

THE EXECUTIVE

THE STATE CHAMBER 
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry
September 2009

Meet Your State Chamber Board

The State Chamber's Executive Council is comprised of the chairman, chairman-elect, past chairman, treasurer, president and six district vice chairmen who represent separate geographic districts. In this issue of *The Executive*, we feature our vice chairman from District I and treasurer.

Rex Fisher is in his first year as District I vice chairman after serving as a State Chamber district director for several years. He is president of Qwest Nebraska in Omaha and has held the position since January 2003.

As president, Fisher directs Qwest's regulatory and legislative initiatives in the state, as well as efforts to strengthen relations with customers and civic leaders.

Fisher's career began in 1980, when he joined U.S. WEST and held various sales, marketing and strategic planning jobs in Omaha, Des Moines, Minneapolis and Denver. From 1997-1999, he served as U.S. WEST's vice president in Nebraska. Rex's father,

Reed, was a technician for Northwestern Bell in Norfolk and Omaha for 42 years.

In addition to his professional duties, Fisher serves on the boards of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Foundation, Durham Western Heritage



Rex Fisher

Museum, and several other organizations. Fisher and his wife, Debbie, are chairs of the 2009 United Way of the Midlands campaign.

Fisher is a native Nebraskan. He graduated from Omaha's Benson High School in 1975 and from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1980. The Fishers have two children, Brian and Jillian.

John Cederberg has served as the State Chamber's treasurer, a director, and a member of the Executive Council since 1991. He has also served as the vice chairman of the

Taxation Council and frequently testifies on behalf of the State Chamber on issues of taxation before the Legislature's Revenue Committee.

Cederberg began his accounting practice eighteen years ago as the "help desk" for independent accounting and law firms. He offers consultation on tax issues and strategic planning for Nebraska businesses. Cederberg is also a part-time business tax lobbyist at the Legislature.

He began his accounting career in the Washington, D.C. national office of Arthur Andersen. In 1976, he returned to Nebraska to open the tax department of the new Lincoln office of Touche Ross. He was a partner at Touche Ross, and Deloitte & Touche after the merger, until retiring early and starting his consulting business in 1991.

Cederberg grew up in Osceola, Nebraska, and has a BA degree from Dana College in Blair. He earned his MA degree from the University of South Dakota and continued his studies at Georgetown University. He and Bonnie have two children: Erika Hamilton, a senior program officer at the Nebraska Humanities Council; and Kevin, a fellow in pediatric radiology at Children's Hospital in Dallas.

For a complete listing of the 2009 State Chamber officers, directors and staff, go to <http://www.nechamber.com>.

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State Chamber Views...

**Editorial by Barry L. Kennedy, CAE, IOM
President**

Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

"Responsible Health Care Solutions Should Be The Goal"

Congressional leaders deserve some credit for their willingness to address problems afflicting America's health care system. The rising costs of health care are unsustainable and hindering the competitiveness of U.S. businesses in our global economy.

The National Coalition on Health Care reports that employer health insurance premiums last year increased by 5 percent - about two times the rate of inflation. The annual premium for an employer health plan covering a family of four averaged nearly \$12,700. The annual premium for single coverage averaged more than \$4,700.

Late last year, the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry visited 35 communities across the state while conducting our annual legislative forums. We surveyed the 1,300 Nebraskans who attended, and a majority said the cost of health care was the top concern for their operation or employer. In fact, more than 40 percent of respondents said employer-provided health care benefits posed the largest financial challenge to their business or organization.

Clearly, we need to address the issue of health care costs if America's private sector is to regain solid footing. But the current prescription offered by congressional leaders is completely wrongheaded. It would do more damage than good.

The congressional plan would impose penalties on employers who fail to provide health insurance for their workers and on individuals who refuse to buy it. It would require insurance companies to offer coverage, without exceptions or higher premiums in cases of pre-existing medical conditions. Financing for government-run insurance would come from a new

surtax on families and small businesses.

A government takeover of health care would compete with private insurance, potentially impacting coverage for 160 million Americans. Meanwhile, cost estimates for the plan range from \$600 billion to \$1.6 trillion. (Yes, that's "trillion.")

With the federal government already carrying an \$11.6 trillion debt, do we really need government running another major sector of the economy?

Perhaps most troubling is that government-run health care would control costs by limiting access to treatments and delaying access to physician and hospital care. Such a system would contradict America's tradition of free enterprise and would seriously threaten the world's most advanced health care system.

Government takeover of health care seems especially unnecessary when, according to a CNN survey, eight in 10 American workers are satisfied with their employer-provided health care.

Fortunately, Nebraska's congressional delegation is in touch with the citizens of our state. It is especially encouraging to see Senator Ben Nelson, a key vote on this and many other issues, stand up to pressure from his party leaders and the White House as they attempt to rush through this massive proposal that would forever change America.

Senator Nelson told the president that he wants a bipartisan plan that does not negatively impact those with health insurance or worsen the national debt, and that there should be no arbitrary deadline to pass legislation. The senator has displayed courageous leadership in a time of high-pressure politics.

Fortunately, lawmakers can do

more than just vote against the plan to nationalize health care - they can also take real steps to expand affordable, quality care. Some of the suggestions offered by Nebraskans who attended the State Chamber's legislative forums include: allow small businesses to pool their purchasing power to lower insurance premiums; promote widespread use of Health Savings Accounts (HSAs); and create incentives for employees who practice healthy living habits.

Only eight percent of the Nebraskans surveyed by the State Chamber cited universal health care coverage or government-run plans as their preferred method to lower health care expenses.

Nebraskans deserve first-rate health care. But that will not happen if the federal government undermines the foundation of the current system and lays unreasonable mandates on the nation's employers.

The debate has begun. Now let's urge our policymakers to take the time necessary to get the job done right. ■

Legislative Forums Now Underway

State Chamber staff members are touring 30 communities across Nebraska as part of the Chamber's annual legislative forums. Held in conjunction with local chambers of commerce, the legislative forums will continue through Oct. 28.

This year's program is focused on the Legislature's recent session, including developments involving taxes, labor law, workers' compensation and economic development. The forums will also examine federal legislation of concern; preview the key issues in the 2010 Legislature; and give attendees an idea of how well Nebraska compares to other states in economic competitiveness rankings.

These forums provide a timely opportunity for business leaders, community coordinators, employees and others to learn about the legislative issues that could affect them most. For more information or a forum schedule, contact the State Chamber office at (402) 474-4422 or e-mail jkarl@nechamber.com. ■

Leadership Nebraska Conducts Ag Tour

Members of the State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska class recently participated in a three-day agriculture tour of north central Nebraska in and around O'Neill. The agriculture session – arranged by Class I Alumni Kirk Cisler of O'Neill – included an examination of different methods of irrigation and soil preparation used in Nebraska; a visit to a cattle feed yard; a tour of a hydroponic tomato greenhouse; popcorn and dry bean production; a dairy facility; a

potato plant; an ethanol plant; and the NPPD wind turbine farm in Ainsworth.

Leadership Nebraska is now in its third year of developing a cross-section of leaders who will use their talents and abilities to foster a new spirit of energy, enthusiasm and vitality throughout the state. Applications for the 2010 Leadership class are being accepted until mid-October. For more information, call (402) 474-4422 or e-mail dmihovk@nechamber.com. To download the application form, go to

www.nebraskaleadership.nechamber.com.

Commencement for Class III will again be at the Grand Manse in Lincoln on Friday, October 23. ■

State Chamber's Annual Meeting is February 4, 2010

A reminder for our members: The State Chamber's Annual Meeting and Legislative Caucus will be Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010, at The Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln. Please make note of this important date.

Those attending the Annual Meeting and Legislative Caucus will have an opportunity to meet with state lawmakers and policy leaders, while also taking part in briefings on several important legislative issues of concern to the business community. The evening's banquet will feature the traditional passing of the gavel to the new State Chamber chairman and a tribute to Nebraska's newest Business Hall of Fame inductees. For more information on the 2010 State Chamber Annual Meeting, please call (402) 474-4422.

Annual Meeting Brings Sponsorship Opportunities

It's never too early to start planning for one of the state's top business events of the year. The State Chamber is now offering sponsorship opportunities to get your business recognized before a large target audience at the Chamber's Annual Meeting on Feb. 4, 2010.

Businesses or organizations interested in sponsoring this important meeting of business and community leaders should contact James Berringer, Vice President-Membership & Marketing, at (402) 474-4422 or jberringer@nechamber.com. ■

Upper left: Senator Mike Johanns discusses health care reform with Federal Fly-Back attendees.

Left: Senator Ben Nelson and State Chamber President Barry Kennedy meet prior to the Senator's briefing on the federal stimulus bill, which was passed and signed into law earlier this year.

Nearly 750 Attend Federal Fly-Back

Approximately 750 Nebraskans participated in the first-ever Federal Fly-Back held Aug. 20 at the Strategic Air & Space Museum near Ashland. Attended by all five members of the Nebraska congressional delegation – as well as Governor Dave Heineman – the event was co-hosted by the State Chamber and the Lincoln, Greater Omaha and Bellevue Chambers of Commerce.

The first part of the day featured a re-creation of the traditional "Nebraska Breakfast," which is typically hosted every Wednesday morning at the U.S. Capitol when Congress is in session. Originating in 1943, the Nebraska breakfast is the oldest and only ongoing state gathering for constituents on Capitol Hill. Attendees heard updates from Nebraska's congressmen and senators on federal proposals that could substantially impact the business community, including the "card-check" bill, cap-and-trade climate legislation, and health care reform. The breakfast was followed by issue briefings conducted by the federal delegation. At the luncheon, attendees heard from the governor; U.S. Chamber of Commerce Chairman and Nebraska business leader Robert Milligan; and keynote speaker Tom Donohue, President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber.

State Chamber President Barry Kennedy

said, "The strong attendance at this event is testament to the civic engagement of Nebraska's business community. We appreciate the enthusiasm and outreach from our congressmen and senators and their willingness to participate and listen to the concerns of Nebraskans. Our congressional delegation has proved time and again to be one of the most accessible in the nation – and that has never been more important." ■



Upcoming Workshops on Business Succession, Lobbying and Campaign Finance

State Chamber members are encouraged to attend two important upcoming workshops:

On Oct. 13, the State Chamber will present a workshop on business succession. The course will be held 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Mahoney State Park near Ashland, and has been approved by the State Board of Public Accountancy as three hours of continuing professional education credit. Featured speaker is John Cederberg, CPA, who brings nearly 40 years of experience in assisting family businesses – including banks and other financial institutions – transfer ownership to the next generation. Business succession is one of the most emotional experiences a family will encounter. This workshop will address all necessary steps and potential pitfalls, including selecting the successor, financing the transition, and ensuring the entire family buys into the succession. Cost to attend is \$85 for State

Chamber members and \$110 for non-members.

On Nov. 10, the State Chamber will host a workshop addressing Nebraska's lobbying and campaign finance regulations. It will be held from 9 a.m. to noon at The Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln, and will serve as either a first-time instructional course or a refresher. The workshop features Frank J. Daley, executive director of the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission, who will review state laws impacting campaigns and campaign contributions, as well as necessary legal information for lobbying at the state level. Cost to attend is \$75 for State Chamber members and \$100 for non-members.

To register for either workshop or for more information, please call the State Chamber at (402) 474-4422 or e-mail nechamber@nechamber.com. ■

Workplace Planning for H1N1 Flu

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) tells *The Executive* that H1N1 influenza outbreaks this fall and winter will likely impact businesses, employees and suppliers of critical material. The World Health Organization declared an H1N1 influenza epidemic this summer.

According to the agency, it is important to identify your business' critical functions and the individuals who perform them, while ensuring there are enough trained staff to do essential functions as you prepare for potential absenteeism.

"Develop a plan that will sustain your core business activities for several weeks," said a HHS spokesperson. "Make sure you have alternate plans for critical supplies in case there is a disruption in your supply chains."

For information about planning, see <http://www.ready.gov/business/plan/index.html>. For information about the prevention of H1N1 in the workplace, see <http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business>. ■

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:

AURORA

Memorial Community Health, Inc.
Diane Keller

COZAD

Cozad Services, Inc.
Jay Halligan

HASTINGS

JM Eagle
Mike Shaw

OMAHA

Meridian Central Public Affairs
Sam Fischer

BRIDGEPORT

21st Century Equipment
Mary Eisenzimmer
*Recommended by Marion Kroeker,
Ogallala/Keith County
Chamber of Commerce*

GRAND ISLAND

Ryder-Rosacker-McCue & Huston
Maureen Vanis

LINCOLN

Embassy Suites - Lincoln
Steve Hilton

Nielsen, Mayne Architecture, Inc.
Gary W. Nielsen

GRETNA

MLA Geothermal Drilling LLC
Marshall Alexander

Lincoln Physical Therapy & Associates, P.C.
Thomas Harmon

Signal 88 Security Group
Shea Degan

CHAPMAN

Preferred Popcorn, LLC
Norm Krug

HARTINGTON

Hydraulic Components Ind.
Lynn Thoene

Schmit Industries, Inc.
Loran Schmit

SIoux CITY, IA

Gateway Engineering, Inc.
Dennis Lines

COLUMBUS

Corner Stop
Jed Brunken

NORTH PLATTE
Title Services of the Plains
Gary Byrne