

Georgia economic development commissioner predicts another record-breaking year



Image: Press photo

Pat Wilson is commissioner of the Georgia Department of Economic Development. Georgia Department of Economic Development



By Erin Schilling – Technology Reporter/ Atlanta Inno, Atlanta Business Chronicle
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For the past five years, every time someone asks what Georgia's economic development pipeline looks like, commissioner Pat Wilson answers the same way — "It's busier than we've ever been."

"It feels almost disingenuous," said Wilson, who leads the Georgia Department of Economic Development. "But we truly are as busy as we have ever been as a department."

His comments come on the heels of a record-breaking job creation for the first half of the fiscal year, which started July 2021. More than 24,400 jobs were created and \$9.8 million invested into the state. This upcoming year could top that record, Wilson suggested in an interview with Atlanta Business Chronicle.

That number includes a 7,500-job electric vehicle manufacturing plant in Covington from Rivian. Rivian's announcement is one of the most recent in a string of massive projects, including huge technology corporations expanding in Midtown and manufacturing and logistics centers around the state. Multiple office landlords in Atlanta are reporting economic development activity remains steady, including companies based in other cities inquiring about the possibility of expanding divisions here.

The strong pipeline is a testament to decades of business-friendly policies, Wilson said. Georgia has a generous tax incentive structure that national site selection consultant John Boyd Jr. says act as tiebreakers when companies are deciding on a new location.

Gov. Brian Kemp's decision to keep the state relatively open throughout the pandemic also helped.

"That is really driving some of this momentum now," Wilson said. "We continued to allow Georgians to go to work."

Wilson takes pride that economic opportunities have spread around the state. About 60% of the job growth and 78% of the investments in the last six months have gone to areas outside metro Atlanta, according to the Office of the Governor.

Legacy sectors like automotive and logistics are leading the growth, Wilson said.

For years, Georgia has had an active automotive manufacturing sector, which contributes \$3 billion to the state economy, according to the economic development department. Rivian's announcement signals that the state is capturing a piece of the emerging electric vehicle industry. Multiple lithium-ion battery suppliers are building facilities in the state as well.

Advanced manufacturing as a whole is booming, Wilson said. Georgia Tech, a university that doubles as a state economic engine, has multiple programs to support that growth. The Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership says it helped 720 state manufacturers create or retain 1,600 jobs.

Atlanta is well positioned as a distribution hub because of its connectivity to the Southeast. The Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the railroad infrastructure and interstate network make the city a prime location for logistics centers. The Port of Savannah — the fastest-growing container port in North America — is also a huge economic driver, Wilson said.