall Villars said so that all the court could hear: 'Sire, I am going to fight Your Majesty's enemies, and I leave you her in the midst of mine.'"*

Voltaire  
*Le Siecle de Louis XIV*  
1751