

Legislative LP Positions

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Beckley- Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce
Legislative Committee

COVID-19 Liability Reform

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many businesses to shut their doors, most of which have not reopened at full capacity. Small business is the backbone of our community and many of these businesses are struggling due to COVID. Almost every entity has reinvented their business model 2 or 3 times. We will continue to work with our small business members and legislators to develop specific policy goals that could provide quick assistance to help small businesses recover and thrive. Hospitals censuses dropped off with no elective procedures and now face serious capacity issues due to the demand created by COVID-19. In several other states we have seen lawsuits popping up against employers related to the COVID pandemic. Many of these states have seen legislation or executive actions by governors designed to protect employers from these lawsuits, and similar legislation should be a priority in West Virginia.

Energy

The Chamber continues to support clean coal research and alternative uses for coal. While supporting coal and its continued use, the Chamber also recognizes the growing importance of energy diversification in the state's and nation's energy mix. The diversification of energy sources in the region would create an economic development opportunity for the region and is a positive step in attracting new businesses and commerce. Supporting all energy sources will prove beneficial to our region and the state.

Government Modernization

The Chamber recognizes transformative change is taking place in West Virginia's economy. Demographic trends continue to show the average age of our citizens is increasing. Population growth remains stagnant to declining and the pool of K-12 and higher education students in K-12 continues to shrink. The era in which the framework of our West Virginia government was established simply is much different than the times in which our citizens now live.

These realities create growing challenges with our ability to adequately fund and provide government services. Yet, public policymakers have been amiss at evaluating, enabling and pursuing opportunities to modernize the structure and delivery of government services at all levels. Too often government innovation is stifled by archaic state code provisions and status quo leadership. The Chamber supports government modernization and West Virginia and its citizens will benefit by implementing policies and solutions that modernize the size and structure of our government and provision of its services. The principles of continuous improvement, streamlining and efficiency have already taken place in both the private sector and neighboring localities. Government modernization can create an atmosphere in which our citizens receive services faster, cheaper and better. While at the same time, modernization promotes a pro-growth economic climate.

Highways and Infrastructure

West Virginia is currently experiencing more highway & road construction projects than ever before under Gov. Justice's Roads to Prosperity Program. The BRCCC supports this program and recognizes the critical role of highways and infrastructure in establishing the foundation for a vibrant economy

Southern WV will benefit greatly from the Roads to Prosperity program as bonds leveraged by toll revenue of the West Virginia Parkways Authority will be used for road construction projects in and around the 10 counties surrounding the WV Turnpike. It is expected that by the end of 2021 \$500 Million will have been deposited into the State Road Construction account and used specifically for Legislatively approved projects.

The BRCCC will also continue to advocate for policy reforms that embrace both proven approaches and new innovation which make roadway (and other infrastructure) construction, operation and maintenance timely and cost efficient.

The BRCCC recognizes that sustainment of our existing highway network is of equal importance to the construction of new highways.

The BRCCC also acknowledges the critical role that the expansion of broadband throughout Southern WV will play in creating the vibrant economy we strive for. We support the on-going installation of fiber optic cable through Southern WV as part of Facebook's initiative to create the backbone infrastructure for "middle mile" and "last mile" connectivity to parts of rural America.

Medical Cannabis

The West Virginia Legislature passed the Medical Cannabis Act in 2017 thereby allowing a limited amount of grower, processor and dispenser permits to be issued throughout the State. Those permits were approved based on certain qualifications and requirements. Raleigh County was the first County in the State to announce that they would “approve a medical cannabis organization to be located or operate within the County” (WV State Code §16A-6-13b2). As a result of this proactive approach on behalf of the County Commission and by support of the BRCCC and New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, Raleigh County was able to secure 2 of the 10 state-wide businesses that were issued Grower permits. These businesses will be located in facilities at the Raleigh County Memorial Airport Industrial Park and will create 150+ jobs.

The West Virginia Legislature should continue to explore the benefits of the leaf and flower form of Medical Cannabis as it has shown benefits for cancer patients suffering from nausea. We also support the passage of legal recreational cannabis. Legal recreational cannabis will increase tax revenue supporting drug rehabilitation programs across the region and state. Passage could also reduce the number of incarcerations thus reducing judicial overload and county jail cost. Legalization will add millions to the local economy, create thousands of jobs, free up scarce police resources, and reduce the racial disparities in marijuana enforcement.

Redistricting

The Chamber believes voters should pick their representatives and representatives should not pick their voters and calls for the Legislature to establish an independent redistricting commission behind the 2020 census. This commission should determine legislative districts that are not partisan in nature and closely adhere to existing county borders, municipalities and magisterial districts and communities of similar interest.

Substance Abuse/Rehabilitation

While the Chamber recognizes and supports the many steps that have been taken by the Legislature to address this issue, more work is needed. Substance Use Disorder, legal and illegal is killing West Virginians and West Virginia's future. Funding for treatment and recovery is a critical need that must be addressed.

New legislation passed during the 2019 Regular Session set new guidelines regarding Expungement eligibility. Under WV Code 61-II-26 in certain circumstances a person may be eligible for accelerated expungement. If qualified, felonies may be expunged three years after completion of any sentence. This will expedite the ability of some substance abusers to put their mistakes behind them and become an employable productive member of our society. We recommend a review of WV Code 61-II-26 to study its effectiveness and determine if modification(s) are needed.

West Virginia has the lowest labor force participation rate in the nation. We must continue to explore every available avenue to expand and educate our labor force. We must provide a dependable and skilled labor force if we are going to attract and maintain investments in our economy.

Tax Reform

The Beckley- Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce (BRCCC) supports legislative committee review and strategic planning on items affecting taxation for both businesses and individuals. The State has the ultimate duty of maintaining the commitment to its citizens of ensuring stable and predictable sources and uses of revenue for government. It is the recommendation of the BRCCC that the State create these sources of revenue by use of the fairest and most competitive methods. In order to promote future economic development, such methods of taxation for both the individual and business, must remain as competitively balanced as possible with the surrounding states.

The BRCCC recognizes the opportunity to repeal or reform certain taxes in an effort to promote economic development. Therefore, we support the elimination of the business inventory tax and personal property tax, however, the State must remain cognizant that this source of revenue represents a percentage of annually budgeted revenue for WV County Governments and that funding must be preserved through constitutional order. Proposed action must be carefully planned so they do not significantly harm essential local services. As it was written and proposed in the previous Legislative Session, the elimination would be done so in a tiered method over a period of time, which we support. However, there was no guarantee that local government services would be fully funded, thereby any future vote on such by the Legislature could reverse or decrease County funding. Under this scenario and without a constitutional order Raleigh County could potentially lose up to 12% annually for funding of these services. A vote by the citizens to repeal must require a vote by the citizens to restore.