

Chamber once again delivers property tax relief

By Doug Loon

Minnesota businesses will see another reduction in their statewide property tax, thanks to the efforts of the Minnesota Chamber and our local chamber partners in concert with the Senate majority. For the second time in two years, the Minnesota Chamber Federation helped lower the statewide business property tax.

This fixed cost is paid by all businesses whether they own or lease property, regardless of whether they are profitable. Minnesota business property taxes are among the highest in the nation, and second highest for some properties. The state levy represents about 27% of a total property tax bill. The state business property tax levy will be reduced from \$784 million to \$737 million for taxes payable in 2020. Businesses will see this reduction on their tax statements this fall.

Health insurance premiums: The Minnesota Chamber scored another success – curtailing the growth in health insurance costs – that will be felt in the pocketbooks of many employers and employees. Reinsurance will be extended two years, continuing to stabilize the individual health insurance market. Since its enactment in 2017, the program has done exactly what it was designed to do. It brought down premiums in the individual market by roughly 20% in 2018 and another 20% this year. The relief provided will be a factor once again as health insurance policies are renewed for 2020.

Three other noteworthy state laws take effect this summer.

Hands-free cell phones: Effective Aug. 1, drivers may use their cell phone to make calls, text, listen to music or podcasts and get directions, but only by voice commands or single-touch activation without holding the phone. Drivers may not hold their phone in their hand. The Minnesota Chamber was among a broad coalition advocating the law change in the interest of promoting safety on Minnesota roads.

No one intends to seriously injure or kill someone by driving distracted. But good intentions don't prevent crashes — smart choices do. We encourage motorists to make the right choice. Put the cell phone down, turn it off, or place it out of reach. Hand-held phone use is allowed to obtain emergency assistance, if there is an immediate threat to life and safety, or when in an authorized emergency vehicle while performing official duties.

Transparency in health care costs: Health care costs continue to rise, forcing Minnesotans to become better consumers when shopping for medical treatment. Even when individuals take time to research costs, they can be rebutted in their efforts. Effective Aug. 1, hospital-based clinics will be required to disclose any facility fees that may be charged for nonemergency services before treatment. These fees can add significant cost to a patient's bill, and they can often be avoided by seeking care at a freestanding clinic that isn't connected to a hospital.

This legislation follows up on our work at the 2018 Legislature where a bill was passed to require health care providers and health insurers to provide a "good faith" estimate— within 10 days – of the cost of medical procedures at the request of a patient or prospective patient.

Wage Theft Act: A new law addresses what is commonly referred to as "wage theft": shortchanging employee paychecks. We worked hard to ensure the new state law will help protect employers who inadvertently find themselves in violation of certain wage laws. The law also increases penalties for employers who intentionally shortchange paychecks. The new law's increased notice and record-keeping requirements went into effect July 1, 2019. Criminal sanctions take effect Aug. 1, 2019. [Click here to watch a prerecorded webinar](#) providing you with all of the details to comply with this law.

These laws are proof positive of the Minnesota Chamber Federation's focus on strengthening the statewide business climate to improve the lives of all Minnesotans.

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