The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce will proactively lead the business community statewide to:

- Advance pro-business, responsible Minnesota public policy that creates jobs and grows the economy
- Provide member services to address evolving business needs
- Be nonpartisan
For the first time in more than 20 years, the Minnesota Legislature and executive branch were governed by single-party control. The 2012 election swept Democrats into the majority with Governor Mark Dayton at midpoint in his first term.

With this political backdrop, the Minnesota Chamber worked hard on behalf of our 2,300 members statewide to bring balance to the debate at the Capitol. We were successful in mitigating a number of legislative proposals that would have been harmful to businesses in our state. One example was our broad grassroots campaign that effectively limited Governor Dayton’s proposal to extend the state sales tax to business-to-business services. Had it passed as the Governor proposed, this new tax would have cost Minnesota businesses $3.2 billion. Another was blocking an increase in the state minimum wage far beyond federal levels and those of neighboring states.

Despite these efforts, the session’s results will have a significant impact on employers and Minnesota’s economic competitiveness going forward. Rather than prioritizing spending, reforming and redesigning operations and services, the Governor and Legislature chose to raise more than $2.3 billion in taxes to resolve a $627 million short-term budget shortfall, impose a host of new fees and regulations, and roll back bipartisan reforms and initiatives. The result is more government at higher cost with no guarantee of better results or improved quality of life for Minnesotans. Government spending will grow by nearly $3 billion, an 8% increase in FY 2014-2015, and nearly $4 billion, an 11% increase in FY 2016-2017.

The 2013 Legislative Voting Record includes votes on key issues based on our members’ priorities. Our successes are measured not only by legislation passed, but also by legislation blocked. It’s unfortunate, but as a result of the 2012 elections, we found ourselves doing more blocking than passing. That means we did not make the progress we had hoped for in strengthening our state’s business and job creation environment.

We are grateful to the senators and representatives who listened to the concerns of employers and voted in support of the Chamber’s position. After you review our report, please take time to thank those policymakers who voted with us on key issues. Don’t neglect those who did not. Use their votes to begin a conversation about the impact their actions will have on your business. Help them understand why, had they voted with the Chamber, your business would be stronger and, potentially, employing more of their constituents.
EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Education and workforce development are priority issues for the Minnesota Chamber. In 2013, we sought solutions to address the immediate workforce need for a greater supply of skilled workers and improve the strength of the education-to-workforce pipeline.

HF 729 - Workforce Development Provisions in the Omnibus Jobs and Economic Development Bill *

The Chamber’s workforce development bill (SF 899/HF 1046), carried by Senator Terri Bonoff, DFL-Minnetonka, and Representative Tim Mahoney, DFL – St. Paul, was ultimately included within the Omnibus Jobs and Economic Development Bill (HF 729). The bill contained measures to strengthen workforce development through publication of labor market supply and demand reports, use of data to guide postsecondary program offerings, and better use of workforce centers to assist adults and students with career pathway counseling. In the Omnibus Jobs Bill, we also advanced a pilot program in manufacturing to enable students to receive customized education paired with on-the-job skills training. The Chamber strongly supported these provisions; however, the vote on this bill was not scored due to other provisions in the bill (discussed below).

SF 1236 - Omnibus Higher Education Bill *

By 2018, 70 percent of the jobs in Minnesota will require some postsecondary training. That urgency compelled the Chamber to examine postsecondary education in Minnesota and advocate policy recommendations to ensure students are ready for postsecondary education, can afford and are benefiting from postsecondary experiences, and are well prepared for the workforce. The Omnibus Higher Education Bill contained several policy provisions supported by the Chamber, including (1) enhanced performance funding measures for the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Colleges and University System; (2) investment in Teach for America; (3) continued development of the State Longitudinal Education Database (SLEDS); and (4) improved affordability for students. While the Chamber strongly supported these provisions, proposed spending levels for this budget item and other sectors of the state budget required substantial revenue increases, causing serious concern.

Legislator Spotlight: Workforce
Rep. Tim Mahoney
DFL-St. Paul
Rep. Jason Isaacson
DFL-Shoreview
Sen. Terri Bonoff
DFL-Minnetonka

These legislators were key advocates for advancing workforce development policies. Representative Tim Mahoney was chief author of Chamber-led legislation requiring production of a workforce report that will be used to better understand Minnesota's workforce needs. Freshman Representative Jason Isaacson developed legislation that creates a customized training program in manufacturing that integrates academic instruction and on-the-job training to meet employers' training needs. Senator Terri Bonoff was chief author of Chamber-led workforce development legislation, and crafted an omnibus higher education bill containing key measures needed to improve the strength of the education-to-workforce pipeline.

HF 630 - Final K-12 Education Omnibus Committee Report

The Chamber opposed several major policy and finance provisions in the K-12 Education Omnibus Conference Committee Report. Although the bill made investments in early childhood education, all-day kindergarten, and the general education formula, other provisions required us to oppose the bill. The Chamber's primary objections included lowered expectations for obtaining a high school diploma (see below), and returning to a statewide general education levy without a corresponding reduction in the statewide business property tax, which results in an additional layer of property taxes on Minnesota businesses.

HF 630 - Amendment to Omnibus K-12 Education Omnibus Bill - Minimum Standards for High School Graduation (Erickson/Pratt)

The Chamber advocated keeping Minnesota high school diplomas meaningful by proposing a minimum level of proficiency required for graduation on the new suite of high school exams. High school diplomas should be based on multiple measures, including an assessment by which students must demonstrate mastery of fundamental academics. While the Chamber was not successful in establishing a minimum proficiency level, we will have a role in development of the new assessments as a member of the Career Pathways Advisory Task Force.

ELECTIONS *

The Chamber advocated for moving the statewide primary election from August to June starting in 2014 in order to drive stronger voter turnout, maximize candidate voter contact efforts, and ensure a more representative candidate selection process. Efforts to effect this change enjoyed bipartisan support in the House (HF 867), but the legislation did not reach a final vote. In its omnibus elections bill (SF 667), the Senate considered moving the primary to June but not until 2016; however, the measure was removed before the final vote. Prospects for the bill next year are uncertain because any changes to voting dates must be done early in the session to allow sufficient time for implementation.

*Indicates a bill that was not scored.
Infographic Sources: Minnesota Jobs Outlook 2010-2020, Department of Employment and Economic Development (July 2012).
40% of their retail sales from qualified renewable energy sources by 2030. These mandates exempted certain industries in certain areas of the state because they are so energy intensive. These exemptions highlight sensitivity and concern about costs, but compound the financial burden and unfairness to others subjected to the mandates. Many other industries throughout the state have high energy use and costs as well. Further, this bill could potentially threaten the reliability of Minnesota's grid. Increasing reliance on intermittent resources like solar and wind at levels above 30% is currently untested with unknown impacts to reliability.

HF 956/SF 901 - Senate Omnibus Energy Bill - Commercial and Industrial Solar Energy Standard Exemption (Koenen Amendment)

This bill included a 1% solar mandate by 2025 and solar industry incentives and preferences. While not as expansive as the House version, the bill still would require significant investment in an expensive generation technology by utilities when they do not need new generation.

The Chamber supported an amendment to exempt all demand-metered customers 25 kilowatts and higher – the threshold to be considered a commercial/industrial customer across many of the state's investor-owned utilities – from the calculation and payment of 1% solar standard, to reduce their energy costs.

Senator Lyle Koenen
DFL-Clara City

Senator Lyle Koenen, recognizing the potential for cost increases to customers from provisions included in the omnibus energy bill, offered a key amendment to protect commercial and industrial customers from the costs of new solar mandates. Businesses throughout the state are concerned about increasing energy bills. Senator Koenen's amendment would have helped mitigate these costs.

Senator David Tomassoni
DFL-Chisholm

As chair of the Environment, Economic Development and Agriculture Finance Committee, Senator David Tomassoni authored and advanced the Chamber's priority cost-based electric rates legislation in the Senate. We appreciate Senator Tomassoni's hard work to ensure this important job retention and energy cost-saving legislation was included in his committee's omnibus bill. We also acknowledge his work to assure that there were no increased fees on water appropriation permits, aquatic plant management and mining industry fees in his bill.

Legislator Spotlight: Energy
Representative Pat Garofalo
R-Farmington

As Republican lead on the House Energy Committee, Representative Pat Garofalo is an important voice raising concerns about the increasing cost of energy in Minnesota and the policies that drive rates higher. Energy rates in Minnesota continue to increase faster than many of our surrounding states and the country as a whole, affecting the ability of businesses to compete, create and retain jobs. Representative Garofalo voted for the House energy omnibus bill in order to serve on the conference committee and have impact on the final bill. We appreciate his efforts to make energy more affordable in Minnesota.

ENVIRONMENT *

Despite bipartisan cooperation and success in improving efficiency and transparency in the state's environmental permitting and review process in previous years, the Legislature did not advance this issue this session, instead focusing on budget matters. It is anticipated that in 2014 the Legislature will address further reform proposals, including improvements to the 90-day permitting goal.
FISCAL

HF 677 - House Omnibus Tax Bill
The Chamber opposed the bill because of its $2.6 billion tax increase including a permanent new 4th tier of 8.49% and 5th-tier surcharge of 12.49% for individual incomes, making Minnesota’s tax rate the second highest nationally. The bill included a $316 million (16%) corporate tax increase that would undermine Minnesota competitiveness. Other tax increases included an industrial sand mining tax, automatic inflation on various spending increases, a cigarette tax increase and a “street improvement fee,” equivalent to a new property tax. We supported the Mayo Destination Medical Center provision, which provided economic development funding for public improvements for the City of Rochester, but opposed the overall bill.

HF 677 - Senate Omnibus Tax Bill
This bill included a $1.8 billion tax increase, raising the individual income tax from 7.85% to 9.4% on incomes greater than $140,000 for married joint filing and $70,000 for single filing. Under this proposal, Minnesota’s individual income tax rate would be the fourth highest nationally, first nationally for certain income levels. The Chamber opposed the statewide property tax increases, business-to-business sales tax expansion, utility tax increases, and corporate tax increases included in this bill. We supported the Mayo Destination Medical Center, but opposed the overall bill due to its serious tax implications.

HF 677 - Final Tax Conference Committee Report
Historic tax increases of more than $2.1 billion now place our state as one of highest tax states in the nation. The tax increases include: (1) a 25% increase in income tax, raising $1.1 billion with 9.85% rate greater than $150,000 for single filing, $250,000 for married joint filing; (2) a $424 million (21%) increase in corporate taxes; (3) new business-to-business taxes on businesses providing the services for warehouse and storage, telecommunication equipment, labor repair and maintenance services for electronic, commercial, farm, medical, computer, and industrial equipment; and (4) cigarette tax increases of $1.60 per pack and a 95% increase in tobacco products, making Minnesota the sixth highest nationally at $2.83 per pack, much higher than surrounding states. As previously indicated, we supported the Mayo Destination Medical Center, and have long advocated for the capital equipment up-front sales-taxes exemption and affiliate nexus tax provision, but because the overall tax burdens are so consequential to business competitiveness, the Chamber strongly opposed the bill.

HF 5 - Health Insurance Exchange
The Chamber has consistently supported the creation of a state health insurance exchange to provide small businesses with greater information, choice and affordability in purchasing health insurance. We opposed this legislation because it financed a state exchange through a premium tax on small businesses, reduced innovation and consumer choice through active purchasing, and restricted small business representation and service on the governance board.

LEGISLATOR SPOTLIGHT: Health Care
Rep. Jim Abeler
R-Anoka
Senator Terri Bonoff
DFL-Minnetonka
Representative Jim Abeler and Senator Terri Bonoff voted to strategically help advance Chamber positions on this legislation. We are grateful for their efforts to lessen small businesses’ costs for purchasing insurance by reducing the premium tax and allowing for greater choice and competition within the exchange.

HF 1233 - Health and Human Services HMO Surcharge Amendment (Benson)
The Chamber supported this amendment because it eliminated a surcharge which would have increased the cost of health insurance for small businesses.

HF 1233 - Omnibus Health and Human Services Mandated Benefits Amendment (Benson)
The Chamber supported this amendment because it required the state to determine the cost-effectiveness of existing and future mandated benefits, which make health coverage more expensive for small businesses in the fully insured market.

*Indicates a bill that was not scored.
Infographic Sources: Minnesota Management and Budget February, 2013 Budget Forecast and Senate Fiscal Analysis Staff report.
LABOR MANAGEMENT
HF 92/SF 3 - Minimum Wage - Federal Conformity Amendment (Loon)

We supported this amendment to conform minimum wage to federal minimum wage law. An increase beyond federal conformity hurts Minnesota jobs and disproportionately affects small businesses and border communities across our state.

Despite these positive measures, the Chamber ultimately opposed the bill due to the inclusion of the labor lockout language and the cost of the energy provisions on ratepayers.

LEGISLATOR SPOTLIGHT: LABOR/MANAGEMENT
SENATOR PAUL GAZELKA
R-NISSWA

Senator Paul Gazelka played an instrumental role in organizing a bipartisan group of senators to oppose extending unemployment benefits for locked-out workers well beyond the time allowed under current law. He was joined by all of the members of the Republican caucus and the following DFL Senators: Terri Bonoff, DFL-Minnetonka; Melissa Franzen, DFL-Edina; Vicki Jensen, DFL-Owatonna; Susan Kent, DFL-Woodbury; Ann Rest, DFL-New Hope; Bev Scalze, DFL-Little Canada; and Melissa Wiklund, DFL-Bloomington.

SF 1234 - Workers’ Compensation

The Workers’ Compensation Advisory Council bill, presented and supported by business and labor, included provisions giving workers appropriate benefit increases while studying health care costs and laying the groundwork for reforms in 2014. The Chamber believes this bill helps move Minnesota in the right direction, and it is our hope that the opportunity to study the system’s health care costs will uncover strategies to address cost concerns. Business and labor will both participate in the study and recommendation process via the Workers’ Compensation Advisory Council.

LEGISLATOR SPOTLIGHT: WORKERS’ COMPENSATION
REPRESENTATIVE ANDREA KIEFFER, R-WOODBURY
REPRESENTATIVE TIM MAHONEY
DFL-ST. PAUL

Representative Andrea Kieffer, the House Republican liaison to the Workers’ Compensation Advisory Council, was an important leader in moving the provisions in the council agreement to final legislation. She participated in many of the council meetings and was effective in articulating the importance of these provisions to her colleagues. The agreement was one of the most significant between business and labor representatives in many years. Representative Kieffer was instrumental in ensuring the unanimous passage of the Workers’ Compensation Advisory Council reform legislation in the House. Representative Tim Mahoney as Chair of the House Jobs and Economic Development Committee was also key to final passage of the agreement.

TRANSPORTATION *

The Transportation Finance Policy bill (SF 1444) represented a “lights on” legislative measure that effectively continued current funding. The Legislature considered including a wholesale fuel receipts tax, a gas tax, a metro sales tax on transit, and a street improvement fee proposal to allow local governments to impose property taxes, potentially only on businesses, to raise additional revenue. These measures were not included in the final bill, in many cases due to the Chamber’s advocacy.

*Indicates a bill that was not scored.
Infographic Sources: These rates are for 16-19 year-olds. 2010 and 2011 averages are BLS tabulations of CPS data. Current teen rate is based on 2012 BLS tabulations of Current Population Survey (BLS and Census) data.
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**Legend:**
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