

Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce 2010 Legislative Policies

The Roanoke Regional Chamber works on behalf of its 1,300 members to make things better for business. Transportation, healthcare costs, education, regionalism and economic growth are among the top issues in our region.

The Chamber 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. The Chamber supports the retention of Virginia's Aaa bond rating and a fully funded revenue stabilization rainy day fund.

TRANSPORTATION

Virginia continues to face transportation challenges while funding remains inadequate for current transportation needs. For example, ending the VDOT maintenance deficit requires \$575 to \$625 million annually.

The Chamber supports appropriate investment in all modes of transportation, including air, transit, passenger and freight rail, roads, and intelligent transportation systems.

The Chamber supports:

- A variety of measures to increase revenue for transportation, including public private partnerships, tolls, congestion pricing, user fees, and a fuels tax increase or a percentage sales tax on fuels.
- The Heartland Corridor and use of a portion of the future growth in state taxes attributed to economic activity generated by the Elliston Intermodal Facility for transportation projects in the Salem District.
- Immediate re-opening of 19 rest area facilities closed in 2009.
- A constitutional amendment requiring that the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) is used solely for its intended use.
- Retention of the existing Transportation Trust Fund allocation formula.
- Development of a 20-year strategic plan in coordination with the existing six-year plan to deal with the 4,826 bridges determined to be structurally deficient and/or functionally obsolete in 2009.

- State Rail Enhancement Funds to be used as Virginia's match for federal rail funding.
- Expansion of Amtrak passenger rail service from Lynchburg to Roanoke.
- The goals of the I-81 Corridor Coalition, I-81 freight rail study, and the Norfolk Southern Crescent Corridor.
- Safety and capacity improvements to I-81, including widening.
- Building I-73, including widening and safety.
- Upgrading U.S. 220 from I-64 to the North Carolina line.
- Completion of the U.S. 58 corridor.
- Completion of the Smart Road.

HEALTH CARE

Rising health care and insurance costs continue to be a top concern of the region's employers, particularly small business owners. While recognizing that many factors contribute to rising costs, the Chamber supports creative measures that would make healthcare coverage more affordable.

The Chamber supports:

- Healthy lifestyles education.
- Caps on medical malpractice liability awards.
- The creation of health care co-ops or insurance pools.
- Allowing the purchase of health care plans from other states.

The Chamber opposes:

- Additional health care mandates from the General Assembly.
- Any requirement for a specific percentage of employee wages to be designated for health care coverage.

EDUCATION: FOUNDATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH'S FUTURE

The Roanoke Regional Chamber clearly recognizes the importance of sustained funding for K-12 and higher education as the foundation of the Commonwealth's future knowledge workforce and economic development.

The Chamber supports:

- Continued full funding for re-benchmarking of the Standards of Quality.
- The Standards of Learning and verified credit for nationally certified programs.
- 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.
- Maintained funding 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).
- Increased Tuition Assistance Grants (TAG) for private colleges and universities.
- Strategies to increase capacity in existing post secondary education in western Virginia.
- Programs to increase achievement and attainment in early childhood education, K-12 and higher education.

The Chamber opposes:

- Any changes in the Standards of Quality Funding Formula which would reduce any funds to local school divisions.
- Additional cuts to higher education and community colleges.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WORKFORCE, & REGIONAL COOPERATION

The Roanoke Regional Chamber is strongly committed to regional cooperation and economic development and understands the critical role that a skilled

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 retain or attract businesses are considered essential for the continued future economic development of the region.

The Chamber supports:

- The Roanoke Regional Partnership's legislative agenda.
- Maintaining, in not increasing, funding for the Virginia Jobs Investment Program.
- Flexibility in the use of the Governor's Opportunity Fund to take advantage of a broader range of projects.
- Restoration of the Virginia Enterprise Zone to 100% grant status.
- Investment in research and development throughout our institutions of higher learning.
- Increased funding of the Workforce Training Program to better meet state and local workforce needs in Virginia.
- Flexibility in the use and leveraging of federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds by removing restrictions that limit the allocation of funds in the most impactful way.
- Restored funding for the Planning District Commissions, which actively enhance regional cooperation efforts.

The Chamber opposes:

- The adoption of new storm water management regulations that would put Virginia at a competitive disadvantage by increasing the cost of doing business and adversely impacting economic development.

ARTS, CULTURE, TOURISM: Drivers of Economic Vitality

The Roanoke Regional Chamber recognizes that tourism represents a \$19.2 billion industry that generates over 210,000 jobs in Virginia. The museums and attractions, including agri- and eco-tourism, throughout our region provide unique cultural and educational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of Virginia's citizens and students who would otherwise not have access to such programs.

These organizations are also an economic development asset and help attract young business professionals.

The Chamber supports:

- Equitable and sustainable funding for state and non-state arts and cultural agencies, museums, and historical attractions. The non-state agencies play a vital role in the Commonwealth by fulfilling the role of state museums while not requiring the state to pay full fare. They also fulfill many SOL standards and are widely utilized by school districts by providing a closer, more cost effective alternative to state facilities several hours away.
- State funding, toward a goal of \$1 per capita, of the Virginia Commission for the Arts, which leverages those dollars throughout the region and the Commonwealth.

TAXATION

The Roanoke Regional Chamber recognizes that Virginia's growing population and the need to remain competitive in the global market place continue to pressure state revenues. The cost of these core investments must be covered by new revenues or cuts to existing programs.

The Chamber also remains concerned with the uneven generation of tax revenue for the Commonwealth versus localities. More services are being designated for local funding while revenues remain flat.

The Chamber supports:

- Comprehensive tax reform, including a business and professional occupancy tax that is equitable and broad-based, that fosters a favorable business climate, encourages economic development, and promotes prosperity for all Virginians.
- Equalization of taxation authority of cities and counties.

The Chamber opposes:

- Any real estate tax cap or other change that would shift the tax burden to the business community, including the so-called homestead exemption.

WORKPLACE

The Chamber supports:

- Virginia's Right to Work law.
- Use of unemployment compensation as currently defined.
- Workers' compensation as currently outlined in the law.

The Chamber opposes:

- Additional mandates for unemployment compensation and workers' compensation.
- State and/or local government wage regulations on private enterprise or so-called "living wage" ordinances.
- Permanently expanding unemployment compensation eligibility for a one time infusion of federal funding.

ENERGY

The Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce supports the development of cost-effective, alternative and renewable energy sources while keeping Virginia competitive in the energy market, including the expansion of nuclear energy sources, wind and solar energy sources, exploration for off-shore resources, exploration for natural gas, and additional incentives for businesses that implement sustainable business practices.

GOVERNANCE

The Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce supports a constitutional amendment allowing Virginia's governors to serve two consecutive four-year terms, balancing power as needed. The Chamber also supports the creation on a non-partisan re-districting commission to create new legislative district boundaries.

WESTERN, SOUTHWESTERN, PIEDMONT, AND SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA CAUCUS:

The Roanoke Regional Chamber, as part of the VA WEST Coalition, advocates a bi-partisan caucus to represent the Western, Southwestern, and Southside areas of the state. This cooperative effort can be most effective in dealing with common

issues such as transportation, workforce education, healthcare costs and economic development.