

THE EXECUTIVE

THE STATE CHAMBER 
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry
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State Chamber Announces Major Legislative Priorities, New Leaders

The State Chamber recently announced its top legislative priorities for the 2010 legislative session. State senators reconvened January 6, which marked the start of the 60-day "short session" of the two-year legislative period.

Last month, the State Chamber's board of directors also elected the association's executive leaders for 2010. **Richard S. Reiser**, Executive Vice President and General Counsel of Werner Enterprises, Omaha, began his duties as State Chamber Chairman on January 1. Reiser succeeded **Marc LeBaron**, Chairman and CEO of Lincoln Industries, Lincoln. **Jeffrey M. Scherer**, CFO of Smeal Fire Apparatus Co., Snyder, serves as Chairman-Elect.

As approved by its board of directors, the State Chamber's 2010 major legislative priorities include:

♦ **Reducing Tax Burden.** To create new jobs and economic growth, the State Chamber believes Nebraska's tax

climate must become more attractive. Specifically, Nebraska's corporate and individual income tax rates need to be more competitive nationally. The State Chamber also supports initiatives to improve efficiency in government, while opposing further broadening of the state's sales and use tax.

♦ **Expanding Economic Development.** The State Chamber supports review and enhancement of Nebraska's targeted job and investment incentive programs, such as the Nebraska Advantage, to ensure the state is competitive in attracting new jobs and retaining current employers. To ensure an adequate number of skilled employees, the State Chamber also supports workforce-related educational programs and customized job training efforts.

♦ **Providing Adequate Highway Funding.** As funding for new road construction becomes tighter, the State Chamber supports the preservation of the state Highway Trust Fund and opposes efforts to divert funds for other purposes.

♦ **Protecting Nebraska's Right-to-Work Guarantee.** The State Chamber supports Nebraska's Right-to-Work constitutional guarantee and opposes efforts to weaken it.

♦ **Reviewing Workers' Compensation & Unemployment Programs.** Because employers pay the full cost of workers' compensation and unemployment insurance, the State Chamber recommends continued legislative

review and implementation of reforms to avoid significant cost increases.

♦ **Ensuring Affordable Health Care Coverage.** Because health care costs continue to be a top concern for employers, the State Chamber opposes any legislation that would negatively impact the affordability and availability of group insurance, including

mandates requiring coverage beyond federal standards. ■



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State Chamber Views...

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"Chamber of Commerce Network Critical To Nebraska's Future"

I recently read a book entitled "Bowling Alone," which documented the dramatic reduction in members belonging to many state and national organizations.

By coincidence, I happen to have extensive experience with one of those organizations. That particular group now has about 10% of the membership base it had in the late 1970s – statistics that generate great concern, especially among association management professionals.

So how are chambers of commerce faring?

To this question, I am extremely pleased to be able to answer "much better." This is because chambers of commerce are making an impact by tackling the issues that matter most to employers and individuals.

According to the book "Bowling Alone," associations that are surviving and growing are groups that express policy views in the local, state and national debate and keep their members informed about issues that will affect their ability to grow and prosper. In other words, the organizations that are thriving are those that take a stand on the more controversial matters facing our communities.

Our legislative accomplishments and recent member surveys tell us that the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry is, in fact, a relevant organization that is having an impact on the state's economic growth.

In addition, Nebraska is extremely fortunate to have so many strong local chambers of commerce comprised of people who evaluate situations within their area and take positive action to

create a better future for their communities.

February is traditionally "Chamber of Commerce Month" in Nebraska, and with that in mind I thought it would be a good idea to highlight a few of the many things that local chambers do for their communities. I apologize in advance to those that are not mentioned in this article and will try to share their success stories in a future article.

♦ **South Sioux City** has bucked all of the national trends with new business activity that has created new jobs and spurred new investment in the area. Several businesses have announced expansions that will add significantly to the economic base of the community, in both jobs and capital investments. The city is also completing needed construction projects to accommodate future activity.

♦ **Falls City** was recently named a Nebraska Main Street City, which indicates its community vision. A new community medical center was recently opened, making Falls City a regional hub for a wide variety of medical services.

♦ **Omaha** continues to serve as a primary business center for the central part of the nation. While other cities in our country are losing companies and business activity, Omaha has been able to attract new private ventures and investments. In the true spirit of cooperation, Omaha has played a key role in the attraction of new business activity to neighboring counties, as well. It seems like every time a new ranking is released on the best places

to live and do business, Omaha is at or near the top.

♦ **North Platte** recently opened the Golden Spike Tower and Visitors Center. The new attraction is generating rave reviews from tourists and train enthusiasts.

♦ **Columbus** continues to provide excellent service to its members. For example, their recent economic forum brought leading economist and state leaders to their community to discuss the prevailing issues. They have also formed a Career Dream Team to highlight the opportunities in manufacturing careers.

♦ All eyes will be on **Grand Island** next summer as they host the State Fair for the first time. The development occurring in Grand Island, coupled with new business activity recently announced, create a high level of optimism for the future of central Nebraska.

♦ **Lincoln** has the new Innovation Park to fill technology opportunities that will create 21st century jobs which will allow Nebraska to keep more of its talented young people here. The 2015 Vision project is creating the foundation to assure Lincoln's ability to grow for the future.

Obviously, I don't have the space in one article to mention every local chamber and their many important activities. Whether it is downtown development in Kimball or the Chatauqua in Broken Bow, local chambers are where people turn when a job needs to be done – and done right.

The private sector is Nebraska's economic engine – and the professionals at our local chambers work extremely hard to carry out the missions set by the volunteer leadership. Moreover, volunteer business leaders are committed to the success of their communities.

The continued growth of Nebraska's economy is tied directly to the efforts of the state and local chambers of commerce. That is why Nebraska's chamber of commerce network will continue to grow and play an integral role in the future of the Cornhusker state. ■

Send Us Your New or Updated E-mail Address

If you have recently changed your e-mail address, or have not yet provided it to us, the State Chamber asks that you take a second and send your e-mail to Kay Koch in our office at kkoch@nechamber.com. Or call us at (402) 474-4422.

By providing your e-mail address today, you will get the most from your State Chamber membership. During the Unicameral's legislative session, members receive the State Chamber's weekly *Legislative Report*, an e-mailed summary and analysis of legislation that could impact Nebraska's business community. Members are also provided updates on committee hearings and the status of all new bills and carry-over legislation. Also, the State Chamber's daily *News Update* is e-mailed every day that state senators are in session. ■



On December 15, State Senator Greg Adams of York, chairman of the Legislature's Education Committee, spoke at the State Chamber board of directors meeting in Lincoln. Senator Adams detailed the objectives of Nebraska's P-16 Initiative and efforts to re-evaluate the state's education standards to ensure future workforce needs.

State Chamber Urges Congress To Pass Long-Term Highway Bill

The Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry has joined other leading business organizations around the nation in calling on Congress to approve a robust, six-year federal surface transportation program authorization. The nation's highways and public transportation law, known as SAFETEA-LU, expired in September, and surface transportation programs have been operating on a series of short-term extensions ever since. Short-term extensions mean less money is available for states and do not provide states the certainty they need to keep crucial transportation projects moving forward.

The letter co-signed by the State Chamber, which was delivered to Capitol Hill in December, stated: "Unlike much government spending, strategic capital investments in our national highway, bridge and public transportation network provide long-lived assets that return value to American families, businesses and the U.S. economy for current and future generations – value far exceeding their initial cost." ■

State Chamber Opposes Senate Health Bill

Several Nebraska business and agricultural organizations – lead by the State Chamber and the Nebraska Farm Bureau – recently noted their strong opposition to the federal health care bill moving through Congress. In a joint letter to U.S. Senators Ben Nelson and Mike Johanns, the coalition urged both senators to vote against a motion to bring the bill to the Senate floor, as well as an expected motion to halt debate on the legislation.

The coalition voiced support for market-based reforms, opposing any form of a government-operated health insurance program. The group also expressed deep concern over the numerous tax increases included in the health care bill.

Also signing the letter were Nebraska Cattlemen, Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Fremont Area Chamber, Scottsbluff/Gering United Chamber of Commerce, and Cheyenne County Chamber of Commerce. ■

Business Hall of Fame Nominations Due March 12

March 12, 2010, is the deadline for nominating the next class of inductees to the Nebraska Business Hall of Fame. Nominations of outstanding Nebraska business leaders should be sent to the State Chamber office. Nominees may be living or deceased individuals who have added to the prestige and growth of business in Nebraska. In addition, a recipient can be from a large or small business. The main criterion is that the individual has made a significant contribution to Nebraska's private enterprise system.

This year, four new inductees to the Nebraska Business Hall of Fame will be announced the evening of February 4. They are: **Abe Baker** of Omaha, Baker's Supermarket; **Joe Hampton** of Lincoln, Hampton Enterprises; **C.G. "Kelly" Holthus** of York, Cornerstone Bank; and **John Nelson** of Omaha, SilverStone Group.

For information on Business Hall of Fame nominations, or if you are interested in attending this year's Hall of Fame Banquet and Program, call the State Chamber at (402) 474-4422. ■

Attend Small Business Day At The Capitol, March 16

If you are a small business owner, consider spending a morning at the Unicameral to learn about the key legislative issues that could impact small businesses. The 2010 Small Business Day at the Capitol will take place Tuesday, March 16.

State Chamber President Barry Kennedy and NFIB State Director Bob Hallstrom will provide insider information on what issues and legislation is worth noting. From taxes to health care to new regulations, this is your opportunity to ask your state senators about the important issues –

including Workers' Compensation, roads funding, union service fees, and corporate income taxes. Highlights will include a visit from Gov. Dave Heineman and several state senators.

The event is presented by the NFIB/Nebraska, the State Chamber, the Lincoln and Omaha Chambers of Commerce, and the Lincoln Independent Business Association. Cost for the program is \$15, which covers materials and lunch. For more information or a registration form, call (402) 474-3570 or e-mail bob.hallstrom@nebankers.org ■

Reminder: State Chamber Annual Meeting February 4

On Thursday, February 4, the State Chamber will hold its Annual Meeting and Legislative Caucus at The Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln. This is the State Chamber's largest event of the year – and several special guests plan to take part in the upcoming gathering. Among the many events planned are panel discussions on federal legislative issues, the role of technology and innovation in Nebraska, and the agendas of state legislative leaders. The day will conclude with the annual Nebraska Business Hall of Fame banquet and program.

To register for the Annual Meeting or for more information, call (402) 474-4422 or see the registration form enclosed with this issue of *The Executive*. ■

Membership Directory Sales Underway

The advertising sales campaign for the 2010 State Chamber Membership and Business Directory will begin this month. Larry Knat, a professional advertising representative of Lawton Publications, will be in contact with members across the state to present advertising opportunities. Take a minute and consider that more than 1,400 fellow members – and other Nebraskans from across the state – will see the State Chamber directory. This resource is utilized often by professionals, economic developers, recruiters, and potential employees at state colleges and universities.

Also, we urge you to review your current State Chamber directory for proper listings, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. Then make a point of noting businesses you know who are *not* listed. Provide those businesses with a copy of your old directory and let them know they should join the State Chamber – just like smart businesses, such as yours. ■

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.

AINSWORTH

Niobrara Valley Equipment
Chris Raymond

CALLAWAY

Progressive Fertilizer Co.
Mark A. Kimball

COLUMBUS

Management Advisory
Services, LLC
Don Heimes

COZAD

Darr Feedlot, Inc.
Craig Uden

DAVID CITY

Butler County Chamber of
Commerce
Stephanie Dubbs

OMAHA

Conductix-Wampfler
Lon Miller

PSI Group, Inc.

Lawrence Morlan
*Recommended by: Duane
Acklie, Crete Carrier Corp.*

Wolf Bros., Inc.

Mary Ann Cummings

OSHKOSH

Nebraska State Bank
Michael L. Jorgensen

PAPILLION

Compound Profit Advisors
Dennis E. O'Connell

PLATTSMOUTH

Wiles Bros., Inc.
Annette Wiles

VALENTINE

Perrett Construction LTD
Gregg W. Perrett