

Rep. Jerry Knowles  
Remarks for Budget Hearing  
Thursday, Feb. 20

GOOD MORNING.

THANK YOU CHAIRMAN ADOLPH AND CHAIRMAN MAKOSEC, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE.

"JOBS, JOBS, JOBS..." IF I'VE HEARD IT ONCE, I'VE HEARD IT A THOUSAND TIMES.

DOING WHAT WE CAN TO GET PEOPLE BACK TO WORK, AND LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO CREATE THE JOBS IT NEEDS TO FACILITATE THOSE WORKERS, HAS BEEN A MISSION AT THE STATE LEVEL SINCE I'VE BEEN IN OFFICE.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE WE'RE CLOSELY EXAMINING ECONOMIC REPORTS FROM MONTH TO MONTH TO ANXIOUSLY TRACK PROGRESS, AND AT THE STATE LEVEL, WE ARE JUST HOLDING THE UNEMPLOYMENT LINE AT 7 PERCENT.

I FEEL AS THOUGH WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY IN PENNSYLVANIA TO HELP GET MORE TRAINED AND HIGHLY-SKILLED TRADESMEN AND TECHNICIANS DISBURSED AMONG OUR STATE'S SKILLED LABOR WORKFORCE.

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1905, THE COMMONWEALTH HAS OWNED THE THADDEUS STEVENS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY, WHICH OCCUPIES 32.5 ACRES IN LANCASTER. IT IS OUR ONLY STATE-OWNED, TWO-YEAR COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY. I'M A GRADUATE OF THADDEUS STEVENS.

IT ENROLLS STUDENTS FROM ALL ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA - STUDENTS REPRESENTING 57 OF OUR 67 COUNTIES. FIFTY-SIX PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS ARE THE FIRST GENERATION IN THEIR FAMILIES TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION.

THE THADDEUS STEVENS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY RECEIVED MORE THAN 3,400 APPLICANTS LAST FALL. THE INSTITUTION COULD ONLY TAKE 550 OF THOSE APPLICANTS. SOME OF THE PROGRAMS THAT CURRENTLY EXIST AT STEVENS - MACHINE TECHNOLOGY, METAL FABRICATION, ELECTRICAL TECHNOLOGY, AND HVAC AND REFRIGERATION - WOULD GREATLY BENEFIT FROM EXPANSION.

NOWADAYS, THERE ARE MANY OPTIONS FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO SEEK OUT ONCE THEY'VE GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL. WE'RE FINDING MORE AND MORE THAT FOR SOME OF OUR KIDS, GOING TO A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE PROGRAM ISN'T THE RIGHT FIT. IT'S LIKE FITTING A SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE, IN SOME CASES.

WE SEE THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES REPEATEDLY. WHETHER A STUDENT GETS ACCEPTED, GOES TO COLLEGE AND DECIDES IT ISN'T FOR THEM, OR WHETHER HE OR SHE STAYS THE COURSE FOR FOUR YEARS AND THEN IS LEFT WITH A DEGREE THAT LEADS TO NO GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT - THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL THAT COLLEGE ISN'T FOR EVERYONE.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT? THAT'S OK! BECAUSE WE'RE HEARING MORE AND MORE FROM BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, THAT THEY NEED MORE SKILLED WORKERS TO HIRE.

THAT'S WHERE INSTITUTIONS LIKE THADDEUS STEVENS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY BECOME THE ANSWER. THE DEMAND IS THERE. BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THE INSTITUTION CAN ONLY ACCEPT ONE IN EVERY FIVE APPLICANTS, AT ITS CURRENT FUNDING LEVEL.

GRADUATES HAVE A 96 PERCENT PLACEMENT RATE UPON GRADUATION. THE BEST PART FOR THE STATE - 95 PERCENT OF THE GRADUATES ARE THEN EMPLOYED IN PENNSYLVANIA.

THE GROWTH IS APPARENT. BUT AS THE INSTITUTION EXPLAINS IT, TSCT HAS A BOTTLENECK. THE GREAT DEMAND OF APPLICANTS IS THERE ON ONE END, AND THE GREAT DEMAND FROM EMPLOYERS IS ALSO THERE ON THE OTHER END OF THE EQUATION.

I'M HERE BEFORE YOU TODAY, BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT BY PROVIDING MORE FUNDING TO TSCT, WE ARE INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE WORKFORCE. THE INSTITUTION WOULD LIKE TO CREATE ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS IN WATER AND WASTE MANAGEMENT, INDUSTRIAL MAINTENANCE, DIESEL MECHANICS, WELDING, SMART CAM, COMPUTER ENGINEERING, AND RESIDENTIAL REMODELING.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT INCREASING FUNDING TO THIS INSTITUTION WOULD GO TOWARD CHANGING LIVES AND HELPING STUDENTS TO BECOME TECHNICALLY-SKILLED PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS. SOME INSTITUTIONS IN THIS STATE REQUEST MORE FUNDING FOR REASONS THAT FALL UNDER THE GLITZ AND GLAMOUR CATEGORY, BUT THAT IS NOT THE CASE HERE.

IN A RECENT NEWS STORY, WILLIAM GRISCOM, PRESIDENT OF THADDEUS STEVENS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY EXPLAINED THAT "ONE YEAR, 30 PENNSYLVANIA COMPANIES COMPETED AGAINST EACH OTHER TO HIRE THE SCHOOL'S 13 MACHINE MAJORS." THE STORIES WE'VE HEARD FROM RECENT COLLEGE GRADS OVER THE LAST FIVE TO 10 YEARS HAVE BEEN THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE.

TIMES ARE CHANGING. AND WE MUST DO ALL WE CAN WHEN IT COMES TO ALLOCATING FUNDING AT THE STATE LEVEL. I AM ASKING ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE THE POWER TO INCLUDE MORE STATE FUNDING FOR THIS INSTITUTION TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER DOING SO.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK BEFORE THE COMMITTEE.

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I commend the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for hosting a hearing to further investigate ways to increase recruitment and retention of our Volunteer Emergency Services personnel. While I regretfully am not able to present my testimony before the Committee in person today, I appreciate the opportunity to submit my comments for the record.

Pennsylvania's Volunteers Services have seen a drastic decrease in their ranks with a more than 10% decrease during the past decade. This is especially unsettling in the rural regions of the state, like the district I represent. We rely solely on Volunteer Emergency Responders to keep our communities safe, and if we continue to see dwindling numbers of Volunteer Emergency Services these Volunteer Companies may eventually no longer be in existence. In response to these alarming statistics, I recently introduced two pieces of Legislation dealing with Emergency Services.

Last fall, I sponsored House Bill 1632 which aims to strengthen the ranks of Volunteer Emergency Service Personnel in Pennsylvania. It would authorize tax credits, not to exceed \$10,000 to a single taxpayer in any fiscal year, for private sector employers that allow their employees to leave work to respond to an emergency or attend training while still receiving compensation. The Commonwealth and political subdivisions would be authorized to grant leave to an employee who leaves work to respond to an emergency call without any adverse treatment from an employer.

House Bill 1632, which passed the House unanimously, would also maintain current provisions that protect an employee-volunteer who responds to a call prior to showing up for work and extends those provisions to include when an employee is authorized to leave work to respond to an emergency call. The bill is currently awaiting consideration in the Senate.

I also introduced House Bill 2060 to help our Fire and EMA Departments. The Bill would amend Chapter 78 of Title 35 – The Fire and EMS Grant Program. Under current law, if two or more fire companies merge, the newly formed entity is authorized to continue to receive each individual fire company's grant in the aggregate for up to five years after the merger. My bill would do away with the five year provision so that fire companies can continue to receive the aggregate in perpetuity.

In example, under current law, if three fire companies merge, and each was receiving \$12,000 from the grant program, the new entity would be entitled to receive the aggregate of \$36,000 for five years. At the end of the five years, the newly formed fire company would receive only \$12,000. With my legislation, they would continue to be eligible to receive \$36,000 into perpetuity. I believe that we must find ways to encourage the cost-saving measure of consolidating fire companies, and this piece of legislation would be one way to do just that.

Although I am not a member of this Committee, as a former active Volunteer Fire Fighter I recognize the important work your Committee does to maintain the overall safety of all Pennsylvanian and I commend you for working on this issue.