

Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship

February 19, 2015 Field Hearing hosted by Senator Vitter

Written Testimony for David Helveston

Thank you, Chairman Vitter, for the opportunity to speak today. I am David Helveston, Vice President for Workforce, Career and Technical Education at the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.

As many of you know well, Louisiana is in the midst of a boom in the petrochemical industry, and over the next few years, is projected to experience unprecedented growth in advanced manufacturing, information technology, and industrial construction. With investments in new facilities and expansions nearing \$100 billion, the impacts will be felt across Louisiana, by large corporations, by small businesses and entrepreneurs, and by individuals struggling to make a better life for themselves. The forecast demand for skilled workers shows that anyone in Louisiana who obtains the necessary training will have not just a job, but a life-long career with a clear path to the middle class. Occupational forecasts also show that most of the upcoming job openings in Louisiana will require more than a high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree. It is essential that Louisiana's Higher Education system delivers the market-responsive training to meet employers' demand and prepare students to enter into the workforce.

To produce graduates who transition seamlessly into the workforce, we must align our program offerings to match occupational outlooks and we must partner closely with business and industry to develop curricula that meet their needs. One of our system's strategic goals is to quadruple the number of partnerships with business and industry by 2020.

A great example of such a partnership is the one here in the Shreveport area between Bossier Parish Community College and Benteler Steel. At the Center for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering on BPC's campus, students can earn their Certification for Manufacturing, an industry-based certification and curriculum developed jointly by Louisiana Economic Development and industry partners. Students train on a steel-tube rolling station that simulates the actual production process in the Benteler facility. Graduates from this program will have the skills they need to succeed from day one, and manufacturing employers in the area will have access to a pool of highly-skilled workers to grow their businesses.

Partnerships like this exist throughout Louisiana among various industries. Our partnership with Associated Builders and Contractors to expand training capacity for the skilled crafts by sharing facilities and instructors is another public-private partnership producing real results at a number of locations. We are also developing partnerships with local businesses to encourage non-traditional students to consider non-traditional careers. For example, a Women in Welding partnership between Dow Chemical and Baton Rouge Community College provides unemployed and underemployed women with scholarships for a short-term, industry-based training program in a field traditionally dominated by men. It also

provides mentoring from experienced women welders and connections directly to hiring employers at its conclusion. Partnerships like these are key to our success.

Louisiana's budget has been in the news a great deal lately, particularly as it relates to Higher Education funding. Regardless of potential cuts, Louisiana's community and technical colleges must have a laser-like focus on producing skilled graduates prepared for the high-wage, high-demand careers that drive further economic growth. This is our obligation to our students, taxpayers, and employers. By aligning our programs to the needs of local business and industry, our community and technical colleges are part of the budget solution. It may be somewhat over-simplified, but our tax base increases when the unemployed, the underemployed, and others receiving government assistance have the skills they need to enter the workforce and become prosperous taxpayers.

At the federal level, we have all heard the President's proposal of free community college. While we appreciate his recognition of the value of community and technical colleges, we understand there are many, complicated issues involved. A more modest proposal that could increase access to the training called for by business and industry in Louisiana involves an adjustment to Pell grants: reduce the clock-hour requirement for program eligibility. Currently, a rigorous 12-week welding program that results in an industry-based certification and near-certain employment is not eligible for Pell funding because of the high clock-hour requirement. This full-time, compressed training leads directly to a high-wage career, yet a financial barrier to entry exists for the unemployed and underemployed.

While discussions surrounding Higher Education and workforce continue at the state and federal level, Louisiana's community and technical colleges remain committed to partnering closely with business and industry to produce more graduates prepared for high-wage, high-demand careers in Louisiana.

Senator Vitter, I thank you again for allowing me to speak today. I look forward to working with you and your staff on these important issues for Louisiana.