



Friday, June 10, 2011

State, gravel trade dig in to remove permit red tape that slowed work

By Jeff Bell

Like other lobbyists around the Ohio Statehouse last year, Patrick Jacomet heard gubernatorial candidate John Kasich rail against government red tape that stymies business growth and promise to do something about it if he were elected in November.

The vehicle to get the job done, Kasich said, would be a program with a catchy acronym – CSI Ohio – with CSI short for Common Sense Initiative. It would be directed by Mary Taylor, Kasich’s running mate for lieutenant governor.

Kasich and Taylor have been in office for five months, and Jacomet, executive director of the Ohio Aggregates and Industrial Minerals Association, stands witness that CSI Ohio was more than just a campaign promise to get votes.

With help from CSI, the trade group Jacomet heads recently wrapped up negotiations with the state EPA on a package of general permits designed to streamline the ability of aggregate companies, such as sand-and-gravel processors, to operate in Ohio. The association had been trying to get the Environmental Protection Agency to approve the permit package since 2001, he said.

“We lacked the ability to get it over the goal line,” Jacomet said. “It just kind of floundered, but when Lt. Gov. Taylor’s office got involved, things started moving.”

Making changes

The EPA agreement with the aggregates industry is one of the stories of progress that have been hailed by Taylor. Others have included:

Working with the Ohio Board of Optometry to withdraw a proposed rule that could have hurt the relationship between retailers that sell eyeglasses and optometrists who see patients in the stores.

Helping change a state liquor law that had prohibited food manufacturers from buying alcoholic products in bulk, forcing them to pay higher retail prices for wine and beer used in their recipes.

Working with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio to rescind a 2008 administrative rule on smaller commercial trucks that business owners had said was costly, over-reaching and burdensome.

One of Kasich's first acts as governor in January was signing an executive order that established CSI Ohio, which was later codified in state law by the Ohio General Assembly. Its goal is develop a process that holds state agencies accountable for promoting flexibility, balance, transparency and consistency when developing or renewing rules and regulations for businesses.

"Part of this is a mindset issue," said Steve Faulkner, Taylor's communications director. "We're saying, 'Hold on. Let's look at the impact of the rules and regulations that are put forward.' "

CSI Ohio is developing a review process for rules drafted by state agencies. It also is working on an analysis instrument that will measure the potential effect that proposed regulations will have on Ohio businesses.

CSI Ohio also has established a website (governor.ohio.gov/CSI) that features updates on the progress of the program as well as a contact form for the public to suggest ideas for improved state regulations.

In the case of Ohio's aggregates industry, the new general permits package negotiated through CSI Ohio provides consistent terms and conditions for operations such as the mining of sand, gravel and crushed stone, Jacomet said. Previously, companies needed EPA approval each time they wanted to begin new operations, and each permit took significant time and resources to develop, he said.

In the new system, companies agree to abide by specific requirements and environmental protections outlined in a general permit issued by EPA. It applies to aggregate processing, mineral extraction and emissions from portable equipment in operations such as sand and gravel dredging.

Companies will be able to get to work immediately on projects by notifying EPA that they will operate under the terms of the general permit, Jacomet said.

"I don't think there was ever a conscious effort by Ohio EPA to slow this down," he said. "It would just hit a snag and get put aside."

A fact sheet from the association states Ohio's aggregates industry employs nearly 5,000 workers with an additional 40,000 employed indirectly in support jobs such as truck drivers, electricians and mechanics. It is a \$1 billion-a-year industry in the state, with road construction projects the largest market for aggregates used in asphalt and concrete.

Check out the Columbus Business First article here:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/columbus/print-edition/2011/06/10/state-gravel-trade-dig-in-to-remove.html>.