



Advancing Arkansas schools

Committee moves forward state's prison, school budgets

CHUCK BARTELS
The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Legislators on Wednesday advanced a proposed \$2.7 billion budget for Arkansas public schools, which would give them about \$500 more per student.

The Joint Budget Committee accepted the proposal on a voice vote. The House and Senate will consider it after the General Assembly's fiscal session begins Feb. 8.

The proposal would increase per-student funding to \$6,023 for the state's 450,000 public school students.

Legislators also advanced budget proposals for the Correction Department, which runs the state prison system, and for the Community Correction Department, which handles lesser offenders and probation and parole.

Correction Department Interim Director Ray Hobbs told lawmakers the system is growing by about 500 prisoners per year. The department is preparing to add 300 beds at a new unit in Malvern.

Sen. Randy Laverty, D-Jasper, said he wants the state to start using house arrest

for nonviolent offenders so it won't have to continue to spend millions to house them in prisons.

As of Wednesday, the state prison system held nearly 15,100 convicts, including almost 1,500 who are in county jails waiting for prison space to open.

The panel recommended a 2011 budget of \$404.2 million, which is \$15.4 million less than the Correction Department sought. Legislators also advanced a budget of \$100.6 million for the Community Correction Department, \$9.4 million less than the department requested.

On Monday, Beebe announced a \$100 million state budget cut for the current year, but state school funding was left untouched. The cut followed a similar reduction last fall, when the Education Department had surplus money to absorb a \$38 million cut. Beebe provided about \$8 million from a rainy day fund to tide over the prison system and some state human services.

Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell told the panel the proposal would maintain schools' "adequacy," which was the quality level needed to remove the

education budget from state Supreme Court supervision in 2007.

Kimbrell said he understands additional funding may not be possible given the state's shrinking revenues.

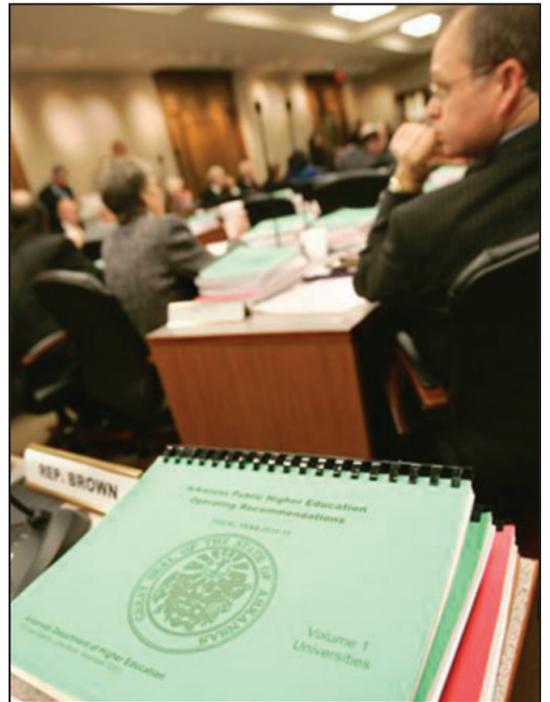
"We know where we are economically in this state," he said.

Committee members spent little time discussing the budget, instead focusing on improvements on test scores among students who plan to attend college. More than half of high school graduates need remedial courses, something Kimbrell said is being addressed through programs to help students become proficient at their grade levels.

Federal guidelines have set 2014 for all students to be proficient. Kimbrell said Arkansas is nearing the 60 percent mark.

"Down the line, I think we'll see the fruits of our efforts," he said.

Rep. Johnnie Roebuck, D-Arkadelphia, asked whether the Education Department is monitoring results in districts where private contractors provide some services. Kimbrell said it is, and the state can try to adopt the best practices in other districts.



The Associated Press

BUDGET PLANS: Higher education budget recommendations and other paperwork sit on a legislator's desk during a hearing of the Joint Budget Committee at the Arkansas state Capitol in Little Rock, Ark., Tuesday. Sen. Steve Faris, D-Malvern, right looks on.

Parade keeps quirky feel

MARK GREGORY
Associate editor

The 2010 St. Patrick's Day parade will have no problem keeping the "quirky" reputation its predecessors earned over the past six years, with an Italian float and a grand marshal who made news Wednesday talking about anti-whaling activities.

Bo Derek, who has agreed to be the first female grand marshal of the First Ever Seventh Annual World's Shortest St. Patrick's Day Parade March 17, was on "The O'Reilly Factor" Wednesday night to discuss her "fight to save the whales," according to a promo on the Fox News Web site.

Also Wednesday, the Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau released a summary of the early entries for the parade, which Steve Arrison, CEO of the CVB, said has already drawn an interesting early assortment of floats compared to past years.

As far as Derek, Arrison said she is "heavily involved in wildlife conservation and protection."

Derek is a staunch supporter of animal rights and an active Republican. She was named to the California Horse Racing Board in July 2008 by California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Leysa Lowery, who manages the entries for the parade, said one returning entry will be from J&S Italian Villa and Dolce Ge-

PARADE, PAGE 3A



The Sentinel-Record/Mara Kuhn

WALK FOR CHILDREN: Rotarian Don Gooch announces First Step's newest idea to aid children - the Ann and Nick Tillman Project for Children with Sensory Needs, which he directs, and the upcoming Walk for Children fundraiser to benefit the project, during Wednesday's Hot Springs National Park Rotary Club meeting at the Arlington Resort Hotel & Spa.

First step in the right direction

BETSY SIMON
The Sentinel-Record

First Step School has taken the initial measures to provide area children who have developmental delays and disabilities with necessary therapeutic and educational programs that will allow them to lead long, productive lives.

At Wednesday's Hot Springs National Park Rotary Club meeting at the Arlington Resort Hotel & Spa, Rotarian Don Gooch announced First Step's newest idea to aid these children - the

Ann and Nick Tillman Project for Children with Sensory Needs, which he directs.

He challenged the Rotarians and all community members to put on their walking shoes and join the school in its mission to better young lives through a fundraiser, Walk for Children, which will begin with a kick off party on May 3, when teams of 12 people will be asked to start making pledges as they walk 100 miles in four months.

Nancy Baxter, director of develop-

ment at First Step, can provide the community with more information about the walk, which Gooch hopes will raise at least \$50,000 for the Ann and Nick Tillman Project.

"With each step people take during this walk, they will know that they are helping a child and making their voices heard about issues surrounding the health of our children," he said.

"I think it's a compelling organiza-

FIRST STEP, PAGE 3A

Author shares with students

CHARLIE GOCIO
The Sentinel-Record

PEARCY - It took Roland Smith 20 years to learn how to write. Since then, he's written more than 25 books.

Smith, 58, authors young-adult fiction, along with non-fiction books for children. A resident of Tualatin, Ore., a suburb of Portland, his works have received several awards across the country.

On Wednesday, Smith spoke to high school and junior high students of the Lake Hamilton School District, sharing the experiences that helped mold his writing and giving advice for aspiring writers.

"When I write a book, I write about what's important to me," he said.

And with a former 20-year career as a zookeeper and research biologist, it's no surprise most of his work revolves around animals.

Drawing from his experience helping with the Exxon Valdez cleanup effort, Smith wrote the non-fiction "Sea Otter Rescue: The Aftermath of an Oil Spill."

"I hate oil spills," he said. "It's impossible to clean oil."

During two separate gatherings in the high school auditorium, Smith told students how he and other members of a rescue crew harbored and saved 300 sea otters, whose habitat is close to the shoreline, which made them especially susceptible to the 1989 oil tanker spill.

"It took four people a whole hour just to clean one otter,"

AUTHOR, PAGE 3A

WAITING FOR HELP: Injured people sit along Delmas road the day after a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Wednesday.



The Associated Press

Haiti earthquake kills thousands

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Haitians piled bodies along the devastated streets of their capital Wednesday after a powerful earthquake flattened the president's palace, the cathedral, hospitals, schools, the main prison and whole neighborhoods. Officials feared thousands - perhaps more than 100,000 - may have perished but there was no firm count.

Death was everywhere in Port-au-Prince. Bodies of tiny children were piled next to schools. Corpses of women lay on the street with stunned ex-

pressions frozen on their faces as flies began to gather. Bodies of men were covered with plastic tarps or cotton sheets.

President Rene Preval said he believes thousands were killed in Tuesday afternoon's magnitude-7.0 quake, and the scope of the destruction prompted other officials to give even higher estimates. Leading Sen. Youri Lator-tue told The Associated Press that 500,000 could be dead, although he acknowledged that nobody really knows.

"Parliament has collapsed. The tax office has collapsed. Schools have collapsed. Hospitals have collapsed," Preval told

the Miami Herald. "There are a lot of schools that have a lot of dead people in them."

Even the main prison in the capital fell down, "and there are reports of escaped inmates," U.N. humanitarian spokeswoman Elisabeth Byrs said in Geneva.

The head of the U.N. peace-keeping mission was missing and the Roman Catholic archbishop of Port-au-Prince was dead.

"The cathedral, the archbishop's office, all the big churches, the seminaries have been re-

HAITI, PAGE 6A

Weather

CHANCE OF SHOWERS. HIGHS IN THE LOWER 50S. LOWS IN THE 30S.

SUNRISE: 7:16 A.M.
SUNSET: 5:19 P.M.

MORE ON PAGE 2A



FRIDAY:
HIGH 59° LOW 38°
SATURDAY:
HIGH 51° LOW 37°

Index

Arts, movies	6B	Lifestyles	7A
Classified	7-10B	Obituaries	9A
Sports	1-3B	Stocks	4B
Features, etc.	5B	Viewpoints	8A
FYI	2A		

Quote of the day

“ If you limit your actions in life to things that nobody can possibly find fault with, you will not do much. **”**
- Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), English author (1832-1898).

