

THE EXECUTIVE

THE STATE CHAMBER 
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry
October/November 2008

Legislative Forums Held Across Nebraska

The State Chamber, in cooperation with local chambers of commerce across Nebraska, has concluded its 2008 Legislative Forums tour. More than 1,300 people attended the 35 forums, held to gather input from the business community on legislative concerns and important economic issues. In addition, 56 state senators and legislative candidates participated in the presentations.

This year's forum presentation highlighted the Legislature's 2008 session, including developments in the areas of taxes, labor law, workers' compensation and economic development. The presentation also examined how Nebraska compares to other states in key areas of economic competitiveness, including taxation and cost of doing business.

Forum attendees were told that the 2009 Legislature will likely spend considerable time on the new state budget, as well as taxation issues. The Legislature is also expected to devote considerable floor time to roads funding, especially since Nebraska's fuel tax collections are flat or declining, and maintenance costs alone will soon

consume the entire current highway budget.

Forum attendees were told that despite recent tax relief, Nebraska taxes remain among the highest in the country. Nebraska's state and local tax burden ranks ninth highest in the United States, consuming nearly 12 percent of the average Nebraskan's income, according to the Tax Foundation.

Nebraska ranks eighth worst in the Tax Foundation's latest business tax climate index, which considers corporate taxes; individual income taxes; sales taxes; unemployment insurance tax; and property taxes (residential and commercial).

However, Nebraska ranks third best nationally in the cost of doing business, due largely to the state's lower utility and industrial rent rates, according to a Milken Institute study. Nebraska is also ranked in the top five states for legal climate and quality of life.

State Chamber President Barry L. Kennedy said: "The economic climate continues to be the top issue facing state policymakers. The Legislative Forums provided a timely opportunity for business leaders to discuss key issues with Chamber staff, community leaders, state lawmakers and legislative candidates." ■

2009 Annual Meeting Set for February 5

Mark your calendars for the State Chamber's 2009 Annual Meeting and Legislative Caucus, set for Thursday, Feb. 5, at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in Lincoln.

This is the State Chamber's largest event of the year. Those attending will learn about key legislative issues impacting the business community. Attendees will also get the chance to meet with Nebraska lawmakers and state officials, as well as pay tribute to some of the state's most recognized business leaders.

Late registration will begin in the atrium of The Cornhusker Marriott at 9 a.m. The Board of Directors meeting

will start at 10 a.m. Governor Dave Heineman will address the noon luncheon, which is open to all members.

The afternoon will commence with the annual business meeting. The business meeting will be followed by panel discussions regarding important topics on the 2009 legislative agenda.

The evening will include a 6 p.m. reception and the annual banquet at 7 p.m. The traditional passing of the gavel will feature 2008 Chairman G. Lee Glenn and 2009 Chairman Marc LeBaron. The Business Hall of Fame induction ceremony will begin at 8 p.m., with closing comments by Chairman LeBaron. ■

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State Chamber Views...
Editorial by Barry L. Kennedy
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"Election Year Responsibility"

As a business leader in your community, you know that you cannot afford to simply sit back, watch and hope that the best candidate for you and your business will be elected by the voters on election day.

If you remain a spectator to the process, others will be making the critical decisions which may not coincide with you or your business' best interest.

You know that you cannot tell your employees how to vote. However, you can educate your employees on which candidates you believe will have the most positive impact on their ability to prosper in Nebraska.

Employers communicate with employees every day on business matters. You can assure that your workforce is well informed and prepared when they vote for key issues and candidates. Studies show that employees trust their employer as a credible source for information, especially on issues that affect the business' ability to grow and provide jobs within the community.

For your part, if there are contested races in your area, ask questions that will give you a clear understanding of which candidates will best serve the interests of Nebraska's economy and provide opportunities for business growth. Do not be reluctant about sharing your evaluation with other business leaders and your employees.

Again this election year, Nebraskans are replacing a sizable portion of the Unicameral Legislature. Fifteen State Senators are term limited this year and seven of those are committee chairs. We are again losing a goodly amount of institutional knowledge to term limits. In total, 26 legislative seats are up for election on November 4. With so much turnover, it is not unreasonable to expect that several

newly-elected senators in 2008 will move into leadership roles mid-way through their first term.

The business community must make every effort to elect the best possible candidates in 2008.

Now is an excellent time to invite candidates to tour your business, meet

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your employees and gain a better understanding of the economic, social and leadership impact that your enterprise has in your community and the entire state.

The State Chamber has members in every legislative district, which means every State Senator has business members as constituents. Elected officials always listen to the voices of constituents, and it is our responsibility to stay informed on the issues of importance and communicate our concerns to elected representatives or candidates seeking those positions.

As a member of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry, you have an opportunity to become even more effective in communicating our point of view if you take the time to know the candidates and their positions on key issues. **Personal relationships with elected leaders are a valuable asset to your business.**

For Nebraska to remain "Open for Business," maintaining a pro-business Legislature is essential. **Don't miss the opportunity to educate your employees and encourage them to vote.** ■

Membership Directory Sales Underway

The advertising sales campaign for the 2009 State Chamber Membership and Business Directory will begin this month. Linda Marks, 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 will see the State Chamber Directory. Your message and listing will also be seen by many others, including economic developers, recruiters, and potential employees at state colleges and universities.

Also, we urge you to review your current Directory for proper listings, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc. Then make a point of noting businesses you know who are NOT listed. Those businesses should be in the Directory, too, as well as being members of the State Chamber. 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. ■

Register To Get The State Chamber's Legislative Report By E-mail

When Nebraska's Legislature reconvenes in early January, the State Chamber's weekly *Legislative Report* will again be delivered by e-mail instead of the U.S. Postal Service. In addition, the bill status sheet, the bill digest and committee hearing notices will also be delivered electronically.

To ensure you do not miss a single delivery of the *Legislative Report*, please e-mail your organization's name along with the e-mail addresses of recipients who wish to receive the *Legislative Report* to kkoch@nechamber.com.

General Election Update

The November 4 General Election is approaching quickly. In the Nebraska Unicameral, there are 26 seats up for election. Fifteen of those seats are open due to term limits on veteran state senators, including seven committee chairs. As noted at the State Chamber Legislative Forums, at least 36 of 49 senators next year will have two years or less experience in the Legislature.

The State Chamber-PAC is supporting candidates in most of the open districts, including 10 incumbents (see enclosed listing).

The State Chamber encourages all members to get acquainted with the legislative candidates. If you have not already done so, invite candidates to visit your business and see firsthand the economic impact that you are making in your community. Put simply, there is no better way for a candidate to appreciate the value of your investment – and the jobs it has produced – than to see your business and employees in person.

In addition to this year's Unicameral races, there are two questions on the General Election ballot of interest to the State Chamber.

Proposed Amendment 1 would change the powers of municipalities relating to funding sources for economic and industrial development programs. During the 2008 legislative session, state senators approved LR 229 CA – a constitutional amendment resolution that must be approved by Nebraska voters in order to be enacted. If approved by the voters, the amendment would remove a requirement that cities and villages use only general tax revenue for economic and industrial development projects.

Another key ballot question is **Initiative Measure 424**, which, if passed, would amend the Nebraska Constitution to prohibit the state, any public institution of higher education, political subdivision or government institution from discriminating against, or granting preferential treatment to, individuals or groups based upon race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in operating public employment, education, or contracting. Opponents contend this amendment could hurt the University and state's ability to recruit talented students and employees.

The State Chamber Board of Directors has taken a position in

opposition to Initiative 424. This position reflects the belief that Nebraska's elected officials should address this issue in a manner and procedure that best serve the interests of the state, including holding public hearings to gather information and policy recommendations from Nebraskans. ■

Annual Meeting Brings Sponsorship Opportunities

It's never too early to start planning for one of Nebraska'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. 5, 2009. Businesses or organizations interested in sponsoring this important meeting of business leaders from across Nebraska should contact the State Chamber as soon as possible. For details or to reserve your sponsorship, contact James Berringer at 402-474-4422 or jberringer@nechamber.com. ■



2008 Forum Highlights

Left: Barry Kennedy summarizes the effects of term limits on the Legislature as part of the Legislative Forum presentation.

Below Left: During the Aurora forum, State Senator Annette Dubas of Fullerton and Barry Kennedy take questions from the audience.

Below Right: At the West Point forum, Tekamah State Senator Kent Rogert (left) meets with State Chamber board member Jeff Scherer of Smeal Fire Apparatus Co.





Milligan Addresses State Chamber Board, Trade Delegation

On September 12, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Vice Chairman Robert S. Milligan spoke to the State Chamber Board of Directors and more than 100 foreign delegates taking part in Nebraska's first-ever reverse trade mission. He delivered his keynote address at a State Chamber luncheon held at The Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln. Milligan, a former State Chamber board member and chairman of M I Industries in Lincoln, will next year become the first Nebraskan to chair the nation's largest business organization. In his speech last month, Milligan highlighted the substantial role that trade plays in the Nebraska economy. Nebraska ranks fifth among all 50 states in agricultural exports, with sales volume of over \$3 billion in 2006, Milligan said, while foreign-owned businesses provide about 20,000 Nebraska jobs. ■

Governor Signs Deals Following Reverse Trade Mission

Nebraska's first reverse trade mission, held last month, produced several cooperative agreements with international participants. The State Chamber was a partner in this important event, which attracted more than 130 foreign trade delegates from 10 countries and five continents.

Governor Dave Heineman signed agreements with five Shanghai, China, companies that want to expand in the United States. Although the agree-

ments do not guarantee the companies will establish operations in Nebraska, they will ensure that Nebraska receives top consideration.

The five Chinese companies agreeing to continue talks with state officials included a manufacturer of parts for power plants, a frozen-food products distributor and a firm that produces communications equipment. All are interested in either establishing a distribution or production plant in

Nebraska. Low costs for land and energy were among the reasons company officials gave for the attraction to the state.

State officials also announced a partnership involving Columbus-based Behlen Mfg. Co. and a Beijing-based company, HRC Energy, to use technology and shallow groundwater to produce geothermal energy. Operations will be based in Waterloo. ■

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.

AUBURN

Auburn Chamber of Commerce
Erin Scoville

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA

Ellison Technologies
Automation
Greg Olenick

LINCOLN

Eley Corporation
Mark Eley

Organizational Conflict & Management Consulting
Matt Butler

CENTRAL CITY

Central City Area Chamber of Commerce
Kendra Jefferson

GORDON

Gordon Chamber of Commerce
Rachael Price

Pure & Secure
Al Meder

Team J Sales & Marketing
Joseph Hahn

COLUMBUS

Aveunue Chiropractic Clinic
Bruce Crabtree

KEARNEY

SCORR Marketing
Cinda S. Orr

Snitily/Carr
Doug Carr

OMAHA

Great Plains Data Center Builders, Inc.
David Pettengill

O'NEILL

John Prouty Construction, Inc.
John Prouty
Sponsor: Rod Hooker, Hooker Brothers Construction Co.

Sand Family Farms
Mike Sand

LAUREL

Laurel Economic Development
Annette Junck

Office Depot
Tony Carrow

WATERLOO

RWK, PC
Rick Kiolbasa