

# Middle-skill jobs will take us to the top

By WILLIAM WARD  
and CHERYL COAKLEY-  
RIVERA

In response to the economic downturn, job creation has been at the top of the policy agenda in Massachusetts.

In addition to looking at measures to create jobs in the near term, we also need to ensure that the people of the commonwealth have the skills and training to succeed in the jobs available as well as

## Viewpoint

those that will be created in the future.

The fact of the matter is, right now, there are employers in Massachusetts looking to hire skilled workers. While the state's unemployment rate is high, there are still spot shortages between the technical expertise companies are looking for and candidates that can perform the work.

Middle skill jobs require more than a high school diploma but less than a college degree.

The jobs are hard to export because we need them here: certified nursing assistants, bus drivers, EMTs, electricians and plumbers. Today in Hampden County, three larger companies are looking for

over 40 skilled machinists, according to Larry Maier, co-president of the of the National Tool and Machining Association chapter in Western Massachusetts. Companies are holding open houses, paying heavily for advertising, and even considering expanding in other states to find skilled machinists.

have higher enrollments than they ever have. Yet in order to prepare skilled workers for future job openings, our entire workforce development system will need more coordination with community colleges and deeper connections to employers.

The Middle Skills Solutions Act, We need to track regionally what industries will be hiring in the next few years and how skilled workers can be accessible. Community colleges need support to be able to offer up to date curriculums in rapidly changing technical fields and transferable credits that lead to industry certificates more quickly

Regional Skills Academies to encourage innovation and incentivize greater resource coordination across agencies, departments, and schools to increase credential and completion rates, and it would require the regular review of local and regional labor market information and the development of regional plans to coordinate training and education activities to meet Massachusetts' demand for middle-skill workers.



Cheryl Coakley-Rivera

**As we continue to seek ways of creating new jobs in the Commonwealth, we must work to ensure that our education and training systems are as robust as possible.**



William Ward

The advanced manufacturing industry is anxious to collaborate with voc tech schools and community colleges to ensure the availability of trained workers both now and in years to come. Massachusetts educators have built one of the best private college systems in the country and our public universities and state colleges are top rate as well.

However, not every young person will go to college, nor do they need to. Vocational technical schools and community colleges

which is currently being considered by the Massachusetts Legislature, proposes to build upon these existing resources and develop a more robust system to prepare non-traditional students for employment in growing industries.

The bill would bolster communication between educational institutions and firms that hire middle-skill workers, to better align post-secondary curricula with employer needs, speed up the attainment of vocational certificates and credentials, and increase the number of adults with middle-skill training.

than our system currently permits. Other states have moved to more job friendly systems, involving rolling admissions, six week courses, and credits that stack towards certificates and associates degrees.

Specifically, the Middle Skills Solutions Act would create a Middle Skills Council to establish baseline data on the commonwealth's skills gap and make recommendations for a system-wide plan to better align adult basic education programs with post-secondary institutions. It would also establish

## Postal 'reform' could hurt non-profits

During this season of Thanksgiving, the U.S. Congress is planning yet another postal reform.

And once again, it will be the poor who will most be affected. I'm referring specifically to a provision in the



## Letters to the editor

The Middle-Skills Solutions Act would give us a leg up by strengthening our education and skills training systems and by helping reduce turnover, hiring and training costs. It is a win-win for employers and employees in the commonwealth. We hope that you will join us in supporting the Middle Skills Solutions Act.

*Cheryl Coakley-Rivera, is the state representative, 10th Hampden District and Bill Ward is president and chief executive officer for the regional Employment Board of Hampden County, Inc.*

And, as a footnote, I had more stress and inconvenience dealing with the construction projects on Interstate-91 and Route 5 this entire summer on my daily trips to work at Bradley International Airport, than the couple of days without power, Martha, could you take a 'look at who screwed this up?'

DAVID J. O'CONNOR