

I. Meeting Packet



State of Florida
Public Service Commission
INTERNAL AFFAIRS AGENDA
Wednesday – August 21, 2024
9:30 AM
Room 105 – Gerald L. Gunter Building

1. Discussion on Utility Workforce Development Efforts by State Colleges, Dr. Kathleen Plinske, President, Valencia College
2. General Counsel's Report
3. Executive Director's report
4. Other Matters

BB/aml

OUTSIDE PERSONS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE COMMISSION ON
ANY OF THE AGENDAED ITEMS SHOULD CONTACT THE
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT (850) 413-6463.

II. Outside Persons Who Wish to Address the Commission at Internal Affairs

Note: The records reflect that no outside persons addressed the Commission at this Internal Affairs meeting.

III. Supplemental Materials for Internal Affairs

Note: The records reflect that there were no supplemental materials provided to the Commission during this Internal Affairs meeting.

IV. Transcript

BEFORE THE
FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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PROCEEDINGS: INTERNAL AFFAIRS

COMMISSIONERS PARTICIPATING: CHAIRMAN MIKE LA ROSA
COMMISSIONER ART GRAHAM
COMMISSIONER GARY F. CLARK
COMMISSIONER ANDREW GILES FAY
COMMISSIONER GABRIELLA PASSIDOMO

DATE: Wednesday, August 21, 2024

TIME: Commenced: 9:30 a.m.
Concluded: 10:35 a.m.

PLACE: Betty Easley Conference Center
Room 105
2524 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Gerald L. Gunter Building
Tallahassee, Florida

REPORTED BY: DEBRA R. KRICK
Court Reporter and
Notary Public in and for
the State of Florida at Large

PREMIER REPORTING
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA
(850) 894-0828

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: All right. Well, good --
3 good morning, everybody. Today is August 21st, and
4 this is our Internal Affairs meeting here at the
5 Florida Public Service Commission.

6 I am excited about a few things we've got
7 going on today. We will jump into our presentation
8 here in a few seconds, and, of course, introduce
9 our -- our speaker and contributor. Before that, I
10 just want to kind of talk about a little bit of
11 business internally here at the PSC.

12 Employee of the Month. Something I always
13 love to do. It's been a nice tradition here. I
14 have been going now down to the office of the
15 individual that wins the award. I literally just
16 came from there a few seconds ago, and I love
17 surprising them. So this -- this month it is
18 Shelly Cannon.

19 Shelly is -- where is Shelly? Is Shelly here.
20 Oh, she was here. She promised me she was coming.
21 But I will talk about her a little bit, right? We
22 often share words, and she's not here. She won't
23 mind that.

24 Shelly is the Operations Management Consultant
25 II in the Division of Administrative and IT

1 Services, and has been employed here at the
2 Commission since 2007.

3 Shelly continues to demonstrate a high work
4 ethic. Provides excellent customer service to all
5 those that she serves on a daily basis. Obviously,
6 an important part here in what we do every day
7 interacting with customers.

8 In particular, Shelly has done an outstanding
9 job on several projects has been assigned to her
10 section since the office moves, and also
11 facilitates management surplus and safety. She is
12 highly regarded by those around her, valued great
13 by AIT and everyone at the PSC.

14 I see Shelly walking in. Shelly,
15 congratulations again being the Employee of the
16 Month.

17 (Applause from the audience.)

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Shelly, I did share that
19 you were quite shocked this morning as I walked in
20 your office. So I did get to surprise her. So,
21 again, congratulations being the Employee of the
22 Month.

23 So this month, if you were here early, you did
24 hear the song of the month. Anyone not hear the
25 song of the month? Come on, Gary. All right. So

1 the song of the month was ABC by the Jackson 5. It
2 was submitted by David Frank, our new Director of
3 Legislative Affairs. I am excited to have him, I
4 was going to talk a little bit about that -- there
5 is David -- I was going to talk about him later
6 today. We appreciate you offering that.

7 You probably think to yourself right now, what
8 does ABC have anything to do what with what we do,
9 right? Well, we are about to find out.

10 So I am excited to introduce Dr. Kathleen
11 Plinske. She's the President of Valencia College.
12 Come on up. She's going to talk to us a little bit
13 today about workforce development. And I know you
14 guys have heard me talk about getting interaction
15 -- or creating interaction between our college
16 system and our university system here in the state.
17 I always like to hear the opportunities that our
18 students have and how we can kind of be a part of
19 that, right? And I think -- I think, at a minimum,
20 we can talk a little bit about where the industries
21 are. Explore what -- what our different colleges
22 are doing.

23 I will tell you that I am a little bit biased.
24 Dr. Plinske and I have known each other for a
25 little bit of time. She's from Central Florida

1 area, of course, an area that I represented the
2 Legislature for a good eight years in the House. I
3 have watched her grow up. I have watched Valencia
4 grow, and I am super excited to, one, invite my
5 colleagues to hear more about what she has to say
6 today; introduce what will be a new series that we
7 will start. We will hear from other schools, both
8 from the college system, the university system in
9 the state. And I thought this was a great kickoff
10 to have Valencia start us off.

11 So, Dr. Plinske, I will kick it off to you to
12 get us going.

13 DR. PLINSKE: Wonderful. Thank you so very
14 much for the invitation. And it is really my
15 pleasure to share with you a little bit about
16 Valencia College and the Florida College System,
17 which I truly believe is the workforce engine in
18 the state of Florida. It is truly a competitive
19 advantage that is unique to our state, and
20 delighted to share a little bit about how I believe
21 that we can address the challenges that utilities
22 industry we face in terms of workforce development,
23 both in terms of looking at retirement and gaps
24 that might be seen as you have an aging workforce,
25 but then also as you have hired a younger workforce

1 and need to scale them up, particularly for a
2 number of the emerging technology that we see,
3 particularly as it relates to automation,
4 artificial intelligence, knowing that those fields
5 are in high demand in all sectors; and then also
6 seeing some non-retirement attrition in the
7 industry that, frankly, we see across all
8 industries after COVID.

9 So the Florida College System, as you may
10 know, includes 28 colleges across the state of
11 Florida, and our service districts are reflective
12 of geographic counties. So Valencia College has a
13 service district that contains Orange and Osceola
14 Counties. But I would say because of the programs
15 that we offer, we actually have students from 59 of
16 the 67 counties in the state of Florida that are
17 enrolled at Valencia College.

18 And we continue to grow at Valencia. In fact,
19 this fall, we are on pace for the largest
20 enrollment in Valencia College's history. So we
21 are continuing to experience significant demand
22 from our students that are looking to develop the
23 skills that our employers demand.

24 We currently serve more than 70,000 students
25 each year, and have 10 campus and training

1 locations across Orange and Osceola Counties.

2 Our students reflect the demographics of our
3 local community. So just about half of our
4 students identify as Hispanic or Latino, and about
5 20 percent of our students identify as Black or
6 African-American.

7 Valencia received the Inaugural Aspen Prize
8 for Community College Excellence. So we were named
9 the best community college in the entire United
10 States, and that success continues.

11 Just last year, we had 8,500 students complete
12 an Associate's Degree or Bachelor's Degree from
13 Valencia College. More than 7,500 technical
14 certificates were earned, and more than 1,200
15 individuals completed a vocational or trades
16 program leading to industry certifications and
17 directly to employment.

18 While my comments today will really focus on
19 Valencia's program offerings, I did want to take
20 just a moment and highlight why I really do believe
21 Florida's education system is a competitive
22 advantage for the state. These next two slides are
23 literally the same slides that we used in our
24 presentation to the National Science Foundation,
25 when Osceola County was competing for an Engines of

1 Innovation grant. There were only 10 engines of
2 innovation identified across the entire country.
3 Florida received one of those Engines of Innovation
4 awards, and that was in Osceola County. And a key
5 portion of our argument to the National Science
6 Foundation was the strength of our education and
7 workforce system.

8 Florida's education system has been ranked
9 number one in the country for two years in a row,
10 and our higher education system has been ranked
11 number one in the country for eight years in a row.
12 And I think that there is a couple of reasons for
13 this.

14 First of all, Florida, uniquely, has school
15 districts that align with counties. And this
16 allows for collaboration between the K-12 system
17 and higher education in ways that you don't see in
18 other places. Just by way of comparison, for
19 example, the State of Illinois has 852 distinct
20 school districts, which creates a very different
21 environment than what we have in Florida. I am
22 able to pick up the phone and speak to the
23 Superintendent of Orange County Public Schools and
24 the School District of Osceola and collaborate in a
25 way that would be impossible if school districts

1 were aligned differently.

2 We also have very, very strong opportunities
3 for high school students to participate in dual
4 enrollment programs. So they are able to earn
5 college credit while they are still in high school
6 at no cost to their families. Last year, we had
7 about 400 students complete an Associate's Degree
8 at the same time that they graduated from High
9 School. So this is a really incredible opportunity
10 for students to accelerate their education.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: How many students overall
12 -- sorry to interrupt.

13 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: How many students overall
15 do dual enrollment, just that are maybe not trying
16 to get their AA or just trying to --

17 DR. PLINSKE: We serve just about 4,000
18 students dual enrolled each year.

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah, that's good.

20 DR. PLINSKE: You are right. It's -- it's
21 whether students complete that degree, or whether
22 they get three credits, or 15 credits while they
23 are in high school, it's a way to accelerate their
24 pathway, and to do so at no cost.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Wow.

1 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah.

2 Of course, our Florida College System is a
3 terrific asset. We are an open access system,
4 which means that any individual with a high school
5 diploma or a GED is guaranteed admission to our
6 institution.

7 We pride ourselves on affordability. And I
8 think this is a really important point.
9 Oftentimes, when I go into the community and I ask,
10 what do you think a degree from Valencia costs?
11 Because there has been so much media attention to
12 the student debt crisis, many families think that a
13 degree costs \$50,000. So when I say that the
14 tuition cost for the degree at Valencia costs just
15 about \$6,000, frankly, I am met with disbelief.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

17 DR. PLINSKE: But it is so affordable. We are
18 currently at \$103 per credit hour. So
19 affordability is a key part of our mission. And
20 more than a third of our students, when you
21 consider fid financial aid and local philanthropic
22 support pay nothing out-of-pocket to attend
23 Valencia College.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: What was that stat?

25 DR. PLINSKE: More than is a third of students

1 pay nothing out-of-pocket. Fewer than a quarter of
2 our students take any sort of student loans. And
3 the students who do take a loan have a debt amount
4 of under \$5,000. So that's a -- that's a
5 counter-narrative that I wish could be communicated
6 as strongly as --

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

8 DR. PLINSKE: -- the national narrative about
9 the student debt crisis.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right. Right.

11 DR. PLINSKE: And then, of course, we have a
12 our incredible State University System. 12 state
13 universities, and guaranteed admission for students
14 who complete an Associate Degree from one of the
15 Florida College System institutions to a State
16 University System institution.

17 In Central Florida, we have a unique program
18 called DirectConnect to UCF. So students who
19 complete an Associate Degree at Valencia know they
20 are guaranteed admission to the University of
21 Central Florida.

22 This has been an incredibly powerful pathway
23 for students. And we have had more than 40,000
24 students complete an Associate Degree at Valencia
25 and then transfer to UCF and complete a Bachelor's

1 Degree. So that pathway has been very, very
2 successful.

3 We have common course numbering system in the
4 State of Florida, which means that when students
5 earn credits at a community college, those credits
6 transfer to the university. There is no loss of
7 credit. This is, I think, something we take for
8 granted in the State of Florida. It is the envy of
9 the country. This is a very, very significant
10 advantage for our state.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Do other states not operate
12 that way? So I don't know.

13 DR. PLINSKE: Not at all. Not at all. You
14 have to -- you -- so I was president of a college
15 in Illinois, and the community college would
16 essentially have to negotiate with each of the
17 universities as to whether or not the course credit
18 would transfer.

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right.

20 DR. PLINSKE: And moreover, the course numbers
21 aren't consistent across the institutions in the
22 state, so English Comp 1, the fact that it's ENC
23 1101 at all 28 colleges and 12 universities in
24 Florida, that is not common across the country. So
25 it might be ENC 101 at this college and ENC 111 at

1 this college, and they may or may not -- so will
2 you involve students who will take Comp 1 at a
3 community college, transfer to a university, and
4 that university says, no, no, you have to take our
5 version.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right.

7 DR. PLINSKE: And so there is actually a
8 phenomenon of transfer credit loss that many
9 students experience, but that is completely a
10 non-issue in the State of Florida.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: That's a confidence
12 builder. I mean, so --

13 DR. PLINSKE: That's right.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: -- you know what you are
15 getting into and otherwise doesn't matter --

16 DR. PLINSKE: Absolutely. Absolutely.

17 One of the other strengths that I think is
18 really unique to our higher education system in
19 Florida is that you have multiple onramps and
20 offramps for individuals, frankly, throughout their
21 careers.

22 I think the model of going to college directly
23 from high school, earning a Bachelor's Degree and
24 then getting a job and not going back to college
25 and not changing careers is outdated, right? So we

1 have to think about how to make it easy for
2 individuals in our community to start their
3 education, to start their career, and to interact
4 between these systems.

5 So, for example, at Valencia College, we have
6 something called Accelerated Skills Training. And
7 what this is, is rather than a traditional degree
8 program, these are programs that are offered in a
9 matter of weeks. They range from four weeks in
10 length to 24 weeks in length. And at the end of
11 the program, students will be eligible to earn an
12 industry certification, oftentimes multiple
13 industry certifications, that leads directly to
14 employment.

15 So the student can then find employment,
16 full-time employment, usually with benefits, sort
17 of create stability in their lives, and they are
18 able then to articulate those industry
19 certifications to college credit if they were
20 interested in continuing their education. So
21 again, there is an onramp and offramp at multiple
22 points in the student's journey.

23 Of course we admit many, many thousands of
24 students directly from high school in our degree
25 programs as well. So students can start directly

1 at Valencia in the Associate Degree program. And,
2 of course, students can start directly in a state
3 university program as well. So there is multiple
4 entry points for students. But there is also the
5 opportunity for continued education throughout an
6 individual's lifetime as they are looking for
7 career advancement. And I think that that is
8 something just really important to consider as we
9 think about preparing for the future -- the future
10 workers.

11 So a couple of specific examples of programs
12 that we offer at Valencia. Our Electrical Power
13 Line Technician Program is one of those accelerated
14 skills draining programs that I described. This
15 particular program is 15 weeks in length. And in
16 the program, students learn to install and repair
17 power lines up to 300 feet in height, as well as in
18 vaults and trenches. They learn to safely climb
19 towers and poles. They learn to assemble
20 substations and transformers, how to maintain and
21 repair overhead power lines. And also learn tree
22 trimming and truck driving. So they earn their CDL
23 as part of this 15-week program.

24 This was designed in partnership with our
25 local providers, Duke Energy, OUC and KUA. They

1 have been fantastic partners in helping us really
2 design the program so that we know that our
3 graduates have exactly the skill set that they are
4 looking for. In fact, that CDL addition was
5 something that was the result of feedback from
6 local employers to add that into the program.

7 We've had 164 graduates from the program over
8 the last five years. And they have experienced a
9 90-percent placement rate after completion of the
10 program.

11 So -- so it's, I think, very unique to have a
12 15-week program where you know that when you
13 complete that program, you essentially can find a
14 really good career. And instead of asking students
15 to go to college for two years, or four years, or
16 six years to then be ready for your clear, we can
17 say, can you give us 15 weeks?

18 And what's neat about the program is that if
19 students, after they are employed, are interested
20 in continuing their education, the industry
21 certifications that students earn in this program
22 articulate to credits toward an Associate Degree.
23 So for example, this particular program articulates
24 to 12 credit hours in our Associate Degree program
25 in Energy Management Controls Technology.

1 So essentially, by completing this program,
2 students earn 20 percent of an Associate Degree, so
3 they have that head start towards that degree if
4 they are interested in continuing their education.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: That's a whole semester
6 worth of class.

7 DR. PLINSKE: That's right. That's right.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: So -- so that's
9 interesting. I was going to ask this question
10 later, whether it's this program or other programs,
11 how often do students take this, get established,
12 have a job and then continue on to finish, you
13 know, there either AA or full degree?

14 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. So we do see many
15 students taking advantage of this. Our accelerated
16 skills training programs are relatively new. They
17 have been in existence now for just about seven or
18 eight years. We actually started an advanced
19 manufacturing --

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right.

21 DR. PLINSKE: -- down in Osceola County, but
22 we have actually seen just about 11 percent of
23 students that have completed one of these programs,
24 have come back to earn a technical certificate or
25 Associate Degree from Valencia. So they found

1 employment --

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

3 DR. PLINSKE: -- are working full time, which
4 is the case for many of our students --

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right.

6 DR. PLINSKE: -- but then continue their
7 education, continue their coursework, and then earn
8 a college level credential as a result.

9 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah. I mean, my personal
10 experience is that -- and now that my boys are
11 getting a little bit older and, of course, they are
12 interacting with high-schoolers, and themselves in
13 high school, and seeing kids go off to graduate
14 have to make a tough decision, right? You know,
15 maybe I have got to work for a little bit before I
16 can go to school. I'm afraid of debt, like you
17 mentioned before, it probably has some bad
18 connotations related to it, but if they can get do
19 a program -- get involved in a program like this,
20 establish themselves almost immediately, right?
21 And then, you know, within a year, you know, be at
22 a full-time job, have good pay, not working their
23 glorified part-time job that they had in high
24 school, and then move on to, you know, both a
25 career and of a degree, wow, impressive.

1 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. It's a -- again, this is
2 a fantastic partnership with our employers as well.
3 All of our accelerated skills training programs are
4 really designed and offered because there has been
5 employer demand. So we engage with a curriculum
6 development process with our local employers again
7 to make sure that what our students are learning is
8 precisely what the employers are looking for, and
9 our goal is to -- is to shorten the training
10 program as much as possible.

11 So we are not looking at this is a
12 semester-long program, or this is a two-year
13 program. It's how quickly can individuals learn
14 the skills that employers are looking for, because
15 what we've learned is that for many students, it's
16 not the tuition cost of going to college, but it's
17 the opportunity cost. It's taking time away from
18 work. So how do we reduce that as much as
19 possible, make sure they have the skills, they earn
20 the industry certifications, and then they are
21 immediately able to join the workforce full-time.

22 COMMISSIONER FAY: Can I ask a question on
23 this?

24 DR. PLINSKE: Of course.

25 COMMISSIONER FAY: So because it's a skills

1 training component, is there -- is there some mix
2 of on-site training and academic or virtual
3 educational components, or is it, you know, there
4 is a schedule from a certain hour to another hour
5 every day for a few weeks? Like, how does that
6 work?

7 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. So these -- all of our
8 accelerated skills training programs are meant to
9 simulate the work environment. So students
10 essentially are at work full-time duration the day.
11 This program, I think, is probably, like, 7:00 a.m.
12 to 3:00 p.m. So they get used to sort of being
13 clocking in and clocking out, if you will.

14 They run -- this program, I believe, runs
15 Monday through Thursday, which allows students to
16 have Friday and the weekend to work, because many
17 of our students are balancing work while they are
18 in the program. And these programs are 80 percent
19 hands-on.

20 So we actually have -- and this particular
21 program is offered at our School of Public Safety,
22 where we have some open acreage, where we are
23 actually able to have land where students can --
24 can practice installing poles, taking poles down.

25 I know our instructors, over night oftentimes

1 students will engage in work, and then the
2 instructors will sort of knock something down, so
3 that when they come back the next morning, they
4 sort of get that hands-on problem-solving
5 experience, right. We are trying to simulate as
6 closely as possible what they would experience in
7 the field.

8 COMMISSIONER FAY: I have a two-year old, so
9 that happens. Things have been knocked down.

10 DR. PLINSKE: That's right. That's right.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: A little unplanned, though.

12 COMMISSIONER FAY: Definitely unplanned.

13 No, I think it's awesome. I had the
14 opportunity, when I was Chair, to go visit a
15 training facility here in Tallahassee, and you just
16 see the difficulty of some of these things, and
17 what's required for the training. And there is all
18 kinds of safety components --

19 DR. PLINSKE: Absolutely.

20 COMMISSIONER FAY: -- involved in this that,
21 you know, have gotten better over time, but there
22 is still risk. There is still risk in these jobs.
23 And unfortunately we hear tragic incidents that
24 will occur occasionally. I think, you know, they
25 can get sort of underrepresented the idea that they

1 go out there every day and, you know, put their own
2 lives on the line to keep power coming.

3 So this is an awesome program. It sounds like
4 you have a demand for it. I will say I did get to
5 climb a pole when I was out here, but they only let
6 me go like two feet off the ground.

7 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. Right. Right. Right.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Something to do with that
9 OSHA regulation?

10 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. Yeah.

11 COMMISSIONER FAY: I don't know what it was.

12 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah, we do. OSHA is the very
13 first thing that our students complete in any of
14 these programs because, obviously, safety is a huge
15 component of it, and that safety training is a
16 really critical element. And, of course, that's
17 something that we build in to our training
18 programs, because it is very serious.

19 It's also what I really appreciate about the
20 80-percent hands-on is that this attracts students
21 that, frankly, may not have enjoyed high school,
22 and aren't excited about the possibility of going
23 to college. So one of the things that I love to do
24 at the beginning of every semester is hand out ice
25 cream at all of our campuses. So I take -- it

1 takes a week with all of our locations, right? But
2 we have ice cream to hand out to students. And
3 when we visit to visit this program, you know, it
4 was late September, so it was hot, so students were
5 getting the sense of what it's really going to be
6 like when they are employed in this field. And, of
7 course, they were very excited to find the ice
8 cream.

9 And I said, well, what are you working on
10 today? And they said, we are digging a trench.
11 And I said, gosh, that sounds like really hard
12 work. And he said, it is, and I love it. And I
13 thought to myself, he would never find -- he would
14 not in last in a week in a Comp 1 classroom or a
15 math classroom. This is his passion, and it's a
16 way, I think, to really validate and give honor to
17 trades professions, which are just as important as
18 pursuing a Bachelor's Degree or beyond. So really,
19 really love the opportunity that this creates for
20 many in our community.

21 COMMISSIONER FAY: It's awesome. Do a lot of
22 them say in the area --

23 DR. PLINSKE: Absolutely.

24 COMMISSIONER FAY: -- because of your
25 partnerships?

1 DR. PLINSKE: Because the employers are --

2 COMMISSIONER FAY: Yeah. Yeah.

3 DR. PLINSKE: It's sort of likes the NFL draft
4 at our graduation ceremonies for this program, but
5 we offer programs in, as I mentioned, Advanced
6 Manufacturing, so CMC Machine, MacTronics. We do
7 forklift operation, forklift repair, carpentry,
8 apartment maintenance technician, HVAC. We are
9 adding one in plumbing, welding.

10 So you can imagine, when students are at the
11 end of the program, have earned their industry
12 certifications and we celebrate with them, they
13 actually have oftentimes multiple job offers, to
14 the point where we've had to add into the
15 curriculum, how do you compare, like, an offer of
16 \$25 an hour without benefits versus \$20 with
17 benefits? Like, how do you actually make the
18 decision that's best for you and your family,
19 that's -- we have had to add into the curriculum
20 because we face this unique wonderful challenge of
21 students just being bombarded with job offers.

22 COMMISSIONER FAY: Yeah. And they are big
23 life decisions. It's awesome that you do that.

24 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. Yeah.

25 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: I have a question

1 too, kind of on this, when you are talking about,
2 like, design the programs with employer partners.
3 So how frequent do you reassess the programs? I
4 was thinking, you know, for things, like, we've
5 been more frequently talking about cybersecurity.

6 DR. PLINSKE: Yes.

7 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: So, like, maybe, you
8 know, when they are working with vendors, like
9 adding -- when would you maybe add something like
10 that, because new things are -- this industry is
11 always changing --

12 DR. PLINSKE: Absolutely.

13 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: -- so how frequent --
14 do you just kind of rely on the employers to help
15 guide you when you are amending programs and
16 things?

17 DR. PLINSKE: Without question. There is a
18 piece of it that is structured and by design, where
19 we have advisory committees, and we meet on regular
20 frequencies, at least on an annual, usually on a
21 twice-a-year basis to get that feedback.

22 For programs like these, however, we actually
23 bring the employers regularly into the classroom so
24 that the employers have the opportunity to talk
25 about the different career opportunities in the

1 field. And so we are in constant communication
2 with our employers, and they are able to help us
3 make adjustments if there are things that our
4 graduates, and once they are employed, they realize
5 there is a skills gap, that is feedback that we
6 want to hear so that we can make adjustments in the
7 curriculum, or if there is a new skill that's
8 emerging, that's something that we can add.

9 Oftentimes, we partner with our local
10 employers to be the industries as well, so we find
11 that that --

12 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: That's really --
13 yeah, and that really helps build, you know, there
14 is a potential employer that they just have right
15 there, and the connections and everything.

16 DR. PLINSKE: Exactly.

17 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: This is awesome.

18 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah.

19 COMMISSIONER CLARK: So you -- also, you were
20 showing your partnerships, and you have three kinds
21 of utilities. You have got the investor-owned,
22 co-ops and municipal. Each of them have had their
23 own private linemen training programs in the past.
24 Have you been able to coordinate some of those
25 things and bring them together into one type -- I

1 know he Southeastern Lineman Lab, I believe in
2 Georgia. FMEA did their own program. Are all
3 these programs designed to get a person to an
4 apprentice level when they graduate the course?

5 DR. PLINSKE: Yes. So -- so I am not sure in
6 terms of the interplay with sort of the private
7 training and -- but I can say that for Valencia's
8 program, we were actually approached, I think
9 initially by Duke Energy, and then we partnered as
10 well with OUC and KUA to meet our specific regional
11 needs. So I am not sure if they continue their own
12 private training, or if it's really transition to
13 us being the provider, but it seems to be working
14 quite well for our particular local region.

15 COMMISSIONER CLARK: I think, if I remember
16 right, you were state to offer this program.
17 Wasn't the Valencia the first one to offer linemen
18 training?

19 DR. PLINSKE: I can't confirm that with
20 certainty, but we started in 2018.

21 COMMISSIONER CLARK: Yeah.

22 DR. PLINSKE: We also have a number of
23 Associate degrees that I think are very closely
24 related to your workforce concerns. For example, I
25 mentioned the Energy Management Controls

1 Technology. This is a program where students, if
2 they complete the accelerated skills training
3 program that you just saw, they can earn 12 credit
4 hours towards this degree.

5 Students could also complete training in the
6 HVAC Technician Program and similarly earn 12
7 credit hours, or students might enter this program
8 directly from High School.

9 And this is a program that we'll really
10 focuses on building automation and internet of
11 things, and so it really looks at programming local
12 area networks, router technology, some elements of
13 cybersecurity, of course, systems, integration and
14 troubleshooting. So, again, this is really looking
15 at smart building technology.

16 Here, we received a \$300,000 National Science
17 Foundation grant to help us build a lab to simulate
18 a smart building so that students have the hands-on
19 experience that they would need. And then we also,
20 in this particular program, partner very closely
21 with Johnson Controls. They have actually
22 sponsored a recruiter to help recruit students for
23 the program, because it's not something that
24 students necessarily graduate from high school
25 thinking, I want to be an energy management

1 controls technician, right? That's just not yet a
2 sort of -- a well-known career. So part of our
3 challenge, frankly, is actually recruiting students
4 into this program so that there is awareness that
5 this is a potential career path. But this is
6 certainly a program that, once students find it,
7 sort of fall in love with it and really see this as
8 a critical need.

9 Another challenge is that our students often
10 get employed, hired before they graduate. So the
11 demand for individuals with this skill set is so
12 high that our challenge here is working with
13 employers to say, okay, can you hire them but then
14 let them keep -- keep going in their education so
15 that they can complete that degree?

16 COMMISSIONER FAY: And are most of these
17 working too in pursuit of the associate?

18 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah, that's a great question.
19 I should have added that context.

20 Just about 60 percent of it students at
21 Valencia attend on a part-time basis, and that's
22 not because they are just deciding to take it easy.
23 It's because 80 percent of our students are
24 working, and many of them are also maintaining
25 family responsibilities as well, whether that's

1 taking care of children or taking care of parents.
2 So by far, the vast majority of our students in any
3 program are going to be balancing work
4 responsibilities at the same time that they are in
5 school.

6 On average, most of our students enroll in two
7 to three classes per semester. So when we -- I
8 actually have tried to stop calling it a two-year
9 degree, because fewer than 10 percent of our
10 students graduate within two years. And again, not
11 because they are doing anything wrong. It's just
12 because they are taking two or three classes at a
13 time, so it's going to take them, by design, three
14 or four years to earn of that Associate Degree.

15 COMMISSIONER FAY: Yeah. And I would imagine,
16 to your point about the debt, and like -- I mean,
17 that formula is much more interesting for most
18 because you are not -- and the Wall Street Journal
19 had an article about co-op programs at
20 universities --

21 DR. PLINSKE: Oh, okay.

22 COMMISSIONER FAY: -- and you take this block
23 of time where they work and then block of time
24 academic and block of time they work, that kind of
25 goes to your process --

1 DR. PLINSKE: Interesting.

2 COMMISSIONER FAY: -- to your point, the costs
3 are still significant for those degrees, so the
4 folks who work part time and then you mentioned
5 your tuition costs, which I am sure there are other
6 fees and that sort of thing, but in general, those
7 costs are low, folks are able to complete that
8 level with very low debt, I would imagine --

9 DR. PLINSKE: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER FAY: -- even if they take out
11 some version of --

12 DR. PLINSKE: That's right.

13 COMMISSIONER FAY: Okay.

14 DR. PLINSKE: The student debt that our
15 students experience is extremely low. And we
16 really try to encourage students to not take loans
17 at all, because, again, a federal financial aid
18 award, if a student is eligible for a full Pell
19 Grant, that actually is more than the cost of
20 tuition. So it not only makes tuition free, but it
21 also provides funding for books, or for housing, or
22 for, you know, supplies that students might need.
23 So, again, the tuition cost is usually not the
24 barrier that makes it difficult for students to
25 persist. It's life gets in the way is usually the

1 reason.

2 COMMISSIONER FAY: Yeah. I appreciate it.

3 My mom raised my brother and I, and to your
4 point, she went back to school, and just the
5 challenge of full-time work, and trying to, you
6 know, get that degree or certification, whatever
7 you may need to be able to provide for your family,
8 I mean, it's -- that cost builds up quickly, and we
9 are seeing on a national level --

10 DR. PLINSKE: Yes.

11 COMMISSIONER FAY: -- and so this -- I mean, I
12 appreciate you bringing this forward, Chairman,
13 because I didn't -- to your point, I did not
14 realize costs were that low for these types of the
15 programs.

16 DR. PLINSKE: Right.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: It's a secret.

18 COMMISSIONER FAY: It really is, I mean,
19 comparatively, and the ability to kind of adapt. I
20 mean, we see so much on TV and on-line about some
21 of these universities all around the country that
22 do these virtual options, and I think there is a
23 trend, you know, this idea of controlling your
24 schedule, your education, that type of thing. But
25 with lot of these components and these jobs, there

1 seems to be, to me at least, some obvious level of
2 personal interaction and hands-on engagement that
3 you just can't get from a coursework. I mean, it
4 just -- and maybe that's too much speculation, but
5 I know NVIDIA has their own AI training now, and
6 I've done some. That's great. But hands-on
7 engagement with other people that are doing that
8 type of work, you just seem to see productivity,
9 and the learning can be much quicker for those
10 folks. So I am guessing you are seeing that.

11 And probably competing with some of these
12 other folks. I think New Hampshire is one I see,
13 like, you see these programs. And there is nothing
14 against them. They are great programs, but you
15 don't get that interaction I imagine.

16 DR. PLINSKE: That's right.

17 I think there are so many secrets about the
18 Florida College System. Of course, the utility
19 program, the power line program, of course, that's
20 100 percent in-person. There is no way to learn
21 that virtually. This program, similarly, we need
22 the students on campus so that they have the
23 experience in the lab that simulates what they
24 would experience in the field working in the
25 buildings.

1 We do -- the next program I will describe is
2 Cybersecurity. That one would be more available
3 on-line, but also, even if students are taking
4 on-line courses, they always have the opportunity
5 to come to campus to meet with their faculty, to
6 have that opportunity for additional instruction.

7 But one of the really great parts about the
8 Florida College System institutions is our small
9 class size. So the largest class that you will
10 find at Valencia College, the largest, is 35
11 students. The average class size is 22 students
12 per class. So just in terms of being able to
13 provide a personalized experience for our faculty
14 to literally know every student's name and to
15 interact with them and support them in their
16 learning is truly unique, and something that --
17 that you wouldn't find at many other options.

18 COMMISSIONER FAY: Yeah. And you are seeing
19 even companies going back to bringing people back
20 in the office for training and all that.

21 DR. PLINSKE: Yes.

22 So you mentioned cybersecurity. Of course, we
23 know that that is a critical need. In fact, I will
24 say that this year, we've seen a 25-percent
25 enrollment increase compared to last year in our

1 cybersecurity program, which is growth that,
2 frankly, we cannot sustain, and I will get to that
3 point in just a moment.

4 But really, our cybersecurity program teaches
5 students how to protect and troubleshoot midsize
6 enterprise level networks. They learn a lot in
7 terms of scripting language, Python and YAML. We
8 have 600 students currently enrolled in the
9 associate and science degree program. And Valencia
10 has been designated as a National Center of
11 Academic Excellence and Information Assurance by
12 got the National Security Agency and the United
13 States Department of Homeland Security, and we are
14 only one of 30 such designated centers in the
15 United States.

16 So this is something -- this is a program that
17 we take very, very seriously. We understand the
18 need for the program, the need for our students to
19 have the skills that so many industries are looking
20 for, and our students are responding very
21 positively to this one.

22 This is not one where we have to really worry
23 about recruiting. Students hear the importance of
24 cybersecurity, they are excited about that as a
25 career field, and we are seeing them choose this

1 program in very large numbers. So growth is an
2 area here that I will mention as a challenge in
3 just a moment.

4 COMMISSIONER FAY: Do you compete with the
5 military for those students? I mean, a lot of the
6 high level cybersecurity stuff comes out of
7 previous military experience. This is more of an
8 entry level kind of program?

9 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. So this would be more for
10 individuals that are preparing to be cybersecurity
11 analysts, and so like a Level 1, Level 2.

12 COMMISSIONER FAY: Yeah.

13 DR. PLINSKE: We do have aspirations to add a
14 Bachelor of Science in cybersecurity. The industry
15 demand is certainly there. And that would actually
16 prepare students then to be able to do, for
17 example, like, penetration testing, and sort of
18 have that higher level skill set that you might
19 imagine.

20 But we do of also have partnerships with
21 military, so that when individuals leave the
22 military and have this training and experience,
23 they can articulate that for college credit. And
24 then, of course, we recruit veterans to serve in
25 faculty roles as well.

1 COMMISSIONER FAY: That's awesome.

2 DR. PLINSKE: And then our last degree program
3 that I wanted to high highlight is in Electrical
4 and Computer Engineering Technology. Here, we have
5 both an Associate in Science Degree, as well as a
6 Bachelor's Degree. This really focuses again on
7 engineering technology, AC circuits,
8 semiconductors, photonics, digital systems and
9 programmable logic controls.

10 We have about 200 students in our Associate in
11 Science Degree program. And this is really
12 designed, again, for that technician level. If
13 students are interested in moving beyond the
14 technician level into more of the design level, we
15 do have the Bachelor of Science Degree in
16 electrical computing engineering technology. And
17 this is more for individuals interested in
18 analyzing, designing and implementing power
19 systems, as well as an emphasis on computer
20 programming. So we do have students here that are
21 actually working on power grid designs as part of
22 the curriculum you, and using CAD software to map
23 out those grids.

24 So this is certainly something that is also in
25 high demand by local employers, not only, of

1 course, our utility partners, but then our local
2 theme parks as well have really been significant
3 partners in this particular program.

4 So if I may be so bold as to share just a few
5 recommendations. In terms of recruiting new
6 employees to the industry, one of the industries
7 that I think has done this really well is law
8 enforcement. And so they have a sponsorship model
9 where they will hire a new recruit, and they will
10 actually pay them as an employee while the recruit
11 goes through the law enforcement academy.

12 So again, this addresses that question of
13 opportunity cost. Instead of trying to figure out
14 how do I balance a part-time job, make ends meet
15 and go to college, I can really focus on getting
16 that training, getting that skill set that I need
17 while I am employed full time, and then I am
18 already -- I already have my employer. I know
19 where I am going to work, and I can start from day
20 one hit the ground running.

21 So that -- that is something that I think has
22 worked really, really well in our law enforcement
23 and fire agencies, and might be something that
24 could be considered as an opportunity to recruit
25 new employees to the field.

1 In terms of incumbent worker training, we have
2 really seen significant success and a dramatic
3 increase in employer sponsored tuition. So for
4 example, we saw this at a large-scale with Walt
5 Disney World, where they have something called
6 Disney Aspire. Any of their hourly employees are
7 able to have their tuition paid for to attend
8 Valencia or a handful of other institutions. They
9 see this actually as a very significant retention
10 tool to keep employees that are currently working,
11 and also make sure that they have the opportunity
12 to continue to grow professionally.

13 We've seen that model now expand to our local
14 hospitals. That also tends to be a really great
15 retention tool, but then also allows individuals to
16 build their skill set. And we've partnered
17 intentionally, for example, we've worked with sort
18 of receptionist staff and offered that accelerated
19 skills training in clinical medical assisting, so
20 they are able to move from an entry level position
21 to a higher skilled position, and that is sponsored
22 by the employer. And actually, we are able to
23 offer that training program at the hospital so the
24 employees don't even have to leave to get that
25 additional training. So that sort of model might

1 also be something to consider.

2 And here again, I would put a plug in for the
3 Florida College System, because there are a number
4 of third-party providers that are engaging
5 out-of-state on-line private institutions because
6 they are able to do so at scale across the country.
7 But since your purview is the state of Florida, I
8 think this would be a real opportunity to focus in
9 on Florida College System institutions and State
10 University Systems.

11 And then finally, I would just ask to continue
12 to be supportive and ambassadors of the Florida
13 College System. Frankly, our growth is outpacing
14 our funding growth. And so as we grow, we actually
15 have fewer dollars per student in terms of
16 operating the institution. And so what that looks
17 like on the ground is really an inability to
18 recruit and retain faculty that we need to continue
19 to offer these programs at the level that our
20 students demand just in terms of size.

21 I mentioned cybersecurity having grown by 25
22 percent. What that means is not that we can add 25
23 percent more faculty. What it actually means that
24 is that all of our full-time faculty in
25 cybersecurity are teaching triple overloads this

1 semester. So they are being asked to work at
2 160 percent of their capacity to meet student
3 demand.

4 So in any way that you can help continue to
5 support the Florida College System, that really is
6 an investment in workforce development in the state
7 of Florida.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Impressive, right? And
9 super informative. So let's kind of talk about
10 funding maybe for half a second.

11 So where does your traditional funding come --
12 or maybe call it -- maybe traditional is not the
13 right word. Where does the funding come from for
14 some of these special programs, especially when you
15 are, like -- when you are teaming up with the
16 different companies and they've got input, just
17 kind of maybe walk us through that a little bit.

18 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah, of course.

19 So for our tradition eight degree programs,
20 just about 50 percent of our funding comes from
21 student tuition revenue, and about 50 percent of
22 funding comes through state appropriations. That's
23 true for Valencia. It will be a different
24 proportion for other colleges.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right.

1 DR. PLINSKE: Just because of our enrollment
2 growth, Valencia, right now, receives the least
3 amount of funding per student across all 28
4 institutions. Again, that's simply a function of
5 our growth. We have just outpaced our funding.

6 So oftentimes, employers who are supporting
7 students in one of the degree programs usually do
8 through -- do so through scholarship programs, so
9 that takes the burden of cost off of the student
10 all together.

11 The accelerated skills training program that I
12 mentioned, those are actually offered through
13 continuing education. So there is no state funding
14 to support those programs, so we actually charge
15 the full cost of instruction for tuition for
16 students. That oftentimes is supported by local
17 employers. So there will be scholarships,
18 sponsorships, as well as our workforce development
19 agency, Career Source Central Florida.

20 So again, each of these programs is going to
21 line up with those targeted industries, and then
22 will be eligible for WIOA funding to help support
23 individuals that are interested in that continued
24 education and training.

25 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: How do you, you know,

1 get that message across to potential students?
2 Because I think that's -- especially if they are
3 going to be helping, you know, that there is all of
4 these funding options. I think about when I
5 started here as an attorney at the PSC, I didn't
6 even know at the time when I started there is a
7 program where you could get your MBA from Florida
8 State, and I went through that program and it was
9 awesome, and I, like, paid for my books, but, like,
10 that was nothing, and I wouldn't have been able to
11 afford that at that time.

12 And so -- and I tell people all the time,
13 like, you know, I have friends who kids are in high
14 school and going to college, and I am like, this is
15 a great -- work for a state agency, and you can get
16 another degree, whatever you want to do, and so --
17 but I didn't -- I didn't know about that, and I
18 think it's a great recruiting tool.

19 So, it's like being able to explain to
20 potential students that there is -- just because
21 you might -- you think you might not be able to
22 afford it, but there are so many options. I mean,
23 the scholarship options are -- and I have seen apps
24 and things trying to kind of help guide students to
25 what they can do to be able to afford, and where

1 they can apply, and all that, but, I mean, you have
2 got such a diverse pool of applicants, you know,
3 you have got right out of high school, and then you
4 have people who are coming back after, you know, 20
5 years or something, and so it's probably pretty
6 difficult, I would imagine, to be able to get that
7 message across all these different groups of
8 people.

9 DR. PLINSKE: It is. It is certainly a
10 challenge. And again, just the media focus on
11 student loan forgiveness, on the debt, all of that
12 is not actually helpful to our message of you don't
13 have to take to go to college.

14 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: We are all shocked at
15 the affordability, right. We are all just -- yeah.

16 DR. PLINSKE: So I think, you know, again, the
17 more we can talk about that publicly and in every
18 different opportunity that we can.

19 Frankly, a lot of what we are seeing now is
20 also word of mouth. Particularly the accelerated
21 skills training programs, what we are finding -- of
22 course, we do have a recruiting team, and they work
23 -- and we work with career source, so those
24 individuals who are looking to change careers. But
25 what we are really finding, and I think this speaks

1 so highly to what we are doing, is that a student
2 will go through the program, they will get hired,
3 they will then talk to their neighbors about their
4 path and how they were able to find this new career
5 opportunity. And then you start seeing sort of
6 clusters within neighborhoods and within ZIP Codes,
7 where somebody goes, tries it. Has success. Comes
8 back, and says --

9 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: Yeah.

10 DR. PLINSKE: -- this worked for me. So
11 that's been really powerful.

12 I will also share a really unique program that
13 was launched three years ago by Osceola County
14 called Osceola Prosper. They started it with
15 American Rescue Plan dollars, and it's been so
16 successful that they have now continued the program
17 with local tax revenue, where it's essentially a
18 promise of no out-of-pocket cost for tuition and
19 fees for any program at Valencia College or Osceola
20 Technical College for every single high school
21 graduate in the county. Public school, home
22 school, charter school, private school.

23 Osceola County in 2010 ranked 61st out of 67
24 counties in terms of the percentage of high school
25 graduates that went to college. The year that

1 Prosper launched, they went from 61st to 4th. The
2 college-going rate went from 41 percent to 63
3 percent.

4 And as we were working with the County to
5 estimate the cost, our initial estimate was that it
6 would cost roughly \$12 million to sponsor an entire
7 high school graduating class. The costs actually
8 came in closer to eight million, in large part
9 because many more students than we originally
10 estimated were eligible for a full Pell Grant,
11 which means that it cost the County nothing for
12 that student, but because of the promise of free --

13 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: Right, getting that
14 message across.

15 DR. PLINSKE: -- families and students then
16 went through the process, and it built a sense of
17 trust.

18 I think there is there has just been so much
19 disappointment and disbelief, frankly. That was
20 the hardest thing with the Prosper messaging, is we
21 would get messages from parents saying, this is a
22 scam, right?

23 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: Right.

24 DR. PLINSKE: This isn't real.

25 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: Yeah. And having

1 neighbors that go through a program and report back
2 positively, I mean, you just hear, like, you know,
3 other scandals of other schools, you know, other
4 institutions, whatever, where somebody puts all
5 this money up, and then they've got really nothing
6 to show for it. And so having -- but if your
7 neighbor had a really successful experience, and
8 you know that this is for real, it's just -- yeah,
9 I think --

10 I mean, I am glad that people are thinking
11 twice before they --

12 DR. PLINSKE: Right.

13 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: -- engage in a huge
14 financial step in their lives, but it's, you know,
15 it's good to know that these are -- these are real
16 when you get that message across.

17 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. But there -- so I think,
18 to your question, there are ways, and we've seen
19 big results from big efforts. But it just
20 continues to be, I think, a continual opportunity
21 to tell our story, and to do so broadly.

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: It's definitely 30 percent
23 of the budget. That's awesome.

24 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah.

25 COMMISSIONER CLARK: I just wanted to add --

1 and thank you. I really appreciate the
2 presentation. I'm a long-time supporter of the
3 community college. I did 16 years as the -- on the
4 Board of Trustees at Chipola College. We are going
5 to demand equal time.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: The floor is open.

7 COMMISSIONER CLARK: Okay. The advocacy for
8 the program, you have our full support there.

9 One of the things I think -- and just to
10 address, Commissioner Passidomo, you made the
11 statement about getting that word out. There is a
12 lot of difference between what we see in rural
13 areas versus the metro areas, because coming from
14 that rural background and rural perspective, it's
15 pretty much a known commodity that you want a great
16 value and a great deal, community college -- the
17 college -- the Florida College System -- I'm just
18 going to say community college -- the college
19 system in Florida is a bargain. And your prices --
20 if you are getting -- if you are getting BS's
21 through at six and 7,000, that is amazing. I think
22 I remember Chipola's average was closer to 10.

23 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah. So the Bachelor's Degree
24 would be --

25 COMMISSIONER CLARK: Oh, I am sorry.

1 DR. PLINSKE: So the Associate Degree is the
2 6,000.

3 COMMISSIONER CLARK: Okay.

4 DR. PLINSKE: And then you add that -- the
5 second -- the second half --

6 COMMISSIONER CLARK: Okay. Gotcha. Double
7 it, right.

8 DR. PLINSKE: But even still -- even still,
9 \$12,000 for a Bachelor's Degree. One of the quotes
10 that I like to say is that our tuition cost -- and
11 this is true -- our tuition cost is less than the
12 cost of to the meal plan at any residential
13 university.

14 COMMISSIONER CLARK: But the lack of -- the
15 competition that you have when you have got a TCC
16 sitting next to an FSU and a FAMU, it is a lot of
17 -- it is a lot of competition there. And, you
18 know, parents are looking at options and sending
19 their kids to school, you don't think about those.

20 It's a really different perspective that you
21 see in the rural areas. It's not second or third
22 choice. It's first choice in a lot of places.

23 DR. PLINSKE: I love that.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: What do you see as next?
25 Do you see, you know, other industries? And of

1 course, we are talking about utilities and utility
2 workforce. But do you see other industries kind
3 of, you know, chiming in, or other areas of growth?

4 DR. PLINSKE: Absolutely. I think that one of
5 the things that I am most proud of is our
6 responsiveness to our local community. That is
7 also, by the way, one of the pieces of the secret
8 sauce of the Florida College System, is that we are
9 able to respond uniquely and locally to the local
10 business and industry that's in our community. So
11 whether that is more rural, you -- the program at
12 Chipola is probably going to look quite different
13 than the program mix at Valencia. So that is, I
14 think, again, just an incredible asset for the
15 state.

16 And so we always welcome employers coming to
17 us with program ideas, whether that means simply
18 adding a specialization or tweaking curriculum that
19 we already have to meet workforce needs, sometimes
20 it's, frankly, just a conversation of building
21 awareness where we already have the program that
22 would meet the employer's needs but the employer is
23 not aware of it, but then literally designing brand
24 new programs to meet employer needs.

25 I think the best example of that is we were

1 approached by Lockheed Martin several years ago.
2 They were very concerned about an aging workforce
3 and a specialized skill set called electronic board
4 assembly. So it's essentially soldering the
5 semiconductors on the green circuit boards that you
6 see if you each open up a, you know, computer,
7 phone, I mean, any of device, right?

8 And there is actually -- there is three
9 different levels of classifications. There is
10 Class A, which is like soldering for a toaster. It
11 doesn't really matter if it breaks. It's not the
12 end of the world. Class B is soldering for, like,
13 a computer or a television. You expect something
14 to last, you know, 10 years. Then there is Class
15 C, which is like missiles and spaceships, right,
16 with it has to be perfect.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: A little more expensive if
18 you mess up.

19 DR. PLINSKE: Yes. In 10 weeks, our students
20 going -- go from no soldering experience whatsoever
21 to Class C. And then they also are doing the wire
22 harnessing and cabling, which is also part of
23 broadband and this different skill set.

24 And in here, we find that students that have
25 either, like, braided hair, or have an interest in

1 crocheting or cross-point needle, like that sort of
2 level of manual dexterity is like the key skill
3 set. And so we are able to recruit and say, do you
4 braid hair? Actually, you would be great at
5 electronic board assembly.

6 And part of it is, again, this bridging of
7 nobody -- nobody -- I mean, before I was at
8 Valencia, I never heard of electronic board
9 assembly. Nobody is growing up saying, I want to
10 be an electronic board assembler.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right.

12 DR. PLINSKE: So part of it is building this
13 awareness of these incredible career opportunities.
14 In 10 weeks, you can get this certification. You
15 will be hired full time at Lockheed Martin, or
16 other local employers. It's not just Lockheed that
17 needs this skill set. And then we are able to see
18 how long our graduates stay, and oftentimes are
19 promoted. So we like to say it's not just
20 preparing students for a job, but truly for a
21 career.

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: One thing we didn't touch
23 on, and maybe I am outdated, but internship
24 programs, right, where -- I guess as I went through
25 college, that was like, that was your experience,

1 right? You got an opportunity to do a summer
2 internship. I know it's -- half joking, I think I
3 am at least -- you know, that there is an
4 opportunity to experience kind of the work life
5 experience of the industry, or maybe a company, you
6 know.

7 How much of that, you know, exists at this
8 level, and is there any kind of interaction or
9 crossroad between, you know, the skill set of the
10 company's needs and actually doing an internship.

11 DR. PLINSKE: We do, we offer internship
12 opportunities for our Associate in Science Degree
13 programs. For some programs, it's a required
14 internship. For others, it's an option for
15 students. I would love to see us expand
16 internships for students.

17 As a personal story, I started out as a
18 physics major, and it wasn't until between my
19 sophomore and junior year I did an internship at
20 the Fermi Particle Physics Laboratory, and we were
21 looking for a particle that theoretical physicists
22 thought was possible called a glumo made up of
23 three gluons. Anyways, that was when I realized, I
24 didn't -- I didn't actually want to do this for the
25 rest of my life. So part of the internship is

1 really important to, like, is this what I really
2 want to do, or -- or before it's too late, can I
3 shift gears?

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Right.

5 DR. PLINSKE: So I would -- I would love to
6 see internships be a larger part of our curriculum
7 offering. I think, again, with additional support,
8 that would allow us -- those are the things that
9 are, like, for us, nice to have. They are not
10 absolutely essential for us to operate. And that's
11 where additional support could allow us to do some
12 more of those partnerships with employers so that
13 students have that workplace experience.

14 And ultimately, you know, 10 to 15 years from
15 now, I would hope that the student doesn't say, I
16 am working on an AS degree in Energy Management
17 Controls Technology, period; but, like, I am
18 working on an AS degree in Energy Management
19 Controls Technology at Universal Studios, or at
20 Duke Energy, right, like, that employer connection
21 is so integrated with their education that it's
22 part of -- it's part of their major, if you will.

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

24 DR. PLINSKE: That would be, I think, really
25 attractive to students, because students are no

1 longer saying, ah, if I go to college, I will
2 figure it out and everything will just be okay.
3 We've seen too much where it's not. And so
4 students are looking for a very specific return on
5 investment, and I think what that is for them is
6 what job is this education going to lead me toward?
7 And if we can find a way to marry that, so when
8 students are in school studying, they know
9 precisely what it is that they are working toward,
10 I think that will make a significant difference.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah. And seeing it in --
12 seeing it in real world, right, is, many times,
13 very different, and sometimes just a culture in
14 which you are surrounded by, you know, might
15 influence in one direction or another. I have done
16 jobs where I have been in one place and said, I
17 don't like doing it so I will do it somewhere else.
18 Hold on a second, this is very different.

19 DR. PLINSKE: That's true.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah, so -- and I have
21 always been a big believer in -- you know, the
22 success stories never -- when you go back and
23 rewind and you listen to them and you try to
24 rewrite them, or just kind of, you know, report on
25 them, they never happen as expected, right?

1 DR. PLINSKE: Yeah.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: So, like, they are never,
3 like, just perfectly storybook. There is always
4 this turn somewhere. And many times, I believe it
5 leads to exposure. It's like I was exposed to
6 something that I never saw, or never expected to
7 see in my life, or it was an opportunity that just
8 really just out of left field.

9 For me, it was, hey, I never thought I would
10 ever get involved in government, right? I was a
11 private sector person. Raised that way. You know,
12 my family influenced me that way. And when I said,
13 I'm going to go get involved in the government, I
14 wanted to run for office, I literally looked like I
15 had four heads. Like, what the heck -- what the
16 heck are you talking about? But that opportunity
17 just really changed my life frankly. And I see
18 that in the education system.

19 So if we can just get the students -- and it's
20 maybe not even a college, because you are talking
21 about, hey, they are also interacting at the high
22 school level, and maybe seeing industries that
23 maybe, you know, doesn't surround them, right? Mom
24 and dad don't do them --

25 DR. PLINSKE: That's right.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: -- or, you know, aunt and
2 uncle don't necessarily do them, or they don't
3 exist in my community, but, wow, I saw this here at
4 Valencia, you know, maybe that's a direction I want
5 to go.

6 So I am super excited for the things that you
7 are doing. It's been too long since you and I have
8 connected, so I am excited to kind of hear this
9 update, but I need to do a better job of continuing
10 to follow up and, of course, support Valencia in
11 any which way I can, of course, in my -- in my
12 private life, but I wanted to bring you in to kind
13 of our world here, and hopefully we can kind of
14 build a bigger connection, not just with Valencia
15 but with other -- other colleges.

16 And I think, you know, government has a role
17 in talking about these things, you know, watching
18 what industry is doing, and if there is an advocate
19 for us, I think there is a way for us to certainly
20 get involved, so I am super excited. I don't want
21 to take questions away if you guys got any more
22 thoughts or any more questions.

23 DR. PLINSKE: Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Well, Dr. Plinske, thank
25 you so much for coming today, and traveling all the

1 way from Central Florida.

2 DR. PLINSKE: I know. I appreciate it.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I did offer you to come on
4 Zoom. You said, no --

5 DR. PLINSKE: You did. There is something
6 about -- there is something about being in person,
7 and it's just a privilege to be engaged in this
8 work, and I will take any opportunity that there is
9 to just talk about the great work of the Florida
10 College System and Valencia College, so thank you
11 very much for the opportunity.

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Awesome, great. Thank you
13 very much. Awesome.

14 All right. So we will finish up here with
15 reports. Let me go over to our General Counsel.

16 MR. HETRICK: Good morning, Mr. Chair,
17 Commissioners. Nothing unique to report on. We
18 are busy with rate cases, as you know. So the work
19 goes on.

20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: No problem. Thank you.

22 And there is, you know, a lot -- a lot going
23 on. We knew this turn of the year would come, and
24 here it is.

25 Executive Director, Braulio -- Mr. Baez.

1 Sorry. I go very informal.

2 MR. BAEZ: That's okay. I am not -- there was
3 -- you once total told me no vote no tie.

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah. Look, Commissioner
5 Graham is following the rules.

6 MR. BAEZ: I can always take comfort that I am
7 as well dressed. That's my goal.

8 Nothing official to report at the moment, much
9 like General Counsel.

10 I wanted to piggyback on something that
11 Commissioner Passidomo was talking about messaging
12 had the availability and the state tuition subsidy
13 programs. And obviously, we have -- we have them
14 hear, as you know. And I just wanted, since the
15 mic is on, to broadcast to those listening inside
16 our building that it is available, and see -- see
17 Bobby Maddox's shop for details at Human Resources.

18 Part of -- much of my day, especially around
19 this time, is spent authorizing tuition waivers and
20 things, and so I get to see how many people. And I
21 will tell you it is -- there are quite a lot that
22 are availing themselves of this, and it really
23 tickles my. It's wonderful that our folks, our
24 staffers are, you know, developing professionally
25 in that manner, whether it's an advanced degree in

1 their specialty, or just something that augments
2 their skill set, I think, is wonderful.

3 And frankly, if I had a wish alone, I would
4 like to sign tuition waivers all day, because it
5 means that folks are really taking advantage of
6 really one of -- it's not quite a secret, but it's
7 one of the lesser -- lesser known --

8 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: Yeah. It's a great
9 recruiting tool, especially for --

10 MR. BAEZ: It's part of our literature.

11 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: -- you know, if you
12 are working for the State, and we have other great,
13 you know, benefits. But that was the one that was
14 the most significant I found that I was like -- I
15 mean, I don't even know what it would cost to get
16 my MBA, but it was not something that I was going
17 to even try to pay for, but that I had that
18 opportunity to get, and it's been really helpful in
19 the job. I mean, I passed my accounting class.

20 MR. BAEZ: I didn't.

21 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: I passed it.

22 MR. BAEZ: I didn't maybe more than once. So
23 many years ago, but -- and it is -- it's wonderful,
24 and it is part of our literature too, when we go to
25 job fairs and stuff, and I think -- I would agree

1 with whoever said it, it's a great retention tool.
2 It's one of the things that we rely on, and we have
3 so few, but just wanted to piggyback on that --
4 that that you said.

5 And finally, I wanted to -- and this is, you
6 know, the vagaries of the calendar being what they
7 are, I wanted to introduce, again on an open mic,
8 David Frank, who most of you know. I wanted to
9 welcome him back publicly. He has agreed to
10 rejoin, or he agreed to rejoin us -- it's too late
11 now, David, okay, you can't take it back -- as our
12 Legislative Affairs Director. So he was part of
13 the staff for several years, also I think had a cup
14 of coffee in the suite as well, so I think you all
15 are well aware of his skills and how fine a person
16 he is, and we are really excited. I am very
17 excited that he accepted our offer to come back and
18 help us in our legislative efforts, of which we
19 have a couple that are -- I am just teasing, but we
20 will have a discussion, I think, down the road and
21 let you know what we hope to be, with your blessing
22 and concession, we will be focusing on this coming
23 session. So welcome, David.

24 And questions? I have -- that's all I have
25 got.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Awesome. Well, thank you.
2 And David didn't hold back and he jumped right into
3 to helping us with the song of the month --

4 MR. BAEZ: Yes, he did.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: -- so he came in ready to
6 work.

7 MR. BAEZ: I am jealous. He has already
8 scored -- he has been here like all of 15 minutes.

9 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: And if you noticed the
10 connection between the song and what we talked
11 about today.

12 MR. BAEZ: I did. It wasn't lost on me. I
13 would say that the volume was a little low, or
14 maybe the volume of conversation was a little too
15 high this time around.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: He also may have had some
17 input of, like, what we are doing, so that might
18 have triggered him to offer such a great
19 suggestion.

20 So, David, thank you, and welcome -- welcome
21 back.

22 Awesome. Well, I don't see any other business
23 before us regarding this Internal Affairs meeting.
24 We do have the Duke rate hearing that is scheduled
25 soon thereafter this meeting ends. It's 10:30-ish

1 now. I am going to say that that will start at
2 11:00 a.m. over in the hearing room. Give us a
3 little bit of time to get over there and get
4 situated and so forth, so 11:00 a.m., the Duke
5 hearing will start in the hearing room.

6 No other business before us, then this meeting
7 is adjourned. Thank you all.

8 (Proceedings concluded.)

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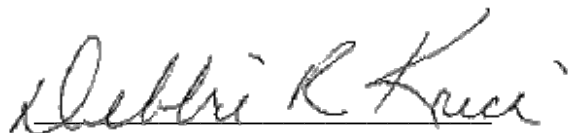
STATE OF FLORIDA)
COUNTY OF LEON)

I, DEBRA KRICK, Court Reporter, do hereby
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time and place herein stated.

IT IS FURTHER CERTIFIED that I
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I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not a relative,
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financially interested in the action.

DATED this 5th day of September, 2024.



DEBRA R. KRICK
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