

# POSITIONED TO COMPETE

## Goodrich on Indiana's Talent, Innovation and Growth

**By Rebecca Patrick**

Photo courtesy of IBJ Photo/Chad Williams

Chuck Goodrich has spent his career grappling with the same questions now at the center of Indiana's economic strategy: How do you grow a business, build a skilled workforce and stay competitive in a rapidly changing economy?

He brings that firsthand perspective to his new role as Indiana's secretary of commerce. As CEO of Gaylor Electric, one of the nation's largest merit-shop electrical firms, Goodrich has helped build an Indiana company, hire Hoosiers and invest in the workforce that fuels growth. Since he became president in 2014, the company has created more than 4,000 jobs.

Goodrich also served three terms in the Indiana House of Representatives and has been a longtime workforce development advocate across the construction industry, higher education and state policy. That combination of business ownership and public service informs his approach to the road ahead: move at the speed of business, focus on measurable results and ensure that Indiana's economic strategy creates greater opportunity for Hoosiers.

In the following conversation, Goodrich discusses the state's competitive strengths, its talent and innovation challenges, and what lasting economic success should look like.

**BizVoice®: You've stepped into this role at a pivotal time for Indiana's economy – with strong economic development momentum, evolving employer needs and intense competition among states for investment and talent. What do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges ahead?**

**Chuck Goodrich:** "Indiana has a strong foundation, but we can't get comfortable. The competition for businesses, investment and talent is only getting tougher. Our biggest opportunity is to better connect the pieces we already have – economic development, workforce, quality of place and entrepreneurship – and get them working toward the same goals. That's what Governor Braun has tasked us with and how we are executing on that with the Commerce Business Plan to grow and retain talent, grow business and grow Indiana. Every initiative should answer one question: Does this create more opportunity for Hoosiers? If it does, we do it.

"The challenge is execution. We have to move at the speed of business, make it easier for companies and Hoosiers to navigate state resources, and stay focused on outcomes. At the end of the day, are businesses growing? Are Hoosiers earning more? And are people choosing Indiana?"

**BV: What do you see as Indiana's strongest economic advantages today and how can the state build on those strengths in the years ahead?**

**CG:** "Indiana knows how to build things, and we know how to grow businesses. We have a strong manufacturing base, a central location, a great infrastructure and some of the best universities and research institutions in the country. We also have communities that understand the importance of being business friendly.

"Our opportunity now is how to build on those strengths for the next generation of Indiana's economy. That means supporting the industries that have made us successful while positioning Indiana to lead in areas like advanced manufacturing, life sciences, semiconductors, defense, energy and emerging technologies. And we

have to keep investing in the fundamentals – talent, infrastructure and communities – because businesses are looking at the entire package when they decide where to invest."

**BV: Talent continues to be one of the biggest challenges for employers. How can Indiana better align economic development, education and workforce strategy to meet future needs?**

**CG:** "We have to start with what employers actually need and work backward from there. For too long, economic development, education and workforce have often operated in separate lanes. Employers don't experience the economy that way, and neither do Hoosiers. If we're recruiting an investment that will require hundreds of skilled workers, workforce planning needs to be part of that conversation from the beginning.

"That also means giving students and workers more pathways into good careers, whether that's a four-year degree, a credential, an apprenticeship or the skilled trades. Our goal shouldn't simply be filling jobs. It should be helping Hoosiers build skills that lead to better-paying careers while giving Indiana employers the talent they need to grow."

**BV: The Indiana Chamber's *Indiana Prosperity 2035* plan focuses on long-term growth through talent, business climate, innovation and quality of place. Where do you see the greatest opportunities for alignment between the state and business community?**

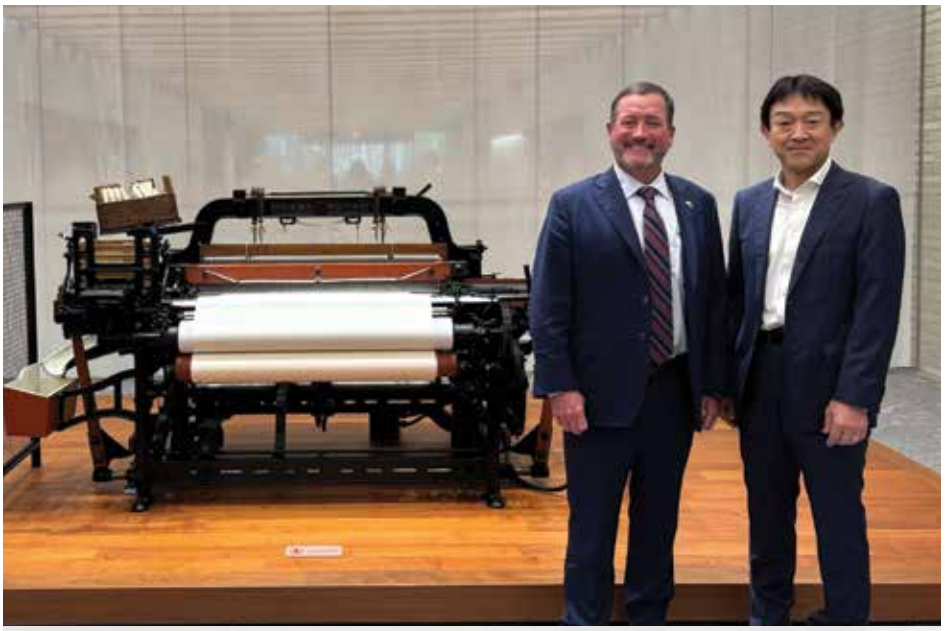
CG: "There is a lot of alignment because we're ultimately trying to solve many of the same challenges. Government can help build the conditions for growth, but the private sector is what drives our economy. We need business leaders at the table telling us what's working, where barriers exist and what they need to compete five or 10 years from now.

"Talent, innovation and quality of place are all good examples. Those aren't challenges government or business can solve independently. The more we can align around measurable outcomes (i.e., business growth, wages, population growth and stronger communities) the more competitive Indiana will be. That's what the Braun administration is driving towards."

**BV: What role should innovation and emerging technologies play in Indiana's economic development strategy over the next decade?**

CG: "Innovation isn't a separate industry anymore. It's changing every industry. You see it in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, life sciences, logistics, defense and energy. Artificial intelligence, automation and other technologies are changing how companies operate and the skills they need from their workforce.

"Indiana has an opportunity to lead because we already have many of the industries where that transformation is happening. Our job is to make sure businesses can invest here, our universities and entrepreneurs can turn ideas into companies and products, and Hoosiers have the skills to benefit from that growth. Technology will change the way we work. We need to make sure Indiana is helping shape that change rather than reacting to it."



Indiana Secretary of Commerce Chuck Goodrich meets with an Aisin Corporation representative during the state's October trade mission to Japan. The visit aimed to strengthen investment and create new opportunities with companies such as Aisin, which has longstanding operations in Indiana.

**BV: How can Indiana continue competing for major investment projects while also strengthening support for entrepreneurs, small businesses and homegrown companies?**

CG: "It's not an either-or proposition. We need both. Major investments bring jobs, capital and new opportunities into Indiana, and we're going to continue competing hard for them. But some of Indiana's biggest employers started as small businesses. As business owners (ourselves), the Governor and I know how important those companies are to their communities and to our economy. That's why the 'grow business' (pillar of the Commerce Business Plan) applies to a company looking to invest billions of dollars in Indiana and to an entrepreneur trying to get their first product to market. We should be helping Indiana companies start here, scale here and stay here while continuing to bring new investment into the state. That's how you build a strong economy."

**BV: Looking ahead five or 10 years, what would success look like for Indiana's economy – not just in terms of jobs and investment, but in overall competitiveness and quality of life?**

CG: "Success is bigger than the number of deals we announce. We want to see more Hoosiers earning higher wages, more Indiana businesses growing, more entrepreneurs choosing to build their companies here and more people choosing Indiana as the place where they want to build a career and raise a family.

"Governor Braun's direction has us looking beyond traditional economic development metrics. Jobs and capital investment still matter, but so do wages, population growth and the strength of our communities. If we can grow businesses, grow and retain our talent and grow Indiana, we'll have an economy that isn't just bigger. It will be stronger, more competitive and built to last."

**RESOURCE:** Indiana Secretary of Commerce Chuck Goodrich at www.iedc.in.gov