

POWERED BY BUSINESS
ABILENE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE
89TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE



POWERED BY BUSINESS

The mission of the Abilene Chamber of Commerce is to develop and promote the economic growth and quality of life in the Abilene area. The Abilene Chamber and its 1,300+ members believe free enterprise and job creation are the solution for creating a higher quality of life for Abilene residents. The Abilene Chamber, on behalf of its members and affiliates, will pursue a pro-growth agenda that creates an environment that encourages job growth, population growth and entrepreneurship.

Your Business Advocacy Council Leadership



Kelsi Mangrem
2024-2025
Chamber Chair
Holland Hearing



Gary Grubbs
BAC Chair
Lawrence Hall



Jay Hardaway
Hendrick Health



Carol Dromgoole
Texas Star Trading Co.



Cynthia Pearson
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Doug Peters
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Abilene Chamber
Government Affairs
Director

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Abilene must continue to be a leader in the State of Texas in developing the key infrastructure to attract, grow and retain quality jobs. We will do this by having innovative programs to offer new businesses and industries, programs to encourage existing businesses to retain and expand workforces, programs that tie education to workforce needs and tax structures that do not stand as barriers to regional development but create a pro-business environment.

Workforce Development

- Support innovative and flexible career and technology education pathways in conjunction with public schools and community colleges, where appropriate, to meet the needs of Texas employers.
- Support legislative efforts to provide incentives to encourage business participation in education and workforce development initiatives.
- Support protecting employers from legislation that increases health care costs. Preserve employee, employer and health plan benefits of Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) by opposing any attempt to erode the federal preemption of state law relating to employer health benefit plans.
- Support significantly increased funding for expansion of daycare facilities and staffing to meet the needs of an expanding, quality workforce.
- Support strengthening the Child Care Services (CCS) program to better serve Texas parents and providers who serve them.
- Support increasing the supply of childcare programs that meet urgent needs.
- Support ensuring programs can recruit and retain qualified and effective staff.
- Support increasing access to public pre-K by expanding opportunities for partnerships with community-based childcare settings.

- Support measures that give school districts the financial flexibility to meet the needs of their students.
- Support investment in rural Texas, including growing our state's broadband infrastructure.
- Support efforts to expand access to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) in grades K-12 and offer rigorous high school STEAM courses, including computer coding. Support teacher advancement initiatives, like differentiated pay, to help alleviate the shortage of STEAM teachers in our public schools. The Abilene Chamber recognizes the extreme importance of access to STEAM courses for the quality of education now and for our workforce in the future.
- Support legislation that strengthens accountability on career and technology money allocation. Support requiring districts that receive funding for career and technology to offer courses that prepare students with a blend of on-site and virtual on-site training, based on their needs of curriculum delivery. Support increased funding for online curriculum and online testing.
- Support industry-aligned early college models, like Industry Cluster Innovative Academies including P-TECH, that include career guidance, mentoring, and applied learning opportunities.
- Community colleges should be supported in maximizing the use of dual-credit courses and other creative partnerships with high schools and four-year universities. The Texas State Technical College System, with its effective pay for performance model, is worthy of support and replication in other systems.

Rural Development

- Support state-appropriated economic development funds for rural areas. Also, support the Texas Agriculture Finance Authority (TAFA) at its current funding level to finance economic development activities in rural areas and streamline TAFA to make it more “user-friendly”.
- Encourage members of the Legislature to give equal treatment to Texans who live west of Interstate 35.

Tax Related Issues

- Support legislation that would give economic developers a wide range of tools to use to enhance efforts to attract new businesses and industries and to encourage retention and expansion of existing firms.
- Support continued use of a locally approved ½-cent sales tax collected by cities to fund economic development efforts.
- Oppose efforts to reduce local control of these funds or efforts to limit the uses of these funds. Because these funds are local funds, taxpayers should retain the right to manage their use so long as they are used for local economic development purposes.
- Support efforts to clarify that the purpose of the sales tax funds is to serve as economic development tools, including education and workforce training.
- Support reviewing and extending the Research & Development Tax Credit.

Infrastructure & Energy

- Support industry-driven initiatives that address the state's growing critical infrastructure needs, including dedicated water supply, electricity, and other essential services.
- Support an “all-the-above” energy strategy that is balanced, cost-effective, and efficient to ensure consistent and reliable power across Texas.

TEXAS 2050 Plan

- Support TEXAS 2050: A Framework for Long-Term Economic Growth in order to continue the level of economic development success that Texas has had in recent years. The plan, developed and endorsed by a broad range of statewide business groups, includes taking a long-term view of human capital, investment capital, innovation, education, tools to compete and infrastructure.

TEXAS 2036

- Support the organization's efforts to ensure Texas is the best place to live and work, we must address the biggest challenges facing our state as our population and economy continue to grow.



MILITARY/VETERANS/ BORDER SECURITY

Abilene will continue to be a leader in the United States in its support of the military. The Abilene Chamber supports continued local funding of mission support and will continue to provide support for local troops and their families. Additionally, the Abilene Chamber will support its Military Affairs Committee in all federal, state and local initiatives to protect and enhance and expand missions for Dyess Air Force Base. We support our veterans who served our nation well. Our interest in border security is economically based. We are interested in programs and actions along the boarder that can be taken that have a minimal negative impact on workforce and the economy.

- Identify and pursue a balanced approach on immigration issues as they relate to our workforce.
- Support continuing to refine legislation that makes the reciprocity of professional licenses and certifications more seamless between Texas and all other states.



EDUCATION

Abilene is a hub for education for the Big Country area. Our Pre-K-12 public schools prepare students for careers or further education opportunities. The city is home of Abilene Christian University, Hardin-Simmons University, McMurry University, Cisco College, Texas State Technical College-West Texas and Texas Tech University Health Science Center Schools of Nursing, Pharmacy and Public Health.

Pre-K-12 Education

- Support a level of adequate funding that would provide for Pre-K-12 education needs.
- Provide all resources that are necessary to boost the state public education system from 28th ranking nationwide (US News & World Report ranking) to being in the top 20 ranked states.

Higher Education

- Urge the Texas Legislature to act towards the benefit of completing the NEXT Lab molten salt reactor project at Abilene Christian University (ACU) and position Natura Resources to commercialize this technology to the benefit of Texas and the world and support the Governor's Public Utility Commission (PUC) initiative to expand advanced nuclear capabilities in the State of Texas.
- Support funding to private graduate schools within the state.
- Support funding from the Permanent University Fund to private colleges and universities within the state.
- Support an adjustment in Texas State Technical College-West Texas' (TSTC's) signature Returned-Value Funding Model to ensure five full years of actual wage data is used in the calculations.
- Provide funding for TSTC's new campuses approved in the last Legislative Session.
- Support TSTC's request for exceptional items that would, in two phases, provide start-up funding for new campuses and provide Capital Construction Assistance Project (CCAP) funding to increase capacity.

- Support TSTC's exceptional item that address the statewide need for CDL drivers by expanding or establishing six training and testing sites, by creating capacity to train approximately 1,100 drivers per year, and by creating a transportation ecosystem meeting present and future needs.
- Support critical items for the Texas Tech University System, particularly for anything related to the Health Science Center in Abilene, which trains students as nurses, pharmacists and public health workers.
- Support increases in the Texas Equalization Grant Program.

Daylight Savings Time

- Eliminate Daylight Savings Time in Texas to improve safety for our students and workers.





ARTS & TOURISM

Abilene is a leader in the attraction of tourism and the development of the arts. Tourism is a key economic development program, and the arts and other quality of life enhancements are becoming increasingly important in the retention and attraction of people to the community. As such, the Abilene Chamber will encourage the development and improvement of facilities that enhance the city's efforts to expand these efforts as an effective economic development strategy.

Arts

- Protect use of Municipal and County Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) to fund the arts.
- Support legislation in the 89th Legislature that will clarify often confusing HOT Tax Code provisions and will create greater transparency and strengthen reporting requirements of comprehensive municipal and county HOT collections and provisions.
- Oppose legislation expanding the eligible uses of the Municipal Hotel Tax beyond the current allowable uses for these funds, including general infrastructure items which would violate the tax law, as written, and would deflect local HOT revenue vital to ensuring continued local tourism promotion.
- Protect the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) base funding and support Exceptional Item #1 - \$9M for “organization” grants with an additional \$4.5M annually to meet significant unmet needs, and Exceptional Item #2 - \$2M for Cultural District Grant program with an additional \$1M annually.
- Promote the important role the legislature’s investment of public resources in the arts plays in the vitality, economic health, and civic pride of communities all across Texas.
- Support and promote the Texas Commission on the Arts’ Cultural & Fine Arts District Program.
- Monitor legislation and regulation that would have any direct impact on our individual artists and their rights to their creative intellectual property.

- Invest in arts education through policy decisions and appropriations. Our goal is to ensure that every student has equal access and opportunity to an arts-rich education.
- Maintain or increase funding for the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program (film, television, commercial, and digital interactive media incentives).
- Maintain funding for tourism promotion in the state budget. Every legislative session, the hotel and travel industry advocate to protect the 1/12th dedicated portion of the state hotel occupancy tax that is used to promote Texas as a tourism destination as part of the state appropriations bill.
- Protect the Historic Texas Preservation Tax Credit Program for both for-profit and nonprofit owned properties. Ensure that tax credits continue to incentivize rehabilitation of historic buildings, and create jobs, as well as the create affordable housing as part of revitalization efforts in historic Texas downtowns.
- Fully fund the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.
- Explore opportunities to fund arts programming and initiatives through other agencies.
- Monitor legislative action that impacts the nonprofit sector, such as tax exemptions, incentives and regulatory efforts.

Tourism

- Support full funding of tourism promotion programs and oppose changes to the Events Trust Fund and Major Events Reimbursement Program.
- Support protecting the integrity of the Hotel Occupancy Tax.
- Support collection of local hotel occupancy tax on Airbnb's and other online lodging brokers.
- Support efforts to preserve a full summer work season with consistent schedule legislation.
- Support expansion of commercial aviation; road, rail and air services modernization.
- Support preserving state funding for beneficial travel and tourism programs at Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD), Texas Historical Commission (THC), Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA).



BUSINESS

The Abilene Chamber will work to maintain a pro-business environment that helps West Texas employers and business owners to thrive. Any regulatory change that adversely impacts business should be pursued only as a last resort after all free-market solutions have been tried and only after a reasonable cost/benefit analysis shows economic growth will not be adversely affected.

- Support programs to provide low-cost loans for businesses.
- Support lowering taxes for small businesses.
- Support designing and constructing of a new ramp at Abilene Regional Airport to park, fuel and load Texas Forest Service aircraft.
- Support efforts to keep Texas a right-to-work state and oppose agency shop legislation.
- Support free-market principles for the corporate sale of liquor. Texas is the only state in the nation that disallows publicly traded companies from selling liquor.
- Oppose legislation that would make private entities subject to open records laws or force the release of proprietary information in governmental entities' contracts with businesses.
- Oppose any legislation that would alter the Texas Franchise Laws affecting direct sales to consumers by manufacturing companies (for example, automotive sales), except laws which already exist.
- Uphold Texas' prohibition of the direct sales of vehicles to consumers.
- Maintain franchise tax relief for small business.
- Help the United States to return to a leadership position in the manufacturing industry through Early Industrial Education (K-12); leveling the playing field both in regulation and policy but also in import taxation; establish county board of oversight and anti-corruption; and provide tax incentives for small businesses.

- Support the continued use of public-private partnerships and reauthorizing the use of Comprehensive Development Agreements (CDAs). Enhance mechanisms that allow project sponsors to access private capital to supplement state or local funds to build infrastructure. We also support efforts to remove statutory or legislative restrictions or limitations on the number or nature of local comprehensive development projects where there is local support for such projects that address local or regional transportation needs.
- Oppose efforts to mandate workers' compensation coverage.
- Oppose legislation that imposes new laws or regulations on employers that are nonsubscribers to workers' compensation.
- Support and preserve the current regulatory structure that prevents lawsuits against employers and property owners who provide workers' compensation insurance.
- Support avoiding blanket prohibitions on artificial intelligence, machine learning, or other forms of automated decision-making.
- Ensure consistency and interoperability with existing regulatory structures.





TRANSPORTATION

Abilene is a major hub for both east-west and north-south transportation. Highways, railroads, and our airport all provide access to Texas and the World, and they offer opportunities to transport products to their end-users. The Abilene Chamber supports efforts to maintain and expand transportation services.

- Support any and all measures that add access to Abilene through major transportation corridors, particularly in light of regional growth opportunities.
- 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 state productivity.
- Support full funding of the Interstate 20 six-lane widening project through Abilene and other major projects through our area.
- Support efforts to expand air service from Abilene Regional Airport.
- Support Texas Department of Transportation efforts to “End the Streak” of daily roadway deaths in the state.





HEALTHCARE & HUMAN SERVICES

As a healthcare hub for the region, Abilene's medical facilities and practices are vital to its growth. The Abilene Chamber supports a variety of measures to strengthen healthcare and human services.

- Support increased funding for mental health services along with program growth through grants and Medicaid rates.
- Support programs to lower the number of uninsured Texans.
- Support programs focusing on low-income and elderly families.
- Support resources to reduce homelessness.
- Support increased direct access to physical therapy.
- Support robust funding for the clinical site nurse preceptor grant program to address the bottleneck in the state's nursing workforce training pipeline.
- Support removing red tape limiting access to health care.
- Protect employers and employees from legislation that increases health care costs.
- Expand the choices available for employers to purchase health insurance.
- Improve access to the health care delivery system.
- Support access to cost-effective, high-quality Medicaid & CHIP programs to improve population health and reduce social barriers to care.
- Support systemwide strategies to improve the value of health care.
- Support legislation establishing both statewide and Taylor County Local Provider Participation Funds (LPPFs). This program provides much-needed funding of services to Medicaid patients.
- Support Family Code legislation, supported by Christian Homes of Abilene, to promote the child adoption process.



AGRICULTURE

The Abilene Chamber supports agricultural businesses and individuals who provide the food and fiber for the United States and the World. Agriculture in the Big Country is a \$1 billion enterprise, by far one of the largest sectors of our economy.

- Support funding a cotton infrastructure initiative, such as the one Sen. Charles Perry passed last Session, which is funded federally and wholly supported by the industry.
- Support continued funding of the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation and its successful efforts in eliminating the pest enemy of cotton.
- Support the Texas Department of Agriculture through adequate funding to ensure fulfillment of existing statutory duties.
- Support programs that aid in the economic development of rural communities.
- Support expansion of affordable broadband service to rural Texas.
- Support the Go Texan marketing program, encouraging consumers to purchase Texas-grown and Texas-produced products.



WATER

Access to reliable water resources continues to be a key issue for many Texas communities to maintain job and population growth. Abilene must continue to develop long-term and short-term strategies for securing resources.

- Support full funding on initiatives to provide the water needs of the future.
- Support the exploration of new and evolving options, including, but not limited to: desalination of brackish ground, surface and sea water; aquifer storage and recovery; conjunctive uses of ground and surface water; innovative reuse and conservation technologies; and broadening water markets through the involvement of the private sector.
- In examining any new legislative proposals to promote alternative or innovative water supply strategies, the Abilene Chamber will: oppose efforts to alter the existing structure of water rights laws in Texas in any matter that would weaken the legal and property interest of existing holders of water rights; monitor the implementation of any programs to increase or enhance the enforcement of water rights, including new watermaster jurisdictions, to ensure that existing water rights are protected and that any costs of new enforcement programs clearly reflect the value of the resource and the fair allocation of costs among water rights holders; and oppose any efforts to modify or weaken the status of senior water rights as defined by the courts.



Advocacy for the business community is our number one job.

Your membership with the Abilene Chamber strengthens the voice of the Big Country business community. Our team is working on your behalf 24/7 to advocate for the programs, policies and initiatives that will help foster economic growth, create jobs and impact the future of our region.

Our core policy statement is clear and direct: “The Abilene Chamber, on behalf of its members and affiliates, will pursue a pro-growth agenda that creates an environment that encourages job growth, population growth and entrepreneurship.”

Our advocacy is not just when the Texas Legislature is in session.

It is working every day with our congressman, our senators and their staffs to make sure Dyess Air Force Base has a solid mission for today and for the future.

It is working every day with state officials and elected lawmakers to open doors for business to solidify their positions in the city and make growth an easy path.

It is working every day with the Taylor County Commissioners Court and elected officials throughout the county to make sure the needs of businesses are being met.

It is working every day with the Abilene City Council, department heads, the local school boards and administration to ensure business is playing a leading role in the operation of the city and the education of our children.

To view the Chamber's advocacy page and download a digital version of the Legislative Agenda please scan the QR code provided.





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