



Media Contact:
Jessica Fletcher
Communications Manager
(w) 502-848-8731
(c) 859-539-0511
jfletcher@kychamber.com

Making progress in tough times

By Dave Adkisson
President and CEO, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

"If you're going through hell, keep going."

Winston Churchill's war-time words carry an important message as the grim economic news continues to frame the lives and work of individuals, companies, states and nations. As experts express doubt that circumstances will change for the better any time soon, an understandable response would be to head to the bunkers.

While some might consider such a reaction the only logical course of action, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce believes that the state can – and should – work to make progress despite the economic crisis. This is not to diminish the magnitude of the challenge facing Kentucky's elected leaders as they work to meet citizens' needs for services in the face of a severe revenue shortfall. Addressing this crisis must be the first item on the state's agenda.

While the immediate need is being addressed, Kentucky also has an opportunity to strengthen its economic foundation in ways that will improve its ability to respond to the inevitable economic challenges that the future holds.

The Chamber's latest agenda, "Bold Steps to Advance Kentucky," focuses on those opportunities by addressing key areas to enhance the state's business environment, ensuring that it can continue to support and strengthen the economy of the state and its citizens.

There are dozens of specific recommendations and policy statements included in "Bold Steps," which was developed by policy committees made up of Chamber members from across Kentucky. The complete document is available online at www.kychamber.com, but here are a few highlights. These reflect the "transformational goals" that are part of the Chamber's strategic plan.

Education leads the agenda – a top ranking it has held historically for the Kentucky Chamber. Our recent emphasis has been on higher education, particularly the areas of greater affordability for students and improved productivity by our colleges and universities. We will be working with state government leaders in the coming months on proposals addressing both of these and other areas so critical to the future of our state and its economy. On the elementary and secondary levels, our emphasis is on developing and rewarding effective teachers and improving the academic achievement of all students.

Modernizing government is another priority item – and one whose importance is emphasized during tough financial times. With state resources at a premium, Kentucky's government must spend every tax dollar as wisely as possible. That means streamlining services, adopting responsible personnel policies, creating a culture of accountability and thinking about things in a new way. For instance, should we consider privatizing state park operations? Should Kentucky have more programs encouraging cities and counties to work together regionally to save money?

Promoting wellness and healthy Kentuckians also holds a key position on the Chamber's agenda. We recognize that private-sector employers can play an important role in this, and our wellness programs are expanding. But we also believe increasing taxes on tobacco products is an effective strategy for reducing smoking – and it is one that Kentucky should adopt.

All of these elements can better prepare Kentucky to **compete successfully in the global marketplace**. So can increasing the number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and math; a competitive tax code that encourages investment; an equitable civil justice system and improvements in the state's infrastructure. All of these areas offer opportunities for progressive change – even when times are hard.

Finally, Kentucky has a tremendous opportunity in the area of energy. Strategies that include continued reliance on coal as a key energy resource while investing in clean technologies, promoting conservation, streamlining the regulatory process, supporting biomass and encouraging alternative energy can position **Kentucky nationally and internationally as an energy leader**.

The current economic turmoil is creating a new reality for Kentucky's companies, its citizens and state government. If we can keep going through this "hell" with a focus on creative thinking and innovative solutions, we have a chance to emerge on the other side as a stronger state.

###