



Higher Education Funding Committee  
Thursday, September 26, 2013

Chairman Sanford, members of the Higher Education Funding Interim Committee, my name is Jon Godfread, I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for the Greater North Dakota Chamber of Commerce, we are the state's largest pro-business lobbyist organization. We have been asked today to comment on some our recent activities involving Higher Education and our newly formed Higher Education Partnership, as well as comment on any suggestions we may have for the committee. Thank you for taking time out of your meeting to allow us to present.

It's no secret that North Dakota is facing many workforce issues. Our unemployment rate is low. We have thousands of jobs available. It's difficult for businesses to find skilled and qualified workers. Many would say our workforce issues are at a crisis level.

Over the course of the last year, several Greater North Dakota Chamber members have been meeting to discuss these workforce issues and how they can work together to address them. In early August, they invited the North Dakota college and university presidents to join them in this discussion. What resulted is the beginning of a new process to bring the private sector and higher education together as partners to address our growing workforce issues.

Several themes emerged during this first meeting.

**A process must be implemented for communication between the business community and higher education.** Businesses must continually communicate their needs so that higher education can respond to them. This is extremely important in North Dakota's rapidly changing economic climate.

**Higher education institutions must be flexible and adaptable.** As workforce needs change, it's important that institutions have the ability to adapt to those needs quickly and effectively.

**We must join together to tell the higher education story.** North Dakota's colleges and universities are alive with vitality and are strong economic engines. There are already many successful partnerships between business and education and our institutions are excited to explore new opportunities.

**The focus must always be on the students.** The mission of higher education is to serve students. The result is a skilled and talented workforce that contributes to society and our economy. This mission must be a part of all discussions.

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As a result of this meeting, the Greater North Dakota Chamber has developed the Higher Education Partnership. This Partnership will be governed by a steering committee of private-sector members and has adopted the following objectives as priorities for the upcoming year:

1. Develop a mechanism for providing factual information about higher education to the general public and the legislature.
2. Encourage institutions to engage the business sector in developing curriculum and programs.
3. Develop a program for institutions and business to partner in student recruitment and pipeline development.

Other items that have been discussed by the Partnership include:

1. Review the higher education funding structure and encourage investment related to workforce development and economic growth.
2. Review the structure and funding for North Dakota's workforce training (TrainND) program.
3. Review the structure and funding for Operation Intern.

The steering committee will continue to discuss these issues to determine the best way for the Partnership to become involved.

Over the next eight months, the Partnership will hold regional meetings to continue the dialogue between business and education, to gather information and to brainstorm ideas for meeting the objectives. The meetings will include college and university leadership, business leaders, economic development groups, local chambers of commerce and legislators.

At the conclusion of these meetings, the Partnership steering committee will review the information gathered to determine the next steps and the future structure of the Partnership. "The Greater North Dakota Chamber is committed to taking an active role in addressing North Dakota's workforce issues. We feel the Higher Education Partnership is a great mechanism for bridging the gap between business and education," said Andy Peterson, president & CEO of the Greater North Dakota Chamber. "I am excited about this opportunity to create a supportive and positive environment for collaboration between everyone involved."