

Senate Education Committee

Public Hearing on Senate Bill 1000 – Rural Regional Community College

Testimony of Robert C. Esch

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I would like to open with, what I believe are some very important observations that certainly support the importance of our discussion today.

I would ask each of you to think about the break-throughs we have experienced in the last (2) decades. Let's begin with:

ENERGY....Particularly Oil & Gas.... being that the original discovery was right here in the Commonwealth and that discovery changed the economy of Pennsylvania and our Nation. Today Pennsylvania has again taken a leading role in the Energy Industry with the discovery of the Marcellus Shale Gas and the continued development of Penn-Grade Oil Production. Across the U.S. as a result of new technologies Oil & Gas Exploration and Production has reached historical highs. Day in....Day out..... We are inundated with media coverage about Oil and Natural Gas.....

Marcellus.....Bakken.....Utica.....Barnett

Growth in Renewable Fuels

Reduction of import dependence

Net Exporter of Natural Gas

Clean Energy

And then add....Green Energy....Solar Energy.....Wind Energy.....Bio Fuels

The Oil and Gas Industry employs 1.8 million people in the U.S. and an additional 970,000 are employed in the Renewable Energy Sector. Employment in the Oil & Gas Industry is projected to increase 4% nationally over the next decade. Although not a significant increase the impact in Pennsylvania will be great.

MEDICINE....How many of you have had the opportunity to take advantage of the many marvelous break-throughs in Medicine? Early detection, comprehensive treatment, more Americans are surviving heart disease, various cancers are becoming treatable, some curable. Limb replacements.....joint replacements and on and on! Think about the technological advances in medicine.....robots performing complicated surgeries, imaging equipment, stem cell research, pioneering pharmaceutical discoveries and finally think about how we now collect and manage healthcare data.....from the perspective of patients confidential records, to administrative records.....to billing!

Today, the Healthcare and Human Service Industry employs 1 million workers in the Commonwealth, 17 million nationally, and it is expected to grow by 33 percent or 5.7 million new jobs during the next decade. In August 2013 this job sector nationally added 33,000 jobs. This job growth is driven by an aging population, longer life expectancies as well as new treatments and technologies.

TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENTS.....How could our world possibly function without the break-throughs we have experienced in technology? Where to begin?.....The question we must ask ourselves is simple: What's next? Think of the most frustrating or simply annoying problems you can imagine.....Now think about what technology is doing to fix them and expand the scope of human possibilities. Just in the last decade we have developed better bio-fuels, efficient solar cells, 3-D screens on wireless mobile devices, cloud computing, social networking, medical implants and robotics. This is only a very small sampling of break-throughs we quickly recognize, that now, have become part of our everyday lives.

How about these?...."Epigenetics".....a test to detect cancer early by measuring the subtle changes in DNA. "Nanopore Sequencing".....a simple and direct analysis of DNA will make genetic testing routine in more situations. I was unable to find employment statistics that defined these opportunities broadly. The term technology might be better defined as "applied technology", which would include advances in all sectors of our economy. I also think we all can agree that the career and job opportunities in this sector are significant!

By now you must be questioning the impact of these break-throughs on SB-1000 and the regional business sector participation, specifically American Refining Group, Inc. in support of the Educational Consortia of the Upper Allegheny Community College initiative and today's hearing? Throughout the Commonwealth and the Nation there is a partnership coming together between Business and Education. This partnership has defined the next "essential" break-through.....EDUCATION.....and I urge each of you not to minimize my use of the word "essential". A break-through in Education is an essential outcome in order to sustain the progress which I briefly described in our economy's "Energy, Healthcare and Technology Sectors". We will see changes in curriculum.....We will see changes in accessibility, where and how we deliver all levels of education.....We must see changes in affordability.....We must reduce the need for remedial education, (in the business world, reworking your product is defined as a cost of poor quality).... and finally education opportunities must be available in all of our rural communities. The deployment of the recommended Community System in our 11 county region will provide "Sustainability" and when I refer to sustainability I mean it in the truest sense.

This regional Community College will provide our Businesses and Industries a sustainable workforce with the necessary skills to support profitable business growth and contribute to the economic well-being of our communities. I also think we need to understand that sustainability will be recognized in other areas. For example, today's workforce is more mobile than at any other time in our history. Yes, today's workforce will follow the jobs, but more now than ever our families consider other opportunities within a community and education.... (from Early Learning through Post-Secondary).... life-long learning..... is a significant

factor. Let's face reality: today's workforce can be incentivized by educational opportunities for themselves and their families.

I want to emphasize these points:

This Regional Community College will provide our Business Community with a sustainable skilled workforce.

This Regional Community College will provide our employees and their families a sustainable educational opportunity.

This Regional College will support the overall economic sustainability of our Rural Communities and slow what some refer to as the "Brain Drain".

I would like to thank Ms. Snelick for her willingness to participate and recognize her for her understanding of the workforce issues that ARG and other businesses face in our rural region. As a workforce development professional Ms. Selnick is recognized through-out the Commonwealth. I would like to follow-up on some of her comments. Her presentation defined the need for "Middle Skill Training" and the decline in employment in the manufacturing sector of our region (34% decline in the past 10 years). I believe this trend will continue without a Community College; and if we cannot provide low cost, open admissions, technical education to our region, "We", the Business Community will miss the opportunity to participate in the next great "Break-through" and the overall decline in our sustainability will leave our rural region of Pennsylvania further behind. A recent statistic from the U.S. Bureau of Labor indicates the 2010-2020 employment demand for Associate Degrees will be higher than the demand for Bachelor's Degrees. Our rural region of the Commonwealth needs a Community College.....Our Business Community will support a Community College as it will bring needed educational services to our current and future workforce.

Think about these facts.....Our 11 County Region is geographically the size of New Jersey, a population of 450,000 people, and NO Community College! I think it is

also important to point out that American Refining Group, Inc. and all the many Businesses of our Region that struggle to be profitable, provide Family Sustaining jobs and contribute to the overall well-being of our Communities have been paying state taxes since the late 1960's to help pay the cost of the existing 14 Community Colleges.....ALL BELOW I-80. As I said earlier.....this break-through is essential....it is time to move this rural education initiative forward. It is time for access to a Community College Education in the 11 Counties represented by the Educational Consortia of the Upper Allegheny and supported by SB-1000 and HB-1701.

In closing.....I would like to call your attention to the document provided to you and authored by the United States Department of Labor....

News Release: "Obama Administration announces \$474.5 million in grants to expand demand-driven skills training and strengthen employer partnerships"
These grants are the third installment of nearly a \$2 billion Community College initiative.

Enclosed in the document is a State by State listing of the awards. Pennsylvania is grouped with Puerto Rico and Rhode Island. The amount awarded to each state is only \$2.5 million. When you review the listing you will also see the distribution of funds has not been determined with these (3) States. For the record....our region.... because there is no Community College..... will not receive a single dollar of this funding. The U.S. Department Labor has directed these awards specifically to Community Colleges. I would also suggest to you that Pennsylvania is losing millions of dollars of education funding each year because of the limited number of Community Colleges in the Commonwealth.