

 April 29, 2020

# PRESIDENT'S **VIEW.**

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One Voice. Amplified



## President's View: Trust is a

### President's View

By Stephen Waguespack

**01.**

About two weeks ago, certain businesses in Lafayette Parish opened their doors to a new way of doing things. They wear masks if interacting with customers. They established systems for spacing employees and customers six feet apart. They monitor employees' health and don't allow sick workers to report in. They keep to 25 percent of their fire marshal's set capacity. And if they don't, they risk fines and even having their utilities cut. It meant some adjustments, creativity and patience, but... they were back in business. Meeting their customers' needs, providing paychecks for their employees and jump-starting a community's economy – safely.

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That's because the leadership in that area listened to employers, consulted with health care experts, worked with economic development officials and came up with a creative solution for businesses that fall within the "gray area" of the governor's "Stay at Home" order... they're non-essential, but also non-prohibited. They trusted their people. It's estimated in Lafayette Parish alone, that gray area covered roughly 60 percent of the parish's businesses. And the governor confirmed that indeed, this "Safe Shop Policy" complied with his order, and these gray area businesses could have been open this whole time, with such safety measures in place. So, if this type of policy is deemed safe and smart for one community, why not for the rest of the state?

Governments don't exist without taxpayers and taxpayers don't exist without jobs. It's time to start listening to employers on how best to put the pieces of our economy back together.

The best way to listen to employers is simply to pay attention to what is happening right now in towns across Louisiana. The businesses providing essential services, such as hardware stores, grocers, the maintenance and construction companies, have operated safely for weeks now. They are meeting the needs of the community, keeping their workers employed and taking smart steps to protect public health. They've shown us how to conduct ourselves, and in the meantime, the curve has indeed flattened.

There's an all-too-prevalent but incorrect assumption that when anyone speaks about the need to open businesses back up, they're putting the almighty dollar ahead of human lives. But that's just not the case. That's a political talking point. These are our neighbors, our friends, job-creators in our own communities who want to do the right thing. They just want to be allowed to do so.

We've all had to pivot in our personal lives. We've figured out video conferencing. We've adjusted to home school. We've altered our daily lives to meet our household needs with health at the forefront, and employers at essential businesses have done the same. When forced to adapt, these entrepreneurs, leaders, thinkers and doers have come up with innovative ways to serve, in a way that makes their clients and customers confident they're entering a safe environment.

Since this crisis started, nearly 350,000 jobs have been lost. Each one of those represents a Louisiana family who is now desperately searching for stability and answers – for them, two weeks is too long a wait. Some projections put the state's post COVID-19 unemployment rate near 22 percent, which would be the highest since the Great Depression.

At LABI, our more than 2,000 member businesses large and small collectively employ more than 320,000 Louisiana workers – including a significant number in the health care sector. We constantly seek their guidance and input, and have spent the past few weeks reaching out individually and in groups to understand what they need to bounce back from the effects of this shutdown. They've been specific in asking that certain regulations be lifted to allow operations, that incentives be tweaked to keep investment robust, and that laws – especially liability protection – be changed in the short term, so they can recover in the long-term. We look forward to releasing those policy recommendations in the coming weeks, but in the immediate future, we ask for something far simpler: It's time for government to start trusting the people they represent again.

Everyone has learned a lot over the last month or so. We are all much wiser to the need to take smart, sanitary steps to protect ourselves, our family and our neighbors. People get it. Businesses get it, too. It's time to let people start using that new knowledge and get back to work in a safe manner.

The legislature seems to get it. They have already stated they are ready to get back to work in a safe way and they seem ready to focus on steps to piece this broken economy back together again. We commend them for that mindset and hope the governor will adopt the same goal soon.

Trust is a two-way street. The people of Louisiana trusted government weeks ago when they were told to sacrifice everything they had to stay home for the greater good. That trust has held firm for weeks now. Now, it is time for government to return that trust to them. The people have earned that right... by their commitment to social distancing, by their sacrifice of their jobs, by the health care

providers who have fought courageously, by the employers who stayed open to serve and by the ones patiently begging and waiting for a chance to do the same. It's time to get back to work. It's time for government to return that trust.

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## 02. Updates

### Louisiana Legislature's Economic Recovery Task Force Will Hold Their Second Meeting Tomorrow Morning

The Louisiana Legislative Advisory Task Force on Economic Recovery, the group formed by Senate President Page Cortez and House Speaker Clay Schexnayder to advise lawmakers on reopening the state's economy, will hold their second meeting **Tomorrow, April 30, at 8:30 am.**

To register to watch the meeting via Zoom, click below.

Any ideas, questions or comments about the task force and its meetings can be emailed to [info@laertaskforce.com](mailto:info@laertaskforce.com)

[Register for Meeting](#)

## 03. News

### LABI President Joins Fox 8 to Discuss Reopening Louisiana's Economy

**Fox 8 New Orleans:** Yesterday, LABI President Stephen Waguespack joined Fox 8 in New Orleans to discuss reopening Louisiana's economy and steps that the organization wants to see the Edwards administration take. Stephen spoke with reporter Sabrina Wilson about a free-enterprise approach to reopening and the untenable position that many companies find themselves in at the moment.

[Watch Now](#)

### Louisiana business group pushing for 'free enterprise' reopening in state

**The Daily Advertiser:** "Business figured it out. Business was told to keep the public safe and stay open, and they did it," Waguespack said of essential businesses during a call Monday with oil and gas leaders. "If we hear about the economy being reopened only with all these mandates and regulations and requirements and red tape coming with it, then (A) many of our small businesses can't afford that, and (B) we haven't learned the lessons of essential services industries over the last month."

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## 04. Sign Up for Daily COVID-19 Updates

To opt in for LABI's Daily COVID-19 updates with the latest information and guidance for business, click below or text "LABI" to 66866.

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