



Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce 2016-2017 Public Policy Positions

Economic Development

The Houston Northwest Chamber is a committed leader in economic development in northwest Harris County, supporting the creation of tools that allow unincorporated areas to incentivize and create investment in future job and economic growth through a reduction in regulatory hurdles and successful state and local incentive programs.

The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce will support measures that provide businesses a competitive advantage. When making decisions to invest time and capital in our area, families and businesses will prefer the Cypress Creek Community. To accomplish this, we support the following measures;

Economic Development Programs and Tools. Continue support for the Texas Enterprise Fund, the Texas Enterprise Zone Fund and the tax incentives available under the Texas Economic Development Act under Chapter 313 of the Tax Code.

Support increased funding for the Skills Development Fund Grant Program administered by the Texas Workforce Commission through our local community colleges. A trained workforce is key to economic prosperity.

Educate lawmakers on the need to create economic development tools and incentives in unincorporated areas. Consideration will be given to the use of the Hotel Occupancy Tax, the creation of a Management District and consideration of allowing a 4A or 4B economic development entity to be formed in an unincorporated area.

Energy and Economic Development. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce recognizes that energy and energy support business comprises a significant sector in our region. In support of these valuable primary employers, the Chamber supports legislation that removes

barriers to conducting business domestically and abroad and that provides support to the exploration and production of adequate supplies of energy from all sources.

Tax abatements and other economic development incentives. Continue to 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.

Transportation

In an opinion survey, members of the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce rate transportation as a top concern for improving economic development and the quality of life. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce's position on all transportation policy decisions focus on increasing mobility in our area and funding what is reasonable, equitable and accessible to local entities for their projects. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports all modes of transportation that alleviate congestion and support the efficient movement of goods and services within the Greater Houston area and beyond. The Chamber supports providing the state and county the tools to plan, design and implement transportation projects that serve the needs of the Houston Northwest area. Priority issues for the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce are:

Mobility

Improved transportation systems. Support improved highways, ports of entry and other infrastructure that facilitates trade, increases the effective flow of goods and services, promotes tourism and increases public safety wherever these improvements can improve economic opportunity and productivity.

Rail. Support the development of privately funded high speed rail between Houston and Dallas and encourage the creation of infrastructure that allows access from the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce service area to the rail hub.

Financing Options

Fees. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports equitable increases in fees and taxes that are directly used to fund local multimodal transportation projects. The Chamber

supports an incremental increase in vehicle registration fees and fuel taxes, indexed to the rate of inflation.

Taxes and Fees

The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports a tax structure that is fair and equitable to all businesses in order to promote a sound economy and stable job creation, while still funding critical government services that benefit all Texans. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce opposes any tax that is not equitable, imposes hidden fees on businesses and makes Texas less competitive with other states. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce tax policy priorities include:

Equity. Support legislative measures to equitably distribute the burden of business sector taxes among all businesses, including service and manufacturing. Also, support legislation ensuring that homeowners and businesses share in the financial support for public education.

E-Fairness. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports federal legislation that will level the playing field for all retailers. Currently, local retailers that are legally required to collect the sales tax are placed at a significant price disadvantage relative to their online counterparts. It is time to require that all retailers pay sales taxes.

Franchise Tax.

Maintain franchise tax relief for small business and evaluate options for alternative taxing mechanisms.

Inventory tax. Support elimination or reduction of local inventory taxes. Texas is one of only six states that permit the levy of a property tax on inventories. This places the state at a severe economic disadvantage.

Education and Workforce Development

Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce members support an education system that prepares students with basic skills to effectively compete in the workforce.

In order to maintain a competitive Northwest Houston and compete for jobs, we will continue to work to ensure that our higher education system is creating an affordable and efficient environment that focuses on outcomes and not solely upon access.

Accountability. Oppose any measures that weaken the current K-12 education accountability system.

Pre- K Access. Support legislation that will provide state-wide free or reduced Pre-K to all Texas school children to secure a better prepared Texas workforce, preferably without a tax increase.

Local control. Support measures that give school districts the flexibility to meet the needs of their students. Support at-will employment for teachers, removing the state from setting the terms and conditions of employment.

Health, Safety and Quality of Life

The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce recognizes that the community's safety and security are of the highest priority.

Law Enforcement.

- Support the inclusion of law enforcement officers in the list of protected classes under the state's "Hate Crime Laws".
- Support increased funding for the provision of law enforcement, particularly for those communities experiencing increased criminal activity.

Health Care.

- Support the funding to insure access to inpatient and out-patient community-based services for Texans with a behavioral health diagnosis.

- Support funding of Medicaid 1115 Transformation Waiver, which helps to fund over 1400 delivery system improvement projects state-wide, improving access and reducing health care costs.
- Support more affordable insurance options for employers and employees.

State Disaster Preparedness. Support improvements to the State General Fund to protect the state from significant losses in the event of a major hurricane to provide a more stable, well-protected coastal business environment, planning for quicker financial recovery and avoiding increased business taxes in the event of a loss to the state's general fund. Support the development of the Coastal Spine along the Texas Coast to protect business and personal property against storm surge.

Fireworks. Provide county commissioners in counties whose population exceeds 4 million, the ability to regulate and eliminate fireworks in the county. As our community grows increasingly dense in population, safety and noise concerns increase. No local entity has the authority to control fireworks.

Noise Regulations. Provide county commissioners in counties whose population exceeds 4 million, the ability to regulate noise levels in the county. As our community grows increasingly dense in population, noise concerns increase.

Flood Mitigation and Drainage Infrastructure. The Houston Northwest Chamber supports investments by local, state and federal government in improvements in infrastructure and preservation of natural resources that will mitigate the impacts.

Federal Business Regulations

Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports a regulatory climate that does not impose hidden taxes on employers and consumers through excessive rules, fees and fines and reduces excessive regulations in order to promote, rather than impede, economic growth, investment and job creation. The marketplace should be governed by market dynamics and not regulators.

Congressional approval of major new regulations. Support efforts to strengthen the authority under the Congressional Review Act or similar legislation to require congressional approval before any major rule (defined as having a cost in excess of \$100 million) can take effect. Such authority would provide some check against regulatory agencies and improve the accountability of Congress in terms of the appropriate latitude given to federal agencies in federal statutory language.

Establish a sunset review for existing federal rules. Support the establishment of a federal sunset process for existing rules that will ensure that regulatory agencies periodically review the need for older regulations, as well as integrate needed updates and reforms into any new regulations being promulgated.

Trans-Pacific Partnership. Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports the ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership to eliminate tariffs and other trade barriers that impact U.S. and Texas exporters and urges the Texas Congressional Delegation to support the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Overtime Rule. The DOL's overtime rules are costly and burdensome for our members. It is estimated that the new rules will result in an estimated cost of \$8.4 billion per year. The Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce supports delay in implementation as well as any and all efforts by Congress to try to block or amend the changes before they can take affect later this year.

~