

UNITING *for* RECOVER

A COVID-19 Economic Response Agenda

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Introduction

In March of 2020, a portion of the Missouri economy came to a sudden, intentional halt. As the public health crisis around COVID-19 arrived in Missouri, many businesses across the state had to dramatically alter their operations as Missourians adopted social distancing practices to help stop the spread of the disease.

These necessary actions had a profound and negative impact across Missouri's economy. During the week of March 23, unemployment claims in the state skyrocketed to 42,000, compared to 4,000 the previous week. By early April, weekly claims topped 100,000 in Missouri. In response to the nation's economic trauma, the federal government enacted relief efforts to help employers stay in business and keep capital flowing through the economy during the crisis. Missouri Gov. Mike Parson also used his authority to help ensure the health of Missourians and ease the impact on the business community.

During this time, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry advocated on behalf of the state's employers, worked to educate Missouri businesspeople about their relief options and collaborated one-on-one with employers to help them access all available resources. The Missouri Chamber worked closely with the federal delegation to ensure that the state was tapping into every possible means to assist Missouri employers.

The Missouri Chamber also began work on a plan to position the state for a strong recovery once the coronavirus threat passed. That plan, contained herein, is founded on the Missouri 2030 strategic initiative. Missouri 2030 was established by the Missouri Chamber as a stable, data-backed plan that would guide the state toward economic progress even as political leadership changed and the state faced unexpected challenges. While a global pandemic was not foreseen when Missouri 2030 was conceived, the plan's vision remains a clear guide Missouri must follow to emerge strong from this pandemic.

Based on a Gallup survey of more than 1,000 Missouri business leaders, Missouri 2030 was devised to help Missouri make progress in four key drivers: Preparing the Workforce, Competing for Jobs, Connecting through Infrastructure and Uniting the Business Community.

The Missouri 2030 Uniting for Recovery agenda holds true to this vision by advancing much-needed policy and programmatic efforts. In presenting this during the state's continued response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Missouri Chamber has divided this effort into three new drivers organized by the urgency of action required: Leading During Crisis, Strengthening Our Recovery and Protecting Our Future.

The Missouri Chamber, our members, Missouri's diverse business community and our state policymakers ask for urgent action on the items contained in the Missouri 2030 Uniting for Recovery. We must act now to ensure our state's economy can fully restart from this intentional pause in business and resume our progress toward economic leadership and prosperity for all Missourians. 

SURVEYING The Damage

In late March, as social distancing efforts were being implemented across the state of Missouri, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry conducted a survey of our members to determine how their businesses were being impacted. The results illustrate the tremendous impact that the coronavirus crisis is having in our state. They highlight the need for a strong, immediate response from state leaders to ensure our economy can rebound when this crisis eases.



15% of Missouri business leaders expect their business will permanently close this year as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Employee Impact



Revenue Impact



The average Missouri business expects revenue to drop

-27%



LEADING

During Crisis

As the state continues to confront the COVID-19 crisis, there are several critical steps that can be taken to protect our citizens and our economy.

The Missouri Chamber urges state leaders to immediately take the following steps.

- Pursue every suitable policy to mitigate the spread of coronavirus and support our health care industry with all available resources to assist sick Missourians, hospitals and health care workers.
- Reduce burdensome administrative requirements for hospitals and health care workers so they can focus on providing care to sick Missourians instead of spending time navigating complicated paperwork.
- Recognize the value of telemedicine and urge health carriers to provide coverage for telemedicine during a state of emergency.
- Prioritize child care assistance for essential workers.
- Create contingency plans for the buildout of non-traditional health care settings in time of emergency (i.e. convention centers, stadiums) to supplement hospital capacity.
- Following the example of the income tax filing extension, the state should enact additional easing of burdens on tax filers.
- Build a more flexible workforce by allowing for accelerated licensing pathways for key professions during disasters including health professions, trucking, etc.
- Assist businesses that have had to transition to remote work by establishing a new tax deduction for telecommuting expenses.
- Prevent undue financial stress on employers by ensuring they are not charged for COVID-19 related unemployment claims.
- Provide additional leeway when it comes to current restrictions on hours and overtime to ensure our regulations aren't standing in the way of a full recovery.
- Show leniency as businesses seek to restart by waiving or delaying licensing and permitting fees as well as extending deadlines for professional licensing.
- Focus on quickly refunding tax overpayment to help return vital capital assets to employers and allow losses during this pandemic to offset any owed taxes.
- Clarify that claims relating to COVID-19 are not eligible for workers' compensation and should be handled through the health care system. 

STRENGTHENING

Our Recovery

Once the immediate threat of COVID-19 passes, Missouri is likely to face a challenging road to a full economic recovery.

These reforms should be pursued by the state as soon as operations begin to return to normalcy to help stabilize our economy and maximize the state's ability to bounce back from this crisis.

- Build additional flexibility into economic development programs, including the One Start program (a state program providing comprehensive recruitment and training solutions for companies) and the deal closing fund jobs-retention requirements, to ensure they can be used to their fullest extent during our recovery.
 - Modify clawback provisions within the state's tax credit programs for companies who aren't able to create or retain the number of jobs in their contract due to the economic impacts of coronavirus.
 - Create a focus on revitalizing our hard-hit small business economy by facilitating investment and support.
 - Increase the utilization of apprenticeships and build more apprenticeship pipelines. Apprenticeships are on-the-job training opportunities that are flexible and customizable to immediately meet the
- needs of employers in many growing industries like technology, manufacturing and health care. The Missouri Chamber's launch of Missouri Apprentice Connect, on target to launch in the spring of 2020, will help displaced Missouri workers and students find new opportunities and training.
- Provide transition opportunities for individuals receiving unemployment insurance benefits to job training and placement programs. Missouri has a robust network of workforce training and placement programs that should be fully utilized to help individuals re-enter the workforce after the COVID-19 crisis.
 - All Missourians are facing unique circumstances in fighting COVID-19. We should consider liability protections for health care providers treating patients and manufacturers producing personal protective equipment. Temporary measures should be put in place to implement this policy, followed with statutory protections going forward.
 - Identify and advocate for funding of shovel-ready road and bridge projects. Basic infrastructure is a prevalent concern of Missouri employers, especially in industries that depend on roads and airports for moving goods. The Missouri Dept. of Transportation (MoDOT)'s Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) plan contains projects that can be set into motion quickly to help maintain Missouri's transportation system.
 - Waive all penalties and interest for business in 2020 in recognition of the extreme financial pressures being borne by employers.
 - Provide property tax relief for commercial property impacted by COVID-19.
 - Create a level playing field for Missouri-based retail businesses by imposing sales tax on online retailers. 

PROTECTING

Our Future

Any shock to Missouri's economy provides an opportunity to build a more resilient system for the future.

The reforms listed in this section are vital to the continuing health of our economy and our ability to minimize future downturns. The reforms here are not needed immediately to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, but should be urgently pursued to help Missouri be better prepared for our next challenge.

- Relax occupational licensing requirements to remove barriers to the workforce. This will help workers regain employment and assist employers in finding the workforce they need, as fewer than half of Missouri business leaders are satisfied with the availability of skilled workforce according to Gallup polling data for Missouri 2030.
- Provide a needed financial break by enacting a full federal tax deduction for corporations and individuals.
- Maintain investment levels in workforce development programs to build a workforce ready to meet the demands of today and tomorrow. This includes Fast Track (a state financial aid grant program for adult learners pursuing a certificate, degree, or industry-recognized credential in a field designated as high need), One Start, and programs for K-12 students like Career & Technical Education (CTE).
- Capitalize on Missouri's position as a top state for tech job growth. The Missouri Chamber Foundation's Technology 2030 Report projects Missouri to be among the top 10 states in tech job growth over the next five years. The Missouri Chamber is deploying \$6 million to establish 5,335 apprenticeship opportunities in tech roles.
- Support continued long-term investment in Missouri's utility infrastructure. As critical as ensuring utilities remain reliable at predictable and affordable rates is under ordinary circumstances, it is even more so during times of crisis. We support continuing to address Missouri's aging utility infrastructure as well as support grid modernization efforts that drive greater resiliency, rate affordability and economic development opportunities.
- Expand access to broadband internet. More than 1.2 million Missourians do not have access to high-speed internet. Long-term goals should be established to prepare for future crises that may necessitate mass shifts to remote learning and working.
- Explore how supply chains will shift in the wake of COVID-19 and ensure our infrastructure work reflects and supports the new economy that emerges from this crisis.
- Support long-term solutions for increased access to health care, especially in rural communities.
- Promote entrepreneurship through the action items recommended in the Technology2030 and Workforce2030 reports. 

VISIT

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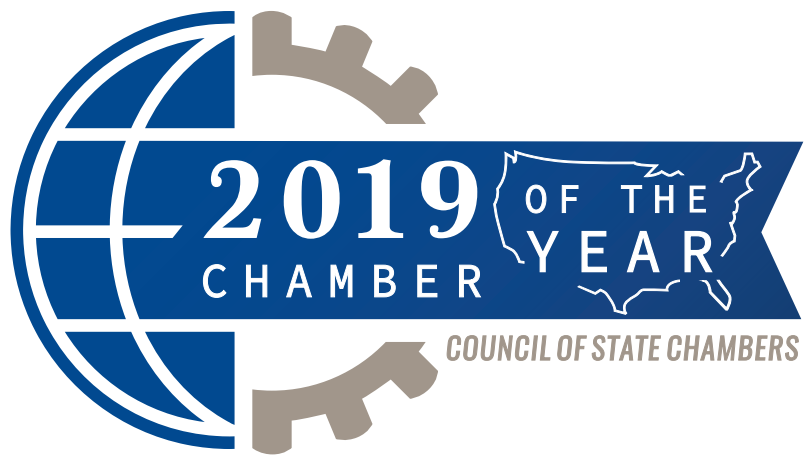
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