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Nebraska Business and Consumer Confidence Indexes: April 7, 2017

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Summary: Consumer confidence was strong in Nebraska in March 2017 while business confidence remained very strong. The Consumer Confidence Index – Nebraska (CCI-N) rose to 100.5 during March, 5.9 points higher than in February. The index value, which is just above the neutral value of 100, indicates that consumer confidence was strong in Nebraska. The outlook of Nebraska businesses is more firmly positive. The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska (BCI-N) stood at 108.2 in February, well above the neutral value. The business confidence index fell slightly, by 0.9% from February, but remains at a high level. When asked about the most important issue facing their business, customer demand was mentioned by 47 percent of business respondents, taxes by 11 percent of respondents and labor availability and quality by 9 percent of respondents. These results reflect a drop in concern about labor availability and quality. Households reported a variety of financial concerns with 27 percent reporting that their primary financial concerns relate to paying off debt or savings and 49 percent choosing the cost of living including health care costs, taxes, major expenses (furniture, appliances, automobiles or college tuition) and the general cost of living.

Consumer Confidence Index - Nebraska

The Consumer Confidence Index – Nebraska (CCI-N) summarizes responses to the *Survey of Nebraska Households* regarding the household financial situation and the environment for a making a major household purchase. Respondents provide their assessment of both current conditions and expectations for the next 6 months. The *Survey of Nebraska Households* is sent to 500 households each month. The survey asks respondents whether: 1) their household is better off financially now than it was six months ago 2) they expect their household to be better off financially in six months, 3) they believe now is a good time to make a major household purchase (automobile, appliance, or electronics) and 4) they expect it will be a good time to make a major household purchase 6 months in the future. The survey also asks a fifth question “What is the most important financial issue facing your household today?” Individual responses to that question fall into eleven categories. In March, responses were received from 138 of the 500 surveyed households, for a 28 percent response rate.

The Consumer Confidence Index – Nebraska is estimated based on responses to the first four questions. For each question, the share of respondents indicating that they are worse off (or

that it is a bad time to make a major household purchase) is subtracted from the percentage who indicate they are better off (or that it is a good time to make a purchase). The number 100 is added to the difference in percentages. A value of 100, therefore, indicates that households are neutral, since a value of 100 would only arise if the same share of households declare that they are better off as declare that they are worse off. A value above 100 indicates strong consumer confidence. A value below 100 indicates weak consumer confidence.

The Consumer Confidence Index – Nebraska is the average of the values for the four questions. Therefore, a value over 100 for the CCI-N indicates strong consumer confidence.

As seen in Table 1, the Consumer Confidence Index – Nebraska had a value of 100.5 in March 2017. This value is above 100 and indicates that consumer confidence is strong in the state, albeit only marginally strong. The value of the index increased by 5.9 points from 94.6 in February.

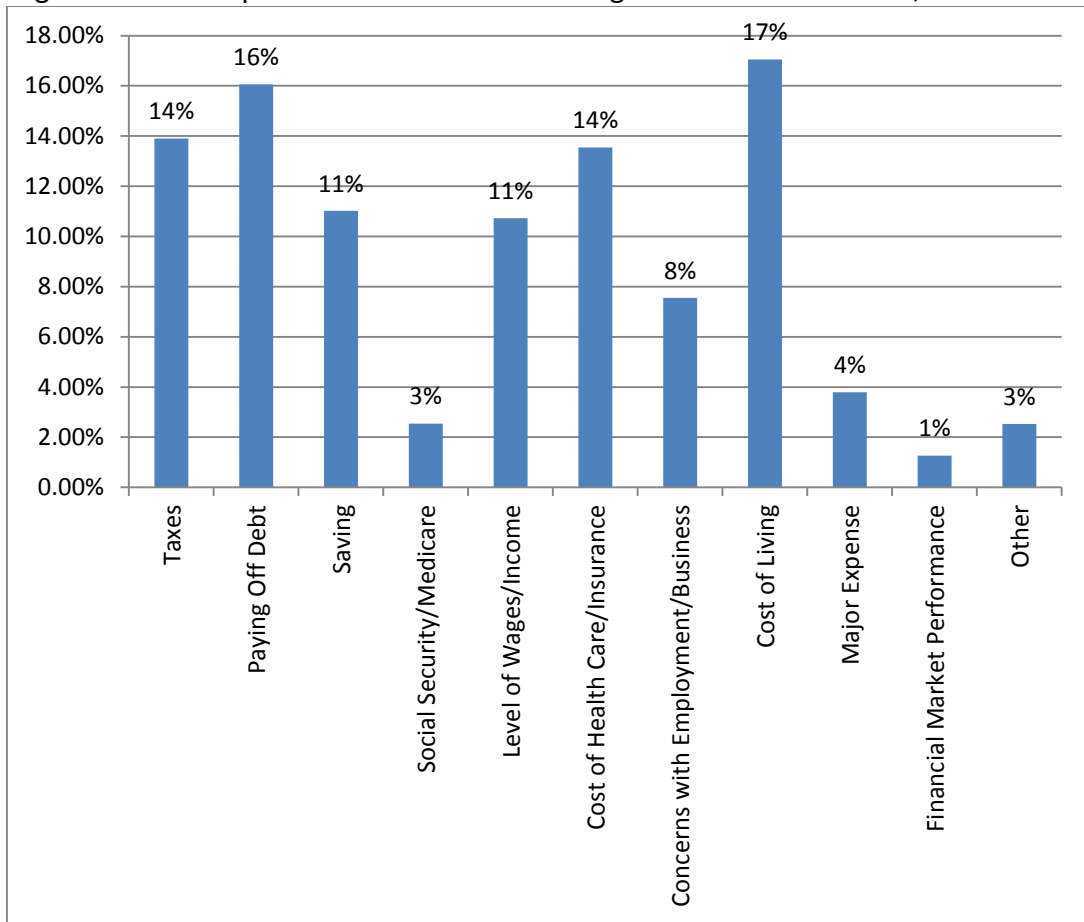
Table 1: Consumer Confidence Index - Nebraska, March 2017

Consumer Confidence Index – Nebraska	
Month	Index Value
March 2017	100.5
January 2017	94.6
Change from Previous Month	5.9

Source: Survey of Nebraska Households

Figure 1 shows household responses to the question about the most important financial issue they face. The most common issues raised in March responses were the cost of living (17 percent) and paying off debt (16 percent). Overall, 49 percent of respondents chose some type of cost factor as their top issue, whether the general cost of living, the cost of health care and insurance (14 percent), taxes (14 percent), or major expenses (4 percent). Twenty-seven percent of respondents choose paying off debt or savings as their top issue. Among other responses, 11 percent chose their level of wages or income as their top issue and 8 percent choose concerns about their job or business. These shares are similar to those found in previous months.

Figure 1: Most Important Financial Issue Facing Nebraska Households, March 2017



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey of Nebraska Households

Survey of Nebraska Business

The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska (BCI-N) summarizes responses to the *Survey of Nebraska Business* regarding business sales and employment. Respondents provide their assessment of both recent employment and sales growth and expectations for the next 6 months. The *Survey of Nebraska Business* is sent to 500 Nebraska business establishments each month. The survey asks respondents whether: 1) the dollar sales volume at their business was higher, lower, or about the same as it was over the previous 6 months 2) the dollar sales volume at their business will be higher, lower, or about the same over the next 6 months, 3) the total number of employees at their business increased, decreased or stayed the same over the last 6 months and 4) the total number of employees at your business will increase, decrease, or stay the same over the next 6 months. The survey also asks “What is the most important issue facing your business today?” Individual responses to that question fall into one dozen categories of business and public policy issues. Surveyed businesses are randomly selected from all industries, including agriculture. Businesses of all sizes are surveyed. In March, responses were received from 136 of the 500 surveyed businesses, for a 27 percent response rate.

The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska is estimated based on responses to the first four questions. For each question, the percentage of respondents who indicate that sales or employment decreased (or will decrease) is subtracted from the percentage who indicate that sales or employment increased (or will increase). The number 100 is added to the difference in percentages. A value of 100, therefore, indicates that businesses are neutral, since a value of 100 would only arise if the same percentage of businesses declare an increase as declare a decrease. A value above 100 indicates strong business confidence. A value below 100 indicates weak business confidence.

The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska is the average of the values for the four questions. Therefore, a value over 100 for the BCI-N indicates strong business confidence. Recent values for the Business Confidence Index – Nebraska are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Business Confidence Index - Nebraska, March 2017

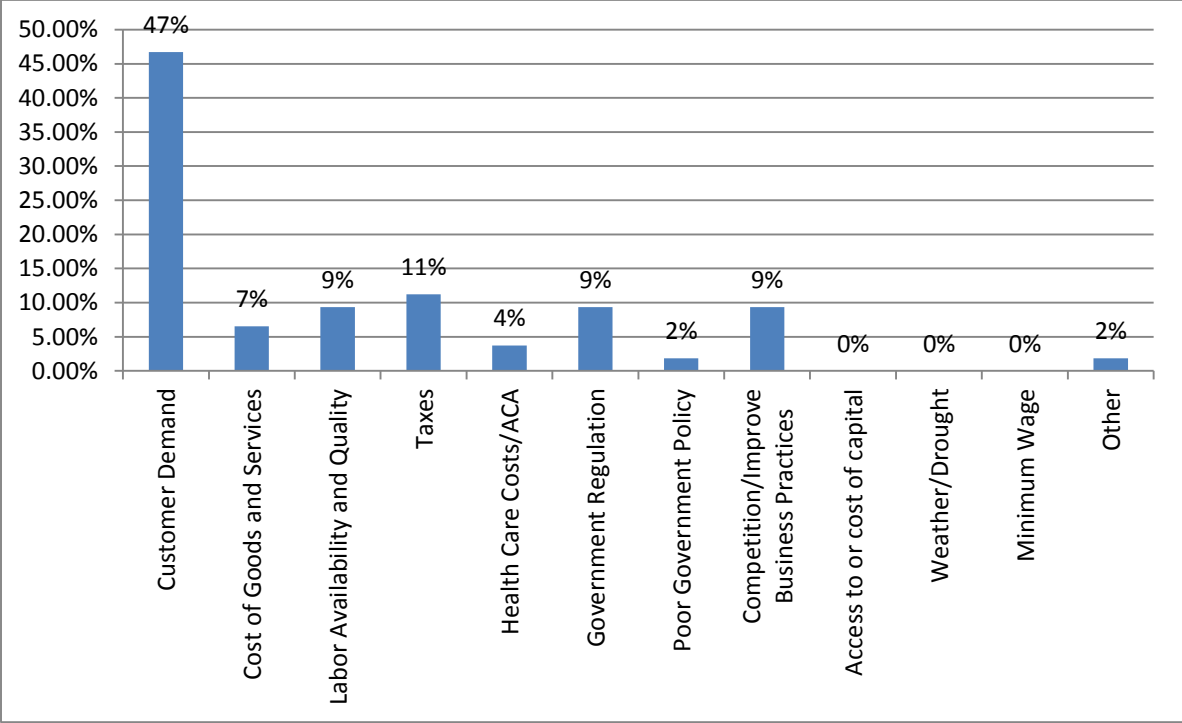
Business Confidence Index - Nebraska	
Month	Index Value
March 2017	108.2
February 2017	109.1
Change from Previous Month	-0.9

Source: Survey of Nebraska Business

As seen in Table 2, the Business Confidence Index – Nebraska had a value of 108.2 in March 2017. This value is well above 100 and indicates that business confidence is very strong in Nebraska. The value of the index fell 0.9 points, from 109.1 in February 2016. This small change indicates that business confidence in Nebraska is holding at a high level.

Results in Figure 2 show the top concerns of business owners and managers responding to the March survey. Three quarters of responses were related to business operations issues such as customer demand for goods or services, labor availability and quality, competition or the cost of goods and services. Customer demand was the most common top concern, named by 47 percent of respondents. The availability and quality of labor was chosen by 9 percent of respondents. This is a much lower percentage than in previous months and suggests that business concerns are turning to other issues. Nine percent of respondents cited competition from other businesses or a need to improve business practices as their top concern while another 7 percent cited the cost of goods and services. These shares are similar to those found in the February 2017 survey. Taxes were chosen by 11 percent of respondents while government regulation was chosen by 9 percent.

Figure 2: Most Important Issue Facing Nebraska Businesses, March 2017



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
 Source: Survey of Nebraska Business