

Executive Summary

The Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce has as its foremost mission the continuation and cultivation of a vigorous local economy and through its many programs enhances the ability of companies in the Brazos Valley to grow and prosper. One of the most important roles for our Chamber is to take a proactive approach to ensure that those who represent us in Washington, D.C., and Austin hear about the business interests of its members.

To accomplish this, the following "Legislative Action Plan" has been approved by the Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors based on input from elected officials, community leaders and local business representatives. The Chamber's mission statement to enhance the economic well-being of the businesses in the communities it serves was the guiding principle and the five areas of legislative action selected include Transportation, Health Care, Economic Development, Taxation, and Homeland Security.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the important legislative goals in each of the five areas of concern. The Legislative Affairs Committee has been in discussions for the past several months on both the short term and long term impact of the goals in this document. While in Washington, D.C., the delegation will meet personally with United States Senators and Representatives to discuss the specifics of the legislation that impacts the businesses of our community. We respectfully request your support on the issues outlined in this legislative action plan.



Jerry Fox
Chairman, Board of Directors



Royce Hickman
President/CEO

Transportation Background

Bryan/College Station in Brazos County continues to be one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the State of Texas. Experiencing a growth rate of more than 25 percent from 1990 to 2000, we are the largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) in the nation that does not have an interstate highway.

Not only for economic development benefits, but also for the critical issue of safety to our 160,000 citizens and our more than 50,000 college students, we need four-lane, divided access to interstate highways to the north, south, east and west of Bryan/College Station. Texas Highway 21 traveling east and west, and Texas Highway 6 traveling north and south present excellent opportunities for us to expand our current system into four-lane, divided highways connecting us with IH-45 and IH-35.

Congress is currently considering funding a demonstration project for high-speed rail services in Central Texas. Bryan/College Station, because of its central location, and its strategic importance as an education research center, should be located on the route, which is proposed between Beaumont and Killeen, Texas.

Requests

- Give Bryan/College Station a direct access route to a major interstate highway. This could be accomplished by federally funding a 25-mile segment of State Highway 21 east from the Navasota River in eastern Brazos County to Interstate Highway 45 in Madisonville, Madison County, Texas.
- Consider southern Brazos County as an alternative corridor for the I-69 Highway plan designated to link industrial centers of Mexico, the United States and Canada and to serve as a vital link for economic development.
- Pass highway legislation that increases Texas' share of federal highway dollars from the current \$0.87 to a more equitable level.
- Provide funding for the development of a high-speed rail route in Texas that links Beaumont and Killeen via Bryan/College Station.
- Include the development and distribution of bio fuels in federal energy legislation.

Health Care

Background

Bryan/College Station has more than 350 health service providers, including two full-service hospitals and one specialty hospital that deliver a level of care usually available only in a metropolitan area. The federal government continues to under fund reimbursements to rural providers especially those who care for Medicare, Medicaid and Veterans beneficiaries. Vulnerable populations are in danger of losing access to critical care because this chronic under funding is now being exacerbated by high fuel costs. The federal government funds approximately forty percent of the total cost of Medicaid insurance in Texas. Other states receive a larger percentage of funding of their total Medicaid obligation from the federal government. Bryan/College Station has a regional veteran's outpatient clinic that should be expanded to care for more patients on a regular basis.

Requests

- Support an increase in medical reimbursements to high-density rural areas like Bryan/College Station and Brazos County.
- Support the Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2005 making it easier for small businesses to buy health insurance together (S.406 & H.R.525).
- Support with federal funding the creation of a four-year accredited nursing program through the Texas A&M University System Health Science Center and College of Medicine to help decrease a critical shortage in the supply of nursing support staff.
- Pass medical liability legislation (Health Act of 2005, S.354 & H.R. 534)
- Support an above-the-line tax deduction on Long Term Care Insurance for companies and individuals.
- Support an expansion of the outpatient Veterans Clinic in Bryan/College Station.

Taxation

Background

In 2005 Texas residents may deduct sales taxes from their federal income taxes; however, current legislation only allows this deduction for the next two years. Texas is just one of eight states that relies solely on a state sales tax to fund all levels of government. Our residents and businesses bear an unfair tax burden when our sales taxes are not deductible. Our local businesses also encounter an unlevel playing field when competing against internet-retailers who are not required to collect sales taxes.

Requests

- Make permanent the full deductibility of state and local sales taxes for federal income taxes.
- Provide a workable definition for “point of sale” in the collection of sales taxes for companies engaged in e-commerce.
- Make permanent the repeal of the estate tax (S.420 & H.R.8).
- Support aggressive measures to ensure the long-term solvency and viability of the social security system, including serious consideration to allowing workers to place a percentage of their social security funds in private accounts.

Economic Development

Background

Our nation needs an educated workforce if we are to continue to compete in the global workplace. We must continue to fund research and development programs at our nation's colleges and universities. We must also create an environment that removes impediments to entrepreneurs starting businesses and allow those same businesses to grow and thrive, thereby adding new jobs to the local economy.

Requests

- Procure for Texas universities, and in particular, Texas A&M University, a major portion of research dollars allocated by the federal government.
- Encourage increased funding for workforce development programs (Workforce Investment Act - H.R.27).
- Encourage and support global free trade agreements.
- Request enactment of legislation that will establish a federal district divisional court in the Bryan/College Station area. This would relieve congestion in the Southern District of Harris County while giving the residents of Brazos County and surrounding areas an easily accessible forum for cases which must be brought to federal court.
- Pursue legislation to amend Federal law 1926(b) to allow a city to acquire a rural water supply corporation or special utility district's service territory as it is annexed as long as the city performing the annexation is willing to pay the pro-rata share of the Federal debt that can be reasonably attributed to the area annexed.

Homeland Security

Background

The Federal Homeland Security Act (H.R. 5005) provides for the creation of regional research centers at major U. S. Universities. These centers will initiate and develop research projects, which benefit federal and state agencies in their efforts to detect, prevent and respond to terrorist attacks. Because of its reputation as a major university, strong in the areas of science, engineering and agriculture, Texas A&M University has already been chosen as a regional research center in agriculture. The support of that center needs to be continued.

Requests

- Continue to support Texas A&M University's National Center for Foreign Animal and Zoonotic Disease Defense.
- Standardize procedures for distributing Homeland Security grants for training, equipment and personnel.