

Please return responses to the Chamber’s Director of Advocacy, Chris Emge, via email at

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STATE LEGISLATURE

*1.* *The COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant impact on the state budget. What issues or priorities will guide your budgetary decisions in the next legislative session?*

With the influx of federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the additional dollars expected through the Build Back Better plan, Indiana’s budget is on a very sound footing. In fact, the State’s surplus is so high – over $5B – that tax refunds will soon be going out.   
  
This influx of federal money should be used in transformative ways. Our roads and bridges need to be upgraded and strengthened. I propose creating a passenger rail system, including a commuter rail system in and around Indianapolis, to decrease congestion, make us less reliant on fossil fuels – especially imported fossil fuels which put us at the mercy of others – and reduce both pollution and greenhouses gases. A passenger rail system would reduce the wear-and-tear on our roads and bridges, making them last longer. It would also reduce deaths due to vehicular accidents.

We need to upgrade other parts of our infrastructure, such as our aging sewer and storm-water systems, and replace all of the lead pipes carrying water to our schools, homes, and businesses. Our dams, ports, and airports need a thorough review, with upgrades where warranted. Money spent on infrastructure provides good-paying jobs, which puts more money back into the economy.

COVID has made it clear that we need state-wide broadband that is affordable and reliable. Broadband is needed not only in rural areas, but in the broadband deserts of our major cities. Businesses, healthcare, education, and farming all benefit from access to broadband.   
  
My other budget priorities include increasing teacher salaries, providing expanded support for rural schools, instituting quality, universal pre-K for all 4-year-olds, expanding childcare vouchers, and providing more scholarships to college students who are studying to become teachers, especially pre-K teachers. Businesses look to relocate to areas which offer good schools, a trained workforce, and the infrastructure that allows them to move their goods and services to market. Quality of place, which is also important, includes parks, trails, greenways clean air, and clean water. We have the ability to provide Hoosiers with quality public education, a sound infrastructure, a healthy place to live, and good-paying jobs.

*2. Many local businesses are struggling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. What state financial aid, programmatic assistance, or other actions would you support in the coming months to strengthen economic recovery?*  
  
Part of the struggle businesses are currently facing is a tight labor market. COVID-19 caused many older workers to re-examine their lives, which led to many of them permanently leaving the workforce. And, some younger workers are no longer working because they are finding it impossible to find quality, affordable childcare. To get workers with young children back in the labor force, I propose offering the type of program which Michigan is currently piloting, called the Michigan Tri-Share Child Care Pilot Project (<https://www.michigan.gov/mwc/initiatives/mi-tri-share-child-care-pilot-project>). This program, which splits the cost of childcare between the employees, employers, and the State of Michigan, helps employers recruit and retain workers. Right now, in part due to non-competitive wages, there is a shortage of childcare workers. This shortage was present before COVID, but with COVID it has gotten much worse. Locally, childcare assistant teachers make less than $10/hour, so it is understandable that they have left the field for jobs which pay much more. I would tie the use of a program like Tri-Share to the wages and benefits offered to childcare workers in an effort to increase childcare availability.   
  
It takes skilled labor to up-grade infrastructure, and Indiana will need a workforce with those skills. We should offer financial assistance and incentives for workers to upgrade their skills.

*3. Other than the current crisis, what will be your top 3 priorities in the state legislature that relate to the business sector?*  
  
 Expand funding for public education from pre-K through college

Improve infrastructure, including state-wide broadband

Provide job training for the 21st Century skills employers want