

OPINION: Sectors act would help boost job training in US

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Gateway Community and Technical College's Center for Advanced Manufacturing provides advanced manufacturing training for current employees and to fill the talent pipeline in the region with the skills businesses need. / Enquirer file

Businesses in Northern Kentucky, from small firms to large corporations, have found we have something in common. We are all struggling to find enough workers with specific skills that will help our companies grow, even when there are many hard-working people in our community who are unemployed.

This is a problem that can be fixed. We've found the solution right here in Northern Kentucky, developing industry-led partnerships with education, training and community stakeholders to help our community's residents develop the skills they need for the good-paying jobs that businesses

need to fill.

Nationally, 12 million people are out of work even though nearly 3.5 million jobs are going unfilled. According to a survey conducted by the Northern Kentucky Industrial Park Industry Partnership in 2012, in our region there are over 680 advanced manufacturing jobs that are going unfilled today, and in the next 10 years we will need to fill 6,250 jobs due to growth and baby boomers retiring. That's nearly six manufacturing jobs going unfilled per employer.

These are good-paying jobs. These positions have a starting wage from \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year with excellent benefits and wonderful advancement opportunities. However, we can't grow our businesses unless we fill these "middle-skill" jobs – positions that require more than a high-school diploma but not necessarily a four-year degree.

These jobs make up the largest share of our state's labor market. According to a report by National Skills Coalition, middle-skill jobs made up 54 percent of the jobs in Kentucky in 2009, but only 45 percent of workers had the skills to fill those jobs. Middle-skill jobs continue to make up over half of the jobs available in Kentucky. If we don't address this skills gap the problem will only continue. This is bad for workers, businesses and the economy.

If I can't find people with the latest technical credentials to fill those positions, I can't expand my business – which means I can't create new jobs. That is why I am joining Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships (BLU) in Washington, D.C., to give a first-hand account of how we are developing these training partnerships and to ask our nation's elected officials to do their part in helping us expand these efforts. BLU comprises employers from a range of industries who are concerned about our nation's skills gap, who are working with local partners to train and hire community residents for skilled jobs and who want our country's policymakers to follow suit and invest, aggressively and effectively, in the skills of America's workers.

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