

**Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  
Hosted by Chairman David Vitter  
Field Hearing**

February 20, 2015, 10:00AM CST  
Delta Community College  
Monroe, Louisiana

**How Innovative Education Systems Can Better  
Prepare Students to Enter the Workforce**

Testimony of

**John F. Jones  
Vice President of Policy  
CenturyLink**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and fellow participants. We appreciate your interest and leadership in calling today's hearing addressing innovation, education and workforce development preparation. We believe much good work has already been done in this area; however, with the rapidly changing economic and employment environment of our state and the rest of the nation, we believe more work remains to be done to achieve greater alignment between education and the business community. My role here today is to discuss the workforce development challenges and opportunities we face as a telecommunications provider headquartered in Louisiana as it relates to education.

CenturyLink is a Fortune 150, international telecommunications company with headquarters in Monroe, Louisiana. We are the third largest telecommunications company in America today. We operate one of the largest communications networks in the United States with a focus on providing high speed internet, data, voice, managed cloud and IT hosting and entertainment services to approximately 13 million customers in all 50 states and overseas. We are a major communications provider for the United States Government for both network and cybersecurity products.

We employ approximately 47,000 people globally—the majority of them with technical, service-oriented backgrounds, along with hundreds of others in supporting non-technical fields. We are in the process of finalizing the construction of a 250,000 square foot Technology Center of Excellence on our campus in Monroe that will open this spring. This building will host state of the art network monitoring, research and development and IT and Engineering support to our international service footprint.

We have agreed to increase our total jobs in Monroe by 1146 positions within the next several years. We are moving forward with that commitment, but we do face some challenges.

One being, finding and attracting more senior technology-trained and other professional employees to Louisiana; and the second being, competing with larger markets in our state and elsewhere for college graduates with the skill sets we need.

Because employee recruitment and long term retention are our goals, our preference is to hire from Louisiana universities as much as we can. We have made significant inroads in exploring partnership opportunities in northeast Louisiana with ULM, Louisiana Tech and Delta Community College. However, within the past year, we have also met with the presidents or faculties of Grambling, LSU, Southeastern and Northwestern universities.

Each meeting has been a learning experience for both parties in terms of gaining a better understanding of curriculum needs as well as our potential job availability for graduates. These discussions have been invaluable for identifying both resources and opportunities. Ultimately, the students will be the net winners of these discussions, and they will benefit from enhanced curriculum development that translates into actual job opportunities in Louisiana. Going forward, we see our company and our vendors playing an advisory role with our universities and K-12 partners in discussing creative partnerships and curriculums.

A recent example of a partnership opportunity is this week's announcement by IBM, the State of Louisiana and CenturyLink. The IBM center in Monroe represents a multifaceted, transformational partnership that will include expanded higher-education programs related to computer science, as well as create new economic growth opportunities in the Monroe area. The IBM center will employ a broad range of college graduates and experienced professionals with backgrounds in computer science, engineering, mathematics, and science. In addition to the 400 direct jobs that will be created at the

center, it is estimated the project will result in approximately 405 new indirect jobs, for a total of more than 805 new permanent jobs in this area.

The State of Louisiana is providing \$4.5 million in funding over 10 years to expand key higher education programs, including the computer science program at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, the cyber engineering program at Louisiana Tech, and the data analytics program at Grambling State University.

Additionally, IBM will work closely with local professors to recommend curriculum innovations focused on technology, math and software development, and equip students to meet the growing demand for business services, including advanced analytics, process innovation and application development. The partnership will also include formal internships with IBM and additional CenturyLink internships for students in the targeted universities. Additionally, IBM will work with the Louisiana Economic Development FastStart<sup>®</sup> program on recruiting initiatives, including campus events in Louisiana and neighboring states as well as via social media, alumni events and the development of recruiting materials.

In conclusion, I will leave you with three thoughts.

We believe that finding additional ways to improve the communication and alignment between the business community and our colleges and universities will foster additional partnerships and curriculums aligned with jobs.

We should also focus on meaningful education reform in our elementary and secondary education schools and curriculums. We would like to see additional development of STEM programs and integration and alignment of K-12 and higher-education programs and initiatives with workforce needs.

Louisiana, and in particular, the I-20 Corridor, have great potential to embrace technology as a key economic development driver. If our state is going to move forward with a high-tech economy, we must begin focusing our education goals towards math and the sciences now.

Lastly, let's not forget North Louisiana. The colleges and universities in this area have provided educations for literally thousands of students whose educations may have otherwise been put out of their reach by distance or cost if these universities had not been strategically placed. We are hopeful funding for our local colleges will be restored to meet the workforce needs of our state and overcome the negative outside perception of education our state experiences today.

Thank you. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.