

# Tort Reform Opens Tulsa's Doors for Business

With a resurging downtown and new businesses across the entire city popping up, there's no doubt that Tulsa's energy is back.

We at the State Chamber of Oklahoma couldn't be happier. And, we couldn't be more excited to help generate future growth.

After years of hard work, we think that's just what we've done with compromise legislation that will reform Oklahoma's legal system.

Our State Chamber specialists on this issue, headed by Mike Seney, senior vice president of operations, have worked many years to convince leaders that comprehensive change to our courts will grow our economy.

This year, legislative leaders resonated with that message, called all parties to the table and Gov. Brad Henry signed into law one of the most-needed laws in state history.

The governor's signature will bring positive reform into the lives of many Oklahomans. Other than delivering much-needed reform to our legal system, we will see better access to health care in all corners of the state.

Doctors will seek to move their practices to or remain in Oklahoma, instead of running from a system that opens them up to unfair lawsuits. That's important in northeast Oklahoma, because many areas outside Tulsa are in need of

better, affordable care.

Businesses can hire more employees, new businesses can invest in Oklahoma and our economy will continue to outpace the rest of the nation if the bull's eye of frivolous lawsuits are taken off their backs.

At the same time, the legislation protects Oklahomans who have truly been wronged and deserve their day in court. Rarely does a bill of this magnitude draw all sides together in hopes of improving many aspects of our lives.

This monumental legislation will let outside companies know that Oklahoma is open for business. Until now, Oklahoma has watched other states pass major reforms and gain better jobs and access to health care. This new reform, however, will not just allow us to catch other states; it allows us to compete in the global economy and offer a more dependable environment for investment.

Reforming our judicial system was issue No. 1 for businesses for many legislative sessions. The end product is exciting: Class action reforms, a cap on appeals bonds, adoption of summary judgment similar to that allowed in federal lawsuits, joint and several liability reforms, product liability reforms, junk science testimony rules, certificates of merit, and even a cap on non-economic damages. This cap can be lifted in cases of gross misconduct.

The State Chamber team knew it would not be easy but that it had to be done. We knew it would be doable through intense negotiations with all parties — the trial bar, doctors, medi-

cal providers, hospitals and the business leadership statewide.

We knew what Gov. Henry wanted in any reform, and we all wanted language to stand up to all expected court challenges. In the end, all sides worked well with Senate President Pro Tempore Glenn Coffee, Rep. Dan Sullivan and Senate policy chief Fred Morgan. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. We will gladly add our governor to that list when he signs his approval.

The nation is noticing. Lawsuit reform organizations and even The Wall Street Journal have called our offices to discuss these positive changes.

We know our work on this issue is not over. If any of the reforms are challenged through a lawsuit, we will be right back at the Capitol defending Oklahoma's business community.

Chairman of the Board Steve Turnbo said, "Make no mistake; these reforms will help Tulsa's resurgence. They will help create investment in the economy. Outside businesses will be calling our local leaders asking for more information on the area. What's even better? The bill was written so Tulsans with real grievances will see a quicker judicial system, spared of junk lawsuits that only slow justice. Frivolous lawsuits need not file."

Once these reforms take place, the economic and health-related benefits will last for decades. That's fitting, because we expect Tulsa's energy to last just as long. "

*Richard P. Rush is president and CEO of The State Chamber of Oklahoma.*



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