

## LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

# Keeping an eye on the issues important to the Alexandria area

By Paul McCarten  
Committee chair

The Legislative Committee keeps an eye on issues important to the Alexandria area business community. The committee then makes its recommendations to the Chamber board and legislative positions are adopted.

In 2007, the following issues came to the forefront.

**Transportation:** Transportation funding is critical for businesses in Greater Minnesota. The ability to transport goods and services is fundamental to allow for competition. Tourism, an important part of our local economy, is also dependant upon good roads. The Chamber supported a 5-cent gas tax increase that was later vetoed by the governor. Minnesota has not had a gas tax increase in 19 years and as a result, transportation funding for roads and infrastructure have failed to keep up with inflation and increased road use.

**LGA Tax Relief:** Local government aid provides property tax relief benefiting businesses and homeowners alike.

This LGA funding distributes general revenue taxes back to communities to help fund necessary services. LGA has been dramatically reduced since 2003, forcing local government to raise property taxes. The Chamber supported an increase in LGA funding to its 2003 level. Some of these cuts were reinstated during the session.

**Energy Legislation:** The Alexandria area power providers, ALP and REA, strive to provide low cost energy for businesses and residents. Though they are sensitive to issues regarding climate change and global warming, they had concerns regarding legislation that could adversely impact their ability to provide low cost energy to the Alexandria area. The Chamber expressed this concern to the Legislature, supporting the adoption of a measured approach that would not dramatically change policy resulting in increased power costs.

**K-12 Education:** State funding for K-12 education is critical for local taxpayers. If the state fails to fund programming, local taxpayers foot the bill through higher real estate taxes. The

Chamber asked the Legislature to restore early childhood education funding and funding for special education, both of which were done. We also supported the Education Bill passed during the session.

**Higher Education/Alexandria Technical College:** The 2007 Bonding Bill had two issues of importance to the Alexandria Technical College (ATC). The technical college provides our Alexandria area business community with highly trained and skilled workers. It provides post-secondary and continuing education for our area residents. The Chamber asked the governor and Legislature to pass the bonding bill that would provide funding for ventilation and air exchange systems for the transportation labs and shops at ATC. Repair in the factoring and technical wing of the college were also funded by the bonding bill during the session.

**Douglas County Social Services:** Fully funding the social services programming is important to all of us. It not only provides for care for those in need, without adequate state funding the expense burden is shifted to the counties and local taxpayers. Social Services program funding for children was of particular concern. The Chamber urged the state to fully fund the state child welfare system.

**I-94 Interchange:** Because of the growth in the Alexandria area, the need for an additional I-94 interchange on

the east corridor of the city is in need of review. Several sites including County Road 17, the Burgen Rest Area and Nevada Street, all provide potential and all would allow for future expansion of industrial and highway commercial development. The Chamber asked MnDOT to work with the city of Alexandria and Douglas County to review opportunities for an additional I-94 interchange for the eastern area of Alexandria.

**Working Together:** The Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce thanks our three legislators, Senator Bill Ingebrigtsen and Representatives Mary Ellen Otremba and Torrey Westrom for supporting our annual legislative positions. We will continue to work with them as we move forward with our legislative agenda on behalf of our Chamber membership and the residents of Douglas County.

In addition to our local legislators, we share our positions with the governor, the Minnesota State Chamber, and other local Chambers expressing the concerns of the Alexandria Area Chamber of Commerce. The Legislative Committee is made up of a broad section of Chamber members including businesses large and small, resort owners, representatives from the city of Alexandria, Douglas County, School District #206, Alexandria Technical College and Douglas County Hospital.



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