

**State of Oklahoma  
House of Representatives**

April 18<sup>th</sup> – April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011  
Rep. Jeannie McDaniel  
**Weekly Wrap #11**

It's hard to imagine that there are only a short five weeks of session remaining. This week was spent on the House Floor hearing many of the 215 bills that must be passed by the April 28<sup>th</sup> deadline or will be dormant for the rest of the session. Bills that are not heard can be considered again in 2012. Floor Calendar - Please use this link if you want to listen or see where we are each day. <http://www.okhouse.gov/FloorAgenda/Default.aspx>

***We have much work that remains undone.***

We haven't seen a draft of the budget for next year but whispered "preliminary numbers" fill the air in the rotunda. This is standard procedure for this time period in April as legislators wait, with anticipation, for leadership in the Senate, House and Governor's Office to reach agreement on agency allocations. Unfortunately, there will not be any winners this year while the economy struggles to recover past downturns and resulting shortfalls. We will be watching for the **percentage** of cuts each agency must balance as they provide services to Oklahoma.

***New Conference Committee Process Begins, Providing Historic Transparency***

Starting next week, the Oklahoma House of Representatives will have standing conference committees that hold meetings open to the public – a historic first for the Legislature. The rules changes adopted this year dramatically increase the opportunity for public input into the legislative process and provide greater safeguards against last-minute changes escaping thorough review.

When the House and Senate pass different versions of the same bill, the legislation is then sent to a joint conference committee where a final version is negotiated. In the past, those conference committees rarely convened in any actual meeting of the members and votes were seldom cast in public.

Under the new process, the House has established permanent standing conference committees to handle its half of the process. Those permanent conference committees will hold public meetings and all votes will be cast in public. Advance public notice that includes a detailed listing of bills on the agenda will be required for each conference committee meeting. Prior to receiving a vote in conference committee, proposed versions of each bill will be publicly posted online for member and public review.

The reforms also include a hard 24-hour rule that requires a House conference committee report to be filed and posted online for a full day before it can be considered on the House floor. Previously, there was no 24-hour rule during the final two days of session.

### ***Honor and Remembrance***

On April 19<sup>th</sup> we marked the 16th Anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing and paid homage to those who lost their lives on that fateful day, and prayed for those affected who continue to persevere in light of their great loss. It was a somber day of reflection. The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum is a remarkable facility. If you are in Oklahoma City take time to stop and visit. The memorial grounds are a beautiful tribute to Oklahoma's resilience and honor. For information visit the website: <http://www.oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org/>

### ***Correction Reform Concerns, HB2131....***

This week saw the passage of a bill to reduce prison overcrowding in the state, but on Wednesday the Senate removed one of the key components of the bill, which was to change the state's default criminal sentencing structure from consecutive to concurrent terms. The bill is expected to save the state Corrections Department about \$4.3 million a year by increasing the use of alternative sentencing programs that cost less than traditional incarceration. Right now the state prison system is at about 99 percent capacity, but due to budget shortfalls, is staffed at 70 percent of authorized levels, according to the Corrections Department. The bill now returns to the House for further consideration.

### ***Property Tax Assessment***

The House voted final legislative approval this week to bring to a vote of the people the option to limit property tax assessment increases to 3 percent on owner-occupied homes and agricultural land. Currently in law is a limit to property tax assessment increases for all real estate 5%. For homes owned by people who are at least 65 years old and who meet household income guidelines, assessments are frozen.

House Joint Resolution 1002 will appear on the 2012 general election ballot as State Question 758, the Oklahoma Secretary of State's Office said. A state analysis of the impact of a 3% assessment limit shows that it would result in \$6.5 million less property tax revenue growth statewide. Around 65% of property taxes collected are distributed to local school districts, 11% goes to career-tech schools, 12% goes to county governments and the remainder is split by various local governments, including libraries, junior colleges and ambulance districts.

### ***More reason to consider restricting cell phone use while driving...***

It was announced this week that Oklahoma is one of 10 states where people are relying more and more on the cell phone – without having a land line at home. Oklahoma was noted as having at least 30 percent of adults rely strictly on cell phones. The reason cited for this increased reliance on cell phones is that it saves money for consumers to no longer have a land line.

### ***Legislation to Protect Disabled Adults Signed Into Law***

Legislation that would ensure individuals with developmental disabilities are protected in the handful of sheltered workshops that do not contract with the state has been signed into law.

HB1228 authorizes the Department of Human Services to issue, modify and revoke licenses for sheltered workshops. The legislation would also authorize DHS to inspect and evaluate

workshops and require criminal background checks for all employees of a sheltered workshop. Many of the sheltered workshops in the state are already overseen by the Department of Human Services Developmental Disabilities Services Division. There is no additional cost for DHS to inspect and license the remaining sheltered workshops that do not contract with the state.”

### ***Governor Signs Legislation to Protect Road Workers***

Gov. Mary Fallin signs HB1061 - intended to increase the safety of road workers in Oklahoma.

**HB1061 reinstates** the right of Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) employees and other road workers to use red-and-blue emergency lights. Rep. Mike Sanders said a total of 54 ODOT employees and eight turnpike authority employees have died while working on roads in the state. That is a higher number than for any other state agency workers, he said.

“Last year, in an attempt to restrict towing services from using red-and-blue emergency lights, we also limited the use of these lights by Department of Transportation employees and other road workers,” Sanders, R-Kingfisher, said. “After we realized what dangers these workers face, **reinstating** their use of red-and-blue lights was the only responsible option.”

The legislation had the support of the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, multiple fire service organizations, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, and the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma.

### ***Road Investments Paying Off***

A report released by Washington, D.C.-based The Road Information Program, or TRIP, shows that Oklahoma’s investment in roads is paying off. The report found that the increased road funding approved over the past five years has dramatically reduced the number of deficient bridges and possibly saved lives.

Additionally, the report shows Oklahoma has reduced the number of structurally deficient, state-maintained bridges by 32 percent - from 1,168 in 2005 to 797 in 2010. Over the last five years lawmakers have pumped an additional \$700 million into the state’s transportation system and an addition \$1 billion is scheduled to be provided over the next five years.

Based on an anticipated \$1.1 billion in state appropriations for road and bridge repair through 2015, TRIP projects Oklahoma will reduce the number of structurally deficient state bridges to 504 by 2015, a 57 percent reduction from 2005 levels. However, Oklahoma still has a long way to go. The state still ranks second in the nation, behind only Pennsylvania, in the number of bridges rated structurally deficient.

Further, the group also noted that the new funding allowed installation of median barriers along hundreds of miles of roadways, which likely reduced the number of traffic-related fatalities. The number of people killed in traffic accidents on Oklahoma roadways dropped from 737 in 2009 to 625 in 2010 – the lowest number of traffic fatalities in the state since 1992, according to the Oklahoma Highway Patrol.