



2019 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, retain and return effective career teachers through policies designed to increase the state's pool of qualified teachers and improve teachers' job satisfaction. This should include:

- a) Incentives, such as tax breaks and student loan forgiveness, and regionally-competitive salaries to establish teaching as a desirable profession;
- b) Mandate and fund additional instructional professionals and staff support for teachers in classrooms, such as paraprofessional educators;
- c) Incentive pay for special education teachers and teachers in high-need districts;
- d) Incentivizing education for aspiring teachers through higher education programs, emphasizing STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) educators;
- e) Supporting professional development through state and local services;
- f) Reduce class sizes, and;
- g) Improving classroom resources and supplies.

Oklahoma's ability to fill its growing teacher shortage with quality, effective teachers is crucial to the postsecondary and career success of Oklahoma students and the sustainability of the state's workforce.

Broaden and Protect Health Coverage

Broaden and protect health care coverage by capturing all available state and federal funds for the Oklahoma Health Care Authority.

Comprehensive Education Funding Plan

Support a comprehensive multi-year plan to meet current and future workforce needs by investing in the state's public education systems and establishing Oklahoma as a national leader in early childhood, K-12, CareerTech and higher education. This should include competitive per-pupil funding and multi-year, dedicated, sustainable revenue. This would allow educational institutions to innovate and plan for the future.

Fund Behavioral Health Services

Prioritize funding for the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to restore recently-cut services and allow for new innovations in prevention, treatment and services. Such investments will increase business' access to healthy workers, boost employee productivity, improve student and youth outcomes, save money in the criminal justice system and enable more Oklahomans to contribute meaningfully to the economy.



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Medical Education Funding

Maintain physician training funding for the state's two largest medical schools in the base budgets of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority or university medical authorities. Without state support of at least \$62 million annually, the loss of federal Medicaid funds would threaten the core activities of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences. These institutions are critical to health of Oklahomans. In addition to providing care to one third of the state's Medicaid patients, they drive economic development and serve as the state's primary physician-training engines.

Restore College & University Funding

Restore funding for higher education to make salaries competitive for faculty and staff, support college completion efforts, and keep tuition affordable for students and families. Higher education has absorbed the majority of overall state budget cuts in recent years, and Oklahoma ranks as the nation's highest for per-pupil cuts to higher education since 2008. This has resulted in layoffs, fewer courses and degree programs, larger class sizes and increasingly non-competitive pay for faculty and staff.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE CRITICAL TO BUSINESS

Eliminate Exemptions to 811 One Call Program

Support the elimination of all exemptions to Oklahoma's One Call Program (Call 811 Before You Dig). Eliminating the exemptions to the One Call Program strongly promotes pipeline and underground utility safety. In previous years, the legislature removed the exemption for cities and counties. However, railroads, certain agencies and other stakeholders utilizing mechanized excavation equipment and other digging devices are still exempt from contacting the One Call program before they dig. Exemptions from the One Call program contribute to underground utilities incidents, threatening the safety and welfare of our fellow Oklahomans. This is especially important for the safety of the workers who are excavating without prior knowledge of what is below the ground.

Support Critically Needed Transportation Funding

Continue to improve our roads, bridges and return our streets and highways to a state of good repair by fully funding the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's Eight Year Plan and the County Improvement for Roads and Bridges Five Year Plan. Prioritize restoring all statutory allocated fuel tax revenue and motor vehicle fees to transportation projects including state highways, city and county roads and bridges, and public transit. Regional high-priority projects which can only be addressed through adequate funding include: 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; 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; expansion of US-75 to six lanes from State Highway 11 to State Highway 67; State Highway 20 bypass in Claremore; and high capacity expressway to expressway interchanges between I-44, US-169 and SH51.



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Support Regional Water Policy

Show strong support for appropriate water conservation practices, incentives, and educational programs to moderate statewide water usage while preserving Oklahoma's population growth and economic development goals. Additionally, support legislation regarding Oklahoma's water law and regulations that ensure a balance among commercial, residential, recreational and agricultural interests. Oklahomans have made significant investments in reliance on existing supply agreements, and the state should continue upholding the principle that its abundant water supplies—both surface and groundwater—are to be efficiently developed, used, reused, conserved, and enjoyed. This will guarantee future availability and financial sustainability for ratepayers, municipalities and rural water districts.

ENSURING A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

Criminal Justice Reform

Strengthen alternatives to incarceration and support reforms in sentencing, reentry and rehabilitation that safely reduce the prison population and enable nonviolent offenders to reenter the workforce. This should include investments in treatment and early-diversion efforts for individuals suffering from mental illness and addiction, as well as structural changes in the criminal justice system. Fully implementing recommendations such as those proposed by the Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force is necessary to reduce the state's prison population. These smart-on-crime reforms would improve community safety, reduce recidivism, lessen the burden on prisons and safety net programs and enable more ex-offenders to contribute meaningfully to Oklahoma's economy.

Economic Incentives

Support tax credits, exemptions and incentives that provide an economic return to the state of Oklahoma, maintain competitiveness in business attraction and retention, and increase capital investment. Several programs proposed for review by the Oklahoma Incentive Evaluation Commission are critical to the state's competitiveness and should be protected, including the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, all Quality Jobs programs, the Quality Events Program, the Film Enhancement Rebate, the Automotive Engineering Tax Credit, Small Business Incubator Tenant Credit and the Oklahoma Seed Capital Fund.

Fund OCAST (Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology)

Increase OCAST's annual budget to fund more approved projects and capture additional matching funds from the private sector. With 85 approved but unfunded OCAST projects in 2018, \$312 million in potential public-private investment was left on the table for growing and diversifying Oklahoma's economy and building the tax base. OCAST 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.



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Municipal Funding Diversification

Support legislation that removes barriers to allow municipalities to reduce costs, operate efficiently, and diversify sources of revenue available to municipalities for operating 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 supporting 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, could subject them to additional liability, and would lose that state hundreds of millions of dollars.

Startup, Early-Stage & Small Business Incentives

Improve state incentives for high-growth startup, early-stage and small companies through new rebates or credits, or amended existing programs. This could include increasing access to the Small Employer Quality Jobs Program by easing the program's unattainable out-of-state sales requirement. State incentives should support a continuum of growth for companies from inception to established small business.



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Federal Priorities

EDUCATED AND HEALTHY WORKFORCE

AmeriCorps funding

Fully fund and enhance the Corporation for National and Community Service, which supports local schools and nonprofit organizations with vital resources and manpower through AmeriCorps programs. Each year, these programs leverage \$35 million in federal and local funding to deploy approximately 1,000 AmeriCorps members in over 50 school districts and 100 nonprofits in Oklahoma to supplement school services and provide unique educational experiences to local children.

Federal Health Care Reform

Refrain from changes to the structure and financing of Medicaid that would increase Oklahoma's uninsured rate and would transfer federal risk and costs to Oklahoma taxpayers. However, remain open to innovations that decrease employer-sponsored and individual health insurance costs. As the largest private employment sector in Oklahoma, health care and social assistance services make up hundreds of thousands of jobs, with Medicaid alone serving more than one million Oklahomans — two in three of whom are children — every year.

Middle-Skill Job Training

Support efforts to meet industry needs for skilled workers in jobs that require training beyond high school but not a four-year higher education degree. This should include funding the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act at the level recommended by Congress as reauthorized in 2014, and increasing funding for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) while expanding this program's support to include apprenticeships and other work-based learning. In addition, reduce barriers for hiring veterans under the WOTC.

Protect Federal Nutrition Programs

Maintain the structure, financing and eligibility criteria of federal nutrition programs under the USDA, which benefit Oklahomans' health, family stability and educational attainment. The Child and Adult Care Food Program; Free and Reduced School Breakfast and Lunch (including the Community Eligibility Provision); the Summer Food Service Program; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); are all critical tools for combating food insecurity and preventing chronic disease, obesity, delayed early childhood development, absenteeism in schools, school behavioral issues, and lower academic achievement.

Reform Federal Financial Aid

Support the reform of federal financial aid eligibility to improve access to higher education for all Americans. This should include:

- a) Increasing funding for the Pell Grant program and oppose attempts to cap per-student grants;
- b) Improve FAFSA outreach and education;



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- c) Allow short-term, industry-driven training programs to qualify for federal financial aid;
- d) Expand student loan forgiveness programs, particularly for graduates in high-demand occupations with workforce shortages; and,

Simplify and streamline the financial aid application process.

Support Pell Eligibility for Short-Term, Industry-Driven Training

Expand Pell Grant eligibility to short-term, industry-driven training at higher education and vocational-technical clock-hour institutions. Pell Grant eligibility is currently limited to programs covering 16 credit hours or 600 clock hours. This restriction was established before shorter-term credentials were as imperative for industry as they are today. Removing this restriction would help to build a much-needed worker pipeline for Oklahoma's companies. However, current Pell funding for students in postsecondary programs should be protected. In addition, continue support and recommend permanently reinstating Second Chance Pell funding.

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 \$153 million in maintenance backlog of MKARNS—\$139 million of which is deemed critical—potentially leading to a shutdown of the waterway over the next five years. Also address the White River Entrance Channel Cut-off problem caused by the tendency of the White and Arkansas Rivers to merge together during flooding. Failure to correct this issue will lead to a loss of navigation on the entire system. Finally, provide the necessary appropriations to deepen the MKARNS to its 12-foot authorized depth, thereby increasing barge productivity by 30 percent. Ensure any federal comprehensive infrastructure package includes funding for this issue.

Tulsa's Levee System

Continue to support addressing the critical infrastructure needs with Tulsa's aging levee system, which the Corps of Engineers has designated as one of the five percent highest-risk levee systems in the country. Through emergency legislation, Congress appropriated \$3 million for the Corps to develop a plan for addressing the structural deficiencies, but securing funding for the project itself should remain a top priority. If one levee fails, it would be catastrophic for homeowners, two nationally strategic oil refineries, multiple industries currently protected by the system, and have devastating environmental impacts for our region. Ensure any federal comprehensive infrastructure package includes funding for this issue.



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ENSURING A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

Eliminate Barriers to Greater Use of Natural Gas

Support measures to reduce or eliminate barriers to greater use of American-produced natural gas, including CNG, LNG, GTL and NGLs. Oklahoma is the third-largest producer of natural gas in the United States, and the Department of Energy should facilitate full development of this resource to strengthen the country's national security, economic outlook and geopolitical position in the world. DOE action on this initiative has the potential to significantly increase the Tulsa region's job creation in the production and manufacturing sectors.

Federal Criminal Justice Reform

Reform national criminal justice systems to emphasize rehabilitation and restorative justice. Restore full funding for the Second Chance Act, reinstate funding for the Justice Reinvestment Initiative and continue to support sustained funding for the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act. In addition, support evidence-based reforms such as removing mandatory minimum sentences, instituting risk-and-needs assessments, and improving prison-based rehabilitation programs. Smart on crime reforms will ease workforce shortages, save taxpayer money, improve public safety and lead to better pathways for ex-offenders to contribute meaningfully to their local economies.

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 the 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 noncertified historic structures should be preserved. Additionally, support the School Infrastructure Modernization Act, which expands the tax credit to include historic school buildings that still operate as an educational institution.

Maintain Funding for EPA Brownfields Program

Encourage Congress to maintain, or even increase, current funding levels for the EPA's Brownfields Program. Federal funding for rehabilitating brownfields sites is vital for Oklahoma's communities to address core environmental challenges, and reopen land for successful economic development and growth.

Small employer health care concerns

Minimize the regulatory burden on small and medium employers under the Affordable Care Act and support efforts to reduce these employers' cost of providing health care. This should include reducing legal and administrative barriers to the creation of association health plans, such as those once housed by chambers of commerce; making permanent the repeal of the Health Insurance Tax; and exploring ways to avoid applying large-employer health insurance requirements to small-scale owners who operate separate small businesses in good faith.



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Support Funding for Critical Economic Development Programs

Strongly support (or oppose efforts to cut) targeted economic development funding for programs that have proven to be effective and beneficial to the Tulsa Region. These include the Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants for infrastructure and planning and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), a program under the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology. MEP partners with the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance (OMA) to help small and medium-sized manufacturers create and retain jobs, improve overall business resilience and increase bottom line performance. The program returns \$65 for each \$1 invested in new sales for Oklahoma manufacturers, and OMA ranks in the top three MEP centers in the United States. Assure OMA funding remains at current levels or higher in its partnership with MEP.