

Retargeting job-training funds

BY ROBERT LOVINGOOD

The federal government's job-training efforts are staggering: Forty-seven separate programs administered by nine different agencies costing \$18 billion. It might sound like a great idea. But most of these programs are not proven to be effective. And that's not just my opinion. A report by the Government Accountability Office found that "only 5 of the 47 programs have had impact studies that assess whether the program is responsible for improved employment outcomes." And among the few that did measure impacts, the results tended to be small, inconclusive or short-term. One federally funded job training program here in San Bernardino County graduated 400 of the 500 students who entered the program. But only 12 percent found jobs in the field they were trained for. By most any standard, that's a remarkably poor return on a \$2 million federal investment. In some cases training programs cost more than \$76,000 per successful job placement, according to the Department of Labor's inspector general. Sadly, the federal government is spending billions on administration of job training programs rather than on training the people who need jobs. In short, job training isn't the goal. Job placement is. Part of the problem is that well-intended training programs are inflexible and contain too many strings when implemented at the local level. We need to shift from predominantly federal control of job training to predominantly local control and instill accountability. Fixing these programs isn't a Republican issue or a Democratic issue. It's really a common sense issue. In recent years, there has been a push for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs in schools. I support these programs, but it will be years before we see results in the workforce. Right now we have thousands of people who are unemployed and thousands more who are under-employed. These are hardworking folks who are busy raising their families and go to work every day, often at low-wage jobs. They have the dedication to hold down a job. But they can only dream of getting the training they need to get ahead to a higher-paying job. Unfortunately, the current job-training programs do little or nothing for these workers who can be our greatest asset. Leading companies are already using best practices in paid, on-the-job training programs. So if we use the same practices to create paid job training programs, we too will succeed. The one-size-fits-all philosophy of federal job training doesn't work. Local control of job training is essential. We need more up front student assessments and proven learning models such as block training. Effectiveness needs to be measured not just in the number of people trained but in how many are placed in the jobs they are trained for. One proposal now in Congress would consolidate 35 federal job training programs into a single fund that states and counties would administer. Another idea is to provide tax credits for on-the-job training. On-the-job training offers the benefit of knowing an actual job exists and that a real-life employer has screened the candidate. But employers are wary of existing programs because if untrained workers don't work out and must be terminated, the employer's unemployment insurance premium will take a hit. So it becomes a big gamble to hire. More than 1.4 million Californians are out of work and 74,400 of them live right here in San Bernardino county. These are people who want to work, who need to work. So the time is right to enhance our job training programs and put our residents back to work.