



# Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce

## 85<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session

### Policy Positions

This document sets the Chamber's official position on a wide range of political issues impacting our business community. The agenda for the 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session builds on the progress of recent years, while committing to address long-term challenges. Several Chamber committees have worked throughout the legislative interim and have heard from many key stakeholders, subject matter experts, and our legislative delegation to prepare the 2017 Legislative Agenda.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce encourages the continuation and expansion of State economic development incentives and protection of local incentive tools to ensure the long-term economic vitality and competitiveness of Texas.

#### **Protect Economic Development Funds**

*Policy Position:*

- *Continue funding of the Texas Enterprise Fund and the Texas Economic Development Act (Chapter 313), both at current levels or above, to attract high-value companies to create jobs and new technology in Texas*
- *Enhance and continue to streamline for companies, colleges and universities, and job seekers the process and funds available, such as Skills Development Funds, to train Texans to fill good jobs created by new and expanding companies*

#### **Gaming**

*Policy Position: Support economic development efforts of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Tribe, including gaming*

#### **Investment in Technology Infrastructure**

*Policy Position: Support state regulatory and tax policies that help attract and grow investment in technology infrastructure and encourage policy makers to work to ensure such investment is unfettered and that Texas is able to capitalize on innovation to fuel additional job growth, business expansion, and investment*

#### **Talent Recruitment/Tourism**

*Policy Position: Oppose legislation which could negatively impact workforce recruitment efforts and the state's tourism industry, thereby hampering economic development in the state*

### **ENERGY**

*Policy Position: Support enabling energy utilities to respond quickly and effectively to changing energy needs through innovative rate approaches that are cost-effective; focused on generation and distribution infrastructure investment; incentivize energy efficiency; promote new technologies; and provide a reasonable rate of return*

## **ENVIRONMENT**

*Policy Position: Support*

- *Efforts to achieve attainment of national ambient air quality standards that help near non-attainment areas and provide sources of emissions the maximum flexibility in obtaining permit authorizations in order to efficiently achieve reductions*
- *Efforts to establish the authority of the TCEQ to acknowledge the contribution of foreign sources of air pollution, incorporate foreign contributions into Texas' air quality implementation plans and petition the EPA for approval of such plans*
- *Continued funding of TERP grants, which are a valuable tool used to reduce emissions*
- *Legislation that increases funding for the Texas Water Development Boards (TWDB) Economically Distressed Areas Program (EDAP)*

## **EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE**

The future success of the state's talent force is contingent on the level of investment made today in our educational institutions, which serve as a training ground for our talent force and hubs for research and innovation. Failure to deliver on a 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational system that is rigorous, equitable and accessible to all students will have deep economic ramifications, impacting future prosperity.

### **60X30 TX Plan**

The Higher Education Coordinating Board has adopted a strategic plan with the goal of increasing the percentage of Texans between the ages of 25 and 34 that hold some kind of degree or post-secondary certification to 60% by the year 2030.

*Policy Position: Support the 60X30TX plan through initiatives such as system-wide collaboration on transfer and articulation agreement reform, improving financial aid programs and access for students in the P-12 pipeline, effective advising aimed at improving student degree completion, and state maintenance of financial investment in higher education*

### **Workforce Development**

*Policy Position: Support*

- *Collaboration between education and business/industry to provide relevant workforce experiences for students and educators, including internships and fellowships, business incentives, partnerships and measurements of engagement and outcomes*
- *Career pathway opportunities and attainment throughout the education and workforce pipeline, including expanded Career and Technical Education (CTE), STEM careers, and industry-specific certification programs aligned to meet workforce needs*
- *Legislation that allows for local flexibility in implementing workforce programs or initiatives based on regional needs*

### **Postsecondary Funding**

An educated community is key in developing and increasing the competitiveness of the state nation and worldwide. Therefore, the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce is supportive of legislation that will further enhance higher education; providing the population, regardless of age and socioeconomic status, an equal opportunity to obtain a postsecondary education. This will assure that the state and our community produces some of the most qualified members of the workforce

*Policy Position:*

- *Restore formula funding to institutions of higher learning and support funding initiatives that will generate a greater number of graduates from Texas universities and community colleges and/or improve the quality and integrity of postsecondary educational programs, including outcomes based formula funding*
- *Support Texas Community Colleges' funding request of \$1.83 billion for the 2018-19 biennium*
- *Protect current appropriations including special items to the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso*
- *Support creation of School of Dental Medicine at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso*
- *Approve exceptional line item funding for an interdisciplinary educational and training simulation institute at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso*
- *Continue the appropriation of funds to retain the Pharmacy Program at the University of Texas at El Paso*
- *Support the increase of funding and grant opportunities for Core Research; further stimulate the Texas Research Incentive Program which will help UTEP become a Tier 1 Research University*
- *Maintain adequate funding for Exceptional Item – Student Success Initiative for the University of Texas at El Paso*

**TEXAS Grants**

*Policy Position: Support and protect funding for TEXAS Grants that would provide scholarships for 100% of eligible students*

**K-12 Formula Funding Disparities**

Texas students should have equal access to high quality education, from pre-k programs through high school. Unfortunately, funding weights are not at a level sufficient to cover the costs of educating a rapidly growing student population that is overwhelmingly low income and bilingual.

*Policy Position: Support*

- *An updated and formula-funded school finance system, which includes sufficient resources for schools to prepare, determine, and report whether Texas students graduate college and career ready*
- *Updating the 'Cost of Education Index'*
- *Continued high school allotment and increased investment in dual-credit programs to allow students to earn college credits while in high school, which will increase graduation rates and further enhance college readiness and enrollment*
- *Formula funding for quality full-day pre-kindergarten programs*
- *Updating the transportation and facility allotments*
- *Tying measures of accountability to existing funding formulas*
- *Removal of the arbitrary TEA indicator in the accountability system that encourages school campuses to cap special education services to 8.5 percent of student enrollment*

## **English Language Learners**

*Policy Position: Support*

- *An increase in time from when a school district must report the assessments of new students who are English Language Learners to up to three years, providing school districts enough time to assess each students' knowledge and abilities, provide the necessary tutoring or support services that may be needed, and affirm their grasp of the English language*
- *Increase outdated funding weights for students who require extra resources, such as English Language Learners, those with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students*

## **Accountability**

The adoption of House Bill 2804 in 2015, established a letter rating system which will be implemented during the 2018 school year; adding further criteria to the domains in which schools are currently being evaluated.

*Policy Position: Support a public school accountability system that ensures ratings are reflective of campuses that have different socio-economic makeups, size, and demographics, and make fair comparisons among school districts*

## **HEALTHCARE**

Our region cannot prosper without top-quality healthcare that is accessible to all individuals. Beyond primary care and emergency care, robust behavioral health and substance-use disorder services must be incorporated into a modern, integrated healthcare landscape.

### **Medicaid Expansion**

*Policy Position: Support Medicaid Expansion in Texas, or a private-based alternative program that provides insurance to those in the coverage gap, through the Affordable Care Act*

### **Healthcare Funding**

*Policy Position:*

- *Provide adequate, balanced funding among both public and private hospitals in 1115 Waiver programs to help mitigate the state's funding shortfall*
- *Encourage HHSC to use the 1115 Waiver structure to provide innovative solutions to the coverage gap and integrated care, ensuring the flow of federal dollars into the Waiver continues after the current extension*
- *Support increases to Medicaid reimbursement rates*

### **Mental Health/Substance Abuse**

*Policy Position: Support*

- *Continued funding and support for community-based mental health, IDD and intensive crisis services to allow individuals with severe and persistent mental illness to receive services in an appropriate setting and divert them from more expensive and inappropriate facilities such as emergency rooms, jails or other State-supported facilities*
- *Opportunities to improve access to integrated care while retaining local control of resources and important community decisions related to public intellectual and developmental disability, behavioral health and substance-use disorder services*

- *Programs for veterans coping with mental illness, jail diversion and initiatives aimed at individuals with a mental health diagnosis interacting with law enforcement/ justice system*
- *Expansion of veterans' court programs and other justice involved specialty programming*
- *Continued support of programs that allow Texas to partner with local providers to address unique problems facing veterans, including the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance program (SB 55)*
- *Expansion of services and reduction of wait lists for individuals and development or intellectual disabilities and their families*
- *Expansion of psychiatric bed capacity*
- *Legal reforms that divert non-violent, low-level drug offenders from jails to treatment*
- *Expand the scope and availability of substance use disorder prevention programs by continuing the expansion made in the last legislative session*
- *Increase substance use disorder treatment budget and treatment capacity*
- *Establish statewide substance use recovery support services centers to enable sustained recovery and prevent relapse*
- *Efforts to improve quality of care at state psychiatric hospitals through partnerships with local entities, public universities and medical schools*
- *Requirements for mental health professionals to undergo continuing education training on suicided crises responses*

### **Healthcare Professional Shortages**

*Policy Position: Support*

- *Increased funding of GME slots to accommodate the additional number of medical students training in Texas in the wake of recent medical school expansion*
- *Modernization of scope-of-practice regulations for advanced-practice registered nurses, physician assistants, and dental hygienists to promote access to primary care while maintaining patient safety at the forefront of any scope-of-duty expansions under consideration*
- *Expansion of telemedicine and virtual health initiatives to expand access to primary and specialty health care across the region by defining a telemedicine encounter as a face-to-face encounter*
- *Maintaining the funding source(s) of healthcare professional shortage policies and programs to support an expanded health care workforce*

### **Maintain and Expand Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center**

*Policy Position: Support*

- *Protect current appropriations including special items to the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso*
- *Support creation of the Woody L. Hunt School of Dental Medicine*
- *Approve exceptional line item funding for an interdisciplinary educational and training simulation institute*

## **IMMIGRATION/BORDER SECURITY/PORTS OF ENTRY**

Immigration issues continue to be a concern for Texas businesses, foreign governments and academic institutions as they engage talent from around the world to remain competitive in an increasingly global economy.

Ports of Entry in El Paso handle more than 18% of all trade between the U.S. and Mexico. In 2015, nearly \$90 billion in yearly trade crossed through El Paso's land ports of entry.

### *Policy Position:*

- *Support national comprehensive immigration policies and continue to support immigration reform which will give employers access to a legal workforce to meet legitimate business needs in all sectors of the economy*
- *Support the creation of a functional and streamlined border security and immigration systems which support our economy at the federal level versus the use of state legislation*
- *Support immigration policies which do not decrease community security by the diversion of local law enforcement resources*
- *Encourage state and federal legislation which provides for the use of public/private partnerships to fund staffing at our ports of entry and other initiatives that improve border trade and commerce*
- *Support the implementation of metrics which would demonstrate the performance and the results of increasing the cost of law enforcement along border communities*
- *Support the allocation of border security funding to local law enforcement entities in border communities through grants and/or to ports of entry to help facilitate secure border crossings*

## **MILITARY**

Fort Bliss is the single largest employer in the El Paso region, contributing approximately \$24.1 billion to the State economy and creating an estimated annual disposable personal income of \$8.2 billion. Fort Bliss was ranked #1 in military value and is home to the Army's largest training area. Approximately 30,000 active duty soldiers are stationed at Fort Bliss.

### *Policy Position: Support*

- *Additional resources dedicated to military installations, soldiers, dependents of soldiers, guardsmen, and the veterans residing in the State of the Texas*
- *Legislation that assists military personnel and their dependents including legislation that address wait times for veterans seeking care at VA clinics and medical centers and address the mental health needs of Texas veterans*
- *Legislation that improves workforce development programs for military personnel, dependents, and veterans*
- *Continued investment in programs, grants and low interest loans to military communities to fund infrastructure needs and protect bases from encroachment, loss of mission and personnel in preparation of coming military budget cuts, and a possible future BRAC*
- *Support continued funding for the Texas Military Preparedness Commission's grant programs, including the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant Program (DEAAG)*

### **Hazlewood Act**

The Hazlewood Act is a State of Texas benefit that provides qualified Veterans, spouses, and dependent children with an education benefit of up to 150 hours of tuition exemption, including most fee charges, at public institutions of higher education in Texas. This does NOT include living expenses, books, or supply fees.

*Policy Position: Encourage the Legislature to fully fund the Hazlewood Act*

### **TRANSPORTATION**

A flexible, reliable transportation system is essential to the stability and growth of business in the Greater El Paso Region and throughout the state. The Chamber supports any efforts to optimize existing funding sources and identify new, sustainable funding sources for transportation.

#### **Funding Options**

*Policy Positions: Support*

- *Increasing the motor fuels tax index*
- *Local ability to call public referendums to consider transportation taxes and fees for regional transportation investments, not to exceed the 8.25% sales tax cap*
- *The redirection of current vehicle sales tax to TxDOT's primary account to fund transportation projects*
- *Project delivery tools for mitigating congestion such as toll roads, tolled managed lanes, design build, and public-private partnerships*
- *The state backing federal legislation which provides for the use of public/private partnerships to fund critical infrastructure*
- *The use of state funding to improve transportation infrastructure concerning our critical ports of entry*
- *Support the creation of a permanent subcommittee of transportation that is primarily dedicated to the infrastructure of our ports of entry*

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