



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER**

Opinion Column

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Government Policies Creating Serious Challenges for Commerce

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As we enter the fourth quarter of the year, 2021 is shaping up as another one for the books. While life for many is getting back to a pre-pandemic “normal,” Americans continue to endure the many impacts of COVID-19 - especially the government’s response to the pandemic. The “Delta variant” reminded everyone that this virus (like all viruses) does mutate and can easily rear its ugly head again. But right now, the problems we face are the direct result of a combination of federal government policies resulting in serious challenges to commerce in Mississippi and nationwide.

Labor shortages are causing significant problems for many industries, including agriculture, food service, trucking, shipping, healthcare, and retail to name a few. Federal government policies have made it more profitable for the American workforce to stay home rather than providing an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. From manufacturing to food service, industries across the board are faced with the task of producing more products with significantly less labor. Farmers - large and small - are feeling the impacts too. For instance, our catfish and meat processors are having trouble finding enough employees, not to mention the challenge of finding steady, reliable on-farm labor which has been an issue for decades. For example, it’s been a greater challenge this fall to obtain adequate labor to help harvest and then haul crops to the elevators. These are just a few examples resulting in fewer products on the shelves, longer wait times for services and higher prices due to inflation.

Persistent labor shortages have intensified the logistical challenges being felt across most industries. The growing backlog at ports is causing greater supply chain bottlenecks. Americans had become accustomed to getting what we want at the drop of a hat, but that is no longer the case even for Amazon Prime customers. Now, container ships are sitting at ports for weeks waiting to be unloaded. As evidence, we were told back in September to begin Christmas shopping early to ensure gifts may be delivered on time. Due to the major shortage of truckers, rail and port workers, supply chains have been severely disrupted at ports nationwide with too few port and rail workers to unload and reload cargo.

In recent reports, it was noted that these labor shortages and supply chain disruptions are making it difficult for even our school systems to get cafeteria food products. But Mississippians understand the food and grocery challenges go beyond school cafeterias. We are all feeling this in our homes, budgets and kitchens as we feed our families right here in Mississippi. Food prices continue to increase, and these price increases should not be interpreted as putting more money back into the pockets of farmers.

In fact, our farmers are experiencing much higher input costs in 2021 as they continue to work producing American food, fiber and shelter. There are significant increased production costs, such as higher feed, fuel and fertilizer costs that are all reflected in higher grocery prices. And rising fuel prices are affecting not only farmers, but every single American at our gas pumps with average prices now topping \$3.00 a gallon in Mississippi.

To add insult to injury, the Biden Administration recently announced an unprecedented nationwide federal vaccine mandate threatening millions of American jobs and potentially eliminating the livelihoods of millions of working Americans, even those employed in healthcare, our first responders and the private sector.

There is a coming crisis in American commerce fueled by an idle workforce, supply chain shortages, inflation, and federal mandates. But there is a solution, and the crisis can be averted. It's a common sense solution: workers must keep working, and those not working must get back to work. To reach this goal, federal and state governments must reverse their anti-work policies and encourage more people and the next generation to enter the workforce. We need more people working, not less. Americans should take a lesson from our farmers and loggers who have always continued to work hard from "sun up 'til sun down" to put food on our plates, clothes on our backs and a roof over our heads. Americans, it's time to get back to work!

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