



2017 POLICY AGENDA

The Washington state economy is healthy, built on a foundation of strong anchor industries and innovation. The Boston Consulting Group projects there will be 740,000 job openings in our state in the next five years. State job growth over that period is expected to be nearly three times the national average. However, economic growth has been uneven across the state – many communities continue to feel the strain of slow job growth and high unemployment – and future growth is not guaranteed. State lawmakers will have an opportunity in 2017 to enact thoughtful policies that foster and support economic health, better prepare our students to access the opportunities employers are creating here, and expand prosperity statewide.

Education

The majority of job openings in our state in the coming years – particularly those that will support upward mobility and good quality of life – will be filled by workers who have postsecondary education or training. Recognizing the need to prepare our kids for these opportunities, the Roundtable has set an ambitious goal: By 2030, 70 percent of Washington students will earn a postsecondary credential by the age of 26. Today, only 31 percent of our students do so. Our state must take a “cradle to career” approach to raising the postsecondary attainment rate for students growing up here.

Address the Washington Supreme Court’s McCleary decision in a manner that leads to student achievement gains, particularly in low-performing schools and among struggling students. As the state takes on a greater share of the cost of education, it should deploy proven strategies to address issues of low performance and ensure support for struggling students. The McCleary solution must be part of a sustainable biennial budget that supports the state’s continued economic health.

Set clear goals and measure progress as part of a robust education accountability system.

A clear and reliable system for assessing school and student performance against rigorous education standards is fundamental to the state’s efforts to raise student achievement. Lawmakers should maintain the state’s commitment to high-quality learning standards and aligned assessments. They should set and measure progress against clear achievement goals, particularly at low-performing schools and for struggling students.

Maintain the state’s commitment to higher education and increased postsecondary capacity with a particular focus on high-demand STEM degrees. Lawmakers moved our state in the right direction in recent years by increasing investments in postsecondary education. They should maintain this commitment and work to increase postsecondary certificate and degree production with a particular focus on high-demand STEM degrees.

Support improvements in school readiness. High-quality early learning programs can support long-term academic achievement and help reduce achievement gaps, especially for children from low-income backgrounds. Lawmakers should continue to expand early learning options for low-income children.



2017 POLICY AGENDA *(continued)*

Economic Vitality

Lawmakers should continue to foster economic growth in 2017, delivering a sustainable biennial budget that invests in priority services, such as education, and paying thoughtful attention to policies that have the greatest impacts on job creation and business investment in our state.

Support continued implementation of the Connecting Washington transportation package.

This investment package will lead to a safer, more efficient, and integrated state transportation system. Lawmakers should maintain support for these investments, particularly the commitment to maintenance and preservation and project completion.

Encourage job growth and prosperity statewide. Washington's economy is performing well overall, but robust growth in the central Puget Sound region is not shared statewide. To expand opportunities for those living and working in communities throughout our state, Washington must maintain an investment climate that encourages and rewards innovation and risk-taking. Lawmakers should take into account the cost implications on job creators of policies they are considering and focus on those policies that will encourage economic growth statewide.

About Washington Roundtable

The Washington Roundtable is a nonprofit organization comprised of senior executives of major private sector employers in Washington state. Founded in 1983, the Roundtable works to effect positive change on the public policy issues that are most important to supporting state economic vitality and fostering opportunity for Washingtonians. We are committed to making Washington a better place to live, work and do business.

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