



Greater Tomball Area Chamber of Commerce 2023 Legislative Priorities

TOP 3 PRIORITIES

- **Public Safety**
- **Workforce Development**
- **Transportation**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sales Tax for Economic Development.

- Support continued use of a locally approved 1/2-cent sales tax collected by cities to fund economic development efforts.
- Oppose efforts to reduce local control of these funds as well as 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 economic development purposes.
- Support the removal of county average wage restrictions that limit a local community's use of these funds for local job training 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, and to prevent raids on the funds for projects that are not related to economic development.

Incentive Modernization:

- Support a state and local economic development incentive to attract new and expand existing, large capital-intensive projects in Texas.
- Support and sufficiently fund all current local and state incentive programs administered through the Governor's Texas Economic Development & Tourism (EDT) division and other state incentive and job training programs such as, but not limited to, the Texas Enterprise Fund.

Supply Chain & Innovation:

- Texas should support and encourage private industry to create a more productive and innovative economy in high-growth sectors. Texas' success will be dependent on our ability to create and cultivate innovation-intensive companies, greater research, and commercialization capacities, more abundant sources of domestic capital, successful and skills-focused education and workforce development efforts and deeper and more resilient Texas-based supply chain capabilities.

Taxpayer Solutions:

- Support policies that reduce tax burdens for entrepreneurs and employers, develop a skilled workforce, and retain and improve Texas sound regulatory climate and support efforts to modernize systems across government agencies to reduce administrative burdens, increase efficiency, promote innovation, enhance transparency, and provide cost savings to businesses and taxpayers.
- Retain and improve tax exemptions for employers to encourage job creation; maintain energy, manufacturing, supply chain reliability; reduce dependence on other nations and states; and help support increased economic opportunity and productivity throughout our state.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

Education Funding. The state should not be permitted to use fund balances of schools that have sound financial practices to solve financial problems of other districts that have not budgeted wisely. Strongly opposed to any new “Robin Hood” -style plan where this could be executed.

Increase access to educational options that will best address students' unique interests and strengths, including:

- innovative learning models, including high-quality virtual education;
- competency-based education models to accelerate student learning;
- dual language programs;
- increased access to advanced coursework for rural and low-income schools;
- funding for special education parents to pursue additional services for their child to speed up their recovery from pandemic-associated learning losses;
- pathways in career and technical education that lead to high-wage, high-demand occupations and credentials of value, especially in the skilled trades and information technology sectors, including through partnerships with community and technical colleges and businesses;
- paid apprenticeship opportunities aligned with opportunities for high-wage, high-demand occupations;
- Explore ways to increase the number of students taking CTE classes in high school that are aligned to high-wage and high-demand fields, including monitoring the effectiveness of recent CTE funding changes in House Bill 1525.

Career and Technology.

- 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 additional mental health professionals and guidance counselors in middle and high school to help students meet the state requirement of selecting a career endorsement by the 8th grade.
- 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.

- Strong support should be reflected for community colleges as important contributors to training students for jobs in the workforce and providing pathways for completion of industry certificates, Associate degrees, Bachelor programs (where a local need exists) and continuous upskilling or reskilling opportunities.
- Community colleges should be supported in maximizing the use of rigorous dual credit courses and other creative partnerships with high schools and four-year universities.

Skills Development Program. Support increased funding for the Skills Development Program administered by the Texas Workforce Commission. Maintain Skills Development Fund grants at the Texas Workforce Commission to improve workforce training.

Special Education. Adequately fund special needs education to meet the needs of the special needs population in a cost effective manner.

Workforce Education

- Monitor the work of the TRUE (Texas Reskilling and Upskilling Through Education) Initiative (SB 1102, 86R) and ensure that it remains a priority to support workforce education;
- Advocate for policies that support employer-driven training models so that business of all sizes can “grow their own” talent pipelines and require transparency in reporting wage/employment outcomes for these programs;
- Support strategies that make re-entry to civilian employment more straightforward for veterans and their spouses;
- Promote expanding adult charter schools that provide competency-based educational models and concurrent industry-based certifications, with stable funding through workforce and adult education funding streams;

- Support measures to increase access to affordable high-quality childcare and before and after-school programming.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Support policies that enhance the ability for employers to freely contract with their employees

- **Arbitration.** Oppose any effort to modify applicable law upholding an employer's right to establish a mandatory arbitration program applicable to at-will employees.
- **Employer Hiring Practices.** Oppose efforts dictating how private employers interview, hire, and pay candidates for employment or structure their applications and/or offers of employment [vote pending]
- **Employment-at-will.** Oppose legislation that would erode employment-at-will as a right for all Texas employers and employees
- **Human Rights Act.** Support the current version of the Texas Human Rights Act and protect employers from changes that could create additional litigation. Support utilization of administrative remedies to protect the rights of all involved parties while decreasing the load on the court system s
- **Right to work.** Support efforts to keep Texas a right-to-work state and oppose agency shop legislation

Protect the ability for employers to enact policies and select benefits that best meet the needs of their workforce.

- **Drug Testing.** Oppose attempts to restrict the rights of employers to conduct random and/or universal drug testing of employees
- **Employer Control Over Work Environment.** Support efforts to maintain employers' prerogative to control the workplace, thereby creating a safe, satisfying, and harmonious working environment.
- **Injunctions.** Support allowing an employer to seek an injunction on behalf of an employee to end workplace harassment without creating a new liability for employers
- **Public Collective Bargaining Rights.** Oppose any expansion of collective bargaining rights in the public sector since the current system adequately provides for employee participation without the potential for disruption of services
- **Property Rights of Business Owners.** Oppose the expansion of legislation previously passed that allows legally owned firearms to be stored on company-maintained parking lots
- **Union Dues Check-Off.** Oppose efforts to allow public employees, or to require private employers, to subsidize or promote labor unions or similar organizations through payroll collection of dues and contributions
- **Non-Compete Clauses.** Oppose unnecessary and additional restrictions to non-compete agreements already governed under Texas Business & Commerce code 15.50

- **Texas Payday Law Reform.** Support efforts to clarify Chapter 61 of the Labor Code to allow deductions from wages of any item that is legal to deduct from minimum wage under FLSA without the need for specific written authorization. Support capping the amount of wages that may be claimed under the statute
- **Employment Practices.** Support efforts to limit municipal laws and regulations affecting employment practices of private employers
- **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Reform.** Support efforts to reform the wage and hour laws by allowing more flexibility for employers and employees in hours worked during a pay period before mandating overtime pay. Provide more freedom and flexibility to classify workers as exempt from overtime requirements and as independent contractors.
- **Minimum Wage.** Oppose arbitrary increases in minimum wage that cannot be supported by improvements in productivity and that deprive many entry-level workers of job opportunities
- **Pay Equity.** Strongly support the current law on pay equity

Support efforts to minimize the impact to employer and reduce the opportunity for excessive litigation within the unemployment insurance program.

ENERGY

Energy Markets

- Encourage healthy economic growth in Texas by promoting the production and adequate supplies of all forms of energy at competitive prices; Advocate for the protection of the Texas energy only market which keeps costs low
- Support implementation of new technologies that are proven, market-ready, and cost-effective, that will encourage greater energy efficiency and support the state's growing energy demands
- Promote an "all-the-above" energy strategy that is balanced and cost-effective to create a more consistent and reliable electric grid
- Establish state-wide policy and tax strategies necessary to attract and facilitate utilization of hydrogen, battery storage, carbon capture, utilization and storage efforts, sustainable aviation fuel, geothermal, etc. to Texas
- Support continued PUC jurisdiction over the rates for electric transmission service in Texas, consistent with SB 1938 enacted by the 86th Legislature
- Support the prioritization of funding to state regulatory agencies whose functions play a key role in supporting critical infrastructure and the Texas economy including pipelines, refineries, and renewable facilities. Programs administered by the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT), the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and the Texas Railroad Commission (RRC) should receive sufficient funding to provide effective regulatory programs in support of these urgent state priorities.

- Support efforts to encourage voluntary, economy-wide, free-market solutions to energy conservation and demand response that save businesses money, maximize investment in energy infrastructure and promote competitive economic development in Texas

Environmental Stability

- Encourage a balanced approach to the development and conservation of the state’s natural resources
- Oppose any efforts to establish or expand the authority of a local government to promulgate environmental regulatory programs that would preempt uniform, statewide regulation by the RRC, TCEQ, or other state regulatory agencies or be inconsistent with existing state regulatory programs

Federal Support

- Ensure that Texas gets its fair share of Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (e.g. Hydrogen hubs, EV charging, transmission lines) and that it is used to promote economic development, reduce air pollution, and advance clean energy in Texas.
- Promote reasonable regulatory frameworks and prevent broad, unnecessary, harmful or hostile laws that stifle energy production
- Ensure Texas has a say against federal mandates that impede energy businesses
- Advocate for nationwide use and reliance on energy generated within Texas

Fuels Diversity. Oppose legislative efforts that would require the use of specific fuels for industrial sources for the purpose of forcing adoption of a particular technology.

HEALTH CARE

- **Protect employers from legislation that increases health care costs**
 - Preserve employer, employee, and health plan benefits of ERISA by opposing any attempt to erode the federal preemption of state law relating to health benefit plans
 - Oppose health care & regulatory mandates that drive the long-term cost of health care to employers
 - Support measures that would increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of health care
 - Support legislation to improve the administration of health care services and lower administrative burdens for employers
- **Expand the choices available for employers to purchase health insurance**
 - Support “Consumer Choice of Benefit” health plans, which will provide an additional, low-cost option for employers when purchasing health benefits for their employees. Consumer Choice of Benefit plans include insurance products that eliminate all contract, benefit, and regulatory mandates that exceed federal requirements

- Support stability in the group as well as the individual health insurance marketplace and provide appropriate options for coverage that are affordable and accessible to employers and patients
- **Improve the efficiency of health care delivery system**
 - Support expanding the use of telemedicine to reduce costs and increase access to care
 - Support removing barriers to top of license practice for advanced practice registered nurses, physician assistants, and pharmacists.
 - Increase the number of health care providers available to Texans without sacrificing quality of care
 - Support efforts to ensure all workers, consumers, and employers have convenient and widespread access to tests and vaccines through multiple health facilities and practitioners
 - Support innovative value-based care models that improve health outcomes and reduce cost throughout the health care system
- **Support access to cost-effective, high-quality Medicaid & CHIP programs to improve population health and reduce social barriers to care**
 - Continue to support Medicaid managed care as a service delivery model
 - Support providing full coverage for women on Medicaid for 12 months post-delivery to improve maternal health and ensure healthier babies
 - Support policies that improve outreach to families eligible for but not enrolled in Medicaid & CHIP and smoothly transition children and new mothers who are no longer eligible for Medicaid & CHIP to other coverage
 - Support legislation that will reduce the number of uninsured Texans by increasing the affordability of health insurance through market-based solutions
 - Support providing HHSC with sufficient resources and processes in place to assure that MCOs fulfill their access and service obligations to enrollees and Texas taxpayers
- **Support systemwide strategies to improve the value of health care**
 - Eliminate utilization of low value care, waste, fraud, and abuse across the health care market
 - Empower employees and consumers with information regarding the cost and quality of health care services.
 - Support efforts to promote competition and increase transparency in health care pricing and quality
 - Protect the ability of health insurers and health benefit plans to negotiate contracts with physicians and providers without government interference
 - Prevent needless increases in cost and litigation through the expansion of any kind of medical liability
 - Support efforts to reform the medical billing dispute process in a manner that achieves the most cost savings for employers and patients

PUBLIC SAFETY

Bail Reform. We support legislation that will disallow early release of violent offenders, support aggregation of charges for multiple felonies and place meaningful statutory limitations on deferred adjudications.

Mental Health Reform. We support mental health crisis intervention. We support training for first responders and additional funding for detox centers & crisis intervention centers to treat persons with mental health issues appropriately and keep them out of already overflowing hospitals and prisons.

Hardening Existing Criminal Statutes. We support strengthened laws so police can enforce law and effectively prevent and deter crime, specifically:

- Strengthening Catalytic converter laws;
- Bolstering laws governing street racing and street take-overs;
- Enhancing penalties for Evading in a Vehicle and Burglary from a Vehicle; and
- Expanding Monica's Law to prevent future instances of domestic violence and strengthen convictions for family violence.

Broadening School Safety. After Uvalde, we support cautiously proceeding with legislation that will harden school campuses while increasing critical-response training and communication between first-response entities.

SMALL BUSINESS

- TAB supports measures that reduce tax burdens for small businesses and incentives that boost economic development, benefiting business of all sizes and providing opportunities in the community.
- Support solutions that allow small business access to affordable, stable health insurance for them and their employees.
- Support policies that reduce tax burdens for entrepreneurs and employers, develop a skilled workforce, and retain and improve Texas sound regulatory climate and support efforts to modernize systems across government agencies to reduce administrative burdens, increase efficiency, enhance transparency, and provide cost savings to businesses and taxpayers.
- Support policies that protect Texas employers including:
 - Enhancing the ability for employers to freely contract with their employees
 - Protecting the ability for employers to enact policies and select benefits that best meet the needs of their workforce
 - Minimizing the impact to employers and reduce the opportunity for excessive litigation within the unemployment insurance program

TAXES AND SPENDING

Casino Gambling. Support casino gambling and sportsbooks in order to reduce the franchise tax and to increase employment opportunities.

Federal Funding. Support state policies and programs that maximize the receipt and use of federal matching and other funds for state purposes.

Privatization. Encourage privatization efforts in government in order to increase efficiency and reduce government spending.

TORT REFORM

- Oppose legislation that creates new private rights of action that employees can use to sue their employers. TAB will oppose legislation that encourages lawyers to pursue economically unproductive litigation against Texas businesses.
- Support measures that limit ability of individuals and entities to use public nuisance lawsuits to attempt to implement policy changes through court decisions.
- Work to protect past legislative reforms enacted to curb rising medical malpractice insurance costs and ensure access to care for all Texans. TAB will work to protect the current cap on noneconomic damages in malpractice cases.
- TAB will work to ensure that reforms enacted to curb rising commercial vehicle insurance costs driven by meritless lawsuits are fair and effective.

TRANSPORTATION

Improved Transportation Systems. Support improved highways, ports of entry, waterways 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.

Toll Roads. Support the authorization and construction of toll roads. New capacity toll roads will provide motorists with choices in safe, reliable travel. User fees will support development, operations, financing and long-term maintenance of facilities that otherwise may not be feasible with traditional state and local resources. Any new toll roads must have local support and not reduce any existing non-tolled transportation options and infrastructure currently available to users in the applicable area.

GTACC supports public-private partnerships that bring innovative methods to design, build, finance, maintain or operate an enhanced transportation system in order to meet the growing needs of Texas, while protecting taxpayer interests and property rights. Such partnerships should ensure that they do not preclude public ownership or operation of toll roads where they are supported locally and can be shown to be economically viable.

Toll Road Operation and Administration. GTACC supports efforts to establish uniform and fair operating and administrative procedures for toll roads and toll road authorities that:

- Maximize the seamless and transparent assessment and collection of appropriate tolls across multiple toll authorities;
- Encourage the payment of appropriate toll charges without excessive penalties, and effective and efficient resolution of toll payment disputes; and
- Encourage uniform policies for safe and effective toll road operation, including those related to accident response, vehicle disablement or other appropriate vehicle operator requirements.

Waterway, Port and Ship Channel Improvements. Support any opportunities available to the Legislature or state agencies to facilitate ongoing efforts to improve the maintenance and modernization of commercial waterways and ports. Support local communities seeking funding through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) or other sources, and support state agency review and coordination of federal or state permits or authorizations. Further, support the continued priority of use of the State Highway Fund (Fund 6) for marine transportation needs, including modal connectivity at ports.

Financing Options. All financing options should be explored.

Motor fuel tax limitations, except for constitutionally-required allocation of motor fuel taxes to the educational system:

- Strict limitations on the use of motor fuel taxes for other than transportation programs, and
- Elimination of diversions of transportation funds to other uses.

Utility Coordination on Transportation Projects. Support coordination efforts between TxDOT and utilities and other local project participants on the design and construction of roadway projects to save time and money and minimize disruption to the surrounding community.

Electric vehicles. With electric vehicles currently not paying road use fees, support the creation of a pilot vehicles mile traveled fees for electric vehicles only.

WATER

- Support statewide strategies to provide an adequate and cost-effective supply of water resources
- Support desalination and other technologies to enhance water supply for industry and the state's growing population
- Oppose efforts to weaken the legal and property interest of existing holders of water rights or impose new enforcement programs and costs on holders of water rights
- Oppose efforts that unfairly impose costs or water use restrictions on commercial or industrial users
- Advocate for consistent management and regulation of groundwater based on defined hydrogeologic boundaries rather than arbitrary political jurisdiction boundaries

29201 Quinn Road, Suite B, PO Box 516, Tomball, TX 77377-0516
281.351.7222 fax: 281.351.7223 admin@tomballchamber.org

- Oppose efforts to restrict or prohibit the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality from issuing wastewater discharge permits for new or expanded wastewater treatment plants in certain geographic areas of the state
- Support efforts to provide more regional and local flood control and coastal storm protection infrastructure
- Support state funding for water, drainage, flood control, and coastal storm protection infrastructure and programs without adding additional taxes, fees, or unfunded local mandates
- Support the use of general revenue to pay for water quality regulatory programs without adding additional taxes or fees on these programs

Ground Water Subsidence District. Support efforts requiring the North Harris County Regional Water Authority to explore new and innovative funding options to implement the Harris-Galveston Subsidence District HGSD 2013 Regulatory plan requiring our area to reduce ground water withdrawals to no more than 20% of the total water demand by the year 2035. Current funding mechanism of pumpage fees are exceeding the cost of water providers to produce, maintain and operate their water systems/districts. Future projections show that the pumpage fees are scheduled to continue to increase and the fees place our region in an economic disadvantage with other regions in the state.

OTHER

Corporate Sale of Liquor. Support free-market principles for the corporate sale of liquor. Texas is the only state in the nation that disallows publicly traded companies from selling liquor. There is no business case for doing so, except allowing the government to narrow competition through mandates.

Immigration. Strengthen existing laws and provide funding for border enforcement and protection.

Unfunded Mandates. Transparency in government includes disclosing the full costs of legislation on many levels. The Chamber favors fiscal notes that project the fiscal ramifications of legislation at all levels of government—state, county, municipal, school district—as well as to businesses, industries, professions and non-profit organizations.

Duplication of Oversight. State agencies providing oversight to various entities—businesses, non-profits, service providers, etc.— across the state should collaborate on their responsibilities in order to reduce their staffs and budgets. Redundant oversight within the same agency should be terminated. Oversight should be reasonable and not cause undue hardship to the entity being supervised.