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North Carolina's small businesses are the backbone of our state's economy. Our state and our people benefit most when these companies prosper and grow. Those of us in the General Assembly are clearly aware of this and we focus much of our effort on making North Carolina a great place to do business.

These efforts and our state's business climate have been recognized throughout the nation and the world. A recent study commissioned by the Council on State Taxation and conducted by Ernst & Young found that North Carolina places a lower state and local tax burden on businesses than any other state. In addition, North Carolina is ranked seventh in benefits received by businesses relative to their tax burden. Our reputation as a business-friendly state assists in our efforts to strengthen our economy and improve our unemployment, as recent important job announcements throughout the state show.

The following information highlights just some of the ways state government works to preserve the well-being of North Carolina's small businesses.

### **Community Colleges**

In recent years, North Carolina communities have experienced tremendous job loss, particularly in the manufacturing industry. This has resulted in an unprecedented

number of people going to our community colleges to learn new skills and retrain for new jobs. Enrollment continues to soar at these institutions. In this year's budget, we fully funded enrollment growth in community colleges to ensure that students are not denied services because of enrollment growth (\$58 million for fiscal year 2009-10 and \$99 million for fiscal year 2010-11). A well-educated and well-trained workforce benefits all businesses in this state, whether they are large or small.

The Small Business Center Network housed within North Carolina community colleges also plays an important role in assisting small businesses throughout the state. We allocated \$5.35 million to the program this year so that it can help North Carolinians start and grow their own small businesses. Each community college in the state is home to a small business center, meaning that such a center is located within a 30-minute drive of almost all North Carolinians. Many of the services offered are free of charge.

The North Carolina Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning, or NC REAL, is a non-profit organization within the community colleges that helps encourage entrepreneurship and small business creation. NC REAL's training programs and curriculum have helped thousands of people create jobs throughout our state. This year, we appropriated \$250,000 for both the 2009-10 fiscal year and the 2010-11 fiscal year.

We also continued to appropriate funds to the community colleges for the NC Military Business Center so that it can continue with its important work. The primary purpose of the center is to help small- and medium-sized businesses throughout the state that are seeking federal contracts, with a focus on military-related contracts. The center also helps highly-trained military personnel transition to civilian employment and recruits new defense-related businesses to the state. We appropriated \$1.25 million in recurring funds for the center.

## **University System**

The University of North Carolina is home to the Small Business and Technology Development Center. The center provides business consulting services and management education to growing small businesses. Although the main office is located in

Raleigh, the center operates 10 regional service centers in 17 offices throughout the state.

## **Department of Commerce**

The One North Carolina Small Business Fund within the Department of Commerce received \$700,000 this year. The program provides matching funds for businesses trying to obtain federal research grants under the Small Business Administration.

In 2007, the General Assembly created the NC Green Business Fund. This fund was established to provide grants or loans to small businesses involved in a variety of "green" industries, such as renewable fuels or energy-efficient building technologies. This year, we allocated \$5 million of federal stimulus money to support this program.

The Business ServiCenter within the Department of Commerce provides information about state and local programs and resources to help growing small businesses. The center provides one-on-one consultation over the phone or in person about issues such as identification of business resources and licensing requirements and can also supply referrals to other state, federal, and local agencies. Much of this general information is also available online at Business Link North Carolina, [www.blnc.org](http://www.blnc.org). The department also has a small business ombudsman, who assists in resolving issues with state agencies.

Kewaunee Scientific Corp, a longtime Statesville laboratory furniture manufacturer, announced this week that it will add 100 full-time jobs. The company is set to invest \$13 million to expand its operations and renovate its corporate headquarters over the next five years.

Solaris Industries Inc., an international manufacturer of steel tubing, will spend \$3.2 million to build a new manufacturing facility in Cleveland County. The company pledges to add 40 new jobs.

IBM has unveiled a massive collection of data processing computer servers at its new \$360 million data center in Research Triangle Park. IBM asserts that the data center will use half the energy of a typical complex.

Commonwealth Brands Inc., a national manufacturer of tobacco and tobacco products, will expand its operations in Rockingham County by investing \$6.7 million and creating 35 jobs in 2010. The announcement was made possible in part by a \$100,000 grant from the One North Carolina Fund.

West Corp. plans to hire more than 175 people for its call center in Rocky Mount. Applicants may apply online at [www.westemployment.com](http://www.westemployment.com). The company will hire its employees from Edgecombe and Nash Counties, two areas that currently have high unemployment.

The Biltmore Estate will create up to 120 jobs with its new Antler Hill Village visitation site, which opens this spring. A job fair is planned for next week while work continues on the village, a 15-acre visitor site for estate guests that will open in late March, with a grand opening in May.

Northeast Foods Inc., a national contract baker for the commercial and fast-food industries, will open a new bakery operation in Johnston County. The company plans to invest \$25.4 million and create 84 jobs during the next two years in Clayton. The new bakery operation is made possible in part by a \$350,000 grant from the One North Carolina Fund.

### **Aid to Non-profits**

The General Assembly provides funding to a variety of non-profits that help foster the growth of small businesses. These agencies include the Rural Center, the Golden LEAF, the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, the Community Development Initiative, the Institute of Minority Economic Development, and others. In addition to ongoing efforts that help small business gain access to capital, this year we appropriated \$500,000 to the Rural Center to assist existing small businesses. The Rural Center combined this money with funds from the Golden LEAF to develop an initiative in conjunction with the Self-Help credit union that will allow Self-Help to make loans in the amount of \$27.5 million to small businesses.

## **Notes**

The state Office of the Commissioner of Banks continues to offer a free program to help homeowners avoid foreclosure. People seeking help can call **1-866-234-4857** (8:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m., Mon.-Fri-; 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Sat) to be connected with a HUD-approved counseling agency that can help you over the phone or provide face-to-face counseling. For more information, visit [www.fightNCforeclosure.org](http://www.fightNCforeclosure.org).

My office number is 733-5974 and my email address is [darren.jackson@ncleg.net](mailto:darren.jackson@ncleg.net). I look forward to hearing from and working with you. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve. As always, please contact me if I can be of service to you.

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