

# 2010 LEGISLATIVE ACTION AGENDA

The Gwinnett Chamber's 2010 Legislative Agenda represents our commitment to creating an improved business climate and quality of life for Gwinnett County and Georgia's Innovation Crescent region that connects Hartsfield-Jackson Airport to Athens.

This agenda was created for one reason...high-wage jobs. And in today's economic crisis, that goal is more important than ever before.

Our agenda addresses the key concerns of our 7,200 members as well as the feedback we received from more than 2,500 residents, business and community leaders during the research phase of Partnership Gwinnett, the community's public-private economic and community development strategy, led by the Chamber, to generate high-wage job growth in Gwinnett, Metro Atlanta, and Georgia's Innovation Crescent regions. Together, the Chamber's membership organizations represent more than 70 percent of Gwinnett's workforce.

Key volunteers from the Chamber's Public Policy Committee and Partnership Gwinnett's Steering Committee also offered specific expertise and perspectives in order to thoroughly evaluate these issues and their potential impact on businesses and the community. The Chamber's Board of Directors adopted the agenda in late 2010 empowering staff and volunteer leadership to communicate these positions to key policymakers at the local, state and federal levels.

The Gwinnett Chamber strongly believes the positions taken here will provide us with the tools needed to create quality jobs and improve the quality of life and standard of living for citizens in Gwinnett and the metro Atlanta region.

Your support on these issues is critical to our success.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

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The future success of our region's economy is not a given. We must constantly invest in infrastructure improvements designed to ensure that our region can continue to meet the demands of sustaining economic success. In order to encourage future investments in our region, the state needs to invest in infrastructure projects, such as transportation and water/sewer.

## TRANSPORTATION

**Support significant new funding sources for all modes of mobility in the metro Atlanta region and the state of Georgia.** The Governor's IT3 Report by the McKinsey Group clearly identified the transportation funding gap in Georgia, estimating it at \$49 billion to \$162 billion over the next 20 years. The benefits of closing the funding gap also clearly outweigh the costs. By McKinsey's calculations, Georgia could reap an additional 320,000 jobs and \$515 billion in economic benefits over the next 30 years if the funding gap is fully closed. Past Chamber Strategic Leadership Visits to TX, NC, and CO reinforce these findings with funding models that can be implemented here. New transportation funding is our number one legislative priority. Specific recommendations include:

- **Allow for a voter approved regional or statewide sales tax for the Metro Atlanta region that contains the same opportunities for all of Georgia's cities and counties that meets the following criteria:**
  - Must generate enough funding to construct major regional projects and reduce congestion in Gwinnett and the region
  - Be open to all modes of transportation
  - Require clearly defined projects selected by local elected officials through the MPO process

- Include strong fiscal accountability measures with measurable benchmarks toward progress to guarantee projects promised are started or completed by tax sunset
- Remove impediments to project implementation by creating an independent oversight committee tasked to oversee the tax expenditure and implementation of projects
- Project implementation conducted through an existing Georgia department, authority, or other public entity authorized by general law to engage in activities relating to transportation projects and purposes
- **Support converting the state's motor fuel excise tax, last adjusted in 1971 to 7.5 cents per gallon, to a revenue-neutral sales and use tax.** Such a conversion would help stabilize the state's transportation program over time, providing needed capital for critical safety repairs and key statewide corridors.
- **Support allowing MARTA the flexibility to access capital reserves to maintain service during this severe economic downturn.** No other comparable system in the country has such onerous restrictions in addition to receiving no state budgetary support.

## WATER

**Support the work of the Governor's Water Contingency Task Force to guarantee long-term availability of water resources in our region.** While our state's leaders have been rightly focused on addressing Georgia's long-term water needs, a federal judge's ruling has created the need for more immediate action. U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson ruled that in July 2012, absent congressional or other action, Lake Lanier will no longer be a viable source of water for the 3.5 million Georgians who depend on it today. Should this ruling go into effect, we will be faced with a tremendous water shortage that could jeopardize the future of Gwinnett, Metro Atlanta, and Georgia. To avoid this, we support the following actions:

- **Fully fund the statewide water plan passed in 2008**
- **Restore funds in water planning grants originally passed in the 2008 budget to expedite reservoir development and other water management tools**
- **Appropriate \$250,000 in state matching funds for the North Metro Water Planning District**
- **Oppose further restrictions or bans on inter-basin water transfers because most counties in the metro region are located in two or more river basins**

## EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In order to ensure a qualified workforce for our region, Georgia must continue to make the necessary investments in our educational infrastructure. Gwinnett enjoys world-class public schools, technical colleges and a four-year college that are all contributing to the region's and the State's job creation and economic competitiveness. No one argues that the State needs to make difficult budget cuts during today's economic climate, however, we urge legislators not to cut investments in k-12 public schools, our technical colleges and university system at a time when their work is more critical than ever to the State's prosperity and global competitiveness. In many cases, more investments need to be made where growth is occurring. A properly funded and successful education system that offers everything from pre-K to PhDs like we now have in Gwinnett is a key economic driver for our long-term future.

### K -12 EDUCATION

- **Uphold the constitutional authority of the elected boards of education of Gwinnett County Public Schools and Buford City Schools to maintain local control of public education, including but not limited to the areas of local revenue sources, curriculum, discipline, and calendar issues.** Specifically, local boards of education should not be restricted by, nor mandated to comply with, legislation that provides a commission or any other entity authority over school district operations and funding.

- **Protect existing state and local revenue sources for Gwinnett County Public Schools by opposing any proposed legislation that would further erode the school district's funding.** Since fiscal year 2002, austerity cuts have resulted in a loss of \$256.9 million in state revenue for Gwinnett County Public Schools.
- **Continue to support the school district flexibility afforded, in exchange for greater accountability for student achievement, through the IE2 (Investing in Educational Excellence) partnership contracts between local systems and the state Board of Education.**

## HIGHER EDUCATION

- **Oppose any cuts to Georgia Quick Start,** the state's customized workforce training offered free-of-charge to qualified businesses in Georgia and heralded as the nation's best. Without fully funding Quick Start, Gwinnett will lose hundreds of potential jobs currently being worked by our economic development team.
- **Fully support the FY 2011 budget request from the Technical College System of Georgia, including maintaining funding for enrollment growth and equipment.** Gwinnett Technical College's fall enrollment increased 25 percent over the same period last year (current enrollment exceeds 6,300 in the college's credit program for fall 2009), marking the eleventh consecutive quarter of double-digit enrollment growth. During the 2008-09 academic year, the college served 22, 638 students in its three main educational delivery areas and was number one in the state in number of academic awards with a job placement rate of 98%. By FY12, the college enrollment is projected to exceed 25,000, with over 10,000 credit students alone.
- **Fully support the FY 2011 budget request from the University System of Georgia, including any special initiative funding dedicated specifically for Georgia Gwinnett College.** It's often said that great communities need great universities and colleges, but it's also true that great universities and colleges need great communities. This is the mutually beneficial relationship that is being forged in Gwinnett, the Atlanta region and our many colleges and universities.

## SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Building a stronger Gwinnett will depend on growing job opportunities and earnings for residents at various skill-levels. Georgia should focus on legislation that will help generate and sustain local jobs in Gwinnett's target business sectors (Advanced Communications, Information Technology, Health Care, Distribution and Trade, Regional and Corporate Headquarters) by addressing the three legs of the best-practice "stool" of economic development: recruitment; existing business retention and expansion; and entrepreneurial and small business development.

### SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURIAL GROWTH

- **Support the appropriate investments for start-up costs for a Gwinnett-based Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC) in partnership with Georgia Tech** to fuel high-tech start-ups and companies in Gwinnett. The Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC) is a nationally recognized science and technology incubator that helps Georgia entrepreneurs launch and build successful companies. A Gwinnett-based ATDC will provide strategic business advice and connects its member companies to the people and resources here in Gwinnett that they need to succeed.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- **Support appropriate investments in Georgia's economic development incentives and financial assistance programs** to ensure our competitiveness with other states and nations. A recent state commissioned study showed that the incentives Georgia uses to attract business often aren't competitive with other states, especially those in the Southeast. In recent years, Gwinnett County has helped to attract thousands of high-wage jobs through projects like Hewlett Packard, Suniva and NCR thanks to our local economic development incentives. This can be replicated at the state level. Specific actions would include:
  - Enable Georgia to close the deal on highly competitive projects, where appropriations for the REBA and Quick Start programs should be maintained and when possible increased.
  - Ensure that local Development Authorities and governments have the tools necessary to recruit companies and close deals.
  - Advocate for other public policies that remove barriers to growth for our targeted industries that produce quality jobs.
  - Enact targeted tax incentives to stimulate the recruitment of key companies to Georgia and grow local businesses.

## **QUALITY OF LIFE**

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Both firms and workers are increasingly placing a high priority on quality of life factors in their location decision making processes. To compete for quality jobs in the 21st century, we must make the necessary investments to keep our quality of life among the best in the world.

## **HEALTHCARE**

- **Support establishing an adequately funded statewide trauma care network.** It will help ensure that we and our families can get life-saving trauma care when and where we need it. While Gwinnett has benefited greatly from Gwinnett Medical Center's level II trauma center, a state-wide trauma network is needed in Georgia. Trauma is the number one killer of Americans between the ages of one and 44, and the number three cause of death across all age groups. In Georgia, the trauma death rate is significantly higher than the national average. If Georgia simply achieved the national average, 712 lives would be saved each year.