

Oklahoma State Senate

February 28, 2011

Senate Review by Gary Stanislawski

The fourth week of session is underway. Monday was the deadline for single-assigned bills in the Senate, while next Thursday, March 3 is the deadline for double-assigned bills. Of the original 969 bills filed this session, as of Monday morning, 330 have been passed out of committee with more on their way.

We will then have until Thursday, March 17 to take floor action on all the Senate bills that were approved in committee, after which we will return back to our committees to start working on House bills.

Out of my 20 bills that I filed, I decided to pull three of them and not hear in a committee. I still have bills (SB 80, 219, 234, 278, 279, and 711) awaiting final consideration in the appropriations committee. I believe they will all be heard before next week's deadline.

SB 109 was approved by the full Senate and sent to the House. The bill requires school principals to develop professional development plans which should contain elements of instructional leadership, school finance, and education law, and present their plan for approval by their superintendent. It also requires superintendents to submit their plans which should include an emphasis on leadership, strategic planning, and ascertaining best practices of school administration, and obtain approval from their locally elected board of education.

Seven of my bills (SB 82, 272, 274, 301, 398, 536 and 710) were all passed out of committee last week and are awaiting consideration by the full Senate. I will write more on those bills as they progress through the process.

The legislature, and state overall, got some positive economic news last week. State revenues are continuing to increase. The State Board of Equalization certified an additional \$105 million in revenue which lowers our deficit to just under \$500 million. While this is good news we will still be forced to make tough decisions

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about cuts to agencies.

We are also taking steps to reduce expenditures in the Senate. The Senate staff has been taking one furlough day a month since last July. A furlough day is a day with unpaid leave. Constitutionally, legislators can't take these, but my fellow Senators and I are going to try to wrap up our work early four total days sometime before the end of session to help save the Senate money. Normally, session concludes on Thursday afternoons. If possible, we're going to try to finish our work on four Wednesday afternoons, so we don't have to be paid our per diem and mileage the next day. Overall, if we're able to do this, it will save our agency nearly \$21,000.

This past week, we tackled some important legislation. We passed SB 435, a reform of the state board of education. This is an important step to ensure that this board is accountable to the people of Oklahoma. Returning the board to its original constitutional membership, which included the Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State and the Superintendent, will ensure that the citizens see the reforms that they voted for in November.

As part of our jobs agenda and healthcare access agenda, SB 863 passed the full Senate. The passage from the Senate represents a starting point for a dialogue about how to best accomplish substantial lawsuit reform. This bill is still a "work in progress" and will hopefully bring jobs to Oklahoma while protecting our citizens.

Rural healthcare is a major issue for many in our state. SB 233 passed out of the Finance Committee this week. This bill will provide a tax credit for rural doctors. This bill will also support the effort to provide more access to healthcare and healthcare professionals in rural Oklahoma.

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.