

# THE EXECUTIVE

**THE STATE CHAMBER**   
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
March 2008

## State Chamber Will Visit Capitol Hill April 22-24

The annual State Chamber visit to Washington, D.C. will be held April 22-24, 2008. As in past years, there will be a luncheon with the Nebraska congressional delegation and senior staff members in the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Wednesday, April 23, sponsored by the Nebraska Public Power District.

Attendees will be able to attend the traditional Nebraska Breakfast, also on April 23. A newly-added

agenda item is an evening reception that will be held at the Washington offices of Husch Blackwell Sanders, LLP at 5:30 p.m. on April 22.

To stay abreast of the latest issues and legislative proposals, those attending will participate in issue briefings at the headquarters of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The U.S. Chamber Briefing will be April 22 at 2 p.m. The

NAM briefing will be April 23 at 3 p.m.

In this presidential election year, it is important that State Chamber members maintain contact with their congressional representatives. For more information or to reserve your spot on this worthwhile visit to the nation's capital, contact Don Mihovk at (402) 474-4422 or [dmihovk@nechamber.com](mailto:dmihovk@nechamber.com). ■

## New Leadership Nebraska Class Convenes

The first meeting of the State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska Class II was held February 6-8 at Mahoney State Park. The class' 23 members participated in an Orientation Session that featured presentations by members of the inaugural class; an interactive presentation by Lincoln-based Talent Plus staff; a talk on "Leading Through Giving" by Lyn Wallin Ziegenbein of the Peter Kiewit Foundation; a discussion on Nebraska history by Dr. Bob Manley; a keynote speech on "Leading Nebraska Through a Continuum of Change" by futurist Ed Barlow; and another interactive

presentation on "Great Leaders In Changing Times" by Cy Wakeman.

The Leadership Nebraska program is aimed at persons who have demonstrated community and professional leadership experiences. The program provides six sessions per year to give class members an opportunity to develop and hone leadership skills and gain a broader understanding of issues facing Nebraska, according to Bob Harris, chairman of the State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska Council. The alumni of each Leadership class will conduct an ongoing series of meetings and programs to strengthen relationships developed and to maintain and enhance the knowledge gained during their Leadership experience.

The remainder of the 2008 Leadership Nebraska program will

feature sessions on the following state issues: Public Service (early March); Education (late April and early May); Economic Development (late June); Agriculture (early August); and Healthcare/Human Services (in September). A commencement ceremony will be held October 24, 2008.

The Class II members come from across Nebraska and range from volunteers, business leaders, philanthropic workers, educators, and agricultural entrepreneurs. This year's class – listed by name, business, and

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**State Chamber Views...**  
**Editorial by Barry L. Kennedy**  
**President,**  
**Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

## "The Obstacles Of Growth"

In the last issue I wrote about pending legislation that would allow Nebraska to be more competitive in job creation and economic growth. Unfortunately, there is also pending legislation that would install substantial obstacles to Nebraska's ability to grow our economy. In this month's article, I will spotlight specific proposals that would be counter-productive to business growth.

### UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Many people do not realize that employers pay the FULL costs of both unemployment insurance and workers' compensation for their employees. Benefits in Nebraska are fair, but not exorbitant. Nebraska is also very fair when it comes to qualification standards.

Currently, an individual's weekly unemployment benefit is one-half of his or her average weekly wage, but capped at the lesser of 50 percent of the state average weekly wage or the previous year's maximum weekly benefit amount, plus \$10 per week. LB833 is a proposal that would significantly increase benefits. If LB833 were to pass, by the year 2013 and thereafter, the benefit amount would be 75 percent, not to exceed 100 percent of the state average weekly wage. That would mean the maximum weekly benefit amount would increase from the current \$298 per week to \$642 per week, according to the Nebraska Department of Labor. Businesses would have to pay more than \$34 million per year, assuming the current insured unemployment rate.

### WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Another bill introduced this year would cover employees' mental injuries resulting from having viewed

violent acts deemed extraordinary or unusual. If enacted, LB1082 would also cover state employees, and state officials estimate that the additional cost to the state alone would be between \$4 and \$26 million per year just for state employees. Studies have shown that the cost of mental illness claims is about 50 percent more than the average claim for a traumatic injury and that mental injury claims are paid over a longer period.

### HEALTH INSURANCE MANDATES

Each year, bills are introduced to mandate additional coverages to employer-provided health insurance programs. An argument can be made regarding the benefit of each one, but each one also adds to the cost of providing health coverage. The State Chamber has had a long-standing position that opposes any legislation that mandates minimum standards for health insurance coverage exceeding federal ERISA requirements. We will continue to oppose initiatives that would place an additional burden for health care finance on employers as well as employees.

### RIGHT-TO-WORK

Nebraska is a "Right-to-Work" state. That tenet is embedded not ONLY in statute, but in our state's constitution. Many economic development consultants will testify that when employers are looking to either expand an existing plant location or cite a new plant location, Right-to-Work is one of the key items they take into consideration when making that decision.

Each year, however, we see a bill introduced that would require employees to pay a fee to a union for representation regardless of whether they are a member of that union or not. Under federal law, a union

chooses whether or not to represent all of the employees in a workplace. Most do choose to represent them in hopes that they are able to attract new members, but this legislation would force payment from employees who have chosen not to belong.

The State Chamber supports the principle of voluntary union membership and Nebraska's Right-to-Work guarantee. We will oppose any effort to repeal or weaken in any way that constitutional protection.

These are just four issues of interest. There are several other tax measures and many regulatory efforts proposed that would be onerous to your ability to grow and prosper in our state. We are now just over the halfway mark for the 2008 legislative session, and we will continue to be ever vigilant in our work to protect your interests. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time with your questions or concerns. ■

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### **Leadership Nebraska** *(Continued from page 1)*

hometown – includes: Cindy Arbaugh, Bellevue Medical Center, Gretna; David Barga, Rembolt Ludtke LLP, Lincoln; Cid Besse, Pinnacle Bank, Seward; Matt Boyd, University of Nebraska Foundation, Omaha; Derrick Eells, TenDot Corporate Travel, Lincoln; John Decker, Jr., Douglas Theatres, Lincoln; Brad Focht, MarketSphere, Omaha; Mike Henke, Associated Staffing, Doniphan; Jamie Karl, State Chamber, Dorchester; Diane Keller, Memorial Community Health, Aurora; Celann LaGreca, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Nebraska, Omaha; Brad McPeak, AIM Institute, Omaha; Tom Nussrallah, E&A Consulting Group, Inc., Omaha; John Plucknett, Home State Bank, Louisville; Bill Rongisch, BD Medical Surgical Systems, Columbus; Jodi Sedivy, First National Bank of Valentine, Valentine; Lynda Shafer, Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Omaha; Deb Shoemaker, Lincoln Community Foundation, Lincoln; Dusty Stamer, Nucor Steel, Omaha; Joni Sundquist, Nebraska Bankers Association, Lincoln; Brian Vasa, NPPD, Ogallala; Lori Warner, Beatrice Area Chamber of Commerce, Beatrice; Brian Wight, URS Corporation, Omaha. ■



## Small Business Day At The Capitol

Governor Dave Heineman delivered the keynote address for Small Business Day at the Capitol on February 20. The event, attended by nearly 40 Nebraskans, was hosted by the State Chamber's Small Business Council, in cooperation with the Nebraska Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB), the Lincoln Independent Business Association, and the Lincoln and Omaha Chambers of Commerce. Attendees of the event also heard from State Senators Chris Langemeier of Schuyler and Deb Fischer of Valentine, regarding legislative proposals before

the Unicameral's Revenue and Transportation Committees. State Chamber President Barry Kennedy and NFIB/Nebraska Director Bob Hallstrom provided insider information and briefed attendees on the key legislation of importance to the state's business community.



## State Chamber-PAC Proves Important In Election Year

This year marks the second consecutive election cycle in which Nebraska's new term limits law will have a significant impact. In 2008, 15 state senators are term limited. An additional 10 state lawmakers are seeking re-election, while another – who was appointed by the Governor – must run for the balance of the term. In total, there are 26 legislative races this year.

Needless to say, this will be another busy year for the State Chamber's Political Action Council (PAC), which serves as the separate political arm of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry. The PAC is comprised of State Chamber members from across Nebraska – people who are interested in electing business-

oriented representatives to the Legislature. It is a non-partisan, voluntary collection of citizens who support the state's employers and want them to be able to prosper.

Supported by contributions from businesses and individuals, the PAC is administered by the Political Action Council of the State Chamber. Throughout the election cycle, either professional or volunteer leadership of the State Chamber meets with candidates who are seeking a legislative seat. Recommendations are typically forwarded to members of the Political Action Council, which can approve political contributions to candidates and their campaigns.

"In an active election cycle, such as this year, the State Chamber-PAC

demonstrates its worth quickly," said State Chamber President Barry Kennedy. "Electing the right people to Nebraska's Legislature is the most effective way to ensure your business interests are recognized," Kennedy added. He added that no State Chamber dues investments are ever used for political contributions.

It would be difficult for any single business or individual to provide the type of candidate support provided by the PAC. Through the PAC, political investments are consolidated with those of other businesses and individuals from across the state, ensuring that each donation has a more dynamic impact on key legislative races.

For more information on the State Chamber-PAC, call 402-474-4422. ■

## FBLA Leaders Spend Time With State Chamber Staff

Nebraska Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) state officers recently spent time shadowing the State Chamber's professional staff. As part of the experience, State FBLA President Justin Schultis of Diller and Treasurer Chelsey Meyer of Neligh participated in the State Chamber's Public Affairs Council meeting on the morning of February 26. At the council meeting, they met with Speaker of the Legislature Mike Flood of Norfolk and heard lobbyists discuss legislation of concern to the business community.

Later in the morning, the FBLA officers stopped by the State Chamber's headquarters and learned about the daily tasks performed by staff during the legislative session. The officers then accompanied State Chamber President Barry Kennedy, Ron Sedlacek, Vice President-General Counsel, and Jamie Karl, Vice President-Public Affairs, to the Capitol to meet with their respective state senators. They were escorted onto the floor of the George W. Norris Legislative Chamber to watch the Legislature conduct business.

The shadowing project is part of the State Chamber and the FBLA's Partnership Program.



Nebraska FBLA State President Justin Schultis (Fairbury High School) and State Treasurer Chelsey Meyer (Neligh-Oakdale High School) met with Speaker Mike Flood of Norfolk and State Chamber President Barry Kennedy during the February 26 Public Affairs Council meeting.

## Governor Plans 'Reverse Trade Mission' For September

Governor Dave Heineman plans to host international guests from several countries September 10-13 as part of what he is calling a "reverse trade mission." The reverse trade mission is aimed at encouraging international companies to explore opportunities for investment in Nebraska. It is anticipated that representatives from Japan, China, Brazil, and Germany will be among those participating. And any international company interested in doing business in Nebraska is invited to participate.

More than 350 businesses in Nebraska are foreign-owned and employ more than 19,000 workers. Overall, international trade is responsible for sustaining more than 56,000 jobs in the state and creating more than \$5 billion in new revenue each year. According to the governor, the event will offer trade representatives and international business contacts the opportunity to see firsthand the benefits of doing business in the state. Events associated with the reverse trade mission will be held in several communities and will highlight several of Nebraska's growing industries, including: renewable energy, agriculture, distribution and logistics-oriented companies, medical research, and information technology, as well as the finance and insurance industries.

The event is being sponsored by the Nebraska Diplomats and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and Agriculture. Trade mission participants will be invited to take part in the annual Nebraska Diplomats' Passport to Nebraska Weekend, planned for September 12-13. ■

## 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.

### CRESCENT, IA

Mt. Crescent Ski Area (Omaha's Favorite Ski Resort)  
Russ Lindeman

### ELKHORN

Heritage Nursery  
Bill Spittler

### GRAND ISLAND

Coca-Cola Bottling Company  
Scott Brokaw

### LINCOLN

BCC Advisers  
R. Brad Harse

Chapman Web/Media Design Solutions  
Carla Chapman

Landscapes Unlimited, LLC  
Judy Terwilliger

Nebraska Lied Main Street Program  
J.L. Schmidt

### OMAHA

Paxton & Vierling Steel Company  
Ed Korbel

Platte Institute for Economic Research  
Roger P. Lempke

### RENO, NV

Digital Sports Video  
Sherry Griffin

### SCOTTSBLUFF

Legacy Toyota Ford Lincoln Mercury  
Rick Covello