Project: Southcentral Montana Workforce Incubation and Retention Center

Brief Description: Montana State University Billings seeks continued funding of $500,000 to further develop the infrastructure, services and partnerships necessary to train today's and tomorrow's workforce for existing and new businesses and industries. The "training mall" will maintain state-of-the-art services and facilities and provide access to expert trainers and best-training practices benefiting the employer, employee and the regional economy.

Executive Summary: The Southcentral Montana Workforce Incubation and Retention Center was given congressionally-directed funding of $100,000 for FY09-10. Continued funding will take the project from planning stage into further design and implementation of programs to respond to opportunities that not only exist now, but in the future. As workers and industry gear up for the future, a facility needs to be in place that would allow businesses rapidly respond to economic change. When the nation's economy rebounds, a new kind of infrastructure will be needed.

Project Description: The training infrastructure established at the WIRC will allow the region to quickly respond to economic development needs related to retaining existing businesses, recruiting new industry, and even providing space to incubate expanding or new industries. The partnerships and collaboration resulting at the center will facilitate the establishment of common best training practices that will hopefully reduce duplicative training, particularly in soft skills, with a work force that is expected to change occupations several times over their life span.

The Center would require the construction of a 100,000 square-foot, multi-use building which would supply much needed room for existing workforce training programs and would include the following space provisions:

- State of the art technology distance learning classrooms and computer laboratories
- Conference facilities
- Office space
- Studio space
- Flexible meeting space with movable walls and multi-functional labs
- Kitchen facilities (to support a major Culinary and Hospitality Management Program as well as regional conferences and workshops)
- Programs and services to be housed in the building include the following:
    - Regional Automotive Training Center
    - Construction and Trades Training Center
    - Industry Support including Mining and Energy Development
- MSU Billings College of Technology workforce training programs
- Additional workforce training programs

The Workforce Development and Training Center will provide technology-enhanced educational opportunities for high-demand technical and occupational programs, a one-stop job center where multiple job training and educational services will be available to Billings and eastern Montana, as well as business development services to aid small business owners.

Congressional Action Needed: An appropriation of $500,000 is requested.

Importance to Montana: As the business and industry hub of Montana and the northern plains, this connection between MSU Billings and business, industry, and other partners creates a synergy that will result in outreach needed for both rural and urban residents. As the region's baby boomers age and begin thinking about retirement and Montana's overall population continues to age, finding new or replacement workers is constant challenge for established businesses and a virtual uphill battle new businesses wanting to relocate or expand to Billings.

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