

# The Time is NOW: Aligning to Rebuild Western North Carolina's Economy

Western North Carolina plays a critical role in our state's economy. Home to many small businesses, the region requires serious consideration of the following policies. We must work together to restore and revitalize North Carolina's economy, ensuring that businesses can rebuild and provide opportunities for people to earn a living.

## State Policy Considerations

- **Prioritize forgivable loans in the next round of disaster funding.** These should be zero-interest products designed for substantial lost revenue during the onset of the fall tourism season. One example is the Jobs Retention Grant program that was used during COVID and managed by the N.C. Department of Commerce. This program provided a forgivable loan to businesses who maintained their employee roster for a defined period. The money covered payroll and was a helpful tool to mitigate revenue loss.
- **Work with the NCDOT and Visit NC to coordinate messaging on travel in Western NC.** Maps and roadside messages are confusing and contradictory in some places. Local communities can amplify messaging through official agencies and trusted sources like chambers of commerce, destination marketing organizations, and others.
- **Resource Visit NC for a "Shop Western North Carolina," holiday messaging campaign.** These could be directed regionally and help drive both in-person and online sales. Similar messaging could be used around the upcoming choose-and-cut tree season as well.
- **Prioritize critical infrastructure repair** including roads, bridges, water/sewer, and work with community, statewide, and contracted partners to fully capture and utilize available FEMA mitigation funds. With the Blue Ridge Parkway out of service for the foreseeable future, primary and secondary roads in the region are being considerably overloaded.
- **Explore options to provide long-term business and employee recovery and resiliency** through solutions, including a small business health insurance product, that improves small business access to value-driven health care in North Carolina to improve health outcomes and make costs more predictable and affordable.

## Federal Policy Considerations

- **Reconvene Congress and fund SBA in similar fashion to what FEMA received in the last continuing resolution.** Assure that loans will have the financial backing to be processed to encourage more applications and sustain small businesses.
- **Encourage forgivable loans in the next round of disaster funding.** These should be zero-interest products designed for substantial lost revenue during the onset of the fall tourism season. A version of grants and/or forgivable loans for the Main Street and tourism-impacted economies would be the fastest way to rebound from extreme revenue loss.
- **Expedite repairs to the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina.** With winter approaching, the time is now to mitigate the direct impact on all impacted communities.
- **Activate FEMA's Community Disaster Loan Program** so local governments are able to function and maintain employment with the impending, substantial loss in tax revenue.
- **Encourage FEMA to provide funding for private road and bridge repair** and to amplify how communities and property owners can document need and access funding.

Together we are championing initiatives to restore and revitalize North Carolina's economy, ensuring that businesses can rebuild and provide opportunities for people to earn a living.

Join us.

Alleghany County Chamber of Commerce  
Andrews Chamber of Commerce  
Ashe County Chamber of Commerce  
Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Avery County Chamber of Commerce  
Black Mountain Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce  
Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce  
Boone Area Chamber of Commerce  
Brevard/Transylvania Chamber  
Burke County Chamber of Commerce  
Business High Point Chamber of Commerce  
Cashiers Area Chamber  
Catawba County Chamber of Commerce  
Charlotte Regional Business Alliance  
Franklin Area Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce  
Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce  
Haywood Chamber of Commerce  
Henderson County Chamber of Commerce  
Highlands Area Chamber of Commerce / Visit Highlands, NC  
Jackson County Chamber of Commerce, Inc.  
Jacksonville Onslow Chamber of Commerce  
Madison County Chamber  
Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce  
McDowell Chamber of Commerce  
Mint Hill Chamber of Commerce  
Moore County Chamber of Commerce  
National Institute of Minority Economic Development  
NC Chamber  
Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce  
Rocky Mount Area Chamber of Commerce  
Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce  
The Caldwell Chamber  
The Chamber, Leading Business in Cabarrus  
The Chamber of Catawba County  
Wilkes Chamber of Commerce  
Wilmington Chamber of Commerce  
Winterville Chamber of Commerce  
Yancey County Chamber of Commerce

To add your organization's name to this growing list, [email kpayne@ncchamber.com](mailto:kpayne@ncchamber.com).