
Senate Bill 493—STEM Workforce Challenge Grants

**REMARKS BY SENATOR JOYCE WOODHOUSE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
APRIL 14, 2015**

Good morning, Mister Chairman and members of the Committee. For the record, I am Joyce Woodhouse representing Senate District 5 in Clark County. I am here today to introduce Senate Bill 493, which creates the STEM Workforce Challenge Grant Fund.

As you know, STEM is an abbreviation for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. You have likely heard that STEM education is essential to Nevada's economic development and diversification, because a significant proportion of the new jobs being created in our State require postsecondary technical education.

This bill is one of the recommendations of the Interim Study Concerning Community Colleges, which I was honored to chair, and included Senator Smith. We heard extensive testimony from Nevada's Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation, the Governor's Office of Economic Development, and the Nevada System of Higher Education, regarding their

coordinated efforts to develop a qualified workforce, capable of meeting the needs of industry sectors our State is targeting for growth.

The recommendation to create a STEM workforce development fund was brought forward by Frank Woodbeck, Executive Director of the Nevada College Collaborative. Mr. Woodbeck proposed such a fund because there are no current funding sources to pay for the establishment of new workforce development programs outside the biennial budget process. Because Nevada has chosen to attract new firms in high-growth industries, in sectors like aerospace and defense; health care; medical services; and information technology, our workforce must be ready. Not only do they need high-tech skills, industry-specific education is a priority as well. As you know, our community colleges are on the front lines of these career and technical education efforts.

If we are to continue attracting targeted industries and firms, we need to demonstrate our commitment to workforce development to meet their specific needs. This Fund demonstrates to firms considering expansion in Nevada, that we are capable of quickly ramping-up new training and educational programs in our community colleges.

Let's examine the details of Senate Bill 493.

It creates the STEM Workforce Challenge Grant Fund. The Fund is overseen by a seven-member Committee appointed by NSHE, GOED, DETR, and the Governor. The Committee must meet at least every three months and members serve without compensation. They are charged with reviewing

requests and awarding funds to pay for the development and implementation of new programs, with the explicit intent that they will become self-sustaining.

Grantees must be a regional consortium of community or state colleges, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses operating in a STEM industry. Preference points will be given to those consortia that are led by a community or state college.

Grant proposals must draw upon data, market analysis, and industry intelligence to identify specific workforce training challenges and strategies to address them. They must propose well-defined performance metrics and accountability measures, and ensure evidence-based decision-making. To ensure those consortia receiving grants are fully invested in their proposal, they must have other funds available to match, dollar for dollar, the grant offered by this program. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, they must have a clear plan to ensure the program will be self-sustaining after the term of the grant.

Additional preference points may also be awarded to proposals that:

- Identify potential cross-sector collaborations;
- Include leadership from area businesses in STEM industries;
- Leverage other State or federal funds;
- Can be replicated in other industries or regions of Nevada; and
- Specifically target citizens who are underemployed or long-term unemployed.

Grants can be awarded for up to \$175,000 per year, for up to two years. This bill appropriates \$3.5 million to establish the Grant Fund.

Mister Chair and members of the Committee, I don't need to remind you how competitive the economic development field is, particularly in the STEM categories. Recent announcements related to the Tesla gigafactory and the new Switch data centers show Nevada can be competitive. However, we must now be vigilant about following our economic development with the needed workforce development.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. That concludes my remarks. I am happy to answer any questions.