Special FutureWork Q&A w/ Lew Ebert of the NC Chamber!

Dear friends,

As many of you know, I’m on point leading IEI’s development of the 2016 Emerging Issues Forum, FutureWork (Feb. 8-9, 2016). We’re less than two weeks out and I’m incredibly excited at how the Forum program has come together.

Anticipating the Forum, I recently connected with Lew Ebert, President of the NC Chamber of Commerce, to get his take on how North Carolina industry is responding to the two convening trends that are the Forum’s focus: increased automation and shifting demography.

Don’t Miss Out!
Get Your Forum Ticket Now!

Only a handful of tickets remain for Day One of the FutureWork Forum! Day Two is sold out. Day One registration closes Wednesday, Feb. 3! Don't miss out on your opportunity to convene with some of the industry's brightest minds! Register here.

Forum on Live Statewide TV!

This year, for the first time ever, Day 1 of the Forum will be broadcast live statewide on the North Carolina Channel, a new service of UNC-TV focusing on civic affairs and other non-fiction content relevant to the state.

Q&As with North Carolina Leaders

Check out our other Q&As with top...
Lew's excited about the Forum, and he congratulated IEI on picking a great topic, one that's timely and sure to spark a much needed conversation in North Carolina. I opened with a broad, Forum-focused question:

**Q: How are tech automation and demographic trends playing out for business in NC?**

Lew is very optimistic about North Carolina's ability to weather the twin storms of increasing automation and shifting demography. He argues that NC is positioned to become a world leader because we've got the infrastructure to make that happen. He cited workers comp and other regulatory reforms as evidence that North Carolina has made a conscious decision to be successful.

With that as the backdrop, Lew noted that North Carolina companies are figuring out how to take advantage of technology. "**NC companies figuring out how to best interface with technology has helped make us the most dynamic job creator in the state.**" But he cautions against those who are nostalgic for the old days. "**The old manufacturing economy with 50,000 people in a factory, that day is gone forever. Its not only about how many jobs are created – what’s key is productivity per worker. If we can be one of the most productive states per worker, North Carolina wins.**"

Lew's thoughts here reflect the fact that younger companies are employing far fewer employees than firms of the past. The Kauffman Foundation has found that new businesses account for nearly all net new job creation; this reality puts a premium on our ability to develop entrepreneurial talent and spark the growth of startups in our state. On this key point, Forum speaker Philip Auerswald understands what it takes to develop ecosystems for growing tomorrow's firms, so I'm...
really looking forward to his address.

Q: What are you hearing about how automation and demographic changes are impacting workforce development needs across the state?

“This is the top issue everywhere,” Lew notes. “Nobody has the talent they need where and when they need it, but companies are now more realistic about what they need to do to find talent.” He championed the state’s efforts to address this challenge through the NCWorks Work Ready Communities (WRC) initiative, where the NC Chamber Foundation works in collaboration with the Office of the Governor, Departments of Commerce and Public Instruction, and the Community Colleges System Office to help North Carolina communities be Certified Work Ready. This initiative ensures that our communities have aligned workforce development efforts and economic development needs. According to WRC’s governing body, the program has positioned North Carolina with the highest number of credentialed potential workers in America.

While touting this success, Lew was realistic about the challenges that lie ahead. In the new economy, he emphasized, we will need all partners engaged in preparing our future workforce with certifications, degrees, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships. Very simply, “We will need all of it to compete.”

Lew’s observations suggest the need for dynamic relationships between industry and communities. As change accelerates, it will be imperative that NC develops plans to accommodate new work arrangements and platforms, as well as training that is ever more responsive to the needs of workers and industry. I’m sure that featured experts Dambisa Moyo and Devin Fidler will have more to say about this issue at the Forum.

Q: What advice can you give new businesses to ensure success in North Carolina future economy?

When I asked Lew about what he saw as the best information he could provide for new businesses about North Carolina, his thoughts turned to the state’s many assets and amenities. At the top of the list was our regulatory environment and the presence of a dynamic creative class. “We’re now becoming a state that is treating capital a lot better than it used to. And the talent and the idea generation that is occurring in North Carolian is now making us attractive to investors looking for the next big idea.” Lew was quick to point out that, although businesses have plenty of choice, North Carolina is now competitive in the relocation competition. Moreover, venture capital now recognizes the critical factors that make North Carolina attractive for investment. One is our talent – North Carolina has a dynamic and growing creative class, and that helps make us attractive on many levels. Boston and New York are not the only East Coast hubs of innovation. North Carolina is emerging as a hotbed for startups.

I’m grateful to Lew for his thoughts. Few individuals are better positioned to help us address the FutureWork challenge in North
Carolina.

I know that we’re hearing plenty about the future of work from some of our brightest minds – folks like Bill Gates, Elon Musk, and Andrew McAfee – and it’s rather dire. Some suggest that nearly half of all current jobs could disappear.

What’s certain is that some communities will emerge as leaders while others suffer as jobs disappear to automation and tech-fueled offshoring. If North Carolina’s communities are to emerge as world leaders in job growth, we need to get moving now.

That’s the task before us at the 2016 Emerging Issues Forum. Get your ticket (act now – we have few tickets remaining) and bring your voice and your ideas. Help North Carolina take on the challenge.

I’ll see you on Feb. 8-9 at the Forum!

Best,
Donnie Charleston