

O. TEMPLE SLOAN, JR.
4900 FALLS OF NEUSE ROAD
SUITE 150
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA 27609

April 20, 2020

Governor Roy Cooper
1 E. Edenton Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Governor Cooper,

Having been in business all my life, I've always believed that the strength of any company rests on the cornerstones of having a great workforce combined with strong leadership. Research shows that employees trust their employers for guidance during stressful times, as well as for their incomes and for much of their purpose in life. This becomes even more important during stressful times. Employers around the state have been unable to provide services to customers, but perhaps even worse, they have been forced to sever ties with the people they see every day, their employees.

The economy has suffered an unprecedented downturn, and unemployment is at an all-time high. More than one tenth of our state's workforce has filed for unemployment, and this number will grow by the day. This will continue to overwhelm our unemployment system and cause damaging delays. With so many businesses closed, each week that passes exponentially increases the time it will take for the economy to recover.

As we look forward, as difficult as it seems, we remember Winston Churchill's famous words in 1940, "Now it would be foolish, however, to disguise the gravity of the hour. It would be still more foolish to lose heart and courage."

North Carolina is the 11th largest economy in the nation, and it is regularly ranked as a top state in which to live, work, play, and learn. Despite the economic downturn, our state is resilient, and our future will remain bright as we shift towards a recovery effort.

Your administration has spoken about the progress North Carolina has made to slow the spread, by taking the pandemic seriously. Now we need to hear a clear strategy to reopen the state's economy – the development of which, should not be viewed as a trade-off of the health and safety of our citizens. This strategy should maintain the progress we have made to slow the spread of the virus, while also defining a path to recovery. This must happen quickly, so that we recover at the same pace as the nation, if not ahead. I'd like to offer some suggestions on how a strategy is developed.

First, I believe that the regional pacts formed last week among 16 states in the west, mid-west and northeast gave people a sense that progress is being made toward reopening safely. Perhaps North Carolina can participate in a regional pact including warm-climate, low density states like ours. We also believe that the White House guidelines can be helpful, and that this plan similarly gave people confidence that deliberate

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decisions are being made. We encourage you to offer assurances such as these to residents and businesses that we will begin a recovery process soon. We can get back to work and do it safely by recognizing the differences among regions and business sectors.

Second, businesses recognize that we cannot return to business as normal, but that we must graciously accept a level of inconvenience in order to protect employees and customers. Provide rational guidelines, and then allow businesses to assess their risks and take appropriate state-approved steps. The single highest priority of employers is to protect their own people. Businesses will be ready to quickly enact protocols for safety and health in every sector and region.

Third, thanks to your "Testing, Tracing, Trends" initiative announced April 15, North Carolina is in the midst of readiness evaluations to fully determine the strength of our health systems while assessing the intensity of virus transmission across the state. This important effort should parallel and inform the process for developing a sound economic revival plan, and we encourage you to announce the association between these two initiatives, that the reopening will be done in a manner that protects the progress we have made.

Fourth, we strongly encourage you to invite the business community to participate in the development of the safe-recovery plan. Businesses need to understand the protocols necessary to get back to work, and business representatives from all sectors and regions must have a seat at the table when these guidelines are being developed. Working with an experienced and diverse business council will lead to smart initiatives that get people back to work before there are too many permanent business failures. This planning group also should include bi-partisan elected officials from the General Assembly and the Council of State.

I, and many other business leaders across our state are ready and willing to assist your administration in any capacity. As Churchill told President Roosevelt in February of 1941, "Give us the tools and we'll finish the job."

Today, I will be urging business leaders across the state to reach out to you to provide support and recommendations. Thank you for your service. Myself, and many other North Carolinians look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



O. Temple Sloan, Jr.