

# Beware of study committees

Among our least favorite terms in state government and politics are “economic development” and “workforce development.” The first is almost always code for tax favors, loans and grants – that is, government money – handed over to private companies. The second usually signifies government programs designed to train workers for private companies – designed, that is, to do for private companies what they should be doing for themselves.

This year, the legislature passed – and the governor signed – legislation creating a “Workforce Development Council.” This council will be made up of the heads of powerful state agencies – Commerce, Education, Employment and Workforce, the Commission on Higher Education and so on – and the councilors will be tasked with “engag[ing] in discussions, collaboration, and information sharing concerning the state’s ability to prepare and train workers to meet current and future workforce needs.”

In short, the bill creates a glorified study committee. It decrees all the jargon-laden things bills like this usually decree: that the newly formed council “make recommendations to the General Assembly concerning matters related to workforce development”; that it recommend “programs intended to increase student access to an incentivize workforce training within state training programs”; that the council “create advisory groups comprised of community or

state or local stakeholders to assist the council in carrying out the council’s duties”; etc., etc.

There is a real danger in statutes like this. Study committees begin life as innocuous things intended mainly for “information sharing” – and there’s nothing wrong with that, right? But soon they begin assuming powers to set policies, force compliance and direct public funds. It often happens. The Education Oversight Committee, for example, was created in 1998 as in essence a

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study committee for the implementation of the Education Accountability Act. Now, however, it's a full-on state agency with a \$1.7 million budget and essentially unaccountable powers to approve curricula and assessment systems.

We suppose we should be grateful that an earlier version of the bill didn't pass – a version that bypassed the process of accretion and gave the Workforce Development Council a far broader mandate.

But back up and ask the larger and more important question of this and similar bills on “workforce development.” Does anyone seriously believe that a band of state employees has sufficient competence to know how and where a constantly changing private economy should allocate its labor force? If you do think that, you have more faith in command economics than we do.

Anyhow: South Carolinians, you now have a council to develop your workforce.

*Courtesy of The Nerve.*