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By: La Crosse Tribune Editorial Board

Education and training can grow Wisconsin's economy

How can we improve Wisconsin's economy? One good way is to make sure that workers have the skills that the job market is looking for.

It's not sexy, and it's not an instant solution. But it will work in the long run if we give it a chance.

Here are a few examples:

- ? Western Technical College is stepping up its effort to train welders. Its current class has 14 students who are either youthful offenders or dislocated workers.

Wisconsin Secretary of Workforce Development Roberta Gassman visited the class Tuesday. Starting wages for welding jobs can reach \$15 or \$16 an hour.

- ? In the Milwaukee area, a seven-county economic development group said the area needs to concentrate on becoming an industrial "design shop" for the world.

Milwaukee used to be known for heavy manufacturing — jobs that could be had by high school graduates without special training before going to work.

But that's not true anymore. Those heavy manufacturing jobs are gone, and the new ones that will take their place require much more specialized education and training before workers ever set foot in the plant.

Gassman said one of the top priorities for the state should be "connecting workers with skills and connecting employers with skilled workers."

- ? Wisconsin needs to make sure its public universities are up to the challenge of educating the next generation of workers. It's hard to do that, however, with the level of budget cuts that University of Wisconsin campuses have been subjected to in the past several years.

Gov. Jim Doyle has urged the Legislature to increase funding for UW campuses that will allow them to increase the number of college graduates trained to be teachers, nurses and engineers.

While UW campuses still have the second lowest tuition rates in the Big Ten, tuition has gone up sharply in the past few years, as administrators have sought to replace state tax dollars with money from tuition.

Education and training can provide Wisconsin with a path to prosperity — but only if the efforts are intelligent and targeted, and only if we keep at it.

Let's be up to that challenge.

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