



# Public Policy Handbook

*(Updated and Adopted 2007)*

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## **Introduction**

The mission of the Chico Chamber of Commerce is to foster a climate in which business can operate profitably. We believe fulfilling our mission means that we serve the business community by representing their needs before government and fighting to ensure that pro-business candidates are elected to public office. As a general rule, the Chico Chamber supports positions we believe advance the interests of businesses and build a stronger community.

In order to achieve those goals, we must create, develop, and utilize current and meaningful policies and practices that will provide outstanding pro-business legislative and local policy representation to our membership.

This ***Public Policy Handbook*** provides policy guidance and direction to the Chico Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and staff for developing and advocating positions on legislation and public policy issues, for assessing candidates for public office, and for monitoring the voting records of elected officials. Through adoption of these policies, the Board of Directors has empowered the Chamber's Board Chair and President/CEO to advocate freely on behalf of the Chamber within the framework of this ***Public Policy Handbook***.

Public policies of the Chico Chamber of Commerce are organized under categories of concern to our business members.

Specific policies are as follows:

## **Building a Stronger Local Economy**

The Chamber of Commerce believes that a sustained, collaborative regional economic development effort is required to meet the business opportunity and job creation needs of Butte County. We can only achieve our goal by growing the number of good jobs in industries that sell their products or services outside of Chico and then bring new dollars into our economy. Encouraging entrepreneurial creativity is essential. Public resources should be made available to assist companies who will bring and sustain these types of jobs in Chico and Butte County. Public policy should enable and not unnecessarily hinder the growth of these companies. To ensure a level playing field in other industry sectors, the community should not subsidize any industry that does not grow the economic base. The community should also avoid efforts to limit competition within business sectors.

## **Business Regulation**

The Chico Chamber of Commerce supports appropriate regulations to protect workers and consumers, provided that these regulations be balanced, fairly administered, and not used as a basis for frivolous and unjust litigation. Businesses cannot continue to prosper, provide jobs, meet market demands for goods and services, and compete effectively when company resources must be devoted to onerous regulations that are confusing, unreasonable, and place undue burdens on business.

The Chamber supports improvement of our system of business regulation with emphasis on the following issues:

- Oppose legislation that attempts to make sensitive business documents open to the public
- Support reasonable accommodations and accessibility of businesses that provide goods or services to the public
- Support the creation of incentives such as tax credits and low interest loans for businesses constructing improvements to ensure compliance with Americans With Disabilities Act as a remedy to any lawsuit alleging non-compliance
- Support the ability of businesses to share consumer information when consumers are given information on business practices and the option to deny access to information and oppose requiring businesses to adopt a “permission required” system of information sharing

### **Campaign Finance**

The Chico Chamber supports full and timely disclosure of campaign contributions so that the public is completely informed regarding who is financing local, statewide and national political campaigns, particularly those contributions made immediately prior to the date of the election. The Chamber opposes the creation of new, overly complicated campaign finance restrictions that serve to limit the ability of individual businesses or organizations to support freely and generously the candidates and issues of their choice.

### **Civil Justice**

The American judicial system is in need of reform to return common sense to the entire system and to discourage frivolous lawsuits that increase the cost of doing business and, therefore, the cost of consumer goods and services. Businesses cannot compete effectively while continually being faced with potential or pending legal actions not based on reason and common sense.

The Chamber supports improvement of our civil justice system to provide more balance and fairness with emphasis on the following:

- Support the freedom of businesses to use arbitration to resolve disputes and reduce liability costs and oppose any effort to prevent businesses from using alternatives to court
- Oppose any mandate to require the use of arbitration
- Oppose attempts to prohibit businesses from entering into confidential settlement agreements in civil cases
- Support responsible reform of the current class action system
- Support legislation that would exclude or limit damages due to consumer misuse that results in injury and supports reductions in business liability insurance premiums
- Support legislation limiting the liability of business owners and/or managers for actions of their employees that they are not aware of and that are unsanctioned
- Oppose new legislation that allows greater opportunities for employees to sue their employers

## **Community Infrastructure**

In order to maintain a solid economic base and compete effectively, we must continue to improve our community infrastructure. Long term, earmarked, and stable federal, state, county, and local funding sources for infrastructure improvements are essential to plan for future growth. The business community must emphasize the importance of continued infrastructure improvements, including capital investment, sound management, and creative partnership between the public and private sectors. New development must make a fair contribution to community facilities through impact fees, but fees should not be relied upon to correct long-term infrastructure deficiencies. Broad-based community financing options should be considered for these long-term problems.

Specific Areas of Concern:

### *Streets and Roads*

The Chico Chamber supports streets and roads policies that allocate funding that assures immediate local needs and safety improvements are the first priorities based on collaborative discussions between the City of Chico, the County of Butte, and other member agencies of the Butte County Association of Governments. Projects that protect and enhance traffic circulation in the Chico area must be the top priority of decision-makers. Collaborative efforts toward funding regional projects should include the Chico Chamber of Commerce and other community interests in discussions to assure full exploration of funding options for transportation infrastructure. Adequate parking is necessary for commercial projects and should be promoted, including additional parking in downtown Chico.

The Chamber encourages voluntary actions by businesses that help reduce peak hour congestion on Chico's streets and roads.

### *Chico Municipal Airport*

The Chico Municipal Airport is a vital regional transportation hub whose future is critical to the economic health of the Chico area. The Chico Chamber of Commerce supports protection of the airport from development encroachment, expansion of commercial air services, and development of additional industrial and commercial facilities on both the east and west sides of the airport. Planning and development of the Airport must include lengthening and expansion of the airport's runways and taxiways and updating and expansion of airport facilities such as the passenger terminal, hangars, and aprons.

### *Sewer Capacity*

The City of Chico must be careful to maintain adequate sewer capacity to accommodate projected growth.

## *Community Parks*

Public resources should be used for the purchase and maintenance of parks and greenways that are open to the public for enjoyment by all.

## **Education and Workforce Development**

Education ranks as one of the highest priorities for all types and sizes of companies. Increasingly, employers experience difficulty in finding well-qualified workers and retraining existing employees to keep pace with changing technologies and markets. Our community must ensure that its youth as well as older workers in need of further education have access to quality education that equips them to compete and succeed in the workplace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We believe, also, that because of California's diversity, local elected school boards are in the best position to make critical decisions regarding educational programs and services. The best reform in public education would be to return decision-making authority to local school boards.

We support improvement of the educational system and enhancement of workforce development with emphasis on the following issues:

- Support reforms in public education that are based on standards and effective assessment of student achievement
- Support returning control over education policy and budgets to local school boards
- Support and assist processes that provide a qualified and able workforce

## **Flood Control, Water Storage and Water Transfer**

Northern California and Butte County in particular are blessed with several valuable natural resources. Water, both surface and ground, is one of these resources. As population increases, water will be needed for residential and other uses. More and more demands will be made on Northern California to give up its water and rights to its water. One solution to maintaining enough water for everyone's needs is to build more water storage facilities so that water can be caught and stored in heavy rain years and used in drought years. In addition, lakes and reservoirs provide recreational opportunities for area businesses and create jobs and thereby improve the local economy. Existing components of our storage system are also key components of our flood control system.

Much of northern California's economy is based upon its vast agricultural industry. To sacrifice that industry in any way would damage the area's largest business and in turn damage those businesses that depend on agriculture. The transfer of too much water or the fallowing of area farmland would damage our agricultural industry and could interfere with any expansion of industry.

The Chamber believes that water planning to provide for California's future growth must protect local water needs as follows:

- Support the building and maintaining of water storage facilities as part of any overall state water plan
- Encourage off-stream storage, where feasible, as the preferred method of storage
- Support the development of new storage facilities before construction of new conveyance facilities
- Support the local control of water transfers from Butte County and other northern California areas
- Ensure adequate investment in flood control

## **Human Resources**

The Chico Chamber encourages employer/employee relationships that fairly balance the interests of business and industry along with those of employees. The California Legislature and voter initiatives should not enact laws and regulations that are more stringent than federal guidelines and standards that would place California at a competitive disadvantage in its ability to attract and retain business.

We support enhancement of our human resources with emphasis on the following issues:

- Support legislation reducing unnecessary and duplicative workplace-related government regulation
- Support health care reform that expands coverage, maximizes free-market forces and health care choice, and minimizes government mandates
- Support enactment of legislation conforming state law with federal law allowing a "safe harbor" for all businesses that correctly follow the legal rules for determining worker tax status
- Support allowing California employers to make decisions about employment and fringe benefits based upon individual economic and competitive factors
- Oppose increasing the minimum wage or instituting a living wage mandate
- Oppose mandatory interest arbitration as a means of resolving public employee labor disputes
- Support an effective workers compensation system that focuses on ensuring employees are healed, compensated for their loss of ability to work in the marketplace and returned to work. The system should be based on clarity of employer responsibilities and liability, incentives for employees and physicians to keep costs to a minimum, and control of costs through a more objective determination of permanent partial disability (PPD) benefits which would shift dollars to more severely injured workers and reduce litigation and fraud potential in disputes relating to PPD determination

## **Local Area Planning and Growth**

Managing growth is at the root of many of Chico's most difficult public policy debates. Through all this debate and dialogue Chico continues to grow. Debates over growth will continue to

occur indefinitely. The specifics of each growth debate will be different. *However, the basic premise should be followed that growth is necessary, that it should not be restricted, and that maintaining our quality of life should be given serious consideration when debating the specifics of any project.* Local land use planning must consider protection of agricultural lands, preservation of Chico's historic character through incentives and community involvement, and development, maintenance and improvement of required community infrastructure.

The presence of unincorporated area pockets of land within the Chico Urban Area creates difficulties with regard to public services including police and fire and public works. The urban area must be unified so that a consistent level of service can be provided to all citizens in the urban area. Meanwhile, joint planning between the City of Chico and the County of Butte is necessary to assure consistency in standards and conditions for development.

Inherent in the debates surrounding local land use planning is the issue of land use restrictions. The Chamber believes that reasonable land use restrictions are acceptable. However, many causes such as environmental protection and historic preservation are viewed by some as more important than individual property rights. Private property rights are fundamental and policy makers should give priority to protection of those rights when wrestling with policy matters. Payment of fair market value compensation should be made when any legal "taking" of property for public benefit occurs.

The approval process for development project approval must be streamlined and predictable.

The Chico area enjoys a unique variety of local parklands and facilities that add tremendous value to our quality of life. The Chico Chamber supports adequate parkland and facilities based on a broad based funding approach that assures construction of parks in a timely manner and with a clear plan for funding ongoing maintenance.

## **Reapportionment**

The Chico Chamber of Commerce supports improvement of the quality of legislative representation through a process of establishing Board of Supervisor and legislative district boundaries that is not influenced by partisan gerrymandering. The Chamber of Commerce supports removing elected officials from the process of drawing their own district boundaries.

Districts should be established based on the following specific criteria:

- Equal in population
- Contiguous and compact districts
- Respect for the geographic integrity of city and county boundaries
- Avoid unnecessary voter deferral
- State is divided into 40 Senate and 80 Assembly districts
- Each Senate district be composed of two Assembly districts

## **Sustainability and Environmental Protection**

The Chico Chamber of Commerce believes that local businesses, like local residents, love the Chico community and want to take actions that are in Chico's long-term best interests. Reducing energy consumption and waste is encouraged. Unfortunately, the business community is inundated with regulations that are often expensive, duplicative, unclear, inconsistent, and based on unsubstantiated research. The resulting requirements often fail to adequately identify and regulate the primary causes of environmental damage. Government regulation represents a burden not only for business, but also for the community, which suffers from decreased job growth and business expansion.

The western United States and California in particular have been inundated with the listing of threatened or endangered species. These species are often located in areas destined for construction or on agricultural lands. The accidental "taking" of a listed species can devastate a business and unfairly penalize its owners.

The Chamber supports improvement of the environment and our quality of life with emphasis on the following issues:

- Promote streamlining and simplifying of the regulatory process
- Promote predictability in project approval processes
- Encourage economic analysis during development of regulations
- Encourage the use of incentives as part of Endangered Species Act implementation
- Require fair treatment of landowners, including compensation for losses when their property is converted or restricted in use to benefit the public
- Require the use of thorough scientific review of listing and de-listing petitions and biological opinions
- Amend the ESA to require development of a recovery plan for the species before listing and set a realistic number for the species de-listing goal
- Alternative energy sources that comply with the local, state, and federal regulations.
- Continue incentive and grant programs that reward consumers for conservation and provide incentives for the use of energy-efficient equipment and practices.
- The California Environmental Quality Act should be streamlined and allow for a reasonable level of predictability in its application.
- Promote education and awareness over regulation in helping businesses reduce waste and energy consumption.

## **Taxation and Public Finance**

In order to attract new businesses and retain and expand existing businesses, a business-friendly tax climate is essential. Excessive taxation and public finance inefficiencies place hurdles in the path of employment growth and impair competitiveness for businesses in today's marketplace. California maintains one of the highest corporate income tax rates in the nation and, locally, special assessments, taxes, and fees collectively add considerable cost for businesses of all sizes.

The Chico Chamber of Commerce believes that additional taxes should only be considered after elected officials have exhausted reasonable attempts to control government spending or provide incentives that increase economic activity and the tax base overall.

We support improvement of taxation and public financing with emphasis on the following issues:

- New development is expected to pay for itself. Development impact fees should continue as one piece of the overall funding strategy and the Chico City Council and other public agencies should explore additional (meaning in addition to existing development impact fees) ways to generate local revenue for capital projects
- Promote efficiency in government, especially that related to budget reform
- Encourage changes in personal and business taxes as well as capital formation rules
- Support policies of greater privatization, where appropriate, of government services
- Support a simple majority vote (50%+1) as the threshold for voter approval of tax increases to support special public services and public facilities such as schools, streets and roads, public safety and other infrastructure
- Support the return of local tax dollars to local governments for local services and full state funding of state mandated programs and services