

Statement of Dr. Ernest Lara
Education & the Workforce Committee
March 20, 2014

“Reviving Our Economy: Supporting a 21st Century Workforce”

Chairman Kline, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee today. I am Ernie Lara, President of Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) and I appreciate the committee’s interest in the vital role community colleges’ play in our economy through workforce development.

Assessing Workforce Needs

Estrella Mountain Community College offers transfer-ready academic courses and job-specific occupational training to the western metropolitan Phoenix population. Our campuses are surrounded by six distinct municipalities. We make it our mission to determine the workforce needs of our communities, our region, and our state. We are committed to the type of systemic meaningful engagement and participation in our environment that provides insight into unmet needs, emerging industries, and new markets requiring trained workers. Our faculty and staff are involved with local, regional, and national advisory boards and associations to keep abreast of emerging issues and industries.

We are data driven. Routine environmental scans identify needs and potential workforce opportunities. As one of the ten Maricopa Community Colleges, we benefit from the Office of Workforce Development which leverages its expertise about the Greater Phoenix workforce by conducting research and collecting data regarding issues and trends.

Arizona Sun Corridor - Get Into Energy - Consortium

Estrella Mountain is working to fulfill the needs of the energy and mining sectors as the lead partner in the Arizona Sun Corridor - Get Into Energy – Consortium. The "Lineman to Engineer" program provides a labor pipeline for our energy partners with sequenced certificates that allow students to climb a career ladder directly into a higher paying job while gaining the necessary education. Credentials are earned at three different points in the program – basic training, industry fundamentals, and job specific – and are stackable. Supported by a Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training - or TAACCCT - grant, five colleges are working with each other, workforce entities, and our industry partners to create best practice training programs that prepare workers for the jobs of today and tomorrow in the energy industry.

Cyber Security/Information Assurance Program

Estrella Mountain is finalizing curriculum for certificates and a degree in Cyber Security/Information Assurance and is planning on offering these programs in fall of 2014. EMCC has begun the process to receive designation as a Center of Academic Excellence for 2-year colleges. The new Cyber Security/Information Assurance program is being built on the foundation of the college’s strong networking and information technologies programs. Students will earn credentials in these fast growing and high demand fields.

Maricopa Pathways Program

Transfer to a four-year institution is an important part of preparing the workforce for 21st Century careers. Estrella Mountain offers the Maricopa Pathways Program to provide students and their families time and cost savings options in high demand degree programs with our

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nearest four-year transfer partner, Arizona State University (ASU). Community college students who meet certain requirements are offered tuition incentives and guaranteed admission into their specified degree program upon transfer to ASU without loss of credit. Students will have earned an Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC) and an associate’s degree while at the community college. Students and their families save time and money.

The Importance of Pell Grants

Pell Grants are important to the students at Estrella Mountain. Pell Grant funds often go further at the community college because costs are generally less and students have lower incomes on average. If Pell or other Federal Aid programs were cut, over half of Estrella Mountain’s degree/certificate seeking students would not have access to the funding they need to attend college.

Maricopa Community Colleges

In closing I would like to point out that Estrella Mountain is one of the ten Maricopa Community Colleges. Together, the Maricopa Community Colleges are the largest provider of workforce training in the state. We generate an estimated \$3 billion in annual direct and indirect economic benefit within our County through the increase in skills learned at Maricopa, the increased output of businesses due to those, and through the higher earnings of our students. We know that two-thirds of all jobs available in Maricopa County will require the skills we teach, and we are training students in 95 percent of the highest demand occupations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.