



# *Business Agenda*

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*The Voice of Vermont Business*

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## *Introduction*

### *Mission*

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce:

- Promotes an economic climate conducive to business growth and preservation of the Vermont quality of life.
- Works with businesses and government to improve the economic well-being of Vermonters by creating a competitive business climate that creates jobs by attracting new investment and enabling existing business to grow.
- Supports a healthy business climate by creating and supporting initiatives that encourage strong economic development programs, sound fiscal policies, an increasing tourism base, sensible environmental regulations, and a dependable infrastructure for movement of goods and information.
- Endorses public policy that is fiscally responsible and supports a vibrant economy that avoids new taxes and imposing mandates.

### *About the Vermont Chamber*

In business since 1912, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce is a private, not-for-profit business organization with nearly 1,500 members representing all sectors of the state's economy.

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce is independent of national, regional and local chambers of commerce.

Among its many activities the Vermont Chamber of Commerce works to increase the effectiveness of government and to facilitate a positive relationship between government and the business community. The Vermont Chamber promotes policies that are good for the economy and the employers we represent.

### *Purpose of the Business Agenda*

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce recognizes the importance of working with lawmakers and government officials at both the state and federal levels in order to achieve employers' primary economic development initiatives during

the immediate legislative session, as well as the ongoing policies outlined in this *Business Agenda*. This document is intended to provide our legislative leaders and state officials with an overview of the Vermont Chamber's policies, as approved by our Board of Directors and serves as a guide to issues and positions that will be addressed in the biennial Legislative Report Card.

### ***Executive Summary***

The policies within this document reflect the positions of the Vermont Chamber of Commerce and consistently support:

- Increased economic development and job creation through investment in infrastructure, workforce development, and education;
- Lowering the cost of doing business through permit reform, reduced regulations, and the removal of burdensome government mandates on business;
- Government accountability through voting records, efficiency in government operations, and public involvement;
- Maintaining and promoting international trade through continued investment in the state's international trade programs, working to resolve issues associated with border crossings, and promoting unified international trade policy that will enhance the capabilities of the Vermont business community;
- Creating environmental policy that strikes a balance between responsible environmental protections, private property rights, and economic opportunity; and
- Developing an energy policy that encourages and promotes a competitively priced sustainable energy mix that includes micro-hydro, wind and other renewables, in addition to large scale hydro and nuclear.

## *Economic Development and Job Creation*

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Continuous economic development is essential to sustain and improve Vermont's economy. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports programs and policies that allow short and long term planning for Vermont businesses. Combined with consistent, reasonable tax policies; improved broadband and cell phone coverage; and predictable government spending; these economic development efforts will result in vigorous business expansions, relocations, and start-ups in Vermont.

A supportive business climate results in economic growth, providing well-paying jobs. A supportive business climate can be achieved through sound fiscal policies that address and mitigate many of the high costs of doing business, such as taxes, energy, workers' compensation, and health care.

### *Economic Opportunity*

Increasing Vermont's competitiveness in the national and international marketplace will result in job growth and higher quality jobs for Vermonters and increased revenues to government.

#### *The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:*

- Efforts to reduce the cost of doing business in Vermont by: continuing the work on reforming the workers' compensation system, reducing and streamlining regulations, enacting tort reform, lowering taxes, and preventing and eliminating unfavorable mandates on businesses;
- Sufficient funding for effective and efficient economic development programs coupled with benchmarks on effectiveness;
- Improvements in Vermont's infrastructure such as maintaining roads and bridges, selective construction of new highways, upgrading airports, expanding broadband telecommunication(s), and improving the electrical energy transmission and distribution system;
- Foreign investment in Vermont, expanded travel to the state, and the export of Vermont products and services;
- Giving like entities equal status for tax and regulatory purposes;

- Programs to aggressively and cooperatively promote the commercial, industrial, agricultural, environmental, education and tourism sectors of economy including promoting our “green” brand;
- Legislation and regulations that encourage investment in telecommunications and broadband infrastructure;
- Market determination of wages and benefits; and
- Increasing the inventory of moderately priced housing to help attract and retain a productive employee pool, increase business profitability, and enhance the state’s competitiveness.

### ***Electronic Commerce***

The Vermont economy, at the local, regional and state levels, is a major benefactor of the vast and varied opportunities provided by e-commerce. However, internet-business opportunities pose many issues such as transaction taxation, protection of intellectual property, the right to privacy and general security that must be resolved as a matter of public policy.

#### ***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Strong policies for the protection of intellectual property;
- General security of internet transactions;
- Statewide access to broadband and further deployment of wireless communication;
- Efforts to encourage increased and incremental private investment in communication facilities that extend broadband and wireless services in Vermont;
- State policy that is technology neutral, and supports solutions which can be self-sustaining as technology advances;
- Using state or municipal funds to subsidize areas not currently served by wireless or broadband;
- Enacting federal laws regarding censorship, privacy and access to promote consistency throughout the nation and avoiding regulations unique to individual states; and
- Aggressive efforts to implement all interaction with state government to electronic format and payment systems.

## ***Government Accountability***

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports the concept of allowing private sector businesses to operate free of unreasonable government regulations and workplace mandates. New or expanded social programs should be funded through the General Fund.

### ***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Four year terms for constitutional officers;
- Holding legislators accountable for their voting records by implementing an electronic voting system in the State House;
- An ongoing evaluation of existing regulations and programs, and their administration, to determine their ultimate economic impact, utility and efficiency in regard to both the consumer and the business community;
- Limiting rules and regulations to legislative intent;
- Preparing risk assessments and cost-benefit analyses for new major laws, mandates or regulations, to demonstrate that the benefits outweigh the costs;
- Holding regulators accountable for the cost, scope, burden and effectiveness of regulations issued by state and federal agencies; and
- Efficiency in government operations.

## ***International Trade***

Maintaining and promoting international trade is a critical issue to member firms of the Vermont Chamber of Commerce. International border issues; import/export procedures; international trade policy, including free trade agreements; and economic sanctions, are all of prominent concern to Vermont Chamber members. The Vermont Chamber believes the success of international trade will benefit the private sector through increased production and sales, and benefit government through increased revenue. In addition, international trade is the mechanism to promote worldwide economic development, and the knowledge and understanding of other cultures.

### ***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Unified international trade policy that will enhance the capabilities of the Vermont business community to engage in international commerce;
- Continued investment in the international trade programs and infrastructure that assist Vermont companies;

- Promotion of Vermont's close proximity to Canada for tourism in Vermont and new market opportunities for Vermont and Canadian companies;
- Working cooperatively with the Vermont business community and governmental entities to increase intellectual property protections around the world;
- Advocating for additional free trade agreements including Free Trade Area of the Americas and renewed authorization of the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA);
- Timely and predictable border crossing and customs clearance for commercial tourism traffic via road, rail, sea and air;
- Continued investment in Vermont's transportation infrastructure, including air, rail and highways, to promote the flow of goods and services internationally; and
- Continued promotion of the Quebec-Vermont Trade Corridor to expand partnerships between Vermont and Quebec.

### ***Workers' Compensation***

The Vermont Chamber supports improving worker safety without state mandated programs that increase costs to employers and hinder job creation. Injured workers should return to work safely, quickly and cost effectively. The longer a person stays out of work, the less likely that worker will return to work.

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports the workers' compensation program as a means of compensating employees injured in work-related accidents or by occupational diseases while protecting employers from legal liability.

#### ***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Maintaining the current standard of burden of proof for mental stress. The standard should not be lowered to make such claims easier to maintain against employers;
- Continuing the reform of the workers' compensation program by assessing the appropriateness of Vermont's benefit levels and compensable injuries as compared to other states.
- A study that compares Vermont benefits with those from other jurisdictions to determine if caps on benefits would bring this system more in line with other states;

*Workers' Compensation System (continued)*

- Continued development and deployment of special workplace safety training and awareness programs to demonstrate the benefits of workplace safety and lower the incidents of workplace injuries and illnesses;
- The development of medical and safety standards as guidelines for all parties to adopt, as applicable;
- Continuous improvement of business processes at the Department of Labor to assure efficient and accurate processing of claims and appeals;
- A single definition of “employee” in the statutes administered by the Department of Labor, including the possibility of an independent contractors registry;
- Continued and expanded education of all medical practitioners, adjusters, and all parties to the workers compensation claim process, to assure understanding of current law, terminology, technology and practices in the workers compensation arena;
- Development and funding for investigation and prosecution of all types of worker compensation fraud by employers and employees;
- The consideration of a Bureau of Enforcement and Compliance for all types of insurance fraud;
- A study and report on statistics involving the number of accepted/disapproved denials (Form 2) and discontinuances (Form 27) and the number of interim orders mandated by the Department of Labor over a two year period;
- Provisions for an automatic stay of a decision of the Commissioner pending appeal to the Superior or Supreme Court. In the alternative, legislative changes enabling recovery of or credit for monies paid pursuant to a final order of the Commissioner if such a finding is reversed upon appeal;
- Modifying the statute on permanent total disability benefits to be consistent with the death benefits and discontinuing benefits when the claimant or claimant’s spouse is entitled to social security act benefits whichever occurs first;
- Utilization of the most current edition of the AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment to determine permanent partial impairment;
- Post-accident drug testing of employees involved in a workplace accident;
- A biannual review and updating of workers compensation fee schedules; and
- Reducing workers’ compensation costs through apportionment of aggravating injuries and pre-existing conditions.

## *Education and Training*

An educated citizenry is the foundation of a successful, healthy and productive society. One major component for business success is the availability of a well-educated and well-trained workforce developed through a statewide system of education and training.

### *Education*

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports an educational policy that assures every child will become a competent, productive, responsible citizen. This can be accomplished in part by supporting and maintaining an educational system that encourages every child and adult to participate in lifelong learning.

#### *The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:*

- Focusing education reform on reducing costs and increasing quality;
- Spending reductions that result in lowering property taxes;
- An ongoing analysis of ways to improve educational quality, structure, and overall governance to assure cost-effectiveness of delivery systems, focusing on improved outcomes and quality while lowering the cost of the K-12 public education system;
- Increased funding for post-secondary education so that all Vermonters, including both traditional and non-traditional students, are ensured equal access to affordable post-secondary education – recognizing that higher education is an important economic engine for Vermont;
- Standardized assessment tools for student performance, which are recognized and utilized locally and nationally and incorporate applied performance;
- Offering the citizens of Vermont greater opportunities for school choice and charter schools;
- The consolidation of both supervisory unions and school districts, when it reduces costs and therefore property taxes;
- Retaining high standards for teachers;
- Flexibility to address the issues of performance-based compensation and alternative certification procedures;
- Initiatives to create safe learning environments;

*Education (continued)*

- Early childhood learning, with parental involvement, as a critical component to long term educational success;
- Initiatives to address the need for improvement with how K-16 students are prepared for work; and
- Innovative ways to keep young adults in Vermont, including working with the universities and colleges, and the business community, to develop internship opportunities and new jobs.

### **Workforce Training**

A well-educated and trained workforce is key to economic success for the state's businesses and workers.

***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Technical and vocational training, with curriculum tied to national industry skills standards, at regional technical centers for high school students and adults;
- Promoting employers' review of high school transcripts to demonstrate a link between education and job skills;
- Better alignment of all elements of education and workforce development programs with national standards and business specific skills to better prepare students for the workforce;
- Greater emphasis on science, math, and engineering in our K-16 education system;
- Continuing to create and fund technology centers in Vermont to serve as magnets for high technology business;
- Continuing to fund federal and state programs to train or re-train Vermonters for jobs of the future; and
- Continued development of career pathways to address critical needs of businesses and employees.

## Energy

The Vermont Chamber endorses a balanced energy policy, increased development of North American resources, supply diversity and the efficient use of energy to ensure Vermont's security. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce recognizes that sufficient, affordable, and reliable energy is necessary to encourage positive economic activity and provide jobs. The Vermont Chamber supports employers in their environmentally beneficial decisions to the extent such uses are economically practical.

***Energy policy must encourage and promote:***

- The re-licensing of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station (VYNPS) should it be deemed safe and reliable by the appropriate authorities;
- Cost effective renewable energy development choices as positive contributions to Vermont's overall energy mix;
- Energy conservation and use of energy-efficient equipment, appliances, buildings and vehicles consistent with national codes and standards;
- Developing environmentally sound and economically viable alternative fuels for vehicles and alternative energy sources for infrastructure energy uses;
- Prudent energy efficiency, demand management, and combined heat and power initiatives;
- Co-generation as part of Vermont's energy mix, including co-generation with alternative sources such as biomass;
- Energy initiatives that appropriately and transparently allocate costs avoiding costs shifts;
- Environmental legislation that creates load-based economic opportunity within the private sector to meet Vermont's energy needs;
- Market-based environmental regulation that incorporates environmental and energy planning;
- Recognition that incorporating environmental externalities in energy pricing, or taxing energy sources in order to discourage energy use, may have an adverse impact on economic activity in the state and therefore the quality of life;

*Energy (continued)*

- Recognition that petroleum-based fuels supply more than 40 percent of the nation's energy and 90 percent of the nation's transportation fuels. A reliable supply of such energy, as well as a long term strategy to increase the use and reliance on alternative sources of energy, are important for heating, transportation, manufacturing and industrial uses;
- The recognition that the cost of gasoline, propane, natural gas, diesel and heating oil is important to economic development in Vermont;
- The availability of natural gas service in regions not presently served by this energy source;
- The fair application of Vermont's permitting process to any structure or development based on industry standards or best practices for energy efficiency;
- Providing Vermonters with more competitive electric rates by supporting more options for energy services and providers; and
- Supporting balanced policies and regulations that are fair to businesses of all sizes and benefit the overall Vermont economy.

## *Environment and Regulation*

Vermont businesses must compete in the rapidly changing global market; predictable, reasonable and cost-effective government policies and regulations are critical for business planning. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce does not believe pursuit of economic development and maintaining and enhancing the quality of our environment are mutually exclusive but rather mutually dependent. A strong economy generates the revenue needed to enhance our environment and environmental programs. Regulation and regulatory processes can be streamlined and made more efficient while assuring fundamental values of environmental quality and economic opportunity are not compromised. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce recognizes the need to protect and conserve natural resources to maintain Vermont's unique environment. This need should be balanced with a fair, timely and predictable environmental permitting process, which recognizes the necessity for economic growth and development to enhance our quality of life.

***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- The use of sound scientific research of environmental problems and in the identification of proposed solutions;
- The implementation of cost-effective regulatory programs such as site reclamation for contaminated properties;
- The recognition that a prosperous economy creates increased state revenues which has beneficial results for the environment and environmental programs;
- Sound land-use planning, locally derived and controlled, with input from directly affected parties, including industries, businesses, and landowners. This planning should further the public interest by creating a balance between responsible environmental protection, private property rights and economic opportunity;
- The use value appraisal of productive farm and forest lands to conserve natural resources;
- Streamlined and voluntary environmental audits to assist facility managers and regulatory agencies in achieving environmental improvement and compliance;

*Environment and Regulation (continued)*

- The recognition that existing and potential commercial activities using Vermont waters, such as snow-making, hydro-electricity, or other private property interests, serve the public interest and are a legitimate use of the state's waters, Amending Act 200 to remove the veto power in the approval process of Regional Planning Commissions over town plans, and to give greater consideration to the protection of private property rights;
- Efforts to oppose private right-of-action which allows individuals to sue businesses they believe are violating or may violate environmental standards;
- Providing for endangered species protection balanced with protection for human and economic needs, and recognizing that a species uncommon in Vermont is not truly endangered if it is common in other parts of the region or nation;
- Notifying property owners when any portion of their property is considered for designation in a map, plan, or inventory resulting in limiting the owner's use of that property and requiring the owner to provide a public benefit;
- Landowner compensation when new environmental regulations take private property for public use by mandating that landowners use their property to provide public benefits, significantly reducing the value of that property;
- Efforts to oppose any mandate requiring the sale of zero emission vehicles in Vermont until it is demonstrated that such strategies are needed to maintain air quality in Vermont;
- Efforts to oppose government seizure by eminent domain of private land for recreational purposes; and
- The need for a sound scientific understanding of the global climate debate and the opposition of any policy or mandate which would put Vermont businesses at an economic disadvantage with businesses located in developing nations.

## *Permit Process*

The Vermont Chamber believes efforts can be made within current regulatory statutes to streamline the permitting processes to enhance consistency and predictability for applicants. Permit processes should support development and ensure environmental quality. Better coordination between federal, state and local regulatory entities can eliminate duplication and delay. Further streamlining of application processes can also enhance efficiency.

***The Vermont Chamber supports a balanced environmental permitting policy which:***

- Streamlines the permitting processes so that all regulators can coordinate efforts resulting in greater government efficiency and shorter time frames for permitting;
- Is fair, timely and predictable and recognizes the necessity for economic growth and development;
- Encourages citizen participation at the District Environmental Commission (DEC) level, but limits appeals of DEC decisions to the Environmental Court to parties by right;
- Allows applicants to choose to have their Act 250 hearings “on-the-record,” thereby requiring that any appeal to the Environmental Court will be a review of the record and not “de novo” (an entirely new hearing);
- Recognizes that permits issued by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources should meet the appropriate criteria in Act 250 proceedings, thereby eliminating duplicate review;
- Provides for a fair prime agricultural mitigation policy, which balances the need to protect prime agricultural lands with the need for economic development and housing;
- Has a rational and predictable state storm water permit process that recognizes the regional and international impact of non-point sources of runoff (including phosphorus) from the State of New York and Province of Quebec;
- Utilizes cost effective municipal waste water systems to resolve storm water issues for discharges into impaired waterways; and
- Encourages clear and concise local zoning permits and regulations.

## *Fiscal Policy*

A consistent and predictable fiscal policy should be integral to the overall plan and vision for expanded business development and job growth in Vermont. Budgetary decisions, both taxing and spending, should encompass a strategic plan for economic development and the needs of Vermonters. State and federal budgets should reflect the need for investment in areas, which will create jobs and reduce Vermont's high tax burden. High taxes, both personal and business taxes, discourage business investment in Vermont and have the potential to influence individual tax payers to leave Vermont. Taxation must be equitable and competitive with other states. The state budget should reflect a fiscal policy, which is equitable, predictable, sustainable and understandable to all taxpayers. Controlling the size and growth of the government will result in greater efficiency and lower taxes.

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce believes sound fiscal policy is necessary to maintain a strong business climate, enhance economic growth, and provide good jobs for Vermonters. The direct correlation between tax policy and the cost of doing business is a major factor in decisions to relocate a business to this state, or to continue operating a business in Vermont. The increased competitiveness of Vermont's businesses in the global marketplace results in a higher number of and better quality jobs, and increases revenues to government.

### ***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Efforts to oppose tax increases or new taxes because of the demonstrated adverse effect on economic development and business growth. The more taxes a business pays, the fewer financial resources are available to grow the business and create more jobs;
- The recognition that personal income tax policy affects Vermont's small businesses' ability to grow. Many small businesses are sole proprietors who do not pay corporate taxes but high personal income taxes;
- Efforts to make our tax policy more competitive with surrounding states;
- A tax policy that seeks to lower taxes on business;
- A balanced budget combined with a stable, predictable and competitive tax climate;
- Prioritizing and combining government programs with a goal of eliminating waste and duplication while maintaining essential government services and by avoiding the creation of new government programs;

- Avoiding state mandates on businesses;
- The development of a state tax policy that retains and encourages business investment such as phasing out the corporate income tax;
- Using the unemployment insurance program to fund unemployment benefits only;
- Limiting, repealing and discouraging the imposition of local option taxes;
- The use of transportation fund revenues strictly for projects directly related to the source of revenues and the end of the diversion of transportation funds to unrelated general purposes;
- Change in tax policy to promote economic development within the state;
- Keeping government spending increases consistent with the rate of inflation and population growth;
- The requirement that the state pay property taxes on government-owned buildings to the municipalities in which they are located;
- Privatization of programs whenever possible and appropriate;
- Market-based incentives in place of mandates; and
- Providing a mechanism for those paying social security taxes to invest a portion of those taxes in an IRA-like personal retirement account; also, allowing government employees the option of shifting a portion of their defined benefit retirement accounts into IRA-like personal retirement accounts.

## Health Care

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce believes health care and health care insurance should be affordable, and thus more accessible, without sacrificing the quality of service and freedom of choice that Vermonters have come to expect. Government should lead the way toward meaningful and long-term accountability that encourages cooperation between the consumer, the provider, the insurance carrier, and the market.

Significant and long-term reform will take place when our health care system rests in the hands of the consumer and the provider to use insurance products, options, and cost structures that meet the demand and need of the end users.

Vermont has concentrated on maintaining a high quality health care system with the goal of complete access to health care by all Vermont citizens. Drivers of higher health care costs include government imposed mandates, under reimbursement of health care providers by Medicare, increased utilization by consumers, and the separation of consumers from knowing the costs of their health care.

Vermont's health care policy should recognize that competition of health plans and providers are an important part of reducing health care costs. Implementation of federal reform should maintain a focus on patients and give decision-making responsibility to patients and their doctors; while working to reduce costs and maintaining a financially sustainable system.

***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Health care proposals that do not unfairly target businesses to fund or subsidize these initiatives;
- Elimination of cost shifting caused by inadequate government reimbursement to health care providers for Medicare and Medicaid by focusing on prioritized spending rather than new revenue;
- Increasing access and treatment options, controlling costs, and improving quality through open and competitive market-based measures;
- Encouraging a strategy where demand, supply, and choice find equilibrium such as increased flexibility in community rating-based underwriting;

- Providing consumers and payers accessible and useful information to compare provider performance, in order to take more control and responsibility for their health and the attainment of the proper medical care, and to bring about accountability from providers for quality and cost of care;
- A multi-payer health care system that enhances the health care market, allowing continued employer participation;
- Encouraging efficiency and performance standards for government purchases of health care services;
- Reducing premiums through initiatives that spread the cost of health care over a larger segment of the population. We support initiatives that decrease the number of uninsured Vermonters, provide premium discounts for low and middle income Vermonters, and reduce the cost for small businesses to start providing insurance for their employees;
- Recognizing the need for tort reform to minimize defensive medical practices and to discourage frivolous lawsuits;
- Encouraging thoughtful and responsible utilization of medical services through cost-sharing techniques such as co-payments, premium contributions, deductibles and medical savings accounts;
- Providing the self-employed with the same health insurance tax equity as other businesses;
- Reducing the cost impacts of mandates and regulations;
- Encouraging personal responsibility in health care decisions; and
- Reducing administrative burdens on businesses to maintain employee health care coverage records.

## *Transportation*

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce recognizes the essential role of safe, dependable transportation systems. Highway and bridge maintenance delays result in significantly higher costs, decreased safety, and less reliability, affecting all highway users including tourists, suppliers and employees. The use of transportation funds for purposes other than the construction, maintenance, and repair of Vermont's transportation infrastructure jeopardizes economic growth in the state. A well-functioning transportation infrastructure is critical to economic growth, international competitiveness, safety, and quality of life.

***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- Improvements in the regulatory process and management practices so that allocated funds can be utilized without incurring significant time delays and inflated costs to construction projects;
- The use of transportation fund revenues strictly for projects directly related to the source of revenues and the immediate end of diverting transportation funds to unrelated general purposes;
- Eliminating the Joint Transportation Oversight Committee (JTOC) transfer;
- The recognition that Vermont is dependent on a variety of transportation systems that are user-funded and economically viable including highway, rail and air networks;
- An accelerated highway and bridge construction schedule which utilizes all available transportation funds to complete postponed or delayed transportation projects;
- Improvements and repairs to existing roadways and bridges taking precedence over planning new transportation projects, unless safety and traffic volume or economic development factors dictate otherwise;
- Effective winter highway maintenance and adequate delivery of police and fire services to ensure the safe movement of goods, services and people within the state, especially during high-risk winter weather conditions;

- Immediate progress on projects that have been deemed necessary for continued economic development like the Circumferential Highway and other significant projects that have been identified and planned; and
- Growth in the aviation industry statewide to enable Vermont companies to better access global markets.

## *Travel and Tourism*

The economic impact of travel and travel and tourism is crucial to a healthy economy in Vermont. The travel and tourism industry provides substantial employment opportunities and generates considerable tax revenue for the state's General Fund. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports future investments in tourism marketing programs and promotional efforts with a goal to increase occupancy rates resulting in increased revenues for Vermont. Tourism marketing is one of the few ways in which the state spends money that in turn generates a significant investment of out-of-state dollars that mostly stay in the state.

In addition to the significant economic benefit, the travel and tourism industry enhances the quality of life in Vermont. Small businesses are the backbone of Vermont's economic structure and many are in the travel and tourism industry – bed & breakfast establishments, restaurants, and shops – and the businesses that support this industry. Additionally, many agricultural enterprises are capitalizing on the growing agri-tourism trend, which is an important contributor in sustaining Vermont's rural character. Value added agriculture and the working landscape add to the aesthetic and rural character of Vermont, enhancing Vermont tourism. In addition, Vermont's visitors assist in supporting state parks, and other outdoor recreational resources as well as cultural heritage resources. Vermont visitors also purchase many locally made products.

The Vermont Chamber recognizes the major contributions of the Vermont travel and tourism industry to the economic well-being of the state and to the quality of life of its residents.

***The Vermont Chamber of Commerce supports:***

- A predictable level of funding for the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing (VDTM) for advertising, promotion and public relations, so it can consistently market Vermont as a tourism destination to potential visitors.
- Increasing promotion of Vermont as a travel destination internationally, especially in Canada;
- Continued investment in Vermont's travel and tourism infrastructure so it can continue to make vital economic contributions to Vermont;

- Participation in regional marketing initiatives that promote New England as a destination area for overseas travelers, as well as distant markets in the United States and Canada;
- Incorporating new and emerging technologies, such as social media and geocaching, into traditional travel and tourism marketing plans and utilizing these technologies to encourage travelers to explore Vermont's secondary highways;
- Development of four season domestic and international marketing efforts aimed at all sectors including motor coach group tours and foreign independent travel;
- Cross-border and business-to-business marketing partnerships; and
- On the federal level, expanding the visa waiver program to enhance seasonal employment, and making our borders safe yet encouraging the free flow of travel and commerce.

## ***Government Affairs Committee***

**Mary Powell**, *Chair*, Green Mountain Power Corporation

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**David Mount**, Mount Family Group, Ltd.

**John O'Kane**, IBM Systems and Technology Group

**Carol Presley**, Acadia Insurance Company

**Barbara Rainville**, Maple Landmark Woodcraft

**Mark Saba**, Formula Ford Autogroup

**William R. Sayre**, Duncan Hermanson Corp.

**Laura Sibilis**, Mount Snow Valley Chamber of Commerce

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