



## NORTH IOWA CORRIDOR SETS PRIORITIES FOR 2019 IOWA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

**WORKFORCE, HOUSING, AND EDUCATION ARE THREE PRIMARY** areas that the North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Corporation would like to see addressed by the Iowa Legislature this year.

"These are our over-arching priorities," said Chad Schreck, NIC President and CEO. "We partner with the Iowa Chamber Alliance (ICA) and Professional Developers of Iowa (PDI) to drive these at the state level."

The ICA is a non-profit coalition of 16 chambers of commerce and economic development organizations in the state, including Mason City. It works to promote programs that stimulate economic growth in Iowa. PDI is a non-profit organization of more than 320 economic development professionals in Iowa.

"The most significant impediments to economic growth are a tight labor market and inadequate housing," according to PDI's list of 2019 legislative priorities. "Together, these challenges perpetuate a cycle. Businesses choose not to locate in areas of Iowa due to insufficient numbers of workers and a shortage of housing. In turn, communities are unable to build housing or draw new residents because of a lack of jobs."

Schreck said NIC staff member Hunter Callanan recently served on the governor's Empower Rural Iowa task force. "They strongly pushed tax credits for employment housing and are asking the state to fund housing needs assessments."

He explained that a housing needs assessment, which can cost \$30,000 to \$50,000, is a critical step in getting developers interested in building in an area. "The state currently has about \$20 million designated for the workforce housing credit. That gets spoken for really fast." PDI is recommending that this appropriation be raised significantly to meet the strong demand and to ensure housing in rural communities can be built.

Other areas promoted by PDI this session include programs that support workforce recruitment and retention; improvement of water quality and infrastructure; an attractive economic development environment; a funding mechanism for Enhance Iowa legislation to improve amenities like trails and parks that attract workers and businesses; an early resolution to school funding debates through "a less politicized process"; and adequate funding for programs to foster entrepreneurs and small businesses.

PDI also addresses the issue of immigration. "Iowa needs to increase population and available workforce by any legal means possible," according to its priorities statement. The organization "supports increased opportunities for a skilled workforce and immigrant entrepreneurs balanced with needed reforms to modernize the E-verify system."

The Iowa Chamber Alliance also set forth priority issues for the state legislature, mostly in regards to

reliably funding new or existing programs. Its top areas of concern are tax reform; economic development programs and tax credits; workforce development and education; general business and regulations; and transportation, infrastructure, and communications.

Both organizations and North Iowa Corridor call for continued support of the Future Ready Iowa program which aims to build Iowa's talent pipeline. Future Ready Iowa sets out a goal for 70 percent of Iowa's workforce to achieve education or training beyond high school by 2025. The Vision North Iowa plan created last year sets out a local strategy to meet that goal.

Schreck said anyone with specific items of concern for the 2019 legislative session is encouraged to contact the NIC office in Mason City at (641) 423-0315.



At the PDI Legislative Forum were Rep. Sharon Steckman (D-53rd District), Sen. Amanda Ragan (D-27th District), Rep. Jane Bloomingdale (R-51st District), Sen. Waylon Brown (R-26th District), Rep. Linda Upmeyer (R-54th District), and Rep. Tedd Gassman (R-7th District)

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