

**North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
2007 Legislative Agenda as Approved by the Board of Directors**

EDUCATION ISSUES

Independent Schools and Universities

The North San Antonio Chamber supports maintaining the current funding level of the Tuition Equalization Grant (TEG). More than 4,400 area students whose average family income is \$35,000 receive an average grant of \$2,900 to help pay tuition expenses at San Antonio's independent universities. The TEG funding level is particularly important to San Antonio families as the need-based grants offer students the choice of attending one of the city's independent institutions best suited to their educational needs and goals by helping bridge the gap between State-subsidized public university tuition and that of private universities.

University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA)

The State of Texas and South Texas in particular is in dire need of additional doctors, dentist, nurses, scientists and other health professionals. The Legislature needs to seriously consider the funding request of the UTHSCSA with general fund revenues as follows:

- A. \$6 million of new funding for the Life Sciences Institute
- B. \$5 million of enhanced funding for the Regional Academic Health Center
- C. \$5 million for the Laredo Campus Extension

We are also asking for your support with three other top funding priorities that will greatly benefit the UTHSCSA and **all** institutions of higher education in Texas as follows”

- A. Full restoration of the 10% budget cut to the non-formula 2006-2007 budget items, amounting to \$5.2 million to the UTHSCSA.
- B. Secure debt service funding for the Tuition Revenue Bonds (TRB's) authorized during the recent special session to build their state-of-the-art South Texas Research Facility.
- C. Secure increased formula funding, as recommended by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, for enrollment growth, diversity initiatives, infrastructure costs and inflationary adjustments, growth in research expenditures, adjustment to the research weight, and inflationary adjustment for Graduate Medical Education.

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University of Texas at San Antonio

As the growth university in the University of Texas system, The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) is managing growth at an unprecedented rate. It is also ranked as the premier school for its Hispanic graduation rate. However, UTSA as does it's sister institution, the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA) clearly needs the support of the legislative delegation in the following areas if it going to fulfill its mission:

- A. San Antonio Life Science Institute (SALSI)--\$6M. Authorized by the 77th Legislature but not funded, the partnership between UTSA and the UTHSCSA to facilitate joint activities will enhance the respective research, teaching and service missions by developing and implementing joint doctoral and master degree programs.
- B. Restore the 10% reduction in baseline non-formula funding--\$2.9M. A reduction in the state appropriation will have a profound impact on UTSA's ability to meet institutional goals. It would also become a setback to UTSA becoming a tier 1 research institution as new graduate and doctoral degree programs would need to be postponed.
- C. Tuition Revenue Bond (TRB) Debt Retirement--\$12.95M. Although the 79th Legislature authorized UTSA's Engineering Building (Phase II), no funding was provided to begin construction. The Engineering building is crucial to UTSA's mission of providing education to historically underrepresented minorities and continued opportunities in attracting and retaining students through the STEM and other outreach programs.
- D. Formula funding increase for instruction, operations and E&G space--\$24.71M. The North Chamber strongly supports Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 2008-2009 formula recommendations to provide additional funding for instruction, operations and space support to reflect enrollment growth, mandatory, unavoidable cost increases, and inflation. The formula adjustment will preserve access and affordability.

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TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

The North San Antonio Chamber has a long history of supporting the infrastructure needs of San Antonio, Bexar County and the State as a whole. We are at a crossroad where traditional methods of funding are all but dried up due to the tremendous burden of maintaining our aging infrastructure. We cannot expect to see any additional dollars coming from the Federal Government and cannot continue to divert funds originally meant to support and build the infrastructure needs of our citizens and business entities. The North chamber supports the following comprehensive methods to assist in easing the problem:

- A. Reduce the diversions of state transportation revenues to non-transportation uses. Over the past twenty years, \$10.5 billion has been transferred from transportation needs to other areas of the state budget. In FY 2006, the diversion totaled \$729 million.
- B. Protect all transportation resources and revenues and the authority and flexibility achieved with HB 3588 and other transportation bills enacted by the 78th and 79th Texas Legislatures. Specifically, the Regional Mobility Authorities (RMA's), the Texas Mobility Fund and Proposition 14 bonding. On a statewide basis, the new tools will allow 88 percent of mobility projects planned for the next 12 years to be built in half the time. In San Antonio, the new tools have resulted in \$1.7 billion in additional projects to the MPO's transportation plan to date.
- C. Enable the motor fuel tax to increase with growth in the economy by indexing it to the consumer price index or an appropriate construction cost index. Since 1991, when the motor fuel tax was last raised from \$.15 to \$.20, inflation has eroded the current value of the gas tax down to \$.14 cents per gallon. At the same time, highway construction cost continue to escalate at about 10-15 percent annually.
- D. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project is an element of VIA Metropolitan Transit's Comprehensive Service Plan. BRT will provide reliable, efficient transportation using exclusive right of way where feasible, queue jumps and off-board collection. Legislation is needed to allow for the safe and efficient operation of BRT to include penalties for unauthorized use of dedicated rights of way and queue-jumping.

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HEALTH CARE COST FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Health care cost have outpaced growth, wages and inflation causing employers and employees to provide a greater and greater percent of their income to pay for coverage. As a result, only 60 percent of employers offer health insurance to their employees, down from 69 percent in 2000. The North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce supports the following solutions that we urge the Texas Legislature to address:

- A. Expansion of consumer directed health plans that allow employers to purchase low-premium, high-deductible policies coupled with a medical savings account.
- B. Increased information on cost and quality measures so consumers can make educated decisions regarding the cost and quality of health care services. This is particularly critical as employers shift from traditional insurance options to high-deductible plans.
- C. Prohibition of balance billing, sensible penalties for waiver of co-payment and reforms to physician self-referral will protect consumers and restrain increases in the cost of health care.
- D. Expansion of Medicaid managed care. The State should apply to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services for a Section 1115 Waiver, which will allow for the most cost effective, high quality care to be implemented in Texas.
- E. Small business entities in Texas should be able to band together in Association and/or Chambers of Commerce to secure group health plans at the discounted/group plan rate.
- F. The Legislature should fund Medicaid and other federal reimbursement programs such as CHIPS to maximize federal matching programs to generate additional resources that may be applied to reduce the economic impact on employer health care costs from funding indirectly, health care for the uninsured.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS EXPANSION

The North San Antonio chamber supports those State initiatives which have produced dramatic results for communities throughout the State of Texas. Specifically, the North Chamber supports the following:

- A. The Texas Enterprise Fund and the claw-back provisions that safeguard Texans investment in the future.
- B. The Emerging Technology Fund and associated Regional Centers for Innovation and Commercialization are serving as a catalyst for emerging technology research, development, Commercialization, and start-up incubation throughout Texas.
- C. The Skills Development Fund is the state's primary employer-driven workforce training initiative. In 2005, the Legislature increased funding from \$25 million per biennium to \$40 million. We expect continued demand for these valuable training dollars as companies relocate to Texas and existing companies expand their base of operations. As such, we feel the Legislature should continue the current funding level for the next bienninum.

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WATER

The North San Antonio supports legislation that would raise Edwards Aquifer pumping limits to 549,000 acre-feet, establish an annualized groundwater withdrawal floor of not less than 340,000 acre-feet during critical periods, and provides for the development of appropriate triggers for the stages of critical period reductions. In addition the North Chamber supports the following:

- A. Adopt legislation to add and amend provisions in Chapter 36 of the Texas Water Code to protect the right of land owners to buy and sell groundwater.
- B. Ensure groundwater may be reasonably withdrawn for use inside or outside the boundaries of a conservation district.
- C. Facilitates the development of brackish groundwater projects
- D. Ensure reasonable, consistent, and predictable rules from conservation districts.
- E. The North Chamber supports legislation that codifies the current sum of all Edwards Aquifer pumping rights at 549,000 acre-feet, establishes an annual groundwater withdrawal floor of no less than 340,000 acre-feet during critical periods, maintains the 50-50 buy-down cost sharing provision between EAA permit holders and downstream stakeholders, and provides for the development of appropriate triggers for the stages of critical period reductions.

PORT OF SAN ANTONIO

The North Chamber supports the need to “Clarify Use of Eminent Domain”, Article 379B.0045 Eminent Domain. The Port Authority is undertaking the improvement of Quintana Road, which could require the use of eminent domain. Clarifications are needed to assure that property outside the “base property,” but affecting redevelopment projects within the base property, are subject of eminent domain provisions.

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