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Workforce development, education key to Iowa's economic potential

Iowa Chamber Alliance announces 2016 legislative priorities

DES MOINES, IOWA (December 9, 2015) – For Iowa to achieve its full economic potential, workforce development and education remain a top priority for the Iowa Chamber Alliance. At a news conference held earlier today, the Alliance outlined key policy recommendations for workforce development and education, as well as, other strategic initiatives crucial to fostering healthy economic growth.

“The Alliance looks forward to 2016 as a productive year that can address needed policy changes and erect the framework Iowa needs to extend and enhance its economic growth,” said Dee Baird, 2016 Iowa Chamber Alliance Chair and President & CEO of the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance. “The 2016 state legislative session can and should advance Iowa’s business climate in a number of ways.”

The Alliance believes economic growth can be achieved by:

- Competitive and fair taxes.
- Strong fiscal management of taxpayer dollars.
- Necessary investments in the full spectrum of infrastructure.
- Forward-looking programs to encourage entrepreneurship and attract investment.
- Predictable and responsive regulatory environment.

2016 PRIORITY ISSUES

Workforce Development & Education

The Iowa Chamber Alliance advocates for state support of a comprehensive study of Iowa’s workforce issues to help assess needs and make sound policy recommendations that follow a broader strategy. Iowa’s workforce development strategy, must address three broad areas:

- Preparing Iowa’s future workforce with a quality education that readies high school graduates for either a four-year college education or a vocational training course without need for academic remediation.
- Equipping Iowa’s workforce of today with the skills they need to compete and fill the jobs industry needs.

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- Attracting people to Iowa and retaining Iowans to participate in Iowa’s workforce, by making it a desirable place to live with robust communities and a high “quality of place.”

Economic Development

Investing in job-creating incentives and programs remains a top Alliance priority. Chamber Alliance recommendations include:

- Fully funding the incentives budget under the High Quality Jobs Program to help ensure Iowa is in a position to close the deal on highly competitive projects.
- Support a new front-end incentive fund – designed with appropriate accountability and protections – to help win more projects.
- Advocate for the adoption of new incentives designed to attract investment in renewable chemical manufacturing and advanced bio-refining. With Iowa’s existing bio-refining infrastructure and our abundant availability of raw feedstock, Iowa is well suited to position itself as a leader to excel at both.
- Support policy measures that align community attraction programs and expand the availability of resources for Iowa’s communities to attract and retain the workforce needed for Iowa’s economic growth.
- Strongly support local economic development tools, such as tax increment financing, as invaluable and integral pieces of Iowa’s economic development efforts. Our organization will vigorously work to ensure their continued strength, flexibility and availability.

Taxes

Iowa’s business tax climate may be improved in a host of ways. Specifically, the Alliance encourages policies that build on:

- Commercial and industrial property tax relief efforts.
- Simplified and reduced corporate income taxes.
- Flattened and streamlined personal income tax codes.

Other areas for further review and improvement include unfunded mandate reduction and public pension reform.

Transportation, Infrastructure & Communications

A solid inter-modal transportation network is critical to economic growth. The Alliance thanks the Legislature and Governor for taking bold action to support the Road Use Trust Fund for critical projects throughout Iowa. Given the capital-intensive nature of transportation infrastructure, long-term funding and distribution issues remain. The Alliance supports a reexamination of current fund allocations to stay true to the TIME-21 formulas.

Iowa’s broadband infrastructure is positioned to be an engine for economic growth in the 21st Century, and broadband investment must be pursued as aggressively as any other targeted industry – through a positive business climate, competitive tax treatment, appropriate incentives and a light-touch regulatory posture that is geared toward the future, not the past. The Alliance supports efforts and policies that attract investment to enhance the broadband infrastructure necessary to bolster our economic future.

General Business

The Iowa Chamber Alliance has consistently supported periodic review and cost-benefit analysis of agency rules and regulations in cooperation with affected businesses and organizations. Such reviews ensure a minimally invasive and efficient regulatory environment. Rules and regulations should be regularly evaluated for necessity, effectiveness, cost-efficiency, enforceability and financial impact. Regulatory stability and responsiveness must be recognized as a critical component of a healthy business climate.

The overall fiscal health of state and local government is an important factor in attracting and retaining businesses. Toward that end, the Alliance supports efforts to modernize and reform budget practices at all levels of government, including multi-year budgeting, and careful consideration of spending in order to maintain fiscal health at all levels of government. The Alliance also supports full funding of its existing budget obligations, including tax credits and promised backfill to local governments related to the property tax reforms of 2013.

The Alliance also strongly supports efforts to reduce revenue demand from local and state governments through public pension reforms.

For more information about the Alliances' positions and legislative agenda, please visit the website at www.iowachamberalliance.com.

About Iowa Chamber Alliance and Members

The Iowa Chamber Alliance is a non-partisan coalition representing the 16 largest chambers of commerce and economic development organizations throughout Iowa. Its mission is to put forth and enact an agenda to grow the state's economy through support of proactive programs that stimulate economic growth opportunities for the entire state and its residents.

Ames Chamber of Commerce/Ames
Economic Development Commission
Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance
Council Bluffs Area Chamber of Commerce
Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce
Greater Burlington Partnership
Greater Cedar Valley Alliance & Chamber
(Waterloo and Cedar Falls)
Greater Des Moines Partnership

Greater Fort Dodge Growth Alliance
Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce
& Industry
Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce
Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce
Mason City Chamber of Commerce/North Iowa
Corridor Economic Development Corporation
Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce
Siouxland Chamber of Commerce

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