



HOT TOPIC ISSUES

12.20.18

Legislative Watchdog will Empower Policymakers and the People

One of presenters at the Senate interim study on the creation of the Legislative Office of Accountability (LOFT) was Maurice McTigue, the vice president of outreach at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University and a former member of the New Zealand parliament. Mr. McTigue spoke eloquently on the need for lawmakers, or anyone really, to have multiple streams of information so that they can make more informed decisions when considering important topics like education, health care, and public safety that are often the focus of legislative bodies. He said, “The quality of the decision you make is directly proportional to the quality of information you receive.”

That is something LOFT (SB 1) is taking direct aim at. Currently, legislators really have one source of information when it comes to agency spending and performance: the agencies themselves. Most agencies are honest brokers with the Legislature. They do have an agenda and that is to put their agency in the best possible light in the hope of getting more money from the Legislature. You can see why it makes sense to have more than one source of information besides the agency being scrutinized for its performance and spending habits.

LOFT would provide lawmakers with an independent source of information on agency spending and performance making them more informed when writing the budget.

The people of Oklahoma will also be better informed by the creation of LOFT. The reports and information produced by LOFT will be available not only to lawmakers, but to the general public as well. Senate President Pro Tempore-designate Greg Treat, the author of the bill to create LOFT, says he anticipates LOFT issuing reports in an easy-to-understand format so that Oklahomans can get a better understanding of how agencies are performing.

Pro Tem Treat also says the focus on transparency is intentional. First, he wants to ensure future leaders in the Senate and House cannot bury LOFT reports if they don't like the findings. Secondly, he says it is important the public has access to the same information so that lawmakers can be held accountable if they choose to ignore the advice and recommendations of LOFT.

LOFT is a transformational idea. Not only will it arm lawmakers with more knowledge so that they can hold agencies more accountable, but it will empower Oklahomans with more information so they can hold elected officials more accountable.