



## National Lieutenant Governors Association

### **ALABAMA IS LEADING THE WAY IN WORKFORCE, EDUCATION, AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT**

**By: Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth**

During my travels across Alabama as a candidate for lieutenant governor in 2018, I asked business owners about their most crucial needs for success and growth. Invariably, they responded that demand for highly-skilled workers was at an all-time high, and more employees with technical training were desperately needed.

For the past several years, Alabama has been a national leader in economic development. The state's Department of Commerce has captured numerous "Silver Shovel" awards and other industrial recruitment honors in recent decades. Our state, in fact, is one of the few in the nation whose economy has remained comparatively strong despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

But my conversations with business owners convinced me that if we are going to continue our forward progress and provide even more jobs, hope, and security to Alabama's families, our attention must focus upon ensuring our workforce is prepared to fill 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs.

Workforce development became a centerpiece of my candidacy and it remains one of my highest priorities as an elected official. Immediately after assuming office, I created the Lieutenant Governor's Commission on a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce and began addressing these critical issues.

Our commission secured an appropriation from the state legislature and partnered with two independent research firms, McKinsey & Co. and Economic Leadership, to take a data-driven, outside look at Alabama's labor pool, education systems, and employment-related state agencies. A 150-page report titled "Alabama Workforce Development - Accelerating the Transformation to Excellence" was produced and is available for download at the link below.

In order to build the talent we need to meet ever-changing economic realities, we are identifying clear workforce development strategies and pursuing new ways to successfully close the skills gap.

A mobile device app is currently being developed in order to provide students across Alabama with a listing of available jobs within a 60-mile radius at any given time. The app will help them spot trends in the local job market, inform them about potential salaries in each profession, and advise them about the level of education, skills, and training they will need in order to fill available jobs. And while the idea is to target students and encourage them to think ahead, the app will prove just as valuable to adults who are between jobs or those who have been laid off and are seeking new careers.

Though Alabama's existing workforce training programs have always received top rankings in national studies and comparisons, we are taking steps to ensure they continue to adapt and evolve in a rapidly changing business environment.

The commission is promoting and expanding the highly successful career technical dual enrollment program, which allows Alabama students to simultaneously fulfill their high school requirements while also enrolling in postsecondary classes that will ensure they are job-ready upon graduation. I believe dual enrollment has played an important role in lowering Alabama's high school dropout rate, and it has helped develop the hidden, untapped potential that many of our students possess.

We have recommended and are currently in the process of securing an additional \$15 million in state funding for career tech expansion and a \$25 million boost for the purchase of new workforce training equipment and plan to expand and train career coaches in our public schools.

Apprenticeship is the oldest method of job training and our commission is seeking to make Alabama a national leader in modern day apprenticeship by allowing trades to be taught with a hands-on approach in a workplace environment.

Because I also chair Alabama's Military Stabilization Commission, we are working to ensure that the families and dependents of our fighting men and women can access employment opportunities while stationed in the state. We have been one of the first states to pass legislation providing occupational license reciprocity for military dependents and we recently launched our "Heroes Welcome" campaign, which provides military and veteran families a one-stop relocation resource.

While the coronavirus pandemic has certainly slowed a record-breaking and historic economy, announcements of industrial openings and expansions still occur on a routine basis in Alabama - and all of that growth will demand qualified workers to fill the labor force. I continue working every day to ensure that Alabamians are prepared to fill those long-lasting, well-paying 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs so that our state may remain an ideal place to live, work and raise a family.

[Alabama Workforce Development - Accelerating the Transformation to Excellence](#)