

Testimony of J. Henry Lievens before the U.S. House Higher Education & Workforce Training Subcommittee Field Hearing, Tuesday, April 9, 2013, at Monroe County Community College

Good morning, Congresswoman Virginia Foxx, Congressman Tim Walberg, Mayor Robert Clark, Monroe County Community College President Dr. David Nixon, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. My name is J. Henry Lievens. I have been a Monroe County Commissioner for 8 years and a practicing attorney for 9 years. For the past 6 years I have served the Board of Commissioners as Chairman for the Personnel Services and Human Resources Committee.

I am also a member of the local Exchange Club, Monroe Center for Health Aging and Land Bank. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss my observations with you today.

The uncertain state of the economy remains a primary concern for many in Michigan and especially so for the residents of Monroe County.

Monroe County has an approximate labor force of 68,500 of which 5,600 or 8.2% are unemployed.

While unemployment numbers are improving, the devastating effects of the peak 2009 14% unemployment rate are still being felt.

Of the changes within specific industries, the largest job losses were in manufacturing (-2,818) and construction (-1,346) while gains were made in service sector jobs, especially health care and social assistance (+1,850).

Thus, the lasting consequence is the necessity for education for skilled trades and professional sector jobs.

In Monroe County, an individual without a high school diploma earns less than \$18,000 a year while their counterpart with an associate degree can expect almost \$37,000.

This reflects the reality that the jobs for the unskilled trades/labor are no longer the reality for Monroe County and demonstrate the need to develop the resources necessary to train for the future needs for skilled trades and professions.