

2009 State Legislative Agenda

The following position statements have been adopted by the Board of Directors of the North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, Convention & Visitors Bureau, as priority issues of importance to the business members of this organization. These issues were determined important through the results of a member survey, briefings from statewide business associations, and research by staff and the Legislative Committee of the Public Policy Council of the chamber.

This now becomes the 2009 State Legislative Agenda and will be presented to our state legislative delegation for support and assistance.

Education and Workforce Development

The chamber is committed to support initiatives and programs which will result in a highly skilled, 21st Century prepared workforce providing family sustaining jobs and ensuring business attraction and growth to our state, county, and city.

We support:

- Programs to prepare, retool, and reeducate South Carolinians.
- Full funding to support Personal Pathways to Success and related accountability measures including required new funding for the dropout prevention component.
- Address inequities in the EFA funding formula currently used to fund public schools in South Carolina which is especially damaging to Coastal Counties due to its index of taxpaying ability calculation. (CCA) *
- Funding and implementing a statewide Workkeys ® initiative at educational institutions, including high schools, designed to insure that students achieve “soft skills” that business leaders say are key to a quality work force.
- Funding and implementation of the Center for Accelerated Technology Training (CATT) throughout South Carolina, including local post-economy educational institutions, specifically Coastal Carolina University and Horry-Georgetown Technical College.
- Expanding the piloted K-4 program statewide.
- Centralization of the state’s workforce development efforts.

Transportation / Infrastructure

To effectively compete in the global marketplace, and to assure the safe and efficient transportation of our thousands of visitors, permanent citizens, and goods and services, the chamber supports modern, up-to-date roads, bridges, and infrastructure to serve our community and state. (CCA)

We support:

- Dedicated funding towards the maintenance of South Carolina roads and bridges, and as a top priority funding of I-73 and I-74 to serve the coastal region of South Carolina as well as support for SC Highway 9 extended to Interstate 95 and SC Highway 31 North connecting to I-74.
- Continuing joint city-county transportation planning.

- Continued planning and funding participation in beach renourishment and dredging to protect investment as visitor destination, both long and short term.
- Dredging of local channels in the Cherry Grove Beach area.
- Offshore storm water discharge improvements.
- Study the feasibility for private / public partnerships, alternative funding sources such as tolls and other non-public funding, in addition to leveraging federal program funding for transportation projects.
- Funding for the approved Myrtle Beach International Airport Expansion Plan. This includes support of the sale of non-essential airport property at the Grand Strand Airport located in North Myrtle Beach while assuring the continual operations of this general aviation airport which is ranked as the number one general aviation airport in the state of South Carolina.

Tourism

The chamber strongly advocates recurring state funding to grow and market the tourism industry as an investment in the state's economy. The tourism / hospitality industry is the number one industry in South Carolina and in our region of the state. In terms of taxes generated to the state and the local community; the thousands of jobs created directly and indirectly; and the millions of visitors we attract, no other industry in the state has a bigger return on investment. (CCA)

We support:

- The General Assembly's reinstatement of full funding for Destination Specific public-private match marketing of \$10 million (CCA).
- South Carolina Parks and Recreation Funding at \$6 million in the 2009-2010 fiscal year (CCA).
- Full funding for the 2-for-1 destination specific matching tourism promotional grant with recurring funds.

Business Creation, Recruitment, Retention, and Expansion

The chamber supports legislation that will improve the community's and regions efforts to expand existing business and attract quality new jobs. In particular, we encourage the creation of growth clusters including the maritime and hospitality industry, and the expansion of knowledge-based businesses.

We support:

- The creation of legislation to provide tax credits to individuals who provide "angel investor funding" to knowledge-based business
- Amend / standardize the business license fee structure to avoid double taxation.
- The South Carolina Department of Commerce Closing Fund
- Seed capital legislation to encourage investment in emerging companies and businesses.
- Reforms to the state's workers' compensation and tort systems, including non-economic damage caps, punitive damages, limits on appeals bonds and seatbelt admissibility.
- Advocate for property tax reform legislation to ensure fairness, stability, predictability, accountability, and compliance while equitably balancing income, property, and sales tax levies based proportionally on necessary services and the ability to pay. (CCA)

Environment / Energy

The chamber encourages legislation to ensure that environmental regulations support a growing economy while balancing and protecting the community's and regions' quality of life. Environmental legislation and regulations should not necessarily increase the administrative burden resulting in unnecessary rules, regulations, or project delays becoming cost prohibitive to business.

We support:

- The development of a comprehensive energy policy that encourages wise use and management of South Carolina's natural resources; ensures that we have adequate supplies for the future which are reasonably priced and generated in an environmentally responsible manner; works with our state and federal government to seek alternative energy solutions; and carefully consider the comprehensive impacts of the development of any alternative energy sources. Such a comprehensive policy will include support of nuclear energy as well as environmentally-friendly drilling for natural gas off the coast of South Carolina if studies and research deem this feasible as long as this is done at a distance which ensures minimal risk to the coastal environment and the coastal tourism and real estate economy. (CCA)
- Support Coastal Carolina University research and development of wind and tidal energy sources.
- Any royalties realized from offshore exploration would be dedicated to a beach and Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway enhancement fund as well as tourism promotion for coastal communities.
- State environmental regulations and legislation which are based on science, not emotion and regulations are not more stringent than existing federal regulations.
- Clarification of wetland regulations to eliminate multiple regulations. (CCA)
- Tax incentives to encourage the expansion of natural park areas such as Waites Island and Tilghman Point.

Healthcare

The rising cost of healthcare is becoming the number one concern for business especially small business which leads the state in job creation. The chamber is committed to supporting and encouraging legislation which will help to relieve this cost burden to business.

We support:

- Modification of the health insurance cooperation legislation passed in 2008 to lower the number of years businesses must commit from five years to two years.
- Support Medicaid reform as long as it does not adversely affect the cost of healthcare.
- An increase in the state's cigarette / tobacco tax to the same rate as North Carolina or Georgia as a means to reduce health care costs to individuals and small business.

* The Coastal Chambers Alliance (CCA) is a coalition of chambers along the South Carolina coast who have joined together to address issues of common concern. These chambers represent 1 million residents, 10,000 businesses and organizations, \$5.4 billion annual tourism economic impact, and generate over \$300 million in state tax revenues from tourism serving 20 million visitors annually.