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Rokita lauds lessening of red tape

Local examples: Farmers, Purdue and a high-tech firm

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Farming in Clinton County, a program at Purdue University and a company at the Purdue Research Park in West Lafayette are all on U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita's list of "victories" in a yearlong effort to reduce federal red tape.

"No one here is saying we don't want any regulations, but we want balance," said the Indianapolis Republican who represents Congressional District 4, during a stop at the offices of Greater Lafayette Commerce on Monday afternoon to present the initial Red Tape Rollback annual report.

Working with the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, Rokita said 71 businesses or individuals have contacted him in the past year with complaints about 41 regulations. The report shows 18 victories — as defined by an effort to overturn or change what had been proposed by agencies that include the Department of Labor, Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Transportation.

"Of 41, 18 victories. For those of us from Purdue, that's an 'F.' But we're grading on legislative terms," Rokita said. The report claims victories when a regulation is slowed down, stopped, a bill to make changes is filed or passed out of committee.

Dan Lahrman, who farms corn and soybeans near Mulberry, became involved when the EPA reportedly proposed to further regulate airborne dust — a natural byproduct of planting, harvesting and driving down some country roads.

"That would have been devastating to farmers. Anything not science-based is going to be horrible regulations," said Lahrman, one of several real-life examples Rokita called on to support his efforts.

"We really appreciate you helping us not have to put diapers on our combines," said Mike Beard, who also farms in Clinton County and became concerned when the Department of Labor proposed regulations in 2011 that would have made illegal many of the chores handled by teenagers and children on farms.

"They couldn't be in with livestock. 4-Hers couldn't be with their livestock," said Beard, who helps operate a farm that provides employment for three generations of his family.

"Given the opportunity to work hard and sweat, we think develops some character. It made me a better person. I tell my children and grandchildren it will make them better people."

Some higher education institutions in Indiana contacted Rokita when the U.S. Department of Education create rules in October 2010 that would complicate distance-learning programs. They are offered by Purdue University and especially targeted to engineering students.

Rokita is co-sponsor of a bill that would repeal the regulations.

"The congressman along with his right-thinking colleagues passed the bill. That actually makes a

difference for young people seeking an education," said Timothy Sanders, Purdue's associate vice president of governmental relations.

The measure has passed the U.S. House, but not the Senate.

Also pending in Congress is a bill to repeal a 2.3 percent medical device tax that will take effect on Jan. 1, 2013, as part of the Affordable Care Act. Rokita said the tax could kill jobs in Indiana, a state with many medical device companies.

Mark Bleyer, president of Cook Biotech Inc., a company in the research park that manufactures regenerative biomedical products, is pleased a vote on the repeal measure is expected this summer, before the congressional recess.

"That's money we could spend on (research and development), new jobs ... we just don't have that," Bleyer said during Rokita's visit. "We'd like medical devices to be less expensive, or at least hold the line."

Tara Nelson, D-Lafayette, is running against Rokita in the general election in November and said the EPA has characterized the farm dust issue as a myth.

"To declare a victory over an issue not even in process ... we need to look further into what victories were won. I would work toward real issues that affect the economy and people in their day-to-day lives," said Nelson. "I would like to see red tape rolled back on corporations that are outsourcing jobs overseas. We need to focus on the economy. I haven't seen much from Rokita on that."

Rokita, a freshman congressman who previously served as Indiana Secretary of State, said efforts to reduce red tape on other issues continue.

"We haven't given up on ones we haven't declared victory on. That is work that's not being done in Washington enough," he said. "There are some things starting to gain traction."
