



# How It All Began

## Developing the State's Economic Vision



By Chris LaMothe

An old quotation attributed to English writer Lewis Carroll goes something like: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” One interpretation is that without clear goals, the distance between the start of something and eventual accomplishments can be longer and more inefficient than if clear goals are in place. In other words, a direct line between goal and success is preferable to a long and windy road.

In the 1980s and '90s, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce was highly focused on protecting the business community from a host of labor issue challenges, lack of educational progress in our state, tax threats, environmental and health mandates, and much more. A great deal of energy and focus was placed on defensive positions, with precious little time on what role we should play in creating a truly great Indiana that benefitted all Hoosiers – especially the next generation.

The Indiana Chamber board of directors, committees and staff began talking about where we were going as a state, what the Indiana Chamber’s role should be in helping to define a clear future and how the organization could be a positive actor in driving progress.

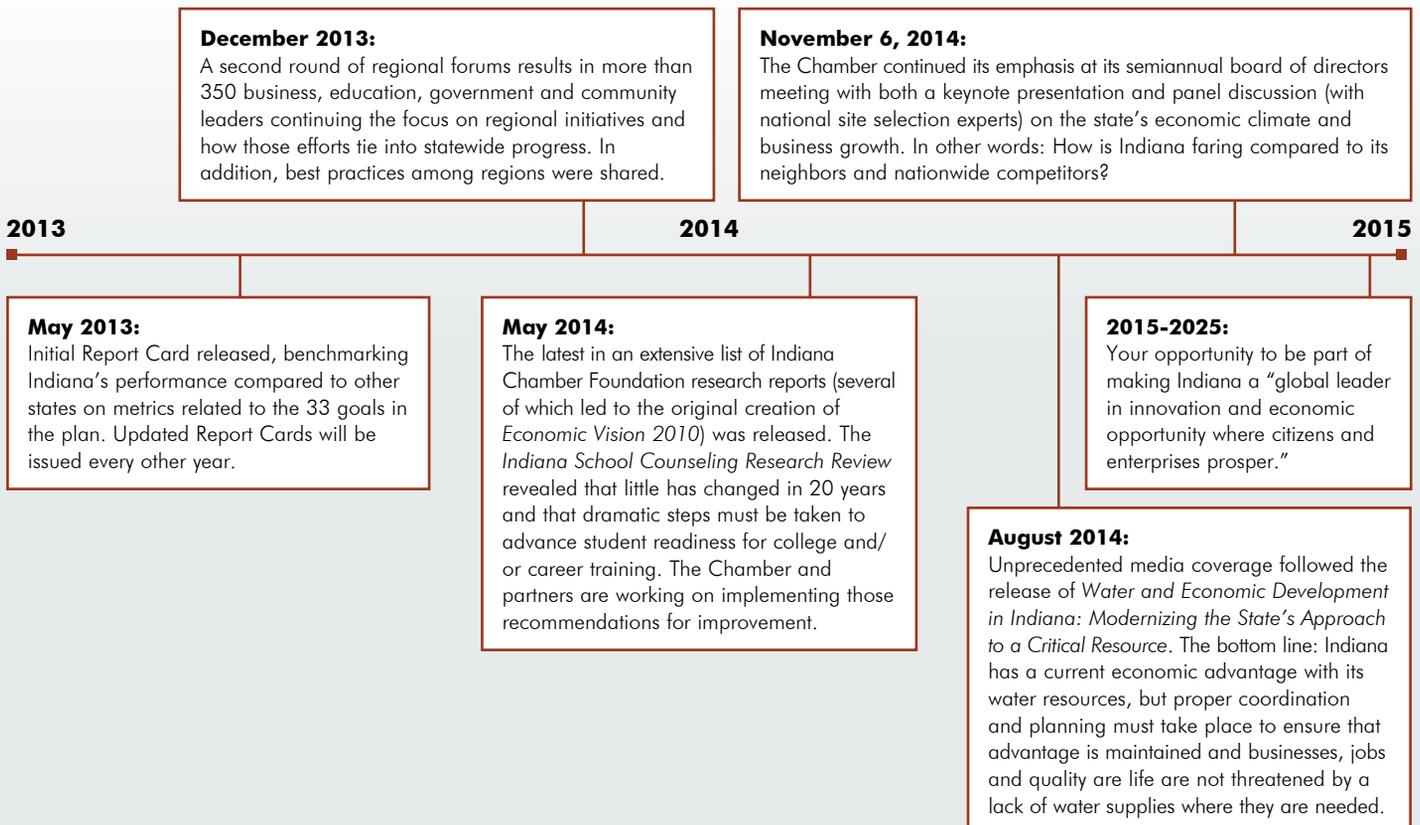
Many bright business leaders on the Chamber board – Marilyn Moran-Townsend, Lee Cross, Mac Parker, Lee Marchant, Jerry Semler, Van Smith, John Barnes, Jim Risk, Al Hubbard and so many more within the leadership and committee structure of the Chamber

– challenged the organization to think BIG. The result was the seminal work called *Economic Vision 2010*, which called for Indiana to move from near the bottom of most rankings, in a broad list of important state competitive factors, to relevance with top-tier states.

The first step was hiring independent, third-party research firms to honestly assess where Indiana stood in areas that included educational achievement, quality of the workforce, tax fairness, environmental performance, infrastructure and “business dynamism” – an effort to determine support for business start-ups and entrepreneurship. Even we were a bit shocked and dismayed at how Indiana ranked, but we were nevertheless determined to move the needle in a positive direction.

A great deal of work ensued in setting difficult stretch goals to turn around those rankings. Months and months of planning, study and meetings – with not only Indiana Chamber volunteers and staff but local

Continued on next page



chambers, regional economic development groups and state government leaders at the time – yielded the specific elements and focuses of the vision.

The initial reaction was very mixed. The business community quickly supported *Economic Vision 2010*, but those in the political sector were not easily sold. They were very uncomfortable with the series of independent studies that pointed to Indiana’s weaknesses. They were also uncomfortable with the stream of articles and speeches throughout the state intended to educate the public on where Indiana stood and to what we aspired.

Over time – with the active support of many local and regional groups noted above as well as several endowments and foundations willing to support these independent studies – attention began to shift from defense to solid initiatives focused on changing our standing among other states.

What did we find out? Well, we learned we did not lack in huge aspirational goals. Who says everything in Texas is bigger? We learned that the old adage that it’s hard to turn a ship on a dime is true. We also learned it takes a great deal more effort and resources to work for positive change than it does to just stop legislation.

After enormous effort, the results were positive and in some cases surprising. Working with coalition partners and others, accomplishments in the first decade of the 2000s included significant education reform, major tax restructuring, a telecommunications

overhaul, passage of Daylight Saving Time, a Major Moves infrastructure plan, expansion of economic development resources and more.

We also learned that in the process of this grand vision, it made the Indiana Chamber itself more relevant and important than the organization had been throughout its long history. We also learned the critical importance of business leadership in the responsibility to lead, to learn, to be consistent and to drive positive improvement.

As we reflect on the *Economic Vision 2010* results, I give the Indiana business community and the Indiana Chamber a B+ on effort and, not surprisingly, a B+ on achievement. Much was accomplished and much was left to be done.

The Indiana Chamber board and staff leadership recognized that the job was not complete and another aggressive, collaborative effort was needed to continue a forward-looking vision for Indiana. After more than a year of planning, work, meetings and consultation, the Chamber launched *Indiana Vision 2025*.

This bold, challenging and mission-focused plan requires the business community, local and regional stakeholders, and our public sector leaders to work together to deliver to citizens a dynamic, competitive state full of innovation and opportunity.

It will take an ongoing emphasis on research, public policy advancements and, most importantly, collaboration to achieve this critical vision. I encourage each of you to be part of that effort.

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**AUTHOR:** The author, currently an executive vice president with Element Materials Technology in Daleville, was president of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce from 1992-2002 and served as task force chairman in the 2010-2011 development of Indiana Vision 2025. Learn more at [www.indianachamber.com/2025](http://www.indianachamber.com/2025)



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