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# State skilled workers shortage real, labor says

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DAN GEARINO, Courier Des Moines Bureau | Posted: Friday, September 15, 2006 12:00 am | (0)

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DES MOINES - A coalition of business, education and labor groups launched a campaign Thursday to push the state to get more aggressive in dealing with shortages of skilled workers.

"Coming is a time when all Iowans who can and want to work can enter the work force," said Des Moines Area Community College President Robert Densen at a news conference outside the Statehouse.

The coalition, called the Iowa Works Campaign, outlined proposals that it hopes will be adopted by the next Legislature and governor:

- Job training programs should be more regionally focused and should work more closely with the companies that have the greatest need for skilled workers.
- The success or failure of job training programs should be regularly assessed and the programs should be held accountable.
- Workers should have easy access to information about what skills are needed for certain careers and what training is available.

Jason Walsh, state policy director for The Workforce Alliance, a national work force development group, said Iowa faces a future in which employers will have an increasingly difficult time finding qualified workers, and workers will find that they don't have the skills to get a good job.

"The challenge confronting Iowa is straightforward and a little unsettling," he said.

Walsh listed Illinois as a state that does a much better job of making sure job-training resources get to the right places. He said that only 3,000 workers got state assistance to pay for job training, while 150,000 workers did so in Illinois.

"Illinois is bigger, but it's not 50 times bigger," he said.

The chief executive of an Ankeny company was on hand to talk about his problems finding the right workers. Roger Hargens of Accumold said hiring the right workers "is a bottom-line issue for us." His company makes molded plastic for medical uses and for other industries.

The Iowa Works Campaign is a nonpartisan coalition of community colleges, trade groups, chambers of commerce, labor unions and other groups.

The announcement Thursday appears unrelated to the recent controversy related to high salaries at a central Iowa job training agency. An investigation of the salaries led to the resignation of top officials at the agency and at Iowa Workforce Development.

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Posted in Politics on Friday, September 15, 2006 12:00 am

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