

Spreading skills and opportunity

Barack Obama
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GUEST ESSAYISTS

Almost six years after the worst financial crisis in generations, our businesses have added nearly 10 million new jobs over the past 52 months. Manufacturers are hiring again, and overall, there's more work available now than at any time since 2007. For the first time in more than a decade, business leaders around the world have declared that the No. 1 place to invest isn't China — it's the United States.

But opportunity for all means that even as we're creating more jobs, we have to make sure that every American has the skills to fill them.

Not every good job out there needs a four-year degree, but the ones that don't need a college degree generally need specialized training. So last week, we took two big steps to make sure every American has the chance to learn skills that lead directly to jobs in growing industries like manufacturing, information technology, energy and health care.

First, in 2011 we called on Congress to reauthorize one of the most important job-training laws in our country, and last week members of Congress worked through their differences to answer that call and got the bill to the president's desk. The law will give communities more certainty to

invest in job-training programs and build on what we know works — more partnerships with employers, more tools to measure performance and more flexibilities for states and cities to run their workforce programs in ways that are best suited for them.

Second, we released an across-the-board review of America's training programs to make sure that they have one mission: Train Americans with skills employers actually need, then match them to good jobs that need to be filled now.

Ideas in the report came from governors and mayors of both parties, industry leaders, community college presidents and labor unions. It's a roadmap for investing in strategies and innovations to help American workers keep pace with a rapidly changing economy.

And right here in New York, Monroe Community College is leading a group of community colleges that received funding from the U.S. Department of Labor to develop partnerships with local businesses, particularly in the optics industry. At one local company, Optimax, many employees have participated in MCC's courses.

The report will also make sure we use existing investments and programs in a smarter way, so workers earn

skills that employers are looking for right now. And it will ensure transparency: Training programs that use federal money will be required to make public how many of its graduates find jobs and how much they earn.

Both of these steps will connect more ready-to-work Americans with ready-to-be-filled jobs. They are a win for workers, the middle class, and those fighting to earn their way into the middle class.

But we need to see even more of that bipartisanship spirit to continue expanding opportunity for all — to make college more affordable, to raise the minimum wage, to ensure women receive fair pay, to reward companies for bringing jobs home instead of overseas, and to fix our immigration system in a way that strengthens our borders and our businesses.

We know that America is full of men and women who work hard and live up to their responsibilities. We've met them across the country. All they want is to see their hard work pay off and their responsibility rewarded. They want to work. They want to provide for themselves and their families. And we're fighting every day to give them that chance.

It's what we need to do more of, together, as we restore opportunity for all.

Obama and Biden are president and vice president of the United States.