

## State's growth depends on prepared workers

When it comes to our economic doldrums, there's no shortage of questions: What's the best way to stimulate the economy? What industries deserve to get bailed out, and how? Most important, when will things get better?

I'm not an economist, and I don't pretend to have all the answers. I've been in business long enough to know that beyond every recession there's a recovery.

For Indiana, the real question is how we can lead the recovery, and leverage it into a period of sustained growth, rising wages and job creation. We can do it by investing in our people, by helping Hoosiers prepare themselves for the jobs of tomorrow. Despite some popular misconceptions, many of these jobs will be found in industries that define our economy today: manufacturing and logistics.

Manufacturing and logistics employ more than one of every five Hoosiers. Yes, we do have a strong automotive industry, and these businesses have been hard-hit by the recession. But Central Indiana has a broad and diverse manufacturing sector that produces everything from the latest jet engines to lifesaving medicines, from high-tech electronics to the batteries that power electric cars.

The Indiana Economic Development Corporation still attracted more manufacturing jobs than from any other sector in 2008, and Indiana ranked number one for a second consecutive year in creating new production jobs through foreign investment. As the national economy picks up steam, I believe manufacturing growth and the flow of goods from our state across the world will fuel Indiana's recovery.

Even with conservative growth estimates, thousands of manufacturing positions will still be available in coming years. The average manufacturing worker in Indiana is almost 50 years old; as more of these baby boomer workers begin to retire, more jobs will open.

Jobs in manufacturing today have little to do with standing on assembly lines. It's about critical thinking, technical skills, working with advanced technologies. During my tenure at Rolls-Royce, I was impressed by the caliber of our middle-skill employees when they were challenged by new and demanding assignments. They are the competitive advantage.

In this environment, a high school diploma doesn't cut it. These jobs demand more education and training.

But in Indiana, almost a third of our work force has only a high school education. Just 23 percent have some college experience, and only 7 percent have an associate's degree.

The most pressing questions for policymakers must be how we get more Hoosiers into our community and technical colleges, and how we connect industry and educators to ensure that we're preparing students for the right jobs. How we spend our share of the stimulus money pales in comparison to how we invest in Hoosiers for the long haul.

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