

THE EXECUTIVE

THE STATE CHAMBER



Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

December 2011



Holiday Greetings!



Leadership Nebraska Adds 20 New Alumni

The State Chamber's Leadership Nebraska has just completed its fifth year of developing a cross-section of leaders who want to use their talents and abilities to foster a new spirit of energy, enthusiasm and vitality throughout the state. In late October, 20 outstanding Nebraskans were awarded a diploma and commemorative plaque at the Leadership Nebraska commencement ceremony held in Lincoln.

State Chamber Past Chairman and current board member Gary Warren spoke to the graduating class about grooming future leaders and identifying key leadership qualities. Leadership Nebraska Council Chairman Tom L. Whalen, along with Warren, presented diplomas to the new graduates.

"Leadership Nebraska gives participants an opportunity to develop and hone their leadership skills while gaining a broader understanding of issues facing Nebraska," Whalen said.

"The key to Leadership Nebraska is that it is based on the premise that all Nebraska citizens have a stake in our future and that cooperative efforts will lead to long-term success."

The members of Leadership Nebraska's Class V come from communities across the state; they range from business leaders to philanthropic workers to educators to entrepreneurs. This year's graduates, listed by name, business, and hometown, are: Eli Aguilar, AIM Director of Out-

reach Western Nebraska, Scottsbluff; Michele Ehresman, Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce; Jennifer Epting, NUCOR Steel, Norfolk; Roger Foster, Windstream/Mayor of Crete; Tari Hendrickson, Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, Lincoln; Dennis Houston, Norfolk Area Chamber of Commerce; Sarah Johnson, Greater Omaha Chamber; Marc Kaschke, Mayor, North Platte; Max Kathol, Plattsmouth Chamber of Commerce;

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Leadership Nebraska Class V at the October 28 commencement ceremony held in Lincoln. The program is designed to develop the leadership potential of Nebraska residents and encourage them to use their skills to address challenges facing the state.

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State Chamber Views...

Guest Editorial by Richard Baier

Executive Vice President

Forging Nebraska's Future

Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry

'Forging A Better Future for Nebraska'

Let me begin by thanking the State Chamber for allowing me to lead the new 'Forging Nebraska's Future' (FNF) initiative. The Chamber has a long history of providing vision and leadership on important issues in our great state, and it is my hope that the planning and prioritization that we do as part of the FNF effort will springboard new opportunities for the next generation of Cornhuskers.

Our goal is quite simple: utilize a business-like model to craft strategies for stimulating the economic opportunity, while increasing jobs and population.

Over the past eight-plus years, I had the opportunity to travel around the nation and the world promoting Nebraska and Nebraska business opportunities as director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. Through this experience, I became increasingly appreciative of the solid and predictable business climate that our State offers. This environment, coupled with our state's solid financial principles and common-sense solutions, has allowed Nebraska to more easily navigate our path through the most recent economic storm.

Rapid technological advances are changing the way Nebraska businesses operate and how individuals make decisions about their careers, families and places of residence.

However, now is not the time to exhibit complacency or to rest on our laurels. Rapid technological advances are changing the way Nebraska businesses operate and how individuals make decisions about their careers, families and places of residence. Many companies and entrepreneurs now conduct business around the world. Similarly, individuals have an

almost unlimited selection of communities, regions and countries to call home; they are doing so in increasing numbers.

As FNF begins to craft long-term strategic plans for Nebraska, it will be important to have a dialogue about the history and values that make our state unique.

For example, we remain the only state in America that has a single house legislature and a 100 percent public power system. Nebraska has always taken pride in our pioneering spirit and our respect for humanity. Nebraskans have also valued a conservative fiscal attitude, strong families, hard work, and the importance of education.

As I prepared for this new career challenge, I have reviewed some of the strategic plans that have been undertaken in our state's recent history. One such initiative was called "New Seeds for Nebraska: Strategies for Building the Next Economy." Conducted in the mid-1980s, this comprehensive plan was commissioned by the Nebraska Press Association with funding from the Peter Kiewit Foundation. This aggressive document included a long list of excellent recommendations for growing Nebraska. While some of the recommendations were adopted, many were not.

To assure success, FNF will need to produce a carefully devised strategy that incorporates a specific implementation schedule. There will need to be a process in place to conduct a periodic review of the strategy and the results to date.

Looking to the future, the next generation of Nebraskans will have much in common with us. They will seek a state that, first and foremost, offers high quality jobs, a reasonable cost of living, a low tax burden, and the opportunity to live in an engaged community. They will want safe streets, abundant recreational and

cultural opportunities, affordable housing, a clean environment, a sound educational system, and ample community pride.

Future Nebraska businesses will seek locations with a strong entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic, a reasonable cost of doing business, a highly trained and dedicated workforce, and easy technological and physical access to the global marketplace – all of this in an environment that is both predictable and profitable.

The good news is that Nebraska already exhibits many of these characteristics. FNF's role will be to maintain and assure our current strengths, address our weaknesses through creative solutions, and find ways to leverage new opportunities for the state's betterment.

In the coming weeks, we will begin our FNF effort by talking with Chamber leaders across the state about their expectations for the future. We will also be soliciting input from our stakeholder partners and interested Nebraska citizens. Input will be gathered via personal and group discussions as well as electronic methods, such as online surveys.

Throughout this process, we will also be actively establishing some general performance metrics for our state. These metrics, or benchmarks, will allow us to more easily quantify the areas of greatest strength and opportunity. By late 2012, we will begin narrowing down this plethora of ideas into key areas of emphasis.

Developing a clear roadmap for Nebraska will require feedback from diverse interests and from every corner of the state. We will need to address difficult – and sometimes emotional – issues and have a frank, statewide discussion.

In the end, we probably will not reach complete consensus on all of the final strategies and recommendations. However, FNF will offer a list of specific suggestions that can help to create a stronger Nebraska for the next generation.

I look forward to working with you on this planning effort over the next several months. If you have questions or ideas about this process, please don't hesitate to contact me at (402) 474-4422 or rbaier@nechamber.com.

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State Chamber Survey Finds 90% of Respondents Positive About Nebraska Economy

A new statewide survey conducted by the State Chamber shows more than 90% of respondents say their local economy is doing well. The survey of local Nebraska businesses and community leaders was conducted from Sept. 12 through Nov. 9 at the State Chamber's legislative forums, held in 32 locations across the state. The forums were attended by nearly 1,200 Nebraskans, including 38 state senators.

More than three-quarters (76%) of the Nebraskans who participated in the State Chamber's annual survey said their local economy was "good," while another 15% said their local economy was "excellent." Only 8% said the local economy was "not so good," while less than 1% of respondents rated it as "poor."

The Chamber's survey results also revealed that availability of jobs was the top concern among survey participants. Over 40% listed "lack of good jobs" as the biggest long-term challenge faced by their community. Infrastructure (23%), population loss (about 16%) and housing (12%) were also mentioned frequently as top concerns.

According to survey responses, Nebraska's ability to weather the

current economic storm has been largely due to the state's conservative approach of government (25%); our diverse economy and agricultural success (18%); responsible fiscal management of Nebraska homeowners and business owners (14%); and the state's job-creation incentives (10%). About 31% said all four of these areas were responsible for Nebraska's solid economic performance.

Respondents were clearly concerned about the proliferation of federal regulations. Nearly 30% said that regulatory actions by federal agencies – including those by the EPA, National Labor Relations Board, and U.S. Department of Labor – would most dramatically impact their business or organization. More than 18% said the U.S. debt and possible new taxes were the biggest federal threats to their operations, while about 13% said the new health care law was their top concern. Another

40% of respondents said the combination of all of these federal issues would equally harm their business.

The State Chamber holds its legislative forums annually in coordination with local chambers of commerce. The main purposes of the forums are to gather input from the business community and inform local leaders about recent activity at the Nebraska Legislature. The forums are open to all members of the State Chamber and local chambers of commerce. ■

Among the 38 state senators who participated in this year's State Chamber legislative forums were Omaha Senators Burke Harr (left), Pete Pirsch and Scott Lautenbaugh.



State Chamber's D.C. Fly-In May 21-23

The State Chamber's annual visit to Washington, D.C., is set for May 21-23, 2012. Those interested in participating should note that the 2012 State Chamber Fly-In will coincide with the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Summit.

As in previous years, fly-in participants will receive issue briefings on the latest policy and political developments, and have lunch with Nebraska's U.S. senators and congressmen at the Chamber's congressional luncheon. Participants will also have the opportunity to attend the traditional Nebraska Breakfast.

Registration cost for the fly-in is \$75 to help pay for the catering services at the May 23 Capitol Hill luncheon. (This fee does not include the registration for the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Summit.)

To register for the fly-in, please

e-mail your name and business to Jamie Karl at jkarl@nechamber.com or call (402) 474-4422. Then mail your check for \$75 to the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry, P.O. Box 95128, Lincoln, NE 68509.

Fly-in participants are responsible for planning and financing their own travel and hotel. The State Chamber will reserve a block of rooms at a hotel (yet to be determined) for those not participating in the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Summit.

If you plan to attend the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Summit, please register on your own. Nebraska Chamber members qualify for a lower fee by using this link: <http://www.regonline.com/Register/Checkin.aspx?EventID=1010066&lbrd=1&rtypeid=211325>. ■

State Chamber 2012 Schedule

Here are some key dates on the State Chamber's 2012 calendar:

Jan. 4	Nebraska Legislature Convenes
Jan. 10	Public Affairs Council Meetings Begin (every Tuesday during legislative session)
Feb. 2	Annual Meeting & Business Hall of Fame Induction
Feb. 3	Nebraska Chamber of Commerce Executives (NCCE) Annual Meeting
March 23	Executive Council Meeting
May 21-23	Chamber Fly-In to Washington, D.C.
June 1	Spring Board Meeting
Sept. - Oct.	State Chamber Legislative Forums
Sept. 14	Fall Board Meeting
Oct. 26	Executive Council Meeting
Nov. 27	Public Affairs Council Meeting
Nov. 28	Winter Board Meeting

January 31 Is Deadline To Post Notices On Union Rights

As reported in the State Chamber's News Update, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has issued a new rule requiring private-sector employers to post an official notice in the workplace regarding employee rights to organize a union. This was done despite concerns from the business community, including the Nebraska Chamber and its national affiliates.

A suit against NLRB – filed by the U.S. Chamber and the National Association of Manufacturers – argues that NLRB does not have the authority to issue the rule and that it is “forced speech.” The D.C. Circuit Court has scheduled oral arguments for Dec. 19.

The deadline for employers to comply has been moved to Jan. 31,

2012. According to the NLRB website, “the notice should be posted in a conspicuous place” and “employers also should publish a link to the notice on an internal or external website if other personnel policies or workplace notices are posted there. If an employer knowingly and willfully fails to post the notice, that failure may be considered evidence of unlawful motive in an unfair labor practice case involving other alleged violations of the National Labor Relations Act.”

You may download and print the official NLRB notice to post at your workplace by using the following link: <https://www.nlrb.gov/poster>. ■

Portion Of State Chamber Dues May Be Deductible

Your 2011 annual dues to the State Chamber may be deductible as an ordinary and necessary business expense. The Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry is a registered 501(c)(6) organization. The State Chamber dedicates a portion of dues to lobbying and business advocacy. Because the Chamber serves as an advocate for the interests of our members – and the association commonly asks policymakers for their support or opposition to legislation – not all of the annual dues are deductible as a business expense. Members with questions should consult their tax professional. ■

State Chamber Annual Meeting Is February 2, 2012

On Thursday, Feb. 2, 2012, the State Chamber will hold its Annual Meeting and Legislative Caucus at The Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln. This is the State Chamber's largest event of the year. Those attending will learn more about the most critical issues affecting the business community by hearing from Nebraska policymakers, state officials and economic development experts.

The event will include the traditional afternoon panel discussions. Topics will include Nebraska's workforce demands, the State Chamber's “Forging Nebraska's Future” initiative,

and the Nebraska Unicameral's 2012 legislative agenda.

Those attending the evening banquet will have the opportunity to pay tribute to some of the state's top business leaders during the Nebraska Business Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

For more information, call the State Chamber at (402) 474-4422 or see the registration form enclosed with this issue of The Executive.

If you are interested in sponsoring this event, e-mail jberringer@nechamber.com. ■



Nebraska Employers To See Reduced Unemployment Insurance Rates in 2012

Nebraska businesses will see a 25 percent reduction in unemployment insurance rates for 2012, according to the Nebraska Department of Labor. This comes after the rates more than doubled in 2010 and stayed flat in 2011.

Cathy Lang, director of the Nebraska Department of Labor, said that the improving job situation in Nebraska has helped the state's business-funded unemployment insurance trust fund to replenish itself. The fund balance increased to \$276 million as of Sept. 30, compared to a peak of \$283 million in August 2008. Employers pay the entire cost of jobless benefits, either through taxes based on experience ratings or by direct reimbursement to the unemployment compensation fund. ■

Leadership Nebraska

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Jeanne McClure, Alegent, Lincoln; Rick Nelsen, NPPD, Columbus; Jane Nielsen, Papillion; Justine Petsch, Mutual of Omaha Bank, Omaha; Roberta Pinkerton, OPPD, Beatrice; Dave Rasmussen, Attorney, Wolfe Snowden, Lincoln; Liz Ring Carlson, State Farm, Lincoln; George Schuler, Boyd Jones Construction, Lincoln; Tom Shoemaker, Cambridge Telephone, Cambridge; Maria Valentin, ConAgra Foods, Omaha; and Andrew Williams, Central National Bank, Kearney.

For more information on the Leadership Nebraska program, contact Executive Director Don Mihovk at the State Chamber office (402) 474-4422, or visit <http://nebraskaleadership.nechamber.com>. ■