

# THE EXECUTIVE

## Workforce, Tax Reform Are Nebraska Chamber's 2019 Priorities

**P**rior to the start of the Nebraska Legislature's 2019 session, the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry announced its major legislative objectives for the new year. The objectives were approved November 28 by the Chamber's board of directors

Some of the Nebraska Chamber's key legislative priorities for 2019 include:

▶ **Workforce Development.** Recent Nebraska Chamber surveys of business leaders have found that the overwhelming majority of respondents say their communities or businesses face a workforce shortage. Because Nebraska's economic growth depends on talent supply, the State Chamber will support policies and programs aimed at growing Nebraska's workforce. Specifically, the Chamber recognizes the value of the state-administered Intern Nebraska program and customized job training, as well as career academies that focus on specific vocational skills in high school and junior high. The Chamber will support reciprocal state licensure and certification recognition, as well as efforts to recruit new workers to Nebraska. To enhance Nebraska's skilled workforce, educational funding programs should improve accountability, reward excellence and encourage innovation.

▶ **Tax Relief & Economic Competitiveness.** Currently, Nebraska's top individual income tax rate is 6.84% – the nation's 15th highest – on earnings just above \$30,000. Nebraska's maximum corporate tax rate is 7.81%, also 15th highest in the country.



Todd Foje



DJ Eihusen

The state's high income tax burden is negatively affecting economic growth and job creation and makes the Cornhusker State less competitive. The Nebraska Chamber will support efforts to lower Nebraska's highest individual income tax rate, as well initiatives to harmonize the top corporate tax rate with that of the individual income tax. The Chamber will oppose efforts to increase state sales and income tax rates, as well as legislation to expand the state sales tax base on business inputs or further earmark tax revenue for specific state spending. Finally, the Chamber will support efforts to modernize and enhance the state's performance-based incentives to give Nebraska a competitive edge.

▶ **Efficiency in Government.** The Chamber will support initiatives to improve the delivery of public services and the overall efficiency of state and local government. This includes the elimination of unnecessary services and programs; the restraint or reduction of state and local government spending; and the improvement of public employee capacity and output. The Chamber will support legislative and administrative proposals to provide for more streamlined, efficient, flexible and focused government services, including at the local level.

These major objectives do not constitute the entire range of the Chamber's legislative

*Continued on page 4*

January/February 2019

## Kristen Hassebrook Joins Nebraska Chamber Staff

**I**n December, the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry welcomed Kristen Hassebrook as the newest member of its professional staff. Hassebrook will play a key role in leading the Chamber's policy development and advocacy efforts.

Hassebrook brings a broad portfolio of experience to the position. **Kristen Hassebrook** Most recently, she served as executive director of the Alliance for the Future of Agriculture in Nebraska (AFAN) and We Support Agriculture, where she developed strategies to grow livestock-related opportunities across the state. Prior to her role at AFAN, Hassebrook was vice president of legal and regulatory affairs for the Nebraska Cattlemen, as well as director of development at the University of Nebraska Foundation.

A graduate of the University of Nebraska College of Law, Hassebrook earned her juris doctorate in 2011. She also holds a bachelor's degree from UNL.

"Kristen brings several important dynamics to the Nebraska Chamber," said Bryan Slone, president of the Nebraska Chamber. "She is a highly regarded and experienced policy advocate. She understands our state's rural and urban communities, as well as the Nebraska economy." ◀



**NEBRASKA CHAMBER**  
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## Let's Spread The News About Nebraska's Quality Of Life

By Bryan Slone  
President, Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

One of the priorities for the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry is attracting new residents to the state, while retaining our young talent. This is a vital step if we are to keep our economy strong and communities vibrant.

In statewide meetings with business leaders, we often talk about Nebraska's quality of life as our best selling point to people under age 40. At one of these recent meetings, an engaged young professional asked me to explain further what I meant by "quality of life" advantages.

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*Nebraska is a standout state for young people who are just starting their careers.*

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That's a fair question, so let me elaborate.

Several nationwide studies on this topic have one theme in common: Nebraska is a standout state for young people who are just starting their careers. Some recent findings include:

▶ Nebraska is the second best state overall for millennials, according to financial website MoneyRates.com. This study considered eight factors – from college tuition affordability to residential rental availability and affordability. Nebraska's

population percentage of 20 to 24-year-olds ranked in the top ten nationally, and the Cornhusker State was among the ten best states for young adult employment.

▶ A study by personal finance outlet WalletHub.com also named Nebraska a top state for millennials. In this study, Nebraska scored well in nearly all of the key categories, including the percentage of millennials not living with parents; millennial unemployment; and average earnings growth for millennials. In the broad categories, Nebraska was sixth best for economic health and we scored well in quality of life, civic engagement and affordability.

▶ Website HowMuch.net named Nebraska as one of the best states for millennials to get their financial lives on track. The Cornhusker State is among the top states for millennial earnings, according to the comparison. This is important because earning above-average wages early in one's career – combined with reasonable costs of living – is a critical predictor of long-term success.

Of course, having a high quality of life is important to everybody in every age

category. That is why the Chamber is quick to remind people inside and outside our state that Nebraska and its communities continue to score high marks in quality-of-life comparisons that matter to everyone.

Some recent examples include:

▶ Nebraska has the nation's second-most affordable housing, according to WalletHub.com.

▶ Nebraska is among the nation's best states in which to retire when considering factors such as cost of living, crime rate, culture and access to health care, according to a recent Bankrate.com comparison. Nebraska is one of America's happiest states when considering factors such as financial security, physical and emotional health, personal purpose and social connectivity, according to another WalletHub.com study. The Cornhusker State scored very high marks in the study's analysis of commute times, personal earnings adjusted by cost of living, jobless rates and job security.

In an increasingly turbulent, uncertain world – with congested areas in which a high quality of life can seem unattainable – Nebraska stands out in a positive way with its perfect balance of career opportunities and great communities.

As a Nebraska native who once left for the allure of large cities and chose to come back home, I am a believer – there is no place like Nebraska. The studies confirm this, and as Nebraskans, we can confidently celebrate and tout our quality-of-life advantages. ◀

## Nebraska Chamber Adds Nine New Board Members

The Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry has elected nine new members to its board of directors. The new members, who represent a wide range of industries, were approved at the Nebraska Chamber's November 28, 2018 board meeting in Lincoln.

The State Chamber's new board members are:

- ▶ **Bruce Bohrer**, executive vice president and general counsel, Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, Lincoln.
- ▶ **Mark Byars**, vice president – finance and administration, Adams Land and

Cattle, Omaha.

- ▶ **Eric Dunning**, director of government affairs, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Nebraska, Omaha.
- ▶ **Patrick Keenan**, president, Keenan Management LLC, North Platte.
- ▶ **Scott McLain**, president and CEO, Garner Industries, Lincoln.
- ▶ **Jim Nolan**, vice president – communications and government affairs, Mutual of Omaha, Omaha.
- ▶ **Jayne Smith**, CEO, Wortman Enterprises, Aurora.
- ▶ **Denise Wilkinson**, president and CEO,

Norfolk Area Chamber of Commerce, Norfolk.

- ▶ **Joseph Young**, director of business development, Sampson Construction Co., Lincoln.

"The Nebraska Chamber welcomes these respected leaders to our board of directors," said Bryan Slone, Chamber president. "Our board sets State Chamber policy and ensures we are representing Nebraska's business community to the best of our ability. These new board members will play an important role in the Chamber's mission." ◀

## News Briefs: Forbes Says Nebraska Is No. 5 For Business

► **Forbes Names Nebraska Fifth Best for Business.** In late November Forbes named Nebraska the fifth-best state for business in its annual “Best States for Business” study. This marks the second consecutive year the Cornhusker State has dropped a spot in the Forbes comparison. In 2015 and 2016, Nebraska climbed all the way to third best in the nation. In the latest Forbes comparison, Nebraska scored strong marks for its regulatory environment (No. 2), low cost of doing business (No. 8), and quality of life (No. 11). The state’s weakest marks came in the areas of growth prospects and labor supply (both at No. 19), as well as current economic climate (No. 20). Nebraska is the only state in the magazine’s top ten with a population of fewer than 2 million. North Carolina was No. 1 overall on Forbes’ list for the second straight year, followed by Utah, Texas and Virginia

► **Study: Nebraska Sixth Best-Run State.** Financial website 24/7 Wall Street recently reviewed the economic indicators, budget allocations and state balance sheets, in addition to a range of social measures to

rank how well each state is run. Nebraska came in at tenth best in the comparison. According to the study, Nebraska has a well-managed budget, with funding for 88.8% of its pension obligations, and its debt is equal to just 17.9% of its annual revenue. Overall, states have an average of just 65.9% of their pensions funded, and the average debt as a percent of annual spending across all 50 states is 54.3%. The comparison notes that Nebraska is facing a projected \$95.1 million budget shortfall in the next two years – a figure that becomes more imposing after voters narrowly approved Medicaid expansion this past November.

► **Nebraska Named A Best State For Volunteerism.** A new federal survey has ranked Nebraska sixth best in the country for volunteerism, with more than 40% of Nebraskans donating time, well above the national average of around 30%. Nebraskans donated more than 53 million hours last year with an economic impact of more than \$1 billion, according to the survey. The survey also ranked Nebraska fifth in the nation for parental engagement. ◀

## Looking Back: Nebraska Chamber Annual Meeting, 46 Years Ago

According to the November 1972 Nebraska Chamber newsletter, the incoming Chamber chairman for 1973, Harry P. Seward – who was president of Bankers Life Nebraska (known now as Ameritas Life Insurance Corp.) – declared that “America’s much-maligned free enterprise system” should be defended and promoted by business leaders.”

Back then, the Nebraska Chamber was called the Nebraska Association of Commerce and Industry. In the fall of 1972, the organization was celebrating its 60th year.



Harry Seward

In Seward’s speech to his board, he said: “I believe in the free enterprise system. Although it is the greatest system, we as businessmen overreact to critics who have never had to meet a payroll. If we accept the system, then we must accept the responsibility of promoting an understanding of that system. We have the responsibility to the people who work for us to recognize them for what they contribute to the free enterprise system.”

Seward added: “Profit is a good word. If we take away the profit motive, the system will fail.” ◀

## Register Now For Nebraska Chamber’s Annual Meeting, Business Hall Of Fame Ceremony

The State Chamber’s 2019 Annual Meeting will be Thursday, February 7, at The Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln.

This is one of Nebraska’s most recognized and well-attended business events. Participants will have an opportunity to hear from key state lawmakers and business leaders, as well as attend briefings on vital issues of concern to the state’s private sector.

Events will take place throughout the day. Beginning at noon will be the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce Month luncheon, which recognizes the efforts of local chambers from across the state. The State Chamber’s Annual Business Meeting will start at 1:15 p.m. (CT).

The afternoon will also feature three policy discussion panels, comprised of experts who will speak on important topics of interest to the business community. This year’s discussion panels are:

► Federal Issues: What the New Congress Means for Business (2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.).

► State Issues: Forces Affecting Nebraska’s Business Climate (3:10 p.m. - 4:10 p.m.).

► Legislative Leaders: Issues Facing the Legislature (4:20 p.m. - 5:20 p.m.).

The evening banquet begins at 7 p.m. and will feature the traditional passing of the gavel to the new State Chamber chairman, as well as a special tribute to the newest inductees of the Nebraska Business Hall of Fame.

For more information or to register, call (402) 474-4422 or email Charlie Volnek at [cvolnek@nechamber.com](mailto:cvolnek@nechamber.com). Or register online at [www.nechamber.com](http://www.nechamber.com).

If your business is interested in sponsoring the annual meeting, e-mail James Berringer at [jberringer@nechamber.com](mailto:jberringer@nechamber.com). ◀

# Legislature's New Session Now Underway



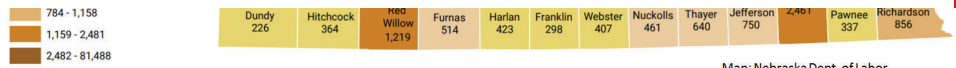
**O**n January 9, the Nebraska Legislature started its 2019 session. State lawmakers will introduce new legislation through January 23, as hundreds of new bills are expected.

For summaries and analysis of legislation that could affect Nebraska's business community and the state's economic competitiveness, Nebraska Chamber

members are sent the Chamber's weekly Legislative Report. This publication includes notices of upcoming committee hearings and the Chamber's position on key bills.

If you are a Nebraska Chamber member who has not received the weekly Legislative Report in the past, and you want to be on the mailing list for 2019, e-mail Jena Bouma at [jbouma@nechamber.com](mailto:jbouma@nechamber.com) or call (402) 474-4422 to be certain your name is included on our mailing list. ◀

# At A Glance: Nebraska Households With Young Children



Map: Nebraska Dept. of Labor

**N**ebraska's future workforce is dependent on the state's population growth and K-12 enrollment. The latest map at Nebraska Workforce Trends – a Nebraska Department of Labor publication – shows the number of households in every county with children under the age of nine, based on the latest Census Bureau data.

As of 2016, there were more than 700,000 households in Nebraska, and 217,155 of them had children under 18 years of age. Approximately 51,700 (23.8%) of these

households included children under age six.

The data show that at the time of the survey, 83.0% of Nebraska's children were white, 16.6% were Hispanic, 5.8% were black, 2.1% were Asian, and 1.2% were American Indian or Alaska Native. Most children (91.8%) lived with their parents (biological, step, or adoptive), while 4.6% lived with grandparents, 1.7% with other relatives, and 1.9% with foster parents or other non-relatives. ◀

## Leadership Nebraska Accepting Applications For Class XII

**T**he State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska is now accepting applications for Class XII, which will begin in June. The program will accept 25 to 30 adult professionals from all across Nebraska – from the public, private and non-profit sectors – who represent a cross-section of the various geographic regions of the state.

Participants are selected based on their demonstrated leadership activities and their desire to serve and help shape Nebraska's future.

Class members have an opportunity to develop and hone leadership skills and gain a broader understanding of issues facing Nebraska, with a focus on issues in the topical areas of:

- ▶ Economic Development
- ▶ Education & Workforce Development
- ▶ Agriculture

- ▶ Government & Policy
- ▶ Health & Human Services

If you would like to nominate a candidate from your business or community, please contact Roberta Pinkerton at [rpinkerton@nechamber.com](mailto:rpinkerton@nechamber.com) or call 402-474-4422.

If you would like to apply to participate in the next Leadership Nebraska class, visit [www.leadershipnebraska.com](http://www.leadershipnebraska.com).

Applications are due no later than Friday, April 12, 2019. ◀



## Nebraska Chamber's 2019 Priorities *Continued from page 1*

interests. Throughout every session of the Unicameral, the Nebraska Chamber closely follows all bills deemed to have an impact on the state's business climate.

In addition to approving the 2019 major legislative objectives, the Nebraska Chamber Board of Directors confirmed the election of the association's leadership for the new year. **Todd Foje**, CEO of Great Plains Communications of Blair, will serve as the Chamber's 2019 chairman. He will officially begin his duties Feb. 7 at the organization's annual meeting in Lincoln.

Foje succeeds 2018 Chairman **Rich Herink** of Lincoln, market executive of First National Bank. **DJ Eihusen**, chairman & CEO of Chief Industries in Grand Island, will be the Nebraska Chamber's chair-elect. ◀