

## Oklahoma Legislative Update

By Clay Taylor

Summer and early fall can be a slow time for political happenings in Oklahoma, especially in an off year for elections. But 2017 continues to show that things are not just business as usual at the State Capitol. Between legislators being forced out of office or retiring, challenges to budget measures passed during the session, and talks of a special session, lots of things are happening at 23rd and Lincoln right now.

### **REVENUE MEASURES CHALLENGED**

As we have previously seen, the Smoking Cessation Act of 2017 was struck down by our Supreme Court as an unconstitutional tax, leaving a gaping hole in our state's budget. It was anticipated to bring between \$215 and \$250 million to healthcare agencies this year. Now with that money gone, the governor and legislative leadership must decide how to handle this budget deficit hole.

Discussions have ranged from a 3.7% across the board cut to most agencies to rumors of nearly \$1 billion in new revenue measures to be brought up during a special session. Leaders at 23rd and Lincoln have said they were going to hold off and see what the court would do with four other revenue measures that were also challenged. The first of the remaining to be ruled on has just been upheld as constitutional.

The court has just ruled that the removal of a sales tax exemption on motor vehicle sales in the state was constitutional, leaving around \$120 million of new revenue in our state budget. The remaining measures I feel have a good chance to stand as well. In light of this development, we will continue to communicate with leaders and try and determine what their ultimate plan will be to deal with the revenue lost in the cigarette fee and when a special session might occur.

### **OPIOIDS**

As we look down the road toward our goal of RxP rights, one part of the discussion we are monitoring is what the state is doing to address the opioid epidemic that grips our state. The state has put together a commission to study the crisis and develop ways to combat it. The Commission's first meeting was held the last week of August and some of the initial proposals are listed below:

- Increasing the number of medical education programs requiring education on opioid prescribing practices, substance abuse addiction and diversion.
- Completing development of a training curriculum to educate prescribers and dispensers and require training of relevant prescribers.
- Establishing a statewide ET discharge database, including drug overdoses.
- Implementing public health surveillance of neonatal abstinence syndrome to assure appropriate interventions to improve patient health, identify trends and direct resources.
- Establishing legislation to create a prescription drug fatality review board that includes representation from state law enforcement and medical agencies.
- Establishing a network between regulator board and state agencies to share information on regulatory actions.
- The passage of "Good Samaritan" legislation allowing for legal protections for individuals that offer reasonable assistance in drug overdose situations.
- Adequate or increased funding for community health providers, a factor White highlighted as potentially the key to combating the state's ongoing epidemic.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

OPA is continuing to do the groundwork necessary to be ready to go after RxP rights for psychologists, and to that end, it is more important than ever that our membership works to build our relationships at the Capitol. One important thing each of you can be doing over the interim is talking to your individual legislators and educating them on your role in the mental health community.

When the time comes that we are going to ask for legislators to vote yes to give us RxP rights, we don't want it to be the first time you have met your legislator nor the first time they have heard about us as part of the health care chain. Each member of OPA should make sure they know their legislator, and please find time to have a cup of coffee with them, or even write them a campaign check. If you don't know your legislator, you can look up who they are by going to Oklahoma legislator home page with the Find My Legislator feature and then enter your home and/or business address.

Please take the time when they are not in session to meet them and build that relationship. OPA's grassroots organization will be key when it comes time to pass bills to help your profession.