



## ABILENE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# PRIORITIES

## 86TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

**The mission of the Abilene Chamber of Commerce** is to develop and promote the economic growth and quality of life in the Abilene area. The Abilene Chamber and its 1,300-plus members believe free enterprise and job creation are the solution for creating a higher quality of life for Abilene residents. The Abilene Chamber, on behalf of its members and affiliates, will pursue a pro-growth agenda that creates an environment that encourages job growth, population growth and entrepreneurship.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Abilene must continue to be a leader in the State of Texas in developing the key infrastructure to attract, grow and retain quality jobs. The Abilene Chamber will be a leader in working with both K-12 and higher education partners to encourage the development of curriculum that trains students for current and future workforce needs and puts Abilene in a competitive position to attract and retain talent for 21st century jobs.*

#### Workforce Economic Development

- Support legislative efforts to provide incentives to encourage business participation in education and workforce development initiatives.
- Support measures that give school districts the financial flexibility to meet the needs of their students.
- Support investment in rural Texas, including growing our state's broadband infrastructure.
- Support efforts to expand access to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) in K-12 grades and offer rigorous high school STEAM courses, including computer coding. Support teacher advancement initiatives, like differentiated pay, to help alleviate the shortage of STEAM teachers in our public schools. The Abilene Chamber recognizes the

extreme importance of access to STEAM courses for the quality of education now and for our workforce in the future.

- Support innovative and flexible career and technology education pathways in conjunction with public schools and community colleges, where appropriate, to meet the needs of Texas employers.
- Support legislation that strengthens accountability on career and technology money allocation. Support requiring districts that receive funding for career and technology to offer courses that prepare students with a blend of on-site or virtual on-site training, based on their needs of curriculum delivery. Support increased funding for online curriculum and online testing.
- Support industry-aligned early college models, like Industry Cluster Innovative Academies including P-TECH, that include career guidance, mentoring, and applied learning opportunities.
- Community colleges should be supported in maximizing the use of dual-credit courses and other creative partnerships with high schools and four-year universities. The Texas State Technical College System, with its effective pay for performance model, is worthy of support and replication in other systems.

#### Rural Economic Development

- Support state-appropriated economic development funds for rural areas. Also, support the Texas Agriculture Finance Authority (TAFAs) at its current funding level to finance economic development activities in rural areas and streamline TAFAs to make it more "user-friendly."

#### Tax-Related Issues

- Support continued use of a locally approved half-cent sales tax collected by cities to fund economic development efforts.
- Oppose efforts to reduce local control of these funds or efforts to limit the uses of these funds. Because



these funds are local funds, taxpayers should retain the right to manage their use so long as they are used for local economic development purposes.

- Support efforts to clarify that the purpose of the sales tax funds is to serve as economic development tools, including education and workforce training.
- Support legislation that reauthorizes municipal ad-valorem tax abatement authority (Texas Tax Code, Chapter 312)

#### TEXAS 2050 Plan

- Support *Texas 2050: A Framework for Long-Term Economic Growth* in order to continue the level of economic development success that Texas has received in recent years. The plan, developed and endorsed by a broad range of statewide business groups, includes taking a long-term view of human capital, investment capital, innovation, education, tools to compete and infrastructure.

#### BUSINESS & TRANSPORTATION

*The Abilene Chamber will work to maintain a pro-business environment that allows West Texas employers and business owners to thrive. Any regulatory change that adversely impacts business should be pursued only as a last resort after all free-market solutions have been tried and only after a reasonable cost/benefit analysis shows economic growth will not be adversely affected.*

- Support efforts to keep Texas a right-to-work state and oppose agency shop legislation.
- Oppose legislation that would make private entities subject to open records laws or force the release of proprietary information in governmental entities' contracts with businesses.
- Uphold Texas' prohibition of the direct sales of vehicles to consumers.
- Maintain franchise tax relief for small business.
- Support improved highways, ports of entry and other infrastructure that facilitates trade, increases the effective flow of goods and services, promotes tourism, and increases public safety wherever these improvements can improve economic opportunity and state productivity.
- Support the continued use of public-private partnerships and reauthorizing the use of Comprehensive Development Agreements (CDAs). Enhance mechanisms that allow project sponsors to access private capital to supplement state or local funds to build infrastructure. We also support efforts to remove statutory or legislative restrictions or limitations on the number or nature of local

comprehensive development projects where there is local support for such projects that address local or regional transportation needs.

- Oppose efforts to mandate workers' compensation coverage.
- Oppose legislation that imposes new laws or regulations on employers that are nonsubscribers to workers' compensation.
- Support and preserve the current regulatory structure that prevents lawsuits against employers and property owners who provide workers' compensation insurance.

#### MILITARY/ VETERANS

*Abilene will continue to be a leader in the United States in its support of the military. The Abilene Chamber supports continued local funding of mission support and will continue to provide support for local troops and their families. Additionally, the Abilene Chamber will support its military affairs committee in all federal, state and local initiatives to protect and enhance and expand missions for Dyess Air Force Base.*

- Support and author legislation that assists Texas military families by reducing barriers to full employment by authorizing reciprocity agreements for professional certifications and licensures.
- Appropriate money for the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEEAG) program to fund military value projects that strengthen Texas military installations.
- Support legislation to expand Texas Military Value Revolving Loan Fund opportunities through additional funding.
- Support legislation that improves workforce development programs for military personnel and veterans.
- Support legislation and regulatory reforms that accelerate and advance the seamless transition of our Texas Veterans into the Texas workforce. These efforts should maintain an emphasis on providing more accelerated skills attainment and certification solutions, while scaling post-secondary efforts that convey more college credit for prior learning and occupational experience with a focus on high-demand occupational needs.



## **WATER/ AGRICULTURE/ NATURAL RESOURCES**

*Access to reliable water resources continues to be a key issue for many Texas communities to maintain job and population growth. Abilene must continue to develop long-term strategies for securing resources.*

The Abilene Chamber supports the exploration of new and evolving options, including:

- Desalination of brackish ground, surface and sea water
  - Aquifer storage and recovery
  - Conjunctive uses of ground and surface water
  - Innovative reuse and conservation technologies
  - Legislation to promote the development of new water management strategies
- Oppose efforts to alter the existing structure of water rights laws in Texas in any matter that would weaken the legal and property interest of existing holders of water rights.
  - Oppose any efforts to modify or weaken the status of senior water rights as defined by the courts.
  - Urge and support Farm Bill legislation that ensures a strong safety net for agriculture. This is vital to preserving the integrity of our food and fiber production, as well as the economy of our region. Support designation of cottonseed as an oilseed by USDA and a strong Title 1 Farm Bill provision for cotton.
  - The Chamber is supportive of additional federal/state funding for water-related research projects, as long as a project benefits the region and does not negatively impact area producers and other water users.
  - Support enhanced cooperative funding for the Texas Agricultural Statistics Service (TASS) budget, as a part of the overall budget of the Texas Department of Agriculture, at the level necessary for TASS to respond to the need for agricultural statistics for Texas. This would ensure that sound production and marketing decisions can continue to be made by all segments of agriculture.
  - Provide additional resources, including authorization and funding for regional travel, to the Texas Department of Agriculture as it addresses the economic development needs of rural communities.

## **ARTS & TOURISM**

*Abilene is a leader in the attraction of tourism and the development of the arts. Tourism is a key economic development program and the arts and other quality of life enhancements are becoming increasingly important in*

*the retention and attraction of people to the community. As such, the Abilene Chamber will encourage the development and improvement of facilities that enhance the city's efforts to expand these efforts as an effective economic development strategy.*

### **Arts**

- Support high-quality arts education and learning in all schools through the employment of certified arts education teachers and partnerships with community arts organizations. Maintain current fine arts education requirements.
- Protect use of Municipality Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) to fund the arts.
- Encourage municipalities that levy the HOT to maximize the full, allowable 15% arts allocation.
- Protect and grow funding to the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) after a 28% cut in 2017.
- Restore \$5 million in General Revenue for FY 2020-2021 to the Texas Commission on the Art's Cultural District Grant Program, and advocate for an additional \$5 million as initially approved by the 84th Legislature.

### **Tourism**

- Preserve full funding for state tourism promotion (Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism). State tourism promotion is a self-funded program with a dedicated funding source – 1/12 of the state hotel occupancy tax.
- Maintain school start date law (4th Monday in August) and proactively seek to eliminate exemptions and waivers.
- Ensure dedicated HOT funds are used for their intended purposes.
- Preserve the Event Trust Funds. Abilene will be applying for these funds to attract national events to the Taylor County Expo Center and Youth Sports facility.
- Preserve state funding for beneficial travel and tourism programs at Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD), Texas Historical Commission (THC), Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA).
- Support comprehensive transportation infrastructure planning and support (Move Texas Forward coalition).
- Support policies which enhance workforce development.
- Support collection of local hotel occupancy tax on Airbnb's and other online lodging brokers.





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