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Many of you may be aware, 2020 marks the 100th year anniversary of acknowledging women’s right to vote. What was viewed as a social issue, became a movement, and resulted in the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. Today more women than men vote, and we are seeing more women than ever before running for and being elected to seats across the spectrum of government. Topics that are viewed as “social issues” can result in new local, state or federal laws and regulations that impact society to varying degrees, including businesses.

How a business reacts to social issues is as varied as the issues themselves, and to try and sum up the complexities of how businesses weigh these issues in a short column does not do the issues or business justice. It’s safe to say that, whether a business remains neutral on a topic or picks a side, social issues do impact business. Some impacts are good, such as laws that protect employees from discriminatory practices, while others, despite good intentions, only add regulatory burdens and costs, without having the desired effect.

Social issues can and do become business issues, which is the focus of this quarterly issue of Report on Business. The topics selected are issues that GNDC has been monitoring including “ban the box,” FFCRA, opportunity gaps, and addiction. The ramifications of these areas present a cost to business and whether it’s financial or a regulatory burden, it’s essential that business is able to partake in the free enterprise system to succeed. Society, who relies on businesses to provide economic prosperity, must honor the pieces of this system including economic freedom, competition, and profit motive.

We know businesses are working hard to adapt and flex to this constantly changing world, especially in 2020. This is evident in your response to the pandemic guidelines. Business leaders have implemented new health and safety standards put in place by both federal and state governments to protect customers and employees. However, there is a fear among decision makers that despite ongoing efforts to comply, companies are vulnerable to civil liability lawsuits as there is no safe haven. GNDC has been working to ensure decision-makers at all levels of government are aware of the importance of business liability protection. As we prompt lawmakers to provide businesses with support and security, my eyes look ahead to the November general election. Be mindful that your vote carries weight and business leaders in the state need to ensure the right candidates are placed in office. GNDC understands the importance of having policy makers who create and support a business-friendly agenda. These are individuals who fight for the success of your businesses and the economy of our state. Given the current condition of our nation, it is even more vital to ensure the voice of business is heard in North Dakota.

The ND Chamber PAC, a statewide nonpartisan political action committee, allows business leaders to deepen their impact and engage in the political process. Contributions not only enable the ND Chamber PAC to advocate for candidates and policies you support, but also provide you the opportunity to amplify your vote at the statewide level. Donate today at NDChamberPAC.com.

Also, be sure to register for North Dakota’s premier public policy event – the GNDC Policy Summit. We are excited about this exclusive format that will be livestreamed. Registration and panel specifics can be found at NDChamber.com. As always, please feel free to reach out to me with your comments or concerns.

Arik Spencer
CEO and President
arik@ndchamber.com
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (“FFCRA”) took effect on April 1, 2020. This law expanded the Family Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”) by creating new paid leave requirements under the FFCRA’s: (1) Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act and (2) Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act. Based on the guidance and regulations provided by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), this article addresses and answers some frequently asked questions regarding this law.

1. What are the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) requirements under the FFCRA?
The EPSLA provisions require that employers provide full-time employees with eighty (80) hours of paid sick leave to be used by the employee if he/she is unable to work (or telework) due to a need for leave because:

1. The employee is subject to a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;
2. The employee has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine because of COVID-19;
3. The employee is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and is seeking a medical diagnosis;
4. The employee is caring for an individual subject or advised to quarantine or isolation;
5. The employee is caring for a son or daughter whose school or place of care is closed, or child care provider is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions; or
6. The employee is experiencing substantially similar conditions as specified by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Secretaries of Labor and Treasury.

Part-time employees are also entitled to paid sick leave equal to the number of hours they work, on average, over a 2-week period. This paid sick leave does not carry over year-to-year and expires on December 31, 2020.

Paid sick leave must be paid at the employee’s regular rate of pay, but compensation can be capped at $511 per day ($5,110 in the aggregate) if leave is taken for the employee’s own quarantine or symptoms and $200 per day ($2,000 in the aggregate) if leave is taken to care for another.

Employers are also prohibited from:

1. Requiring employees, as a condition of providing paid sick leave, to find a replacement employee to cover their missed shifts;
2. Requiring employees to use other paid leave before using paid sick leave provided under FFCRA; or
3. Retaliating against any employee, who takes paid sick leave or files a complaint about the FFCRA.

2. What are the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act (EFMLEA) requirements under the FFCRA?
The EFMLEA of the FFCRA amended FMLA to provide employees with 12 weeks of job-protected emergency FMLA leave if the employee is unable to work (or telework) due to a need for leave to care for the son or daughter under 18 years of age of such employee if the school or place of care has been closed, or the child care provider of such son or daughter is unavailable, due to a public health emergency. Employees are eligible for this leave if they have worked for the employer for at least 30 calendar days.

The first ten (10) days of leave may be unpaid, but an employee may elect to use accrued vacation, paid time off, or other sick leave during this period of time. The remaining leave would be paid by the employer at two-thirds (2/3) of the employee’s regular rate. The compensation must be based on the number of hours the employee would otherwise normally be scheduled to work. Paid leave for this reason can be capped at $200 per day and $10,000 in the aggregate.

3. Which employers are covered by the FFCRA?
The FFCRA applies to all businesses with fewer than 500 employees.

4. Are there any exclusions to the FFCRA?
Employers of employees who work as health care providers or emergency responders, may elect to exclude those employees from these requirements. The DOL further has authority to exempt small businesses with fewer than 50 employees from the emergency FMLA requirements “when the imposition of such requirements would jeopardize the viability of the business as a going concern.”

5. What are the available tax credits under the FFCRA?
The FFCRA provides a tax credit equal to one hundred percent of qualified EPSLA pay (as identified in question 1 above) and EFMLEA pay (as identified in question 2 above) for any quarter through 2020. In addition to the amounts paid for qualified EPSLA pay and EFMLEA pay, the tax credit is increased by the amount of qualified health plan expenses (i.e., employer-paid health insurance premiums) properly allocable to leave paid pursuant to FFCRA.
Additionally, the tax credit is increased by the amount of the employer’s share of Medicare tax (1.45%) on qualified paid leave required by the FFCRA, and employers are not required to withhold the employee’s share or pay the employer’s share of Social Security tax (6.2%) on FFCRA paid leave.

Employers can immediately access the tax credits under the FFCRA by retaining employment taxes (both the employer’s and the employees’ shares) otherwise required to be deposited with the IRS up to amounts paid for qualified sick leave and family leave payments.

6. How do employees apply for benefits under the FFCRA?
Benefits under the FFCRA should be applied for and documented in a similar manner as regular FMLA benefits. The DOL advises employers to draft certification forms that adhere strictly to the eligibility requirements of the FFCRA. Likewise, the IRS has issued guidance that an eligible employer will substantiate eligibility for the sick leave or family leave credits if the employer receives a written request for such leave from the employee in which the employee provides: (1) the employee’s name; (2) the date(s) for which leave is requested; (3) a statement of the COVID-19 related reason the employee is requesting leave and written support for such reason; and (4) a statement that the employee is unable to work, including by means of telework, for such reason.

7. Where can I go for guidance when dealing with FFCRA issues?
Employers are encouraged to work with professionals, including employment lawyers, accountants, and other professional advisors with experience in navigating FFCRA issues. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) also issued the federal Regulations for the FFCRA, available at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-04-06/pdf/2020-07237.pdf; and the DOL updates its FFCRA Questions and Answers page as needed, available at: https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-questions. The Department’s Q&A page, in particular, gives a wide range of guidance, including how to calculate an employee’s “regular rate” for payment of FFCRA benefits, how and when to use paid leave benefits under internal policy, recordkeeping, intermittent leave considerations, telework options, recertification of EFMLEA benefits when the school year ends, etc.

KrisAnn Norby-Jahner practices employment and education law at the Vogel Law Firm. Contact her at knorby-jahner@vogellaw.com or 701.258.7899
In Focus: FFCRA

As a provider of essential energy and infrastructure services, MDU Resources Group and our family of companies are grateful for the dedication and commitment of our employees during this challenging time. Most notably, our appreciation extends to our frontline employees who have faithfully continued providing safe and reliable energy services to customers’ homes and businesses and have maintained the roads, highways and other infrastructure that are critical to our daily lives and keep our economy moving.

Although we continued to provide uninterrupted services to our customers, COVID-19 impacted every area of our operations in some way. In the Human Resources area, we were significantly impacted by the passage of the Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) like many others.

When the FFCRA went into effect April 1, the language of the act, along with subsequent guidance from the Department of Labor (DOL), was not as clear as we would have hoped. That’s understandable given the accelerated nature of its passage and implementation. It left our company, like others, scrambling to find clear and concise guidance. At MDU Resources, we relied heavily on our legal team, alongside guidance from third-party employment law resources and experts who combed through the FFCRA and DOL rules. This guidance evolved, as did the legislation and DOL rules in the weeks following its passage.

While the FFCRA focused on companies with less than 500 employees, MDU Resources chose to implement the law as consistently as possible across all our companies to simplify leave administration related to COVID-19. Just days after April 1, we effected our new HR practice related to FFCRA and shared it broadly across our companies. The new practice addressed the key provisions related to eligibility, and outlined the new emergency paid sick leave and family medical leave components of the law. In some instances, we chose to offer richer benefits than required by FFCRA.

It was important to explain and train our employees how the new provisions of FFCRA intersected with and enhanced our companies’ existing sick and family medical leave practices. We enacted pay codes specific to COVID-19 so we could track related employee leave and other expenses for financial reporting and regulatory purposes. Within our utility companies, we also daily tracked how many employees were working from home, working in the field, were on vacation, or were out for unscheduled reasons.

In addition to implementing the sick and family medical leave provisions of FFCRA, we took other steps to assist our employees. We eliminated co-pays associated with getting tested for the virus. We provided access to medical and behavioral health services at no extra cost through Doctor on Demand. We lifted vacation caps and gave employees the chance to sell vacation back to the company if they were unable to use it during the pandemic. We gave employees the chance to change their dependent care flexible spending account contributions if their childcare arrangements had been impacted. We also amended our 401(k)-retirement plan to allow employees impacted by COVID-19 to make withdrawals from their accounts without penalty and spread the associated taxes over 3 years.

Without a doubt, it was challenging to implement FFCRA so quickly, especially without clear federal guidance. But these extraordinary times require an equally extraordinary response from all in the business community, including HR professionals. The bottom line for us at MDU Resources was to ensure that FFCRA was implemented and that our employees were aware of and receiving the benefits of the legislation. We wanted them to know they and their families would be taken care of at the same time they were taking care of our customers.

MDU Resources Group, Inc. is the only Fortune 500 headquartered in North Dakota. For additional information on their organization visit mdu.com.

MDU Resources Group, Inc. is the only Fortune 500 headquartered in North Dakota. For additional information on their organization visit mdu.com.
Over the past few years, several states and localities have enacted legislation “banning the box” on job applications, the question asking if a candidate has ever been convicted of a felony and prohibiting employers from running background checks on candidates until the employer has made a conditional offer of employment.

Public-sector employers hiring in 35 states and over 150 localities already prohibit this practice, but the push to expand “ban the box” to private employment is fairly new. Currently, thirteen states have “banned the box” on job applications for private-sector employers as well. North Dakota is included in the list of states who have banned this practice for public-sector employment.

Supporters of “ban the box” policies argue that allowing businesses to inquire into a person’s criminal history disproportionately affects individuals seeking low-wage employment opportunities. Opponents, on the other hand, argue that these policies restrict private employers, and according to research from economists at Texas A&M University and the University of Oregon may decrease employment prospects for minorities.

Though the specifics of the legislation have varied from state to state (and locality to locality), employers are still able to run background checks later in the hiring process, usually after a conditional offer of employment is made. Additionally, employers can choose not to hire an applicant later on in the process when criminal history is revealed, which may cause an employer to miss out on another promising applicant that, in the meantime, has moved on to another employer.

For several decades there has been discussion regarding “ban the box” policies which prohibit employers from conducting background checks until the employer has made a conditional offer of employment. What started as mostly public sector policy seems to have evolved into proposals affecting the private sector. Like many things, what seems like a simple solution often leads to unintended consequences after implementation.

The construction industry in North Dakota is a large employment sector and greatly varied in scope of work and needed skillset. 2019 ND Quarter 3 figures indicate approximately 31,000 people employed, ranging from small local to large international/global operations. Implementing a one-size-fits-all mandate may work fine for some but for certain positions, criminal background checks are necessary due to restrictions of individuals with certain convictions to be on or near a specific location.

There are often private sector solutions to address issues rather than a broad-based mandate. The perception is a “ban the box” policy will provide an avenue for people with criminal backgrounds to receive a second chance in the employment arena. The industry I represent has a history of already providing those second chances. For example, one Associated General Contractors of North Dakota member company has an established partnership with a correctional facility. Together, they place former inmates into construction industry jobs. This relationship has yielded great success for both the employee and the employer.

The legislative process is the place where all types of policy should be thoughtfully discussed. However, when doing so, it is important to understand there usually is no easy fix to complex issues. Broad sweeping regulation places undue burden on businesses of all size which, in turn, will impact the workforce and potential employees.

By Russ Hanson, Executive Vice President of Associated General Contractors of North Dakota

BAN THE BOX – AN INDUSTRY’S PERSPECTIVE
Career discussion begins early in life with a question like, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Children respond with answers related to what they are familiar with: firefighter, teacher, doctor. Then the reaction from the important adults in their lives reinforces or discourages that response. And so, the shepherding down an acceptable path has begun. But what is an acceptable path in today’s workforce and career preparation? The answer to that is as diverse as the students traveling it. There are so many paths for students to consider: straight into the workforce, on-the-job training, apprenticeship, two-year college, four-year college, military, etc. With so many options, students need to know themselves well, develop skills and research all possibilities. Armed with knowledge and a skill set will make finding the right fit for future success more likely.

The success of our students is a high priority, so over time the question changes to, “What college are you going to?” Historically the push in the United States and in North Dakota has been to get a four-year degree. Adults want children to be successful, and in many minds successful means making more money. There has been much marketing to show that more education equals more money. However, if one looks at labor market information, it does not take long to notice there are many high-paying AND high-demand jobs that do not require a four-year degree. A good place to start is with the North Dakota Career Outlook on pages 6 and 7, where you will find “North Dakota Top Careers by Education.”

The average wages for occupations that require certifications or associate degrees are comparable to those of occupations that need a four-year degree. Another perspective can be found by looking through “2019 High Need and Emerging Occupations & Qualifying Programs List” for the Career Builders Scholarship, published by the North Dakota University System.

When comparing the two lists, you will find many occupations that crossover between them, and many that preparation includes training at a two-year college. Students completing programs at two-year colleges achieve two goals: 1. Fill workforce needs; and 2. Achieve success, meeting expectations from the adults around them.

Finding success and meeting workforce needs are two advantages to enrolling at a two-year college, but there are others. Lower tuition rates, smaller class sizes and diversity in instructor backgrounds, to name a few. In North Dakota, the eleven state post-secondary institutions work together to make transitions from one campus to the next as smooth as possible, so if students determine that a change of course is necessary, it does not have to delay their progress.

It is true that preparation for some occupations does require a four-year degree, or more. However, with the world changing as quickly as it is, leaving two-year colleges out of the mix does not meet the needs of all students or the workforce. So maybe it is time to rethink the questions being asked of our children. Maybe the new questions need to be: “What self-knowledge and skills do you have?” – “What self-knowledge and skills do you need?” – “Where is the best place to acquire what you need?”

If you have not seen “Success in the New Economy – Future Built” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=bauDp4NdPK8) by Kevin Fleming, take time to watch it and consider it a challenge to change your mind set about two-year campuses.
AMERICA’S OPPORTUNITY GAPS: 
BY THE NUMBERS
Systemic barriers to equality of opportunity for Black Americans and people of color

By U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce launched the Equality of Opportunity Initiative to address opportunity gaps that perpetuate broader inequalities in our society and hold back individual and business success and economic growth.

Suzanne Clark, President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce stated “In order to drive meaningful, measurable impact through public policy and private sector solutions, we must first listen and learn. This research informs our work as we pursue targeted, data-driven, and sustainable solutions that will help deliver the American promise of equal opportunity to all.”

The US Chamber compiled research to show the magnitude of opportunity gaps in six key areas.

EDUCATION
Racial disparities in learning begin even before formal schooling starts. The "achievement gap" for children begins shortly after birth, with early learning experiences varying considerably based on parents’ income level. In everything from the number of words a young child hears to access to resources like museums or libraries, there is a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and early learning.

EMPLOYMENT
For the past four decades, Black unemployment rates have been consistently twice as high as white unemployment rates. Across six major categories of occupations ranked by 2019 median weekly earnings, 23% of Black (non-Hispanic) workers were employed in the lowest earning groups (manual labor and service occupations) and 25.7% in the highest earning groups (management, professional, and technical occupations). For non-Hispanic white workers, the percentages are 13.3% and 50.4% respectively.

At the same time, disparities in earnings along racial and gender lines are evident across similar occupations and education levels. For example, within “high earning managerial and professional” roles in 2019, the median weekly earnings for non-Hispanic white men was $1,538, while for non-Hispanic Black men the median was $1,167. A smaller gap exists for women.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Entrepreneurship plays an important role in building wealth in families, communities, and economies, but the opportunity to start and grow a business is not equal for white and Black Americans. Black Americans are underrepresented among entrepreneurs, representing 12% of the U.S. labor force but only 9.4% of business owners. They also are less likely than white Americans to launch businesses, and when they do, those businesses tend to have lower revenues and fewer employees.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE
Black Americans represented 27% of all individuals arrested in America in 2016, about twice their proportion of the total population. Black Americans are more likely than white Americans to be arrested. Once they are arrested, they are more likely to be convicted. And once convicted, they are more likely to experience lengthy prison sentences. Black Americans comprise 13% of the U.S. population, but 40% of the incarcerated population, and Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at 5.1 times the rate of white Americans. Data shows it is also harder for Black Americans to bounce back economically after incarceration.

HEALTH
Black Americans have markedly worse health outcomes than white Americans. Black patients are 2 to 3 times as likely to die of preventable heart disease and stroke than white patients. They also have higher rates of cancer, asthma, influenza, pneumonia, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and homicide.

A racial gap in health insurance also exists. In 2018, 54.4% of Black Americans had private healthcare insurance provided by an employer or union, purchased directly or TRICARE – compared to 74.8% for non-Hispanic whites, 73.1% of Asians, and 49.6% of Hispanics.

WEALTH
here are significant racial disparities in wealth in America. At $171,000, the net worth of a typical white family is nearly ten times greater than that of the average Black American family ($17,150). In addition, Black Americans are much more likely to experience poverty: 21% of Black Americans and 8% of whites live below the poverty level, though there have been improvements in recent years.

For more information on the report or the Equality of Opportunity Initiative visit uschamber.com.
The chronic disease of addiction, including the opioid crisis, is one of the biggest challenges facing our nation and our workforce. The numbers don’t lie. It is estimated that heavy drinking by employees alone leads to $82 billion lost in workplace productivity. The overall economic costs associated with addiction are over $600 billion annually in the United States according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. And this may be the most important point: of the over 22 million people in this country with the disease of addiction – nearly 70% of them are employed full-time.

The current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic may only exacerbate the nationwide addiction crisis, as one 2017 study found that every percentage point increase in a county’s unemployment rate drove up the opioid death rate by 3.6%. The added stress and isolation brought on by COVID-19 means that addressing the mental health and addiction issues needs to be a priority now more than ever. While I am not an expert on the disease of addiction, I do have life experience. I have been in recovery from alcohol addiction for over 18 years. I spent 15 of those years in silence. Keeping my recovery and my past struggles with addiction, to myself like they were shameful secrets.

There were two things that made the difference for me in finding recovery: asking for help and a supportive work environment. I started to face my addiction when I reached out to my teamleader at work and shared that I needed help for my addiction.

I was so nervous to tell my employer about my struggles with addiction and feel the judgment that I had felt so many other times before this moment. But after I had shared what I was going through, there were tears in her eyes and a look of compassion and understanding. She simply looked at me and said, “Let’s do this.”

My team leader didn’t look at me as less-than, or make me feel ashamed, she simply listened, showed me compassion and supported me to go to treatment. The current statistics show that only one in 10 people who need treatment for addiction, will actually seek and receive treatment. This open and honest conversation with my employer was a pivotal moment in helping me find recovery.

As leaders in the workforce, you can play a critical role in helping to create recovery-friendly workplaces. That starts with understanding what the face of addiction looks like. It looks like me and it can look like any one of you. Addiction is a disease that does not discriminate based on gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, where you come from or your background.

Employers should seek adaptive solutions to get the most out of your employees, while supporting them through their struggles. This can be done by outlining policies in a benefits package that support treatment or employee assistance program options. In certain instances, employers can also consider transferring employees who are battling addiction to different departments to ensure safety and continuity of work is upheld. Supporting an employee in their recovery creates a culture where employees ‘want’ to invest in their employer because they understand the company is investing in their well-being.

The changes businesses make do not need to be sweeping policy or benefits changes. Even small changes can lead to massive results. Following a conversation with business leaders at one Fargo company, a change was made to add mocktails to the beer garden of their summer employee picnic – providing an inclusive environment that respects employees who may be in recovery or in the middle of their battle with addiction.

Many businesses have employee resource groups that represent diverse groups, such as women in the workplace. Consider starting an employee resource group for those in recovery, or the family and friends of those impacted by addiction.

There are state and national resources that can help employers understand the impact of addiction on the workforce and provide the knowledge and tools to create meaningful change. From the Workplace Cost Calculator that can measure the cost of substance use to a business; Shatterproof Just Five program that offers online, self-paced learning; a variety of workplace toolkits on recoveryreinvented.com; or a behavioral health employer toolkit specifically addressing COVID-19 issues.

Everyone has the power to create a supportive work environment for recovery. You all can be that employer, HR manager, or team leader that I met during my road to recovery who makes all the difference. By eliminating the stigma surrounding addiction, and through creating support for recovery where we work, we are enabling a healthy and strong 21st century workforce that can respond to the emerging challenges we face. Reaching this vision of a workforce that embraces recovery starts with you.
The Board of Directors of the Greater North Dakota Chamber formulates broad policies that govern the activities in the best interest of the membership, GNDC Partners, and the entire business community.

Applicants must work for a current GNDC member and submit a resume with a cover letter expressing their interest in serving on GNDC’s volunteer board of directors. Cover letters should highlight the applicant’s business and civic leadership as well as public policy experience. Consideration will be given to industry, company size, and geography to ensure balanced representation and diversity on the board.

Applications are due by Friday, August 7 and may be sent to GNDC President & CEO Arik Spencer at arik@ndchamber.com.

All applications will be reviewed by the GNDC governance committee, which will recommend candidates to the full board for election in September. If you have any questions, please contact GNDC at 701.222.0929.

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**GNDC IS NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS TO JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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**GNDC IS NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS TO JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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We invite you to engage with regional industry experts who will sit down together to have conversations about topics that are impacting North Dakota’s business climate.

**Aug 25-27**

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*Panel presentation from Governor Burgum

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**Greater North Dakota Chamber 13**
For anyone that knows me, this next statement will not come as a shock. I am an extrovert. I like meeting people, I like shaking hands, I’ll even openly admit, I’m a hugger. The past 3 months have been difficult for the extroverts of the world. I haven’t been able to go out and have meetings, talk over lunch, or buy members a cup of coffee to check-in… and let’s face there wasn’t a face-to-face conference for me to attend anywhere!

In a preCovid world, I spent a lot of time out of the office. Talking to members and nonmembers about the benefits of GNDC. We are the state chamber of commerce, and work on statewide business issues, advocating for the free enterprise system and ensuring North Dakota has one of the best business climates in the nation. I usually share about our policy track record during legislative session or the issues that we stood up for and lobbied against. And most importantly, I talk about how we are the voice for business. This abstract thought is the true essence of the chamber and often can’t be drawn out in diagrams or flowcharts or listed in the benefit list.

Enter Covid – 19.

While many organizations and business found themselves in panic mode, GNDC dug deep. We were quick to switch gears – shifting from the upcoming session to ensuring businesses had resources. We put up our COVID-19 resource page in one day and have been updating since then. We started pumping out validated resources and researching ongoing policies that would impact or regulate business. We worked to partner with the State of North Dakota and we reached out to our congressional delegation. But the biggest thing we did, to ensure we were moving in the right direction was listen.

Our COVID-19 procedures didn’t look any different than our normal operating procedures. The focus remained on our members. We replied to phone calls, emails, and texts to answer questions or hear concerns. We hunted down answers, held webinars, talked to experts to provide current, clear information, and we asked about you, your business, and your ongoing struggles. We wanted to be sure we put your concerns on our radar. This ensured that you could focus on your work and your employees.

Businesses are the heart the North Dakota’s economy. Leaders like you are what make our businesses successful. Your workforce is relying on you and we are here to help. I often think of GNDC as an umbrella. You don’t need it all the time but when the rain starts coming, you are sure glad you have it.

In the meantime, I’m planning a roadtrip – if you want to chat more about your membership benefits, I’d love to buy you a cup of coffee. Shoot me an email to schedule something, chris@ndchamber.com.

**We are pleased to welcome these businesses to GNDC!**

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BCBSND is here to support your organization by protecting the health and well-being of your employees. We've taken steps to expand coverage related to COVID-19. We're offering fully covered testing, expanded telehealth and wellness benefits along with more support for employers and members.

Find expanded coverage details at BCBSND.com/covid-19

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Contact an agent today.

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Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross & Blue Shield Association
Twenty nine counties and thousands of landowners have united to support wind energy developments benefitting schools, emergency responders, roads, veterans and so much more. Landowners are seeing how significant their lease payments have been in supporting their farm and ranch operation, making them more resilient for up to 25 years. Wind Energy has grown to 3,600 megawatts of electricity being produced throughout 29 North Dakota counties, offering some of the least expensive electricity rates in the country.

Landowners and County Officials encourage the Public Service Commission to support Wind Energy in North Dakota.