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Written Statement

of

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Before the

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Agriculture

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Good afternoon, Chairman McIntyre, Ranking Member Conaway, and members of the Subcommittee on Rural Development, Biotechnology, Specialty Crops, and Foreign Agriculture. It is an honor and privilege to testify before your Subcommittee today. My name is Randy Smith, and I am President of the Rural Community College Alliance, an affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges.

The American Association of Community Colleges serves as the national voice for the country's nearly 1,200 community colleges. Community colleges enroll more than 11.6 million students annually. Forty-four percent of all U.S. undergraduates attend community colleges. The colleges enroll a higher percentage of minority students than any other sector of higher education. 52% of Hispanic, 43% of Black, 45% of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 52% of the country's Native American undergraduates are attending community colleges, where the average student age is 29.

More than half of the nation's two-year colleges are rural-serving, with an estimated combined enrollment of 3.2 million students annually. The Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) represents more than 150 rural-serving colleges in 34 states.

Rural community colleges, like their suburban and urban counterparts, rely on state and local funding to maintain low tuition and open-door access for individuals seeking postsecondary education and workforce training. The average annual tuition and fees for a full-time student at public community colleges is about \$2,400, which is considerably less than that of 4-year public colleges or private universities. The majority (60%) of students who enroll at community colleges, however, are part-time students. Most of these students are employed at least part-time and many juggle work and family responsibilities while attending college.

America's rural community and tribal colleges offer an affordable, quality education that assists students in meeting their immediate and long-term educational and career goals. Their comprehensive missions, coupled with open admissions, provide a wide variety of opportunities for both students and businesses to access services and educational programs designed to help secure their future success. In addition to direct academic programs, community colleges play an important role in economic development, especially in rural areas.

Community colleges share two primary missions. First, they are dedicated to serving their students through excellent teaching and learning. Community colleges excel in delivering instruction and technical training. Second, community colleges exist to help their communities with economic development. They serve as the local catalyst for job training and development. Community colleges have the ability to respond quickly to the needs of the communities they serve. When a new or existing business needs a trained workforce, they often turn to their local two-year college for assistance. Rural community colleges truly create opportunities in place for their students, for their communities, and for local and regional business and industry.

Rural community colleges help their communities with economic development by:

- Providing expert faculty to educate, train or re-train workers.
- Providing technology assistance and training to new and established businesses to help them reduce costs and improve productivity.
- Partnering with city and county authorities to help recruit new industries.
- Teaching students on the latest high-tech equipment used by industry and offering flexible schedules and curricula beneficial to employers.
- Offering both short-term and long-term training for multiple shifts and on the job site, if needed.
- Providing temporary space for new companies interested in moving to the community, while facilities are under construction.
- Providing space for start-up businesses, i.e., business incubators.
- Providing online training opportunities for employees seeking to upgrade their skills.
- Providing entrepreneurship certificates and degrees.
- Providing specialized courses in a modular format designed to meet the specific needs of a particular industry.
- Creating training programs to upgrade technical skills for potential employees required by a specific industry.
- Administering State and regional incentive programs to maximize economic development opportunities for new and existing business and industry.

Community colleges are on the frontline of workforce development. Some specific examples of rural-serving community colleges making an impact on the economic development of their communities are listed below.

### **Alternative, Renewable, and Traditional Energy**

Community colleges have an important role in helping people qualify for “green jobs.” Rural America continues to provide much of the energy for the rest of the nation, whether it is petroleum, coal, or one of the newer energy sources. As the demand for alternative and renewable energy increases, the need for more skilled workers grows. Community colleges produce highly qualified energy technicians that help with the fabrication, installation, and maintenance of turbines, solar panels, and other key elements needed for wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass energy sources.

A few examples of the many community colleges providing training for alternative and renewable energy technicians include Columbia Gorge Community College (OR), Iowa Lakes Community College (IA), Mesalands Community College (NM), and Lane Community College (OR).

Community colleges such as Bismarck State College (ND) work closely with industry to train individuals in the field of electrical transmission systems technology. With funding from the National Science Foundation’s Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program, Bismarck State College and its industry partners created an associate degree program for electrical transmission system operators.

The Kentucky Coal Academy (KCA), comprised of four community and technical colleges located in the eastern and western Kentucky coalfields, provides career and technical education and training for students interested in mining careers. The colleges -- Big Sandy Community and Technical College, Hazard Community and Technical College, Madisonville Community College, and Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College -- through the Kentucky Coal Academy have trained more than 25,000 students and incumbent workers in the mining profession since KCA’s creation in 2005. These jobs accounted for \$1,034,834,951 in wages in the state of Kentucky in 2006. The \$4.97 billion in receipts from coal produced and processed in Kentucky in 2006 generated additional economic activity totaling \$588 billion and accounted for 55,301 jobs in 2006.

Somerset Community College in rural Kentucky has been successful in establishing a lineman training program to prepare new employees for the energy industry. The college partnered with the local rural electric cooperative, the area economic development district, and city and county officials to create this needed program. To date, 42 linemen have graduated from the program, supplying a much needed technical worker to the local industry. Through extensive partnerships the college has been the catalyst for establishing an important workforce training program to provide technical workers who will earn a high wage and contribute to the local economic base.

### **Agriculture**

Community colleges in rural America have a longstanding role in agriculture, educating future farmers and providing technical training for those interested in learning the latest farming technologies. Several colleges have launched new viticulture programs, including Northeast Iowa Community College (IA), Shawnee Community College (IL), and Redlands Community College (OK). Faculty members from these community colleges have a program, the Viticulture and Enology Science and Technology Alliance (VESTA), which utilizes Missouri State University's expertise in grape research and education. Using distance education as well as classroom instruction and hands-on experience in the vineyards, VESTA's program provides students and employees in the wine industry with the latest industry-validated programs.

### **Biotechnology**

In addition to partnering with industry, community colleges often work with consortia of colleges and universities to deliver high-tech programs to meet the needs of their students and communities. For example, the Robeson Regional Biotech Education Consortium (RRBEC) promotes agricultural biotechnology in southeastern North Carolina. Robeson Community College in Lumberton, NC, has an articulation agreement with the University of North Carolina to provide biotechnology courses and works with local public schools and industry partners to provide educational programs to spur economic growth for the region.

Southeastern Community College in North Carolina has the distinction of being the first agricultural biotechnology associate degree program in the United States. SCC's

program concentrates on the propagation of plants using tissue culture techniques (micro-propagation). This allows a technician to produce large quantities of plants from a very small amount of mother stock resulting in plants that are pest and disease free.

## **Rural Health**

Access to good health care is essential for attracting and retaining businesses and prospective workers to a community. Community colleges educate more than half (59%) of the new nurses and the majority of other new health-care workers nationally. For rural communities, educating and retaining skilled nurses, dental hygienists, lab technicians, respiratory therapists, radiology technicians, paramedics, and other health care providers is particularly challenging. The cost of educating and training individuals in these disciplines is high. The cost of specialized equipment, laboratories and clinical facilities, and expert faculty members is daunting. Retention of skilled health care personnel is also challenging, especially given the higher salaries offered in large urban medical centers.

Western Oklahoma State College has been successful in educating a higher number of nurses in a very rural area through the use of technology. Through the use of interactive television and on-line courses, Western has been able to open three additional sites where nurses are trained. These rural communities would have continued to have a shortage of nurses had it not been for the innovative use of technology in order to deliver curriculum to several satellite sites at one time. The use of technology has allowed Western to double its number of nursing program graduates in just five years.

Approximately six years ago, the faculty in the Health Occupations Department along with college administration at Indian Hills Community College in Iowa identified a need for a stronger relationship between the health care facilities and the education programs that were preparing future workers. An initial survey of future workforce needs resulted in the creation of the Rural Health Education Partnership (RHEP). This organization is focused on delivering easily accessible high-quality programming to meet the ongoing educational needs of the health care professionals and first responders in the ten county area served by the college. Currently the RHEP has 79 members. The membership includes critical access hospitals, long term care facilities, emergency medical services and fire departments.

Indian Hills Community College is located in rural southeast Iowa. Discussions with members of the RHEP revealed a critical need for health care workers coupled with the difficulty of attracting and keeping health care professionals in this rural area. It became clear that the best solution was to "grow our own". The college had a variety of education programs available. One of the challenges was getting place-bound individuals to education programs. This has become more critical as transportation costs have increased. In 2004 a decision was made to take the programs to the students via the Internet. By 2005 the Health Information Technology Program had been reinvented in an online format. In the next two years the remaining programs in the Health Informatics Cluster - Medical Transcription, Medical Insurance Coding and Health Unit Coordinator were redesigned for online learning. Enrollment in these programs more than doubled. As a result of the success of the Health Informatics programs, the Associate Degree Nursing Completion and Pharmacy Technology Programs are being revised for delivery using web based technology.

### **Emergency Services**

Nationally, close to 80% of law enforcement, fire fighters, and EMS professionals are educated at community colleges.

On February 18, 2008, a refinery in Big Spring, Texas, located along I-20 suffered a major explosion that received national news coverage. The explosion resulted in massive damage to both the refinery itself and the business operation. First responders from the community and the region were on-site within minutes. Miraculously, there were no deaths and a low number of injuries suffered. There was a huge fire to fight, hazardous conditions to monitor and a major interstate diversion to address. Emergency workers trained at rural community colleges were on hand to protect life and property.

The possible death of a major business was at stake and the resultant economic loss to a community weighed heavily on the area. The battle with the explosion was won. Next the battle to recover would begin. From the first responders to the recovery process, partnerships and the relationship between the refinery and Howard College in Big Spring, Texas, would factor into the success of the company to resume its business operations by summer and to celebrate its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary on February 18, 2009.

## **Partnerships / Entrepreneurial Pursuits**

Alabama Southern Community College, East Central Mississippi Community College, and Meridian Mississippi Community College secured a WIRED grant which is now in its final stages. The Mississippi Entrepreneurial Alliance (MEA) was formed to promote entrepreneurship in rural communities. This group of rural community colleges has been striving to identify and empower local champions to promote small businesses to start and grow in the rural areas of the two-state region.

Miles Community College in Montana is facilitating a community vision-building project with the area economic development council and the chamber of commerce. This program will determine what the citizens and business community want their area to look like in the year 2015. Through the use of focus groups which include high school students, senior citizens, church groups, area ranchers and business owners, specific goals will be identified and implemented. The college will host a series of meetings where community members can vote on the activities they want to see implemented.

North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) located in rural North Iowa has been instrumental in developing an economic development strategic plan for the region. NIACC has been nationally recognized for its John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (JPEC) and additional regional economic development efforts. NIACC underwrites the cost of supporting economic development through its Lean Training (companies reported over \$273 million in savings or increased profits as a result).

The NIACC JPEC has been recognized nationally for its exceptional efforts in business start up, growth and retention efforts. Through its programs, over 290 new businesses have been started and over 70% of those are still in business at the end of 2008, attesting to the value of the initial and ongoing services provided. The NIACC JPEC supports business from birth to rebirth, and was instrumental in an 80+ person company making a transition that enabled it to remain in the rural community and retain the jobs there. The NIACC JPEC has the mission of entrepreneurial education (traditional and nontraditional), business support, and partnerships to stimulate entrepreneurship. More than \$100 million in capital and loans have been generated through this project to help fund 12 businesses. This helps drive rural economic development in North Iowa through investing in new and expanding businesses.

## Summary

The examples listed in this document are just a few of the hundreds of economic development projects currently underway at America's rural community and tribal colleges. Rural community colleges are a major contributor to the economic development of the communities they serve.

Rural community colleges are providing innovative strategies all across the nation to spur and enhance economic development. Community colleges often serve as the catalyst for this important development, and they are a vital component to the economic prosperity of the regions they serve, as evidenced by the many examples listed above.

Please consider the importance of rural community colleges as a major contributor to the overall economic health of rural communities. Community colleges are all about training people for jobs and growing the local economy in collaboration with a wide variety of partners. Truly, rural community colleges create opportunities in place.

Chairman McIntyre, Ranking Member Conaway, members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Rural Development, Biotechnology, Specialty Crops, and Foreign Agriculture today.