PRESS RELEASE -
For more info: (518) 563-1000

BUSINESS COMMUNITY EXPRESSES VIEWS AND CONFIDENCE - -

February 1, 2019
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The North Country Chamber of Commerce has released the results of its Annual Issue Survey, providing a snapshot of the collective position of the North Country business community on a number of state and federal issues as well as an indication of its business expectations for the year ahead.

CONTINUED CONFIDENCE IN NORTH COUNTRY ECONOMY

BUSINESS UP = 79%
BUSINESS STEADY = 17%

Each year, the Chamber gauges the region's Business Confidence Index, which is a combination of those expecting their business activity to grow this year and those expecting their business to remain steady. For 2019, 79% expect business to be up while 17% expect it to be steady for a "Business Confidence Index" of 96%. This is the same finding as a year ago for 2018. However, there was a small movement from Business Steady (17% in 2019 compared with 21% in 2018) to Business Up (79% in 2019 compared with 75% in 2018).

"This expression of optimism and confidence is consistent with other recent findings and measures," states Garry Douglas, Chamber President. "Unemployment in the area has been as low in recent months as 3.4%, the real estate market is performing well, Canadian visitation last year was strong, sales tax revenues are up, and most manufacturers have been growing. Add factors such as the facility and service advances at Plattsburgh International Airport, the current construction of the new Norsk Titanium project, the major sports events and hotel projects drawn to the Adirondacks, downtown revitalization initiatives in Plattsburgh and Saranac Lake and strong investment interest from Canada, and you can see the ingredients for general confidence."

The North Country Chamber sees the index as a sign of continued support for the strategies and work of the area's economic and workforce development team, including the Chamber, the Development Corporation, the North Country Regional Economic Development Council, the Regional Workforce Development Board, Empire State Development, CITEC, area IDA's and partner officials at the federal, state, county and local levels, among others.

VALUING OUR ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP WITH CANADA

The primary importance of the North Country's multi-faceted economic partnership with Canada was once again strongly reaffirmed, providing an important message following a year of difficulties related to trade negotiations and tariffs. Virtually 100% agree that the U.S.-Canada relationship is working for the North Country and must be supported and preserved as a key to the North Country's current and future economy. Only one respondent disagreed.
97% agree that Congress should approve the updated NAFTA agreement (USMCA), bringing stability and predictability to the U.S.-Canada economic partnership. And 96% agree that a settlement must be reached soon that will end U.S. and Canadian tariffs on steel, aluminum, softwood lumber and other materials.

On the topic of China, 81% believe the continuation and possible expansion of a tariff based trade war with China would be harmful to the U.S. economy. 19% believe it would be beneficial.

NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

On the New York State front this year, 92% state that it is time to make the state's 2% Property Tax Cap permanent. On other issues:

- 94% believe small business tax relief should be a priority given increasing labor costs and regulations, and must include small businesses not organized as corporations.
- 96% call for greater and more flexible state support for workforce development and training, including partnerships with employers and employer organizations, aimed at addressing skill gaps and workforce needs.
- 93% agree that, in light of the enactment of a number of new mandates on employers over the last few years, it is important that no new mandates be imposed on employers this year.
- 89% oppose the expansion of state prevailing wage mandates, effectively requiring union labor/wages on all projects receiving any state funding or support, including private projects.
- 83% ask that the questions and concerns of employers be heard and considered as the state moves toward the potential legalization of recreational marijuana.
- 94% agree that the state should engage in helping to close major cell phone service gaps in the Adirondacks and elsewhere in the North Country.

When asked if New York State should enact a full state takeover of health insurance coverage, or focus on reducing state imposed costs on healthcare and bringing coverage to those not yet insured, 89% indicate that the state should focus on cost and covering the uninsured.

Overall state priorities are as follows:

#1 - MORE SUPPORT FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING
#2 (Tie) - STATE SUPPORT TO HELP CLOSE CELL PHONE SERVICE GAPS
#2 (Tie) - AVOID ADDITIONAL MANDATES ON EMPLOYERS
#3 - MAKE 2% PROPERTY TAX CAP PERMANENT

The North Country Chamber of Commerce is the largest business and economic development organization in northern New York, linking more than 4,000 employers across Clinton, Franklin, Essex, Hamilton and northern Warren Counties and Akwesasne. It serves as a leading advocate in Washington, Albany and elsewhere on behalf of the North Country economy.