Representing Southeastern Virginia
Our members’ business needs are our primary focus, and we will strive to meet those needs through our advocacy efforts. During the 2020 legislative session, the Hampton Roads Chamber’s efforts at the state level will reflect the following core values: strengthening and diversifying our regional economy; enhancing our state’s “business friendly” climate; reducing over-regulation and taxation of business; re-shaping education & workforce development; improving healthcare access and managing healthcare costs; investing in transportation infrastructure, energy and technology; and supporting initiatives that protect and grow Virginia-based military and federal assets.

The Hampton Roads Chamber’s legislative agenda is produced by members of the Public Policy Advisors Committee and business stakeholders and approved by the Chamber’s Board of Directors. This document outlines the Chamber’s positions on critical issues affecting the business community.

We recognize the importance of providing a positive business climate and how it affects our future. With a flourishing, business friendly environment, more jobs will be created, putting more Virginians to work, improving our communities, and making Virginia a premiere destination to do business. Strengthening the state's ability to create, attract, retain, and grow jobs for decades to come is the Hampton Roads Chamber’s highest priority!

We look forward to working with our stakeholders, the General Assembly, and the Northam Administration to help bring prosperity to the region and the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,
Bryan K. Stephens
President & CEO
Bryan K. Stephens has extensive leadership and business experience. Prior to assuming his current position, he served as President and CEO of Kalmar in San Antonio, Texas; a $250M/year manufacturer of material handling equipment, after serving a distinguished 28 year career in the U.S Army, retiring as a Colonel. In the Army he served in a variety of progressive operational leadership and command positions. His last assignments include Infantry Brigade Commander and Division Chief of Staff, 10th Mountain Division (LI) Fort Drum, NY and Chief of Operations and Chief of Staff, Joint Warfighting Center, USJFCOM in Suffolk, VA. His military qualifications include, among others, Ranger, Airborne, Pathfinder, Air Assault and Joint Staff Officer.

Since taking the helm of the Hampton Roads Chamber, Stephens has led the Chamber to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce “5 Star Accreditation”, an achievement only obtained by the top 1 percent of the over 7,200 Chamber’s in the Nation. In 2016 he was awarded the Chamber Executive of the Year for the Commonwealth of Virginia by the Virginia Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives and in 2017 he was #15 on Inside Business’s Top 25 Most Powerful People in Hampton Roads.

Mrs. Rhonda Bridgeman is the 2020 Chair of the Hampton Roads Chamber and is the President of Comfort Systems of Virginia, General Contractor, Comfort Systems of Virginia, Inc. specializes in HVAC, Plumbing and Sheet Metal services serving the Virginia and North Carolina areas. While setting the benchmark in the industry, Comfort Systems has received numerous awards locally, state-wide, and nationally. Alongside Comfort Systems, Rhonda’s career has focused on community outreach. Rhonda serves on the Hampton Roads Chamber Board, Hampton Roads Chamber Chesapeake Board, and Executive Committee.

Rhonda is an active member of the community and encourages all her employees to do the same. Rhonda has dedicated her time to the Chesapeake Hospital Authority, where she served as Chair, attending every event and meeting all while representing Chesapeake Regional Healthcare. She also served as Chairman of the Hampton Roads Chamber’s Chesapeake Division and is an active board member of the Chesapeake Public Schools Education Foundation.
HAMPTON ROADS CHAMBER

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Objective 1: Promote Policies That Improve Virginia’s Business Climate and Economic Competitiveness

**Position:** Support legislation that strengthens Virginia’s competitive standing in the national and global economy.

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

- Regional, collaborative economic development initiatives that help to enhance and diversify Virginia’s economy
- Go Virginia and funding initiatives that promote policies to improve the region’s business climate and economic competitiveness
- Fiscal and tax policies that will attract new investments and future growth to industries that will bring jobs to the region
- Virginia Small Business Development Center
- Initiatives that grow and support small business job creation
- Small business and entrepreneurial investments
- Reducing regulatory burdens for businesses
- Changes that will modernize Virginia’s tax structure
- Retention of the State’s historic tax credits
- Virginia’s Right to Work laws for private and public employees
- Abolishment of the BPOL tax
- Enhancing R&D Tax Credits to include providing incentives for high-paying employment generators
- Reducing the burden of litigation, as well as a statutory cap on punitive damages
- An Unemployment and Workers’ Compensation system that is efficient for all stakeholders
- International marketing for tourism and business development
- Efforts to promote sports and tourism
• The deepening and widening of Virginia’s channel to 55 feet to improve the Commonwealth’s ability to attract the “first-in” and “first-out” service over other East Coast ports, ensuring speed to market for importers and exporters

• Efforts to elevate recurrent flooding as a regional issue to include the authorization of a Cabinet Secretary and support staff for the Commonwealth

• Promotion of international trade in the Commonwealth

**Importance to the Business Community:** The Hampton Roads Chamber takes an active role in advocacy for fair business taxes and tax incentives to encourage small, medium and large business growth, stimulate hiring and increase revenues that help bolster economic development. Economic development initiatives are an essential component of a healthy business environment. Without business and job growth, our valued quality of life will be negatively impacted. Legislative policies and actions that provide businesses of all sizes with the tools and talent they need, help increase their competitiveness, and additionally, stimulate growth while continuing to attract new industries to our region. We encourage state-level efforts to ensure our region and state are in the most competitive position possible for future growth through sound, pro-business, job-creating legislation.
Objective 2: Advocate for Enhancements to the Commonwealth’s Energy Resources

**Position:** Enhance the Commonwealth’s energy resources to promote stable rates, economic development, energy independence and environmental protection.

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

- Atlantic Coast Pipeline Project

- Traditional and alternative energy investments in new sources of power generation (including but not limited to natural gas, coal, nuclear, biomass, solar and wind) as long as new energy supply projects do not negatively impact the mission or training for the Department of Defense

- Development of clean energy sources

- Efforts that increase power generation in Virginia to accommodate present demand and long range growth

**Importance to the Business Community:** The Chamber provides a voice and advocacy on behalf of the region’s business for policies, laws and regulations that promote low cost and reliable power supplies. The Chamber recognizes the necessity of affordable and dependable energy to promote economic development and growth. Our region is essentially “out of natural gas” and on several occasions, large customers, including the military, have been asked to curtail usage on a short term basis. There is a critical need for additional natural gas infrastructure and supply. The Atlantic Coast Pipeline Project would improve gas supply for Mid-Atlantic markets, thereby promoting price stability and enhancing economic opportunity. The ACP would also create more than 2,200 permanent, full time jobs in Virginia and North Carolina.
Objective 3: Promote Improvements to Virginia's Public Education System to Ensure a Capable, Productive and Sustainable Workforce

Position: Support the Commonwealth's Pre K-12 public education and higher education systems to develop college-ready and career-ready citizens that strengthen Virginia's workforce. High performing Pre K-12 public education systems drive economic development by growing existing businesses, attracting new employers and ensuring the workforce to support them.

AREAS OF INTEREST

• Full funding of early childhood education programs

• Proposals that assist in the attraction and retention of quality teachers

• Amendments to the Standards of Quality to expand funding efforts to strengthen the linkage between the classroom and the workplace at all levels with efforts by both the public and private sectors

• Initiatives designed to prepare students for careers in STEM-H (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and healthcare)

• Funding efforts to encourage on-line interactive and digital learning initiatives

• Strengthening vocational opportunities, including apprenticeships starting at High School level

• Teaching entrepreneurship in schools statewide

• Industry certification and credential programs consistent with Virginia’s present and future workforce needs

• Public-private partnerships for early learning that ensure quality care for at-risk students in communities around the state
Importance to the Business Community: The Hampton Roads Chamber joined a broad coalition of public and private sector interests in 2016 to urge the legislature to increase K-12 funding for education. Investments in our education system must be of the highest quality to compete in today's global economy. Aligning our educational and publicly funded workforce development systems with business and industry demand is critical to our success. Ensuring that Virginia has a competitive Pre K-12 education system and high quality colleges and universities will enable Virginia to meet future workforce needs. While progress was made, present investment in Pre K-12 is not adequate to meet the business communities' objectives in education.
Objective 4: Encourage Policies That Help Control Health Care Costs, Positively Impact the Health Care Delivery System, Expand Access and Improve Quality Care

**Position:** Support reasonable market-based efforts to make health care more affordable and manageable for Virginia's business community that provides health insurance for employees.

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

- Policies that help businesses provide affordable coverage for employers and their employees
- Reasonable measures to manage healthcare costs
- Certificate of Need Program

**Importance to the Business Community:** The Chamber seeks to inform and promote solutions that decrease cost, expand access and increase quality of healthcare for Virginia's business community. Health care costs are rising much more rapidly than the cost of living. There are a variety of factors driving these costs on both an individual and collective basis.

The Certificate of Need Program in Virginia, for example, should not be eliminated or substantially modified until the General Assembly can guarantee that doing so will not adversely impact access, quality, public safety or the cost of health care to Virginia's businesses. Hospitals are required to provide care to every individual who seeks care in the emergency room, regardless of ability to pay. Government programs, such as Medicaid and Medicare, reimburse hospitals and physicians at rates far below the costs of treating their beneficiaries. Hospitals absorb many of these costs themselves, but a substantial portion is passed on to large and small businesses in the form of increased health insurance premiums for employees. The Certificate of Need program is one of the single best ways to keep rising health care costs in check, making sure there is a real, true need for a new hospital or expensive equipment before any money is spent. Any legislation to deregulate COPN must be coupled with policies to promote access to care, ensure provisions of essential health services, fund graduate medical education and maintain the fiscal stability of Virginia's healthcare community.
Objective 5: Shape Policies That Foster the Creation of High Technology Related Jobs and a High Technology Economy

**Position:** Enhance policies that support innovation and job creation in the technology sector.

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

- Research of emerging technologies and the impact to Virginia’s economy
- Policies that encourage private sector investment leading to universal access to broadband communication through the use of all available technologies, including wireless, fiber optics and cable
- Business friendly legislation and tax incentives that stimulate innovative business concepts, foster competition, reduce barriers to entry and provide retention and growth for high-tech entrepreneurs and technology businesses
- Private sector partnerships with colleges and universities to increase commercialization
- The development of cyber security infrastructure and workforce
- Leverage available assets for regional connectivity, educational and economic opportunities, Smart Region Capabilities and workforce development
- Expansion of business opportunities in conjunction with the completion of the Trans-Atlantic Data Cables to land in Virginia Beach

**Importance to the Business Community:** Technology-based industries and businesses create tremendous growth of opportunity and are essential to competing in an interconnected world. The Chamber supports policies that foster investment in the technology industry.
Objective 6: Champion Transportation and Transit Improvements to Maximize Job Creation and Investment

**Position:** Support a balanced investment in the Commonwealth’s transportation system that ensures the efficient and effective development of all modes of transportation infrastructure, reduces congestion and enhances the mobility of goods.

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

- Strategic and expedited use of the new regional transportation revenues to address regional congestion and support current and future military assets
- Continued investment in maintenance and expansion of Virginia’s transportation infrastructure
- HRTPO and HRTAC long-range transportation plan
- Viable and transparent public/private partnerships
- Port growth and development/multimodal systems
- Intercity and high speed rail
- Funding to expand Norfolk International Airport runways and facilities
- Improved multimodal facilities throughout the Virginia Port system to handle anticipated increase in freight as a result of the Panama Canal expansion
- Funding from state and federal sources for the proposed widening of the Hampton Roads Harbor
- Using smarter project and service delivery methods to efficiently connect communities across the region with transit infrastructure and services
- Flexibility and diversity of funding sources and financing options, including new dedicated regional transit funding, with the ability to leverage resources to make each available dollar go farther
• General Assembly actions to more fully realize revenues to address transportation and funding gaps

**Importance to the Business Community:** Over 2,000 businesses which are members of the Chamber believe transportation is a state-wide issue and should be dealt with on a state-wide basis. Sustainable long-term funding for transportation is vital on a state-wide basis for the Commonwealth to remain competitive and to sustain our significant military and federal presence.
Objective 7: Encourage Strategic Initiatives that Preserve and Grow Military and Federal Assets

**Position:** Support efforts to protect and maintain area bases by mitigating the effects of potential Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and/or federal legislative actions anticipated in the future.

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

- Veteran job transition and training programs focused on reducing the skill gaps in Hampton Roads
- Workforce development efforts for veterans, including recognition of military work history in obtaining civilian credentials
- Marketing of military workforce to potential employers
- Increased educational and workforce opportunities targeted to veterans and their families
- State funding for ongoing support of the employment transition center initiative for our region’s veterans
- Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) related infrastructure investments / land acquisitions

**Importance to the Business Community:** The Department of Defense (DOD) is a leading driver of our economy, serving as the region’s most significant industrial cluster and heavily influencing the region’s economic well-being. The business community stands behind our military personnel and the services and industry which supports their activities.
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