

## Fall Legislative Forums Set

**T**he Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry needs to hear from you this fall as we visit 32 Nebraska communities for our annual Legislative Forums during the weeks of October 24-28; October 31-November 2; November 7-9, and November 14-17.

This is your opportunity to tell us what's on your mind regarding legislation and to visit with your state senators, who are invited to all Forums in their districts. The program will focus on key business legislation passed earlier this year, as well as a look at the upcoming session.

A listing of locations and dates is

enclosed with this issue of the *Executive*. State Chamber elected leaders and executive staff members will be present to discuss issues and answer your questions. There have been some minor changes to the schedule since we printed a proposed schedule in the last *Executive*, so please check dates and locations carefully.

Surveys have shown that employers are well regarded by their employees as a good source of information on elections and issues affecting their jobs and lifestyles. The Forums are a great opportunity

to give key employees a firsthand look at the legislative process, learn the issues, and meet their elected representatives. For more information, please contact the State Chamber office. ■



**Plattsmouth Senator Roger Wehrbein addresses Nebraska City Forum last year.**

## Compdata Surveys

**C**ompdata Surveys is a national compensation survey and consulting firm. Through them, State Chamber members can participate in an annual survey on more than 500 jobs sorted by industry, company size and Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Their goal is simple: to continue to expand the largest and most comprehensive database of current pay and benefits information, and make it available to employers at a reasonable price.

The company has been conducting compensation surveys since 1988. Today, the group surveys organizations across 37 states and is sponsored by 26

State Chambers of Commerce. Annually, Compdata collects information from thousands of employers from coast to coast and publishes state-specific reports from the data collected. In 2004, they gathered compensation information from nearly 5,000 organizations on over 5.3 million employees across the country, making their database the largest in the nation on current pay and benefits information.

Two things differentiate Compdata products from other surveys. With thousands of companies participating, they are able to report data from far more than just the 25 largest cities in the country. In fact, their surveys include 217 separate MSAs across 37 states. Additionally, participants in our survey receive thorough compensation information for their state, as well as

comprehensive benefits data. There is no need to buy multiple surveys. Every year, Compdata makes improvements to the survey based on feedback from clients. This allows customers to create the most effective compensation plans possible, saving their organizations thousands of dollars.

Compdata offers an extensive array of consulting services on employee compensation issues. While their main focus is on the state-specific surveys, custom surveys are also conducted and custom runs are provided for companies with special needs. In addition to the comprehensive annual state surveys, reports on Executive Compensation and Benefits Practices are published each year. For more information, please note the accompanying Compdata brochure. ■



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

**Guest Editorial by Ron Sedlacek  
Vice President-General Counsel,  
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

### **Report On Workers' Compensation Reform In Nebraska: "United Front Needed"**

**T**he State Chamber was a key player in supporting major workers' compensation reform legislation that was passed into law in 1993 (LB757). For the first three to four years after implementation of the LB757 reforms, the costs associated with workers' compensation in Nebraska declined. From the late 1990s until 2002, these reforms played a significant role in easing the nationwide pressure on rising workers' compensation costs. Since 2002, many employers reported that, in addition to the recessionary years of 2002-03, workers' compensation costs were once again having a negative effect on both employment and wages. In recent surveys, businesses have said that their major concern was workers' compensation costs. The State Chamber has heard from many members that workers' compensation costs are a heavy burden for them and that Nebraska's program needs further reform and improvement.

During the 2005 session of the Legislature, the State Chamber was involved in 25 legislative bills addressing various aspects of Nebraska's workers' compensation law. Of those 25 measures, the State Chamber supported 10 bills that would, to some degree, reform various aspects of the current workers' compensation system and help ease pressure on rising costs while providing reasonable benefits to injured employees. Six bills, supported by labor interests, trial lawyers or both, were opposed by the State Chamber for the sole reason that each of these measures represented significant costs to the system. The remaining nine bills, which were watched closely by the State Chamber, involved topics that divided our

membership or that were administrative or procedural issues.

The Business and Labor Committee under the able leadership of its Chairman, Wausa Senator Doug Cunningham, advanced 10 workers' compensation bills from Committee and killed one bill. Two bills were passed into law. The Committee decided to take no action on the remaining 13 workers' compensation measures introduced last session, mainly due to the extraordinary amount of time and work devoted to unemployment insurance reform legislation. Rather than dealing with workers' compensation reform on a piecemeal basis, the Committee decided to seriously study the issue during the 2005 legislative interim and develop a more comprehensive approach in addressing future reform legislative proposals.

As a result, Legislative Resolution 146 (LR146) was approved by the Legislature that directs the Business and Labor Committee to study the Nebraska workers' compensation system with two major goals: (1) cost containment without adversely affecting the outcomes experienced by injured workers and; (2) returning employees to work as soon as possible. On August 18 and September 1, Chairman Cunningham invited interested parties to attend informal discussions on how reforms to the current system might be addressed. In both sessions, over 50 persons participated in these discussions. Representatives included the State Chamber, several other business associations, trial lawyers and defense attorneys, insurers, self-insurers, third party administrators, labor unions, the Workers' Compensation Court,

Department of Insurance, Department of Labor, local governments, hospitals, physicians, therapists and other providers. Formal interim committee hearings are scheduled statewide: September 19 in North Platte, September 20 in Scottsbluff and Chadron, September 21 in Valentine, October 7 in Lincoln, and October 17 in Norfolk.

The cost containment measures that are currently being discussed would affect several members of the business community, particularly health care providers, hospitals or insurers in various ways. This is because policymakers are examining efforts to address the skyrocketing costs of medical care. The National Academy of Social Insurance reports that nationwide, roughly 45% of workers' compensation benefits are for medical care. In Nebraska, reports indicate that almost 55% of benefits are for medical care.

At this time, there appears to be little consensus on health care cost containment issues. As a result, the State Chamber will be taking on the role of facilitating a "meeting of the minds" among our own membership and within various interests of the business community to achieve agreement on the issues and how to best resolve them. Sensitive to concerns expressed within the State Chamber's membership, we hope to achieve the goal of uniting the business community, providers of health services, self-insurers, as well as private market workers' compensation insurers, in support of those measures that will indeed reduce costs to the system. ***The State Chamber's ability to provide a forum for these diverse interests will be crucial, for the prospects of success in reforming the workers' compensation system will depend ultimately upon whether the business community can present a united front during the next legislative session.*** ■

## Congress Passes Key Legislation

Before Congress took its summer break, three key issues of concern to Nebraska were passed. The Energy bill was signed by President Bush and offers a strategy to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign sources of energy, promote renewable fuels without mandates, enhance efficiency and conservation and improve infrastructure. There are many positive enhancements for ethanol in both versions, and it's likely that the final bill will be positive to Nebraska's corn and ethanol industry.

The DR-CAFTA Trade Agreement (Dominican Republic and Central American nations) was passed by two votes in the House. Collectively, DR-CAFTA is the second largest U.S. export market in Latin America and 13th largest export market worldwide. Significantly, it is a larger market than Russia, India and Indonesia combined. Ninety percent of the U.S. manufactured goods trade deficit comes from countries with which we do not have trade agreements. Failure to pass CAFTA in 2005 would likely derail future efforts to bring down foreign

trade barriers to our very low levels.

Finally, both houses did pass the reauthorization of the 5-year highway bill, H.R. 3, The Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users. Nebraska gained some 30.32% more in funding than the last plan, equaling some \$64.653 million more for highway funding. This legislation will begin to address the nation's growing highway and public transportation needs.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, as more people and freight use the nation's transportation system, greater infrastructure investment is critical to ensuring future economic growth, international competitiveness, national security, and better quality of life for America's traveling public. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, every \$1 billion invested in highway and public transportation infrastructure creates 47,500 jobs.

Be sure to thank all of your Nebraska congressional delegation, as each voted in favor of the three bills mentioned above. ■

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## Two Nebraska Chambers Honored By ACCE

Two Nebraska chambers of commerce were recently named finalists in the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives' (ACCE) annual Award for Excellence (AFE) competition. The **Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce** and **Lincoln Chamber of Commerce** were both finalists, and the Lincoln Chamber won the award in its division. The AFE is the highest achievement in the chamber membership development profession. Finalists must meet stringent selection requirements, including:

- Meeting or beating the national average in their dues category for each of three key membership benchmarks
- Program excellence
- Communications excellence
- Internal operations excellence

Finalists are named in each of four annual dues categories. Winners were selected during ACCE's annual convention held in St. Louis, Missouri last month.

Representing more than 5,500 individuals, ACCE enhances the knowledge, leadership skills, and management effectiveness of chamber executives and their staff through education, benefits programs, trend analysis, benchmarking, and network development. ACCE promotes the highest standards of professional excellence and integrity within the chamber profession. ■

## Mechatronics Education Center

Central Community College in Nebraska received a \$1.64 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Presidents High Growth Job Training Initiative to develop a Mechatronics Education Center (MEC). The MEC provides state-of-the-art technical training to secondary and post-secondary faculty, high school and college students, entry level, intermediate and experienced employees, and dislocated workers. The Center builds and teaches curriculum utilizing simulation software which is responsive to the needs of regional business and industry by addressing industry-validated skills.

Project participants have access to the MEC's curriculum, simulation software, and the Manufacturing Learning Laboratory. Training is delivered utilizing workshop, lectures, simulation software, and Web-based technology. The goals of the project are to adopt and adapt exemplary manufacturing technology curriculum that can be disseminated nationwide; keep instructors at Nebraska community colleges and secondary schools in pace with modern tools and technologies through professional development activities; enhance the image of manufacturing careers; increase the number of skilled technicians; build new and existing relationships with industries; and advance articulation of industrial technology/automation programs.

If you are interested in financially supporting this initiative or have any questions regarding the project, please contact Doug Pauley at (402) 562-1280 or [dpauley@cccneb.edu](mailto:dpauley@cccneb.edu). ■

## Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry Partners with Department of Labor for 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor's Summit on Workforce Development

Efforts are underway to coordinate Nebraska's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor's Summit on Workforce Development, being held November 9-10, 2005, at The Doubletree Hotel in Omaha. Once again, the Nebraska Chamber has formed a solid partnership with the Department of Labor and the SilverStone Group to develop the Summit agenda.

The one-and-a-half day conference will bring Nebraska's current workforce development challenges to the forefront, promoting prosperity and growth in our state and local workforces. This year's Summit will host nearly 500 professionals from across the state who represent the business, economic development, education, government and health care communities. Keynote speakers from across the nation and results-driven breakout sessions will both challenge and engage attendees.

Seats are filling quickly so register today! For more information and to register online, visit [www.NebraskaWorkforce.com](http://www.NebraskaWorkforce.com) and click on the 2005 Governor's Summit icon. ■

## Workshops Set For November

The State Chamber will present a 2005 Lobbying Update Workshop on November 2 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at The Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln. Recent changes to the Accountability and Disclosure laws will affect lobbyists and those managing political action committees. Conducted by Executive Director Frank Daley of the Accountability and Disclosure Commission, the Workshop will focus on changes made by the passage of LB242 this past session. Cost to State Chamber members is \$40; non-member cost is \$65.

The following day, November 3, the State Chamber will present a Workshop on "Negotiation" at Mahoney State Park, Riverview Lodge. Featured presenter will be State Senator David Landis, an expert in negotiation and mediation skills. The program will begin at 8:30 a.m. and run until noon. Further details for both workshops are enclosed with this month's *Executive*. ■

### 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.

#### BURWELL

Burwell Chamber of Commerce

Lynn Kratky

Sponsor: Bethanne Kunz,  
Ord Area Chamber of Commerce

#### FREMONT

Lou's Sporting Goods  
Roger Brackhan

#### KEARNEY

Builders Warehouse  
Craig Bradshaw

#### LINCOLN

Apollo Steel Company  
John Judds

Bio Nebraska  
Julie M. Karavas

Dickey & Burham, Inc.  
Stephen Dickey & Steven Burham

Interactive Information R & D  
Joseph Knecht

#### OMAHA

Eran Industries, Inc.  
James S. Bachman

GWR Wealth Management  
LLC

Gail Werner-Robertson

Hilton Omaha  
Keith Hess

Sponsor: Rich Bailey,  
Bailey Lauerman

Lithia Ford of Omaha  
Bryan Smith

Midwest Housing Equity  
Group, Inc.  
Jim Rieker

Millard Electric Co., Inc.  
Tom Novak

Rawson & Sons Roofing,  
Inc.

Alan Rawson

#### WAYNE

First National Bank of  
Wayne  
Kent Franzen