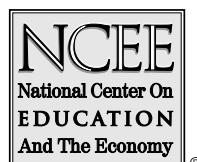


Implementation of the Workforce Investment Act: Practices in Workforce Development

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*Summary Remarks of Tim Barnicle, Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness,
House Committee on Education and the Workforce*



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During the Hearing on
"Implementation of the Workforce Investment Act:
Practices in Workforce Development"
Thursday, September 12, 2002***

Thanks Mr. Chairman and Congressman Tierney for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), Workforce Development Program and my colleagues in directing this work -- Mary Gardner Clagett and Ray Uhalde. Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would like to briefly summarize my written statement.

Mr. Chairman, under your leadership, the Committee did yoman work in producing WIA in 1998. Since then, its importance has been demonstrated time and time again.

Yesterday, we commemorated the cowardly attacks of one year ago and the tragic loss of innocent life. As I thought about it, I could not help recalling the extraordinary effort of the WIA community in New York City and State to provide jobs, counseling, training and support to those whose economic lives had been attacked by the terrorists, as well. One person who played a central role in this response was the WIB staff person - Dorothy Lehman - who despite losing her brother in the WTC provided energy and direction to this extraordinary effort. In my mind, her efforts and those of many WIA colleagues, in New York, are truly heroic responses to the economic casualties of 9/11.

And of course, across the country the economy slid from the doldrums to recession back to the doldrums. And our WIA system has responded -- particularly to the needs of the unprecedented 2.3 million men and women who lost their livelihood in the last two years. Thank God the WIA system was at a point in its development

where it was able to respond -- 100's of thousands of workers, their families and their communities all across America are better off as a result.

Of course, we did not have the resources necessary to respond to the needs of the thousands of young adults who bore the largest share of the burden of these economic conditions. And this is an area that Congress needs to give serious consideration. Young adults need to work too and WIA needs to be financially and professionally better equipped to respond.

Clearly, the volatility of the economy, the intensity of global competition, the severe skills gaps, the pace of technological change -- all of which led to the consensus in Congress regarding the need for WIA -- have become more important to the nation's economic policy. Tom Friedman in his best selling book "Lexus and the Olive Tree" suggest that this law and system could well be the most important domestic policy creation of the 90s.

But, Mr. Chairman, two or three years ago, as WIA implementation began, how effective it might be was a matter of grave concern. After all this was a dramatic change, that received little or no public attention. The challenge was great indeed. We all asked ourselves, for example;

- Would states and localities work out the division of responsibility amicably or would the flexibility in the law produce a giant jurisdictional food fight?**
- Would "mandated partners" go to the trenches to fight the partnership and collaboration clearly called for, but vaguely enforceable, under the law? (After all, collaboration is often described as an "unnatural act among consenting adults".)**
- Would PICs -- largely focused on an advisory role related to budgeting a few federal dollars - evolve to play the key economic development/human resource development regional leadership role Congress envisioned?**

To these and many other questions the answers have begun to emerge, slowly but clearly.

Yes we can do it and we have!

"Always and everywhere?" By no means!

But in most places across the country -- state after state, city after city, common sense, hard work, and dedication to serving our communities needs are winning and overcoming these very real challenges. "Are we ready to declare victory and begin to relax?" No way!

But we can honestly see real progress and momentum on a very tough assignment by many thousands of men and women from business and labor and positions of community leadership.

We have visited One-Stops all over the country. We know what's happening, in some detail, in the cities, counties and states that are part of two consortia we coordinate.

And, Mr. Chairman, I can assure you as have GAO and others that the momentum is with us. Day by day, partnerships by partnerships, obstacle by obstacle, we are making solid progress in creating the "civic infrastructure" envisioned in the act.

I have included in my written testimony some examples of successful and promising practices and ask permission to submit a more detailed list to the Committee in the next few days for inclusion in the hearing record.

Mr. Chairman, none of this is to suggest that we do not have a lot of work to do and a long way to go. We do. But it is well begun.

Many challenges remain, most for the states and localities and their Workforce Boards and One-Stops. But some can be helped immeasurably from state capitals, Congress and the Executive Branch.

A few examples of important challenges are these:

- **Funding** -- For WIA to meet the Committees expectations, those of business and other community leaders we are engaging, and our citizens, we have to have the wherewithal to produce high quality results.
- **System Integration** -- The challenge to integrate is very tough. The One-Stop system needs friends in high places to push at the highest levels to get this done and to make it less time and energy consuming.
- **Business Leadership** -- This is key to WIA success. Active Labor engagement is also crucial in many sections of the country and sectors of the economy. The private sector has voted with its feet for WIA, over 15,000 businessmen and businesswomen all over the country serving on Workforce Boards. Getting them there is a challenge, keeping them there may be even harder. And getting these leaders to engage the WIA System for their own major companies will be the next real measure of our progress.
- **Training** -- We do not have to do it, but we sure better be able to connect people to it and find ways to fund it where appropriate. If we are not able to improve significantly people's career prospects and standard of living, we will not have much to brag about.
- **Youth** -- "Leave No Child Behind" is a basic American value. WIA can play, must play a key role as envisioned in the Act. If the magnitude of our response is not a lot greater than it has been in this economic downturn, WIA will not come close to meeting my expectations. And Americans - all Americans - will pay a staggering price economically and socially.

Mr. Chairman, my written statement goes into all of these items in more detail and I ask for its inclusion in the hearing record.

Again, thanks for the leadership and the invitation. I hope we can be of help to the Committee as we build on the progress to date.