

## Oklahoma State Senate

March 21, 2011

### *Senate Review by Gary Stanislawski*

We wrapped up our work concerning Senate bills last week. The deadline was Thursday, but we worked long hours all week and were able to finish on Wednesday and adjourn early saving the Senate and State money.

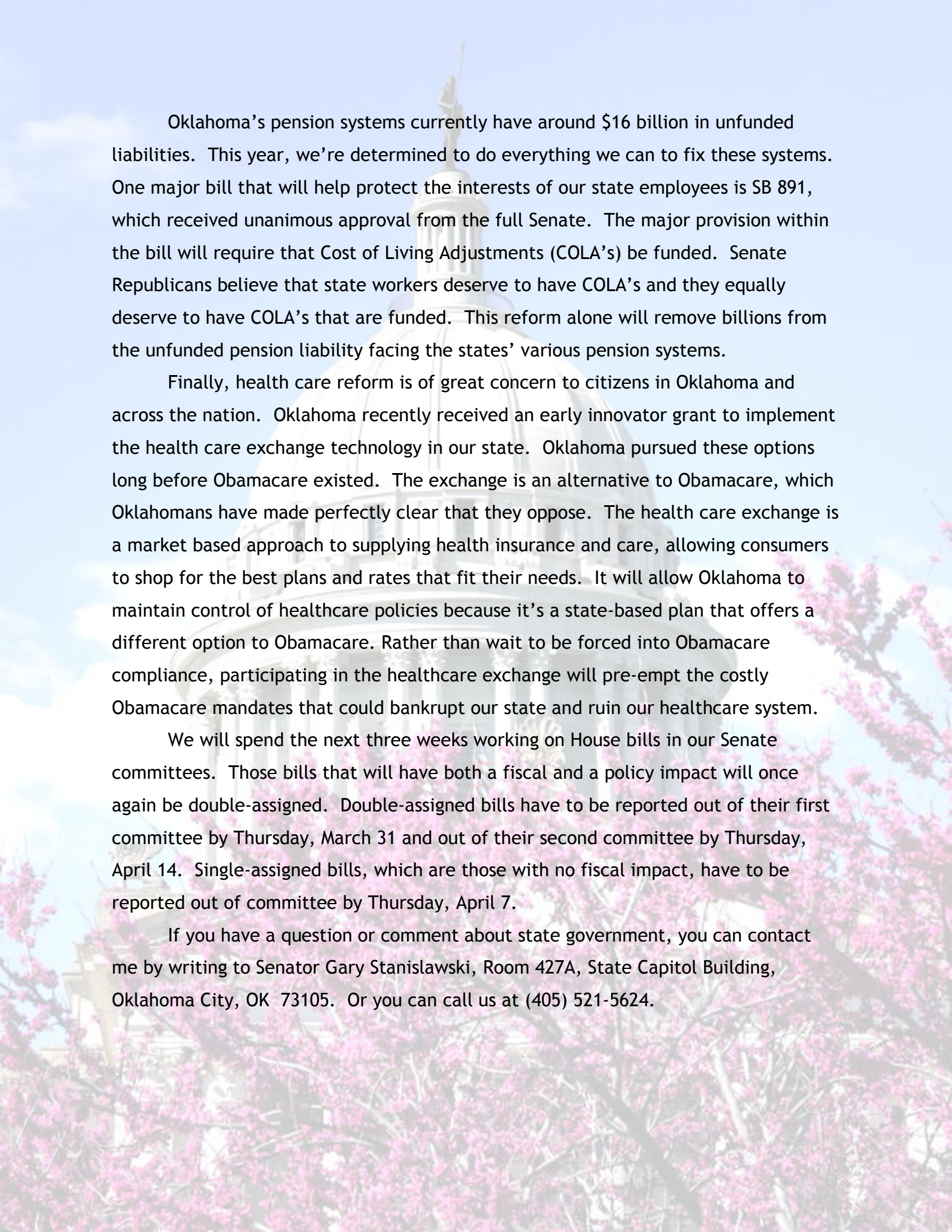
Overall, out of the 1,016 Senate bills and joint resolutions that were introduced, we passed 367 off the floor. The House succeeded in passing 263 bills and joint resolutions out of their chamber of the 1,209 originally introduced bills.

The Senate Republicans were able to pass numerous bills that are part of our legislative agenda. In Education, we passed SB 969, which will give businesses and individuals the opportunity to play a role in providing quality education by allowing them to contribute to scholarship funds which will be awarded to students on a need and residence basis. A 50% tax credit will be given to contributors, capped at \$1,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for corporations.

SB 346 will require that students read at grade level by the third grade. Senate Republicans believe that “social promotions” are unacceptable and must stop. It’s a sad day when so many students drop out of High School primarily due to the fact that they cannot read.

My SB 80 will remove the limit on school district carryover funds. This bill will encourage fiscal responsibility within school districts by allowing them to carry over excess funds into the next school year, instead of being forced to spend or return the money before the next year.

Reforming our state government has also been one of our major goals this year. SB 772 will create a “one stop shop” for business licensing and regulatory responsibilities from various agencies. The bill will simplify the licensing and regulatory process helping to remove the red tape and allow businesses to spend more time at work and less time in lines at various state agencies.



Oklahoma's pension systems currently have around \$16 billion in unfunded liabilities. This year, we're determined to do everything we can to fix these systems. One major bill that will help protect the interests of our state employees is SB 891, which received unanimous approval from the full Senate. The major provision within the bill will require that Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA's) be funded. Senate Republicans believe that state workers deserve to have COLA's and they equally deserve to have COLA's that are funded. This reform alone will remove billions from the unfunded pension liability facing the states' various pension systems.

Finally, health care reform is of great concern to citizens in Oklahoma and across the nation. Oklahoma recently received an early innovator grant to implement the health care exchange technology in our state. Oklahoma pursued these options long before Obamacare existed. The exchange is an alternative to Obamacare, which Oklahomans have made perfectly clear that they oppose. The health care exchange is a market based approach to supplying health insurance and care, allowing consumers to shop for the best plans and rates that fit their needs. It will allow Oklahoma to maintain control of healthcare policies because it's a state-based plan that offers a different option to Obamacare. Rather than wait to be forced into Obamacare compliance, participating in the healthcare exchange will pre-empt the costly Obamacare mandates that could bankrupt our state and ruin our healthcare system.

We will spend the next three weeks working on House bills in our Senate committees. Those bills that will have both a fiscal and a policy impact will once again be double-assigned. Double-assigned bills have to be reported out of their first committee by Thursday, March 31 and out of their second committee by Thursday, April 14. Single-assigned bills, which are those with no fiscal impact, have to be reported out of committee by Thursday, April 7.

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.