

# Oklahoma State Senate

March 30, 2009

## *Senate Review by Gary Stanislowski*

Work continues at the Capitol as we enter into our ninth week of the session. We've officially passed the halfway mark and completing our last week of House bill consideration in our committees. Next week, we'll return to the Senate floor to look over those House bills that made it out of committee. We'll spend three weeks on the floor, and then will spend the remaining five weeks working on the budget and finalizing legislation in conference committee.

This year, I authored eight House measures. HB 1298 is the same legislation as my SB 886. It modifies the "zone of safety" law by applying it to those whose victim was a child under the age of 18. Currently, the "zone of safety" only prohibits registered sex offenders from loitering within 300 feet of any elementary, high school, playground, etc. if the person has been convicted of crime in which the victim was a child under the age of 13.

SB 1738 requires health professionals who report abuse or neglect of a child to provide copies of the examination on which the report was based, and other relevant records, to law enforcement and the Department of Human Services.

HB 1909 provides a tax credit of 1% for any state banking association, national banking association, or credit union originating in this state, for the amount of the lender fee paid to the US Department of Education (DOE) for the "Stafford" loan guaranty program. The loans must be given to Oklahoma residents who are attending colleges in Oklahoma, which are eligible to participate in the DOE's federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP). The measure is effective January 1, 2009, and the credit can only be applied to lender

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fees paid on or after January 1, 2009, but not later than December 31, 2010. Due to the low interest rates one half of the lenders that provided loans to students last year have now exited the market and many more lenders had plans to exit as well. This bill provides an incentive to lenders to continue to make loans for college students.

HB 1935 makes technical corrections to current statutes for the Oklahoma Teachers Retirement System (OTRS). It updates current statutes to conform with an IRS Private Letter Ruling (2003), which is now in effect. The measure also deletes obsolete language which required teachers to retire by age 70, and deletes references to a retirement option that has never been used by the OTRS because it is not actuarially feasible. The measure also rewrites OTRS confidentiality requirements, and does not appear to alter the confidential status of any information maintained by the OTRS. A minor personnel change includes re-naming the Executive Secretary to the Executive Director. The measure is effective July 1, 2009.

HB 2004 encourages teachers' preservice programs to include components on mental health symptoms identification and issues, encourages school administrators and teachers to complete a minimum of three hours of professional development in mental health issues once every three years, and authorizes certain school employees to make mental health referrals.

HB 2078 deals with the Reed Act of 2002. Congress authorized a distribution of money to all states under this Act. Oklahoma's share was \$81,441,628. This money has been deposited in Oklahoma's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund and can only be used to support Oklahoma's Unemployment Insurance Program and Employment Services, both of which are administered by the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC). The Oklahoma Legislature must appropriate the money for use in these programs

before it can be drawn down by OESC. The current amount remaining in the Trust Fund is approximately \$25,000,000. HB 2078 authorizes an appropriation from the Trust Fund to OESC of \$14,000,000, to be used to support Oklahoma's Unemployment Insurance Program and Employment Services. The total appropriation is \$14 million - \$6.325 million for the Employment Service Program and \$7.675 million for the Unemployment Insurance Program, to be used before December 31, 2010.

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.

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