

Office of Missouri Governor
MICHAEL L. PARSON

Dear State of Missouri teammates –

We have been working together for a while now to anticipate and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I hope all of you and your families are safe. I also hope you are settling into a new rhythm at work and at home. It is not easy. The shifts in the past few weeks are unsettling. More than thirty of our colleagues have tested positive to date out of our nearly 50,000 person team. Some are receiving medical care, some are at home, and some have returned to work already.

We each will have personal stories to share once we overcome this challenge. If you have kids at home, you may now be a teacher too. And after a few weeks together, you may feel your kids are a greater threat to each other than COVID-19 ever could be. (Or perhaps that is only my kids.) Or you may be missing seeing a parent or grandparent. While my mother-in-law lives with us now, both my parents are in assisted living homes in New York State. They are locked down completely. So I cannot visit them until this is over. And I know this is nothing compared to the challenges so many of your families have to manage.

I admit thinking about COVID-19 has started to get to me a bit. I started to get anxious, more anxious than when I had served in Iraq or Afghanistan years ago. I talked about it with a friend who had served in Afghanistan too. He said he felt the same way. We concluded together: this feels different because our families are at risk. We talked it through. Thankfully, the virus is not targeting the young – but it is still a risk. Importantly, we have our responsibilities to our teams and our communities. Focusing on that helps.

This is why it is more important than ever to stay in contact with each other and our teammates. That conversations with a colleague really helped me. Especially when things are uncertain, we should focus on the basics of how we work together. Now more than ever, stepping back from the demands of the day-to-day to listen, coach, and provide feedback is critical.

So don't view ENGAGE 2.0 or conversations like that as "extra." Make it important. Adapt to the situation. Many conversations have to be by phone. All at a distance. But let's continue to have real coaching and development conversations to help each other. We work together best when we focus on the basics.

And we will have to continue to adapt as we go.

As Governor Parson has said from the start, this challenge will not be over in a few weeks. That's why he announced last Friday we would extend the closure of our state government offices and facilities to the public until April 24. Schools remain closed. Social distancing limits remain in effect, including new limits on how many people can be in a store at any one time. For more information on the policies, go to <https://governor.mo.gov/press-releases/archive/governor-parson-issues-statewide-stay-home-missouri-order-control-contain>.

I have heard some people question whether social distancing works. After all, the case count continues to rise. True, it has. And we expect the number of confirmed cases will continue to go up in the coming weeks as more and more tests are done. But we need to remember that what we see in today's public health statistics really happened perhaps 2 or more weeks ago. That is just how the virus works: it takes a while to get infected and then sick. The impact of your following the public health guidance today won't be felt until later in April.

Some good news: Missourians are taking social distancing seriously. One way you can track whether people are adjusting their routines is by tracking traffic. Missourians have reduced their driving close to 50%. You can track our daily progress here: <https://www.ms2soft.com/traffic-dashboard/>. Let's hope that we soon "flatten the curve" and begin to slow the spread of COVID-19

Amidst all the change, one thing has been constant: our state government has continued to deliver for our fellow Missourians. This isn't some abstract thing. This is because of the hard work and dedication of amazing public servants across the state in all our departments.

In the past few days, I have visited some of our teams – while following the social distancing rules! I spent time with colleagues doing their jobs. Sounds simple. But we need to remember these jobs do amazing things for others, including:

- Helping Missourians apply for unemployment benefits
- Processing tax returns to support operations of government
- Imaging new laptop computers so even more team members can work remotely
- Figuring out how to get support to our direct care staff across the state

Our fellow Missourians are counting on us. I know it does not always feel that way at the end of a hard day of work, but we have the privilege to be public servants. As Governor Parson often says, few people get to help their fellow citizens like we do. Times like this matter. Every role matters. Working together, you help save lives, protect our communities and citizens, ensure essential services continue across, and prepare to help Missouri to recover as fast as possible.

Many thanks for all you do every day to help each other and make Missouri stronger.

Best,

Drew Erdmann

Chief Operating Officer

State of Missouri