



## **Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission**

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### **NEWS RELEASE**

#### **Special for the Shawnee News-Star**

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### **Bird Brings ‘Airvangelism’ Message to Shawnee Rotary**

**OKLAHOMA CITY** – Victor Bird, director of the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission, will be the guest speaker during the Shawnee Rotary Club meeting scheduled for noon Tuesday, Jan. 8, at the Golden Corral restaurant, 2513 N. Harrison.

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 Shawnee Regional Airport. In particular, he will address the link between aviation and economic development.

Bird will also present a brief overview of aviation- and aerospace-related legislation that may be heard at the state Capitol in 2008, including the Airport Modernization Bill (House Bill 2082) and the Engineer Workforce Bill (House Bill 2085). HB 2082 would provide \$30 million in one-time state funding to several of Oklahoma’s 49 business regional airports for specific airport-improvement projects, including the construction or renovation of terminals and hangars primarily used for general aviation. HB 2085 would provide tax credits and tuition rebates to engineering graduates who choose to work for an Oklahoma aerospace company. The aerospace companies would also receive tax credits for hiring those graduates.

House bills 2082 and 2085 overwhelmingly passed the House and Senate during the 2007 legislative session. No appropriations were available to fund HB 2082 by the end of the session, however. In addition, legislative leaders could not agree on an omnibus tax incentives/tax credit bill that would have included HB 2085. As a result, HB 2082 and HB 2085 are still pending in conference committee.

“Airports are ‘gateways to the world’ for communities and are extremely important in helping generate economic activity around our state,” 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.”

According to various economic reports, Oklahoma’s aerospace industry is one of the state’s largest employers, resulting in approximately 150,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs statewide. The industry yields an annual industrial output of \$12.5 billion and generates an annual payroll of \$5 billion.

Bird said that one in 10 Oklahomans derive their income from the aerospace/aviation industry with an average salary of nearly \$55,000 compared to \$29,000 for all Oklahomans. 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 400 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 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.