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Governor Wolf Unveils Workforce and Economic Development Plan to Get Pennsylvania Back to Work

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The COVID-19 global pandemic has significantly affected Pennsylvania workers, businesses and communities. To bolster economic recovery efforts and position Pennsylvania for economic growth, Governor Tom Wolf today unveiled his “Back to Work PA” plan.

“Pennsylvania needs a comprehensive, forward-thinking plan to jumpstart our economy and support our workforce,” Gov. Wolf said. “Back to Work PA will make strategic and comprehensive investments to build a stronger and more diverse workforce, support Pennsylvania businesses while attracting businesses to the commonwealth, and assist communities with economic recovery efforts – all of which will help us get back on track and build a brighter future for Pennsylvania.”

Back to Work PA builds on recommendations from the Keystone Economic Development and Workforce Command Center’s annual report, published in January 2020. Refocusing Restore PA, Back to Work PA would be funded by a commonsense extraction tax on the natural gas industry, which would allow for an injection of $3 billion to enhance existing initiatives and create new, innovative programs to address barriers that are holding back our workforce.

Invest in Our Workforce to Support a Fair and Equitable Economic Recovery

To build a stronger and more diverse workforce, the plan would support workers most significantly impacted by the pandemic, address inequities, direct resources to support talent development for high-demand occupations, and focus on high-quality well-paying jobs that lead to careers with family-sustaining wages:

- Invest in rapid reskilling, upskilling, and skills transfer to connect unemployed Pennsylvanians to new career opportunities.
- Invest in programs that enhance digital literacy skills.
- Expand on registered apprenticeship programs to include non-traditional occupations like health care, child care, information technology and manufacturing.
- Expand on education and training opportunities that support middle-skill jobs and the skilled-trades.
- Transform workforce development services, including individualized career coaching and enhanced wrap-around supports to address barriers to employment.
- Support child care stabilization by increasing child care subsidies, assisting employers seeking to develop or expand on-site child care, assisting child care centers to expand services during non-traditional work hours, and eliminating child care deserts.
- Support innovative programs that help re-entering citizens obtain credentials and access employment opportunities.

Catalyze Pennsylvania’s Economic Recovery through Strategic Business and Community Support

To support and attract businesses, Back to Work PA would develop a strong reshoring initiative. Supply chain issues have affected businesses across this country, and Pennsylvania’s manufacturing sector is poised to compete nationally and globally to address those needs.

- Develop a strong reshoring initiative by prioritizing and recapitalizing existing programs such as:
  - Business in Our Sites
  - Industrial Sites Reuse Program
  - Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority
  - Machinery and Equipment Loan Fund
- Increase investment into an aggressive business attraction marketing strategy to package and promote reshoring programs.

- Support innovation and entrepreneurs by developing a funding strategy to foster the creation of new companies and attract and retain talent in Pennsylvania.
- Provide strategic financial planning opportunities for municipalities so that they can address the revenue losses experienced during the pandemic and prepare for potential future economic disruptions:
  - Expand Municipal Assistance Program (MAP) to provide additional services to municipalities.
  - Expand and Reform Act 47.
  - Expand Strategic Management Planning Program (STMP).

Ensure Reliable Broadband for All Pennsylvanians

COVID-19 disruptions have shown that broadband access is a necessity. Back to Work PA would prioritize making high-speed internet access available to all Pennsylvanians by building out this infrastructure in unserved areas of the commonwealth. Pennsylvanians deserve an opportunity for economic vitality and internet access is a fundamental pillar to that opportunity.

“We know that no two jobs are exactly the same, no two workers are exactly the same, and no two businesses are exactly the same. The individualized services in the governor’s Back to Work PA plan connect job seekers to the education or training that will set them up for success in the labor market, while also helping businesses connect to the skilled workforce they need to thrive,” said Department of Labor & Industry Acting Secretary Jennifer Berrier. “By making these smart investments now, we can build up our workforce to make Pennsylvania’s workers the most in-demand in the country as we emerge into the new post-pandemic world.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic has hurt our communities and businesses, and we cannot stall on taking bold, strategic action to expedite a faster recovery,” said Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Secretary Dennis Davin. “Bolstering our workforce benefits our economy—and by extension, our communities—and Back to Work PA would provide the critical funding necessary to address Pennsylvania’s needs both now and in the future.”

Back to Work PA is part of the governor’s 2021 legislative plan, which prioritizes cut taxes for working families and businesses, while investing more money in education and workforce development.

“Our commonwealth is competing against the world for talent. To hasten Pennsylvania’s recovery, and strengthen its long-term competitive advantage, we must make the shift to people and place-centered economic policies that enhance the pipeline to retain, train, attract, and empower a diverse, talented workforce, which in turn will strengthen our business community. The Back to Work PA Plan would do just that,” said Kevin Schreiber, president of the York County Economic Alliance.

“I’m proud to partner with Governor Wolf and support his plan to invest in working families and get our economy back on track,” said state Sen. John Kane (D-Chester/Delaware). “I was a union plumber for four decades, and I led my union through the Great Recession. I have seen firsthand the toll that this kind of economic downturn takes on working people. This is more than a paycheck. During the recession, I lost members to suicide and overdoses, and those issues have only gotten worse during this pandemic. We need to get our low-wage workers, our workers of color, folks that have been disproportionately impacted, back to work. The governor’s plan would do just that, and I’m proud to stand with him to fight for a Pennsylvania that works for working people.”

“Pennsylvanians continue to face the biggest and most critical challenges of their lifetimes due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said state Rep. Maureen Madden (D-Monroe). “Back to Work PA offers a path to economic stability by imposing a long overdue commonsense tax on natural gas extraction. I fully support Governor Wolf’s diverse initiative to rebuild our infrastructure and get Pennsylvanians back in the workforce.”

Since the start of the pandemic, the Wolf Administration has provided more than $670 million in relief to businesses and non-profits in addition to support programs such as the Paycheck Protection; most recently, $145 million to provide much-needed immediate relief to the hospitality industry.

“Our businesses need the immediate relief that these funds will provide, but we also need long-term solutions,” Gov. Wolf said. “Getting Pennsylvania back on track after the pandemic means investing in the businesses and workers that drive our economy and developing a sustainable solution to support long-term economic recovery. Back to Work PA will foster economic recovery by investing in our businesses, our workers, and our communities.”