

How can you tell when a Workforce Development Initiative is a Scam???

Question by Robert A. Williams

Editor's Note: This is what I have heard is going on. I smell a rat. A Scam. What about you?

Word is floating around Cleveland County that there are not enough qualified workers in the county to fill the jobs the Economic Development Partnership have already brought in. Forget for a moment that this statement might be a scam all by itself put out by Commissioner Eddie Holbrook, the self appointed head of the Economic Development Partnership, to get himself re-elected as a County Commissioner. Incumbent Commissioners Eddie Holbrook, Ronnie Whetstine and Doug Bridges signed up with the Election Board Monday to run for re-election. Politicians do lie you know. School Board Chairman Phillip "Bully" Glover put out a story right before last years school board election that CCS was looking for an architect to build new auditoriums at Burns and Crest High Schools. Later stating falsely that the cost would be \$42 million. An excessive cost that Cleveland County cannot afford to spend on 50+ year old schools.

Also consider that trained workers in Cleveland County have, for years, been traveling out of Cleveland County to find jobs that pay competitive salaries. Census Records show that the population in Cleveland County has shrunk as many of these trained workers (and their families) move closer to their jobs. Basically abandoning Cleveland County as it became a jobs wasteland. Records just obtained from Cleveland County

DSS through the County Attorney show over 20,000 on Food Stamps. A sure indication of unemployment and under employment. Another indication of problems is the DSS (welfare) annual budget for Cleveland County is \$240 million and the annual budget for schools is \$165 Million. DSS found jobs for only 26 out of 20,000 yet paid for daycare for 554 children whose parents were in job training or working. And almost half Cleveland County School students graduate without being able to read proficiently. None of the numbers add up to anything close to a success story and DSS report show that there is no guidance, direction or even communication between DSS and Economic Development although all are under County Commissioner oversight. The same Commissioners who are reported to be in charge of a new Workforce Development initiative.

Factor in to all this the fact that Cleveland County Schools is trying to throw off most vocational training onto Cleveland Community College through a so called dual-enrollment program. A program that has drawn state money to both CCS and CCC. A program that has also drawn criticism alleging CCC is dumbing down classes so more will pass and more money will pass to CCC. My understanding is CCC is hiding results from an outside investigation that addresses these allegations because the CCC attorney told the CCC BoT that the report does not look good for CCC in a pending legal action.

Also factor in CCC has touted a multimillion dollar grant to build an "Advanced Manufacturing Training Center" but doesn't have a clue on what kind of manufacturing they are going to train for. According to the Economic Development crowd there are 170 manufacturing companies in Cleveland County but only name five or six in their propaganda literature.

Now consider that there is word floating around that Cleveland County will be a part of a three county Workforce Development regional committee whose members will be appointed by the governor. And Governor Roy Cooper is a lawyer with no idea

about workforce development or advanced manufacturing. Gov. Cooper has decided to let the County Commissioners in the three counties decide who to appoint to this committee. Word is CCS has recommended Sharon Robbs, Director of Communities In Schools and sister in law to Coleman Hunt, to this committee and left off School Board member Danny Blanton who asked to be appointed. Blanton is probably a thousand times more qualified for this committee than Robbs, yet word is Blanton was deemed unqualified by a person who was unqualified to make such a decision.

On top of all this a search of the County Website found this:
Region C Workforce Development Board : Assists individuals in attaining the skills necessary for employment and employers in becoming competitive in the global economy. Phone: 828-287-2281 ext. 124, Bill Robertson

Region C consists of Cleveland, Rutherford, Polk and McDowell Counties. Obviously this new Workforce Development Committee is a duplication of effort for the Region C Workforce Development Board, although this Board has either been ignored, is incompetent or has just failed to do it's job as described above. Either way something is amiss and the Cleveland County workforce has missed out on opportunities that should have already been determined and already in place.

Folks, This is what I know about any formal workforce development planning and implementation in Cleveland County. Basically, scam or not, there has been no good planning by competent people or any implementation that I can find-and I have looked-regarding this so called problem with the lack of qualified Cleveland County workers to take manufacturing jobs that are already available, even if that statement is true. But. Hey! Stay tuned to my next article titled "Workforce Development-A Manifesto." Not everybody in Cleveland County is confused about what to do.

Again, read my follow-up article, which provides a plan that already has proven over hundreds of years to work It can and

will work again if implemented. At little to no cost to implement. CCS and CCC just have to do the job they are already paid to do.