

# FOSTERING AN ENGAGED ELECTORATE IN THE WORKPLACE



**Barbra Solberg**, public policy strategist at the Economic Alliance; **Doug Neumann**, executive director of the Economic Alliance





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OCTOBER 2020  
VOLUME 10 | NUMBER 10



The Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) is the voice of Iowa business. It is Iowa's oldest and largest business network, representing 1,500 businesses that employ more than 333,000 Iowans. ABI benefits members by advocating on their behalf at the statehouse, connecting them with decision-makers to share ideas and services, offering solutions and best practices for issues that affect their businesses and developing our state's business and civic leaders.

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Business Record® (USPS 154-740, ISSN 1068-6681) is published by Business Publications Corporation Inc., The Depot at Fourth, 100-4th Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309, (515) 288-3336. Contents © 2020 Business Record. Published weekly. Annual subscriptions \$69.95. Single copy price is \$1.75. Copies of past issues, as available, may be purchased for \$4.50 each. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Business Publications, The Depot at Fourth, 100-4th Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309.

A CUSTOM PUBLICATION FOR ABI

## A VIEW FROM THE TOP

# Iowa is Better When Iowans Vote



**Steven M. Bradford**  
*ABI Chair  
HNI Corporation  
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Next month's important national, state and local elections and getting out the vote are the focus of this edition of Business Record Iowa. ABI members take voting seriously and our organization provides several resources to help you and your employees make informed choices.

One key resource is **IAVotes.com**, a non-partisan project to assist employers in communicating with employees and the community about the people and policies that impact their jobs and industries. ABI is proud to support IA Votes, a partnership between the Business-Industry Political Action Committee and Economic Progress for Iowa's Citizens (EPIC). EPIC is a coalition of Iowa business organizations that seeks to promote information about candidates and policies. Read more about IA Votes in this edition of Business Record Iowa and then go online to learn more.

Most importantly, share information about candidates, campaigns and policies with your employees and encourage them to vote. Iowa is better when Iowans vote.

By the way, it is not too early to make your plans to attend two important ABI events—they are must-attend events for Iowa's business community. On January 13, 2021, ABI will hold its annual Legislative Reception. This event draws hundreds of Iowa business leaders and more state officials of both parties than any other similar event. And June 8-10 is the date for the 2021 Taking Care of Business Conference, ABI's 118th annual convention. This is simply Iowa's very best business event of the year. Go to [www.iowaabi.org](http://www.iowaabi.org) for more information.

In the meantime and as always, thank you for your support of ABI. ■

## IOWA BUSINESS REPORT

# ABI-Supported Radio Program Shares Iowa Success Stories



**Jeff Stein**  
*Host, Iowa Business Report  
[radio@totallyiowa.com](mailto:radio@totallyiowa.com)*

Whether a multi-generation, family-owned manufacturer...an entrepreneur making her dream of a start-up become reality...or a new owner taking an established company in wider directions...the success stories of Iowa's businesses are compelling.

Each week, the "Iowa Business Report" radio program tells the stories of Iowa business and industry, detailing economic trends, profiling businesses, and examining the factors that impact the state's growth and development. The centerpiece of the program is made up of interviews with business leaders, economists, professional development experts and others who contribute to the dynamic and diverse blend making up Iowa's economic drivers.

The half-hour radio program airs on some of Iowa's most respected radio stations, including WMT in Cedar Rapids, KXEL in Waterloo/Cedar Falls, KASI in Ames/Des Moines, KMA in Shenandoah, KGLO in Mason City, KFJB in Mar-

shalltown, KSCJ in Sioux City, KROS in Clinton, KALA in Davenport, KXIC in Iowa City, KFVD in Fort Dodge and KSIB in Creston.

Sponsored by the Iowa Association of Business and Industry, the radio program is also available as a podcast, along with extended interviews that are only available online.

Listen to podcasts of the "Iowa Business Report" by going to [www.totallyiowa.com](http://www.totallyiowa.com) and clicking on the radio programs link, or by subscribing to any of the popular podcast platforms, including iHeart, Apple, Google, Stitcher, Spotify and TuneIn. Podcasts are also posted at [www.iowaabi.org](http://www.iowaabi.org).

*Jeff Stein is a 40-year broadcasting veteran who produces and hosts the "Iowa Business Report" each week through his company, Totally Iowa Media. He welcomes suggestions for the weekly IBR Business Profile, as well as ideas for program topics generally. He can be reached at [radio@totallyiowa.com](mailto:radio@totallyiowa.com). ■*





## CULTIVATING IOWA'S TALENT CONTINUUM

# The ABI Foundation Starts Next Fiscal and Programming Year, 2020-21

As I try to put this year into words, I'm thinking of all we've said to bring comfort to each other. I often add "someday" or "soon" to my comments. What might have changed the most is what opportunities and challenges mean, for each person, family, business and community. The ABI Foundation has been a source of information, support and encouragement for individuals and organizations for nearly 40 years. These are the principles that have and continue to see us through.

## When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

We have seen Iowans respond. Companies pivoted their services to manufacture needed materials and products, such as the production of face masks and hand sanitizer. Executives with vision and skilled workers prepared and collaborated. Iowans are stepping up beyond their titles and responsibilities to help the greater good.

There are numerous examples of this in Iowa businesses across the state, many with the help of the more than 6,500 alumni of the ABI Foundation's three statewide leadership programs. We're proud we inform and inspire Iowans with life-changing experiences so that there are lifelong leaders at work for our state.

## It's what's "next" more than what's "new."

The change of our calendar and the conversations I've had with business leaders about the upcoming months prompts me to consider the difference of 'now' and 'then.' Despite the disruptions of the pandemic, what you've done and what you do continue to be important.

Seeking new beginnings (or a 'new normal') can be wonderful, but immediate next steps are often more impactful.

Our staff has worked to continue to achieve exceptional experiences while going from in-person to virtual programming. There was a lot of discussion about reinventing the wheel versus recreating the wheel, and we adapted our proven processes for participant outcomes into online formatting that met the needs of the moment.

## One leader at a time.

I'm the most encouraged when I think of each person who makes our work possible. The guidance and passion of our board members. The collaboration of our partners. The energy from our volunteers. The endorsement of our sponsors. The dedication of our donors. Overcoming their own difficulties, they rallied to support the ABI Foundation.

Words are powerful. So is action. Iowans are afforded opportunities because leaders provide them. Our network let us know the value our programs provide to them, their organizations and the State of Iowa. We are so grateful for their ongoing commitment.

These are my reflections as we are moving forward. Lastly, I would like to invite you to get involved with us. An immediate action you can take on our behalf is making a personal donation at [www.iowaabi.org/abi-foundation/pay-online/](http://www.iowaabi.org/abi-foundation/pay-online/).

With any questions, you can reach me at [rcoady@iowaabi.org](mailto:rcoady@iowaabi.org) or 515-235-0569. ■



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## EXPERT ADVICE

# When Impossible, Becomes Possible

It's nearly cliché to say now, but 2020 has been the year where the impossible becomes possible. Entire nations shut down, stock markets hit new lows, "hurricanes" devastate the Midwest, impossible became possible. On the flip side, innovations abound, toolboxes transform into life-saving ventilators, drones deliver packages and "To-Go Cocktails" become permanent. As a leader, it's time to make the impossible, possible, and technology can help make it happen.

As a leader, it's time to make the impossible, possible, and technology can help make it happen.

Companies that are not just surviving but thriving through this climate had either previously invested in progressive technologies that help their organizations work more efficiently, innovatively or better engage with the customer. Or they've made strategic moves during the last seven months to leverage technology to innovate.

These leaders have listened to the challenges their consumers and employees face, they've viewed change as an opportunity and they've stayed flexible in a potentially paralyzing atmosphere.

How can you leverage technology to strengthen your organization during this time?

- Create more engaging customer experiences – Use custom applications to streamline communication, add transparency and incentivize wanted behaviors.
- Employ data and analytics – Uncover untapped or underserved segments of your client base or up-sell related products and services based on buyer behavior. Increase visibility and reduce overhead costs by streamlining operations.
- Integrate or enhance back-end systems to provide a faster, more secure experience for both employees and customers.

If necessity is the mother of invention, technology can be the key to unleashing its potential. Now is the time to take ownership of 2020 and make the impossible—possible. ■



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**Barbra Solberg**, public policy strategist at the Economic Alliance; **Doug Neumann**, executive director of the Economic Alliance



# FOSTERING AN ENGAGED ELECTORATE IN THE WORKPLACE

BY GIGI WOOD

Creating a better tomorrow for the state of Iowa requires efforts on multiple fronts. Safe communities, strong schools and profitable businesses are formed through exhaustive work by many in various public and private organizations. One of the ways to build healthy communities is through public policy.

Local, state and federal laws and regulations establish public policies for communities. Those policies are advocated for by various groups and voted on by elected officials. Naturally, voting for politicians with effective public policy platforms is important to grow successful local communities and a robust state.

## Addressing elections and voting in the workplace

In such a divisive political climate, it can be difficult to approach the topic of politics and public policy, especially in the workplace. An engaged electorate can be very powerful, and educated employees can use their ballots to lobby for the public policy positions to improve communities and build stronger businesses. For many employers, it makes sense to encourage employees to vote. Addressing the topic may seem daunting to some employers, but there are programs available to help start that conversation.

IA Votes is a nonpartisan initiative that helps employers talk to employees and the greater community about the people and policies that affect their jobs and industries. The initiative, also known as the Iowa Prosperity Project, is a state partner of the Business-Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC) and is sponsored by Economic Progress for Iowa's Citizens (EPIC). EPIC is a nonprofit created by several businesses and statewide business associations that advocate for a pro-business environment, but for this initiative, it does not endorse or oppose any candidates. Instead of making endorsements, the program works to educate where and when to vote and what issues are on the ballot.

"We believe when employers and employees share information in a nonpartisan way, more Iowans will appreciate the importance of state and federal elections," the IA Votes website states.

IA Votes is also an Employee Voter Registration Week partner, joining business organizations across the country in the effort to increase the number of registered voters. IA Votes provides the business community with messaging and graphics on registering to vote and reminding employees of upcoming Iowa dates and deadlines.

As residents of a battleground state, Iowans are well aware of the upcoming election; political ads have been relentless this season. A Pew Research Center study published in August found voters are highly engaged this year. When it comes to the presidential election, 83% said it "really matters" who wins the presidency; more so than any election during the past 20 years. That figure is typically between 50% and 74%.

While most voters understand the importance of the election, some may not know about the issues on the ballot that could affect their community or employer. IA Votes aims to give employers tools to educate employees on how to vote and on the issues that could affect their families and their jobs.

## Starting the dialogue

BIPAC's goal is to improve the political climate for the business community by providing insight, strategic guidance and comprehensive resources to make it easier for government affairs professionals to execute their own public policy goals, says Dalexi Carrillo, manager of member and partner advocacy services for BIPAC.

The group partners with the Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) to provide employers with informative resources on the state legislative session and get out the vote materials leading up to Election Day.

"IA Votes is ABI's advocacy and voter education program," Carrillo said. "Over the years, BIPAC has collaborated with IA Votes on a number of initiatives."

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The two groups worked together to create the IA Caucus Toolkit, which houses resources and messaging around the caucus process that employers can include in communications to employees, for example.

Employers can communicate with employees about voting in a variety of ways, she said.

“It’s important to remember to stay true to the organization’s culture and tailor when necessary,” she said.

She suggested using email, newsletters and digital monitor signs as useful methods of communicating about voting.

“This can be as simple as an email blast with voting reminders and links to find polling places, registration information and the state’s election website,” she said. “An employer might also consider coordinating with their HR team to include voting information in companywide emails with other organization updates.”

Newsletters can offer how-to articles on participating in the election.

“Besides upcoming deadlines, newsletters can offer information on how to volunteer as a poll worker, guidelines on early voting and voting by absentee ballot, upcoming candidate town halls, updates on the key races, and a rundown of the issues important to the industry and organization,” Carrillo said.

Employers with in-person facilities can set up digital monitor signs with election dates, deadlines, polling locations and other voting information. Digital monitor signs can be placed in entrance ways, breakrooms and other common areas to serve as regular reminders to get out the vote.

Employers can also post similar reminders on social media internally and externally.

“Internal social communication channels can be leveraged to provide regular reminders on upcoming deadlines and to answer questions that employees may have on voting,” she said. “In the end, the goal is to provide employees with the information they need to know to cast an informed ballot.”

BIPAC publishes a biennial “Employer to Employee Engagement Study” that illustrates the importance of employee engagement. In 2018, the survey found that 61% of individuals who received information from their employer said it made them more likely to vote and 84% said it was very or somewhat helpful in deciding which candidate(s) to vote for in the election, Carrillo said.

“Moreover, the study found that employees at a company with an already established employer-to-employee program are also more likely to agree that their employer should be active in promoting public policy and more likely to have voted in the 2018 election,” she said. “It’s clear that employees want to hear from their employer on elections and politics, but they do not want to be told who or what to vote for. The information provided to them should be presented in a nonpartisan and objective way so that they are empowered to make their own decisions.”

#### Hosting voting events in the workplace

Employers can even host events to educate and excite employees about the voting process. Carrillo suggested events such as hosting voter registration drives,

candidate meet-and-greets and town halls.

“These events not only guide voters through the election process, but they also expose them to the candidates running in their area and where they stand on the issues,” she said. “However, in the age of COVID-19 and social distancing, employers may need to get a bit creative. If they wish to provide more information on voter registration, organizations should consider holding virtual ‘hangouts,’ where they discuss and answer questions on voter registration and how to vote according to state guidelines. Webinars with candidates and elected officials can also inform employees of the individuals running in their area and where they stand on the issues that impact them, their jobs, and families.”

#### Advocating for growth, rebuilding

The Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance has long been a partner with ABI and BIPAC in IA Votes.

“While the Economic Alliance is a nonpartisan organization and we don’t endorse candidates, we are heavily involved in voter education,” said Doug Neumann, executive director of the Economic Alliance. “We use a lot of different resources and avenues to help us educate our members on where candidates stand on issues and we encourage our members to vote for candidates who support policies that grow our region and state.”

With 1,200 members, most of which are small businesses, the Economic Alliance can provide a louder voice when advocating for policy issues than what many Eastern Iowa companies could do on their own.

“As policies are discussed at the local, state and federal levels, we want a seat at the table to influence and shape the policies that directly affect our businesses and community,” Neumann said. “If we’re not at the table, someone else will be.”

Since the devastating derecho on Aug. 10, the organization’s focus has shifted to recovery efforts. In Iowa, the high-wind storm hit Cedar Rapids the hardest, causing millions of dollars in damage.

“On both the state and federal level, we’ve shifted to a recovery focus — recovery efforts due to the pandemic and now derecho,” Neumann said. “Both phenomena hit our area hard, and we’re pushing for policies that ease the way for employers to rebound, add and keep their employees, and grow their businesses. On the state level, we’re ramping up efforts to support quality of life initiatives because we see keeping and attracting workforce as a key to our recovery and growth efforts. Initiatives that make a community more attractive for someone can be everything from recreation amenities to broadband connectivity.”

On a federal level, the group pushes for immigration and criminal justice reform, as well as infrastructure investment.

“We’re advocating for solution-oriented policymakers at all levels of government,” Neumann said. “The political arena has become so toxic that it’s hampering good policies from becoming realities. We’re all for debates, disagreements and discussions — it’s the way we work out issues and come to agreements. But those

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**Dalexi Carrillo**, manager of member and partner advocacy services for BIPAC





debates, disagreements and discussions are only productive if they are civil. We need to continue to push policymakers to return to civility and compromise to achieve the best results.”

Each year, the Economic Alliance publishes an election/voter guide that educates readers about policy issues and encourages people to vote.

“We see one of our roles as facilitating access to policymakers for our members, not just during election time, but all year round,” said Barbra Solberg, public policy strategist at the Economic Alliance. “As a business advocacy organization, it is our responsibility to encourage our members and their employees to be engaged. And it’s our job to listen to them to learn about their needs. The best and most realistic ideas for policy change and reform come from people who are affected by the policies day to day. So listening is an important role for us so we can tell their stories to policymakers and influence change.”

#### Voting advocacy at Vermeer

At agricultural and industrial manufacturer Vermeer Corp. in Pella, employees have long been encouraged to vote. The company also offers information on issues that affect the company, such as infrastructure, workforce education and international trade.

“We got involved several years ago and we were really looking for a way that we could provide two things; one was a way for our team members to easily find information about how to vote, where to vote, why to vote and to get to know candidates . . . The other reason was that if there was an issue that was relevant and important to speak out on, it allowed employees a way, with a few clicks, for their voices to be heard,” said Daryl Bouwkamp, Vermeer’s senior director of international business development and government affairs. “That’s a no-brainer for us, to apply an IA Votes-type tool for our team members to make sure they’ve got the

right information that’s up to date.”

Vermeer was able to seamlessly incorporate the program into its intranet system, giving employees easy access to the information. IA Votes provides information on state and federal candidates and issues, while BIPAC focuses on issues on the federal level. Vermeer provides additional information on issues if needed.

“BIPAC takes a very nonpartisan approach to things, so they stay at a pretty basic level with some of the issues,” Bouwkamp said. “If we really want to educate a little bit further or more in-depth for manufacturing purposes or a certain segment that we serve, sometimes we get more in-depth, not only for our own understanding, but to provide examples to our employees about how it affects them, how it affects our company, how it affects our customers.”

The programs also train employers on what specifically can be discussed with employees, and what messaging goes too far.

“With BIPAC, there’s an opportunity also to educate employers on what’s appropriate to talk to team members about, what’s inappropriate with election law and corporate law in mind,” Bouwkamp said. “Employers can also be educated about making sure they are appropriate in their communications with team members about voting and related issues.”

Vermeer strives to keep employees actively engaged in national and local issues that have an impact on the company and their communities.

“Informed and active citizens make for a stronger country, a stronger economy, a stronger workforce,” he said. “Civic education, civic knowledge and civic participation are pretty essential for the continued prosperity of the United States, which you can drill down to our state, to our city, to our family. We want to make sure we meet our responsibility of providing good education and opportunities for our team members to play a meaningful role.” ■

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CAPITOL BUSINESS



# ABI PAC Endorses Friends of Iowa Business



Each election cycle, the Iowa Association of Business and Industry’s nonpartisan political action committee, IIPAC, evaluates candidates for state office. Those candidates who support a competitive business climate and focus on a regulatory climate conducive to job creation are endorsed as Friends of Iowa Business.

In 2020, the following 19 Iowa Senate candidates and 57 Iowa House candidates have been endorsed by IIPAC as Friends of Iowa Business. They are listed by district. “I” indicates the candidate is an incumbent, “C” indicates the candidate is a challenger, and “O” indicates the candidate is running for an open seat.

### Iowa Senate

- District 2: Jeff Taylor, O
- District 4: Dennis Guth, I
- District 6: Craig Williams, O
- District 8: Dan Dawson, I
- District 10: Jake Chapman, I
- District 12: Mark Costello, I
- District 14: Amy Sinclair, I
- District 20: Brad Zaun, I
- District 22: Scott Cirkse, O
- District 24: Jesse Green, O
- District 26: Waylon Brown, I
- District 28: Mike Klimesh, O
- District 32: Craig Johnson, I
- District 36: Jeff Edler, I

List continues on page 12



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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



OCTOBER 13

**Return to Learn: Childcare and Business Best Practices During COVID-19**

Virtual | 10 a.m.

OCTOBER 20

**ABI Environment Committee Update with DNR**

Virtual | 1 p.m.

NOVEMBER 5-6

**Leadership Iowa**

Sioux Center

Visit [www.iowaabi.org](http://www.iowaabi.org) and click the "Events" tab for details on upcoming events, including updates in response to COVID-19-related safety restrictions for public gatherings.

## EVENT REWIND

## Executive Open

August 31 | Des Moines Golf &amp; Country Club

This year's Executive Open looked a little different. Elbow bumps replaced high-fives and handshakes, networking was socially distanced, and impromptu conversations across the parking lot took the place of the post-round reception.

What made the event a huge success once again is what remains the same each year—a great turnout of 100+ golfers, valuable introductions being made and important deals being struck.

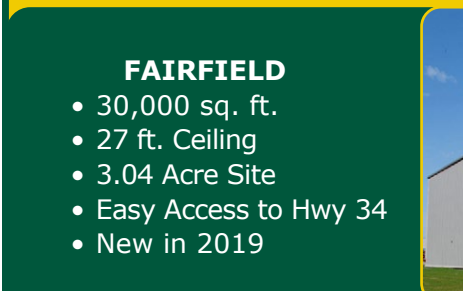
Congratulations to the winning group: Brian Crotty, Tony Niedert, Devin Boyer and Nick Pirotte. Thanks to all of the golfers and sponsors who participated, and to the staff of the Des Moines Golf and Country Club for their warm hospitality. ■



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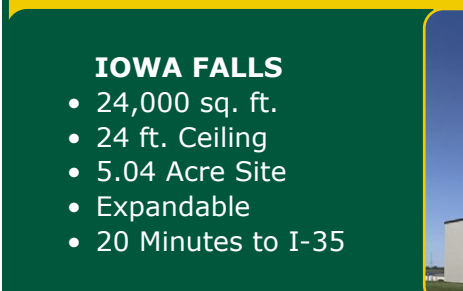
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District 38: Dawn Driscoll, O	District 30: Brian Lohse, I
District 40: Ken Rozenboom, I	District 37: John Landon, I
District 44: Tim Goodwin, O	District 38: Garrett Gobble, C
District 46: Mark Lofgren, I	District 39: Eddie Andrews, C
District 48: Dan Zumbach, I	District 47: Phil Thompson, I
	District 48: Rob Bacon, I
<b>Iowa House</b>	District 49: Dave Deyoe, I
District 1: John Wills, I	District 50: Pat Grassley, I
District 2: Megan Jones, I	District 51: Jane Bloomingdale, I
District 3: Dennis Bush, O	District 54: Shannon Latham, O
District 4: Skyler Wheeler, I	District 55: Michael Bergan, I
District 5: Tom Jeneary, I	District 56: Anne Osmundson, I
District 6: Jacob Bossman, I	District 57: Shannon Lundgren, I
District 7: Henry Stone, O	District 63: Sandy Salmon, I
District 8: Terry Baxter, I	District 64: Chad Ingels, O
District 9: Ann Meyer, I	District 67: Sally Abbott, O
District 10: Mike Sexton, I	District 71: Tony Reed, O
District 11: Gary Worthan, I	District 72: Dean Fisher, I
District 12: Brian Best, I	District 73: Bobby Kaufmann, I
District 14: Steve Hansen, O	District 75: Thomas Gerhold, I
District 16: Brent Siegrist, O	District 76: Dave Maxwell, I
District 17: Matt Windschitl, I	District 78: Jarad Klein, I
District 18: Steve Holt, I	District 79: Dustin Hite, I
District 19: Carter Nordman, O	District 80: Holly Brink, I
District 20: Ray Sorensen, I	District 82: Jeff Shipley, I
District 21: Tom Moore, I	District 84: Joe Mitchell, I
District 22: Jon Jacobsen, I	District 88: David Kerr, I
District 23: David Sieck, I	District 91: Mark Cisneros, O
District 24: Cecil Dolecheck, I	District 92: Ross Paustian, I
District 25: Stan Gustafson, I	District 94: Gary Mohr, I
District 27: Joel Fry, I	District 96: Lee Hein, I
District 28: Jon Thorup, I	District 97: Norlin Mommsen, I


The nonpartisan IIPAC Board, comprised of IIPAC contributors, makes the Friends of Iowa Business selections. The board encourages voters to consider these endorsements when evaluating where candidates stand on business.


Candidates are evaluated on their support for a competitive business climate and their focus on a regulatory climate conducive for job creation. Criteria included positions on issues based on interviews, stated approach to general business community concerns, voting records of incumbent candidates, and input from ABI members and IIPAC contributors. ■


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