

PERSPECTIVE

March 10, 2023



Legislative Update: Non-resident driver's licensing and hazard mitigation districts

The week ending March 3 marked the first major deadline for the 2023 Legislative Session. Thursday, March 9, was the final day for all bills except budget bills to be passed out of their assigned committee from their chamber of origin. While numbers are not yet finalized, there are around 1,000 bills and joint resolutions left alive after the Thursday deadline.

One bill that was passed out of committee this week was SB 669 by Sen. Michael Brooks. SB 669 would allow non-residents who file state taxes to utilize their individual tax identification number instead of a Social Security number to apply for a driver's license. The driver's license would be marked with a "NR" notation to indicate that the license holder is a non-resident.

The bill has received support from the law enforcement community as it would allow some 33,000 people in Oklahoma to be documented in the driver's license system, which is the primary database used by law enforcement officers at all levels across the state. Additionally, other states that have implemented this legislation have seen their uninsured motorist and hit-and-run numbers drop dramatically.

There has been concern expressed that allowing non-residents to apply for a driver's license will result in non-residents being registered to vote. However, the bill explicitly states that those using an individual tax identification number shall not be provided voter registration services. Additionally, the bill goes to great lengths to ensure that individuals utilizing the individual tax identification number to apply for a driver's license are vetted through the State Election Board at least quarterly to ensure that those individuals are not intentionally or accidentally obtaining a voter registration card.

This bill will be beneficial to farmers and ranchers across the state who hire immigrant laborers to work on their farms and ranches by providing a path for those workers to receive a driver's license. It will lower the numbers of migrant workers driving without a license, which risks liability to the farm owner and causes significant delays if a farm vehicle driven by an unlicensed worker is impounded or detained.

HB 1921 by Rep. Lonnie Sims was approved by the House County and

Municipal Government committee the same week. HB 1921 seeks to allow counties to create Hazard Mitigation Assessment Districts to raise revenue that might be used to leverage funds from the Federal government to assist with a variety of disaster mitigation uses.

The funds would be accumulated by an increased property tax to all property within the county. An amendment has been made to the bill to exempt all agriculturally assessed land in the county. However, private residences and businesses would still be subject to the property tax increase, and it is unclear how equipment would be impacted. Oklahoma Farm Bureau remains opposed to the bill in its current form because it still has the possibility to increase property taxes for farmers and ranchers.

HB 1921 is now available to be considered by the full House of Representatives.

For an update on weekly happenings at the Capitol and an outlook on what is ahead, be sure to tune in to Oklahoma Farm Bureau's Weekly Public Policy Update Zoom call each Friday at Noon.



Congressman Tom Cole answers questions from Farm Bureau members alongside OKFB president Rodd Moesel during the organization's annual leadership conference in Oklahoma City.



Sen. Jessica Garvin visits with OKFB District 8 Board Member Mike Leverett during the legislative reception of the 2023 OKFB Leadership Conference Tuesday, Feb. 21, in Oklahoma City.

Farm Bureau members learn from a full lineup of informational speakers at the 2023 Leadership Conference

More than 80 Oklahoma Farm Bureau members and guests convened in Oklahoma City for the organization's annual leadership conference Feb. 21.

Farm Bureau members kicked off the morning with Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell, who shared the importance of rural Oklahoma, agritourism and Farm Bureau's advocacy efforts.

"There has never been a more important time for Oklahoma Farm Bureau," he said.

Members learned about State Question 820 – the vote to legalize recreational marijuana – from former Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb.

Lamb expressed that legalizing marijuana could lead to a number of societal problems, including homelessness, increased crime and the breakdown of the family.

OKFB members have strict policy against recreational marijuana, and stood opposed to SQ 820.

Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur closed out the morning speaker lineup with an overview of agriculture in the state.

Arthur touched on Oklahoma's drought conditions and relief efforts, upcoming farm bill priorities and encouraged OKFB grassroots members to stay engaged at the state Capitol.

"My hope is that wherever you are from that your state senator or state representative knows your name and that you are in the agriculture industry," she said.

Over lunch, attendees heard from Senate and House Ag Committee chairmen Sen. Chris Kidd and Rep. Dell Kerbs as they discussed top agricultural issues currently moving through the legislative process.

Members also heard from Emma Alexander, a field representative for Congressman Frank Lucas, as she shared more about the congressman's involvement in discussions about the upcoming farm bill.

Mike Fina, chairman of the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board, kicked off the afternoon with an in-depth discussion of the state of broadband accessibility in Oklahoma and the goals of the broadband board in the future.

"We learned that our broadband is insufficient at best," he said of his work with the current broadband board.

Fina said the standard broadband speed in Oklahoma is a download speed of 25 Mbps and an upload speed of 3 Mbps – a benchmark set back in 2015.

The Oklahoma Broadband Office seeks to provide symmetrical download and upload speeds of 100 Mbps by the time the agency sunsets in five years.

Andy Evans of the Oklahoma Public School Resource Center visited with members about the impact of ad valorem protests on school budgets.

Evans cited the Oklahoma Supreme Court case *Kingfisher Wind v. Wehmuller* as a notable example of the effect ad valorem protests have on local school districts, as Kingfisher Wind, through

intangible property rights, received a tax credit for 48% of their wind turbine assets, causing Kingfisher Public Schools to lose the same amount in tax revenue.

Evans noted the importance of finding an equitable solution to tax protests for both taxpayers and school districts as he recognized the right to protest ad valorem valuations is crucial.

Special guest Congressman Tom Cole spoke to attendees about his time in Washington, D.C., and the current hurdles the country faces, including the border crisis and American energy challenges.

Cole expressed his optimism as a new Congress gets underway and the Oklahoma delegation takes on new jobs, assignments and leadership roles.

"This delegation is probably the most powerful delegation Oklahoma has ever seen since Carl Albert was Speaker of the House," he said.

Jerome Loughridge, senior vice president of operations at Oklahoma State University, rounded out the afternoon with an update on OSU's veterinary medicine program, rural healthcare and the university's nationally recognized research in unmanned aerial systems – an area he said is crucial to national defense efforts.

The evening concluded with a legislative reception and awards dinner to honor 12 state legislators who received special awards for their service to agriculture and rural Oklahoma.

OKFB members celebrate Farm Bureau Week at the El Reno Farm Show

Oklahoma Farm Bureau week was packed full of events to celebrate Farm Bureau Week in Oklahoma. Members spent time meeting with potential new members at the Crossroads of Oklahoma Farm Show in El Reno. Women's Leadership Committee members read accurate ag books and gave away a toy tractor to a winner.

Canadian County Women's Leadership Committee member Angela Heinrich (right) reads an accurate ag book during the Crossroads of Oklahoma Farm Show on Thursday, February 23.



Sen. Lonnie Paxton



Sen. Darcy Jech



Sen. Brent Howard



Sen. Chris Kidd



Rep. John Pfeiffer



Rep. Jon Echols



Rep. Kyle Hilbert



Rep. Dell Kerbs



Rep. Anthony Moore

Twelve legislators receive OKFB Champion awards for their commitment to agriculture at OKFB Leadership Conference

Twelve state legislators were honored at Oklahoma Farm Bureau's annual leadership conference Feb. 21 in Oklahoma City.

OKFB presented 10 legislators with the 2022 OKFB Champion award – an honor given to state lawmakers who served as exemplary advocates for Oklahoma agriculture during the 2022 legislative session.

Champion award recipients were Sen. Lonnie Paxton, Tuttle; Sen. Darcy Jech, Kingfisher; Sen. Chuck Hall, Perry; Sen. Brent Howard, Altus; Sen. Chris Kidd,

Waurika; Rep. John Pfeiffer, Orlando; Rep. Jon Echols, Oklahoma City; Rep. Kyle Hilbert, Bristow; Rep. Dell Kerbs, Shawnee; and Rep. Anthony Moore, Clinton.

"We are fortunate to have an outstanding group of lawmakers advocating for farmers, ranchers and rural Oklahoma at the state Capitol," said Rodd Moesel, OKFB president. "Farm Bureau members appreciate these 12 individuals and their understanding of the importance of agriculture in our state, and we are honored to recognize

them for their hard work."

In addition to the OKFB Champion award, OKFB presented Senate Pro Tempore Greg Treat and House Speaker Charles McCall with a special service award for their role in OKFB's first-ever Youth Legislative Experience in July 2022.

Award winners were nominated by county Farm Bureau members and the OKFB board of directors. Recipients received a plaque in recognition of their service to agriculture and rural Oklahoma.

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Oklahoma Farm Bureau members visit state Capitol

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members from Cotton, Caddo, Dewey, Ottawa, Tulsa and Washington counties visited the state Capitol and met with their respective legislators about upcoming legislation that affects rural Oklahoma including education, hazard mitigation and the marijuana industry in Oklahoma.



Cotton County members
with Sen. Chris Kidd



Caddo County members
with Rep. Dick Lowe



Dewey County members
with Rep. Mike Dobrinski



Ottawa County members
with Rep. Rusty Cornwell



Dewey County members
with Rep. Kenton Patzkowsky



Tulsa County member
with Rep. Steve Bashore