

Expanding Opportunities for Work-Based Skills Training



By **Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici**

As I visit communities across Northwest Oregon, I hear from many Oregonians who feel left behind and left out of the economic recovery. Too many people are still struggling to make ends meet. If they are working, their wages are stagnant. They feel overwhelmed by rising rent prices, barriers to transportation, and sky-high childcare costs. There may be job openings in their community, but the jobs require skills and resources they don't have.

They are not alone. More than half of the jobs in today's labor market require less than a four-year degree, but more than a high school diploma. Unfortunately, only 43 percent of American workers have the skills for those positions. This creates a "skills gap," leaving businesses struggling to find workers with necessary skills, and workers without pathways to better-paying jobs.

Apprenticeships and work-based learning programs help close the skills gap. Employers can align training with the skills they need, and workers learn while they earn through classroom instruction and paid, on-the-job training. It's a win-win.

We need to strengthen investments in work-based learning programs that respond to local industry needs, like the Oregon Manufacturing Innovation Center (OMIC). OMIC brings together industry leaders like Boeing with educational institutions such as Oregon Tech, Oregon State University, Portland State University, and Portland Community College to develop work-based learning programs. This collaboration will result in growth and efficiency in advanced manufacturing, and more good jobs for Oregonians.

OMIC is the right approach, at the right time, in the right place. It will foster the expertise and innovation that American industries need to continue to thrive and compete globally. This public-private partnership is a tremendous opportunity for Oregonians because it brings value to our communities and the economy.

To help Oregonians and many other Americans who still face job insecurity, we must expand work-based learning to sectors of the economy that lack established apprenticeship programs, like health care and technology start-ups. Small- and medium-sized businesses often do not have the resources to establish work-based learning programs. Like OMIC, industry partnerships bring together employers,

education institutions, training providers, and community-based organizations to support the creation and expansion of work-based learning programs that benefit workers and the economy as a whole.

Recently my colleague on the Education and Workforce Committee, Congressman Drew Ferguson, and I introduced bipartisan legislation to expand opportunities for skills training. Our bill, the PARTNERS Act, would support industry partnerships to help small- and medium-sized businesses develop work-based learning programs - at no additional cost to taxpayers. The industry partnerships will also make it easier for people to re-enter the workforce by providing workers with access to tools, work attire, transportation, child care services, and mentorship support.

Through greater investment in apprenticeships and other training programs, we can get more people back to work and provide our nation's businesses with a more productive and efficient workforce. The PARTNERS Act and OMIC stem from the same good concept: when we approach economic problems with workers and businesses in mind, we come up with better solutions for everyone - and we all win.

Health Care Open Enrollment Ends December 15

By **Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici**

Keeping ourselves and our families healthy is important, and that's why I've worked to protect and expand access to affordable health care under the Affordable Care Act. Shopping for health insurance at HealthCare.Oregon.gov could save you money through assistance and subsidies, or it could help you find a plan that better suits your health care needs and your family's needs. The continuing rising cost of health care is a challenge that I am working to address with my colleagues in Congress. But many Oregonians can find quality, affordable coverage when comparing options for 2018. In fact, 77 percent of Oregonians qualified for financial assistance that lowered the average price of coverage to under \$148 a month in 2017.

Enrollment for coverage in

2018 is open now at HealthCare.Oregon.gov and lasts until December 15 - that's just four weeks to make sure you are covered. Even if you already have insurance, it's a good idea to compare plans and make sure you have the most affordable insurance plan that offers the best coverage for your needs.

Free help is available if you would like assistance enrolling in a plan or updating your information. Call 1-855-268-3767, attend an enrollment event near you, or contact a partner agent in your county. Support is available in sixteen languages.

You must enroll by December 15, 2017 for new or updated coverage that will start on January 1. If you are one of the 136,000 Oregonians who already gets coverage through the exchange and you don't make any changes by December 15, you will automatically be re-enrolled in your current plan.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, about 20 million more people across the country now have health insurance coverage. About 95 percent of Oregonians and 98 percent of children in Oregon are covered. I remain committed to protecting the Affordable Care Act and making sure that any action we take improves, not weakens, health care for Oregonians.

If you would like to know more about my work around Northwest Oregon and in Congress, please sign up for my monthly Bonamici Bulletin email newsletter at Bonamici.House.gov or follow me on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. You can also contact my Oregon and Washington, D.C. offices with questions, comments, or for assistance with a federal agency.

VERNONIA'S
voice
reflecting the spirit of our community

Publisher and Managing Editor
Scott Laird
503-367-0098
scott@vernoniasvoice.com

Contributors
Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici
Jim Bryson
Chip Bubl
Kala Cota
Tobie Finzel
Kailia Jackson
Karen Kain
Stacey Lynn
Aaron Miller
Karen Miller
Shannon Romtvedt
Robert Schattschneider

Photography
Scott Laird

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Vernonia's Voice, LLC
PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064
503-367-0098

www.VernoniasVoice.com

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