

Skilled Workforce Development to Support Industrial Production in Depressed Border Regions

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REQUEST: Create a productive industrial workforce by recruiting and vetting an existing pool of highly skilled, experienced talent from the abundant manufacturing base in our neighboring countries. Target specialized sectors such as engineering, technology and research, and other STEM-based careers that will immediately close the skills gaps found along the US-Mexico border. This will have a high impact toward productivity in predominantly low skilled areas along the border and generate binational cooperation for economically stable, sustainable, and more secure border regions.

BACKGROUND: Since WWII the U.S. has fallen from a 50% share of the global manufacturing market to a mere 20%. A study by the Boston Consulting Group, “estimates that reshored production... could create between 600,000 and 1 million direct manufacturing jobs by 2020.” Laredo, Texas, a community of 266,000, sits on the US./Mexico border. In 2016, Laredo recorded a 32% poverty level, one of the highest in the country. Over 30% of the population is employed in the logistics and transportation industry at near minimum wage levels. Securing the border strengthens the border through talent development and retention and creates an economically viable and sustainable region. Our demographics make a strong play for the development of a highly competitive manufacturing industry targeting a higher skilled, higher paid workforce. A strategy, however, is needed to make it happen.

In a recent high-level dialogue between the US. and Mexico, a binational solution to challenges faced by communities of the four border states with Mexico addressed issues related to competitiveness, workforce development, and productivity. The US-Mexico Bilateral Agenda recommended “working in a coordinated manner to change the perception of the border to one of mutual and sustainable prosperity; and a focus on high-impact strategic actions to increase competitiveness, connectivity, economic growth and productivity”.

ISSUE: A move toward higher value-added manufacturing industries requires a competent, skilled workforce.

Difficulty in finding talented workers to fill skilled factory jobs can deflate productivity and curtail development and growth of the manufacturing industry. With the right policies, the U.S. can address the current shortage of experienced workers particular to the manufacturing industry by tapping into the experienced talent base that exists outside of the U.S. Targeting and vetting the existing talent pool will:

- Immediately fill the skilled labor gaps that exist along impoverished borders
- Integrate training and apprenticeship programs to provide the necessary skills to local communities
- Attract foreign investment incentivized by the availability of a skilled labor force and a “MADE IN AMERICA” designation, generating job growth and economic stability
- Promote skills development by way of industrial growth in highly impoverished, low-skilled regions

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- Provide a secure and productive option for immigration by means of a targeted and vetted talent pool while also promoting binational goodwill