

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Too many schools? (KAIT, Channel 8, Jonesboro)

Consolidation.

It's a buzzword in Arkansas education.

The state fights for it and small schools fight to save themselves from it.

Meanwhile, supporters say it's a fight to save money.

But does consolidation really save any money? And would it work in Craighead County?

Those are questions we posed to area educators including Dr. Radius Baker, superintendent of Valley View Schools.

"Craighead County is unique, simply because you have 8 school districts, and 6 of those 8 are in the city limits of Jonesboro," he says. "Actually some of the property is in the city limits of Jonesboro."

Dr. Baker says the idea of consolidation someday to a county-wide school system in Craighead County is intriguing.

According to the Arkansas Department of Education, during the 2012-12 school year, more than 16,600 students were enrolled in K-12 in those 8 districts.

That's 8 superintendents.

And 8 superintendent salaries.

Comparing strictly enrollment, the Pulaski County Special School District in Little Rock is similar with just short of 17,000 students and just one superintendent, Dr. Jerry Guess.

"You are going to add specialized positions to take care of those services that are required in that bigger district," says Dr. Guess.

Consolidation is nothing new to Dr. Guess. He's been through a consolidation before in his career, even shuttering the school he attended.

He says if a school is meeting the financial and educational needs of the community then, "I think that district is doing a good job and would be hard to justify merging that district with others."

But what about those big superintendent salaries?

The 8 superintendents in Craighead County make more than a million dollars a year combined.

Those schools, however, have combined total budgets of over 150 million dollars.

Which means that even if you got rid of the superintendents and didn't replace them at all, the schools in Craighead county would only save .6%.

"i understand where that comes from when you see that salary, but that's only one person," says Chip Layne, superintendent at Bay.

He says administrative consolidation actually adds staff.

"They need them now in the current format," Layne said. "It's kind of silly to think you wouldn't need them if you went together."

A 1999 study of consolidation by the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators backs the claims of all three men.

Following 30 years of Arkansas consolidations, only 15 districts of 113 actually saved money the following year.

Dr. Baker says he knows people will say the administrators just want to save their jobs.

"I've announced my retirement. I'm not here to keep my job," he says. "I am here to make education as good as it can be in Craighead County. And i think we've shown as Craighead County schools that we are doing the best that we can. Can we do better, of course we can."

For a link to the consolidation study, [click here](#)

Chamber working with MHS (Maumelle Monitor)

More than 100 Maumelle area business leaders met on Monday, Feb. 18 with Maumelle High School and Pulaski County Special School District officials to explore areas where they could work together to support the high school.

Adam Henderson, local banker and president of the Maumelle Area Chamber of Commerce said, "As President of the Maumelle Area Chamber of Commerce, it is a great honor for the Chamber to build such a strong partnership with the Maumelle High School. It was such a great feeling of community yesterday as numerous business leaders/members of the Chamber attended the partnership kickoff meeting.

The large turnout of local business leaders just proves how vital the success of our local High School is to continuing our great quality of life in OUR community, MAUMELLE."

Retired investment executive Jamie Stell, who also retired from the Maumelle City Council last month said the meeting was the most impressive meeting he's attended since he moved to Maumelle decades ago.

"The group has potential – an awful lot of potential," Stell said.

He said he was especially impressed with principal Becky Guthrie's presentation and ideas.

Chamber executive director Julianne Cole thanked those who took time out of a busy Monday to attend.

"It was incredible to see how many business leaders took time away from their busy schedules to provide input on how to best prepare students for jobs in the 21st century. The enthusiasm and support for this new partnership is overwhelming. I am very excited about our chamber, our community and our educators & future leaders at Maumelle High School," Cole said.

The group met around lunchtime in the high school's large classroom that doubles as a community meeting place capable of hold around 150 people. Following a Powerpoint presentation from Gutherie the group broke into smaller groups for lunch and for a discussion on specific ideas and questions.

The group met again to compare notes from the breakout sessions, Stell said.

Everyone involved said this is a long term venture which will continue for years.

Jacksonville Mom Worries About Possible Mold At Daughter's School (Fox 16)

Video posted at <http://www.fox16.com/news/local/story/Jacksonville-Mom-Worries-About-Possible-Mold-At/AB5IJWJrkOn6pF2ydUu8A.csp>

LITTLE ROCK, AR-- A Jacksonville mother is worried about possible mold at her daughter's school.

"My main concern is getting this fixed so that those kids are healthy," said Tamaria Taylor.

Her daughter is a fifth grader at Pinewood Elementary and says the issue has been around since December.

"Before Christmas break, it was really stinking in my room," said Mya Taylor.

The Pulaski County Special School District confirms they have gotten Taylor's complaint. But they can not say whether the problem is in fact mold.

School leaders do acknowledge the roof has had leaks in recent weeks.

"When it rains like it did this weekend, then it makes it stink even worse," said Mya.

Maintenance workers will be on campus Wednesday to evaluate the problem.

PB Board approves \$2k teacher signing bonuses (Pine Bluff Commercial)

The Pine Bluff School District Board of Directors voted unanimously to approve one-time \$2,000 signing bonuses as a way to attract top quality educators to the school district upon the recommendation of district superintendent Linda Watson at the board's regular monthly meeting Tuesday night.

"We want to offer incentives to attract teachers who we have had difficulty recruiting including those who teach math, science, foreign languages and language arts," Watson said.

In other business Watson told the board that her administration is making progress in its assessment of which schools may need to close because of falling enrollment.

“At its last meeting the board authorized my administration to study closing schools and towards that end we have met with principals and staff,” Watson said. “The next step will be to have a community meeting to discuss the reason why this is necessary. Over the next couple of weeks we will continue to visit with staff and hopefully we will have all of the information we need by the March board meeting or the April meeting at the latest.”

The board approved a bid of \$205,894 submitted by Arkansas State Security Inc. for the installation of 43 interior cameras and 22 exterior cameras at Jack Robey Junior High School; as well as 40 interior and one exterior camera at Pine Bluff High School. The bid includes nine microphones as part of the system at Jack Robey.

The board approved the low bid of \$27,411 submitted by Otis Elevator Co. for the repair of the freight elevator at the Central Office.

Arkansas Elevator LLC submitted a bid of \$30,700; and Kone Elevators/Escalators submitted a bid of \$32,750.

The board approved the low bid of \$10,880 from Jeff Roberts Plumbing, Inc. for the installation of a Cross-Connection Control Assembly at Pine Bluff High School for identifying potential health hazards in the water system as required by the Arkansas Department of Health.

Roberts Plumbing, Inc. submitted a bid of \$15,500; and another company submitted a bid of \$12,750.30.

The board approved the resignations of classified personnel Bradley McCuller, a custodian in the maintenance department, effective Jan. 3; and Joshua Handley, a bus driver in the transportation department effective Feb. 5.

The board approved the termination of classified employee Charlotte Davis, a food service assistant in the food services department, effective Jan. 22.

The board voted to move the date for the March regular board meeting to March 12 from March 19 in order to avoid meeting during spring break, which runs March 18-22.

The financial report for the month ending Jan. 31 showed a beginning balance of \$13,391,509; revenue of \$3,789,330; expenses of \$3,266,553; amount available for operating of \$16,286,354; and a total balance for all funds of \$21,190,714.

The board recognized the death of former district superintendent Roy Scoggins.

“Those of my generation knew how much he did for this district,” board president Piccola Washington said of Scoggins.

Washington said the National Football League will host a Hometown Hall of Famers ceremony for recent Hall of Fame inductee Willie Roaf at Pine Bluff High School Feb. 27.

“Willie Roaf will get there at 12 p.m. and the event will go from then until 2:30 p.m. with a reception afterwards,” Washington said.

Teen develops cold fusion in his garage (Greenwood Democrat)

Taylor Wilson outlines how he obtained materials and then developed cold fusion at his home, using donated materials. His fusion project was featured in the March Popular Science magazine. Teen inventor Taylor Wilson finds science fascinating.

Wilson, 18, is one of a handful of people — and the youngest — who has developed cold fusion in his garage.

“Science is really cool, I think. I don’t know why science has gotten a bad rap,” Wilson told educators and students recently at the Arkansas Public School Resource Center conference at the Hot Springs Convention Center.

Formerly of Texarkana, the applied nuclear physicist now lives with his family in Reno, Nev. He began gathering materials for a “survey of every-day radioactive materials” project when he was 12.

It formed the nucleus of his experiments, leading to power generation two years later.

Taylor Wilson, Katie Clifford and Rep. Bruce Westerman talk to Rep. Prissy Hickerson after Wilson’s talk. Clifford is communications director for the Arkansas Public School Resource Center, Using a borrowed Geiger counter; he learned that old clock faces contained radioactive material. He found more materials in lantern mantles and Fiesta glazed plates. And radioactive materials are abundant in nature, he said.

He urged budding scientists to make connections to obtain materials — with researchers, universities and industries.

The reactor’s actual construction took about a year.

Wilson didn’t divulge details, but acknowledged his fusion project attracted attention from state and federal officials — but it didn’t stop his success.

He hopes low-cost fusion reactors can be used at medical facilities to produce nuclear isotopes for fighting cancer.

Isotopes have an extremely short half-life, mandating costly delivery by jet. Producing isotopes on-site could slash the cost, he says.

Science fairs are an incubator of new ideas for science.

“For me, science fairs were the most-fun part of high school,” he said.

Science should be hands on. Wilson urged students and educators to participate in and promote science fairs.

“Hands-on learning is what it’s all about. It’s all about doing experiments,” he said.

“If you teach science the way you teach history, it’s not going to work.”

Awards were also nice.

“I won close to \$100,000 in prize money in nine years of science fairs,” he said.

Science fair projects offer an opportunity for students to become really passionate about science, he said.

He enjoys other subjects, too.

“I loved history and English in school,” he said. “Writing is a big part of science.”

Wilson hopes to market another invention.

He developed an inexpensive Cherenkov radiation detector that won a \$50,000 award in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in May 2011.

Radiation detectors have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars each, making it impossible to test most entry points around the nation. His detector can be built for several hundred dollars.

He hopes to deploy his device to U.S. ports for detecting potential nuclear threats.

It would be cheap enough that every container, every shipment entering the United States could be tested, he said.

Science is about taking risks, he said. Experiments are worthwhile, even if they apparently fail.

“Some of the biggest failures in science were the biggest successes,” he said. “If it fails, it’s still science. The greatest reward comes with the greatest risk.”

Fusion offers an abundant supply of clean energy, but politics has kept it from widespread use, Wilson said. The same technology that can produce fuel for safe fusion power can also be used to produce nuclear bombs.

“Nuclear waste has been a huge issue, but we have the solution to solve the problem,” he said. Nuclear waste is used in breeder reactors to create new nuclear fuel.

Wilson gave a brief history of nuclear fusion, noting that key fusion research has been conducted in Arkansas.

The Southwest Experimental Fast Oxide Reactor near West Fork (Washington County) was a nuclear breeder reactor operating from 1969 to 1972, when the original program was successfully completed.

SEFOR was privately operated by General Electric and funded by the federal government through Southwest Atomic Energy Associates, a nonprofit consortium including the 17 power companies in Southwest Power Pool, and also European nuclear agencies. Southwest Power is based in Little Rock.

The University of Arkansas now has the decommissioned reactor.

Last June, Wilson was awarded a Thiel Foundation Fellowship. The two-year \$100,000 fellowship would require him to drop out of college for the duration of the fellowship, so he could pursue his passion full time.

He’s one of 18 teens to be named a Thiel fellow this year.

How did Wilson gain the opportunity to make a feature presentation at the Arkansas conference?

It started back when Hot Springs Village resident Bill Wilkie told Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-Fountain Lake, how wonderful it would be to lure the young inventor back to Arkansas, and for the state to become a technology mecca in the manner of Silicon Valley, Calif., and Austin, Texas.

“We need to help Arkansas create a system to make inventors and designers the heroes of 2030, much like we made the 1980 geeks the heroes by 2000,” Wilkie told the Voice recently. “This 18-year-old inventor could be the Thomas Edison of the 21st century.”

Westerman caught Wilkie’s enthusiasm and contacted Rep. Prissy Hickerson, Texarkana, who happened to be a former neighbor of the Wilsons.

Several Fountain Lake EAST students were among those attending the conference.

Wilson said the United States has been and continues to be a world leader in research, but it cannot assume it always will lead.

The United States must emphasize science education, he said, if the country intends to preserve its way of life on a long-term basis.

“Science is changing the world,” he said. “The more we have science on the national stage — the more we emphasize science education — that will take us on the track to beat China.

“I hope society won’t just assume innovations will continue,” he said. “You’ve got to get out there and do the research.”

Wilson says he can’t predict where he will end up living and working. But he’s committed to keep inventing, and helping change the world.

Leaving Illinois post, says finalist for LR schools chief (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — As the Little Rock School Board named Walter Milton Jr. of Springfield, Ill., one of four finalists for the superintendent’s job Monday night, he announced publicly in Springfield that he will leave the superintendent’s job there before the school year’s end.

Milton, who has headed the Springfield system since 2007, will interview for the Little Rock job on a yet-to-be finalized date later this month or in early March.

Other finalists the Little Rock board will interview are Connie Hathorn, superintendent of the Youngstown, Ohio, public schools; Stefanie Phillips, deputy superintendent of the Clayton County, Ga., public schools; and Dexter Suggs Sr., chief of staff in the Indianapolis school system.

The Little Rock board is seeking a replacement for Superintendent Morris Holmes, whose contract will expire June 30.

Milton said in an interview Tuesday that his actual departure date from the 15,000-student Springfield district “has not been set in stone.”

In a statement that he read during a Springfield SchoolBoard meeting and provided to the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Milton said it “has become clear in the past several months” that his efforts to improve student performance are not supported by some on the School Board.

He said he was not questioning the Springfield board members’ desire to act in a way they believe is best for students.

“But regrettably, there are fundamental policy disagreements that prevent us from moving forward in a manner that I believe - and many in the [Springfield district] community believe - best serves students and their families,” his statement said.

He cited as an example the board’s decision to close a middle/high school for boys that was designed to assist students from low-income families in preparing for college.

He said that it was in the context of the policy differences that he had asked the board at the beginning of the school year to extend his contract beyond its June 30, 2014, expiration date. That was declined, which prompted him to explore other job possibilities. He said the decision to part with the district was “mutual” and “amicable.”

A phone message to the school district’s attorney regarding the circumstances of Milton’s impending departure and an e-mail message to the Springfield School Board president were not returned Tuesday afternoon.

Milton and the Springfield board signed a confidentiality agreement weeks ago that states that they have negotiated the terms for the superintendent’s “cessation of services.”

The agreement, publicly released Monday in response to a request from a Springfield news organization, calls for the board and Milton to issue a joint news release on March 11 regarding the superintendent’s departure.

In the Monday night statement, Milton noted that he was pursuing the Little Rock job and that it is one “where I believe I could make a real difference. But that is for the folks down there to decide.”

Milton, 46, who earns a base salary of \$220,000, was a superintendent in Flint, Mich., and Fallsburg, N.Y., before heading the Springfield district. He applied for the Little Rock superintendent’s job in 2011 but withdrew before being interviewed.

News articles are circulating in Little Rock regarding Milton’s recommendation, while in Flint, to hire an acquaintance once charged with molesting a child, a reported foreclosure on a house in Flint and the results of a district audit from Milton’s tenure in the Fallsburg district. Milton said Tuesday that the reports don’t tell the complete stories and leave the wrong impression about him.

He said he was unaware of the molestation charge against the acquaintance at the time he recommended the man’s hiring and did not become aware of it until it was discovered by the Flint media. Milton sent to the Democrat-Gazette a Georgia court document showing that the accused employee was acquitted.

Milton said there was not a foreclosure on a house in Flint but that he and his wife ultimately had to sell what was once a \$422,000 house for \$150,000.

Milton also forwarded an April 2012 letter from a Pittsford, N.Y., attorney to Milton that said that “an amicable settlement” had been reached regarding disputes and counter-disputes between Milton and the Fallsburg district.

"In our opinion, there is no substantiated wrong doing or any other legal violations engaged in by you," the attorney, H. Todd Bullard, wrote to Milton. "Indeed political issues drove the publicizing of the events and disputes between you and your former employer back in 2005, and thereafter," Bullard wrote to Milton.

Stephens school chief fails in bid to keep job after DWI (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

STEPHENS — The Stephens School Board on Monday fired the district's superintendent, who had been suspended with pay since his second-offense DWI arrest in July.

Darrell Porter was represented in the School Board hearing by El Dorado attorney Robert Depper, who described efforts he said Porter has made to address personal problems that played a part in his arrest and subsequent suspension.

After hearing from Depper and Porter, the board went into executive session and, upon returning to open session, board member Maurice Porchia moved that the board terminate Porter's contract, effective immediately.

The motion was approved unanimously by those present with one member, Sarah Green, absent.

After the hearing, Porter said he had no comment on the board's action.

Depper said he would be filing a lawsuit of wrongful termination because Porter had a contract with the board, his arrest came while on his private time and did not affect the school district, and no one criticized his "skills as a superintendent."

During the hearing, Depper reminded board members that they had suspended Porter with the advice to seek help.

"The good news is he has stepped up to the plate," taken responsibility and achieved sobriety, Depper said, adding that Porter "has dealt with the demons that befell him."

Depper asked his client to describe the events of the night he was arrested.

Porter, who had been divorced for a year, said he "had a panic attack" when returning "home to an empty house" and seeing a family portrait of himself, his ex-wife and four children.

He dealt with the situation by "consuming alcohol," Porter said, adding that he had previously told the School Board about "anxiety attacks."

Asked by Depper about the circumstances of his arrest, Porter acknowledged that he pleaded no contest to driving 86 mph while going through Kingsland and to second-offense driving while intoxicated.

Porter previously pleaded no contest to first-offense driving while intoxicated after being arrested by the Arkansas State Police on Oct. 17, 2008. Charges of endangering a minor and driving left of center were reportedly not prosecuted.

His sentence for the July offense included a fine, going to a defensive-driving course, a Mothers Against Drunk Driving class - which he said he has not completed because one is not available in the area - and using alcohol monitors in his vehicle and home.

Asked by Depper about what he has done “to get and maintain sobriety,” Porter said what has helped most is “prayer and fasting.” He said he also attended Alcoholic Anonymous meetings and went to counseling sessions.

Porter spoke of “the embarrassment, the things I’ve lost - friends, job opportunities” and said, “I won’t ever do this again.”

Later, when being questioned by board members, Porter was told by Porchia that “when we hired you, you said everything in your past was behind you,” an apparent reference to his DWI arrest in Smackover and subsequent firing from his job as Smackover School District superintendent.

Depper asked the board if there is a personnel policy that covers termination for personal problems. “I call it a morality clause,” he said.

Paul Blume of Little Rock, representing the School Board, said later that all board action does not have to be addressed by a personnel policy.

“No law addresses dismissal of a superintendent,” he said.

Board President Erma Brown said documents showed that in addition to second-offense DWI and speeding, at the time of his arrest, Porter had also been charged with careless driving, driving left of center and having a weapon in the car.

Porter responded that he was found guilty only of DWI and speeding.

During his suspension from the Stephens School District, Porter had continued to receive his annual salary of \$85,000.

At the time he was suspended, the board appointed high school Principal Mary Thomas to act as interim superintendent. In January, the board hired retired Hope Superintendent Kenneth Muldrew to be interim superintendent, with a six-month contract paying him \$43,000.

Shield for concealed-gun carriers favored (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The House of Representatives voted 84-3 Tuesday in favor of a bill to exempt the names and ZIP codes of concealed-handgun license holders from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

On a sometimes testy 37th day of the session, members also took up bills that would resume lethal injections in the state and allow students to stay in their schools if the School Choice Act is ruled unconstitutional.

No members spoke for or against the gun legislation, Senate Bill 131. The legislation, which also exempts the names and ZIP codes of former license holders and applicants, was sent to Gov. Mike Beebe; the governor has not said whether he’ll sign it.

In 2009, the Legislature had voted overwhelmingly to shield some concealed-weapon registration data, including permit holders’ addresses, from public disclosure.

The current bill’s sponsor, Sen. Bruce Holland, R-Greenwood, introduced the legislation after a New York newspaper published information about concealed-weapons permit holders in that state.

The House also voted 89-1 Tuesday in favor of Senate Bill 237, proposed by Sen. Bart Hester, R-Cave Springs, which attempts to resume lethal injections in the state after the existing statute was ruled unconstitutional by the Arkansas Supreme Court in June. The bill was sent to the governor, who will sign it into law, Beebe's spokesman Matt DeCamp said.

SB237, which was presented to the House by Rep. Nate Steel, D-Nashville, attempts to address the issues raised in the court's ruling.

Under the bill, prisoners would first be injected with a benzodiazepine, an anti-anxiety drug, before receiving "a barbiturate in an amount sufficient to cause death."

PROCEDURAL WRANGLING

One day after Republican leader Bruce Westerman fell two votes short of the 51 required to amend one of his own bills, two of his fellow Republican lawmakers responded by blocking similar requests from two Democratic lawmakers.

"Every member ought to have the right to amend his own bill," said Rep. John Burris, R-Harrison. "[Monday] that courtesy was denied to Rep. Westerman and I wanted to make a point." But Westerman took to the floor Tuesday afternoon and asked members to respect the customary privilege to amend their own bills.

"It's disappointing that we're at this point, but I hope that we'll all join together and support this bill and pass it out like it should be," Westerman said.

House Speaker Davy Carter said he would be "extremely disappointed" if he saw the procedural action used again in the future.

"I've said to every member I've come across, and I'll say it again now in front of you, 'We're not going to get into that kind of stuff.' Everybody's even now, right," Carter said.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

At a news conference, Beebe signed identical bills to increase penalties for human trafficking and provide defenses for victims who are charged with prostitution.

Senate Bill 242, proposed by Sen. Missy Irvin, R-Mountain View, is now Act 132. House Bill 1203 by Rep. David Meeks, R-Conway, is now Act 133.

The acts make it a Class Y felony to traffic a minor for labor or sex. Human trafficking is currently a Class A felony.

A Class Y felony is punishable by 10 to 40 years or life in prison. A Class A felony is punishable by six to 30 years in prison.

The acts also create defenses against charges of prostitution and sexual solicitation for victims of human trafficking and allow victims to file civil actions against traffickers.

ELECTRONIC PROOF OF INSURANCE

In other business, the Senate approved Senate Bill 243 to allow proof of insurance for motor vehicles to be presented in either paper form or electronic form

Sen. Larry Teague, DNashville, who sponsored the bill, told senators that many people “don’t think of having paper” and already carry proof of insurance on their cell phones.

CONSULTING CONTRACT

The Joint Budget Committee signed off Tuesday on a state Department of Human Services’ proposal to pay more to experts helping the department on its Medicaid payment overhaul.

The department proposed adding \$12.4 million to its existing \$15.5 million contract with McKinsey and Co. Inc. of Washington, D.C.

The increase in the consulting firm’s contract is for additional work on the Arkansas Health Care Payment Improvement Initiative, according to the Bureau of Legislative Research.

The department started the Medicaid payment overhaul in October to replace its traditional model of paying for each medical test and procedure without many limits to one in which doctors and other providers will be held financially accountable: Rewarded for containing costs and eliminating waste; penalized if costs and services are deemed excessive.

Department officials have said the speed at which Medicaid costs increase has slowed significantly, a change they attribute to the payment changes. But Republican lawmakers have questioned that explanation.

ETHICS BILL

A Senate committee endorsed a bill to bar the state’s constitutional officers from registering as lobbyists until a year after the end of their terms. State workers employed by constitutional officers would be barred from lobbying for a year after they leave their jobs. State agency heads, their deputies and members of the Public Service Commission also would be barred from lobbying for a year after leaving their government posts.

The bill’s sponsor, Sen. David Sanders, R-Little Rock, told the Senate State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee that the restrictions are similar to what legislators face.

In 2011, Sanders sponsored a bill that became Act 1200 that prohibits members of the Public Service Commission and its director, and the commission or deputy commissioner of the bank, insurance and securities departments from working for businesses they’ve overseen until a year after leaving the agencies.

EDUCATION

The House Education committee approved a bill that would allow students who transferred under the Public School Choice Act of 1989 to remain in their nonresident schools if the act is later ruled unconstitutional or is repealed.

House Bill 1294, proposed by Rep. Kim Hammer, R-Benton, also would allow a sibling of a nonresident student to enroll at the same school for the duration of their secondary education.

The committee also approved a bill that would add Arkansas to an interstate compact that waives certain state-specific academic requirements for children of active-duty military members who complete another state's requirements.

Senate Bill 15, introduced by Sen. Eddie Joe Williams, R-Cabot, would allow children who have been accepted into Gifted and Talented and Advanced Placement programs in other states to be admitted to those programs in Arkansas.

Beebe also has publicly supported the bill.

PREGNANCY AND DEADLY FORCE

The House Judiciary unanimously passed a bill that would allow a pregnant woman to use deadly force to protect her fetus if she reasonably believed the fetus was threatened.

Under Senate Bill 170, proposed by Sen. Gary Stubblefield, R-Branch, the pregnant woman would not be obligated to retreat or surrender property.

Arkansas' next challenge (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Commentary by Rex Nelson)

LITTLE ROCK — It was Nov. 21, 2002, and life was about to change for those of us who worked in the office of Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee.

On that fall Thursday, the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled that the state had to change its system of funding public education. Trying to adhere to the Lake View ruling would dominate Huckabee's final four years in office.

In his 2010 book *Defining Moments*, Robert L. Brown, a former Arkansas Supreme Court associate justice, writes: "The tsunami created by the Arkansas Supreme Court's Lake View decision threatened a sea change in public education as it had been known, structured and funded for decades. The court's ruling struck down the formula used to fund public education on grounds that it fostered inequality in educational opportunity and offered students an inadequate product to boot. The court focused on abysmally low national rankings in per capita student expenditures; mediocre test scores; the substandard numbers of high school graduates, college graduates and those with graduate-school degrees; graduates with an inability to read and write; inadequate teacher pay; and abnormally high remediation requirements in college for English and math proficiency."

We already had begun putting together the governor's package for the 2003 legislative session; now those plans were worthless. Brown is correct when he writes that "no one in state government knew quite what to do. Education funding already comprised fully one-half of the state's budget with a total appropriation approaching \$2 billion. If additional funds were required, where would the money come from? And for what new programs? The session had not yet begun and already the General Assembly's budget process had been derailed by the Arkansas Supreme Court and was in complete disarray."

In his State of the State address on Jan. 14, 2003, Huckabee unveiled a plan that called for spending increases, accountability measures and a massive consolidation of school districts (an idea later watered down by the Legislature).

The governor, legislators and staff members spent the entire 2003 regular legislative session dealing with the Lake View decision, and the Supreme Court said it wasn't enough. A special session began in late 2003 and

stretched into 2004. It was the longest special legislative session in the state's history. Still, the Supreme Court said it wasn't enough. Huckabee spent his last regular legislative session as governor in 2005 dealing with the issue, and Gov. Mike Beebe spent his first legislative session as the state's chief executive in 2007 responding to the Lake View decision.

One of the greatest public-policy success stories in Arkansas history is the progress the state has made during the past decade improving its system of public education from kindergarten through high school. Much work remains to be done, but the ground that has been made up since November 2002 is remarkable. Looking to the next decade, the key to Arkansas being competitive in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st Century is our ability to transform the focus from K-12 to K-16. In other words, higher education. I took the job two years ago as president of the association of the state's 11 private colleges and universities because I believe the biggest thing holding our state back is the pitifully low number of residents with college degrees.

Arkansas ranks next-to-last nationally-ahead of only West Virginia-in the percentage of residents 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher. Arkansans were upset last fall when the University of Arkansas Razorbacks lost a football game to the Ole Miss Rebels on the final play at Little Rock's War Memorial Stadium. If only we could summon as much righteous indignation a few blocks down the street at the state Capitol over the fact that we have a lower percentage of college graduates than even Mississippi.

Last week during a Senate Education Committee meeting, Sen. Joyce Elliott of Little Rock asked the president of the University of Arkansas System, the president of the Arkansas State University System and a representative of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to testify in an attempt to put more of a legislative focus on higher education. I looked around the committee room and saw a lot of familiar faces. Some had been allies in our efforts to address the Lake View ruling a decade ago. Others had stubbornly fought for the status quo.

In the end-thanks to courageous legislative leaders such as former Sen. Jim Argue of Little Rock-it was determined that the status quo would no longer suffice when it came to K-12 education. In higher education, we're doing a better job getting students into college. Now, we must find ways to keep them there and ensure that they receive degrees. Beebe set a goal of doubling the number of college graduates in the state by 2025. It's a worthy goal. In order to achieve it during the next dozen years, legislators and governors will have to make higher education a priority and devote the proper resources to the battle.

When it comes to the future of Arkansas, there's no issue that surpasses the need to increase the number of college graduates. Which legislators will lead the way? Who are, if you will, the Jim Argues of tomorrow? Those were the questions I asked myself as I looked around that Senate Education Committee room.

Freelance columnist Rex Nelson is the president of Arkansas' Independent Colleges and Universities. He's also the author of the Southern Fried blog at rexnelsonsouthernfried.com.

Redfield student writes letter to president to save school (KTHV, Channel 11)

Video available at <http://www.todaysthv.com/news/article/249599/2/Redfield-student-writes-letter-to-president-to-save-school>

REDFIELD, Ark. (KTHV) - Up until now only parent have sounded off in the fight to save Redfield Middle School, but now some students are getting involved and taking their concerns all the way to "the top."

By the "top" there, we're talking about the President of the United States. Seventh-grader Sara Beth Farley wrote a letter to President Obama about a month ago, asking him to do whatever he can to save Redfield

Middle School. It is set to close this fall.

"Dear Mr. President Obama, my name is Sara Beth Farley. I live in Redfield Arkansas," Farley read from the letter she recently wrote to the President.

About a month ago, 7th grader Sara Beth Farley "penned" a two- and-half page letter on notebook paper to Mr. Obama, pushing to save her school.

"It pains me to see them shut down such a big and major part of our town," Farley read from more of the letter.

Last month, the White Hall School Board voted to close Redfield Middle School, saying financially they just can't keep the building open with rising healthcare and renovation costs, but Farley feels money should not be the deciding factor.

"If they do not keep our Redfield Middle School open, it will surely affect us kids' education," Farley read more of the letter and added, "It's my first year, and I already feel so close to it because everybody accepts you there, and all the teachers help you. They actually give you one-on-one help if you need it."

"I am asking you to please do everything in your power to save our school," Farley read aloud.

While no response has come in yet, Farley's hopeful that her written words won't go unnoticed at the White House.

"I'll give it time to wait, of course, because it takes awhile, but I feel confident he will at least try to help us," Farley said.

In the meantime, she said that some of her classmates are following her lead.

"When they found out that I wrote it to the President, they were like 'I want to write one, I want to write one,'" Farley said.

It's adding to the student appeal to keep this place open, line by line.

THV 11 did put a call into the White House Media Affairs Office to see if they've received Farley's letter. The office told us to write an email with a request, but THV 11 has yet to receive a response.

The back-up plan right now is to bus the Redfield students to White Hall Middle School.

Concerned residents of Redfield have met with state education leaders to keep their school open, but no intervention has happened there yet.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Education said the agency doesn't have the authority to overrule a school district decision.

Farley's grandfather said that he's trying to work with his state senator to get a meeting with the governor.