



**Opening Statement of Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL), Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Hearing: “Preparing Students for Success in the Skills-Based Economy”
January 18, 2024**

(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you for joining me today to discuss the critical role of K-12 career and technical education (CTE) in preparing young students for success in the modern economy.

I’d like to start off by quoting a man whom I regard as an authority on technical education. A man with perhaps the longest CV to ever exist. A giant of American culture.

Of course, I am referring to the host of Discovery Channel’s hit TV show *Dirty Jobs*, the great Mike Rowe.

In 2017, Rowe came before the Committee and sat in the very seats our esteemed witnesses sit in today to discuss the value of career and technical education.

He testified, “When we took shop class out of high school, we sent an unmistakable message to an entire generation of students. We told them—no, we showed them—that a whole category of jobs was simply not desirable.”

Rowe was—and still is—spot on. A day in shop class is an invaluable teacher. The curriculum of life requires you to know how to do things such as change a tire. Whether a student is an aspiring doctor or electrician, showing up to high school and learning how to dissect an organ or rewire a circuit can be a spark for a lifelong, successful career.

As a country, we've consistently understated the value of this type of education. It began by removing shop class from school, and it's been perpetuated by the baseless idea that everyone needs a college degree to be successful.

We must do better to reverse the stigmas surrounding career and technical education because these stigmas are reflected in the growing skills gap. Doing so is the only way to reach the large pool of talented but dislocated American workers.

Here's the truth: Two-thirds of Americans do not possess a bachelor's degree. One out of three students who starts college never finishes.

If we don't recognize these realities and reflect them in the Committee's priorities, employers will. In fact, industry is already out ahead changing the way we view education.

Employers are removing degree requirements for job applicants and moving towards skills-first hiring. LinkedIn's 2023 Skills First Report found significantly fewer job postings are requiring degrees, and more employers are explicitly hiring using skills data than in previous years.

If we plan on closing the skills gap, collaboration between educational institutions and industry partners will be key. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses on how we can better promote industry partnerships.

In closing, I'll note that Mike Rowe last appeared before the Committee seven years ago, yet today, the economy still languishes under the same problems he identified. In his testimony, Rowe pointed to 5.6 million open jobs. Try 8.8 million today.

This hearing is an opportunity to have an honest discussion about the many facets of the persistent skills gap and how CTE can help close it.