

House Appropriations Committee
Chairwoman Nancy Ballance
House Appropriations Committee Members

EXHIBIT 2
DATE Feb 5, 2015
HB 356

February 4, 2015

Dear Chairwoman Ballance and Committee Members,

I would like to register my support of HB356, increasing funding for Career and VoTech Education in the state.

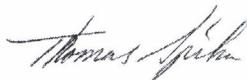
As the CEO of a manufacturing company in Lewistown, we deal on a daily basis with what has become a critical shortage of skilled workforce. We offer secure, desirable jobs, good wages and benefits, and opportunities for advancement, yet we struggle to fill our open positions. We have numerous applicants for our positions, but find so many do not even have the basic soft skills or understanding of industrial processes that would entice an employer to invest in them.

Data shows that a substantial percentage of high school students do not continue their education in 2- or 4-year post-secondary programs. Yet many Montana schools acknowledge that they develop their high school curriculum for a college preparation track. This obviously fails to serve the needs of the segment that will be entering the workforce, and by design handicaps those students when they attempt to secure desirable employment.

I believe a strong industrial arts/vocational technical program would serve to lessen high school dropout as well. We all have personally known high school students who struggle with advanced math, sciences, or communications classes, yet seemed to excel at "hands-on" courses. This demographic often thrives on challenges in mechanical, computer, or creative arts fields, yet often fail at the "three R's." Granted, those core competencies are critical to success in life, but the discouragement and struggles that come with learning more advanced levels often unfortunately encourages this group of students to drop out. While not a complete solution, it would stand to reason that offering classes that engage these students and teach tangible skills that they can immediately utilize upon graduation may motivate them to continue and complete their high school education.

I appreciate your consideration of my perspective, and ask your support of HB356.

Sincerely,



Thomas Spika, CEO, Spika Mfg Inc.