

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Longview Chamber of Commerce (LCC) drives regional economic development by partnering with a network of business leaders, elected officials, and economic agency allies to provide an array of services to companies with business retention, expansion and relocation needs.

- Supports legislation that preserves the Texas Enterprise Fund (TEF), the Emerging Technology fund (ETF), the Texas Enterprise Zone, the Skills Development Fund and the Texas Economic Development Act: Chapter 313 Tax Code and encouraging more application and use in rural areas.
- Supports the development of local energy resources such as natural gas, oil and lignite.
- Supports balanced development of other energy resources based on cost effectiveness, competitive prices and positive economic impact on the Longview region.
- Supports continued regulation of electricity in East Texas which results in lower electricity rates in Longview.
- Supports the continued strengthening of the 4A-4B, ½ cent sales tax to promote economic development, and further support efforts to clarify that the purpose of the economic development sales tax fund is to serve as an economic development tool primarily targeted for the creation of long-term jobs.
- Opposes any legislation that would result in diverting economic development sales tax dollars for use in other areas already supported by dedicated taxing mechanisms.
- Opposes efforts that would reduce local control of sales tax dollars – the funds that are generated locally should be spent locally.
- Opposes increased taxes and fees on energy sources.
- Supports the elimination of tax inequities and subsidies for energy production.
- Supports balancing environmental concerns with economic and other impacts to local energy production and usage.
- Supports the reinstatement of the research and development tax credits and other business tax incentives that attract high quality jobs and ensure that Texas remains a leader in energy, biosciences, nanotechnology and other research-intensive sectors.
- Supports the elimination of tax disincentives on “cloud computing companies” that result in Texas imposing the highest effective state tax rate on these types of companies, which encourages their location in other states.
- Supports the establishment of regulatory policies that allow for appropriate capital investment in Texas’ electric infrastructure to ensure a safe and reliable grid system.
- Supports the cost-effective development and implementation of new technologies which will encourage electric energy efficiency and meet the area’s growing electricity needs.
- Opposes policies that work to increase electricity costs without a corresponding benefit to customers and the safe and reliable operation of the electric grid.

TECHNOLOGY

- Encourage school districts to submit for approval to the Texas Education Agency additional computer science courses that can be taken in lieu of traditional math and science courses to meet the growing technology workforce needs.
- Support programs to increase awareness of how small and medium sized businesses can protect themselves from cybersecurity threats. Also, support efforts to increase the supply of a skilled workforce for the cybersecurity sector, including programs that effectively transition veterans into this sector.
- Support efficient and effective infrastructure assets, including ICT (Information & Communications Technology), in order to help build capacity needed to accommodate our growing population and help us to remain competitive with other states.
- Oppose any attempt to apply state regulation to Internet services or providers. Government intervention in the broadband marketplace through the imposition of restrictive policies, such as measures to control how providers price, market and manage their products and services, would deter innovation, reduce competition and thwart continued investment in, and enhancement of, broadband networks.
- Support patent reform at the state level to stop abusive patent litigation from harming Texas business. Patents are essential to innovation, and Texas needs to protect its current technology-based companies, as well as attract new ones. While legitimate patent infringement litigation is necessary to the protection of intellectual property, abusive patent litigation diverts valuable resources and focus away from research and development, hiring new employees, releasing new products or expanding a business to the internet.
- Encourage and support business efforts to develop and disclose comprehensive, market-driven privacy policies.
- Oppose efforts that would create a "patchwork-quilt" of state laws that would further impede the growth of Internet commerce.
- Encourage and support an environment that increases high-tech business development in Texas and the continued development of electronic business-to-business transactions.

TRANSPORTATION

- Support the funding of Interstate 20 additional lanes, ramp and interchange reconstructions along high crash segments in Gregg County to improve safety and relieve congestion as recommended in the I-20 East Texas Corridor Advisory Committee Implementation Plan.
- Support the funding of State Highway 42 improvements to widen the highway from two to four lanes between Interstate 20 and U.S. 80 near Longview.
- Support new legislation that will provide a reliable and permanent funding solution critical to planning, programming and projects for highway and multi-modal transportation projects.
- Support the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) notwithstanding Sunset staff review recommendations that hold the agency accountable for financial management and performance and assist the Department to implement changes that will allow them to better plan, select and deliver projects effectively.
- Support the continuance of funding from the constitutional amendments Propositions 1 and 7 and maintain the directive to end the diversions from the State Highway Fund. These new sources of funding are critical for the needed transportation improvements to our area.
- Support the continued use of Public-private partnerships and Comprehensive Development Agreements (CDAs), and enhance mechanisms that allow project sponsors to access private capital to supplement state or local funds to build infrastructure.
- Support the continued funding and development of expanded rail service and infrastructure, both passenger and freight, along the I-20 corridor.
- Support the additional flights and routes from East Texas Regional Airport through the current air carrier or through the addition of a second carrier.
- Support the development and funding of international trade corridors to accommodate cross-border traffic between Texas and Mexico and those transportation demands resulting from the North America Free Trade Agreement.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Support legislation to utilize probation and state jail felony community supervision as a part of a sentence to increase people's access to employment, housing and other critical tools to reduce rates of re-arrest and re-incarceration.
- Support efforts to ensure that criminal records made available to potential employers are accurate.
- Support efforts to abolish DRP, which is a double penalty, in tandem with identifying a new funding mechanism for trauma centers, which are currently receiving funding from the DRP. While the DRP was a well-meaning idea created in 2003 to fund trauma centers, it has many unintended consequences. The reality is the DRP is making Texas more dangerous by creating severe economic hardship, putting more unlicensed drivers on the road, and limiting employment opportunities.
- Support efforts that prioritize educational and vocational programs for individuals that are proven to reduce re-offending and increase workforce participation. The harder it is for someone to find a job after release from prison, the greater the chance he or she will end up going back to prison.
- Support efforts to treat offenders with mental health issues and ensure that services are readily available when released. Adults with untreated mental health and substance issues are 20-25% more likely to be rearrested.
- Support efforts to allow the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to provide the timely award of credits for participation in self-improvement programming within state jails.
- Support legislation to downgrade first-time minor drug possession offenses and allow courts to divert individuals to a treatment program when the offender is deemed by the court not to be a threat to public safety. Use the savings derived from diversion to strengthen existing treatment programs in the community or create tailored treatment programs, as necessary, to address possession offenses.
- Support legislation to address property offenses by updating damage thresholds in light of inflation and updating monetary thresholds for property-related offenses that have not changed in 20 years.
- Support legislation that allows 17-year-olds to be treated in the juvenile system when appropriate, while giving judges authority to transfer those younger than 18 into the adult system on a case-by-case basis.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

LCC supports the promotion and expansion of the oil and natural gas industry in a safe and environmentally-responsible manner to protect national security and ensure continued economic and employment growth in Texas. In addition LVOC supports long-term, sustainable, and innovative energy technologies and efficiencies to meet the growing needs of Texas industry and consumers. A long-term, affordable, sustainable method is needed to fund projects detailed in the 2017 State Water Plan.

State and Federal Regulation and Legislation:

- Support legislation that protects the rights of East Texas to maintain control of historical water rights and allows for market-based solutions to Inter-Basin transfers.
- Support legislation to require that research data and analysis relied upon as the basis for proposed regulations by state and federal environmental agencies be made available for review by the regulated community before a regulation can be adopted or prohibit the adoption of regulations for which supporting data are not publicly available.
- Oppose legislation that places additional requirements on business and industry without a firm technical basis or appreciable benefit to the environment.
- Support legislation that affirms the rights and powers of the state government and limits intrusion by federal agencies in the state's implementation of delegated environmental programs.
- Oppose the federal effort to take over state permitting programs.
- Oppose any federal or state government actions regarding climate change that could adversely affect the international competitiveness of Texas or the U.S. economy in the global economic arena.
- Support delayed electric deregulation in Northeast Texas. Longview continues to benefit from some of the lowest electric rates in Texas. Deregulated areas of Texas have significantly higher rates. The low electric rates in Longview offer a distinct economic development advantage in terms of operations costs for business and cost of living for employees.
- Oppose new legislative efforts that would require the use of specific fuels or energy generation technology for industrial sources.
- Support removal of economic and supply barriers that distort fuel competition and free-market influences.
- Support legislative efforts to increase the supply of energy, using a diverse mixture of fuels including oil, natural gas, coal and nuclear, applied in an environmentally safe manner and coupled with encouragement of conservation and the practical use of renewable energy sources.
- Support Texas law that requires state environmental agencies to estimate the cost and net benefits to regulated entities before adopting any major proposed rule.
- Support any changes in law that will simplify, consolidate or otherwise streamline the process of assessing regulatory costs and benefits without compromising the ability of an agency to produce a comprehensive and accurate assessment.

Statutory and Regulatory Compliance:

- Support legislation to streamline the permitting process to ensure that businesses can maintain environmental compliance and at the same time minimize roadblocks that result in expensive procedural delays.
- Support scientifically credible initiatives to achieve solutions for areas which are in non-attainment to come into attainment under the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. Help near non-attainment areas stay in attainment through the use of locally led Early Action Compacts to reduce regional emissions through voluntary action. Ensure that the responsibility for emission reductions is shared equitably among all emission sources, and assure that efforts toward cleaner air are directed in a manner that balances environmental gain with economic impact.
- Oppose the imposition of any new fees to recover the cost of regulatory programs unless the program can be shown to clearly address a critical environmental or public health need. Fees should only be assessed to recover the actual costs imposed on government by the activities of the regulated entities and must reasonably allocate costs between members of a regulated universe and must be adjusted periodically to actually match agency budgets and legislative appropriations.

Emissions:

- Support flexible permitting solutions that result in statewide emissions reductions.
- Oppose arbitrary emission limits established in statute that do not provide flexibility for site-specific conditions and future development of best practices or best control technology standards.
- Support utilizing economically viable, scientific solutions to bring areas of non-attainment into attainment and support a locally led Early Action Compact which would reduce regional emissions through voluntary action.
- Support ensuring that the responsibility for emissions reductions is shared equitably among all emission sources and assuring that efforts toward cleaner air are directed in a manner that balances environmental benefits with the economic impact.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

LCC recognizes investing in education to provide a well-educated job-ready workforce will drive economic growth of our state for a high societal return. The LCC believes that close collaboration and connection between public education, higher education, and the business community is critical to the improvement of student success.

- Support funding for long-term, sustained, quality investment in public education by the state of Texas in traditional and charter schools.
- Support the establishment or enhancement of linkages and partnerships between public education, higher education, and the business community.
- Support increased educational and enrichment opportunities for children ages 3-5.
- Support earlier intervention regarding soft skills such as communication, commitment/dependability, teamwork and continuous learning, as well as career pathways and quality education starting in the elementary public school levels.
- Support efforts to create meaningful and relevant career pathways through the P-16 continuum.
- Support increased preparation of students for entry into the workforce, including a region-wide implementation of Work Keys.
- Support increased funding for equipment, faculty, tuition and books for dual credit students.
- Support increased flexibility regarding credentials for public school teachers in CTE courses, and increased funding for off-campus learning opportunities and for start-up technical programs.
- Support appropriate funding for Adult Basic Education.
- Support the encouragement to the business and industry partners to give preference in hiring to those applicants who present a transcript and who possess some post-secondary credentials or coursework.
- Support recognizing the important role of support services, advisement and counseling to better prepare students for multiple pathways and find ways to financially support these services.
- Support state funding and curriculum guidelines that recognize multiple pathways for students-pathways that include both professional and technical workforce careers.
- Support reducing current unfunded mandates and limiting future unfunded mandates.
- Support allowing local districts some flexibility in class size, setting calendar (start dates), and many other issues.
- Support shifting the funding emphasis to provide support on the “front end” to attract the best teachers into the profession and to maximize student success at the beginning of the process.
- Support moving performance based funds to a true incentive structure that would be above and beyond the base.
- Support restoring the funding lost to Districts as a result of SB 1.
- Support funding to staff to support the increasing needs of students living in poverty (parent advocates and liaisons)
- Support the development of an accountability system that allows for a variety of measures to determine student growth and student proficiency.
- Support the ability to develop local measures with the accountability system to allow for the use of portfolios and other student samples of work to show growth and proficiency.
- Oppose unfunded mandates as well as any new unfunded mandates and infringements upon local control.

WATER

- Support efforts to ensure that the allocation of water during drought or other emergency conditions to meet critical public health and welfare needs is conditioned on recipients of water implementing the most stringent water conservation measures and allows for compensation to those water rights holders who surrender water to meet public emergencies based on true market value.
- Support the authority of groundwater conservation districts that is consistent with recent court decisions that affirm the rights of property owners in the access to and use of their groundwater property rights;
- Support efforts to ensure that the authority and function of groundwater conservation districts fully supports reasonable measures to develop brackish groundwater sources through desalination or other technologies;
- Support efforts to ensure that the authority and function of groundwater conservation districts fully supports reasonable measures to enhance water supplies through aquifer storage and recovery. Aquifer storage and recovery projects should have the purpose of storing water during periods of abundance and using the stored water during periods of drought. Projects should not be used as a method of circumventing permitting policies of local groundwater districts
- Oppose any new taxes to pay for additional water resource or water quality regulatory programs.
- Oppose the imposition of any new fees to recover the cost of water resource or water quality regulatory programs unless the program can be shown to clearly address a critical environmental or public health need. Fees should only be assessed to recover the actual costs imposed on government by the activities of the regulated entities, must reasonably allocate costs between members of a regulated universe and must be adjusted periodically to actually match agency budgets and legislative appropriations.
- Support efforts to ensure that water users are required to develop and enforce stringent water conservation measures as a condition of receiving any state financial or technical assistance for water resource planning and development
- Support efforts to ensure that water providers are able to establish rates for retail water use that appropriately balance both the need to recover the costs of water supply and delivery infrastructure and encourage necessary water conservation, and
- Oppose any efforts to establish or enforce water conservation measures that unfairly burden one class of water user or impose a disproportionate demand for water use restrictions on commercial or industrial users.
- Encourage public water supply entities to implement policies that encourage the use of water conserving landscaping practices and the use of reclaimed water for irrigation.
- Support Legislation that protects the rights of East Texas to maintain control of historical water rights and allows for market-based solutions to the Inter-Basin transfers.
- Continue to support the state permitting programs and environmental issues.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS and WORKERS COMPENSATION

Longview Chamber of Commerce (LCC) supports continued initiatives that enhance the strong economy and workforce of Texas. Toward that end, legislation and initiatives strengthening employers' position for control and limited regulation are supported and pursued.

- Oppose legislation that would erode employment-at-will as a right for all Texas employers and employees.
- Support transferring control over federally mandated programs like unemployment insurance to states.
- Oppose legislation and regulations on both federal and state levels that would increase the already-considerable burden on employers regarding occupational safety and health administration (OSHA) requirements.
- Oppose efforts to allow forced subsidization or promotion of labor unions through payroll deductions of dues and contributions. Funding union activity at company expense is counterproductive to the free enterprise system.
- Support the proposed five (5) year "Break in service rule". Employer notice to Employees" in the Ragsdale v. Wolverine Worldwide, Inc. decision supports the ability of employers to retroactively designate leave as FMLA-qualifying provided doing so does not cause harm or injury to the employee. The Employee notice to Employers revision that employees must provide specific information to employers before the FMLA employer notification to employee process begins.
- Support transferring control over federally mandated programs like unemployment insurance to states, thereby reducing employers' tax burdens and increasing local control over workforce-related programs.
- Limit UI benefits to 20 weeks if the state's average unemployment rate for the year preceding the calendar year in which the claim takes effect is below 5 percent.
- Oppose attempts to restrict the rights of employers to conduct random and/or universal drug testing of employees.
- Support legislation that provides that a claimant who fails or refuses to submit to an employer-required drug test that is a condition of the job offer or refuses the offer of work without good cause would disqualify the claimant from receiving unemployment benefits.
- Support efforts to maintain employers' prerogative to control the workplace, thereby creating a safe, satisfying and harmonious working environment.
- Oppose efforts dictating how private employers interview and hire candidates for employment.
- Support efforts to reform the wage and hour laws by allowing more flexibility for employers and employees in hours worked during a pay period before mandating overtime pay. Provide more freedom and flexibility to classify workers as exempt from overtime requirements.
- Oppose efforts to modify the FMLA, and oppose any initiatives to require employers to pay for FMLA leave with unemployment insurance taxes.
- Support legislation to allow the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to hire outside contractors on a pay-for-performance basis to assist in efforts to detect and remedy unemployment benefits fraud.
- Oppose expansion of the current coverage of the Texas Human Rights Act that may cause additional litigation.

- Support allowing an employer to seek an injunction on behalf of an employee to end workplace harassment without creating a new liability for employers.
- Oppose piecemeal mandates that vary from city to city requiring employers to pay a wage level higher than the federally required minimum wage.
- Oppose arbitrary increases in minimum wage that cannot be supported by improvements in productivity and that deprive many entry-level workers of job opportunities.
- Strongly support the current law on pay equity.
- Support reform of the Payday Law to achieve greater consistency with provisions of federal law and follows DOL guidelines or federal court decisions under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Support legislation to eliminate the Payday Law's applicability to non-wage benefits, including vacation pay, sick pay, etc., and issues relating to employee classification under wage and hour law. Support capping the amount of wages that may be claimed under the statute.
- Oppose any expansion of collective bargaining rights in the public sector since the current system adequately provides for employee participation without the potential for disruption of services.
- Oppose the expansion of legislation previously passed that allows legally-owned firearms to be stored on company-maintained parking lots.
- Support efforts to keep Texas a right-to-work state and oppose agency shop legislation.
- Support legislation to allow employers to apply part of their unemployment insurance taxes toward the cost of training workers for their businesses.
- Strengthen overpayment recovery statutes to prohibit waiver of overpayments. Revise the Texas Unemployment Compensation Act's (TUCA) definitions of "able and available" to meet the revised standards in federal law.
- Support fundamental changes in the unemployment insurance system that would abolish traditional federally controlled unemployment insurance programs in favor of establishing individual Unemployment Savings Accounts (USAs) for employees. These would be available if needed for unemployment, training or as a supplement to retirement income.
- Oppose efforts to allow public employees, or to require private employers, to subsidize or promote labor unions or similar organizations through payroll collection of dues and contributions.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

- **Drug compounding.** Support legislation that aids in the safety of injured workers when compounding drugs. Support legislation that addresses the high cost of compounding.
- **Exemplary damage caps.** Oppose legislation to remove caps on exemplary damages in workers' compensation claims, and oppose any attempts to reverse the *Rutiger* decision.
- **Fraud: monitoring, detection and prosecution.** Support legislation that increases the Texas Department of Insurance's ability to identify and prosecute fraud and abuse within the workers' compensation system. Also, support incentives for the identification and successful prosecution of workers' compensation fraud.
- **Health and safety.** Support cost-effective health and safety measures.
- **Illegal drug use.** Support legislation encouraging zero tolerance for the presence of alcohol or illegal drugs on the job. Support efforts to make the intoxication defense stronger.
- **Impairment ratings.** Support legislation to maintain the objectivity of the workers' compensation system by ensuring that adopted medical impairment guidelines do not raise impairment benefit amounts. Oppose efforts to lower the impairment rating threshold for an injured worker to receive supplemental income benefits. Also, support continued monitoring of the income benefits system.
- **Indemnity benefits.** Ensure that indemnity benefit changes are based on reliable data vetted by the employer and insurance community and that changes do not negatively impact return-to-work initiatives.
- **Mandatory workers' compensation.** Oppose legislative efforts to mandate workers' compensation coverage.
- **Mental health.** Oppose legislation designed to expand mental health treatment guidelines, or the inclusion of psychologists, as authorized treating physicians.
- **Nonsubscription.** Oppose any legislation that would directly or indirectly hurt nonsubscription plans. Nonsubscription refers to a Texas-specific law that allows employers to opt out of providing workers' compensation benefits and create their own insurance plan to control costs and make injured workers whole.
- **Opinion of chosen doctor.** Support legislation to clarify that claimants may not appeal the opinions of their treating doctor in the areas of medical treatment, impairment and dispute process.
- **Over-burdensome laws.** Oppose legislation that imposes new laws or regulations on employers that are non-subscribers to workers' compensation.
- **Performance Based Oversight (PBO).** Support efforts to eliminate PBO which has been more of a regulatory burden than an effective tool to increase the quality of the workers' compensation system.
- **Physician dispensing.** Oppose efforts to allow physician dispensing of prescription drugs.
- **Physician training.** Support measures to increase training of medical providers in the inappropriate use of narcotics.
- **Regulatory efficiency.** Support measures to increase efficiency in the operation and administration of the Texas Department of Insurance and within the DWC and reduce unnecessary administrative and legal burdens.
- **Retaliatory discharge.** Support legislation to limit damages and restrict the scope of action filed by a terminated employee for workers' compensation retaliatory discharge.

- **Return-to-Work (RTW) guidelines.** Support legislation to allow treating physicians and employers to use the same guidelines for RTW and treatment.
- **Settlements.** Oppose legislation that attempts to reintroduce lump sum settlements, including medical lifetime benefits, into the Texas workers' compensation system.
- **Statutory employer.** Support and preserve the current regulatory structure that prevents lawsuits against employers and property owners who provide workers' compensation insurance.
- **Subrogation rights.** Support legislation to maintain subrogation rights of employers and insurers in recouping money paid to claimants for third party actions.
- **Subsequent Injury Fund.** Support legislation to secure the solvency of the Subsequent Injury Fund that does not require an increase in the maintenance tax.
- **Treating physicians.** Support legislation that strengthens the role of treating physicians to ensure quality medical care and effective management of care for injured workers. Also, support clarifying current law regarding the authorization for a treating doctor.
- **Utilization review.** Support legislation to promote utilization review as a method of cost containment and quality improvement.
- **Waiver.** Support legislation to specify that the defense of "No compensable injury" cannot be waived regardless of any time constraints.

GENERAL BUSINESS

LCC supports the policies that position the region's business community as a regional and state leader, with aspirations toward future efforts for national and global competitiveness.

- Support continued development of electronic business to business transactions.
- Support business efforts to develop and disclose comprehensive, market-driven privacy policies.
- Support enhancements to the state model legislation patterned after the Federal Regulatory Flexibility Act to improve the climate for small businesses.
- Oppose any federal legislation that doesn't enforce net neutrality over broadband services.
- Support creating tax incentives for businesses of all sizes.

HEALTH INSURANCE AND HEALTH CARE

LCC is proud of the healthcare system in the community and the advanced technology brought to this region. It is one of the greatest economic and socially responsible drivers/institutions of the region. LVCOOC supports initiatives which foster the advanced care as well as efforts to increase health care access, control rising costs and reduce the number of uninsured and underinsured in the region.

- Support employer wellness initiatives encouraging personal responsibility and enhancing community health awareness
- Support local hospitals/providers and promote access to affordable healthcare in the community.
- Oppose any Federal or State changes to reimbursement levels that financially harm hospitals, physicians or providers.
- Support tort reform measures protecting healthcare providers from frivolous lawsuits and oppose any measure that would diminish this protection.
- Support initiatives reducing the number of uninsured across the State (Medicaid & CHIP).
- Support incentives that reward healthcare reimbursement based on outcomes and overall care.
- Support the “Texas Way” solution in the State that allows Texas to access federal reimbursement dollars.
- Support development of community based alternatives to hospitalization for individuals with mental illness to include respite, supportive living and crisis residential care.
- Oppose any healthcare programs that diminish the quality of healthcare benefits and negatively impacts competitive pricing.
- Support legislation that results in additional State sponsored psychiatric bed solutions .
- Support legislation to increase access and choice of health care programs by supporting market-driven health policies that maximize consumer and public benefit and allow for the continuation of employer-sponsored voluntary health care coverage.
- Support the establishment of programs that would allow employers selection of the highest quality benefits and the lowest, most competitive prices.
- Oppose any measure that increases costs for Texas employers and their employees and families.
- Support anti-fraud insurance legislation and enforcement which costs Texas businesses and individuals millions of dollars in the insurance marketplace.
- Support businesses in their efforts to develop and disclose comprehensive, market-driven privacy policies.