



Believe in Rhode Island

Creating & Growing Good-Paying Jobs

When it comes to creating jobs in Rhode Island, our state government has been solving the wrong problem. Our economic development strategy has been built around recruiting companies with tax incentives and negotiated deals. That model made sense in another era. Today, companies go to states that are investing in and supporting their workforces.

When Hasbro left Pawtucket for Boston, the CEO didn't cite tax rates. He said Boston's talent and innovation lined up with where the company needed to go. That's the competition Rhode Island is losing.

We are not going to out-Boston Boston or out-tech Silicon Valley. As governor, I will take a different approach to creating jobs and growing our economy here in Rhode Island—one that makes use of assets that no other state can replicate: Four hundred miles of coastline. A world-class food and arts scene. Excellent colleges and universities. And our people.

I'm excited to announce my plan for creating and attracting new good-paying jobs to Rhode Island by supporting our existing companies and bolstering our major industries, investing in our most promising sectors for growth, and making the Ocean State the best place in the nation to start a new business.

The sector of our economy that I'm most excited to continue to grow is one that no other state can replicate: the ocean economy. Our 400 miles of coastline sets us apart from every other state in the nation. The Port of Providence has staged every major offshore wind project in America. The University of Rhode Island trains the workforce that the ocean economy depends on. The Naval Undersea Warfare Center in Newport anchors a defense and marine technology corridor no competitor can copy.

Rhode Island's ocean economy is already strong, and under the right leadership, we have so much more room to grow. Under my administration, the ocean economy will be the centerpiece of a deliberate strategy to attract and retain the engineers, researchers, and entrepreneurs who want to build something no one else can.

While other states may try to grow their economies with massive tax incentive packages or venture capital, Rhode Island will grow by leaning into our strengths. I'm excited for us to build it together.

—*Helena*



A THRIVING OCEAN ECONOMY

THE RHODE ISLAND OCEAN ECONOMY INVESTMENT FUND

Invest in the Ocean Economy of Tomorrow

I will propose a \$150 million Ocean Economy Investment Fund, backed by bond financing within our existing capacity, to accelerate port infrastructure, marine-technology facilities, aquaculture operations, and offshore-wind supply-chain assets. This bond is a downpayment on the investments we need to supercharge the growing ocean economy in Rhode Island.

Expand Our Port Infrastructure

Rhode Island has Narragansett Bay and all its ports. We have the location, but we need more built-out infrastructure to expand. I will commission a port-expansion study within my first 100 days and include infrastructure funding in the Ocean Economy Investment Fund. We need to ensure that we have sites ready to go for startups and companies that want to expand here in Rhode Island.

Protect the Ocean Economy of Today

At the same time, we need to do more to not only preserve but to revitalize our commercial fishing industry in Rhode Island. From Galilee and on down to other coastal communities, fishermen in Rhode Island—the small business owners our economy depends on—work extremely hard, but their entire way of life is being put at risk by the effects of climate change and warming oceans. I will dedicate a portion of this bond financing to establish local fishermen's cooperatives and to invest in infrastructure improvements such as wastewater treatment facilities needed for seafood processing operations, allowing fishermen to grow their businesses, be more competitive, and create more jobs.

Fishermen's cooperatives have a long tradition in Rhode Island and throughout New England. By enabling small-boat fishermen to collectively own and operate the critical infrastructure they need to build and grow their businesses—including dockside buildings where fishermen can offload and ice their catches, shared sales operations to connect them directly with local restaurants and markets, and equipment for storage and delivery—we can make it possible in today's economy for small-boat fishermen to thrive again. As governor, I will work to find and secure dockside facilities and start-up grant funding for upgrades and equipment in order to expedite efforts to strengthen this crucial industry.

AN OCEAN ECONOMY ECOSYSTEM

Make the Ocean State the Ocean Economy Capital

Big coastal cities, including San Diego, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Boston, all boast large ocean-economy job sectors and major employers in the industry. Rhode Island can capitalize on its unique geography, including its close proximity to deep-water ocean and its unrivaled density of ocean jobs and employers to position itself as the Ocean Economy Capital of the United States. We can achieve this through major financial investments in the industry from the Ocean Economy Investment Fund described earlier, but we also must work to make our state a hub for entrepreneurs, researchers, students, job seekers, and more.



As governor, I will work with industry leaders to create a major ocean economy conference—think South by Southwest, but dedicated to marine technology, aquaculture, fishing, ocean tech, and more—right here in Rhode Island to attract talent from across the country.

Create an Ocean Economy Jobs-to-Careers Compact

Our ocean economy has a chicken-or-egg dilemma when it comes to jobs: Employers have difficulty expanding because they can't find the trained workers they need, but our education system can't train workers for jobs that don't yet exist. That is why we need an ocean economy jobs-to-careers compact.

We are investing \$100 million in Career and Technical Education school construction to ensure that all Rhode Island students, irrespective of zip code, have access to these quality jobs. By creating a single statewide pipeline linking high schools, CCRI, URI, union apprenticeship programs, ports, aquaculture firms, and startups, we can ensure that Rhode Islanders have the skills needed for these good-paying jobs, and that startups and established businesses in the state have the trained workers they need to grow and to succeed.

ADVANCED OCEAN TECHNOLOGY

Become the Best Ocean-Tech Testbed State

We need to make Rhode Island the easiest place on the East Coast to build, test, and commercialize ocean technology. We can do this by ensuring that we have a trained workforce ready to go for employers, and that we have sites pre-permitted and ready to go on day one.

We also need to have a governor who actually listens and is willing to move the levers of government to ensure that these employers have what they need to succeed. As governor, I will commit the state to fully fund — through the Ocean Economy Investment Fund — and accelerate the buildout and development of the SmartBay program, a network of sensors of Narragansett Bay that would significantly improve the ability of researchers and innovators to develop exciting new technologies at lower costs and more efficiently than anywhere else.

Expand Our Ocean Defense Economy

NUWC Newport, with more than 3,300 employees, is an anchor institution. Electric Boat, a General Dynamics subsidiary at Quonset, is a major employer and driver of advanced manufacturing. And the NOAA Marine Operations Center-Atlantic, a \$150 million facility on Naval Station Newport, is funded and already under construction. And our state is home to SENEDIA companies of all sizes. Together, defense-related payroll tops \$1 billion statewide, representing 2.3 percent of Rhode Island's GDP. Federal research, maintenance, and production contracts that support this economy must be protected and expanded. By providing capital and job training, we can not only retain these good-paying jobs, but expand the defense workforce.



EXPANDING RHODE ISLAND BUSINESSES – IN RHODE ISLAND

Last September, Hasbro announced it was moving its headquarters to Boston and taking approximately 700 jobs with it.¹ Governor McKee's response: a press release assuring Rhode Islanders that "today's announcement does not impede Rhode Island's growth or economic success." We don't know if we could have kept them here, because we didn't even have a governor who tried. The number one job our administration has when it comes to job creation should be doing everything it takes to keep the jobs we already have right here in Rhode Island—and creating a business climate that allows our successful employers to create even more jobs for Rhode Islanders.

BUILD OFF WHAT RHODE ISLAND ALREADY DOES WELL

Rhode Island is fortunate enough, despite being a small state, to be full of successful, intelligent, and ambitious business leaders who have made Rhode Island their home and their businesses' home. Rhode Island businesses already do a lot well, and Rhode Island ranks among the top states in the nation for business creation.² To put it simply, the number one thing the Rhode Island governor can do to support Rhode Island businesses is to listen to Rhode Island business owners themselves, and do what it takes to keep them here and allow them to thrive.

JOB SECTORS THAT DRIVE GROWTH

Create Jobs Across Rhode Island's Major Industries

Rhode Island may be a small state, but we have a diversity of talent and businesses across multiple industries that offer strong economic benefits to the state and good-paying jobs for Rhode Islanders. These include manufacturing, healthcare, education, professional and technical services, financial services, and tourism and hospitality, among other sectors.

Due to Rhode Island's proximity to neighboring states, it is essential that we create a business and regulatory climate that incentivizes businesses and entrepreneurs in these industries to remain in Rhode Island, not expand elsewhere. Last-minute decisions that increase financial barriers—like taxing PPP loans for manufacturers—are exactly the kind of impediments to growing these key industries in-state. We must create a climate that says to employers across industries, "Rhode Island is open for business."

We will also work with local businesses to identify areas where well-intentioned regulations are actually counterproductive and work with the legislature to modify these regulations to work for workers, consumers, and businesses alike.

Support a Strong Manufacturing Industry

The number of manufacturing jobs in Rhode Island has remained relatively level for the last 15 years, apart from a temporary drop during the COVID-19 pandemic, with approximately 40,000 jobs across the sector. While the supply chain weakness exposed in COVID has led to onshoring jobs elsewhere, Rhode Island isn't capturing these gains.

1. Hasbro Investor Relations: Headquarters Relocation (2024)
2. "Business Creation Rate." U.S. News & World Report



The fact is we need to do much more than just keep those good-paying jobs and economically important businesses intact in Rhode Island. The manufacturing industry here once supported more than twice as many jobs as it does in 2026.³ Today, economic pressures, increased competition, and an aging workforce all present real challenges to maintaining our manufacturing industry, not to mention growing it. As governor, I will work with industry leaders to develop a plan to double the number of manufacturing jobs in Rhode Island, including by investing in career and technical education, the ocean economy, and factory modernization.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EVERY INCENTIVE DOLLAR

Incentivize Businesses and Ensure Accountability

We need a new approach to incentives for large companies. Too often, “economic development” amounts to little more than a race to the bottom of which state can offer the biggest tax break to large corporations. We need a broader approach that offers these companies a state that has affordable housing for their workers, a job training pipeline for future employees, and a governor who actually tries to help these employers expand and thrive.

So while we should do all we can to attract, and retain, employers in Rhode Island, we also must hold them accountable when they don’t live up to their promises. When a major employer decides to abandon Rhode Island for tax handouts from another state, we need to ensure that they aren’t able to keep state benefits or incentives that were tied to their presence in the state. As governor, I will propose the creation of a transparent and enforceable clawback mechanism for every new economic-development incentive agreement the state issues going forward. We will work hard to bring new, exciting businesses to our state—but also ensure that Rhode Island gets a good deal.

A DIVERSE BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

Lean on Rhode Island’s Growing Diversity

While well-intentioned, the Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), Women Business Enterprise (WBE), and Veteran Business Enterprise (VBE) programs have fallen far short of their billing in Rhode Island, leaving too many promising startups and longtime businesses without the support they need to succeed.

The state needs to do more to break down barriers to success for these entrepreneurs and business owners, including through education and outreach; and by partnering with successful and growing organizations such as the RI Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. We also need to reorganize our state’s approach so that it actually works for these small businesses—including family-owned businesses and sole proprietorships—and provides easy-to-access, as well as culturally competent and bilingual, information on key business issues including licensing, taxation, and regulations.

3. “All Employees: Manufacturing in Rhode Island.” Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis



THE BEST STATE TO START A BUSINESS

ONE-STOP RHODE ISLAND: A BUSINESS NAVIGATOR THAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Streamline Starting and Expanding a Business

If you want to start a business in Rhode Island today, you are forced to navigate multiple agencies and inconsistent timelines, and nobody owns the problem from start to finish. In fact, Rhode Island currently ranks the worst of the 50 states for starting a business.⁴ It doesn't have to be that way. New Jersey built a Business Action Center that made over 52,000 direct business-community connections in a single year. Rhode Island is smaller, simpler, and should be faster. On my first day, I will direct the Department of Commerce to create a single-portal business navigator—one number, one website, one human being who will walk you through permitting, licensing, financing, and workforce connections, from application to opening day.

A business navigator will not move Rhode Island from 50th overnight. But it will stop us from losing businesses to red tape while we work on the structural reforms that take longer. And while we may not be able to compete with some larger states in terms of incentive packages for large corporations, by streamlining the process for businesses of all sizes, we can shorten the time it takes for a new business to open and bring in revenue sooner rather than later.

Refocus State Government to Serve the People

These efforts should extend beyond just making it easier for businesses to get started; it also should be easier for individuals—business-owners and otherwise—to access and navigate the services they need. In Pennsylvania, for example, Gov. Josh Shapiro established the Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience specifically to improve online services for Pennsylvanians; the state also created incentives for public-facing departments and workers if certain performance goals that benefit taxpayers directly are met.

We need to bring that same mindset to Rhode Island by rethinking departments across state government to serve the people, not the other way around. This should include a radical reorganization of Rhode Island Commerce to be truly “customer centric,” with a single entity tasked specifically with helping business owners navigate and solve problems with state and federal government contracts, regulations, and more.

THE BIGGEST LITTLE STATE TO VISIT

Market Rhode Island to Tourists—and to Businesses and Entrepreneurs

Tourism in Rhode Island accounts for tens of thousands of jobs, billions of dollars in visitor spending and economic impact, and hundreds of millions of dollars in state and local tax revenue.⁵ But with everything Rhode Island has to offer, we can do so much more to guarantee the greatest return on investment possible in attracting visitors to our state.

As governor, I plan to attract the best marketing talent available to ensure that we are targeting our efforts and using the most advanced tools to increase industry spending throughout Rhode Island. In 2026, we can't just throw a few million dollars at generic ads touting the Ocean State in airports and billboards in far-flung places. We must get the data on who visits Rhode Island, where they come from, how long they stay, and what we can do to better support our tourism industry; and then maximize results with effective, targeted marketing strategies. We also must celebrate our diverse small business community around the state by

4. “R.I. remains the worst state to start a business, WalletHub says.” Providence Business News. Jan 2026

5. “Rhode Island Tourism Industry.” Visit Rhode Island



highlighting and enhancing the capabilities of small businesses—our restaurants, shops, hospitality and tourism entities, and other businesses vital to our economy.

We also must pair our efforts to support the tourism and hospitality industry with efforts to bring in new employers and create new jobs throughout the state. In 2024, while total visitors to Rhode Island increased by 3.7%, visitors here on business declined by 22%. By tailoring our strategies and directing our resources toward businesses and entrepreneurs, we can reverse that trend, increase tourism spending, and create more jobs in the process.

Invest in Main Streets Across the State

We should not just invest in marketing the great things our state already has to offer, but should also invest in making what our state has to offer even better. While we don't have the same big-city appeal of places like Boston or New York, we do have dozens of charming small towns and cities that provide a unique experience and quality of life for residents and visitors alike. As governor, I will create a fund specifically to invest in the beautification and revitalization of small-town Main Streets across the state, with the goal of bringing people together, and bringing them back to downtown parks and businesses.

For the Creative Economy, It Starts with a Governor who Believes in the Arts Community

Rhode Island already has a vibrant arts community and is one of the best places to live in America. But we need to make it easier for the arts economy to expand and use our existing amenities to attract more digital nomads who can work anywhere to come to Rhode Island. That starts with housing. Nothing hurts the arts community more than the high cost of housing; we're not going to attract anyone to a state where housing is unaffordable. That's why I have a plan to build 20,000 new homes and get rent down. But we must take advantage of this new housing to help grow and expand these jobs.

Austin, Texas built its economy on being the Live Music Capital of the World. Then housing costs rose 93 percent in a decade. Rents from 2010-2019 increased faster than in any other major American city. Musicians who used to live in central Austin now commute. Venues have closed in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. The city's own creative-economy organizations are now scrambling to find affordable housing for the artists who gave Austin its identity.^{6,7} As we build 20,000 new homes, we should ensure that we focus on the arts community and provide not just housing, but also smart tax policies and incentives to help grow this vital sector.

6. Pew Charitable Trusts: "Austin's Surge of New Housing Construction Drove Down Rents" (March 2026)

7. Axios Austin: "How rising rents are forcing out austin musicians" (2022, updated 2025)

