



Advocacy Priority:

Education & Workforce Training

Background:

Washington is confronted with a skills gap that threatens its economic future, limits job opportunities for residents, and prohibits employers from finding job candidates with the skills necessary to meet their needs. While roughly two-thirds of future family-wage jobs in our state will require post-secondary education and training, only 74% of our students graduate from high school each year, leaving a significant number of teens and young adults inadequately prepared for these future jobs.

School districts still face too many barriers as they struggle to address student achievement; student, teacher and principal performance; and talent acquisition. Schools must be given greater flexibility to implement designs that more fully empower principals, lead to overall higher levels of achievement and improve student graduation rates. More attention must be placed on skills gaps at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, and more emphasis needs to be placed on skills certifications as a means to close identified gaps.

By 2019, two-thirds of job openings in Washington will require at least one year of college education, many in skilled trade positions supported by community and technical colleges. Additionally, four of ten baccalaureate graduates start at the community college.

Washington State University Tri-Cities is the only four-year institution serving the south-central region of the state. WSU Tri-Cities is operating on a state appropriation equal to what it was in 1989-91 in actual dollars, not adjusted for inflation. A 52% reduction in that appropriation since FY 2009 has resulted in numerous faculty and staff positions left unfilled and the reduction or elimination of various services to students. Simultaneously, enrollments have increased and the campus currently enrolls 212 FTE students (24.5%) above its enrollment target. Five years of continual budget reductions backfilled only partially by tuition increases totaling more than 75% will result in decreased offerings of programs and services and fewer students able to afford to pursue a degree, significantly reducing the ability to meet industry demand for graduates.

Recommendations:

- Support Columbia Basin College (CBC) and the Community and Technical Colleges (CTC) system by advocating for:
 - Additional funded enrollments that will enable more Washingtonians to get good jobs, move ahead, and build the skilled workforce our state needs to compete in the new economy;

- Full funding for the CTC capital projects so CBC can construct its planned Social Sciences and World Languages Center
 - No further cuts to higher education, which has become the key to opening the door to the middle-class; and
 - Maximum flexibility to manage budgets to benefit residents of Benton and Franklin counties.
- Advocate for support of enrollment growth at WSU branch campuses as quickly as funding allows, with the goal of reaching the capacity the Legislature originally planned for WSU Tri-Cities, emphasizing freshman and transfer admissions and increasing enrollments in graduate programs.
 - Continued support WSU's Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine and the regional hub that will be established in the Tri-Cities for medical education
 - Support full funding of the new Tri-Cities Academic Building at WSU Tri-Cities, which will provide adequate classroom and laboratory space for future growth
- Continued support of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and Career Technical Education (CTE). Delta High School is a bold collaborative initiative among Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland School Districts; Battelle; WSU Tri-Cities; Columbia Basin College; and the Washington State STEM Education Foundation. Delta is a 21st-century visionary school for its teachers and students, preparing graduates for careers and college, while serving as a cornerstone for future economic development and growth.
- Promote state policies that encourage more innovative learning models and improve student achievement
 - Support giving school principals greater authority to assemble staffs to meet the needs of students
 - Oppose legislation to delay, weaken or remove teacher and principal evaluation standards
- Enact performance-based management policies
 - Require the use of teacher and principal evaluation information in hiring, retention, promotion, professional development, and compensation decisions
- Support efforts of the higher education system to better meet the needs of employers statewide
 - Support flexibility for institutions to manage efficiently and effectively to ensure program quality and alignment with employer needs, and evaluate targeted programs to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Investment in clinical and allied health programs throughout the state to ensure that communities can "grow their own" clinical and allied health professionals, especially in underserved areas, such as Eastern Washington.



Advocacy Priority:

Energy & Carbon Emissions

Background:

Washington's economy is built on access to abundant, reliable and affordable electricity. Although the state relies primarily on inexpensive, zero greenhouse gas emitting hydropower; it also has significant biomass and wind resources that are potential sources of renewable energy. Despite Washington's unique ability to use its sustainable managed feed stocks for renewable energy purposes, our competitive energy advantage has seriously eroded over the last decade. This erosion began with the 2000-01 energy crisis and persists today as utilities are raising rates to comply with both federal and state mandates.

In 2006, voters narrowly approved Initiative 937, or Washington's Energy Independence Act (EIA), which requires qualifying utilities to obtain 15 percent of their energy supply from prescriptively defined "eligible renewable resources" by 2020 and also obtain "all cost-effective energy conservation," without fully recognizing that nearly 80 percent of electricity generated in this state comes from renewable and alternative energy resources, such as hydropower, biomass and nuclear energy.

Washington's energy policies increase the cost of energy and fail to maximize the use of our state's abundant, renewable resources. Increased energy costs are passed on to the end users – Washington's families and businesses. Also, the mandates within the EIA are more restrictive than the laws of neighboring states and place Washington at a competitive disadvantage in the region.

In addition, as Washington moves forward to meet goals of reducing carbon emissions, it must also consider the economic impact carbon regulations have on employers, particularly small businesses. The state is already ranked as one of the best states in the union for renewable energy generation and cleanest economies. Protecting the environment should be a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors and accomplished through policies that do not harm the economies of the Tri-Cities and Washington State.

Recommendations:

- Support the efforts by the Citizens for "Protecting Our Washington's Energy Rates" (P.O.W.E.R.) to change the wording of the Energy Independence Act to protect utility companies from purchasing power they don't need to serve their customers, thus

avoiding unnecessary rate increases. This alignment would benefit customers, utilities, and renewable energy developers in three distinct ways:

- Customers would not need to spend money on energy or credits they do not need
 - Utilities would be incented to implement conservation to delay or reduce load growth
 - "Boom-bust" cycles within the renewables market would be avoided by better matching the development of new renewable energy resources with customer needs.
- Expand the EIA to include acquisition of renewables to the boundaries of the Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC), as well as provide greater renewable energy credit (REC) banking flexibility, without a corresponding increase in the Renewable Portfolio Standards.
 - Support legislation that recognizes hydropower as an eligible renewable resource that is used to integrate other renewable resources into the transmission system. The chamber also supports legislation that recognizes incremental hydro generation development from all Pacific Northwest facilities, including federal hydropower and existing and/or new hydropower generation facilities less than 30 megawatts as an eligible renewable resource.
 - Promote and support policies that encourage private-sector investments in carbon reducing technologies and incentivize investments in energy efficiency projects and the utilization of cleaner fuels.
 - Support legislation and policies that provide opportunities for developing energy parks that include generation and storage of electricity and other carbon neutral forms of energy such as nuclear, wind and solar power, as well as bio-fuels and the development of smart grid applications at existing nuclear project sites in Washington.
 - Emphasize and incentivize conservation - it's the lowest cost resource and most effective for the environment.



Advocacy Priority:

Tax & Fiscal Policy

Background:

The Washington Supreme Court's *McCleary* decision to require ample funding of education still looms over the legislature and pressure for pension funding, maintaining a safety net and increasing our state competitiveness, are also important issues that remain. All of these demands are placed on an antiquated tax collection system that is out of date, not supported by new technology and is expensive to operate. The risk of system failure is very real for taxpayers and improvements are needed. Moving to modern technology will increase efficiencies and available features for Washingtonians.

Over the last decade, major changes to and interpretations of tax laws have been made that have resulted in a lack of certainty, consistency and equitable treatment of taxpayers. All Washingtonians deserve fair treatment regardless of the pressures placed on our economy and our tax collection system.

Recommendations:

- Amend the state constitution to include a supermajority vote requirement for increasing taxes.
- Balance the state budget while promoting and protecting economic development opportunities and Washington's competitiveness rankings.
- Fund the next phase of the Legacy System update and ensure protection of taxpayer information maintained by state government. The system should allow for cities with license requirements and B&O tax to participate in the master business license service provided by the Department of Revenue.
- Ensure Washington taxpayers are treated fairly and reform the appeals system/processes at the Department of Revenue and the Board of Tax Appeals. This should include requiring the Department of Revenue to publish all decisions and change the unreasonably high "burden of proof" placed on Washingtonians that challenge property valuations to the more widely used standard of the "preponderance of evidence."

- Update, clarify or affirm tax laws to provide technical clarity and ensure that legislative intent is met. Clarify that online searchable databases are an exempt business input and not a digital automated service.
- Reduce regulatory red tape and paperwork burden facing employers. This should include reducing the number of times that a sales tax rate is changed in a year, consolidating the annual survey and report, and removing the penalty.
- Support reauthorization of Local Revitalization Financing (LRF). Reauthorization of LRF, along with modifications towards tax increment financing (TIF), will help promote economic development efforts in municipalities in the Tri-Cities Region and other communities across Washington.



Advocacy Priorities:

Water Resources

Background:

Access to water is critical to the economic vitality of Washington, especially Eastern Washington communities such as the Tri-Cities. For decades, Eastern Washington has experienced rapid population growth in the Columbia and Yakima River Basins. This growth, combined with recent impacts of drought and climate science, has made water policy a critical issue for the economic survival of the region and entire state. The Tri-City Regional Chamber of Commerce supports water policies that will help address these needs, increase water storage and protect our existing dams to ensure our community and state have reliable access to water that can address future needs.

Recommendations:

- Support legislation that recognizes water rights as equal to all other property rights in Washington State.
- Allow mainstem Columbia-Snake River water right holders to retain annual operations and maintenance conservation savings for new seasonal use.
- Re-address the water right “relinquishment” provisions under the current water code (RCW 90.14) by changing the definition of “beneficial use” to reflect the peak-year use of a water right during the past 15-20 year history of a water right.
- Support continuing solutions for utilizing Columbia River water to relieve the Odessa sub-area aquifers.
- Create achievable water quality standards. Overly aggressive and arbitrary rules hurt prospective business and create huge regulatory barriers for companies currently operating that already are meeting and/or exceeding environmental regulation standards for responsible corporate stewardship.
- Washington’s WAC173-531a provides a framework for establishment and protection of water rights in the mid-Columbia region. The current version of the act sunsets in 2020,

and there is an opportunity now to update and extend the act to better serve in the future

- Oppose any efforts to remove existing dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers.
 - The Columbia-Snake River dams play a vital role in flood control, irrigation, navigation, power generation and recreation in Eastern Washington
 - The four lower Snake River Dams alone generate 1,000 average megawatts of carbon-free electricity, enough to power 800,000 homes
 - According to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), survival rates for yearling Chinook salmon for each of the four Snake River Dams are all above 96%.

Support a Columbia River water resources management policy that:

- Implements fully the *Voluntary Regional Agreement* between the Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association (CSRIA) and the Washington State Department of Ecology.
- Supports a new Columbia River water right for the Kennewick Irrigation District, allowing for diversion point changes from the Yakima River.
- Supports the State's Water Conservancy Boards to authorize water right changes and transfers in their State designated areas.
- Support public and private sector investment for water conservation measures and the use of private sector capital for access to the Lake Kachess dead storage, for new irrigation supply, for the Yakima Basin.
- Supports actions for by the Office of Columbia River-Ecology for permitting new municipal & industrial water rights; and allowing for new irrigation rights.