

THE EXECUTIVE

THE STATE CHAMBER



Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

May/June 2012

Governor Hosts Chamber Cornerstone Members

On April 4, Governor Dave Heineman and First Lady Sally Ganem hosted the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry's Cornerstone Dinner at the Governor's Residence in Lincoln. More than 60 attended the event, which included Lieutenant Governor Rick Sheehy and his wife, Connie. The governor spoke with State Chamber members at the pre-dinner social and then addressed the gathering later in the evening. He noted some of the highlights of the 2012 legislative session, as well as

the state's current challenges and opportunities.

The annual dinner is held in tribute of the State Chamber's "cornerstone members" – the organization's top financial contributors. The contributions made by cornerstone members allow the association to enhance and expand its services for all members.

Top sponsors for this year's dinner were **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Nebraska, ConAgra Foods, and Nebraska Public Power District.**

Platinum sponsors were **Archer Dan-**

iels Midland, Black Hills Energy, Farmers Mutual Insurance, Lincoln Industries, Mutual of Omaha, Nelnnet, Pinnacle Bank, Union Pacific and, Vetter Health Services. Gold sponsors were **Ameritas, BNSF Railway, CenturyLink, Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Duncan Aviation, Great Plains Communications, Mid-Continent Technologies, SourceGas, Valmont Industries, Verizon, and Windstream.** ■



In Clockwise Order: The Governor and First Lady had their photographs taken with cornerstone members, including Union Pacific's Brenda Mainwaring and Beth Ryan.

Lieutenant Governor Rick Sheehy meets with Mick Jensen, Chairman of the Board of Great Plains Communications, Blair.

Governor Heineman greets State Chamber Chairman Steve Ford, CEO of Pepsi-Cola Bottling Co., Lincoln.

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State Chamber Views...

Guest Editorial by Robert B. Harris

1987 Chairman

Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

'The State Chamber's First 100 Years'

It was a Friday when my father, Lew Harris, called from Omaha to say he and my mother were unexpectedly returning to Lincoln. He was on the board of the Nebraska Association of Commerce & Industry – the precursor to the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry – and their annual meeting had been abruptly canceled. I was a college freshman. U.S. President John F. Kennedy had just been shot.

Another State Chamber memory involves a conversation that my father – who would go on to be elected the 1969 NACI president – had with two of his close friends, Earl Luff (1944 and 1957 president of Associated Industries of Nebraska, which was an even earlier precursor of the State Chamber) and George Mechling (1961 AIN president). Now if you think today's Tea Party defines fiscal conservatism, you never met these three graduates of the Great Depression. Listening to their conversation in the early 1960s, I remember realizing they not only knew Nebraska's governor but, even more amazing, they actually talked with him! That was quite a revelation for a naïve (in those days, really naïve) high school student.

A half century ago, it was impossible to imagine I would eventually become the last chair of the NACI. The organization's name changed to the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry during my term. As chair, I would visit regularly with the Governor. Of course I did not talk with him, like my father and his friends did. Instead, I talked with her (Governor Kay Orr).

A great deal has changed over those 50 years – including throughout my 34 years as a member of the State Chamber Board of Directors. Yet two key themes have remained constant

over that time; and they are the basis for this organization's success and longevity.

First, our State Chamber has had – and continues to have – very active grassroots involvement from committed business and community leaders across Nebraska.

Second, particularly since 1982 when Jack Swartz arrived, the State Chamber has had excellent professional staff leadership.

I joined the NACI's Executive Council in 1982 and was able to witness Jack's impact firsthand. The Board began to become much more connected with state legislative issues, as well as focusing on more effective state economic development efforts. Several new councils were formed to support deeper analysis of specific topics and the statewide fall legislative forums were introduced.

Back then, it was becoming clear that we needed to strengthen our financial position. To address that, Jack encouraged the Executive Council to modify our nearly total reliance on dues as the primary source of income.

In the '80s, the NACI served as representative for small businesses' health insurance program and received some income as a result. Jack asked me to take a look at the details of the program and, since I knew very little about insurance, I somehow concluded that we should be able to make considerably more money from the program. Jack and I met with the insurance provider and I very aggressively presented my views – which in hindsight (and in fact) made absolutely no sense.

Fortunately, my proposal was so ridiculous that it apparently confused our provider, who – possibly still in shock – renegotiated our contract. That new contract, combined with more aggres-

sive promotion of the program, resulted in a huge increase for non-dues income. The increase turned out to be enough to support an additional senior staff member in 1986. We hired Barry Kennedy and, stating the obvious, that has worked out pretty well.

After reading the Nebraska Chamber's new 100-year anniversary publication – entitled "Century 2012" – you can see the extremely positive impact Jack and Barry have had on this organization. And just as important, you see time and time again the critically vital contributions made by State Chamber members.

Think about the incredible number of hours volunteered by State Chamber members: in testifying at hearings; contacting legislators in person, by phone or by letter; meeting with regulators; participating in council and board meetings; supporting Chamber programs and forums; and much more. This is what gives the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry its strength.

It is active member support that has transformed the Nebraska Chamber from having been a good organization in the past into being one of Nebraska's most important and influential groups today.

There's a great statement in aviation that "only the runway in front of the plane is important." While it is fun to look at the State Chamber's tremendous past, the future is really where we remain focused. And thanks to an extremely active membership and superb professional leadership, the future – as we are clarifying through the new "Forging Nebraska's Future" effort – is certainly bright.

With 100 years now safely behind us, I can hardly wait to see what's next. ■

Robert B. Harris is Principal of RB Harris Company based in Lincoln. He served as chair of the Nebraska Chamber in 1987 and has served on the State Chamber's Board of Directors for more than three decades. He is also the current chair of the Chamber's "Forging Nebraska's Future" advisory committee.

Governor Signs Job Reference Bill, LB959

Just prior to the conclusion of the Nebraska Unicameral's 2012 legislative session, Governor Heineman signed LB959, one of this year's most important labor law bills. Introduced by Fremont Senator Charlie Janssen and prioritized by Lincoln Senator Colby Coash, LB959 allows employers to provide job references for current or former workers by limiting the threat of legal action under specified circumstances. The State Chamber supported LB959, which will become law on July 10, 2012.

At least three dozen other states already have some form of immunity

for employers who provide job references. Enactment of LB959 is expected to improve Nebraska's standing in national competitiveness rankings, including the U.S. Chamber's review of state employment policies. ■

Pictured at the signing of LB959 are (from left): Robert Hallstrom, Director of Nebraska NFIB; Barry Kennedy, President of the Nebraska Chamber; Senator Coash; Governor Heineman; Senator Janssen; and Ron Sedlacek, Vice President-General Counsel of the Nebraska Chamber.



Save The Date: Chamber Economic Outlook Forums, November 12 & 13

The Nebraska Chamber is pleased to announce that in recognition of our 100th anniversary, the Chamber will host "Century 2012: An Economic Futures Forum." The event will be held November 12 in LaVista and November 13 in Kearney. It will feature nationally-recognized speakers from the Tax Foundation, American Legislative Exchange Council and other organizations to address key topics impacting Nebraska's economy, workforce and population.

Among the topics to be discussed: Nebraska's economic and tax competitiveness; educational innovation; strategies for a successful economic future; and technology and innovation in business. The November 12 forum will be held at the LaVista Conference Center, beginning at 10 a.m. The November 13 forum will be at the Kearney Holiday Inn Convention Center, also beginning at 10 a.m.

If you are interested in helping sponsor this important event, call (402) 474-4422 or e-mail James Berringer at jberringer@nechamber.com. ■

Tax Cut, Economic Development Bills Signed

During the final full week of the Nebraska Legislature's 2012 session, Governor Heineman signed into law four tax-related bills, including LB970, his revised tax cut plan that makes modest reductions in state income taxes paid by low- and middle-income families. As amended, LB970, sponsored by Bellevue Senator Abbie Cornett and prioritized by Omaha Senator Beau McCoy, will provide about \$97 million in tax relief over three years. Additionally, the governor signed three economic development bills aimed at continuing to improve Nebraska's competitive edge for job creation: LB830 to provide a tax exemption for bio-chips; LB872 to reduce the income tax burden of Nebraska-based businesses providing services to customers in other states; and LB1080 to provide incentives for existing data centers to expand business operations in Nebraska. The State Chamber supported all of these tax-related bills. ■



Pictured above are Senators Beau McCoy of Omaha; Heath Melloy of Omaha; Deb Fischer of Valentine; Galen Hadley of Kearney; and Governor Dave Heineman.

Now Available: 2012 Nebraska Human Resources Library

Have you hired a new employee? Given a performance evaluation? Dealt with an unemployment claim? Good human resources guidance can help employers steer clear of costly lawsuits and legal fees. Fortunately, the 2012 Nebraska Human Resources Library is now available – and as a member of the State Chamber, you can save a significant amount on the purchase of these publications. Written by top employment lawyers, this two-book set gives you the tools you need to stay in compliance and out of trouble.

The Nebraska HR Library features:

- Two books, over 900 pages, 54 chapters, over 200 policies and forms;
- Plain, simple English -- no legalese, no case citations, no footnotes;
- A quick, 21-question HR audit;
- Chapters on discrimination, wages & hours, social media, hiring, background checks, leave, benefits, discipline, genetic information, termination, and much more; and

- Policies and forms covering social media, job descriptions, workplace relationships, time off, absences, attendance, drugs & alcohol, and much more.

Protect yourself from unexpected and costly legal problems. Order today for only \$158 and save \$40 off the non-member price.

To order, call our partners American Chamber of Commerce Resources at 1-866-439-2227 and use code NENEWS12. ■

Nebraska Ranked In Better Half of Tax Collections Per Capita

The Tax Foundation has released a new map showing state tax collections per capita. The map reflects the amount collected by each state government from everyone in fiscal year 2010, the most recent year of data available. According to the Tax Foundation, Nebraska is No. 32 highest – or 19th best. No. 1 Alaska has the highest state tax collections per

capita at nearly \$6,395, mostly due to that state's rich oil and gas resources.

Nebraska collects \$2,091 in tax collections per capita, based on the data. That compares favorably to No. 4 Wyoming (\$3,766 per capita), No. 23 Kansas (\$2,281) and No. 25 Iowa (\$2,239). But Nebraska's per-capita tax collections are significantly higher than No. 41 Colorado (\$1,714), No. 44

Missouri (\$1,623) and No. 46 South Dakota (\$1,607). The nation's lowest per-capita tax collections are in No. 50 South Carolina (\$1,475), No. 49 Georgia (\$1,529) and No. 48 Texas (\$1,574).

The full map may be viewed at <http://www.taxfoundation.org/blog/show/28134.html>. ■

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. We encourage you to consider doing business with fellow Chamber members.

COLUMBUS

PST

Jim Pillen

KEARNEY

Holiday Inn

Paul Younes

IntelliCom Computer Consulting, Inc.

Bryan Kuntz

LINCOLN

Embassy Suites Hotel

Steve Hilton

Nebraska Concrete and Aggregates Association
Jerome Montgomery

Nebraskaland Steel Products, Inc.
Randy D. Taylor

Paragon Sanitation, Inc.
Steve Hatten

Stock & Sipp
Darrell Stock

Universal Cold Storage LLC

John Jacobson

Wolfe Electric Co. Inc.

Dick Wolfe

OMAHA

American National Bank

Steve Ritzman

Recommended by: G. Richard Russell, Millard Lumber Inc.

Charter Hill Partners LLC

Jeffrey Vaske

Chubb Foods

Ron Meredith

Complete Nutrition

Ryan Zink

Recommended by: Lori L. Hogan, Home Instead Senior Care

Commercial Finance America LLC

Stephen K. Wild

Recommended by: Dick Thompson

Nebraska Junior Chamber of

Commerce

Chad Sherrets

socialmedia contractors

Kristopher R. Kluver

Recommended by: Mike Baldino, Baldino Enterprises, LLC

PAWNEE CITY

C.J. Foods

Tod Morgan

SIDNEY

Steffens Home Interiors LLC

Diann Steffens

SCOTTSBLUFF

Herstead Monument Co.

Bryon Wilson

SPRINGFIELD

McCoy Roofing & Siding

John McCoy