



# RENSCOCONNECT

WHERE BUSINESS + COMMUNITY CONVERGE

RESPONSE, RECOVERY & REOPENING

## A Conversation with Heather Briccetti



Chamber President Kate Manley recently caught up with Heather C. Briccetti, Esq., president and chief executive officer of The Business Council of New York State. Ms. Briccetti is an appointed member of the New York Forward Reopening Advisory Board, tasked with guiding the state's decisions on reopening strategies amid the COVID-19 virus.

**Kate:** How do members of the New York Forward Reopening Advisory Board formulate and communicate recommendations to the governor?

**Ms. Briccetti:** We've been communicating with the governor's team since day one, starting with closures and determining what businesses were essential and needed to stay open and what were non-essential. Next, we focused on identifying

businesses that could retool and adapt to produce the PPE equipment that was needed for health care workers. We then shifted our focus to address phased reopenings to get businesses back on track and people back to work. Our conversations are with businesses from virtually every industry, finding out what they need, what their challenges are and what their ideas for reopening are. No one knows business like business owners; their ideas about how to meet the challenges of reopening and keeping people safe from the virus are crucial to the conversation. We're distilling their industry-specific questions, ideas and challenges and communicating all of it to the governor's representatives.

**Kate:** What impact are businesses having on the strategies of reopening, particularly in the Capital Region?

**Ms. Briccetti:** Businesses are on the front lines and know best what the challenges are and what the possible solutions should be. I'll give you an example: the owner of a salon in Troy developed a reopening plan on her own that showed how she could service her customers safely while complying with the appropriate health guidelines. Her plan influenced the outcome of the guidelines for phase two reopenings. That's the kind of initiative, creativity and talent that is making a difference in our reopening strategies and in recovery efforts.

**Kate:** What will our economic recovery look like and what should businesses expect?

**Ms. Briccetti:** Of course, we can't recover lost revenue. But lost revenue doesn't occur in a vacuum and different parts of the economy have been impacted in different ways. Some industries, such as durable goods, have surged. It's unclear if you look across industries what the overall impact has been and economists agree it will take a while to quantify. Certainly, there has been a loss of GDP and we'll have to climb out of it. On the plus side, businesses are re-opening and many people have disposable income. Savings rates have been high during this pandemic. We need to focus on where we go from here and how we can make New York more business friendly, especially our tax environment, and make sure we are encouraging businesses to stay, grow and compete here.

**Kate:** What are the Capital Region's priority needs for short-term and long-term economic recovery?

**Ms. Briccetti:** We haven't dealt with a pandemic in 100 years. It seems the measures we took (closures, masks, etc.) have been impactful in deterring the virus from spreading. What we've learned about heading off this type of threat can serve as a playbook going forward. All of us in the business community need to think about how to reposition our industries. The U.S. needs to develop a supply chain to manufacture the goods required by the health care industry. New York and the Capital Region can and should be part of the supply chain. For instance, we have a very robust paper industry in New York -- how can we use it to make masks? How do we encourage and incentivize the repatriation of pharmaceuticals, talent and facilities necessary to manufacture the medicines we need? Our short and long-term job is to recognize these opportunities, position business and industries to answer the need and advocate for supportive change among the policy advisors to the governor.

**Kate:** What have we learned during these months that affects the business community going forward?

**Ms. Briccetti:** The social unrest that has come on the heels of the pandemic is changing everything, including how we do business. We are not the same society or the same people we were before. We need to find ways to strengthen communities from their core, so there is equity and respect. Businesses have to address how their company culture is encouraging these values at every level if they are going to achieve the success they desire.

Chamber President Kate Manley is talking with some of the key leaders in our business community about response, recovery and reopening in the wake of COVID-19. This is the second in a series of conversations published in our digital newsletter. For COVID-19 resources, visit [renscochamber.com/coronavirus-resource-guide](https://renscochamber.com/coronavirus-resource-guide).



ASK A BOARD MEMBER:

## Strong Responses to COVID

**Christopher J. Nolin** is Director, Community and State Relations in the Office of Government and Community Relations at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He works to promote partnerships with the local community and with New York State entities.



**Q » How has Rensselaer responded to COVID-19?**

**A »** At the start of the pandemic response, Rensselaer transitioned to remote instruction while also incorporating COVID-19 into our curriculum. From modeling its transmission, forecasting its potential spread and developing solutions to mitigate its impact, everything our students, faculty and staff are doing recognizes that solutions require creative collaboration. Our considerable scientific resources and expertise are continually seeking ways to advance the global effort to combat the virus and save lives.

**Q » What are some of these collaborations?**

**A »** COVID is a "big data" problem and artificial intelligence is a crucial tool for finding answers. Rensselaer is working with government and researchers to use the supercomputing power of AiMos — the most powerful supercomputer housed at a private university — which allows researchers to model the virus at a molecular level. Cleveland Clinic is using AiMOS in the hunt for a vaccine and to learn what medical procedures work best for different populations. Rensselaer IDEA has created COVIDMinder, a tool that helps states and counties understand and combat the pandemic regionally ([covidminder.idea.rpi.edu](https://covidminder.idea.rpi.edu)).

**Q » What about prevention and treatment?**

**A »** Rensselaer researchers working on viral detection, therapy and inhibition have developed a viral trap, a DNA-based nanotechnology that they hope to tailor to COVID-19 to capture and kill the virus in the bloodstream. Rensselaer scientists are also developing various CRISPR-based detection systems by partnering with a local company that produces a digital detection tag for biological testing. The tag shows promise in detecting corona and other viruses in minutes, using a handheld device.

**Q » What about masks and PPE equipment?**

**A »** Rensselaer engineers are working under a National Science Foundation grant to give antiviral properties to N95 respirator masks and to improve their durability for sterilization. Tackling PPE challenges, our engineers are working with Industrial Tool & Die Company of Troy to manufacture face shields for Albany Medical Center. In addition, we're using plastic injection molding and laser-cutting machines that can manufacture an average of 50 face shields per hour. As the pandemic wages on and the world continues to fight it, the research and breakthroughs from Rensselaer will continue to make a difference.

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