



DOLLARS AND CENTS

SETTING PRIORITIES FOR THE 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Jack Whitver, Senate majority leader and Jake Chapman, Senate president. Photo by Duane Tinkey



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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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A CUSTOM PUBLICATION FOR ABI

A VIEW FROM THE TOP

A Look Ahead at the Iowa Legislature



Steven M. Bradford
ABI Chair
HNI Corporation
Muscatine

January is a key month for most businesses. While it may or may not be the start of a fiscal year, the beginning of a new year on the calendar always brings opportunities to move your business forward.

That is also true at ABI. We are excited about the year ahead as ABI continues to move forward. In 2021, you will see ABI continue its award-winning public policy work. And, with your help and with strong action by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and members of the General Assembly, we anticipate Iowa will have a very successful legislative session. In that regard, this edition of Business Record Iowa is focused on the top business issues to be addressed during the upcoming legislative session.

Also in 2021, you'll see ABI continue its ag-

gressive programming to bring value to your business and to your bottom line. Just as importantly, you will see even more great things from the ABI Foundation.

One thing you can expect is a fabulous 2021 Taking Care of Business Conference, ABI's 118th annual convention. The conference will be held June 8-10 in Coralville/Iowa City, and you will want to mark your calendars now for this spectacular event.

Finally, as the new year begins, I would note that ABI enjoyed a strong 2020. Despite challenges faced by members and the association related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the August derecho, among others, ABI ended the year stronger than ever. That is thanks to *your* support and we never take that support for granted. Thank you. ■

CULTIVATING IOWA'S TALENT CONTINUUM

99 Counties and Leaders in Each One



McKenzie Kielman
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"Leadership is..." is a fill in the blank question we often ask. Everyone has a different answer, and everyone is correct. It's one of my favorite practices of the ABI Foundation.

There are two ways you can answer, too: Nominate Iowans (consider friends, family, neighbors, colleagues and others) for our programs. Or donate to the ABI Foundation to help us reach more leaders.

Remember, there are no wrong answers—and with each one, you can make a difference in the life of another.

We ask for your involvement so that we can reach all of Iowa's 99 counties this year!

It's our mission to reach all Iowans and all communities in each corner of our state with the outstanding programming and opportunities offered by the ABI Foundation.

You can recognize leaders while being recognized as a leader! Each action you take will be counted as involvement from your city and county.

TAKE ACTION:

- Nominate high school students for our business-ready program, Business Horizons!
- Nominate college students for our opportunities-awareness program, Leadership Iowa University!
- Nominate community leaders for our issues-awareness program, Leadership Iowa!
- Donate to the ABI Foundation's statewide leadership programs!

To take action and see your community's involvement, visit www.iowaabi.org/abi-foundation/get-involved/. ■



Jack Whitver, Senate majority leader and Jake Chapman, Senate president. Photo by Duane Tinkey

DOLLARS AND CENTS

SETTING PRIORITIES FOR THE 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY GIGI WOOD

Lawmakers are back at the state Capitol this month for the start of the 89th Iowa General Assembly. The session will have a different look to it this year, as some will be donning face masks and others will be working remotely to protect one another from the COVID-19 pandemic. While it may have a different countenance, many of the issues remain the same.

Senate Republican leaders recently shared their priorities for the session. For the most part, they expect to be tackling issues they've faced in the past, ranging from workforce development to tax reform. Above all, their interests remain the same as years before: keeping Iowa's business environment competitive.

"Our goal as a caucus has always been to pass policies to make our state attractive for businesses," said Jack Whitver, Senate majority leader. "We have also worked to bring more people into the workforce and to help them obtain the skills necessary to fill the jobs openings in Iowa. We intend to continue to implement those policies in 2021."

Top issues

Iowa's low unemployment numbers were the envy of other states, and Republican senators aim to help workers and businesses return to pre-COVID prosperity, Whitver said.

"Our goal this legislative session is going to be helping Iowans back to work and getting our state back on track to be the best state in the country to live and work," Whitver said. "Prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus, Iowa had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, wages were rising, and more job openings existed than Iowans looking for work. Recent unemployment numbers are among the best in the country, but more work remains to be done to restore the economy and improve career opportunities for all Iowans."

Senate President Jake Chapman said the pandemic will indirectly play a role in legislative priorities as lawmakers work to put the economy back on track.

"We are still strong economically; Iowa was recognized as being the best state to weather COVID-19 financially because of the budgetary practices we had put into place," Chapman said. "But certainly we want a thriving economy. We want an economy where businesses are expanding and where there are opportunities for Iowans to either grow in their jobs or to seek other opportunities and employment that might better their lives and livelihood."

This is the fifth year in a row that Republicans have been in the majority in the Senate, and during that time they have focused on rewarding work and investment and making it easier to conduct business in Iowa, Whitver said.

"That focus will not change in the fifth year in the majority," Whitver said. "Businesses and business owners want to stay open; they want to keep working. Their success obviously helps the business owners, but it is also good for their employees and the families who may depend on those jobs. The policies we plan to implement will be beneficial for all Iowans, whether they are small business owners or employees."

Our goal as a caucus
has always been to
pass policies to make
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businesses...

— Jack Whitver, Senate majority leader

Budget and tax reform

Senate leaders said conservative spending and keeping the tax rate low are of particular interest this year.

"The Iowa Senate will continue to work to provide consistency and stability in the state budget," Whitver said. "It won't spend more than it takes in and will ensure that fiscal promises are kept. The Senate will also work to reduce the tax rates on working Iowans. Iowa remains one of the states with the highest income tax rates in the country. Making Iowa more competitive with the states around us will improve the ability for Iowa businesses to compete at home and abroad."

Tax reform needs to continue to be at the forefront this session, Chapman said. He pointed out how businesses in northwest Iowa have moved to South Dakota to benefit from its no personal income tax and low sales tax rate.

"I've been a huge advocate for significantly [reducing] and ultimately eliminating income tax in the state of Iowa, both on the corporate and individual side," Chapman said. "And every year that goes by that we don't do that, other states are pursuing those paths. I just recently saw that the governor of Mississippi has announced that their focus for 2021 will be to phase out that income tax in their state. And so certainly that will be one of the areas that will help economically. My hope and my goal would be for this next session that we can focus on how we can provide tax relief here in Iowa."

Regulatory relief and unemployment insurance will also be priorities, Chapman said.

"The one thing that has really concerned me is our unemployment insurance here in this state. If we're not careful, you know, that will be a tax increase on businesses," Chapman said. "So I was very happy to see the governor use some CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) Act money to shore up our unemployment in a manner that didn't increase those tax rates on businesses."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9 >>





CAPITOL BUSINESS



What to Expect from ABI During the 2021 Legislative Session

The legislative session will begin on Jan. 11, 2021. As you have read in this column before, ABI serves as the Iowa business community’s eyes and ears at the Capitol. Except for health and safety accommodations related to the coronavirus, the upcoming legislative session will be no different. It is fitting to once again share with you what to expect from ABI during the session, as well as how you can be engaged in the policymaking process.

THREE THINGS TO EXPECT FROM ABI:

- 1. **Round-the-clock coverage at the Capitol** – The ABI public policy team has followed this mantra for the last decade and will continue to do so: “As long as they are there, we are there.” If the Legislature is in session, you can count on the ABI team to provide you information about what’s happening at the Capitol. ABI will be there for Iowa employers day and night. We will work to educate lawmakers about the impact various proposals will have on employees and employers statewide.
- 2. **Weekly updates** – Each Thursday afternoon, ABI members will receive the Voice of Iowa Business newsletter. The newsletter will feature a summary of key issues ABI has engaged in on behalf of members during the week. The newsletter will be timely and in your email inbox before the end of the week.
- 3. **Twice-monthly conference calls** – ABI members also get up-to-date information on twice-monthly conference calls, which are made possible by ABI member company support of the organization. These calls give specific information on bill status and provide members with an insiders’ look into the legislative process. The calls begin Friday, Jan. 29, 2021. Go to the Events Calendar page on the ABI website to register.

THREE WAYS YOU CAN GET ENGAGED:

- 1. **Meet your local elected officials** – Iowa legislators remain accessible and some will continue weekend forums. Many legislators are willing to come to businesses and meet with employees and other businesspeople from their districts while practicing good coronavirus protocol. All legislators maintain state email accounts and are very interested in feedback from their districts. You can find your legislators here: www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find. The best way to educate legislators is to help them understand what you do and why your business is important to the Iowa economy. Invite them to your office, plant or construction site. Get to know them.
- 2. **Attend Iowa Business Day on the Hill** – In addition to the ABI Legislative Briefing that kicks off the legislative session, ABI also plans an Iowa Business Day on the Hill. This year, the event is scheduled for March 11, 2021 at the ABI office. Check out www.iowaabi.org for details as the event draws nearer.
- 3. **Make sure you receive ABI emails** – I know you receive a lot of emails from organizations you’re a part of. However, if you want to stay up-to-date on the legislative happenings at ABI, make sure you read the Voice of Iowa Business newsletter on Thursdays. Also, when an email comes from Mike Ralston, Brad Hartkopf or myself, know it’s related to a pending public policy issue and that we need your insight and support. Please help us and reach out to your legislators when requests come from ABI.

We are honored to represent you and the hundreds of thousands of employees you employ throughout the state each and every day. You can expect us to work hard every day for you and for a better climate to be an Iowa employer. If you have a question about public policy, please email or call us. Our job is to represent you and be responsive to your questions and concerns. Thank you for your commitment to ABI and Iowa’s business community! ■



JD Davis
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GET INVOLVED – MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Iowa Association of Business and Industry works hard year-round, representing member companies and employees at the Statehouse and in the development of administrative rules and regulations to ensure businesses are treated fairly.

Financial contributions to ABI’s political efforts help support candidates who understand the importance of a favorable business climate in Iowa. These contributions are important to ABI’s work in promoting pro-business legislation and stopping proposals that would harm Iowa companies. Learn more about the two programs you can support through your contributions below

	Iowa Industry Political Action Committee (IIPAC)	Iowans for Jobs Initiative (IFJI)
What is it?	IIPAC is a way for ABI members to actively participate in the political process by combining their personal support with other IIPAC contributors. This amplifies the effectiveness of individual contributions to support candidates who understand the importance of fostering a pro-business climate in Iowa.	The Iowans for Jobs Initiative is the public policy education arm of ABI. Its objective is to promote the importance of pro-jobs, pro-business policy for all Iowans.
How is the money used?	IIPAC funds provide direct financial support to pro-business Democrat and Republican candidates for statewide and legislative offices in Iowa.	These funds help educate Iowans and Iowa lawmakers on issues important to ABI, such as Iowa’s Right to Work laws. The funds also allow us to file amicus briefs standing up for employers in court and also aid get-out-the-vote initiatives.
What types of contributions are accepted?	IIPAC accepts personal contributions.	The Iowans for Jobs Initiative accepts both corporate and individual contributions.
Why is it important?	IIPAC is critical to ABI’s ability to support and help elect allies to state offices who are committed to fostering a pro-business, pro-jobs climate.	The Iowans for Jobs initiative plays a critical role in helping Iowans understand how the decisions of legislators affect the paychecks of all Iowans.
How do I contribute?	Please contact jddavis@iowaabi.org .	Please contact jddavis@iowaabi.org .

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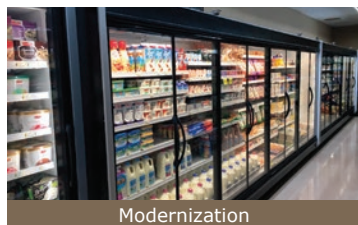
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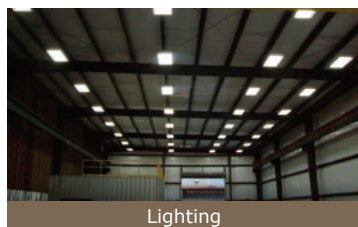
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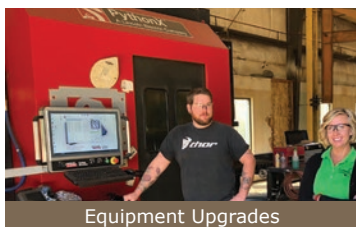
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



JANUARY 13

Legislative Briefing

Virtual | 4 p.m.

JANUARY 13-15

Leadership Iowa

Virtual

FEBRUARY 16

Iowa's Role in Vaccine Development

Virtual | 9 a.m.

MARCH 4

Connecting Statewide Leaders

Quad Cities

MARCH 4-5

Leadership Iowa

Quad Cities

MARCH

Iowa Business Day on the Hill

Des Moines

Visit 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.

JOIN US

Legislative Briefing and Reception Postponed; Additional Virtual Briefing to Be Held in January

ABI's second-largest annual event, the Legislative Briefing and Reception, has been postponed due to COVID-19.

The event was originally scheduled for Jan. 13 at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines. The rescheduled date is to be determined.

"The health and safety of our members is our top priority," said ABI President Mike Ralston. "We'll continue to monitor safety restrictions for public gatherings."

The Legislative Briefing and Reception has a long-standing tradition of being held the first week of the new General Assembly.

"Members have come to depend on the briefing to learn about ABI's legislative priorities and understand how potential policies may affect their employees and businesses," said Ralston.

So members don't miss out on this important information as the Legislature kicks off, ABI has created a new, additional event, a virtual Legislative Briefing, on Jan. 13.

During the virtual briefing, ABI's public policy team will announce the association's legislative priorities and take questions from members. This event is open to ABI members only.

Register for the virtual briefing, as well as the rescheduled briefing and reception, at www.iowaabi.org/events.

Litigation protection

Whitver and Chapman said the greatest accomplishment of Republicans during the 2020 session was when they passed legislation to protect businesses from COVID-19-related lawsuits. It limits who can file lawsuits against companies for COVID-19 illnesses.

"In my mind, the most important piece of legislation passed during the final weeks of last session was passing litigation protection for small businesses and nonprofits operating in good faith to protect their employees and customers," Whitver said. "It was critical in helping Iowans start working again and supporting themselves and their families. This legislation protected those businesses following the guidelines from the governor and public health officials from frivolous litigation in the event someone who had been at their facility tested positive for COVID-19."

Chapman said the Senate may look into ways to assist business sectors that were hit particularly hard by the pandemic. He said it's too soon to know what types of assistance may become available.

"We'll also be looking at specific industries, sectors that have been decimated by COVID-19 and how we might be able to assist them in bringing those businesses back bigger and stronger than ever before," Chapman said. "When you're not able to function and bring customers in, you don't have revenue coming in, but yet you still have to pay utility bills, you still have to pay your property tax. And it's crushing a lot of businesses. So we're going to do everything we can to incentivize them and bring these industries back as strong as we possibly can."

ABI priorities

At the Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI), workforce, infrastructure and regulatory reform are top priorities for 2021. For ABI, that means overcoming barriers

to employment, access to affordable housing, availability of training programs and ensuring workplace safety.

"ABI's 1,500 members, with 330,000 employees, are drivers of the Iowa economy," said JD Davis, ABI's vice president, public policy. "Especially in 2021 when the job of the legislative session is to chart a course to economic recovery from the disruption of the global pandemic, workforce, infrastructure and regulatory reform becomes the road map to that recovery."

The tumultuous past year has highlighted the needs of the state's businesses and easily guides the priorities of 2021, Davis said.

"ABI members have remarked that the challenges of 2020 did not so much bring new issues to the forefront as they magnified the need to address issues that have already been identified," Davis said. "Think of the increased need for employee child care when the lack of in-school teaching requires home schooling. High-speed broadband deployment becomes an imperative in a scenario where employees must work from home. The stress on the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund to cover unemployment claims while remaining solvent have highlighted the need for reform there."

Positive outlook

While 2020 was a difficult year on many fronts, Whitver shared his optimism for 2021 and beyond.

"I am confident in the future for Iowa and for America," Whitver said. "This nation has faced many challenges since its founding, and we have continually met and overcome those challenges. I am optimistic the creativity, ingenuity and diligence of the people of this state and nation will overcome the challenge of the coronavirus and news of the successful vaccine approvals will continue to move our economy forward." ■

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