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Asa Hutchinson Announces Workforce PREPARE Plan Says Skills & Training Key To Economic Growth

Little Rock – Republican candidate for Governor, Asa Hutchinson, released his plan today to improve the skills and training of Arkansas’s workers as a way to encourage job growth in the state.

“My number one priority is economic growth and job creation in Arkansas. If we are serious about growing Arkansas’s economy, then we have to be serious about training our workforce. We have an opportunity to create a competitive edge in recruiting industry to Arkansas. We are competing for jobs in the global marketplace and the jobs will flow to those states with the skilled workers and with an educational system that matches the training to the technology of the workplace.”

Hutchinson’s PREPARE plan relies on improved efficiency and consolidation of our state’s workforce training; the engagement of industry, educators and economic developers through “Workforce Education Councils”; and providing students with an additional career path that leads to a good paying skilled job. The Workforce Education Councils will engage employers, local high schools and vocational and technical colleges in the development of regional workforce education plans that reflect real opportunities in the workplace. The Workforce Education Councils will coordinate training students in high-demand careers and will be organized based on the state’s existing Planning and Development Districts.

Hutchinson pledged to waste no time in moving forward with the plan, “As Governor, I will work with the legislature to pass legislation to create Workforce Education Councils across the state and to

streamline the funding of our workforce education funds into training programs that work and produce results. Furthermore, my administration will expect a specific plan from each of the Workforce Education Councils no later than six months after the date of their formation.”

Hutchinson continued, “The goal of this plan is to take advantage of the renewed focus in the United States on the return of manufacturing from overseas. Arkansas is in a perfect position to compete in the world market place for the thousands of manufacturing and technical jobs that will be created in the next decade. This plan will give our high school students more opportunities to choose a career path that may or may not include a four-year degree is part of that plan. A lot of economic growth comes from skilled jobs, where the training is beyond high school but it’s not a four-year-degree, either. We must provide a meaningful opportunity for a skilled job career path. I am confident it will ultimately lead our state to attracting major manufacturers to Arkansas because of what we offer in terms of work ethic and skill.”

Hutchinson noted that Arkansas has several programs designed to improve the skills of the state’s workforce but argued that there was too much overlap and not enough coordination between the state’s programs. Hutchinson concluded, “We need to be efficient and focused on providing Arkansans with the skills they need to build an economy that will be competitive worldwide.”

To review Hutchinson’s full policy proposal, please visit www.asaforgovernor.com

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Asa Hutchinson is running as a Republican candidate for Governor of Arkansas. He has served as U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Arkansas, Congressman from the 3rd Congressional District, Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency and Under Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. Asa has spent the majority of his career in the private sector as a small business owner, lawyer and entrepreneur. He and his wife Susan have been married for forty years and have four grown children and five grandchildren.

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PREPARE Our Workforce

The Hutchinson Plan For Skills and Jobs Training

Arkansas has many advantages in economic development, including natural resources, a strategic geographic location and people who are willing to work. However, when businesses choose where to locate, other states provide a better-trained workforce with greater technical skills.ⁱ According to the 2011 U.S. Skills Gap Report by the Manufacturing Institute, 83% of businesses that rely on skilled production had a serious or moderate shortage of qualified workers. This needs to change. Arkansas can lower taxes, offer incentives and provide infrastructure, but unless Arkansas develops its human capital by investing in the training required for the skilled jobs of today, we will not be successful in winning the “jobs war”. We will continue to be passed over and other states will continue to grow faster in economic development unless we seize the opportunity to bring manufacturing jobs back to Arkansas.ⁱⁱ The Hutchinson plan to PREPARE creates a smarter and more efficient way of skilled jobs training in Arkansas.

I.

Arkansas has made an effort to address the need for greater skills training that reflects the needs of industry and business but there is more that can be done and it can be done more efficiently. Currently, Arkansas has several agencies responsible for providing training for today’s workforce. There are also many different programs, some using federal dollars and some using state dollars, that work toward providing these skills.

One example is the Workforce Readiness Curriculum developed by the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges. This is a key program because more than 95% of the state's population lives within a 30-mile radius of one of Arkansas's technical colleges or institutes.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) works with six^{iv} other agencies to provide a Career Readiness Certificate to demonstrate that an individual possesses the skills demanded by today's jobs.^v In addition, the Existing Workforce Training Program and the Business & Industry Training Program both provide training to Arkansas workers. Arkansas Works and the Workforce Training Consortia both coordinate training of employees to match the needs of employers. The Department of Workforce Services and the Department of Career Education each have programs that they administer jointly or separately. Some apply to current high school students, although most do not.

II.

Unfortunately, this piecemeal approach is a recipe for redundancy, inefficiency, and waste. Students need to understand and consider all their options in order to make an informed decision of whether to pursue a four-year degree or move into the workforce through vocational or technical training. A Hutchinson administration will work to create a system that:

Provides resources for training programs;

Represents the various and diverse regions of the state;

Enables students to train for the workplace of the future;

Produces students with skills that are in demand;

Assists graduates in transitioning from the classroom to the workforce;

Retains and grows industrial and manufacturing businesses in Arkansas;

Expects & demands results;

Not all jobs require a four-year degree and not all students are suited for a four-year degree path. The Hutchinson plan enables the goals of the student to match the needs of the employer. Jobs that require specialized training often pay quite well, even without a four-year degree. Manufacturing jobs such as welding allow for a broader manufacturing and industrial base in our economy. However, Arkansas lacks a sufficient workforce that possesses all of the necessary skills, leaving many businesses to look elsewhere. Arkansas needs to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach to education and economic development is a disaster for the economy, the education system and the student.

The goal of the Hutchinson PREPARE plan is to enable every student who chooses a 2-year degree plan or other technical or vocational career to be successful by providing a seamless transition from K-12 through workforce training and into a job. This means that a student who chooses to work in plumbing, electrical, welding or any other manufacturing or technical field will have options and support in meeting his or her goals.

III.

As Governor, Asa Hutchinson will implement the PREPARE plan by working with the legislature to create Workforce Education Councils which will coordinate and expand the existing training programs for high school students and provide greater coordination between the needs of Arkansas's businesses and the training offered through our existing institutions.

Provide Resources For Training Programs:

A current 0.5% tax on corporate income over \$100,000, totaling approximately \$34 million a year, has been distributed by the Department of Higher Education through formula funding in recent years. The Hutchinson PREPARE plan supports directing this funding to specific and approved training

programs rather than going into the general fund of the school that allows the money to be diverted to administrative and other educational costs. The distribution of the funding will be to training programs that are consistent with the guidance of the Workforce Education Councils and funding will be guided by performance and results.

Represents The Various Regions Of The State:

Using Arkansas's current eight Planning and Development Districts as the geographical basis for Workforce Education Councils, employers and prospective employers considering developing in Arkansas will be able utilize the Workforce Education Councils to provide ideas, direction and coordination on curriculum and training with:

- Regional economic development authorities
- Local high schools
- Regional vocational and technical schools

This coordination enables high school students in each region of Arkansas to receive training in skills that are currently in demand and are consistent with the priorities of their respective economic development region. The training of high school students may be at the high school or coordinated with a local two year or technical school. Most importantly, the coordination increases their likelihood of the student preparing for and getting a job that pays well.

Enables Students To Train For The Future:

As students plan their futures after high school, the coordination through the PREPARE Workforce Education Councils between employers and high schools will enable high schools to better inform students about their options and opportunities in their own communities.

Produces Students With Skills That Are In Demand:

When a student chooses to pursue a particular set of skills under the PREPARE plan, he or she can be assured that there are employers needing someone with those skills. We can achieve this by allowing industry to partner with both our high schools and technical colleges to teach students the skills in demand.

Assists Graduates In Transitioning From The Classroom To The Workforce:

The PREPARE plan helps students transition from the classroom to the workforce by using curricula developed by employers and approved by the Department of Education. Furthermore, students can opt into apprenticeship programs administered jointly through the school, the employer and the Workforce Education Council.

Retains Industrial And Manufacturing Businesses In Arkansas:

By providing students with the skills and support to make a high-demand career successful, Arkansas will retain more manufacturing and industrial jobs. A trained and ready workforce is not developed overnight but once we show that Arkansas has the skilled workers needed, businesses will plan to start, stay and grow in Arkansas.

Expects & Demand Results:

The PREPARE plan relies on constant coordination and cooperation between employers, training programs, and students through the Workforce Education Councils. When a particular skill set is in greater demand, educators and industry leaders will inform students and more students will choose that career path or vice versa. Meeting the needs of businesses and students is a plan that will keep businesses here in Arkansas and will attract more employers to move to Arkansas.

A Hutchinson administration will use existing resources to prepare our workforce, create and keep jobs and embrace a place for hands-on learning in our education system. A focused system of

Workforce Education Councils will be more efficient and more effective at preparing the workforce that Arkansas needs for the jobs of tomorrow. That is the kind of leadership Asa Hutchinson will bring to the Governor's office.

ⁱ <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/states/>

ⁱⁱ https://www.bea.gov/newsreleases/regional/gdp_state/gsp_highlights.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.arkansasedc.com/site-selectors/workforce-development#top>

^{iv} <http://www.arkansasedc.com/site-selectors/workforce-development#top>

^v <http://dws.arkansas.gov/Programs/CRC/index.htm>