



Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission

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NEWS RELEASE

Special for the Enid News & Eagle

For Immediate Release

April 10, 2008

Bird Brings ‘Airvangelism’ Message to Enid Rotary Club

OKLAHOMA CITY – Victor Bird, director of the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission, will be the guest speaker during the Enid Rotary Club meeting scheduled for noon Monday, April 14, at the Continental Tower North, 302 N. Independence. Later in the day, he will meet with the Woodring Regional Airport Advisory Board and attend a reception and dinner in his honor.

Bird, who has directed the Commission for five years, will share his strong belief in “airvangelism” with those in attendance and discuss the importance of general aviation airports to Oklahoma’s communities, including the Woodring Regional Airport. In particular, he will address the link between aviation and economic development.

“Airports are ‘Gateways to the World’ for communities and are extremely important in helping generate economic activity around our state. And Woodring Regional Airport is no different,” Bird said. “The businesses that fly in and out of our communities cite convenient access to a general aviation airport as one of the key reasons for either relocating or expanding to a particular community. And those are the same businesses that create jobs and invest in our communities.”

There are nearly 70 aircraft currently based at Woodring Regional Airport, according to the airport’s aviation director Don Cornell, many of which belong to local companies that conduct business around and outside the state.

“We had more than 34,000 total operations (takeoffs and landings) last year and many of those came from some of Enid’s largest employers such as Continental Resources, Johnston Enterprises, Atwoods, Groendyke Transport and Ward Petroleum, just to name a few. Chances are that if Enid had no airport – at least one that wasn’t jet-capable – many of these companies would not be located here today,” Cornell said.

Cornell noted that local retail chains such as Dillard’s, Lowe’s and Wal-Mart use Enid’s airport on a regular basis. Even Vance Air Force Base, which claims to be Enid’s largest employer, uses the airport extensively on Saturdays when the base is closed.

During his Rotary presentation, Bird will also provide a brief overview of various aviation-related bills that are currently making their way through both chambers of the Oklahoma Legislature, including House Bill 2784, the Regional Business Airport Modernization Bill; HB 3239 and Senate Bill 1171, the Aerospace Industry Engineer Workforce bills; and HB 3098, the Aerospace Development Act of 2008.

HB 2784 by Rep. Mike Jackson, R-Enid, authorizes the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission to provide state grants to Oklahoma’s 49 business regional airports for specific airport-improvement projects such as renovating and constructing terminals and hangars, and improving and installing navigational aids.

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HB 3239 provides tax credits to engineers who choose to work for an Oklahoma aerospace company after Jan. 1, 2009, as well as tax credits to the companies that hire them. SB 1171, on the other hand, provides a tax credit to only new engineering graduates hired after Dec. 31, 2008, but no tax credits to the companies.

HB 3098 redirects the Oklahoma Aerospace Institute (OAI) and the Center for Aerospace Supplier Quality (CASQ) from the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology to the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission. The purpose of the OAI and CASQ is to create a partnership of service providers to more effectively respond to the needs of the aerospace industry in the areas of education and training, research, and economic development.

HB 2784, HB 3239 and HB 3098 overwhelmingly passed the state House earlier this session but only HB 3239 has passed the full Senate so far. HB 2784 and HB 3098 are scheduled to be heard on the Senate floor in the coming weeks, however. SB 1171 passed out of the Senate by a wide margin last month and is now making its way through the House.

Oklahoma’s aviation and aerospace industry is one of the state’s largest employers, resulting in approximately 150,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs. Recent studies have revealed that the industry yields an annual industrial output of \$12.5 billion in the state and generates an annual payroll of \$5 billion.

Bird said that one in 10 Oklahomans derive their income from the aviation and aerospace industry and that the average salary for an employee in the industry is nearly \$55,000, compared to about \$30,000 for the average Oklahoman. He noted that Oklahoma is one of seven centers in the world for the modification, maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft.

“Among the more than 500 aerospace companies in Oklahoma, we have one of the highest concentrations of companies and skilled workers in the world who are engaged in the MRO of aircraft,” he said. “Jobs in Oklahoma’s aviation and aerospace industry are good jobs, too. They are the kind of jobs that keep our best and brightest here and attract other talented workers from out of state.”

An attorney and veteran of state government, Bird served Oklahoma State University’s Board of Regents for five years, the Lieutenant Governor’s office for one year and the Attorney General’s office for nearly 12 years. Bird spent his last four years with the Attorney General’s office as chief deputy attorney general of the Civil Division, supervising more than 50 assistant attorneys general. He was also the driving force for the enactment of the Oklahoma Antitrust Reform Act in 1998 – the first significant revision to Oklahoma’s antitrust law since statehood – and for the formation of Governor Brad Henry’s 2004 Aerospace Task Force.

Bird currently serves as treasurer on the executive committee of the National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO) and is an active member of the Governor’s Council for Workforce and Economic Development.

Bird earned his juris doctorate and bachelor’s degree from The University of Tulsa.

The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission’s mission is to promote aviation, which includes fostering the growth of the aerospace industry and ensuring that the needs of commerce and communities across Oklahoma are met by the 114 public airports that comprise the state’s air transportation system.