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School Finance Review Commission Act, four-day school week bills generate buzz in House

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(eCap) A bill forming a financial review commission for Oklahoma's public schools and another accounting for the submission of four-day school week plans generated considerable discussion on the House floor Tuesday morning.

HB1578, by Rep. Chad Caldwell, R-Enid, and Sen. Gary Stanislawski, R-Tulsa, creates the School Finance Review Commission Act. It creates the School Finance Review Commission. It provides for membership. It provides a January 1, 2025 Sunset. It sets about responsibilities and goals of the Commission in reviewing all matter related to school finance. It requires the Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability provide staff and administrative support to the Commission. It requires the State Department of Education to aid either commission in providing necessary staff and administrative support. It requires the Commission submit its findings annually to the Governor, President Pro Tempore and the Speaker until its sunset.

The bill passed on a vote of 64 to 26.

While there was no formal debate against Caldwell's bill, it did meet considerable resistance from a handful of the minority party's members.

Rep. Shane Stone, D-Oklahoma City, questioned Caldwell on the overall need for the bill. Caldwell cited education being "the single most important" budget item for the state. "This just gives an opportunity to reviewing anything having to do with school finances," Caldwell explained. "That could include teacher pay. It could include benefits." Rep. David Perryman, D-Chickasha, asked if the bill carried any fiscal impact to which Caldwell noted none existed in the language as is.

Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester, asked if the commission would also look into the finances of charter schools. "They certainly could," Caldwell said, reminding Renegar

that charter schools are public schools. He added the bill afforded the commission latitude to study or review matters most pressing.

Caldwell reiterated a number of times the commission would only study finances of public schools, therefore not extending to home schooling or private institutions. Rep. Edward Cannaday, D-Porum, asked for clarification on whether the bill focused on education or finances given the bill would through the House Appropriations and Budget Committee as opposed to the Education Committee. He pressed Caldwell on how a finance bill could advance with no funding attached.

Caldwell stressed once again no projected cost was expected to stem from forming the committee.

"We'll fund 100 percent of the zero cost; how about that?" Caldwell joked.

Another bill related to education that generated a healthy amount of discussion on the part of House Democrats was [HB1684](#), which requires school districts moving to a four-day school weeks to submit a three-year plan to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE).

The bill failed on a vote of 45 to 43.

[HB1684](#), by Rep. Harold Wright, R-Weatherford, and Sen. Eddie Fields, R-Wynona, requires that a school district that adopts a four-day school week and any related rules submit a plan to the State Board of Education no later than September 1. It requires any such plan detail goals to be achieved by the four-day school week as well as intended education and fiscal benefits and the anticipated impacts or outcomes the plan will have in the school district including a discussion of any potential disadvantages that have been identified by the school district. It requires such a plan be for no longer than three years, and the district provide an updated plan at the beginning of the third year. Wright served notice reconsideration on the vote by which the bill failed.

"I think schools should ponder this issue," Wright said. He posited that the bill would allow school boards to consider what is best for the students before cutting an school day, adding he himself was supportive for full five-day school weeks.

Wright noted that districts are currently not required to submit such a plan, adding the bill came at the request of the OSDE. He also noted the bill does not include a penalty. "I don't think it's unreasonable to only ask them to file a report," Wright said. "I don't think it's too much to ask."

Perryman made a motion to suspend House rules for an untimely filed amendment to only allow the report only be submitted on years in which the Legislature provide a budget by the statutorily mandated deadline of April 1. Perryman's motion failed on a vote of 21 to 57.

Rep. Emily Virgin, D-Norman, felt the bill did not allow schools much flexibility given the Sep. 1 deadline. Wright responded the bill still needed to go before the Senate and that he would be willing to work on amending that provision.

In debate against the bill, Stone referred to it as another unfunded mandate that would not provide a barrier from four-day school weeks to districts; only a report that would ultimately amount to nothing but an extra cost for schools already in dire straits. "It doesn't do anything good for anybody," Stone said.

Perryman echoed Stone's concerns, adding that to accuse schools of not pondering four-day weeks was an insult.

"Hard decisions are being made by school boards (and) superintendents," Perryman said, reiterating earlier criticisms of the Legislature's apparent inability to establish an education budget by April 1 most years.

"We need to ponder the effect that we're doing," Perryman said, gesturing to the chamber.

Wright closed debate, arguing he was simply asking school boards to consider a plan, much in the same way a teacher would a lesson plan. He corrected earlier claims that the bill came with a fiscal impact and the plan does not require state approval.

Other measures passed Tuesday morning included:

- **HB1201**, by Rep. Dennis Ray Casey, R-Morrison, and Sen. Marty Quinn, R-Claremore, modifies information relating to the School District Transparency Act. It

deletes the requirement for school districts to provide copies of all credit card statements, identified by the department responsible for each credit card. The bill passed on a vote of 80 to 6.

- **HB1263**, by Rep. Matt Meredith, D-Tahlequah, and Sen. Dewayne Pemberton, R-Muskogee, allows certified reserve peace officers to be eligible for full-time training academy if they have completed the 240-hour reserve peace officer certification program and is hired by a law enforcement agency as a full-time peace or police officer. The bill passed on a vote of 87 to 0.

- **HB1427**, by Rep. Kyle Hilbert, R-Depew, and Sen. James Leewright, R-Bristow, creates the Out-of-State Tax Collections Enforcement Act of 2017. It requires the Tax Commission to establish one field office in a state other than Oklahoma for the purpose of collecting taxes owed to the state. It allows the Commission to maintain a full-time employee and not less than five out-of-state tax auditors. The bill passed on a vote of 70 to 17.

- **HB1555**, by Rep. George Faught, R-Muskogee, and Sen. Marty Quinn, R-Claremore, transfers the State Employee Assistance Program from the Office of Management and Enterprise Services to the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. The bill and its emergency passed on a vote of 88 to 0.

- **HB1583**, by Caldwell, and Sen. Kyle Loveless, R-Oklahoma City, as amended, consolidates the Office of the State Bond Advisor into the Office of the State Treasurer. It accounts for the transfer in relation to funds and records. The amendment directs the Bond Oversight Revolving Fund to the State Treasurer. It repeals language related to said Fund. The amendment provides for disclosure to be made by any public service provider for the direction of any and all direct financial contribution which exceed \$5,000 on a cumulative basis to any nonprofit organization. It provides a similar procedure for contributions exceeding \$100 on a cumulative basis to any elected officials or employees of a State or Local Governmental Entity to which financial services are to be provided in connection with issuance of debt obligations or contributions made to any individuals associated with a nonprofit. It provides when this disclosure must be filed. The bill, as amended, passed on a vote of 84 to 0.

- **HB1667**, by Rep. Todd Thomsen, R-Ada, and Sen. Eddie Fields, R-Wynona, modifies the ways in which the State Board of Education to award contracts for statewide student assessment system which preparing students for college and careers. It allows assessments to be reviewed for alignment to the subject matter standards. The bill requires the six-year subject area textbook adoption cycle to align to the subject matter standards adoption cycle. The bill passed on a vote of 81 to 6.

- **HB1670**, by Thomsen, and Sen. Greg McCortney, R-Ada, increases the separate fee amount to be paid to the court for traffic offenses from \$9 to \$10; a fee collected by the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET). The bill passed on a vote of 51 to 37. Thomsen served notice for reconsideration on the vote by which the legislation passed.

- **HB1824**, by Rep. Chris Kannady, R-Oklahoma City, and Sen. A J Griffin, R-Guthrie, as amended, requires a health benefit plan that provides benefits for prescription drugs delivered, issued or renewed after November 1, 2017, to provide for synchronization of prescription drug refills on at least one occasion per insured per year, provided all of the conditions therein are met. It requires such a plan apply a prorated daily-cost sharing rate to any medication dispensed by a network pharmacy when necessary to permit synchronization. It prohibits dispensing fees from being prorated and requires all dispensing fees be based on the number of prescriptions filled or refilled. It defines "synchronization" as used therein. The bill passed on a vote of 92 to 0.

- **HB1889**, by Rep. Pat Ownbey, R-Ardmore, and Sen. Frank Simpson, R-Ardmore, authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to construct, establish, administer, operate and maintain a State Veterans' Cemetery System. It directs State Veterans' Cemetery System to consist of one or more cemeteries to serve the veterans, spouses and eligible dependents of the veterans of the State of Oklahoma. The bill also outlines the duties of the ODVA in establishing said cemetery. The bill passed on a vote of 88 to 0.