

**Joint Education Appropriations Committee**

Madame Chair and members of the committee, for the record, I am Mark Branger. I am the Executive Director of the Montana Association for Career and Technical Education, which represents the interest of over 1,500 secondary and post-secondary Career and Technical educators across Montana. Our mission as a professional organization is to provide quality career and technical education to better prepare students to enter the competitive workforce in the global marketplace which contributes to Montana's economy.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity this morning to speak in favor of the education budget submitted by the Office of Public Instruction and more specifically the additional monies for Career and Technical education. I am excited about the opportunity that this additional money gives Montana's students as well as what it can do to help build the economic condition of Montana.

Montana ranks near the lowest of all states for funding the added costs for Career and Technical Education in the nation and yet, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 18 of the 20 fastest growing occupations within the next decade will require career and technical education. Other states have been successful in drawing a correlation between an investment in technical training and economic development.

Agriculture education is no longer just about beef and crop production but includes aquaculture, floriculture, landscape management and wildlife production and management. Business education is no longer just about accounting and keyboarding but includes Cisco Networking, Computer Programming and Information Systems. Family and Consumer Science education is no longer just about sewing, foods and family living but now includes culinary arts, textile arts, early child care and recreation and tourism. Industrial education is no longer about woodworking but is about CNC (Computer Numerical Control) milling, robotics and automation technology, precision machinery technology and mechatronics\*. In Montana, Career and Technical education now has started Health Occupations Education and is training Certified Nurses Assistants and includes a myriad of other related health occupations. At Huntley Project Schools, where I serve as the District Technology Director, we are starting a program this semester in Pharmaceutical Technician. This semester course will prepare students to take the National Board Pharmaceutical Technician certification test.

All Career and Technical Education programs have costs above and beyond the expense of textbooks that the core education classes like English, History and Math traditionally require. The additional monies in Career and Technical Education will help our programs provide continual program improvement to meet the demand of new technologies and to prepare students for the constantly emerging new career opportunities.

Montana must strengthen the system of Career and Technical Education in the public schools in order to prepare students for post-secondary technical education and the demands of an ever-increasing technical work force. In Montana, out-of-state employees fill many jobs that require special technical skills. It is our obligation to prepare our own students for these jobs and to prepare them for a competitive work force outside Montana. We need to fund our technical education programs at levels that provide our students the same competitive edge as students across the nation.

Former U. S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin who spoke at the Baucus Economic Summit stated "You have in this state a lifestyle that has enormously broad appeal and you have that lifestyle at a time when the great problem that most companies face is how to attract highly trained people capable of engaging in the technologies of the New Economy." The New Economy he is talking about is a technically skilled workforce. He went on to further mention, " That has led companies to locate their business where people want to work and then send the information back to the corporate headquarters. What Montana needs is an energetic strategy to go after these businesses with such components as a very good educational system." I believe that opportunity is here before us now. Show them that we have a highly skilled trained workforce and they will come. He further states that "In Montana, it seems to me, the risk lies in inaction.

In conclusion, in the best interest of Montana's students, and for the improvement of the economic condition of Montana, I strongly encourage you to support the increase in Career and Technical education funding. Thank You.

***Career and Vocational/Technical Education programs focus on career preparation, resource management, communication, technical skill development, applied academics, technological literacy; and personal skills and leadership. Programs are driven by authentic applications where students will be prepared for the workplace.***

\*Mechatronics is the field of study that combines the fundamentals of Mechanical, Electrical, and Computer Engineering.