

## Welcome to the OCS Monthly Policy Review

At Renee McPherson's suggestion, OCS has begun putting together a monthly review of issues that may be on the political agenda and which may be of importance to OCS, the College of Geosciences, and OU, or of general interest to a wider audience. The review is intended to highlight information that can help guide planning in a variety of OCS programs and initiatives.

Why policy? Because OCS activities are so highly intertwined with the state Legislature, it seemed wise to keep an eye on what may be coming up before the Legislature. Hopefully, this will help keep OCS from hearing about new initiatives via the media, much as we did with the 1996 Cloud Seeding initiative. It is a way of sampling the "policy soup", from which initiatives typically emerge.

Renee asked me to prepare the reviews because of my work in Political Science. For those of you who may not know me well, I am presently working on a Ph.D. in Political Science. My goal is to better understand the policy system, as a resource for us to better educate policy makers on issues pertaining to the scientific community. It is intended to be a two-way street. As we improve ties with legislative staffers, people in state agencies, and others, not only will they better understand the possibilities – and limitations – of science and technology, but their needs can help us set our research agendas.

At first, these reviews may seem a bit rough, until we have a better sampling of resources for information. For this first issue, I chose to focus on the broader picture of Oklahoma state government. In future issues I hope to delve more into issues within NOAA and other federal agencies, as well as interim studies and task force meetings within Oklahoma. This issue summarizes four items: New Legislative Districts, New Oklahoma Web Portal, Disaster Aid for Cordell Tornado, and a UCO study on state tax revenues & government expenditures.

I welcome any suggestions for articles, policy issues, or activities to review. Over time, I hope that this series will have a highlight "feature of the month", and then briefer summaries of other issues floating about. Feel free to contact me at [mshafer@ou.edu](mailto:mshafer@ou.edu) or 325-3044.

Sincerely,  
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# MONTHLY POLICY REVIEW

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(copy posted on [http://cig.ocs.ou.edu/~wafe/policy/policy\\_summaries.html](http://cig.ocs.ou.edu/~wafe/policy/policy_summaries.html))

## New Legislative Districts

State House and Senate redistricting was completed in the 2001 regular Legislative session. Maps of the new districts are posted on the House and Senate web sites:

House Districts: [http://www.lsb.state.ok.us/house/house%20districts\\_new.htm](http://www.lsb.state.ok.us/house/house%20districts_new.htm)

Senate Districts: [http://www.lsb.state.ok.us/senate/Redistricting/proposed\\_ok\\_state\\_districts.gif](http://www.lsb.state.ok.us/senate/Redistricting/proposed_ok_state_districts.gif)

Here's a summary of how the changes affect current Norman-area legislators. All will retain their current districts, although boundaries change significantly in some cases. The regional senate districts essentially rotate clockwise about 30 degrees, centered on Lexington (hmm, coincidental?). The house maps have detailed district close-ups, while the Senate maps only are statewide, so exact senate boundaries are difficult to discern from the web.

## House Districts:

- 44: Bill Nations (D-Norman) – Central Norman, essentially unchanged; expanded to include North Campus. Boundaries (roughly) are Highway 9 (south), Tecumseh Road (north), I-35 (west), and Classen / Porter (east).
- 45: Thad Balkman (R-Norman) – East Norman, even more east than present. The district loses Noble but adds Lake Thunderbird. Boundaries (roughly) are Highway 9 (south), Franklin Road (north), Classen / Porter (west), and east of Lake Thunderbird (east; street names out there no longer marked on the map).
- 46: Doug Miller (R-Norman) – West Norman and South Norman – a stronger interest in Norman than the previous district. Boundaries (roughly) are Grady County (west), I-35 (east), Moore (north), and Goldsby (south). The south Norman stretch goes eastward from I-35 to Prairie Creek (about 132<sup>nd</sup>), bounded by Highway 9 on the north and Maguire Road on the south.
- 53: Carolyn Coleman (R-Moore) – really gets squeezed out of Norman; loses most of West Norman and East Norman.. Boundaries (roughly) are 48<sup>th</sup> Ave (west), Pottawattomie County (east), Franklin Road (south), and 104<sup>th</sup> Street (north), excluding Lake Stanley Draper.

## Senate Districts:

- 15: Jonathan Nichols (R-Norman) – was pretty much Garvin and McClain counties, now most of McClain and northern Cleveland counties. Boundary travels from roughly the McClain/Garvin county line, along the McClain/Grady county line, turning northeast just south of Newcastle. The district then goes eastward through West Norman, south of Moore, and fans out to cover east of Moore to the Oklahoma County line and extends eastward to Pottawattomie County. The southern boundary of the Cleveland County portion appears to be about Highway 9.

- 16: Cal Hobson (D-Lexington) – Loses most of Norman but retains OU proper. The district includes the McClain County “bootheel” from the Garvin to Pottawattomie County lines. The western district boundary travels northward along the Cleveland / Pottawattomie county line. Highway 9 makes up the northern boundary, except for a little spot extending up to the OU campus. The eastern edge is about 12<sup>th</sup> Street straight south to Garvin County.
- 17: Brad Henry (D-Shawnee) – no longer will represent Norman. His new district includes only a small portion of far northeastern Cleveland County, but now includes all of Pottawattomie County.
- 24: Carol Martin (R-Comanche) – The thumb through Newcastle is a bit wider, and may include some portions of northwest Norman before picking up most of Moore. She loses Jefferson County on the south end.

### **New Oklahoma Web Portal System (<http://www.youroklahoma.com/>)**

On October 15, the state of Oklahoma unveiled a new system for consolidating information about government, business, records, and other vital information. The new system is designed to move beyond simply being a resource for information; it will eventually provide abilities such as renewing licenses (including drivers licenses) and filing applications for state benefits and programs. The system was developed by the National Information Consortium of Overland Park, Kansas.

According to the Oklahoman (Oct. 14, 2001), Bill Young, public information manager for the Department of Libraries, said the portal marks the beginning of the second phase of state Web site development that stresses interactivity. “The first step has been to put public information on Web sites,” Young said. “The next phase is to make them more interactive.”

Oklahoma does not have a chief information officer, but does have the Oklahoma State WebManager’s Group, founded in 1997. Generally, web sites had easy access to information (within one or two clicks of the home pages) and few sites had broken links. A survey of state agencies found that 87% had Web sites. Of these, 83% had mission statements, 72% told users about the services offered by the agency, and 85% had primary contact information (main mailing address and phone number). Personal information was more limited due to privacy and security concerns. Sixty percent of agencies included agency reports and other publications and 58% had recent news releases. One common complaint was an inability to search for specific documents on the web sites or across web sites. Efforts toward remedying this weakness are being developed by the Department of Libraries at [www.soonersearch.odl.state.ok.us:8080/](http://www.soonersearch.odl.state.ok.us:8080/). The major weakness of web pages, according to Vicki Sullivan, administrative librarian at the Department of Libraries, is that most sites do not archive information.

Beginning January 1, 2002, a new state law requires agency Web sites to post information about public meetings, including the date, time, place and agenda. Presently, 35% of agencies post meeting schedules and 19% post agendas. Only 12% post meeting minutes. Nearly a quarter of sites provided forms for citizen comments, even though only agencies that perform an oversight function are required to do so.

So, what does this have to do with the Oklahoma Climatological Survey? First, the new web site does not include OCS. A search of the word “climate” revealed documents from the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. The agency listing did not mention OCS (are we really a state agency housed at OU, or does the state consider us a university entity?). The weather links they have (under Facts & History / Weather) has links to the NWS Norman office for “Local Weather” and to the NWS *Western Region* for regional weather. There is no mention of climate and no OCS products on the site.

Second, OCS may need to pay closer attention to the mandates of other state agencies. The OCS mission statement should be explicitly stated on the OCS homepage. Currently, “About OCS” refers to elements of it, but there is nothing that says “Mission Statement”. This probably should be made explicit for the people who scan pages for the word “Mission”. Recent discussions about putting OCS news releases on the web are consistent with the direction of the state web development. We probably could do more in putting some of our publications – conference preprints, technical reports (including things like Readme files accompanying datasets), and in-house summaries of weather and climate events on the web. OCS / Mesonet will need to pay close attention to the meetings, agendas, and minutes requirements.

As a side note, the Oklahoman article had a link to OCS under a column titled “Information Please”. In this column, specific services were mentioned, such as breeds of livestock, Native American Law, and weather information. The weather information URL was OU: <http://climate.ocs.ou.edu/normals-extremes.html>. They didn’t quite point to the correct location, but at least the Oklahoman linked to OCS!

### **Keating seeks disaster aid for Cordell**

The Cordell tornado on October 9 destroyed 146 homes, 22 businesses, and six public buildings. More than 75 other homes, businesses and public buildings sustained damage. State Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher estimated the damage in excess of \$15 million. Governor Keating applied for federal assistance – the third request for Cordell in less than a year. Cordell sought assistance for the December 2000 ice storm (\$12,665 in damages) and a windstorm in June which caused \$75,663 in damages.

Governor Keating “marveled at the fact Cordell suffered no fatalities.” This is a testament to the effectiveness of OK-FIRST. Lyndel Hamilton, Director of Emergency Management for Washita County, had just completed an OK-FIRST refresher course four days before the tornado struck. He had his spotters positioned and was able to effectively relay warnings. Although the Cordell tornado was mentioned by local media, most of their attention focused on the storm to the north near Foss, that was captured on live video by several television station crews. This event was highlighted in the OK-FIRST presentation to Harvard’s Innovations in American Government review panel.

### **Government Income Outpaces Paychecks**

The Oklahoman, on Sunday October 14, carried a story on a study by Russell Jones and Nancy McClure, marketing professors at the University of Central Oklahoma. The study concludes that Oklahoma government has exceeded its capacity for generating revenue given the current economics of the state. The report states that Oklahoma has 14,257 more employees than it should. "Higher education is particularly bloated when compared to other states" they said, as is the state public welfare system.

Critics of the report note certain conditions in Oklahoma differ from some comparison states. For example, Oklahoma takes a larger responsibility for common education expenses, in lieu of county and local expenditures. Other big-ticket items, such as the state's \$1 billion road program, skew recent numbers upwards. And the recent "boomlet" of students (nationally) and rising health care costs for the elderly and disabled have placed higher burdens on state coffers.

When total government expenditures are considered, the gap between Oklahoma and Texas or Colorado is not as large as Jones and McClure portray. In Oklahoma, 15% of the state's gross state product comes from state-produced goods and services, whereas in Texas it is only 9% and Colorado is 10%. However, their figures do not include county expenditures, which are substantially higher in Texas and Colorado.

The report advocates smaller government and lower taxes and fees as a means to spur economic development. While this is not a new story, sometimes these reports have a way of catching a particular moment and resonating with governing elites. This report could either be of no consequence, or it could generate calls for reducing the scope of employment in higher education and public welfare, something that would have profound effects upon OU, the College of Geosciences research units, and OCS. Although it presents no immediate concern, it is wise to know that the issue is floating around again.