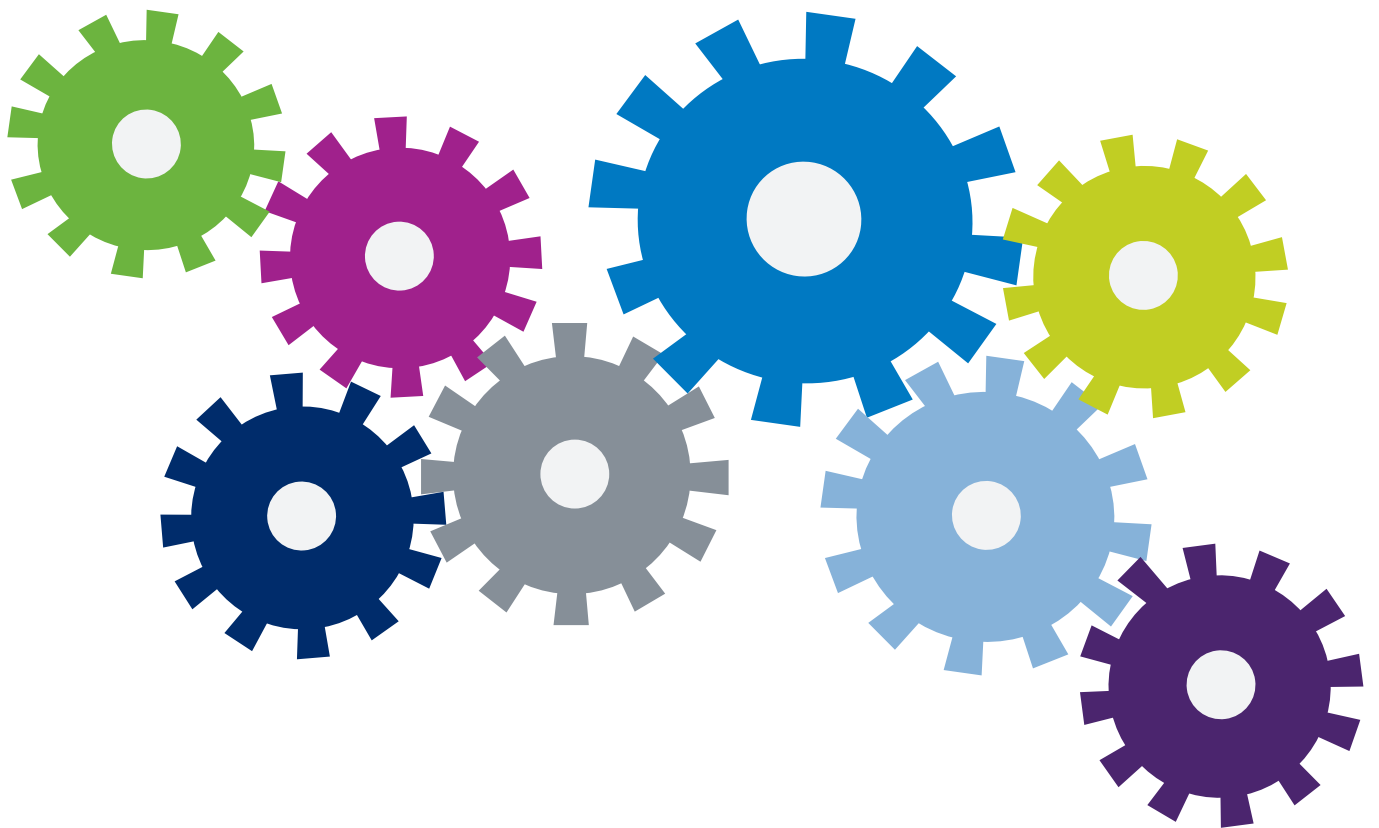




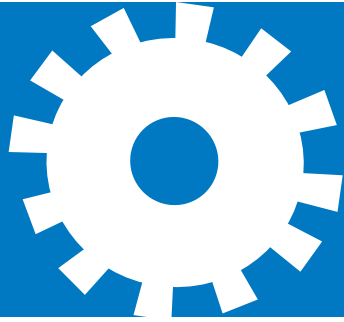
Baton Rouge Area Chamber®

*Leading Economic Development
in the Baton Rouge Area*



Baton Rouge Area Chamber's 2009 Agenda:

GEARED FOR INNOVATION



Baton Rouge Area Chamber's 2009 Agenda:

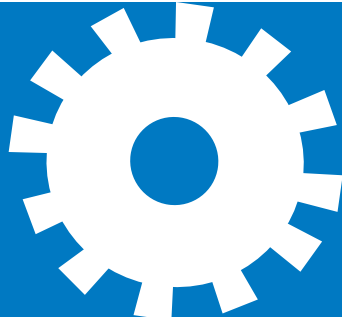
GEARED FOR INNOVATION

The first three years of *The Campaign for a Greater Baton Rouge* have brought about remarkable economic development progress in the Baton Rouge area. The region has witnessed successful strides with business development, LSU, Pennington Biomedical Research Center, ethics reform, workforce development, transportation investment, and digital media cultivation, to name only a few. The hard work and dedication has given the Baton Rouge area a solid foundation from which to grow.

The Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC), through the *Campaign*, has been proud to lead many of these efforts, and yet there is still much to do. We must continue to actively market the region for new business investment with messages that counter the negative external images that have long plagued the perception of Louisiana's business climate. Solutions must be found for an East Baton Rouge public education system that still has yet to meet the needs of its students; a transportation strategy that lacks a consistent implementation plan and proper funding mechanism; the continually underfunded colleges, universities, and research centers; workforce programs that are currently unable to respond to the current and future demands of business, and much, much more. These are all areas that can be fixed, but they will require an extremely high level of focus.

The financial uncertainty affecting many in the United States has minimally affected the Capital Region. This situation presents a unique opportunity for the Baton Rouge area to improve its competitive position relative to its peers. The nation's most economically diverse, growth-oriented regions have actively structured themselves to be globally competitive. Now is the time for the metro area to dedicate itself to an economic future built on knowledge, creativity, and innovation. The time to make a commitment to doing what needs to be done. The time to ensure success.

BRAC's *2009 Agenda: Geared for Innovation* identifies the priorities most critical to the region's long-term prosperity. Following a proven model of success under *The Campaign for a Greater Baton Rouge*, it lays out actionable strategies for the year, following the input and ideas of the business community and BRAC's members, investors, and board of directors. It puts forth a plan to address the Baton Rouge area's weaknesses and build up its strengths in a systematic manner. The agenda provides an encompassing look at what needs to be accomplished, and how BRAC's actions in 2009 will achieve its long-term goals. These priorities, initiatives, positions, and projects identified present the most succinct strategy for the Baton Rouge area to reach its aspiration of becoming the Creative Capital of the South.



Baton Rouge Area Chamber's 2009 Agenda:

GEARED FOR INNOVATION

The Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) has a demonstrated track record of success and, in 2009, will continue to deliver on its mission of leading economic development in the nine-parish Baton Rouge area. After completing the third year of its transformation, BRAC is seeing the results that will ensure the Capital Region's continued growth and progress as the Creative Capital of the South.

BRAC's 2009 Agenda provides a framework that will drive the organization's efforts over the coming year. The agenda is organized by specific topics and then outlines priorities under each. Each topic will consist of flagship priorities, active initiatives, and policy positions. It also outlines how BRAC will address each of these. These items are those most critical to the Baton Rouge area's economic future as derived from BRAC investor and member feedback.

Top priorities for 2009 are identified on the following page. The remaining document is organized into the following sections:

- Business Recruitment and Retention 4-7
- Education 8-13
- Small Business 14-15
- Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship 16-19
- Transportation 20-23
- Workforce 24-25
- Other State and Local Issues 26-30

Issues and activities are classified into four categories:

Top priorities: BRAC is committed to dedicating significant resources and providing aggressive, proactive leadership on these issues in 2009.

Active initiatives: BRAC has identified a clear position on these issues and will likely be actively involved with these issues in 2009.

Policy positions: BRAC has identified a clear position on these issues, but does not anticipate addressing these issues in 2009. BRAC will become active on an issue if there is a clear, discreet opportunity to make a meaningful impact.

Priority projects: BRAC engages on a wide range of activities and issues that do not involve governmental advocacy, but do contribute to economic development in the region. Examples include policy research, community improvement initiatives, and business recruitment and retention activities.

Top Priorities

BRAC is committed to dedicating significant resources and providing aggressive, proactive leadership on these issues in 2009:

- **Business recruitment and retention project wins:** conduct aggressive professional marketing, sales, and retention efforts to ensure that the Baton Rouge area captures project wins totaling at least 800 jobs at wages competitive in targeted sectors
- **Digital media competitiveness:** further develop our strategy for the digital media sector
- **New local and regional business incentives:** encourage the establishment of rapid response funds and other targeted incentives at the parish level (and potentially region-wide) to position our communities to better compete for projects that create high-wage jobs
- **Public education reform:** aggressively support key public education reforms such as supporting bold leadership at the system level, creating a strategy for cultivating high-performing charter schools, increasing principal training, and modifying tenure rules to provide greater flexibility for restructuring low performing schools
- **LSU institutional advancement:** aggressively support and promote LSU's development of the next phase of its National Flagship Agenda
- **Southern University institutional advancement:** pursue opportunities to support the institutional advancement of Southern University as an economic driver
- **State and regional innovation strategy:** champion a state and regional innovation strategy and lead a regional innovation analysis to produce coordinated, best-in-class research park and business acceleration programs
- **Regional transportation solutions to increase mobility:** pursue short- and long-term solutions to congestion and inter-parish mobility, including funding for priority regional transportation projects identified by BRAC's business-led regional transportation group, advancing the Baton Rouge Loop project towards implementation, and conducting research on best practices for regional transportation planning
- **Regional workforce solutions:** nurture and develop regional cooperation for the delivery of demand-driven workforce services in the Baton Rouge area and develop expertise for project- and sector-oriented solutions
- **State business taxes and incentives:** advocate for targeted tax and incentive reforms that spur growth, remove unorthodox business taxes, and provide small business relief



BRAC leads an aggressive strategy to retain existing industry, recruit outside businesses into our region, and negotiate for expansions. To succeed in its efforts, BRAC must professionally market and sell our region to businesses across the world and work with the existing industrial community to understand and address their concerns. In addition, advances in state and regional government policies are needed to help place the Baton Rouge area on equal footing with many other communities in the United States.

TOP PRIORITIES

Business recruitment and retention project wins: *conduct aggressive professional marketing, sales, and retention efforts to ensure that the Baton Rouge area captures project wins totaling at least 800 jobs at wages competitive in targeted sectors*

The Baton Rouge area will continue to be successful in securing new jobs for the region consistently through a focused, well-designed plan that is executed over multiple years. BRAC maintains an awareness of issues and challenges facing our region's companies and works with local and state governments and regional partners to tailor solutions that ensure that their jobs and new corporate investment stay in our region. In addition, BRAC will continue its aggressive marketing efforts to attract new companies to our region.

Digital media competitiveness: *further develop our strategy for the digital media sector*

The Baton Rouge area is building a successful track record in the digital media sector through a growing base of companies and university programs. In order to further cultivate this unique, growth-oriented sector, BRAC will continue to develop its business development efforts and strengthen our competitive advantages for digital media in partnership with the Baton Rouge Area Digital Industries Consortium (BRADIC) and the state. The state should also update the digital media tax credit by maintaining the 20% incentive through all six of the beginning years of operation, instead of the diminishing rate system now in place. To do so would preserve Louisiana's competitive advantage in this highly lucrative industry sector.

New local and regional business incentives: *encourage the establishment of rapid response funds at the parish level (and potentially region-wide) to position our communities to better compete for projects that would create high-wage jobs*

Across the nation, communities that are successfully winning business recruitment projects often rely on cash incentives to help close deals. Local and/or regional rapid response funds and other business incentive programs enable our region to better compete for major projects. Further, state economic development programs are increasingly prioritizing business development projects that include local matching funds. BRAC will champion the creation of local and/or regional rapid response funds that are governed by strict criteria that ensure the funds are used to recruit high-quality jobs to the Baton Rouge area.



ACTIVE INITIATIVES

State business development efforts: *strongly support measures to advance the state's business recruitment and retention efforts to the next level*

Recent investments in Louisiana Economic Development (LED) have provided the necessary resources to significantly enhance its business recruitment, retention, and expansion capabilities. As such, opportunities to improve the state's competitiveness must be continually sought. Louisiana can rapidly improve its competitive position by accelerating the development of mega-sites most conducive for attracting immediate investment prospects, enhancing state capacity to effectively manage large site-selection opportunities, implementing a statewide GIS with detailed site/building and workforce information, adopting a statewide prospect-protocol system, developing a real-time workforce information system, and fostering greater collaboration between LED and the state's regional economic development organizations. These initiatives represent immediate improvement opportunities which will lead to increased success in winning business recruitment, retention, and expansion projects for the Baton Rouge area. Over the longer term, Louisiana needs to prioritize efforts focused on the development and attraction of high-wage, knowledge-based industries.

POLICY POSITIONS

Funding for regional economic development: *encourage continued state funding for regional economic development programs*

State-regional partnerships are among the most effective means to coordinate business recruitment and retention efforts. LED's matching grant program provides critical funding for state-regional economic development initiatives, and encourages stronger regional coordination around the state. Continued funding of the program will enable BRAC, and other economic development organizations throughout the state, to continue their aggressive campaigns to grow jobs in Louisiana.

Funding and predictability of state business incentives: *support efforts to maintain and increase predictability of state business incentive programs*

In business recruitment efforts, powerful, yet flexible, state incentives often make the difference between winning and losing deals. Maintaining funding for the state's current business incentive programs will help ensure that our state and region's economic development efforts remain competitive. Additionally, achieving greater predictability from project to project in discretionary programs (e.g., rapid response fund) would enable economic development organizations, such as BRAC, to be more successful in attracting high-paying employers to our region.



Nuclear energy: support the cultivation of the nuclear energy industry in Louisiana and position the Baton Rouge area as a leader in its development

The rising cost and finite availability of oil, increased political pressure to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, and an improved public perception of nuclear power makes the development of the nuclear energy sector a compelling economic prospect. The International Atomic Energy Agency projects that worldwide nuclear power capacity will increase 15-42 percent by 2020 and 21-87 percent by 2030 compared to 2006 levels. This forecast suggests total capital investments on the order of \$500 billion to \$2 trillion (in today's dollars) across the world over the next 20 years, representing roughly 70-280 new nuclear reactors. In the U.S., developers of as many as 22 nuclear reactors plan to submit their applications to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission by the end of 2008 and bring the reactors online around 2015, representing a total potential US capital investment on the order of \$150 billion. Recent estimates from Goldman Sachs anticipate \$60-90 billion in capital spending on new nuclear plants in the U.S. by 2020. Industry innovation has produced nuclear plants that are much more safe and efficient, leading to lower operating and usage costs. Our region's current expertise in energy generation, well-developed energy studies programs at both LSU and SU, and private sector entities already engaged in nuclear reactor project development indicate that nuclear power is a natural fit for the Baton Rouge area.

Information on local sites/properties: encourage state and local government entities to provide electronic access to fresh information on properties in the Baton Rouge area

Ensuring quick, easy access to current and relevant information is critically important to our region's success in identifying sites for businesses looking to expand or relocate. As such, improving electronic access to data managed by state agencies and local assessors can position our region to be more competitive in completing deals. Appropriate government entities should strive to develop their GIS capabilities (for example, GIS-supported information on location, zoning, and valuation) on industrial sites and other properties so that our region has a competitive edge in winning business relocations and expansions.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

BRAC executes a comprehensive program designed to position the Baton Rouge area to win business recruitment and expansion projects. Selected activities and projects include:

- Completing site visits with major regional employers in targeted industry sectors to understand and assist with opportunities for expansion
- Executing a national earned-media campaign to promote the Baton Rouge area outside of our region
- Placing regionally-branded advertising and advertorials in targeted industry trade publications
- Completing an aggressive trade show schedule focused on target industry sectors



Business Recruitment and Retention

- Completing a region-wide (parish by parish) public return-on-investment model to evaluate incentive packages
- Performing site evaluations and developing marketing collateral for potential industrial and office sites throughout the region
- Providing rapid responses to site selection inquiries, including assistance with state and local incentive programs
- Working with national site selection consulting firms to ensure they understand the advantages of locating in the Baton Rouge area
- Tracking and reporting on key regional economic trends
- Support state efforts on international business development
- Rural parish capacity building

Education is an absolutely critical factor in preparing our community and workforce to meet the challenges of a 21st century economy. Education issues and initiatives include learning and instruction from pre-K programs through post-secondary education. Furthermore, post-secondary education is also closely aligned with the innovation strategies outlined in our agenda and has a direct impact on economic diversification. Recognizing the profound role of education in advancing economic development, The Campaign for a Greater Baton Rouge, BRAC's five-year economic development capital campaign, includes a regional Learning Community initiative as one of its seven major strategies.

TOP PRIORITIES

Public education reform: *aggressively support key public education reforms such as supporting bold leadership at the system level, creating a strategy for cultivating high-performing charter schools, increasing principal training, and modifying tenure rules to provide greater flexibility for restructuring low performing schools*

Lagging student achievement in public schools, particularly in areas with large populations of low-income families, poses the single greatest challenge to our state and region's long-term economic development prospects. A bold, targeted approach to public education reform will generate significant increases in student achievement in a fiscally responsible manner.

- **System leadership:** *actively support bold system leadership for public school districts, particularly during the transition of leadership in East Baton Rouge (EBR) Parish*

For the Baton Rouge area to truly compete in today's economic landscape, we must cultivate a world-class education system. Public school systems must be directed by strong leaders who have a vision for excellence and will not accept the status quo. Our system must be led by people willing to find and implement creative solutions to the critical problems that have too long plagued our public education systems. They need leaders who will engage external stakeholders, such as the business community and non-profit organizations, to form the partnerships essential for productive, successful school systems.

- **Charter schools and school alternatives:** *endorse and support the development of high-performing alternatives to traditional school models*

Families with children in failing schools should have the ability to transfer to a more successful public school, magnet school, or charter school. Independent charter schools have more freedom with regard to how the school is run and often deliver student achievement levels that outperform district averages. Frequently, high-performing charter schools are developed locally rather than recruited from outside of a region. BRAC and its regional allies should carefully support the development of high-performing charter schools to provide alternatives to families whose children are in under-performing schools, as well as state and local policies that advance this practice and engender successful charter schools. School systems should welcome family



concerns regarding their children's education and seriously consider, when financially and operationally feasible, offering families the option to transfer to a different school if it would benefit their children's academic development. At the same time, aggressive efforts must be made to reconstitute failing programs, particularly at the region's approximately twenty-five academically unacceptable schools.

- **School principals:** support efforts to develop a "pipeline" of exceptional school leaders in our region's public schools

Principals play a critically important role in school performance by setting the proper tone, making strategic decisions, and demanding high levels of performance from teachers, staff, and students. Currently, nearly half of all EBR principals have over thirty years of service, making them eligible for retirement. As the current cadre of principals approaches retirement, a strategy for principal cultivation and training is critical to the ability of the school performance and student achievement to improve. Larger, more comprehensive investments in principal recruitment and development should be supported, including strengthening existing models, establishing a "leadership and training academy," and exploring alternative approaches in the Capital Region.

- **Teacher tenure policy:** support modifications to state teacher tenure policy to increase teacher performance and accountability and create greater flexibility for restructuring low-performing schools

The state recovery school district has more authority when it takes over failing schools than do districts seeking to address the same challenges. In particular, a school's employment practices can be restructured in order to identify the most appropriate staff to play a role in the operation. In order for superintendents and districts to address school improvement, the state must enable and encourage districts to hold school leadership and teachers more accountable for performance. Current tenure laws prevent districts from having the flexibility enjoyed by recovery and charter schools when restructuring low-performing schools. It also affects districts negatively when low-performing schools are taken over by the state, as they are forced to absorb lower-caliber tenured teachers to the detriment of possibly higher quality ones. Whether in failing schools or otherwise, teachers—like students, schools, and other professionals—should be held accountable for their performance. High performance and accountability should trump years of service as the criteria for continued employment.

LSU institutional advancement: aggressively support and promote LSU's development of the next phase of its National Flagship Agenda

As a flagship research university, LSU drives the Baton Rouge region's innovation economy. Our region's competitiveness and the future of LSU lies in its ability to be consistently identified as a top-tier research university. BRAC research identified that LSU would need over \$100 million in additional operating funding and significant additional research infrastructure capacity to be among the top 50 public research universities in the U.S. To achieve this goal,

the university and its allies should develop and promote the next phase of the National Flagship Agenda. The agenda, created in 2002, is a structured blueprint for improving LSU's research and educational capabilities. It is essential that the university evaluate the elements of the agenda, ensure that the strategic direction laid out six years ago is viable and meaningful, and lay out an organizational and political action plan to achieve its goals.

Southern University institutional advancement: pursue opportunities to support the institutional advancement of Southern University as an economic driver

Southern University (SU) in Baton Rouge is the main campus of a prominent, historically black, land-grant university system. In addition to preparing students for careers and for study in graduate and professional schools, SU has a unique opportunity in the Capital Region to leverage federal and private research funding for minority-serving institutions in addition to other sponsored research. The institution also plays a role in regional and local business development, nurturing current and future entrepreneurs through its business school and other programs. By aggressively pursuing institutional advancement, SU could substantially increase its share of sponsored-research activity and private sector partnerships, and thereby support greater technology-based economic development in the Baton Rouge area.

ACTIVE INITIATIVES

Higher education funding: support a formula for funding post-secondary institutions that rewards student progress and completion, success of the research enterprise, and programmatic alignment with workforce needs

Past formulae for higher education funding have focused in large part on student enrollment rather than on student progression through meaningful courses of study, and the development of premier research capacity at certain four-year institutions. A more sophisticated formula that takes into account aspects and outcomes such as differential program cost, student progression, federal research activity, alignment with high-demand workforce needs, and increased production of degrees and certificates incentivizes higher education institutions to succeed in their individual role, scope, and mission. Such a formula assures the development of a robust post-secondary educational landscape from community and technical college certificates and degrees, and four-year degrees, through graduate education and premier research activities.

Accountability in public schools: support efforts to protect and strengthen the state accountability plan for public schools in Louisiana

Louisiana's award-winning public school accountability plan is a central component in efforts to increase student achievement across the state. The accountability plan includes high-stakes standardized tests that evaluate the ability of students to demonstrate skills in key subject areas. Maintaining the accountability plan will support increases in student achievement, educational attainment, and long-term economic growth in our state and region.



Alternative funding for school infrastructure: *identify mechanisms to accelerate funding for school infrastructure improvements, including the development of alternative funding models*

Ensuring a pleasant and productive learning environment through school construction and maintenance is a key component to a positive educational experience. Yet the system budget is not always able to fund needs for new or updated facilities as they arise. An examination of alternative funding mechanisms to accelerate investments in up-to-date infrastructure is needed to ensure that children have positive learning environments.

Market-based teacher compensation: *support efforts that allow district leaders to adopt market-based teacher compensation practices*

The ability to develop and maintain a base of qualified teaching professionals hinges, in part, on the capacity of school districts to offer competitive compensation packages, particularly for those positions that are toughest to fill. Many of our districts have great difficulties hiring and retaining math and science teachers for high-poverty schools. In addition, starting salaries for teachers are often set at levels that are not competitive with neighboring districts or states. A more comprehensive market-based compensation system may help in attracting qualified teachers throughout our region by providing administrators with the flexibility to differentiate pay levels based on the subject area, market conditions, and/or individual and school performance.

POLICY POSITIONS

Early childhood education: *support expansion of early childhood education (pre-kindergarten) programs*

Research demonstrates that three- and four-year-old children who participate in high-quality, academically rigorous early childhood programs have higher scores on math and reading tests, greater language abilities, and higher graduation rates. Many districts in the Baton Rouge area have less than 50 percent of at-risk four-year-olds enrolled in pre-kindergarten despite the general availability of Head Start and LA-4 programs. Districts in the Baton Rouge area should consider investing in needed facilities and greatly expanding their marketing and outreach programs to low-income families to drive enrollment levels in pre-kindergarten programs. Furthermore, the state should continue to further expand access to and availability of early childhood education.

Tutoring programs: *fund and develop one-on-one or small group tutoring programs that aggressively help at-risk students who have fallen behind catch up with their peers*

Many students in the Baton Rouge area—particularly those coming from low-income families—begin school at a stage of learning development that falls below the standards for their age. In such situations, national research suggests that one-on-one or small group tutoring with a highly structured curriculum in the early grades is one of the most effective forms of remediation. The funding and implementation of such tutoring programs could have

a substantial impact on overall student achievement levels in the Baton Rouge area and can be structured in ways to efficiently target expenditures on children most in need and most likely to benefit from the programs.

Alternative certification: *support efforts to develop and strengthen alternative certification programs for teachers and principals*

Teacher certification requirements seek to ensure competence and appropriate skills among education professionals. However, rigidly-designed certification requirements also discourage some talented professionals, particularly college graduates without degrees in education, from pursuing the teaching profession. As such, alternative certification initiatives such as the Practitioner Teacher Program are important to recruiting exceptional individuals into the teaching profession.

Principal autonomy: *support initiatives that empower principals to make school-level decisions and cultivate a performance culture focused on student achievement*

Research indicates school performance can be improved when principals are responsible for key activities such as recruitment and development of teachers, curricular issues, and the design and implementation of standard school-level functions and policies. Today, across the Baton Rouge area, principals have limited control or authority over their schools, classrooms, budgets, policies, and many practical decisions impacting their operations and effectiveness. Districts should identify and implement mechanisms to further empower principals to make those school-level decisions that impact student achievement and avoid mandating school-level policy at the district level.

Test score routing: *oppose state or district efforts that route or re-route test scores in a way that undermines the intent of the state's accountability system*

The state and districts are currently able to represent school performance disparately, depending on how scores are attributed to certain schools. Initial state policies regarding the routing of scores were intended to address alternative education options in regards to improving outcomes for students struggling in traditional schools. Today, districts are considering and adopting policies that re-route scores from magnet school students back to their home attendance zones, distorting actual performance of schools. Both the state and districts should consider new policies that eliminate the inaccuracies of score routing efforts.

Collective bargaining: *oppose efforts to introduce collective bargaining arrangements in public school districts in the Capital Region*

Collective bargaining arrangements can significantly restrict the ability of school boards to address the challenges facing public schools and, based on the balance of evidence available, do not contribute to increased student achievement. Specifically, policies and contract provisions demanded by teachers' unions generally focus on issues of job security and uniform



compensation increases, often in direct opposition to initiatives with proven or promising potential to increase student achievement (e.g., tenure reforms, market-based compensation, alternative certification). As such, collective bargaining likely would pose new obstacles to improving public schools and advancing economic development in the Baton Rouge area.

Minimum Foundation Program (MFP): *support modifications to the state funding formula to better address inequities created when new school districts and charter schools are formed*

Restructuring the MFP, the formula used to distribute state dollars to local school districts, is a crucial element in fostering an environment open to innovation in educating Louisiana's young citizens. For instance, the current formula creates undue burdens on existing school districts when new school systems are formed. This issue has resulted in the EBR Parish School System facing revenue shortfalls to cover certain costs (e.g., retired teacher medical and life insurance) when new districts have formed. The MFP should be modified to ensure fair and equitable funding for regions, such as the Capital Region, that are exploring innovative means to improve student achievement.



Small businesses play a tremendous role in our region's economy, and BRAC maintains a strong commitment to advancing the interests of the small business community. Government policies and programs that foster the success of small businesses are essential to our region's efforts to grow jobs in the Baton Rouge area.

ACTIVE INITIATIVES

Business start-ups: *pursue improvements that simplify and accelerate the processes for acquiring necessary permits and licenses for business start-ups*

Acquiring all of the necessary licenses and permits to start a business is a frequent challenge for many business owners. Efforts to simplify and accelerate approval processes at state and local government levels are needed so that entrepreneurs can focus more energy on successfully opening and running their businesses. Streamlined permitting and reporting, facilitated by online resources, can help our region's small businesses grow and prosper.

Health insurance costs: *oppose unnecessary insurance mandates that drive up healthcare costs*

Rapidly rising healthcare costs make it increasingly difficult for businesses to introduce or maintain coverage for their employees. Limiting the scope of mandated healthcare benefits will help to control healthcare costs for businesses, making employer-based health plans more affordable and supporting both workers and small businesses in the Baton Rouge area.

Corporate franchise tax exemption: *support exempting the first \$300,000 of taxable base from state corporate franchise tax*

All businesses subject to the corporate franchise tax, no matter the size, are forced to pay the tax due to a minimum tax requirement. This requirement is costly and inefficient to the state department of revenue, who is forced to attempt to collect this tax from hundreds of inactive or non-existent businesses. Exempting the first \$300,000 of taxable base from the state corporate franchise tax would eliminate inefficient minimum collections and reduce a financial and regulatory burden for businesses during their early stages.

POLICY POSITIONS

Regulatory burdens: *support measures, including increased availability of online forms, to facilitate compliance with necessary regulations on business activity*

Depending on the nature of their operations, small businesses in the Baton Rouge area must comply with the regulations of some or many local, state, and federal agencies. Reducing the associated costs of compliance would contribute to the success of many small businesses even as regulations continue to protect consumer and public welfare.



PRIORITY PROJECTS

In addition to our efforts to improve access to government programs and to foster governmental policies and practices that support small business, BRAC is also conducting a number of initiatives covering areas of interest to small business. Examples include:

- Promoting and enhancing a web-based business resource center, the BRAC Business Guide, to help businesses start-up, grow successfully, and fully leverage incentives and other programs available to support business growth
- Pursuing online non-sufficient funds (NSF) check registrations to simplify collections for business owners



Our ability to compete as a region will increasingly depend on the ability of our workforce and companies to embrace technology and innovation. To meet this challenge, our region must invest in institutions and programs that help position the Baton Rouge area for a knowledge-based economy. We must also create and foster a culture of entrepreneurship that will develop true wealth-producing, innovative companies.

TOP PRIORITIES

State and regional innovation strategy: *champion a state and regional innovation strategy and lead a regional innovation analysis to produce coordinated, best-in-class research park and business acceleration programs*

- **State innovation strategy:** *develop and promote a multi-faceted, state innovation agenda that advances the state and our regional economy in a globally competitive environment*

With two research universities and strong concentration of engineering, science, and technology-driven industries, the Baton Rouge area benefits from state and regional investments that foster innovation. Over the last decade, the state has moved to invest in research and research infrastructure, but it has not been consistent or significantly competitive with other state and regional efforts. The state would accelerate its innovation economy by launching a multi-faceted innovation agenda, focused on 1.) attracting more federal and private research and development dollars; 2.) recruiting top university research talent; 3.) improving access to proof-of-concept funding and early stage risk capital; and 4.) accelerating and launching innovative, high-growth companies.

- **Regional innovation strategy:** *develop and launch a regional innovation strategy to produce coordinated, best-in-class research park and business acceleration programs*

Areas around the country like Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania have succeeded in building research parks and business cultivation strategies that convert public sector and university research strengths into private sector investment and jobs. Further, business incubators provide a critical economic development function by nurturing promising start-up companies, thereby supporting diversification and growth in the Baton Rouge area. An assessment of the current research, incubation, and entrepreneurial development assets of the Capital Region—in partnership with the Research Park Corporation, LSU, and the LSU System Research and Technology Foundation—will enable us to truly participate in the knowledge economy by having the resources to grow and assist innovative firms and the entrepreneurs that start them. Efforts to develop capacity at regional incubators—including the Louisiana Technology Park, the Louisiana Business and Technology Center, and the Louisiana Emerging Technology Center—should be supported in order to foster technology-based entrepreneurship in the Capital Region.

ACTIVE INITIATIVES

Pennington Biomedical Research Center (PBRC): aggressively pursue funding for continued growth of PBRC

PBRC is one of the most powerful economic development assets in the Capital Region, attracting tens of millions of dollars in sponsored research and boasting world-class capabilities in nutrition and preventive medicine research. In order to fully leverage PBRC’s economic development potential, the legislature should support a dramatic expansion of the facility that would allow it to compete with the top institutions of its kind in the world, while creating thousands of high-paying new jobs. In the entire state, few institutions offer such a singular, proven investment opportunity to increase economic development. PBRC’s new clinical research building should be viewed as an important, yet relatively small, first step, especially when compared to similar investments in other states totaling hundreds of millions each. Increasing capital funding for PBRC in the range of \$150-200 million, while dramatically increasing its operating funding, will secure Louisiana’s position in a market poised for rapid growth—one that offers thousands of knowledge-based, high-paying jobs that support the foundation of a knowledge-based economy.

Incentives for technology-based economic development: support implementation of technology-based incentives that would be beneficial in Louisiana’s efforts to be competitive in the quest for knowledge-based jobs, including a renewal and strengthening of the state’s research and development tax credit and digital media tax incentive

Recruitment of new business enterprises, especially ventures that create knowledge-based jobs, is important to the economic development of the state and region. Proper implementation of the Technology Commercialization and Jobs incentive, which was created during the 2007 legislative session, along with identification of other potential incentives focused on research and intellectual-based enterprises will strengthen our ability to compete for federally-funded research teams and other projects with high-wage jobs.

Venture capital incentives: support appropriate incentives to encourage expansion of angel, seed, and venture capital funds under management or investing in Louisiana

Access to angel, seed, and venture capital is one of the critical elements for start-up businesses, particularly in technology-intensive fields. While several incentive programs have been developed over the years to increase the availability of venture capital in Louisiana, these incentives must continually be evaluated to ensure their success and updated as necessary to remain competitive with other states. Encouraging Louisiana venture capitalists to support entrepreneurs in the Capital Region enhances new industry and economic prosperity while retaining local wealth.

POLICY POSITIONS

Technology-based economic development organization: support the creation of a statewide, business-led, non-profit organization promoting technology-based economic development

Nearly every state in the nation has some state-level entity that focuses on enhancing technology-based economic development. In today's economy, economic success is being driven by innovation, not by capital accumulation or a reliance on natural resources, and states are adjusting their economic development strategies accordingly to meet this new challenge. A statewide, business-led non-profit organization that promotes technology-based economic development would ensure that Louisiana maintains a consistent focus on this important part of our state's business development strategy.

Academic medical center: advocate for the creation of a university research hospital and trauma center in Baton Rouge

Earl K. Long Medical Center has become increasingly outmoded and inadequate for meeting the diverse healthcare needs of our regional population. In the context of broader statewide healthcare reform, the creation of a state-of-the-art academic medical center would establish a university research hospital and trauma center in Baton Rouge, provide a premier training base for future Louisiana doctors, and advance economic development by attracting additional federal funds and catalyzing new business ventures. Formation of an academic medical center should be based on a rigorous assessment of the post-Katrina healthcare landscape in order to ensure that any new capital investment does not create an unhealthy imbalance in the healthcare market. Additionally, LSU should pursue partnerships with other hospitals (e.g., affiliation agreements) wherever possible in order to avoid duplication of community resources, to minimize competition for scarce healthcare professionals, and to maximize opportunities for graduate medical education. Finally, lawmakers should enact an equitable compensation model for indigent care.

Local tax on custom software: advocate measures to exempt custom software from sales and use taxes

State law excludes custom computer software from the definition of tangible personal property for state sales and use taxes and enables similar exclusions from local sales and use taxes at the discretion of parishes and municipalities. While other areas consider custom software to be a professional service, EBR Parish has not passed an ordinance exempting custom software from taxes designed for traditional retail products. Exempting custom software from sales and use taxes would level the playing field for local software development firms and enhance the growth of this sector in the Capital Region.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

In addition to our governmental advocacy efforts, BRAC is also conducting a number of initiatives, research projects, and educational programs designed to foster the development of new technology-related jobs in the Baton Rouge area. Examples include:

- Highlighting and supporting the success of technology companies in the region through earned media
- Serving as a lead partner in the Baton Rouge Area Digital Industries Consortium (BRADIC) and creating targeted material to recruit digital media companies to the region
- Working with LSU and the Pennington Biomedical Research Center to improve commercialization of intellectual property, including technology transfer and partnerships with business

Transportation issues are driven by the needs of a growing economy. Sound planning policies, quality infrastructure, and enhanced mobility throughout the Capital Region can dramatically enhance our region's economic development. Specific topics of interest include road and highway development, commercial and industrial development, land regulations (e.g., planning and zoning), mass transit, and wastewater and water infrastructure.

TOP PRIORITIES

Regional transportation solutions to increase mobility: *pursue short- and long-term solutions to congestion and inter-parish mobility, including funding for priority regional transportation projects identified by BRAC's business-led regional transportation group, advancing the Baton Rouge Loop project towards implementation, and conducting research on best practices for regional transportation planning*

- **Regional transportation funding:** *secure funding for important regional transportation projects identified by BRAC's business-led regional transportation group that enhance regional transportation mobility and accessibility*

The Capital Region's economic development depends on regional mobility and accessibility for businesses and individuals. Through a fact-based approach in 2008, BRAC's business-led regional transportation group worked to identify and build consensus around a set of high-impact regional projects that will have the biggest impact on eliminating traffic congestion. Securing funding for all or some of these projects will greatly enhance regional mobility by eliminating hundreds of thousands of hours of traffic congestion.

- **Baton Rouge loop and other toll road projects:** *advance the Baton Rouge loop project toward implementation and support efforts to develop toll roads to enhance regional mobility*

Many regions across the country have constructed toll roads to provide residents and businesses new transportation options despite shortages in state and local government transportation budgets. In Louisiana, however, toll roads are relatively uncommon. Local and regional communities have state authorization to establish tolling authorities that enable the financing of new toll roads; however, toll road projects typically do not generate enough revenue to fully fund themselves. BRAC and its regional economic development organization partners support the Baton Rouge loop, and will advocate for its implementation in part or in whole. If there is a financing gap, the recently authorized Transportation Mobility Fund (TMF) could address it by supplementing toll revenue with state funds. If properly funded, the TMF could allow for implementation of the first phases of the Baton Rouge loop project and would catalyze the development of necessary new regional thruways that would increase mobility and commerce throughout the Capital Region. However, the Baton Rouge loop and other projects should be accompanied by master land-use plans in the parishes in which this infrastructure will reside.



ACTIVE INITIATIVES

State transportation funding: *aggressively support a statewide transportation financing solution to improve roads*

With a backlog of state transportation needs amounting to \$14 billion and growing, additional funding is necessary to address Louisiana's substandard road and bridge conditions, highway safety issues, and increasing traffic congestion. A transportation financing solution that includes (1.) the dedication of at least \$500-600 million per year in additional sustainable funding, including a portion allocated to the TMF; (2.) the strategic use of tolls for major capacity expansion projects; and (3.) a substantial allocation of one-time funds from budget surpluses, could address at least half of the state's transportation needs over the next 20 years.

POLICY POSITIONS

Transit operations: *support efforts to achieve fiscal stability for transit operations in the Capital Region*

The Capital Area Transit System (CATS) has been subject to perennial budget shortfalls that impair its ability to focus on improving operations and adjusting to changes in the Baton Rouge area. Current local efforts to achieve fiscal stability, including an independent study of the CATS budget and operations, represent critically important steps for improving transit and mobility in the Baton Rouge area. These efforts should ultimately include the implementation of transit operations with the appropriate level of revenues and overall service levels to sustain economic vitality in our region and should examine the options that improve regional mobility as well as inter-city mobility.

Local road improvements: *monitor and support the execution of the Green Light Plan in East Baton Rouge Parish to ensure its success*

The Green Light Plan, a \$460 million roads program spearheaded by EBR City-Parish Mayor-President Holden, aims to develop greater connectivity between existing streets and to create alternate routes that will help get traffic flowing safely throughout EBR Parish. By supporting the implementation of this program, the business community will help ensure the success of an initiative that directly addresses one of its top concerns: traffic congestion.

Regional airport services: *support strategic investments in the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport, including aggressive use of airline incentives to recruit new low-cost carrier services*

Airports play a critically important role in a region's economic vitality by providing efficient and effective air transport to and from other markets. Based on a BRAC strategic assessment, residents and businesses of the Baton Rouge area would be best served over the next 25 years by making continued investments in the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport at its existing location and by aggressively leveraging airline incentives to recruit new low-cost carrier service



to the airport. Compared to strategic options that involve the construction of new airport facilities, this extremely cost-effective strategy is expected to result in substantially reduced ticket fares and increased airline service levels (including the number of destinations served by direct flights and the number of flights per day) for Baton Rouge area travelers.

Mixed-use and traditional neighborhood developments: *support well-designed mixed-use developments that create vibrant alternatives to traditional single family home neighborhoods*

Communities across the country are discovering that well-designed mixed-use developments aligned with key smart growth principles can add community vibrancy and provide fresh alternatives to traditional single family home neighborhoods. Businesses and residents increasingly look for the presence of these types of developments when determining a location to call home. By embracing new mixed-use and traditional neighborhood developments that complement existing neighborhoods, our region can offer current and new residents a greater variety of lifestyle options that can enhance the overall “quality of life” of the region.

Land development processes: *pursue consistent and fair approval processes in planning/zoning matters*

With the recent surge of development in the Capital Region, there is increased need for streamlined and consistent rules in the permitting process for new projects. In addition, outside businesses looking to expand or relocate to our region are often deterred due to the perceptions of permitting complexity. Planning and zoning rules that are consistently applied will support fairness and integrity in development as our region continues to grow. In addition, timeliness and consistency will instill confidence in investors who are considering expanding or relocating to the Baton Rouge area.

Wastewater infrastructure: *monitor and support the execution of the EBR wastewater improvement program and offer options as necessary to ensure the success of the program*

The wastewater system in EBR has severe environmental deficiencies and is in need of major upgrades. The city-parish has approved the wastewater improvement program to make these upgrades in a cost-effective manner, yet the program is still estimated to cost over \$500 million to complete. An inadequate wastewater system can create roadblocks to new industrial and commercial growth in EBR and can make us less competitive in our efforts to attract and grow jobs in the region. An expedient, yet rigorous, effort to execute on the approved wastewater improvement program should remedy this situation.

Louis Armstrong International Airport: *support governance of and investments in the Louis Armstrong International Airport that allow the state’s only international airport to compete with neighboring peers*

The Louis Armstrong International Airport is a key asset to our economic competitiveness. The airport has suffered from a landlocked position and years of political arguments spurring



from the fact that it is owned by one parish and sits mainly in another. The creation of the Southeast Regional Airport Authority is a good first step in bringing all parties together to determine the best course of action to ensure that our state can compete with our peers by having a world-class international airport. Regional cooperation and a well-founded strategy are necessary to ensure that we maximize the potential of this key economic asset.

International trade: *support strategies to improve the ability of the Baton Rouge area and Louisiana to compete internationally, as well as efforts to help Baton Rouge area businesses to operate globally*

Business today is no longer local, regional, or statewide. Businesses who truly want to compete are working in a global marketplace. While international development may not be a consideration for every business, it is a critical component for expanding many businesses. The state and BRAC's regional partners should develop a coordinated strategy incorporating our port, rail, road, and air infrastructure to ensure that we are able to offer best-in-class services to companies pursuing international trade and development. The state's strategy should target the use of limited dollars to deliver the best outcome where Louisiana can achieve and maintain a competitive advantage. Also, BRAC supports efforts to inform the region's businesses on global business trends and international trade strategies.



Access to a well-trained workforce is an absolute necessity for businesses to successfully compete in today's economy. Having workers who are trained and able to continue learning as work processes change over time has become the most pressing concern of business leaders in the Capital Region. Establishing a workforce development system that streamlines training delivery based on market demands is a critical component of a healthy system of economic development. Building upon the successful state reforms of 2008, BRAC continues to push forward on efforts to improve the quality and availability of workers in targeted sectors.

TOP PRIORITY

Regional workforce solutions: *nurture and develop regional cooperation for the delivery of demand-driven workforce services in the Baton Rouge area and develop expertise for project- and sector-oriented strategies*

The Baton Rouge area is experiencing rapid growth and enjoying significant new capital investment. However, companies are facing significant challenges in their efforts to meet the new demands of the economy. In particular, attracting qualified employees is a top concern for many area businesses. Coordination of the two local workforce boards in the Capital Region, better involvement from key business representatives, and a workforce assessment that identifies areas of market demand will lead to a much stronger regional workforce system. Supporting workforce development efforts that are coordinated at the regional level (e.g., worker recruitment efforts, expanded training programs for high-demand occupations) aimed at developing a well-trained, growing regional workforce will enable new and existing businesses to succeed as they respond to the exciting growth opportunities in the Capital Region.

ACTIVE INITIATIVES

Regional career technical high school: *push forward efforts to construct a model career technical high school*

The EBR Parish School Board secured funding for a new career technical high school. BRAC supports the development of the high school as soon as financially feasible, supports that it be available to serve the region, and advocates that it be located in proximity to and in coordination with Baton Rouge Community College.

Statewide workforce solution: *aggressively support implementation of comprehensive reform of Louisiana's workforce development systems to streamline training delivery based on market demands*

Despite substantial recent advances in Louisiana's community and technical college system, Louisiana's persistent "skills gap"—too many citizens lacking job skills and too many employers lacking qualified workers—still presents a huge obstacle to our economic development efforts. Recent reforms of our state's workforce development systems, including streamlining responsibility among key public entities and empowering business leaders to set



goals based on market demands show promise for the development of a more responsive workforce system. Louisiana also should follow the lead of states like Georgia that have developed sophisticated, customized training programs to rapidly address the workforce needs of business recruitment and expansion prospects. Finally, the workforce development system should include programs and post-secondary admission policies that encourage high school students (and graduates) to consider both specialized technical training and traditional college degree programs, as both paths can lead to many good job opportunities.

Career orientation of school experiences: *support initiatives to increase the career orientation of students' school experiences*

Citizens and experts agree that young people need to be informed of their future employment opportunities, as well as the qualifications for their chosen career goals, whether they involve post-secondary education or technical training. Districts across the Capital Region should consider replicating and further coordinating successful programs that address this objective, including dual enrollment in high school and community/technical college courses and the proposed career technical high school. In addition, districts should ensure an adequate number of specialized career guidance counselors and a sufficient level of support and training for these professionals.

POLICY POSITIONS

Higher education system: *support the realignment of higher education expenditures to optimize resources and align with workforce needs*

With its disproportionately large student enrollment in inadequately funded four-year universities, Louisiana operates an expensive, inefficient higher education system that encourages low graduation rates and poor alignment with workforce needs. By raising admission standards at state universities and by increasing the proportional enrollment of the community and technical college system, our state and region can optimize expenditures, boost educational attainment, and align our higher education system with workforce needs.



BRAC actively engages on any government issue that has a significant impact on economic development in the Baton Rouge area. For instance, changes to labor, expenditure, and taxation policy can often have significant positive or negative impacts on the Baton Rouge area. Listed below are issues that are not specifically covered by a BRAC Issue Council, yet still represent important components to our region's economic development.

TOP PRIORITIES

State business taxes and incentives: *advocate for targeted tax and incentive reforms that spur growth, remove unorthodox business taxes, and provide small business relief*

- **Unorthodox business taxes:** *pursue changes to state business taxes that put Louisiana in an unfavorable competitive position compared to peer states*

While Louisiana has made recent progress in efforts to eliminate unorthodox business taxes, there are still instances that put us at a disadvantage when compared to other states with whom we compete. For example, lawmakers should include an exemption to the corporate franchise tax that would exclude the obligation on a business's first \$300,000 in revenue per year. Another possible modification should be the elimination of the state income tax on income investment and capital gains. Such exemptions/exclusions would provide needed capital vital for growth, especially for small businesses.

- **State business incentives:** *support efforts to enhance statewide incentives that drive growth in targeted industry sectors*

A key aspect of any state and regional economic development program is the ability to provide competitive incentive packages that are tailored to foster stability and growth in sought-after industries. In order to maximize the attractiveness of these incentives, the state must continue to evaluate and enhance the existing incentives to ensure that we remain competitive.

ACTIVE INITIATIVES

Governmental ethics: *monitor and aggressively oppose efforts to weaken Louisiana's governmental ethics laws and enforcement programs*

In 2008, Louisiana became a national model in governmental laws and enforcement when it passed a series of stringent reforms. These reforms are going a long way in the state's desire to reverse the long-held perception of government corruption and lack of integrity. The #1 third-party ranking that Louisiana garnered has and will continue to pay dividends as we foster new business investment here. However, it is imperative that we deter any efforts to weaken these reforms and anything that would lessen the positive effects of this new found national distinction.

Fiscal responsibility: *aggressively support initiatives and policies that facilitate investments in long-term economic development*

Optimizing resources available for investments in economic development means our state must aggressively manage expenditures in areas that do not contribute to our economic growth and prosperity. To maximize resources for such high-impact areas, state leaders must ensure that Louisiana's government operations are consistent with appropriate benchmarks in other states, particularly in areas such as healthcare spending and overall government employment. Aggressive fiscal discipline is necessary because, without targeted investments in areas that drive economic development (e.g., higher education, transportation, and workforce development), Louisiana's economic growth will lag and our social welfare costs will spiral out of control. In order to achieve success, cuts must be made in areas that exceed justifiable levels such that resources can be redirected to economic development priorities. Additionally, the growth rates of expenditure categories that do not directly contribute to economic growth should be carefully managed.

Surplus and excess state revenues: *support efforts to leverage projected surplus and excess revenues for strategic investments that position Louisiana for accelerated long-term economic growth*

Rebuilding and reconstruction activities associated with the devastating 2005 hurricanes are generating substantial increases in state revenues—although most indicators are pointing to these increases slowing. These funds represent a one-time opportunity for Louisiana to invest in its future. Funds should be allocated towards investments in promising avenues for economic development—for instance, research institutions, higher education, and transportation.

Air emission controls and penalties: *oppose efforts by environmental agencies and environmentalists to require expensive controls and/or penalties on Baton Rouge area businesses that do not address the root causes of ozone exceedance*

Five parishes in the Baton Rouge area, Ascension, EBR, Iberville, Livingston, and West Baton Rouge, are classified as non-attainment with regards to air ozone pollution levels. These pollution levels are associated with numerous complex factors, including industrial activity, traffic, mobile combustion equipment, and natural causes of air pollution. Area industry has been aggressive over the last two decades in reducing air emission levels; however, ozone air pollution levels above federal standards have persisted despite these great strides. Future efforts to achieve attainment with ozone air quality standards should be based on sound science, and not focus exclusively on industrial emission sources in a way that jeopardizes our region's cost competitiveness. In particular, control requirements and/or penalties should be focused on the sources most responsible for exceedance.



POLICY POSITIONS

Qualifications of key state and local government officials: *establish professional requirements for state, regional, and local board/commission appointments*

State, regional, and local boards and commissions establish and implement policy that has profound economic impacts on our state and region. Strong leadership on key boards and commissions is critically important to the growth and development of the Baton Rouge area. Improvements in the appointment process that require potential candidates to meet professional and educational qualifications would create a basis for solid, objective evaluation.

Uniformity in property assessments: support efforts to value property for tax collection purposes in a consistent manner that is well-aligned with market valuations

A non-uniform code of property assessment produces differences in measurements of real property values and leads to inflation in millages. In bringing all assessments into line with the true market value of properties and supporting subsequent “roll-backs” where appropriate, the market discourages government from raising millages to unreasonable levels. Uniformity in property assessments will enable a fair tax system and will promote a positive view of government, thus instilling property owner confidence in the economy.

Civil justice system: *support efforts to defend the existing structure of civil justice*

In several of the past years, Louisiana lawmakers have taken legislative action to balance the state’s civil justice system. The state’s image and economic prosperity have benefited from these efforts. Legislation that attempts to dilute these balanced structures should be opposed or amended to safeguard the economic welfare of the state and our region.

State retirement system: *support adjustments to state retirement system requirements*

The current state retirement program is out of line with the private sector and the evolving life-expectancy of Louisiana citizens. Funding for state workers’ retirement in Louisiana needs to be stabilized to ensure state fiscal security. Amending state retirement systems to raise the retirement age and number of years of service requirements will not only secure a senior workforce in state agencies, but will also ease the burden of the financially unstable retirement system.

At-large representation: *expand representation of parish-wide interests with the introduction of at-large seats using proportional voting mechanisms*

The current system for electing Metro Council members in EBR Parish and most other regional parish governments provides representation for individual local districts, but does not ensure that a parish-wide perspective is considered by our elected officials. Using a proportional voting mechanism such as cumulative voting, the introduction of “at-large” seats on local



councils can encourage a parish-wide focus while also protecting minority voting rights.

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG): *endorse Gulf Coast LNG terminal development unless there is a clear and significant environmental threat*

The construction of LNG terminals both on and off the coast of Louisiana presents the opportunity to help stabilize the supply and price of natural gas for industrial facilities, particularly chemical manufacturers, in the Baton Rouge area. High natural gas prices have reduced the competitiveness of our region's industrial facilities in the global marketplace. Lower natural gas prices would help to restore our region's competitiveness as a chemical industry hub. In addition, the development of multi-million dollar LNG terminals would support hundreds of construction jobs and create significant opportunities for industrial construction businesses in our region.

Public parks and recreational amenities: *support regional recreation and park organizations, including BREC, in efforts to upgrade public parks and recreational amenities in the Baton Rouge area*

Businesses and individuals evaluate numerous "quality of life" factors in determining a location to call home. Impressive public parks and recreational amenities are a significant component of "quality of life" evaluations, and a component over which local governments have significant control. Efforts to maintain and improve the Baton Rouge area's public parks, including the establishment of signature parks with unique and compelling assets, will make our region more competitive in attracting and retaining talented workers and high-wage businesses.

Crime and safety: *encourage communication and pursuit of best practices to address public safety and crime issues in the Baton Rouge area*

Public safety and crime issues are major determinants in the "quality of life" of communities across the Baton Rouge area. Furthermore, crime levels are a significant factor shaping our region's national image, particularly as represented in popular rankings of "best" cities and regions. Efforts to increase communication among key stakeholders and to implement best practices in our communities, complemented by separate efforts to address the root causes of criminal activity, will help address public safety concerns and stimulate economic development.

Tolerance, diversity, and community mindset: *support programs and initiatives that set a progressive, inclusive, community tone; ensure that key organizations and leaders are aligned to create positive change*

The most vibrant economies in the U.S. increasingly are those that have learned to embrace diversity and maintain an optimistic, inclusive vision for their community, while always remaining receptive to change. These intangibles can have a major impact on economic development, particularly in competitive situations, as well as community pride and commitment to enact positive change.

Attractiveness of public spaces: *encourage cities and parishes in the Baton Rouge area to improve the attractiveness of their communities by establishing well-maintained green spaces*

Businesses, individuals, and site-selection consultants evaluate communities using a number of factors, both objective and subjective. Initial impressions, often determined during “drive-by” experiences, can often impact company decisions on where to relocate and individual decisions on where to live. By maintaining attractive green public spaces across the region, including urban areas, the Baton Rouge area can ensure that it makes great first impressions when decision-makers are evaluating our community.

Arts and cultural amenities: *support the development of artistic and cultural infrastructure in the Baton Rouge area*

Successful metro economies are increasingly marked by a high degree of artistic activity and cultural amenities that attract young, educated professionals and knowledge-based companies alike. By encouraging positive actions and celebrating those who make a difference (e.g., artists, philanthropists, developers), the Capital Region can create momentum and public support for the development of artistic and cultural assets that accentuate our unique regional character and history.

