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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
Chairman Doug Lamborn
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
on Tuesday, June 24th, 2014
1334 Longworth House Office Building

Oversight hearing on: "American Energy Jobs: Opportunities for Education."

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I'd like to thank our witnesses for being with us today. Today we are meeting to discuss "American Energy Jobs: Opportunities for Education." This hearing is another in our ongoing series examining the economic benefits of domestic energy development and how these benefits are strengthening and transforming our economy and creating new opportunities for Americans across the country.

Today, we will be hearing testimony from educational leaders about the growing educational opportunities for students interested in pursuing careers in the energy development industry.

Whereas historically energy production has been seen in limited geographic areas where there are established education and training programs in place, for the first time new technology coupled with new geological discoveries are allowing the United States to become a world leader in energy production from coast to coast.

This boom in energy development is generating a demand for skilled workers in a broad array of economic sectors, which poses both opportunities and challenges for policymakers, businesses and job seekers.

Simply looking at the employment needs in energy producing states shows that these jobs, in oil and gas specifically, are plentiful and skilled workers are in demand. In some western states where energy production has been occurring for decades, over half of the local economy is tied to energy production.

In Ohio the industry supports over 178,000 jobs, which is up from approximately 22,000 jobs in 2012, according to Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. This number includes over 12,000 jobs in leasing, exploration, drilling, production and pipeline construction jobs.

In Pennsylvania, according to the state Department of Labor & Industry, the numbers are equally staggering with approximately 245,000 indirect jobs in the natural gas industry, and over 18,000 in direct jobs.

Consequently, this new “energy age” has created an extraordinary need for local workers who have the skills and the training to fill the needs of these employers. As a result, educational institutions have risen to the challenge and created programs with the explicit goal of training our workforce to compete and succeed.

In areas where technical skills jobs were beginning to be displaced, engineering, land administration, welding, computer aided drafting, and electrical construction programs are making a resurgence.

Universities and community colleges are working hand in hand with the energy industry to tailor their programs to the needs of the industry. This not only includes creating and reinforcing the requisite educational programs, but offering students internship and apprentice opportunities in the industry and bringing in highly qualified industry professionals to teach students the skills needed to succeed in the industry.

From the standpoint of higher education, students in these areas of study enjoy an extremely high post-graduation placement rate, whereas other sectors tend to not offer the same results.

While some college graduates are forced to look for months and sometimes years to find a stable job that utilizes their degree, students in these programs are nearly guaranteed to find a high-paying job right out of college.

Also, these educational opportunities are not only limited to higher education. In Ohio, the Southern Local Board of Education is moving forward with enrollment for the Utica Shale Academy of Ohio – a charter school program that will train students in grades 9 through 12 for oil and natural gas jobs. For the first time this will allow students as young as 14 to be trained for a high-paying career in the oil and natural gas industry.

Nor are these opportunities only limited to direct oil and natural gas jobs. A strong energy workforce requires a strong downstream workforce to support it. This includes opportunities in the healthcare, hospitality, legal and financial industries – industries that also require robust educational training programs to provide a strong workforce.

Aside from American energy production, another issue that most assuredly enjoys bipartisan support in the House of Representatives is promoting STEM education – science, technology, engineering and math. These are skills that go hand-in-hand with the growing needs of today’s energy workforce.

The bottom line is that growth in our energy sector has created a host of new challenges and opportunities for Americans of all backgrounds. As policymakers, we must recognize the opportunity and put forth policies that will allow all Americans to benefit.

I’d like to thank our witnesses for being with us today and I look forward to hearing your testimony and how we can all work together to better prepare our students and Americans of all walks of life to succeed in this booming sector of our economy.