Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Director Is Out of Touch, Michigan Chamber of Commerce Member Survey Demonstrates

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In a recent media interview, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Director, Steve Chester, stated that "business has a much more favorable impression of the DEQ" (see "Chester Trumpets DEQ's Good Reputation with Biz," MIRS Capitol Capsule, July 18, 2008) -- a misleading claim based upon the results of a Michigan Chamber of Commerce member survey released today.

More than half of the 300 Michigan Chamber member firms who participated in a poll to gather their opinions and comments regarding the DEQ gave the department a grade of "C" or worse. Specifically, 23 percent of the respondents gave the department a "C"; 18 percent a "D"; and 10 percent an "F."

"Over the last year and half, we have received numerous complaints from member companies about the poor service they have received from the DEQ," noted Doug Roberts, Jr., Director of Environmental & Energy Policy for the Michigan Chamber. "These results confirm that problems with the DEQ are not limited to just a handful of companies."

Reasons cited for these poor markings concerned customer service and outcomes. The five most cited comments concerning customer service were:

-- Too slow
-- Unresponsive or difficult to reach
-- Not knowledgeable or lacking experience and training
-- Arrogant, rude or generally difficult to work with
-- Too much bureaucracy and burdensome over-regulation

The five most cited comments concerning outcomes were:

-- Too slow - from 30 days to 6 months to 4 years to 14 years and counting. "There is no sense of urgency that we must have to survive in business," noted one respondent.

-- Too costly - "It took over two years and $45,000 in attorney costs," noted another respondent.

-- Inconsistent outcomes/responses - "Ranged from weeks for phone calls/emails to three years on a report. They are now no longer reviewing draft reports at all. Unconscionable," said yet another respondent.

-- Standards keep changing - "Some projects remained unreviewed for two years after submittal, and then they were reviewed using guidance not applicable at the time of the submittal," noted another respondent.

-- Bad/unhelpful attitude of staff - "We received no service, but rather totalitarian edicts."

"At a time when our state's economy is hurting, we must get better results from the DEQ, as they are often the gate keeper to economic development in our state," said Jim Holcomb, Vice President of Business Advocacy & Associate General Counsel for the Michigan Chamber. "Many job providers cannot expand and grow without permits from the DEQ and the comments from our members demonstrate that we need dramatic change in the direction and culture of the DEQ."

"We call on the Governor and the Legislature to take action to reform and improve the performance of the Department of Environmental Quality," Holcomb concluded.

The Michigan Chamber of Commerce is a statewide business advocacy organization representing over 7,100 employers of every type and size in all 83 counties in Michigan.

NOTE: Member comments about the overall performance of the DEQ are available on the Michigan Chamber's website at www.michamber.com .

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