

Testimony of Felix W. Ortiz III, CEO of Viridis Learning, Prepared for the Energy & Power Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Energy & Commerce Committee Hearing on Proposed Workforce Bill for Creating a 21st Century Energy Workforce, April 23, 2015

Summary of Testimony

- Introduce myself and explain why I founded Viridis Learning, and why the country needs to eliminate the skills gap
- Advocate for greater federal direct assistance to community colleges, technical colleges, workforce boards, and other institutions of training the nation's energy workforce.
- Encourage the creation of a national clearinghouse of actionable data that will help inform Americans, and especially minority groups, about career choices in the energy industry.
- Advocate for a greater degree of collaboration between educational, governmental, and commercial bodies in order to eliminate the skills gap.

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Rush, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for affording me the opportunity to speak this morning.

I am the founder and CEO of Viridis Learning, a New York-based technology company that uses data analytics to match community college students to jobs. My desire to align students with sustainable, fulfilling employment stems from my own experience as a veteran of the United States Army, in which I served proudly during the first decade of this century. Upon my discharge from the military, I found that many of the resources offered by the military and by traditional internet-based job websites provided inadequate career guidance for myself and my fellow veterans. Many of us wound up in the wrong careers, and in the most extreme cases ended up homeless.

As I conducted more research into how Americans obtain employment, I saw that many individuals, especially those from underprivileged and minority backgrounds, struggle with being caught in the “skills gap,” meaning that the labor skills they possess do not align with the jobs they desire. This mismatch comes at great cost to both job-seekers and employers. In an effort to eliminate America's skills gap, I founded Viridis Learning in 2009, and today we build customized pathways to employment for community college students, and match those students with employment opportunities at over sixty partner employers, including several Fortune 100 companies.

I come before you today to urge you to adopt the language in this bill. As America enters an unprecedented period of energy production, the country will need a skilled technical workforce able to meet the demands of the industry. This bill provides for the kind of skills training we need as a nation to remain economically competitive with other oil-producing nations.

But economic growth must benefit all Americans. In the past few decades social mobility has stagnated for many individuals, especially for minorities and the socioeconomically disadvantaged. I am pleased to say that this bill calls for greater minority participation in a sector of the economy currently enjoying tremendous growth and innovation.

Moreover, the energy industry depends heavily on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, where many minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged people are drastically underrepresented. For example, according to a 2010 National Science Board [study](#), African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians and Alaska Natives account for only 10 percent of the country's workers in science and engineering. Community colleges are often the most accessible educational option for minorities, and I am encouraged to see the Committee consider additional direct assistance to community and technical colleges.

Additionally, the provision for a national clearinghouse of information on energy and manufacturing sector jobs means that more Americans can access actionable data on what kinds of careers are best suited to them. One of the greatest problems in minority communities is not a lack of intelligence or motivation, but an absence of basic knowledge on subjects like what kinds of jobs exist, what these jobs pay, and the skills necessary to obtain them. This expansion of information also benefits

employers, as the greater availability of this data will attract talent who otherwise would have not known about these opportunities.

I am also excited to see the Committee's decision to establish more collaboration between educational, governmental, and commercial bodies. As businesses forge a deeper partnerships with community colleges, those schools will respond by providing curriculum directly tailored to what businesses want. This relationship will organically produce the kinds of skilled workers America needs to stay globally competitive. By fostering a greater degree of cooperation between these bodies, more students, and especially minorities, can be more informed in their career choices. It is my personal and professional hope that this kind of integration between students, education, and work can become the standard vision for American workforce policy.

Thank you.