



ROANOKE REGIONAL

CHAMBER

2015 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES





The Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce 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 2015 Legislative Priorities reflect our support for a market-based approach to expand and reform Virginia's Medicaid program, continued investment in our transportation infrastructure, on-going efforts to improve governance through reform of Virginia's ethics laws and the redistricting process, results-oriented economic development programs, and innovative approaches to education.

To enhance its reputation as a top state for business and to remain competitive in the global economy, the Commonwealth must continue to be pro-active in diversifying its economic base, streamlining tax and regulatory policy, and building strong communities. The General Assembly is uniquely positioned to lead by example by evaluating public policy in a deliberative, pragmatic, factual, and constructive manner.



HEALTH CARE

POSITION: 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, incentivizes fee-for-performance care, improves the quality of health care while eliminating waste and abuse, and expands affordable health insurance coverage options for employers.
- Accessing available federal funding to reform and expand Virginia's Medicaid program, including market based alternatives, that will limit the shifting of the escalating and unsustainable costs of uncompensated care onto the business community and other unsubsidized users of Virginia's hospitals and health care providers.

The Chamber opposes:

- Additional health care mandates.

GOVERNANCE

The Chamber supports:

- Modernization of Virginia's ethics laws to promote greater transparency and integrity in the political process, including the creation of an independent ethics commission that is equipped to conduct investigations.
- Steps to diminish the partisan influence over the redistricting process.
- Consideration of a one-year prohibition on the transition from state legislator to judgeship.
- A constitutional amendment to allow Virginia's governors to serve consecutive four-year terms.
- Efforts to review and minimize burdensome regulations.
- A competitive grant program to promote regional collaboration as recommended by a 2012 JLARC Study.
- Increasing the base allocation for Planning District Commissions to support efforts in promoting regional collaborative approaches to issues of common concern to local governments.

The Chamber opposes:

- Additional unfunded mandates on localities in the Commonwealth.



EDUCATION

POSITION: Human capital, particularly in the form of educational attainment, is strongly associated with economic growth and prosperity.

The Chamber supports:

- Elimination of the post-Labor Day school opening requirement to allow local school boards to schedule school calendars based on local or regional needs.
- Incentivizing participation in STEM-H courses.
- Funding for post-secondary education to provide essential workforce training and continuing education opportunities and increased funding for the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program.
- High quality, evidence based early childhood education programs and practices that improve school readiness.
- Exploration of additional opportunities for collaboration between the business community and K-12 schools, STEM-H education, community college programs, and mentoring programs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

POSITION: Results-oriented economic development programs that encourage regional cooperation to retain or attract businesses and that do not create market distortions are vital to the economic future of communities throughout the Commonwealth.

The Chamber supports:

- The Commonwealth's existing Right-to-Work laws.
- A competitive tax environment with greater transparency and oversight of Virginia's tax incentives.
- Efforts to create an inclusive, tolerant, and welcoming environment for business.
- A comprehensive review of Virginia's tax structure.
- A study of the costs and administrative burdens related to the collection of taxes on behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia, including the Sales and Use tax and other taxes.
- Continued funding for the Angel Investment Tax Credit, the Commonwealth Research Commercialization Fund, and the Research and Development Tax Credit.
- Sustained funding for the Virginia Jobs Investment Program (VJIP) to support investment in human capital.
- Restructuring the local Business, Professional, and Occupational License (BPOL) tax based on net income instead of gross receipts with consideration given to the fiscal impact on local governments.
- A thriving arts, culture, and tourism industry and adequate funding for the Virginia Commission for the Arts to oversee a competitive grant review process.

The Chamber opposes:

- Expansion of "ban-the-box" hiring requirements to private sector employers.

TRANSPORTATION

POSITION: The construction and maintenance of a multi-modal transportation network is a core service of government.

CHALLENGES: Because modern business models are dependent on the efficient delivery of goods and services, continued investment in the Commonwealth's transportation infrastructure supports Virginia's economic competitiveness and quality of life. To continue to meet the growing demand on its aging transportation infrastructure, policymakers must remain pro-active in identifying sustainable, equitable, and innovative sources of funding. Efforts to repeal or delay key provisions contained in the 2013 transportation funding legislation will create economic uncertainty by potentially disrupting the project planning process already hampered by funding shortfalls due to lower than budgeted revenues.

Proposed solutions:

- Continued exploration of innovative funding approaches, including mileage-based user fees and electronic tolls to generate revenue equitably from all users of Virginia's transportation system.
- Alignment of transportation funding to meet prioritized needs in our region.
- Focused efforts to discourage distracted driving in order to ensure the Commonwealth's highways are safe.
- Development of policies to address the rapidly advancing field of autonomous vehicles and to position Virginia at the forefront in the research and development of related facilities and technology.

The Chamber supports these key regional transportation initiatives:

- Safety and capacity improvements to I-81 throughout western Virginia, especially the S-curves between mileposts 167.5 and 168.5 in Botetourt County.
- Timely expansion of passenger rail from Lynchburg to Roanoke and additional study of opportunities for expansion to the New River Valley and Southwest Virginia.
- Safety and capacity improvements on I-73 in Virginia between I-581/ U.S. 220 in Roanoke and I-73 at the North Carolina border.
- Design and construction of safety and capacity improvements to U.S. 220 in Botetourt County.
- Steps to reduce congestion on the Orange Avenue/U.S. 460 corridor from I-581 to U.S. 220(A).
- Development of intermodal facilities in the Roanoke region, including application of \$20M previously appropriated, to ensure Southwest Virginia has access and connectivity to domestic and global trade networks.



ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

POSITION: The continued safe development of cost-effective, traditional and renewable energy sources will keep Virginia competitive in the energy market.

The Chamber supports:

- Evaluating energy legislation and regulation with due consideration given to economic feasibility, natural assets, and benefits such as air and water quality improvements.
- Efforts to incentivize energy conservation and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Maximizing efficiency in the permitting process for energy sources to facilitate project development.
- Steps to mitigate unfunded mandates that reduce local autonomy over stormwater and water quality management.

