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Our view: Job market has changed, so La. must

Louisiana faces some fundamental challenges when it comes to workforce development. Among the most important are these: focusing the stakeholders on shared goals, working together to meet them, and holding people accountable every step of the way.

Achieving that will go a long way toward positioning the people of Louisiana so they can compete effectively.

This makes perfect sense, and it is precisely what Louisiana needs to hear from the head of the Louisiana Workforce Commission, Tim Barfield.

Barfield, speaking last week with The Town Talk's editorial board, said the fate of the workforce is tied to the fortunes of business, and vice versa. That, he said, means workforce development must match the needs of the market.

That sounds overly simple. But when you examine all of the programs, policies and politics related to workforce development, you see nothing simple and much that makes no sense at all, starting with funding formulas that have outlived their effectiveness.

Louisiana has to change its thinking, said Barfield, echoing his boss, Gov. Bobby Jindal.

More than half of all future jobs in Louisiana will require more than a high school education, less than a four-year degree and a certain amount of specialized training. Louisiana needs a plan to respond to that reality. Immediately, that means improving the state's community and technical colleges.

Louisiana is not alone with the challenge.

A sea change in the world economy made possible by technological advances has states scrambling to meet the incredible opportunities that have been created while maintaining the foundation on which they were built.

Different thinking about learning is essential -- in the short run to fill critical gaps and in the long run to ensure an approach that is effective and flexible.

That starts with focusing on regional workforce priorities and engaging the education community -- to develop partnerships; to match private and public resources with education and training needs; to provide "real world" career guidance for young people; and to impart a passion for lifelong learning.

That approach is proving itself in Georgia, North Carolina, Texas and other states with growing economies. That best practice should take hold here.
