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als in apparent distress. The specific industries targeted for grant money under the QRT program are aviation/aerospace, health and information technologies, plastics and engineering simulation. If you're not in one of these sectors, you lose, and you lose with your own tax dollars spent on some other corporation. And you're a big loser if you run a small-scale service business – the largest category of business in the state – because then you are guaranteed to be ineligible for any QRT money, assuming you could use or want the assistance.

At the local level, a whole new layer of market obstructions rise up with the continuing reliance on local/regional workforce development boards, which sit like great Buddhas in the middle of the road preventing private sector initiatives from getting around them. Take for example the Florida Center for Manufacturing Excellence (FCME), a private sector training initiative started in 1998 and at the time serving Sarasota and Manatee Counties (see *The Review*, Dec. 11/98). After 10 months in operation, the plug got pulled on this innovative and inexpensive industry training project. Why? Community college vo-tech administrators politically undermined it with the Suncoast Workforce Development Board, and the workforce board “damned it with faint praise” in a reapplication bid to the state. Result? Another community business initiative dies on the vine.

The problem really goes deeper. Federal legislation effectively designates community colleges as the exclusive delivery agencies for workforce training. Since vo-tech college administrators are not inclined to share their turf with any other groups, least of all private sector training associations, any organizational competitors are kept at bay.

At the center of this “educracy” is a vo-tech bureaucracy that serves its own institutional interests first. When the

colleges offer courses, they are designed to fit the established nine or ten month school year. But most industry training can be undertaken in one-third that time duration and at a lot less cost – FCME charged 20 percent less for training than the community colleges. In addition, community college courses are often designed to suit the instructors’ preferences and knowledge, which just as often are not industry-based. And some courses the colleges pawn off on industry are really just unfilled classes in residual program areas, where colleges try to complete their “full-time equivalent” state funding requirements.

The workforce problem is a serious business issue in this state and given current organizational and programmatic arrangements, it has a long way to go to fulfill the needs of business and industry. Perhaps the first step toward some truly productive response would be for the state to “privatize” the effort. This would mean staying out of the management of labor markets, and allowing private technical colleges to respond directly to the requirements of business. Right now, almost all the focus is in satisfying individuals and their career aspirations without any real connection to the number and kinds of jobs available. Who best to determine what training is required than those who post the jobs? If a state role is absolutely necessary, then the legislature ought to offer tax credits to industry and commerce to train workers in private technical colleges, on the condition that matriculating students have job prospects available to them upon timely graduation.

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