

# THE FIRST WORD

December, 2004

## ACEC OKLAHOMA Endorses Fuel Tax Initiative Members Encouraged to Gather Signatures & Contribute

The ACEC OKLAHOMA Board of Directors has endorsed the initiative petition currently being circulated which would put an increase in the state motor fuel taxes to a vote of the people. At their November Board meeting, the Board unanimously endorsed the proposition and authorized the use of ACEC OKLAHOMA's name in promoting the proposition.

The drive for an initiative petition continues through December 23rd in hopes of gathering support for a proposed amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution to increase motor fuel taxes to create a new transportation fund.



ACEC OKLAHOMA Chairman of the Board Don Vick (right) presents Coalition Chairman Neal McCaleb with a check from ACEC OKLAHOMA PAC supporting the petition drive.

Neal McCaleb, former Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation, is leading the effort by Oklahomans for Safe Bridges and Roads, and McCaleb was the featured speaker at the November ACEC OKLAHOMA meeting.

He explained that the group's proposal calls for an incremental increase of fuel taxes over five years to 22 cents, which amounts to eight cents per gallon for diesel and five cents per gallon for unleaded fuels. The funds would be placed into a new transportation fund "lock box" if voters were to approve the ballot initiative.

"Oklahomans will soon have an opportunity to save our roads, bridges, and highways by changing our state's Constitution and increasing our fuel user fees by several pennies," McCaleb said. "Correcting the

legislature's consistent diversion of our fuel tax away from our transportation system by creating a 'lock box' trust fund is critical."

McCaleb said this "diversion" has led to massive deterioration of the state's transportation system. "One fourth of Oklahoma's roads are in critical condition, meaning traffic accidents are 56 percent more likely to occur on these roads," McCaleb said. "There are more than 1,600 bridges in desperate need of repair, while 150 need to be replaced altogether."

The new taxes would generate an estimated \$150 million a year in new revenue, which would be earmarked expressly for transportation construction and maintenance.

McCaleb said Oklahoma has consistently under-funded the transportation system. "You can tell by the seat of your pants and the comparison to the funding per mile allocated here versus our neighboring states," he said. Currently, Oklahoma has the lowest motor fuel taxes in the region with diesel taxes at 14 cents per gallon and 17 cents per gallon for unleaded fuels.

## Motor Fuel Tax Petition

(Cont. from Page 1)

"Oklahoma has historically had the worst roads and bridges in the country over the last 80 years," McCaleb said. "Right now Oklahoma spends \$6,414 per mile, while Texas spends \$29,183, Colorado spends \$18,305, and even Arkansas out spends us at \$8,534 per mile." Oklahoma has 12,266 miles of highway.

The coalition has until Dec. 23rd to obtain 219,000 signatures in order for the petition to be successful. Under Oklahoma law, the group must present the Secretary of State with a number of signatures that equates to at least 15 percent of November 2004 General Election turnout. The Coalition, however, is hoping to gather 272,000 signatures, a 25% cushion, as it is expected some of the signatures gathered will not be valid. Just prior to the Thanksgiving holiday, 205,000 signatures had already been collected.

"Some may question the timing of a tax increase, given current prices at the pump," McCaleb said. "But the fact of the matter is, there is never a popular time for tax increases. The condition of our roads has reached a point of crisis, and we need to stop sacrificing the safety of our families for what will cost the average Oklahoman \$30 a year."

All ACEC OKLAHOMA members are encouraged to circulate the petition within their own firm, their friends, and family. If you don't already have a copy of the petition, please call the Oklahomans for Safe Bridges and Roads office at (405) 286-4465 or go to their website, [www.oksaferoads.com](http://www.oksaferoads.com).

Additionally, funds are needed to cover the cost of collecting the signatures along with other overhead needs.

ACEC OKLAHOMA members, especially those firms which provided transportation consulting, are encouraged to contribute to the fundraising efforts. Since this is a "ballot question", corporate funds can be used to make the contributions.

ACEC OKLAHOMA PAC contributed \$500.00 toward the effort and we strongly encourage all member firms to join in the effort to place the petition on an upcoming election ballot.

Time is growing short and your assistance will be greatly appreciated!!!!

## Bush Re-Election Good News For ACEC

The re-election of President George W. Bush, as well as victories by ACEC/PAC-supported candidates in both the House and Senate, bodes well for advancing ACEC business interests.

"The Bush administration has been good for the industry in many key areas, notably the new corporate tax deduction for A/E firms as well as rules governing overtime which now will remain in place," said ACEC President Dave Raymond.

"We still have work to do with both the President and Congress to build support for more investment in infrastructure. But the Bush win—and the new margins in the House and Senate—will keep in place the legislative gains we've made so far, particularly on the tax and labor law fronts, and give us a more pro-business Congress to work with in 2005."

In the House, the current ratio of 223 Republicans, 210 Democrats and two Independents changes to 231 Republicans, 202 Democrats, and one Independent, with two House races still to be decided. In the Senate, the 51-seat Republican majority grows to 55 seats, with 44 Democrats and one Independent.

As for the Senate, ACEC OKLAHOMA members who attended the August meeting in Tulsa with Senator Jim Inhofe probably questioned his prediction that Republicans would have 55 seats following the election. Well, the now-Senior Senator from Oklahoma was right on the mark as Republicans gained four seats bringing the Republican majority to 55 seats, with 44 Democrats and one Independent.

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## ACEC OKLAHOMA's 50th Anniversary Party Set For December 10th

Just a reminder that ACEC OKLAHOMA will be celebrating the organization's 50th Anniversary on Friday night, December 10th at the Clarion Meridian Convention Center in Oklahoma City.

Registration is \$45.00 per person, which includes a reception, dinner, and entertainment.

We look forward to seeing all of our members, past and present, as we celebrate 50 years of service to the consulting engineering profession. Contact ACEC OKLAHOMA at 405-525-7696 for more information.

## ACEC's *Last Word* Goes 100% Electronic; Printed Version Ends

Of the more than 34,000 individuals who receive ACEC's ***Last Word***, only a few do not receive the e-mail edition.

The month-end printed edition of *Last Word*, largely a recap of previous weekly editions, had originally been sent to thousands of individuals who did not have e-mail. Today the large majority of those individuals are now net-wired and prefer to receive *Last Word* by e-mail only.

Many members have also questioned the necessity of a monthly wrap-up edition which duplicates what they have already read in weekly editions.

Therefore, *Last Word* will enter the Digital Age completely and cease publishing the monthly printed version with the November 2004 issue.

For those who have not yet provided ACEC with your e-mail addresses for a free e-subscription to *Last Word*, now is the time to do so: Contact ACEC's Melissa Acevedo at macevedo@acec.org, or call her at 202-682-4336.

For the very few individuals who don't have e-mail, you will be able to receive highlights and summaries of important news items and announcements in the bi-monthly *Engineering Inc.* You may also receive a faxed copy of the weekly *Last Word* through a fax-on-demand service by calling 888-277-6363.

## ***As 2004 Comes To A Close, ACEC OKLAHOMA***



***Wishes  
Everyone A  
Blessed and Safe  
Holiday Season,  
and a Fruitful  
and Prosperous  
New Year!!!!***

## Republicans Take Oklahoma House; Gain Ground in Senate

Oklahoma Republicans comprise a majority in the Oklahoma House of Representatives for the first time in 84 years and only the second time in state history. With their newfound power, Republicans have nominated Rep. Todd Hiatt (R-Kellyville) to be the next Speaker of the House.

Hiatt, the House Minority Leader for the past two years, was unanimously endorsed for Speaker by the House Republicans during their traditional post-election caucus. Hiatt's election will be formalized when the 50th Legislature convenes at noon Jan. 4, 2005, for a one-day organizational meeting.

Hiatt, a part-time auctioneer, a cattle rancher and ex-dairy farmer, was re-elected to his sixth and final term in the Legislature. Due to term limits, Hiatt will only serve one term as Speaker as he will not be eligible to run for re-election to his House seat in 2006.

Hiatt will be the first Republican Speaker of the House since the late George B. Schwabe in 1921-22, when the GOP picked up 25 seats to claim control of the Oklahoma House for the first time since statehood.

Republicans recorded a net gain of nine seats in the Oklahoma House, boosting their numbers from 48 to 57 while the Democrats plummeted from 53 to 44.

The Democrats' erosion started 20 years ago, when the House had 76 Democrats and 25 Republicans. Since 1984 the Democrats have lost 32 House seats — 21 of them just in the last six years.

Constitutional term limits was a critical factor in the GOP's takeover. Twenty-eight House members (18 Democrats and 10 Republicans) were forced from office this year because of 12-year term limits.

On the Senate side, Republicans gained ground on the Democrats who have controlled the Senate since statehood. Republicans picked up 2 seats, narrowing the Democratic control to 26-22.

The Oklahoma Legislature will reconvene at noon Feb. 7, 2005, to start its four-month First Regular Session and to listen to Gov. Brad Henry's annual "State of the State" address.

## Still Looking for that PERFECT Christmas Present?????

Then have we got a great idea for you!!!!



**ACEC Midwest States Conference**, June 8-15, 2005, at the The Westin Resort, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands. This will be a four-state convention, with the addition of ACEC/Kansas to Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma.

It's not too early to begin making your plans. Sure the convention is seven months away, but we want to give you as much information as possible so that you don't miss out on this great convention in one of the most beautiful places in the world, as well as a GREAT gift idea.

To learn more about the hotel and St. John, go to the hotel's website at "[www.westinresortstjohn.com](http://www.westinresortstjohn.com)". We're sure that once you learn more, you won't want to be left out.

### DRAFT PROGRAM

#### Wednesday, June 8

This is travel day for most people to reach St. John, if you aren't there already!

#### Thursday, June 9

8:00-9:00 a.m. - Informal Roundtables  
9:00-12:15 p.m. - Seminar/Program  
6:00-7:00 p.m. - Opening Reception

#### Friday, June 10

8:00-9:00 a.m. - Informal Roundtables  
9:00-12 Noon - State Business Meetings  
5:00-7:00 p.m. - Sunset Cruise

#### Saturday, June 11

8:00-9:00 a.m. - Informal Roundtables  
9:00-12:15 p.m. - Seminar/Program  
6:00-10:00 p.m. - Reception & Banquet

#### Sunday, June 12

8:00-9:00 a.m. - Informal Roundtables  
Day & Evening - ON YOUR OWN  
Afternoon - Some couples leave for home

#### Monday, June 13

8:00-9:00 a.m. - Informal Roundtables  
10:00-4:00 p.m. - Optional Trip to British Virgin Islands  
Evening - ON YOUR OWN

#### Tuesday, June 14

8:00-9:00 a.m. - Informal Roundtables  
9:00-12 Noon - Seminar/Program  
Afternoon/Evening - ON YOUR OWN

#### Wednesday, June 15

7:00 a.m. - Departures for home or post-convention trips



### HOTEL INFORMATION

The Westin Resort  
"[www.westinresortstjohn.com](http://www.westinresortstjohn.com)"

\$149 - single or double

Reservations cut-off-date: **April 4, 2005**

