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Economic Development

Overview:

The Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce recognizes that competitively positioning Texas for business relocations and expansions is essential to Fort Worth’s economic growth. It has been recommended by some to do away with the state’s economic incentive tools. While we support continual oversight of such tools, to do away with these tools would severely inhibit our ability to attract quality jobs to the state.

Therefore, the Fort Worth Chamber encourages the 84th Legislature to maintain all existing tax treatments that spur investment, stimulate economic development, create jobs and contribute to local tax bases.

Priority Positions:

- Fund the Texas Enterprise Fund so that each biennium the fund retains a level of $200 million.
  - Current Biennium Funding: $90 million ($45 million of which was from the discontinued Emerging Technology Fund)
- Fund the Moving Image Industry Incentive Program (Film & Commercial Incentives) at the $70 million level.
  - Current Biennium Funding: $24 million.
- Amend the Texas Economic Development Act Tax Code, Chapter 313 to make all $1 billion capital investment projects eligible (mega projects).
  - Projects with over $1 billion capital investment should be automatically qualified for Chapter 313 incentives.
Current requirements under Chapter 313 make it difficult to attract large investment projects and could hinder the state’s ability to bring these companies to Texas.

**Standing Positions:**
Support continued appropriations for existing economic development programs and oppose legislation which weakens the effectiveness of existing economic development statutes such as:

- Research & Development tax credit
- Skills Development Fund
- Tax Increment Financing Act; Tax Code, Chapter 311
- Property Redevelopment and Tax Abatement Act; Tax Code, Chapter 312
- Enterprise Zones; Government Code, Chapter 2303
- Exemption from franchise tax obligations for certain small businesses with total revenue less than or equal to $1 million.
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Water

Overview:

The Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce applauds the Texas Legislature for their work last session to address our long-term water funding needs.

Water availability is one of the most common questions asked by companies looking to relocate to our state. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue to work to ensure that our state’s water needs are met.

The Fort Worth Chamber asks the Texas Legislature provide proper oversight on all SWIFT applications, so to ensure each project is prioritized according to demands.

Priority Positions:

- Conduct proper oversight on all SWIFT applications made to the State of Texas.
- Oppose any legislation that would unreasonably prevent the State or water providers from exercising their ability to follow water management strategies in the upcoming State Water Plan.
- Protect the use of eminent domain authority for water providers in order to ensure a reliable water supply to growing communities.
- Preserving reuse as a water management strategy when taking any action in protecting environmental flows.
- Encourage targeted public information campaigns at the local level, addressing public awareness of water issues, the benefits of conservation and reuse, and the public’s responsibilities relating to water.
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Transportation

Overview:

Texas continues to grow in both population and the economy. Our state leadership has succeeded in creating a favorable business environment and excellent quality of life. However, our state transportation funding has failed to keep up with the growth. In order for our state to continue to lead the nation in job creation, it is imperative that our infrastructure supports the capacity for continued growth.

The Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce supports and encourages initiatives that increase the state’s investment in transportation infrastructure. The state must find new, sustainable sources of revenue to address our current and anticipated transportation needs.

Priority Positions:

- Support continuation of eminent domain authority and related tools to allow planning and development of new and/or expanded transportation corridors including high speed rail, commuter rail, freight rail, and highways.
- Continue policy of ending diversions of transportation resources (excludes education diversion).
- Preserve regional ability, where practical, to use Comprehensive Development Agreements (CDAs as a means of providing an alternate funding source for road and rail infrastructure to sustain previous investments and provide additional capacity for projected population and economic growth.
- Continue policy of laid out by the legislature in the 83rd and 84th Legislative Session and approved by voters which provides a reliable revenue stream for transportation infrastructure.
• Protect the various “tools” for mitigating congestion, including toll roads.
• Index the motor fuel sales tax to the Highway Cost Index, or some other agreed upon index that mirrors the transportation industry.
• The Fort Worth Chamber supports the appropriation of $200 million for the Rail Relocation Fund. The 79th Texas Legislature passed legislation to create the Rail Relocation Fund, however the program was not funded.
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Education and Workforce

Overview:

The Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce believes that the Texas public school systems and institutions of higher education need to be adequately and equitably funded. The chamber endorses an effective P-16 education system that will place an early emphasis on higher education and ensure a successful transition into the state's higher education institutions.

Additionally, the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce recognizes the need for quality, high-wage jobs that do not require a full, four-year degree. Therefore, increased student engagement and flexible diploma plans should be included.

To continue to create a well-educated and competent workforce to attract and retain high-growth industries, the state of Texas must make education and workforce development a priority.

Public Education:

- Restore public education funding to at least FY10 per pupil funding levels for each school district. Provide funding to support student achievement as defined by the THECB and TEA in the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards.
- Provide funding to be allocated locally by ISDs specifically but not exclusively to prepare students to meet college/career readiness standards and better guide and counsel them on appropriate courses and pathways more closely aligned with Texas' mid- and high-wage career opportunities.
- Adjust long-term formula deficiencies: update the Cost of Education Index, funding for students learning English, and include formula funding for quality full-day pre-K (pre-K
program must utilize developmentally appropriate assessments, leverage available resources, coordinate with other early childhood providers, and offer teachers professional development).

- Support Innovation Zones (HB 1842) which allows campuses to develop local initiatives to improve education outcomes. Allows permanent authority to accredited school organizations to operate with limited state intervention in organizational and managerial affairs, human capital and financial resource management.
- Support the work of the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium to develop innovative, next-generation learning standards, assessment and accountability systems.

Higher Education:

- Support measures that are recommended in the 60x30TX Plan which would progressively increase the percentage of Texans with a certificate or degree to 60% by 2030.
- The Legislature should authorize additional Tuition Revenue Bonds or their equivalent for capital improvements to address public higher education institutions capacity needs.
- Continue the policy of funding current and emerging Tier-One institutions, the Research Development Fund, the Competitive Knowledge Fund and the Texas Research Incentive Program for emerging research universities at internationally competitive levels, and preserve options for universities to adjust tuition as necessary.
- To protect college access and increase graduation rates for those students who are academically prepared and are in need of financial assistance, the Legislature must enhance TEXAS Grant appropriation to cover 100% of eligible students.
- Protect and enhance Texas Equalization Grants for private higher education institutions.
- Texas should address existing formula funding to increase efficiency and the number of graduates from universities and community colleges, especially in high-demand fields.
- Texas should simplify the process of applying for and enrolling in post-secondary education, to include eliminating duplicative paperwork, adoption of a common course numbering system, integration of state and federal college applications and state and federal electronic financial aid forms.
Workforce:

- Allow the Skills Development Funds to be more flexible in meeting industry needs in order to support their growth and development of a needed workforce.
- Defend current K12 and higher education funding for dual credit courses. For CTE dual-credit courses, utilize funds efficiently by incentivizing institutions to offer dual-credit courses which fulfill industry demand and obtain a recognized industry certification with substantial labor market value or result in transferable college credit.
- Maximize flexibility in educator contracts for qualified Career and Technical Education instructors coming from industry.
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Health Care

Overview:

Texas continues to grow in population as state leaders have succeeded in creating a favorable business environment. However, the state’s health care infrastructure has failed to keep up with the growth. Despite significant reductions in the number of uninsured Americans in the last several years, Texas is the only state in the nation where roughly 20 percent of its residents still lack health insurance (which means higher costs for the privately insured; higher costs for local taxpayers; a significant uncompensated care burden for providers; and, reduced productivity and profits for Texas employers).

The Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce recognizes the need for stable and equitable financing for health care providers as well as a sufficient and well-trained health care workforce.

Priority Positions:

- Support efforts to increase the number of Texans with comprehensive health insurance, including:
  - Enrolling all uninsured Texans who are eligible for coverage into the health insurance marketplace; and,
  - The state’s acceptance of federal funds to increase access to coverage for low-wage working Texans whose incomes are too low to qualify for the health insurance marketplace.
- Preserve and protect critical trauma care funding in Texas. Whether it is through an improved Driver Responsibility Program or another dedicated source, the state must ensure a stable source of funding for trauma care.
• Support the necessary state funding to ensure timely and appropriate access to inpatient, outpatient and community-based behavioral health services.

• Support Medicaid reimbursement rates for providers that more accurately reflect the cost of delivering care.

• Support the long-term extension of the state’s Medicaid 1115 Transformation Waiver and increased uncompensated care funding in order to:
  o Continue the financial savings for the state and federal governments achieved through statewide managed care for Medicaid participants;
  o Preserve health care access for the state’s uninsured population; and,
  o Continue health care innovation through more than 1,400 delivery system reform projects that are improving access to timelier community-based care, reducing avoidable hospital admissions and readmissions, improving self-management of chronic illnesses and reducing health care costs.

• Support continued appropriations to address the state’s critical shortage of physicians, nurses and behavioral health care professionals, including continued funding for the Professional Nursing Shortage Reduction Fund, the state’s graduate medical education programs and the loan repayment program for behavioral health care professionals.
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Military Affairs

Overview:

The Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce proudly supports the Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base (NAS JRB). For decades, NAS JRB (formally Carswell Air Force Base) has been a tremendous partner to our community and region. NAS JRB is a top tier economic driver in our region; in fact, it is the third largest employer in North Texas with a $2.3 billion annual economic impact.

Furthermore, NAS JRB provides critical mission components that serve our national security and is a shining example of the joint basing method.

Therefore, protecting our military installations from encroachment issues must be a high priority for our state. In fact, it is estimated the federal government will enact a Base Realignment And Closure in 2019. It is vital that we make all reasonable protections available to our nation’s military.

Priority Positions:

- Promote compatible growth that lessens the impact on military installations and provides enhanced options for cities and counties to manage growth.
- Provide tools that can be used at the local level to promote compatible growth around military installations such as:
  - Effective requirements for notification, analysis and consultation for certain proposed activities that may adversely affect military operations (e.g. wind turbines, communications towers, etc.) between project developers and military bases and City and County Officials.
- Expanding existing municipal authority within the extra-territorial jurisdiction of unincorporated areas within noise contours.
- Protecting the voluntary participation of coordination efforts by governmental entities surrounding military installations.
- Enhancing communication efforts for new potential residents that may be affected by military operations.