

Lawmakers Attend National Civic Education Conference

OKLAHOMA CITY (October 3) - Fresh from their trip to the Third Annual Congressional Conference on Civic Education, a bipartisan pair of state lawmakers plan to take stock of Oklahoma schools in an effort to improve civic education.

"Over the next two years, we want to survey schools and determine the status of civic education in Oklahoma," said State Rep. Bill Nations, D-Norman. "Hopefully, this process will energize people across the state and we'll cap everything off with a summit on civic education in our 2007 centennial year."

"The challenge we face is to promote civic education in a way that rises above the partisanship that accompanies our political process," said State Rep. Gary Banz, R-Midwest City. "It's our belief that the importance of civic participation can be stressed in Oklahoma classrooms without dividing students along ideological lines."

Both men attended the Third Annual Congressional Conference on Civic Education on September 24-26 in Washington, D.C.

The conference is a congressionally funded five-year effort to elevate civic education curriculum in public schools.

According to conference officials, "the first two Congressional Conferences succeeded in sparking a proactive movement in each state to restore the civic mission of schools." This year's conference was "the third of five planned annual conferences designed to focus public attention on the state of civic education in America."

More than 400 people from 50 states and eight countries attended this year's conference.

This is the third year Nations has attended while Banz, who taught in Oklahoma Public Schools for 28 years, was making his second trip.

The two men said the proposed survey of Oklahoma schools will help policymakers identify any weaknesses in the state school system and help officials improve civic education efforts.

"It is important that we encourage our young people to play an active role in their communities, their state and their nation," Banz said. "And this program could be a major part of that learning process."

"You can't overestimate the impact of civic education," Nations said. "After all, today's students will be the leaders of tomorrow's government."