

TRANSMITTAL # 1

MEMORANDUM

May 4, 2006

TO: Workforce Development Council

FROM: Roger B. Madsen, Director

SUBJECT: Economic Symposium – Feedback from Regional Breakouts

ACTION REQUESTED: Information only.

BACKGROUND:

Economic Symposium – Feedback from Regional Breakouts

At the Idaho Economic Symposium 2006 on January 31 regional economists provided data on each region's local economy and workforce to facilitate discussion on direction and strategies that can be pursued to strengthen their local economy. The major topics and points of discussion were also documented by regional economists and facilitators. A summary of the feedback and discussion from these regional breakouts is attached.

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Attachment

REGIONAL BREAKOUT SUMMARY – IDAHO ECONOMIC SYMPOSIUM 2006

REGION 1 – Northern Idaho

- Participants called for schools, businesses and government to come together to find solutions to the problem of educating today's students for tomorrow's jobs and getting direct advice from business on curriculum decisions.
- They called for high schools to add courses in problem solving, languages and personal finance, agreeing that the technology rich culture of young people today negates any need for additional computer courses.
- Developing a speaker's bureau of both business people and educators would provide a platform from which students could be made aware of career opportunities and the education required to achieve them.
- Internships from businesses would help achieve the same goal.

REGION 2 – North Central Idaho

- Participants suggested Idaho Commerce and Labor use its upcoming rural forums to facilitate discussions about the importance of linking education to business needs.
- They called for regionwide collaboration on training and education for health care services, which are comparatively limited in the region that is becoming a Mecca for retirees.
- Inadequate communications and transportation infrastructure was cited as at least one explanation for the region being the least economically active in the state.
- With comparatively sparse population, the region may need subsidies from businesses for community college training in needed skills. The schools currently have the resources to provide the training, but to be financially viable the training must be provided to relatively large class sizes when there are not that many people ready or willing to take the courses.
- Raising awareness of the possibilities of collaboration between the University of Idaho and Washington State University and reducing the competitiveness could create a high-tech corridor between the two schools.
- Retraining programs are needed to maximize the value of the region's labor force that has a higher percentage of post-secondary degrees than any other region in the state.

REGION 3 – Southwestern Idaho

- Participants proposed creation of an organization dedicated to keeping open the lines of communication between businesses and educators so employers know the capabilities of their schools while the schools know the needs of their businesses.
- Schools, primarily junior colleges, must respond more quickly to the evolving labor and training needs of businesses, especially small business that can starve to death without quick access to skilled workers needed to expand.
- Charters are becoming effective in educating students who can meet the demands of the new economy because they have more flexibility to adapt to changing cultural and business circumstances.

- Fees for the community college components of the state's universities and colleges are up to three times higher than the rate affordable by potential students needing those courses.
- The region participants called for full restoration of financial support for the school to work program.

REGION 4 – South Central Idaho

- Communication between employers and educators on the labor force demands of Idaho's evolving economic future was a dominant topic during the regional sessions that closed out the Idaho Economic Symposium 2006.
- "Education is the rigor, and business is the reality," Blaine County School District Superintendent Jim Lewis said.
- Concerned that retraining of workers must be put on a par with basic kindergarten through high school education, Lewis and other symposium participants from Region 4 in south central Idaho committed to a fall summit between education and business leaders to define common goals and what is needed to achieve them.
- They want to inject "the human thing" into collaboration between teachers and employers, and they expressed some concern that rigid adherence to testing goals will stifle the kind of innovation that enables education to adapt to the changing labor needs of their region.

REGION 5 – Southeastern Idaho

- Participants called for expanded access to education and skill transfer training in rural communities, especially through distance learning programs.
- The lack of broadband access in many areas is inhibiting educational opportunities and could possibly be resolved if public facilities which have broadband in those areas can somehow extend the service to the rest of the communities.
- While mathematics and science education is important and crucial to college attendance, the way those subjects are taught must be changed so that grade school students do not zone out on the subjects and want to pursue them into high school.
- Barriers such as high fees and counsel authorization for student participation in the digital academy must be removed.
- Charter schools are improving and having an impact.
- The belief of parents and other adults that what was good for them in school is good enough for their children is no longer acceptable and must be changed to reflect thinking beyond their experience and planning beyond their future.

REGION 6 – Eastern Idaho

- Participants called for more retraining opportunities to help workers caught in the transition of responsibilities at the Idaho National Laboratory and more direct training of students in the technical areas critical to the continued success of the laboratory and its spin-offs.
- Development of strategies, including those making higher education more affordable, that will convince rural students to go on to college and persuade those

who do to stay in Idaho or return to Idaho after graduation to end what the region calls the lose of its labor force future.

- Creation of mathematics, science and technology camps at facilities like the Idaho National Laboratory, Micron Technology or Hewlett-Packard, to name just three locales, that would make students aware of the fascinating aspects of careers in those sectors and the education needed to achieve them.
- Eastern Idaho Technical College is chronically underfunded for worker retraining.
- There is a need to integrate business, education and government to develop new innovative strategies for retraining the current training pools and groom future pools.
- Engage business, education and government collectively to solve current and future labor shortages.