

Let's make Minnesota ready to compete

By Doug Loon

Minnesota's future success depends on a vital statewide business community. We must build on our strengths and minimize our weaknesses so all businesses can compete in today's global economy.

We look with optimism to make Minnesota ready for the future— ready for change and ready to grow. The new political landscape presents opportunity to advance initiatives at the 2017 Legislature and work with Governor Dayton to create economic growth for all Minnesotans.

The Minnesota Chamber is your full-time government affairs team— playing “offense” and “defense” on range of issues to help build the bottom lines of all Minnesota businesses no matter the company's size, location or industry. Taxes, transportation, health care, and workplace mandates top our legislative agenda.

Enact tax relief: We will seek to reduce uncompetitive taxes to encourage investment, innovation and growth among all businesses. We will renew our efforts to enact meaningful business property tax relief with primary focus on eliminating the automatic inflator in the statewide business property tax. Also on our radar: Reduce income-tax burdens impeding investment in Minnesota businesses and jobs; enhance the research-and-development tax credit; conform Minnesota's estate tax to the federal threshold.

Pass long-term transportation: Political gridlock has blocked transportation funding in recent years. We will seek to pass strategic and sustained funding of roads, bridges and transit. We support generating new funding through efficiencies in operations, bonding and use of transportation-related revenues from the general fund. Lawmakers should also identify metro funding opportunities for the build-out of Twin Cities transit. Those who benefit directly and distinctively from transportation projects should pay for a share of the costs.

Expand health care options: Health insurance costs are skyrocketing for individuals and small businesses. It's critical that we ensure access to affordable, quality health care for employers and their employees. We will seek to make it easier for small employers to self-insure while opposing new mandates and taxes that increase employer and employee costs. We must reform and stabilize the individual market, which supports the self-employed and those with defined-contribution arrangements. We also must strengthen our public health care programs. Employers have a keen interest insuring that public-sector programs are financially sustainable for the state and taxpayers, and that they prepare participants for eventual transition to coverage in the private sector.

Minimize workplace mandates: We will seek legislation to make explicit the fact that state law preempts municipal regulation of wages and benefits. Minnesota is best served with consistent, statewide laws rather than letting local governments create a patchwork of employer mandates. We will advance legislation to strengthen the law enacted by the 2016 Legislature that prevents abusive lawsuits under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Minnesota Human Rights Act. Also on our agenda is to remove the automatic inflator in the state's minimum wage. As we oppose one-size-fits-all mandates, we will work to share employers' best practices so all businesses in the state are aware of nonregulatory approaches to workplace rules and employee relations that will help them compete for and retain the best employees in a competitive marketplace.

Minnesota has much to be proud of as underscored in our annual Minnesota Business Benchmarks, key economic indicators that measure Minnesota's competitiveness and the health of the state's economy compared with the rest of the country. The benchmarks show stress signals, too. Produced by the Minnesota Chamber and our local Chamber Federation partners, the Business Benchmarks provides an excellent springboard for our legislative agenda.

Minnesota cannot afford to rest on our past successes. We must continue to adapt to changing competitive pressures. Our work at the Minnesota Chamber is to make Minnesota ready for the future – ready for change and ready to grow.

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