

A Step in the Right Direction

By Rep. Glenn Grothman

There is no greater problem facing Wisconsin right now than our loss of manufacturing jobs. With 20 percent of our workforce involved in manufacturing, Wisconsin has the second highest percentage of manufacturing jobs in the country. During the recent economic downturn from November 2000 to November 2003, our state unemployment rate jumped from 3.2% to 4.5%, and we lost 85,800 manufacturing jobs.

One area of concern that we cannot control is the natural cyclical nature of the economy. The bulk of the problem must be dealt with on a federal level as our manufacturing base moves to China and other nations with cheap labor and little environmental or safety regulations. Another part of the problem is our high taxes. Today I will discuss our regulatory climate – specifically our Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is out of control. If a new industry decides to locate here, expand here or even replace old machinery here, they must get permits from the DNR.

I believe that in this state compared to other states and even other countries is that our government agencies are not business friendly or even people friendly. The worst offender is the DNR. We have heard stories of Wisconsin businesses expanding in other states, threatening to leave Wisconsin, or not coming to Wisconsin because of environmental regulations.

I should point out that usually the problem is not emission standards. The problem may be unnecessary delays in granting permits or determining if designs meet standards. The problem could be unnecessary monitoring requirements on equipment that is already known to meet environmental standards. Finally, in our part of the state we are considered a non-attainment zone with regard to ozone levels and standards the DNR imposes may not always be entirely necessary or beneficial to industry.

Hopefully, this will begin to change. I was fortunate enough to serve on a special Jobs Creation Committee in Madison that culminated in passage of a bill this week. Highlights of the bill included streamlined permitting procedures, hopefully favorable reviews of monitoring standards, and more public input on compliance with non-attainment areas.

Extremist environmental groups fought the bill. These groups feel businesses have endless streams of money, don't begin to understand that time is money, and quite frankly would probably prefer no more development of any kind in this state. Their motto could well be what one Department of Revenue employee once told me, "If they don't like it, they shouldn't have gone into business."

A very good sign was that the negotiations which led to the bill, included the Doyle Administration which clearly realized things have to change. George Meyer, who was Tommy Thompson's Natural Resources Secretary and currently represents the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, attacked the bill. Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager, apparently trying to ingratiate herself to the extremist wing of the Democrat Party also opposed the bill. While business groups would have liked more, the bill is a major improvement over current law. Governor Doyle deserves credit for standing up to the fringe of his Party. The bill passed the Assembly 80-14. Hopefully, this is just the beginning.

Please let me know what you think on this issue. Contact me here in Madison--
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