



AGENDA FOR
ECONOMIC VITALITY
IN NEVADA



COVER PHOTO CREDITS:

Sparks Marina courtesy of Kristy Crabtree

Downtown Reno courtesy of City of Reno

CHAMBER PUBLIC POLICY MISSION

The public policy mission of the Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce is to shape an environment conducive to business growth, job creation and a high quality of life throughout our community; to support local businesses; to promote member companies, our region and free enterprise; and to advocate for public policies consistent with the economic well-being of the regional business community and superior quality of life standards.

The Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce, Northern Nevada's largest business organization, is a volunteer organization funded by 1,500 private businesses and their 70,000 employees. Other than some local public sector membership-related dollars, the Chamber receives no local, state, or federal tax dollar support. Ninety percent of the businesses providing direction and financial support to the Chamber are small businesses employing less than 50 people.

The Chamber's Business Advocacy Council represents members' interests in federal, state and local government forums and supports the basic tenets of free enterprise. Its actions include testifying on behalf of the business community before the state legislature, county commission, city councils, and their affiliated agencies, boards, and commissions, as well as raising and advocating key issues in the community.

The Chamber strongly believes that providing education and information to the business community and to the public is more effective than government imposition of regulations or control. The Chamber believes a business has an obligation to provide a safe workplace and proper compensation based upon the market conditions for skill, knowledge, ability, desire, and contribution to the product or service of the employer. The Chamber advocates equal opportunities for jobs, education and advancements, and reasonable worker's rights; however, the Chamber opposes governmental interference in labor management matters.

LEGISLATIVE OBJECTIVE

The legislative objective of the Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce is to provide a strong private enterprise voice for its members to local, state, and federal officials and their administrative agencies. The Chamber is highly selective about the issues in which it develops positions. The Chamber neither courts nor shuns controversy, but evaluates and provides positions on specific issues and pieces of legislation. Chamber positions fall within broad general policy approved and set forth by the Board of Directors of the Chamber.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY

This Agenda has been in existence since 1972. While Chamber policy is reviewed periodically, the broad general policies and guidelines have remained reasonably consistent over the years and are outlined in this manual. Within the guidelines of this legislative policy manual, the Business Advocacy Council, the Chamber Board and staff are able to make timely decisions, deliver testimony and employ direct contact with elected officials to solicit an appropriate response on behalf of the Chamber membership.

TAXATION

Our quality of life in Northern Nevada depends on the job creation and tax revenue that only a vibrant business sector can provide. It is therefore critical that tax policy supports business growth and the creation of new jobs.

The Chamber believes that a strong economy is enhanced by a stable and equitably broad-based tax system. The Chamber believes Nevada's tax structure is a key component of overall efforts to grow and diversify Nevada's economy. Efforts to raise more revenue through increased taxes on business to support government services should be evaluated carefully with clear and justified benefits, following efforts by government to deliver services and administer programs more efficiently. One specific industry should not be a tax or fee target for a service or program provided to the general public. Also, the Chamber believes that taxes raised at the local level should, whenever possible, be utilized to support local services. Finally, tax policy is best decided by the elected branches of government rather than through initiative petitions or referendums.

SUPPORT

- A comprehensive and broad-based analysis of Nevada's tax structure with recommendations to the Governor and State Legislature for review, adoption, and implementation of a structure that will fairly and equitably generate the revenues to meet the requirements of a growing and diversifying economy without jeopardizing our economic development stature
- Broad-based use taxes to provide general government support, including consumption taxes, i.e., sales tax
- Continued effort to ensure a stable and predictable broad-based tax climate in Nevada
- Working together with the various entities that represent Nevada businesses to ensure an equitably assessed tax system for every business
- Concept of reasonable tax and fee caps to prevent government from unnecessary expansion
- Legislative review of all sales and other tax exemptions, abatements, and exclusions
- Removal of depreciation of real property at point of sale
- Continued efforts by the state to implement equitable local sales tax allocation
- Continued support for the Streamlined Sales Tax project for the purpose of facilitating sales tax collection

OPPOSE

- Placing business in a position of being a non-transparent, hidden tax collector
- Any personal or corporate income tax
- Gross receipts tax
- Any type of excise or business tax assessed per business branch location
- New and increased taxes discriminating against a specific business or industry
- Increasing federal tax rates on carried interest and investment partnerships
- Tiered tax rates that create a disincentive to hiring or the purchasing of goods

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Chamber recognizes that our transportation infrastructure is the lifeblood of our region's commerce. The strength of the local economy is dependent on a well-maintained system of roads, highways, and other transportation options. Government policies should encourage the smooth and expeditious flow of vehicle traffic and prevent/discourage bottlenecks and delays.

SUPPORT

- Advanced capital improvement/facility planning
- User-based broad financial support of roadways
- Enhanced funding options for highway and transportation projects
- Efforts to ensure that Nevada receives no less federal transportation dollars than it contributes
- Measures that safeguard transportation networks from hazardous and toxic materials
- The use of public-private partnerships in finding new, innovative solutions for road-building
- Broader utilization of the design-build process, construction manager at risk, and other innovative construction delivery systems
- Use of publicly transparent performance measures and cost-benefit analyses by local and state transportation agencies
- Efforts to improve enhanced air carrier and rail access
- Identifying the specific uses of any new revenue available for transportation projects

OPPOSE

- Increased impact fees that are inflated without relevant and transparent data
- Weight and distance taxes
- State mandates for new sources of funding highway and transportation projects aimed at local business and/or local government without first exploring better utilization of existing resources

EDUCATION

A world-class educational system is the foundation for our community, economic and workforce development goals. The Chamber supports an educational system that delivers an effective and engaging educational experience. It supports innovative programs and other reforms that will enhance educational success as well as improve graduation rates and preparation for post-secondary education and workforce training. A superior education system is essential to the development of an informed citizenry and an advanced, competitive workforce.

GENERAL

SUPPORT

- Greater emphasis on performance results in schools, colleges, and universities
- Autonomy and flexibility to allocate scarce resources at the local level
- Accountability and transparency in financial and business operations
- Public-private partnerships that foster the transfer of experience and expertise
- Objective performance standards that measure student growth and teaching effectiveness
- Adequate and stable revenue streams to fund educational systems and institutional operations, justified capital construction, maintenance and facility renewal as well as all mandated educational programs
- Collaborative educational efforts to promote careers in technical and craft trades
- Rigorous, attainable, relevant academic standards for students at all levels
- High standards for educators with rewarding opportunities for professional development and advancement
- Merit and incentive pay for educators who demonstrate measured success in student learning.
- Effective programs of instruction that foster literacy and English proficiency
- Continued interaction of executive educational leadership to coordinate educational preparation and transitions

K-12

SUPPORT

- The financial viability of charter and empowerment schools that allow each school to meet state standards and determine the individual needs of its students, which could include a structured full-day kindergarten and other extended-day educational programs
- Alternative teacher licensing and the ability of school districts to hire technical professionals without teacher certification
- A reliable funding mechanism for technology-related capital expenses for local school districts
- Legislative reform of requirements like prevailing wage, collective bargaining (NRS 288.150) and supervisory unions that add significant costs to K-12 funding

HIGHER EDUCATION

SUPPORT

- Merit based compensation scheme for faculty and classified staff and more flexibility in personnel policy
- Reforms to the Millennium Scholarship Program to ensure that it remains a viable program for students who graduate from a Nevada high school
- Financial need-based grants to provide greater access to higher education to students from low-income families
- Funding levels that allow the state's investment in education to be leveraged with other grants and capital
- Tuition and registration fee retention which will provide incentives for academic and recruiting entrepreneurship leading to great academic success, national recognition, and student body diversity
- Efforts to protect and commercialize NSHE innovations, including forming new Nevada companies, attracting companies to Nevada, and collaborating with existing Nevada companies
- Institutions with strong research programs that can provide a skilled workforce to encourage economic development, economic diversification, and innovation in Nevada to help provide quality job opportunities to Nevada's citizens

EFFICIENT DELIVERY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Local businesses depend on municipal and county government services for safety, transportation, recreation and other functions. Large responsibilities have been placed on the shoulders of our public officials, and it's important that such services are adequately funded.

It is also important that government programs are administered efficiently and effectively in order to keep the tax burden on Nevada citizens and businesses at reasonable levels and to deliver the maximum benefit for the tax dollars invested. It is important for county and municipal governments to continually find ways to deliver services more efficiently, especially in areas and functions with overlap. In some cases, this may mean examining the number of employees required to perform each function, and the systems used to ensure the maximum contribution of each employee and team. Cooperation and collaboration among all levels of government is essential for sound governance. We encourage government, like private business, to be nimble enough to respond to fluctuations in the economy and revenue. To demonstrate to taxpayers regional fiscal responsibility and accountability, all government entities must improve the transparency of their activities and decisions and the associated fiscal impacts.

SUPPORT

- Business-experienced candidates for all public offices
- Continued biennial state citizen legislature of specified duration
- Greater penalties for voter registration fraud
- Reform of state and federal prevailing wage laws to lower costs
- Local government budgets disclosing the impact of binding-arbitration collective bargaining contracts
- Privatization of any function that can be accomplished on an improved cost benefit basis through private sector competition and bidding including services where wages and fringe benefits have become disproportionate to the general wage scale in the community
- One-stop process for obtaining business licenses and permits
- Functional consolidation of appropriate services to optimize operational efficiencies and reduce the effective costs of government
- Working closely with Washoe County governments on tax allocation, infrastructure and regional issues, including regional fiscal equity studies
- Limitations or revisions to the initiative and referendum petition process
- Constitutional amendments that reflect only policy governance

- Exploration of alternative methods of funding and constructing capital improvement projects
- Strengthening statutory limitations for budget growth and appropriations to allow for expenditures with accountability, efficiency and necessity
- Limited use of statutory eminent domain practices to benefit public good with statutory protections and just compensation to private land owners for approved takings
- Transparent expense/revenue budget and actual spending comparisons and year-to-year variances
- Continued periodic and public reviews of the public employee retirement and benefit programs that allow for possible modifications for efficiencies, cost savings, and approximate parity with Nevada's private sector
- Statutory sunsets with periodic review of boards and commissions to determine efficiencies, practices, continued purpose, and funding sources
- Comprehensive asset management of all government-controlled real property assets
- Creation of a communications structure managed by a Nevada State Grants Coordinator to facilitate and coordinate grant funding opportunities among governmental agencies
- Modifications to the state budgeting system that establish budget funding priorities based upon levels of expected revenues

OPPOSE

- Concept of concurrency as a growth-limiting tool
- Other public employee groups being added to Nevada law and allowing union employee bargaining groups to obtain the most expensive features of existing contracts in effect at the time of consolidation
- Unfunded mandates
- Public employee pay increases that occur on an annual basis as a function of time rather than productivity and performance
- Public salary increase requests when the reason given is to achieve parity with other local or state government employment component
- Binding arbitration and retroactivity in labor management relations in public sector, and public employee collective bargaining
- Government competition with or acquisition of private enterprise

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSIFICATION

A strong and viable economy is enhanced by government at all levels working with the business community to provide a favorable and progressive business climate that will create job growth, capital investment, and wealth building in Nevada. It is important that our economic development and diversification efforts be recognized and supported by all branches of government with a dedication toward maintaining a stable tax and fee structure combined with regulatory certainty.

SUPPORT

- Programs of economic diversification that provide emphasis on participation by the private sector
- Concepts that create or continue a favorable climate for encouragement of new or expanded payrolls and capital investment in Nevada
- NSHE programs that lead to a highly-skilled workforce and the attraction of high-tech companies that pay high wages
- Establishing appropriate policies for the orderly transfer, use, or licensing of intellectual property developed, owned, or controlled by public institutions that will result in the creation of jobs within the State of Nevada
- Community projects and programs that promote economic development, diversification and tourism opportunities
- Coordinated economic programs with economic development organizations like the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN), and the Northern Nevada Development Authority (NNDA), and educational institutions
- Responsible, transparent administration of carefully adopted redevelopment areas
- Regional cooperation and consolidation in promotion of stronger economic development and diversification
- Efforts to maintain supply of workforce affordable housing through regional dialogue and cooperation
- Growth initiatives that take into account surrounding traffic/infrastructure needs and residents' ability to walk to work, shop, eat, and enjoy entertainment
- Steps to take advantage of our geographical location, such as turning Nevada into a logistics and transportation hub and an exporter of goods and services

OPPOSE

- Wage, price, and rent controls
- Obstacles to regional cooperation and consolidation

HEALTHCARE

Because healthcare coverage is provided primarily through employers, the Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce supports improved access and affordability of healthcare insurance for employers, as well as reasonable efforts to reduce healthcare costs, such as incentive programs for healthy lifestyle behaviors.

SUPPORT

- Availability of and access to affordable insurance for employers
- Availability of health savings accounts
- Medical malpractice tort reform
- Ability of healthcare consumers to purchase insurance in a nationwide marketplace
- Monitoring efficiencies in the Medicaid program, and ensuring fair share federal formulas for Nevada
- Funding for more nursing and other healthcare graduates, along with cooperative and reciprocity policies for Nevada licensure
- Study of a high risk medical insurance pool
- Programs designed to promote substance abuse prevention and treatment, including methamphetamine, that limit impacts on healthcare insurance as well as the larger economic and community costs
- Allowing individuals and small businesses to deduct the full cost of insurance expenses from their federal tax liability
- Ensuring that government programs pay enough to cover the costs of the services provided to recipients, which will reduce cost shifting to those employers/employees who have insurance
- Requiring a complete cost/benefit analysis to ensure that any new public policy that impacts healthcare providers or insurers has a greater benefit than cost and that the cost is paid for
- Appropriate incentives to encourage employers to provide health insurance

OPPOSE

- Requiring businesses to purchase their health insurance from the government
- Treatment of employer contributions to their employees' premium expense as taxable income
- Mandating employers provide health insurance coverage and mandating benefits
- Creation of multiple layers of bureaucracy for healthcare and health insurance financing and delivery

INSURANCE AND TORT REFORM

Nevada's civil litigation system is overdue for review concerning efficiency and fairness doctrines. Excessive liability damage and punitive awards are counter-productive to Nevada's national competitive corporate and small business economy.

State insurance regulators should require access to all underlying documents for disclosure of judicial awards of any nature to be presented for review and analysis before approving rate increase requests for any insurance category. The Chamber supports a strong competitive marketplace for insurance of all types, with reasonable regulations and market-based rates.

SUPPORT

- Several liability statutes that ensure that liability is consistent with responsibility
- Caps on non-economic awards
- Product liability tort reform
- Construction defect tort reform

RESOURCES

Local businesses rely on energy to light and heat their place of business, operate equipment and machinery, deliver services, and produce and transport goods. Affordable and reliable supplies of energy are critical to local business, and to our region's ability to attract and retain quality companies. The Chamber therefore supports public policies that ensure reliable and affordable energy supplies.

Mining employs thousands of people throughout the state. Fifteen counties in Nevada, including Washoe, have mined mineral resources. Nevada depends on mining for jobs, tax revenue, and economic development in our rural counties. Every one of us benefits from mined materials in the tools that we use in our homes and businesses every day. The Chamber supports a viable, robust mining industry.

SUPPORT

- An orderly, cost-sensitive transition from traditional sources of energy to cleaner, next-generation renewable sources of energy
- Responsible utilization of Nevada' abundant natural resources, such as wind, solar, and geothermal
- Increasing Nevada's energy independence so as to reduce the need for purchasing energy from neighboring states
- Alternative transportation fuel projects such as the Washoe RTC hydrogen fuel project
- Responsible regulations oriented toward scientifically-based environmental standards
- Research and development of nuclear energy technologies
- Development and implementation of emerging technologies that create greater efficiencies and conservation
- Efforts to make transmission of energy more efficient statewide and available to rural resources

OPPOSE

- Efforts to impose onerous and retroactive royalty fee increases on the mining and geothermal industries, which employ thousands of Nevadans
- Unreasonable government regulations that hamper the extraction of minerals in Nevada

IMMIGRATION

Immigration has a significant impact on the economy of Reno-Sparks. Our employers must be able to access documented, legal workers to ensure that customer demand and service is met and exceeded. While the problem of illegal immigration is a serious one that must be addressed, the current mixed messages at all levels of government, the lack of enforcement of current laws, and the emphasis on employer screening could have a significant negative impact on the businesses and families of our community. Our members are law-abiding employers who must have the tools necessary to ensure compliance with respected and enforced federal immigration laws.

SUPPORT

- Greater border security
- Stricter enforcement of current federal immigration laws
- Continued federal support for local governments burdened with detaining undocumented aliens
- Increased legal immigration levels that allow employers to find and hire willing workers and that are based on professional service requirements and market demand
- The establishment of a comprehensive guest worker program with absolute identification and time limits on workers who come here from outside our borders
- Programs that allow for employers to easily and accurately determine legal status of all potential employees
- Penalties for employers who KNOWINGLY hire illegal immigrants

OPPOSE

- Burdensome requirements and “catch 22” civil rights arguments that place the employer in the position of enforcing immigration law

CRIME PREVENTION

The prevention and reduction of crime is essential for people to feel safe in their homes, at work and at school. Our community, with its important active visitor base, must necessarily focus on law and order to be a healthy and prosperous place to live and do business. The Chamber actively supports an aggressive assault on drug abuse, a realistic sentencing policy with an emphasis on rehabilitation alternatives versus traditional incarceration for non-violent offenders and strong victim's rights laws. Recognizing that violent juvenile crime and gang activity exist, the Chamber supports a judicial system that holds juveniles and their parents responsible for their actions.

SUPPORT

- Regulation, enforcement, and consistent funding to control drug abuse and for continued state support of the drug court system
- Anti-drug paraphernalia laws and enforcement
- Prison and parole reform with a greater emphasis on realistic sentencing, rehabilitation, and lower cost alternatives to traditional incarceration
- Requirements for restitution and victim's rights, with criminals made more responsible for restitution
- Well-structured work release programs for non-violent criminals
- Efforts to modify exclusionary rule to allow admissibility of evidence discovered while enforcement officers work in another area
- Public service work for certain offenders as part of sentencing and/or probation
- Regulated use of polygraph
- Parental responsibility for juvenile crimes
- Activities and programs to combat anti-gang activity, graffiti and nuisances
- Law enforcement cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation to ensure both effectiveness and efficiency
- Neighborhood and Business Watches and Secret Witness Programs
- DNA sampling and processing to assist in national, state, and local criminal investigations

LABOR AND MANAGEMENT

The Chamber believes that all businesses must employ sound human resource practices with their employees to promote a healthy work environment. Labor laws should encourage a strong economy that provides good job opportunities and the right to work if qualified.

SUPPORT

- Strong Right-to-Work law with no changes
- One week waiting period for unemployment compensation benefits
- Fair and reasonable compensation for industrial injuries with a strong rehabilitation program
- Fair and reasonable unemployment insurance program with emphasis on employment, training and placement
- Minimum wage differential for entry and training level workers
- Heavy sanctions and aggressive prosecution of workers compensation fraud by employers and employees
- Drug testing in the workplace

OPPOSE

- Wage and price controls of any kind
- Tip reporting for income purposes unless all tip income is reported by all tip earners
- Mandated benefits and or mandated personnel staffing requirements
- Mandated family leave
- Any effort to weaken the rights of employees to a secret ballot unionization process that is free from intimidation and coercion

WATER AND AIR QUALITY

Because water and air do not recognize political boundaries, the Chamber supports regional planning for water, air and flood control. Our region relies on a dependable water supply if we are to maintain our quality of life and ensure future economic prosperity.

SUPPORT

- Truckee River Operating Agreement (TROA)
- Retrofit of water meter program and fair billing for usage
- Adequate Truckee River storage to meet drought year demands
- Western Regional Water Commission, which will allow for the consolidation of review efforts for water resource management to optimize fiscal and operational efficiencies and best practices including acquisition, planning, and conservation
- Regional conservation plan designed to reduce drought year water demands
- Minimum in-stream flows for the Truckee River and its tributaries
- Agreements with other entities to ensure water quality in the Truckee River
- Reasonable air quality requirements and enforcement
- Flood control planning and implementation
- Current consolidation efforts of regional water suppliers

OPPOSE

- Water importation proposals and expenditures based solely upon potential user hook-ups and without proven long-term reliability for both quantity and quality
- Water quality standards based upon arbitrary or undocumented cause and effect scenarios
- National air quality standards that do not account for different climates, air basins, and regions

