

# THE EXECUTIVE

## THE STATE CHAMBER

Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

May/June 2007

### State Chamber Visits D.C.

**T**he State Chamber's annual visit to Washington, D.C. was held May 8-10, 2007. Some 23 State Chamber members attended the three-day function, which included the weekly Nebraska breakfast; a congressional luncheon with Chamber members; a reception at the Washington offices of State Chamber member Blackwell Sanders Peper Martin law firm; and briefings from the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Members and local chambers were represented from Bellevue, Columbus, Grand Island, Kearney, Lincoln, Omaha and Scottsbluff/Gering.

On May 8, group members were briefed at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce headquarters. Topics included

the "Card Check" bill addressing union membership; energy issues; and environmental- and trade-related legislation. That evening, Nebraskan Kyle Gilster of the Blackwell Sanders Peper Martin Washington law office hosted the group at the firm's offices. Congressional staffers joined the group and heard remarks from former Reagan Administration Budget Director Jim Miller.

At the Nebraska breakfast on May 9, Senators Ben Nelson and Chuck Hagel, as well as Congressmen Lee Terry, Jeff Fortenberry and Adrian Smith made brief remarks and introduced the State Chamber group, including the large Columbus Chamber contingent of eight members. Later that day, the congressional delegation and staff members joined the State

Chamber members and representatives from the Federal Home Loan Bank Topeka at a luncheon sponsored by FHLB. The congressional delegation provided excellent updates on current federal issues as more than 45 people attended the luncheon.

Later that afternoon, the State Chamber delegation heard from Jim Neil of NAM on federal issues affecting manufacturers and business in general. The State Chamber delegates also took advantage of the trip by making individual calls on their representatives to inform them of community and local issues.

Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce President Cindy Johnson said the trip was well worthwhile. "Not only is it crucial to meet with our legislators on the Hill, but the contact with other Chamber organizations in our state allowed for instant analysis of the day's activities," Johnson said. "I returned with a new vigor for what our Chamber can do for our business community." ■



**Left: President Barry Kennedy, K.C. Belitz and State Chamber Chairman Tom Whalen at the Nebraska Breakfast.**

**Below: Delegation at the U.S. Chamber Briefing hears about the "Card Check" Bill.**



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## **State Chamber Views...**

*Editorial by Barry Kennedy*

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# **"Thoughts From Our Nation's Capitol"**

**H**aving just returned from Washington, D.C. and meetings with all members of our congressional delegation, as well as staff professionals from the U.S. Chamber and NAM, I arrived back home with two conclusions.

First, Nebraska is very fortunate to have a delegation of Senators and Congressmen that understands the importance of pro-business policies that produce jobs and enhance our nation's economic competitiveness. We need to continue to express our appreciation to the entire delegation for their support of pro-growth initiatives.

Second, the Nebraska business community must attend to several

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issues making their way through congress and communicate our positions to the delegation. The next few years are critical in maintaining a competitive business climate in a global economy.

Back to the first point: Our two U.S. Senators and all three Congress-

men from Nebraska each earned higher than 80% rankings on the latest voting reports compiled by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). The Nebraska State Chamber is an affiliate of both organizations, which annually track federal legislation that impacts members' profitability and competitiveness.

On the most recent reports, Senator Chuck Hagel earned a 100% from both organizations for his votes on important issues such as tax relief, transportation infrastructure, energy production, medical liability and small business health plans. Senator Nelson earned over 80% on both reports in support of pro-business issues.

On the House side, both returning Congressmen, Lee Terry and Jeff Fortenberry, had over 90% on similar business issues. Though Congressman Adrian Smith has not been in Washington long enough to establish a voting record, he obtained a cumulative voting record of over 90% while in Nebraska's Unicameral on the State Chamber Voting Record.

All five members of the 2006 Nebraska congressional delegation received the U.S. Chamber's Spirit of Enterprise Award.

Now about the issues: First and foremost is the "Free Choice Act," federal legislation that would eliminate the secret ballot process when unions try to organize at a work place. More commonly referred to as "Card Check," unions would need to obtain only 51% of the employees' signatures in order to unionize. Under this method, there could be significant pressure put on individuals to sign the card. It is interesting to note that a secret ballot would still be required to

decertify.

All three of Nebraska's Congressmen voted against the "Card Check" bill, even though it did pass in the U.S. House of Representatives. It will likely be voted on in the Senate soon, and our Senators need to hear from Nebraska employers on this vital issue.

Meanwhile, the issue of taxation remains extremely important to business survival, and there are a number of tax cuts that have 2010 expiration dates. We need to constantly remind our delegation of the importance of making those tax cuts permanent so business can continue to invest and create new job opportunities.

Here are a few other issues that deserve our vigilance and which our delegation must know we are concerned about.

There are efforts to expand the Family Medical Leave Act and broaden its impact on smaller companies. There are new ideas surfacing almost daily on immigration, some which would place additional burdens on employers. Health care costs continue to rise, making it more and more difficult for some employers to provide coverage to employees. EPA is proposing stricter regulation of ozone emissions that could affect utility costs. These are just a few of the wide array of issues that could affect trade and business growth.

As stated earlier in this article, Nebraskans are fortunate to have a congressional delegation in Washington that understands the importance of pro-business policies. We are also very fortunate to have a delegation that is very open to input from constituents. I have always found our delegation and their professional staff to be very receptive and interested in hearing from Nebraskans on all issues. Please seize every opportunity to communicate with our delegation about the issues that impact your ability to prosper in Nebraska. ■

## **Arth, Downs, and The Buckle Honored by UNL College of Business**

**O**n April 27, 2007, the College of Business Administration Advisory Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln held its 2007 awards luncheon to recognize Nebraskans who have excelled in the business world, as well as Nebraska-based companies that achieved a high level of success. We are proud of the following State Chamber members who were recognized for their accomplishments:

· **Larry Arth, UNIFI:** The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Larry Arth, chairman and CEO of the UNIFI Companies and chairman of the board of Ameritas Life Insurance Corp., headquartered in Lincoln. A native of Lincoln, Arth graduated from UNL in 1965 and served in the U.S. Navy. He joined Ameritas Life in 1968. The company joined forces with Acacia Life and Union Central Life last year under the UNIFI Mutual Holding Company umbrella. UNIFI Companies employ approximately 1,100 associates in Nebraska.

· **Ryan Downs, PayPal:** UNL alumnus Ryan D. Downs was presented with the Business Leadership Award. Downs currently serves as senior vice president of worldwide operations at PayPal, with its 130 million domestic and international accounts. Downs joined PayPal in 2001, following a stint with an Omaha IT consulting and Web development firm. Downs graduated from UNL in 1991 and from Harvard Law School in 1994.

· **The Buckle:** Kearney-based apparel company The Buckle, Inc. was named the winner of the Corporate Leadership Award. Dennis Nelson of Kearney, The Buckle's president and CEO, accepted the Corporate Leadership Award on behalf of the company. The Buckle began as a single men's clothing store in 1948. Today the company operates 352 stores in 38 states and has more than \$500 million in annual sales. ■

## **Kearney's Ray Ward Receives UNL Alumni Achievement Award**

**S**tate Chamber board member Dr. Ray Ward of Kearney is one of seven University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduates to receive the 2007 Alumni Achievement Award from the Nebraska Alumni Association. Presented with the award at the Nebraska Champions Club May 4, Dr. Ward was recognized for his service to his community, state and nation. Ward is president and co-owner of Ward Laboratories, Inc. in Kearney. His company provides consultation on crop nutrition and management, feed testing, fertilizer recommendations, manure and sludge management, soil and plant testing and water. Ward also teaches the introductory soils class at the UNK and agronomy 405 at UNL, and serves on the UNK College of Natural and Social Sciences Advisory Board. ■

## **Nebraska Ranks 3rd Best In Law-suit Climate Study**

**T**he U.S. Chamber Institute for Legal Reform (ILR) has released a study showing that Delaware has the best legal climate in the country, and West Virginia has the worst. The annual assessment of state liability systems, conducted by the nonpartisan polling firm Harris Interactive, showed that Nebraska has the third best legal climate for business. Other top states include Minnesota, Iowa and Maine. West Virginia is ranked in last place for the second year in a row. Others at the bottom of the list include Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Illinois and California. Tom Donohue, president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said: "We've been telling some of the worst states for six years now that they need to improve their lawsuit system in order to attract new business and grow jobs and, for a number of states, the message appears to be getting through." The survey of 1,599 senior attorneys is the preeminent standard by which companies, policymakers and the media measure the legal environment of states. ■

## **Postage Increase May Save Some Businesses Money**

**INC**.com reports that while many businesses frown on the new postage rate increase — which took effect May 14 — those that make smart use of the new pricing system could actually see their costs reduced. While the cost of mailing a first-class letter weighing one ounce increased by two cents, to 41 cents total, rates for other categories were reduced. Letters weighing up to two ounces dropped to 58 cents — five cents less than the previous 63 cents. Businesses that reduce the frequency of their mailers by combining them stand to gain. A small business mailing 5,000 such letters would save \$250 more than what it would have saved before the rate drop. However, sending odd-shaped or odd-sized letters will cost more, since it is more expensive for the USPS to process these pieces of mail. A two-ounce large envelope will now cost 97 cents to send, which is a 53 percent increase from the earlier 63 cents. A possible solution for businesses? Reconfigure the mailing to a standard envelope size and pay just 58 cents to post it. ■

### **State Chamber Workshop Calendar**

Sept. 7, 9:00 a.m. to Noon — "I.D. Theft: Are You At Risk?"

Sept. 21, 8:30 a.m. to Noon — "Negotiation & Principled Bargaining" with Senator Dave Landis

*See flyers in this Executive.*

# Hagel, Nelson Recognized for Pro-Business Voting Records

On May 18, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) awarded Senator Chuck Hagel with the *NAM Award for Manufacturing Legislative Excellence*. A ceremony was held at the headquarters of Valmont Industries in Omaha, where Valmont Chairman and CEO Mogens Bay presented the award to the Senator. The *NAM Award* is presented to members of Congress who vote in the best interest of the manufacturing economy at least 70 percent of the time on key manufacturing votes. Senator Hagel was one of only 20 U.S. senators to earn a 100 percent voting record from NAM during the 109th Congress (2005-06) on votes addressing domestic energy supply, legal reform, free trade agreements and tax policy, among others.

Meanwhile, Senator Ben Nelson was presented the Adam Smith Award on May 2 for his continued support for lower taxes, business development and free markets. The Adam Smith Award is sponsored by the Business Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC), a leading business group, and the Friends of Adam Smith, a non-profit foundation that researches and promotes the historical and relevant link between politics, public policy and economic freedom in this nation. The award is given to one

elected official and one business leader each year whose life work emphasizes their commitment to promoting free enterprise. Senator Nelson was selected for the award due to his work in promoting business

growth, including his efforts to help pass tax cut packages that were signed into law, as well as his work on legislation to allow small businesses to band together to purchase health care for employees. ■

On May 18, U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel was honored with NAM's Manufacturing Legislative Excellence Award during a presentation hosted by Valmont Industries in Omaha. Hagel's voting record with NAM was a perfect 100% during the 109th Congress. Pictured above are Robert Meaney, Sr. V.P.



of Valmont Industries; Chip Tangen, NAM Regional Manager; Mogens C. Bay, Chairman & CEO of Valmont Industries; Tony Raimondo, Chairman of Behlen Mfg. Co.; Senator Hagel; Barry Kennedy, President of the State Chamber; and Jeffrey Scherer, CFO of Smeal Fire Apparatus Co.

## Nebraska Launches Redesigned Economic Development Web Site

(The Nebraska Department of Economic Development's new Web Site ([www.neded.org](http://www.neded.org)) is now online for users. New features include simplified categories and links to department programs and services, as well as greater accessibility to all programs and services. DED said an internal information technology and marketing design team spent several months soliciting information from DED staff and constructing the site before it was emailed to external clients and internal staff for testing and critique. ■

## State Chamber Welcomes New "Investors"

Membership in the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry is an investment in Nebraska's economic well-being. This month, the State Chamber welcomes the following new members and encourages members to consider doing business with fellow Chamber members.

### MINDEN

Wardcraft Homes, Inc.  
Curt Wilkerson

### OMAHA

DTN, Inc.

Robert Gordon

Great Plains Metallurgical Co., Inc.  
Robert L. Barchus

M & I Equipment Finance  
Tina Netsch

Mid-America Expositions, Inc.  
Robert P. Mancuso

NorthStar Financial Services Group,  
LLC

Brian Nielsen

Sponsor: Brian Kavanaugh, Nebraska  
Junior Chamber of Commerce

Protexter Consulting - Clay Develop-  
ment

Bill Protexter

Telenational Communications, Inc.  
Chris Canfield

### SCHUYLER

Schuyler Area Chamber of Commerce  
Marlene Moore

### WEST POINT

CharterWest National Bank

Kevin J. Larson

Sponsor: Jeffrey Scherer, Smeal Fire  
Apparatus Co.

Harry Knobbe Feed Yards

Harry Knobbe

Sponsor: Jeffrey Scherer, Smeal Fire  
Apparatus Co.

# THE STATE CHAMBER

## 2007 Washington Trip



# LEADERSHIP NEBRASKA

The State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska Inaugural class completed sessions on Public Service and Government in early March and its agricultural tour May 2-4.

Dinner with Republican State Senators, briefings on the budget, demographics, key legislative issues, the history of the Unicameral and George Norris, a reception for state senators and constitutional officers, and role-playing as U.S. Congresspersons were the highlights of the March 6-8 Public Service and Government session.

In early May the class met (appropriately) for lunch at the Leadership Center in Aurora and a briefing on the development of ethanol in Nebraska. On the Arrow Stage Lines charter, we next toured the Nebraska Energy ethanol plant in Aurora. Speakers on the bus rides informed the class on ag-related issues from water, to research, planting techniques, feedlot operations, and sugar beet production. Stops included a feedlot, corn farm, Lake McConaughy, the Haythorn Ranch, and Western Sugar. Natalie Peetz, Peetz & Company, chaired the Public Policy Session and Rob Robertson, Farm Bureau, chaired the Agriculture session. Both sessions were well received and most informative to the class.

The rest of the sessions include the Economic Development session in Omaha June 27-29; the Education session in Kearney on July 31-Aug. 2; and the Health/Healthcare/Human Services session in Norfolk on September 12-14. A commencement ceremony will be held in Lincoln on November 2.

We encourage State Chamber members to consider being a mentor to members of the Inaugural class. Nomination forms for the 2008 class may be submitted beginning July, 2007. The Leadership Nebraska Council is planning for next year now. For any aspect of the State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska program, please contact Executive Director Don Mihovk at the State Chamber office or log on to [www.statechamberleadershipnebraska.com](http://www.statechamberleadershipnebraska.com).

