

Matt Pierce, Democratic Candidate for Indiana State House District 61
Responses to questions from the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
For the Nov. 3, 2020 General Election

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 state revenues down by billions of dollars, writing the next budget will be very difficult. My top priority is to maintain funding for K-12 public schools and higher education. Our public schools are already underfunded and cannot withstand further cuts at the same time they are facing additional expenses to provide a safe learning environment during the pandemic. Maintaining funding for public schools alone will likely consume half of the budget. The state also must maintain its safety net for families that are struggling to meet basic needs like nutrition, shelter and health care. Funding decisions for the remaining state programs should avoid placing additional burdens on those already struggling to get by such as senior citizens living on fixed incomes.

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?

The state should do what it can to stimulate consumer spending and assist Indiana small businesses that are struggling to survive. The first thing the legislature should do when it reconvenes is order the immediate distribution of Indiana's federal CARES Act relief money the Governor is hoarding. More than a billion dollars in unspent relief money could be helping people now. Instead, the Governor has chosen to hold most of the money hoping the federal government will allow him to use the money to offset the state's budget deficit.

The legislature should take advantage of low interest rates and maximize its bonding capacity to accelerate infrastructure projects. This will create jobs now and result in better infrastructure that will benefit Indiana's economy for decades to come.

State economic development incentive programs currently focused on attracting out-of-state companies should be temporarily redirected to preserving existing businesses already in the state.

3. Other than the current crisis, what will be your top 3 priorities in the state legislature that relate to the business sector?

More needs to be done on workforce development. While several workforce development bills were passed during the last couple of sessions of the General Assembly, they have mostly rearranged the bureaucracy and rebranded programs. Indiana businesses will not be able to expand, and it will be more difficult to attract outside investment to the state, if skilled employees are not available. A skilled workforce cannot be developed without properly funded public schools and colleges and universities. That is the necessary basic foundation for educated workers. Upon that foundation, the state needs to continue building robust apprenticeship programs that provide training for the skilled crafts that are in high demand.

Attracting skilled workers to Indiana is another important component of workforce development. That requires the legislature to think of quality of life issues as economic development issues. Younger workers in particular want to live in places with clean environments and amenities like modern transit systems and recreation opportunities.

They also want to live in places that value equity and inclusion. Unfortunately, the General Assembly has contributed to a negative image of Indiana with actions like being slow to pass a hate crimes bill and then not making it fully inclusive, passing legislation that legalized discrimination before repealing it under pressure, and not confronting racial inequality in our state.