

SCORECARD
HOW THEY VOTED

Following is a scorecard of how Edmond-area legislators voted on key issues as identified by OKWatchdog for Edmond Sun readers. OKWatchdog is a nonprofit consumer



Jeff Raymond

OK Watchdog

HB 1332
Summary: This bill requires anyone who transfers ownership of a certain number of dogs or cats to have a license.

Vote: Passed House and Senate, now in conference committee

Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Aye

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Nay

Our take: Oklahoma has the dubious distinction of being a place where puppy mills are rampant.

However, some legislators say this bill just adds another layer of bureaucracy without putting bad breeders out of business.

perhaps the most controversial of the session, showing that politics makes strange bedfellows. It blurred political lines among business interests, the biomedical research establishment, pro-life groups and others. Supporters of the ban argued that embryonic stem cell research involves destroying human life, and adult stem cell research offers greater promise. Opponents of the ban argued that the embryos used will be discarded regardless, and they hold the promise of treating debilitating disease. The House overrode the governor's veto, but the Senate failed to do so.

SB 834

Summary: This bill exempts school districts from most state mandates.

Vote: Governor vetoed
Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Aye

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Aye

Our take: This bill allows typical schools to operate like charter schools, which aren't subject to the same set of requirements, including class-size limitations and due-process protections for teachers. Supporters said the bill would improve education by providing greater local control, while opponents said it would undo progress that has been made and voters have approved.

SB 609

Summary: This bill reduces the number of judges on the Workers Compensation Court from 10 to seven and requires Senate approval of nominees.

Vote: Governor vetoed
Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Aye

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Aye

Our take: Requiring Senate approval of Worker's Compensation Court judges risks politicizing the process. A resolution to send similar changes to a vote of the people passed both chambers and doesn't require the governor's signature.

HB 2030

Summary: This bill creates the Silver Alert Act, which sets up an alert system for missing senior citizens.

Vote: Governor signed
Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Aye

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Aye

Our take: Missing children are often found using Amber Alerts. Six in 10 people with Alzheimer's disease will wander from their caregivers at some point. This legislation will help keep them safe.

HB 1888

Summary: This bill requires counties to draft EMS plans and frees ambulances from having to respond to calls from areas that haven't adopted such plans. It allows revenue to be raised as counties, cities and towns choose.

Vote: Passed House and Senate, now in conference committee

Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Aye

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Nay

Our take: Since 2000 about 50 ambulance services have closed in the state, leaving areas orphaned and putting pressure on surviving services. Medicare and insurance reimbursements are low, and patients often can't pay, yet state law requires the closest ambulance to respond to an emergency, often outside their service areas. This bill directs counties to come up with EMS plans and gives them the flexibility to choose what works best.

SB 4

Summary: This bill requires voters to provide proof of identity when voting.

Vote: Governor vetoed
Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Aye

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Aye

Our take: Showing an ID when you go to the polls may sound like a good idea, but this bill has more to do with politics than protecting the integrity of elections. A resolution to send similar changes to a vote of the people passed both chambers and doesn't require the governor's signature.

HB 1975

Summary: This bill requires health insurance coverage mandates to be introduced in odd-numbered years, passed in even-numbered years and have financial impact reports.

Vote: Governor vetoed
Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Nay

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Aye

Our take: This bill ensures that health insurance mandates such as autism coverage will never be heard, despite having a high level of support. Although this bill was cast as a way to keep health insurance rates from increasing, it would have done nothing to slow the double-digit increases we've become accustomed to. This bill is little more than a big, sloppy kiss for the insurance lobby.

JEFF RAYMOND is executive director of OKWatchdog. He may be reached at jraymond@okwatchdog.org.

HB 1326

Summary: This bill prohibits embryonic stem cell research.

Vote: Governor vetoed
Sen. Todd Lamb: Aye
Sen. Clark Jolley: Aye
Rep. Marian Cooksey: Aye

Rep. Ken Miller: Aye
Rep. Lewis Moore: Aye
Rep. Jason Murphey: Aye

Our take: This bill was

MILITARY
IN THE NEWS

The following question is highlighted this week in "Ask AP," a weekly Q&A column where AP journalists respond to readers' questions about the news.

Q: Are we still arresting detainees such as those in Guantanamo, and if so, where are they being held? If not, what has changed to make such arrests no longer necessary? — Jon Larimore, Arlington, Va.

A: The jail at Guantanamo Bay has held nearly 1,000 prisoners, many of them captured in Afghanistan. More than half have been released or turned over to other governments. Most of those prisoners were either captured by the U.S. military or handed over to the U.S. military by other government forces or bounty hunters.

The jail was created shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, when the Bush administration deter-

mined it wanted a secure, separate jail to hold prisoners it believed did not qualify for standard prisoner-of-war protections.

Guantanamo was chosen because it is on an American military base in Cuba, which the Bush administration deemed to be outside the reach of U.S. courts.

There are now about 240 prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, which is slated to be closed next year. The U.S. military is no longer sending prisoners to Guantanamo, and is instead keeping them at military jails in established war zones like Afghanistan and Iraq.

The CIA has transferred more than a dozen prisoners — the exact number is classified — to Guantanamo, the last in 2008.

The CIA still has the authority to take prisoners, but CIA chief Leon Panetta

told Congress in April the agency had not captured anyone new since he took over in February.

The agency is only allowed to hold prisoners on a short-term basis, and if it takes new prisoners, they will be held in U.S. military facilities or handed over to foreign governments.

The CIA also operated a network of secret overseas prisons, but the Obama administration ordered them closed as one of its first acts in office.

The senior terrorists the CIA is interested in are rare and difficult to catch. Many are presumed to be hiding in Pakistan's lawless tribal border region — an area that's difficult to penetrate and operate in.

— PAMELA HESS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

HAVE QUESTIONS of your own? Send them to newsquestions@ap.org with "Ask AP" in the subject line. And please include your full name and hometown so they can be published with your question.

Public shouldn't notice state agency budget cuts

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — During the next five weeks, state agency heads will be working out the details on how to comply with cuts of up to 7 percent included in a \$7.2 billion state budget adopted by the Legislature for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

Reductions in staff and services are likely at some agencies, but officials indicated they have a common goal for providing state services during the economic downturn: That the public never notice they are operating with less.

"It's business as usual," said Hardy Watkins, director of the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, and an Edmond resident.

The possibility of budget cuts has loomed since lawmakers convened the 2009 Legislature on Feb. 2. In his executive budget, Gov. Brad Henry proposed hefty cuts to state agencies that protect public water supplies, manage the state's flood plains and protect Oklahomans from the dangers of hazardous waste.

In one case, Henry proposed that the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, responsible for setting water quality standards, enforcing dam safety regulations and managing Oklahoma's flood plains, lose more than \$1.1 million from its \$4.6 million budget, a 25 percent reduction. The budget approved by lawmakers cut the agency's budget by only about 4 percent.

The state budget for the 2010 fiscal year includes \$631 million in federal economic stimulus dollars that led to hefty budget increases in education and health care and standstill budgets or negligible cuts to public safety agencies.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority, administrator of the federal Medicaid program, got an increase of \$128 million — more than 15 percent — thanks to stimulus dollars.

The public school budget was increased about \$40.5 million, or 1.6 percent, while higher education got an increase of \$31.6 million, or 3 percent.

But other agencies lost millions of dollars in their budgets for the upcoming year. The Tourism and Recreation Department lost about \$2 million, an annual budget reduction of 6.9 percent.

Watkins said his agency has been planning for a smaller budget since the nation's economy began to sour last year.

"Obviously, we've been planning for a budget cut for the past several months," Watkins said. "We have had to cut back and will cut back next year on some promotional things."

But Watkins said there are no plans to close any of Oklahoma's 50 state parks or to lay off or furlough members of the agency's staff.

"It really is just a tighter management, not filling some positions and monitoring our seasonal activities as well," he said.

Watkins said the agency is also implementing belt-tightening moves such as retrofitting light bulbs with high-efficiency fluorescent bulbs to cut the agency's electrical and utility costs.

Paula Ross, spokeswoman for the Oklahoma Tax Commission, said her agency is reviewing measures it will take to accommodate a budget cut of more than 7 percent that will trim almost \$3.5 million from its 2010 budget.

But the agency has ruled out cutting services to taxpayers, such as eliminating annual notices to motorists whose license tags are about to expire.

"This year we worked to cut expenditures," Ross said. The commission has placed a freeze on hiring and promotions and has been shifting workers from various divisions to assist processing and mail opening of tax returns during tax season, limiting the need for temporary workers.

The agency also is encouraging taxpayers to e-file their tax returns to help cut down on the 9 million pieces of mail it gets each year. "There's not quite as much processing," she said.

Ross said the agency has achieved staff reductions through attrition and is studying ways to provide quality services to taxpayers while accommodating the budget cuts. Furloughs are not under consideration.

"That would obviously be a difficult decision," Ross said.

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