**Delivering on the Jobs Agenda**

**The Illinois Chamber of Commerce**

**A Report to the Illinois Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors**

**December 2011**

**Setting the Agenda**

In 2011, the Illinois Chamber of Commerce compelled lawmakers to act on the business community’s biggest priorities by producing a “Jobs Agenda” and advocating for employers through:  
  
**Demanding Change**: The Chamber challenged the state’s most entrenched interests to fix Illinois’ broken workers’ compensation system.

**Offering Invaluable Member Resources:**  Through unique marketing, networking and educational opportunities, the Chamber provided members with the latest information on evolving energy, environmental, transportation, health care, trade and tax policies.

**Providing Peerless Legislative Expertise**: The Chamber pressed for a better business climate in Illinois by initiating pro-jobs legislation and halting proposals harmful to Illinois employers.

**Demanding Change**

**Leading the Charge on Workers’ Compensation**

The Illinois Chamber acted as the business community’s most relentless and outspoken advocate in its drive to reform Illinois’ expensive and flawed workers’ compensation system in 2011. The Chamber was instrumental in framing the worker’s compensation debate and – through effective outreach to media, allies, legislators and grassroots networks – turning up the heat on the state’s public officials.

The result was to jump-start dormant workers’ compensation reforms. While more progress is needed, Chamber members have the momentum for continued improvement of Illinois’ workers’ compensation system.

**Advancing Employers’ Priorities**

* The Chamber helped encourage economic growth and open Illinois businesses to new markets in 2011 through its successful efforts to increase international trade. In addition to making global business the centerpiece of its annual meeting, the Chamber also effectively lobbied Illinois’ Congressional Delegation to approve free trade agreements with South Korea, Colombia and Panama.
* The Chamber worked to sustain investment in Illinois’ roads, bridges and railways by educating the state’s new Congress members, and encouraging the Illinois delegation to support long-term transportation funding despite Congress’s current sentiment toward restrained spending. [Photo A]
* The $12-billion Illinois Toll Highway Authority capital plan, which will modernize roadways, ease congestion, stimulate the economy and help businesses efficiently move goods and services, benefitted from Chamber support. [Photo B].

**Offering Invaluable Member Resources**

**Guiding Members and Lawmakers**

* In August, the Chamber conducted a one-of-a-kind networking and education experience – “Taking the Future Out for a Spin” – in conjunction with Argonne National Laboratory, the Autobahn Country Club in Joliet and several of the nation’s vehicle manufacturers. During the event, elected officials and 150 members test drove the latest alternative-fuel vehicles and learned about new infrastructure and energy developments. [Photo C]
* The Chamber’s Energy Council arranged visits to key Illinois power stations for Chamber members, government agency staff and elected officials to highlight the jobs and economic benefits attributable to the state’s energy industry. The group visited Prairie State Energy Campus, the nation’s newest coal generation power plant showcasing state of the art technology, and several energy facilities in LaSalle County. [Photo D]
* A record number of members – from Fortune 500 executives to new entrepreneurs – participated in more than 60 webinars produced by the Chamber’s Business Services Division (BSD), covering such vital business subjects as global trade, social media, finances and human resources. BSD’s expanded program helps employers better manage their businesses and employees.
* Members received insight and the latest information on two of the most troublesome business costs at the Chamber’s health care and workers’ compensation conferences.

**Spotlighting Key Issues for Businesses**

* Governor Quinn and legislative leaders headlined this year’s Business Lobby Day, which was devoted to passing workers’ compensation reform legislation. The Chamber’s unwavering dedication to workers’ compensation reform was demonstrated by employer participation and aggressive statewide media outreach.
* The Chamber’s Infrastructure Council organized two private roundtables with U.S. Dept. of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, at which members were able to share their opinions on Illinois’ transportation priorities.
* Launched in 2011, the revamped Chamber website and “Chamber Dispatch” blog make it easier than ever for members to connect with vital employer information and keep up to date with the latest news affecting Illinois’ business community.

**Forging Connections Between Employers and Our Military**

* The Chamber convened several successful “Hire our Heroes” events across the state to connect employers with unemployed veterans, National Guardsmen and Reserve personnel in partnership with the U.S. Chamber and local chambers of commerce.
* To increase the amount of business the Illinois National Guard transacts with Illinois companies, the Illinois Chamber and local chambers registered more than 50 employers as National Guard vendors.
* At its annual meeting, the Chamber honored four members – Ford, Ameren, CSX and Hanson Professional Services – that won the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Freedom Award in 2011. The award is the highest honor the Secretary of Defense can bestow on employers for their support of workers serving in the National Guard and Reserve.

**Providing Peerless Legislative Expertise**

**Furthering Real Solutions**

* The Chamber published its Jobs Agenda in 2011 to provide legislators, local chamber executives, business leaders and members of the media with a blueprint for how to effectively promote growth and prosperity in Illinois, from enhancing economic development to adopting a tax policy that favors job creation [Photo E].
* More than 6,000 permit-holding Illinois businesses benefitted from successful legislation championed by the Chamber and the Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group (IERG) to improve the Illinois EPA’s inefficient and unpredictable air permitting practices.
* Illinois employers will save more than $400 million in unemployment insurance taxes through 2019 thanks to legislation shaped by the Chamber to address the state’s debt to the federal unemployment insurance trust fund while restoring the solvency of the Illinois Department of Employment Security reserve.
* Small businesses will benefit from increased competition among insurance providers, and be better able to provide health benefits in accordance with the federal Affordable Care Act, thanks to the General Assembly’s passage of the Health Benefits Exchange Act – a major legislative win for the Chamber.
* Through Live Healthy Illinois, the Chamber’s workplace wellness initiative, 4,000 employees from 70 companies exercised for 9 million minutes, lost more than 17,000 pounds and potentially reduced their future health care costs by as much as $1 million.

**Directing Efforts to Defend Illinois Businesses**

* The Chamber testified before the General Assembly on behalf of Illinois’ business community to oppose the state’s 67 percent corporate tax increase, and provided a comprehensive list of recommended measures to the Legislature’s Joint Committee for Business Tax Reform [Photo F].
* The Chamber championed: rollback of the corporate income tax rate increase; extension of the research and development tax credit; restoration of the net operating loss deduction; increasing the inheritance tax exemption to match federal law; changing the apportionment formula for electronic trades; and opposed disallowing accelerated depreciation for equipment purchases.
* Illinois companies can continue to buy and store goods intended for multi-state use without incurring sales tax – keeping jobs, businesses and revenue in state – as a result of the Chamber’s successful work with the General Assembly to extend the temporary storage tax exemption.
* Employers avoided having to pay a back-door tax increase thanks to the Chamber’s alert intervention to derail the Secretary of State’s effort to change franchise tax reporting.
* A last-minute attempt to rewrite the state’s sales tax law as it pertains to sourcing would have unfairly penalized Illinois retailers and put local businesses at risk. The Chamber tagged the measure’s overly vague language and successfully thwarted the legislative effort mounted by the Department of Revenue, the Regional Transportation Authority and several local governments to reverse 80 years of sales tax law.