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HOUSE BILL 1105: The Coronavirus Relief Act : \$14.3 Million Awarded to City of Conover & Gaston County : Reported by NC Rep. Jay Adams District 96

Recently House Bill 1105 The Coronavirus Relief Act was signed into law that will have lasting impact on the United States, North Carolina and the Catawba Valley. Within the \$1.1 Billion bill there is a \$14.3 Million appropriation to the City of Conover and Gaston County to fund the establishment of facilities that will bring the research, development, and manufacture of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to North Carolina.

During the early days of the pandemic the US relied on suppliers based in China for a number of PPE items including, but not limited to, a variety of mask and garments used in hospitals and care facilities. As you may recall, China restrained delivery of some of the products due to their internal demand for the products and later used them for leverage in various negotiations.

Fairly quickly US manufacturers began making mask but the materials for the mask were not technically suitable for truly qualified protection. They were only marginally effective for the public and not at all suitable for hospital and care facilities.

The need for reliable PPE, effective for all applications, was quickly realized to be a necessary, strategic item in our effort to combat COVID-19. Looking about in our region we could see a number of capabilities that could be coordinated to produce the needed products. The research and development component is located in Catawba County at the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC), a component of the Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC). MSC would require additional space for a state-of-the-art clean room and additional space for new testing equipment. In Gaston County there is the Textile Technology Center that develops advanced fiber technology. However, that equipment is housed in a building that is on a short-term lease that will not be renewed. House Bill 1105 provides funding for a new 30,000 square foot building to expand the facilities of MSC in Conover and a new 15,000 square foot building to house the equipment in Gaston County.

These community college facilities will house the organizational, research, development and testing elements of USA produced PPE. The textile industry can produce the yarn, the fabrics and the finishing capabilities for PPE material. The furniture industry with it's vast cut and sew capabilities can produce the finished products.

Additionally, as icing on the cake feature, the Simulated Hospital at CVCC is a nearly ideal facility to actually use prototyped PPE products in a classroom environment to see if there are practical modifications needed in the various gowns, head gear, mask and other items.

We are on the threshold of creating a nearly vertical manufacturing cluster and installing the core capability in the Catawba Valley. The pandemic, hopefully, will end soon, but the ability to produce these products will be here at home, not in the hands of our adversaries. If needed, we will have the ability to produce high-quality PPE to suppress whatever medical threat might

emerge. Furthermore, these research and development capabilities will likely allow us to design PPE equipment and items that will evolve into products we cannot imagine presently. We, in the Catawba Valley, are innovators, we don't just make things, we make better things! What we see today is just the beginning!

The opportunity to make these products came from a disastrous pandemic. Thanks to people that looked past the dark early months of 2020 and recognized opportunities and needs that might be met, and thus began to formulate and craft a strategy to make this happen. It was through collaboration, cooperation, and diligent attention to the production of necessary information that we were able to achieve the legislative results necessary to capitalize on this opportunity. It was local governments, legislative delegations and business at its best. I am proud to have been a part of it.