

the 2015 policy agenda

WASHINGTON ROUNDTABLE

Washington's economic growth continues to outpace that of the nation. But recovery has been uneven across the state. Lawmakers have an opportunity in 2015 to enact targeted policy improvements and invest in critical services – namely, education and infrastructure – that will drive opportunity and shared prosperity. The Roundtable urges lawmakers to pursue four priorities in 2015:

Enact a sustainable biennial budget that supports the state's economic health and addresses the McCleary decision in a manner that leads to student achievement gains, improved teacher effectiveness and increased focus on STEM.

Washington has an opportunity to drive economic growth and shared prosperity by preparing all students for college and careers. The Washington Supreme Court's 2012 McCleary decision mandates that the state significantly increase its investment in K-12 education. McCleary funding must be part of a sustainable biennial budget that supports economic health and leads to clear, demonstrable gains in student achievement. It should tie resources to strategies that support increased teacher effectiveness and STEM education.

Prioritize investment in higher education and increase capacity at the state's postsecondary institutions, with a particular focus on high-demand STEM degrees.

Postsecondary education is a powerful tool for social mobility, career opportunities and fulfilling lives. Washington ranks 38th among the 50 states in bachelor's degrees awarded per capita, and there is a persistent gap between the skills that job candidates have and the skills that Washington's employers need. Our state must do better. Lawmakers should prioritize higher education funding and position the postsecondary system to support economic opportunity through better alignment with workforce needs and increased capacity in high-demand STEM programs.

..... PRIORITIES FOR 2015 (CONTINUED):

..... Invest in the preservation and maintenance of Washington's roads and bridges and complete improvements in key transportation corridors.

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) conducted an economic analysis of components of transportation proposals that received substantial support during the past two legislative sessions. BCG found that a \$7 billion investment to preserve and maintain state road and bridge networks and to improve key economic corridors would generate \$42 billion in benefits. Absent new funding for preservation and maintenance, 60 percent of state highway pavement will be in “poor” condition or worse in just 12 years. Lawmakers should enact a comprehensive, statewide transportation package that invests in preservation and maintenance of roads and bridges and completes improvements in key economic corridors. To maximize the impact of this investment, the state should reform how it plans, delivers and funds projects. Lawmakers also should provide regional governance and financing structures that enable metropolitan areas with disproportionate needs to better plan, prioritize and fund projects.

..... Encourage job growth and economic opportunity.

Washington ranks 33rd in the nation for business tax burden as a percent of private-sector gross state product, and it is among the 10 most expensive states for unemployment insurance tax rates and workers' compensation benefits paid. Such costs create a competitive disadvantage and discourage job creation. Washington should enact targeted reforms to support job growth and economic opportunity.

The Washington Roundtable is a nonprofit public policy organization comprised of senior executives of major private sector employers across Washington state.

Since 1983, the Roundtable has worked to create positive change on critical policy issues that foster economic growth, generate jobs and improve quality of life for Washingtonians. Areas of focus include: economic climate, infrastructure and education.



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