

2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



- #1 Sustained Funding for COVID-19 Recovery and the Reopening of Regional and Community Assets**
- #2 Increase Full Access to Mental Health and Primary Care**
- #3 Support Innovation Within Rural Education: Early Childhood, K-12, Higher Education, and Community**
- #4 Ensure End-of-the-Road Access to High-Speed Broadband**

INTRODUCTION

Great Northwest Day at the Capitol exists as a cooperative effort by Northwest Missouri communities to unify and enhance our region's image in Jefferson City. For the past 20 years the event has created a forum for northwest Missourians and legislators statewide to meet face-to-face. Due to COVID-19, the **Great Northwest Day at the Capitol** event will be held virtually on February 1-3, 2021 at www.facebook.com/GreatNorthwestDay.

The goal of the Great Northwest Day Priorities Committee is to present to our legislators and government officials a strong united message based on a broad circle of voices and research. The feedback is reviewed against the criteria of (1) legislative impact, (2) overarching regional impact, and (3) non-partisan perspective. Short videos discussing the priorities will be posted at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, February 2, 2021, followed at Noon by a Facebook Live event with Missouri Governor Mike Parson.

2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

#1



Sustained Funding for COVID-19 Recovery and the Reopening of Regional and Community Assets

- Support for Public-Private Partnership and collaboration between entrepreneurs, local public entities, and private support organizations working on economic and community development
- Wayfair Online Sales Tax Reform
- Tailor resources to rebound and build a stronger culture of empowering local businesses throughout the region to expand

The year 2020 caught everyone by surprise. Many communities and businesses in northwest Missouri suffered tremendous economic setbacks due to COVID-19. While the Federal government and The State of Missouri have designated pandemic assistance to some business owners, schools, and local government entities during these difficult times, many other organizations and entrepreneurs have yet to experience any relief. Especially hurting are the local employers - businesses and nonprofits - that are considered nonessential and were forced to close temporarily or permanently due to COVID-19.

The impact of these closures is significant from an economic perspective. From a social capital perspective, the negative trickle down may have even deeper and longer-lasting consequences than the economic challenges. We must do everything in our power to keep residents of ages connected and continuing to feel as though they belong to their local communities and our region as a whole. Hence the reason the residents of NWMO need sustained funding for all of the Public-Private Partnership and multi-sector collaboration efforts that are helping our region survive and thrive.

Local economic developers in northwest Missouri highly recommend supporting sustained funding for COVID-19 relief. This can be accomplished by providing resources at all levels of government and all types of community organizations. We must provide local businesses with the resources, technical assistance, and empowering networks they need to adapt the way their business operates. The Great Northwest region is seeking the support from the State of Missouri to assist local business owners with the more resources and better guidelines that will level the playing field for small business owners to survive. Ensuring that Internet sales are taxed in a way that benefits our local economy is one way to help.



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Increase Full Access to Mental Health and Primary Care

- Collaborate across the aisle to implement Medicaid expansion fairly throughout the state considering unique characteristics of rural and urban residents
- Ensure resources that help reduce opioid use and dependency

“Easy access to affordable healthcare affects everyone. The issues that are facing us are enormous, but I know for a fact that by coordinating our efforts we can accomplish much more together than alone.”

- Rodney Hummer, RN BSN, Director of Development and Community Engagement, Northwest Health Services

High-quality and accessible health care amid a global pandemic requires top-priority attention as we are all concerned for the health and safety of our residents and for the front-line workers who are caring for our families and friends. We must continue to do everything we can to get past the threats of COVID-19 and on to the work of building and leading a more thriving state. That said, all of the challenges that existed related to our healthcare system prior to the pandemic are still a concern that must be resolved for our region to thrive.

Increasing access to quality affordable primary care and treating mental health the same as any other area of health care can help:

- *Prevent more serious – and costly - physical and mental health problems from developing.*
- *Reduce substance abuse and crime.*
- *Encourage and educate residents to make healthier life choices.*
- *Decrease deaths of despair; particularly those caused by overdose.¹*
- *Keep and attract more healthcare professionals in and to our communities who also play important leadership roles beyond patient care.* National statistics tell us there are only 55 primary care physicians and 30 specialists per 100,000 rural residents compared to 79 and 263 respectively per 100,000 urban residents.²
- *Keep and attract more businesses in and to our region. Some of our largest employers have indicated that health care is an essential aspect of economic development and they will not recruit or retain employees without it.³*

1 & 2 “Rural Health Insurance Market Challenges,” National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, August 2018, <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/advisory-committees/rural/publications/2018-Rural-Health-Insurance-Market-Challenges.pdf>

3 NW Electric Power, Inc. Targeted Load Growth Strategic Plan prepared by Ady Advantage, December 16, 2019.



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Support Innovation Within Rural Education: Early Childhood, K-12, Higher Education, and Community

- Ensure access to high-quality, affordable child care and early childhood development programs in the interest of sustaining and growing our workforce
- Maintain core funding for higher education institutions so they can sustain academic programs as well as workforce development and community involvement
- Fully fund the education formula
 - Encourage new and high-quality approaches for in-person and online learners in K-12
 - Retain good teachers in our schools
- Ensure NWMO representation on state-level education-related boards, task forces and committees

If ever there has been a time to think outside the proverbial box of “doing things the same way because that is how they have always been done,” it is now. COVID-19 has demonstrated that all kinds of things are possible in education from birth through retirement that were never thought possible or even considered. When teachers and parents give it enough time and attention, virtual learning and connection can happen. Large numbers of people can function safely in schools together when everyone respects each other enough to follow the health safety rules. Both options are viable. Education is no longer bound by the restrictions of sitting in class after class, day after day.

Our country and state has a unique opportunity to not only make some changes, but transform educational approaches that can meet the learning needs of each unique child as they prepare for a very different work world. We could, if made a priority, help our youth build lives of prosperity by better preparing them for the needs of employers that are navigating a global economy that is changing at a faster pace than ever experienced in human history. We must not retreat from funding our educational institutions. Now is the time to ensure they not only have the resources they need, but also the empowerment to think differently.

The future of our region depends on an educated and motivated workforce that is skilled in the needs of today as well as the ability to anticipate the needs of tomorrow. These skills are not learned by following the same methods of yesteryear. School districts and educational institutions contributing to the development of Missouri’s next generation of citizens, from preschool through multiple postsecondary options such as professional certificate and degree programs, cannot fulfill their mission without your support. We ask our legislators to continue investing in education, workforce development, and leadership development that can move our state forward.



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Ensure End-of-the-Road Access to High-Speed Broadband

- Expand access to agriculture, businesses, and households – especially those with students and remote workers – beyond the fiber fringe
- Encourage innovative solution development and implementation in addition to expanded funding by lifting any regulatory roadblocks
- Support multi-sector collaborations to move solutions forward faster

High-speed broadband that is reliable, easily accessed, and priced reasonably for every residence and business is no longer an amenity. It is an essential utility for living in today's global, fast-paced, and technology-dependent world. The stay-at-home orders and necessary quarantines brought about by COVID-19 made Internet accessibility critical for any continuity of education and business for nearly everyone. Those living without high-speed broadband in our primarily rural region have especially felt this year the crushing reality of the inequities that exist between urban and rural communities in our state. Conversely, those who do have fiber or have found innovative - albeit expensive - ways to stay digitally connected are finding more opportunities than ever to expand their learning and grow their businesses. There is hope!

This priority of broadband has been on our region's list of key concerns for many years and some very good progress has been made. However, *the urgency of the big opportunities we have to attract new residents, entrepreneurs, and businesses at all stages of growth to our area is growing exponentially.* **We must launch a faster pace of investment.** We must ensure that our rural residents, and those living in our metropolitan and micropolitan communities on the fringe just outside of the fiber lines, have the same dependable connections as those living elsewhere.

Rural, suburban, and urban residents and businesses all use the Internet for approximately the same amount of time and connecting with the same types of devices each day.¹ In fact, the advanced agri-business technology of today that feeds the world is even more dependent on excellent connectivity for their GPS-enabled equipment. Telemedicine and education at all levels need fast upload and download speeds. **We cannot rest on this priority until high-speed broadband is available to the end of every road in Missouri!**

¹ <https://www.fcc.gov/general/universal-service-high-cost-areas-connect-america-fund>



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