

March 10, 2019

Triumph Gulf Coast Inc.
Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Triumph Board of Directors,

Bob Ballard, TCC's Wakulla Environmental Institute director, is spreading the word that Triumph Gulf Coast this month is going to award \$1.5 million in BP money to WEI for its Proposal 167, an Unmanned Vehicle (drone) Systems Center of Excellence. The question posed by many in Wakulla County is why?

An obvious criticism arises from Triumph awarding \$750,000 to Gulf County schools, not far from Wakulla County, for unmanned systems training. WEI's proposal duplicates parts of that program.

One disturbing factor in WEI's Proposal 167 is its laundry list of questionable claims. For example, WEI says it wants to build on four drone courses in its "...existing unmanned aerial system training program." But TCC records show WEI held only two drone courses in 2018: A Spring and Fall drone introduction class and a Fall drone editing class with no more than nine students.

TCC also said it wants "to extend the current programs being offered and develop an Associates of Science degree in Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS A.S.), as well as additional certificate programs," a claim that reminds many of the sweeping unfulfilled promises TCC used to get funding for WEI.

Those promises began in 2012, when TCC lobbied for millions of tax dollars to create WEI by pledging eight environmentally focused degree and certificate programs. WEI would become the "hub" of Northwest Florida for all things environmental, TCC said. Meanwhile Florida TaxWatch called it a turkey.

After fits and starts, TCC ended its Environmental Science Technology A. S. degree in 2017, and deleted its environmental courses on Nov. 19, 2018. In fact, the total number of all types of classes WEI offered in 2018 was four: the three drone classes and an oyster farming class in the Fall.

While ignoring its academic promises, TCC/WEI started an oyster farming class in 2014, and, by 2017, signed a business partnership with a for-profit oyster co-op set up by WEI students as directors, which also included a TCC trustee, WEI director and Wakulla County commissioner. TCC was to receive two percent of the co-op's profit while the co-op got the use of TCC's name and logo to secure grant funding. The TCC backed co-op, by the way, is in competition with other oyster processors in Wakulla County.

It is disturbing that WEI's Proposal 167 fails to present any assurance that a curriculum for an Unmanned Vehicle Systems Center of Excellence would not vaporize like its promises for environmentally focused degrees and certificates, and, instead, become a means for TCC/WEI to establish another business.

That possibility looks more probable after reviewing WEI's repetitive 94-page Marine Manufacturing Training center Proposal 177, which includes future "planned on-site housing (page 50)," where "individuals" could stay on WEI's campus. If so, WEI's "on-site housing," if realized, would compete with local established lodging businesses, hardly a boost to Wakulla County's economy.

The plausibility of future WEI construction is further strengthened in WEI's drone proposal (page 27) by saying the "Gulf Coast will reap immediate benefits from construction at the WEI through the purchase of building materials and employment of workers from across the region." Although there is no budget request listed in Proposal 167 for construction, new construction is implied.

Proposal 167 also states TCC "personally talked with the FAA about bringing a Center of Excellence to WEI (page 24)," but omits whether the FAA supports the proposal. As for an FAA recommendation, it appears WEI included recommendation letters from a different proposal (Proposal 168): one letter is from a technology company and another from an energy company. No comment from the FAA.

Another dubious claim, which appears in all of WEI's Triumph proposals – 91, 167, 168 and 177 – is that SmartAsset.com ranked TCC as number 8 among the nation's top performing community colleges. SmartAsset.com's website, however, does not show TCC as listed as one of its top-ten community colleges for 2018, or its top 25; nor does it list TCC in the top 10 for 2017, 2016 or 2015.

TCC/WEI claims it has "sound financial" stewardship, and cites private sector funding for its proposals from TCC's Foundation (page 41). Yet, WEI's track record shows, in 2014, TCC's Foundation advanced \$75,000 for interest-free loans to 10 oyster farming students, who agreed to pay back the loans from oyster sales. TCC 2018 records show three of nine 2014 students had not paid back the loans and students in subsequent classes also have not paid back loans. In addition, Florida Division of Aquaculture oyster farming 2018 harvest reports show little success in making a living wage from oyster farming.

TCC/WEI job claims also merit scrutiny. Initially TCC told the *Tallahassee Democrat* in May 2014, that its oyster program would create 900 jobs. Now, in its Triumph proposals, TCC/WEI claims its oyster program has created 100 new businesses and 150 new jobs (page 29), but fails to produce any record of business registrations, the number of employees hired for the businesses, the average length of employment (seasonal or fulltime) and wages (many oyster farming employees work for minimum wages). Wakulla County has about 50+ oyster leases (some existing before WEI's 2014 oyster program), and, considering each individual lessee as a business owner, state harvest reports in 2018 show about 20 percent of the leases are not being worked (no plantings and no harvests). There is no documentation backing WEI's rosy job creation report on the oyster farms.

WEI also wants funding for more classrooms. Again, why? WEI has no faculty, no full load of classes on campus; its state-of-the-art classrooms and lab sit empty, as does its well-equipped meeting room. WEI is not an environmental "world-class facility"; nor is it the "hub for education, conservation and recreation in Northwest Florida." In fact, WEI's parking lot is barely used and its campus sits quietly exempt from county taxes on its 158 "biodiversity hotspots" acres of land.

Before awarding any BP dollars to WEI, much less a total of \$19 million, as TCC/WEI has requested, many in Wakulla County hope Triumph will seek answers to unanswered questions in all of TCC/WEI's proposals and award grants that would benefit Wakulla County and its existing business owners.

Sincerely,
Dana Peck
2481 Surf Rd.
Panacea FL 32346