

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

March 11, 2013

Eureka Springs Elementary School Locked Down (KARK, Channel 4)

Authorities say Sara Smith showed up to Eureka Springs Elementary with a baseball bat, demanding to see her child Thursday. School officials locked down the building and called police.

According to the superintendent the child has a protection order against Smith. When police arrived, Smith hopped in her car and took off. Authorities chased her to Berryville roughly 12 miles away.

Officers finally caught Smith, in a Wal-Mart parking lot, and arrested her.

Draft probes bills' racial equity (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

State Sen. Joyce Elliott and members of the Legislative Black Caucus are working to draft legislation that would require lawmakers to consider certain bills' cost to members of minority groups, not just to taxpayers' pocketbooks.

While the fiscal impact of bills is frequently addressed during legislative debate, Elliott, a Democrat from Little Rock, said the bill would require legislators to look at the sometimes intangible cost of legislation on people.

"There is a high cost to some of the legislation that we pass - and that doesn't have anything to do with the [fiscal] impact ... [it's] the impact on people's lives," Elliott said.

Elliott shared a rough draft of legislation with members of the black caucus last week and had said she hoped to file a bill before today's deadline to file legislation for the current session.

According to The Sentencing Project, a Washington, D.C.-based criminal justice research and advocacy group, only a handful of other states require lawmakers and state agencies to consider what effect changes in the criminal justice system will have on racial and ethnic minority groups.

In 2008, after a study found that Iowa led the nation in racial disparity in the prison population, that state's Legislature responded by passing the first racial-impact law of its kind.

Wayne Ford, who served as a Democrat in the Iowa House of Representatives from 1997-2010, said he was the state's only black legislator when Iowa approved the measure.

The bill, which Ford wrote, required the state to consider racially disproportionate effects before passing laws that created new criminal offenses or changed sentencing laws. Members of both political parties supported it.

"This is not a black and white issue. This is a human issue," Ford said.

The same year, Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle ordered several state agencies to begin tracking to see whether decisions within the criminal justice system disproportionately affected members of minority groups. The move came after a report found that his state was leading the nation in racial disparity in youthful-offender incarceration.

Around the same time, officials in Connecticut and Minnesota began establishing rules and drafting legislation to address racial disparities in their states.

Adjoa Aiyetoro, the director of Racial Disparities in the Arkansas Criminal Justice System Research Project, said the proposed legislation would address Arkansas' racial disparities.

Aiyetoro said that while black men make up 8 percent of the state's population, they represent 42 percent of the prison population.

"It's not saying to anybody that you can't pass a law. It's not saying to anybody that you can't continue punishments. What it's saying is let's make sure that when we pass legislation that addresses crime and punishment, that in fact we are not passing legislation that has a disproportionate negative impact on people of color," Aiyetoro said.

Marc Mauer, executive director of The Sentencing Project, said the goal of racial-impact statements is to avoid "unintended consequences," such as those seen in federal sentencing guidelines for crack cocaine and powder cocaine.

Mauer said blacks were disproportionately handed lengthier sentences under the guidelines because blacks more often bought or sold crack, while whites more often bought or sold powder cocaine.

Laws that pose harsher penalties on urban crime than rural offenses can also have a racial effect because the areas' racial demographics are different.

"We care about public safety, that's the job of the Legislature, but in the course of doing that we should not enact policies that exacerbate the problem of racial disparity," Mauer said.

Elliott said a partnership between the Legislature and the Department of Human Services or a state university could allow for the same seamless reporting that is currently used for fiscal impact reports through the Bureau of Legislative Research.

"It's something new and different for our state ... but it's not something new and different for the country," Elliott said.

State board to consider closing Weiner High School (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The state Board of Education is considering a request to close the Weiner High School in northeast Arkansas.

The Weiner district was annexed in 2010 into the Harrisburg School District after its enrollment fell below 350 students. Since then, supporters have fought to keep the elementary and high schools open.

Harrisburg Superintendent Danny Sample is seeking approval to close the high school effective July 1. Under the proposal, Weiner students in kindergarten through sixth grade will remain on the Weiner campus for at least a year as school officials monitor funding and spending issues.

The board meets Monday and will consider Harrisburg's request to close the high school. The vote comes two days after Weiner's girls basketball team finished as runners-up in the Arkansas Class 1A State Championship.

Monday Matters: Alma Principal An 'Instructional Leader' (Southwest Times Record)

ALMA — A "nickel tour" of Alma Intermediate School does double duty when Principal Jim Warnock leads the way: The same imaginary nickel that buys a stroll down color-coded halls pays for a solid introduction to the man behind that amiable hum of learning.

And most decidedly, he is not the man behind the desk.

When he pops into classrooms, teachers don't bat an eye and students barely do. The lesson goes on as if he's not there. Sometimes he leans in for a look at a child's work or a quiet assurance before he slips out.

"I'm always dropping in on them. They're used to it," he said.

Shea Klomp, a third-grade literacy teacher, said Warnock's style at first surprised her.

"It was a surprise, but a good kind of surprise," she said. "He's always checking in on us. He likes to know what's going on with the kids and what's happening in the classroom. ... He's all about the kids."

Warnock, 57, has been principal of Alma Intermediate, which covers third, fourth and fifth grades, since 2001.

"I love having them for three years. You don't get to know them as well if you only have them for one or two years, and you get to see that they're learning," Warnock said.

A native of El Dorado, he began his career teaching music, his favorite subject, and has taught all grades from kindergarten through 12th.

Not until 1993 did he become a principal — and only after a model principal came along who erased his mental image of a principal as a building manager who sat in an office all day.

"Glynn Calahan — that was the first time I'd ever seen a principal who was involved with the kids," Warnock said. "That gave me pictures in my head, of becoming an instructional leader."

After leading Junction City High School and Middle School for a year, he led Yocum Elementary in El Dorado for seven years before coming to Alma, where he oversees 785 students and 70 staff members, including 55 certified teachers.

"What I'm proudest of is our teachers' willingness and excitement about collaborative learning. ... You're not just shown your classroom and told where the copy machine is. It's very supportive. We have a first-year literacy teacher that parents were surprised about her being in her first year, because she had that support coming in and blended right in," Warnock said.

Suzy Ferguson, assistant principal, said Warnock replaced John Ewing, who retired, and took the school in a "really great new direction" marked by forward thinking and willingness to embrace change.

While Ewing described himself as an “old-school” principal, Ferguson said, Warnock leads a different sort of culture.

“When a child has a problem, he doesn’t come to the principal’s office, we go to his classroom,” Ferguson said.

As the president-elect of Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators — he’ll take the reins in June — Warnock sees his child-centered educational philosophy reflected in the organization.

“The children come first,” he said. “That’s what the organization is all about.”

The AAEA is an umbrella organization, with groups such as the Arkansas Association of Elementary School Principals as its constituent organizations. As president, Warnock said he will lead the annual teachers and administrators conference in Little Rock as well as quarterly board meetings, and a two-day session for planning legislative and professional-development goals.

“Membership is very important. It was very important for me when I first became a principal. I literally had a list of other principals I could call on if I had a question,” he said.

David Woolly, superintendent of the Alma School District, said Warnock’s leadership role with AAEA speaks well of both Warnock and the district, which boasts Jerry Valentine, Alma High School principal, as a past president of AAEA.

“Jim is a terrific principal,” Woolly said of Warnock. “He’s a very effective principal and a very strong instructional leader.”

Watch DOGS program instrumental to school (KFOX, El Paso, Texas)

HOT SPRINGS, Ark. — Langston Aerospace and Environmental Magnet School Principal Terry Lawler said the school's Watch DOGS program is a key to the school's success.

"When you know you've got the community's support, when you know you have other people who are not paid to be here coming in to help you — that is so encouraging for all of us," Lawler said. "So it is very instrumental to our success, I think."

Hot Springs School District Superintendent Joyce Craft began the Watch DOGS (Dads of Great Students) program four years ago and four men currently volunteer their time at Langston.

Retiree Larry Davis, Jon Frey, president of Mountain Vending, and brothers Clif and Clint Coleman volunteer as the school's Watch DOGS. Clif Coleman retired from his position as an intervention specialist at Langston last year and continues to teach courses in special education at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock graduate school. Clint Coleman is a fisheries biologist for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

"These gentlemen are some of the most generous I have ever met," Langston Instructional Facilitator Lana Shewmaker told The Sentinel-Record.

"The Watch DOGS program is instrumental to our school," Lawler said. "We have students, faculty members and staff that look forward to seeing those gentlemen come in each day. It's not just extra support, but it's also encouragement."

The men in the program will read and work with students, be involved in activities during recess, eat lunch with students, monitor school entrances and hallways, assist with traffic flow and mentor students.

"As a person who is retired, I see this as one of the most worthwhile things that I can do," Cliff Coleman said. "Mrs. Shewmaker is an outstanding proponent of the Watch DOGS program."

"It is wonderful to have a male presence in the building since we do not have very many males," Shewmaker said. "Most of our staff is comprised of females. So it is wonderful to have these gentlemen here."

"I think it is a chance to give back, based on my Christian beliefs," Davis said. "That's what we should be doing. This gives us a chance to give back."

"I think so many of these boys in this school are without male role models and it gives us a little bit of a chance to be an input in their life. Hopefully they can learn what a real man is," he said.

Watch DOGS began in 1998 in Springdale and has since grown into a nationally recognized program. Cliff Coleman began to invite others into the program once it began at Langston.

Cliff Coleman spoke at Davis' church three years ago and Davis began to mentor students. A year later he began in the Watch DOGS program. Frey had previously spoken to fourth graders for Career Day, and Coleman convinced him to join too, despite his full time job.

"I think he came here the first day, went into a classroom and the children just fell in love with him," Shewmaker said of "Papa Jon" Frey. "I think he was hooked."

"It gives men a chance to show kindness to children," Cliff Coleman said. "It is wonderful."

Coleman said the men are able to change the "building tone" with positive reinforcement and making them feel safer.

"Just from a caring standpoint - people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," Cliff Coleman said. "That's what we provide - caring."

"I'm learning a lot as well as giving," Frey said. "I'm getting an introspective view of the educational system at this level, which I've never had before. Schools are very different today than when I went to school - the way they approach the students and the way they approach the teaching."

Cliff Coleman said it is also an opportunity for outreach to students as an employee of the AGFC. He said he talks to students at other schools as well.

"It gives me the opportunity to be there for the kids, but also help them understand you can work for the commission," Coleman said. "Our programs start for kids in the fourth grade. So we start talking to kids early to introduce them to what we also do. So it kind of works hand-in-hand for me."

Cliff Coleman points out that not many schools have a program like Watch DOGS. He said he sees it as a program that is beneficial for both the students and the volunteers.

"They see you coming and they smile - that makes it all worthwhile," Frey said.

Arkansas Legislature: Lawmakers Work To Solve Budget Puzzle (Southwest Times Record)

LITTLE ROCK — The chairman of the House Revenue and Taxation Committee sees the state's proposed \$4.9 billion budget and all of its moving parts as a six-sided Rubik's Cube.

"When you're watching a youngster sitting in the corner working on the Rubik's Cube, you keep looking, and it looks like the same mess over and over," said Rep. Charlie Collins, R-Fayetteville. "But in reality, that youngster is moving things around, and you can't see it until all of a sudden, pop, two turns and the whole thing comes out fitting together."

Collins said lawmakers are addressing the 2013-14 fiscal budget in a similar fashion, trying to match up a balanced budget at current funding levels, while mixing in an anticipated \$300 million surplus and a sizable amount of tax cuts, along with expanding health care coverage and finalizing the state's obligations for a proposed \$1.1 billion steel mill project in Mississippi County.

"All of these need to fit together in such a way where at the end of the day we have the right policy for Arkansas, a balanced budget, the right health program moving forward."

Collins and other legislative leaders said last week they are still turning the Rubik's Cube and that they are close to solving the complicated puzzle.

Gov. Mike Beebe has proposed reducing the state grocery tax within his proposal balanced budget, which also calls for tapping the surplus to help cover a shortfall in the state Medicaid program. The governor is working with legislative leaders to fashion a program to provide health insurance for up to 250,000 low-income Arkansans.

Closing the steel mill deal would require legislative approval for a \$125 million bond issue under Amendment 82, the so-called superproject amendment.

House Speaker Davy Carter, R-Cabot, has suggested parameters on tax cut proposals and asked lawmakers to limit the total amount of tax cuts to \$150 million.

Senate President Pro Tem Michael Lamoureux, R-Russellville, says Senate leaders are reviewing tax cut proposals and will come up with their own estimates on how much taxes can be cut, possibly this week.

The goal, the legislative leaders said, is for the House and Senate to come to an agreement on an amount of tax cuts and then move forward to accomplish that goal.

Last week, the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee endorsed and the Senate passed 34-0 Senate Bill 463 by Sen. Jim Hendren, R-Gravette, which would exempt the service pay of about 6,300 active duty military personnel from the state income tax.

The tax cut would cost the state about \$7 million annually, a reduction the state fiscal office says the state cannot afford within Beebe's balanced budget proposal.

Lamoureux asked that the measure be held in the Senate rather than be transferred to the House for consideration.

"I have all the confidence the bill will eventually become law," Lamoureux said, but he said it cleared the Senate before the leadership could confer with House leaders on an overall tax reduction goal.

"It kind of came out of here a little faster than the other ones. I wanted to slow up and let the negotiations move forward before we sent that to them," Lamoureux said, adding that all tax-cut measures will be considered.

"I think we need to do a fair valuation of the true cost of the tax cuts ... we're relooking at the bills and making sure that the long-term amount of the cuts ... in years three, four, five and out, doesn't grossly exceed the amount in the first two years, so that whatever agreement we reach, the bills reflect that agreement," he said.

Carter also said the House is "trying to evaluate all these proposals collectively."

"We're still revising the impact numbers and looking at what's on the table," he said. "We're still looking at the aggregate impacts of all of the tax bills that have been presented."

With \$2 billion in tax reductions proposed, "we're going to make sure we're responsible in what we send out and how we analyze the pros and cons of all the bills," the House speaker said.

Sen. Jake Files, R-Fort Smith, chairman of the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee, said he anticipates the Legislature will support a reduction in the sales tax manufacturers pay for electricity and natural gas.

Rep. Lane Jean, R-Magnolia, has filed House Bill 1218, which would reduce the tax from the current 4.375 percent to 1 percent at a cost of about \$13.1 million next fiscal year and \$25.4 million the following year, according to the Bureau of Legislative Research.

Collins said he expects proposals to reduce the state's income tax also will get serious consideration.

Beebe has successfully pushed for reducing the grocery tax from 6 percent to 1.5 percent since taking office in 2007. His latest balanced budget proposal includes further reducing the food tax to 0.125 percent, eliminating all of the state sales tax on groceries except for a one-eighth cent conservation tax approved by voters as Amendment 75 in 1996.

The tax cut, which officials estimate would cost the state \$69 million, would be triggered if obligations in several key areas decline by at least \$35 million for six consecutive months. They include payments the state must make to the three Pulaski County school districts as part of a desegregation settlement and some state bond payments.

Collins said no decision has been made on whether to include the governor's tax cut proposal in the Legislature's tax cut goals or to allow it to occur just as Beebe proposed.

"It's too early to answer how that is going to come out," he said. "I think one school of thought is that the governor has laid out his proposal as he would desire it to happen. I tend to respect that, and my goal, off the top of my head, would be to be able to deliver what he has asked for, but that doesn't mean that has got to be that way. Obviously, this all needs to be part of a complete program."

In fact, all of the tax cut proposals now before the House and Senate committees could be changed, Collins said.

"I think people have different priorities, and all of us have different views on what we think is the most impactful in terms of things like job growth and things of that nature," he said.