

Advance priorities in St. Paul, Washington

By David C. Olson

Are you frustrated with the direction Minnesota and the nation are heading? Do you feel like policy-makers – whether in St. Paul or Washington, D.C. - really don't understand what it takes to run a business? Do you have the impression that some leaders don't listen at all?

Two important events warrant your attention and participation.

First stop: Join the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, our local chamber partners and your colleagues March 10 at the annual Minnesota Business Day at the Capitol.

Second stop: Join the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Executives and business leaders May 17-19 in Washington, D.C., as we lobby federal policy-makers in conjunction with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Small Business Summit.

Close to home, the 2010 Legislature is under way. If our recent regional meetings across the state are any indication, Minnesota business leaders are nervous about what lawmakers may do "to them" this session, especially as they balance another multibillion-dollar shortfall in the state's checkbook. There's a growing lack of confidence that our elected officials truly understand the daily challenges that businesses face in running their operations and providing jobs for Minnesotans.

Business leaders have an opportunity to speak in unison by participating in Business Day at the Capitol, the largest business lobbying day in Minnesota. Join us as we lobby with one voice on the issues that will shape the state's economy.

The Minnesota Chamber [Federation represents more than 15,000 Minnesota companies](#). Our top five priorities this year are: Streamline the environmental permitting system to reduce cost and compress the timeline; secure a reliable supply of electricity at competitive rates; advocate meaningful spending and tax reforms; guarantee world-class workforce; ensure quality and affordable health care. Our collective focus is making certain that Minnesota is poised for growth as we recover from the recession.

The folks who want to increase taxes and regulations on Minnesota businesses, and spend more of someone else's tax dollars, are in St. Paul every day. The spending lobby is a drumbeat. Business leaders go the Capitol once a year as a large group. Let's bring a thousand business leaders together.

On the federal scene, we are hearing more and more concerns across the state. That has not always been the case. Business leaders are worried about the impact of proposed health care reform. Other equally important issues remain in the wings – cap and trade, immigration reform and the Employee Free Choice Act. The list is long, and the implications of the wrong solutions could be devastating to Minnesota companies and our national economy.

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Executives coordinates an annual trip to Washington for local chambers and their members. We include meetings with all members of the Minnesota congressional delegation. In addition, we partner with the

U.S. Chamber on an agenda that includes a number of nationally known speakers and political analysts. We arrange “Minnesota only” events as well.

We appreciate that business leaders work overtime at running their businesses, especially in the current economy. It’s vitally important, however, that legislators hear our united message: The business community is paying attention, and the issues under debate make a big difference to our companies.

Thanks for your continuing support, and I hope to see you in St. Paul and Washington. Together, we can make an impact.

David Olson is president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. For more information, visit the Web at www.mnchamber.com.