

## COLUMN | FOCUS

# Collective effort needed to reach statewide excellence

As 2020 approaches, the Iowa Business Council is diligently working on creating a career ready workforce, strategies to diversify and increase our population and connecting business with education to make lasting impressions among our youth about the possibilities that exist in their backyard.

As we look to our state's economic future, however, the picture is uncertain. Each quarter, we survey our members on their expectations for sales, capital spending and employment for the next six months. Their third quarter economic outlook showed weakened confidence among businesses spanning industries from manufacturing and agriculture to financial services and logistics. At its lowest point since the fourth quarter of 2016, the dip in optimism is likely due to political and global market uncertainty and a disruptive regulatory climate.

Members cite recent trade clashes and an uncertain geopolitical climate as the major disruptors for their growth. Understanding the importance of certainty for market expansion, the Iowa Business Council has been urging Congress to pass the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA). Ratifying USMCA is essential for providing stability in the markets here and abroad. Additionally, the USMCA can be a key building

block to carry momentum on the global stage with China and others.

Turning toward state dynamics, IBC is committed to continuing high-level initiatives for pro-growth strategies that will strengthen our state's overall economic vitality. Throughout the year, IBC travels the state to present Iowa's Competitive Dashboard, an annual research document that measures our state's competitiveness in several different categories. The data often leads to discussion on the barriers to business growth with community leaders and an examination of the solutions offered in different communities.

Additionally, we host Vision to Vitality forums quarterly to provide a platform for candid discussions with IBC members and local community members about regional economies, best practices for future growth and overcoming barriers. These conversations serve as a launching point for solutions on how business, government, education, nonprofits and citizens can engage to collectively move the needle in their communities.

Some of the common themes heard in each community revolved around the lack of a skilled workforce and strategies to upskill their population, the need for affordable, accessible childcare, difficulty in physician recruitment, which

hurts overall workforce recruitment and the path forward to connect schools, teachers and parents to better educate our youth on the 21st century careers across the state.

As the Iowa Business Council prioritizes our 2020 agenda, common themes expressed throughout the state will help shape our policy advocacy and high-level initiatives. We will be rolling out a pilot program to better connect rural, urban and suburban school districts with work-based learning opportunities to expose students to hands-on experiences. We also know that Iowa has struggled to keep up nationally in attracting people to our state. IBC brought together public and private stakeholders to come up with solutions to this problem, and we will be releasing specific strategies to recruit more people to live, work and play in Iowa over the course of next year.

We know it will take a collective effort to drive these initiatives forward. There are fantastic programs happening in pockets across Iowa and regional excellence in the Corridor can serve as a foundation for statewide excellence. The Iowa Business Council hopes to be a conduit for this great work, to unify communities, and connect resources to share and elevate best practices so we can move forward together. •



Joe Murphy is executive director of the Iowa Business Council, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose 23 members are chief decisions makers of major Iowa employers.

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