

# A VISION FOR JOB GROWTH IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING ECONOMY

by Governor Phil Bredesen

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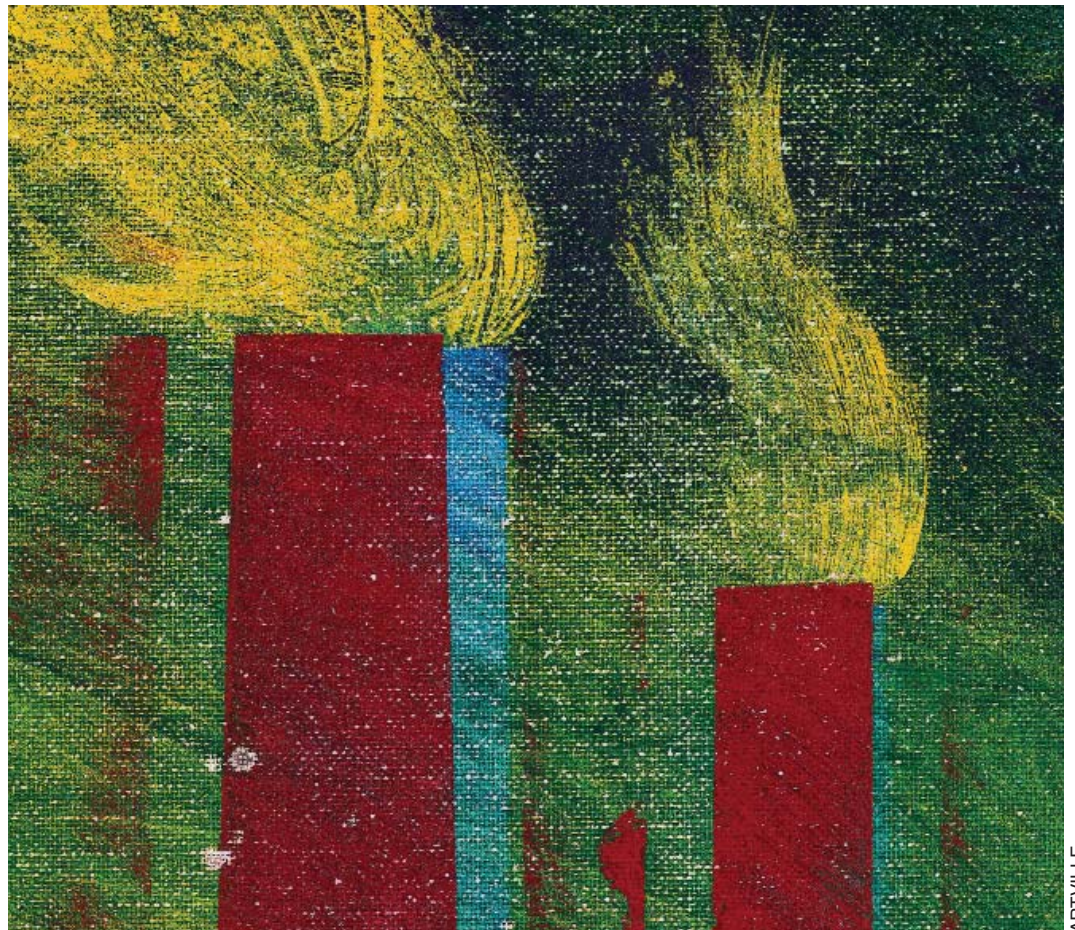
**A**s I've traveled around the state, a lot of people have asked me "What are you doing about the job situation in Tennessee?" We've accomplished quite a bit in these first 13 months—more than 12 major jobs announcements with 4,000 new jobs created statewide. But Tennessee's economy only prospers when all 95 counties prosper. As a result, the real question is how do we spark job creation in smaller, more rural communities? I've been giving this issue a lot of thought.

I come at this from perhaps a slightly different perspective. I grew up in a healthy,

vibrant, close-knit small town—the kind of place where everybody pretty much knew everybody else, and we all did our shopping at the stores in the center of town.

The local economy had a central anchor, the Papec farm machinery plant, a major manufacturer. Papec, like so many manufacturers in small towns of the 1950s and '60s, hit hard times and then finally shut down when I was in college.

The Shortsville, New York, that I'd grown up in really never recovered—many of its Main Street businesses closed, and families had to move away to find work. Over the years, it has



become largely a commuter community whose economic center is Rochester—miles away.

It's that experience, along with what I've learned from my travels throughout the state and as mayor of Nashville, that has shaped my view of what we need to do to bring jobs to all 95 counties in Tennessee.

We are fortunate in Tennessee that our overall unemployment rate is still lower than that of the nation as a whole. Our state's economy is almost as diverse and resilient as our people. But there are too many pockets of persistent high unemployment in this state, where the economy is stagnant or declining.

The good news is that there's never been a better time than right now to try to bring industry into small towns. The businesses looking to relocate are not the giant industrial plants hiring thousands of workers—they're customer service centers and specialty manufacturers of 50 to 100 employees. They're looking for an inexpensive location, a good quality of life, and a ready workforce. Tennessee has a lot to offer in that regard. The key is helping smaller communities better compete for this kind of business.

Just as the businesses we seek to attract have to meet the needs of their customers, the state views prospective and existing industries as its customers. In December 2003, we launched a new initiative entitled FastTrack, administered through the Department of Economic and Community Development. The service is designed to help expedite interest on the part of businesses looking to expand or invest in Tennessee jobs.

FastTrack is a simple process. Any business interested in an investment opportunity in the state, whether an expansion of an existing Tennessee business or a new investment, can simply call our FastTrack toll-free number (1-877-4TN-FAST). A FastTrack representative will work to provide an initial response on options available from the state within three business days. If a serious commitment is made to invest in new jobs, a tailored job training packet will be developed within seven business days.

Good customer service is a priority of this administration. We realize that time is money for many businesses. Limiting the bureaucracy and governmental red tape to speed up the process is not only a benefit to the potential employer but also to those communities that have a stake in attracting those new jobs.

In addition to services like FastTrack, earlier this year to tackle this very issue I also created the Jobs Cabinet, made up of commissioners from seven state departments as well as representatives from higher education and business trade groups, with the intention of encouraging better cooperation between state agencies that have a hand in job creation.

Since last July, we have taken the Jobs Cabinet on the road for meetings across the state in our "Hands on Tennessee" tour. The cabinet has traveled to rural areas hardest hit with high unemployment rates and has gathered feedback about concerns on job growth and community development. This road tour was specifically designed as a means to meet with local community leaders and to listen and learn more about the concerns of those on the front lines of trying to create jobs and grow their local communities.

We hope to work closely with rural counties across the state to help rethink what each one has to offer from a marketing standpoint and what kind of businesses they want to attract. And we want to not only attract new business but also focus on keeping and expanding existing industry. We need to be more proactive and less reactive in that area.

This local-level approach to finding solutions has been helpful and is giving Jobs Cabinet members a good overall sense of what Tennessee communities need and where we can help. We realize that a "one size fits all" approach will not work. We need to play to our regional strengths, and that takes some creative thinking on the local as well as the state level.

The state will help in every way we can to draw from each community's unique strengths and help address weaknesses. But frankly, we can't do everything. Part of the responsibility rests with local leaders. A poorly performing school system will reduce a community's chances of landing new industry. Companies just won't locate in a place if the schools aren't viewed as "good enough" for their middle managers' children. Another big obstacle is land access. The bottom line is communities have to be willing to meet us halfway.

I want to make sure our Tennessee communities, large and small, can enjoy a great quality of life for generations. That's going to require everyone at the state and local levels to work together on regional strategies that make sense.

That's why our economic development plans can't be dictated from Nashville but must be sown in the rich soils of rural west Tennessee, carved from the rocks of the Cumberland Plateau, and modeled from the mountains of east Tennessee. Local communities know their strengths and know what they have to offer. They know their needs better than I do.

I'm determined not to leave any community behind as Tennessee builds its economic future because Tennessee can't prosper unless all its 95 counties prosper.

Please let me know what you think by e-mailing me at [phil.bredesen@state.tn.us](mailto:phil.bredesen@state.tn.us) or by writing to me at Office of the Governor, State Capitol, Nashville, TN 37243. ■

## The Jobs Cabinet

- *Commissioner Matt Kisber*
- *Environment and Conservation  
Commissioner Betsy Child*
- *Agriculture Commissioner  
Ken Givens*
- *Labor and Workforce  
Development  
Commissioner  
James Neeley*
- *Transportation  
Commissioner  
Gerald Nicely*
- *Education Commissioner  
Lana Seivers*
- *Tourism Commissioner  
Susan Whitaker*
- *University of Tennessee  
interim President  
Joe Johnson*
- *Tennessee Chamber of  
Commerce and Industry  
President Deb Woolley*
- *Tennessee Higher  
Education Commission  
Executive Director  
Richard Rhoda*
- *Tennessee Board of  
Regents Chancellor  
Charles Manning*
- *Tennessee Industrial  
Development Board  
President Randy Brewer*