

Editorial: Our future in 'middle jobs'

If you're a fabricator who knows how to build and repair equipment, you don't need a four-year university degree to get a good job. At Oregon Freeze Dry, they were looking for somebody like that the other day, and they offered between \$48,000 and nearly \$60,000 a year, depending.

You don't need a four-year degree for work like that, but you need to know more than you can pick up in high school. And that's an issue for Oregon and the U.S.

The issue is middle-skill job openings, and whether there are enough people to fill them, especially after the economy recovers.

A report came out the other day, and it said: "Middle-skill jobs, which require more than high school but less than a four-year degree, make up the largest portion of Oregon's jobs and will continue to grow in the coming decade. Oregon does not have enough workers being trained to this level to take advantage of the jobs."

The report came from an alliance of educators and industry representatives, and they've launched a publicity campaign to convince the public and policy makers we should pay more attention to this issue.

They want Oregon to make sure that everybody — not just young people but adults already in the workforce — have access to at least two years of education past high school.

This guarantee — if there were such a guarantee — "would provide workers and businesses with the skills needed to compete in an increasingly competitive global marketplace," the group says.

One of the many attractive aspects of this idea is that these are jobs that cannot easily be exported.

"Middle skill workers are the people our communities depend on," says Andy Van Kleunen of the Workforce Alliance, a national sponsor of the campaign to beat the drums for these jobs. He is talking about police officers, firefighters, nurses, electricians, truck drivers and many of the other countless occupations that make up our economy.

The most convenient place to get the kind of training people need for these jobs is a place such as Linn-Benton and other community colleges.

These colleges need to have enough support so they can do the various kinds of training that our society needs done. (hh)