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Workforce Development Conference Report

Message From The President of AEDC

In a short time, our state will likely be facing a critical shortage of qualified workers. This shortage will be caused by a growing Alaska economy, potential gas pipeline construction, increased capital project development, increased oil and gas development, and an aging workforce.

On October 9, 2006, the Alaska Workforce Development Conference was held. Our approach to this conference was to bring together the many different organizations in Alaska that have been working to help address the workforce challenge. The intent was to encourage synergies between them and to develop solutions with them that would help ensure Alaska can meet the upcoming employment challenges. Included in this report are a proposed set of concrete action steps that the next administration, the next Legislature, and we as Alaskans can take to make this problem a great opportunity for our state.

Combining our strengths statewide towards solving our workforce challenges will be critical to a bright economic future for Alaska. The time lag inherent in meeting future workforce needs requires this issue be a primary agenda item for our next Governor, their administration, and the 25th Alaska Legislature. Alaska's workforce challenge must also be at the top of mind for Alaskan residents, our leaders, and the companies doing business here; each of us has a role to play.

In order to meet our goal, the day opened with attendees hearing from a panel of experts who discussed current efforts and analysis on the Alaskan workforce challenge in order to establish a common base of understanding for all participants.

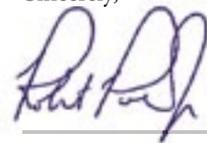
Immediately following, a total of four break-out periods were held on recruitment, training, employment, and funding. For each topic a facilitator led the discussion on what tactics are working, what are missing, and brainstormed strategies that addressed the problems identified. At the end of the day, the entire group came back together to vote on the proposed solutions in order to develop a strategy the next administration and Legislature could take to meet Alaska's workforce development challenges.

Lunch time and breaks provided the opportunity to learn more about what others are doing to address the workforce development problem in Alaska through exhibits and other displays.

This report includes many elements from the work accomplished on October 9. A total of four action statements passed with 75% voter approval, while two did not meet that standard. For your information, we have included all six of the proposed action items. Also included is an overall conference description and summary of presentations that were discussed. In addition, we have included results from a survey we conducted in the early planning stages, which guided us when choosing what subjects to focus on during the conference. Lastly, a list of all action statements proposed during the breakout sessions is included.

We look forward to sharing the work our participants have completed on the subject as well as working with you to implement and find solutions to Alaska's workforce development issues.

Sincerely,



Robert G. Poe,
President and CEO,
AEDC



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For more information on workforce development in Alaska, please call AEDC at:
(907) 258-3700 (Anchorage)
(800) 462-7275 (Statewide)

Online visit www.aedcweb.com



Action Statements and Approval Ratings

Passed

1. Establish a career and technical education outreach program where employers partner with the State of Alaska, the University of Alaska, local schools, and tribal partners to assist students (P-16), parents, out-of-school youth, and employed/unemployed Alaskans to learn about training, internship, apprenticeship, and employment opportunities. Provide tax credit to encourage employers where possible. (passed by 96%)
2. Build on ALEXSYS and appropriately market an internet-based training and employment clearing center to help students and unemployed Alaskans find training and employment opportunities; and employers find qualified employees and candidates for training programs. (passed by 85%)
3. Establish, in collaboration with private sector employers, a clearly articulated career and technical education program that:
 - Is funded over the long term,
 - Utilizes existing education facilities more fully including evenings, weekends, and summers,
 - Uses a broad range of educational resources, not limited to the University of Alaska,
 - Includes a broad range of options including apprenticeship, internship, and private career and technical education programs,
 - Specifically targets rural Alaskans, and out-of-school youth, and
 - Use distance learning capabilities where available. (passed by 96%)
4. The Governor and Legislature should restructure the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) by establishing a direct reporting relationship to the Governor, making it industry driven, and establishing full time professional staff to support the Board. (passed by 83%)

Failed

1. State of Alaska should support the student loan program and consider funding a loan forgiveness program in certain strategic fields. (failed 69% of vote – needed 75% to pass)
2. All State of Alaska capital spending should require use of apprentices from accredited apprenticeship programs. (failed 45% of vote – needed 75% to pass)

Workforce Development Conference Overview

Recognizing the impact of statewide workforce issues that will face Alaska over the next decade, AEDC took a proactive approach by hosting a one-day conference for residents to gather and discuss solutions.

The goal of the conference was to bring together different organizations that have already begun to address the issue; to create a clear plan of action and to ensure that workforce development is a top agenda item for the next administration.

To determine the issues and topics of the conference, AEDC conducted a statewide poll of community leaders inquiring the priorities of Alaska's workforce development needs.

The conference program included presentations from Commonwealth North, University of Alaska, AFL-CIO, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Associated General Contractors and a report from the "Putting Alaskans Resources to Work" (PARW) initiative.

With over 100 Alaskans attending, representing 75 organizations and businesses and 12 communities from Barrow to Juneau, the AEDC Workforce Development Conference was a success.

Summary of Presentations

Commonwealth North White Paper on Workforce Development

Alice Galvin, BP

Jeff Staser, Staser Group

68,000 Alaska jobs, from all sectors of our economy, are held by non-residents. In other terms, 30% of the market of private sector jobs goes to non-residents. Meanwhile, Alaska's unemployment rate is about 50% above the national average. With no overarching state plan to shape our economic future, our workforce development efforts have become reactive rather than proactive.

This has become a problem that all Alaskans need to address, not just government alone. The goal of workforce development is to increase income for individual Alaskans who live in or are born in Alaska. There are four key components that will help us accomplish this; economic development, workforce development and training, healthy communities, and education, all incorporated into a shared community vision.

Ten recommendations are proposed:

1. The Governor must set clearly quantified targets for Alaskan participation in quality jobs.
2. Utilize the full capacity of the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB).
3. Establish an economic development plan for Alaska that integrates workforce development, education, and healthy communities.
4. Ensure all funding spent on workforce development includes integration with economic development, healthy communities, and education reform efforts.
5. Establish an Information Clearinghouse within AWIB that will have three major components; Information Base, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance.
6. Force strong alignment between the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Department of Commerce and Economic Development.
7. Reconfigure the educational system.
8. The Board of Regents and the Board of Education must coordinate and align their goals.
9. Promote healthy communities.
10. The interest, participation, and enthusiasm of industry must be engaged in Alaska's future workforce development.

Vocational Education White Paper on Workforce Development

Mary L. Madden, Madden Associates

Vocational education is becoming increasingly important to building Alaska's workforce. University of Alaska enrollment in high demand occupation programs has continued to rise year over year leading to increased community college functions, funding, and business/industry partnerships. In addition, career and tech centers, private postsecondary programs, and adult program funding has become more readily available.

Recommendations to boost Alaska's output of vocation educated workers includes establishing stable and sufficient funding, incorporating high academic quality in secondary programs, enhancing industry involvement, and providing career education early in the process.

Labor's Perspective on Workforce Development

Vince Beltrami, AFL-CIO

Labor sees the workforce development challenge rooted in replacing and replenishing the aging workforce in preparation to build mega projects. The key barriers Alaska is facing is a shortage of skilled workers and educated applicants, diminished funding of voc-ed schools, bigger K-12 classrooms, the inability to attract qualified teachers, and spiraling drop out rates, all compounded by a lack of a comprehensive plan.

New ideas that should help solve the workforce challenge from a labor standpoint include articulation agreements with schools and districts around the state, a state funded pipeline training facility in Fairbanks, and a construction academy at the King Career Center.

Alaska Native Perspective on Workforce Development

M.J. Longley, Cook Inlet Tribal Council

Alaska boasts the nation's largest indigenous population per capita; one in five residents are Alaska Native. We must also keep in mind the contribution that Alaska Native organizations make to the development of Alaska's workforce. In 2005, of the top 100 largest private employers in Alaska, 17 were Native-owned. In addition, ten of the top 22 nonprofit employers were Native organizations.

Although close to half of Alaska Native men and women are working, the difference in wages between Alaska Natives and non-Natives is \$17,000 per year. Employing poverty criteria, 20% of Alaska Native households fall below the poverty line compared with 7% of non-Native households. Unemployment rates continue to be significantly higher for Alaska Natives than non-Natives as well.

CITC places a high value on the critical need for Alaska Natives to attain transitional skills, to transfer rural skills to an urban employment environment, and to transport workforce skills to any location by exercising employment options available to the majority of Alaskans. CITC is currently seeking support for additional vocational training centers in urban centers impacted by the high mobility and in-migration of rural Alaska Natives; increased capacity to recruit and train Alaska Native workers in high growth industries; and a provision of career guidance in Alaska schools and colleges; and a focus on prioritizing opportunities for Alaska's growing out-of-school youth population.

Putting Alaska Resources to Work

Colleen Ward, XCEL

Dave Rees, BP

Many upcoming projects in Alaska including the natural gas pipeline, Cook Inlet gas and oil development, and mining, will require a huge number of workers for construction, but for fewer legacy jobs. These legacy jobs, which are "goods-producing", are not the growth leaders but are among the best paid and promise a long career.

Four strategies have been identified in order to put Alaska resources to work;

- engage the stakeholders
- train the workforce
- employ skilled Alaskans
- adaptively sustain the system.

By engaging the stakeholders, we can provide career education and enhance industry recruitment and public awareness, while increasing funding. In order to train our workforce, we must integrate career and technical education into K-16, fill postsecondary gaps, retrain, and capitalize on retirees. By aligning the availability with the needs and focusing on placement, we will employ our skilled laborers. Lastly, by achieving stable and just-in-time funding, we can adaptively sustain our workforce.

Appendix of Supporting Research

Preliminary Survey Results

The results from the following survey determined the direction of the Workforce Development Conference held in October 2006.

Respondents were asked to rate how important each issue was to the future of Alaska.

Responding effectively to large capital projects on Alaska's horizon – i.e. – natural gas pipeline, Pebble Mine, Pogo Mine, Kensington Mine, Port of Anchorage, etc.

85.3% Very Important
11.9% Somewhat Important

Employing Alaska's next generation – making sure that professional jobs are available for college graduates that are seeking opportunities in Alaska.

78.9% Very Important
21.1% Somewhat Important

Creating/expanding programs that encourage high school students to seek certifications and degrees in the technical fields.

67.9% Very Important
26.6% Somewhat Important

Keeping young professionals in Alaska in an effort to replace retiring baby boomers.

67.0% Very Important
26.6% Somewhat Important

Avoiding economic downturn once large projects are completed.

67.9% Very Important
22.9% Somewhat Important

Increasing Alaskan hires.

59.6% Very Important
35.8% Somewhat Important

Maintaining workforce for existing Alaskan companies during heated economic times and having an adequate workforce for minimum wage jobs.

47.7% Very Important
37.6% Somewhat Important

Implementing a P-20 educational system to improve links between interdependent parts of the education system, such as that between high school and college.

37.6% Very Important
39.4% Somewhat Important

Implementing guest worker program J1 Visa – enhancing international relationships and encouraging work visas for international students while they are in Alaska.

10.1% Very Important
47.7% Somewhat Important

Issues and additional action statements discussed at the October 2006 Workforce Development Conference

(Listed in no particular order)

Reinstate student loan forgiveness and/or provide affordable student loans

Identify appropriate skill tests and measure standards

Cooperation between vocational groups

No Child Left Behind Act displaces emphasis

Fix the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) and listen to it

- Empower it
- Make it actionable
- Follow its recommendations

Adequately fund secondary, career, and technical education

Common vocabulary through out the system

Market Alaskan opportunities locally

The state should require that every state job offer a registered apprenticeship program to help others learn business skills

Develop a program where employers go into classrooms and share with students what it is like to do different jobs, offering students insight into different careers

Generate exciting career fairs for middle school and high schools

Find alliances between

- Providers
- Suppliers
- Employers
- Job Seekers

Start early learning programs

Meet constitutional requirement to fund the connection of the P-16 thru Adult Learner system

Use career resource counselors and bring in the community to convey message of career pathways including non-college track starting in elementary school

Leverage resources that understand multi-generational appropriate messages (i.e. Generation X, Generation Y)

Increase compulsory education age to 18 years or H.S. diploma

Conduct a comprehensive inventory of Alaska jobs

Use governor's office to profile/promote math/science achievement and employability skills in our schools

Industry re-educate itself on what skills are really needed for positions

Industry to increase flexibility to work with employees' job descriptions as their life situation and job skills change

Need training facilities in rural Alaska, i.e. teaching facilities w/ housing

Tax credits/incentives and grants for industry to partner with education/training providers

Build and fund partnerships/coalitions to utilize existing infrastructure between individual entities and industry

Partner/Fund program to educate high school students about options beyond university -- CTE (sophomore year & beyond)

Clear statewide vision of a complete education package and adequate funding (Career Technical Education CTE)

Recommend legislative bill that a percentage of state general fund revenue will go towards CTE

P-16 strategy that recruits and retains students and teachers

Better utilization and provision of distance delivery capabilities

Develop workforce collation around common areas and recommendations

Increase Accreditations

Earmark Career and Tech education/Vocational education training

Industry contribution (based on ROI)

Make it clear that everyone is responsible for funding

Long term funding strategy, identify needs/amounts, and ROI-payback

After hours instruction and training for high school and OSY (out of school youth)

UAA become a year round school in all fields

Postsecondary/ University- Fast track (TVC)
Extend school year, extend school hours. We add more and more to teacher plates and not enough time to teach the curriculum

Support and build quality trainers and retain the ones we have

Give incentive for employers to train