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Local News

Legislature making cold medicine law more strict

**By Mike Dougherty
Courier Staff**

Friday, February 4, 2005 2:17 PM CST

Sen. Percy Malone, D-Arkadelphia, has been adjusting his bill on the sale of Ephedra-based cold medicine products to make it more like a tough Oklahoma law, yet not repeat facets of existing Arkansas law, Sen. Shane Broadway, D-Bryant, said today.

Broadway reviewed the proposed bill this morning before an audience of about 70 people attending the third legislative breakfast at Saline Memorial Hospital.

Broadway carried the bulk of the speaking load today because the Senate was not officially in session, but he was joined by Rep. Dawn Creekmore, a freshman Democrat from East End, who made her first appearance in the legislative breakfast series.

Both Rep. Dwight Fite, D-Benton, and Rep. Janet Johnson, D-Bryant, who have attended the two prior breakfasts, were scheduled for committee meetings that started at 7:30 a.m. today. Broadway said he urged them not to rush to the breakfast because of the freezing fog that hung over central Arkansas this morning.

The breakfasts, co-



DAWN CREEKMORE, a freshman Democratic state representative from East End, speaks at the legislative breakfast at Saline Memorial Hospital in Benton Friday. (Courier photo by Mike Dougherty)



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sponsored by the Benton Area and Bryant chambers of commerce, are held every other Friday during the 85th General Assembly at Saline Memorial Hospital's main cafeteria. The meal is provided by Saline Memorial Hospital Foundation.



Broadway thanked Darci Stonesifer of Benton for providing Malone and him with comments on Malone's bill and for information on the comparison with the Oklahoma law as he and Malone have worked on the bill in recent weeks.

He said the bill would, in effect, make tablets containing ephedrine, an over-the-counter product that has been used by methamphetamine manufacturers, a Schedule 5 narcotic available only through a licensed pharmacist. He added that the only form of the drug that will be available off the shelf will be the gel caplet, which has not been used for meth-making so far.

Broadway said the bill, as it stands now, would make it a felony for a licensed pharmacist to dispense more than the prescribed amount of the Ephedra-based product.

Malone, the bill's sponsor, is a pharmacist-businessman.

Creekmore said she is a sponsor of a House bill making all combat-zone pay to military and National Guard personnel exempt of Arkansas income tax. The bill already has passed the House.

She said she also has been interested in consumer protection legislation, including a bill that has passed the House, which ends the use of Social Security numbers on orders of protection.

"I think this type of protection is necessary to help stop the growing problem of identity theft," she said.

Broadway noted that work continues on a bill that would set up a uniform punishment plan for people convicted of failing to stop where a school bus is unloading. The bill has drawn interest in Saline County, he noted, because of the death of William Isaac Brian, who was killed in September as he crossed the street after getting off a school bus that had picked him up at Salem Elementary School.

He said he has filed a bill that would offer a constitutional amendment to allow Arkansas residents to vote on legalizing charitable bingo for nonprofit groups.

A bill that would allow charitable clinics to acquire unused medication blister packs from nursing homes has passed the Arkansas House and is in committee in the Senate, Broadway said.

He said he and Fite are among legislators working on a bill for a constitutional amendment that would require all counties to use the same base year in determining when caps are applied in assessing property values. He noted that Saline County uses 2000 as its base year, while Garland County uses either 1991 or 1993 and Pulaski County uses 1996.

Fite, vice chairman of the Education Committee, also is working on a bill that gives more flexibility to teacher requirements for professional development, Broadway said.

He added that there is still little detail available on Gov. Mike Huckabee's "Health Care, Highways and Higher Ed" plan.

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"But every time I see anyone working on a highway bill," Broadway said, "I mention to them that we have a bridge in Bauxite that still needs widening.

"It is included in the Highway Department's five-year plan, but we'd like to get it moved up to be done sooner."

He said work continues on establishing a "draft bill" on the school facilities problem, including establishing priorities noted by district superintendents from throughout the state who came to Little Rock to share their opinions.

He said one of the draft bills will include as a "hammer," or a way to hold districts in compliance with state facilities standards, a provision taking away a district's extracurricular activities if it fails to comply.

Broadway was co-chairman of the state School Facilities Review conducted last fall.

All of the soldiers involved with the club members are stationed either in Iraq or Afghanistan, a student noted.

Camo Teen members said they would appreciate community support for the Yellow Ribbon Drive.

If there are people who would like to donate any of the items that are appropriate to send to the soldiers, they are asked to call Tollett at 776-5749.



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