



Northwest Michigan Regional Chamber Alliance

BENZIE CADILLAC CHARLEVOIX GAYLORD PETOSKEY TRAVERSE CITY

2009 Legislative Agenda

Benzie County Chamber of Commerce
Cadillac Area Chamber of Commerce
Charlevoix Area Chamber of Commerce
Gaylord-Otsego County Regional Chamber of Commerce
Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce
Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce



Gaylord/Otsego County
Chamber of Commerce



Northwest Michigan Regional Chamber Alliance

Legislative Agenda

The partnership of the Northwest Michigan Regional Chamber Alliance was established based on the premise that many legislative issues impact Michigan's northwest lower peninsula in similar ways. The alliance of the Benzie County Chamber of Commerce, Cadillac Area Chamber of Commerce, Charlevoix Area Chamber of Commerce, Gaylord-Otsego County Chamber of Commerce, Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce has identified legislative areas that should be monitored and advocated to elected officials on the local, state, and federal levels. These issues should be addressed regionally to maximize the influence of the Alliance and its more than 5,200 members that span across ten counties in northwest Michigan.

When deemed appropriate and in support of Chamber Alliance positions and recommendations, member advocacy and grassroots activities will be developed and promoted using this legislative agenda as a basis for taking position on legislative policy.

We will be champions for business! The Alliance believes that it is important for our legislators to work together in a bi-partisan manner, as co-operation and consensus are important elements needed to assure that all legislators work towards the betterment of the region.

The legislative agenda was developed and agreed upon by each of the Northwest Michigan Regional Chamber Alliance partners. The top legislative items and additional position statements listed in this document came together through the collaborative input of chamber members from each of the Alliance chambers. Through the development process of this document, it became evident that even though each of these issues are important on their own, they are all interrelated and must function as a whole to create a growing region that strives to retain and create jobs in northwest Michigan. This document is not meant to reflect a snapshot in time, but is intended to be flexible in its application to specific legislative items while blending a focus on specific short term items while taking a broad and long term perspective to the region.

If you would like to further discuss any of the agenda items or positions of the Alliance, please contact Jamie Callahan, Senior Vice President of Government Relations for the Northwest Michigan Regional Chamber Alliance at 231-995-7109 or at jamie@tcchamber.org.



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TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- Reduction and elimination of MBT Surcharge
- Support increased and consistent funding for tourism promotion
- Enact specific governmental reforms to better provide essential services and a business friendly regulatory environment
- Support incentives that retain and strengthen manufacturing production
- Promote initiatives that encourage economic growth and diversification in the region

TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Supporting Points

MBT Surcharge

- Takes away from a company's ability to hire workers and grow their business.
- Surcharge was to be a short term fix for a prior budgetary shortfall, so cannot become a long term tax.
- Government reform and spending control must be adopted to reduce and eliminate this burden.

Tourism Promotion

- Michigan offers some of the best recreational, historical, arts and cultural, and vacation opportunities in the country, yet few outside the region know it. Tourism promotion leads to greater awareness and desire to visit the region.
- Tourism is a powerful driver for the state's economy. Tourism generates additional economic activity and creates more jobs along with state and school tax revenue. Investing in tourism promotion increases the strength and vitality of our state's economy almost immediately.
- Long term funding is needed to continue advances made from recent advertising.

Government Reform/Creating Business Friendly Environment

- Michigan government needs to adapt to the current economic times and live within its means while providing the services Michigan needs to succeed and grow.
- A streamlined government will free up resources for Michigan's most critical functions.
- Simple and concise permitting requirements with reasonable turnaround times reduce costs and uncertainty for businesses.
- A competitive regulatory climate will put Michigan on a more level playing field with other states, while redundant and outdated requirements add to the cost of doing business in Michigan.
- Oppose additional mandates on businesses, such as ergonomic standards.

Strengthen Manufacturing

- Manufacturing continues to be a major source of good paying jobs for thousands of workers across northwest Michigan.
- This industry can be supported through a reduced regulatory and tax environment, coupled with competitive incentives.
- Manufacturing workers make many of the purchases and pay the taxes that keep Michigan in business.

Promote Economic Growth and Diversification

- Competitive economic incentives and creative employee education programs can attract new industries, support business expansion, innovation, and recruit entrepreneurs.
- Local and state agencies must be progressive, agile, and proactive in drawing additional industries to the region as the economy and market change.
- As the population of the region continues to grow, the number and types of jobs available in the region must adapt to keep pace and support the additional growth.
- A strong and diverse economy is more likely to withstand economic downturns.

REGIONAL PRINCIPLES

The following topic areas contain issue specific positions that will be used as guiding principles for determining legislative positions. These issues have been identified as important to the success of the region by the Alliance partners.

Agriculture

Agriculture remains one of the largest industries in northwest Michigan. Domestic agricultural production must remain a priority for the long term sustainability of the state. To remain competitive in Michigan, it is critical that farmers be allowed to operate their business without the threat of undue and excessive local ordinances or state regulation that restricts their ability to grow and process their crops and get them to market. Areas of interest include the expansion of “value-added” agriculture, viticulture, horticulture and agricultural research station funding, greater access to the state’s timber resources when combined with sound harvesting practices, supporting Farm-to-School food sourcing initiatives, and promotion of buy local food programs.

Economic Development

A top focus of the Northwest Michigan Regional Chamber Alliance legislative agenda is the creation and retention of jobs throughout the region. The agenda supports an environment conducive to job creation and growth through a business friendly and progressive climate. Northwest Michigan’s economy continues to change and diversify. Local and state agencies must be progressive, agile, and proactive to support new business opportunities and recruit entrepreneurs to the region.

Continued support and expansion of economic tools for job providers to retain and expand their businesses should occur. In particular, the creation of new incentives to encourage development within city centers and improving the region’s communication infrastructure through additional broadband, wireless, and fiber technology will all foster additional business growth. Management of economic development programs need to be responsive and act quickly to promote business growth.

Education

Quality education for Michigan’s students is critical to the success of the business community and the state as a whole. Schools in every corner of the state will need to graduate students armed with the education, test scores, and skills necessary to compete in the global job market for Michigan to thrive. For Michigan to be successful, skilled trades need to be promoted to students as a career option, encourage partnerships between education and industry to instruct students in those fields, and ensure curricula include coursework geared towards 21st century jobs. Michigan should promote life-long learning and retraining to get workers back into the job force. Community colleges play an important role in the education process across northwest Michigan for students, university partnerships, and job training for employers and need to be supported. Two specific areas that should be given additional attention:

Education, continued

a. Funding equity

Funding equity for all students across the state remains a priority. Innovation and reform within and between school districts will further educational opportunities for students, as will proper funding to keep community colleges and universities accessible and affordable.

b. Early Childhood Education

Supporting early childhood education will be critical, as starting children off with a solid educational background at an early age allows them to build for long term success in education and in life. Michigan should support local initiatives at both the public and private levels that operate early childhood education programs.

Energy

Energy is needed by every job provider to operate their business. For the region's businesses to remain competitive, a comprehensive energy policy for the state is needed. Inclusion in such a policy should include: ensuring a competitively priced, reliable and sustainable supply of energy; expanding the sources and production of our energy; and supporting the conservation of energy use. Energy generation, transmission, distribution, and conservation are inter-connected to the economic, social and ecological health of local communities. The generation of electricity has the potential for job creation in the region through the expansion of production from alternative sources and the manufacturing of products to support this growing industry.

Environment

The greatest asset Michigan has to offer in addition to the talent and character of its citizens is its natural resources. Michigan relies on these assets to power the economy, from generating electricity, growing crops, manufacturing products, to providing opportunities for numerous recreation activities. Many industries choose to remain in Michigan because of these assets and is a vital tool to attract new employers to our state. Any new regulations towards the state's natural resources should be based on sound scientific principles and not impede farmers, businesses, or industry from carrying out their daily operations.

Government Reform

Organizational reform within every department should be consistently evaluated, with the expectation that programs not providing results or deemed wasteful are either retooled to become successful or eliminated. Opportunities for reform include the consolidation of redundant governmental functions, reducing the duplication of services and layers of government between municipalities, encouraging public-private partnerships to provide governmental services and programs, and an expedited permitting process. Michigan should be striving to create a more streamlined and competitive regulatory environment compared to other states. The current term limits statute should be analyzed and evaluated to determine if revisions are needed.

Government Regulation

The continued increase in government regulations upon the business community is of major concern for businesses across northwest Michigan. We strongly believe there is a need to speak with a unified voice against government intrusion and departments overstepping their authority. The expansion of government regulation continues to increase the cost of doing business in Michigan. A competitive regulatory climate will put Michigan on a more level playing field with other states, while redundant and outdated requirements add to the cost of doing business in Michigan.

Health Care

A healthy society allows for a more productive workforce. The cost of health care continues to be the determining factor when it comes to deciding whether a business is able to provide employer sponsored health care coverage. Greater affordability and coverage can come through market and consumer driven reforms, eliminating regulations that increase costs to job providers and employees, opposing additional mandates of health care coverage, and supporting the integration of employee wellness and prevention programs. Northwest Michigan's hospitals and health care employers play a significant role in the region with a proven ability to provide high quality, affordable and accessible health care services, which is an excellent recruitment tool for attracting businesses and families to the area.

These forces will have limited results unless reform is coordinated with a combination of private and government efforts, including more efficient claim processing, simplified reporting and processing requirements, use of current software and technology, timely payments, and reasonable reimbursement to health care providers. Competition among insurers and providers combined with government reform provides consumers a better understanding of treatment options and a greater voice in how they manage their health care needs.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing continues to be a major source of good paying jobs for thousands of workers across Northwest Michigan. The production of durable goods has long been the backbone of Michigan's economy, earning Michigan the nickname 'The Arsenal of Democracy'. Even as Michigan continues to diversify its economy, manufacturing will continue to be critical to the health of our state. Job providers also need access to an educated workforce and training opportunities to expand and grow. The region's manufacturing sector can be supported through a reduced regulatory and tax environment coupled with competitive incentives to attract new industries and entrepreneurs to the region. Reducing the burden of personal property taxation and avoiding special fees specific to manufacturers should be supported.

Regionalism

Due to the geographic distance between economic centers in northwest Michigan, there is a definite need to think and act regionally. A cooperative approach to governmental ordinances, economic incentives, and planning are needed in order to bring new jobs into the region. For the success and growth of the region, coordination between governmental bodies for the delivery of services should be explored. It is through the leadership of the Alliance and their members that effective structural

Regionalism, continued

changes may be advocated and promoted. Regional planning initiatives, such as the Grand Vision in northwest Michigan, are encouraged and should be supported across the state.

Taxation

Michigan's economic climate is framed and influenced by its tax policy. A state or local government cannot tax itself into prosperity, but must determine what level of taxation is appropriate for government to effectively operate while creating a tax environment viewed as competitive when compared to other states. Michigan must foster economic growth by allowing taxpayers to keep more of their money and by providing a more competitive tax climate to encourage savings and investment. Michigan's tax policy is a contributing factor when businesses consider locating in the state. The calculation and reporting requirements of Michigan's tax code must be streamlined and simplified. Incentives to spur business retention and growth should continue to be a tool for state and local municipalities. The state government should not increase or impose user fees or certain excise taxes as a means to balance budgets.

Tourism

Tourism is one of the largest segments of the regional economy. The natural beauty and small town charm of the region adds to its appeal for visitors. To keep the region as a travel destination, additional opportunities for specialty tourism should be developed, i.e. historical, agricultural, cultural, and ecological tourism, along with collaboration between area convention and visitors bureaus and Travel Michigan to further regional promotion.

Support for recreational opportunities along with the region's arts and cultural resources add to the quality of life that will attract entrepreneurs, businesses, workforce, and visitors, keeping the region competitive. State assets that are part of Michigan's tourism infrastructure, such as state campgrounds and parks, need to remain open, supported and promoted to increase tourism in the region. Reform to the H-2B Visa application process is needed to support businesses that use seasonal workers.

Transportation

Michigan's transportation system is the backbone of our economy. Goods produced by our businesses need stable avenues for their product to be delivered to their destination and to effectively carry employees to their workplace. The continued maintenance, improvement, and diversification of the transportation system is needed for the long term success and growth of the region and state. Quality roads and infrastructure benefit the state's manufacturing sector by reducing wear and expense to the vehicles that bring supplies to manufacturers and those that take those finished products to market. The use of water transportation for cargo should be encouraged.

Further initiatives to support include the continuation and growth of reliable cargo and passenger rail service, northwest Michigan's fair share for regional projects in the MDOT 5-year plan, state and federal funds for the upkeep and repair of the Mackinac Bridge, fighting for northwest Michigan's share of funding for area road and bridge improvements, as well as collaboration on a local and regional level for transportation planning.

