

MEETING SUMMARY

LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON  
WORKFORCE EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

Thursday, June 21, 2018  
9:00 A.M.  
Association of Arkansas Counties Building  
Little Rock, Arkansas

Senator Jane English, the Senate Co-Chair of the Legislative Task Force on Workforce Education Excellence, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

**LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON WORKFORCE EDUCATION EXCELLENCE IN ATTENDANCE:** Senator Jane English, Senate Co-Chair; Representative Rick Beck; and Representative Dan M. Douglas.

**NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON WORKFORCE EDUCATION EXCELLENCE IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr. Kenneth Calhoun; Mr. Randy Henderson; Mr. Stephen Horton; Mr. Mike Rogers; and Mr. Greg Taylor.

**OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ATTENDANCE:** Representative David Fielding; Representative Kim Hammer; and Representative Johnny Rye.

Minutes:

Without objection, the minutes of April 25, 2018, were approved as written.

Exhibit:

Exhibit C – 04/25/2018 Minutes

Remarks by the Chair

Senator English said the Task Force has reviewed the status of education and workforce programs in Arkansas in its past meetings. She said panelists in today's meeting would discuss opportunities and training necessitated by changing workforce needs in medical and industrial fields. She stated the objective is to build bridges between K-12, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges, and partners in industry to ensure alignment of education and workforce training to meet current and future service and production demands.

Presentations Regarding the Future Skills Development, Education, and Training Needs of Arkansas's Energy, Manufacturing, and Medical Industries

Following introductions by Task Force and panel members, presentations ensued.

Presenters - Medical

**Dr. Benny L. Gooden**, Executive Director of Institutional Relations, Arkansas Colleges of Health Education (ACHE), was recognized. Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Dr. Gooden discussed how Arkansas ranks in health care; the growing need for health care professionals; attracting and retaining professionals, especially in underserved regions; building awareness about opportunities in the field; helping students acquire

necessary skills; the results of an Occupational Needs Study; and the mission of ACHE. Dr. Gooden also provided a comprehensive report on the Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- importance of a needs assessment,
- partnerships with undergraduate programs,
- use of private funding, and
- program admission and retention.

PowerPoint Presentation:

ACHE Needs and Responses

**Ms. Chanda Chacon**, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President, Arkansas Children's, was recognized. Ms. Chacon commented on Arkansas not doing well in the area of child health and well-being; it ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation. She discussed the statewide presence of Arkansas Children's; and remarked that it needs to make sure health outcomes are achieved with its recently created network of care. She stated the most profound way to achieve outcomes is through its workforce, and Arkansas Children's puts an emphasis on being a great employer. She said, while there is clearly a shortage of nurses and physicians, opportunities also exist for employment and careers in health care that do not require a 4-year degree, *i.e.*, pharmacy technician, radiology technician, certified medical assistants, as well as other non-clinical administrative and skilled employees. She noted that of the 100 jobs Arkansas Children's currently has open in Little Rock, 64% do not require a 4-year degree: 22% require high school graduation and 42% require an associate's degree.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- successful programs in other states that are helping to develop a workforce,
- reaching into schools in the Little Rock area,
- differences between certified medical assistants and certified nurse assistants,
- providing clinical training sites throughout the state,
- level of tuition assistance provided by Arkansas Children's,
- employers referring employees to training programs,
- high school counselors referring students to training programs, and
- differences between medical assistants and Licensed Practical Nurses.

Presenters - Energy

**Mr. Bruce Rew**, Vice President of Operations, Southwest Power Pool, was recognized. Mr. Rew presented an overview of Southwest Power Pool (SPP), which manages the electric transmission grid in the central United States, ensuring that generation is reliably dispatched and economically delivered. He said in order for this to be accomplished, the SPP staffs over 100 engineers, primarily electrical engineers, who constantly study the electrical system. He said SPP also needs a strong computer system to receive data from its members on a real-time basis, and huge databases to collect and analyze the data. Mr. Rew explained that four out of five SPP employees have technical, IT, or professional degrees; one out of five do not, with the majority of the latter operating the grid. He said non-degreed positions are very technical, skilled positions that require a lot of training. He said SPP will hire skilled, non-degreed people, who show technical aptitude to enter its training program. He emphasized the importance of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) education in high school.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- status of the workforce and low turnover rates,
- hiring locally in Arkansas, and
- engagement in the STEM process.

**Mr. J. D. Lowery**, Economic Development Manager, Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, was recognized. Mr. Lowery gave an overview of three broad groups which comprise the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas: Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC), Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (AECI), and 17 electric distribution cooperatives around the state. He noted the rapid pace of change going on in the industry. He said 26% of employees in craft and trade jobs at AECI, and 31% of engineers at AECC are poised to retire over the next seven years; and people are needed to fill those jobs. He commented that between AECC and AECI, there are currently 27 vacant positions, 24 of which do not require a college degree or any experience; and the company is having difficulty filling these positions. He said Arkansas has a shallow pool of engineers and AECC has had to recruit from outside the state. He stressed a STEM education is the future and having Arkansans fill the jobs. Mr. Lowery commented that an increase in the workforce is also needed to deal with issues of cyber security, data-heavy systems, and developing renewable energy sources to meet members' power needs.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- ✓ sources from which to recruit engineers,
- ✓ skillsets needed among the cooperatives,
- ✓ internship and apprenticeship programs at cooperatives,
- ✓ participation in statewide events at high schools,
- ✓ developing programs in K-12 technical centers, and
- ✓ best programs in state from which to recruit non-degreed employees.

Presenters - Manufacturing

**Mr. Mark DiGirolamo**, Controller, Nucor Steel Arkansas, was recognized. Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. DiGirolamo discussed Nucor Steel-Arkansas; Nucor Yamato Steel; End Products; Nucor Coast to Coast; Nucor Today; Nucor Footprint; Steel of Yesterday; Steel of Today; Global Leader in Steelmaking Sustainability; Low Unemployment; Specialty Cold Mill Complex – Entry Level; The STEM Challenge; The Nucor Way; Starting early with education dream; looking for Talent in Arkansas; Searching Outside Arkansas; Developing from within Nucor; The Current State; and The Key to Nucor's Success.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- ❖ source of contractors for larger projects,
- ❖ employees living outside of Arkansas along border states,
- ❖ tech school work programs in Alabama, and
- ❖ high school students lacking sufficient counseling about available opportunities in non-degreed positions.

PowerPoint Presentation:

Nucor Steel Arkansas

**Mr. Greg Taylor**, Training and Development Leader, Georgia-Pacific, and Member, Legislative Task Force on Workforce Education Excellence, was recognized. Mr. Taylor stated that every week in this country 350,000 years of experience walks out the door because of the number of people retiring. He raised questions about whether this number matches the ratio of people wanting to enter the workforce; and what companies can do about this issue. He discussed recruitment, benefits, and retention of employees. Mr. Taylor stressed the necessity of creativity and partnering with the legislature to revamp secondary education to get people in the door. He also commented on giving young adults the opportunity to enter the workforce without the burden of debt.

**Mr. Steve Saucier**, Training and Development Manager, Georgia-Pacific, was recognized. Mr. Saucier shared views about getting people into the system and keeping them there. He said the need is to start talking about *learning* instead of about *training*. He said countries around the world that lead in terms of an educated society today are steeped in a culture of learning. He said resources and money are wasted training people to

fill positions without looking at their capabilities to meet the needs of business. Mr. Saucier's comments on current needs included the following:

- more involvement in education systems from a business standpoint,
- talking more about community college systems emphasizing vocational and technical education,
- start talking at the junior high level about vocational and technical careers,
- put business and leadership people into the classroom to better understand what education looks like today, and differences that can be made with day-to-day involvement in the education of children,
- get away from the idea that we hire people for jobs. He said the people who truly have careers within Georgia-Pacific are those in its mill towns who start at the beginning and work their way up through lines of progression to technically sophisticated jobs,
- bring leadership, principled behavior, and collaborative learning into school systems, and
- start partnerships at the community level.

Following remarks about Georgia-Pacific's involvement with STEM programs in high school and summer internships for teachers and educators, Mr. Saucier concluded with a discussion of disappearing mechanical trades and increasing competition with Europe and Asia. He stated paradigms of the past need to be rethought; and new models for building careers need to be found.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- importance of having a broad view on this issue,
- importance of having cultural change, and
- whether anything could be added to Arkansas Works to make its work component more effective.

**Mr. Mike Rogers**, Director of Industrial Maintenance and Refrigeration Management, Tyson Foods, Inc., and Member, Legislative Task Force on Workforce Education Excellence, was recognized. Mr. Rogers described some of the transitions he has seen, especially in the food industry, which require production to be quicker, faster, and better to be more competitive. He said this cannot be done without technology. Mr. Rogers discussed getting the future workforce component and the technology needs that young people must have to do the job today. He discussed the challenges the company faces, including automation, special equipment design, fitting the process to the product, equipment asset management, and other variables heavily related to technology. He said the company has to rely on technology; it is not replacing people, it's replacing skillsets. Mr. Rogers stated it takes ten years to develop a skilled employee, an employee who has ability to innovate, work collaboratively, to think, to reason, to be systematic, and to be hungry to learn the necessary skills.

Contributor to the Discussion:

**Dr. Nathan Smith**, Director of Economic Policy, Arkansas Development Finance Authority

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- thinking about continuous learning,
- snowballing effect of technology,
- having a multitude of skills coming out of high school to face changing technology,
- facilitating conversations between legislators, industry, and the community,
- coming up with better models, better solutions,
- rethinking the skills to bring to children so they can adapt to changing technology,
- examining stagnant wage growth,
- "career job" is exceptional; gaining transferable knowledge,
- encouraging junior high and high school students to become financially literate, and
- giving entrants a seat at the table from time to time.

*Next Scheduled Meeting:*

Tuesday, July 10, 2018, at 9:00 a.m. at the Association of Arkansas Counties Building, 1415 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street,  
Little Rock

*Adjournment:*

The meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.

*Approved: 08/22/2018*