

EDITORIAL

Clout gained at state Chamber of Commerce

Lawton-Fort Sill did a great job on Thursday when members of the Oklahoma State Chamber conducted their annual meeting and installed a new chairman. Members from around the state had the opportunity to learn more about why Lawton and Southwest Oklahoma are important to the state's overall economy.

The State Chamber is working hard to make Oklahoma more business/jobs-friendly, which should have an impact on whether or not today's schoolchildren will have to leave home to meet their career goals. Real, competitive business thrives south of the Wichita Mountains, too, the chamber members learned. Southwest Oklahomans are competitively educated at Cameron University and at Great Plains Technology Center and they work hard.

For the next year, The State Chamber is going to be led by a Lawton retailer. Chairman Phil Kennedy will bring to the board of directors meetings some Southwest Oklahoma common sense about the challenges along Main Street. He knows what can make a transaction succeed or fail.

All area chamber members need to contact Kennedy. Give him your views on how to lower the costs of doing business and increase the private investment that could mean new educational opportunities for faculty and students and training for the workforce. Chamber members, this is a unique opportunity for you.

Kennedy's election is important to the fourth-largest city in Oklahoma and to Southwest Oklahoma because so much of what happens in the state is often seen as east vs. west or urban vs. rural. Many local business and political leaders often feel left out of the process. That is because many more awards and appointments by government and business leaders go to the Oklahoma City and Tulsa areas. Kennedy has the communication skills to help directors see a broader and less parochial view.

Those skills will be needed because the business and political climates — on investment, labor, water, transportation, environment and tax policies — are set by the Legislature. Because most of Southwest Oklahoma's businesses are small, executives are not as free to go to Oklahoma City on short notice and talk about the impact of legislation on our area.

Kennedy's chairmanship should sharpen the focus on issues and provide an additional voice when final decisions are made. With the great work done for the board meeting last week, chamber members from around the state now will have a better idea of how our area fits into the Oklahoma economy. When our area's views are expressed, they will better understand them.