

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY

BUSINESS & LABOR

SENATE SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE HEARS NEEDS

■(GIT) After a number of meetings across the state, Sen. Jim Maddox, D-Lawton, and his Senate Small Business Committee have a pretty good idea what small business owners want in the way of legislation.

Wednesday, lawmakers listened to another group of business owners in a public hearing at MetroTech in Oklahoma City.

Agreeing the legislature can help small business, Senator Dave Herbert, D-Midwest, spoke briefly on what small business owners can do to help themselves. "It's a copout," Herbert said, "to say you're too busy making a living to become political. I got in politics because government got involved in my business, and I decided I wanted to be the one to make the decisions."

Jack Moore, a small business owner in Norman, said, "it's true. Business people don't have time to get involved. A simple boy like me can't track a bill. You could help small business by simplifying the bill process. We operate under a different dynamic. Small business survives by the absence of laws," he concluded.

Senator Angela Monson, D-Oklahoma City, responded. "It doesn't take all day, every day. Take the time to make a simple phone call or send a letter or fax. Let us know how you feel. Be informed. Let us know your position, not the position of your association."

Requests from those present added to the fund of knowledge already available. One of the new ideas mentioned was expansion of the Training for Industry Program (TIPS), which is designed to help pay for training for new employees in the manufacturing sector. One business owner requested that TIPS also be available for re-training employees to new technology and keep current with requirements for various licenses. The TIPS program is funded by the state and training is done by the vo-tech schools.

"We need to hear about programs that work," Herbert said. "I've never seen the

legislature fail to respond when we have documented evidence a program works."

Another business owner wants the legislature to consider tax credits to employers for training employees.

Over the last months, small businesses have repeatedly requested help with the following issues:

- Worker's compensation reform: Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin's committee "will have four or five items" to put before the legislature, Sen. Maddox said.

- Infrastructure: Better roads, sewer and water systems were mentioned all over the state as a means of attracting new business and keeping old business in town.

- Right to work: Called both political and needed for economic growth, right-to-work is seen as a central issue for small business.

- Franchise tax: Abolish it, business owners said. "It is more of a hassle than anything," one business owner said.

- High-tech incentives: Promote training for high-tech small businesses, enhance incentives for companies to come to Oklahoma.

—GERRY CHERRY
10/30/96

LEGISLATION PASSED IN THE 45th SESSION THAT BENEFITS SMALL BUSINESS

■(GIT) Sixteen bills passed last session will be of benefit to small business, indeed all business. They are bills geared to economic development. Following are the bill numbers and a short explanation:

SB679: Includes electric motor vehicle property for purposes of the income tax credit for converting vehicles powered by conventional fuels. Also extends the amount of credit at 50 percent of the conversion expense, and provides an effective tax credit until 2002.

SB689: Continues the Quality Jobs Program, Saving Quality Jobs and Former Military Facility Development Acts, by removing their sunset provisions. The bill requires the Oklahoma Dept. of Commerce to submit a report every three years documenting the results of these programs and their cost effectiveness.

SB711: Creates a Master Business License System Task Force to study business licensing process in Oklahoma. Members of state agencies who deal with business licenses and permits and business people are on the task force. Recommendations to

streamline the process must be presented to the Governor and legislature by January 1, 1998. The report will include a design for creating a one-stop computerized business license system and a cost-benefits analysis of the design.

SB730: Provides that if improvements, other than buildings, are made in anticipation of residential or commercial development and the property is not conveyed before January 1 of the first assessment year, the property will be valued at the lower of the fair cash value with improvements or the fair cash value before improvements.

SB907: Adds establishments which provide adjustment and collection services for loans made primarily by out of state debtors to the definition of a basic industry which qualifies for the Quality Jobs Program Act.

SB911: Includes tax credits for extending the life of marginal oil wells. The bill provides a six-seventh gross production tax credit for certified "economically at-risk oil leases." The tax commission certifies the leases according to requirements of the act and the exemption applies only if the price of oil is under \$20.00 per barrel. The bill was called Project ALARM, for Adding Life to At-Risk Marginal Wells.

SB921: Omnibus tax bill exempts many heretofore taxed entities from sales tax.

SB982: Requires the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce to jointly establish a strategic plan for promoting and marketing value-added agricultural products processed in Oklahoma.

SB1111: Increases the estate tax exemption for lineal heirs of a farm or business from \$175,000 to \$600,000.

SB1310: The prime vehicle for amendments to the Worker's Compensation Act.

HB1434: Called the Rural Economic Action Plan of 1996, the bill establishes three grant programs for local infrastructure projects to municipalities with a population of 7,000 or less.

HB1947: Authorizes interstate branching of state-chartered and national banks into and out of Oklahoma, beginning May 31, 1997.

HB2146: Omnibus economic development bill which reserves 25 percent of the Qualified Small Issue Pool for bond issuers providing financing for small business equipment, among other provisions.

HB2798: Amends the Small Business Linked Deposit Act to allow an increase in

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"Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better."

Richard Hooker