

Jindal urges regions at summit to train skilled workers

BY MARSHA SILLS
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LAFAYETTE — As the nation grapples with the faltering economy, Louisiana faces increasing challenges to find and train workers to build its own.

Gov. Bobby Jindal told employers Wednesday the state has 90,000 job openings, while thousands of residents are moving out.

"Unemployment is the lowest in 30 years. Despite that, thousands of our people are not in the work force," Jindal during a stop in Lafayette at the state's first Louisiana Workforce Commission summit.

The summit targeted regional and state work force and economic development leaders, educators and employers in south Louisiana.

Skilled workers remains one of business prospects' chief concerns in Louisiana, Jindal said.

Recent work-force-related reforms and legislation are addressing the state's training gap, while ethics and tax reforms in the past year are prompting major companies to take another look at Louisiana, Jindal said.

In the past year, at least three

businesses moved headquarters to Louisiana, and on Tuesday, Jindal said, he attended the groundbreaking of the state's first clean-coal technologies plant in Red River Parish.

And for the first time, the state is also focusing resources on recruiting existing businesses for expansion, Jindal said.

Fruits of those efforts have included The Shaw Group's addi-

tion of 1,500 jobs in Baton Rouge and another 1,500 jobs in Lake Charles with the company's partnership with Westinghouse, he said.

The summit is one of two slated to help educate stakeholders about the status of the changes and foster regional employers' involvement.

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The next summit is set for Nov. 5 in Monroe.

The state's overhaul of the labor department, now known as the Louisiana Workforce Commission, decentralized programs to give regions more control of how and where training and program dollars are spent.

The reorganization isn't the state's only solution to workforce problems, said Tim Barfield, the agency's executive director.

"More regional and local collaborations are needed," he said. "If this is going to happen, you are the key."

New regional job forecasting sessions will help regional work force panels make those decisions, but employers' participation is needed, said Glenn Dugas, administrator of the Lafayette Workforce In-



Advocate staff photo by BRYAN TUCK

Gov. Bobby Jindal encouraged employers attending a conference Wednesday in Lafayette to take part in efforts to improve Louisiana's job market. Jindal said the state has 90,000 job openings and that, despite unemployment at 30-year lows, thousands of residents are not in the work force.

vestment Board.

Local chambers and economic development boards will be involved in the twice a year sessions, Dugas said. "Regional forecasting sessions will give us the most up-to-date numbers for an accurate pulse of a region," Dugas said.