

Texas Wide Open for Business, or for Exodus?

Joint op-ed by Texas' Metro 8 Chambers of Commerce

Under former Gov. Rick Perry and Gov. Greg Abbott, the state's economic development office has employed a slogan: "Texas: Wide Open for Business."

Texas has enjoyed more than a decade of being named Numero Uno for business by ranking entities such as *Chief Executive*, *Site Selection* and *Forbes*. Companies have flocked here from California, Illinois and other states with heavy tax burdens and onerous government regulations to enjoy our affordable, business-friendly environment.

In spite of this success, some elected leaders in our capital would slam the wide-open door for business in the face of those treasured companies with a state mandate that is based on hyperbole and fear, not facts.

These are also known as SB6 and HB 2899, the "bathroom bills." In other words, we're wide open for business, but not your business.

Texas cannot afford such legislation. We only have to look at the debacle in North Carolina to see evidence of this. North Carolina's 2016 bathroom bill overrode local anti-discrimination protections and resulted in boycotts of national tournaments, conferences and corporate relocations, and in short order was repealed after a deluge of national negative publicity and statewide reputation damage.

This week, the Metro 8 Chambers of Commerce, composed of the Arlington, Austin, United Corpus Christi, Dallas Regional, Greater El Paso, Fort Worth, San Antonio and Houston chambers, sent a letter to our state legislators pleading for them to recognize that Texas is best served by policies that portray our state as a welcoming, open place to live and do business.

The Perryman Group, a well-known, respected economic research and analysis firm, recently published a report concluding that passage of bathroom legislation would cost Texas almost \$3.3 billion per year, with a high probability of costs increasing even further in future years. Workforce talent recruitment will also be limited by any bathroom restrictions.

In terms of corporate expansions and relocations, Texas cities could be crossed off the list of contenders, especially for high-wage, global tech companies and professional services that rely on the creative class.

Furthermore, this matter is not one that state government should be legislating but should be the purview of city councils, county commissioners and school boards who were elected to address local issues and who are closest to the citizenry.

This legislation, and the danger of shutting down state agencies and calling special sessions until it is passed, is an economic and brand killer for Texas that could cost billions of dollars, thousands of jobs, increase costs to taxpayers and not provide any more privacy or safety for anyone than we already have through existing criminal laws.

We, the Metro 8, call on the Texas Legislature in the name of 20,000 Texas companies, 19.4 million urban residents, and \$1.2 trillion in GDP to reject this unnecessary, unfunded, unenforceable mandate.

If not, Texas may have to get a new slogan.

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