

# The ADVOCATE

## for Business & Community

A quarterly publication of the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry

*We need to make our voice heard on issues to ensure our community's economic vibrancy. Your Chamber's Business Advocacy & Community Leadership Council recognizes we must be engaged in the process. Through our public policy initiatives, we inform our members and the public on important issues affecting the business community. 2015 can be a year of opportunity and progress but we need leadership, political courage and a sense of urgency to get things rolling. Get connected at [GreaterReadingVoice.com](http://GreaterReadingVoice.com) to be engaged on policy issues, community leadership initiatives and connect with elected officials and community leaders.*

Gail A. Landis, C.P.M.  
V.P. Government & Community Relations

### 2015 CONGRESSIONAL CONVERSATION

As the new 114th Congress sets their policy agenda and priorities, our 2015 Congressional Conversation, member only event on March 12th provided an excellent opportunity for interaction with our Congressional Delegation. Congressmen [Charlie Dent](#) (15th District), [Pat Meehan](#) (7th District) and [Ryan Costello](#) (6th District) joined us for a breakfast networking reception, sharing their insights and answering questions. Congressman Joe Pitts, a past-participant, unfortunately had a conflict and was unable to participate.



The discussion focused on the impact of regulatory and policy uncertainty for our economy. Our Congressman acknowledged that federal regulations impose burdens on business that increase costs and that the administration is overstepping its authority when it comes to rule making. Congress has been working to peel back some of the regulations but they are dying on the President's desk. We discussed the need for sustainable federal transportation funding as a priority since our state projects such as 222 North include federal funding to make them a reality. All agreed that a six-year surface transportation bill is needed and they are working on plans to identify ways to fund it. The US is the highest cost country in the world to do business with in regard to taxes. Corporate tax reform using a simpler tax code would enable the rate to be dropped to more competitive levels, but it will require a comprehensive approach. Other topics discussed included energy and workforce skill training and education.

The Chamber maintains an open dialogue with our Congressmen. We will be traveling to DC to advocate on transportation funding May 13 and also anticipate a regional Chamber DC trip in the fall - stay tuned!

### PA 2015-16 BUDGET COUNTDOWN

Gov. Tom Wolf's proposed 2015-16 PA Budget is the first step in adopting a plan for State operations. Budget adoption is a process that involves public hearings by both the House and Senate to vet the issues. The Governor's budget is a very

bold proposal and contains a significant number of new taxes and an increase in spending of \$33.8 billion (general fund - 16% over current year). Details on the proposed budget along with related information is available by clicking here: [2015-16 Proposed PA Budget](#).

The Chamber Board of Directors and Business & Community Advocacy Council are actively monitoring and discussing the budget process. Collectively, we believe no new revenue sources should be considered until we have meaningful public pension reform (state and municipal). Your Chamber has been a leader in forming the [Coalition for Sustainable Communities](#) advocating and presenting proposals to address this unfunded liability issue. If the legislature addresses the pension issue we will be vigilant to ensure that any revenue increases are tied to strategic economic investments in our state and our economic outlook and education improvements.

We would like to hear from members with regard to the proposed tax reform impacts related to: Increase in Personal Income Tax (PIT) from 3.07% to 3.7% and Sales Tax increase from 6% to 6.6%, as well as the proposed goods and services eligible to be taxed. In addition, Corporate Tax Changes would implement unitary combined reporting and reduce the Corporate Net Income Tax (CNI) from 9.9% to 4.9% by tax year 2018, lowering Net Operating Loss (NOL) deduction to \$3 million or 12.5% taxable income (currently \$ 5 million or 30%), continuing a phase-out of Corporate Stock and Franchise Tax (CSTF) along with a severance tax in addition to the existing impact fee on gas extraction. Also proposed is an increase in the minimum wage to \$10.10.

Please email [Gail Landis](#) to share your thoughts, or call 610-898-7773 concerning the proposed 2015-16 PA Budget. Please also take the opportunity to talk with your Legislators about the budget and other issues impacting business at the Legislative Breakfast on April 10 - [register here](#).

## EVERY VOTE COUNTS: 2015 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

### Are you prepared to make an informed vote in the Municipal Primary Election on May 19?

Last day to register to vote in the Primary is **April 20**.

Last day to apply for an absentee ballot is **May 12**.

Last day for County Board to receive absentee ballot is **May 15**.

For more information about voting and the candidates, click here: [Voter Resources](#) and [Berks County Election Services](#).

On April 28th, the Chamber has partnered with the Reading Berks Association of Realtors to host 'Know Your Berks County Judicial Candidates Information Forum' - [Click here to register](#).

## TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES & FUNDING

### Route 222 North

The 222N work group of the Chamber's Transportation Committee continues to work with Penn DOT, Berks County Planning Commission and our regional partners and elected officials to ensure US Route 222 North remains our # 1 priority road project. This corridor is vital to our region's economic stability, job growth, and quality of life.

### ReadingBridges.net

The Reading Bridges work-group, a public private partnership facilitated by the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the Berks County Commissioners, along with key stakeholders, is dedicated to continually providing the Greater Reading community with the latest news and updates regarding the Reading Bridges Projects. We are currently validating the time line, detours, commuter resources and real time traffic information with regards to the Buttonwood Bridge rehabilitation project that will begin in 2015. The bridge will remain closed for approximately two construction seasons.

### Transportation Funding

The August 2014 \$11 billion stopgap measure that Congress passed to carry us when the federal highway trust would have been insolvent will expire May 31, 2015. The Chamber continues to advocate that we enact a fully funded, multi-year surface transportation bill at the earliest possible date. [Click here](#) to read the **Chambers for U.S. Infrastructure Investment** letter sent to Congress and [click here](#), to read the thank you letters sent to Berks Congressman Costello, Dent and Meehan for signing on to the letter submitted to Speaker John Boehner and Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi.

We are working collaboratively with the Keystone Transportation Funding Coalition, holding meetings with our Congressmen on sustainable transportation funding.

## WORKFORCE PIPELINE INITIATIVES

At the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry we recognize that our future business leaders and entrepreneurs are learning in the classroom right now. The guidance and tools they receive in school can have a huge impact on their future success. In order to ensure each student maximizes his or her potential, the Chamber has launched a Workforce Pipeline Initiative.

### Young Leadership Conference Series: Building Tomorrow's Leaders Today



On March 13th we had nearly 300 students and 250 mentors from the business community interact in the Chamber's 'Building Tomorrow's Leaders Today' Leadership Conference, held at Penn State Berks. It was a day focused on mentoring, inspiring, empowering and commitment to the success of the future leaders of Berks County.

We would like to acknowledge our Young Leadership Conference Series Sponsors, Donation Supporters, the Young Men & Young Women Planning Committees and Volunteer Mentors

that made this conference such a success! Visit our [Workforce Pipeline & Policy](#) webpage for a complete review of the event!



### We are currently looking for volunteers to participate in our Spring Workforce Initiatives:

#### Career Prep Fair: April 29, 2015

Unlike a typical career fair, Reading High School seniors are given the opportunity to learn more about particular career paths and local opportunities. Volunteers will:

- Offer students more information about their particular companies
- Identify skill sets (technical and soft) required to be employed, as well as an overview of the application process.

Click [here](#) to download the Career Fair volunteer registration form.

#### CHOICES Program: May 19-20, 2015

An interactive decision-making workshop for 8th graders at Reading Intermediate School, walking students through real-world exercises about the benefits of staying in school and introducing practical skills. Volunteers will:

- Offer a 45-minute presentation with a co-presenter on two consecutive days
- Complete a 2-hour online certification
- Be provided with presentation materials and class kit.

Click [here](#) to download the CHOICES volunteer registration form.

## NEWS BITES

The PA Department of Community and Economic Development has approved \$17,101,702 through the **Keystone Innovation Zone Tax Credit** program for 227 companies located within one of the state's 28 Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZ). Your Chamber is the coordinator for the Greater Reading Keystone Innovation Zone (KIZ). Two of the Greater Reading KIZ companies have been awarded a total of \$200,000 in tax credits: **Liquid Interactive, LLC** and **Continental**

## Tide Defense Systems, Inc.

The KIZ Tax Credit program provides the KIZ Company with the ability to sell its credits for cash. The KIZ Tax Credit program is a great way for companies to support their cash flow needs, giving them the opportunity to hire new staff, expand their market and purchase equipment.

## ENGAGE & CONNECT

- April 10 [Legislative Breakfast](#)
- April 28 [Know Your Berks County Judicial Candidates Information Forum](#)
- April 29 Career Prep Fair at Reading High School: Volunteer Opportunity, Contact: [Gail Landis](#)
- May 13 Federal Transportation Funding DC Fly-In: Meet with Congressional Members, Contact: [Gail Landis](#)
- May 15 PA DCED Acting Secretary Dennis Davin: Business Advocacy & Community Leadership Forum, Contact: [Gail Landis](#)
- May 19 Primary Election - Visit [Voter Resources](#) for more information!
- May 19-20 CHOICES Program at Reading High School: Volunteer Opportunity, Contact: [Gail Landis](#)

## STAY CONNECTED ~ TAKE ACTION

[GreaterReadingVoice.com](#)  
[ReadingBridges.net](#)  
[@VoiceOfReading](#)

## PARTNERS IN ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Community Priorities ~ Economy ~ Legislation/Regulations ~ Local Business Issues ~ Workforce Pipeline

Title Partner



Leadership Partners



Advocacy Partners



---

Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry | 201 Penn Street, Suite 501, Reading, PA 19601  
Tel: 610.376.6766 | Fax: 610.376.4135  
[info@GreaterReadingChamber.org](mailto:info@GreaterReadingChamber.org) | [www.GreaterReadingChamber.org](http://www.GreaterReadingChamber.org)

Follow the Chamber:

