

VAWEST

BUSINESS & LEGISLATIVE COALITION

LEGISLATIVE POLICIES

FOR

YEAR 2009

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEMBERS

Bedford Area, Botetourt County, Charlottesville Regional, Danville/Pittsylvania County, Franklin County, Greater Bluefield, Harrisonburg-Rockingham, Lexington-Rockbridge County, Lynchburg Regional, Martinsville-Henry County, Roanoke Regional, Salem-Roanoke County, Smith Mountain Lake, Twin County Regional, and Wytheville-Wythe-Bland

A UNITED VOICE FOR WESTERN VIRGINIA ON ISSUES THAT AFFECT THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The VA WEST Business & Legislative Coalition works as a unified voice on issues that affect the business community. As a guiding principle, VA WEST generally supports the public policies of VA WEST members and the Virginia Chamber.

VA WEST:

- Supports sound fiscal management at all levels of government and urges the Commonwealth of Virginia to apply financially sound principles to all aspects of budget planning and long-term strategic planning and governmental operations and construction. VA WEST supports the retention of Virginia's Aaa financial bond rating.
- Believes that any state mandate on localities must be fully funded.
- Strongly supports continued state tax restructuring as a primary means of finding permanent, long-term solutions to meet our region's and the Commonwealth's growing transportation and education needs.
- Supports two-term governorship, balancing the power as needed, and views this as a step toward improving long-term strategic planning efforts.

TRANSPORTATION: *Virginia continues to face a Transportation Crisis*

Virginia continues to face transportation challenges while funding remains inadequate for current transportation needs. Highways and bridges are in continual decline.

VA West supports:

- Development of a 20-year strategic plan in coordination with the existing six-year-plan to deal with the 4,551 bridges determined to be in need of repair or rehabilitation in 2008.
- Finding long-term solutions, with a dedicated revenue stream, to meet critical transportation needs. For example, it is unacceptable that by 2013 there will be no state dollars to match federal dollars for essential state projects.
- Retention of existing Transportation Trust Fund allocation formula.
- A constitutional amendment to restore trust in the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) by using TTF funds solely for their intended use.

VA WEST supports appropriate investment in all modes of transportation, including highways and bridges, air, transit, passenger and freight rail, roads, and intelligent transportation systems, with an emphasis on:

- Highways/Bridges
 - Widening/improvements for I-81, with short & long-term improvements.
 - I-77/I-81 seven mile overlay upgrade.
 - Building I-73 and upgrading 220 from I-64 to the North Carolina line.
 - Fast-tracking U.S. 501 improvements.
 - Completion of the U.S. 58 corridor.
 - Completion of all work on U.S. 29 limited access bypasses at Lynchburg (southern portion) and Charlottesville.
 - Improvements to U.S. 460.
 - Completion of Route 221 (five laning) in Bedford County.
 - Completion of the Meadowcreek Parkway.
 - Completion of the Southeast Connector Road.

- Improvements to Route 37 Eastern Loop Road in Harrisonburg..
- Recognition that the Smart Road Demonstration Project offers statewide benefits and should be funded as such.
- Rail:
 - Heartland Corridor and related Intermodal systems as they support freight and passenger rail.
- Air:
 - State leadership initiatives on air service to maintain current levels of service at regional airports in Charlottesville, Danville, Lynchburg, Roanoke, and the Shenandoah Valley.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WORKFORCE, & REGIONAL COOPERATION

The VA WEST Coalition is strongly committed to regional cooperation and economic development, and advocates the critical role that a skilled, globally competitive, workforce plays in these efforts. Programs which encourage investments in technology infrastructure, support regional economic development planning, promote regional workforce training, or otherwise promote cooperative city and county efforts to maintain or attract businesses are considered essential for the continued future economic development of the Piedmont, Southside, Southwestern, and Western Virginia.

VA WEST supports:

- Programmatic restructuring to provide for more meaningful and effective enterprise zones.
- The statewide efforts of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and regional economic development groups, including: Roanoke Valley Economic Development Partnership, Region 2000 Economic Development Partnership, Rockbridge Partnership, Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation, Shenandoah Valley Partnership, Thomas Jefferson Partnership, Mount Rogers Partnership, and Virginia's @Corridor.

WORKFORCE

VA WEST recognizes the vital importance of maintaining and developing new and innovative workforce development concepts to prepare local unemployed/underemployed citizens for job opportunities associated with the knowledge economy.

The VA WEST Coalition supports:

- Adequate funding for adult education.
- The concept of middle college.
- Continued adequate funding of Workforce Services, currently through the Department of Business Assistance, and flexibility to use funds for training of new workers and re-training of existing workers.
- Sustained funding for: Bedford Science and Technology Center, Botetourt Center at Greenfield Workforce Training Center, Dabney S. Lancaster Workforce Training Center, Danville Community College, Roanoke Higher Education Authority, Franklin County Workforce Consortium, Central Virginia Community College, Lord Fairfax Community College, Patrick Henry County Community College, Roanoke County/Bedford Regional Alternative Education Center, Piedmont Virginia Community College, "Piedmont Works," Blue Ridge Plecker Workforce, Virginia Western Community College and all community college satellite facilities, and the Wytheville Community College Workforce Training Center.

- Flexibility in the use and leveraging of the federal Workforce Investment Act funds, and in implementing the federal WIA regulations, to ensure services are focused on skills development that are responsive to the current needs of business.

TOURISM: Drivers of Economic Vitality

VA WEST recognizes that tourism, including arts and culture, represents a \$18.6 billion industry providing over 210,000 jobs in Virginia. Arts, culture, and tourism are drivers of economic vitality. Museums and attractions, including “heritage tourism”, “agri-” and “eco-tourism” throughout Piedmont, Western, Southwest, and Southside Virginia, provide unique cultural and educational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of Virginia’s citizens and students who might otherwise not have access to programs in larger metropolitan areas. These opportunities provide an added incentive for economic development and help attract young business professionals.

VA WEST:

- Supports equitable funding for quality of life entities, including state and non-state agencies, museums, and cultural and historical attractions, specifically Ashlawn-Highland, the Danville Science Center, Heritage Preservation Center, Nat’l D-Day Memorial, VA Museum of Natural History, Monticello, Montpelier, Piedmont Arts Association, VA Horse Center, VA Museum of Transportation, Art Museum of Western Virginia, The Arts Council, Blue Ridge Zoological Society of Virginia, Inc., Harrison Museum of African American Culture, History Museum & History Society of Western Virginia, and Science Museum of Western Virginia.
- Believes that non-state entities represent a bargain for the state by fulfilling the role of state museums while not requiring the state to pay full fare. These facilities fulfill many needs including meeting SOL standards and are widely utilized by school districts where it may not be cost effective to use some state facilities several hours away.
- Supports state funding of the Virginia Commission for the Arts.
- Supports funding for the Virginia Tourism Corporation’s Cooperative Marketing Program, which benefits the broader region’s tourism efforts.
- Supports continued growth and further development of the wine industry throughout central and Western Virginia. Viticulture and winemaking are successful examples of agribusiness and agri-tourism. We support equitable open markets in which Virginia’s vintners can continue to grow and flourish.

EDUCATION: Foundation for the Commonwealth’s Future

The VA WEST Coalition clearly recognizes the importance of sustained funding for educational programs (K-12) and higher education programs as the foundation of the Commonwealth’s future knowledge workforce. VA WEST encourages innovative ways to create and sustain education programs.

The VA WEST Coalition supports:

- Maintained funding of state colleges/universities, community colleges, and for K-12 programs, especially construction.
- Expanding opportunities for access to pre-K education.
- Allowing localities to determine how to spend state allocations for education with proviso that no local reductions in expenditures can occur so that state funds are a net gain to the funding pool.
- Continued full funding of the Standards of Quality, support for and review of the Standards of Learning, and verified credit for nationally credited programs.

- Maintained support for teacher professional development and training in workplace technology applications and character principles instruction for K-12.
- Sustained support of the Literary Fund & Virginia Public School Authority.
- Proposed guiding principles for state education funding as recommended by Virginia CARES (Consortium for Adequate Resources for Education) and JLARC (Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission).

SOUND FISCAL PRACTICE

The VA WEST Coalition believes that a guiding principle of sound governmental fiscal practice must be to structure governmental services to available resources. Sound fiscal practice also requires that fiscal balance be achieved by controlling spending before increasing tax rates or adding additional taxes and sources of revenue.

VA West strongly encourages homeownership and opposes any policies that shift the tax burden onto the business community, including the homestead exemption.

VA WEST supports:

- Comprehensive tax reform that is equitable and broad-based, fosters a favorable business climate, encourages economic development, and promotes prosperity for all Virginians.
- Reform and repeal of local business and professional occupancy tax authority.
- Supports a single factor sales tax.

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare costs are crippling Virginia's economy and its businesses. Creative measures are essential to making healthcare coverage more affordable.

VA WEST:

- Supports efforts to reduce healthcare costs, including pooling, medical savings accounts, or other affordable means.
- Supports caps on medical malpractice liability awards.
- Opposes additional healthcare mandates from the General Assembly, such as requiring insurance coverage for hearing aids or other specialized items or procedures.
- Opposes any mandated percentage of healthcare costs to be paid by businesses for their employees.

ENERGY

VA West supports the development of cost-effective, alternative, and renewable energy sources while keeping Virginia competitive in the energy market.

WESTERN, SOUTHWESTERN, AND SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA CAUCUS:

The VA WEST Coalition advocates a bi-partisan legislative caucus to represent the Western and more rural portions of the state. This cooperative effort can be effective in dealing with common issues such as transportation, workforce, education, and economic development.

NOTES

NOTES

VAWEST

BUSINESS & LEGISLATIVE COALITION

Virginia West Business & Legislative Coalition members work together to help the western region speak with a unified voice for business. Virginia West represents over 7,000 businesses in over 10,000 square miles.

LEGISLATORS

Senator R. Creigh Deeds
Senator John S. Edwards
Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.
Senator R. Edward Houck
Senator Robert Hurt
Senator Stephen D. Newman
Senator Mark Obenshain
Senator Phillip P. Puckett
Senator W. Roscoe Reynolds
Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr.
Senator Ralph Smith
Delegate Watkins M. Abbitt, Jr.
Delegate Ward L. Armstrong
Delegate Robert B. Bell
Delegate Kathy J. Byron
Delegate Charles W. Carrico, Sr.
Delegate Ben Cline
Delegate William Fralin

Delegate C. Todd Gilbert
Delegate H. Morgan Griffith
Delegate W.R. Bill Janis
Delegate R. Steven Landes
Delegate Matthew J. Lohr
Delegate Danny Marshall
Delegate Joe T. May
Delegate Donald Merricks
Delegate David Nutter
Delegate Charles Poindexter
Delegate Lacey E. Putney
Delegate Christopher B. Saxman
Delegate Edward Scott
Delegate Jim Shuler
Delegate Anne B. Crockett-Stark
Delegate David Toscano
Delegate Shannon Valentine
Delegate Onzlee Ware

VIRGINIA WEST BUSINESS & LEGISLATIVE COALITION

210 SOUTH JEFFERSON STREET □ ROANOKE, VIRGINIA 24011-1702
540.983.0700 EXT. 226 □ FAX 540.983.0723 □ JWAUGH@ROANOKECHAMBER.ORG