



**IOWA
ASSOCIATION
OF BUSINESS
AND INDUSTRY**

BUSINESS

JAN. 2025

MONTHLY

NEW ABI PRESIDENT NICOLE CRAIN:

Speaking Up For Business 'Ingrained In Who I Am'



STORY ON PAGE 12

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY 24

Legislative Update
(Members Only)

**Occurs bi-weekly during session*

VIRTUAL

FEBRUARY 20

Registration Open: Taking Care
of Business Conference

MARCH 6

Connecting Statewide Leaders
CLINTON

MARCH 12

Business Day in Des Moines
DES MOINES

APRIL 7

Nominations Open: Coolest
Thing Made in Iowa

**VISIT WWW.IOWAABI.ORG AND CLICK THE "EVENTS"
TAB FOR DETAILS ON ALL UPCOMING EVENTS.**

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FROM THE CHAIR:

A View from the Top: 2025 - A Look Ahead

In this column last month, we reflected on the successes of the organization over the past year. While 2024 was good, I truly believe that ABI is poised for an even better 2025 from both a program and impact perspective. To kick things off, January 1 marked the first time in two decades our association has had a new executive leader with Nicole Crain assuming the role of ABI President. Nicole has been working with the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors in ensuring the organization is positioned to meet both our current needs and our requirements for future success. Many of us have had the opportunity to work with Nicole during her tenure in other roles in the organization and with this month's feature story, we will learn more about her leadership style, vision and the passion she has for our organization.

In addition to a new leader at ABI, we have a new leader as President of the United States and a new Lieutenant Governor for Iowa, as well as many new elected officials at all levels of govern-

ment. As we head into a new state legislative session, this edition provides additional insight showcasing Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver and what he sees ahead for 2025.

As business leaders, it is beneficial for each of us to know, and have the ability to engage with our elected officials. By reaching out to them with an email, call or better yet offering a facility tour, we can help them understand the importance of ABI member businesses to Iowa's economy and the impact legislative proposals would have on our businesses and communities.

No matter your business function and focus, developing a relationship with your state representative and senator ensures your voice is heard and this member engagement is key to impacting legislative issues that affect your business. If you would like assistance making those connections, please reach out to JD Davis or Brad Hartkopf at ABI.

By the time this monthly edition goes to press, ABI will have held its second-largest annual event, the asso-

ciation's Legislative Briefing and Reception. Over 400 Iowa businesspeople and elected officials will have participated. To continue that momentum, I hope you will join me at Business Day on March 12 in Des Moines. We will hear from key legislative leadership mid-session and get the latest developments at the Capitol.

ABI is a member driven organization that serves as a unified voice for Iowa business. If you are not currently one of our valued 1,500 member companies, we encourage you to reach out and learn more about how ABI can provide benefit to your organization by visiting www.IowaABI.org or contacting Levi Lefebure, Membership Development Manager at llefebure@iowaabi.org or 515-235-0568.

Finally, this column wouldn't be complete without reminding you of the ABI Annual Conference in Council Bluffs June 10-12. Hotel rooms are filling up, workshops are selected, and keynote speakers are getting finalized. I can't wait to welcome you to Council Bluffs. **ABI**



Chad Reece
ABI Chair
Winnebago Industries

FROM THE FOUNDATION:

Start the New Year by Investing in Iowa's Future

For more than 40 years, the Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) Foundation has led educational programming to inspire the next generation of leaders through initiatives like Leadership Iowa, Leadership Iowa University, Business Horizons, and Elevate Advanced Manufacturing.

This impact is possible thanks to partners across Iowa who support the Foundation's mission to educate, equip, and inspire current and future leaders. These individuals and organizations understand that human capital is essential to the success of our communities, workplaces, and state.

As the new year begins, now is the time to invest in Iowa's future. Join our network of partners supporting workforce, education, and future-focused programs like Business Horizons and Leadership Iowa University. Contributions of time, talent, or treasure make a meaningful difference for participants.

- **Corporate Sponsorship & Donations:** Our statewide youth programs offer various sponsorship opportunities paired with unique benefits to recognize your generosity. Whether through a personal donation or corporate grant or sponsorship, your tax-deductible contribution plays a critical role in empowering youth and strengthening communities.
- **Support Local Students or Interns:** Several sponsorship levels allow companies to provide free

program attendance to students in their communities and/or internship programs. This option not only supports local schools and families, but also helps build your talent pipeline and boosts statewide brand recognition among young minds eager to identify future employment opportunities.

- **Volunteer & Nominate:** Volunteers serve as the heartbeat of our programs and often have a profound impact on attendees. Additionally, the simple act of sharing these opportunities with others or visiting our website to "nominate" potential participants fosters self-confidence and sparks empowerment among future leaders. Local involvement ensures your community, company, and industry are well-represented in these statewide programs.

"The fact that companies are willing to invest in our futures gives me hope and reassurance that my generation can truly do wonderful things," shares Saad Mann, a Pleasantville High School Business Horizons 2024 participant.

Let's make 2025 a year of growth and opportunity. Your investment in the ABI Foundation ensures Iowa's leadership and workforce continuum remains strong and vibrant for years to come. For sponsorship opportunities and more information, visit www.IowaABIFoundation.org or contact Meg Schneider at mschneider@iowaabi.org. **ABI**



Jessi McQuerrey
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EXPERT ADVICE:

Estate Planning for Business Succession Amid Possible Tax Changes

Despite the potential extension of the current estate tax exemption amounts, estate planning remains crucial for business succession. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) of 2017 temporarily doubled the estate and gift tax exemption, allowing individuals to transfer up to \$13.61 million (\$27.22 million for married couples) without federal estate or gift taxes for 2024. However, strategic planning is still necessary.

**Joe Drish**

Principal
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Strategic Asset Transfer

Transferring business assets to successors early can be beneficial, especially if those assets are likely to appreciate. Strategies like grantor retained annuity trusts (GRATs) and installment sales to intentionally defective grantor trusts (IDGTs) help transfer future asset appreciation while retaining some income or interest, reducing the taxable estate's value and aiding business ownership transition.

Family Limited Partnerships

Family limited partnerships (FLPs) or family limited liability companies (FLLCs) are useful for leveraging the annual exclusion and lifetime exemption in business succession. These entities allow families to pool business assets, creating different ownership classes. By gifting or selling non-voting or limited interests to successors at a discounted value, more wealth is transferred while retaining voting interests. This method supports wealth transfer and structured management of family businesses.

Personal Cash Flow and Successor Needs

Evaluating personal cash flow requirements and the needs of successors is vital. Assessing the financial situation and successors' capability to manage the business responsibly helps in establishing trusts or other fiduciary vehicles that provide protection and guidance while maintaining some flexibility and control for the grantor. This approach safeguards the business legacy and prepares new management.

Adapting to Changes

Business succession planning must

adapt to potential tax law changes and personal circumstances. Even if TCJA provisions are extended, thorough estate and financial planning remains essential. Evaluating potential estate tax liability and its impact on business continuity is crucial. Staying informed about legislative changes and adjusting strategies accordingly preserves the efficacy of succession plans.

Comprehensive estate planning for business succession is indispensable for effectively managing, preserving, and transferring business wealth, regardless of estate tax implications. Strategic asset transfers, family limited partnerships, considering personal and successor needs, and adapting to changes create robust succession plans that withstand evolving tax laws.

For more information on CLA contact Joe Drish at joe.drish@CLAconnect.com or 319-558-0299.

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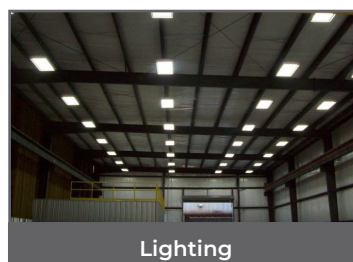
- Loans: \$50,000-\$300,000
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Powerful Partnerships

COVER STORY FROM PAGE 9

NEW ABI PRESIDENT NICOLE CRAIN: Speaking Up For Business ‘Ingrained In Who I Am’



BY EMERY STYRON

Newly-minted ABI President Nicole Crain traces her passion for business advocacy to her youth working at the family's restaurant in her hometown of Blockton, Iowa.

"I drank the Kool-Aid early on. It's ingrained in who I am," says Ms. Crain, who moved into ABI's top leadership role with Mike Ralston's retirement in mid-December after nearly two decades at the organization's helm.

"Working in the restaurant, supporting the town, serving people, doing dishes, counting back change" was a formative experience, says Ms. Crain. "I remember the regulations we had to comply with, wanted to comply with, Mom getting a call from a state agency in the middle of fried-chicken day."

Her father played a supporting role in the restaurant, but it was her mom's operation, another lesson that has served her well. "For me it's kind of natural. I'm always glad for that female role model to look up to. In ABI, we have strong leaders that are men and women in all the industries we're involved in," Ms. Crain says.

The Simpson College magna cum laude graduate in political science and management is well-prepared as she adjusts to her new role. She worked a year as director of governmental affairs for Associated Building Contractors of Iowa, then nearly four years as director of government relations at ABI under Mr. Ralston's mentorship. She left ABI for a short stint as president of the Iowa Taxpayers Association, returning in 2019 as senior vice president for public policy and vice president for government relations. She was promoted to executive vice president in 2019.

'Natural Fit For Role Of President'

In her more than 16 years at ABI, Ms. Crain worked closely with members and the board on varied initiatives involving organization finance and operations, membership, a partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation on childcare issues, and public policy advocacy.

"Nicole has been an exemplary steward of ABI's mission to serve as the champion for Iowa businesses for more than a decade," says Mr. Ralston. "Her work for ABI and our members has been pivotal in driving organizational growth and visibility. She is a natural fit for the role of president, and I have profound confidence in her leading ABI forward."

"Nicole's outstanding professionalism, track record for success and incredible work ethic rose to the top during our search," says Chad Reece, ABI Board of Directors' chair. "She has a strategic plan for the future of ABI that strongly aligns with the board's vision for the organization. That combined with her unwavering commitment to and passion for the organization and its members, deep knowledge of our business, and understanding of our mission make her the right fit for the future."

"It's a huge responsibility," says Ms. Crain of stepping into Mr. Ralston's role. "He has been a great mentor, a great boss. I started working here when I was in my mid-twenties. He helped empower me to grow. He will be missed in our organization. It was an honor to work for him. His values were the values of ABI members: Your word and your integrity are all you have. Treat others as you would like to be treated."

Ms. Crain's strategic plan for ABI's future includes building on the organization's strengths. "I've been here awhile," she says. "I have knowledge of what's worked well. I want to ensure ABI's continued record of legislative success. We've been instrumental in standing strong for employers, making sure businesses can stay in Iowa."

Manufacturing, ABI Foundation Top Priorities

The organization, founded in 1903 as the Iowa Manufacturers Association, will continue support for the industry with a focus on expanding resources, says Ms. Crain. "We're working on bringing more small manufacturers into ABI, making sure manufacturers are engaged. We're involved in supporting Manufacturing 4.0, and we remain the go-to organization for manufacturers. We're committed to that."

ABI membership includes many private and family-held companies that are essential to the economic strength and quality of life of the state, she adds. "There's so much that the public doesn't realize about business in general, just how businesses are important to the sustainability of the economy, how significant they are to the community. Things like sponsoring a little league team or donating a chipper after a disaster can make such a difference. We can help tell their stories. When someone needs help, we can connect them with people who have answers."

Another focus will be the ABI Foundation, a 501(c)(3) entity supported by contributions from corporations, individuals and others with a mission of providing statewide education programs to develop community leaders and strengthen Iowa's workforce. Programs

and initiatives include Business Horizons, Leadership Iowa, Leadership Iowa University and Elevate.

"We have the opportunity to leverage and align the work of the foundation with the organization. We want to bring in new grant partners and be the go-to for reinforcing manufacturing careers and the talent pipeline," says Ms. Crain.

Working Mother's Perspective

As a parent, with her husband Josh and two young children, she also brings to her job the perspective of a working mom. "It's a balance," she says. Fishing and other outdoor family activities are important to her. "My fun is seeing life through a child's eyes."

Ms. Crain's promotion is among several staff changes to prepare ABI for growth and higher visibility in coming years. Olivia Jones, a former intern and alumna of ABI Foundation programs, comes on board as marketing and communications assistant as Communications Director Kelsey O'Connor takes maternity leave. Member Services Coordinator Levi Lefebure has been promoted to membership development manager, taking on some of Ms. Crain's former duties. Two other new hires will focus on member and business relations.

"It is an honor to be trusted with such an important position," says Ms. Crain. "I have a strong vision for the future of ABI — one that encourages more member and partner engagement, growth of our membership, and additional opportunities to educate all Iowans about the importance of business to the state's success. I will continue to fulfill our mission to advocate, collaborate, educate and motivate to move Iowa forward. I'm excited to get started in 2025." ABI

Q&A: Interview with Majority Leader Jack Whitver

What are the top priorities for your caucus in 2025?

Senate Republicans heard a clear mandate from voters in November to continue implementing more pro-growth, pro-taxpayer, pro-freedom legislation in the same way we have since taking the majority in 2016. I have often said as long as I am the leader and Senate Republicans are in the majority, we will work on taxes. I expect this year the focus will turn more to property taxes than sales or income taxes. Voters also expressed their concern about the rapidly rising cost of living. I expect our caucus to take a look at the cost of doing business in Iowa, the cost of housing and energy, and other areas driving the cost of living in this country.

You are now leading a GOP team in the Senate that represents all or a portion of all 99 counties. What is it about that brand that has developed such broad appeal?

The most important part of any campaign is the candidate, and we have a great set of candidates and Senators in the Republican Caucus. They come to the Senate to do something, not be someone and the voters see that mindset and reward it with their vote.

Another aspect of our success is because we get things done. Working with the House and Governor Kim Reynolds, we have delivered historic tax relief, property tax reform, landmark protections for law enforcement, realigned state government and eliminated dozens of needless regulations. Iowans have responded positively to that agenda. I think they also appreciate the fact that when we say we are going to do something, we get it done.

There is much talk about property tax reform and reduction. What does success look like for 2025?

I believe success on property taxes in 2025 looks like bending the cost curve of local government down. Since 2000 the rise in property taxes has far outpaced population growth, wage growth, and state revenues and spending, and Iowans are demanding relief. The property tax system in Iowa took decades to become so expensive and complex, and it will take years to

unwind, but I am optimistic we will find some agreement here because like I said previously, we have been very productive as a team with Governor Reynolds and the House of Representatives.

You have a background in business ownership. Any lessons learned that you have applied to your work in the Senate?

The best lesson that translates from business ownership to the Senate is to be ready and willing to do the hard work necessary to succeed. Success in the Senate takes a lot of time and effort to work through policies, develop relationships, and work with the public, fellow senators, the House of Representatives, and Governor Reynolds.

Your party (Republican) now controls both legislative chambers and the Governorship in Iowa and both chambers in Congress and the Presidency. What public policy opportunities are now available because of this alignment?

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 was a tremendous success for Iowa and the whole country. It spurred years of dynamic economic growth and complimented the tax relief work we did here in Iowa to reduce income taxes for families and job creators. It allowed us to have rolling conformity with the federal tax code and make taxes fairer and simpler. I am optimistic we will see similar successes over the next four years on taxes and regulations. I am also optimistic Iowa may have more flexibility in delivering social programs to encourage and reward work and move more able-bodied Iowans into the workforce.

How will you grade the outcome of the 2025 session?

I will view the session as a success if we continue to implement conservative spending practices, continue to ease the tax burden, and find ways to control rapid increases in the cost of living and doing business. •



Majority Leader
Jack Whitver

CAPITOL BUSINESS:

ABI's Legislative Agenda for 2025

The November Election is over and now the focus has turned towards the 2025 legislative session. The 91st Iowa General Assembly was set to kickoff on Monday, January 13. The 110-day session is tentatively set to conclude on May 2, which is when legislators' per diem expenses expire.

The results of the election were strong for ABI as 70 out of 74 (more than 94%) IIPAC endorsed Friend of Iowa Business candidates won their races for the State House. This means a pro-business Legislature is in charge for the next two years. ABI is in a good position to advance our priorities.

Taxes

Perhaps no other state in the country has transformed its tax climate in a more competitive direction than Iowa has since 2018. An individual flat income tax of 3.8% is in effect beginning this year, the corporate income tax is 7.1% and will hit a flat 5.5% in a few years, the inheritance tax has been phased out, retirement income is exempt from tax and the first round of property tax reform took place in 2023.

Governor Kim Reynolds and legislative leaders have their sights set on additional property tax reform in 2025, which lines up with ABI's top priority.

Though progress has been made, Iowa is still uncompetitive in this space as the nonpartisan Tax Foundation ranks Iowa 32nd in the country in their 2025 State Tax Competitiveness Index. ABI's position is to ensure that if relief is provided, it should be incurred by all classes of payers.

Another key issue under tax is unemployment insurance premium reform. Iowa's unemployment insurance trust fund is in a sound position because of actions taken by Governor Reynolds during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and policymakers' decision to reform the system to emphasize re-employment during the 2022 legislative session. Now, the amount of premiums being paid by employers into the trust fund is significantly greater than the amount of claims being paid out. You can expect ABI to be supporting legislation that will right-size the amount of money in the trust fund.

Workforce

Policymakers have sought to break down barriers to entering the workforce by enacting policies that will make childcare more affordable and available, expand the number of housing units across the state and fund programs that will allow Iowans to up-

skill. Over the last number of sessions, ABI supported many of those bills and appropriations then and you can expect us to be at the table again in 2025 when additional potential solutions are discussed.

ABI will also be advancing drug and alcohol testing legislation that seeks to address some imbalances in the Iowa Code and ensure employers can continue to maintain safe workplaces.

Regulatory Reform

ABI is always looking to cut red tape for our member companies so they can operate more efficiently and effectively. We'll be supporting legislative efforts that facilitate this. In fact, regulatory reform is something we're focused on year-round, not just during the legislative session, as we work with department agencies to ensure rules they promulgate do not exceed the statute's authority from which they are derived.

One thing you can do to help move our agenda forward is to attend Business Day in Des Moines on March 12. Our Legislative Briefing and Reception was a success. The March event is the next opportunity to continue to foster and build a relationship with other business leaders and connect with Iowa's legislative leaders. **ABI**

**Brad Hartkopf**

Senior Director, Public Policy
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EVENT REWIND:

Leadership Iowa Visits Ottumwa to Explore the Future of Iowa's Workforce

In December, the Leadership Iowa Class visited Ottumwa to explore economic development initiatives and gain insights into the future of Iowa's workforce. The group toured Indian Hills Community College, where they participated in hands-on career training simulations, and heard inspiring success stories from students at the Ottumwa Job Corps.

The session also featured many expert speakers including Beth Townsend, Executive Director of Iowa Workforce Development. Townsend addressed the

class and other community members during an ABI "Connecting Statewide Leaders" event. She outlined innovative strategies to address workforce shortages and reaffirmed Iowa's commitment to expanding work-based learning opportunities. Townsend emphasized initiatives such as the implementation of apprenticeship programs in schools and businesses statewide. Don't miss the opportunity to attend our March "Connecting Statewide Leaders" event and networking lunch in Clinton. Register now at www.IowaABI.org/events. **ABI**



WHAT'S TRENDING:

How Integrated Receivables Reduces Past-Due Payments and Disputes

Very few integrated receivables (IR) platforms provide collections modules, with most focusing solely on cash application. This article explains the unique benefits of the collections module.

Collections Management and Automation

While still fairly new and unique, some integrated receivables (IR) systems provide modules with collection management capabilities to help prevent and convert past-due receivables into cash. Sophisticated AI is used to help determine a customer's future risk of delinquency, automatically adjust collection strategies based on that risk, prioritize delinquent accounts for optimal cash flow and provide automated outreach for accounts at a lower risk of delinquency.

Most IR systems with collections platforms use AI and automation support to improve cash flow in the collections process in three main areas:

- **Identification:** Calculating a customer's willingness to pay.
- **Prioritization:** Adjusting strategies and priority of a contact.
- **Coverage:** Contacting the entire portfolio multiple times throughout each collection period.

The best IR platforms allow businesses to define the collection strategy and templates used in any automated outreach activity based on a customer's risk level. These systems use

data such as customer payment history, credit bureau data and amount owed to determine risk levels.

Dispute Workflow Enhancement

Dispute and deduction management workflows are also an area that IR can address. Leading IR systems often include the ability to identify and code disputes and deductions during cash application. Items are then automatically routed to the appropriate team for resolution. This helps businesses:

- Enable real-time collaboration between all teams involved.
- Allow automatic escalations that reduce resolution times.
- Provide real-time reporting for root cause analysis and prevention.

Identifying root causes for disputes and deductions is key to quickly resolving and preventing repeat occurrences. IR allows businesses to eliminate blind spots through clear tracking and reporting. Improving the dispute resolution experience reduces the frustration that can often stem from slow or inconsistent processes.

The best IR platforms enable users to eliminate their old manual processes, disparate data sources, disconnected workflows and multiple spreadsheets. IR can increase efficiency and effectiveness across all areas of receivables management.

Contact me or your Treasury Sales Officer for more information. **ABI**



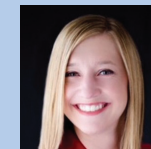
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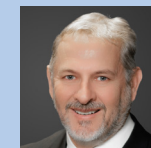
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The Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) has been the voice of Iowa business since 1903. Its mission is to provide a strong, unified voice to business and industry on issues affecting Iowa employers. ABI is comprised of member companies representing all industries and sizes in Iowa's 99 counties. ABI members employ more than 330,000 Iowans.

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