

Education

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Riley's 'State of the State' proposals could affect projects, teachers at county schools

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

MONTGOMERY — The Choctaw County public schools could benefit from proposals made by Governor Bob Riley during his 'State of the State' address on Tuesday evening. During his annual address, Riley laid out his proposed budget, calling for appropriations of a record \$6.6 billion for education, an increase of \$394 million from last year's spending. His proposals include funds for teacher pay raises and money for capital construction projects for overcrowded schools across the state. Among the proposals that could potentially affect Choctaw County schools is the \$850 mil-

lion school building program. Riley announced plans for such a program last month, stating that the funds would go toward capital building projects to provide classroom space for system's that need them. Topping the county's list for capital outlay projects are classrooms for Southern Choctaw Elementary. The projected construction plans would add 6 new classrooms, a library, and a new computer lab for the school, which has been suffering from overcrowding for the past several years. The school is now using three portable classroom units, including two 2-classroom units for 6th grade, and one 3rd grade classroom. Riley's projected building program would only provide money for

such projects, and would not alleviate the financial woes that are now being addressed by the school system because of their non-compliance with the Accountability Act of 2006. (A report on that non-compliance appeared in Tuesday's issue of the Sun.) Choctaw County could also potentially benefit from Riley's proposed teacher pay raise. The governor's education budget would spend about \$250 million from the Education Trust Fund next year to give 7% salary increases, effective October 1, for teachers and other staff members in the state's public schools and two-year colleges. The move could help alleviate increasing teacher shortages in the state and could poten-

tially impact Choctaw County. With Alabama ranking 47th in the nation in teacher salaries, recruiting and keeping teachers in the state's school systems is often difficult. Choctaw County High School, in particular, has suffered from teacher shortages in the junior high math department. While pay raises for teachers may not entirely alleviate the problem for CCHS, the recruitment of teachers from other states — and keeping teachers who are already in the state from leaving for higher paying jobs elsewhere — would obviously be more likely with higher salaries. In addition to salary increases, the governor called for bonuses for teachers with superior performance and a mentoring program for new

teachers to help reduce the high teacher turn-over rate. Riley's education goals also called for an expansion of the Alabama Reading Initiative to grade levels beyond grades K-3. Both county elementary schools have taken part in ARI, with Choctaw County Elementary one of a select group of schools to participate in the Alabama First Reading Initiative (ARFI). The proposed plan also includes installing the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative — which is currently being implemented at Southern Choctaw High School — in more schools, and providing distance learning labs in all high schools by 2010. Riley announced that 26 additional high schools would become part of the

ACCESS (Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide) program which is already being used at Choctaw County High. Riley's proposed budget would also spend another \$131.8 million on public universities. The governor's proposals for increases in education spending come alongside his call for tax cuts, including targeted tax relief for families earning less than \$100,000 per year — proposals that some say cannot be accomplished together. However, Riley insisted that the state's boisterous economy and economic surplus would more than allow the tax cuts without affecting the Education Trust Fund.

SFC Clint Miller leaving for second deployment to Iraq

■ Father of SCES students speaks to class about serving in the U.S Army

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN — "I'll do whatever I have to do for a better way of life for all of us," Sgt. 1st Class Clint Miller told a group of students at Southern Choctaw Elementary School on Monday. Within the coming days, Miller will be leaving Choctaw County to serve his country in Operation Iraqi Freedom. It's a place he's been to before, and one that he knows is filled with danger on every corner. But Miller is not hesitating to go back there. After all, he says, it is his job as a soldier in the U.S. Army — a job that he does with pride. For the next 12 to 18 months, Miller will be serving alongside some 4000 other soldiers in his unit in an effort to maintain order in the streets of Baghdad. The deployment will be his second since the war began. Miller's first deployment was one that often put him in harm's way. Among his duties were the raiding of homes of suspected insurgents, checking cars for weapons and explosives, and patrolling the streets. Although his first deployment was dangerous, this time he says his role will be even more so. He will be part of a force that is determined to secure the Iraqi capitol and to rid it of the insurgents who are killing



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell
SFC Clint Miller speaks to students at SCES about his service in the Army and his second deployment to Iraq.

innocent civilians and soldiers on a daily basis. With thousands of soldiers already losing their lives in the war, Miller told the students that it was natural for even soldiers to be afraid. But, he says, that fear does not keep them from doing their jobs. "Of course soldiers are scared," he told the class. "But the Army philosophy is 'You watch my back, I've got yours.'" As he prepares to

leave for Iraq, he'll be saying good-bye to his family again, including his daughters Breanna, 5th grade, and Kiara, 2nd grade, who are students at SCES. In a show of support for Miller and his fellow soldiers, the Student Government Association at the school will be sponsoring goody boxes for Miller's unit. With public sentiment about the war becoming increasingly negative, Miller says that — as a

soldier who will now be returning for the 2nd time to fight in the war — he sees his role as one of duty and love for his country. "When I joined the Army, I knew I might have to go to war," he told the class. "But I did it so we could keep our freedoms." "If I lose my life, give the ultimate sacrifice," he added, "I'll be doing it for you to have the freedoms we have."

Education briefs

UWA plans to honor outstanding students

LIVINGSTON — The University of West Alabama will recognize outstanding students for their academic achievements and leadership roles at the institution's annual Honors Day, scheduled for Wednesday, March 21. Honorees and their guests will be treated to a luncheon at the Bell Conference Center before the Honors Day Convocation in Bibb Graves Auditorium at 2 p.m. Frank Stegall, superintendent of the Hale County School System, will serve as keynote speaker at the luncheon.

Southern Choctaw Elementary registration

GILBERTOWN — Southern Choctaw Elementary School has set Friday, March 30, 2007 as the date for its Kindergarten and new student pre-registration for the 2007-08 school year. The pre-registration will be held on from 8:15 to 10:15 a.m. Parents are encouraged to pre-register their children who will be in Kindergarten, as well as first through sixth grade students who will be coming from another school. Pre-registration allows the school to determine how many teachers will be needed for the next year. Parents who will be pre-registering their child for next year will need the following documents for each child:
• Valid birth certificate. (School will make a copy for the student file and return the original.)
• Valid Social Security card. (School will make a copy for the student file and return the original.)
• Alabama Immunization Card (Blue Card). (School will keep the original)
• Proof of address (utility bill in parent's name, lease agreement).
If you do not have all the required documentation, you may bring what you have. Children being pre-registered should accompany the parent. These children will be given a pre-Kindergarten assessment.

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The Sullivan Family
Blue Grass Gospel Group
Will be singing at the
Wimberly Methodist Protestant Church
on
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7:00 P.M.
Love Offerings will be taken.