



Legislative Priorities *for the* 81st Texas Legislature

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Greater Irving-Las Colinas
Chamber of Commerce

www.irvingchamber.com



STATE PRIORITIES

Transportation and Infrastructure

The Chamber will continue to support legislation that would provide funding to properly maintain current infrastructure systems and fund expansion projects as well as support a regional solution for rail expansion to further our economic development growth and provide transportation for the future increase of our businesses and employees. The Chamber will also support an alternate transportation program such as ride sharing (e.g., improved and expanded carpooling and vanpooling options and availability) for a more immediate solution to reducing the cost of employee work commute, reduction in emissions and congestion as well as to remain competitive without overtaxing businesses. **The Chamber further supports DART's efforts to seek approval from the Legislature to have ability to issue loan rate debt.** It is important for the entire DFW region to enhance mobility and air quality.

Education/Workforce Development

With the passage of HB 2237 in the 80th Legislative Session, **the Chamber will continue to support legislation that furthers pilot programs for dropout prevention, high school success, as well as college and workforce readiness in public schools.** As technology changes the way employers do business, future workers will need greater skills. Today, a high school diploma has become essential for the majority of jobs. Keeping students in school is a critical component for the workforce in Texas. According to the non-profit, Washington D.C.-based Editorial Projects in Education, only 66.8 percent of Texas students graduate from high school. Texas economist Ray Perryman says that keeping kids in school isn't just good for them but good for the economy. He estimates that a 10 percent reduction in dropouts would produce 175,000 new Texas jobs and \$200 billion in economic output.

As employers are in greater need of employees with specific technical skills, the Chamber recognizes community colleges will be serving 56 percent of students in public higher education. As the enrollment in these colleges steadily rise, **the Chamber will support legislation that will increase funds for community colleges.**

The Chamber will also support legislation to fund a new public law school in the North Texas region.



Franchise (Margin) Tax

The Chamber will support legislation rebating to taxpayers any excess revenue collected from the franchise (margin) tax. The Legislature passed a revised version of the Texas franchise tax in 2007. The revisions were passed due to a Supreme Court ruling mandating the state provide additional revenue to decrease property taxes and mend the school finance system. **The Chamber will continue to advocate that legislation shall include authorizing a business' losses on the franchise tax to be carried forward for up to 10 years and will support an exemption from the franchise (margin) tax of all flow-through funds that are mandated by contract to be distributed to other entities.**

Health Care

Being that Texas has the highest percentage of uninsured, **the Chamber will support legislation regarding the reduction of the uninsured population.** Health care costs and premium increases have outpaced GDP growth, wages and inflation causing employers and employees to dig deeper into their pockets to pay for coverage. Texas is home to the largest percentage of uninsured residents. Health insurance premiums average \$11,000 per family. Even when an employer offers coverage, an increasing number of employees are declining employer-sponsored coverage due to the rising cost of enrollment. As a result, only 60 percent of employers offer health insurance to their employees, down from 69 percent in 2000. A 2005 survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention puts the total number of uninsured Texans at a staggering 5.6 million, 25 percent of our state's total population. Inability to afford private insurance is not limited to households with below-average income. Surprisingly, the households in which the percentage of uninsured is growing at the fastest rate are those whose annual income exceeds \$75,000, followed closely by those in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 bracket.

Energy

The Chamber will continue to encourage research for funding to look at solar energy alternatives and push for coal technology and other fuel sources such as nuclear power and wind power. Our state will require additional power, transmission and distribution to meet growth projections. Economic development successes and the business growth are dependent upon sufficient and reliable energy supplies.



Air Quality

Businesses in Texas, specifically Irving, are committed to reducing air emissions and waste water discharges. The cost of these emission reductions; however, has been high. The challenge of reaching compliance with federal Clean Air Act standards in the future continues to grow. The path is uncertain, but one thing is clear—the responsibility for future emission reductions must be shared equitably among all emission sources. With the passage of SB 12 which increased funding for the Texas Emissions Reduction Program (TERP) for issuing grants for the reduction of diesel emissions and extends the program to 2013, the Chamber will continue to support legislation that will support advanced research and expand technologies in its efforts to achieve compliance with the Federal Clean Air Act.

Water

With the passage of the 2007 Water Plan, the Chamber will continue its support as written and monitor throughout session to avoid any changes that might negatively affect the Irving area. The Chamber would like for the water management strategies identified in the plan to remain and will support City of Irving initiatives regarding seeking additional water sources. With the annual rate of economic growth projected to be 3.7 percent between 2007 and 2010, Texas depends on clean water to manufacture products and electric power to fuel that growth.

Economic Development

The Chamber will continue to encourage lawmakers to increase funding for the Emerging Technology Fund and the Texas Enterprise Fund, in order to remain competitive and bring more jobs and businesses to Texas. We will also support local control and flexibility in the use of tax abatements, tax increment financing, reinvestment zones and other incentives to promote economic development and job creation.



Veterans Affairs

The Chamber will support legislation that will give better integration of service and housing funding along with better programs targeted to our veterans through community mental health centers. The Chamber will also support legislation that improves state veteran hiring practices and addresses veteran reintegration issues.

Property Owners Associations

Any bills which would have a negative impact on the Las Colinas Association and the Valley Ranch Association will be opposed by the Chamber. These property owners associations are instrumental in maintaining the quality of Irving's important two master-planned communities.

Film Production

The Chamber supports the modification of the existing Texas Moving Image Incentive Program in order to be more competitive. The Chamber recognizes the important role film and television play in the economic and artistic life of the state and city of Irving. With a strong existing infrastructure and talent base, Irving has been a hub of production. Film and video projects financially benefit businesses in providing services such as housing, food, beverage, clothing, dry cleaning, construction supplies as well as tourism.

Telecommunications

The Chamber will continue to support legislation which promotes meaningful investment, competition, job creation and the development of advanced technologies in their importance to overall economic growth and in close comportsment with the principles of free enterprise.



Appraisal Caps

The Chamber joins with the City of Irving in opposing proposals to cap appraisal values. Lowering the appraisal cap will adversely impact our local and state economies as well as local infrastructure development and economic development and economic development incentives which negatively impacts future business growth.

Casino Gambling

The Chamber would support legislation for a limited number, strategically located **high-end destination-type casinos/hotels** that would economically benefit the State of Texas.

Drug Testing for Uninsured Beneficiaries

The Chamber will support legislation making drug testing mandatory for UI beneficiaries. We will also push for random drug testing throughout the insurers' coverage.



FEDERAL PRIORITIES

Immigration

Although the Chamber realizes that immigration is a federal issue, **the Chamber would support legislation that complements the principles of the Texas Employers for Immigration Reform (TEIR).** This program gives businesses a voice in the immigration debate. In regards to the principles for immigration reform, the Chamber supports:

- Comprehensive reform addressing both future economic needs for future workers and undocumented workers already in the U.S.
- Reform that strengthens national security by providing for the screening of foreign workers and creating a disincentive for illegal immigration.
- Reform that strengthens the rule of law by establishing clear, sensible immigration laws that are efficiently and vigorously enforced.
- Reform that creates an immigration system that functions efficiently for employers, workers, and government agencies.
- Reform that creates a program that allows hard working, tax paying undocumented workers to earn legal status.
- Reform that ensures that U.S. workers are not displaced by foreign workers.
- Reform that ensures that all workers enjoy the same labor law protections.

Adopted

September 23, 2008
The Board of Directors Meeting of the
Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce

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About

The Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce

Las Colinas Valley Ranch DFW Freeport Heritage Crossing

The Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce promotes the growth and expansion of business in Irving, an international community that is home to 200,000 residents and more than 8,000 businesses, including the global headquarters of four Fortune 500 companies and the presence of more than 20 more. The Chamber serves as the unified business voice for Irving, which is located in the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. With a rich heritage of leadership and collaboration, the Chamber works in partnership with the City of Irving and the corporate community to **create, advance and promote** business in the city and further develop and market Irving's advantages as a premier location for doing business.

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