



St. Joseph Area



CHAMBER
of Commerce

2010

LEGISLATIVE
ISSUES

St. Joseph, Mo.

Dear Chamber Member:

The St. Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce is pleased to provide this document, which outlines the priority legislative issues for 2010. The issues were identified by the Chamber's Government Relations Committee and the position statements were approved by the Board of Directors.

Our hope is that you will find the brochure a resource on legislative issues during the course of the year. The issues are divided between federal, state, and local government. Background information is provided on each issue and a position is noted. In addition, you will find information on federal, state, and local government officials for easy reference.

We encourage you, as a Chamber member, to be active in legislative matters of interest to you and your business. We hope this brochure will assist you in this effort.

Sincerely,



St. Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce

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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Government Relations Division of the St. Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce works to foster good relations with the various levels of government and to represent the business community in addressing legislative issues. Several programs and events derive from this division:

St. Joe Rising

St. Joe Rising is designed to bring current legislative issues to the membership. Held quarterly, the morning meetings feature breakfast, followed by the program and a question/answer period.

Great Northwest Day at the Capitol

The Chamber participates and helps to coordinate Great Northwest Day at the Capitol. The event exists as a cooperative effort by Northwest Missouri communities to unify and enhance our region's image in Jefferson City and to pursue issues and legislation beneficial to the "Great Northwest."

Washington, D.C. Fly-In

A delegation of local business and community leaders annually visit the nation's capitol as part of the Washington, D.C. Fly-In. While in Washington, D.C., the delegation meets with members of Congress, U.S. senators, legislative staff and U.S. Chamber officials.

Public Service Candidate School

Held in the fall prior to a local election, Public Service Candidate School provides an opportunity for participants to be introduced to, and gain a working knowledge of, the local political process.

Legislative Updates

Receive ongoing updates of action being taken during the legislative session. The e-mailed updates focus on business issues and provide information on community issues of interest to St. Joseph.

For more information regarding the Chamber's Government Relations programs:

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FEDERAL ISSUES

Federal Funding

Background: A local partnership has been created that directs federal lobbying activities on behalf of the St. Joseph community. The effort focuses on bringing federal dollars to the community to support local projects.

Position: The Chamber endorses the federal legislative agenda and will continue to be involved in the community's federal lobbying activities.

Worker's right to a secret ballot

Background: Organized labor is proposing the "Employee Free Choice Act" (also known as "Card Check"), which would eliminate the use of secret balloting in employee elections authorizing the adoption of a labor union. This would result in union organizers being allowed to confront employees in the presence of fellow workers to ask for their signature on a voting card, without the use of a secret voting ballot in a private booth.

Position: The Chamber believes the use of secret ballots in all elections help to protect individuals' right to privacy and strongly opposes any effort to eliminate the use of secret balloting in the process of organizing a labor union in the workplace.

Funding for combined sewer project

Background: The 1972 Clean Water Act contains provisions that require cities with combined sewer systems to meet or exceed state water quality standards for all discharges from their combined sewer systems into the waters of the state or alternatively to reduce the frequency of those overflows to no more than four times per year. The City of St. Joseph prepared a Long Term Control Plan that estimates the cost of improvements at the treatment plant and collection/conveyance system to be \$450 million to reduce overflows to four times annually. The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) general goal is for a city to complete this work in 15-20 years, however, the City of St. Joseph cannot afford to do so in such a short time frame and still keep sewer user fees below an equivalent of 2 percent of median household income, an amount to avoid exceeding, according to EPA guidance documents.

Position: The Chamber supports the City of St. Joseph's pursuits for financial assistance to help defray the cost of the federally-mandated improvements for the combined sewer system changes.

Tax Reduction and Regulatory Reform

Background: Implementation of permanent tax cuts, the elimination of the death tax, repeal of the personal and corporate alternative minimum tax and general tax code reform to simplify compliance with Internal Revenue code are all issues which have major impacts on businesses.

Position: The Chamber supports tax reduction and regulatory reform as related to businesses of all sizes. It supports legislation that would simplify and improve fairness in the federal tax code.

Energy Diversification:

Background: "Cap and Trade" legislation, as currently proposed, would be unfair to states in the Midwest and Southern regions, which generate electricity from fossil fuels. The legislation would put a cap on the amount of carbon that can be emitted on a national basis. The cap goes down over time and businesses would buy or sell permits to release carbon dioxide. This would put these areas at a competitive disadvantage while states in other regions (that use more hydro-powered and nuclear energy) wouldn't feel the full impact of these new federal mandates.

Position: The Chamber supports legislation that would promote the development of alternative fuels and energy conservation without the adoption of punitive federal mandates as in the "Cap and Trade" legislation, which also has been re-branded in the Senate as "Pollution Reduction and Investment."

Health Care Reform

Background: Small businesses continue to be disadvantaged in accessing affordable health care insurance for employees. Restrictions on pooling coverage and premium costs, which are impacted by excessive medical liability and the continued growth of indigent care, discourages small businesses from providing medical coverage for themselves and employees.

Position: The Chamber supports legislation that would improve access to affordable health care insurance for small employers and individuals and reduce health care costs, without the formation of a new government-operated health insurance program or new mandates on small businesses.

Education

Background: The Chamber believes there is a direct correlation between public investment in education/workforce development, and the long-term vitality of the regional economy. Furthermore, it also believes the most efficient and effective methodology for addressing the educational requirements and issues of local employers should be through collaboration between the local school board, its administrative officers, the Chamber of Commerce and employers in the community.

“No Child Left Behind,” a relatively new federal policy, was adopted to require continual improvements in public education. Each state has some latitude in the process for evaluating progress at the local level, which may restrict the funding for local school districts. As in many other states, the evaluation processes imposed on local school districts in Missouri do not adequately recognize progress being made in public education and have caused many, including St. Joseph, to be unfairly penalized for performance measures that are beyond their control.

Position: The Chamber supports the effort to leverage the influence of state and local chambers and member companies in order to shape critical state and federal education and workforce policies, public debate, proven practices, and public-private partnerships in an effort to improve the quality and retention of skilled workers in the regional labor pool. Federal and state funding should be increased in all areas of public common education, higher education and technical training. The Chamber also opposes unfunded federal and state mandates imposed on local school districts, unfair performance standards and evaluation processes that restrict federal and state funding and any initiatives that diminish the oversight and governance role of local elected school boards.

The Chamber believes Missouri’s performance measures should be reconciled with those being used in other states. It also supports efforts to eliminate the unfunded federal mandates of “No Child Left Behind.”

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Vice President

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U.S. Senator

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STATE ISSUES

Transportation

Background : The state’s highway system is in need of expansion and improvement in order to serve the transportation needs of the state. Efforts to provide additional revenues for maintenance and new roads have had limited success. The lack of adequate funding impacts current projects, which hinders continued growth of the local economy.

Position: Efforts should continue by the Legislature to increase funding for the construction of new roads and improvements to existing roads. The Chamber supports the redevelopment of the Interstate 29/Highway 169 interchange, construction of the Alabama Street bridge overpass, improvements to the Riverside Road and U.S. Highway 36 interchange and the extension of Riverside Road north of Frederick Avenue.

Education and Workforce Development

Background: As the global economy increases the demand for an educated workforce, we must invest in strategies that improve the potential for educational attainment and retention of our students. Early childhood learning, student awareness of promising career opportunities, continued life-long learning and skill development, enhanced work ethics and improved attainment in science and math curriculum are all essential long-term strategies for meeting the workforce needs of the diverse base of employers in the St. Joseph area.

The Chamber believes there is a direct correlation between public investment in education and the long-term vitality of the regional economy. Furthermore, it also believes the most efficient and effective methodology for addressing the educational requirements and issues of local employers should be the primary responsibility and authority of the local elected school board.

Position: The Chamber supports workforce development efforts and increased public investment to partner the State of Missouri with local educational institutions and other potential support groups to implement a wide range of programs that will improve the quality and retention of skilled workers in the regional labor pool. State funding should be increased in all areas of public common education, higher education, and technical training. The Chamber supports efforts to improve quality and access to early childhood education, a quality rating system for childcare providers and increasing the income guidelines for childcare subsidies. The Chamber also opposes unfunded federal and state mandates imposed on local school districts, unfair performance standards and evaluation processes that restrict federal and state funding, and any initiatives that diminish the oversight and governance role of local elected school boards.

Economic Development

Background: Enhancing the economic vitality of the community is the highest priority of the Chamber. Local communities in Missouri are at a competitive disadvantage compared to other areas of the country in retaining existing jobs and attracting new employers and investment. In addition, the state has not adequately funded training grants to business. This has had a negative impact on existing employers with training needs and has diminished the ability to offer training incentives to potential new employers.

Position: The Chamber urges the Missouri legislature to adopt meaningful legislation that would provide for competitive economic development incentives to support local communities in their efforts to retain jobs and investment. Further, the Chamber supports additional funding of state training grant programs to support economic development efforts and the removal of authorization limits for accessing the state’s “Quality Jobs Program.” Lastly, the Chamber supports the prudent use of economic development tools, including Tax Increment Financing (TIF), and we support continued participation and input from all affected taxing authorities in decisions regarding tax abatement and reallocation of funds.

“Stacking Taxes”

Background: Senate Bill 711 was signed into law during the 2008 legislative session. Language contained within its pages alters the definition of a taxing jurisdiction’s tax rate ceiling. It would compel the City of St. Joseph to roll back its General Fund tax levy six cents, causing a reduction of annual property tax revenue in its General Fund by \$600,000. About 80 taxing jurisdictions across the state have a “stacked sales tax,” meaning these cities have exceeded a single statutory increment for General and/or Capital Improvement Project (CIP) – type sales taxes. The Missouri Department of Revenue has consistently ruled, orally and in writing, that “stacking” these specific types of sales taxes is permissible, essentially treating them as legislative increments, not legislative caps. According to City of St. Joseph, this would result in an immediate annual revenue loss to the General Fund of over \$5,000,000 and cause it to refund sales taxes totaling \$33,245,000 collected since the “extra” tax was approved by voter in 2001.

Position: The Chamber supports re-establishing essential revenue for municipal services by securing statutory relief on the state’s limitation of “stacking” of city sales taxes and rollback provisions contained in SB 711 regarding property taxes.

Agricultural/Life Sciences Funding

Background: Agriculture, Agribusiness, Animal Health and Nutrition and related Life Sciences are major economic drivers in our local economy and offers the best opportunity for growth of high-tech jobs in the state. State policies should encourage growth in these important industries.

Position: : The Chamber supports the branding of St. Joseph as the home of the Animal Health Corridor and supports expanding all markets to our animal health and nutrition products. The Chamber also supports efforts to expand our agricultural, agribusiness and biotechnology markets in a global economy.

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LOCAL ISSUES

Funding for St. Joseph School District

Background: The St. Joseph School District's newest elementary school was built in 1972. Others are much older and most are in areas of the city other than the growing east side. While the teachers and administrators do their best to operate in these older facilities, St. Joseph could benefit with newer buildings in which to teach our children. These facilities would improve St. Joseph's image and could factor into new businesses or new business recruits deciding to move to our city.

Position: The Chamber supports the passage of a new bond levy to fund the construction of new grade schools in the St. Joseph School District.

Missouri River Navigation

Background: The Missouri River has been used for transportation of commerce for hundreds of years. Over the last decade there have been efforts by northern states to restrict water release from upstream dams, resulting in commercial navigation being somewhat unpredictable and thus, an unreliable mode of transportation. This has meant communities on the river, like St. Joseph, have had to restrict use of their ports, which has diminished economic development efforts.

Position: The Chamber supports efforts to secure adequate funding to strengthen the Missouri River levees through the St. Joseph metropolitan area.

Redevelopment Initiatives

Background: Over the last several years, three redevelopment initiatives have been undertaken in St. Joseph. This includes redevelopment of the Downtown, riverfront and stockyards areas. These redevelopment activities will be an important element of the community's future economic growth and vitality.

Position: The Chamber supports these important redevelopment initiatives by the city. Consideration should be given to development incentives, financing mechanisms and public investment as a way to stimulate private development in these redevelopment areas. The Chamber also will continue to support continued progress is the continued development of the Riverside corridor, Eastowne Business Park and other vital areas of commerce and industry.

Economic Development Incentives

Background: The Chamber works in partnership with the City and County to attract new investment and create new jobs in the area. The ability to provide local incentives is critical to this effort.

Position: The Chamber realizes the need to build the community's tax base. To facilitate this, the Chamber encourages the responsible use of incentives by the City and County to support business attraction and retention efforts.

Community Enhancement and Safety

Background: The appearance and safety of a community is important to economic development efforts. As businesses consider the community, they are interested in how the community looks from a "quality of life" point of view and the safety of its residents. St. Joseph has for many years struggled with issues associated with the condition of buildings and housing, as well as the cleanliness of the community.

Position: The Chamber continues to support the city's cleanup initiative and supports efforts to improve local funding for public safety.

Infrastructure Funding

Background: Over the past decade, there has been much accomplished in the community through the city's Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Even with this progress, there is still much more to be done to support growth of the community. More financial resources will be required in the future, if the city is to make real progress in terms of growth and quality of life.

Position: The Chamber supports efforts to establish an ongoing General Obligation Bonds program funded through property taxes to address the community's aging infrastructure needs, including upgrading the city's sewer system to federal EPA standards.

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Mayor & Council (2010-2014)

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U.S. President _____	www.whitehouse.gov
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U.S House _____	www.house.gov
Missouri Government _____	www.mo.gov
Missouri Senate _____	www.senate.mo.gov
Missouri House _____	www.house.mo.gov
Buchanan County _____	www.co.buchanan.mo.us
City of St. Joseph _____	www.ci.st-joseph.mo.us
St. Joseph School District _____	www.sjsd.k12.mo.us
Chamber of Commerce _____	www.saintjoseph.com