

## Legislative Objectives

# Rural Jobs



### **Background/Problem:**

Historically, Washington State’s rural areas have struggled to keep pace in many key economic measures like unemployment, job growth, labor force trends, median wages, and home prices, when compared with urban centers around the Puget Sound, Vancouver, and Spokane regions. Our state relies heavily upon its vital natural resources. Farms, forests and fisheries—together, the largest employers in Washington—and the rural communities that adjoin them have struggled in the past several years as urban economies have flourished.

In 2017 and 2018, AWB hosted three summits on rural jobs and heard from employers, state legislators and agency officials, local governments including city, county, and port officials, chambers of commerce and economic development organizations. Members spoke out in favor of improving the economic prosperity in the rural areas.

AWB recognizes the value of rural areas, and that the rural economy is an important and significant component of the state’s overall strength. AWB recognizes the policy issues found in the rural areas are diverse and represent broad perspectives, requiring a wide net, collaboration with employers, rural communities, and stakeholders. These areas include economically sustainable agriculture and forests, regulatory reform, recreational opportunities, infrastructure and public facilities, workforce/housing, water availability, environmental stewardship, tourism, and natural resource management.

Broadband infrastructure is also important in the rural areas and our partners in the telecommunications industry are leading the way. AWB telecom member companies have worked hard, for many years to bring fast and reliable internet service to the citizens of Washington state. Just in the previous five years alone, these businesses have invested nearly \$9.5 billion in telecom infrastructure. All within the borders of Washington State. And their investments aren’t just about fiber and hardware, it’s also about people. Telecom companies employ about 22,000 Washingtonians, all with high tech, family wage jobs. Our citizens have never been as connected to the world as we are today thanks to private enterprise. We still have work to do, as an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 people, mostly in the rural areas, remain unserved.

AWB members will work toward the following legislative objectives for the upcoming legislative session.

### **Objectives:**

1. Improve job creation, retention, and workforce development in the rural areas. Support development of policies with flexibility to customize policies to fit the needs of different communities.

2. Support efforts to create more high-wage jobs in the manufacturing sector. Support lowering the B&O tax for manufacturing in a manner that is not limited to geographic locations in the state.
3. Support rural development and ensure adequate access to water and oppose regulatory standards that are not based on best available science and/or create competitive disadvantages.
4. Support infrastructure improvements throughout the state. Protect, preserve, and promote access to essential public facilities for rural development including all local infrastructure, water availability, and access to ports that support Washington's trade-based and rural economies. Provide greater certainty in permitting and environmental reviews. Protect commitments from the 2015 Connecting Washington revenue package; keep projects funded and on schedule.
5. Recognize and support policies and appropriate investments that improve the economic and environmental benefits of transporting freight on Washington's roads, air, marine, and rail systems.
6. Support expanding and improving internet connectivity (broadband) in rural, unserved areas.
7. Improve access to financial capital in the rural areas and support the Rural Jobs Act.