



## Editorial: Middle-skill jobs offer opportunity for Western Massachusetts

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For nearly three years, Massachusetts has endured a string of dismal employment statistics, but on Monday we saw one number that presents the region with an opportunity and a challenge.

A recent study from by the National Skills Coalition, SkillWorks and the Workforce Solutions Group says that more than 396,000 jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree are expected to open in Massachusetts over the next six years.

The opportunity is there because Massachusetts has the community colleges, vocational schools and training institutes where people can learn middle skill jobs in fields such as health care and manufacturing. Western Massachusetts is filled with high-tech industries whose leaders worry if they will ever find enough skilled workers.

And that presents a challenge, because those programs might not be enough. More money is needed for job training. For example, the state's Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, which seeks to boost the skills and salaries of it workers, lacks funding in the current state budget.

Although the debate over federal spending and the deficit has been heated, we think it is important to make every effort to fund job programs.

High-skilled workers earn more and they pay the taxes needed to cut the deficit. In business it's called return on investment. Unfortunately, what we see is too much rhetoric over unemployment and the deficit, but too little action.

Joseph L. Peters, president of Universal Plastics in Holyoke, gave a concise picture of how job skills have changed in recent years. "Where it used to be that you could bring a guy in off the street who had no training whatsoever, it's no longer the case," he said.

While it's true there are many programs in place to train workers, we think more can be done to train people.

After all, there's nearly 400,000 jobs hanging in the balance, and, as Peters said, you can't grab workers off the street anymore.