



2014

Session Overview

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Two of the legislature’s top priorities entering the 2014 legislative session included decreasing the personal income tax and funding much needed repairs for the Oklahoma State Capitol building. Additionally, legislators addressed a wide array of policy issues such as employee pay raises, tax credits, repealing Common Core, and pension reform.

Criminal Justice

Human trafficking received much attention this session. **HB 2353** adds human trafficking to the list of crimes for which a person must serve 85% of the sentence imposed. The measure also increases the penalty for human trafficking to a term of between 5 years and life imprisonment, a fine of not more than \$100,000 or both fine and imprisonment. If the victim was under the age of 18, the penalty is increased to a term of not less than 15 years imprisonment, a fine of not less than \$250,000 or both fine and imprisonment. **SB 1433** requires offenders to be in compliance with the standards for Class Level 2 behavior while incarcerated to qualify for achievement earned credits. Another measure, **SB 1538**, allows a civil action brought in a human trafficking case to be instituted in the district court in the county in which the prospective defendant resides or has committed any act which subjects him or her to liability. The measure establishes that the statute of limitations does not commence until the plaintiff discovers or reasonably should have discovered that he or she was a victim of human trafficking and that the defendant caused, was responsible for or profited from the human trafficking. A final measure, **HB 3496** requires

Introduction

Although the state’s economy is strong, the Legislature was confronted with a \$188 million shortfall in available funds to appropriate. The shortfall was due, in part, to pre-designated funding for certain items like roads and bridges and also as a result of lower corporate income tax collections. A majority of state agencies received budget cuts of 5.5%, while some received no cuts and others saw greater cuts. Most noteworthy, however, the 2015 budget protects, and in some cases increases, funding for core government functions like education, human services and public safety.

every person having reason to believe that a person or child-placing agency is engaging in the crime of trafficking in children to report the matter promptly to the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Control. The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Control is to refer the information to the appropriate district attorney within 7 days of receiving a report.

A related measure, **HB 2349** increases the fine for maintaining a house of prostitution from not less than \$100 to a fine of not less than \$2,000. The measure also increases the fine involving obscene materials from not more than \$1,000 to not less than \$2,000 and the term of imprisonment to not less than 3 years nor more than 20 years. The punishment for second and subsequent violations related to child pornography is established as imprisonment for not less than 10 years nor more than 30 years, a fine of not less than \$20,000 or both fine and imprisonment.

Economic Development and Financial Services

The Legislature aimed to expand and extend programs derived to spur economic development throughout the state, while also ensuring that unemployment benefits are provided only to those who meet the program requirements.

HB 2956 expands the Small Employer Quality Jobs Program to allow businesses located in larger counties to participate. The measure removes the population qualifier in the program, which is currently restricted to qualified establishments located in counties with a population under 200,000 or located in an opportunity zone.

HB 2509 extends the sunset date of the aerospace engineer tax credit to January 1, 2018. The measure also modifies the definition of qualified employee to include those who worked in the aerospace sector, not as full time engineers, prior to receiving an undergraduate or graduate degree.

HB 2580 extends the sunset date of the Compete with Canada Film Act to July 1, 2024.

The film rebate program was set to expire July 1, 2014. The rebate provides a film maker one dollar in return for every three dollars spent on movie production within the state.

HB 2505 makes numerous changes to provisions relating to unemployment benefits. Most notably, the measure requires the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) to randomly review five percent of unemployment benefits cases where misconduct was alleged. The measure also modifies the definition of *misconduct*. A misconduct violation does not require a prior warning from the employer and as long as the employee knew, or should have reasonably known, that a rule or policy of the employer was violated, the employee will not be eligible for unemployment benefits. There is also a rebuttable presumption of misconduct if a state or federal agency has findings of failure by the employee to meet the applicable civil, criminal or professional standards of the employee's profession.

The measure also provides that reimbursed pay or back pay received by a recipient of unemployment benefits will be subtracted from the claimant's weekly benefit check if the claimant is placed on furlough or experiences a work stoppage due to a lapse in appropriation or a budget shortfall and is subsequently reimbursed full pay when the work stoppage period ends. The OESC is authorized to reconsider a benefit determination to correct for any reimbursed or back pay received by a claimant. An employer may also file an untimely objection to a claim for unemployment benefits if good cause is shown.

Lastly, the measure repeals the Shared Work Unemployment Compensation Program. The program was established in 2011 to allow certain employees to collect partial unemployment benefits if the employees share the work remaining after a reduction in the total number of hours of work and a corresponding reduction in wages.

Under increased scrutiny following last year's deadly tornadoes, roofing contractors are now required to register with the Construction Industries

Board under **HB 3184**. The measure exempts charitable organizations, handymen, and prime contractors who subcontract their roofing work from this registration. Roofing contractors are required to display their firm's name and registration prominently at the job site, as well as on signs, business cards, letterheads, etc. The measure directs the board to establish educational standards.

Education

Due to growing parental concerns about their lack of involvement in the decision to retain their child who does not successfully complete the 3rd grade reading proficiency test, **HB 2625** was enacted. The measure requires school districts to immediately begin a student reading portfolio for those students who, at any point during their third grade year, are identified as having a reading deficiency. Students who score at the limited knowledge level on the third grade reading exam may qualify for automatic promotion to the fourth grade. Prior to promotion, the parent(s) must be informed of their child's score and the parent decides whether or not the child is retained in the third grade. If a child is promoted, the student reading proficiency team will develop an intensive remediation plan. If a student does not satisfy proficiency requirements by the end of the third grade, either through an assessment or student portfolio, and are not subject to a good cause exemption, the student will be ineligible for automatic promotion.

For the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, the student will be evaluated by the proficiency team for probationary promotion to the fourth grade. The superintendent must approve the team's recommendation for promotion and the team must continue to review the student's reading performance until they demonstrate proficiency. For the 2015-2016 school year, students who do not demonstrate proficiency and do not qualify for a good cause exemption will be retained in the third grade and provided intensive instructional service and supports. School districts must provide an annual report of the number of students promoted to the fourth grade. Following the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, school districts must report

the number of students promoted to a subsequent grade. Lastly, school districts may apply the principles of the student reading proficiency team to grades kindergarten through the second grade.

In an effort to exert state rights over academic standards, the Legislature passed **HB 3399**. The measure stipulates that by August 1, 2016, the State Board of Education, in consultation with the State Regents for Higher Education, the State Board of Career and Technology Education, and the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, must adopt standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and math that are considered college and career ready to replace current standards. Until new standards are adopted, the board will implement the standards for ELA and math that were in place prior to the revisions adopted in June 2010. The board will seek to have the state regents certify the standards as college and career ready as defined by federal law. For the 2017-2018 school year, the board must develop statewide student assessments for the ELA and math standards.

Subject matter standards will no longer be promulgated as rules or subject to the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), and any current rule that conflicts with this measure must be amended or repealed. Subsequently, the measure establishes a new approval procedure for academic standards. All standards and revisions will be subject to legislative review and cannot be implemented until the review process is completed. Standards will now be adopted through a joint resolution. Upon approval, the board will submit a copy of the standards to the Secretary of State, who will include them in the administrative code, and they will have the same force and effect of law as agency rules promulgated through the APA.

Lastly, the measure requires school districts to develop and adopt policies for the inspection of instructional materials by parents or guardians enrolled in a school, and it amends the Reading Sufficiency Act by adding prekindergarten and students who have been granted by the State Department of Education an exemption for medical emergencies to the list of good-cause exemptions.

HB 2730 prohibits a public school and district from being a member of a school athletic association unless the association has adopted a written policy that abides by the Oklahoma Open Records Act and the Oklahoma Open Meetings Act. The measure requires an annual financial and compliance audit to be conducted in accordance with the Oklahoma Public School Audit Law and that a performance audit be conducted by December 31, 2014, and by December 31 every five years thereafter.

HB 1623 allows the board of education of each school district to provide suicide awareness and prevention training to staff and students in grades seven through twelve and the training curriculum will be made available online through the school district website. Additionally, personnel will be immune from discipline and civil liability for communicating information in good faith concerning drug or alcohol abuse, a potential safety threat by or to any student to the parents or guardians of the student, law enforcement, or health care providers. Employees must notify parents or guardians immediately if they determine that a student is at risk of attempting suicide. School districts may enter into agreements with designated Youth Services Agencies for the delivery of intervention and prevention services.

SB 1902 authorizes the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA) to open and operate its own charter school. The Board of Juvenile Affairs will act as the school's governing body, and would be subject to any appropriate State Board of Education rules.

Energy and Utility Regulation

Pipeline safety is given greater priority by **HB 2533**. It puts the Corporation Commission in charge of enforcing the Oklahoma Underground Facilities Damage Prevention Act, and directs the Commission to look into several pipeline safety issues, including complaint processes and rights during legal proceedings.

SB 1418 strengthens rules for the disposal of field waste by requiring the Corporation

Commission to maintain public records of the materials in the waste including its source and where it was disposed.

General Government

Government Employee Compensation

HB 3293 creates the "State Employee Compensation Program" within the Executive Branch. The program is established to attract, retain and reward quality employees with competitive total compensation based on relevant labor markets. The Office of Management and Enterprise Services is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the program.

Thousands of Oklahoma's most under compensated employees will receive a pay raise of either 6.25 or eight percent under the provisions of **SB 2131**. The measure includes more than 7,000 employees performing core government services who are paid much less than those with similar positions in the private sector. Similarly, the legislature passed **HB 1794** which would prohibit the legislature from considering a reduction in state employee benefits until the legislature has approved an additional \$60 million for future employee raises.

State Capitol Building

The process of repairing the Oklahoma State Capitol building was one of the legislature's top priorities this session and was achieved with the passage of **HJR 1033**. The measure authorizes the Oklahoma Capitol Improvement Authority to issue obligations not to exceed \$120,000,000 for the purposes of renovation, repair, and remodeling of the State Capitol Building. In order to reduce costs, the bonds are to be repaid over ten years. Finally, the measure creates the State Capitol Repair Expenditure Oversight Committee to prepare and approve a programming plan for the repair of the State Capitol Building and requires the plan be submitted to the Director of the Office of Management and Enterprise Services by December 31, 2014.

County Government

In response to the findings of a 2013 interim study, the legislature passed **HB 2951**, which requires the Commission on County Government to oversee professional development programs for training county officials and their employees, including: commissioners, clerks, treasurers, assessors, court clerks, sheriffs, excise board members, and candidates for county office through the Cooperative Extension Service at Oklahoma State University. The measure also requires the commission to provide guidance to the extension service in designing training materials. Further, the measure directs the commission to set research priorities which improve county government. The measure requires the commission to cooperate with advisory boards to determine the education needs of county officials and their employees. Finally, the measure requires the commission to cooperate with the extension service to administer personnel education and training for counties and political subdivisions.

Health and Human Services

Children and Families

SB 2127 appropriates an additional \$35.9 million to DHS to implement year three of the Pinnacle Plan, which is the result of the 2012 settlement of the class action lawsuit brought against the agency, and to fund pay increases for child welfare workers.

HB 2130 modifies the conditions under which parental rights can be terminated to include a finding by the court that there has been a substantial erosion of the parent-child relationship due to serious neglect, abuse or exploitation, or a prolonged absence of the parent or unreasonable failure by the parent to maintain contact with the child; a finding that a child who is 4 years of age or older has been in DHS custody for 15 of the most recent 22 months and the child cannot be safely returned home; or a finding that a child who is younger than 4 years of age has been in DHS custody for 6 of the preceding 12 months and cannot be safely returned home.

A similar measure, **HB 2667**, modifies the list of crimes under which a district attorney is required to file a motion to terminate the rights of a parent that has been convicted of certain crimes regarding the neglect, abuse, endangerment, exploitation, voluntary manslaughter or murder of a child or of felony assault, voluntary manslaughter or murder of the child's other parent. The measure also requires the district attorney to file a petition for termination no later than 90 days if a parent has not made measurable progress on the individualized service plan ordered by the court.

In response to the high profile death of Quinten Douglas Wood, a severely developmentally disabled teen, whose neglect had been reported to DHS, **HB 3469** requires the department to give special consideration to the risks of any child who is unable to communicate effectively about any abuse or neglect that they may be suffering or who is vulnerable because of the inability to communicate.

HB 2585 allows any party to file an application for an emergency hearing that demonstrates harm to the health, safety or welfare of a child who is the subject of a deprived child proceeding. If the court does not conduct a hearing within 72 hours, the party who filed that application can present it to the presiding judge who must conduct a hearing within 24 hours of receiving the application.

HB 3472 prohibits a court from awarding custody or guardianship of a child to a person who has been convicted of certain crimes regarding the abuse, endangerment or exploitation of children.

SB 1793 modifies the procedures for handling a grievance filed by a foster parent against an employee of DHS by directing that the Office of Juvenile System Oversight within the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth receive the complaint and then work with the Office of Client Advocacy within DHS to ensure that the complaint is investigated and resolved. The measure requires that the OCA resolve grievances within 60 days of receiving the complaint and to notify all foster parents about the grievance procedures and how to file a complaint. Finally, the measure directs OJSO

and OCA to compile an annual report for the legislature detailing the number and nature of complaints received and resolved.

Abortion

The Legislature passed several abortion related measures this session. **HB 2684** stipulates that only a physician who has the ability to assess the duration of a pregnancy; has the ability to diagnose ectopic pregnancies; is able to provide or has plans in place to provide surgical care; and has access to medical facilities equipped to provide blood transfusions and resuscitation may provide an abortion inducing drug, including Mifeprex. Patients receiving Mifeprex must be provided the FDA-approved medication guide and final printed labeling.

HB 2685 requires abortion providers to inform a patient seeking an abortion that perinatal hospice is available and that it is an alternative to abortion. The bill requires the state board of medical licensure and supervision to publish materials regarding the availability of perinatal hospice and palliative care and to develop a website containing the information.

SB 1848 requires an abortion facility to have a physician on the premises who has admitting privileges at a general medical surgical hospital, which offers obstetrical or gynecological care, within 30 miles of the facility. The measure also requires the State Board of Health to establish abortion facility supplies and equipment standards. The board is charged with adopting physician assistant training and volunteer standards for abortion facilities, as well as evaluation standards for patients. The board is also tasked with developing abortion procedures and post abortion procedures. An abortion facility must notify the board if a patient or child born-alive is injured in a facility. In the event of a patient's death, the facility must notify the board no later than the next business day.

Health

HB 1020 is a significant milestone for physical therapists in Oklahoma. After several previous

failed attempts to pass legislation that would allow patients to self-refer to physical therapy, HB 1020 was enacted this session. The measure permits physical therapists to evaluate and treat a patient for up to thirty days without a referral from a physician.

The Legislature took action this session to prohibit the furnishing of vapor products to minors. **SB 1602** defines *vapor products* and stipulates that FDA approved products will not be considered vapor products. The Prevention of Youth Access to Tobacco Act is amended to prohibit vapor products from being sold to minors. Stores licensed to sell vapor products that violate the youth access to tobacco act, and fail to pay the associated fine, will have their sales tax permit suspended. Businesses that sell or display vapor products must post appropriate signage. Vapor products are prohibited within 300 feet of any playground, school, or other facility that is primarily used by minors. Lastly, the measure does not prohibit any agency or political subdivision from exercising their lawful authority to regulate zoning, land use, or to enforce a fire code regulation regulating vapor products.

HB 2554 directs the Board of Nursing to develop program guidelines for board-approved nursing education programs to facilitate the transition of veterans with prior military medical training and experience into such programs.

HB 2603 directs the medical board to prepare an annual brochure and online presentation for health care providers regarding their responsibilities and rights under the Hydration and Nutrition for Incompetent Patients Act, the Nondiscrimination in Treatment Act, the Oklahoma Advance Directive Act, the Oklahoma Do-Not-Resuscitate Act, and the Assisted Suicide Prevention Act. The brochure and presentation must be made available on the board's website, and inpatient health care service entities must be informed of their availability and how to access them online. The brochure must be provided to practitioners at least once during the year, when beginning employment, beginning service on a board of directors, or when beginning to serve patients at a health care service entity. Additionally, the medical board is required to prepare a disclosure

statement to inform patients of their rights under these acts. The State Department of Health must make the disclosure statement available online, as well as be provided to patients by certain entities.

Elderly and Long-Term Care

SB 1536 requires hospitals to give each patient or patient's legal guardian an opportunity to designate a lay caregiver who will provide after-care assistance to the patient following discharge from the hospital and directs that a hospital consult with the caregiver to prepare him or her to meet the aftercare needs of the patient and to issue a discharge plan that describes those needs.

SB 1874 requires that any long-term care policy issued under the Oklahoma Long-Term Care Insurance Partnership Program provide annual inflation protection for policy holders younger than 61 years of age of at least 3% per year compounded annually or a rate based upon changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and provide inflation protection for policy holders 61-76 years of age of at least 3% simple or a rate based on the annual CPI.

Higher Education and Career Technology

HB 3350 provides a career tech tuition waiver to any child of an Oklahoma peace officer, firefighter, emergency medical technician or member of the law enforcement retirement system whose parent gave their life in the line of duty. The tuition waiver also applies to a child of a member of the law enforcement retirement system whose parent is disabled by means of personal or traumatic injury that occurred in the line of duty. The waiver is limited to five years, and it will be considered a service benefit for Oklahoma peace officers and firefighters.

SB 1829 directs the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to adopt a policy that allows a student who receives a full scholarship from the Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps or Navy/Marines

Reserve Officers' Training Corp to be eligible for resident tuition.

SB 1830 requires institutions within the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education to grant a leave of absence to military students called to active duty. The student will be eligible to withdraw and receive a full refund for all classes during the period of active duty service without penalty to their admission status or GPA and without loss of institutional financial aid. The student's leave of absence cannot exceed a cumulative 5 years.

Judiciary

In response to the devastating tornados that have frequented Oklahoma over the years, the Legislature will be providing limited liability to good Samaritans and professionals that assist in the needs of the affected community. Additional measures were enacted which provide direction on the handling of cases involving product liability, child support and violations of the Open Meetings Act.

Additionally, the Legislature took action to reject a 12 percent pay raise for the judiciary, which was recommended by the Board on Judicial Compensation at their biannual meeting on July 17, 2013. In lieu of the 12 percent raise, legislators approved, through the passage of **HJR 1096**, a six percent pay raise for district judges and district attorneys, but required the salary increases to be paid from existing funds.

HB 2338 provides civil immunity to any person, business, church or school that offers emergency care, aid, shelter or other assistance during a natural disaster or catastrophic event. The immunity does not apply if damages were caused by gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.

HB 3365 provides that there is a rebuttable presumption that a manufacturer or seller is not liable for any injury to a claimant caused by some aspect of the formulation, labeling or design of a product if the manufacturer or seller complied with mandatory safety standards in place at time of manufacturing or if the product received premarket

licensing or approval by the federal government and was subsequently deemed appropriate for sale by the federal government. No product liability action may be asserted against a product seller unless:

- the seller exercised extensive control over the aspect of the design, testing, manufacture, packing or labeling process;
- the seller altered or modified the product and the modification contributed extensively in causing harm or damage;
- the seller made an express warranty independent of any warranty provided by the manufacturer;
- the claimant is unable to identify the manufacturer of the product;
- the manufacturer is not subject to service of process under the laws of the state; or
- the court determines that the claimant would be unable to enforce a judgment against the manufacturer.

SB 1497 entitles any party that brings a civil suit against a public body for a violation of the Open Meeting Act to be awarded reasonable attorney fees. However, if the public body successfully defends the civil suit and the court finds that the suit was frivolous in nature, the public body will be awarded reasonable attorney fees.

SB 1784 removes the requirement that a court must suspend or revoke any state licenses held by an individual who is in noncompliance with an order for child support. The measure places the decision to revoke or suspend licensure at the discretion of the court.

Public Safety

The Legislature adopted several measures to secure the rights of individuals to carry firearms. **HB 2614** allows valid handgun permit holders handguns on elementary and secondary school parking lots, provided the handgun is stored and hidden from view in a locked motor vehicle when the vehicle is unattended. The penalty for illegally carrying a handgun on school property is reduced from a felony to a misdemeanor with a maximum fine of \$250. The measure also removes the \$250

administrative fine associated with violations relating to a handgun licensee who carries a weapon into a prohibited location, other than a school parking lot.

In an effort to improve the background checks made on persons seeking a handgun carry license, **SB 1845** requires a court which adjudicates a person mentally incompetent or orders the involuntary commitment of a person due to a mental illness to send a certified copy of the order or adjudication to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for purposes of the National Instant Criminal Background Check system database and to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation. The measure also creates a mechanism to allow a person who has been involuntarily committed or adjudicated to petition the court to remove the disability which prevents the ability of the person to obtain a firearm.

Vetoed by the Governor, then overridden by the Legislature **HB 2461**, requires a sheriff or chief of police to execute any request for documents relating to the purchase of firearms defined by the National Firearms Act within 15 days if the purchaser is not prohibited of possessing a firearm.

Retirement

With the passage of two bills, the legislature continued its focus on reforming the state's pension system. The first bill, **HB 2630** creates the Retirement Freedom Act and requires the Oklahoma Public Retirement System to establish a defined contribution system for employees first employed on or after November 1, 2015. The measure will not be applicable to correctional officers, probation and parole officers, or fugitive apprehensions agents, who are employed by the Department of Corrections.

The measure establishes that an employee must contribute between three to seven percent of their salary to the defined contribution system. The state will match the employee's contribution.

The measure establishes that participants have complete retirement discretion over the

contributions and the gains and losses of their accounts. The measure also establishes that participants be vested with respect to employer matching amounts according to the following schedule:

Year 1 – 20%	Year 4 – 80%
Year 2 – 40%	Year 5(+)- 100%
Year 3 – 60%	

The measure establishes that members will have investment discretion over employer contributions and details the process and procedures for the administration of the defined contribution system. A similar bill, **SB 2120**, exempts district attorneys, assistant district attorneys or other employees of the district attorney’s office. The measure also adds to the list of exemptions elected county officials and employees of county and city government, conservation districts, circuit engineering districts or members of certain public or private trusts from participation in the defined contribution plan.

Revenue and Taxation

Personal Income Tax

After the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled against HB 2032 from the previous session, the Legislature returned determined to reduce the personal income tax rate. The Legislature also debated the extension of several incentives for the oil and gas industry, military personnel and tornado victims.

Contingent on certain revenue growth, **SB 1246** establishes a trigger mechanism to reduce the top marginal personal income tax rate to 5 percent. If the total General Revenue Fund estimate for FY2016 is greater than the total General Revenue Fund estimate for FY2014, the rate would be reduced to 5 percent for tax year 2016. If the tax cut is not implemented, then the State Board of Equalization will repeat the comparison in subsequent tax years until the trigger is met. Following the implementation of the 5 percent tax rate, there is a second revenue based trigger to reduce the top marginal personal income tax rate to 4.85 percent.

SB 1723 makes permanent an income tax deduction that allows military personnel to deduct 100 percent of income derived from active military pay.

Sales Tax

HB 2562 establishes a reduced two percent gross production tax rate on production from a new well spudded on or after July 1, 2015 for 36 months of production. Thereafter, the standard seven percent rate takes effect. The apportionment of gross production taxes collected at the two percent rate will be distributed as follows:

- 50% will be credited to the General Revenue Fund;
- 25% will be credited to the County Highway Fund; and
- 25% will be credit to each county, to be distributed to the school districts on an average daily attendance per capita distribution basis.

HB 3216 provides several sales, ad valorem, income, vehicle registration and vehicle excise relief measures to victims of tornadoes occurring in calendar year 2012 or calendar year 2013 for which a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration was not issued. The following benefits would be extended to qualifying individuals:

- credit for registration fees associated with a vehicle which is a replacement for a currently registered vehicle which was destroyed;
- sales tax exemption on the sales value of tangible personal property donated for the assistance of persons affected by a tornado;
- late admittance of a sale tax report by sale tax vendors;
- credit for excise tax previously paid for a destroyed vehicle, which is to be applied to the excise tax due on a replacement vehicle;
- refundable income tax credit for any increased ad valorem tax that is a result of rebuilding or repairing residential real property damaged or destroyed as a result of a natural disaster.

The credit is the difference between the ad valorem taxes paid on the property in the year prior to the damage and the ad valorem taxes paid on the first year the property is completely or fully repaired or rebuilt. A similar measure, **SB 1199**, would allow these relief measures to be applicable for tornados that could occur in future years.

Utility and Environmental Regulation

In an effort to reform the state's net metering policies **SB 1456** requires utilities to seek approval from the Oklahoma Corporation Commission to increase the fixed rates for customers who install distributed generation, i.e. on-site electricity generation that is connected to the grid. The new tariff must be implemented by December 31, 2015, but does not apply to customers with distributed generation as of November 1, 2014.

Veterans and Military Affairs

The War Veterans Commission is renamed to the Oklahoma Veterans Commission under **SB 1970**. The membership requirements are changed so that at least one of the Veterans appointed to the Commission must have served in the Persian Gulf Wars. **SB 1239** extends the Commission's authority to give emergency aid to, not only those who have served in a war, but to all discharged veterans.

Benefits for Oklahoma's veterans are sometimes directed only to war veterans and other times to simply veterans or those who have been honorably discharged. **SB 1610** directs that war veteran be treated the same as veteran or ex-service person for benefit purposes, and removes the requirement that a veteran be someone who has served during a period of war or a military campaign.

Traumatic brain injury has become known as the signature injury of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. **SB 1604**, the Oklahoma Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment and Recovery Act, is an attempt to help those dealing with serious brain injuries. The Oklahoma State University Center for Aerospace and Hyperbaric Medicine (OSUCAHM) is in charge of the program and

preparing a standard treatment plan and subject to available funds any Oklahoma veteran diagnosed with traumatic brain injury is be eligible for hyperbaric treatment at no cost.

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