



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. 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, comprised of approximately 100 Chamber members, 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 Legislative Policy Manual has been in existence since 1972. While Chamber policy is reviewed biennially, 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. The Chamber also believes that there should be a nexus between any tax and the purpose for the tax and one specific industry should not be targeted for the entire tax. 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 and gasoline tax
- Continued effort to ensure a stable and predictable broad-based tax climate in Nevada, i.e. current gaming, mining, and modified business tax structure
- Working together with the various entities that represent Nevada businesses to ensure a fairly 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
- Examining removal of depreciation of real property at point of sale
- Continued efforts by the state to implement equitable local sales tax collection, including examination of the national streamlined sales tax project currently underway

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
- Legislation to increase workers compensation benefits without providing for reasonable cost controls

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
- 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

An effective, world-class educational system is the foundation for the future of our community and of our economic and workforce development efforts. The Chamber supports a strong K-16 educational system with superior academic and accountability standards designed to deliver to our children an enduring and relevant educational experience. In order to eliminate student drop-outs, the Chamber supports access to programs and educational opportunities that enhance student success at all levels. All high school graduates should be prepared for post-secondary education and entrance into the workforce. A superior higher education system is an essential investment in the future of the state yielding an informed and responsible citizenry and a highly competent advanced workforce.

GENERAL

SUPPORT

- Greater visibility and accountability of performance in schools, colleges, and universities
- Greater transparency of revenue/expense budget and actual spending comparisons
- Public-private partnerships improving instruction through business/private enterprise education and business leadership mentoring
- Adequate and reliable revenue streams for school districts and NSHE to finance efficient operations, effective programs, justified capital construction, maintenance, and facility renewal needs, and all state- and federally-mandated programs
- Efforts to promote workforce development, including programs linking education and business partners and increased practical Career and Technical Education program opportunities
- High, rigorous academic standards, particularly literacy, mathematics, science and social studies, for students at all levels
- High expectations and pursuit of teaching excellence for educators and substantive opportunities for professional development and advancement
- Performance pay for educators who demonstrate pursuit of teaching excellence and student achievement and incentives for critical need education professionals
- Effective programs of instruction for English Language Learners, including fast-track English proficiency, that promote and subsequently teach in English

OPPOSE

- Increased funding without justification, accountability, and linkage to student and educator performance

K-12

SUPPORT

- Testing of empowerment school concept that allows each school to determine the individual needs of its students, including full-day kindergarten and other extended-day programs for the children who really need the extra attention
- Support of charter schools legislation to ensure success for students and financial viability
- Alternative teacher licensing and the ability of school districts to hire technical professionals without teacher certification
- A reliable state funding mechanism for technology-related capital expenses for local school districts
- Legislative review of current requirements like prevailing wage, collective bargaining (NRS 288.150) and supervisory unions that add significant costs to K-12 funding

OPPOSE

- State-mandated universal full-day kindergarten

HIGHER EDUCATION

SUPPORT

- Reforms to the Millennium Scholarship Program to ensure that it remains a viable program for students who graduate from a Nevada high school
- Institutions that bring independent prestige to the university and community such as the National Judicial College and the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges
- Financial need-based grants to provide greater access to higher education to students from low-income families
- Funding that allows for attraction of outside grants and capital that leverage the state's investment in education
- Continuing efforts to achieve greater cross utilization of capital intensive equipment and facilities between different educational units and government entities

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
- Repeal of the Little Davis Bacon Act (prevailing wage)
- 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
- Periodic and public reviews of the public employee retirement and benefit programs that allows for possible program modifications for efficiencies and cost-savings
- Statutory sunsets with periodic review of boards and commissions to determine efficiencies, practices, continued purpose, and funding sources

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. Programs enhancing new and existing business growth within the private sector are preferred versus the expansion of non-private sector activity. 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
- 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

OPPOSE

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

HEALTH CARE

Because health care coverage is provided primarily through employers, the Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce supports improved access and affordability of health care insurance for employers, as well as reasonable efforts to reduce healthcare costs.

SUPPORT

- Availability of and access to affordable insurance for employers
- Availability of medical savings accounts
- Medical malpractice tort reform
- 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

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 health care and health insurance financing and delivery
- Discriminatory pricing of services and medicine. Government programs should pay enough to cover the cost of services rendered

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.

SUPPORT

- Joint and 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 is Nevada's second largest industry, employing 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
- Development of clean-coal technology, recognizing the abundant supply of coal and its important role in our energy mix and our nation's energy security
- Responsible utilization of Nevada's 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

OPPOSE

- Efforts to impose onerous and retroactive royalty fee increases on the mining industry, our state's second largest industry and the employer of 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 federal immigration laws, including Social Security fraud
- 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

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

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

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