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Hearing entitled "Title II: 21st Century Workforce"

Summary

1. There is a need that exists between those who are recognized as the underrepresented and disadvantaged, and those entities that make up the energy and manufacturing industries. This 21st Century Workforce bill provides the jumpstart to establishing the conduit between the two groups.
2. With awareness, educational access and willingness, the workforce development needs of the energy and manufacturing industries can be met by those from the underrepresented and disadvantaged populations.
3. Success can come in unexpected and unplanned manners. That success is hinged upon thinking critically and having specific, attainable goals to provide the navigation to that success.
4. My success in energy has allowed me to take my blueprint to thousands spanning from elementary to high school. It has provided the framework for my own children to map out careers in the energy industry, establishing a generational bridge between the industry and future workforce.

A sense of hopelessness is the most pervasive feeling that permeates disadvantaged, underrepresented communities. Each day feels like an eternity in a dark abyss, with no route of escape. All one generally has to hold on to are fantasies and dreams. Rarely do we see tangible, realistic examples of people who found a reproducible, sustainable pathway out of these environments and into lifestyles that seem made only for movies or televisions. I am not talking about ultra-rich, excessive lifestyles - but simply where the most stressful decision within the household is choosing between public or private school for our children. Instead, the decisions are often between payment of the electric or gas bill.

There are two main groups that have needs: the energy and manufacturing industries and disadvantaged populations. The two industries have what the disadvantaged populations need and the disadvantaged populations can meet the needs of the two industries. This is a classic case of “win-win.” What is missing is the bridge between them. For those of us who represent the disadvantaged group, the gap consists of awareness and educational access. For those of us who represent these two industries, the gap consists of awareness and willingness to help.

As a person who represented the disadvantaged as a youth, I was unaware that careers in energy and manufacturing existed. There was no one who lived in my neighborhood or who came to my schools to expose me to the opportunities that were offered by the energy and manufacturing industries. Though I knew what energy was from a physics standpoint, I would not have been able to name the types of jobs I could attain upon graduation from high school. The only job I can remember correlating with manufacturing was work within an auto assembly line. My awareness of the vastness of other variations of energy and manufacturing would have altered every decision and process that I executed. I would have known that I had something to look forward to and live for. I would have known that there was a way out. I would have found hope.

My newfound hope for these careers would have helped me establish specific goals. Along with those established goals would have come a roadmap on how to attain them and the educational requirements that I would have needed to pursue those careers. The question would have become, as it is for those in this same situation today: where do I get the education and how?

Educational access encompasses both of those questions. There exists those who want the education, but lack the resources to see that education come to fruition. If one cannot obtain an adequate food supply, proper shelter and clothing, education will not be accessible. If one cannot obtain the financial resources to pay for the education, education will not be accessible. The awareness and educational access is what this bill can impact and bridge for those underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

The energy and manufacturing industries have had a “golden era” of highly skilled, seasoned and loyal workers that have made up the workforce for the last thirty years. Most are now retiring and exiting the workforce or coming back as contractors at a high cost to the companies. There exists and has been a wellspring of talent that has the ability to fill these occupations, but they lack the knowledge and skills. The scope of the industry has been narrowed to the same colleges and universities that are used by other industries that have need for certain skills, but offer the perception of better quality of life and workplaces. They eventually win most of the talent and leave the energy and manufacturing industries to fight over a shrunken pool.

With few representatives of the disadvantaged having a “seat at the table” and their lack of representation in these industries, they are marginalized and overlooked.

A willingness by energy and manufacturing industries to recognize these underrepresented and disadvantaged groups as having the talent and abilities to meet their workforce needs has to exist. If this willingness exists and receives “buy-in” throughout the organization amongst the key decision makers, then resources will be allocated to harness that talent through outreach and education. An open sharing

of the knowledge and skills required for employment within the member companies will exist between themselves, educational institutions and workforce development entities. An ecosystem will be established where the investment into the talent will produce a workforce that is tailor-made for meeting the industries' needs, while providing reproducible, sustainable pathways out of the low- or non-wage, depressed communities that many of the disadvantaged originate from or reside in. This bill provides an incentive for that investment by the industries and those disadvantaged groups by showing that our governmental leaders recognize this self-sustaining model. It shows that our government is willing to provide the "starting current" to kick off this relationship, which has latent impacts to position the U.S. as the most competitive and talented nation in energy and manufacturing.

I embody every aspect of this argument. It began with my awareness. Unfortunately, mine came after a series of youthful misjudgments and missteps. I was unaware of the necessity in having specific goals laid out. Those goals would have incentivized my behavioral decision-making. I was raised in an environment that was rooted in love by my mother, who bore me as a teen. She had severely limited SNAP resources and raised me and my younger sisters in the Englewood neighborhood of the south side of Chicago. My home was fatherless and gangs surrounded me on every block. The streets were littered with gunshots, homicides and robberies. The murder totals were nearly twice as high as they are today. Downtown Chicago seemed like a distant city that I would never have an opportunity to live in or enjoy.

I became a teenage husband and father at the age of seventeen. I had a friend, who also became a teenage father and husband, join the U.S. Navy. He easily convinced me that I should join, as well. It was in the U.S. Navy that I became aware of the opportunities that existed, not only outside of Chicago, but in the energy industry. I was trained over a twenty-month period as a Nuclear Operator and Engineering Laboratory Technician, serving aboard two nuclear-powered submarines. This newly acquired skillset provided me the qualifications I needed to pursue a career in the commercial nuclear energy industry upon completion of my enlistment.

After my six year enlistment, I worked as a Nuclear Chemistry Technician, Nuclear Chemistry Trainer, and Senior Reactor Operator Certified Trainer.

I have since had two additional children. My oldest is attending Howard University, a Historically Black University, majoring in Nuclear Engineering on a full academic scholarship. My second oldest graduates in 2016 and is preparing to obtain at least a two-year degree so he can begin his career in the nuclear energy industry as a Nuclear Operator. He will likely obtain several academic scholarship offerings, but he has his goals clearly set as his contingency and it inspires his actions and continued academic excellence. My youngest son is only a toddler, but will have three examples of success laid out before him and will only know these lifestyles as his norm.

I decided shortly after being hired in the commercial industry that it was my responsibility to be the person that I wished had been in my neighborhood or school. I created a critical thinking curriculum with another minority U.S Navy nuclear operations veteran whose roots were in Chicago, as well. We facilitated this Legacy Character Development and Logic curriculum, bringing awareness and education to more than four thousand Chicagoland, Arizona and Pennsylvania youth between 4th through 12th grades. The philosophy is simply: if we could make it, so could you; and here is how.

With the support of the Department of Energy and entities such as the Center for Energy and Workforce Development, the American Association of Blacks in Energy, Hispanics in Energy, Estrella Mountain Community College, Linn State, Joliet Junior College, Luzerne Community College, etc., we can ensure that we establish a pipeline of highly skilled, well-grounded, knowledgeable leaders to the energy and manufacturing workforce. This collaboration will not only meet the needs of today, but will help bring recognition to the United States as the world leader in energy and manufacturing and job creation. I fully support the establishment and passing of this innovative "Title II: 21st Century Workforce" bill. I am prepared to continue to assist in the creation of New Legacies of Success.