

Small Business Committee

Good morning. My name is Bruno Schickel. I own a small business in the Ithaca New York area.

My company, Schickel Construction, specializes in residential and light commercial construction.

I am the first in my family in many generations **NOT** to go to college.

Being the ninth child of 13 children, I think my parents were somewhat relieved when I chose a different path, given the financial burden of college tuition.

I like to say that going to college is not the **only** way to get an education.

Getting a college degree just happens to be the easier and the more expensive way to get an education.

I attended shop classes in high school, and built a lot of great furniture, which is still in use today.

I wanted to MAKE THINGS -- I did not want to go to college.

After high school I joined the carpenter's union and worked in residential construction for six months.

The next 10 years I worked for different construction companies, all of which provided on the job training.

I started my own company in 1984 and have consistently employed 10 to 15 people throughout the past 39 years.

I polled my employees, and the majority of them -- 60% -- attended shop class in high school.

Four of my employees have graduated from college. I do not see that as a prerequisite for employment. I don't think they do, either.

But the people who work in my company have done well enough in the building trade to send their own children to college, and many have done so.

Hands-on or on the job training is how I learned the ins and outs of construction.

I like to say that anyone can easily learn how to build a house, but not everyone can easily learn how to run a business.

I learned how to run a business by attending the annual International Builders Show, sponsored by the National Association of Homebuilders -- NAHB.

For 35 years I have been attending these extravaganzas and taking part in over a hundred different seminars that are offered over the course of the three-day convention.

Becoming a member of this trade group and attending their annual International Builders Show has been the secret sauce in my success, without question.

As I said before, going to college is not essential to career success or fulfillment; it just happens to be the easier and more expensive path.

There is very little difference in the unemployment rate for people who have a college degree and those who don't.

The big difference is the debt burden going to college imposes.

This sets young people back decades in terms of their own financial security and their ability to fully participate in our economy.

Historical perspective

Back in 1982 in the middle of a major recession I was working for a construction company and we were looking to hire more carpenters.

We put an ad in the local paper, and we were absolutely flooded with people looking for work.

I had the job seekers form a line out the door and would interview each for about five minutes and then move onto the next one.

Then in 2008 – 2009. Another major recession, this time, I was looking to hire workers.

I was lucky if I had one job applicant per week.

The situation today is even worse.

We are currently seeking carpenters to bring onto our teams.

But we receive very little or no response to advertisements, so we are seeking alternatives, such as using word of mouth and reaching out directly to local schools that have vocational training programs.

But sometimes I just give up looking all together.

Short term problem.

The building industry like all industries is facing historic labor shortages.

The labor shortage is nothing short of a crisis that must be addressed.

In the last few days preparing for this hearing, I have had the opportunity to speak with many small business owners and employees.

Everyone reports the same problem: **There is nobody to hire.**

Just think about how much more growth our economy could have if businesses could find and hire eager workers they need.

I know that for my business we could easily increase volume by 20 to 30% if we had more workers.

The National Association of Home Builders estimates that we will be short 2.2 million workers in the next two years.

Because of this shortage, we are being prevented from building approximately 1 million houses in that time frame.

Currently, this country has an unprecedented number of job openings unfilled, at the same time that we have an unprecedented number of people not working and relying on government benefits.

Clearly something is out of whack and needs to be adjusted.

Long term problem.

There has been a radical shift in the workforce way from MAKING THINGS and what people are willing to consider for possible careers.

This is ironic, because “making things” is now fashionable. Hipsters seem to want to make everything from craft beer to their own furniture.

Over the past 50 years, the workforce balance has shifted radically.

Too much emphasis has been put on attending college, and too little on finding a rewarding career in a trade.

Resources for Vocational and technical training have declined.

Many public schools no longer offer shop class, preventing young people like the kid I was from having access to a very rewarding variety of careers.

The vocational track has been seen as the poor cousin to the college track.

We need to restore balance.

Many of my long-time employees are now nearing retirement age. A few of their young-adult relatives have joined my workforce.

These young people have learned from the previous generation that making things and building things is a highly rewarding career path.

But I cannot count on my own workers to populate my work crews; for my company to build homes for all the people who want and need housing, we need for young people to understand that a college degree does not guarantee success.

How do we encourage more young people to take the non-college career path?

The option of hands-on work and on the job training is a great place to start.

Let's bring back Shop class!!!

Thank you,

Bruno Schickel