

Guin: Bond issue for schools likely to pass



By **ED HOWELL**
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House Majority Leader Ken Guin said chances are good that an educational bond issue for construction and other needs will be passed.

Guin discussed a range of issues in advance to the Alabama Legislature's regular session, which started Tuesday. On Wednesday, he said many items in

Rep.
Ken Guin

Gov. Bob Riley's State of the State address the night before had agenda items that Democrats were pushing last year.

The biggest problem may be in some of the tax breaks and incentives Riley proposed. Guin said legislators who work on the budget feel Riley may have over anticipated revenue in the Education Trust Fund by as much as \$50 million.

The bond issue is one area

where Democrats and Riley will likely agree, Guin said.

"Obviously a school bond issue is very important to us. When this session is over with, the 2007 session will be remembered for the education bond issue," Guin said.

Guin predicted last week that the bond issue would be in the \$750 million to \$850 million range. Riley proposed Tuesday night that the issue be at \$850 million, while Senate Pro Temp Hinton

Mitchem, D-Union Grove, said it should be for \$1 billion.

Details are still being worked out, which means that while Guin thinks the bond issue will be passed, it will not be early in the session.

"That will have a huge impact on the Walker County School System and the Jasper City School System," Guin said, as well as other systems he represents in

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Natatorium gets \$10,000 grant

Music in motion

Dance group holding performance



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Winston and Tuscaloosa counties.

Guin said among the details to be determined are how the money will be distributed and how much each system receives. He does feel that it will likely result in a split of roughly 70 percent for grades K-12 and 30 percent for higher education, "give or take a few percentage points." Per student enrollment will probably be used to distribute the money, but another formula could surface, especially as some system may need the money more than others.

He said he doesn't think chances for a constitutional convention passing are good this year.

"We obviously need constitutional reform in the state. For a long time I've been a supporter of dealing with the constitution article by article. I think the issues are so complex and so broad that I don't believe there is any single document that would come out of a convention that would pass a ratification by the people because of the multiplicity of issues that you would have. There may be some merit in having a convention in seeing what type of document they would draft and then taking those items article-by-article," he said.

Guin, who has been mentioned in stories about the two-year college scandals in terms of the two salaries he draws from Beville State Community College and Shelton State Community College for legal and lobbying work, said he has not heard of any talk about bills this year aimed at reforming the system. He said the Legislature will deal with any that are brought up, but he doesn't know what they could be.

"The truth is most of the things that can be done can be done by the state school board," Guin said. "They can do internal regulations. From a legislative standpoint, I don't think we would see a whole lot."

He said Dr. Thomas Cortis, who recently resigned as head of the two-year system, had told Guin recently he had no bills ready for this session. Cortis later resigned after the Alabama State Board of Education criticized his work after he suggested a separate board be started to oversee the two-year system.

Guin feels there will be a move to give pay raises to state teachers and employees. He said representatives for state troopers and correction officers have already contacted him about the possibility.

"Every year we have those issues come up, and I don't expect this year to be any different," he said. "Some areas like corrections, we are just so underfunded in that area with their salaries. Some of them you've got to get to a level so they can be competitive."

Guin said it is actually a little premature to speculate as legislators have not seen many details concerning the budgets, and probably won't until later in the session. Some basic figures have been provided to allow legislators to know generally how the state is standing, he said.

He said he has not seen a vote count on legislative pay raises, but it has been 16 years since a pay raise for the Legislature and there could be an increase as a result.

In the wake of the industrial incentive package passed by legislators in the special session, Guin said there will very likely be a move to pass economic help for existing industry trying to expand or increase the number of employees.

An ethics reform bill will be brought up to end PAC-to-PAC transfers, Guin said.

"I don't have a problem with how much money somebody gives to a campaign," Guin said. "I just believe you ought to be able to figure out where it came from. We've got a system that makes it very easy to pass campaign dollars from PAC to PAC. It's very difficult, if not impossible, to figure out who is the original source of the money."

A bill is also circulating to push for the nonpartisan election of state judges in the wake of last year's expensive chief justice race. Guin, who favors the idea, said Republican opposition will likely kill the bill this year.

"The Republican Party has taken a very firm position against that," he said.

Guin said the Democratic Caucus this year has an informal agenda for the session, including a ban on pass-through pork projects. It will seek to expand the state's

ethics act that so that anyone dealing with the executive branch, such as with contracts will be subject to the ethics act. Currently that law only applies to the Legislature in certain instances.

One bill would create a center through the state Department of Agriculture and Industries to promote alternative fuels. The center would help to inform others about money and technology that is available to provide these fuels, Guin said.

"We're going to have a prohibition of companies being able to receive state contracts if they employ illegal immigrants," Guin said. "That's one area we can control in the state. A lot of immigration law is federal in nature."

The caucus, taking a cue from NBC's "Dateline" investigation into Internet predators, will have a bill to allow property to be seized if it has been used for Internet solicitation, Guin said. This will be similar to many drug laws that allow seizure of property.

One bill will have a direct local effect on the county, Guin said.

"We are going to prohibit foreign interest in our state dock system. We have a state dock in Cordova," Guin said.

Guin said he would again sponsor a Bible literacy course for public schools, allowing a textbook and the Bible to be used.

Also, currently an interest group or individual can spend money on an election campaign without putting it into the actual campaign organization, Guin said. The group or individual directly spends the money on issue or candidate ads, with no obligation to disclose the source of the money. Democrats will propose a bill to provide disclosure of those funds, he said.

The party also has other bills, including a constitutional amendment to say life begins at conception and holding property tax reappraisals every four years instead of annually.

"The governor may have actually been right in going to annual reappraisals, because there may be some federal issues that required us to do it. We're trying to look into that and see," Guin said.

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ent/offense reports in January, down from 27 filed in February 2006.

ere were six drug arrests made in February. The department made 22 total arrests in February, down from 27 in February 2006.

are making headway," he said, "although many say we aren't." The department will add two more full-time officers.

"We're trying to get the department to a level it should be," he said.