



# HUTCHINSON / RENO COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## 2018 Public Policy Agenda

The Chamber of Commerce is an advocate for policies and actions that promote a positive business climate, economic growth, business investment in the community and tourism. Chamber members, public officials, business leaders and community organizations frequently inquire about the policy positions of the Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce. This document provides an outline of the issues the Chamber's Public Policy Advisory Committee and the Board of Directors have identified as core policy priorities and specific policy positions for 2018.

### CORE POLICY PRIORITIES

#### **Tax Policy**

The Chamber supports efforts to promote fiscal responsibility and thoughtful consideration of tax policies by federal, state and local governments.

#### **Economic Development**

Government has important roles to play to help facilitate efforts to increase employment opportunities, to retain and expand existing businesses and to offer competitive incentives for new businesses to locate in the community. The Chamber supports government assistance in economic development efforts and workforce training and development programs intended to recruit new business investment in the community and state.

#### **Education & Workforce**

Public education is a core policy priority. Quality public schools are important to attract and encourage young families to make their homes in Kansas and the community and to provide employers a well-educated and highly-skilled workforce.

#### **Local Government**

The Chamber supports exploring opportunities for unification of local governments, consolidation of public services and improving the working relationships between local governments and local businesses. The Chamber believes that government works best when it is closest to those it serves, and supports preservation of local control over the policies and governance of local organizations and boards.

#### **Regulatory Environment**

The Chamber encourages a business climate in which regulatory burdens on business are minimized and necessary regulations are administered in a manner that promotes economic and community development and facilitates planning for the future.



## TAX POLICY

Federal, state and local tax policies exert substantial influence on the business climate. The Chamber supports efforts to promote fiscal responsibility by governments at all levels, fiscal restraint in state and local spending and transparency in budgeting and implementation of tax policies.

The Chamber supports a balanced, reasoned approach to tax reform, to funding public services through a traditional balance of revenues derived from *ad valorem* property taxes, income taxes, and sales taxes. The Chamber opposes tax policies that have the effect of further increasing the burden of local property taxes. Proposed changes in state and local tax policies should carefully consider the implications of such changes on economic development, employment and the delivery of essential public services.

Sound tax policies should facilitate retention of existing business and industry and attract new business investment. A balanced structure of personal and corporate income taxes, sales and use taxes, and equitable property taxes are important to an economic environment in which businesses may succeed and grow.

The Chamber supports personal property tax exemptions for manufacturing machinery and equipment. The Chamber opposes a return to the taxation of inventories.

The expansion of internet-based retail sales without collection of retailer sales taxes places local retailers at an unfair disadvantage. The Chamber supports efforts to require on-line retailers to collect state and local sales taxes on a par with local retailers.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development is a top priority of the Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber believes federal, state and local government play important roles in efforts to facilitate employment growth and business investment opportunities, to retain and encourage the expansion of existing businesses and to offer a competitive climate for new employers to invest. The Chamber realizes that economic development programs are critical tools used to retain and attract businesses and create jobs.

The Chamber supports economic development and workforce programs intended to recruit new business investment in the community and state such as PEAK and HPIP, and strongly encourages the creation of a comprehensive and coordinated statewide plan to facilitate and enhance economic development and job growth. Kansas must be aggressive in implementing and maintaining economic development policies and resources that support business development and job growth in order to compete with other states and communities that dedicate substantial resources to economic development.

### **Workforce Programs**

The Chamber supports the coordination of state workforce efforts that enhance professional, technical and vocational education programs in order to meet the workforce retention, recruitment and training needs of Kansas business and industry, including resources to assist in the training and retraining of Kansas workforce.



## Incentive Programs

The Chamber supports incentive programs that enhance primary job creation. The Chamber supports continued use of performance based tax incentives and also encourages consideration of programs that provide monetary incentive to job creating businesses earlier in the development process. The Chamber supports the continuation of the *High Performance Incentive Program*, the *Promoting Employment Across Kansas* program and economic development programs including *STAR Bonds*. The Chamber supports local control and flexibility in the use of tax abatements, tax increment financing, neighborhood revitalization programs, and other incentives to promote economic development and job creation in the community.

## State Department of Commerce

The Chamber works closely in partnership with the Kansas Department of Commerce to recruit new business investment and employment in the community. The Chamber supports appropriate funding of the Department and opposes any reorganization that could hinder fulfillment of the Department's important mission as the front line of business recruitment and promotion of the State for business investment.

## TRANSPORTATION

The Chamber recognizes the importance of a quality, well-maintained comprehensive highway system and is concerned with delays in previously approved projects as well as regularly scheduled maintenance of highways and bridges throughout the state. Thus, the Coalition supports the full funding and implementation of T-Works and opposes further diversion of funds from the Kansas Highway Fund.

The quality, ease of travel, maintenance and access provided by the transportation network within Kansas is a core component of economic development, job growth and the retention and expansion of existing Kansas businesses. Kansas must position its transportation system to be competitive in an increasingly global economy. The investments Kansas made from the 1989 Comprehensive Highway Program, the 1999 Comprehensive Transportation Program and the 2010 T-Works Program have made the Kansas highway system one of the nation's best. Hutchinson has benefited greatly from the investments in area highway improvements and supports additional improvements to enhance highway access to Hutchinson and South Central Kansas.

The Chamber opposes the reduction of funding for highway improvements, or any diversion of funds intended for highway improvements to other state governmental uses. The Chamber opposes increasing the total amount of debt incurred by the Department of Transportation while simultaneously redirecting other Department funds into the State General Fund.

The Chamber supports the establishment of a transportation task force relating to the evaluating of State highway funding and the state highway transportation system.

## Priority Highway Projects

The Chamber has identified the following highway improvements as priorities for future investment:

- K-96 diagonal super-two between Hutchinson and Sterling
- K-96 diagonal to Great Bend and, ultimately, to link with I-70
- K-61 super-two upgrade from Hutchinson to Pratt



## EDUCATION

The Chamber supports investments in Kansas public education because top quality educational opportunities attract young families to Kansas and promote a well-educated workforce are essential for economic development. The Chamber supports funding public education under a balanced formula that utilizes revenues from *ad valorem* property taxes, sales and use taxes and income taxes in a manner to assure that students throughout Kansas have equal access to educational opportunities and that the burden of funding public education does not fall disproportionately on local communities.

The Chamber calls for a fair, adequate and equitable K-12 funding formula that allows for a substantially equivalent opportunity for all students to achieve statewide defined educational outcomes. The formula should include strong and flexible local authority regarding the raising and spending of education funds.

The Chamber encourages the Legislature to fulfill its constitutional duty to make suitable provision for financing public education from early childhood through high school. Such financing must be reliable and reduce, to the extent possible, reliance on local property taxes to pay the costs of public education. The Chamber supports restoring and maintaining state funding for public education in accordance with current law.

Hutchinson Community College is a vital component of public education and an important resource for the region's workforce development and economic growth. The Chamber supports measures to expand and improve technical and career education opportunities and funding for Kansas public colleges and universities.

## WORKFORCE & TRAINING

### **Workforce Training & Education**

A skilled workforce is essential for economic growth and expansion of employment opportunities. The Chamber supports policies that provide incentives for investment in high-cost, high-demand technical and vocational education programs and that facilitate greater cooperation between public schools and community colleges to provide cost-effective opportunities for vocational and technical education for both secondary and post-secondary students in Kansas. The Chamber supports and encourages the Kansas Legislature to fully fund the vocational and technical training initiatives.

### **Workforce Related Regulation & Right To Work**

The Chamber supports current Kansas "right to work" law. The Chamber recognizes that while it is important to provide workers protection from unfair practices by employers, laws and regulations that impose unreasonable burdens on employers may impair economic development and expansion of employment opportunities.

### **Workers Compensation**

The Chamber supports continued reform in the Kansas Workers compensation system to provide fair, cost-effective workplace insurance protection for employees and employers alike. The Chamber advocates refinements to the definition of work disability, improved



guidelines and the provisions to clarify and simplify administration to control costs and maintain adequate employee protection.

### **Unemployment Programs**

The Chamber opposes legislation that diverts unemployment compensation funds for other programs and urges the legislature to protect the integrity of the unemployment compensation fund and maintain it for the purpose for which it was originally intended. Further, the Chamber encourages the Legislature to continually review the Unemployment Compensation Fund account balances to determine whether a moratorium can be placed on the fund for a specified period of time.

## **HEALTH CARE**

Health care providers and hospitals combine to employ large numbers of employees in Hutchinson and Reno County and are important for the area's economic health and development. The Chamber believes that access to health care is one of the keys to a productive and efficient workforce and is a top consideration in locating and operating businesses.

Currently, KanCare is cumbersome and costly for providers, especially smaller providers, to deal with. In addition, health care costs of uninsured individuals are being passed on to businesses and providers throughout the state. The Chamber therefore supports expansion of the State's Medicaid program to reduce the numbers of the uninsured and ensure the viability of health care providers who serve the uninsured and underinsured. Thus, the Chamber supports legislative action that positions Kansas to respond to changes in the ACA and take advantage of available federal funds; improves the quality, organization and efficiency of the KanCare system; and adopts a Kansas-designed program to expand eligibility for Medicaid coverage.

The Chamber also is an advocate for establishment of a health care insurance exchange designed and operated for the people of Kansas rather than a health insurance exchange operated by the federal government.

## **ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES**

The availability of sustainable natural resources are essential to meet the basic needs of all citizens and adequate supplies of clean air and water are essential for business and economic growth. The Chamber is an advocate of proper management of natural resources in a manner consistent with its members' economic and business interests.

### **Wind Energy**

The Chamber encourages Kansas law makers to support programs which encourage the development of wind energy resources. State goals for wind energy use support local employers that manufacture wind energy products and encourage new business investment by enterprises that seek a range of traditional and renewable energy resources.

### **Expansion of Energy Production Facilities**

Adequate energy resources are essential for economic development and the Chamber believes that decisions relating to the development and expansion of particular energy



production facilities should take into consideration the needs and perspectives of local businesses and governments.

### **Electric Utility Costs**

The Chamber supports fair and equitable policies governing the allocation of electric energy production costs that balance the interests of homeowners and residential consumers with the interests of Kansas businesses. A balanced approach to utility cost allocation is important in order to enhance Kansas' ability to compete effectively for economic development projects.

### **Water**

The Chamber supports continued implementation of the State Water Plan and dedicated funding with an urban/rural balance. The Chamber supports encouraging voluntary, cost-effective measures that will maintain water quality in compliance with federal regulations in order to minimize regulatory impact to business.

## **HOUSING & LOCAL REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT**

The Chamber recognizes that variety in available local residential housing is a key component to attracting a skilled workforce and maintaining the local quality of life. While no single policy or legislative action will address all housing issues, certain policies will be helpful. The Chamber supports the use of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) to encourage new investment in blighted areas across Reno County and supports local efforts to establish their appropriate NRP areas based on local needs within the state law.

The Chamber also recognizes that attractive, cost-effective housing development can be better achieved through a balanced approach to land use regulation that does not impose disproportionate costs and burdens on contractors and developers. It also is important to provide local government with effective tools to improve blighted neighborhoods. Accordingly, the Chamber opposes efforts to restrict local government's use of its powers of eminent domain to acquire blighted property for re-development.

The Chamber also supports the implementation and enforcement of development friendly policies that encourage and create an environment to allow for quality building construction and encourage renovation of existing structures while upholding and maintaining public safety standards.