

Westerville Area Chamber of Commerce
Legislative Roundtable
April 6, 2017

Speakers Present – Senator Kevin Bacon, Representative Rick Carfagna, Mayor Kathy Cocuzzi, Genoa Township Trustee Connie Goodman

Members Present – Charlene Kott, Charles Griffith, Frank Dantonio, Mark Bennett, Matthew Fisher, Michael Swartz, Ashley Fellers, Kathy Krendl, Jason Koma, Jeff Akers, Jill Rudler, John Kellogg, John Oleyar, Janet Tressler-Davis

Janet thanked **Asset Management** for sponsoring the roundtable today. Charlene Kott shared a few comments.

Janet kicked off the discussion with a roundtable of introductions of members present and an introduction of each speaker.

Member Question –

What is the most pressing issue related to business growth?

Representative Carfagna spoke of the challenges that are here right now are how to manage growth that is already coming. He spoke of the economic differences between the areas that he represents – from the fast-growing economy and low employment in Delaware County to Knox County with its higher unemployment and looming shutdown of Siemens' production operations. He feels that the challenge is to get all the members of government to cooperate from the local township and county level to the state and even federal level.

Senator Bacon indicated that he would like to see the local government fund restored/enhanced. He emphasized the importance of the TRAC system in that it prioritizes infrastructure needs around the state and removes the politics from the decisions.

Representative Carfagna emphasized the need to take care of school infrastructure as well.

Member Question –

What's going on at the state level to encourage manufacturing – for example, what's being done to keep Siemens?

Senator Bacon indicated that "lack of talent" is a big problem – that there has been a major shift in that many of these jobs require a technical background and there have been challenges in finding qualified workers. He indicated that a lot of focus now will be on finding money in the budget for training for manufacturing jobs. He believes that the talent pool is one of the biggest issues.

Representative Bacon expressed his disappointment in the education budget noting cuts to career centers and technical schools.

Rick Akers from Columbus State commented on how they've met with different industries and manufacturers to try to understand what they need so they can provide related education and training. He cited an example of meeting with the insurance industry and then launching an insurance certificate program to meet the qualifications that they were seeking. He indicated however, that there has been a problem in getting their certified students hired by that industry of hiring them at minimum wage.

Member Question –

How do we challenge the need for technical degrees versus 4 year degrees in the long term?

Kathy Krendl discussed things that are happening at Otterbein to help with this balance – ie., opening of the Steam Center, a newly formed 2+2 partnership with Columbus State. She indicated that we need to be careful to not segment the different education paths. She indicated that a challenge for Otterbein and its lower income students is the reduction in OCOG funding – 34% of Otterbein students are Pell grant eligible. Both Cols. State and Otterbein have frozen tuition for the last four years. There are many choices we are providing students from the ability to earn college credit while in HS, moving to Cols. State or the 2+2 track this can be very affordable.

Senator Bacon said that he has made it a high priority to get more money into this program.

Mark Bennett spoke of a “soft skill” training program that had been implemented at Jonathon Alder schools where 70% of kids weren't going to college following graduation. The program guaranteed the “graduates” a minimum of 10 job interviews upon graduation. It has been highly successful – the program went from 4 graduates in its first year to over 400 graduates in its fourth year.

Discussion continued from members of the importance to get industry back in the education process. Encourage employers to offer continuing education. Testing and the State Report Card may be important. Just as important is delivering on what is needed for employers today.

Sen. Bacon commented that 60 billion dollars has been proposed in the state budget

Member Question –

The recent Chamber of Commerce survey results indicated that the topic of business regulations was among the most important to member businesses. Can you tell us what are some of the hot topics regarding business regulations right now?

JCAR has to hear the rules from all agencies. HB2 created two years ago allows for ‘rules’ to be created rather than always a regulation that is required to receive a vote from the legislature. This group is active and working to stream line the agencies.

Janet asked about the state municipal tax issue –it is clear many of the municipalities and the state are not seeing eye to eye on this issue. Bringing uniformity to the income tax collection she presented two of the main concerns our city has expressed and provided solutions that could be considered.

Representative Carfagna believes they are working this out – maybe by using the Ohio Business Gateway system. This is being worked on by the Ways & Means Committee. Mayor Cocuzzi indicated that the City would like to not make it mandatory. She believes that it's important to keep some control at the local level which is in keeping with being a "home rule" state. She also expressed concern over the Senate Bill 331 which relates to cell phone towers and antennas. The city has joined a lawsuit against this bill as in the city's opinion, it is an erosion of the home rule. She added that the legislation came through in December and there were no public hearings. Mayor Cocuzzi also expressed concern regarding a state bill in consideration that would allow chickens on residential properties.

Mayor Cocuzzi asked where the interest goes for taxes collected through the Ohio Business Gateway – back to the local government or state? Representative Bacon said that he would consider it.

Charlene Kott reported that she had to use the Ohio Business Gateway recently for her business and indicated that it was very problematic. If the law moves in the direction to force businesses to use that site, then it needs to have the tools to be able to handle the influx in usage.

Member Question –

What is the status of allowing townships/cities to have medical marijuana dispensaries?

Senator Bacon indicated that they were working on this now and indicated that there was some local controversy as to where these sites can go.

Trustee Connie Goodman stated that she would like to get information as soon as it comes available and that Genoa Trustees are keeping an eye on this issue. Their concern is that though it is legal in Ohio it is still illegal at the federal level.