

Ryan's Background

Ryan M. Bloser, 37, was born and raised in the greater Ford City community, located in Armstrong County, graduating Ford City High School, and attending Duquesne University to major in Accounting. Ryan has been an entrepreneur all his life, starting his first company, a computer venture, at age 14. Currently, he maintains a full-time job with a prestigious non-profit Hospital system in Pittsburgh, as their Director of Finance and stays close to his entrepreneurial roots, running one of Armstrong County's hottest restaurants.

Ryan's Testimony

Good Morning:

I am honored to be before the committee today and thank you for the opportunity to speak on this topic to help move Pennsylvania forward.

Before we proceed, it should be said that the last year and a half could not have been expected and there was great loss on many fronts. While we are not fully out of the woods yet, we need Pennsylvania to be that fertile soil to grow new businesses, new industries, new jobs, and new skills that will propel us into the future.

In 2019, US World News and Report ranked Pennsylvania 43rd in employment. In 2021, WalletHub, an online financial site ranked Pennsylvania 48th for the best states to find a job. Regardless of the methodology, this is not a strong message we are sending to our citizens, children, graduates, or future Pennsylvanians. If we continue to maintain these rankings, our citizens may begin an exodus to other states where more opportunities exist or have a more favorable business climate, as we have seen in our nation during the past few months.

I wasn't invited today to list the problems we are facing, but the first step in addressing any problem is admitting we have one. Pennsylvania is faced with an economic growth dilemma and the folks that I'm looking directly at today can alter the course for millions of Pennsylvanians, present and future. While these issues cannot be boiled down into a 5-minute testimony, there are general themes that can be addressed.

The engine to growth is not some secret formula that only the super wealthy know, it's written into our founding documents – Freedom. Businesses and people need to be free of barriers of entry from government and be able to engage and create markets. Competition is extremely beneficial to capitalism, driving innovation, research, and investment – helping to enhance and develop new markets. Pennsylvania creates barriers in two lenses – regulation and taxes. In addition, the state can focus on programs that encourage marketable skills, education, and the development of business.

Regulation is needed in any society however over regulation stifles growth – most of the time, simple makes sense. The Mercatus Center, out of George Mason University ranks Pennsylvania 11th highest in regulations, with 162,937 restrictions in the PA Code. I'm not advocating to reduce any regulation that protects the lives and welfare of our citizens, but unneeded regulations lead to higher prices, fewer new small businesses, and less economic prosperity for all Pennsylvanians.

As the saying goes - "nothing is certain except death and taxes". However, taxes in Pennsylvania can cause financial death to families and businesses alike. Using Wallethub's 2021 analysis of state and local

taxation, Pennsylvania ranks 48th on the list. In addition, we have the second highest gas tax, behind California. The state has been wrestling with how to properly fund education as school property taxes continue to raise. The removal of the property tax barrier would be one of the greatest economic stimulants Pennsylvania could provide – homeownership becomes less costly; businesses do not have to bear additional costs and the new solution could provide larger investments into our educational programs. Former Representative Jeff Pyle was an advocate for an expanded, yet lower state sales tax to eliminate property taxes. Legalization of marijuana could provide additional state revenues, provide economic opportunities for new ventures and lower state costs for enforcement. Any future tax increases must be discouraged, and spending must be curtailed to fund only the most essential programs and services.

Now that we have touched on barriers, let's switch our focus to three areas that can help foster economic growth and prosperity.

Focusing on the future, we must create and retain a workforce with marketable skills that will be invaluable to future economic growth. Educational programs regarding vocational and technical training need to be presented earlier in a student's career as viable career options. In building my first restaurant, the lack of skilled tradesmen greatly hampered my ability to progress as fast as I wanted, causing delays due to scheduling or contractors that did not meet requirements. While college can create economic opportunities, other valuable options exist to make a very comfortable living with a very bright future. The state should use every possibility to incentive the learning of a skilled trade.

Additionally, education is a tool that can greatly enhance the economic opportunities for the people of Pennsylvania. Barriers should be removed from our state funded schools, allowing students of all ages to invest in their education. In addition, there should be a focus on STEM related fields, as these positions are highly recruited in the corporate world. Locally, the state should partner with community colleges, allowing the student flexible options to earn college credits at the lowest possible price, without sacrificing the quality of their education. As the pandemic proved with the use of technology, we should embrace distance learning, which will allow more Pennsylvanians to balance work, school, and family commitments, while completing their education.

Lastly, our state needs to embrace the small businesses of the future. In my restaurant each year, I sell thousands of ounces of beer, especially craft beer. Pennsylvania ranks 3rd in the number of craft breweries and craft beer is leading the industry with no signs of slowing. As these small breweries move into the community from the garage, they employ new people, rent facilities, develop new spaces, and can spawn additional business, such as restaurants or event centers. However, the state-imposed taxes on breweries, which raises costs with no favorable economic impact. With the economic growth that many breweries have created, these are the small businesses that the state must embrace as the industrious landscape of state changes. There are many industries of the future across this state that must be nurtured as they mature.

In closing, Pennsylvania has EVERY opportunity to become the leader in economic recovery, development, and growth in the next 10 years. With wise investments, removal of barriers and the empowerment of the entrepreneur, Pennsylvania can enact changes today to paint a much brighter financial future for its citizens.