Obama Administration Invests $2 Million to Spur Advanced Manufacturing in South Central Kansas

The Obama administration recently announced a $2 million Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge award to the Center for Innovation and Enterprise Engagement to support the south central Kansas region’s efforts to jumpstart advanced manufacturing and create the jobs of the future. The $37 million Jobs Accelerator competition leverages funding from three federal agencies and technical assistance from 13 additional agencies to support the development of 20 high-growth industry clusters across the country. Funding for workforce training and technical assistance is provided by the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA), the Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration (EDA), and the Small Business Administration (SBA).

Two manufacturing industries—wind turbine and medical equipment—are specific targets of the initiative being led by Wichita State University. The effort encourages the migration of technology into the region’s economy to develop composite and advanced materials products and processes and bring with it new, high-paying jobs. But other opportunities will undoubtedly come from exploitation by other industries of the composite materials sector in the region.

The investment will help assure that south central Kansas will remain a dynamic center of manufacturing and a generator of jobs for years to come. The recently announced decision by Boeing that it will be closing its Wichita operations later this year is a sign of how important it is that we continue to anticipate future economic
challenges and make investments that will better prepare us to take advantage of new and growing technologies and to support job creation.

The Jobs Accelerator funding will help equip south central Kansas manufacturers with the resources and the workforce needed to diversify the regional economy while maintaining the region's existing manufacturing base. It will also position the regional advanced manufacturing cluster for future growth, stability, and global competitiveness. It will provide a forum for industry collaboration and will provide assistance to accelerate development of innovative, cost-effective, sustainable, next-generation composites and advanced materials, processes, repair technologies and products. Further, it will expand workforce training—from students, to entry-level workers, to experienced engineers—equipping them with the skills they will need to obtain or upgrade employment in a variety of high-growth industries. Additionally, it will engage historically underrepresented and excluded communities in support of identifying, planning, and developing new business opportunities.

President Obama was in Osawatomie, Kansas, just last month, where he noted that “in today’s innovation economy, we also need a world-class commitment to science and research, the next generation of high-tech manufacturing.” That is why this investment is so timely. The goal is to accelerate the growth of advanced manufacturing in Kansas, building upon Wichita’s long-held and continued prominence in aircraft production—and on Wichita State’s research and engineering strengths. Equally impressive is that Wichita State has risen to be second among the nation's universities in aeronautical research and development expenditures.

I am pleased that we are able to partner with local leaders to help strengthen the south central Kansas regional economy and create jobs. When America's regions are strong, America is strong. Working together, we can ensure that America remains globally competitive.

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