

Legislative Report

The Members Have Spoken: SMC Government Relations Issues Survey

by Eileen Anderson

We are now assembling our federal and state position papers in preparation for spring grassroots lobbying trips to Harrisburg and Washington, D.C. Members have asked how our legislative agenda and positions on state and federal issues are developed.

We listen to what you have told us over the past year, whether it be at events, or at meetings. Also taken into consideration is the likelihood of legislation coming up, what's realistic, and what we worked on last year. In addition a Government Relations Issues Survey was sent out to members in March. We combined information from these sources to write draft position papers. The papers were then reviewed at the Government Relations Committee meeting on March 5 and further comments from members were solicited.

Consensus at the March 5 meeting is that it's impossible to single out any one issue over another in importance this year. At the Federal level we will address Health Care, Labor Issues, Taxes, and Economic Development. At the State level we will address Health Care, Taxes, Workforce Issues, and Economic Development. The SMC position papers are still a work in progress and will be available later on this spring. However, following is some of the information gathered from our recent survey:

TAXES - Survey results clearly showed that slow sales, the high cost of health insurance, and taxes are the main concerns of members. See charts 1, 2, and 3. Twenty-three per cent of members indicated they had already laid off workers as of March 2009.

Message: Given the state of the economy now is not a good time to raise taxes of any kind on businesses or individuals. That money can be put to better use for investment in business for the creation of jobs.

LABOR - In a November survey, 65 per cent of respondents were opposed to "Employee Free Choice Act" legislation. This bill does away with the secret ballot process in votes to organize unions in the workplace. Eighty-three per cent were also opposed to a provision in the same legislation that mandates compulsory binding arbitration on the employer and employees.

On another labor issue, the Family and Medical Leave Act, 88 per cent were opposed to reducing the threshold from 50 to 25 employees for applicable benefits.

Message: The unionization of workplaces and increasing regulations stifle business and hamper job creation.

HEALTH CARE - Health care and insurance costs are a significant burden for many small businesses and the Obama administration is going full steam ahead to tackle Health Care Reform. Respondents were asked what they would do if they were in charge of health care and were given nine reforms to choose from. Twenty-four per cent are in favor of giving tax credits to small business to aid in purchasing insurance, 20 per cent would do away with the use of an individual's health history as a rating tool, and 18 per cent were in favor of building reforms using both public and private systems. Thirteen per cent would encourage the use of health savings accounts. Thirteen

per cent would like to retain the employer-based system and improve on it and seven per cent want to eliminate the employer-based system totally. Five per cent wanted a single payer system, and none want to eliminate the employer's tax deduction for health care, none are in favor of an employer mandate, five per cent wanted a single payer system.

Message: Health care costs must be reined in. Now is not a good time to be adding more fees and requirements on small employers.

Participants were also asked what additional issues SMC should be working on. They cited in order of importance: 1) simplification of the federal tax code; 2) state government reform; 3) lawsuit abuse reform; 4) state economic incentives for small businesses; 5) access to Small Business Administration loans; 6) workforce issues; 7) small business contracting; and, 8) independent contractor's classification.

Our grassroots lobbying trips are scheduled for Monday, May 4, 2009 to Harrisburg, and Tuesday and Wednesday, June 9 and 10, 2009, to participate in the annual Washington Presentation to Congress in Washington, D.C. Please join us if you can. E-mail eileenanderson@smc.org for information and to register. ▼

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