

Oil surges past children as state's most precious natural resource

By Raymond Gary,
Partisan Staff Reporter

In the past two years, oil has surged past children as Oklahoma's most precious natural resource, an industry analyst said last week.

Gordon McLain, speaking at a luncheon for energy executives and state lawmakers, said aggressive incentives for oil and gas companies would prove far more profitable than spending money on the state's children.

"In the next three to five years, oil will continue to move to \$60 or \$70 a barrel. At the same time, we see the market for children continuing to decline," said McLain. "Given the state's limited budget, it would generate more wealth to invest in oil, rather than spending the time and money it takes to make the average child profitable."

In recent weeks, energy and education forces have squared off

over House Bill 1715, which exempts certain oil and gas related equipment from ad valorem taxes at the expense of state schools. Rep. Kevin Calvey, the measure's author, said McLain's presentation showed the need for the state to stop putting our children ahead of big energy companies.

"Devon (Energy Corporation) has seen billions in profit over the past three years. In the same time span, the average child has barely learned to speak or walk upright. Which do you think is more profitable?" said Calvey, R-Del City.

Faced with McLain's charts and graphs, even skeptical lawmakers conceded that children were a nearly worthless natural

resource. After speaking with McClain, Gov. Brad Henry announced he would no longer seeking funding for all-day kindergarten.

"Lottery tickets are a better deal," said Henry.

Supporters of the state's struggling child industry say the market could be improved through decreased government regulation. Currently, child production and storage is governed by extensive feed, abuse and neglect laws that eat into profit margins.

Child officials are calling for increased funding for production, as well as the abolition of treatment standards, which they say will allow the child labor industry to compete with oil and gas companies.

"Children are our most precious natural resource," said advocates.

"Until you run out of gas," replied McLain.



Rep. Kevin Calvey,
Realist

Why our children are worthless

As shown on this chart, oil and gas production far outpaces children in terms of profit and economic development. In 2004, the energy industry made millions in profit, while children made pictures out of macaroni and string.

Crap your kid made - \$0.00

Oil industry profits - \$1.5 gazillion

Governor offers puppy to Legislature in exchange for state budget deal



If Democrats and Republicans can put aside their differences and craft a state budget, they will get the "cutest widdle puppy dog ever," Gov. Brad Henry said.

OKLAHOMA CITY (OP) — If legislators are good boys and girls, and get a state budget compiled, they will get a puppy, Gov. Brad Henry announced last week. The offer is the latest in a series of political maneuvers as Democrats and Republicans wrestle over appropriations issues.

"I've thought it over and, if the Legislature can produce a budget that incorporates funding for all-day kindergarten, we'll go to the pound and get a puppy," Henry said.

"Yay!" said state Democrats.

"Certainly, we had hoped for puppy and ice cream, but we are willing to compromise," said Senate appropriation chair Johnnie Crutchfield, D-Ardmore

However, soon after the announcement of the offer, Republican leadership accused the governor of playing politics.

"The cuteness of puppies notwithstanding, we reject the governor's attempts to woo the Legislature," said House Speaker Todd Hiatt, R-Kellyville.

Hiatt said Henry had used the

"I want a pony."

— Rep. Susan Winchester

tactic in the past, most recently when he promised to take lawmakers to Six Flags if they backed his education lottery bill.

While Republicans rejected the puppy proposal, they did leave the door open for future negotiation.

"I want a pony," said House Speaker Pro Tem Susan Winchester.