

# Prepared Remarks for Gov. Reynolds Press Conference

Andy Van Kleunen, National Skills Coalition

April 16, 2018

---

Thank you, Governor Reynolds and Lt. Governor Gregg, for allowing me to join you here in Des Moines this morning.

National Skills Coalition is a non-partisan network of businesses, worker advocates, education and training leaders from across the country who want to see America grow its economy by *investing in its people*. Over the years, we've been fortunate to host in Washington, DC a number Iowa's community colleges—as well as the members of Iowa's Skills2Compete Coalition—to share what they have figured out about how to make workforce and education programs more responsive to the needs of today's workers and industries.

But Governor Reynolds, it's a particular honor to be **here with you** this morning, to be a witness to the incredible leadership you have shown to make it easier for Iowans to enroll in the college courses that THEY think will best position them for career success.

As you know, Iowa faces a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive global economy, with growing skill requirements across almost every occupation and industry. Your state has responded, in part, by making it easier for more Iowans—both young people and working adults-- to enroll in shorter-term, industry-recognized college certificate programs designed in partnership with those industries.

Unfortunately, our **nation's** higher education policies have not kept pace with that reality. This would include our federal Pell Grant program—the primary means whereby we provide college tuition assistance to lower-income and working-class Americans. Pell Grants won't support shorter-term certificate courses because of a federal rule set by well-intentioned policymakers years ago when the **only people** they thought needed to go to college were those seeking a full-time, four-year degree. As a result, less than 5% of our federal Pell Grant resources go to working students enrolled in the types of effective, industry-recognized certificate programs we're discussing today.

Not only is this federal approach outdated. It's just plainly unfair to working people who don't have the time to take a long-term degree program, but who still need some financial assistance to help them keep their jobs or advance their careers. **We want to change that.**

Thankfully, Governor Reynolds, we can point to Iowa as an example.

- Iowa’s GAP Tuition Assistance Program picks up where federal financial aid leaves off – enabling students to attend short-term community college programs that lead to in-demand credentials.
- And Iowa’s Pathways for Academic and Career Employment, or PACE, program further extends that support to hard-working Iowans whose reading, math or digital literacy skills need to be updated as part of their return to study at a local community college.
- With the additional proposals contained in your “Future Ready Iowa” plan, your state is well ahead of the curve.

Washington really needs to catch up to Iowa. That’s why National Skills Coalition is urging Congress to extend Pell Grants to people taking short-term programs – credit or non-credit – that lead to high quality, industry-recognized credentials. Congress could do that by modernizing the Higher Education Act, or by simply passing bipartisan Senate legislation—the JOBS Act—that would **end Pell’s bias** against students who want short-term training.

Governor, thank you for your leadership on these issues. I’m encouraged that so many members of the Trump administration have recently spent time here with you to learn from your example. I’m hoping **we can work together** to ensure that Congress follows their lead as we try to bring our nation’s higher education policies into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

And now, to talk about some of these effective programs that are moving Iowans into skilled jobs, I want to introduce Chris Duree, the Chancellor for the Iowa Valley Community College District.