



2010 Legislative Agenda for the Georgia General Assembly

Active Positions

Regional Transportation Sales Tax: Different areas of our state have differing needs for transportation improvements. However, all areas lack adequate funding to meet their transportation requirements. The proposal of a one-cent, regional, special purpose local option sales tax creates an opportunity for communities of interest to take a step forward in building their needed infrastructure. Like other special purpose local option sales taxes it would have to be approved by the voters after they were given a project list, and renewed on a regular basis. In addition, all monies raised should stay within the region in which they are raised. The Augusta Metro Chamber supports the development of this approach to the growing need for transportation funding.

Transportation Statewide Funding Balance: Currently transportation funds in Georgia are partially distributed based on congressional district. This system assures all segments of the state receive a fair share of transportation improvements. However this system is difficult to manage effectively due to the design of district boundaries. Modification to this system to improve the efficiency and flexibility of transportation improvements should be made. Any new system must still provide for the guaranteed distribution of funds to all sections of the state; any proposal lacking a mechanism to fairly distribute funding, recognizing the varying legitimate needs of regions of the state, should be rejected.

Statewide Water Management: Georgia needs to better manage its water resources. The plan to create improved policy and structure for the use of water resources passed during the General Assembly in 2008 must be allowed to meet the goal of watershed based, science driven, regionally determined plans to allocate water resources. The Georgia General Assembly should not make changes to Georgia's water policies that are not in keeping with the plan it approved that resulted from an open, statewide, process.

Medical College of Georgia: The Medical College of Georgia, the state's health sciences university, is committed to its mission of "improving health and reducing the burden of illness on society." Ongoing capital and operational investment is required to assure that MCG continues to provide the high-quality health professionals needed by the state. At present, the Medical College of Georgia is at a critical juncture in the institution's transformation. Continued success in the area of cancer research hinges on continued investment, particularly to defray the start-up costs associated with recruitment of the caliber

of faculty being attracted to the institution. Five years ago, the Governor committed \$5 million per year to jump start the Cancer Center initiative with the understanding that MCG would be positioned to assume responsibility for the initial investment made by the state. While the Cancer Center has leveraged this initial investment to achieve notable outcomes, MCG has sustained overall reductions in state support which compromise the institution's ability to fill this gap in funding. While the Governor has fully met his commitment, the reduction in support for MCG's cancer research activities at this juncture will reverse positive gains achieved over the past five years, limiting MCG's ability to become a national leader and to combine research excellence with clinical and educational excellence to favorably impact the health of Georgians. MCG continues to present an opportunity for prudent investment in the future by the State of Georgia. As an institution squarely focused on the health needs of the state, MCG has provided an excellent return on investment for the dollars appropriated to it in the past, in terms of economic development, scientific advances, and improvement of the health of Georgians. Therefore, the Chamber supports the state's continued investment in the MCG Cancer Research Center at levels previously funded.

Augusta State University: ASU's campus is a blend of modern and historic facilities, providing students with an inspiring place to receive a great education. ASU has experienced tremendous growth and needs to keep pace. Augusta State University seeks approval of \$1.8 million recommended by the Board of Regents for the design of a \$27.5 million academic building to be constructed adjacent to Christenberry Field House on Wrightsboro Road. The building, which will house ASU's College of Education and its Department of Nursing, is crucial to the continued development of the university, whose student enrollment grew by 5.6 percent this fall. Moreover, because graduates in education and nursing tend to enter or remain in the local work force, the building will help alleviate shortages in these critical-employment fields, produce economic benefits for the Augusta area economy, and increase business along the Wrightsboro Road corridor.

Tax Exemption on Energy Used in Manufacturing: Rising energy costs have a large impact on Augusta area industry, already competing in a globalized economy. Manufacturing jobs make up approximately 15-20 percent of the total local workforce. By removing the 4% state sales tax, Georgia would save some of Augusta's largest employers' significant costs. Given the tax policies of other southeastern states, the tax on energy for manufacturing puts Georgia at a distinct disadvantage for manufacturing development and Augusta's manufacturing base at a competitive disadvantage, especially with bordering states. The capping of tax on energy costs made during the 2008 Session was a needed step and should not be rescinded. However, The Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce supports the complete removal of the state sales tax on energy for manufacturing.

Tax Reform: A business friendly tax environment is essential to the success of our members. In addition, every Georgian is dependent on services provided by state and local government. The Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce will closely monitor the progress and content of tax reform measures, and evaluate their impact on our business community. The Augusta Metro Chamber will keep its members educated and informed regarding vital tax reform issues.

State Budget: The State of Georgia has suffered revenue losses that have left our state with fewer dollars to address the ever increasing funding needs of the state. As the General Assembly looks to balance the budget, the Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce

encourages them to focus on the basic needs of the state that do not shift costs to local governments while continuing to support investments that bring positive returns for the state and prepare us for the future.

Georgia Golf Hall of Fame and Botanical Gardens: Efforts must be made to maximize the public investment that has already been made by the State of Georgia, the City of Augusta and private investors. The Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce believes that the feasibility study conducted on a multi-use sports and entertainment facility has merit and we endorse the concept. Subject to a more defined business plan, we believe the concept meets many important thresholds including the opportunity for private investment and a use that will yield a significant economic impact for all citizens. We urge the leadership of the State of Georgia to yield their ownership of this property to the City of Augusta so that it can realize its full economic potential.

Standing Positions

Healthcare: Quality healthcare is one of the most basic needs for every Georgian. The increasing cost of providing healthcare coverage is a growing challenge for Augusta's businesses and their employees. Our state leaders should search for policy solutions that stabilize the rate of rise of healthcare cost for those businesses that are committed to providing healthcare benefits to their employees and to avoid any new cost shifts onto private employers.

Interbasin Transfer: The Savannah River is a priceless resource for metro Augusta, and is integral to our economic wellbeing. This resource should be for the use of those who live adjacent to the water source and not sent to distant parts of Georgia or South Carolina. The Augusta Metro Chamber supports the reasonable restriction of movement of water between river basins.

Augusta Technical College: Augusta Tech is an important part of our regional educational infrastructure. As ATC continues to grow and offer a wider variety of vital educational opportunities it is important that funding to support its many missions keeps pace.

Civil Justice Reform: The Augusta Metro Chamber supports recent improvements in Georgia's civil justice system. These changes will protect Georgia's standing as a business friendly state, as well as help maintain our health care quality. The Chamber opposes any effort to roll back civil justice reform.

Fort Gordon: Fort Gordon is the largest single employer in Augusta and an important part of our nation's defense. It is important that Georgia continue to pursue policy initiatives that make our state, and Fort Gordon in particular, a location that is friendly to our nation's military and its personnel and retirees. The Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce supports Fort Gordon.