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YOUR CHAMBER.  
YOUR ADVOCATE.

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## 2018 Capital Region Advocacy Agenda for Prosperity



**Our Vision for the Region:** At the Center of New York's Tech Valley is the Capital Region, which works across geographic and political boundaries, and is known for its thriving economy and vibrant quality of life.

**Our Mission:** The Capital Region Chamber is a unifying force for change to provide greater influence and opportunities for our members and Capital Region communities.

In support of the Chamber's Vision & Mission, we present the 2018 Capital Region Advocacy Agenda for Prosperity.

# TOP THREE PRIORITIES

## Business Climate Improvement:

### NEW YORK'S RANKINGS MUST CHANGE

49<sup>th</sup> WORST BUSINESS TAX CLIMATE

49<sup>th</sup> WORST INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX

47<sup>th</sup> WORST PROPERTY TAX

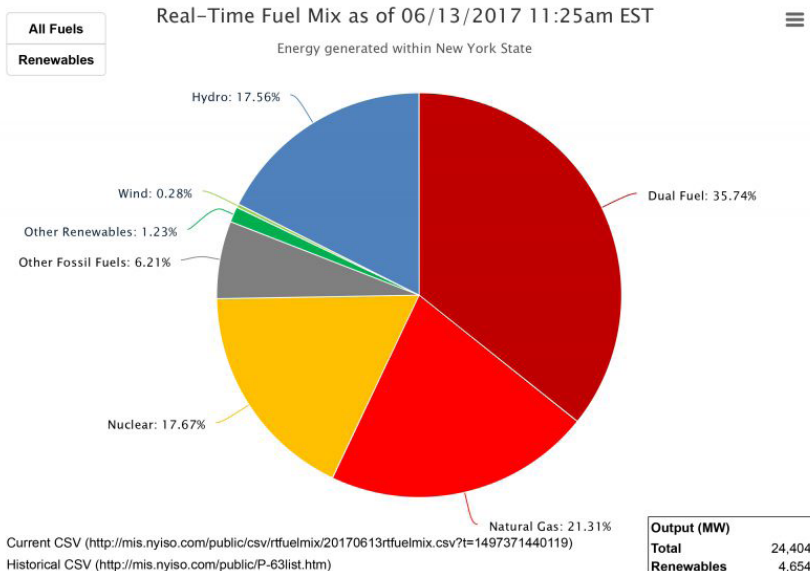
43<sup>rd</sup> WORST SALES TAX

30<sup>th</sup> WORST UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TAX

Source: The Tax Foundation's 2018 State Business Tax Climate Index

The Chamber will advocate for regulatory reforms that will improve the state's current business climate. Included in an extensive list of reforms that will assist businesses and employers, we will fight for the following: the reduction of small business taxes; the reduction of taxes, surcharges and assessments the state imposes on employers and individuals who purchase health insurance; and the reform of the Wicks Law which subjects most public projects to separate bidding requirements for HVAC, plumbing and electric contracts. Unless meaningful action is taken, New York State's business climate will not improve.

**Scaffold Law Reform:** The Chamber will be a vocal advocate for the reform of the Scaffold Law. This law holds property owners, employers, and contractors liable for gravity-related injuries that happen on the job even if the employee contributed to their injuries. This New York only law costs taxpayers \$800 million and drives up the cost of doing business in our state by \$1.49 billion annually.



**Energy Policy:** New York State consumers pay some of the highest energy prices in the nation. Additionally, the Capital Region is faced with critical natural gas supply constraints and these constraints are becoming more serious as demand has outstripped supply. A consequence of these limitations in bringing electricity to the Capital Region from power producers outside of our region is higher energy prices. As demand for energy continues to grow, natural gas is becoming increasingly important for New York consumers and businesses. The Chamber will advocate for upgrading the state's high-voltage electric transmission system and policies that increases access to natural gas for manufacturing facilities, power production, transportation, and other purposes to support New York's economy and quality of life.

# CHAMBER ADVOCACY: A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

## KEY ISSUE AREAS:

### **Taxes/Regulations/Government Operations**

Make the Capital Region and New York State more competitive through mandate relief, responsible stewardship of local finances, and reducing significant state and local regulatory and tax burdens. The Chamber supports policies that improve the state's business climate (*for more, see page 4*).

### **Energy**

New York State consumers pay some of the highest energy prices in the nation. Physical limitations in bringing electricity to the Capital Region from power producers outside of our region are creating congestion that is driving up costs significantly. The Chamber supports policies that promote access to affordable and reliable energy (*for more, see page 5*).

### **Education/Workforce Development**

Businesses rely on a qualified workforce to successfully operate. A skilled workforce is therefore critical to regional job growth and prosperity. The Chamber supports education policies, school funding, and workforce development initiatives that are available to students and workers at all levels so that they are ready to enter and re-enter the job market (*for more, see page 5*).

### **Employment**

Growing private sector jobs is key to the Capital Region's economic future. Regulations and mandates on employers have a significant impact on a company's competitive position in attracting and retaining high-quality personnel. The Chamber believes employers are best suited for determining the terms and conditions of employment based on their financial condition and competitive position. We must encourage state and federal governments to pursue pro-employment policies (*for more, see page 5*).

### **Healthcare**

As healthcare costs rise, many employers and working families continue to experience difficulties finding affordable coverage. The Chamber supports policies that promote affordable access to health insurance and a robust healthcare system without imposing new mandates and taxes (*for more, see page 6*).

### **Transportation/Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is an important asset for all businesses and residents. Without the proper investment, our economic stability, potential for job growth and competitiveness are threatened. The Chamber supports continued investment in our transportation, and water and sewer infrastructure (*for more, see page 6*).

### **Downtown Revitalization**

Thriving downtowns and urban business districts are essential to the long-term economic health of the Capital Region. The Chamber supports policies and funding that promote the continued revitalization of our downtowns (*for more, see page 6*).

# WHERE WE STAND

## Taxes/Regulations/Government Operations

- Support broad-based tax reform:
  - Support a permanent property tax cap that is coupled with meaningful mandate relief. It is an absolute necessity to provide municipal government with appropriate state aid and mandate relief;
  - Support the reduction of burdensome, outdated and complex business taxes;
  - Support a permanent and broad personal income tax reduction to provide relief and help sustain small businesses;
  - Support accelerated estate tax reductions;
- Support policies that promote the sharing economy and ensure New York State's competitiveness in this innovative marketplace;
- Support policies that promote the creative economy and ensure New York State's competitiveness in this innovative marketplace;
- Ensure that the reforms and improvements of the workers' compensation system that were agreed upon in 2017 are implemented. These include modernizing the rating system through which schedule loss-of-use awards are determined by updating applicable medical treatment guidelines and eliminating or modifying the indexing of maximum weekly benefits to control growing program costs;
- Support reforms to the Scaffold Law, which imposes absolute liability on employers and property owners when construction workers are injured in elevation-related accidents, regardless of whether the worker refused to use safety equipment or was impaired by drugs or alcohol. Any reform must adopt a comparative negligence standard which will level the playing field and reduce costs for small businesses, farms, municipalities, school districts, and ultimately taxpayers;
- Support legislation that requires any state mandated program imposed on municipalities and school districts to be funded by the state;
- Support regulatory reform that reduces the unfunded mandates on not-for-profit organizations, an essential and substantial component of the Capital Region's economy;
- Support the extended delay of the Affordable Care Act's Health Insurance Tax (HIT). Under the ACA, the HIT is imposed on fully-insured health insurance plans, the Medicare Advantage Plan and the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. If a delay is not extended, the HIT will be re-imposed in January of 2018 and will raise an estimated \$14.3 billion, with much of the cost being passed on to consumers and small businesses in the form of higher premiums;
- Support providing the Office of the State Comptroller with the authority to audit all state-funded economic development initiatives;
- Oppose legislation to impose significant new procedural requirements on economic development assistance provided by state and local public authorities;
- Support the repeal of Wicks Law, which subject school districts and other local governments to separate plumbing, heating/ventilation/air conditioning and electrical contracts, significantly increasing project expenses from 8% to 30%;
- Oppose the use of Messages of Necessity for Budget Bills. The public must have time to review and comment on these important bills;
- Support Taylor Law reforms to encourage public employers and employees to work together to achieve labor contracts that are equitable;
- Oppose efforts at the state level to regulate toxic substances. This issue has been appropriately addressed at the federal level by Congress through the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act (Public Law No. 114-182).

## Energy

- Support upgrading the state's high-voltage electric transmission system in a manner consistent with competitive wholesale energy markets to make pricing more competitive in upstate communities;
- Support policies that allow for the development of natural gas infrastructure and expand access to natural gas for consumers and businesses;
- Oppose efforts to provide legislative review of Public Service Commission rate setting decisions;
- Given EPA's recent study, encourage the reconsideration of DEC's temporary ban on hydraulic fracturing in New York State.

## Education/Workforce Development

- Support fair and equitable state funding among all school districts. Today, some school districts receive more than 100% of the State aid that the school aid formula suggests, while other districts receive less than 60%. This inequitable distribution of school aid negatively impacts the Albany, Schenectady and Troy city school districts;
- Support policies that expand access to high-quality workforce training programs and early learning programs;
- Support increasing funding for community colleges toward customized industry training and equipment;
- Support education models to better prepare students for entry into career and/or college:
  - Support efforts to improve science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education;
  - Support efforts to better prepare students for careers in healthcare and long-term care;
  - Support expanded access to innovative education models and multiple pathways to graduation;
- Continue to support higher standards for education and assessments;
- Support efforts to address teacher quality and retention concerns;
- Support evaluating the government employment and training system to better align resources for employers and job seekers;
- Support increased state funding of Entrepreneurial Assistance Program Centers. The Chamber hosts one of 24 EAP Centers located around the state (i.e., Entrepreneur Boot Camp). These EAP Centers provide intensive training programs that shepherd would-be entrepreneurs and existing businesses. Currently, the state funds these centers through a grant that requires a 50/50 match. Because these centers provide a valuable and unique service for the state, the state should increase its share, eliminate the required match and fully fund EAP Centers.

## Employment

- Support efforts to strengthen the Capital Region's ties to the advanced materials, bio/life sciences, clean-tech/energy, homeland security/defense, information technology and nanotechnology/semiconductor industries;
- Support programs that assist veterans and disabled veterans with business ownership and employment opportunities;
- Support the growth of the tourism sector to expand economic opportunities;
- Oppose efforts to prohibit employers from using consumer credit reports in hiring and employment decisions;
- Oppose prevailing wage mandates on private projects that receive public funds or financial assistance;
- Oppose efforts to regulate or prohibit employers use of on-call scheduling of employees;

- Support legislation authorizing non-CPAs to be minority owners of CPA firms;
- Support federal immigration reform:
  - Support increasing the availability of temporary skilled-worker (H-1B) visas;
  - Support increasing the availability of permanent-resident visas (green cards) for STEM graduates and workers;
  - Create new-startup visas for immigrant entrepreneurs who launch businesses in the U.S. and meet certain employment and financing goals.

## Healthcare

- Support affordable access to health insurance and a robust healthcare system without imposing new mandates and/or taxes on businesses or individuals;
- Support the reinstatement of the Health Care Quality and Cost Containment Commission. This commission would provide lawmakers with a cost and efficacy analysis prior to a vote on health insurance mandates;
- Support reforming the medical tort system to make costs more affordable and predictable;
- Oppose any additional health insurance tax to sustain New York State's Health Exchange;
- Oppose efforts to mandate health care staffing.

## Transportation/Infrastructure

- Support continued investment in our aging water and sewer infrastructure;
- Support cashless tolling along the entire Thruway system;
- Oppose efforts to shift the cost of MTA capital improvements onto utilities and their customers. MTA must take responsibility for these improvements and must ensure that costs are properly controlled;
- Remain a leading advocate for increased flight service and competitive pricing to/from the Albany International Airport;
- Support increased funding for continued improvements at the Port of Albany. As shippers look to increase their use of East Coast ports, it is critical that improvements be made at the port to further attract the shipping industry;
- Support funding to reduce congestion within the Capital Region's passenger rail system, as well as the creation of express trains from Albany to New York City;
- Support and ensure the continued upstate/downstate parity in state investments in transportation infrastructure;
- Support Amtrak routes in New York to provide roll-on services for bicycles or allow unboxed bikes to be checked as baggage;
- Support expansion of CDTA's Bus Plus (Bus Rapid Transit) and green initiatives in the Capital Region.

## Downtown Revitalization

- Support enhanced historic rehabilitation tax credits;
- Support an asbestos remediation tax credit to promote the redevelopment and reuse of existing underutilized properties;
- Support reforms to the brownfield program to include certain superfund and RCRA sites, and to expedite review and approval of remediation projects;
- Support integrated policies that support urban redevelopment, including transit and mobility options that include bike and pedestrian enhancements;
- Support improving the availability of capital from conventional and unconventional sources to attract investment for housing, retail, business expansion, mixed-use and other downtown projects.