

# NORTH DAKOTA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

## Minutes of the

### WORKFORCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday and Thursday, April 9-10, 2008  
Nafus Student Center, Jamestown College, Jamestown, North Dakota  
State Capitol, Bismarck, North Dakota

Senator Tony Grindberg, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

**Members present:** Senators Tony Grindberg, Ray Holmberg, Dave Nething; Representatives Donald L. Clark, Stacey Dahl, Glen Froseth, Eliot Glassheim, Pam Gulleson, Nancy Johnson, George J. Keiser, Lisa Meier, Lee Myxter, Dan J. Ruby, Clark Williams

**Members absent:** Senator Tom Seymour; Representatives Mary Ekstrom, Steve Zaiser

**Others present:** Karen K. Krebsbach, State Senator, Minot

Joe Kroeber, State Representative, Jamestown  
See [Appendix A](#) for additional persons present.

#### WORKFORCE SYSTEM STUDY

The committee held a two-day meeting. The first day the committee met in Jamestown and conducted the final focus group of the workforce system study. On the second day the committee met in the State Capitol and conducted the Workforce Congress, the culminating event of the workforce system study.

#### Focus Group - Young Professionals and Students

As part of the workforce system study required under Section 20 of House Bill No. 1018 (2007), the committee worked with the Department of Commerce in conducting four focus groups across the state at which invited business leaders were able to participate. The committee and the Department of Commerce decided to conduct a fifth focus group at which young professionals, high school students, and college students were invited to participate.

The focus group for young professionals and students met from 10:05 a.m. to 1:45 p.m., Wednesday, April 9, 2008, in the Nafus Student Center, Jamestown College, Jamestown. The committee members, students, and young professionals sat at round tables in the center of the room, with other individuals in attendance seated at chairs at the end and around the perimeter of the room.

The committee used the following basic format for this focus group:

- Welcome and opening comments from Chairman Grindberg; Dr. Robert S. Badal, President, Jamestown College; and

Mr. Shane C. Goettle, Commissioner of Commerce;

- Introduction of two committee consultants who facilitated the focus group;
- Review of 2007 legislative workforce initiatives;
- Review of 2008 Workforce Committee activities;
- Summary of North Dakota's workforce situation;
- Review of prefocus group surveys;
- Breakout session; and
- Closing remarks.

The committee's two consultants--Mr. Thomas P. Miller and Mr. Roy Vanderford, Thomas P. Miller and Associates, Greenfield, Indiana--worked together to facilitate the focus group. Mr. Miller and Mr. Vanderford used a computer presentation ([Appendix B](#)) to assist in presenting information throughout the focus group.

#### Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Grindberg introduced Dr. Badal who welcomed participants to Jamestown College. Dr. Badal reviewed the history of Jamestown College and provided data regarding programs of study. Additionally, he provided the following statistics regarding Jamestown College's workforce activities:

- Using a three-year average of postgraduate surveys of Jamestown College graduates, six months post graduation, 62 percent of Jamestown College graduates are working in North Dakota.
- One of three Jamestown College graduates who go on to do postgraduate studies stays in North Dakota following graduation.
- Jamestown College student surveys indicate 55 percent of the student body is from out of state.

Dr. Badal said overall he is very proud of the workforce activities Jamestown College is performing.

Chairman Grindberg thanked the students and young professionals for taking time out of their busy day to participate in the focus group. He said the reality in North Dakota is that there are more than 10,000 open jobs that need to be filled and there is an aging workforce. However, North Dakota is one of the best places in the country for doing business, with businesses stating their biggest challenge is meeting workforce needs. He said this leads us to the committee's charge of determining what the state might do to address the workforce needs of

businesses. He said it was clear from conducting the first four focus groups with business leaders that the committee needs to meet with the youth of the state to determine what it will take to attract and retain young workers.

Chairman Grindberg called on Mr. Goettle for welcoming remarks. Mr. Goettle said using the state's most up-to-date technology, including *JobsND.com* and the Job Service North Dakota spider program, statistics indicate there are approximately 15,000 unfilled jobs in the state. He said North Dakota has a declining high school enrollment and an aging workforce and this does present a challenge; however, this challenge is a great opportunity for our youth.

### Interview

Following the welcome and introductions, the consultants conducted a group interview that included gathering information regarding the focus group participants. Additionally, the consultants reviewed the background of the workforce system study, reviewed the 2007 legislative workforce initiatives, reviewed the steps that will be taken during this interim's workforce system study, reviewed data relating to the state's current workforce situation, provided details regarding the results of the prefocus group survey completed by business leaders who were invited to attend the first four focus groups, reviewed the results of the four business leader focus groups, and conducted a breakout session.

The breakout session was made up of four exercises. The participants at each table were asked to discuss and record how the participants would like to:

1. Change the actions of employers so they would better meet the needs of youth;
2. Change the actions of young adults so they would stay in North Dakota;
3. Change the actions of schools so they promote retention of young talent; and
4. Change the actions of government so it meets the state's workforce challenges.

The facilitators recorded the results reported from each table for each of these four classes for which changed action is sought. Upon completion of this breakout session, participants voted on which of the recorded changes are most important in addressing the state's workforce challenges.

### Closing Remarks

At the end of the focus group, Chairman Grindberg thanked participants for attending and reminded participants that the workforce system study is an ongoing process. The consultants will compile the information recorded and gathered through the breakout session and use this information in their presentation to the Workforce Congress and in drafting the final report.

## Workforce Congress

As part of the workforce system study required under Section 20 of House Bill No. 1018 (2007), the committee worked with the Department of Commerce in conducting the Workforce Congress at which participants were invited to receive a report on the activities of the focus groups, identify methods to enhance the state's workforce system in order to be well-positioned to participate in a knowledge-driven economy and to be globally competitive, and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the state's existing workforce system.

The Workforce Congress met from 9:00 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. on Thursday, April 10, 2008, in the State Capitol, Bismarck. The meeting began in the House chamber, broke into small groups that met in four meeting rooms in the State Capitol, and then reconvened in the House chamber. Workforce Congress participants included private business leaders, economic developers, educators, and young professionals.

The committee's two consultants--Mr. Miller and Mr. Vanderford--worked together to facilitate the Workforce Congress portions in the House chamber. Mr. Miller and Mr. Vanderford distributed a written version of a computer presentation ([Appendix C](#)) to assist in presenting information throughout the Workforce Congress.

The committee used the following basic format for the Workforce Congress:

- Welcome and opening comments from Chairman Grindberg, Vice Chairman Ruby, Governor John Hoeven, and Mr. Goettle.
- Consultant report regarding an overview of the workforce system study process and destination, process and expectations for the Workforce Congress, key economic and workforce facts about North Dakota, and highlights and insights from the four regional focus groups and the students and young professionals focus group.
- Break out into four groups, each assigned to address desired changes in the behavior of either employers, individuals, educators, or government in order to have a positive effect on North Dakota's ability to respond to workforce challenges.
- Reconvene to report on the activities of the four breakout groups.

### Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Grindberg, Vice Chairman Ruby, Governor Hoeven, and Mr. Goettle welcomed the Workforce Congress participants and thanked them for their ongoing commitment to the workforce system study process.

### Consultant Report

Mr. Miller said the Workforce Congress is all about rolling up our sleeves and getting the work done. He said the participants are fortunate to be in a state that

is making a real effort to listen to its people. Mr. Miller began the report by reviewing slides 3 through 13 of the written material.

Mr. Vanderford reviewed slides 14 through 21 of the written material and summarized the activities of the fifth focus group of students and young professionals, recognizing that the first four focus groups spent a lot of time talking about young people and the fifth focus group spent time actually talking to the young people. He said the fifth focus group seemed to support the belief that there is a lack of career information available to young people; there is a critical lack of access to online job opportunity information; student loan incentives would be greatly appreciated; and young people are seeking employers who are willing to invest in leadership development for young employees.

Following the presentation of the focus group results, Mr. Vanderford posed the following question to the Workforce Congress participants: Does this reflect your beliefs? Participant comments included:

- Manufacturers are unable to find a workforce; therefore, it may be necessary to consider whether there are untapped sources of workers. For example, it might be productive to address the individuals who are unable to pass employer drug tests and are therefore unemployed or underemployed.
- In the energy sector there appears to be a disconnect between the educational statistics and the ease of finding a job. However, there was recognition that the energy sector has aggressively tried to connect with schools.
- There is an unmet need for the education system to help students pursue technical career goals such as truckdriving and welding.
- Businesses that offer internships are faced with the reality that students frequently seek to leave the state following graduation. However, there were comments that some institutions of higher education and some businesses are being creative in addressing opportunities with interns.
- The real point is the problems associated with disposable incomes. We have a high cost of living and real estate prices are rising, resulting in problems with people being unable to purchase housing.
- Students are lacking the necessary work ethic, problem-solving skills, and critical-thinking skills.

Chairman Grindberg pointed out how slide 12 of the written material, showing a national map of population growth rates, indicates North Dakota has "here and now needs," but we also have "future needs."

### Breakout Groups

The Workforce Congress participants were divided into four groups and assigned to meet in one of the

following four meeting rooms to address the associated behavioral changes:

1. Changes in the behavior of government (Pioneer Room). This small group discussion was facilitated by Senator Grindberg.
2. Changes in the behavior of individuals (Prairie Room). This small group discussion was facilitated by Mr. Vanderford.
3. Changes in the behavior of employers (Roughrider Room). This small group discussion was facilitated by Mr. Goettle.
4. Changes in the behavior of educators (Harvest Room). This small group discussion was facilitated by Mr. Miller.

To assist in the breakout group discussions, the consultants provided Workforce Congress participants with a document ([Appendix D](#)) of policy options for each of the four behavioral changes. This document includes current North Dakota programs, policy suggestions from the focus groups, and potential legislative options.

### Reports From Breakout Groups

Following the breakout groups, the Workforce Congress participants reconvened in the House chamber and reported each small group's top three changes in behavior and also reported a fictional headline from *The Wall Street Journal* in the year 2013 reflecting North Dakota's success in meeting its workforce needs.

The breakout group addressing changes in the behavior in educators reported the following three items:

1. Align higher education with growth sectors of the economy.
2. Provide more and earlier career awareness education and information to students and parents.
3. Provide rapid response of higher education to "hot needs."

The breakout group addressing changes in the behavior in individuals reported the following three items:

1. Establish a statewide structure for a comprehensive curriculum for career exploration and decisionmaking.
2. Provide more affordable higher education for both recent high school graduates and adults.
3. Keep North Dakotans in the state through alignment of educational standards for moving throughout the P-16 system.

The breakout group addressing changes in the behavior in employers reported the following three items:

1. Create tax incentives for automation and innovation tied to increases in productivity.
2. Create an aggressive statewide career awareness initiative.
3. Support employer-sponsored school-to-work programs to engage non-college-bound youth.

The breakout group addressing changes in the behavior of government reported the following three items:

1. Improve career advising and training by getting industry involved in the process with education and by delivering at the community level.
2. Provide tuition loan programs for all types of workers so all people can access training.
3. Expand and continue existing programs and pilot programs that have proven to be successful.

### Closing Remarks

Following the reports of the breakout groups, the Workforce Congress participants commented on the day's activities, including:

- There is a recognized need for government to support innovation, technology, and automation.
- Addressing career specialists and career awareness does not have to start fresh as there are examples of successful programs. Additionally, there was discussion that the market works best when we have good information and, on that same premise,

students will make good decisions if they have the right information.

- There was general support that the committee and the consultants should consider all of the ideas of the breakout groups because there were great ideas that did not make the top three issues reported out of the four groups.

Chairman Grindberg and Mr. Goettle thanked the Workforce Congress participants for their commitment to the process. Mr. Goettle said there is a real value to this bottom-up approach. Overall, he said, North Dakota has a lot to be excited about with a strong economy. He said we cannot let our challenges get us down, but we also do not want to hide from our challenges.

At the completion of the Workforce Congress, Chairman Grindberg adjourned the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

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Jennifer S. N. Clark  
Committee Counsel

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