

Oklahoma State Senate

June 1, 2009

Senate Review by Gary Stanislawski

What an exciting first session! I couldn't have asked for a better time to be involved in the legislative process. Since the Republicans were in the majority for the first time in state history, we were able to adopt numerous reforms that have been ignored in past years.

Being from Tulsa, I was especially pleased to see HB 1127 signed into law creating a public-private agreement to keep the OSU Medical Center in Tulsa operating. Having this facility makes a tremendous difference in the healthcare of not only our area, but the entire state as well by providing healthcare access to more Oklahomans along with training physicians to work in rural Oklahoma.

Another big issue this year that finally received the attention it needed was a measure to protect one of Oklahoma's most precious natural resources, which is our water. Texas and other states have wanted access to our water for years and it's a battle that continues to this day in court. It was important that we pass this legislation to ensure that our state remains in control of this natural resource and that the needs of our citizens and their communities are met.

Lawsuit reform has been a hot button issue at the Capitol since the 90s and maybe even before, and I'm proud to say that the issue has finally been addressed and signed into law. Of course, getting this bill approved and signed required give and take on both sides of the aisle, and I applaud my fellow legislators and the Governor for making this law a reality.

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The measure, will among other things, improve health care access to all Oklahomans and ensure small business' health and viability in the state. It will also provide additional protections to the medical and business community from frivolous lawsuits while protecting the right to a trial by a jury of peers for those that are truly injured.

Finally, a bill was signed into law to ensure that state and county elected officials convicted of crimes while serving in office must forfeit their benefits. This stems from incidents in the last few years where officials, such as former state Senator Gene Stipe, have been convicted of crimes but continued to receive their pensions. Stipe, for instance, receives \$7,042 a month in retirement even after being convicted of federal crimes and accused of various other crimes including using state money for his own benefit and paying kickbacks to other legislators. This seems like a common-sense bill but it's had a hard time getting through the process the last few years, so I'm pleased to say that it is now law. Unfortunately, it's not retroactive and will only apply to those currently in office. However, this will help ensure that taxpayers are not footing the bill for criminals' retirements in the future.

In the coming months, I'll be discussing the many other reforms that were approved in the areas of government, health care, education, taxes, energy, and transportation.

In closing, I want to remind parents about the Department of Libraries free annual summer reading program that begins in June. The program is offered by most libraries throughout the state and offer kids an opportunity to continue learning and improving their reading skills throughout the summer. There is overwhelming evidence that kids with good reading skills are more successful and happy in school than those that struggle with reading. This also gives them the chance

to spend time with their friends and make new ones. Also, let's not forget that it gives mom and dad some much needed free time too. Just contact your local library for more information about enrollment.

If you have a question or comment about state government, you can contact me by writing to Senator Gary Stanislawski, Room 427A, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Or you can call us at (405) 521-5624.