

Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce 2012 Legislative Policies

The Roanoke Regional Chamber works on behalf of its members to create a thriving business climate, strengthen private enterprise, and improve the region's quality of life.

The Chamber's 2012 Legislative Policies reflect our concerns about the Commonwealth's growing transportation infrastructure needs, accessibility of affordable healthcare, and the impact that continued economic uncertainty will have on funding the core services of government.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a core service of government that is not being adequately addressed. With an estimated funding shortfall conservatively estimated to be \$1 billion a year and growing, all funding mechanisms should be seriously examined in light of the threat that congestion and decreased mobility pose to Virginia's economic competitiveness and quality of life.

The Chamber supports:

- Long-term, sustainable, and dedicated funding mechanisms that are indexed for inflation and efficient to collect.
- Exploration of alternative transportation financing mechanisms, such as a Vehicle Miles Traveled fee, that will capture revenue from emerging motor vehicle technologies like hybrid and alternative fuel engines.
- Consideration of tolling Virginia's interstate highways to improve and maintain these critical transportation corridors.
- Ongoing safety and capacity improvements to I-81 from Exit 132 in Roanoke County to Exit 156 in Botetourt County.
- Expansion of passenger rail from Lynchburg to Roanoke.
- Long-term funding for commuter bus service to Lynchburg's Amtrak passenger rail station from the Roanoke and New River Valleys.

- Permanent funding source for passenger rail capital improvements and operations.
- The Heartland Corridor, the Crescent Corridor and construction of the Elliston Intermodal Facility to facilitate the movement of goods from the Port of Virginia.
- Continued investment in existing infrastructure to improve the condition of Virginia's deteriorated pavement and thousands of bridges classified as structurally deficient and/or functionally obsolete.
- Significant safety and capacity upgrades to U.S. 220 from I-64 to the North Carolina line, including I-73.

The Chamber opposes

- Mandates that would devolve responsibility of maintenance, construction, and operations for Virginia's secondary roads to county governments. The Chamber believes that the decentralization of planning and resources from the Virginia Department of Transportation will increase inefficiencies and exacerbate existing fiscal pressures on county governments.
- Legislation that would alter the current VDOT payment rate to urban localities that maintain their own streets.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Roanoke Regional Chamber is strongly committed to building a business climate that attracts investment and innovation. The Chamber supports results-oriented economic development programs that encourage regional cooperation to retain or attract businesses. In addition, the Chamber supports efforts to review and minimize the adverse impacts of regulations on business, a competitive tax environment, and a thriving arts, culture, and tourism industry.

The Chamber supports:

- The Roanoke Regional Partnership's legislative agenda.
- Maintained funding for the Virginia Jobs Investment Program and the Department of Business Assistance.
- Increased funding and greater flexibility for the Virginia Small Business Financing Authority to provide access to credit for small businesses and entrepreneurs and promotion of the Angel Investor Tax Credit

and the Virginia Small Business Investment Company Credit.

- Flexibility in the use of the Governor's Opportunity Fund to take advantage of a broader range of projects.
- Full Funding for Virginia's Enterprise Zones.
- 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.
- Measures to improve the coordination of agencies, institutions, and programs involved in workforce training to ensure greater alignment between projected workforce needs and workforce programs.
- Maintained funding for the Planning District Commissions, which actively facilitate regional cooperation.

Stormwater Management

- The Chamber opposes unfunded mandates that impose stringent regulatory burdens and penalties on local governments.
- The Chamber supports a regional, uniform approach to stormwater management that will not adversely impact economic development.

Taxation

The Chamber supports:

- The JLARC study on the impact of restructuring the local Business, Professional, and Occupational License (BPOL) tax based on net income (relative profitability) instead of gross receipts.
- Reducing or repealing Machinery & Tools tax to increase capital investment.
- 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.

Arts, Culture, & Tourism

The Roanoke Regional Chamber recognizes that tourism represents an \$18.9 billion industry that generates over 204,000 jobs in Virginia and 7,000 jobs and over \$134 million in local employee earnings in the Roanoke Valley. Museums and attractions in 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.

The Chamber supports:

- Equitable and sustainable funding for state and non-state arts and cultural agencies, museums, and historical attractions.
- To promote strong and diverse arts and cultural organizations, state funding toward a goal of \$1 per capita of the Virginia Commission for the Arts, which leverages those dollars throughout the region. The Virginia Commission for the Arts review process ensures a high level of quality and artistic excellence that meet community expectations.
- The efforts of the Roanoke Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau to promote tourism in the Roanoke Region.

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:

- Proposals that would weaken secret ballot protections in union Elections.
- Additional mandates for unemployment compensation and workers' compensation.
- State and/or local government wage regulations on private enterprise

or so-called “living wage” ordinances.

EDUCATION: FOUNDATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH’S FUTURE

The Roanoke Regional Chamber recognizes the importance of sustained funding for K-12, post-secondary, and higher education as the bedrock of workforce and economic development.

The Chamber supports:

- Continued full funding for re-benchmarking of the Standards of Quality.
- The Standards of Learning, including courses on financial literacy, and verified credit for nationally certified programs
- Greater local flexibility in determining how to spend state allocations for education with proviso that no local reductions in expenditures can occur.
- Funding of the Literary Fund.
- Increased funding for Tuition Assistance Grants (TAG) for private colleges and universities.
- Strategies that increase access to Virginia’s public colleges and universities for in-state students.
- Funding for the Roanoke Higher Education Center to increase access for degree completion for the 42,210 people in the Roanoke Region that have partially completed degrees, adults who are unable to pursue education full time, and others who are not seeking the traditional college experience.
- Funding for Virginia Western Community College to improve the ratio of full-time faculty to part-time faculty, enhance services for military personnel and veterans, and strengthen education programs in science, technology, engineering, math, and allied health (STEM-H).
- Funding to expand access to and improve the quality of early childhood education programs like Smart Beginnings.

HEALTH CARE

Rising health care and insurance costs continue to be a top concern of the region's employers, particularly small business owners. The Chamber supports legislation that promotes personal responsibility, improves the quality of health care while eliminating waste and abuse, and expands affordable health insurance coverage options for employers.

The Chamber supports:

- Fully funding state share of Medicaid so costs are not shifted to the business community in the form of higher premiums.
- A results-oriented health care system that rewards doctors and hospitals for outcomes and promotes healthy lifestyles education and wellness programs.
- Maintaining current 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.

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.

The Chamber supports:

- Evaluating new sources of energy with consideration given to economic feasibility as well as secondary benefits such as air and water quality improvements.

- Preservation of existing constitutional eminent domain provision for public service corporations, public service companies and railroads.
- Maximizing efficiency in the permitting process for energy sources to facilitate project development.
- Green Job tax credits.
- Promoting collaboration between private business and universities on the research and development of clean energy.
- Expanding job training opportunities in renewable energy at Virginia's community colleges.

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 steps to make the re-districting process less partisan.

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.