

Reopening Minnesota's economy: Where's the plan?

By Doug Loon

Last week's announcement about increasing capacity in some businesses was good news. But with President Biden's announcement that all Americans will be eligible for vaccination by May 1 at the latest, the business community again asks – where is the plan to fully reopen our economy?

Throughout the challenges presented by this public health emergency, the Minnesota Ready Coalition's goal has been to strike a balance between safeguarding health and protecting our economy. Businesses that were deemed essential developed detailed strategies to protect their workforce from the spread of COVID-19 while ensuring continuity of operations. Consumer-facing businesses that were closed or allowed to operate only at limited capacity have used this time to develop their own plans and procedures to reopen their doors and restart their operations safely and responsibly in line with the requirements of this "new normal."

As the number of positive cases decline, hospital capacity increases and more Minnesotans are vaccinated, it is time for a transparent plan to reopen our economy that Minnesota businesses, their employees and customers can rely on – rather than an indefinite pause that suspends economic recovery. Detailed plans have been developed and include achieving certain health-based metrics, dates, or other milestones in order to trigger reopening. This type of approach has been lacking here in Minnesota.

We appreciate the intent and clarity that Rep. Dave Baker's bill, HF 1336, provides concerning reopening our economy. We believe the Legislature and the Walz administration must develop such a strategy based on transparent metrics that allows for a responsible, phased reopening. Other states have already done this; why can't Minnesota?

We also recommend that if the course of the virus or new variants require future restrictions on businesses to protect public health, a minimum seven to ten-day notice be provided to affected businesses to prevent loss of inventory, provide reasonable notification to staff and establish necessary operational plans. Businesses are struggling to keep their doors open and can't afford more losses.

Minnesota employers have done their part to curb the spread of the virus, and they will continue to do so. But they deserve to know what is in store for them, their employees and their customers. Doing so is critical as we continue to navigate our way through this pandemic together and promote economic recovery.

We call on Governor Walz and policymakers to adopt a detailed, understandable and attainable plan that balances business survival and the health of the public to safely reopen Minnesota for our employers, employees and for the state's economy as a whole. Whether this is the plan proposed by Rep. Baker, Senator Matthews, other legislators or Governor Walz's, businesses deserve to know that there is a clear plan to safely reopen and get our economy back on track.