

U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Field Hearing
Friday, August 16, 2019
Des Moines, Iowa

Thank you, Senator Ernst. It's a pleasure to be with you today to discuss the important issue of workforce development and building the talent pipeline of the future.

When you visit all 99 counties in Iowa each year, like Sen. Ernst and I do, you hear a lot of concerns from Iowans. What struck me from my very first days as Lt. Governor is how common -- and universal -- the concerns were about workforce development.

Employers, across all sectors, were struggling to find workers with the right mix of skills for their open jobs. Iowa workers, of all ages, were looking for the right education and training to help them adapt to a changing world.

It was this range of concerns that convinced me my number one priority as Governor needed to be doing everything possible to help Iowans of all ages prepare for the cutting edge careers of the 21st century economy. By closing the skills gap, we can help Iowans pursue a career they love that will provide for their future. This isn't just an economic issue; it is also a vital quality of life issue.

Before I outline some of the initiatives underway in Iowa, I want to express my appreciation to Sen. Ernst for the strong partnership we have with the federal government. Rather than pursuing a new federal program for every problem, we need people in Congress who, like Sen. Ernst, understand that more flexibility to the states to effectively and creatively implement solutions is a good thing.

Specifically, I know Sen. Ernst has reintroduced the EMPOWERS Act, which would provide states with waivers to integrate and reform multiple federal means-tested programs. This would be a significant step forward for states, like Iowa, looking to be innovative in addressing issues of employment, financial literacy, family stability, and self-sufficiency.

In addition, I appreciate the Senator's focus on helping address a critical and immediate workforce need, with her Wind Workforce Modernization and Training Act. We all know that Iowa is the tip of the spear in the wind revolution. That has created an enormous demand for workers skilled to maintain the more than 4,100 wind turbines in Iowa today. This bill would greatly enhance the wind technician training programs at seven Iowa community colleges as well as Iowa State University and the University of Iowa.

Future Ready Iowa

At the state level, our workforce development work has ramped up considerably over the last couple of years. In 2018, I'm proud that the Iowa Legislature passed the Future Ready Iowa Act unanimously.

Understanding that a high school diploma is simply not enough to thrive in the modern economy, the goal of Future Ready Iowa is for 70 percent of our workforce to have education or training beyond high school by 2025.

To accomplish that, the Legislature approved more than \$16 million this year to support three innovative new programs:

- The \$13 million **Last-Dollar Scholarship program** will help pay tuition for designated two-year degree programs. This will create opportunities for good-paying careers that meet employers' needs for more skilled workers while growing our economy. Both new high school graduates and adults already in the workforce or unemployed can participate;
- The \$1 million **Future Ready Iowa Grant program** provides stipends to Iowans who left college after earning at least half the credits toward a four-year degree in a high-demand field, and who return to complete their degree. This will be an important way to address the shortages that exist in a number of occupations requiring a four-year degree;
- The \$1.2 million **Future Ready Iowa Employer Innovation Fund** is a matching grant opportunity for employers and other partners to collaborate and carry out innovative, creative initiatives to address local workforce issues.

Apprenticeships

In addition to a degree, there is probably no better way to prepare someone for a successful career than on-the-job training. Apprenticeships combine work-based, on-the-job learning with relevant technical classroom education. In some fields, such as nursing, welding, building maintenance, computer support, culinary, and others, this kind of hands-on training is the best way to prepare for a job.

The State of Iowa provides grants to support the development and operation of apprenticeship programs, including high school apprenticeship programs, employer-driven programs, and those sponsored by labor and trade associations.

Probably our most unique apprenticeship program is run by the Iowa Department of Corrections statewide, in all nine institutions. Registered apprenticeships are available in 25 occupations, with 350 registered apprentices and 200 who have earned their national certification. That is a remarkable way to both help meet Iowa's workforce needs and to help ex-offenders find a successful career pathway after prison.

STEM Initiative

Finally, I'd like to discuss an issue that has been near and dear to my heart since being elected Lt. Governor in 2010: STEM. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

In today's fast-changing, information-based world, there are enormous opportunities in these fields. We need to inspire more young people to have a passion for STEM-related fields and to position themselves to thrive in a global economy.

Iowa's nationally-recognized STEM Initiative has a goal of increasing student interest and achievement in STEM and promoting STEM economic development. This isn't a government-run effort, but instead a private-public partnership with strong bipartisan support.

One example of the work of the STEM Initiative is the STEM BEST Program. BEST stands for Businesses Engaging Students and Teachers. It fosters a learning environment where students are able to participate in real workplace projects designed by business professionals and teachers and apply K-12 STEM skills, knowledge and behaviors needed for STEM careers. To date, there are more than 50 STEM BEST programs in Iowa, involving 54 school districts, 5,000 students, and more than 450 businesses and community partners.

I'm grateful for how Iowans rolled up their sleeves and came together on the issue of STEM. From educators to businesses to legislators of both political parties, it really is a model for us to follow in solving our workforce development needs of the future.

Again, thank you for inviting me today. Thank you, Senator Ernst, for bringing the attention of the U.S. Senate on these very important issues for Iowans. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.