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Secretary Gassman: Assembly Budget Denies Youth School-to-Work Opportunities, Hurts Small Businesses

Labor Secretary Says Governor Doubles Youth Apprenticeship Funding to Ensure First-Rate Workforce, while Extreme Assembly Budget Hinders Economy, Job Growth

MANITOWOC – Department of Workforce Development Secretary Roberta Gassman today described Youth Apprenticeship as one of the state’s best job training programs, yet the Assembly’s extreme budget would deny school-to-career opportunities to nearly 2,000 high school students a year, just when employers need new talent to sustain economic growth and avoid labor shortages.

“Since Youth Apprenticeship began 15 years ago with bipartisan support, the program has been very successful and popular with both students and employers,” Secretary Gassman said. “Over 10,000 students have graduated from the program, and many are now mentoring a new generation of apprentices. At a time when we should be celebrating the program’s success, the Assembly’s budget would deny approximately 2,000 students school-to-work opportunities in a whole range of fields. At a time when employers need new recruits to replace skilled workers approaching retirement, the Assembly takes a big step backward, undermining economic growth and our future.”

Earlier this year, Governor Doyle offered a fiscally responsible, opportunity budget for working families that reflects Wisconsin’s values. Among a number of proposals building on the success of his first term, the Governor’s budget doubles funding for Youth Apprenticeship, from \$1.1 million to \$2.2 million a year. The new funding would allow as many as 4,000 high school juniors and seniors statewide to participate in the school-to-work program that has created strong partnerships between local schools and businesses.

“Nearly nine out of 10 Youth Apprenticeship graduates get permanent job offers from their employers when they graduate from high school,” Secretary Gassman said. “If it were not for the Youth Apprenticeship program and its hands-on learning in the working world, it’s fair to say some of these successful graduates would have been high school dropouts. Apprenticeship graduates who go on to college or technical school generally do better than their peers. Most of the participating employers are small businesses, and virtually every one of them highly recommends the program.”

Secretary Gassman made the comments during a visit to Beamaco LLC, a machine shop in Manitowoc that has participated in the Youth Apprenticeship program for 11 years. She met with Jeff Havlichek, President of Beamaco; Ryan Schuette, who is entering his second year of apprenticeship training as a manufacturing machinist; and Kevin Dresang, who completed youth apprenticeship training and is now in the adult apprenticeship program.

“We need more people trained as machinists to keep Wisconsin at the forefront of manufacturing,” Secretary Gassman said. “Our labor market economists project 420 openings per year through 2014. These are good, family-supporting jobs paying an entry level wage of \$13 per hour and \$20 an hour or more with experience. Youth Apprenticeship lets students explore these and other good, career opportunities.”