



EMBARGOED UNTIL: March 12, 2009

CONTACT: Agnes Balassa
Regional Field Director, The Workforce Alliance
(503) 559-8651 - office
agnesb@workforcealliance.org

NEW REPORT FINDS OREGON WILL SEE 340,000 MIDDLE-SKILL JOB OPENINGS IN NEXT DECADE

State will face shortage of trained middle-skill workers

Salem, Oregon – Despite the loss of thousands of jobs in the past several months, 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. Further, many of the jobs created in Oregon as a result of the federal economic recovery legislation will fall into this category.

This information is being released today as part of a report by The Workforce Alliance on behalf of the Skills2Compete-Oregon campaign. Skills2Compete-Oregon is an affiliate of a national Skills2Compete campaign. The report, *Oregon’s Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs*, counters notions that a four-year degree is the only pathway to in-demand jobs.

“This study shows that jobs requiring more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree make up the largest segment of jobs in Oregon’s economy,” said Andy Van Kleunen, Director for The Workforce Alliance, the national sponsor of the Skills2Compete campaign and report author. “It is therefore essential to our economic future that we align our policies and investments to ensure Oregon has enough middle-skill workers to fill these jobs.”

Middle-skill jobs currently make up 52 percent of the positions in Oregon while only 47 percent of residents are trained to this level. The demand for such jobs is expected to increase in the next decade, with more than 340,000 middle-skill job openings. Over the same time period, the report finds that the number of Oregonians trained at the middle-skill level is projected to decline, worsening the state’s middle-skill gap.

“Middle-skill workers are the people our communities depend on – police officers, fire-fighters, nurses, electricians, and truck drivers. These are local, hands-on, and well-paying jobs that can help provide for families,” said Van Kleunen.

Many of these middle-skill positions are well-paid jobs, offering median earnings that exceed Oregon’s overall 2006 median of \$31,034.

- more -

The report also finds that two-thirds of the people who will be in Oregon's workforce in the year 2020 were already working adults in 2005 – long past the traditional high school to college pipeline. This finding underscores the crucial importance of investments in training and re-training the current workforce, which consists of mostly adults, to close the skill gap. Increased investment in the nation's K-12 education system won't alone solve this problem.

Middle-skill workers needed in high growth sectors

Health care: As baby boomers age, the demand for qualified healthcare professionals will grow. The Oregon Employment Department projects that jobs in the health care sector will grow nearly 28 percent from 2006 to 2016. Many of these jobs require less than a four-year degree.

"People won't ever quit getting sick, which means I will never be out of a job," said Rebekah Parker, a C.N.A. at Signature Home Health and Hospice in Eugene and a recent graduate of Pinnacle Health Care. "And by getting additional certifications on the job, I'm able to expand my opportunities even more."

"Green" jobs: Oregon is on the forefront of the sustainability movement. Most green jobs, such as retrofitting homes and businesses for energy conservation, are middle-skill jobs.

"The construction industry has slowed down because of the recession, but with tax credits and other incentives, people are looking to make buildings more efficient and save money in the long run," said Mike Hewitt, president of E2 Powered in Bend. "This industry is about creating a new economy using clean energy and green jobs. Finding skilled people to do the work is the first step."

Manufacturing: Despite some job losses in this sector, Oregon is poised to add middle-skill manufacturing jobs in many industries.

"The baby boomers who make up the bulk of my company are beginning to retire," said Gary Gaussoin, president of Silver Eagle Manufacturing in Portland. "I need trained workers to take their places. And today's high-tech manufacturing requires training beyond high-school."

Oregonians need a skill guarantee

With the release of the report, the campaign is calling for a new vision for Oregon based on these findings: every Oregon worker should have access to at least two years of education or training past high school. This guarantee would provide workers and businesses with the skills needed to compete in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

A two-year skill guarantee could come in a variety of forms, such as occupational certifications, associate's degrees, and apprenticeship certifications, and could be earned in different settings, including community colleges, community-based training organizations, and workplaces. The ultimate goal is to ensure Oregonians have access to a vocational credential, industry certification, or two years of college – fundamental tools to pursue growing openings in middle-skills jobs.

The study has powerful implications for Oregon as it strives to rebuild its economy in the wake of the turbulent economic times. A more robust investment in middle-skill education and training will yield better economic results in a faster timeframe than any other sector of education. In the coming days, Skills2Compete will be briefing federal and state policymakers and urging them to refocus on middle-skills education and training.

###

Skills2Compete is a non-partisan campaign to ensure the U.S. workforce has the skills needed to meet business demand, foster innovation, and grow broadly shared prosperity. The campaign's diverse and growing list of endorsers include national and local leaders from business, labor, education and training, community and civil rights groups, and the public sector. The Skills2Compete Vision: Every U.S. worker should have access to the equivalent of at least two years of education or training past high school – leading to a vocational credential, industry certification, or one's first two years of college – to be pursued at whatever point and pace makes sense for individual workers and industries. Every person must also have the opportunity to obtain the basic skills needed to pursue such education. For more information visit www.Skills2Compete.org and www.Skills2Compete.org/Oregon.

The Workforce Alliance's mission is to advocate for public policies that invest in the skills of America's workers, so they can better support their families and help American businesses better compete in today's economy. TWA is a coalition of community-based training organizations, community colleges, unions, business leaders, local officials, and leading technical assistance and research organizations from the field of workforce development. This alliance of stakeholders, who have not previously come together, ensures that our efforts are not in the self interest of a particular group, but are instead in the broader public interest of the nation. For more information, visit www.workforcealliance.org.