Legislative Objective

Education & Workforce Training

AWB understands and acknowledges the challenges that lie ahead in the 2015-17 legislative biennium to fund basic education and comply with the statutory timelines set in House Bills 2261 and 2776. We believe all education investments should increase student opportunities and develop clear and challenging academic standards to improve student outcomes. Our education system must focus not only on funding K-12 but in enhancing all avenues of postsecondary education to support our competitive and global state economy. With the current and growing number of unfilled skills gap opportunities and with the intent of solidifying a world class education for every student in Washington State, AWB proposes the following legislative objectives:

Any investment of taxpayers’ dollars directed to fund education programs should have a demonstrated ability to enhance student learning with clear articulation of expected outcomes and performance measures associated with the funding.

Fully implement education reforms passed in recent legislation, including next generation science standards, 24 credit career & college graduation requirements, common core, and the expansion of charter schools. These reforms will elevate this generation and the next generation of students through meaningful accountability, consistent standards of achievement and innovative opportunities in learning.

Expand Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs in all levels of education throughout every school district to ensure that classroom and career/technical education curricula prepare students for pursuing career or post-secondary education opportunities.

Incorporate student achievement as one measure in teacher evaluations, qualifying Washington school districts to obtain critical federal Title 1 education funding that is essential to serving at-risk students. Based on research, teacher quality is paramount to student achievement as such we support teacher skills enhancement, principal-directed quality assessments and evaluations.

Eliminate barriers for youth employment and training to encourage innovative work-based learning opportunities and create comprehensive workforce training strategies that include business and all institutions of higher learning.

Increase the current higher education funding allotment, including but not limited to: Four-year institutions, community colleges, and career and technical programs beyond the current 9.2 percent of the NGSF+ accompanied by clear expectations for college course availability and timely degree completion. This will protect student affordability and access, stabilize the postsecondary system for long term development, secure student outcomes for employment, and provide a skilled workforce for Washington businesses.

Support work experience and military service credits to advance more students through our institutions of higher education and into the job market.

For questions, please contact AWB’s Sheri Nelson at 1-800-521-9325 or Sherin@awb.org.
Legislative Objective

Health Care

Health Care is one of the most prominent rising costs for both small and large businesses today. Large employers are now mandated to provide health care coverage and small employers struggle to continue to provide health care benefits to their valued workforce. Our health care system is in a constant state of flux as components of the Affordable Care Act are implemented and our State creates new standards and criteria. In an effort to ensure choice of coverage, affordability and cost containment for all employers and consumers as well as to protect the private sector delivery and purchasing system, AWB submits the following intentions for the 2016-17 legislative session:

*Oppose additional market rules that exceed federal law and/or threaten the private health care market, hinders employers from providing coverage for their workforce, or create challenges for consumers to afford private health coverage.

*Support retaining Association Health Plans (AHP) as a viable market option to fulfill and serve the health care needs for businesses and their workforce.

*Oppose the creation of structural elements that increases dependence on state or federal government health care coverage, creates duplicate services or expands the role of government in the health care industry.

*Support research and development within the private sector for market-based solutions that increase alternative payment models to the traditional fee-for-service model of reimbursement, including outcome-based payment methods.

*Oppose legislation that expands government regulation on the contractual or market relationship between private businesses.

*Ensure legislation that alters or expands current systems also contains elements establishing evaluation processes, accountability systems, and outcome benchmarks for any expansions and/or additions within our health care system.

For questions, please contact AWB’s Sheri Nelson at 1-800-521-9325 or Sherin@awb.org
Background/Problem:

Land development and construction are a critical part of Washington’s economy. Unfortunately, the construction industry continues to feel the impacts of a slow economy and regulations add more pressure to an already fragile recovery. Our land use and environmental regulatory system creates uncertainty and can be needlessly complex and duplicative. The decision to expand the scope of state environmental reviews to include climate impacts outside the state’s jurisdiction has also introduced ambiguity across the entire land use and construction fields.

Solution:

AWB supports the following objectives for the upcoming legislative session:

- The protection of Vesting Laws and opposes any new limitations.
- Regulatory reforms to add greater certainty, predictability, and efficiency to environmental reviews.
- Voluntary energy efficiency programs and incentives, but opposes mandated requirements that cannot demonstrate economic justification or that result in diminishing health and safety standards.
Legislative Objective

Tax & Fiscal Policy

Problem:

Numerous challenges and fiscal issues face lawmakers in the 2016-17 budget cycles. The McCleary court decision to require ample funding of education continues to loom over the legislature and pressure for pension funding, maintaining a safety net and increasing our state competitiveness remain.

Over the last decade, major changes to and interpretations of tax laws have been made that have resulted in a lack of certainty, consistency and equitable treatment of taxpayers. Taxpayers deserve fair treatment, regardless of the pressures placed on our economy and our tax collection system.

Solution:

AWB supports legislation to:

1. Balance the state budget while promoting and protecting economic development opportunities and our state competitiveness rankings.
2. Ensure taxpayers are treated fairly and equitably by strengthening the taxpayer bill of rights. Reform the appeals system and processes to:
   a. Allow for independent review of department of revenue decisions without a requirement to pay the underlying taxes;
   b. Change the unreasonably high “burden of proof” placed on taxpayers that challenge property valuations to the more widely used standard of the “preponderance of the evidence”.
3. Update, clarify or affirm tax laws to provide technical clarity and ensure legislative intent is met. Clarify that digital automated services are an exempt business input, and detail specific business activities that would be defined as digital automated services.
4. Reduce regulatory red tape and paperwork burdens facing employers. This should include reducing the number of times that a sales tax rate is changed in a year, consolidating the annual survey and report and removing the 100% penalty.
5. Update systems to allow for state level centralization of business tax filing and reporting for all cities with license requirements and/or B&O tax, similar to current sales and use tax reporting.
Problem:

AWB believes that transportation infrastructure is critical to our state’s business climate and economic future. We supported a statewide effort to implement transportation reforms and viable funding strategies that will improve job creation, freight mobility and commerce. With the adoption of this statewide transportation reform and revenue package, AWB supports the following transportation objectives for the upcoming legislative session:

Solution:

Uphold commitments from the 2015 Connecting Washington revenue package; keep projects funded and on schedule; fully implement the reforms; keep maintenance and preservation dollars for its primary purpose and oppose diversion of funds to non-transportation purposes.

Continue support for reforms that reduce project costs and delays, improve accountability, transparency, and efficiency on projects, budgeting, and the administration of programs and services.

Support incentives for emerging and growing technologies in alternative fuel use and infrastructure, and oppose implementing stricter fuel standards and other carbon pricing schemes that increase transportation and energy costs.

Oppose legislation or the use of transportation resources that adversely affect Washington businesses or create competitive disadvantages.

For questions, please contact AWB’s Mike Ennis at 1-800-521-9325 or mikee@awb.org.
Legislative Objective

Workers’ Compensation Reform

Background/Problem:

Washington State continues to have a compulsory workers’ compensation system that is one of the most expensive and administratively complex in the nation. The last major worker’s compensation reforms took place in 2011. Some of the largest cost-saving pieces of the 2011 reforms like voluntary settlement agreements for certain injured workers have fallen short of their projected savings.

The Washington Courts and the State, continue to expand the definitions of who is an employee and what is a covered condition. True workers’ compensation reform must address issues such as the high incidence and cost of occupational disease claims, and the unfair and unduly complex process for calculating workers’ benefit levels under state law. Real cost reduction and increased efficiency in the workers’ compensation system will result in a better outcome for both injured workers and employers.

Solutions:

1. Simplify the statutory formula for calculating wage benefits by adopting a flat rate applied to an employee’s wage at time of injury, as calculated by a 52-week average.

2. Ensure that Washington State’s workers’ benefit package can continue while maintaining state fund solvency and affordable premium rates for workers and employers by clarifying the scope of covered conditions. This includes restoring the original intent of the law that the system covers only work-related exposures and conditions.

3. Expand the use and reduce unnecessary administrative requirements of the claims resolution settlement option.

4. Expand the claims management authority for retrospective ratings groups and self-insured employers.

5. Prohibit the diversion of workers’ compensation trust funds for non-workers’ compensation programs and purposes.