

Speaker Bios



Michael L. Parson, Governor
State of Missouri

@GovParsonMO 

Michael L. Parson was sworn in as Missouri's 57th governor on June 1, 2018. Throughout his more than 30 years of public service, Governor Parson has been a strong advocate for economic development. As lieutenant governor, he spearheaded the BuyMissouri initiative to promote Missouri-made products and businesses.

Prior to his time in the executive branch, Governor Parson served in the Missouri Senate from 2005-2017 and in the Missouri House of Representatives from 2005-2011. Governor Parson also served as the sheriff of Polk County from 1993-2005, and spent six years in the U.S. Army.



Rob Dixon, Director
Missouri Department of Economic Development

@DixonRob 

Rob Dixon leads the Missouri Department of Economic Development, the state agency that houses the Divisions of Business and Community Services, Energy, Tourism and Workforce Development.

Previously, Dixon was President and CEO of the Missouri Community College Association. He also served in multiple leadership and economic development roles at the Springfield area and Hollister Area Chambers of Commerce. He served in Afghanistan as a U.S. Marine.

Director Dixon is a native Missourian and holds a master of public administration from Missouri State University, a bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and an associate of arts in political science from St. Charles Community College.



Zora Mulligan, Commissioner
Missouri Department of Higher Education

@zzmulligan 

Zora Mulligan leads the Missouri Department of Higher Education, which coordinates higher education policy for Missouri's 43 universities, community and technical colleges, and career schools.

She previously served as chief of staff for the University of Missouri System, executive director of the Missouri Community College Association, assistant commissioner and general counsel for the Missouri Department of Higher Education, and assistant attorney general for the Missouri Attorney General's Office.

A native of West Plains, Missouri, Mulligan holds bachelor's degrees in political science and psychology from Drury College and a master's degree in education and juris doctor from the University of Kansas.



Mardy Leathers, Director

Missouri Department of Workforce Development

@MardyLeathers 

Mardy Leathers oversees the division of the Department of Economic Development that helps job seekers find gainful employment and provides businesses with a skilled, trained workforce. Mardy was appointed to serve as the director of the Missouri Division of Workforce Development in October 2017.

Prior to becoming the director of workforce development, he served as executive director of the Center for Workforce Development at East Central College in Union, Missouri. There, he played a key role in launching the statewide Community College Workforce Development Network and oversaw the college's business and industry training efforts, community education, healthcare career certification, and WIOA programs. Director Leathers is a former county clerk of Crawford County Missouri, and local economic developer and entrepreneur.

He holds a bachelor of science degree from Southeast Missouri State University, a master of business administration from William Woods University, and is a doctor of management candidate with Webster University.



Ed Castile, Executive Director

Alabama Industrial Development Training

Ed Castile was appointed deputy secretary of commerce for Alabama's workforce programs on July 1, 2015. Castile also serves as director of Alabama Industrial Development Training, a position he has held since August 16, 1993. AIDT provides new and expanding companies in Alabama with workforce recruitment and training needed for success. It consistently ranks in the top 5 among all U.S. state workforce training programs.

He is a former director of the State of Tennessee Industrial Training Service, and currently serves on a number of boards and councils including the Governor's Alabama Workforce Development Board. He is a two-time past president of the National Association of Industry Specific Training Directors.

Castile earned a master of vocational technical education degree and a bachelor of science in industrial studies education degree from Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.



Alan Spell, Economic and Workforce Research Manager

Missouri Economic Research and Information

Alan Spell manages the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC) within the Department of Economic Development. He and his staff provide economic and workforce analysis to policymakers, planners, and the public. The center has been recognized with 15 national awards for research excellence since it was formed in 2001.

Spell has worked in economic development for over 22 years in various roles. His career spans industrial site design in Georgia to spatial, workforce, and business research in Missouri. Alan is a certified economic research professional who holds degrees in economics and landscape architecture.



Ken Lund, Managing Director
PricewaterhouseCoopers Public Sector LLP

@KenLund1 

Ken Lund is a managing director in PwC's State and Local Government Practice. Lund serves clients on matters related to strategic planning, leadership development, change management, economic development, and workforce, with particular emphasis on the implementation of critical goals and objectives to achieve maximum impact.

In 2010, Lund joined the cabinet of Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper, as chief legal counsel and as the governor's cabinet secretary for the Office of Economic Development and International Trade. He developed and implemented the Colorado Blueprint, the statewide economic development strategy. Lund's team facilitated a process that engaged over 15,000 for each of 64 Colorado counties. He had the privilege of leading over 100 employees in effectively and efficiently deploying over \$3 million in programs and services.



Chris O'Brien, U.S. State & Local Government Practice Leader
PricewaterhouseCoopers Public Sector LLP

@obrienchris 

Chris O'Brien leads PwC's U.S. State and Local Government Advisory Practice. His primary focus is to serve state and local government clients as they seek to enhance service to citizens, reduce costs, increase efficiency and implement process improvements by enabling technology. Chris has more than 20 years of experience helping clients develop innovative strategies to achieve improvements in performance and increase efficiency.

O'Brien has led a number of engagements to enhance the economic development strategies of cities and states across the midwest and the United States.



Senator Mike Cierpiot
District 8

@MikeCierpiot 

Senator Mike Cierpiot represents Eastern Jackson County in the Missouri Senate.

Previously, Cierpiot spent seven years in the Missouri House of Representatives where he served as the assistant majority floor leader for three years and was later elected to serve as the majority floor leader until the end of his tenure in the Missouri House.

Cierpiot is a 1971 graduate of De La Salle High School. He attended MCC's Longview Campus and the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He has lived in Eastern Jackson County for the past 40 years and currently resides in Lee's Summit.



Senator Caleb Rowden
District 19

@calebrowden 

Senator Caleb Rowden was elected to the Missouri Senate in 2016, representing Boone and Cooper Counties. Previously, Rowden served two terms in the Missouri House of Representatives. He was first elected to the Missouri House in 2012.

Senator Rowden's passion for serving is what has motivated and informed his career as an elected official. He is as committed and passionate as he has ever been in his resolve to see his community continue to be a great place to live, work and raise a family. Rowden has been steadfast in his support for education, and has played a significant role in creating a positive environment for Missouri's small businesses through his work as chairman of the Missouri House Economic Development Committee.



Representative Donna Baringer
District 82

@STLDonnaB 

Rep. Donna M. C. Baringer represents the city of St. Louis in the Missouri House of Representatives. She was elected to her first two-year term in November 2016. She holds a bachelor of science in business management from Maryville University and a master of science in corporate communications from Lindenwood University.

Previously, Baringer served as the 16th ward alderman in the City of St. Louis where she focused on public policy that enhanced the quality of life. She positively impacted public safety, sustainable initiatives, economic development, education, parks and transportation.

Rep. Baringer spent her grade school years in Jefferson City and attended high school in West St. Louis County. She currently resides with her husband of 26 years in the St. Louis Hills neighborhood.



Representative Travis Fitzwater
District 49

@travisfitzwater 

Rep. Travis Fitzwater represents parts of Callaway and Cole Counties in the Missouri House of Representatives. He was elected to his first two-year term in November 2014.

In addition to his legislative duties, Rep. Fitzwater has worked in non-profit management as a marketing coordinator and chief operating officer. He has also started a business and worked on staff with a campus ministry teaching students about leadership and faith principles.

Rep. Fitzwater earned his bachelor's degree in political science, with a focus on international relations, from Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina. He was born in Cleveland, Ohio and currently resides in Holts Summit.



Representative Holly Rehder
District 148

@hrehder 

Rep. Holly Rehder represents parts of Scott and Mississippi Counties. She was elected to her first two-year term in November 2012.

Rehder worked as a campaign staffer for Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson. Currently, Rep. Rehder is a member of the NFIB, Sikeston Chamber of Commerce, Charleston Chamber of Commerce, Benton Chamber of Commerce, Scott City Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Sikeston Historic Downtown Association and National Rifle Association of America. Rep. Rehder attends, and raised her family at, Life Church in Sikeston.

Rep. Rehder is a graduate of Southeast Missouri State University with a bachelors of science degree in mass communications, public relations.