

A blurred background photograph showing the back of several people's heads. In the foreground, a person wearing a maroon shirt has their right arm raised, palm facing forward, as if asking a question or participating in a discussion. The scene is set indoors, possibly in a lecture hall or conference room.

2021

# ANSWERING AMERICA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

 BUSINESS FORWARD  
FOUNDATION

# INTRODUCTION

Our politics are broken; our communities polarized. We've fallen from a "battle of ideas" into a war against misinformation. Business leaders can make a difference, speaking from their experience as an entrepreneur, executive, or small business owner. Business Forward is here to help.

With Answering America, Business Forward helps local business leaders answer the questions their neighbors are asking about critical issues, including climate change, immigration, healthcare, infrastructure,

criminal justice, voting, and the future of work.

We use a "business case" approach that focuses on costs, return on investment, long-term trends, and what our competitors are doing. Each answer incorporates case studies, insights, and recommendations from local business leaders participating in our network briefings.

By doing so, we hope to re-establish common ground, work from the same set

of facts, and rebuild the kind of political consensus real reform requires.



**JIM DOYLE**  
PRESIDENT,  
BUSINESS FORWARD FOUNDATION

# ABOUT THE BUSINESS FORWARD FOUNDATION

The Business Forward Foundation is an independent research and education organization that takes a business-minded look at policy issues affecting America's economic competitiveness. Our work combines insights and advice from tens of thousands of business leaders across the country with rigorous policy analysis.

Through white papers, issue briefs, conference calls, and other events, we educate policy makers and the public about climate change, immigration reform, infrastructure investment, the future of work, and other critical issues.

Over 10 years, we've organized briefings with more than 150,000 local business leaders across the U.S. More than 650 mayors, governors, members of Congress, and senior Administration officials have participated, including two presidents, a vice president, and most of the candidates in last year's presidential election.

## OUR TEAM

### **Jim Doyle**

President,  
Business Forward  
Foundation and  
Business Forward Inc.

**Anthony Dumville**  
Creative Director

**Elizabeth Fairchild**  
Executive Director,  
Business Forward  
Foundation

**Alexia Lipman**  
Digital Manager

### **Rachael Packard**

Digital Associate

**Alex Pasanen**  
Research Manager

**Jana Plat**  
Executive Director,  
Business Forward Inc.

# A NOTE ABOUT OUR SOURCES, APPROACH, AND FOCUS

## WE PREFER DATA AND ANALYSIS FROM REPUBLICANS OR INDEPENDENT AGENCIES

It's hard to answer undecided Americans' questions by citing sources they've been told to distrust.

Business Forward cites Business Roundtable, a national nonpartisan trade group that generally supports conservative policies, on immigration reform and CEO confidence. We cite Republican Congressman (and former CIA officer) Will Hurd on border security. We cite the Wall Street Journal on business trends.

On taxes, we cite both the Congressional Research Service and the progressive Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. On coal, we cite the Department of Energy, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Stanford University. On jobs, we use Bureau of Labor Statistics data and analysis from Deloitte, McKinsey & Company, and the World Economic Forum.

## IN BUSINESS, REINFORCING CYCLES CAN BE DECISIVE

Clean energy is benefitting from a virtuous reinforcing cycle: Investments in R&D made a decade ago increased capacity, lowered prices, and generated new demand. That new demand encouraged more R&D, which generated even greater efficiencies, and so on. The result? Wind and solar power prices fell 71% and 90% since 2009, respectively, and are cheaper than fossil fuels in two-thirds of the world.

By comparison, most counties in the U.S. are struggling with a negative reinforcing demographic cycle. Their aging workforce is hurting job growth, tax revenue, and home values, which is causing younger workers to move away, putting further pressure on job growth, tax revenue, and property values, and so on.

Some of our biggest problems — like climate change, deficit spending, college loan debt, and our crumbling infrastructure — are creating negative cycles. The longer we wait, the harder they get to fix.

## WE LOOK TO COMPETITORS FOR PERSPECTIVE

Good business leaders keep a close eye on their competitors.

Think we're spending too much on renewable energy, high-speed rail, or airport improvements? Think again. China invests 1.6X as much as the U.S. in renewable energy and 11.7X more on infrastructure. They have 19,000 miles of high-speed rail; we have 34.

Think working mothers are better off in the U.S.? Other advanced nations invest 3X more in family support.

The U.S., once a leader in smart investments like these, is falling behind. To fix Washington, we must demonstrate what these gaps mean.

## FOCUS ON IOWA, MICHIGAN, OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA, AND WISCONSIN

Throughout this series, we provide case studies from Midwestern states. Here's why:

First, these states are disproportionately disrupted by economic trends (like automation) and demographic trends (like a shrinking, aging workforce).

Second, many assets on which these states rely — natural resources, skilled workforce, corporate concentration, research institutions, and infrastructure — are threatened. Climate change threatens farm yields and automotive supply chains. Many of the river levees, roads, bridges, and railways that connect companies to other markets are underfunded and structurally unsound.

Midwestern states are at the frontlines of our biggest challenges, and present our greatest opportunity for innovative solutions.