



Capitol Network News

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REPUBLICANS RENAME FERGUSON LEADER

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) House Republicans reelected Larry Ferguson to serve as House minority leader Friday, during a caucus of that branch's minority party.



Rep. Larry Ferguson
Minority Leader

Ferguson, D-Cleveland, said his fellow Republicans came into Friday's caucus in a "surprisingly good mood," despite seeing their hopes of significant gains in House membership being beaten back during last week's general election.

"When you look at what happened across the country," said Ferguson, "where there were so many states in which the Democrats gained seats, I think we had reason to feel good. While we didn't gain any seats in the House, we didn't lose any, and we picked up two seats in the Senate."

Additionally, Ferguson noted, Republican candidates won 45 percent of the vote or more in a significant number of elections.

"All across the country the Democrats

made a big push to get everyone to vote a straight party ticket," Ferguson added. "Obviously, that didn't happen here."

The newly reelected minority leader said the House Republican delegation "will continue to do what we were doing last session — fighting for the reforms we think we can get."

Specifically, Ferguson said, Republicans have their sights set on repealing the prison early release law, enacting truth in sentencing legislation and dealing with the corrections situation. Additionally, he said, tax cuts will be considered if projects show the state will have enough revenue to afford them.

"We're not out to get credit for passing everything," Ferguson said. "There's no

pride of authorship for us. What we will have to do is to get behind a Democrat with a good bill and push that legislation."

Other members of the minority leadership team selected Friday include:

- Assistant minority floor leaders Robert Worthen, of Oklahoma City; Fred Morgan, of Oklahoma City; and Ray Vaughn, of Edmond;

- Caucus chairman Forrest Claunch, of Midwest City;

- Assistant caucus chair John Bryant, of Tulsa;

- Caucus secretary Joan Greenwood, of Moore; and

- Whips Don Ramsey, of Chickasha; and Tim Pope, of Mustang.

MENTAL ILLNESS INSURANCE COVERAGE PARITY TASK FORCE MOVES TOWARD RECOMMENDATIONS

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) The Task Force on Parity for Mental Illness Insurance Coverage moved a step closer to making its recommendations to legislative leaders Friday after hearing from a series of speakers, many of whom expressed caution about mandating such coverage.

The legislatively-created task force is examining the idea of implementing a minimum standard of mental health insurance, comparable to that offered for physical illnesses and injuries, to be offered by those who provide group insurance plans, particularly businesses. In previous meetings, members of the task force, as well as those testifying before the panel, have expressed support for that idea.

The amount of support expressed Friday, however, was somewhat more limited.

Tom Laster, a regional representative for Rogers Benefit Group, a marketing and service organization for small group insurance plans, told the panel that by mandating certain types and amounts of coverage that they would likely force the cost of insurance to increase.

"From a small business perspective," said

Laster, "you have to remember that any increased cost that results from a mandate is like a tax on small business."

Additionally, Laster noted, such an effort might have an unintended consequence, causing some business, particularly small ones, to look toward self-insurance, which would not be covered by a state law.

Laster's position was supported by Roger Hicks, of Roger Hicks and Associates, a firm similar to Laster's that deals with smaller companies. Hicks said that while he and others in the insurance industry shared the goal of providing mental health insurance parity, many were concerned that such an effort would drive up costs, and in turn, reduce the amount of access to both mental health and physical health services.

Also expressing opposition to the mental health insurance parity idea were The State Chamber and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce.

In a letter to Sen. Angela Monson, D-Tulsa and chair of the task force, Ron Cupp, vice president of government affairs for The State Chamber, and State Chamber educa-

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