

People want improved economy, job creation

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



As the Legislature opened, the governor presented the State of the State address and the presi-

dent gave his first State of the Union address. In this milieu, what the people desire is an improved economy and jobs. With lots of discussion and media attention over the past year, the public understands well how the perfect economic storm formed to create the unprecedented times we are in. What they want to hear and see are the vision, leadership and actions to get beyond these times and back to building a strong, healthy and prosperous community, state and nation. That goal will be achieved by creating an environment where businesses can thrive — plain and simple.

To get there, we cannot continue with government as usual. Change is required.

The government we have today is beyond our means and, on a state level, continues to add to the massive and unfunded retirement-benefits debt. Government, like businesses, must pare down to what we, the businesses and public who pay for it, can afford. A smaller government will translate to reduced taxes, not more, and improve all of our bottom lines.

This year, addressing the proposed unemployment-insurance-tax hike is a top priority; businesses, the administration, lawmakers and labor all are working toward that end. Chambers of commerce statewide support a chamber bill known as "C3" to reduce the amount of the increase, lower the taxable wage base, and set the appropriate reserve multiplier at 1.0. Other bills also have been introduced, and we are making recommendations to move forward with the

best-possible solution. The latter must happen quickly to avoid further job losses, and, given the tremendous support, businesses are likely to see some relief.

Planned tax credits that spur job creation are highly beneficial and embraced by the chamber, as are other initiatives that lower business costs, and allow businesses to expand and bolster their work forces. Such programs offer economic advancement by lowering the cost of job creation which can result in more jobs; by offsetting government-unemployment expenses; and by gaining additional Unemployment Trust Fund revenue when jobs are filled.

Access to capital is important for sustaining and growing businesses, and programs to improve such access are vital. As financial institutions tightened lending practices, businesses found themselves strapped for cash during this recession. More available capital will help stabilize businesses and expedite recovery.

The chamber supports leveraged programs that give us more bang for our buck and put people back to work. We applaud programs like the 10 percent tax credit on expenditures for the hotel-and-resort construction or renovation that can assist the visitor and construction industries, as well as contribute to the overall economy. Legislation that multiplies positive impacts and our return on investment should be backed widely.

The quality of education impacts our long-term economic health, and revamping the Department of Education structure is critical. Educationally, we have lagged behind the national average for decades. While we have pockets of excellence, the overall system is top-heavy, and we spend too much without appropriate results. Furthermore, we need children and teachers in the classroom, and there are fiscal

options other than Furlough Fridays. This chamber emphasizes excellence, responsibility and achievement, and promotes more business-and-community input in the educational planning-and-implementation process. Investing in revamping this system for our children is well worth the reward!

A well-educated work force is also key to a bright future. Augmenting STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and other work-force-preparedness programs will give our children the skills they need to compete for the jobs of tomorrow, and will deliver a prepared, well-educated labor pool for businesses.

When it comes to ideas and programs to be delivered, credit, power and political rhetoric are unnecessary. What people truly want are results. They want lawmakers to work together to deliver the best-possible results in a reasonable timeframe. They want a focus on the economy and jobs. And, they want to hold elected officials accountable for that work.

Our members have said that holding elected officials accountable is their No. 2 priority, after legislative advocacy, which is at No. 1 because they want lawmakers to understand their plight and what they bring to the table. As the voice of business, we ask that partisanship and pride of authorship or ownership be set aside so needed results can be achieved. We are eager to work together to bring about a more business-friendly environment through valuable initiatives and constructive change.

Want an improved economy, with robust job creation and a better quality of life? Then, support the business sector. It is a solution that has a long history of delivering those results!

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.