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Assembly Committee on Education

Testimony – AB391

Provided by

Chuck Alvey, CEO and President – Economic Development  
Authority of Western Nevada

Good afternoon. I am Chuck Alvey, CEO and President of EDAWN (The Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada). EDAWN is a private, non-profit corporation founded by community leaders in 1983. Over the years, the EDAWN professional team and member volunteers have worked with primary industry entities to help them relocate, expand, retain or start and grow their businesses. We represent over \_\_\_\_ member companies in Northern Nevada.

I am here on their behalf to testify in support of funding the Workforce Development Challenge Grant. We feel that there will be significant impact by providing Truckee Meadows Community College and the other community colleges the ability to increase their efforts in workforce development and training.

One of the primary considerations of each business we serve is the availability of a skilled workforce. The economic future of the State depends in large measure on the strength of our workforce. Future labor market projections emphasize the need for significant changes in the agility and responsiveness of our workforce investment system and the creation of viable partnerships between education, government and the private sector that recognize the symbiotic relationship between economic development and workforce development systems.

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ASSEMBLY EDUCATION

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SUBMITTED BY: CHUCK ALVEY

Historically, economic development has largely been focused on infrastructure issues. Today, the provision of a quality system to produce an adequate supply of skilled workers is a necessary component of economic development. Companies making site location or expansion decisions want to know about the existing pool of potential workers and the responsiveness of higher education training providers. The workforce development system needs not only to provide assistance for the unemployed and underemployed, it needs to connect the world of education, training, and work for all workers and employers. The National Governors Association in 2002 said we must build a workforce enterprise that:

- improves the productivity and competitiveness of all workers and employers;
- builds the skills needed for quality jobs;
- provides lifelong learning opportunities;
- supports workers in managing their careers; and
- is supported by public and private investment.”

In December 2001, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development David Sampson clearly and concisely articulated what is at stake.

“Unless the skills gap within the United States is closed and employers can find the workers they need, and job seekers have the skills to pursue the opportunities that will exist, then America’s economy will remain extremely vulnerable...The stakes are high: freedom of trade and commerce; personal and political liberty; and national and individual security.”

To stay competitive, Nevada must continually upgrade its education and training infrastructure to meet the changing needs of employers and workers. The Workforce Development Challenge Grant proposes a statewide pilot program that takes an important step

in development of such a workforce enterprise through the community college system. Nationwide, community colleges have emerged as the primary state resources delivering workforce training and assistance. Locally, in northern Nevada we have worked closely with and have developed a wonderful relationship with Truckee Meadows Community College. The grant program proposed would enable us to work together on the training needs of companies considering relocation and on the upgrading of skills required for incumbent workers if companies are to remain competitive. We see as advantages of the proposed program the fact that the program:

- a. engages business and industry as full partners in system design and execution as the employer is the system's primary customer;
- b. designs education and training programs customized to meet the diverse needs of employers and employees/students focusing on accessibility, responsiveness, modular curriculum, contextual learning, and expanded e-learning opportunities;
- c. increases assistance to small and medium sized businesses, with a focus on streamlining workforce development program delivery and providing human resource services; and
- d. provides flexible funding to enable education and workforce development efforts to be agile and responsive to market demands.

In a recent article, community colleges were referred to as the workforce development engines of communities and the statement was made that to not fund this capacity was tantamount to "eating your seed corn." We believe that the Workforce Development Challenge Grant Program pilots the ability of Nevada's community colleges to be an even more integral part of a workforce development system that will assist in advancing economic

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development and diversification as well as increasing the productivity and competitiveness of our businesses.

Thank you for your time and attention.