



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

Education
Energy and Natural Resources (Vice Chair)

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Anna Novak, representative from District 33.

I support Senate Bill 2003, which is the Career and Technical Education budget. Over the past 4 years or so, we have seen some wonderful outcomes from the classes offered in the CTE realm. Many of these classes spark an interest in a specific career for the students taking the course and have changed the entire trajectory of their life! But beyond this, I think one of the most exciting parts of CTE is the way these courses have been able to help our local employers with the workforce shortage! From my experience, it is much easier to keep people in a community than recruit someone to move to a different area from an opposite part of the state or country.

As I mentioned, I support this budget. But I am here to ask this committee to restore all, or at least some, of the funding for new CTE capital projects and include language for a 1 for 1 private-public partnership. Currently, we have invested a tremendous amount of money into CTE centers in our urban areas...with virtually nothing for our rural communities. Many of the urban areas have smaller towns located within 15-30 miles and those rural schools are able to commute to utilize those CTE centers. However, there are many pockets of the state that are located just too far away. My district is one of those. We are located about an hour and 15 minutes away from Mandan and about an hour and 45 minutes from Dickinson. While we have the opportunity for distance education classes, I think we all know that in-person learning is the optimal experience for education, especially with anything related to the trades.

I worked with our local superintendents and my regional CTE director during the interim to come up with a plan for a smaller, local CTE program and building for my district. It would serve several schools in the area and fill in one of the state's gaps in CTE locations. We met with local employers, including healthcare, telecommunications and those in the coal industry - which specifically employs 3000 people directly and 12,000 people indirectly. Just like everyone else, they are hiring and are struggling immensely to fill positions. The fact that they are unable to fill positions with yearly salaries of \$80K-\$120k should tell you that this is a real problem. Every single employer we met with was very supportive of the concept and was also supportive of donating a financial or an in-kind of contribution to make this possibility a reality for our community.

An issue we face is that some of the positions they need to fill require education that is hours away. So, the students have no option but to leave our area for their education. And sometimes they just simply don't come back after moving to a larger area. We can't control that, but we are finding that it's easier to keep people in an area versus attracting new people to move to a new area of the state or country. Many of these specialized programs could be done partially or completely locally through a CTE program. We identified between 5 and 10 different courses we wanted to focus on to fill the workforce shortage in our area.

Rural North Dakota is frustrated with the educational opportunities versus the opportunities available in our larger towns. Whether it's funding private school education, new buildings that aren't falling apart like many located within our smaller towns, and now CTE offerings. While there are many wonderful things offered to our kids in rural schools - including great teachers, smaller class sizes and oftentimes a more personal connection - I believe the spread between educational opportunities between our large and small towns is becoming greater with every legislative session. And it is truly inequitable.

Please consider adding funds to the CTE budget for capital projects in rural North Dakota. Energy and agriculture are the largest industries in our state - and those are located in our rural areas. In order for us to continue feeding and fueling the world, our schools need CTE just as much as our urban areas do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.