

March 7, 2023

RE: LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HB 1232 ON APPROPRIATIONS FOR CAREER EXPLORATION SOFTWARE

Dear Chairman Wobbema and Members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee:

My name is David Farnsworth, recently retired North Dakota Manager of Power Generation and Engineering for Great River Energy. For the past two decades I have been heavily involved in creating a skilled and technically advanced workforce for the North Dakota Energy industry. My efforts have included helping to create new and updated Energy programs within K-12, Higher Education, and Organized Labor. I have worked hard with multiple Industry partners, parents, career counselors, instructors, and students in promoting the high paying and high demand occupations that exist in North Dakota. Through my chairmanships of the BSC Polytechnic Business and Industry Leadership Teams and the Workforce Development Council, I have developed a strong understanding of the broader workforce shortages across all the business sectors in the State.

As members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, you are well-attuned to the large labor shortages being experienced in nearly all occupations and regions of the State. A young person is faced with a vast variety of options for which career to choose, and they can spend years trying to figure out which careers best fit their interests and aptitudes. One of the great advancements in career awareness in recent years has been the introduction of virtual reality software that enables the student to place themselves in the midst of very realistic job situations. They can virtually observe a person performing their normal job duties in a variety of situations without exposing them to the hazards of the job. For example, a student can be virtually placed upon a tall structure being constructed and “look around” to observe ironworkers lift steel and attach structural members together. They can be placed atop a 350 foot wind tower and observe wind technicians performing maintenance on the nacelle. Or a student can be virtually placed in an operating room and observe the various interactions of the staff performing a major surgery. The use of virtual reality can help the individual determine whether they could be a good fit in the career they are exploring.

It should also be noted that virtual reality can be coupled with simulators to provide safe, realistic job training. I have personally donned a pair of virtual reality goggles with a set of controls before me and practiced “driving, maneuvering, and parking” a self-propelled manlift on a job site --- all in the safety of a classroom setting.

I highly recommend the approval of HB 1232 in appropriating money for use in virtual reality software for career exploration training.

Sincerely,

David E. Farnsworth
Bismarck, North Dakota