

Testimony to the Committee on Education and the Workforce
Dr. Ted Brown, President
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Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of a topic that is important to all of us, but especially to my institution, Martin Methodist College. And I want to say a word of thanks to Congressman DesJarlais for his role in this invitation as well.

Many assume that our public colleges and universities are the central educational resource for workforce initiatives because they are intrinsically closer to state government and the structures that support workforce development. But I want to make the assertion that our private or independent institutions—especially those like my institution that are enrollment driven—are at least as important to workforce development because we are closer to the market. We have to be—our livelihood depends upon. Of course, I am not suggesting that this is some sort of competition because the truth is the more we cooperate together the stronger our employment situation in the United States and in our region will be.

Martin Methodist College has always been important to our local and regional economy. We are among the largest employers in Giles County, generating more than \$60 million in economic impact each year. At the same time, we serve the needs of local industry in terms of the education of prospective employees, as well as the continuing education of current employees. Many of our degree programs, such as Management Information Sciences, Accounting and our new baccalaureate Nursing program were developed largely out of on-going conversation with local industries and organizations about their needs. We were among the first institutions in the state to develop an evening college degree program for working adults, again largely in response to the needs of local industries and businesses.

I want to focus on one specific issue that is of special importance to us right now because our county is very intentionally shifting away from the old model of economic development—hunting down large manufacturing operations—and moving to a new model that is focused on planting and growing small businesses. You hear a lot of talk about small businesses being the backbone of our economy, but I frankly see very little public support for that notion. The case in point is the Giles County Small Business Development Center (GCSBDC). We began conversations more than four years ago—the College, the Economic Development Commission, the Chamber of Commerce and Pulaski Electric Service—about a center that could help establish and grow small businesses. We sought support for the concept through every state and federal resource we could identify and in the end we came up bone dry.

Last year, almost out of desperation, I decided that Martin Methodist College would move ahead with establishing the Giles County Small Business Development Center and fund it internally. The program is now in place, with a well-qualified director who is jointly appointed to a small business position on the faculty of our business school and to the position of Director of the GCSBDC, with offices both on campus and in the Chamber of Commerce building on the Pulaski Square. One of the critical elements

that our college brings to this table every year is a significant number of students who have very imaginative small business ideas along with a wealth of energy to drive business creation and success. And our campus is not different from most colleges and universities in that respect. What we are missing is the linkage between students and local resources that enable and encourage small business development. Our GCSBDC provides precisely that linkage, along with a host of resources for those in the community who want to establish and grow small businesses.

While the GCSBDC is a fledging operation that is drastically underfunded (it continues to be funded almost entirely by Martin Methodist College), we have proven that this kind of public-private partnership can work and has the potential to be an economic engine for a small community and region. I am convinced that we have also proven that state and federal workforce resources continue to be focused on the old manufacturing model and do not take seriously the importance of establishing and growing small businesses, especially in our rural and small communities and counties.

I am not here to beg for resources for the GCSBDC, but I am pleading for those who have control of workforce development resources to take seriously what all the statistics clearly prove—that small businesses are the key to economic recovery and to our nation's future financial strength.