

**State of Oklahoma
House of Representatives**

Weekly Wrap #10
April 11th – April 15th, 2011

By Rep. Jeannie McDaniel

This week at the Capitol legislators saluted **the Oklahoma National Guard 45th Infantry Brigade as about 3,300 of its soldiers prepare to be deployed in June to Afghanistan.** We honored our soldiers for answering their call of duty and wished them and their family well as they brace for the difficult days ahead. Our National Guard members are not only invaluable assets to our U.S. military, but to our state as they consistently step up in service to Oklahomans by helping to fight wildfires and rescuing stranded motorists in snowstorms, to name a few. Our thoughts and prayers are with them all.

The House floor work was very slow this week (only 1 bill heard yesterday) while committee hearings on Senate bills finished up. We will be hearing these bills on the House floor next week. Meanwhile, redistricting discussion has continued and should be completed next week.

Did you know.....?

The House of Representatives and Senate celebrated April 13, 2011, as “Agriculture Day” at the State Capitol, and various entities representing the agriculture industry were present as well as fiddlers of all ages to celebrate Bob Wills day. **There are approximately 86,600 farms in Oklahoma, with 89% of these being family farms with a total amount of farmland estimated to be over 35 million acres. Oklahoma ranks in the top ten nationally for sales of cattle, swine, and horses, and sales of poultry and eggs.**

Budget talks are underway but more work ahead.

A research group that studies state policy issues said this week that budget writers should consider closing income tax loopholes, eliminating some sales tax exemptions and tapping non-appropriated state revenue to prevent potentially drastic budget cuts to state-funded education, health care and law enforcement services. The Oklahoma Policy Institute said funding for public services has declined over the past two years due to the economic downturn and low energy prices and that more than half of all state agencies have absorbed funding cuts of 15 percent or more. Deeper cuts could harm seniors and persons with disabilities and mental illness who rely on state services. Currently the state revenue shortfall is projected to be around \$500 million.

State Revenue Picture Improving

For March, total General Revenue Fund collections surpassed last year’s receipts for the same month by \$37.3 million and exceeded the estimates used to develop the current year state budget by \$42 million. The Office of State Finance (OSF) reports that total year-to-date collections this year have now come within 15 percent of meeting total collection numbers through March 2008 before the recession impacted Oklahoma.

All major tax collection categories for March increased over the same month a year ago. Sales taxes were up 11.2 percent from March 2010 and ran 3.9 percent higher than the estimate. The

OSF report showed total, year-to-date General Revenue Fund collections are \$3.541 billion, which is \$142.7 million or 4.2 percent above the estimate for the fiscal year and \$308.6 million or 9.5 percent above prior year collections for this same period of time.

Food for thought...

An article was released this week that revealed that overall, Oklahoma gets back \$1.35 for every dollar its residents and businesses pay in federal taxes. The report, conducted by the Tax Foundation, a nonpartisan research group, stated that this was the 15th most generous return among the 50 states. The article stated that about 7 percent of the area's workers are federal employees, more than double the U.S. average. Meanwhile, federal spending on roads, a huge Federal Aviation Administration center and a sprawling Air Force base not only keeps more than 20,000 Oklahomans employed but also is helping to nurture entire sectors of the area's increasingly prosperous and diverse economy. It also noted Oklahoma City's major transportation hub centered around three major interstate highways, which were built with federal money. The article also highlighted the state's booming energy sector as well as many Oklahoma farmers who benefit from federal subsidies.

From USA Today and the Census Bureau.....

Shock employment figures: Fewer than 46% of Americans have jobs

By David Edwards

April 14, 2011

The percentage of Americans who have jobs has fallen to the lowest point in three decades and now hovers just above 45 percent of the total population, according to an analysis of labor data published by USA Today.

The report [1], based on figures provided by the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, showed that at 36.7 percent, Mississippi had the lowest percentage of population working.

Employment rates were also low in California and Arizona, where just over 37 percent had jobs. At 55.8 percent, North Dakota had the highest rate of employed residents.

Overall, 45.4 percent of Americans were working, the lowest since 1983. Employment peaked at 49.3 percent in 2000.

"The bad economy, an aging population and a plateau in women working are contributing to changes that pose serious challenges for financing the nation's social programs," the paper noted.

The news comes at a time when Republican senators have unveiled a plan [2] to raise the retirement age, which would force more Americans to search for jobs that just aren't there.

Freshman tea party-backed Sens. Mike Lee (R-UT) and Rand Paul (R-KY) -- along with Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) -- have joined the call, seeking to raise the retirement age to 70 in the next 20 years.

"If you talk to young people in America - they've already accepted this," Paul said Wednesday.

USA Today featured an interactive chart showing every individual state's total employment figures. Click here [1] for the whole article.

URL to article: <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2011/04/14/shock-employment-figures-fewer-than-half-of-americans-have-jobs/>

[1] report: <http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/employment/2011-04-13-more-americans-leave-labor-force.htm>

[2] unveiled a plan: http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2011/04/13/6464594-gop-senators-raise-retirement-age-means-test-social-security-

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Many bills were sent to the Governor for approval this week, including:

- ⌚ HB1634 reduces by half the annual fee for vending machines, which according to the Tax Commission will result in a decrease in revenue of \$4,089,300.00.
- ⌚ HB1047 authorizes the Department of Rehabilitation Services to conduct national criminal background checks on prospective employees.
- ⌚ HB1372 adds the staff for any elementary superintendent and assistant superintendent the list of administrative services for which districts must cap spending.
- ⌚ SB12, exempts technology center employees hired on a part-time or temporary basis for the instruction of adults only from the requirement for national criminal history background checks.
- ⌚ SB406 increases the distance requirements under the Oklahoma Funeral Picketing Act from 500 feet to 1,000 feet and extends from 1 hour to 2 hours before or after the funeral services the time limitations on picketing.
- ⌚ HB1255, states that any United States Attorney or Assistant United States Attorney may carry a firearm on his or her person anywhere in Oklahoma if the person has successfully completed an approved course of firearm training conducted by a certified firearms instructor which is equal to the minimum requirements for firearms training as set forth by CLEET.
- ⌚ HB1991 authorizes the Department of Corrections to use a lethal quantity of any “drug or drugs” when the state carries out the death penalty.
- ⌚ HB1380 eliminates “trial de novo”, to allow local school boards to dismiss teachers without an appeal process to court.
- ⌚ HB1888 creates the “Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.” The proposed law would require abortion providers to determine fetal age prior to an abortion and make it illegal to perform an abortion on an unborn child who is 20-or-more weeks of age. The bill exempts situations in which the life of the mother is at risk or when the mother faces “serious risk of substantial and irreversible physical impairment.”
- ⌚ SB547 would ensure that standard health insurance policies sold in Oklahoma do not include elective abortion coverage.

Bills approved by the Governor this week include:

- ⌚ HB1044, states that any rule which establishes or increases fees or any rule by an agency, board, or commission shall require approval by the Legislature by joint resolution. If the Legislature fails to approve the rule on or before the last day of the legislative session, the rule shall be deemed disapproved.
- ⌚ HB1249, exempts persons from trespassing on the premise that the person is in the process of retrieving their livestock or other animals.
- ⌚ HB1511, states the intent that the Legislature commemorates June 28th of each year as “Second Amendment Day” in Oklahoma.
- ⌚ HB1669, modifies the definition for a “dilapidated building” to mean a structure that has been boarded or secured for 18 months, instead of 36 months as previously defined.
- ⌚ SB117 requires candidates for county commissioner to have been a registered voter in such district and a resident residing within such district for six months preceding filing.
- ⌚ SB162 allows a retired district attorney to carry a firearm anywhere in the state and also allows a retired district attorney investigator to retain custody and ownership of the sidearm and badge upon retirement.