

# THE JOURNAL RECORD

Opinion

## **Pitts: Legislative report card shows good news for biz**

October 22, 2007

Business-friendly legislators continue to increase in number, according to an annual legislative report card of the Research Institute for Economic Development (RIED) released this month. The study reveals what has become growingly apparent.

It also reflects the success of the Oklahoma Prosperity Project, a program of the Oklahoma State Chamber that is participated in by 30 trade associations, 60 local chambers of commerce and more than 1,000 companies. Its purpose is to provide information on business issues and the positions on them of legislative candidates that can be distributed to employers and employees and has been instrumental in getting pro business people to vote.

Begun prior to the 2004 elections, the project has grown in membership and is credited with helping get more business-friendly legislators elected through educating voters about business issues. Both groups maintain a nonpartisan approach and do not endorse candidates being concerned mostly in showing their positions on business related issues.

The RIED study is based on an analysis of votes on more than 200 pieces of legislation that impact economic growth, jobs and business development either negatively or positively that is considered during each legislative session. Legislators earn evaluation points when they champion jobs, business and economic growth issues and lose points by introducing business negative legislation and supporting anti jobs and anti-growth matters.

One hundred is considered a perfect score, while 70 is the cut line for a passing grade, a broad range that depicts a realistic scenario for determining a legislator's business orientation in relation to his constituency.

For the 2007 Legislature 83 members of the House of Representatives received a passing grade with 16 Republicans getting a perfect 100 points. Of the 18 failing grades, four were Republicans and 14 were Democrats. The two lowest scores were achieved by state Rep. Darrell Gilbert, D-Tulsa with nine and state Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, who had a 90 in 2003 his first year in the Legislature but dropped to 20 in 2006 and 10 points this year.

Among the House Republican leadership, Speaker Lance Cargill, Harrah was tops with 100 points. House Speaker Pro Tempore Gus Blackwell, R-Goodwell, got 90 and Majority Floor Leader Greg Piatt, R-Ardmore received 80. House Democrat Minority Leader Danny Morgan, Prague also made 80.

In the state Senate, 73 percent received passing grades with three members getting the top score – Democrat Susan Paddock, Ada; Brian Bingman, R-Sapulpa; and Ron Justice, R-Chickasha.

Twelve other senators scored 90 or above, including Co-Senate President Pro Tempore Glenn Coffee, R-OKC with 97, Co-floor leader Owen Laughlin, R-Woodward with 90. Thirteen senators had failing grades, with the two lowest belonging to state Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso with 29 and state Sen. Anthony Sykes R-Moore with 45 points. Next was state Sen. Bill Brown, R-Broken Arrow with 55 points.

Nine Democrats, including Senate President Pro Tempore Mike Morgan, Stillwater, with 60 had failing marks. Senate Co-floor leader Charlie Laster, D-Shawnee received a rating of 81. State Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, who is running for the U.S. Senate against Republican incumbent U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, Tulsa narrowly missed the cut with 69 points

How has the business complexion of the Legislature changed since the first report card was issued? In 1999, only 35 percent of Oklahoma’s legislators supported economic growth issues. Obviously the RIED reports have made an impression on legislative candidates and incumbents as the pro business scores have grown steadily reaching their highest point this year.

The State Chamber’s Prosperity Project sends out questionnaires to legislative candidates regarding their positions on a multiplicity of business issues. How well the candidates stand by their responses with their actions once elected can often be determined through the RIED report card.

What can be concluded from the RIED study is that Oklahoma has a business-friendly Legislature with for the most part a pro-economic growth leadership. It also demonstrates the work of the two groups has been an effective contributory factor in bringing about the change.

*William O. Pitts may be reached by phone at (405) 278-2880 or by e-mailing [bill.pitts@journalrecord.com](mailto:bill.pitts@journalrecord.com).*

Copyright © 2007 The Journal Record All Rights Reserved  
101 N. Robinson Ave., Ste. 101, Oklahoma City, OK, 73102 |  
P.O. Box 26370, Oklahoma City, OK, 73126-0370 | (405) 235-3100  
415 S. Boston Ave., Ste. 101, Tulsa, OK 74103 | (918) 295-0098