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Kentucky Chamber releases 'Bold Steps to Advance Kentucky'
2008 business agenda outlines platforms on education, health care and beyond

Frankfort, Ky. (Nov. 20, 2007) – The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce has its sight set on improving education. The organization's 2008 business agenda, "Bold Steps to Advance Kentucky," points to postsecondary education as one of the top priorities it will focus on during the 2008 Session of the General Assembly. Workers' compensation reform, health care cost containment, small business tax incentives and sustainable public employee benefits are also high on the Chamber's list of issues to address.

On Dec. 4 in Louisville, the Chamber's Task Force on Postsecondary Education will release the findings of a study launched in May. The study, which researched the strengths and weaknesses of Kentucky's college and university system, will shape the basis of the Chamber's public agenda on higher education.

"Students are entitled to a world-class education that prepares them for today's globally competitive market and provides employers with highly skilled employees to do the same," said Kentucky Chamber President and CEO Dave Adkisson.

In 1996, the passage of the Kentucky Workers' Compensation Act brought sweeping reforms to one of the most expensive workers' claims programs in the country. In recent years, however, employers have seen the cost savings of reform be eliminated by dramatically higher medical costs.

In 2008, Chamber will work to protect our current system which provides clear definitions of injury and disability, requires independent medical examinations and objective medical findings, minimizes litigation and protects the integrity of exclusive remedy. The Chamber also backs legislation that overturns case law that runs counter to these core principles, as well as legislative and regulatory efforts to control rising medical and prescription drug costs.

"By enacting legislation that controls runaway medical costs and restores balance for employers and employees," said Adkisson, "we can realize substantial savings – and do it while making sure truly injured workers receive the immediate, appropriate and consistent care they deserve."

With the ever-rising costs of health care, the Chamber also supports a comprehensive statewide strategy to increase the number of medical professionals trained in Kentucky as well as innovative approaches to encourage them to practice in the Commonwealth. The Chamber also advocates that the state offer incentives for businesses to offer wellness programs and that "transparency" remain a focus to provide consumers with the information they need to be smarter health care consumers.

Last year, in partnership with the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and the Kentucky League of Cities, the Chamber launched The Coalition for Sustainable Public Employee Benefits. As part of this project, the Chamber will also continue to focus on working with the General Assembly and Executive Branch to develop a meaningful solution to the high cost of public employee benefits. Meaningful reform must take into consideration strategies that private employers have addressed, including cost saving changes to eligibility requirements, pension benefits, health care benefits and compensation levels.

"As public retirement and health care costs escalate, they drain tax dollars away from vital programs such as education, and their continued increase puts essential services at both the state and local level at risk," said Adkisson. "Between 1996 and 2008, health insurance and retirement took 50 percent of all the new money appropriated for education."

In addition to these platforms, the Chamber will also continue to strive to help small businesses in Kentucky succeed. Small, locally owned businesses provide over half of the jobs across Kentucky, and in some regions, the percentage is even higher. In order to provide ongoing support to smaller companies providing

employment to a majority of Kentuckians, the Chamber supports the development of new incentives to help small businesses invest in new equipment and technology. This will help them compete more effectively in today's ever-changing business environment.

More than 400 Kentucky business leaders have helped the Kentucky Chamber create its 2008 business agenda. Through a comprehensive public policy survey and a series of meetings held earlier this year, Chamber members chose these and other issues outlined in "Bold Steps to Advance Kentucky."

"We believe there are several key opportunities for the business community to have a positive impact as we look towards the 2008 Session of the Kentucky General Assembly," said Mike Ridenour, the Chamber's vice president of public affairs. "Through an extensive member-driven committee process, the Kentucky Chamber has developed a distinct public policy perspective on environmental, human resources, economic development, fiscal policy, health care, and education issues."

To download a PDF of "Bold Steps to Advance Kentucky," visit www.kychamber.com.

About the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

From its beginnings in 1946 as a bipartisan voice for business at the state Capitol, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce has evolved into the premier business association in the state. Today the Chamber represents more than 12,000 business leaders — from Fortune 500 companies and family-owned shops — which share a strong interest in the state's economic future. Kentucky employers benefit from a broad range of services offered through Chamber membership: year-round lobbying, timely communications on business issues, publications and seminars on evolving regulations and policies, and a variety of other member benefits.

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