

2015

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



East King County
Chambers of Commerce
Legislative Coalition

The Coalition Represents 10 Chambers of Commerce

Bellevue • Bothell • Issaquah • Kirkland
Maple Valley-Black Diamond
Newcastle • Redmond • Sammamish
Snoqualmie Valley • Woodinville

www.eastkingchambers.org

COALITION EVENTS & PROGRAMS

www.eastkingchambers.org

Legislative Breakfast

January 8, 2015

Our premier annual event, where members from each chamber and our legislative delegation come together to discuss the upcoming session.

Chamber Day in Olympia

January 28, 2015

Chamber members and Coalition delegates engage legislators on the legislative priorities of the Eastside.

Legislative Wrap Up

Post-Session 2015

Legislators discuss session highlights and provide insight into next year's priorities.

Legislative Report Card

Post-Session 2015

See how legislators voted on the issues that matter most to the Eastside business community.

To our Legislative Delegation and Chamber Members:

I speak for delegates to this Coalition as well as business people throughout the Eastside when I say we are richly blessed to work toward growing our businesses and families and developing lifelong bonds with our neighbors and schools in safe communities. We love our communities and appreciate the opportunity to have our voice heard on a variety of different topics of importance, including the legislative agenda we develop each year. The nine topics we focus our attention on this year – and for many previous years – are vital to the continued growth of the Eastside as an attractive place to start a business, grow a business, and integrate a business into the community.

The East King County Chambers of Commerce Legislative Coalition (Coalition) advocates for Eastside business priorities each year for our members, for our communities, and for our elected representatives. Many difficult decisions must be made by our elected representatives in Olympia to create a sustainable and forward-looking 2015-2017 biennial budget. We hope to help with that process. Our 2015 legislative agenda contains many pro-business goals that we believe will help grow tax revenues, grow business development, and ultimately grow Washington's economy. The Eastside is entrepreneurial and growing quickly. We need a state legislature that is focused on making that growth and entrepreneurship easier to attain.

We believe the legislature must prioritize education funding in the state budget, especially as it pertains to new revenue. We believe math, science, and computer-related programs must be readily available for all K-12 students, creating a much-needed pipeline to university or college education. We believe investing in high demand fields of study at institutions of higher education will help fill an ever-growing jobs gap in Washington and the Eastside. We believe a transportation package anchored by an increase in the gas tax that funds maintenance and operations and finishes incomplete projects will relieve congestion, efficiently move goods and services, and restore the belief that the legislature can accomplish difficult legislative tasks. We believe renewing the high technology research and development tax incentives is critical to helping Washington compete in a global marketplace hungry for development and investment.

In short, we believe pro-growth, pro-business public policy and priorities will expand Washington's economy.

Whether directly involved in the Coalition or not, business people need to have their voice heard in legislative issues. We encourage Eastside business people to familiarize themselves with our 2015 legislative agenda and reach out to legislators directly or through the Coalition to tell your story. We look forward to working with legislators in 2015 and believe our agenda – approved by ten Eastside chambers of commerce – is a valuable resource for everyone interested in legislative issues. The Eastside can compete with any region in the world and we believe our 2015 agenda sends a strong competitive message on many pressing legislative items.

Sincerely,



Ernie Simas
2014-2015 Chair

East King County Chambers of Commerce Legislative Coalition

EDUCATION

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

Washington is confronted with a serious challenge that threatens the state's economic future. Too many students are leaving our education system without the skills needed to pursue higher education or compete for 21st century jobs. This education gap is particularly acute for Eastside businesses that need qualified employees in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), information technology, finance, health care, and skilled trade fields. It is estimated that by 2018, two-thirds of jobs in Washington will require post-secondary training. We urge the legislature to support interaction, collaboration, and partnership between businesses and schools, and:

As it pertains to basic education and early learning, we urge the Legislature to:

- Prioritize education funding in the state budget, particularly with respect to any new revenue.
- Ensure that additional education funding is tied to educational outcomes through the faithful implementation of the state's new accountability framework and programs that modernize and improve the education system.
- Pass legislation to include student achievement growth data as a mandatory factor in teacher and principal evaluations.
- Ensure that more students graduate from high school on time and ready for college and career.
- Ensure enhanced math, science, and computer-related programs linked with career and college planning are readily available.
- Ensure reliable funding for school construction, including updating funding formulas to reflect current construction costs and allowing for construction of schools within districts that straddle Urban Growth Areas.

As it pertains to Higher Education, we urge the legislature to:

- Increase higher education funding with special emphasis on additional funding for high demand fields.
- Provide support to higher education institutions to help close the skills and education gap between graduates with two year, four year, and advanced degrees and the state's job market, especially in the engineering and computer science fields.
- Continue to provide colleges and universities with tuition-setting authority and operating flexibility to pursue efficiency and enhance performance outcomes.
- Fully fund the State Need Grant Program and the Washington Opportunity Scholarship Fund.
- Provide funding for necessary infrastructure projects at Eastside higher education institutions, including University of Washington Bothell, Bellevue College, Lake Washington Institute of Technology, Cascadia Community College, Renton Technical College, and Green River Community College.
- Identify and eliminate duplicative or unnecessary reporting requirements.

TRANSPORTATION**2015 SESSION PRIORITY**

The Coalition believes that the legislature should pass a statewide transportation package to provide funding for transportation projects that allow continued economic expansion, increase personal mobility, reduce congestion, improve travel time reliability, implement the Growth Management Act, and enhance our natural environment. Investments should be prioritized to preserve existing transportation assets and finish incomplete projects that are critical to the state's primary economic corridors, such as I-90 and SR-18, SR-520 and I-405, and SR 169.

We believe effective investments in transportation infrastructure are best developed by adhering to the following basic principles:

Performance

- For new project investments, priority should be placed on congestion relief and travel time reliability for all users, by adding capacity and improving management. Projects should be prioritized based on safety, operational efficiency, market demand, contributions to economic development, improvement of freight mobility, and location in heavily populated and fast-growing urban and suburban areas.
- The Coalition opposes implementation of HOT lanes except where net toll revenue after deduction of toll related operating costs is sufficient to meet debt service requirements necessary to fund all HOT lane construction costs. The Coalition supports the expansion of I-405 Renton to Bellevue and will consider support of the establishment of two HOT lanes when this revenue performance criteria is met between the intersection of I-405 and I-5 on the north and NE 6th in Bellevue on the south.

Funding

- Financing plans necessary to fund the capital, operating, and maintenance costs of our transportation system should be weighted toward user fees as the primary source (e.g. gas tax).
- Revenues from tolling should be collected and spent on projects for the benefit of those who pay them and considered as a funding source only for specific high-cost facilities and additional highway capacity.
- All traditional and new transportation taxes and fees on automobiles and trucks (e.g. all road user taxes such as fuel taxes, weight fees and toll revenues) should remain and be dedicated to street and highway uses and be protected under the 18th Amendment of the state constitution.
- Any additional funding sources should be efficiently collected and have low administrative costs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

Economic development and job creation must be a priority for Washington's legislature in 2015. A healthy and stable private sector ensures continued job growth and funding for the quality of life and public services that our citizens have come to expect.

Without significant taxation and regulatory reform, Eastside businesses will operate at a competitive disadvantage in 2015 in a highly competitive global economy. Lowering, reforming, and streamlining business taxation while preserving and reinstating tax incentives that spur entrepreneurship and job growth would ensure a healthy and competitive economic foundation for our region and state.

We would like to see the legislature:

- Expand upon the sustainable biennial budget passed in 2013 and “do no harm” supplemental budget passed of 2014 by passing significant business tax reform legislation to spur economic growth and entrepreneurship.
- Allow the five-city “B&O tax portal” to continue its work to streamline the assessment and collection of B&O taxes but continue to work toward statewide streamlining with the Department of Revenue.
- Provide tools for infrastructure funding through tax increment financing (or value capture financing).
- Preempt municipalities around Washington from enacting individual minimum wage laws or other employment laws that will require employers to administer different human resource policies within the State and/or have a negative impact on the state's job creation.
- Maintain existing minimum wage laws tied to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W).
- Identify innovative solutions to the Workers Compensation program that will reduce costs on employers, including allowing workers under the age of 55 to receive structured settlements as well as allowing private companies to offer workers compensation insurance.
- Make the Washington estate tax exemption the same as the federal exemption and modify rates to be competitive with other states.
- Renew the high technology research and development tax incentives to help Washington and the Eastside compete for research and development operations and investment.
- Oppose unnecessary regulatory restrictions on emerging technologies.
- Support policies that encourage private sector investment in infrastructure and development of advanced communication technologies to increase broadband availability and adoption, including public-private-partnerships in underserved areas.
- Require public employee collective bargaining negotiations to be open to public analysis, ending the practice of closed door negotiations that have long-term impacts on Washington's budget.

EMPLOYMENT AND BENEFITS

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

The legislature can help Washington businesses create jobs and help our economy get back on track by doing the following:

- Preempt municipalities around Washington from enacting individual minimum wage laws or other employment laws that will require employers to administer different human resource policies within the state and/or have a negative impact on the state's job creation.
- Maintain existing minimum wage laws tied to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W)
- Act boldly in addressing minimum wage laws on a statewide basis to ensure that business development, job creation, and entrepreneurship are not negatively affected.
- Maintain the right of employers to discuss work-related issues with employees; resist all efforts to eliminate or restrict employee choice and privacy with respect to secret ballot union elections; and do not impose state-level collective bargaining obligations on State employers or those employers who receive payments from the State.
- Repeal The Family Leave Insurance Act of 2007 as an unfunded, unworkable mandate.
- Pass legislation that is sustainable and funds pension obligations for State employees.
- Privatize Worker's Compensation insurance to move the system towards greater choice and competition, thereby reducing costs.
- Do not expand Unemployment Insurance benefits and do not transfer UI funds to unrelated State programs. Freeze voluntary quits.
- Fund retraining programs for long-term unemployed.

ENERGY

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

A reliable, sustainable, and affordable energy supply is vital to the economic growth and strength of Washington.

We urge the legislature to:

- Facilitate utilities' ability to comply with the requirements of the Energy Independence Act (I-937). Clarify obligations, ease reporting and facilitate acquisition of all cost-effective conservation resources. Ensure the economic development and environmental benefits of the Initiative are balanced with appropriate cost caps to protect electric utility ratepayers.
- Encourage development of a diverse portfolio of cost-effective energy resources including but not limited to hydroelectric, geothermal, solar, wind, biomass, fuel cells, and tidal/wave power for electric and thermal generation. This would include energy storage technologies and smart grid investments for the transmission and distribution infrastructure necessary to deliver these energy resources to Washington's load centers.
- Recognize and support land-use planning requirements in a manner that will continue to protect the environment and ensure the reliability of energy services, including the necessity to upgrade existing and add new energy infrastructure and equipment to meet energy needs of businesses and residents. Allow cities to protect vital infrastructure information for security purposes.

ENVIRONMENT

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

We must reassess our environmental priorities to ensure that we are receiving the most environmental benefit in a way that truly promotes long-term job creation and prosperity. Mandates drive costs up and a blanket approach on environmental policy often creates undue or extreme hardships in local jurisdictions.

We urge the legislature to:

- Give local jurisdictions more flexibility on environmental mandates to determine what is best for their local conditions.
- Insist that environmental regulations, especially in urban areas, are market and incentive-based (not mandated) and that they have clearly defined, measurable outcomes. Focus on the financial/economic impacts of environmental regulations and sustainability initiatives – not just the environmental and social impacts. Maintain a healthy balance among these three pillars of sustainability.
- Require state agencies with broad environmental mandates to have more accountability to the private sector by requiring an economic analysis to accompany significant regulatory proposals. Have clearly defined outcomes and designate clear areas of authority for achieving the desired outcomes.
- Oppose the implementation of “Cap-and-Trade” at the state and local levels.
- Eliminate the state goal to reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled and replace with a goal to maximize the efficiency of the transportation system.
- Repeal the 2012 Phase II Municipal Storm Water Permit for Western Washington requiring a storm water management program.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

As a state, we must be prepared for anticipated growth by ensuring that there is an adequate supply of economically feasible buildable land with the infrastructure to support it. Our state must do no further harm to the construction industry and prepare for the future growth of our region. We must provide predictability, consistency, and flexibility in our regulatory structure.

We urge the legislature to:

- Reduce state regulations to lower cost and/or improve predictability for construction that might conflict with impending national regulations.
- Require losing appellants to bear the actual costs created by private challenges to land development.
- Tie state infrastructure funding to cost-effective local investments.
- Maximize efficiency of existing and planned infrastructure to achieve the greatest return on investment.
- Enforce legislation that requires impact fees and infrastructure revenue from excise taxes to remain restricted to currently designated capital infrastructure and to be invested in a timely fashion.
- Ensure property owners are given a predictable process and just compensation for property takings and do not deprive owners of reasonable use.

HEALTH CARE

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

Ensure that the private health insurance market is allowed the freedom and flexibility provided in The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) to offer products that meet the needs of businesses and employees.

Ultimately, the legislature must support choice, competition, and affordability in the private health insurance market.

LIABILITY REFORM

2015 SESSION PRIORITY

The cost of liability insurance is an increasing burden on the business community. The overall economy suffers when productivity and growth are slowed by excessive litigation, which discourages risk-taking and slows the introduction of new products and technologies.

We urge the legislature to:

- Defend against legislation that would create new causes of action and allow for further lawsuit abuse.
- Provide adequate funding to the courts so that cases may be heard and resolved in an efficient and timely manner.
- Enact laws to limit lawsuit abuse and reduce the practice of using courts to regulate business.
- Advance proposals to help resolve cases faster and increase the fairness and predictability of the civil justice system.
- Support legislation that makes the reward proportional to the defendant's fault, limits defendants to only responsible parties, and maximizes compensation for the plaintiff versus the lawyers.



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Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000
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