

Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development

MEETING MINUTES

Date: April 24, 2020

Time: 9:00 A.M.

Place: Virtual Meeting

Welcome/Call to Order

Chair Michelle Choquette welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda.

Secretary Kouplen's Update

- COVID-19 update - There's a new symptom tracker from Google on the Health Department website that will help us track where outbreaks are occurring around the state.
- Our unemployment has sky rocketed and that is really depressing. On average, OESC had been taking about 300 claims, now it has peaked at 12,687 in one day on April 7th and it is still between 4,000-6,000.
- The \$600 per week for unemployment started arriving two weeks ago. It is good for those who are laid off but it will be a challenge when businesses start hiring back and people won't want to return because they are making more money on unemployment. Those businesses who received PPP have to hire back what they were paying pre-COVID so this is going to be challenging when people refuse to return.
- We were ranked number seven in the country for the payroll protection program. If you look at the percentage of our payroll, we have about 63% funded on the first round and now there is another round coming of about \$310 billion. Sixty billion was just approved to go in to the Small Business Disaster Loan program which is good news.
- One-time checks to Oklahomans started last week. We've got about \$1.25 billion dollars of Federal stimulus that will be coming into Oklahoma. Of the \$1.25 billion coming in, a majority of it will be going to cities and hospitals and that's understandable. Secretary Kouplen said they think that they may be able to carve out of that \$10-\$50 million of that for small businesses and help people to get through this time. He would love to have any feedback from Council members on how they would use that money. Just send him an email and let him know.
- They had a big press conference on Wednesday that announced the Bounce Back Plan. The Oklahoma Manufacturing Reboot Program was super popular and he thinks they will be doing more of this. The Department of Commerce, with approval from the Governor, took \$5 million from the Closing Fund which is typically used to recruit new business into Oklahoma, and used it for the Manufacturing Reboot Program where it would help existing businesses. There were grants from \$25,000-\$150,000 awarded to manufacturers to help them retool. This might help us with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or other things. Of the 350 applicants, 37 were selected. This is about 11,000-12,000 jobs that we're talking about and a good way to grow business in the future.
- They've been doing industry sector calls every Wednesday with about eight different sectors and they have been very successful.
- They've been involved with essential and non-essential businesses and set it up on the Commerce website with the NAICS codes. They had about 4,000 calls the first day and it was wild.
- The Open Up and Recover Safely (OURS) Plan is a three-phase plan they came up with to open Oklahoma's economy after looking at the data and trends every day for a couple of months and the continuing downward trajectory. The Governor felt like it was time to have a measured reopening plan for the state. There are two weeks for each phase and they are starting the first phase today (April 24). They will have two weeks, then they will look at the data, and then two more weeks for phase two and look at the data, then two weeks for phase three. Media outlets report cumulative cases, so when we look at the cases, the number is always going to go up. We're looking at new

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cases per day and the percentage of cases being tested and PPE levels, etc. There are a lot of things they are looking at before opening businesses back up. The good news is the data seems to be flattening and dropping. We have 15 times the hospital bed capacity that we need. On March 30th we peaked at 560 hospitalizations, we are now down to 284. We have 4,600 patient capacity, there are 80 testing sites across the state, and we are going to be testing every nursing home and long-term facility, every patient and home because that is about 40% of our Coronavirus deaths. Secretary Kouplén said, in his opinion, we shut down businesses in order for healthcare to be able to build their capacity to handle the Coronavirus. He also said that although about 40% of the deaths from the virus are from our nursing homes, when compared to deaths in nursing homes last year before the Coronavirus, it is virtually the same. The Governor is focusing on Oklahoma data and not the national news. They have a three-phase plan to reopen. The first phase is today, the safer at home for those 65 and older and the vulnerable population is still in place, the personal care places like hair salons, nail salons, spas, barber shops, tattoo parlors, etc., can open by appointment only. Sanitation protocols have to be in place, social distancing, wearing masks, taking temperatures to be sure clients are not infected. State parks and outdoor recreations are opening back up – zoos, bicycle rentals, etc. Grocery stores are open but we want them to maintain their hours for vulnerable populations as well. On May 1, the Governor will open up dining, entertainment, theaters, gyms, etc. They will have to follow social distancing and sanitation protocols. The Governor could do an Executive Order to open up everything but he chooses to have the mayors open up their cities. They just decided this morning to have organized sports able to open up. Practices can start on May 1st and teams can start playing on May 15th. Churches can open up on May 1 if they follow the guidance that is on the website.

Phase two – May 15 – we can resume non-essential travel, funerals, weddings, and children’s nurseries at churches can open and operate under proper social distancing and sanitation protocols. Bars can operate with diminished standing-room occupancy, where applicable and appropriate, and under social distancing and sanitation protocols. If hospital and incident rates remain at a manageable level for 14 days, then they will move to Phase 3.

Phase three – June 1 – if everything goes alright, that’s when summer camps, church camps, school camps can open back up and that’s when we’d like to see the social distancing requirements lift but that depends on how things so. Last thing to remember is no business has to open unless they are ready, businesses can be stricter than the guidelines, and should follow each municipality’s guidance. Another thing to look at is mental health. People are isolated, they’re either all alone or all cooped up in a small area and can get depressed. When the money went out to Oklahoma’s businesses over the last week or two and now we are going to have another set come out, at the end of eight weeks that money stops. We need to get our businesses going and building our economy back because there’s probably not going to be another safety net. The government can only come forth with more dollars so many times.

- Secretary Kouplén wanted to give a shout out to Don Morris, Brent Kisling and Robin Roberson for all of the tremendous work they’ve been doing. He’s very proud of his team.

Impacts of COVID-19 and the Workforce System’s Response

- **Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development – Don Morris, Executive Director**
Don commended the Local Workforce Boards and their leadership and while the centers are closed they continue to take in new cases and manage cases, so they are still taking care of people in the State. They are having meetings on the process of reopening the workforce centers and are expecting some guidance from the Governor in the next few days. While our job centers are not state agencies, he thinks it’s prudent to follow that lead and timing as well as protocols. These discussions will involve our local boards, state office, leaders, and core partners.

Thanks to the Office of Workforce Development staff, monitoring is continuing. Instead of visiting the centers and with staff, all of it is being done virtually.

To point out the resources on our web page, a large part of the work that we've done is to connect people through our web page so go to www.Oklahomaworks.gov. One new feature that we have is a Talent Exchange that connects job seekers with employers. Our web page as well as OESC's web page is a great place to go to look for open positions. He's been on a couple of news shows in Tulsa and also spoke to the board of Oklahoma Human Resources around the state to push that out as well. There are employers hiring in Oklahoma and we want people to know that there are jobs, in fact some industries have grown during the pandemic.

Don said they've made it easier for people to find resources on our website. If you go to Oklahomaworks.gov, you will see three options: career services, employers, and unemployment benefits (this is our connection to OESC and Q&A for unemployment).

Don said that they have applied for a Dislocated Worker grant in the amount of \$3 million to spend over twenty-four months as a partnership with OESC. They are also launching a Dislocated Worker Task Force for this process and ongoing. They are focusing on customer experience so they will be having a statewide survey for people visiting the centers as well as partnerships and general process improvements, and how they can better take care of folks and to set ourselves in a better position to better ourselves competitively nationwide. We also expect that grant to support OK Reboot – a manufacturing reboot program that Secretary Kouplen mentioned.

The State Office completed some local area briefings this week prepared by Dr. Natalie Daugherty. This is important for the local workforce boards because we can be more data driven and that's one of Don's goals this year. Council members can get with their local area directors and go over the reports with them.

Don wanted to share a couple of positives that have come out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- One is better interagency connectivity. They are seeing that they need to be aligned better, not only for a pandemic, but day to day. When a person is struggling looking for work, it's like a pandemic to them and we need to learn to respond to them in the same way. It's forcing discussions to virtual improvements and what the workforce will look like after all of this. In his opinion, he believes there will be a lot more virtual opportunities so it's forcing them to look at software upgrades and to look at how we can start to capitalize ourselves on staying up to speed on virtual capabilities. He was excited to see that the second part of the CARES funding involves funding for extending broadband capabilities for rural areas. That will have a big impact on our ability to increase the labor participation rate in Oklahoma.
 - It's also given some statewide exposure to workforce development in general. This pandemic has given people the opportunity to see what we do and how to answer the question of how do people really connect to work in our state and how do employers connect to people outside of their own recruiting efforts and also how do we take care of those with barriers?
 - We've built some great industry relationships, specific to grocery associations, trucking, agriculture industry, retailers, restaurants and hospitality. These are all part of that Talent Exchange he mentioned earlier. It helps us to better understand what those needs are and they have a better understanding how we can support their needs.
- **Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) – Teresa Keller, Deputy Director**
Teresa is filling in for Robin Roberson while she is recovering from surgery. She wants to thank Governor Stitt, Secretary Kouplen and Secretary Ostrowe for their support of OESC during this crisis.

With regards to the impact of COVID, she says that it will remain to be seen what that will actually look like. They don't know how many businesses will be able to open up and bring back their staff and they don't know how many businesses will close permanently and leave those employees looking for work. OESC is focused at this time on getting benefits paid to people who are impacted by COVID. They started keeping track of claims being paid due to COVID on March 15 and generally during that six week period of time they would have taken about 9,000 claims. But since

March 15, they have taken at least 236,000 claims. In the coming weeks, they will be ramping up and focusing on finding suitable work for their customers. During the past week with the field offices closed, they've had their field staff pitching in to help with claims and they had to suspend their Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment Program. They will be able to start that up again in a few weeks and USDOL has given them permission to use Vet staff to help with that program until their field staff are no longer needed to help with claims.

OESC is partnering with OOWD in a joint application to receive federal funds – about \$3 million - for a Dislocated Worker grant. OESC also has some funds from a prior Dislocated Worker grant that they are working with OOWD to see how quickly they can get that into the hands of claimants who need them. The funds will be used in part to upskill workers through retraining. They are working with OOWD and OU to help with retraining for IT positions. These are for starter positions so the training can be pretty quick and this appeals to a lot of claimants. There are companies that are waiting to hire these people as soon as they come out of training, so that's good news. The training will be virtual. Once the Centers reopen, claimants can use the resource rooms and have access to computers, the internet, etc. to complete their training if needed.

- **Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) – Melinda Fruendt, Executive Director**
Melinda said that from their perspective at the Department of Rehabilitation Services and for purposes of this meeting, she will talk about their Vocational Rehabilitation Division, their Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired Division, as well as their School for the Blind and School for the Deaf. Obviously, their Schools for the Blind (in Muskogee) and the Deaf (in Sulphur), specialty schools, they had the extended Spring break just like all the other public school systems and also cancelled all of their extracurricular activities for the rest of the year. Both schools have implemented distance learning plans and provided multiple community resources to parents and students during the crises. Melinda reported that they have had zero connectivity issues across the state with their students. They do serve out of all 77 counties as students are from all over the state. The distance learning with the ASL and teaching across at the School for the Deaf offered a few challenges, and for the blind and visually impaired at the School for the Blind did present some challenges there as well, but all is going well on those two fronts.

Moving on to Vocational Rehabilitation, Melinda said they're talking about individuals that have a lot of barriers that need wrap around services and medical services to get up to par to be able to be ready for employment. Our focus is to help them over their barriers or to eliminate them and to work with our partners across the state so they are ready for employment. With the medical providers and service providers closing down across the state, there has been a challenge. So the counselors are working with the clients (not face-to-face) and they are learning in higher education but for some the distance learning is not working well for them depending on what their barriers are, so the challenges are similar for vocational rehabilitation as they are for the blind and visually impaired.

They continue to work daily with their rehabilitation service providers. One of the challenges they have is that there are not a lot of them in the rural areas and many of them had to close their doors because of the face to face contact they have with consumers with disabilities and they're wondering how many will be able to return back to having their businesses. For services for the blind and visually impaired, counselors are working with clients and are trying to be more creative in helping them. They are also introducing clients to online support groups across the nation.

They continue to point clients to UI and OESC for unemployment benefits.

- **CareerTech – Marcie Mack, State Director**
Marcie has a few updates as it relates to the Governor's Council and as they move forward and partnering with all the other agencies and connecting students to work, specifically with Adult Basic Education (ABE), one of the key pieces for the Governor's Workforce Council. For the ABE, they have continued to deliver across the state, whether that be electronically or paper packets that have been delivered and then each instructor connects with individuals via phone, Zoom or various avenues. She said one of the pieces is connectivity and accessibility for students they are working

on this so students can stay safe across the state. In keeping individuals connected, specifically for their directors and educators, making sure they have the resources they need or as they realize they need additional technology or platforms, they are meeting at least once a week if not more with directors, educators, administrators of each of those areas to help them find manpower if needed to help stand up particular curriculum, etc.

Marcie said through their Business and Industry piece, they are still helping their students find employment. If they are adult students who has already been licensed and are ready to go to work, they are helping them finish that. If it's students who may have to experience clinicals to get their licensing or certification to get into the work place, they have put into place for them to have proctored, secure exams from an entity that they have contracted with that does this nationwide. Marcie said that they already had the contract in place so they were able to add other industry credentials to it as well as some of their testing sites. They will be having some more come online the first of May. They do have some secure testing sites where individuals do not have to come into contact with others and everyone can maintain the appropriate CDC guidelines. They want students to know that they can finish their educational process and there is a light at the end of the tunnel. And for Business and Industry, they can retrain and retool individuals now and get them ready for when they are brought back into the workplace in a timely manner.

Marcie said their criminal justice involved programs which lead to some specific populations for their students who have transitioned from the Department of Corrections, they are still working to find employment so they are connecting with them with employment opportunities. There are greater opportunities in the Tulsa and Oklahoma City areas than some other areas, but they are utilizing other resources as Don mentioned and connecting them with their cross-agency partnerships. They are working to continue to move that forward from sanitation procedures to safety to updating computer skills and other digital opportunities at this time and helping individuals to gain comfort in that.

Q&A

- Dee Hays asked if there are any plans to help the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma in the current market situation?
- Secretary Kouplen said that he and the Governor have both met with energy leaders across the state and part of the dilemma is that many of the smaller companies qualify for the many of the programs offered like disaster loans or PPE. And with the larger players, many are dealing with billions of dollars in issues. He would take any ideas or suggestions that anyone wants to give because the toolbox is pretty slim right now.
- Don Morris added that OESC has grant funds specific to oil and gas that they've been able to stretch across energy sectors as well. He said if we get to the point where the best solution for the workers themselves is to upskill and reskill, we have funds in that area. Teresa Keller added that was the first Dislocated Worker grant that they received. They have expanded it from oil and gas to also include manufacturing, transportation and healthcare. They still have about \$6-7 million of it left so there is still a lot of money out there for retraining individuals who have been recently laid-off. If they have been laid-off recently from the oil and gas industry or have been in the past, they can qualify. She said this grant is the most flexible one that she has ever seen. If someone needs money for gas, child care or equipment for training, it's very, very flexible. The taskforce would like to get this money out there and into the hands of people who need it.
- Secretary Kouplen said that one of the Council members asked where they can find the OURS plan. He said it can be found on the Department of Commerce website at www.okcommerce.gov. On the banner that talks about COVID-19 and recovery resources, just click on that and you'll see the full plan.
- Don said that in future meetings with the Governor's Council he is wanting the Core Partners to give an update each time, much like they did today and also to have the meetings more interactive. He asked everyone what do they see as the greatest challenge that we (in workforce) can handle in moving forward? And what do you see as our top priority?
- Stephanie Cameron commented it is getting people back to work.

- Don said one of the biggest challenges of the 236,000 who were laid off or furloughed is knowing how many of them were laid off permanently or how many will be returning to work or how many are we going to need to reskill. And with those laid off that are receiving funds, how many aren't going to want to return to work?
- Teresa Keller commented that the \$600 that is under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation section of the CARES Act, they are going to try to get the word out to both claimants and employers that if an employer opens their doors and invite their employees back to work and the employees do not want to return to work because they think that they are better off staying at home and collecting the extra \$600 in benefits and they refuse to come back to work, the employer can call OESC and OESC can cut off those benefits for the employee due to refusal to work. This is a concern nationwide that some employees will be making more money on unemployment than working but it is a temporary situation. Secretary Kouplén said that has been a concern to him also.
- Chad Marisky asked if there was a way to reduce the state's portion of unemployment since the federal portion can't be reduced in order to prevent this problem of people making more on unemployment than when they were working so they won't refuse to go back to work?
- Teresa Keller replied that she doesn't think that we can do that, but they can do a request that the payment can be terminated for Oklahoma if they want to. She said that if the economy opens up, then if they continue, the last payment would be July 31. If people refuse to go back to work and OESC knows about it, then they can put a stop on their unemployment claim.
- Secretary Ben Robinson said that this isn't about a challenge but about an opportunity. We have learned so much about teleworking in the last six weeks. If we look at teleworking, we could have about 30% more of the workforce available to us if we perfect teleworking. We have so many people who are not out there actively in the workplace as we know it today, but still have the expertise, energy and motivation to do the work, but to do it from home. He said that after this is all over, we need to sit down and bring those people in that have gained a lot of success, information and knowledge and see from data how we can grow this workforce through teleworking. Dr. Mack has an opportunity within CareerTech training programs for people who specialize in teleworking. We add 5G to that and he thinks it's a tremendous opportunity for us to grow our workforce that doesn't require for us to add more office space, cubicles, bigger buildings, but we do it through teleworking. One of the things that they are interested in on the Veterans side of his position is spouse employment. How do we employ spouses that are going to end up with three-year careers or one-year? Some spouses at Vance and Altus that are going to be there for a limited amount of time, how can we get them engaged in teleworking with companies that have national footprints? Two examples are Paycom and Express Professionals. Ben thinks there is a tremendous opportunity out there and we need to step up to it and capture it before we lose it.
- Don Morris said that is a fantastic point and it will be a part of their Dislocated Worker work flow process with OESC and OOWD. He said they've also had discussions on how Oklahoma can be a teleworking hub for other states. When he first came into this position, one of the challenges that they discussed was Labor Participation Rates. It's a very discouraging thing to look at. When the pandemic started and they started seeing support for broadband access in rural areas, the ability to telework versus transportation and those type of things, he thought that we have a chance here to get to more of our population that can't participate. We also have housing deserts and other issues around needing people to work in affluent areas who don't live in affluent areas – how do we get them there? He sees all of these issues as the next step. Don says that Secretary Robinson is a visionary in bringing that point up. How do we use this situation to improve our state?
- Secretary Kouplén asked Brent Kisling to talk about some legislation that has come up around remote workers and that they see as a huge strategic opportunity for Oklahoma.
- Brent Kisling said that over the last couple of years the Tulsa Remote program got started and it became world renown and was very successful. So they attempted during this legislative session to get a bill that would allow partnering with local communities so they can set up something similar to Tulsa Remote. Tulsa Remote is a partnership with folks to try to get them to move to Tulsa and they would receive \$10,000 plus some moving expenses. They had thousands of applications and hundreds of people moving to the area because of that program and they were trying to duplicate it with other communities to try and set something up. One thing that we've learned through all of this

is that we have a lot of areas where we've got to develop our broadband spectrum much better than we do right now.

- Chuck Gray said given the importance of aerospace to Oklahoma and regarding the impact of COVID-19 stimulus on Federal 2021D DOD, NASA, FFA, etc., budgets, he presumes that Oklahoma leadership is collaborating with the administration and congress to lobby for no significant cuts to these budgets currently moving through congress.
- Secretary Kouplen answered 100%. He said Senators Inhofe and Lankford are both aerospace fanatics and they understand what's coming down the pike and that we need to keep those dollars in place.
- Gayle Donica asked regarding the \$600 if we are reimbursing employers required to pay for this or is this paid for with Federal funds? It is not exactly clear on the FAQs on the OESC website.
- Teresa Keller said that fund is 100% federally funded and that is for benefits and administration of those funds. It is taxpayer dollars but is not coming out of our trust fund or anything like that.
- Melinda Fruendt said that a huge challenge ahead for the workforce system is going to be dealing with mental health issues for employees returning to work. Any thoughts or ideas among the group on how we can start thinking about addressing those issues?
- Teresa Huggins said they've been running leadership meetings each morning at the health and wellness center, which is federally funded, in southeast Oklahoma. We've been talking about phasing in our production back to where it was and we are mindful of employees' anxiety and mental health issues coming back into the building and into the workforce, so we sent employee assistance information to all of our employees. Teresa said that she doesn't know how many businesses in the state that don't have employee assistance programs, but if there was money available that could be used for helping those businesses that don't have one so they could develop one would be very useful.
- Don Morris added from an HR background, that mental health issues are probably one of the most unrecognized and certainly not dealt with issues among workforce across the state and he thinks it is extremely prudent to have that discussion.
- Melinda Fruendt added that the other part is jobseekers moving into employment. If they've been on UI and then you get people with different kinds of emotions and types of mental health issues. She said that some who will be returning to work may have some PTSD if they didn't know how to remote work before and they hadn't been used to it. The challenge that Ben Robinson brought forward is what we can learn from this that's to the positive, but she thinks that we have a lot to learn that's to the negative of how people are experiencing telework and remote work. At DRS, they are going to do a survey in their cabinet hopefully next week. Secretary Justin Brown said that they were doing a survey of their employees to see what their experience and satisfaction was with teleworking because it does take a certain kind of mindset and discipline to telework and to not allow outside distractions, etc. She said that she does know that some people are probably going to have a little PTSD.
- Don Morris added that some people who are not laid off sometimes experience survivor's guilt.
- Another question in the chat box is while our universities and colleges will graduate more than 4,700 doctors, nurses, allied health, and public health professionals this spring, many of those graduates are likely to go out of state despite being among one of the most in-demand occupations in Oklahoma, are there any thoughts on incentives to get them to stay in our state?
- Secretary Kouplen said that this may be something that we could use some of the stimulus dollars for. He hadn't thought about it before but thinking about the need for healthcare professionals in the state, it's possible they could use some of the CARES money for that.
- Tony Hutchison said that the irony of it is that there is such a need in the state for RNs and many are working day and night, but many have been laid off if they are not working in those emergency areas. Many of them are looking at opportunities out of state.
- Don Morris said that when you look at apprenticeship opportunities, most of those positions are for plumbers, HVAC and those sort of jobs. He asked Sarah Ashmore to talk about discussions they've had around that.
- Sarah Ashmore said they've talked about degreed apprenticeships programs and are looking at how they can better connect students to those. They've been looking at RN to BSN and those types of programs and have been working with some folks to work some of them out.

- Shelly Ellis, SDE, commented that they have created guidance on social emotional learning for students as well as self-care for parents and caregivers during this time. You can find these resources at www.sde.ok.gov/counseling.

Legislative Update

Don Morris said that there are a lot of good legislation around apprenticeships, tax credits for apprenticeships, work comp insurance premium credits for apprenticeship programs, etc. Given the situation right now, we are at a standstill with all of those things. Hopefully, by our July meeting we will have a more informative breakdown of all of the current legislation in the state involving workforce.

CARES Act

Teresa Keller, OESC, reported that there are three provisions under President Trump's CARES Act that went into effect on March 28th. The first is the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation which is the extra \$600 per week that we've been talking about, and that is being given to regular unemployment claimants filing under PUA (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance) and those filing for extended benefits under the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation section of that act. These payments are effective from March 29-July 31.

The next item that applies is for individuals who are not eligible for regular benefits or extended benefits. It includes people who have exhausted their benefits, it's for self-employed people, 1099s, hair dressers, nail techs, etc. It may even extend to people who maybe didn't even have a job but was looking for a job or was looking for part-time work. They are expecting 100,000 or so of those claims, they're not sure how many. They are going to pay the minimum benefit amount of \$188 per week, but those individuals will also be getting the additional \$600 per week. If someone comes forward and says that they should be getting more than that, then OESC will recalculate it and pay them whatever they are entitled to. This program, the Pandemic Assistance, will be effective until the end of this year on 12/31/20. Teresa said that they do not have programming for this program and OMES was kind enough to step in and get all kinds of resources together for them and the program and if all goes well, they will be going live just any minute or in the next few days or weeks. They have not had a lot of time to test the system, which is scary.

The third item of the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation will be 13 weeks of additional benefits added to regular unemployment insurance. Plus they can get the extra \$600 for the 13 weeks.

Governor Kevin Stitt

Governor Stitt joined the meeting and gave an update to the Council. He thanked everyone on the call for taking time to help our state. He said we have some of the top workforce leaders and business leaders in our state on the call and he knows how valuable your time is so on behalf of Sean Kouplen, the Department of Commerce, and the state of Oklahoma, thank you for being engaged and helping us think about the future. He said it is really amazing how quickly our world has changed. We have all been just focused on COVID since mid-March. He said as little as two months ago, we were all talking about how to find workers for the open jobs. The unemployment rate was down around 3.5% or so and our unemployment rate now is over 13%. He stated that the Council's role is more important than ever now and they need your teamwork, innovation, execution, to get Oklahomans back to work. He is excited about the new OKJobMatch app that the Council was instrumental in and rolled out a few months ago, and the new talent exchange that was recently redesigned.

Governor Stitt said that he had two kinds of goals in mind that have been guiding the thought process in opening our economy back up. One is to protect the health and safety of Oklahomans and that has always been the number one priority in his administration. The second is to mitigate the effects to the economy and get our workforce back to work as quickly as possible. He said they have issued 15 executive orders and it's important for everyone on this call and Oklahomans that his message has been why they did the executive order and the safer at home for our vulnerable, it was to accomplish two things. One is to flatten the curve. And number two, is to make sure our hospital capacity and our healthcare system could handle the amount of COVID patients that people were predicting would go into our hospitals. It was also to protect the healthcare workers with PPE (personal protective equipment). They have done all of that. They have built the capacity in our hospitals, they have currently up to 4,600 hospital beds across the state. They have the

National Guard and the Corp of Engineers working on other sites. Two COVID centers have been set up, one in Tulsa and one in Oklahoma City and some non-COVID centers to prepare for the surge. And then they watched the hospitalizations start climbing and on March 30th they had 560 people in our hospitals being treated for COVID and COVID-related symptoms. Since March 30th, they've had a nice, slow, steady decline in that number and as of yesterday, they had 284 people across the state of Oklahoma in hospitals. Gov. Stitt said they have continued to flatten the curve and that's a great stat, and they have met the four steps that the White House has rolled out and they are starting to think about a measured reopening plan.

Regarding testing, they have 80 testing sites right now all across the state. Gov. Stitt wants every single person to get tested if they have symptoms or are exposed to someone who has or had COVID. He said you can always call 211 to get tested. We will always be data driven in Oklahoma and focused on the data that's happening in our state and not what we see on national T.V. or on the news or what's happening in other states. He said he will always make the decision of what's best for the citizens of Oklahoma.

Governor Stitt said earlier this week he rolled out a three-phase process and they will start going through phase one starting today in certain cities around the state. They opened up some barber shops, beauty salons and nail salons by appointment only today. By May 1st, they want every city, municipality and county to enter phase one which is some restaurants and dining, etc. There will be some restrictions and guidance that they put out across the state. Churches are able to start reopening so it's just going to be a very measured response. And then they will move on to phase two as long as the data stays where it is. He says they believe they can do both - have a healthy economy and they can safely start reopening while they are watching the trend lines. People will have to continue social distancing because we still have COVID in the U.S. and in Oklahoma and people are still going to come into contact with it so we have to take the necessary precautions. The whole goal was to flatten the curve and we've done that in Oklahoma and now it's time to slowly and measurably start opening some things. He said we can always push back these phases if we start seeing some early trends, whether if it's the number or percentage of those who have tested positive or hospitalizations, we have all the metrics in place and we're going to continue to monitor them.

Governor Stitt wanted to give a special thanks to all of the regional workforce centers across the state. He said they are on the front lines doing amazing work helping getting the economy going again and helping folks who have been affected by this. Governor Stitt heard that the Governor's Council was having a Zoom meeting, he wanted to jump on and thank all of the business leaders, and everyone and what you are doing on helping us guide our thoughts going forward. He said to remember that Oklahoma and the U.S. economy and what we have endured and how we have thrived from other setbacks in our history. If you remember how we came back after two world wars, we have bounced back after the depression when we had a huge stock market crash, a great recession, black Monday, numerous energy crises that have specifically affected Oklahoma, the missile crisis, 9/11, the mortgage crisis that happened in 2007, so he knows that we are going to bounce back stronger and we're going to do this measured and he wants everyone to know that the Governor's Solutions Task Force and the Health Department is monitoring everything from day to day and they will continue to update Oklahomans and they will have a measured reopening across the state.

WIOA Reauthorization

Don Morris said that there wasn't much to report on right now due to everyone's attention is on the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the WIOA reauthorization is due this October. He had the opportunity to attend his first National Governors Association (NGA) meeting where there was discussion with the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Labor and they opened up the floor to workforce leaders around the country to discuss the good and the bad of the WIOA Act so he knows that they are doing that in other venues as well. They are wanting people to know that the WIOA reauthorization is up this fall and we're hoping that they will fix some of the difficult things about it.

Announcements

- Workforce Vision 2020 Conference, October 29-30, 2020 in Oklahoma City
- Oklahoma Works Partners Conference, September 23-25, 2020

Next Meeting

The next Governor's Council meeting is July 31, 2020.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:32 a.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Linda Emrich*