



The Virginia Chamber of Commerce is the only association that speaks for the entire Virginia business community. While much of our efforts are focused at the state level, the Chamber has expanded its reach in recent years to represent Virginia business at both the state and federal levels, given the challenges that the business community currently faces from Washington.

Our membership ranges from Fortune 500 firms to small, family-owned businesses. Most of Virginia's local and regional chambers of commerce and many industry-specific trade associations also are members of the Virginia Chamber. They all share a common understanding that protecting and improving Virginia's business climate is the key to our future prosperity.

Our combined and continued efforts have not gone unnoticed. Virginia has been recognized in recent years by several prominent sources as a good place to live and work. ***Forbes.com*, for example, has ranked Virginia the "Best State for Business" - four years running.**

These rankings do not occur by accident. They are the result of many people making the right choices. With your support and advice, we can ensure that Virginia remains the best state for business and a great place to live and work.

Recent Accomplishments

TRANSPORTATION – In recent years, the Chamber has spent considerable time urging the General Assembly to enact comprehensive legislation that addresses our critical transportation needs statewide and brings relief to the congestion-plagued Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads regions.

The Chamber has worked to bring together members of the business community to urge the General Assembly and the Governor to address the problem - now. It's a work in progress that will continue into the 2011 General Assembly and beyond.

The Chamber continues to stress that the ongoing upgrading of a world-class, multi-modal transportation system in Virginia is a top priority for the business community, and the Chamber will continue to speak out strongly in support of efforts to that end.

WORKPLACE LAWS – The Chamber has repeatedly blocked big labor's efforts to extend collective bargaining rights to state and local government employees and has on many occasions blocked or rewritten workplace laws that would have a negative impact on business. For example, the Chamber and other allied employer groups have twice blocked efforts, one as recently as 2010, to pass laws prohibiting employers from adopting workplace policies against employees leaving guns in their vehicles while at work. This failed effort has taken hold in other states, despite the objections of business. **The Virginia Chamber is often the only business organization taking the lead on state workplace issues.**

With a new Congress in place, and again working with our allies, we have turned our attention in recent months to stopping the “card check” bill dead in its tracks.

HEALTH CARE – The Chamber has played a major role in recent years in defeating state proposals to remove cost-cutting incentives for doctors to participate in health care plan networks. The Chamber also has repeatedly, and successfully, opposed state health insurance mandates that drive up costs, and in 2009 we helped broker a new health insurance product for small business owners that is devoid of most of the state mandates. **The Chamber – despite recent federal action - continues to believe that improvements in access, quality, and affordability are best achieved through targeted, market-based reforms that rely principally on the disciplines of the marketplace rather than on government regulation.**

CIVIL JUSTICE – The Chamber has worked diligently to maintain Virginia’s status of having one of the best legal environments in the nation for business and actively seeks opportunities to improve that status.

During the 2010 General Assembly, for example, the Chamber introduced legislation that would have improved Virginia’s tort system with regard to “offers of judgment” and “summary judgment”. While the legislation was not approved, it was sent to the state’s Small Business Commission for closer study and perhaps a recommendation for passage in 2011.

Also during the 2010 session, the Chamber worked with business community allies to defeat efforts that would have greatly increased the legal exposure for Virginia businesses.

Going forward, the Chamber will continue to pursue policies that maintain our favorable legal environment and strengthen our reputation as the best place in the nation to do business.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – The Chamber spearheaded successful efforts in 2006 to better coordinate and manage Virginia’s diverse and fragmented workforce development and training resources. Legislation championed by the Chamber establishes the Governor as the chief workforce development officer in the Commonwealth and empowers him to appoint a senior advisor to coordinate efforts statewide and report directly to him. In 2008, the Chamber enthusiastically endorsed the actions of the Governor to vest responsibility and accountability for workforce development in the Virginia Community College System. The Chamber will pay close attention to the performance of the System as it carries out this critical responsibility. **In recent years, the quality of the labor force has become the primary determinant of employer satisfaction; consequently, the Chamber will continue to emphasize the critical nature of Virginia’s response to this demand.**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - The Chamber was “in the van” in 2009 in support of critical legislation to improve the marketing capability and fiscal incentives available to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. The ability to sell Virginia in a highly competitive marketplace while taking full advantage of Virginia’s ranking as the #1 state in the nation for business is paramount. Of particular importance was the Chamber’s aggressiveness in support of legislation enabling the Commonwealth to compile and control large prospective industrial sites, as well as the fiscal incentives required, to compete for so-called “mega projects”. **Controlling physical infrastructure is essential in winning these major job-producing projects. Rural and distressed areas of Virginia stand to benefit enormously from this legislation.**

TOURISM FUNDING – The Chamber served as the chief catalyst to obtaining \$2.5 million in additional marketing funds for the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) during the 2009 Session. In December of 2008, our Economic Leadership Conference, “*Moving Virginia Tourism Forward*”, was attended by legislators and senior money committee staff who clearly were struck by the message that Virginia was losing its edge in tourism marketing nationally. That awareness led to a significant increase in funding in the ’09-’10 budget approved in that session. The Chamber has also been fully and vocally supportive of Governor McDonnell’s special emphasis on tourism funding that resulted in an additional \$3.6 million being appropriated for VTC in each year of the 2010-12 biennium. **We will maintain our vigilance in preserving the Commonwealth’s competitive posture in this vital component of Virginia’s economy.**

IMMIGRATION REFORM – Since 2007, the Chamber has worked with allied employer groups to either rewrite or block state bills aimed squarely at punishing employers who inadvertently hire illegal workers. **We continue to believe that immigration reform remains a pressing federal issue requiring a comprehensive federal response and consistent enforcement.**

TAX ADMINISTRATION – In 2009, the Chamber won a case before the Virginia Supreme Court that makes clear when a local government can charge and collect BPOL taxes attributable to a company’s work performed in another locality. The ruling resulted in a sizeable refund for the affected Chamber business and put an end to illegal taxation going forward for all other businesses. The Chamber is presently engaged in yet another but slightly different BPOL issue before the same Court. **The Chamber is often the only business group working on these issues.**

BUSINESS TAXES – In 2008, and again in 2009, the Chamber led an impressive and successful business effort to defeat a constitutional amendment that would have likely cost Virginia businesses \$1 billion a year. The wildly popular but misguided “homestead exemption” was defeated twice in 2008, the second time by only two votes! In 2009, the same measure failed to muster even one vote in a House subcommittee; its Senate companion bill was withdrawn.

In 2010, the Chamber, working again with its allies, was successful in restoring much of a \$30 million a year business tax break that was pegged for elimination by outgoing Governor Tim Kaine. For the balance of 2010, the Chamber will turn its attention to several studies looking at Virginia’s corporate income and other business taxes. **The Chamber will continue to be vigilant to assure businesses assume only their fair share of the state tax burden.**

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE - The Chamber has defeated or diverted – repeatedly - bills that would have substantially increased unemployment taxes on all Virginia employers. In 2009 and again in 2010, for example, a Chamber-led business coalition short-circuited efforts to expand benefits to new classes of claimants, saving employers millions of dollars. **The Virginia Chamber is the only statewide business organization that staffs a task force devoted solely to understanding and responding to unemployment compensation insurance issues. Its work has created one of the best insurance programs in the country.**

WORKERS' COMPENSATION - The Chamber houses and runs the only statewide business coalition on workers' compensation and has done so since 1993. Through its efforts, unfavorable bills have never seen the light of day, while improvements to the law are made each year. The coalition has also been successful in placing judges on the Commission who understand their role in administering the law in a fair and consistent manner.

ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION & ENERGY POLICY – In 2006, the Chamber contracted with an outside advocacy firm to provide enhanced representation in the environmental regulation and energy policy arena. **That representation continues to raise the Chamber's profile to that of a key advocate in environmental and energy issues whose opinion is sought by policy makers.**

Activity in these areas is intensifying daily. In 2009, for example, the Chamber was successful in improving a burdensome "stormwater" regulation aimed squarely at business and industry, and then brokering a legislative deal in 2010 delaying the entire regulatory package. As proposed, this regulation would have brought development projects to a halt, and would have prevented future projects from being started.

Our goal is to ensure that policy makers and elected officials understand the risks to future prosperity and employment, take into account the concerns of the business community, and implement affordable, commonsense solutions.

VIRGINIA CHAMBER POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (VCPAC) – The Virginia Chamber formed its PAC in 2003. Funds are used to supplement the Chamber's lobbying efforts by allowing the Chamber to support pro-business legislators. Contributions – both personal and business - are invited and always welcomed!

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