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homa is the backbone of this state, and it is time we shared in the economic growth of the big cities."

Like Green, Mass and Erwin, House Speaker Glen Johnson, D-Okemah, said many small rural communities lack money for infrastructure improvements needed to attract industries, as well as the expertise needed to apply for federal grant money for local development.

"Through this package," Johnson said on Thursday, "I think we will realize benefits in rural Oklahoma, as well as the rest of the state."

McAlester's city manager and the head of its economic development agency, McAlester Economic Development Service executive director Terry Heilig, are in the right position to see just how effective the plan will be. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, McAlester saw a sudden surge in new industries locating in the southeastern Oklahoma community of just under 19,000. In one year alone, some 1,500 new jobs were created.

But, Green admits, McAlester had an advantage over some communities.

Two industrial parks, one developed by the city with the aid of state and federal funding and another by private interests, already existed. Also, a local group, the McAlester Investment Group (MIG), was ready and willing to pump their money into some of the new companies considering McAlester for their home.

"Most communities don't have private groups like that," the city manager said, "and

they are going to need to be able to offer some incentives for a business or industry to locate in a town or city. Most just don't have a source of funding for that."

Today, McAlester is considered by many to be the economic hub of southeastern Oklahoma, evidenced by a growth in sales tax collections that has substantially outpaced statewide averages. Its industries employ people from a large radius surrounding the community and its retail stores benefit from sales to those people, as well as others living in neighboring small rural communities.

Now, Heilig notes, the investment group's plate is full. That means he has to find alternative sources of funding to use in attracting industries and businesses to the area. Meanwhile, voters in the community have become cautious when they go to the polls, forcing officials to fully justify any ballot issue affecting the city's sales tax or ad valorem collections.

Earlier this year, for example, Green found himself in exactly the position he described — Being considered by a chicken processing company as a site for future expansion, but faced with having to build a new wastewater facility if the plant chose his community. Unfortunately, Green noted, the company chose to locate elsewhere, but he was forced to ask himself a difficult question:

"Would the city's voters think 1,500 jobs was worth part of a sales tax to fund the new wastewater plant?"

"That's a tough question to answer," Green said. "But that's one of the problems towns our size and smaller have to face. Often times a city or some other group will give a company a site and then have to find a way to get city services, such as water and sewer, to that site. It's not always an easy proposition."

Heilig said he could see another possible benefit to the program — The elimination of some of the burden placed on other sources of economic development funding.

"I think the program could take the heat off other programs," Heilig explained, "such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program."

That program, Heilig explains, provides nearly \$25 million in federal funds to Oklahoma for use by cities and towns in community and economic development. But the program has what Heilig called a wish list some five years long.

"That's just crushing the program on the economic development side," Heilig said.

"Communities like McAlester and others in the rural areas need to be able to access that money, but it's just not possible right now because of the five-year list. Maybe this program can take some of that pressure off, either by funding some of those projects already out there or by making new money available to those who can't get on the list."

And, Heilig noted, there is always the chance the federal money could dry up depending on the mood in Washington.

Heilig said he was also hopeful the program will draw more attention to the rural areas, which he said have sometimes been slighted in the state's economic development efforts.

Specifically, Heilig pointed to marketing and site selection efforts at the Department of Commerce.

"In the six years that I've been in McAlester," he explained, "the Department of Commerce has only brought three prospects into McAlester. All the others have gone to larger communities. All their marketing efforts, too, are more geared for the big communities, such as Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Unless more attention is paid to the rural areas, Heilig added, "I fear the gap between the rural areas and the urban areas, as far as economic development and growth are concerned, is just going to get wider and wider.

"Maybe a program like this will focus more attention on what's going on in rural Oklahoma and change some of that."

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the prison population, it would create administrative conflicts.

"Internally, you will have inmates serving time under the old sentencing laws and inmates serving time under the new sentencing laws," he said. Keeping track of both, would "be like keeping two sets of books."

Other states, such as Washington and Oregon, have had success with a similar sentencing measure, Rabon said. Like those states, Oklahoma can expect a "leveling off" period in terms of prison population.

"Our projections show we are still going to have the need for more space as time goes on," he said. "I don't know that it [TIS] is going to change that."

If enacted, the system would not go into effect until 1998, allowing state officials time to assess any initial problems. Rabon said DOC would use the time to create related

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