

THE EXECUTIVE

THE STATE CHAMBER 
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry
October/November 2009

Legislative Forums Held Across Nebraska

The State Chamber, in cooperation with local chambers of commerce across Nebraska, is nearing the conclusion of its annual legislative forums – held every autumn to gather input from the business community on legislative concerns and key economic issues. Approximately 1,200 people had attended the forums as of the deadline for this issue of *The Executive*. Nearly 40 state senators had also participated in the presentations.

This year's forum presentation has highlighted Nebraska's competitiveness compared to neighboring states, in important areas such as taxes and the cost of doing business. The forums have also included a review of the Legislature's 2009 session, emphasizing developments in the areas of labor

law, workers' compensation and economic development.

Forum attendees were told that while Nebraska is still considered a high-tax state, conditions have recently improved for businesses. The forums have featured notable economic rankings, including one from the Tax Foundation that shows Nebraska has become more business-friendly over the past year. The foundation's business tax climate index ranks Nebraska as 33rd best – up nine spots from last year's ranking of No. 42. Nebraska continues to receive high marks for its legal environment and cost of doing business.

"From Omaha to Scottsbluff, the economy continues to be the top issue facing our business community and employers," said State Chamber

President Barry Kennedy.

The State Chamber legislative forum tour will conclude in Lincoln. The Lincoln forum will be held October 28 at 7:30 a.m. at the Nebraska Club. Call the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce at (402) 436-2385 for more details. ■

Below Left: State Senator Tim Gay of Papillion answers a question at the breakfast forum in Sarpy County, as Senators Scott Price of Bellevue and Heath Mello of Omaha await their turn.

Below Right: During the forum in York, state Senator Greg Adams of York spoke on his priorities as chairman of the Legislature's Education Committee.

Bottom: At the forum in Blair, state Senator Scott Lautenbaugh fields a question from State Chamber board member Eric Johnson of Cargill, Inc.



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State Chamber Views...

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

Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

"State Chamber Membership - Best Value in Tough Times"

The Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry's primary objective is to represent your business interests before the Nebraska Legislature so that you can continue to run your business without being overly taxed and regulated. We make every effort to keep you well informed through reports, newsletters and meetings on issues that might affect your ability to earn a profit and employ people in Nebraska.

In addition, we have also enhanced our communications with Nebraska's congressional delegation in Washington on federal issues that affect your cost of doing business. Card check, cap-and-trade and health care reform are just a few of the issues we have discussed with our U.S. senators and congressmen.

You have hired us, through your dues investment, to protect your business interests. The State Chamber is not a charitable organization. We are a business trade association that provides a valuable service for a fee. We know that running your business is more than a full-time job for you and your employees. You simply do not have the time to lobby full time and stay abreast of all the proposed rules, regulations, laws, procedures and other issues that affect your bottom line.

Whether it be labor law changes, taxation policy, group health insurance mandates or national trade policy, your State Chamber strives to make your views known to the elected officials who make decisions that will impact your operations.

When times are going extremely well, it is easier to forget there are people on the front lines each and every day working to protect the interests of the business community.

When times get tough, as we have experienced this past year, our work is not any more important but may be more noticeable.

It is difficult to put an exact dollar amount on the value of your State Chamber membership. We know that, on average, Nebraska employers pay one of the lowest unemployment insurance premiums per employee of any state in the nation – several hundred dollars less per employee compared to some other states. We have fought to keep workers' compensation costs as low as possible and to avoid additional mandated benefits on the health insurance policies, which most employers provide to their employees.

Taxes are never fun to pay, and even though Nebraska is not viewed as a low-tax state, we have worked hard to keep business taxes at a reasonable level and to protect incentives earned by businesses that invest and grow their employment base in our state.

Like most businesses, our work never really ends. We will be constantly vigilant in doing what you have hired us to do. You are a valuable partner to the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry, and we will work hard to be a valuable partner to your continued success. Your membership creates a strong coalition of business interests and ensures that your voice is heard.

You recently received a copy of our "2009 Results for Business" report that shows the myriad of issues that the State Chamber is involved in on your behalf. The results were quite positive this year. With our increased involvement at the federal level and carry-over state legislation that is not business friendly, our unified voice will

be even more important throughout the next few years.

When the opportunity presents itself, please recommend State Chamber membership to other business associates. There is strength in numbers. The larger our membership base, the stronger our voice will be. ■

2010 Annual Meeting Set for February 4

Mark your calendars for the State Chamber's 2010 Annual Meeting and Legislative Caucus, set for Thursday, February 4, at The Cornhusker Marriott 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, state officials and policy experts, as well as pay tribute to some of the state's top 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 will be open to all State Chamber members. The afternoon will commence with the annual business meeting, followed by panel discussions led by key experts and lawmakers. Panel topics will cover workforce preparedness, federal issues, and the priorities of the Legislature's leaders.

The evening will include a 6 p.m. reception and annual banquet at 7 p.m. The traditional passing of the gavel will feature 2009 State Chamber Chairman Marc LeBaron of Lincoln Industries, Lincoln, and 2010 Chairman Richard S. Reiser of Werner Enterprises, Omaha. The Business Hall of Fame induction ceremony will begin at 8 p.m., with closing comments by Chairman Reiser. ■

Nebraska Gets High Marks In New Rankings For Business Conditions, Energy Costs

Forbes Magazine has named Nebraska as its No. 9 "Best State for Business." According to the magazine's Web site, Forbes' 2009 "Best States" ranking measured six vital categories for businesses: costs, labor supply, regulatory environment, current economic climate, growth prospects and quality of life. Business costs – which include labor, energy and taxes – were weighted the most heavily. Nebraska scored especially well in the categories of business costs and quality of life.

In another recent study, Nebraska is ranked No. 7 for overall energy costs. The 2009 Energy Cost Index compiled by the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council considered the two major energy costs affecting small businesses – the retail price of

regular gasoline and the cost of electricity.

Only four states have more affordable electricity rates than Nebraska, according to the SB&E Council index. In the overall rankings comparing all states and the District of Columbia, Wyoming is No. 1; Hawaii ranks

No. 51 with the nation's highest energy costs. Of the 10 worst-ranked states – those with the highest energy costs – eight are located in the Northeast United States, where environmental restrictions and energy development regulations are most stringent. ■

Forbes 'Best States for Business'

1. Virginia
2. Washington
3. Utah
4. Colorado
5. North Carolina
6. Georgia
7. North Dakota
8. Texas
- 9. Nebraska**
10. Oregon

(Source: Forbes Magazine, September 2009)

SB&E Council 'Energy Cost Index'

1. Wyoming (Lowest Energy Cost)
2. Idaho
3. Utah
4. Kentucky
5. West Virginia
6. Missouri
- 7. Nebraska**
8. Indiana, Iowa, North Dakota (Tied)

(Source: SB&E Council Index, 2009)

Kennedy, White Honored at Nebraska Diplomats Annual Banquet

On the evening of September 11, 2009, Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry President Barry Kennedy was presented the Nebraska Diplomats' Ambassador Plenipotentiary Award – the Diplomats' highest honor. The award recognizes a lifetime of commitment to shaping and growing Nebraska's economy and moving the state forward. Previous winners include former Governor Kay Orr; Walter Scott, Jr.; Tony Raimondo; former Congressman Doug Bereuter; former Congressman and NU Football Coach Tom Osborne; Senator Mike Johanns; Gary Warren; Allen Beermann; and others.

Receiving the Diplomat of the Year Award was Tim White, Vice President of Beaver Creek Marketing of Grand Island. White, who serves as a State Chamber Vice Chairman, has played a key role in several statewide economic development efforts.

Community of the Year Awards went to Falls City and LaVista. Business of the Year Awards went to Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad and Duo Lift Manufacturing Company. The Power-In-The-Partnership Award

went to the University of Nebraska. The awards ceremony marked the conclusion of the annual Nebraska Diplomats' Passport Weekend.

With a membership of more than

475 business executives and community leaders, the Nebraska Diplomats is the largest economic development organization in Nebraska. ■



State Chamber President Barry Kennedy is awarded the Nebraska Diplomats' Ambassador Plenipotentiary Award, presented by Governor Dave Heineman and Diplomats President Mary Gerdes.

Upcoming Workshop on Lobbying and Campaign Finance

State Chamber members are encouraged to attend an upcoming workshop covering some basic rules for lobbying in Nebraska.

On November 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 will feature 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 the workshop or for more information, please call the State Chamber at (402) 474-4422 or e-mail nechamber@nechamber.com. ■

Applications Due for 2010 Leadership Nebraska Class

The State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska program is now in its third year of developing and motivating a cross-section of leaders who will use their talents to inspire others and foster a new spirit of enthusiasm and vitality throughout the state. Now is your chance to apply or nominate a deserving candidate to be part of the next Leadership Nebraska class.

Each year, a class of up to 30 leaders is selected to participate in the program. Those selected possess skills and experience in civic activities, public affairs and their professional careers. Although the selected participants will be from different regions of the state – and have varied backgrounds and diverse qualities – they all must have one common characteristic: an abiding interest in Nebraska and its future. *Applications for the 2010 class should be sent as soon as possible.* Sessions begin in late February.

For application forms or more information, log onto <http://nebraskaleadership.nechamber.com/>, e-mail dmihovk@nechamber.com or call (402) 474-4422. ■

Get the Chamber's Legislative Report by E-mail

The Nebraska Legislature will begin its 2010 session on January 6. With hundreds of new bills expected to be introduced – and hundreds more carried over from the 2009 session – State Chamber members must be vigilant and well-informed. For summary and analysis of legislation impacting Nebraska's business community, be sure you are signed up for the State Chamber's weekly *Legislative Report*.

In addition to the *Legislative Report*, members get weekly updates on committee hearings and the status of all bills. The *Legislative Report* is e-mailed to members at the end of every week throughout the session.

If you wish to receive this service, 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 or call the State Chamber at (402) 474-4422. ■

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. We encourage you to consider doing business with fellow Chamber members.

FREMONT

FX Technology
Debbie Vacha

*Recommended by John Toney, UNL-
IANR*

GRAND ISLAND

Anderson Ford Lincoln Mercury
Roger Anderson

Beavercreek Marketing
Tim White

HASTINGS

T-L Irrigation
Marc Lubken

*Recommended by Chris Roth, Reinke
Manufacturing Co., Inc.*

KIMBALL

Clean Harbors
Jared Hunsaker

LINCOLN

Frosty's Specialty Advertising, Inc.
Forrest Critchfield

Guardian Angels Homecare, Inc.
Kris Beckenbach

Roper & Son's Funeral Service
Bill Roper

R U Nuts Co.
Charlotte Ralston

OMAHA

CETAC Technologies
Bill Ahern

Favor Human Resources Consulting
Kathleen A. Nicolini

Freedom Specialty Contracting, Inc.
Randall D. Tufly

SEWARD

Plains Equipment Group
Russ Stigge

*Recommended by Brian Hamilton,
Beardmore Chevrolet, Inc.*

WAYNE

Pac N' Save
Donald Endicott