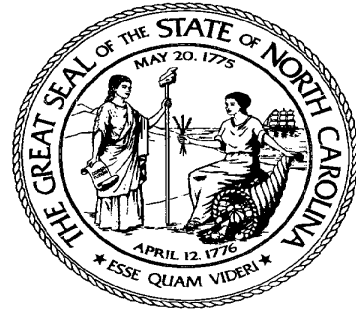


LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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An Opportunity Missed

HB99 (An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act) was passed during the 2005 session of the North Carolina General Assembly. This act authorized the General Assembly to appoint a Workers' Compensation Study Committee to review issues surrounding disability benefits available under the Workers' Compensation Act. According to ECNC sources, legislative leadership has decided *not* to appoint this committee before the 2006 session which begins May 9. Many people have asked, "How can they do that?" Well, more often than not, committees are authorized by bills ratified during session and the leadership for various reasons decides not to appoint them.

This study committee would have been the perfect opportunity for the business community to share their problems regarding the current workers' comp system. Even though this opportunity is lost for now, ECNC will continue to meet with the Governor's Office and legislative leadership to push forward the issue. A complicated and controversial issue like workers' comp reform typically takes several years for passage.

ECNC's Regulatory Reform Bill Hearing

Over the years, we have received many complaints from members regarding burdensome regulatory requirements by North Carolina state agencies. To address these concerns, ECNC has been working with Sens. Fletcher Hartsell and David Hoyle for passage of a bill (SB664) requiring state agencies to consider the economic impact of their proposed rules on business. To ensure compliance, the legislation gives companies the right to judicial review of any agency that does not comply with the rule making process required by the act.

SB664 passed the Senate Commerce Committee last year, but stalled in the Senate Appropriations Committee. On April 20, the Administrative Procedures Oversight Commission heard the bill. Speakers from ECNC and the federal Small Business Administration (SBA) explained the main provisions of the bill and testified to the importance of its passage to small businesses in North Carolina. We are optimistic that this hearing, plus other lobbying efforts, will aid in the Senate's passing the bill early this Short Session.

Health Insurance Proposals Move Forward

The House Select Sub-Committee on Health Care and Health Insurance has met for several months to study the problems associated with small business health insurance and to review possible bills for the short session. In April, the subcommittee reported to the full committee that three bills received a favorable report and a recommendation that they be introduced for the Short Session, which convenes May 9. Below is a listing of the bills:

- A bill creating a high risk pool to subsidize the insurance costs of "uninsurable" individuals
- A bill creating 90% in subsidies to businesses with fewer than 25 employees who do not currently insure their workers
- A bill that would provide tax credits for small businesses with fewer than 25 employees who do provide health insurance

All three bills are very expensive and the one with the greatest likelihood of passage is the tax credit bill. The House passed a small business health insurance tax credit bill last year and the Senate seems to be warming up to the idea. *(Bills are not assigned a number until they are introduced during session.)*

Crowder Construction Company

Founded in 1947 in Charlotte by brothers Bill and O.P. Crowder, this second generation privately held company is now run by cousins Otis and Bill Crowder. Its 600 full-time employees specialize in industrial, site and highway, bridge, and civil and environmental construction, producing revenues of over \$150 million.

Carolinas AGC awarded Crowder with its prestigious Pinnacle Award for "Best General Contractor". The judges made the choice for three reasons:

- Impressive Employee Benefits
- Outstanding and consistent support to the construction industry
- An exceptional safety record and program

Crowder's mission is to build high-quality projects through integrity and commitment to their customer's satisfaction. The company understands that a good business climate in North Carolina is important for all types of business, which is why they support the legislative advocacy efforts of ECNC.