

# The Ouachita CITIZEN

## **Jindal: Lack of skilled workers hinders state**

by **Scott Rogers** - posted Wednesday, November 5th, 2008 @ 8:10 pm

Gov. Bobby Jindal says Louisiana has lost economic opportunities because it lacks a skilled workforce needed to fill jobs.

That's why he firmly believes investing in workforce development is one of the most important things the state can do to move forward.

Jindal spoke briefly Wednesday at the northern regional workforce summit held at the Monroe Civic Center. Several summits have been held throughout the state to review the various workforce needs in Louisiana.

According to Jindal, 70 percent of employers, who are looking to locate in Louisiana or expand an existing business, say one of their top two concerns is finding a skilled workforce.

"We need to do a better job of training our people," Jindal said. "Our top priority has to be workforce development."

He said currently there are 90,000 jobs in Louisiana that cannot be filled because the state lacks a skilled workforce.

"It makes no sense to have 90,000 vacancies while our kids are still going to Houston, Dallas or Atlanta," Jindal said of out-migration.

"These are good jobs in manufacturing, transportation and healthcare," Jindal continued. "Our greatest export are our sons and daughters who leave every year for Texas or Georgia to pursue their dreams."

Jindal said he envisions the day when people from Houston and Dallas complain that their young people are leaving for good jobs in Louisiana.

However, until the workforce issue is addressed, Louisiana will continue to be overlooked by potential business and industry, according to Jindal.

He said the state is focused on revamping its community college and technical school programs to better meet workforce needs.

Economists say that over the next five years, most jobs in Louisiana will require training beyond high school, but less than a traditional four-year college degree, Jindal said.

Less than four percent of the state's youth currently pursue training at a technical college.

"If we don't transform the way we train our high school graduates, the gap between the skills of our workforce and our existing jobs will widen and cripple our economy," Jindal said.

The Louisiana Workforce Commission also implanted a "day-one guarantee," which says if technical college graduates are not ready to work on their first day on the job, they will be retrained for free.

"Imagine being able to go to employers and say we've cut taxes (on business and industry), we've got stronger ethics laws, and now we're willing to guarantee you a skilled workforce," Jindal said. "We'll be running circles around every state in the region and the country."

The Legislature also established a \$10-million workforce training rapid response fund during its most recent regular session.

The rapid response fund provides the community and technical college system financial backing to address workforce needs whenever they arise, Jindal said.

Workforce reform legislation approved last regular session also provides \$3 million to the Department of Economic Development's fast start program, which enables workers to attend expedited classes and training so they can more quickly enter the workforce.

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