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2017 Regional Legislative Agenda

State Priorities

EDUCATED AND HEALTHY WORKFORCE

- **Address the Teacher Shortage**
  - Improve the ability of Oklahoma's Pre-K-12 public schools to attract and retain effective career teachers through policies designed to increase the state's pool of qualified teachers and improve teachers' job satisfaction. This should include ensuring competitive teacher pay; incentivizing education for aspiring teachers; eliminating barriers for alternative certification, special education and returning retired teachers; ensuring low student-teacher ratios; and supporting professional development. Oklahoma's ability to fill its growing teacher shortage with quality, effective teachers is crucial to the college and career success of its students and the sustainability of its workforce.

- **Behavioral Health Services**
  - Expand behavioral health and substance abuse services that improve workforce efficiency, boost public safety, create efficiencies in state spending and help additional Oklahomans suffering from behavioral health issues. This should include increasing funding for the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; expanding mental health and drug courts to decrease unnecessary incarcerations; preparing judicial districts to enact the Labor Commissioner Mark Costello Act, with adequate funding for new assisted outpatient treatment; and expanding the use of assisted outpatient treatment by broadening the definition of who can petition courts to seek an order for outpatient treatment.

- **Expand Insure Oklahoma**
  - Expand Insure Oklahoma and pass the Medicaid Rebalancing Act to reduce the number of uninsured Oklahomans by accepting federal funds. This will improve the health of Oklahoma's workforce, strengthen behavioral health services and create sustainable jobs in rural and urban areas — all of which are paramount to an economically viable Oklahoma.

- **Healthcare Workforce Expansion**
  - Address current and future healthcare workforce needs in urban and rural Oklahoma through the following means: 1) Use all available state and federal resources to support and expand Teaching Health Center related programs, including by expanding the Oklahoma Hospital Residency Training Act to include community-based training; 2) Support the Physician Manpower Training Commission, which is uniquely situated to serve as a valuable resource on provider workforce issues; 3) Support reforms that will allow Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants with appropriate levels of training and experience to practice to the full extent of their license without the physical presence of a supervising physician; and 4) Support efforts to expand the availability, funding and utilization of telehealth services in a manner that enhances locally-provided healthcare services.

- **Oppose School Vouchers**
  - Oppose school vouchers and any programs directing public funds to private schools, including Education Savings Accounts and private school tax credits. Taxpayer money should instead be spent on improving public schools, where those funds can be used more effectively to improve academic outcomes for more students and maintain the strength of local school districts.

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- **Restore Education Funding**
  - Safeguard current funding for Oklahoma's education institutions and resolve to restore funding levels to their pre-Recession highs relative to enrollment. Long-term trends of reduced funding for Pre-K-12, higher education and CareerTech have curtailed the ability of Oklahoma's education systems to produce an educated workforce, making the state less competitive for new and expanding businesses and damaging its reputation around the world as a quality place to live, work and build a business. Oklahoma must make up ground to ensure an economically vibrant state.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE CRITICAL TO BUSINESS

- **Defend Existing Road Funding and Dedicate Motor Vehicle Fees**
  - Defend all existing road funding; prevent any diversion of monies; and support increased funding for transportation by developing an adequate, comprehensive funding strategy and financing plan to broaden the sources of funds and increase the total amount going to transportation statewide to support the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's Eight Year Plan, the County Improvement for Roads and Bridges Five Year Plan, the municipal Street and Alley Fund and the construction and operation of Oklahoma's planned weigh stations. Support moving the remaining 25% of motor vehicle fees, which currently go into the state general revenue fund, to transportation priority areas which may include state highways, city and county roads and bridges, and public transit. Support the following regional high-priority projects: widening of I-44 from I-244 east to the Will Rogers Turnpike; widening I-44 from the Arkansas River west to I-244 (Red Fork Expressway); expansion of U.S. 169 to six lanes north to State Highway 20; realignment of Highway 20 from U.S. 169 to Claremore; construction of a four-lane Port Road on Highway 266 from U.S. 169 to the Port of Catoosa, and from the Port of Catoosa to I-44; and expansion of US-75 to six lanes from State Highway 11 to State Highway 67.

- **Gilcrease Expressway**
  - Support the completion of the Gilcrease Expressway from I-44 to US-412/Edison as a part of the Oklahoma Driving Forward initiative through a funding partnership with the City of Tulsa, Tulsa County, INCOG, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and tribal governments to expedite this long overdue transportation project.

ENSURING A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

- **Criminal Justice Reform**
  - Support sentencing reforms and rehabilitation programs that enable nonviolent offenders to reenter the workforce faster and reduce the financial strain on Oklahoma's criminal justice system. Overly-punitive measures for drug users and other nonviolent offenders have given Oklahoma one of the nation's highest incarceration rates, contributing to workforce shortages, harming economic growth and overburdening taxpayers. A stronger focus on rehabilitation would reduce recidivism, lessen the burden on prisons and safety net programs and enable more ex-offenders to contribute meaningfully to Oklahoma's economy.

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- **Economic Incentives**
  - Support tax credits, exemptions, and incentives that provide an economic return to the state of Oklahoma, maintain our competitiveness in business attraction and retention, and increase capital investment. Several programs proposed for review in the first year of the Oklahoma Incentive Evaluation Commission are critical to our state's competitiveness and should be protected, including:
    a. Five Year Ad Valorem Exemption
    b. Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
    c. Aerospace Engineer Tax Credit
    d. Aerospace Engineer Tax Credit – Tuition Reimbursement and Compensation Paid
    e. Quality Events Program
    f. Film Enhancement Rebate

- **Fund OCAST (Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology)**
  - Maintain OCAST's annual budget at its Fiscal Year 2017 level. The state has lost more than $600 million in potential public and private investment as a result of reduced funding for OCAST over the last five years. This funding assists Oklahoma in four vital areas: (1) research and development funding for businesses & universities, (2) two- and four-year college internship opportunities, (3) manufacturing support, and (4) early-stage funding for start-up businesses. This funding allows Oklahoma communities to attract and retain high-quality STEM businesses and critical college talent, which will encourage growth and expansion in these target industries.

- **Improved Business Climate for Oil and Gas Production**
  - Oklahoma's combination of abundant energy resources and an entrepreneurial people has resulted in some of the lowest energy costs of any state in the nation. To preserve and maintain our position as a leading oil and gas producing state, and to protect the important economic impact of oil and gas production to all Oklahomans, we support efforts to open all geologic formations in Oklahoma to horizontal drilling. We support an Oklahoma energy policy that provides a clear regulatory environment and oppose unnecessary and burdensome regulations.

- **Municipal Funding Diversification**
  - Support legislation to preserve and diversify sources of revenue available to municipalities and reduce the volatility associated with a single source for revenue. Key initiatives include diversifying revenue for funding public safety agencies, streets, and other infrastructure improvements; and preserving and strengthening cities' authority to promote economic development activities within their borders.

- **Self-Determination in Facility Firearm Policies**
  - While acknowledging the rights granted by the Second Amendment, protect the current law giving venue owners, event operators, and recreational facilities the authority to control firearm policies on property they manage. Removing this control would endanger Oklahoma's ability to attract events that bring thousands of visitors and millions of dollars into our economy each year. Many events—especially in youth and collegiate sports—have non-negotiable firearm policies and removing the controls under current law would limit facility operators' ability to ensure the safety of their events, increase the cost of providing security, and could subject them to additional liability.

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- **Support Regional Air Quality Efforts**
  - Support and fund regional air quality efforts to avoid federal non-attainment designation and the economic hardship this would create for our region. Tulsa area ozone levels have periodically approached the current EPA standard, and an even tighter standard is anticipated. Continued support for common-sense strategies like the Ozone Advance Program and the development of a local air shed model is critical to assure the most appropriate and cost-effective reduction strategies, and all efforts toward air quality improvement initiatives—both private and public, voluntary and enforceable—should be made as soon as possible. In addition, continued support to increase public CNG fueling infrastructure will help decrease the current level of vehicle emissions, while aligning with the Oklahoma First Energy Plan.

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Federal Priorities

EDUCATED AND HEALTHY WORKFORCE

- **Graduate Medical Education**
  - Through long-term funding authorization, fully fund existing HRSA Teaching Health Center programs at $150,000 per resident and allocate additional resources to double the number of funded THC residency positions nationwide. This will allow for training more homegrown physicians, strengthening the most effective tool for improving Oklahoma's physician shortage.

- **HEA Reauthorization**
  - Support the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and fully fund federal mandates.

- **Long-term Insure Oklahoma waiver reauthorization**
  - Encourage flexibility in negotiations to grant a long-term reauthorization of Oklahoma's Section 1115 waiver for Insure Oklahoma. Uncertainty in the long-term future of Insure Oklahoma has hurt enrollment and resulted in the exclusion of thousands of Oklahomans who would be eligible for coverage even under current requirements.

- **Mental Health Reform**
  - Support large-scale reform of the national mental health system that elevates the national priority for mental health issues. This includes increasing funding for evidence-based strategies and services; incentivizing assisted outpatient treatment; permitting integration of mental health and substance treatment records with medical records; ensuring complete enactment of the mental health parity law in Medicaid and Medicare; and enhancing behavioral health workforce training.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE CRITICAL TO BUSINESS

- **Arkansas River Corridor Development**
  - Support efforts to expedite the implementation of the Arkansas River Corridor Project for river infrastructure improvements. Allow federal match credit to be accrued for state and local expenditures in order to advance construction activity while preserving the Tulsa region's access to future federal funding for this federally authorized project.

- **McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System**
  - Increase Congressional appropriations to address the approximate $180 million in maintenance backlog of MKARNS—50% of which are deemed critical—potentially leading to a shutdown of the waterway over the next 5 years, and the White River Entrance Channel Cut-off problem caused by the tendency of the White and Arkansas Rivers to merge together. Provide the necessary appropriations to deepen the MKARNS to its 12 foot authorized depth, thereby increasing barge productivity by 30%.

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- **Tulsa's Levee System**
  - Support addressing the critical infrastructure needs with Tulsa's aging levee system, which the Corps of Engineers has designated as one of the 5% highest-risk levee systems in the country. If one fails, it would be catastrophic for homeowners, two nationally strategic oil refineries, and multiple industries currently protected by levee system, and have devastating environmental impacts for our region.

ENSURING A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

- **Accelerate Permitting of Energy Projects**
  - Support efforts to accelerate federal permitting for projects necessary to achieve domestic energy independence. Legislative and Administrative efforts should focus on ensuring concurrent permitting for all federally required approvals, approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline, streamlining the process for FERC approval of Liquefied Natural Gas Terminals and interstate pipelines, and permitting of U.S. Petrochemical projects that make fertilizer, polyethylene and other natural gas derived products. These projects would create a boom in the U.S. domestic economy, support job creation, strengthen our trade balance, and increase product security and price stability on a global scale.

- **Collection of Online Sales/Use Taxes**
  - Support passage of the Marketplace Fairness Act or other federal legislation which will ensure that the sales and use taxes already owed from online purchases are fairly and effectively reported, collected, and remitted.

- **Federal Historic Tax Credits**
  - Maintain federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits for the restoration of historic buildings. These credits have for 30 years been an important catalyst for incentivizing private investment to preserve our nation's historically-significant buildings and revitalize the historic cores of American cities. The existing 20-percent income tax credit for certified historic structures and 10 percent credit for certain non-certified historic structures should be preserved.

- **Federal Immigration Reform**
  - Support comprehensive immigration reform that enables the U.S. to attract the best and brightest talent from around the world. Steps should be taken to secure borders and establish reasonable, affordable and efficient visa policies that empower American businesses to hire essential workers and remove barriers for top talent to work in the U.S. Immediate steps should be taken to address workforce shortages in specialty and technology occupations, including increasing the cap on H-1B visas; and improving H-1B fairness for small and medium employers by lowering application fees and eliminating the lottery-selection process in favor of a needs-based system. Oppose further state legislation related to immigration reform.

- **Position Tulsa for F-35 Operations**
  - Support the Tulsa Air National Guard Base in positioning the 138th Fighter Wing for selection as an operating location for the next generation fighter aircraft, the F-35 Lightning II. With an economic impact of more than $530 million to the community, the base supports more than 1,200 citizen soldiers and plays a key role in the defense of this nation and the continued vibrancy of the Tulsa region's economy. The Tulsa basing of the F-35 could increase base employment by another five percent.

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Restraint in Labor Regulation Changes:

- Moderate changes in labor regulations to ensure fairness for both employer and employee and minimize harmful effects on job creation. Recent rulings and interpretations by the Department of Labor and NLRB targeting overtime pay, independent contractors and joint employment status will reduce employers' hiring capacities; disproportionally harm small businesses, the hospitality industry and the nonprofit sector; increase legal liabilities; and threaten business models that have worked for decades, such as franchising and the legitimate use of independent contractors. These changes represent drastic departures from previous norms and should reversed, pared down or implemented more gradually while protecting existing business models.

- **Restrict Federal Rulemaking Authority**:
  - Encourage and support members of Congress to restrict federal rulemaking authority by requiring a standardized, comprehensive, and cumulative cost/benefit analysis of the total economic impact of rules, including the effect on jobs, electricity rates and reliability, gasoline prices, energy-intensive manufacturing, small businesses, housing market, power plant closures, agriculture, and state and local governments. The regulating entity should perform the cost/benefit analysis along a standard process which should then be reviewed by at least one independent agency.

- **Support Legislation Delaying the Implementation of the EPA 2015 Ozone Standard**
  - The Tulsa region's challenges to avoid the economic burden of non-attainment have resulted in substantial ground-level ozone improvement over the past 25 years. However, even though continued air improvement is foreseeable, the implementation schedule for the EPA's 2015 ozone standard could cause non-attainment for Tulsa and many metropolitan areas across the nation. EPA regulatory implementation schedules are bound by an outdated law which no longer provides adequate time for air quality improvements to occur before overlapping regulation and non-attainment may occur. Undeniably, good air quality is fundamental to healthy communities and to economic development. However, EPA's untimely schedule for implementing the October 2015 ozone NAAQS may cause non-attainment status and the far-reaching economic burden we have long sought to avoid.