



2018 FEDERAL AGENDA



birmingham
businessalliance
THE CHAMBER FOR REGIONAL PROSPERITY

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The Birmingham Business Alliance (BBA) supports policies that will help the region grow in jobs and capital investment. Advocating for legislative priorities that put the Birmingham region in a competitive position increases our ability to attract and retain business and a quality workforce. The BBA's Federal Agenda consists of policy priorities that are critical to the economic development success of our region. The BBA advocates for policies and legislation that may require action, as well as closely monitors legislation and issues that stand to positively or negatively impact the business climate of our region.



ACTION AGENDA



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

UAB Biomedical Research Crescent

The BBA supports the continued development of the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Interdisciplinary Biomedical Research Crescent through a substantive investment in the Genomic Medicine and Data Sciences Building. This complex, once completed, will provide new research space for interdisciplinary biomedical research, including investigators from multiple schools working on common themes. The complex would house researchers studying medical informatics, personalized medicine, cybersecurity and the analysis of "big data." This is an important opportunity for the state to invest in new jobs and economic development in the Birmingham area.

National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation

The BBA supports sustained or increased funding levels for the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation. Furthermore, the BBA opposes any stagnated funding that impedes research and development. Any decrease in federal funding would result in significant job loss in the Birmingham region.

Federal Agency Actions

The BBA opposes unjustified and unreasonable federal agency actions, including overly burdensome regulations, initiatives and guidance. While the BBA recognizes the importance of community stewardship as a component of the region's quality of life and economic growth strategies, unjustified and unreasonable agency actions have the potential to (1) raise consumer costs by adversely impacting the costs of production, and/or (2) impair the current and future economic development of the state by creating artificial advantages for other regions. The BBA supports recent federal actions to lessen the burden of regulation.

Export-Import (Ex-Im) Bank Reauthorization

The BBA supports a long-term reauthorization of Ex-Im Bank's charter. The BBA supports the Ex-Im Bank having a fully functioning Board of Directors. Failure to act would further damage and threaten the jobs at 59 exporters within the state of Alabama and the more than 22 exporters in the Birmingham region that utilize Ex-Im Bank's resources. Ex-Im Bank provides loans, loan guarantees and export credit insurance to help cover financing gaps for American exporters. This is also a critical resource for our small and medium-sized businesses as it helps to level the playing field for U.S. companies seeking new sales in fiercely competitive global markets.

NAFTA

The BBA supports modernizing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Trade with Canada and Mexico has created American jobs, boosted economic growth and strengthened local economies. Reduced trade barriers in the region have provided extraordinary benefits to Alabama businesses, particularly the automobile industry, manufacturing, machinery, primary metals and chemicals. Any effort to modernize NAFTA must not harm the benefits enabled by the existing agreement.

Sugar Policy Modernization Act of 2017

The BBA supports modernizing the U.S. sugar program through the passage of the Sugar Policy Modernization Act of 2017. The bill will make needed reforms to the current federal sugar support program that frequently keeps our sugar prices excessively high relative to our global competitors. The Sugar Reform Act would ensure no net cost to taxpayers, repeal domestic supply restrictions and reduce market distortions caused by sugar import quotas.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Expand Apprenticeships and Industry Partnerships

The BBA supports investing in industry partnerships to help the infrastructure industry expand apprenticeships and build a skilled workforce to compete in today's global economy.

Modernize Year-round Pell Grants

The BBA supports modernizing Pell to be more demand-driven and responsive to employer skill needs while creating advancement opportunities for entry-level employees. The Pell Grant is a valuable investment in a better-educated workforce and a vital component to our nation's long term economic strength. In 2017, Congress approved the restoration of year-round Pell. In order to make Pell Grants work for our businesses and employers, Congress should make short-term occupational certificate programs with a track record of success eligible for Pell Grants.

Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act

The BBA supports the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006.

Graduate Medical Education

The BBA supports funding at the authorized level for pediatric graduate medical education (CHGME) and stable Medicare funding for adult GME programs, which play key roles in training physicians, while ensuring Alabama's future medical workforce needs are met. Furthermore, the BBA supports medical training program expansion while encouraging research and quality innovation.



HEALTH CARE

Medicaid Reform

The BBA supports meaningful reforms that do not create an additional uncompensated care burden for provider, reduce basic federal funding to the state, or reduce benefits and eligibility for the core federal program.

Medicare Wage Index

The BBA supports efforts to reach an equitable resolution on the Medicare Wage Index issue so that hospitals in the region will be fairly reimbursed for the services provided to the Medicare population. The current wage index calculation penalizes Alabama hospitals, which are already some of the most efficient in the country in terms of costs, by paying hospitals in other states almost double what is paid in Alabama for the same care.

Children's Health Insurance Program Funding

The BBA supports federal funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for up to five years.

Small Group Insurance

The BBA supports passage of H.R. 1624 and S. 1099, which would enable states to maintain their current definitions for the small- to medium-sized employer marketplace. Failure to maintain the current definition of "small group coverage" could result in higher premiums for more than 200 medium-sized businesses (51-100 employees) in the Birmingham region, create instability in the small group market and cause coverage disruptions for Alabama workers.

Medicaid DSH Restoration

The BBA supports restoration of the October 1, 2017 statutory reductions in Medicaid Disproportionate Share hospitals, particularly in ACA non-expansion states.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Northern Beltline

The BBA supports the expeditious construction, full funding and timely completion of the Northern Beltline as an essential component of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS). The BBA also supports continued 100 percent federal funding for the ADHS, the appropriation of funds over and above Alabama's formula apportionment, and inclusion of the ADHS in any infrastructure proposal from Congress or the current administration. It encourages consideration of non-traditional funding solutions in order to accelerate completion of this transformational project through a mix of local, state, federal and public-private partnerships. The BBA opposes any effort to limit the amount of available funding or reduce the national priority status for the completion of the ADHS and this project.

Bus Rapid Transit

The BBA supports the Birmingham Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) initiative and identification of matching funds necessary for full implementation. The BBA supports the City of Birmingham as it pursues future BRT funding opportunities, in addition to the \$20 million TIGER grant it received in 2015. BRT is an efficient bus-based transit system that delivers fast, comfortable, convenient and cost-effective services at metro level capabilities. The BRT corridor will be 12.5 miles in length, connecting 25 neighborhoods through 19 stations beginning in Birmingham's Woodlawn neighborhood and extending westbound through parts of Downtown Birmingham before terminating near the CrossPlex facility. The BRT will grow the city's economy by attracting new development in surrounding neighborhoods, connecting residents to jobs, schools, health care, recreation/entertainment establishments and businesses along the corridor.

Highway and Transit Investment

The BBA supports Congress dedicating additional revenues in support of highway and transit investment. In 2020, the Federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) will once again be insolvent unless Congress acts to address the revenue deficiency for the HTF in conjunction with any available legislative tax vehicle. This should take place well in advance of the September 30, 2020, expiration of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act in order to provide the certainty Alabama and the Birmingham region need to move forward on significant transportation projects.



TAX

Federal Historic Tax Credit

The BBA supports the Federal Historic Tax Credit (HTC) program, an investment that is critical to economic growth in the Birmingham region. In the past 15 years, there have been over 41 federal HTC projects in the Birmingham area alone. Statewide, between 2002 and 2016, 4,466 jobs were created as a result of the program, resulting in over \$281 million in total development. The BBA opposes eliminating or decreasing the credit.

New Market Tax Credits

The BBA supports New Market Tax Credits (NMTC) to incentivize community development and economic growth. For every \$1 invested by the Federal government, the NMTC program generates over \$8 of private investment. The BBA opposes eliminating the NMTC program.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Innovate Birmingham

The BBA supports the strategic development and funding of Innovate Birmingham. Innovate Birmingham is an initiative that leverages existing resources at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Innovation Depot and Southern Research to harness Birmingham's intellectual capital into a vibrant, dedicated and connected area. Innovate Birmingham bolsters collaboration and success by providing businesses the facilities, infrastructure, access to capital and community support they need to thrive, while physically co-locating job creators with job seekers to create a new, inclusive innovation economy for Birmingham.

Broadband Policy Initiative

The BBA supports broadband policies that promote: (1) increased access to affordable broadband for all Alabamians, (2) continued investment, technology development and enhanced deployment across Alabama, and (3) competition and choice for Alabama's businesses and residents. The BBA opposes public policy that leads to burdensome government intervention or government owned competition and government regulation of the Internet, which will inevitably drive up costs for business and consumers in Alabama. Broadband is an important component of Alabama's infrastructure and the continued growth and diversification of Alabama's economy.



ENERGY/ENVIRONMENT

EPA Actions

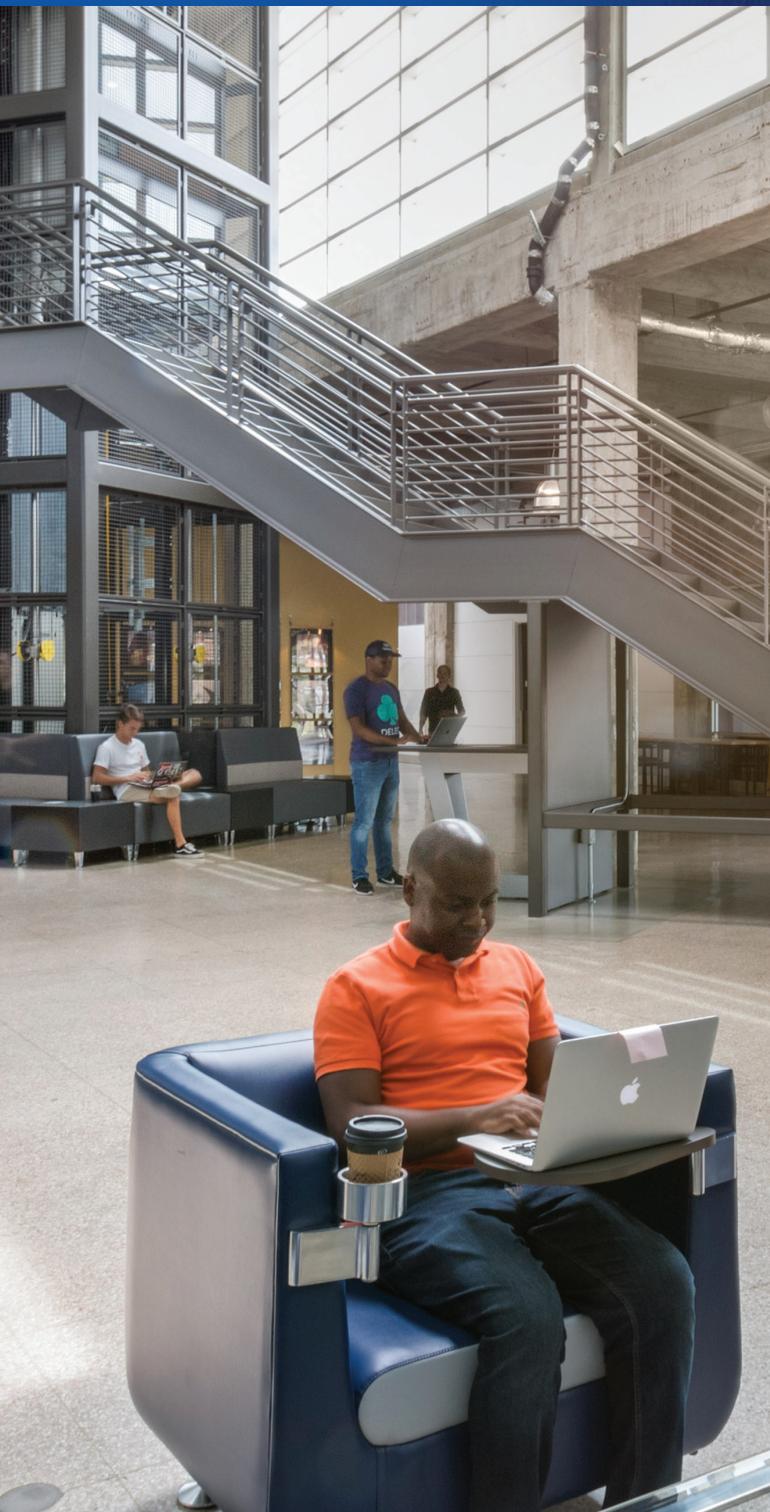
- The BBA opposes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal agencies' use of legally problematic tactics such as (1) funding policy initiatives through aggressive enforcement actions with unclear legal foundations, (2) using the agency's statutory authority to pursue extraneous political goals, and (3) pursuing regulation through closed-door, "sue and settle" negotiations, which circumvent the Administrative Procedures Act, hinder transparency and limit public participation in the rulemaking process.
- The BBA opposes efforts by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and other parties, to reduce and/or withdraw the state's authority to administer any of the delegated federal programs.

Energy

The BBA supports future federal energy policy that does not disadvantage one region of the United States in relation to others. If a renewable energy mandate is adopted, it should incorporate all clean energy technologies, including hydroelectricity, nuclear, clean coal with carbon capture and sequestration, and natural gas, so that the most affordable and efficient clean energy solutions can be deployed for Alabama consumers.

Water Resources

- The BBA supports efforts to provide adequate infrastructure to meet the state's needs for municipal and industrial water supply, navigation, energy production, economic development, irrigation and recreational uses. This includes continued funding for the Drinking Water & Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund programs and providing funding for the Water Infrastructure Finance & Innovation Act (WIFIA) and the Water Resources Development Act (WDRA).



- The BBA opposes the expansion of federal jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act to allow federal agencies to regulate ditches, culverts and pipes, desert washes, sheet flow, erosional features, and farmland and treatment ponds as “waters of the United States” subjecting such waters to all of the requirements of the Act (see the “Clean Water Rule,” 80 Fed. Reg. 37,054 (June 29, 2015)).

Red Mountain Park

The BBA supports the completion of Red Mountain Park by promoting the project as it relates to federal, state and local funding opportunities.



HEALTH CARE

Payments to Hospital-based Outpatient Clinics

The BBA opposes the recommendation of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission that the payment rates for evaluation and management of outpatient visits be the same whether the service is provided in an outpatient department or a physician’s office. This has a severely negative impact on academic health centers.

340B Pharmaceutical Program

The BBA supports the continuation of the 340B Pharmaceutical Program, which was established in 1992 to reduce outpatient costs for health care providers that serve high volumes of poor, uninsured and underinsured patients. The loss of the 340B program would force safety net facilities, children’s and rural hospitals to offer fewer services, serve fewer patients and incur greater loss.



Birmingham-Jefferson County Port Authority

The BBA supports and encourages the efforts of the Birmingham-Jefferson County Port Authority to obtain funding on the private, local, state and federal levels in order to improve safety, encourage economic development and bring jobs to Birmingham and surrounding areas. This includes but is not limited to grants and other funding streams.

Freight Transportation Projects

The BBA supports investment in infrastructure projects that improve freight movements, reduce traffic congestion and strengthen public safety, such as constructing more grade-separated railroad crossings to eliminate bottlenecks and to improve public safety, improving access to intermodal shipping for manufacturers by making freight transfers among trains, trucks and boats more seamless and convenient, and consistently maintaining the interstate and national highway system facilities in a state of good and safe repair.

High Capacity Transit Projects

The BBA supports federal, state and local partnerships that encourage funding for the Birmingham area’s transit corridors, including support for:

- Preliminary engineering and capital equipment purchase for transit facilities and services identified as part of the I-65 South Mobility Matters Project;
- Preliminary engineering and capital equipment for transit facilities and services to support the U.S. 11 Corridor Coalition efforts;
- Preliminary engineering and capital equipment for transit maintenance facility and operations center; and
- Preliminary engineering and capital equipment for satellite transit transfer facilities in local municipalities.

Interstate 22

The BBA supports the long-term completion of the stack interchange connecting Interstate 22 to U.S. 31.





“Employee Free Choice Act”

The BBA supports a worker's right to confidentially decide whether to unionize. To this end, the BBA will oppose the so-called “Employee Free Choice Act” and implementation of its provisions through regulations and the National Labor Relations Board.

Protection of Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

The BBA supports the availability of arbitration and other alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.



Tax Reform

The BBA supports working with Congress to achieve pro-growth tax reform. The BBA supports a reduction in the corporate tax rate and preserving the corporate interest deduction. The BBA opposes any new bank tax in the tax reform legislation as it's being considered in Congress. The BBA opposes the elimination or reduction of the federal historic tax credit (HTC), New Market Tax Credits (NMTC), or Private Activity Bonds (PABs).

The Marketplace Fairness Act

The BBA supports the Marketplace Fairness Act legislation or its alternate, the Remote Transactions Parity Act. The Act would authorize states, with proper enabling legislation, to require internet-based vendors to begin collecting state and local sales tax from their customers and remitting the tax to authorized states. Such legislation would also require a one-stop filing and coordinated tax audit by a “single entity administrator,” such as the Alabama Department of Revenue.

Mobile Workforce State Income Tax Simplification Act of 2017

The BBA supports the Mobile Workforce State Income Tax Simplification Act of 2017. This bill prohibits the wages or other remuneration earned by an employee who performs employment duties in more than one state from being subject to income tax in any state other than (1) the state of the employee's residence, and (2) the state within which the employee is present and performing employment duties for more than 30 days during the calendar year. The bill would support our increasingly mobile workforce and their employers.

Business Activity Tax Simplification Act (BATSA)

The BBA supports definite standards to govern when states may impose business activity taxes making it easier to determine the economics of interstate transactions.

“Last In, First Out” (LIFO) Inventory Method

The BBA opposes any effort to repeal the LIFO Inventory Method.

Health Insurer Tax Repeal

The BBA supports H.R. 928 and S. 183, which would repeal the insurance premium tax that was added to the Affordable Care Act. The insurance premium tax, currently in effect, has had a negative impact on insurance rates for small businesses since its implementation.

Short Line Tax Credit Extension

The BBA supports the extension of the Short Line Tax Credit that expired on December 31, 2014. This credit assists the smaller freight railroads across Alabama and the United States with upgrades to their lines enabling them to handle larger, already-existing freight car shipments traveling across our country. The lines of these smaller freight railroads are often the key for prosperity and economic growth for areas they serve.



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