

State Chamber gives session an 'A-minus'

U.S. military and business leaders across the state were honored Thursday at the State Chamber of Oklahoma's annual meeting.

Lt. Gen. David P. Valcourt, deputy commanding general/chief of staff of the Army Training and Doctrine Command in Virginia, delivered the keynote address.

Valcourt, who discussed how military leadership can be used in the business world, was introduced by Fort Sill Commander, Maj. Gen. Peter M. Vangjel. Valcourt served as commanding general of the U.S. Army Field Artillery Center and Fort Sill from December 2003 to August 2005.

Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee and H.J. Reed, chairman of the State Chamber's legislative affairs committee, joined chamber lobby team to recap the 2009 legislative session.

The State Chamber gave the session an "A-minus." Lawsuit reform was called the session's greatest accomplishment. The reform package will fairly compensate injured Oklahomans while discouraging frivolous lawsuits.

Access to affordable health care should increase, as Oklahoma should no longer lose doctors and nurses to states with better laws.

"This was definitely a strong year at the Capitol for the Oklahoma business community and one of the best we've had in years," said Richard P. Rush, president and CEO of the State Chamber.

"The State Chamber and our statewide partners put a ton of energy into this year's session, and the benefits from that work will be felt for years to come."

Other results from the State Chamber's work this session included:

- House Bill 2026: Creates new health care coverage options such as health benefit mandate-free plans for Oklahomans under 40 and expands the Insure Oklahoma! premium assistance program to accept high-deductible plans, which are accompanied with health savings accounts.

HB 1127: Funding for Tulsa's Oklahoma State University Medical Center guarantees osteopathic physicians who often work in rural and underserved areas.

- Senate Bill 938: The 21st Century Quality Jobs Act allows cities, towns and counties to pool resources on economic development projects. The bill should attract high-paying jobs in growth industries.

- HB 1483: Gives Oklahomans priority to use Oklahoma water while opening the door for future water sales to others if they meet certain statutory criteria.

- SB 222: Department of Education accountability changes will ensure student testing and data gathering are more accurate and accessible to the public.

- SB 313: This legislation will extend tax incentives until July 1, 2012, for the state's oil and natural gas industry.

- The State Chamber also supported tax credits for alternative energy sources and killed more than a dozen bad bills.

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