

The following article was published in the *Houston Chronicle* on Thursday, January 19, 2012 (available online at <http://www.chron.com/business/article/Q-and-A-Partnership-chairman-has-eyes-fixed-on-2618371.php>):

Q&A: Tony Chase

Getting Houston ahead of the curve

By L.M. Sixel

Entrepreneur, lawyer and political insider **Tony Chase** takes the gavel as chairman of the Greater Houston Partnership at its annual meeting Thursday.

Chase, **a professor at the University of Houston Law Center** and CEO of the recruiting and staffing firm ChaseSource, grew up in the Third Ward. After he went to Harvard University - where he got bachelor's, MBA and law degrees - he came home to launch a succession of careers, including investment banking, buying and selling radio stations, and teaching contracts and communications law.

In 2006 Chase began serving as deputy chairman and director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas but resigned that position in 2008 to raise presidential campaign funds for his friend and Harvard law school classmate Barack Obama. Chase spoke with the Chronicle about his goals for the partnership in 2012. Edited excerpts:

Q: How is the Houston economy doing right now?

A: Houston is a great place to be right now. It's the last major metropolitan area to enter the recession, and it's the first one out. In fact, it's the only major metropolitan area to have fully recovered all the jobs it lost during the recession. And GHP believes Houston will add an additional 84,600 jobs in 2012.

Q: Several forecasts project that Houston will lose government jobs. Will that have an effect on Houston?

A: Sure. We expect the principal impact of the loss of government jobs to be related to the Texas Legislature's actions from last session in cutting education funding with the specific impact on the Houston Independent School District. But I think the larger, longer-term impacts are more important than the immediate job losses at HISD.

Houston needs an educated, competitive workforce. One of the things you will see during my chairmanship is advocacy for more funding to education as well as to determine a funding mechanism to do that. It's important that the business community be on board making that kind of statement.

Q: Why is it so important for Houston to have a well-educated workforce?

A: In earlier times, Houston's businesses competed on a more localized basis than they do today. Today they compete with firms around the world. In order to effectively compete, we have to have a competitive workforce.

Q: How about improving Houston's infrastructure? What would you like to do?

A: Houston will double in size by 2050. The congestion tax, if you will, will be great going forward if we're not proactive.

Specifically, I'd like GHP to advocate strongly on the federal level for funding for mass transit, as well as roads and highway improvement and expansion of light rail funding.

Q: What is your No. 1 goal for the partnership this year?

A: As a small-business owner, I'm very attuned to the importance of small business in the economy and the jobs it creates. Small business is really the engine of creating jobs in our economy, and GHP will be very active in 2012 supporting that segment.

In terms of energy, Houston is really the energy capital of the world. But I think it should lay claim to a more specific title: the natural gas capital of the world.

Q: Even with natural gas prices so low?

A: Yes. I see natural gas playing an important role in the future of energy. We benefit from high oil prices in Houston, but I think there is a tremendous future to natural gas as an efficient, clean-burning fuel.

A lot of advancement in exploration technology, particularly in the area of natural gas and hydraulic fracturing, originated in Houston. That has unlocked new reserves throughout the United States, and many of those have been found and exploited by companies based in Houston.

Q: What is the biggest challenge facing the Houston business community?

A: A competitive work force is one. There are challenges in terms of quality of life, challenges in terms of congestion and traffic and infrastructure, the things that are the byproducts of growth.

Q: Are you going to use your personal ties to the White House to help ease Environmental Protection Agency rules to benefit local industry?

A: I intend to act in the best interests of Houston's commercial interests along the Gulf Coast and to do everything I can to enhance our opportunity and to create prosperity for this region - all, of course, in a completely appropriate way. Frankly, I believe some of my thoughts and positions are at odds with the administration. But that's OK.

Q: Will you be fundraising again for the Obama campaign?

A: The president and I are good friends. I have not yet determined the role, if any, I will play in his campaign.