



Rick Winsman

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Skills Matter

**O**ur nation continues to struggle with the highest unemployment rate in generations. Americans

are demanding that policymakers address this challenge and sent a very clear message with the way they voted last month. There is a lot of disagreement about the best ways to do this, but there is one key part of the solution that cuts across the aisle: Skills matter.

#### The economic challenge facing our country is in part a skills challenge

We're experiencing a skills gap in our community now and it will get worse in the future. In a survey conducted by the Chamber for this conference, business indicated they had 100 plus jobs unfilled and 55 new jobs planned in 2011. Eighty percent indicated that they are challenged to find applicants with the basic skills to work.

We have eleven percent unemployment. We have jobs going unfilled. We should never have these two problems at the same time. So what do we do?

Last month, I joined 16 other employers from the manufacturing, healthcare, construction and clean energy industries for meetings with the White House, Department of Labor, and Members of Congress to talk about a key solution: Industry driven training through a proven strategy called Sector Partnerships.

Sector Partnerships bring together multiple employers across an industry, labor, career and technical

education programs, community organizations, and community colleges to reshape education curriculum to match current industry skill demands.

#### Sector Partnerships work for business

Lower Columbia College's Pulp and Paper Technology program was created in response to the need for specially skilled workers for our local manufacturing companies.

#### Sector Partnerships work for workers

A recent survey on the effectiveness of sector-focused workforce programs found positive outcomes for workers including, steadier employment with increased earnings and better access to benefits.

Sector Partnerships are a win-win approach for American business and workers. But right now, there is no dedicated federal support for this distinctive and successful approach.

#### Something Americans agree on

The American public disagrees about many things, but on this most of us agree: Skills matter.

It is essential that we invest strategies like Sector Partnerships that increase the effectiveness and efficiencies of our workforce education efforts in this country. Better workforce training is not a silver bullet that will lead us straight to recovery. But we will not recover without it. Skills matter.

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*Rick Winsman is President of the Kelso Longview Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.*



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