

## ***Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce 2009 Legislative Policies***

The Roanoke Regional Chamber works on behalf of its 1,400 members to make things better for business. Transportation, healthcare costs, education, regionalism and economic growth are among the top issues in our region.

As a matter of principle, 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 further supports maintaining a fully funded revenue stabilization rainy day fund.

The Chamber supports one six-year term or two consecutive four-year terms for governors, balancing power as needed.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

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

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 fully-funded Rail Action Plan that includes restoration of passenger rail service to Roanoke.
- State Rail Enhancement Funds to be used as Virginia's match for federal rail funding.
- 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 and rehabilitation in 2008.
- Retention of the existing Transportation Trust Fund allocation formula.

- Finding long-term solutions to meet critical transportation needs. For example, by 2013 there will be a shortfall in state dollars to match federal dollars for state projects.
- A variety of measures to increase revenue for transportation, including public private partnerships, tolls, user fees, and a fuels tax increase of at least 10 cents or a percentage sales tax on fuels, to help meet current and future transportation needs.
- Transportation Trust Fund to be used solely for transportation purposes and a constitutional amendment to guarantee this sole use.
- The Heartland Corridor and related intermodal facility location in the Roanoke region.
- 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**

The Roanoke Regional Chamber understands that health care and insurance costs continue to top employers' concerns. 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 Chamber opposes:**

- Additional healthcare mandates from the General Assembly.

- Any requirement for a specific percentage of employee wages to be designated for healthcare coverage.

## **EDUCATION: FOUNDATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH'S FUTURE**

The Roanoke Regional Chamber clearly recognizes the importance of sustained education 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 rebenchmarking 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.
- Increased operational funding for higher education and use of capital bonds as capacity is available.
- 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.

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

The Chamber supports:

- Creation of funding vehicles to attract investment capital to Virginia for research-related and strategic-growth industries.
- The creation of a statewide Technology-Based Economic Development plan (TBED) to help ensure that technology-related growth is directed throughout all areas of Virginia.
- State incentives at a competitive level to attract new jobs and expand existing business.
- Investment in research and development throughout our institutions of higher learning.
- Sustained funding for four-year colleges and universities, community colleges, workforce training centers, and satellite facilities.
- 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 keep us from allocating funds in the most impactful way.
- Restored funding for the Planning District Commissions, which actively enhance regional cooperation efforts.

## **ARTS, CULTURE, TOURISM: Drivers of Economic Vitality**

The Roanoke Regional Chamber recognizes that tourism in Virginia, including arts and culture, represents an \$18.6 billion industry providing over 210,000 jobs in Virginia. In the Roanoke Valley alone, tourism generates \$732 million in revenue with over 7, 500 jobs. 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 of Commerce recognizes that Virginia's growing population demands public services and infrastructure that continue to pressure state revenues.

The Chamber believes that there are certain core investments that the Commonwealth and its localities must make to keep Virginia competitive in the global marketplace. The cost of such investments must be covered by new revenues or cuts to existing programs.

The Chamber also is 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 Commonwealth's tax code remains outdated and in need of reform.

The Chamber supports:

- Comprehensive tax reform, including a business and professional occupancy tax that is equitable and broad-based, fosters a favorable business climate, encourages economic development, and promotes prosperity for all Virginians.
- Tax reform to ensure vital state services including: public education, health care, transportation, public safety, and higher education, are funded by the most efficient means possible.
- Equalization of taxation authority of cities and counties.
- A single factor sales tax.
- A repeal of deconformity from the IRS tax code.

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:

- Adding mandates or broadening of uses for unemployment compensation and workers' compensation.
- State and/or local government wage regulations on private enterprise or so-called "living wage" ordinances.

## **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.

## **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.