Dear Members,

It's been just over a week since my last update...here are some things that are going on:

**State Protocols & Other Updates**
The State added several new Best Practices & Protocols for different types of businesses/activities over the last week, here are the links: County Fairs, Deputy Registrar, Driver Exam Services, Bowling Alley’s may reopen under the Consumer/Retail/Services/Entertainment protocols, Beaches, Hiking/Mtn. Biking, Canoe Liveries & Recreational Paddling.

Also of note, the baseball/softball rules were updated earlier this week, and they issued an FAQ for restaurants/bars (they addressed the ability to host live music, which we were getting several questions about).

Yesterday, the Governor said they hope to announce opening dates for attractions, amusement parks, museums, and other similar venues sometime next week. I know we have some local places waiting for that still.

The Governor also announced yesterday an increase in the testing locations (now including pharmacies) and the ability for more people to have access to tests. You can check the state website to see locations, and of course our local health care facilities also offer this. Here’s the direct wording from the State on testing:

Testing must be first available to individuals described in Priority Groups 1, 2 and 3, but Ohio is expanding to allow partners and communities to test Ohioans in Priority Group 4 which includes testing “Individuals in the community to decrease community spread, including individuals with symptoms who do not meet any of the above categories.”

And also yesterday, they announced a plan to lift restrictions on visitation at assisted living homes in Ohio. Beginning June 8, 2020, properly prepared assisted living facilities and intermediate care facilities for individuals with developmental disabilities can begin to allow outdoor visitation. The lifted restrictions do not yet apply to nursing homes.

**House of Reps passes bill to amend PPP**
The House of Representatives passed a bipartisan bill to make amendments to the popular Paycheck Protection Program, easing in some flexibility for businesses. This is the first step in the process, but it is expected that the Senate also wants to look at easing in flexibility. Here's what the House passed. I’ll keep you updated on what else happens. Until changes are signed into law, we are still under the current regulations.

In the meantime, the US Chamber added this explainer video about how to seek forgiveness under the current rules. It’s worth a watch and about 15 minutes of your time. Also, the Treasury department released this updated report of the status of PPP earlier this week. Ohio businesses have received over $18 Billion so far, and there is money remaining.

My understanding is that there is definite discussion and lobbying also happening regarding the rules issued by the IRS on deductibility of PPP expenses. I’ll keep you updated.

Lastly, we have been advocating on your behalf as businesses for some liability protection. The US Chamber is leading the charge to create a safe harbor for businesses who are following appropriate guidelines. This is something that has been done many times in the past in response to a crisis.

**New Round of Tech Cred Opens in June**
Yesterday the Lieutenant Governor announced results of the latest round of the State’s Tech Cred training program. If you haven’t followed Tech Cred, this program was launched in 2019 with the goal of expanding tech talent and helping businesses upskill their current employees in areas such as software development, robotics, and cyber security. If you have a need for employee training, there are over 1,000 credentials covered in this program. Applications for the next round open on Monday and go through June 30th.
US 30 Project Kicking Off
The major rehabilitation of US 30 through the City of Mansfield is kicking off. ODOT has created a special website to keep you up to speed on progress. That website has good information on when traffic will be impacted by lane closures and timing. We will continue to keep you updated on this massive project.

Employer Survey
We are working with our local OhioMeansJobs representatives to conduct a short survey about what you’re seeing as employers. Click here to take the survey, and help us all better serve you during this challenging time — it’s very brief!

Census Response
Have you responded to the 2020 Census? Why do I keep bringing it up? Simple. It’s extremely important to our future as a community. Our population count determines how billions of dollars are allocated across the country for things such as schools, hospitals, roads & infrastructure, social services, and more. It determines how many elected representatives we have in Congress. It also helps tell a story about an area – are we growing or declining? In 2018 & 2019, Richland County showed year over year growth for the first time since the early 2000’s. Our area needs your help! We’re currently showing at a 66.9% response rate for the County. I hope you will consider encouraging your employees to complete their Census forms. Here’s an example of a form you could share with them, or another.

Richland County STRONG
Next week you will be hearing much more about a new campaign we are kicking off called the “Richland County STRONG” Campaign throughout the month of June. We are encouraging our residents to support our local businesses – especially our small businesses. We will also be introducing new benefits for our members to take advantage of to help get the word out to their customers. We need your help to get the word out. Watch your email for more on Monday! In the meantime, we have expanded our email list for the last several months to include our prospective members….now would be a great time to plug into the Chamber more officially and start taking advantage of all our member benefits.

#InThisTogetherOhio
We’ve been distributing the list of local PPE Suppliers for the last several weeks. Sometimes I wonder, are people really clicking on that list and using it? My answer came this week from our friends at MHS Industrial Supply who sent us this photo to say “THANK YOU” to all of you who have chosen to support local businesses like MHS during this time! It’s a great lead in for the Richland County STRONG Campaign kick off! Thanks team!

Final Thoughts
The weather today pretty accurately reflects how I feel – gray & dismal. It’s been a rough week. 2020 continues its relentless march – health crisis, economic crisis, race crisis. I find that I don’t honestly have the words to express all that my heart is feeling.

I’ve written often in this part of my emails about the need for empathy as we journey on this road together. To be able to put yourself in another’s shoes is exceedingly difficult, but ultimately a worthwhile exercise. We all have experienced feeling misunderstood at different points of our lives. Remembering that feeling of frustration gives me added incentive to try to understand different points of view.

There are no easy answers in 2020. We are facing very difficult times. To move forward, we need to keep
reaching out to each other and cultivating relationships. I often think about the eloquent poem by the late Maya Angelou called “Human Family”. You can watch an amazing recitation here. She ends this way:

“We are more alike, my friends, than we are unalike.”

Onward!
Jodie

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President & CEO
Richland Area Chamber & Economic Development

PS – We have been widening our email list. If this is the first email you’ve received – Welcome! Here is a link to our past emails and other great resources to help your business!

PPS - Remember, I’m not a banker, lawyer, accountant or other highly talented person. I’m simply trying to share good resources when we find them. Please always consult original sources for details especially when it comes to lending & finance! Thanks!