

# Springdale Chamber Legislative Agenda

## Proposed Legislative Agenda - Summary

### December 12, 2016

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In the past 15 years, Northwest Arkansas has been responsible for 56% of the job growth in the state. In fact, during that same time, the region can also take credit for 53% of the state's population growth. Northwest Arkansas, with its tremendous growth, accounts for 17.3% of the state's population and 18.5% of the state's workforce. We predict that, soon, one out of every five people, as well as one out of every five jobs, will be in Northwest Arkansas. We are the fastest-growing region in the state, and we remain one of the fastest-growing regions in the United States. NWA is consistently rated by national publications as one of the best places in the nation to live, work, and locate a business.

Northwest Arkansas has served as the engine driving the state economy forward as we have entered the twenty-first century. The Springdale Chamber of Commerce proposes the agenda below to continue the positive growth for our city, the region and for the state.

#### **Education and Workforce Development**

Springdale is leading the state in developing career readiness, technical certification, and vocational training programs that are housed in our area high schools, community colleges, and technical institutions. Workforce Development is our number-one priority as a region.

Excellence in education is also a high priority for the Springdale business community. With an overall enrollment in area school districts that has increased by 35% since 2004, NWA's school systems continue to lead the state in K-12 education attainment. The region's 88% graduation rate surpasses the national average. Advanced Placement participation and pass rates in area schools are higher than the state average, as well as the overall ACT composite score for the region. Northwest Arkansas school students have also exceeded all measurable performance standards of the PARCC and ACTAAP tests

#### **K12 EDUCATION & WORKFORCE TRAINING**

1. Support incremental increases in permanent funding for High-Quality, Voluntary Pre-K over a five to ten-year period beginning with a \$20 million increase in 2017. This will not be a new allocation - rather, it will include the Governor's commitment of \$3 million, a federal grant of \$15 million, and greater efficiency and effectiveness by moving the program from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education.
2. Develop a statewide program that offers flexibility in technical training, industry certifications, as well as college credit for students in Arkansas's high schools, enabling them quicker entry into the workforce as skilled and productive employees if they choose not to enter college immediately upon graduation.
3. Support for legislation that will streamline articulation agreements between area schools and higher education institutions.

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4. Support for measures that decrease the liability issues of area businesses that offer internship opportunities for local students.

#### **POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE TRAINING**

1. Make Arkansas Scholarship Lottery funds available to all Arkansans who seek to obtain vocational training and/or technical certifications through its existing institutions. This will enable such students to find good jobs that pay well, and will address critical shortages in high-demand positions for employers statewide.
2. Support the governor's Master Plan for Higher Education and its 2025 goal of reaching a 60% postsecondary attainment rate in Arkansas, including increasing the number of Arkansans with postsecondary credentials and degrees at all levels.
3. Support efforts of the governor and higher education leaders to create an outcomes-based funding model for higher education that is accountable and transparent, while promoting the goals of increasing postsecondary attainment through improved retention and graduation and a focus on affordability.
4. Work to insure adequate funding for UAMS NW, with a goal of significantly increasing the number of medical residencies to alleviate the doctor shortage in the region.
5. Work with governor and legislators to establish a telemedicine program for the state of Arkansas.

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Springdale and Northwest Arkansas region leads the state in population and job growth with economic growth so strong that it benefits the entire state. Three of the state's Fortune 500 companies are headquartered in a region of more than 500,000 residents, and more than 1,450 Walmart suppliers operate here. Both the region's population and its companies need excellent infrastructure to maintain quality of life. New investments in highways, public transportation, alternative transportation, airports, and water-quality protection remain necessary for the region's long-term future growth and continued success.

#### **Infrastructure**

1. Support the governor's position that additional funding is needed for Arkansas highways without decreasing General Revenue.
2. Support the state legislature referring a highway-funding ballot issue to voters that does the following:
  - Raises at least \$500 million annually for highway maintenance and expansion;
  - Includes an extension of the half-cent sales tax, set to expire in 2023, as at least a portion of those new revenues; and
  - Specifies which new highways will be built and widened, including some big-ticket projects in metropolitan statistical areas.
3. Support reasonable measures that benefit alternative transportation, specifically bike lanes, as part of new, secondary highway projects and city thoroughfares in the state's urbanized areas.
4. Support policies that allow the region to grow through improvements and enhancements to the subsurface infrastructure of the region.
5. Support enhancements to the technological infrastructure that will improve the overall connectivity of both the state and the region.
6. Support state legislative action that would assist the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport in recruiting daily or near daily low-cost air service, as the airport's current high-priced fares negatively impact the region's business community.

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The Springdale business community recognizes the need to improve Arkansas's ability to compete both nationally and globally for economic development projects that bring good paying jobs to this region and to the state. The Springdale Chamber and the Northwest Arkansas Chambers of Commerce led the legislative effort in 2015 to place Issue 3, on the November 2016 ballot. The region also continues to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit by providing academic and business environments in which startups can not only flourish but also expand. With support from major employers and world-class academic research, agriculture has a significant impact on the businesses and overall health of the economy here. The Springdale business community supports efforts by the state that will enable the agriculture industry to grow and flourish in the region as well.

#### **Economic Development and Agriculture**

1. Support the governor's executive recommendation for funding the Governor's Quick Action Closing Fund for economic development projects.
2. Support the mission and the current program of the work of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission as it strives to bring new industry and jobs to the state of Arkansas.
3. Be aware that our business community will not support any major changes to the eminent domain statutes already contained in the Arkansas Code.
4. Adopt a method to mitigate employers' increased cost exposure from the closing of the Death and Permanent Disability Trust Fund. Reduce opioid abuse and provide better more consistent care for injured workers through the adoption of evidence based treatment guidelines, and Protect the workers' compensation reforms enacted by Act 796 of 1993.

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Being one of the fastest-growing regions of the country presents both challenges and opportunities for the many industries and residents of Springdale and Northwest Arkansas. The business environment and the quality of life here are exceptional because of the hard work that has been done to make our communities safe, attractive, and vibrant places to live for our increasingly diverse population. Policies and legislation enacted on a state level can have a serious impact on the region's ability to grow and prosper.

#### **Regional Stewardship, Placemaking, and Overall Business Climate**

1. We will not support any legislation or policy enacted by the state of Arkansas that casts the state or this region in a negative light, or that jeopardizes the ability of the region to attract people, talent, events, or businesses in a competitive environment.
2. Support including coverage under the ARKids First program for Marshallese children who qualify for the program.
3. Fully support Governor Hutchinson's Arkansas Works Program.